

SOC 138: The Sociology of Reality TV
Lehigh University, Spring 2018
CRN: 14099 (4 Credits)
Tuesday/Thursday 2:35 pm- 3:50 pm
Room: Mudd 353

Professor: Danielle Lindemann
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Office Hours: By Appointment

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Course Description:

How does *The Bachelor* shed light on contemporary courtship rituals, and what can the Kardashians teach us about the social functions of the family? Reality television shows may seem like frivolous fun (and they are!), but they are also illuminating cultural artifacts that reflect contemporary American behaviors, norms, and tastes. In this course—by reading sociological literature, paired with episodes of reality shows—we will learn to analyze these forms of entertainment through a social scientific lens. Topics covered in this class include the sociology of gender, race, class, dating and sexuality, the family, culture, competition, and deviance. For their final group projects, students will select one of our course readings and apply it to a reality show we have *not* watched for the class.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the semester, students should be able to...

- ...define, and have a basic working knowledge of, “sociology”;
- ...approach a variety of broad subject areas—including gender, race, social class, the family, courtship and sexuality, sports, and deviance—from a sociological perspective;
- ...apply a critical sociological lens to reality television shows, and other media;
- and, more broadly,
- ...think critically about how to apply sociological insights to contemporary issues and their own daily lives.

Required Materials:

- PDFs of all required readings are available on Coursesite.
- In most cases, the TV episodes for this class will be available on Coursesite as streaming content. However, due to copyright issues, *The Bachelor* and *Hoarding: Buried Alive* will not be there. These two shows are available for purchase on iTunes for \$1-\$3 each. They may also be available on Amazon instant video or Hulu. Warning: Many times, episodes on YouTube are mislabeled. You are responsible for making sure you are watching the correct episodes for this class.

Course Requirements:

Exams – (4 exams x 15% each = 60% of final grade)

Each exam will *focus* on the material we have covered since the previous exam but may cover prior material as well. *Material from the lectures and the readings is fair game for the tests.* All exams will be in-class, closed book, and closed notes. All exams will have the following format:

- I. Multiple choice questions (20 questions x 2 points each = 40% of exam grade)
- II. Short-answer questions (includes fill-in questions and definitions of concepts) (10 questions x 4 points each = 40% of exam grade)
- III. Short essay question (20% of exam grade) – This question, similarly to one of our “Q&A” prompts (see below), will ask you to apply one or more of our course readings to one or more of the shows we have watched. In our last class meeting before each exam, I will provide a list of several potential essay questions. I will select *one* of these essays for the exam.

Participation – (5% of final grade)

This is NOT attendance. We will not be taking attendance in this class. Your grade on this item will be based on how much you actively engage in class discussion. We will keep track of your participation throughout the semester.

Q&A responses – (15% of final grade)

On select days, where marked on the syllabus, I will open the class with a specific question that asks you to link the reading and the TV show for that week. Students will have ten minutes to write responses in class. While there is no single “correct” answer to these questions, your response should: 1) clearly and directly answer the question; and 2) demonstrate that you have done the reading, watched the episode, and thought critically about the connection between the two. You may refer to your notes when writing your response, but not the reading or the internet. *We will drop your lowest Q&A grade.* Q&A grading rubric:

√+ = A = It is evident that you did the reading and watched the episode, and you clearly and accurately responded to the prompt.

√ = B = It is evident that you did the reading or watched the episode, but perhaps not both/ or some elements of your response were inaccurate.

√- = C = You tried.

0 = You did not complete a Q&A sheet.

Final group project/presentation – (20% of final grade)

See “Group Project Guidelines” sheet on Coursesite for further details.

Grading Scale:

93%-100% = A

90%-92% = A-

87%-89% = B+
83%-86% = B
80%-82% = B-
77%-79% = C+
73%-76% = C
70%-72% = C-
67%-69% = D+
63%-66% = D
60%-62% = D-
0%-59% = F

Missed Exams/Late Assignments:

Students must sit for exams **in class on the day they are given**. Barring extreme circumstances (*e.g.* illness with a doctor's note), there will be no make-up exams offered.

Late presentation slides will not be accepted.

Policy on Laptops/Cell Phones:

In general, students are not permitted to use laptops except at times specified by the instructor. If you have a circumstance that requires you to use a device in class, please speak with me privately. See the policy on accommodations below.

Cell phone use is never permitted.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting accommodations, please contact both myself and the Office of Academic Support Services, Williams Hall, Suite 301 ([610-758-4152](tel:610-758-4152)) as early as possible in the semester. You must have documentation from the Academic Support Services office before accommodations can be granted.

The Principles of Our Equitable Community:

Lehigh University endorses The Principles of Our Equitable Community [http://www.lehigh.edu/~inprv/initiatives/PrinciplesEquity_Sheet_v2_032212.pdf]. We expect each member of this class to acknowledge and practice these Principles. Respect for each other and for differing viewpoints is a vital component of the learning environment inside and outside the classroom.

Student Senate Statement on Academic Integrity:

“We, the Lehigh University Student Senate, as the standing representative body of all undergraduates, reaffirm the duty and obligation of students to meet and uphold the highest principles and values of personal, moral and ethical conduct. As partners in our educational community, both students and faculty share the responsibility for promoting and helping to ensure an environment of academic integrity. As such, each student is expected to complete all academic course work in accordance to the standards set forth by the faculty and in compliance with the University's Code of Conduct.”

Schedule of Assignments:

Week 1 (Introduction): Welcome to the *Real World*: Using the Sociological Imagination

Tuesday, January 23rd

- Course introduction and administration.
- Because it is only available on DVD, we will also watch season 1, episode 1 of *The Real World* (MTV, 1992) in class today.

Thursday, January 25th

Q&A in class today.

Read for this class:

- Mills, CW. "Chapter One: The Promise" in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959)
- Durkheim, E. "Chapter One: What Is a Social Fact?" in *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, pp. 50-59.

Week 2 (Sociology of Gender): "May the Best Woman Win": Doing Gender in *Rupaul's Drag Race*

Tuesday, January 30th

Read for this class:

- West, C., and D.H. Zimmerman. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society* 1.2 (1987): 125-151.
- Butler, J. Selection from *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999, Routledge), pp. 174-180.

Thursday, February 1st

Q&A in class today.

Watch for this class:

- *Rupaul's Drag Race*, season 3, episode 11: "Jocks in Frocks" (Logo, 2011)

Week 3 (Sociology of Race): Let's Get Intersectional: Black Femininity in *Love & Hip Hop*

Tuesday, February 6th

Read for this class:

- King, D.K. "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology." *Signs* (1988): pp. 42-72.
- Smith-Shomade, B.E. Selection from *Shaded Lives: African-American Women and Television* (Rutgers University Press, 2002)

Thursday, February 8th

Q&A in class today.

Read for this class:

- Phillip, A. "Why Black America Hates VH1's 'Sorority Sisters.'" *Washington Post* (12/27/14)

Watch for this class:

- *Love & Hip-Hop*, season 1, episode 1: "Love & Hip-Hop" (VH1, 2011)

Week 4: Race, Class, and Intensive Mothering in *Snooki & JWoww*/ Exam #1

Tuesday, February 13th

- We will do a brief review for the exam in class today. Please come prepared with any lingering questions you might have about the material. I will also distribute your essay "question bank" in class.

Read for this class:

- Hays, S. (1996). *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven: Yale University Press: pp. 19-50. [continued...]

- Gates, R. 2017. “What Snooki and Joseline Taught Me About Race, Motherhood, and Reality TV.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*. Oct. 21. Available [here](https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/what-snooki-and-joseline-taught-me-about-race-motherhood-and-reality-tv/) or here: <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/what-snooki-and-joseline-taught-me-about-race-motherhood-and-reality-tv/>
- *There are no TV episodes assigned for this class session.*

Thursday, February 15th

- **IN-CLASS EXAM #1**

Week 5 (Sociology of Culture): “Money Can’t Buy You Class”: Habitus and *The Real Housewives*

Tuesday, February 20th

Read for this class:

- Bourdieu, P. Selection from *Distinction* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 99-114.

Thursday, February 22nd – NO CLASS!

- I will be away at a conference. Please get a head start on your viewing/reading for next week!

Week 6 (Family Sociology): *Housewives* continued/*Keeping Up with Family*

Tuesday, February 27th

Q&A in class today (Bourdieu/*Housewives*).

Watch for this class:

- *The Real Housewives of New York City*, season 3, episode 11: “Housewives Overboard” (Bravo, 2010)

Read for this class:

- Goode, W.J. (2006) “The Theoretical Importance of the Family” in Skolnick, Arlene and Jerome Skolnick, (Eds). *Family in Transition*. Boston: Allyn Bacon: 14-25.
- Baumrind, D. “Authoritarian vs. Authoritative Parental Control.” *Adolescence*. 3.11 (1968): 255-272.

Thursday, March 1st

Q&A in class today.

Watch for this class:

- *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, season 1, episode 1: “I’m Watching You” (E!, 2007)

Week 7: Keep on *Keeping Up* / Exam #2

Tuesday, March 6th

- We will do a brief review for the exam in class today. Please come prepared with any lingering questions you might have about the material. I will also distribute your essay “question bank.”

Read for this class:

- Lofton, K. (2017) “Kardashian Nation: Work in America’s Klan,” in *Consuming Religion*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press: pp. 164-193.
- Leppert, A. (2015). “Keeping Up with the Kardashians, Fame-Work, and the Production of Entrepreneurial Sisterhood,” in *Cupcakes, Pinterest, Ladyporn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early 21st Century*. Elana Levine., ed. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press: pp. 215-231.

Thursday, March 8th

- **IN-CLASS EXAM #2**

Week 8: SPRING BREAK

Tuesday, March 13th

- NO CLASS

Thursday, March 15th

- NO CLASS

Week 9 (Sociology of Sports): *Dance Moms* and “Competitive Kid Capital”

Tuesday, March 20th

Read for this class:

- Friedman, H.L. “Chapter Three: Cultivating Competitive Kid Capital” in *Playing to Win: Raising Kids in a Competitive Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 81-120

Thursday, March 22nd

Q&A in class today.

- You will indicate your final project group preferences in class today.

Read for this class:

- Friedman, H.L. “Tiger Teachers: The New Stage Moms Aren’t the Moms.” *Huffington Post* (6/07/12)

Watch for this class:

- *Dance Moms*, season 2, episode 14: “The Battle Begins” (Lifetime, 2012)

Weeks 10 & 11: No Class/ Teen Pregnancy/ Exam #3

Tuesday, March 27th

- NO CLASS

Thursday, March 29th

Read for this class:

- Brückner, H., Martin, A., and P.S. Bearman. “Ambivalence and Pregnancy: Adolescents’ Attitudes, Contraceptive Use and Pregnancy.” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 36.6 (2004): 248-257.
- Schalet, A. (2006) “Raging Hormones, Regulated Love: Adolescent Sexuality in the United States and the Netherlands” in Skolnick, Arlene and Jerome Skolnick, (Eds). *Family in Transition*. Boston: Allyn Bacon: 129-134

Tuesday, April 3rd

Q&A in class today.

- We will do a brief review for the exam in class today. Please come prepared with any lingering questions you might have about the material. I will also distribute your essay “question bank” in class.

Watch for this class:

- *16...and Pregnant: “Life After Labor” Finale Special: Hosted by Dr. Drew*, season 2 (MTV, 2010).

Thursday, April 5th

- **IN-CLASS EXAM #3**

Week 12 (Sociology of Courtship): *The Bachelor* in Historical Perspective

Tuesday, April 10th

Read for this class:

- Bailey, B. (1989.) “Sex Control” and “The Etiquette of Masculinity and Femininity,” in *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in 20th-Century America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press: 77-118 + Notes

Thursday, April 12th

Q&A in class today.

- Project groups will meet in class today to decide on final presentation material.

Watch for this class:

- *The Bachelor*, season 19, episode 2: “1902” (ABC, 2015)

Week 13 (Sociology of Deviance): Hoarding as “Spoiled Identity”

Tuesday, April 17th

Read for this class:

- Goffman, E. Selections from *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963, Simon & Schuster), pp. 1-19 and 41-51.

Thursday, April 19th

LAST Q&A in class today!

Watch for this class:

- *Hoarding: Buried Alive*, season 1, episode 2: “Beyond Embarrassment” (TLC, 2010)

Week 14: Meta-Analysis: Why Do People Watch Reality TV? / Exam #4

Tuesday, April 24th

- We will do a brief review for the exam in class today. Please come prepared with any lingering questions you might have about the material. I will also distribute your essay “question bank” in class.

Read for this class:

- Lundy, L.K., Ruth, A.M. and Park, T.D. (2008). “Simply Irresistible: Reality TV Consumption Patterns.” *Communication Quarterly*, 56(2): pp. 208-225.
- Papacharissi, Z. and Mendelson, A.L. (2007). “An Exploratory Study of Reality Appeal: Uses and Gratifications of Reality TV Shows.” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 51(2): pp.355-370.

Thursday, April 26th

- **IN-CLASS EXAM #4**

Week 15: Presentations/ Course Wrap-Up

Tuesday, May 1st

- **ALL groups’ presentation slides are due** to Coursesite prior to the start of class (2:35 PM) today.
- Group presentations begin

Thursday, May 3rd

- Group presentations continue
- Course wrap-up

HAVE A GREAT SUMMER BREAK!

