

## **SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE: SOC6516F**

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Instructor: Professor Shyon Baumann  
Class: Mondays, 2pm—4pm, Room 240  
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### **Course Description, Goals, and Outcomes**

This seminar provides an introduction to some of the principal approaches to the sociological study of culture. The course is designed to equip students with an overview of how sociologists conceive of culture, the methodological approaches they use to study it, the major debates within the field, and an appreciation for how the field has evolved in the past few decades. Emphasis is on understanding how culture influences action, the relationship between culture and social inequality, how culture is produced and consumed, and how to measure meaning. Along the way, students will learn what the sociology of culture offers for studying a range of cultural objects, such as food, music, scents, and books, and also the cultural dimensions of diverse phenomena such as networks, bodies, and families.

### **Course Requirements**

<b>COMPONENT (ESSAY, TEST, PRESENTATION)</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION (PAGE-LENGTH, TIME REQUIREMENTS, CONTENT)</b>	<b>DATE DUE (DD/MM/YY)</b>	<b>RELATIVE WEIGHT</b>
1. Essay	3000 – 3500 words	December 12 at 5pm; late penalty of 5% per 24 hours of lateness	35%
2. Three linking memos	~1000 words each	Ongoing; at least one due before October 15	30%
3. Presentation and discussion leading	10 minutes of presentation plus leading discussion	Ongoing	15%
4. Participation	Engaging in class discussion	Ongoing	10%

5. Discussion Questions/Talking Points	Submitting 2 discussion questions/talking points for 10 classes	Ongoing	10%
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Submit all material to me by email only. No hard copies.

*Participation:* Class attendance is a bare minimum for participation. More importantly, students are expected to engage with the readings and with each other and with me during class meetings. Participation is evaluated based on how your contributions to class discussions show engagement with the issues and familiarity with the issues as they are represented in the assigned readings. (10%)

As you do the readings, working through the following questions will help prepare you to participate:

- What is the research question(s) the author is trying to answer?
- How does the author define "culture" (or the aspect of culture on which she or he focuses)?
- What are the other key concepts and how are they defined?
- What is the research design and the data or empirical evidence? Is the research design effective for the questions the author(s) is posing?
- What are the main conclusions of the research? How convincingly does the evidence support the conclusions?
- How does the work relate to other readings or streams of research? Does it build and extend earlier work? Challenge or contradict other studies?
- What do you see as the weaknesses or flaws in the research?
- Are there any ideas or assertions in the reading that you disagree with?
- What do you find innovative, if anything, about the work?
- What is most surprising or puzzling to you about the reading?
- What puzzles or questions are left unanswered by the reading?
- What is the main contribution of the reading?

(Thanks to Ann Mullen for permission to borrow these questions.)

*Presentation and Leading Discussion:* Over the course of the semester, each student will lead a discussion on the assigned readings. Leading the discussion will involve presenting an assessment/explication/elaboration of the readings (~10 to 15 minutes) to start the discussion, followed by posing questions to the seminar participants to initiate conversations. Students will forward to me their list of questions no later than noon on the day of the class. (15%)

*Linking Memos:* Over the course of the term, you will write three memos of around 1000 words in length. These memos link the course material to outside material (1 or 2 articles) that you already know or that you search out based on your interests. The goal is to demonstrate how the course material is linked to other topics that you are interested in and to show how the course material provides an alternative perspective, a contradiction,

an elaboration, an emphasis, analytical tools, methodological tools, etc. relevant to this outside material. Although culture is its own subfield, cultural concepts are employed in the service of the study of virtually all other sociological subfields, so there are plenty of links to make. (30%)

*Term Paper:* You will write a paper 3000-3500 words in length. The goal of this paper is flexible, but it must relate to an exploration, critique, elaboration, or employment of the material encountered in the course readings. For example, you could synthesize readings in ways that we have not explored or inadequately explored to show how one can be used to critique or build on another. Or you could take one of the past questions that have been asked on the Sociology of Culture comprehensive exam (questions are available from the Graduate Office) and answer that question. This would have the benefit of giving you practice for the comprehensive exam. I will provide more information on this component of the course throughout the term. (35%)

*Discussion Questions/Talking Points:* Each student is responsible for composing a minimum of two discussion questions or talking points (interesting observations or arguments) for that session's readings. Your discussion questions/talking points help prepare you for class, give me a sense of how you are engaging with the course readings and help focus our discussions. Think carefully about what you want to ask. Good questions/talking points focus on core and critical issues or make connections between different readings. Avoid questions that focus on a small detail or tangential point, questions that can easily be answered in a sentence or two, and yes/no questions. Avoid talking points that are reiterations of what is already in the readings. Discussion questions are due by noon via e-mail on the day of class (to me and the presenter for that week). Students must submit questions on ten sessions to receive full credit. Questions/talking points will be evaluated on a pass/fail basis. (10%)

### **Academic Integrity Clause**

Copying, plagiarizing, falsifying medical certificates, or other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Any student caught engaging in such activities will be referred to the Dean's office for adjudication. Any student abetting or otherwise assisting in such misconduct will also be subject to academic penalties. Students are expected to cite sources in all written work and presentations. See this link for tips for how to use sources well: (<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>).

According to Section B.I.1.(e) of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters it is an offence "to submit, without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom it is submitted, any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course or program of study in the University or elsewhere." By enrolling in this course, you agree to abide by the university's rules regarding academic conduct, as outlined in the Calendar. You are expected to be familiar with the

*Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/The-rules/code/the-code-of-behaviour-on-academic-matters>) and *Code of Student Conduct* (<http://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/publicationsandpolicies/codeofstudentconduct.htm>) which spell out your rights, your duties and provide all the details on grading regulations and academic offences at the University of Toronto.

### **Accessibility Services**

It is the University of Toronto's goal to create a community that is inclusive of all persons and treats all members of the community in an equitable manner. In creating such a community, the University aims to foster a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of all persons. Please see the University of Toronto Governing Council “Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities” at <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppnov012004.pdf>.

### **Equity and Diversity Statement**

The University of Toronto is committed to equity and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect. As a course instructor, I will neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual in this course and wish to be alerted to any attempt to create an intimidating or hostile environment. It is our collective responsibility to create a space that is inclusive and welcomes discussion. Discrimination, harassment and hate speech will not be tolerated.

Additional information and reports on Equity and Diversity at the University of Toronto is available at <http://equity.hrandequity.utoronto.ca>.

### **Course Schedule**

#### **(1) September 10: Introduction**

Roy, William G. and Timothy J. Dowd. 2010. “What Is Sociological about Music?” *Annual Review of Sociology* 36(1):183–203.

Please read for the first class. The above article takes the topic of music, as a self-evidently ‘cultural’ topic, and discusses how we can study things culturally and extend cultural analysis to a wide range of sociological concerns. Through the clear example of music, we can highlight how cultural analysis in sociology is about applying a set of concepts and methods that can illuminate the cultural dimensions of a wide range of social phenomena, including those that aren’t typically thought to be ‘culture’ (e.g., shopping, education, health care, etc.).

## **(2) September 17: Definitions and Debates**

Omar Lizardo. 2017. "Improving cultural analysis: Considering personal culture in its declarative and nondeclarative modes." *American Sociological Review* 82: 88-115.

Sewell, William H. 1999. "The Concept(s) of Culture." Pp.35-61 in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, edited by Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gramsci, Antonio. 1990. "Culture and Ideological Hegemony." Pp. 47-54 in *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

One vein of discussion in the sociology of culture is to define what culture is. This can be helpful, allowing us to have focused and coherent conversations. But it turns out that we mostly cannot agree. There are competing and complementary conceptualizations of culture. The above readings highlight that it can be helpful to parse out how different forms of culture do different things. Further, instead of a focus on what is or is not culture, these readings highlight that we can use cultural sociology as an approach that can illuminate the cultural dimensions of all social phenomena. This week we'll also discuss the distinction between the sociology of culture, cultural sociology, and cultural studies.

## **(3) September 24: Meaning and Measurement**

Griswold, Wendy. 1987. "A Methodological Framework for the Sociology of Culture." *Sociological Methodology* 17: 1-35.

Mohr, John and Craig Rawlings. 2012. "Four Ways to Measure Culture: Social Science, Hermeneutics, and the Cultural Turn." Pp. 70-113 in *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology*, edited by Jeffrey Alexander, Ronald Jacobs and Philip Smith. Oxford University Press.

Pugh, Allison. 2013. "What Good Are Interviews for Thinking About Culture? Demystifying Interpretive Analysis." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 1(1): 42-68.

One key dimension of cultural phenomena is that they are understood to have meaning for people. Methodologically, the challenge is that meaning is created inside people's heads, and it's different for each person. It's not straightforwardly observable and measurable. These readings advise sociologists about how to best tackle this challenge.

#### **(4) October 1: Bourdieu and Field Theory**

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1983. "The field of cultural production, or: The economic world reversed." *Poetics* 12, 4–5: 311-356.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital," In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John G. Richardson, 241–58. New York: Greenwood Press.

Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. 1998. "A Cultural Field in the Making: Gastronomy in 19th-Century France." *American Journal of Sociology* 104(3):597–641.

The English-language subfield of the sociology of culture was transformed in the 1980s by the incorporation of Bourdieusian analysis. Although a lot of contemporary work is not oriented toward Bourdieu, a lot also is. Moreover, Bourdieusian concepts and vocabulary have filtered out into general usage. For these reasons, it is useful to gain an acquaintance with Bourdieu's core cultural ideas early on in the course.

The *Poetics* article is hard to read if you have no familiarity with Bourdieu, because the concepts are complicated and the terminology is specialized. You might benefit from background reading that aims to explicate the core Bourdieusian terms to broad audiences. For example:

Sallaz, Jeffrey, and Jane Zavisca. 2007. "Bourdieu in American Sociology, 1980–2004." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33: 21-41.

Kamphuis CBM, Jansen T, Mackenbach JP, van Lenthe FJ (2015) Bourdieu's Cultural Capital in Relation to Food Choices: A Systematic Review of Cultural Capital Indicators and an Empirical Proof of Concept. *PLOS ONE* 10(8): e0130695. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0130695>

Lamont, Michèle. 2012. "How Has Bourdieu Been Good to Think With? The Case of the United States," Lizardo, Omar, "Comment on Lamont," Mische, Ann, "Response to Lamont and Lizardo," and Lamont, Michèle, "Response to Lizardo's and Mische's Comments." In *Sociological Forum* 27(1):228-254. [1]

#### **October 8: Thanksgiving; University Closed**

#### **(5) October 15: Culture in Action**

DiMaggio, Paul. 1997. "Culture and Cognition." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23: 263-287.

Vaisey, Stephen. 2009. "Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 114(6):1675–1715.

Frye, Margaret. 2017. "Cultural Meanings and the Aggregation of Actions: The Case of Sex and Schooling in Malawi." *American Sociological Review* 82,5: 945-976.

In addition to the Bourdieusian concepts, another foundational set of concepts come from the vein of research that can be called "culture and cognition." We will learn about the roots of these concepts in psychological research, how these concepts compare to Bourdieusian concepts (answer: some important overlaps, some distinct divergences), and how these concepts can help to explain the relationship between culture and behavior. Notice that this literature emphasizes an understanding of culture that is quite different from the study of cultural objects (below).

### **(6) October 22: Culture is Produced and Consumed**

Childress, Clayton. 2017. *Under the Cover: The Creation, Production, and Reception of a Novel*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

The sociological study of culture has a long history of studying cultural objects, that is, things that are widely understood to be primarily vehicles of meaning. Books are an example *par excellence*. Within that history, it has been conventional to study the production of culture, the content of culture, and the reception of culture separately, just for the sake of manageability. Those researcher-imposed divisions, however, created significant blind spots. This week's reading teaches us about the history of those divisions, but also shows us what we can learn from studying production, content, and reception together.

### **(7) October 29: Further Exploring the Reception of Culture and Meaning Making**

Cerulo, Karen A. 2018. "Scents and Sensibility: Olfaction, Sense-Making, and Meaning Attribution." *American Sociological Review* 83,2: 361-389.

Fligstein, Neil, Jonah Stuart Brundage, and Michael Schultz. 2017. "Seeing Like the Fed: Culture, Cognition, and Framing in the Failure to Anticipate the Financial Crisis of 2008." *American Sociological Review* 82,5: 875-909.

Benzecry, Claudio, and Randall Collins. 2014. "The High of Cultural Experience Toward a Microsociology of Cultural Consumption." *Sociological Theory* 32,4: 307-326.

In these readings, we learn about new developments in how we conceptualize the process of reception. Each of these readings incorporates foundational concepts from

neighbouring subfields, and in doing so, they provide novel ways for understanding the causes and consequences of how people make meaning from cultural objects.

### **(8) November 5: Classification and Evaluation**

Edelman, Achim. 2018. "Formalizing symbolic boundaries." *Poetics*

Lamont, Michèle. 2012. "Toward a Comparative Sociology of Valuation and Evaluation." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38: 201-21.

Negro, Giacomo, Özgecan Koçak, and Greta Hsu. 2010. "Research on Categories in the Sociology of Organizations." *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 31:3-35.

How and why do we place things in categories? Why are these categories often hierarchical? What are the consequences of evaluations? How do those placements relate to social distinctions and patterns? If cultural reception involves individual-level interpretations, why do we see clear patterns and agreement in how cultural objects are perceived? How are these patterns accomplished?

### **(9) November 12: Omnivorousness: Theory and Methods**

Peterson, Richard. 2005. "Problems in comparative research: The example of omnivorousness." *Poetics* 33,5-6: 257-282.

Johnston, Josée, and Shyon Baumann. 2007. "Democracy vs. Distinction: A Study of Omnivorousness in Gourmet Food Writing." *American Journal of Sociology* 113,1:165-204.

Lizardo, Omar, and Sara Skiles. 2012. "Reconceptualizing and theorizing 'omnivorousness': genetic and relational mechanisms." *Sociological Theory* 30,4: 263-282.

While Bourdieusian analysis highlights the "homology" between class and culture, a long line of empirical research, spearheaded by Richard Peterson, complicates the Bourdieusian perspective. Omnivorousness is the label given to the high status cultural consumption pattern observed in many dozens of studies, across times and places, where people with high socioeconomic status consume culture inclusively – across many genres – and not exclusively – shunning lowbrow culture – as Bourdieu would argue. How do we measure tastes and cultural consumption? How do we conceptualize omnivorous cultural consumption: when is it actually inclusive? What does inclusive cultural consumption among high SES people mean? Is it a truly tolerant and democratic cultural stance? Or is it just another way to use culture to bolster class distinctions?

### **(10) November 19: Culture and Inequality (1)**

Small, Mario Luis, David J. Harding, and Michèle Lamont. 2010. "Reconsidering Culture and Poverty." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 629(1):6-27.

Lamont, Michèle, Stefan Beljean, and Matthew Clair. 2014. "What is missing? Cultural processes and causal pathways to inequality." *Socio-Economic Review* 12,3: 573–608.

The concept of a "culture of poverty" was proposed in the 1960s to understand persistent inequality in the United States. The idea was quickly critiqued as an instance of blaming the victim, because it suggested that poor people were doing things that caused their own poverty. As we know, poverty has structural roots (i.e., our system is set up so that there will always be quite a few poor people). How can we bring our cultural perspectives to bear on this problem in a productive way? These readings demonstrate recent advancements in conceptualizations of how culture works, and the relationship between culture and structure, while avoiding the problem of victim-blaming.

### **(11) November 26: Cultural Transmission and Inequality**

Erickson, Bonnie H. 1996. "Culture, Class, and Connections." *American Journal of Sociology* 102: 217-251.

Lareau, Annette. 2002. "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families." *American Sociological Review* 67,5: 747-776.

Banks, Patricia A. 2010. *Represent: Art and Identity Among the Black Upper-Middle Class*. New York: Routledge. Chapters 1, 4, 5, and 6, pp. 1 – 12, 55 - 96. [1]

One of the ways that culture plays a role shaping inequality is through its transmission. Culture can be transmitted through networks, within families, and within communities and class strata. In this week's articles, we see examples of very different kinds of culture transmitted in very different ways, but all have profound ramifications for social inequality.

### **(12) December 3: Materiality and Embodiment**

Griswold, Wendy, Gemma Mangione, and Terence E. McDonnell. 2013. "Objects, Words, and Bodies in Space: Bringing Materiality in to Cultural Analysis." *Qualitative Sociology* 36: 343-364.

Shilling, Chris. 2017. "Body Pedagogics: Embodiment, Cognition and Cultural Transmission." *Sociology* 51,6:1205-1221.

Wacquant, Loic. 2015. "For a Sociology of Flesh and Blood." *Qualitative Sociology* 38: 1-11.

This final week's topic deals with concepts that are relatively innovative for the subfield of cultural sociology. The subfield largely delineates itself from other sociological subfields through its focus on meaning, which necessarily emphasizes discursive and abstract aspects of culture. However, much of what we think of as culture takes material form, and when we think about how culture is related to action, it necessarily raises the point that actions are something we do physically with our bodies, not just mentally. These readings help us sort out how to understand how the material and the bodily can be cultural and sociological.