

Culture & Networks

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At the root of this class is an exploration of the idea that culture is shaped through social interactions and relationships with others; and that the opposite is also true. Networks coalesce, are transformed, and dissolve because of cultural change – and indeed, there are good reasons to think of networks as a form of culture as well. This is a graduate course that has a dual focus on subfields of the sociology of culture and social networks; and as such, there is a tradeoff here. I make a choice for breadth across these fields rather than the requisite depth that either one deserves (indeed, entire careers have been devoted to each one). Still, the course is based on the conviction that using a lens of the study of culture can be a useful entry point into the study of social networks, and vice versa.

The format of the course is partially discussion-based, and partially practical application.

a) Discussion: I will spend time each week giving key background and context to how the work articulates with the development of the field, and each week one (or two) of you will lead a discussion introducing the material (no more than 15 minutes), and we'll spend the remainder of the time engaging with the questions raised by the discussants. This discussion will touch on conceptual/methodological contributions of the studies, how they articulate with prior approaches, and any challenging questions they raise.

b) The practical application part of the course will involve you identifying and working with a model dataset (provided to you by me, or that you can source on your own) that has data grounded in both relational and culture dimensions, and then completing three workshop assignments.

c) Starting in Week 2, if you have not signed up as one of the week's two discussants, you will be required to write and submit a 1-page memo (single-spaced, 12pt font) on an aspect(s) of the reading(s) that you found interesting (or provocative, or problematic) to Canvas by Wednesday @ 12n. The list of weekly supplemental readings is intended to provide extra detail for those that wish it; these are not required.

Course Objectives

Your goals in this course are related to critical thinking and communication above all, and more practically to take the topical knowledge and skills you learn during the term to develop a research paper to inform a comps, dissertation chapter, or independent manuscript. Any of these course products will be evaluated by me, but part of your final paper grade will come from thoughtful peer reviews of your classmates' paper outlines, and then presentations, to help them advance their thinking should they decide to develop it further into a publication, thesis, or dissertation – so group collaboration skills are also a key focus.

Grading:

- 30% class participation and engagement (including serving as discussant and your weekly reflection papers);
 - *Check+* : active participation and promotion of critical dialogue in class discussions; engaging in independent and self-motivated research and testing of ideas; expanding upon subject material presented in readings and proposing issues to enhance or challenge the research.
 - *Check* : active participation in group discussions and demonstration of enthusiasm of topics presented in readings; addresses and expands on issues presented in the readings; demonstration of understanding of issues
 - *Check-* : Occasional contributions to class discussions and occasional enthusiasm about assignments and class material.
 - *No Check* : Student not present for class discussion, repeatedly late to class, or exhibiting difficulty in demonstrating understanding of issues/concepts in a given week.
- 30% Three workshop assignments (0-100 scale)
- 40% Final paper (0-100 scale).

GRADE SCALE:

Graduate (600-800 level courses):

At least 93: A , At least 90 but less than 93: A- , At least 87 but less than 90: B+ , At least 83 but less than 87: B , At least 80 but less than 83: B- , At least 77 but less than 80: C+ , At least 73 but less than 77: C , Less than 73: F . * *The lowest passing grade a graduate student can receive is a C (in 500-800 level courses).*

Required materials:

- adams, jimi. 2019. *Gathering Social Network Data*. Sage, Inc
- Rawlings, Smith, Moody, McFarland. 2023 *Network Analysis (Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences)*. Cambridge, MA. – hereafter “RSMF”

Prerequisites. Students are expected to come to class and section having read the material so we can discuss, engage, and critique it. Some of this material will (intentionally!) challenge you. If you are outside Sociology, please email the instructor to discuss your degree program and how this course might complement it.

Week 1: Network origins of culture (w/o September 8)

- Breiger, Ronald L. 1974. "The Duality of Persons and Groups." *Social Forces* 53(2):181-90.
- RSMF, Chapters 1-5 "Thinking structurally" (pp.1-88)
- Simko, Christina, & Olick, Jeffery K. 2021. What we talk about when we talk about culture: A multi-facet approach. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 9, 431-459.
- Also recommended:
 - Emirbayer, Mustafa and Jeff Goodwin. 1994. "Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency." *American journal of sociology*:1411-54.
 - Emirbayer M. 1997. "Manifesto for a relational sociology." *American journal of sociology* 103(2):281-317
 - Collins R. 2003. "A network-location theory of culture." *Sociological Theory* 21:69-73

Week 2: Cultural origins of networks (w/o September 15)

- Fuhse, Jan A., and Neha Gondal. "Networks from culture: Mechanisms of tie-formation follow institutionalized rules in social fields." *Social Networks* 77 (2024): 43-54.
- McPherson, M., L. Smith-Lovin and J. M. Cook. 2001. "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27:415-44.
- McLean, Paul. 2016. *Culture in Networks*. Chapters 1-2.
- Also recommended:
 - Friedland, Roger and John Mohr. 2004. "The Cultural Turn in American Sociology." *Matters of culture: Cultural sociology in practice*:1-68.

Week 3: Towards synthetic perspectives (w/o September 22)

- Pachucki, Mark A. and Ronald L. Breiger. 2010. "Cultural Holes: Beyond Relationality in Social Networks and Culture." *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol 36 36:205-24.
- Bolibar, M. (2016). Macro, meso, micro: broadening the 'social' of social network analysis with a mixed methods approach. *Quality & Quantity*, 50(5), 2217-2236.
- Fuhse, Jan, and Ann Mische. "Relational Sociology: Networks, Culture and Interaction." *The Sage Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, 2nd ed. London: Sage (2024): 55-71.
- Also recommended:
 - Rule, Alix and Peter Bearman. 2015. "Networks and Culture." *Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Art and Culture*:161.
 - Mische, A., 2011. Relational sociology, culture, and agency. *The Sage handbook of social network analysis*, pp.80-97.

Week 4: Measurement of meaning (w/o September 29)

- Mohr, John W. 1998. "Measuring Meaning Structures." Annual review of sociology:345-70.
- Mohr, John W. and Craig Rawlings. 2015. "Formal Methods of Cultural Analysis." in International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, Vol. 9, edited by J. D. Wright: Elsevier.
- Bail, Christopher A. 2014. "The Cultural Environment: Measuring Culture with Big Data." Theory and Society 43(3-4):465-82.

***** Workshop Homework 1 due October 3 *****

Week 5: Culture & cognition (w/o October 6)

- Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review*:273-86.
- Vaisey, Stephen. 2009. "Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 114(6):1675-715.
- Vaisey, Stephen. "Welcome to the real world: Escaping the sociology of culture and cognition." In *Sociological Forum*, vol. 36, pp. 1297-1315. 2021.
- Martin, John Levi, and Alessandra Lembo. "Response to Vaisey." In *Sociological Forum*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 294-303. 2022.
- Also recommended:
 - Lizardo, O. and Strand, M., 2010. "Skills, toolkits, contexts and institutions: Clarifying the relationship between different approaches to cognition in cultural sociology." *Poetics*, 38(2), pp.205-228.
 - Martin, John Levi. 2010. "Life's a Beach but You're an Ant, and Other Unwelcome News for the Sociology of Culture." *Poetics* 38(2):229-44.

Week 6: Network measurement (w/o October 13)

- Adams Chapter 1-2 (pp. 1-37)
- RSMF, Chapters 6-12 "Seeing structure" (pp.89-269)
- Felmlee, Diane, Cassie McMillan, and Roger Whitaker. "Dyads, triads, and tetrads: a multivariate simulation approach to uncovering network motifs in social graphs." *Applied network science* 6, no. 1 (2021): 63.

Week 7: Meaning-making processes & network mechanisms (w/o October 20)

- Fuhse, Jan A. 2009. "The Meaning Structure of Social Networks." *Sociological Theory* 27(1):51-73.
- Lin, N., 2017 [1999]. "Building a network theory of social capital." In *Social capital* (pp. 3-28). Routledge.
- Yeung, King-To. 2005. "What Does Love Mean? Exploring Network Culture in Two Network Settings." *Social Forces* 84(1):391-420.

***** Workshop Homework 2 due October 24*****

Week 8: Research ethics with relational data (w/o October 27)

- Kadushin, Charles. 2005. "Who benefits from network analysis: ethics of social network research." *Social Networks* 27: 139-153.
- Tubaro, Paola. "Whose results are these anyway? Reciprocity and the ethics of "giving back" after social network research." *Social Networks* 67 (2021): 65-73.
- Pasquale, Dana K., Tom Wolff, Gabriel Varela, Jimi Adams, Peter J. Mucha, Brea L. Perry, Thomas W. Valente, and James Moody. "Considerations for social networks and health data sharing: An overview." *Annals of Epidemiology* 102 (2025): 28-35.
- adams, Chapter 4 "Ethical considerations". pp.61-71

Week 9: Social movements & networks (w/o November 3)

- Granovetter, M., 1978. "Threshold models of collective behavior." *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(6), pp.1420-1443.
- Gould, R.V., 1991. "Multiple networks and mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871." *American Sociological Review*, pp.716-729.
- Ghaziani, Amin and Delia Baldassarri. 2011. "Cultural Anchors and the Organization of Differences a Multi-Method Analysis of LGBT Marches on Washington." *American Sociological Review* 76(2):179-206.
- Also recommended:
 - Padgett J, Ansell C. 1993. "Robust action and the rise of the Medici, 1400-1434." *American Journal of Sociology* 98(6):1259-319

***** Workshop Homework 3 due November 7 *****

Week 10: Cultural production and networks (w/o November 10)

- Goldberg, Amir, Michael T. Hannan, and Balázs Kovács. "What does it mean to span cultural boundaries? Variety and atypicality in cultural consumption." *American Sociological Review* 81.2 (2016): 215-241.
- Lizardo, O. 2014. "Omnivorousness as the Bridging of Cultural Holes: A Measurement Strategy." *Theory and Society* 43(3-4):395-419.
- Leal, Diego F. "Locating Cultural Holes Brokers in Diffusion Dynamics Across Bright Symbolic Boundaries." *Sociological Methods & Research* (2025): 00491241251322517.
- Also recommended:
 - DiMaggio, Paul. 1987. "Classification in Art." *American Sociological Review*:440-55.
 - Sonnett, J. 2016. "Ambivalence, indifference, distinction: A comparative netfield analysis of implicit musical boundaries." *Poetics*, 54, 38-53.

Week 11: Cultural preferences, attitudes, & tastes (w/o November 17)

- Lewis, K., 2016. "Preferences in the early stages of mate choice." *Social Forces*, 95(1), pp.283-320.
- Vaisey, Stephen and Omar Lizardo. 2010. "Can Cultural Worldviews Influence Network Composition?" *Social Forces* 88(4):1595-618.
- Lewis, Kevin, and Jason Kaufman. "The conversion of cultural tastes into social network ties." *American journal of sociology* 123, no. 6 (2018): 1684-1742.
- Also recommended:
 - Erickson, Bonnie H. 1988. "The Relational Basis of Attitudes." Pp. 99–121 in *Social Structures: A Network Approach*, Vol. 99, edited by B. Wellman and J. Bercovitz. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Week 12: Thanksgiving week – NO CLASS**Week 13: What's next: the future of the analysis of culture and networks (w/o December 1)**

- Doehne, Malte, Daniel A. McFarland, and James Moody. "Network ecology: Tie fitness in social context (s)." *Social Networks* 77 (2024): 180-196.
- Ghasemian, Amir, and Nicholas A. Christakis. "The structure and function of antagonistic ties in village social networks." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 121, no. 26 (2024): e2401257121.

Week 14: Final project presentations and group feedback, Part 1 (w/o December 8)

In this class session, your goal is to publicly summarize (in 10 minutes) your final project, lessons learned, and next steps. This will serve as a workshop of sorts, and allow you to integrate feedback from your peers in time for the final paper submission.

******* Final papers due Tuesday, December 15 *******

Academic Honesty Statement: Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent
(http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/)

AI policy: In terms of the above clause that “other sources of information or knowledge be appropriately credited”, please be advised that AI-generated content is severely frowned upon in this course, though there is a rich debate about its place in our society. Here’s the ultimate position of this course: (a) your engagement with and understanding of the material is one of the primary ways for you to learn about the world; circumventing this with AI will slow your intellectual growth; (b) a major objective of college is to help you to get better at writing so that when you enter the workforce, you’re equipped to succeed. For most of us, this will involve making mistakes and learning from them.

Accommodation Statement: The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements. For further information, please visit Disability Services
(<https://www.umass.edu/disability/>)

Title IX Statement: In accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 that prohibits gender-based discrimination in educational settings that receive federal funds, the University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students, free from all forms of discrimination, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and retaliation. This includes interactions in person or online through digital platforms and social media. Title IX also protects against discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, miscarriage, abortion, or related conditions, including recovery. There are resources here on campus to support you. A summary of the available Title IX resources (confidential and non-confidential) can be found at the following link:

<https://www.umass.edu/titleix/resources> . You do not need to make a formal report to access them. If you need immediate support, you are not alone. Free and confidential support is available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week / 365 days a year at the SASA Hotline 413-545-0800.

Department of Sociology Statement of Values

The Department of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive and equitable department. We ask that all members of the Sociology community -- faculty, staff, and students -- be mindful of our responsibility to create an environment that is welcoming to all, and where each person feels accepted, included, seen, heard, valued, and safe. We recognize that learning how to be inclusive and respectful is an iterative process and sometimes we all act in imperfect ways. As sociologists, we are aware that we are all inheritors of systems of inequality, whether to our advantage or our disadvantage. We also acknowledge that we each are privileged in various ways. We strive to create safe spaces to encourage productive dialogue with the goal of learning from our mistakes and changing for the better.

We strive for excellence in all we do. True excellence requires each individual to be able to work and learn in an atmosphere of respect, dignity, and acceptance. Our commitment to equity and inclusion requires each of us to continuously ensure that our interactions are respectful. We recognize that marginalized groups of people have unique experiences in the Pioneer Valley and within the larger society. We are committed to making our department a place that counteracts, to the best of our abilities, those processes of marginalization, and that inspires academic freedom and creativity.

Whenever and wherever possible, our department will affirm this commitment to values that oppose racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, classism, and hatred based on religious identity publicly and explicitly. As a department dedicated to social justice, we will take very seriously reports, formal or informal, of harassment and discrimination. We will make every effort to ensure that this commitment manifests in our department's policies, programs, and practices. In the Department of Sociology, we:

- Value equity, inclusion, and dignity for all.
- Insist on a culture of respect and recognize that words and actions matter. The absence of action and words also matter.
- Encourage respectful expression of ideas and perspectives.
- Will not tolerate sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and other overt and covert forms of prejudice and discrimination.
- Share in the responsibility to create a positive culture and to safeguard equity, inclusion, dignity, respect, and safety for all. Each member of our community - faculty, staff, and students - should be a role model for others.
- Will take action when we observe people being treated unfairly or in a demeaning manner.
- Envision and strive to foster an inclusive, welcoming department.