



## **SOCI 2626 – SOCIOLOGY OF POPULAR CULTURE**

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### **Course Description**

Sociology is the “study of society” that examines and questions patterns of social behavior. In this course, we will focus on one prominent aspect of social life: popular culture. Students will explore theories and concepts central to the sociological study of popular culture in an effort to move beyond a common-sense understanding of ubiquitous cultural objects and their producers. The goal is to “remake” students’ view of pop culture so that they may more critically evaluate and appreciate its production, consumption, meanings, and use. We will turn a sociological lens to music, TV, film, comics, sports, fashion, and other popular media to learn how pop culture and the industry that produces it influence (and are influenced by) our society. Students will learn to use sociological theory and concepts to evaluate these elements of the social world to gain a better understanding of their lives and the lives of those around them.

### **Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes**

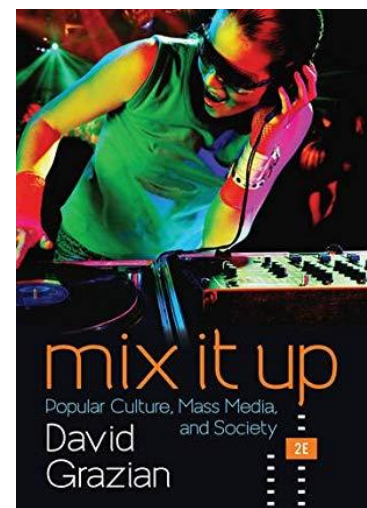
This course is intended to introduce several central principles, concepts, and perspectives used as “tools” in the study of culture. Students will develop a social scientific approach to understanding pop culture and will be encouraged to reconsider and challenge widely held beliefs about the topic that they may hold or which they may encounter. The primary objective of the course is for students to expand their perspectives to think sociologically and critically about this largely taken-for-granted aspect of social life in the modern world, and to demonstrate this knowledge. These objectives will be met through course materials, writing, and in-class discussion.

Students will teach and learn from each other in the classroom and are expected to be actively engaged. *Students are asked to remain both open to new material and perspectives on the topics covered, as well as to ask questions regarding the course material or objectives.*

### **Required Text & Materials**

There is one required book for this class: *Mix It Up* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) by David Grazian (2017, W.W. Norton).

We will be reading from this text at the start of the course, so please acquire it as soon as possible. Any materials *not* from *Mix It Up* will be available through the Canvas course page. Some required videos are available through the streaming service *Kanopy*. Accounts are free for students ([register here](#)).



## READING LIST: THEMES, MATERIALS, & ASSIGNMENTS

### Course Introduction & Defining Pop Culture

Reading: 📖 Course syllabus (**on Canvas**)

Form groups: 🗨️ Students will form groups of five. Each group will identify a shared interest. These should be broad topics that are relevant to the course (e.g., prison labor, local jails, immigration detention, juvenile detention, fines and fees, probation and parole, etc.). Group members *and* selected topics will stay the same throughout the quarter. Today, discuss the following questions and submit your written response at the end of this class period: *What is punishment? What things count as punishment? (It is okay to provide multiple definitions...)*

Reading: 📖 Grazian, 2017. *Mix it Up*, chapter 1 (**required text**)

Reflection: 🤔 *How does David Grazian define pop culture? How does this differ from how you defined pop culture at the start of this course? What are the benefits and limitations of Grazian’s view? In other words, what does his approach encourage us to view as pop culture that we otherwise might not have, and what does it exclude that we otherwise might have included?*

### What Does Pop Culture Really Do?

Reading: 📖 Grazian, 2017. *Mix it Up*, chapter 2 (**required text**)

Discussion: 🗨️ *What “rituals” are performed in the world of your chosen topic? How is “solidarity” established? What images, symbols, or ideas do groups rally around, and how do these reveal who is “in” or “out” of the community?*

Video: 🎬 “[Rubble Kings](#)” (in-class) [**Warning: This film contains descriptions or depictions of physical violence related to gang activity in the 1960s and 1970s.**]

Reflection: 🤔 *What are the core ideas and concepts of the “functionalist” approach to culture? How do these ideas and concepts help to make sense of what we see in this film? In other words, how would a functionalist sociologist explain the events it depicts—especially regarding the role of pop culture? Use specific examples from the film to discuss specific aspects of the functionalist approach.*

### A Critical View of Pop Culture

Reading: 📖 Grazian, 2017. *Mix it Up*, chapter 3 (**required text**)

Discussion: 🗨️ *How are the hierarchies of our society reflected or depicted by your chosen topic? How are social inequalities perpetuated by what goes on in the world of your chosen topic? What forms of rebellion are apparent in your chosen topic?*

Video: 🎬 “[This Changes Everything](#)” (in-class) [**Warning: This film contains brief descriptions of sexual misconduct or abuse in the pop culture industries.**]

Reflection: 🤔 *What are the core ideas and concepts of the “critical” approach to culture? How do these ideas and concepts help to make sense of what we see in this film? In other words, what concepts and ideas would a critical sociologist use to explain the phenomena the documentary depicts? Use specific examples from the film to discuss specific aspects of the critical approach.*

### The Industry behind the Culture

Reading: 📖 Grazian, 2017. *Mix it Up*, ch 6 (**required text**)

Discussion: 🗨️ *What is the “product” associated with your chosen topic, and how is it really produced? Who has the most power to influence what is produced and how*

things are produced? In what ways have disruptions to elements of the “six-facet model of cultural production” influenced what gets produced?

Video:

👤 “[Hitmakers](#)” (in-class)

Reflection:

🔗 What power or influence does the pop culture industry have, and how do we see this in the documentary? How might functionalist and critical views of culture help explain these phenomena? Use specific examples from the film to discuss specific aspects of these approaches. Finally, how has the dynamic between creators and the industry changed in the digital era—do you foresee other changes in the future?

### **Meaning & Authenticity in Pop Culture**

Reading:

📖 Grazian, 2017. *Mix it Up*, ch 8 (**required text**)

Optional:

📖 Hess, 2005. “Hip-Hop Realness and the White Performer.” (**on Canvas**)

Discussion:

👉 What are the dominant markers of “authenticity” within the world of your chosen topic? Who gets to decide which objects or individuals have authenticity? How do people who lack authenticity in this realm try to attain or claim it?

Video:

👤 “[Why is Country Music So White?](#)” (in-class)

Video:

👤 “This is Pop: When Pop Goes Country” (in-class)

Reflection:

🔗 What is a sociological definition of authenticity? How do social class, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality affect how authenticity may be constructed or viewed? Finally, how do these markers of authenticity shape music genres like country music? Use specific examples from both videos and connect them to details from the assigned reading and class lecture.

### **Globalization & Pop Culture**

Reading:

📖 Grazian, 2017. *Mix it Up*, ch 10 (**required text**)

Discussion:

👉 What does the global market look like for your chosen topic? In what ways have its products or influence been imported or exported? How might global politics or cultural differences between countries influence how products related to your chosen topic are created, consumed, or interpreted?

Video:

👤 “[The Illusionists: The Globalization of Beauty](#)” (in-class) [**Warning: This film contains adult images in its depictions of advertising and popular media.**]

Reflection:

🔗 How would a functionalist sociologist view/discuss the globalization of pop culture depicted in the film? How would a critical sociologist view/discuss it? Use specific examples from the film to discuss specific aspects of these approaches. Finally, how do these approaches align with your own views of globalization and pop culture? Please provide specific details.