

COM 527: Cultural Studies in Communication

Instructor: Dr. Jane Banks

Office: Neff 230 J

Office Phone: (260) 481-6548; Do *not* leave messages; I do not use my voicemail. Call me at home instead.

Home Phone: (260) 456-5054

E-Mail: banksj@ipfw.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday, 5:00-6:00, and by appointment

Department Contact: Judi Tennison located in Neff 230 (260) 481-6825

Texts: Durham, G. and D. Kellner, Eds (2001). *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords, Revised Edition*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Hartley, J.(2002). *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts, 3rd Ed*. New York: Routledge.

Fussell, Paul (1983). *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*. New York: Touchstone.

Holtzman, Linda (2000). "Is the United States a Classless Society?" in *Media Messages: What Film, Television, and Popular Music Teach Us About Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe. pp. 98-148.

COM 527 Course Goals:

- To understand how cultural variables (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, and social class) are socially constructed and represented through media discourse and everyday cultural practice
- To develop an understanding of the media's role (including economic, political, and production contexts) in shaping our perceptions of others different from ourselves
- To understand how a person's social identity affects his or her interpretations of media
- To understand and explore the role of media in the everyday lives of individuals
- To understand the ways in which individual media consumers accept, interpret, and resist media discourses *and* who benefits from media consumer transactions
- To apply these understandings to specific artifacts of popular culture
- To explore what cultural studies has to offer communities and organizations outside the university

This semester in particular we will be looking at *social class* as constructed in media discourses such as movies and television shows and as practiced in everyday life. We will study the ways in which social class is enacted through artifacts and practices in media discourses, in organizations, cultural institutions, and in the home. Finally, we will look at how those constructions affect our acceptance or rejection of American myths such as social mobility and the classless society. You will be asked to examine your own place in America's social hierarchy and your attitudes toward social class.

Campus Services: Listed below are several support services located on campus that may be of assistance to you during the semester.

Services for Students with Disabilities- If you have or acquire a disability, contact Services for Students with Disabilities in Walb 113, 481.6657. I will work with you, through this office, to make whatever accommodations are needed for you to complete this course.

The Writing Center- A writing consultant will work with you one-on-one to provide assistance in understanding writing assignments, brainstorming and planning, revising, and polishing final drafts (Kettler G19).

Center for Academic Support and Advancement- CASA can provide assistance with reading and study skills, tutoring, supplemental instruction, etc. (Kettler G23).

Office of Multicultural Studies- This is a support system for African American, Hispanic, Native American, International, Asian American, and at risk students who are enrolled at IPFW (Walb 118).

Center for Women and Returning Adults- Office offers support services for women and returning adults (Walb G25).

Course Requirements and Policies

- A significant part of your grade is based on participation which includes but is not limited to showing up for class. This is *particularly important* in class that only meets once a week. I will be taking attendance, and if you miss class, you are responsible for everything that occurred, including details about assignments. If you miss more than one class, it will affect your grade. If you have already made plans that mean missing more than one class, you should reconsider your decision to take this class. Remember, *one class is the equivalent of one week*, and participation points cannot be made up.
- Participation also includes coming to class *prepared*, which means having done the readings and bringing appropriate texts to class. Take notes as you read. This class will be run in discussion format. I will expect everyone to contribute to discussion (which also means that I will expect the more talkative among you to give your classmates a turn). I will look for contributions that are on topic, constructive, respectful, and reflect active engagement with the readings, lectures, and screenings.
- Assignments must be typed, double-spaced in size 12 font with one-inch margins all around, and follow the APA style manual. I expect all written work to be grammatically correct and well organized. Please don't turn in your first draft—I rewrite my work, and so should you. I also expect that your analysis and arguments will go beyond the superficial and that you will provide evidence for your assertions. I will give you as much guidance as possible regarding my expectations for writing and other assignments. An A or a B grade means that you have gone *beyond* minimal compliance with the requirements.
- Assignments must be *handed in on time*. Late assignments (turned in the next class period) are one week late and will receive the equivalent of one letter grade deduction. If

you are too ill to attend class, have someone drop your assignment in my mailbox in NF 230L. I will not accept any assignments turned in more than one class period late. If you have a documented emergency that prevents you from adhering to these guidelines, send me this information via email.

- In summary, this class will entail a lot of work, but I think it will be worth it. Some of the reading is very challenging, as are the assignments. Because of this, you will not be successful in this class if you fall behind in your reading or your assignments. The above policies are designed to ensure that you keep up.

Assignments

Participation	15%
Autobiography, social class, and media	30%
Team Teaching	30%
Textual analysis	25%

Participation

Is discussed under course policies. I would only add here that in addition to compliance with policies, I will look for enthusiastic, informed engagement with course material and ideas, including the ideas of your classmates.

Autobiography, social class, and media

In this assignment you are asked to write an autobiography in which you examine your own class background, from your first awareness of social class difference (that some people had more than others) to this point. Using some of your readings as a starting place, you will write an in-depth analysis of your own class status growing up. How did you begin to understand the concept of social class from family, peers, books, movies, magazines, TV, and other sources? What were the signifiers of social class displayed in and around your home and on your body and the bodies of your family members? How important was status to you and your family and how was status measured? What was meant by upper class, middle class, working class, and lower class? Were these concepts defined by profession, money, family background, education, or some other means? How did people reveal their class status—how did you learn to recognize the signifiers of social class? How important was it to your parents that your friends were of your same social class? Finally, how much do you believe any and all of this affected or affects your personal or professional life or opportunities? This paper should be about 5-7 pages long.

Team Teaching: Student groups of three will be formed on the first day of class. Each group will select a day to teach the class. On their days to teach, groups will be responsible for teaching the relevant concepts from the assigned readings to the class with a level of intellectual engagement appropriate to a graduate class.

Groups must use the readings given on the syllabus, although you may choose to focus on some concepts more than others (they should be the right ones). Your class should be intellectually rigorous. We want to see what is on *and* under the surface. You should figure out some ways to

encourage participation from everyone (not just some) and to make your class think deeply about what they have read and heard.

As a group, you will decide how to best present these readings. For example, you may choose to use various resources including group activities (but only if they are appropriate to a graduate level audience), large and small group discussion, and various media clips. Keep in mind that this is a “media” driven class, so do not hesitate to use these resources in presenting the material. For example, if you are discussing racial stereotypes in prime-time television, it may be beneficial to show clips from a show to use in discussion.

Groups will be graded on **their understanding of concepts, ability to present material effectively, creativity in presenting material, appropriateness of readings, class activities, use of media resources, and the level of engagement they attain from the class.** Each group will be in charge of two 50-60 minute sessions, occurring over a two week time period. These will usually be the first half of class. During your session, you are to unpack the readings, distill them to their essence, and make them clear. Remember, as Henry Louis Gates said, “If you can’t explain it to your grandmother, you probably don’t understand it yourself.” It’s your job to help your classmates understand the material.

Groups should show a lesson plan to me one week in advance. On the day in question I should receive a packet including the plan, including an overall summary of content, your learning objectives, the concepts you are covering, your rationale, and your teaching strategies, including media, exercises, group discussion, etc.

Textual Analysis

For this assignment, you are to choose a visual narrative fiction---either a television show or a film---and write an essay that analyzes how this show or film works to naturalize the prevailing social order in relation to social class. Given that texts are, as Stewart Hall says, “structured in dominance,” how does your text work to serve the interests of the dominant social order? In addition, John Fiske says that even as media texts reproduce dominant ideologies, they simultaneously offer opportunities to contest them, negotiate them, or modify them. This is truer, according to Fiske, of some texts than of others. Television, for example, is a more “open” text (available to more possible interpretations) than film. In your paper, you should describe whatever opportunities for resistant or oppositional readings that occur in your text. Finally, you must remember to look not only what is there, but what is absent from your text. Whose interests are served by your text’s inclusions and omissions? Your essay should make an argument with a clear thesis and specific examples from your text as support. Essays should be typed and double-spaced.

I have described your goal, now I will suggest some ways of achieving it. I will also be giving you some guided exercises in class to help you.

Look at *representations* of social class (including occupation, educational level, and economic status) not just by itself, but also in relation to race (also ethnicity, nationality), gender, and

sexuality (particularly gender expectations for women and men and the ways in which sexuality is displayed and/or effaced) in your text.

Look at *narrative outcomes*. What roles do the characters in your text have, and what rules must they live by? Which roles, behaviors, and characteristics are rewarded and which are punished within the narrative? For instance, if a woman is portrayed as economically successful or powerful, what happens to her in the narrative? Is she also shown as having a successful or fulfilling personal life?

Look at the *codes of communication*. **Verbal** codes at the level of semantics such as names, value terms, ideological language, and metaphors and at the level of syntactics such as duration of messages, turn taking, interruptions, and arguments and the interaction of verbal with visual and auditory codes. In short, who gets to talk, and for how long? Look at **visual** codes such as color, framing, lighting, foregrounding, and conventional icons in addition to the visual constructions of emotion. Look at the interaction of visual with other codes such as sound, and the use of visual codes to remind us of images from other texts. **Acoustic** codes such as ambient sound, paralinguistic cues, auditory orientation, auditory allusion (particularly musical allusion), and interaction of auditory with other codes are all important in analyzing media texts.

Nothing appears in these texts by accident— on the set of a TV show, the plastic ashtray on the coffee table is a signifier of the middle class status of the family who lives in the house, the color of the bracelet on the wrist of an extra in a crowd scene works with the other colors of the set and costumes to create a disharmonious sense of unease. Everything you see and hear is carefully chosen—to address a particular spectator in a particular way for a particular reason. Analyzing the specifics of the text should enable you to answer the question in the first paragraph—how does this text work to say what to serve whose interests? How does your text serve the dominant order? How (if at all) does your text oppose or contest it?

Readings

Below are the readings required for each section of the Durham and Kellner (D&K) book, broken down by parts. Read roughly the first half of the readings for the first class meeting allocated to that part, the second half for the second class meeting. If there are specific readings that you need to have read by a particular day, your teaching team will tell you in advance. Do not skip the introduction to each section—it will help you understand the readings and help you relate them to each other and to the course. The Hartley book is assigned as a reference. Buy it. You will be glad you did.

Part 1: pp 1-30 (read this before the second class meeting)
Introduction (as always), Chapters, 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6

Part II:
Introduction; Chapters 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

Part III:

Introduction; Chapters 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21

Part IV:

Introduction; Chapters 22, 23, 24, 25, 27

Part V:

Introduction; Chapters 29, 30, 31, 32

Part VI:

Introduction; Chapters 34, 35, 37, 38

Tentative Schedule

Week 1

Tues. 8/25: Welcome: orientation, screening: *Class Dismissed*
Read D&K 1-30, and Fussell, Ch 1-5 or more
Groups are assigned today.

Week 2

Tues. 9/1: Introduction to Cultural Studies
Read the rest of Fussell

Week 3

Tues. 9/8: Group I: The Basics
Read Chapter 3 in Holtzman, on ResExpress

Week 4

Tues. 9/15: Culture, Ideology, and other basic vocabulary

Week 5

Tues. 9/22: Group 2: More Basics; **Autobiographies due**

Week 6

Tues. 9/29 The active audience

Week 7

Tues. 10/6 Group 3: Political Economy

Week 8

Tues. 10/13 Who sells what to whom; who benefits?

Week 9

Tues. 10/20 Group 4: Representation;

Week 10

Tues. 10/27 And its consequences

Week 11

Tues. 11/3 Where is the working-class hero? (Hint—not on TV—this guy needs a bigger screen)

Week 12

Tues. 11/10 Is what you see really what you get? **Textual analysis due**

Week 13

Tues. 11/17 Group 5: Postmodernism

Week 14

Tues. 11/24 What comes after postmodernism?

Week 15

Tues. 12/1 Group 6: Globalization;

Week 16

Tues. 12/8 And imperialism

Optional Final Exam:

Tuesday, 12/13, 5:45-7:45 p.m. at Henry's on Main

Grades on Final Project Distributed, Dr. Banks' (early) retirement celebrated.