YOUTH CULTURE, MEDIA AND SOCIETY

DR KATE ORTON-JOHNSON
THURSDAY 11.10 –13.00
LECTURE HALL C DAVID HUME TOWER

UNDERGRADUATE HANDBOOK
# Youth Culture, Media and Society

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**Course Outline**

This course will explore sociological understandings of youth cultures, tracing the socio-historical factors which facilitated the development of the modern youth market and critically evaluating the ways in which sociology has theorised the relationship between young people, popular culture and ‘old’ and ‘new’ media.

Themes covered by the course include: young people and mass media, TV and film, cultural representations of youth style and gender, subcultural groups and ethnic identities, youth cultures and music scenes, young people and new technologies and global and local youth cultures.

The course will also look beyond youth culture in a critical examination of post-subcultural youth and neo tribalism.

Students will be encouraged to develop a critical understanding of the main sociological theories and concepts which have been forwarded in an attempt to explain the relationship between youth and popular culture, and to make connections with how the themes and issues covered in this course feed into wider sociological debates such as: the significance of consumption in late modern society, the role of the media in the construction of social ‘reality’, the unstable and shifting nature of ‘identity’ in contemporary social settings and the relationship between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’.

**Course Objectives**

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Account for the social and historical factors that facilitated the development of the modern youth market.
- Critically assess key theoretical accounts of the relationship between youth and popular culture in a local and global context.
- Reflect on the notions of ‘youth’, ‘gender’ and ‘ethnicity’ as they are represented in, shaped by, and articulated through popular culture.
- Critically evaluate the relationship between youth cultures and ‘old’ and ‘new’ media.
- Examine the theoretical relevance of the terms ‘subcultural’ and ‘post subcultural’ in an understanding of contemporary youth cultures.
- Connect themes and issues covered in the course to wider sociological debates.

**Course format and requirements**

The course consists of a weekly two-hour session. The first hour of the session will usually be a formal lecture. The format of the second hour of the session will vary but may include; class discussions, small group work or tutorial activities. All students are expected to attend and to consult at least two readings (or other materials as directed by the lecturer) prior to the session in order to participate fully in the debates and activities.

**Course assessment**

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<th>Wall wisher exercise</th>
<th>1,400 - 1,600 words</th>
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<td>75% course mark</td>
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<td>3,500 - 4,500 words</td>
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1. The wallwisher exercise
25% of the course mark will be assessed by a written and multimedia exercise of 1,400-1,600 words (excluding bibliography).

This exercise is designed to help you to connect themes and issues covered in the course to wider sociological debates and to critically reflect on a range of media sources that talk about and represent youth cultures in different ways.

The exercise is also designed to help you to think critically about the kinds of media representations of youth culture(s) that we will be looking at in the first few weeks of the course.

The exercise is in 2 parts: Creating your wall and writing a summary and reflection on your wall.

Part 1: Create your own wall

For this assessment we will be using wallwisher: http://www.wallwisher.com
Wallwisher is basically an online notice board that allows you to collect links to a variety of video, audio, image and text based web sources.

For the assessment you are required to create a wall that has a set of links relating to the course themes.

The first thing you need to do is to create your own wall. It’s very simple:

1. Go to the wallwisher website here: http://www.wallwisher.com
2. Select ‘Build a wall’
3. You will be asked to give your wall a title and description.
4. Please use your UUN as a wall title (so I can mark it anonymously)
5. You are now ready to start posting to your wall

For each link that you post add a short bit of text to describe the link – you can post link to websites, audio files, images and videos (basically anything you can find online).

For the assessment you will be required to regularly add links to your wall that relate to the course themes.

Your wall will be assessed under the following criteria:

- Does it demonstrate regular posting of content - evidence of new material every week and not all wall posts added just before the assessment is due?
- Does it demonstrate regular and reasonably varied postings from a range of sources?
- Are your postings indicative of a good level of engagement with the course themes?

My own wall is an example of the kind of thing that I am expecting and will give you an idea of
the kinds of things that you might want to post. You can access it via Learn or directly here:

http://www.wallwisher.com/wall/kateyouthculture

I will talk more about the wall exercise during the first seminar session but throughout the course please feel free to post to my wall as well and to ask any questions that you have about this part of the assessment – this can be done anonymously on my wall if you like – try it out!

Part 2: Write a summary of and reflection on your wall

The second part of the assessment is a 1,400 – 1,600 word summary of and reflection on your wall postings.

The purpose of this part of the assessment is to critically reflect on the postings you have collated on your wall.

Your reflection will be assessed under the following criteria:

• Does the assignment show a critical engagement with the content of the course?
• Does it demonstrate breadth of understanding of the concepts covered?
• Does it demonstrate knowledge of and use of the literature
• Have relevant key references been used?
• Have relevant wall posts been drawn on and coherently integrated into the analysis?

I hope that you will have posted regularly to your wall using a variety of sources covering a variety of themes. In a short piece of written work like this it would be impossible to cover all of the concepts that the course looks at so I would strongly encourage you to select one or two main themes from your wall and focus your reflection and discussion on these.

For example you might want to look at links relating to moral panics or only links relating to youth culture and gender or links which are related to ideas about subculture.

The main things you are trying to do in this discussion and reflection are:

• To provide a summary description of the relevant links on your wall e.g. describe the theme(s) that you are going to focus on and the examples that you have collected around this theme(s).
• To interpret your examples eg explain what you think is interesting about them and what concept(s) you think they represent or illustrate and how.
• To reflect on how it is relevant to the course theme(s) that you have chosen and explain how they add to the debates we have considered and how they are significant.
• To illustrate how they relate to relevant literature.
• To consider what biases exist in the sources that you have selected to look at from your wall?

You can do all of these things by using your knowledge and readings of Subcultural theory, Post-subcultural theory and of media representations, constructions and mediations of youth culture to think about the ways in which young people are being constructed and represented in your links.
2. The Long essay

75% of the course mark will be assessed by a long essay of 3,500 – 4,500 words.

The assessment must be submitted by MONDAY 29th APRIL, no later than 12.00 noon.

Suggestions for long essay titles and topics can be found below. Students are encouraged to develop or adapt them and produce an original piece of work. This must be done in consultation with me. I will not mark essays whose title I have not agreed.

Students writing long essays are advised to submit a plan or outline of their long essay so that they can receive some informal feedback before the final assessment is due (plans should be no longer than 2 sides of A4 and should include the issues you intend to explore and the reading you intend to use and should relate to a specific essay title rather than a general topic). This plan should be submitted to me no later than the end of week eight of the second semester.

For advice on planning, writing and referencing your work please refer to the assessment pages Learn.

Example long essay titles

- Critically evaluate the sociological significance of the Birmingham CCCS to the study of youth subcultures in post-war Britain.
- How useful is Cohen’s notion of ‘folk devil’ in understanding mass media representations of young people?
- How and why does the mass media attempt to define youth culture as a social problem?
- Evaluate the significance of the concept ‘post-subculture’ for our understanding of contemporary youth culture.
- What are the strengths and limitations of the notion of post-subculture as a means of understanding the cultural identities of contemporary young people?
- Is the term subculture obsolete?
- Discuss the ways in which gender identities are constructed and expressed through youth cultures.
- Has popular music culture reinforced or challenged traditional gender divisions?
- To what extent is the Internet likely to encourage multiple and fluid identities among young people?
- How are mobile technologies being woven into the cultural worlds of young people?
- Explore the relationship between youth culture and representations of young people in television and film.
- What is the value of a global perspective in our understanding of contemporary youth culture?
- To what extent is it appropriate to refer to ‘youth culture’ as a global phenomenon?
- Is the sociological study of youth culture the study of white western youth?
- "Contemporary youth culture is apathetic and apolitical" Discuss.

Essay Length

Long essays must be between 3,500 and 4,500 words in length, including footnotes/endnotes
but excluding the bibliography. These are strict limits around which there is no latitude, and you will be penalized if you go beyond them. You must include a word count (which your word processing software can produce) on the title page.

**Submitting work electronically**

From 2012-13 Sociology is trialing a new way to handle essay submission, marking and return. Junior and Senior Honours students will submit an electronic copy of their essay, in normal word processing format, through Pebble Pad. You will find Pebble Pad on your MyEd screen.

You will not be required to submit paper copies of your essay, and feedback will be provided direct to you through the Pebble Pad system.

We hope that this will make things easier for students, administrative staff and teaching staff, reduce printing costs, and help the University to be more environmentally responsible.

Full information on how to submit your Sociology essays can be found here:

[https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/SPSITWiki/Submitting+Work+Using+PebblePad](https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/SPSITWiki/Submitting+Work+Using+PebblePad)

**Pitfalls to avoid: Plagiarism**

You **must** ensure that you understand what the University regards as plagiarism and why the University takes it seriously. This is **your** responsibility. All cases of suspected plagiarism, or other forms of academic misconduct, will be reported to the College Academic Misconduct Officer. You’ll find further information in the Sociology Honours (or Visiting student) handbook, and at the following site:

[http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/honours/what_is_plagiarism](http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/honours/what_is_plagiarism)

The School of Social and Political Science uses the ‘Turnitin’ system to check that essays do not contain plagiarised material. Turnitin compares every assignment against a constantly-updated database, which highlights all plagiarised work.

**Pitfalls to avoid: Lateness**

Please note that should you submit after the deadline (_noon_ on the relevant day) then Lateness Penalties **will** apply. See the Sociology Honours Handbook for the lateness penalties, and on what to do should you have a good reason to miss the deadline.

**Assessment criteria**

The following are the criteria through which the assignment will be marked. However, it is important to note that the overall mark is a result of a holistic assessment of the assignment as a whole.

- Does the assignment address the question set, and with sufficient focus?
- Does the assignment show a grasp of the relevant concepts and knowledge?
• Does the assignment demonstrate a logical and effective pattern of argument?
• Does the assignment, if appropriate, support arguments with relevant, accurate and effective forms of evidence?
• Does the assignment demonstrate reflexivity and critical thinking in relation to arguments and evidence?
• Is the assignment adequately presented in terms of: correct referencing and quoting; spelling, grammar and style; layout and visual presentation?

Office hours
I am happy to chat about the course or about assignments so feel free to come and see me in my office hours between 11am and 1pm on Tuesdays. Outside of office hours please get in touch to arrange an appointment. You can email me (k.orton-johnson@ed.ac.uk) or call me on 0131 651 1230. My office is 6.25 Chrystal Macmillan Building.

Learn
All course information, slides, announcements and updates will be through the course instance of learn – please ensure you check it regularly.

General reading/textbooks
There are a wealth of textbooks, edited collection and monographs covering the sociology of youth culture, popular culture and the media. Readings are listed for each week and additional readings are available on webCT. There is no set textbook for the course but some key texts and edited collections that you will find useful include:


Course in detail

1. The Origins of Youth Culture
This lecture will cover organisational matters and provide an overview of the course as a whole. It will then lay the foundations for the subsequent lectures by considering the socio-historical and technological factors which converged during the post-Second World Period to produce the worldwide consumer boom of which the post-war youth market was a central part. The lecture will consider the way in which youth-orientated consumer items, such as fashion and music, were appropriated and inscribed with symbolic meanings by post-war youth as a means of marking out a cultural territory distinct from their parent culture and from wider society.

Readings


Seminar session

Opening discussion about the course, the seminars and assessment and about the socio-historical background of the course.
2. The development of Subcultural Theory: Sociological understandings of youth style

This lecture will explore the first sustained sociological attempt to study post-war youth style, conducted by a group of theorists based at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, the CCCS. Central to the Birmingham studies was the idea that each post-war youth style, from Mods and Rockers to Skinheads and Punks, became incorporated into a particular expression of subcultural solidarity. The lecture will examine this contention and will explore some of the criticisms that have been directed at the CCCS – particularly the invisibility of race and gender in their accounts of subcultural styles.

Readings

As you can see many of these readings are from Resistance through Rituals. Although it was written in the 70s it really is the classic text and it would be hard to get a real feel for the work of the CCCS without having a look at at least a couple of chapters (I suggest you select what interests you most and go from there).


Seminar session

On the basis of their reading, students in each group will be asked to discuss the sociological value of the term subculture for our understanding of youth identities in contemporary society. In their discussion, students should try and provide answers to the following questions:

- How do sociologists attempt to define youth subcultures?
- What aspects of subcultural theory are most effective in explaining youth subcultures?
- What aspects of subcultural theory are least effective in explaining subcultural theory?
- Which are the main youth subcultures of the 21st Century?

3. Youth culture and the mass media: ‘Victims’, ‘moral panics’ and ‘folk devils’

From moral outrage to entertainment, the mass media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion about youth culture and the various forms of social practices that young people engage in. However, it would be erroneous to assume that these messages are, in any way, ‘value free’. This lecture will critically consider three principle effects of mass media’s reporting on youth culture through an exploration of images of youth as ‘victims’ of mass culture, of youth as ‘folk devils’ and by examining the media creation of ‘moral panics’. The lecture will also consider the subcultural press as a response and reaction to mass media coverage of youth subcultures.

Readings


Hall, S. (et al) (1978) Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order. London:
Macmillan. (Chapters 3, 4 and 5)


Seminar session

Students are to bring in examples (newspaper clips, articles, news stories, images etc) of ways in which the media represents young people as a social problem. Discussion will then focus on the following questions:

• Why do the media use youth as a focus for moral panics?
• What do you think the underlying agenda is for the creation of moral panics and folk devils?
• Do moral panics have the desired effects?
• How do youth respond to being the focus of moral panics?
• Is it a valid argument to suggest that young people can be seen as folk devils?

4. Questioning youth culture: Post-subcultural youth and neo-tribes

This session will challenge the notion of youth culture and explore research that argues that youth subcultures are a thing of the past, replaced by a new post-subcultural groupings whose collective identities are based not on structural determinants such as class, gender and race but around new consumer sensibilities of lifestyle and taste. Drawing on the early rave scene and on contemporary dance culture this lecture examines the concept of post-subcultural youth and evaluates its significance as a means of sociologically understanding contemporary youth culture.

Readings


**Seminar session**

Based on their readings so far in the course students are asked to prepare for an in-class debate. Is youth culture alive and well and subculture is still an important part of sociological understandings of youth? Or is youth culture dead and do we need to understand young people in terms of post-subcultural groupings?

Questions to think about:

- Are pressures experienced by youth today different from those experienced by youth 20 years ago?
- Do you think youth culture is still a valid sociological term?
- What evidence is there to suggest that we can still talk about subcultural groupings?
- What is meant by the term ‘post-subculture’?
- What evidence exists for claiming that contemporary youth culture is ‘post-subcultural’?
- Have we seen, as post-subcultural theorists argue, the disappearance of youth subcultures in contemporary society?
5. **Style and gender: Masculinity, femininity, gender bending and androgyny**

This lecture will examine the ways in which gender roles are portrayed and effectively ‘constructed’ through forms of youth style. Focusing primarily on popular music but also drawing on examples from film and video, the lecture will consider the development of gender representations in popular culture from traditional stereotypes to ‘new’ sexualities based on gender-bending and androgyny. The lecture will explore the ways in which dominant definitions and stereotypes of gender are reproduced through popular culture and will trace the emergence of more fluid and flexible understandings of gender and sexuality as cultural objects.

**Readings**


Seminar session

Students are to bring in images from the media that represent different gender identities and discussion will orient around the ways in which these identities are constructed, why they matter and how they reflect and shape youth cultures. In particular students will be asked to think about the following questions:

- How do visual representations of gender in the media correspond with traditional notions of gender?
- How do the visual representations of gender in the media challenge traditional notions of gender?
- What influence do such gender representations have on their consumers?
- What sociological significance can be given to such forms of gender representation?

6. Youth cultures and ethnic identities: Hip-hop & ‘the ghetto’ around the globe

Hip-Hop is one of the most significant youth cultural forms of the late 20th Century. Growing out of the black inner-city ghettos of the US during the early 1970s, Hip-Hop was a medium through which young African-Americans voiced their discontent concerning aspects of contemporary US society. This lecture will explore the cultural significance of Hip-Hop as a global phenomena and will chart the origins of hip hop in the US before going on to consider how it has been appropriated and reworked by young people in other countries across the globe, exploring issues of race, ethnicity and citizenship in rap from Los Angeles, Germany and Italy.

Readings


Seminar session

The class will be asked to discuss the relationship between youth, music and ethnic identity, with particular reference to the following questions:

- What connections can be made between music, ethnic identity and youth?
- How do the artists in the video clips attempt to promote particular notions of ethnic identity?
- Are ethnic identities fixed or are they constructed by individuals?
- Are ethnic identities more or less important now than they were twenty years ago?

7. Youth culture and new media: Chatting, gaming and virtual spaces

This lecture considers the significance of new media in contemporary youth culture, from the Internet to mobile phones and video games. In particular, the lecture examines how technologies allow for the demonstration of particular forms of cultural capital in youth cultural groups. In relation to the mobile phone, we will explore how new forms of communication between young people are being facilitated and the ways in which the divisions between public and private spaces are being eroded. The lecture will examine the increasing significance of the
Internet as a means of communication for young people in contemporary society and will consider how on-line communication between groups and individuals is giving rise to new ways of understanding sociological terms such as ‘group’, ‘community’, and ‘subculture’.

Readings


Seminar session

Based on their reading the class will discuss if the Internet has provided a new social space for youth subcultures or marked the end of youth culture? You should think about the following questions:

- How do new media differ from traditional media, for example, television, in terms of their impact on young people?
- Are there gendered patterns of new media use among young people?
- What factors influence access to new media among young people in contemporary society?
- Do new technologies, such as social networking sites shape the ways in which young people construct and manage their social relationships?

8. Cultural representations: Youth film

Sociological research on young people and film has produced a number of theories to explain both the appeal and impact of images and text on the behaviour, attitudes and overall outlook of youth cultures. This lecture considers a number of ways of interpreting the meaning of film for young people and also examines the relationship between representations of youth and the everyday life experiences of young people. The second part of the lecture will focus on the significance of film in the cultural representation and historicisation of youth culture.

Readings


Seminar session

The class will be asked to discuss the significance of youth films for young people in contemporary society. During their discussions, students should attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

- What role do youth films play in the historicisation of youth culture?
- How do visual representations of young people in youth films fit with the actual everyday lives of young people?
- In what ways do films represent young people?
- Are films accurate/distorting/glamourising/sexualising?

9. Youth culture and globalisation: Broadening the view

Traditionally, there has been a heavy bias in the sociological study of youth culture towards examples drawn from Britain and the US. With reference to studies of youth in Russia, Australia, Nepal and Algeria and using theoretical frameworks such as McDonaldization, ‘glocality’ and cultural imperialism, this lecture will consider why a global perspective is of value in a sociological understanding of youth culture.

Readings


Seminar Session

The class will be asked to discuss the extent to which they think the sociological study of youth culture is ‘White and Western’. Try and reflect on the ways in which sociological knowledge is constructed and the ways in which effects of the media, globalisation and socio-cultural and political climates may influence our understandings of global youth.

10. Questioning youth culture: Generation X? Generation Y?

The final lecture will challenge the notion of youth culture and present a sociological critique of ‘Generation X’, a phrase often used to imply youth are disaffected, apathetic and apolitical. The lecture will illustrate how the term Generation X is based upon a highly subjective ‘baby-boomer’ notion of youth which, in its romantic and nostalgic visions of the 1960s, takes little account of the new social pressures, particularly those of risk and uncertainty, confronting contemporary youth. Finally we will consider the terms ‘generation y’ and ‘igen’ in a reflection on contemporary notions of youth culture.

Readings


Seminar session
In this final session I want to return to earlier debate in session 4 and conclude the course by reflecting on the theoretical and empirical concerns we have covered and raising the following questions:

• Do you think youth culture is still a valid sociological term?
• What evidence is there to suggest that we can still talk about subcultural groupings?
• What is meant by the term ‘post-subculture’?
• What evidence exists for claiming that contemporary youth culture is ‘post-subcultural’?
• Have we seen the disappearance of youth subcultures in contemporary society?
• How does an understanding of cultural products and processes – film, Internet, TV, Music etc help us to understand youth culture in it’s myriad of forms?