

SOCIOLOGY 363
THE SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE
Alexandra Hrycak

Spring 2011
MW 3:10-4:30
Psych 102

Vollum 223
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Office Hours: MW 2:00-3:00

Course objectives:

This course uses sociological theories to explore the production and consumption of culture. It introduces how sociologists answer central questions about the relationships between culture and society: What is the relationship between social change (particularly, changes in the economy, but also new patterns of settlement and lifestyle) and the kinds of culture people produce and consume? How is contemporary popular culture produced? What sets of institutions and actors are involved in shaping the cultural objects we consume? What and who influences our judgments? What role do tastemakers play in how people in different racial and socioeconomic positions craft their identity? How different is elite and non-elite cultural consumption -- are consumers of "trashy novels" *really* more passive and less original in their reading habits than are elite cultural consumers of hip hop music or experimental novels? How do newsmakers and activists shape our view of reality? We will answer these questions through discussions and close readings of sociological studies that fall under three main topics: 1) Methods for studying cultural meanings, 2) Production of culture, and 3) Professionals gatekeepers and cultural mediation.

A main objective is to teach you to use this class to write a serious research paper that utilizes sociological methods to explore a case of cultural consumption or production chosen in consultation with me.

Prerequisites: Sociology 211.

The following books can be purchased from the Reed College Bookstore and are available on reserve at the College library:

- Victoria Alexander, *Sociology of the Arts: Exploring Fine and Popular Forms*
- Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*
- David Grazian, *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs*
- Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*

In addition, all of the books we are reading have been made available at the library reserve desk. Required articles (see below) are available through on-line journal archives (typically, JSTOR, but also EBSCOHOST). For your research paper, you will be encouraged to also use the on-line journal archive "Project Muse." If you are not familiar with these resources, I will be glad to demonstrate how to use them.

Reading Assignments
PART I CULTURAL CONSUMPTION

Week 1 Introduction Jan. 31, Feb. 2

Monday

Introduction

Wednesday

Classic Debates on Human Agency and Capitalist Hegemony

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," excerpt from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (available via moodle, under "resources")

Crane, Diana. 1999. "Gender and Hegemony in Fashion Magazines: Women's Interpretations of Fashion Photographs." *Sociological Quarterly*. Vol. 40 Issue 4, pp. 541+. (JSTOR)

Victoria Alexander. *The Sociology of the Arts*, Chapter 2-3

Homework exercise: choose a set of images from Charlene Makley's image archive (<http://academic.reed.edu/anthro/faculty/mia/sexist.html>). Analyze it for class discussion in light of Horkheimer and Adorno's argument. Be prepared 1) to talk about its meaning in class, 2) to use it to illustrate and analyze models/perspectives mentioned by Crane for explaining consumption of hegemonic meaning.

Week 2 Feb. 7, 9

CLASS REPRODUCTION THEORY

Monday

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, pp. 1-7 in "Introduction,"; pp. 13-41 in Chapter 1; and all of Chapter 2

Victoria Alexander. *The Sociology of the Arts*, Chapter 12

Key word: Habitus

Wednesday

Michele Lamont, *Money, Morals, and Manners*, Chapters 1, 4, 7 (reserve)

Peterson, Richard and Roger Kern. 1996. "Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore." *American Sociological Review*. 61: 900-907. (JSTOR)

Recommended:

DiMaggio, Paul and Michael Useem. 1978. Social Class and Arts Consumption: The Origins and Consequences of Class Differences in Exposure to the Arts in America. *Theory and Society* 5(2):141-161.

Key word: Boundary work, cultural boundaries, “cultural excluder”, possessing a wide range of cultural repertoires, omnivore

Week 3 Feb. 14, 16
Consuming Romances

Over half of paperback novels sold annually are romance novels. Why and how has romance been commodified so successfully, who are its consumers, and why do they find this genre so appealing?

Monday Patriarchal domination or resistance?

In the 2003 archive section of www.thislife.org, listen to the 9/19 show (episode 247), “What is this thing?” [http://www.thislife.org/Radio_Archive.aspx?year=2003#9].

Read the following:

An online Harlequin romance novel (“for women who love to read”)

<http://www.eharlequin.com/>

Douglas, Ann. “Soft-Porn Culture,” *New Republic* 8/30/80, Vol. 183 Issue 9, p. 25-30.

[handout to be distributed via moodle]

Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*, Chapters 1-2,

Victoria Alexander, *The Sociology of the Arts*, Chapter 10

Wednesday

Radway, *Reading the Romance*, Chapters 4-5

Key words: reception approaches, popular culture, the dominant-hegemonic position, the oppositional position, horizon of expectations, “dominance games”

PART II THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURE:
PRODUCERS, CORPORATIONS, and MARKETS for CULTURE

Week 4 Feb. 21, 23
Blues Performances and Performers

Monday

Becker, Howard S. 1974. "Art as Collective Action," *American Sociological Review* 39 (JSTOR)

David Grazian, *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs*, Introduction, Chapters 1 - 2

Paper one, Memo, 5 pages, due in class Monday

Alexander, *Sociology of the Arts*, pp. 67-75 in Chapter 5

Key words: art worlds, conventions, nocturnal capital, authenticity

Wednesday

David Grazian, *Blue Chicago*, Chapter 3-5, 7

Week 5 Feb. 28, March 2 Country Music Production

Monday

Listen to:

“NPR: Scott Simon Essay: Hank Williams”

<http://www.npr.org/features/feature.php?wfId=902058>

“NPR: Hank Williams’ Last Ride”

<http://www.npr.org/features/feature.php?wfId=1116315>

Hank Williams “Cold, Cold Heart”

<http://www.npr.org/programs/asc/archives/asc12/index.html#hank>

Richard Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*, Chapters 1, 2, 3
(circa 50 pages) plus 6 and 9 (circa 40 pages)

Wednesday

Richard Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, Chapters 11-13

Week 6 March 7, 9 THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURE PARADIGM

Monday Musical Innovation Cycles

Listen to “Rappers Delight” Morning Edition audio Dec. 29, 2000

<http://www.npr.org/features/feature.php?wfId=1116242>

Read:

Hirsch, Paul. 1972. “Processing Fads and Fashions: An Organization Set Analysis of Culture Industry Systems,” *American Journal of Sociology* 77: 639-659 (JSTOR)

Smitherman, Geneva. 1997. ““The Chain Remain the Same”: Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation.” *Journal of Black Studies* 28: 3-25. (JSTOR)

Wednesday

Theories of Innovation and Diversity

Peterson, Richard and David Berger. 1975. “Cycles in Symbol Production: The Case of Popular Music” *American Sociological Review* 40: 158-173.

Lopes, Paul D. 1992. “Innovation and Diversity in the Popular Music Industry, 1969 to 1990.” *American Sociological Review* 57:56-71.

Victoria Alexander. *The Sociology of the Arts*, pp. 76-81 and Chapter 6

Key words: the production perspective, distribution system channels and constraints, production system channels and constraints, gatekeepers

Week 7 March 14, 16

Monday

Library research session

Wednesday

Whose vision of the past is hegemonic?

Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 97, pp. 376-420

"Maya Lin [videorecording] "A Strong Clear Vision" (excerpts about the conflict over the Vietnam War Memorial)

Week 8 SPRING BREAK

PART III GATEKEEPERS AND CULTURAL MEDIATION

Week 9 March 28, 30 THE MASS MEDIA

Monday The production of news

Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, Preface, Chapter 1

Michael Schudson, "The Sociology of News Production," Chapter 1 in Dan Berkowitz, *Social Meaning of News* (reserve) or pdf file on the class moodle ("resources")

Read the entire front section of the New York Times (bring a print copy in to class)

Research proposal/literature review due

Wednesday What makes a "fact"? What work do newsmakers think they do?

Tuchman, Gaye. 1972. "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity." *American Journal of Sociology* 77 (4) (JSTOR)
Sigelman, Lee. 1973. "Reporting the News: An Organizational Analysis." *The American Journal of Sociology* 79:132-151 (JSTOR)

Please watch, or listen to, an entire mainstream news broadcast and take notes on the roles played by the following: anchorman, reporters, interviewees – how are they depicted relative to the story lines you might draw from novels or film characters in a television drama or sitcom?

Week 10 April 4, 6

MONDAY

Moral panics and sex scandals

Angela McRobbie and Sarah L. Thornton, Rethinking 'Moral Panic' for Multi-Mediated Social Worlds, *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Dec., 1995), pp. 559-574 (JSTOR)

Gamson, Joshua. 2001. "Normal Sins: Sex Scandal Narratives as Institutional Morality Tales." *Social Problems*, 48 (2): 185-205. (JSTOR)

Gamson, Joshua. "Jessica Hahn, Media Whore: Sex Scandals and Female Publicity." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Jun2001, Vol. 18 Issue 2, (Academic Search Premier)

Keywords: Moral panic, drama, institutional morality tale

Recommended:

Hilgartner, Stephen and Charles L. Bosk. 1988 "The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model." *The American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1): 53-78.

WEDNESDAY

Oppositional Media Routines

Nina Eliasoph, "Routines and the Making of Oppositional News," Chapter 16 in Dan Berkowitz, *Social Meaning of News* (reserve), or download pdf on class moodle ("resources")

Please watch, or listen to, an alternative news broadcast, such as 90.7 FM KBOO. What types of "sources" are cited in mainstream versus "alternative" news? What stories are told? Many news broadcasts are now available as podcasts you can download and listen to when it is convenient.

Week 11 April 11, 13 **Framing and content analysis**

MONDAY

Victoria Alexander, *The Sociology of the Arts*, Chapter 12, Case Study 12.1

Binder, Amy. 1993. "Constructing Racial Rhetoric." *American Sociological Review* 58:753-767.

Schudson, Michael. 1982. "The Politics of Narrative Form: The Emergence of News Conventions in Print and Television." *Daedalus* 111(4): 97-112.

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.

Keywords: Frames, frameworks, frame resonance, emplotment

In-class frame analysis exercise: Bring in relevant examples of texts written by gatekeepers in your case and be prepared to present the main frames to the class and talk about progress on your final research paper.

WEDNESDAY

Pescosolido, Bernice A., Elizabeth Grauerholz, and Melissa A. Milkie. 1997. "Culture and Conflict: The Portrayal of Blacks in U.S. Children's Picture Books through the Mid- and Late-Twentieth Century." *American Sociological Review* 62: 443-464. (JSTOR)

Shively, JoEllen. "Cowboys and Indians: Perceptions of Western Films Among American Indians and Anglos." *American Sociological Review* 57:6 (Dec., 1992), pp. 725-734. (JSTOR or Academic Search Premier)

Week 12 April 18, 20 CONCLUDING DEBATES

MONDAY

Interpretation, reflection and shaping approaches

Monday *How does culture work? Tool kits? Cultural repertoires? Strategic action?*

Read:

Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51:273-86. (JSTOR)

Define and explain the relevance of the following terms and reply to reading questions distributed via moodle.

Key words: reflection, content analysis; resistance

WEDNESDAY Thinking about the effect of "culture industries"

Schudson, Michael. 1989. "How Culture Works: Perspectives from Media Studies on the Efficacy of Symbols." *Theory and Society* 18: 153-180. (JSTOR)

Victoria Alexander. *The Sociology of the Arts*, Chapters 3-4

Key words: dimensions of cultural power (retrievability, rhetorical force, resonance, institutional retention, resolution), “aura”, hegemony, cultural dope, cultural diamond, distribution and production systems

Week 13 April 25, 27
RESEARCH PAPER WORKSHOPS

MONDAY

Methods readings (TBA)

WEDNESDAY

Author presentations in small groups

Note: You must complete Author and Reader reports before each class.

Week 14 May 2, 4

Monday

Reader report: Peer-editing presentations in small groups

Wednesday

Wrap-up

FINAL PAPER DUE MONDAY, MAY 16