SOC 8: POPULAR CULTURE

Foothill College Course Outline of Record

Heading	Value
Effective Term:	Summer 2025
Units:	4
Hours:	4 lecture per week (48 total per quarter)
Degree & Credit Status:	Degree-Applicable Credit Course
Foothill GE:	Area 4: Social & Behavioral Sciences
Transferable:	CSU/UC
Grade Type:	Letter Grade (Request for Pass/No Pass)
Repeatability:	Not Repeatable

Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will identify the two main component parts or features of the sociological imagination.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of why the sociological imagination is sociologically significant.
- Students will identify the component parts of the scientific method.
- Students will identify the leading components or indicators of methodology.

Description

Theoretical and methodological overview of American popular culture. A critical examination of the socio-historical development and contemporary forms of popular culture in America. The relationship of popular culture to individual, group and mass identity formation. Analysis of popular culture and its racial and class dimensions.

Course Objectives

The student will be able to:

1. Summarize main terms and concepts of, and misconceptions about, the sociology of American popular culture and its racial, ethnic and class dimensions.
2. Identify and critically analyze historical and contemporary sites of American popular culture.
3. Describe the main factors contributing to the socio-historical development of popular culture.
4. Explain the relationship between popular culture, social institutions and the social (class, racial, ethnic and gender) structure of American society.
5. Explain the distinguishing characteristics of major theoretical approaches to popular culture and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.
6. Illustrate the main methods of sociological investigation of popular culture and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.
7. Apply theoretical and methodological models in critical analyses of popular culture.
8. Problematize popular culture and show it in relation to larger social processes and social inequality to do with race, ethnicity, gender and class.
9. Synthesize issues of race, class, gender, age, sexuality, crime and social change in relation to popular culture.
10. Analyze popular culture as both an instrument of social control and political resistance.

Course Content

1. Defining popular culture
   a. Culture and its racial and class dimensions
      i. Material culture
      ii. Non-material culture
      iii. Dominant culture
      iv. Sub-cultures
      v. Counter cultures
   b. Folk culture and its racial and class dimensions
   c. Elite culture and its racial and class dimensions
   d. Popular culture elements
      i. Symbols
      ii. Language
      iii. Beliefs
      iv. Values
      v. Norms
      vi. Rituals
      vii. Myths
      viii. Ideologies
      ix. Shared meaning
      x. Learned
      xi. Taken for granted
      xii. Diversity
   e. Meanings vary across time, space and place
   f. As a field of dispute and an arena of power struggles
   g. Cultural capital—the appropriation of culture as a way to maintain social status
   h. Misconceptions about popular culture
      i. It is simple
      ii. It is trivial
      iii. It is intellectually, morally, culturally and socially inferior
      iv. It is immediate, only dealing with what is popular at this moment
      v. It is exclusionary
2. Selected sites of popular culture
   a. Popular literature
   b. Mass media
      i. Advertising
      ii. Newspapers
      iii. Magazines
      iv. Zines
   c. Cyberculture
   d. Popular art
   e. Performance art
   f. Electronic entertainment
      i. Film
      ii. Television
      iii. Radio
      iv. Music

g. Everyday life
   i. Shopping, fashion, style and taste
   ii. Fashion, clothing
   iii. Malls
   iv. Style
   v. Taste
   vi. Leisure
h. Food and restaurants
   i. "Fast Food Nation"
   ii. The McDonaldization thesis
   iii. Toys
   iv. Bar and social gathering behavior
   v. Recreational drug use
   vi. Gambling
i. Sports and travel
   i. Theme parks
j. Celebrities and fans

3. Main factors in socio-historical development of popular culture
   a. Social change that facilitated development of popular culture
      i. Political changes
   b. The rise of the contested public sphere
   c. Public (State) and private control of popular culture
      i. Processes of race and class exclusion/oppression

4. Economic changes
   a. Industrialization and urbanization
   b. Assembly line work
   c. Material excess
   d. The continued development of capitalism

5. Spatial changes
   a. Increasing privatization of public space
   b. Movement of popular forms of culture to new sites

6. Technological changes
   a. Inventions that facilitate development of new products
   b. Production networks to reach consumers

7. Popular culture, the social structure and American social institutions
   a. The social structure
      i. Statuses
      ii. Roles
      iii. Dominant and competing values
   b. Popular culture, the social structure and social institutions

8. Overview of theoretical paradigms and theories of popular culture
   a. Functionalist
      i. Socialization theory
      ii. Popular culture integrates people into society
      iii. It provides stability and group cohesion
      iv. Creates and sustains widely held beliefs and values
      v. Strengths and weaknesses of
   b. Symbolic interactionist
      i. Social exchange theory
      ii. Social constructionism
      iii. People trade symbols and through social interaction create meaning
      iv. Meaning systems shift and change
      v. Strengths and weaknesses of
   c. Conflict

   i. Cultural studies
   ii. Marxist political economy
   iii. Ideology and hegemony—Gramsci
   iv. Popular culture reflects hierarchical power arrangements, coercion, competition, censorship and social control
   v. Strengths and weaknesses of
d. Feminism
   i. How is the status of women reflected in popular culture?
   ii. Strengths and weaknesses of
e. Post-modernism
   i. People use discourses to create society
   ii. Society is a subjective experience embodied in popular culture images
   iii. Multiple experiences and interpretations
   iv. Strengths and weaknesses of

9. Overview of main methods of inquiry in popular culture
   a. Survey
   b. Case study
   c. Focus group
   d. Ethnography
   e. Content analysis
   f. Textual and graphic chat space analysis
   g. Ethnomethodology
   h. Strengths and weaknesses of each

10. Production of popular culture
   a. Who makes it?
      i. Ownership
      ii. Class values of producers
   b. How is it made?
      i. Labor arrangements/sweatshop labor
      ii. Invisibility of labor processes used in production of popular culture products
      iii. Production, economic or technological constraints shape product
   c. For whom is it made?
      i. Commercial culture and reinforcement of consumption
   d. Who is the audience or market?
      i. Audience and market characteristics
   e. Critical perspective
      i. Who benefits from these arrangements?
      ii. Who suffers in these arrangements?
      iii. Who is centralized in the process?
      iv. Who is marginalized in the process?

11. Social inequality and popular culture
   a. Ideology
      i. Representation social reality is produced through popular culture images (mediated images)
      ii. Common sense is produced and maintained by popular culture images
      iii. Popular culture images naturalized and de-politicized as "the way it is"
   b. Race and ethnicity
      i. Race, representation and the effects of representation for racially and culturally marginalized communities, particularly

Native American, African American, Asian American and Chicano/Latino communities
    ii. Ethnic forms of popular culture
  c. Social class and socio-economic status
  d. Gender
    i. Masculinity
    ii. Femininity
    iii. Gender tourism
    iv. Sexuality
  e. Age
12. Social issues and popular culture
  a. Affluenza
  b. Brands and branding
  c. Culture lag
  d. Crime and deviance
  e. Mass production, commodification and consumption
  f. Ethnocentrism
  g. Globalization, cultural imperialism and colonization
  h. Forms of resistance
    i. Alternative media
    ii. Culture jamming and anti-advertisements
    iii. Media literacy
13. Popular culture and social change
  a. Popular cultural transformation
  b. Diffusion of popular culture
  c. Popular culture and innovation
    i. Science and technology
  d. Popular culture and cultural resistance
    i. Political protest or revolution
    ii. Nationalism
    iii. Identity politics
  e. Popular culture and the future

Lab Content

Not applicable.

Special Facilities and/or Equipment

When taught as an online distance learning section, students and faculty need ongoing and continuous internet and email access.

Method(s) of Evaluation

Methods of Evaluation may include but are not limited to the following:

Class discussions
Active learning exercises
Oral presentations
Critical essay(s)
Examinations or quizzes

Method(s) of Instruction

Methods of Instruction may include but are not limited to the following:

Lecture
Discussion

Oral presentations
Electronic discussions/chat

Representative Text(s) and Other Materials

Grazian, David. Mix It Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media and Society. 2017.

Kidd, Dustin. Pop Culture Freaks: Identity, Mass Media and Society. 2018.

Berger, Arthur Asa. Ads, Fads and Consumer Culture: Advertising's Impact on American Character and Society. 2020.

Sternheimer, Karen. Connecting Popular Culture and Social Problems: Why Media is Not the Answer. 2019.

Duncombe, Stephen. Cultural Resistance Reader. 2002.

Tomasino, Anna. Discovering Popular Culture. 2007.

The Duncombe and Tomasino texts are classics and the most recent editions; they are current, relevant and topical.

Types and/or Examples of Required Reading, Writing, and Outside of Class Assignments

1. College level readings from primary and secondary sources
2. College level writing assignments based on primary and secondary source reflection and/or analysis

Discipline(s)

Sociology