

MEDIA AND SOCIETY
432 OLD MAIN
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TTH 12:50 - 2:30 PM

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Introduction

“In a society that fancies itself the freest ever, spending time with communications machinery is the main use to which we have put our freedom.” (Todd Gitlin, *Media Unlimited*)

These days, we encounter media in the form of morning TV shows and a newspaper at breakfast, on our computers throughout the day, and with Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and Conan O’Brien just before falling asleep. Given the near omnipresence of mass media in contemporary society, it has become an increasingly important institution for sociologists to study. In this class, we will ask a variety of significant and timely questions about the relationship between media and society, such as what groups and individuals have power to shape media content? What type of messages and information do media outlets communicate (particularly in terms of race, class, and gender)? Do people blindly accept media messages or do we have the capacity to resist in some form? What possibilities does the Internet offer for democracy? In considering these and other questions, we will explore major theories of mass media as well as the dominant methodologies researchers have used to begin to find answers.

This course will also cultivate several skills that will be of use to students in the future. First and most importantly, students will be encouraged to think creatively and approach readings in the spirit of critical inquiry, digging deep into texts and challenging assumptions. Secondly, in keeping with Concordia’s curricular theme of “Becoming Responsibly Engaged in the World”, we will think closely about the global implications of a powerful and largely American mass media infrastructure and consider the ways in which mass media might be reformed. Finally, students will be expected to put complex ideas into coherent language through regular writing assignments. Training students to be great writers is one of the fundamental hallmarks of a liberal arts education and well-honed writing skills empower students to articulate their thoughts clearly.

Required Texts

Croteau, David and William Hoynes. 2003. *Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Copies of *Media/Society* are available in the bookstore, but are also widely available online (probably for a better price). Students are encouraged to get the best deal possible, but also to get a copy quickly as it will be needed to complete the readings for the second class session.

Other readings for the course are available on the course's Moodle site (<http://moodle.cord.edu/>). The key code for the site is "media" (case sensitive).

Requirements

Developing sophisticated insights about society and good suggestions to help solve social problems requires careful reading, reflection, and writing. Additionally, since the ability to understand issues is dependent on amassing empirical evidence, it is essential to become informed about and utilize appropriate methodologies for gathering data. To promote learning in these areas, your progress in this course will be measured in several ways. The following are the course assessments:

1. **Participation** (10%) – Active participation is essential to having good class discussions. Therefore, you will be expected to complete the readings and be prepared for each class. Each week will include a mixture of lectures and discussion. Being prepared means arriving promptly, remaining in class for the whole session, and actively contributing and listening.
2. **Reading Questions** (20%) – For nine weeks of the course students will be required to submit responses to critical reading questions. Each week, I will distribute two sets of three questions each -- the first set representing the Tuesday readings and the second set representing the Thursday readings. Students will answer one question of your choosing from each set (two questions total). You will submit an answer from the first set on Tuesday and one from the second set on Thursday. Answers should be typed and should reflect both knowledge of the text and critical thinking (I will assign 40% of the grade based on evidence of reading and 60% based on your ability to critique the work).
3. **Exams** (40%) – There will be two non-cumulative examinations testing material covered both in the readings and in class. The first will be held on Oct. 9 and the second on Dec. 16 at 11 am. Exams will incorporate multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.
4. **Fieldwork paper** (5%) – One of the assigned readings for class is an excerpt from David Grazian's book, *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs* (2005). He describes how blues artists (and club owners) nightly manufacture performances that appear "authentic" in order to attract crowds of (largely white) tourists. You will conduct your own fieldwork at a local concert of your choosing (it could be rock, jazz, classical, etc.) and write a brief 3-4 page paper (double-spaced) describing your findings. Oct. 2. This paper is explained more fully on the attached assignment sheet.
5. **Content Analysis Group Project** (25%) – Over the course of the semester, working in groups of four, students will conduct their own research project on the content of television programming, resulting in a group presentation during the final few weeks of class. Each student will also have specific area of focus within the group project. A one paragraph description of each student's focus is due on Oct. 7 and the full paper is due on Dec. 11. The project is explained more fully on the attached assignment sheet.

Summary:

10% Participation
20% Reading Questions
40% Two Exams
5% Fieldwork Paper
25% Group Project, Presentation, and Paper

100% Final Grade

Grades:

94%-100%	A	90-93%	A-	87-89%	B+
84-86%	B	80-83%	B-	77-79%	C+
74-76%	C	70-73%	C-	67-69%	D+
64-66%	D	60-63	D-	<60	F

Late Policy: On all assignments, your grade will be reduced by one unit for each day late (e.g., 1 day, from A to A-; 2 days, B+; 3 days, B, and so on). After two weeks from the due date, you will receive a zero for the assignment.

Missed Exam: Don't do it. A make-up exam will be given at my discretion and I reserve the right to change the format.

Cheating and Plagiarism: Students are expected to complete their work independently (except in the case of group projects) and violators will be seriously penalized. According to the *Concordia College Handbook*, cheating is “when one uses a resource other than one's own scholarship to answer [exam] questions.” Plagiarism is “when one misrepresents another's ideas as one's own on an assignment.” If you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism and/or cheating, please discuss it with me in advance of due dates or exams. In the case of a violation, the offending student will receive a zero (“F”) for the assignment and be reported to the Academic Dean's Office, which may result in disciplinary action. Please don't let this happen!

Civility and Respect: This course will include discussions of class, nationality, religion, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. I expect students to show respect toward all the subjects of our study. More importantly, I expect you to treat your classmates and your instructor with respect and dignity at all times – especially when you disagree with them.

Course Outline

All listed readings are required. The readings are listed using the following shorthand: (M/S) *Media/Society* (Croteau and Hoynes) text and (E) available electronically on Moodle. The course code for Moodle is “media” (case sensitive). Please let me know immediately, if you have difficulty accessing the electronic files.

Week 1: Introductions

Aug. 28 Intro and "The" Media, Survey

Week 2: The Media Torrent

Sept. 2 Media Torrent/Sociology of the Media
(M/S) Ch. 1
(E) Todd Gitlin, "Media Unlimited"

Sept. 4 Media in An Age of Mechanical Reproduction
(E) Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry"

Week 3: The Concentration of Media Ownership

Sept. 9 Concentration of Ownership
(M/S) Ch. 2
(E) Eric Klinenberg, "Fighting for Air"

Sept. 11 Ownership (Cont'd)
(E) Joshua Gamson and Pearl Latteier, "Media Monsters"

Week 4: Politics and Mass Media

Sept. 16 Political Influence
(M/S) Ch. 3
(E) Andrew Lindner, "Controlling the Media in Iraq"

Sept. 18 Film: NPR's *Radio Lab* (WNYC), "War of the Worlds"
(E) Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky "Manufacturing Consent"

Week 5: Production of the News

Sept. 23 News Production
(M/S) Ch. 4
(E) Herbert Gans, "Deciding What's News"

Sept. 25 Ideology and Objectivity
(M/S) Ch. 5

Week 6: Production of Art

Sept. 30 Authenticity and Starving Artists
(E) David Grazian, "Blue Chicago"

Oct. 2 Library Session with Librarian Amy Soma (Meet in Ylvisaker Library)
Due: Fieldwork Paper

Week 7: Exam Week

Oct. 7 Tying Together Big Themes/Exam Review
Due: One Paragraph Project Description

Oct. 9 Exam #1

Week 8: Advertising and Mass Consumption

Oct. 14 Advertising, Consumption, Being Cool
(E) David Brooks, "Bobos in Paradise"
(E) Malcolm Gladwell, "The Coolhunt"

Oct. 16 Merchants of Cool
For class, watch the PBS *Frontline* film, *Merchants of Cool* (53 minutes)
Available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/view/>

Weeks 9 and 10: Inequality and Media Images

Oct. 21 No Class (Mid-Semester Recess)

Oct. 23 Race, Class, Gender, and the Media
(M/S) Ch. 6

Oct. 28 Race, Class, Gender, and the Media

Oct. 30 What do Magazines Tell Us?

Week 11: Audiences

Nov. 4 Media Effects and Political Knowledge
(M/S) Ch. 7

Nov. 6 Agency and Resistance
(M/S) Ch. 8

Week 12: New Media and Democracy

Nov. 11 New Media and Social Change
(M/S) Ch. 9
(E) Chris Anderson, "The Long Tail"

Nov. 13 The Internet and Political Polarization
(E) Cass Sunstein, "The Daily We"

Week 13: The Globalization of Mass Media

- Nov. 18 Globalization or Cultural Imperialism?
(M/S) Ch. 10
- Nov. 20 Booming Bollywood and Cell Phones in Africa
(E) Sara Corbett, "Can the Cellphone Help End Global Poverty?"

Week 14: Understanding the Rest of the World

- Nov. 25 Where is Afghanistan?
- Nov. 27 No Class (Thanksgiving)

Week 15: Content Analysis Group Presentations

- Dec. 2 Presentations
- Dec. 4 Presentations

Week 16: Presentations (Cont'd) and Course Wrap-up

- Dec. 9 Presentations
- Dec. 11 Wrap-up/Exam Review
Due: Project Paper

Exam Week

- Dec. 16 Final Exam (11 am – 1 pm)

Content Analysis Group Project
SOC 380: Media and Society
Andrew Lindner

As a way of putting into action some of the major ideas of this course's readings, each group will present an in-depth analysis of one particular type of television programming, such as children's television, national news, or commercials. The goal of this assignment is to critically evaluate the programming in terms of structure, techniques, gender roles, racial and ethnic images, values and ideologies, and language and images.

Working in groups of four, students will select one of the twelve types of television programming listed below. The group should then begin to record the shows (or locate them on the Internet). Regardless of how you record or access the show, every group member must watch all episodes. The number of episodes to be recorded will depend the type of program your group selects; I will discuss with each group what an appropriate number of episodes would be. While all group members will record a variety of notes on the programs, each student will examine a different aspect of the same program. For example, if a group is studying local news programs, one person might be responsible for monitoring gender images, while another person could focus on the structural elements of the production.

In watching the episodes, all members of the group will keep a detailed diary of what you are watching. Your TV diaries will be essential to producing both your presentation and your project paper. The diaries need not be typed, but must be turned in with your paper.

Though group members may choose who will focus on what aspects, each group should keep detailed notes on the following features of the programming:

1. Record the time, date, and channel of each episode; or, if it was located on the Internet, provide information on how to locate each episode.
2. Tabulate the number of people or characters as best as you can in terms of available information on gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, social class, body image, nationality, etc.
3. Describe how you would characterize the core themes of the show (for example, violence can happen regularly, or transgressions are almost always punished, or tolerance of diversity is valued, or happiness comes with beauty and youth, or foreigners are not to be trusted, etc.)
4. Explain how the production elements of the show are structured and what these might communicate (music, camera angles, set designs, language of the introductions, clothing, other symbols, etc.)

Assessments

Using the information collected in the TV diaries, students will work in groups to produce presentations to be presented in front of the class during the last few weeks of class. Additionally, students will *independently* write a paper bringing together the project findings and past academic research. There are three important due dates:

1. *One Paragraph Project Description (Due Oct. 7)*: After meeting with your group and clarifying your role on the project, submit a paragraph description of your specific task/focus. Also include citations for at least three peer-reviewed research articles related to this area of focus. To aide you in locating these articles, we will have refresher session in the library on how to search for sociological articles during class time. After a short presentation, you will be given time to search with help from Amy Soma, the social science librarian.

2. *Group Presentation* (Final weeks of class): Each group will give a 30 minute presentation to the class. Since it is not possible to show every clip or to describe in detail all your findings, your group must strive to present your most important observations and conclusions in an organized and concise fashion with time left for class discussion. Normally, this would mean 5 minutes per person, a few minutes to show exemplary clips, and a few minutes of discussion. PowerPoint can be a very useful presentation tool, but do not simply read off slides. Also, be sure to rehearse!

3. *Project Paper (Due Dec. 11)*: This paper should be a primarily analytical paper that develops the student's particular area of focus. First, using at least three academic research articles from peer-reviewed journals, describe how past theory and research have considered your particular area of focus (e.g., what does past research tell us about how women are depicted on TV?). Next, fully discuss the shows you watched and what you found in reference to your area of focus (e.g., how were women depicted in the shows you studied?). Finally, compare your results to previous findings and consider the implications for media consumers (that is, what do your findings suggest for theory and policy?) The paper should be 6-8 pages (double-spaced) and must include an ASA-style bibliography.

In total, the project, presentation, and paper are worth 25% of your course grade. 60% of this grade will be based on the quality of your TV diary and paper and 40% will be based on your group presentation. If anyone in your group is not doing her/his share, please let me know immediately.

Types of Television Programming

Groups should choose one of the following topics.

1. Children's TV (cartoons, *Sesame Street*, *Hannah Montana*, etc.)
2. Talk shows (*Oprah*, *Tyra Banks*, *Ellen*, etc.)
3. Local news programs (e.g. *Valley News Live at 5:30*)
4. National news programs (NBC, CNN, etc.)
5. News Magazine (*Dateline*, *60 Minutes*, *Nightline*, etc.)
6. Reality programs (*Big Brother*, *The Bachelor*, *Project Runway*, etc.)
7. Entertainment news (*Access Hollywood*, *E! News*, *The Soup*, etc.)
8. Sports
9. Sitcoms (top ten)
10. Classic TV sitcoms
11. Dramas (top ten)
12. Commercials (choose one time slot only)

Many television shows of all sorts can be found on various network websites and www.hulu.com.

Fieldwork Paper
SOC 380: Media and Society
Andrew Lindner

Fieldwork is a historically important method of sociological research and remains today one of the most important ways of gaining richly nuanced information about the subtleties of human interaction. An excellent recent use of fieldwork is sociologist David Grazian's 2005 book *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs*, excerpts of which we will read in class. In the book, he describes how blues artists (and club owners) nightly manufacture performances that appear "authentic" in order to attract crowds of (largely white) tourists. Of course, blues musicians are not alone in behaving in certain ways to enhance the supposed authenticity of the performance. Any behavior apart from the technical manipulation of the instrument serves to cultivate a particular image of the artist. In their own way, all artists attempt to fabricate certain "authentic" images.

For this assignment, you will conduct your own fieldwork on the ways in which musicians construct "authentic" performances by conforming to certain conventions of their genre. First, read the excerpts from *Blue Chicago* and consider Grazian's descriptions of how blues musicians recreate the iconic blues performances that audiences seek. Next, attend a local concert of any sort – rock, jazz, classical, etc. – and study the interaction between the performers and the audience. Begin by noting the gender, class, age, and racial/ethnic composition of the musicians and the audience. Next, observe the musicians' behavior. How would you characterize their performances? For example, do they appear serious or fun loving, tortured or easygoing, arrogant or modest? In what ways do the musicians communicate this image and how does that image fit with their genre or context? Finally, you might consider briefly interviewing some members of the audience about what they expect or hope for from live performances. Alternatively, if possible, you could interview the musicians about what kinds of things they do on stage that audiences respond to the most. Interviewing is *not* a necessary requirement of this assignment. But if you do interview people, don't ask questions like, "how do you fabricate authentic performances?" If you would like to discuss how best to frame your questions, please come and see me before your fieldwork.

After conducting your fieldwork, write a 3-4 page paper (double-spaced) briefly describing your findings from the concert and comparing them to Grazian's account of Chicago blues artists. Remember, this paper is first and foremost an assessment of your ability to think critically about the way that media (music) is produced. Don't get too hung up on recording every detail of the concert. Rather, use examples from the concert and Grazian's book to examine the issue of whether or not musicians' performances inevitably conform to the unwritten rules of a particular genre of music

Due Oct. 2