

Department of Sociology • Johns Hopkins University
Spring, 2025

Sociology of Culture (AS.230.639)

Thursdays, 2:30-5:00, 526 Mergenthaler Hall (Coleman Room)

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:30-4:00, or by appointment

Course Overview

This course is a survey of the analytic study of culture, both as cause and effect, in sociology. We will survey the literature in the sociology of culture, with an emphasis on current approaches to the theory, measurement, and assessment of culture. The course should stimulate ideas for empirical work in cultural sociology and offer cultural tools for application to empirical research in social science and beyond.

Readings and Resources

Required Books

Jennifer C. Lena. *Entitled: Discriminating Tastes and the Expansion of the Arts*. Princeton University Press, 2019.
Hannah Wohl. *Bound by Creativity: How Contemporary Art is Created and Judged*. University of Chicago Press, 2021.
Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy. *The Ordinal Society*. Harvard University Press, 2024.
Diana Graizbord. *Indicators of Democracy: The Politics and Promise of Evaluation Expertise in Mexico*. Stanford University Press, 2024.
Chana Teeger. *Distancing the Past: Racism as History in South African Schools*. Columbia University Press, 2024.

Supplementary Readings

All additional readings are available either on the web or on the course website. The course website is available through <https://jhu.instructure.com/courses/85722>

Assignments

Discussion Participation (40%). You must attend and participate actively in all course discussions – which requires having done the reading and being prepared for conversation.

Analytic Note (20%). For some week of your choosing, you will prepare an analytic note of approximately 1,000 words. This note should synthesize or build upon the readings for the week, offering a critique, combination, or extension of that material.

Final Paper (40%). This is an in-depth writing project related in some way to cultural sociology. You may (and should!) use the project toward your research program, but you must use the paper to engage deeply with the methods, tools, and concepts of cultural sociology.

Course Schedule

January 23: *A History Of, and Agenda For, Cultural Sociology*

Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51 (April 1986): 273-286. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095521>

Michael Schudson, "How Culture Works: Perspectives from Media Studies on the Efficacy of Symbols." *Theory and Society* 18:2 (March, 1989): 153-180. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00160753>

Adam Kuper, "Introduction": Culture Wars." pp. 1-20 in *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Available on Canvas.

Lizardo, Omar. "Improving Cultural Analysis: Considering Personal Culture in its Declarative and Nondeclarative Modes." *ASR* 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416675175>

January 30: *Debates in Theory and Method*

Wohl, Hannah. "Community Sense: The Cohesive Power of Aesthetic Judgment." *Sociological Theory* 33:4 (2015), 299–326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275115617800>

Corey M. Abramson, "From 'Either-Or' to 'When and How': A Context-Dependent Model of Culture in Action." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 42:2 (2012). <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-5914.2011.00484.x/full>

Paul DiMaggio, "Culture and Cognition." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997). <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.23.1.263>

Christopher A. Bail. "The Cultural Environment: Measuring Culture with Big Data." *Theory and Society* 43:3-4 (2014), 465-482. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-014-9216-5>

Rotolo, M. "Culture beneath discourse: a conceptual model for analyzing nondeclarative cultural knowledge." *Am J Cult Sociol* 10, 432–460 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-021-00135-0>

February 6: Jennifer C. Lena. *Entitled: Discriminating Tastes and the Expansion of the Arts*.

February 13: *Art, Music, and Taste*

Becker, Howard S. "Art As Collective Action." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 39, no. 6, 1974, pp. 767–76. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094151>

- Berghman, M., Calkins, T., van Eijck, K. et al. The female nude and the naked guy: declarative and nondeclarative personal culture in aesthetic responses to artistic nude photography. *Am J Cult Sociol* 11, 419–443 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-022-00152-7>
- Fang, Jun. “The Culture of Censorship: State Intervention and Complicity Creativity in Global Film Production.” *American Sociological Review* 89:3 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224241236750>
- Frédéric C. Godart, Ashley Mears, How Do Cultural Producers Make Creative Decisions? Lessons from the Catwalk, *Social Forces*, Volume 88, Issue 2, December 2009, Pages 671–692, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0266>
- Babon, Kim. “Composition, coherence, and attachment: The critical role of context in reception.” *Poetics* 34 (2006): 151--179. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2006.01.003>

February 20: Hannah Wohl, *Bound by Creativity*.

February 27: *Political Culture*

- Andrew J. Perrin, Political Microcultures: Linking Civic Life and Democratic Discourse, *Social Forces*, Volume 84, Issue 2, December 2005, Pages 1049–1082, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2006.0028>
- Karakaya, Yagmur, and Penny Edgell. “The Curious Transformation of ‘Critical Race Theory’ to ‘CRT’: The Role of Election Campaigns in American culture wars.” *Poetics* 108 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2024.101964>.
- McDonnell, T.E., Taylor, M.A. & Wood, M.L. Making Obama iconic: iconic potential and the affordances of images. *Am J Cult Sociol* 12, 575–619 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-024-00210-2>
- Rucks-Ahidiana, Z. Ambitious ideals, realistic expectations: how prior experiences with structures moderate the goals of Section 8 voucher holders through frames. *Am J Cult Sociol* 12, 652–676 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-024-00208-w>
- Wetts, Rachel. “Money and Meaning in the Climate Change Debate: Organizational Power, Cultural Resonance, and the Shaping of American Media Discourse.” *American Journal of Sociology* 129:2 (September, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1086/726747>
- Ruth Braunstein, Toward a cultural sociology of taxation, *Socio-Economic Review*, Volume 22, Issue 2, April 2024, Pages 931-52, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwae017>
- Salazar, P.-J. (2004). Compromise and Deliberation: a Rhetorical View of South Africa’s Democratic Transformation. *Social Science Information*, 43(2), 145-166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018404042578>

March 6: Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy. *The Ordinal Society*.

***March 13:** *Culture and Inequality*

- Valentino, Lauren, and Stephen Vaisey. “Culture and Durable Inequality.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-030320-102739>

Oshotse, Abraham, Yael Berda, and Amir Goldberg. "Cultural Tariffing: Appropriation and the Right to Cross Cultural Boundaries." *American Sociological Review* 89:2 (2024).

Streib, J., Ayala, M., & Wixted, C. (2016). Benign Inequality: Frames of Poverty and Social Class Inequality in Children's Movies. *Journal of Poverty*, 21(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2015.1112870>

Daniel, Caitlin. "Economic Constraints on Taste Formation and the True Cost of Healthy Eating." *Social Science & Medicine* 148 (January 2016). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.11.025>

March 27: Diana Graizbord. *Indicators of Democracy*.

***April 3:** *Comparison and Culture*

Tavory, I., & Swidler, A. (2009). Condom Semiotics: Meaning and Condom Use in Rural Malawi. *American Sociological Review*, 74(2), 171-189. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400201>

Peng, Yusheng. "When Formal Laws and Informal Norms Collide: Lineage Networks versus Birth Control Policy in China." *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 116, no. 3, 2010, pp. 770–805. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/657102>

Janssen, Susanne, Giseline Kuipers, and Marc Verboord. "Cultural Globalization and Arts Journalism: The International Orientation of Arts and Culture in Dutch, French, German, and US Newspapers, 1955-2005" *American Sociological Review* 73:5 (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240807300502>

Inglehart, Ronald, and Wayne E. Baker. "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values." *American Sociological Review* 65:1 (2000). <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240006500103>

April 10: Chana Teeger, *Distancing the Past*.

April 17: *Collected and Collective Memory*

Adams, T., Vinitzky-Seroussi, V. Memories of Others for the Sake of Our Own: Imported Events in American Presidential Rhetoric (1945–2020). *Am J Cult Sociol* 11, 317–336 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-022-00157-2>

LaBranche, Jillian. "Macro-Micro Interaction in Knowledge Construction: Structural and Communicative Memory in Rwanda and Sierra Leone." *American Journal of Sociology* 130:3 (November, 2024). <https://doi.org/10.1086/731782>

Luft, Aliza. "The Moral Career of the Genocide Perpetrator: Cognition, Emotions, and Dehumanization as a Consequence, not a Cause, of Violence." *Sociological Theory* 41:4 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1177/07352751231203716>

Schuman, Howard, and Jacqueline Scott. "Generations and Collective Memories." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 54, no. 3, 1989, pp. 359–81. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095611>

Griffin, Larry J. "'Generations and Collective Memory' Revisited: Race, Region, and Memory of Civil Rights." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 69, no. 4, 2004, pp. 544–57. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3593064>

***April 24:** *New Frontiers*

Karell, Daniel, Jeffrey Sachs, and Ryan Barrett. "Synthetic Duality: A Framework for Analyzing Artificial Intelligence's Representation of social Reality." *Poetics* 108 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2024.101966>.

Yongren, Kiley, Lin. Beyond statistical variables: Examining the duality of persons and groups in structuring cultural space. *Poetics* 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2024.101967>.

DeSoucey, Michaela, and Miranda R. Waggoner. "Another Person's Peril: Peanut Allergy, Risk Perceptions, and Responsible Sociality." *American Sociological Review* 87:1 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224211067773>

Kiley, Kevin, and Stephen Vaisey. "Measuring Stability and Change in Personal Culture Using Panel Data." *American Sociological Review* 85:3 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420921538>

Dates marked with an * may need to be rescheduled