

University of Hawai'i at Manoa
Sociology 459
Popular Culture
-Fall 2017-
TR 1:30-2:45p, WEB 102

Instructor: Angel Camacho – M.A., Sociology; M.A., Criminal Justice

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Office hours: TTH 11:00a-12:00p

Course Description:

This course relies on the three theoretical perspectives of sociology to examine the role of popular culture in American society. Various themes in popular culture will be explored including social class and consumerism, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, and power and ideology. Additional topics will include social media, movies and music, reality TV, sports, advertising, fashion, technology, and political satire.

Course Objective:

Popular culture is often absorbed without thinking critically about its content or consequences. We often do not stop to think about or question the underlying assumptions of popular culture, nor do we think about what (or whom) such content may support. Questions of power and ideology are deeply interwoven in popular culture despite their seeming absence. Additionally, popular culture has an incredible impact on how we view ourselves as individuals in relation to others.

Every day we are exposed to thousands of images, sounds, and experiences that we understand as natural – as just the way the world is. But this aspect of everyday life we take for granted is anything but natural. Thus, the overall objective of this course is to explore how popular culture, in all its various forms, not only reflects the changing world around us but also how it influences the way we perceive ourselves, how we view and interact with others, and how we behave as human beings. To this end we will examine a wide range of subjects using a critical sociological lens.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

By the end of the semester, students who have successfully completed this course will:

- Be able to apply the three theoretical perspectives of sociology to various forms of popular culture.
- Understand the role of popular culture and the way it reflects and influences American culture and society.
- Be able to identify popular representations of race, class, gender, and other structures of society that either reinforce or challenge stereotypes.
- Know how to effectively identify and communicate their understanding of popular culture in broader social contexts.

Textbook:

Grazian, David. 2017. *Mix It Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media, and Society*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Norton.

Supplemental readings will be available on Laulima or handed out in class.

Requirements:**1. Attendance: 20%**

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken each class period. We will meet a total of 31 times throughout the semester. Thus, attendance grades will be calculated by taking the number of times you have attended class and dividing it by 31. *Excused absences will be at the discretion of the instructor. Be sure to keep and show the instructor any proof of doctor's visits, car troubles, flight itineraries, etc.*

2. Weekly Reflections: 35%

Each week you will complete reflections on the **prior week's readings and lectures**. Weekly reflections should begin with a **brief** summary of the readings. **Reflections should show me that you have read, critically thought about, and are able to apply the material to your life in some way.** Please keep reflections brief—2 pages *max* (typed, double space, 12-point font, 1-inch margin). Reflections will be graded on a 3-point scale (low satisfactory, medium satisfactory, high satisfactory). All reflections must be turned in at the beginning of class on the due date (*denoted by a "(WR)" on the class schedule below*).

3. Pop Quizzes: 10%

Throughout the semester *five* (5) pop quizzes will be administered on unannounced days and times. These quizzes will determine whether you are keeping up with the required readings. Quizzes may be short answers, multiple choice, true/false, or fill-in-the blank. *Make-up quizzes will only be allowed for excused absences, which will be at the discretion of the instructor.*

4. Final Presentation: 35%

Toward the end of the semester you will be required to create a presentation on a topic in popular culture. It is recommended that you chose a topic that has not been fully explored in the course. The primary purpose of this presentation is for you to demonstrate your ability to identify and critically think about previously unexplored/underexplored examples of popular culture. I will provide a list of basic possibilities (in terms of general ranges of popular culture phenomena), but it will be up to you to decide what, specifically, you will examine. While there is no official paper in this class it might help you to research and write this project up as if it were a final paper (intro, lit. review, etc.) and then create a presentation according to this paper. The more creative the presentation, the better! Further details for this assignment will be made available on Laulima under the "Resources" tab.

Grading Scale:

100—90% = A+ — A-
89—80% = B+ — B-
79—70% = C+ — C-
69—60% = D+ — D-
59—0% = F

Academic Dishonesty:

Any form of cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive an automatic zero (0) for the assignment in question. Not understanding plagiarism will not be an acceptable excuse. Please familiarize yourself with the UHM guidelines and penalties for academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism. A useful resource can be found here:

http://studentaffairs.manoa.hawaii.edu/policies/conduct_code/table_of_contents.php

Expectations:

As with any learning experience, your level of engagement will determine what you get out of this course. I encourage you to make the most of this opportunity by actively participating in class, keeping up with the assigned readings, and reflecting on your own experiences. And, ask questions! If there is anything that you do not understand or that you are having trouble with, please ask for help. I want to make sure that you are learning the material and learning how to think about the material in a sociological manner.

Throughout the course, some of the topics will be sensitive, so I expect that we approach these classes with respect. While each person is entitled to an opinion, it is crucial that our discussions remain respectful. In other words, **always engage in debates about ideas, never engage in personal attacks**. I reserve the right to ask a student to leave the class if their comments are disrespectful or inappropriate in any way.

Cell phones need to be on silent AND put away during class. When you are in class be “in-class” and not somewhere else. Please do not work on assignments from other classes while in my class. **Laptops, iPads, and Tablets must be closed during lectures**. Lastly, please do your best to be on time. Again, I reserve the right to ask students who are being disrespectful or disruptive to leave the class.

Communications:

E-mail is a good way to reach me. Monday through Friday I generally respond within 24 hours. If you e-mail me after 5pm on Friday, I may not respond until Monday morning. Sometimes questions and concerns come up that are best discussed in person. If it turns out you have such questions or concerns, we'll find a time to meet—either during office hours or at another mutually convenient time. Lastly, I would like to avoid receiving e-mails with questions that can be answered with a close reading of the syllabus.

Facing Challenges?

If you have things going on in your life which will affect your ability to do your best, then let me know as soon as possible—don't wait! You may not be responsible for your circumstances, but you are responsible for letting me know you need help or support.

Disabilities:

Please notify me if you have any particular needs. UHM strives to maintain a barrier-free environment so that students with disabilities can fully access classes, programs, services and other campus activities. If you need any assistance please contact the KOKUA Program at 808.956.7511 or you can visit their website at:

<http://www.hawaii.edu/kokua/>

Syllabus:

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus at any time. If I make changes, I will send out an email informing you of the amendment. **It is your responsibility to check your email for announcements, updates, and general class correspondence.** My goal is to keep pace with the class schedule, but throughout the semester there may be times when we explore topics that require more or less time than I have scheduled for them. We should feel free to explore these issues fully without the anxiety of having to keep strictly to the schedule.

SOC 459 Tentative Class Schedule

*Note: All readings should be completed ***prior*** to the date reflected on the class schedule.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
1	8/22	Introductions	N/A
	8/24	3 Theoretical Perspectives of Sociology: A Brief Review	N/A
2	8/29	What is Popular Culture?	John Storey, Ch. 1: "What is Popular Culture?"
	8/31	Semiotics	Daniel Chandler, "Semiotics for Beginners" (<i>read "Introduction" <i>and</i> "Signs)</i>
3	9/5	Mass Media	Grazian, Ch. 6 pp. 120-131 (WR1)
	9/7		Grazian, Ch. 6 pp. 131-141
4	9/12	FUNTIONALIST APPROACH TO POPULAR CULTURE	Grazian, Ch. 2 pp. 24-33 (WR2)
	9/14	TBA	TBA
5	9/19		Grazian, Ch. 2 pp. 34-42 (WR3)
	9/21	CRITICAL APPROACH TO POPULAR CULTURE	Grazian, Ch. 2 pp. 48-58
6	9/26	culture, ideology, and marxism	John Storey, Ch. 5: "Marxisms" pp. 82-94 (WR4)
	9/28	althusserianism	John Storey, Ch. 5: "Marxisms" pp. 94 - 103
7	10/3	hegemony and neo-gramscian cultural studies	"Gramsci and Hegemony" <i>and</i> "Hegemony in Gramsci" <i>and</i> John Storey, Ch. 5: "Marxisms" pp. 103 - 108 (WR5)
	10/5	reproducing inequalities: global and racial Inequalities	Grazian, Ch. 2 pp. 58-63 <i>and</i> Michael Apple, "Consuming the Other: Whiteness, Education, and Cheap French Fries" <i>and</i> Michael Omi, "In Living Color: Race and American Culture"
8	10/10	gender representation and inequality	bell hooks, "Selling Hot Pussy..." (WR6)
	10/12	advertising & consumerism	Grazian, Ch. 2 pp. 63-71

9	10/17		Naomi Klein, No Logo, Ch. 2: "The Brand Expands" and Naomi Klein, No Logo, Ch. 9: "The Discarded Factory" (WR7)
	10/19		http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/01/0111_040112_consumerism.html and http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=american-consumption-habits
10	10/24	INTERACTION APPROACH TO POPULAR CULTURE	Grazian, Ch. 4 pp. 74-95 (WR8)
	10/26	Cultural Consumption and Social Class in America	Grazian, Ch. 7 pp. 144-159
11	10/31	The Globalization of Media and Popular Culture	Grazian, Ch. 10 pp. 206-225 (WR9)
	11/2	Film: TBA	N/A
12	11/7	PRESENTATIONS BEGIN	(WR10)
	11/9		
13	11/14		
	11/16		
14	11/21		
	11/23	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving	
15	11/28		
	11/30		
16	12/5		
	12/7		