

Fall 2022. Sociology 160: **SOCIOLOGY of CULTURE**

CLASS HOURS	Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 11am-12pm in 2040 VLSB
INSTRUCTOR	Joseph Klett
EMAIL	jklett@berkeley.edu (Read this , and include “SOC160” in subject line)
OFFICE HOURS	Tuesdays 10a-12p (by Zoom) Wednesdays 2p-3p (in Social Sciences Building 496)
READERS	Audrey Augenbraum, audrey.augenbraum@berkeley.edu Elgin Nelson, elgin.nelson@berkeley.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the sociological study of culture. We will discuss debates about what culture is, how it works, and why it changes. We will survey a variety of empirical studies to see how culture exists at small and large scales, from very personal behaviors to nationwide conversations to language itself. We will focus on American culture in general – and we will question whether such a thing as American culture even exists.

We start by asking the basic question, *What is culture?* The answer is not an easy one. The meaning of the word has varied since its entry into colloquial English in the late 19th century. And for sociologists, the details of the culture concept have been theorized and debated ever since.

Some scholars begin by first *locating culture* in certain social domains. Building on the work of anthropologists, their work has long entailed ethnographic studies of cultural processes like rituals and traditions, including novel methodologies for teasing-out culture from immediate, real-world interactions. Others have wondered if culture can be found in the very bodies of those participating in common practices, while others still have argued that culture is best localized in the beliefs, thought processes, and even sensory perceptions shared among individuals.

Where we decide to look depends greatly on our *theories of culture*. Culture is a popular topic among social theorists, especially those interested in how language and other modes of meaning-making can reveal a system of symbols at play in everyday life. Taking this further, some theorists argue that these symbols correspond to an even deeper set of classifications which can be found across different cultures and which may be universal to the human mind. Others draw different conclusions: theorists concerned with conflict see culture mainly as a tool for manipulating collective thought and behavior, serving only the interests of the powerful. Or do people have more to use culture as they desire, with limited information, to mixed results?

Different theories make for different views on what, if anything, is at stake with *culture in conflict*. First is the notion that cultures constitute unique identities that make individuals feel a part of a whole, and at times, in a fight to define the essence of society. Often this is explained as the hidden effects of class distinctions. But there are other theoretical foundations that reject economic arguments in favor of random historical accidents that nevertheless come to define a cultural mainstream. Some theorists try to split the difference, showing how power reproduces imperfectly, and in ways that create surprising evolutions of culture that restructure society at a fundamental level.

At the conclusion of the course we will account for the above approaches and arguments to ask ourselves, can we compare cultures? As the issue remains unsettled, we have the opportunity to wonder about the scope and limits of comparing cultures, and the ethics of doing so.

Let's go!

COURSE REQUIREMENTS (% of final grade; all work submitted after the deadline will receive a 5% deduction per 24 hours unless excused)

- A) **Participation** (34%): You are expected to attend lectures well-read and prepared to discuss the material assigned for that day. Your undivided attention is expected. *To receive attendance credit, you must submit one question via bCourses by the end of each day of lecture.*
- B) **Reading responses** (36%): You will complete three reading responses (2-3 pages each) that connect class material to an example of your choosing. These are due at the end of weeks 4, 8, and 13. Complete instructions will be provided in week 2.
- C) **Midterm** (15%): You will complete a take-home midterm consisting of several short-answer (1-2 page) prompts covering the first half of class. Due Sunday, October 16.
- D) **Final** (15%): You will complete a take-home final consisting of several short-answer (1-2 page) prompts covering the second half of class. Due Sunday, December 11.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

You are expected to follow the [University guidelines for academic honesty](#). Violations include cheating and plagiarism, as well as self-plagiarism (submitting your own work from a different assignment). Attribution and proper citations are expected for all ideas that are not your own. If you have any doubts, please speak to me or your reader *before* your work is due.

SPECIAL NEEDS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

All students should be able to participate in this course. Please address any special needs you may have with me at the beginning of the semester, or when a challenge arises. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation plan from the Disabled Students' Program (DSP) to me by email, preferably within the first two weeks of the semester. Contact the DSP by phone (510) 642-0518 or by email to dsp@berkeley.edu.

COURSE OUTLINE

Readings should be completed prior to the class meeting to which they are assigned. All readings can be found on [bCourses](#).

WEEK.DAY DATE: Topic

1.1 **Wednesday 8/24:** Introduction

1.2 **Friday 8/26:** What is culture?

- a. Raymond Williams. 1976. "Culture."

PART I: Locating Culture

2.1-2.2 **Monday 8/29 & Wednesday 8/31:** How do we get into culture?

- a. Howard Becker. 1953. "Becoming a Marihuana User."
- b. Gary Alan Fine. 1979. "Small Groups and Culture Creation."

2.3 **Friday 9/2:** Making norms appear

- c. Harold Garfinkel. 1967. "Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities."

Monday 9/5: NO CLASS

3.1-3.2 **Wednesday 9/7 & Friday 9/9:** Is culture in our bodies?

- a. Marcel Mauss. 1973. "Techniques of the Body."
- b. Karin Martin. 1998. "Becoming a Gendered Body."
- c. Loïc Wacquant. 2015. "For a Sociology of Flesh and Blood."

4.1-4.2 **Monday 9/12 & Wednesday 9/14:** Is culture in our heads?

- a. Roy d'Andrade. 1981. "The Cultural Part of Cognition."
- b. Eviatar Zerubavel. 1993. "Introduction," "Islands of Meaning" and "The Great Divide" in *The Fine Line*.

4.3 Friday 9/16: Sharing perception

- c. Hannah Wohl. 2015. "Community Sense."

Sunday 9/18: Reading response #1 due

PART II: Theories of Culture

5.1-5.2 Monday 9/19 & Wednesday 9/21: Culture as a symbolic system

- a. Roland Barthes. 1957. "The World of Wrestling."
- b. Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith. 1993. "The Enduring Structure of Civil Discourse."
[MW]

5.3 Friday 9/23: Interpreting meaning

- c. Clifford Geertz. 1973. "Thick Description." [MW]

6.1-6.2 Monday 9/26 & Wednesday 9/28: Culture as classification

- a. Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss. 1903. "The Problem" in *Primitive Classification*.
- b. Emile Durkheim. 1912. "Introduction (II)" in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.
- c. Mary Douglas. 1975. "Jokes."

6.3 Friday 9/30: Sorting things out

- d. Eviatar Zerubavel. 1996. "Lumping and Splitting."

7.1-7.2 Monday 10/3 & Wednesday 10/5: Culture as power and domination

- a. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 1846. "The German Ideology." Pg. 154-155; 172-174.
- b. Walter Benjamin. 1935. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."
- c. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. 1944. "Mass Deception."

7.3 Friday 10/7: Ideology or liberation?

- d. *Helvetica*. 2007. Gary Hustwit (dir.)

8.1-8.2 Monday 10/10 & Wednesday 10/12: Culture as action

- a. Ann Swidler. 2001. "Cultured Capacities and Strategies of Action" and "Ties That Do Not Bind" in *Talk of Love*. [or "Culture as a Toolkit" in **MW**]

8.3 Friday 10/14: Avoiding politics

- b. Nina Eliasoph. 2002. "Close to Home." Pp130-140 in Lyn Spillman (ed.) *Cultural Sociology*.

Sunday 10/16: Reading response #2 due

9.1 Monday 10/17: Midterm Review I (in class)

9.2 Wednesday 10/19: Midterm Review II (online)

9.3 Friday 10/21: TAKE-HOME MIDTERM

PART III: Culture in Conflict

10.1-10.2 Monday 10/24 & Wednesday 10/26: What is a cultural identity?

- a. Stuart Hall. 1996. "Who Needs Identity?"
- b. Miliann Kang and Katherine Jones. "Why Do People Get Tattoos?"
- c. Iddo Tavory. 2010. "Of Yarmulkes and Categories."

10.3 Friday 10/28: Is there a "culture war" in the USA?

- d. John Evans. 2003. "Have Americans' Attitudes Become More Polarized? An Update."

11.1-11.2 Monday 10/31 & Wednesday 11/2: Does culture produce inequality?

- a. Mario Small et al. 2010. "Reconsidering Culture and Poverty."
- b. Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura Hamilton. 2013. "Introduction" in *Paying for the Party*.
- c. Anthony Abraham Jack. 2019. ["I Was a Low-Income Student. Classes Weren't the Hardest Part."](#)

Friday 11/4: NO CLASS

12.1-12.2 Monday 11/7 & Wednesday 11/9: Why do we like what we like?

- a. Bethany Bryson. 1996. "Anything but Heavy Metal."
- b. Jennifer Lena and Richard Peterson. 2008. "Changing Musical Styles." [MW]

Friday 11/11: NO CLASS

13.1-13.2 Monday 11/14 & Wednesday 11/16: How do we reproduce culture?

- a. Pierre Bourdieu. 1984. "Introduction" in *Distinction*.
- b. Pierre Bourdieu. 1994. "Social Space and Symbolic Space."

13.3 Friday 11/18: Making meaningful distinctions

- c. Viviana Zelizer. 1989. "The Social Meaning of Money."

Sunday 11/20: Reading response #3 due

14.1 Monday 11/21: So are we omnivores or not?

- a. Richard Peterson and Roger Kern. 1996. "Changing Highbrow Taste."
- b. Will Atkinson. 2011. "The Context and Genesis of Musical Tastes."

Wednesday 11/23 & Friday 11/25: NO CLASS

15.1-15.2 Monday 11/28 & Wednesday 11/30: Can we compare cultures?

- a. Wendy Griswold. 1987. "The Fabrication of Meaning."
- b. Monica Krause and Alexandra Kowalski. 2013. "Reflexive Habits."

15.3 Friday 12/2: Reading the classics

- c. Laura Bohannon. 1966. "Shakespeare in the bush."

16.1 Monday 12/5: Final review (online)

16.2 Wednesday 12/7: Final review (in class)

16.3 Friday 12/9: TAKE-HOME FINAL