About this class
I assume you are already knowledgeable consumers of popular culture: you know what you like and don’t like, what is cool and what is not, how to access and use technologies and genres of popular culture, and even how to produce your own (for example, videos, blogs, and so on). So this course is focused on other aspects of popular culture: why popular culture matters, what it means to talk about the “politics” of popular culture, and whether we find popular culture to be a source of hope or despair in fashioning our collective future. Does popular culture work to discipline us as consumers or is popular culture a place where, in the words of cultural critic bell hooks, “new and radical happenings can occur” (Yearnings, p. 31)?

Required text

Policies
• Attendance is important. After three absences, I will deduct five points from the final class score for each absence. Only absences approved through the Dean of Students absence will be exempted from this policy.
• Group assignments require commitment and contributions from all members. Individual students may lose points from a group’s final grade for slacking.
• All students are subscribed to the course email list (popcult-l@mtu.edu).
• All non-medical electronic devices (cell phones, pagers, PDAs, etc., must be turned off or set on mute during class time.
• Breaks from class are discouraged. Please take care of personal needs before and after class time.
• Plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students so carefully document any sources you use for your presentations.
• I encourage you to contact me about any questions or suggestions. In addition, please see me about any particular accommodations in accordance with MTU’s ADA policy: MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students (72212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action office (7-3310).

Grading
3 quizzes.....................10% each
3 analysis exercises.......15% each
Group presentation.........15%
Attendance/participation....0%
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1, 1/10 & 1/12 What is popular culture? Why does it matter?
- C.B. Holmberg, “What is popular culture?” (pp. 1-17) in Sexualities and popular culture.
- T. Miller & A. McHoul, “The popular” (pp. 3-19) in Popular culture and everyday life.
- Popular Culture resources: U of IA: http://www.uiowa.edu/~commstud/resources/POP-Culture.html

Week 2, 1/17 & 1/19 Beyond consumption: methods of studying popular culture
1. Textual Analysis: how do specific works of popular culture make their meanings? how do explicit meanings differ from implied ones? how do texts explicitly and implicitly shape those who hear, see, or touch them? Some approaches: Semiotics, narrative analysis, ideological analysis.
   a. Silk Cut analysis from Nice Work by David Lodge
      http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem07.html
   b. Chandler’s frameworks for analyzing ads
      http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Modules/MAinTV/analad.html
2. Production Analysis
   a. Technical focus: limits/possibilities of the medium in production?
   b. Corporate focus: who owns the media? how democratic or elitist is the production of popular culture? how much is motivated by commerce? how much creative expression is possible?
      ii. Mark Crispin Miller What’s Wrong With This Picture? December 20, 2001 (January 7, 2002 issue)
         www.thenation.com/doc/20020107/miller
         http://www.thenation.com/doc/20020805/larson20020723
      iv. Researching corporations:
         http://www.corporations.org/research.html
3. Audience Analysis: how do different groups of popular culture consumers, or users, make similar or different sense of the same texts?
   a. Fan identities and contexts of consumption/production
   b. Markets and corporate systems of production/distribution
   c. David Morley, Audience Research, Museum of Broadcast Communications
4. Contextual analysis: social, political, cultural, economic contexts
   a. Grossberg: "We have to ask how [is it] connected – consciously and
      unconsciously, intentionally and unintentionally—to other things going on in
      American society and in the lives of its people, to larger social struggles,
      projects, and directions. We have to put [these phenomena] in context. When you
      think contextually, in the middle, you realize that everything (from crime to the
      market) is what it is, is made to be what it is, by the relationships that surround
      and penetrate and define it, that is, by its context. But contexts themselves are the
      result, across time and space, of the relations among human activities and
      political agendas, social forces and historical logics" (103). In Caught in the
      crossfire: Kids, politics, and America's future.

5. Historical Analysis: how have the other dimensions changed over time? how
   does current popular culture differ from that of ten, twenty, or thirty years ago?
   what accounts for the changes?
   Resources: http://www.wsu.edu/~amerstu/pop/hist.html

Week 3, 1/24 (no class) & 1/26 Theories of representation and expression
   • Stuart Hall, "Introduction" (pp. 1-12) in S. Hall (Ed.), Representation: Cultural
     representations and signifying practices.

Week 4, 1/31 & 2/2 Looking at advertising & issues of consumption
   (Superbowl ads)
   • Berger, "Running it up a flagpole to see if anyone salutes" (pp. 59-67) in Ads,
     Fads, & Consumer Culture.
   • Ads, Education, Activism: http://www.genderads.com/
   • Consumer culture: http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Sections/advert03.html
   • Kellner, "Media culture and the triumph of the spectacle" (pp. 1-27) in Media
     spectacle.
   • Ritzer, "The revolution in consumption and the larger society" (pp. 25-45) in
     Enchanting a disenchanted world, 2nd ed.

Exercise #1: ad analyses

Week 5, 2/7: Superbowl & Winter Carnival

Week 6, 2/14 & 2/16 Theories of popular culture (Strinati)
   • "Mass culture and popular culture"
   • "The Frankfurt School and the culture industry"

Quiz #1

Week 7, 2/21 & 2/23 More theories (Strinati)
   • "Althusser's theory of ideology"
   • "Gramsci's concept of hegemony"

Quiz #2: theories
Week 8, 2/28 & 3/2 (Strinati)
Read:
• “Feminism and popular culture”
• “Postmodernism and popular culture”
Quiz #3

[Spring break]

Week 9, 3/14 & 3/16 Representing youth
• Grossberg, “Life in the war zone” (pp. 37-63) and “Accounting for the kids” (pp. 77-102) & “Kids and the struggle for imagination” (pp. 307-310) in Caught in the Crossfire
• Mazzarella, “Constructing youth: Media, youth and the politics of representation” (pp. 227-246) in A. Valdiva (Ed.), A companion to media studies.
• Osgerby, “All-consuming passions: Youth as ‘creative’ consumers” (pp. 135-144) & “Totally wired: youth and new media” (pp. 191-216) in Youth media.

Group presentations

Week 10, 3/21 & 3/23 Representing family
• Coontz, “‘Leave it to Beaver’ and ‘Ozzie and Harriet’: American families in the 1950’s” (pp. 23-41), In The way we never were: American families and the nostalgia trap.
• Alters, “The family in U.S. history and culture” (pp. 51-66) & Alters & Clark, “Conclusion: The ‘intentional’ and ‘sophisticated’ relationship” (pp. 171-180) in Hoover, Clark & Alters, Media, home, and family.
• Kompare, “Our television heritage: Reconceiving past television” (pp. 101-130) in Rerun nation: How repeats invented American television.

Group presentations

Week 11, 3/28 & 3/30 Representing race & gender
• Stuart Hall, “The whites of their eyes: Racist ideology in the media” (pp. 18-22) in G. Dines & J.M. Humez (Eds.), Gender, race and class in media: A text-reader.
• McCarthy, “All consuming identities: Race, mass media, and the pedagogy of resentment in the age of difference” (pp. 513-528) in A. Valdiva, A companion to media studies.
• Freccero, “Identity politics and postcoloniality” in Popular culture: An introduction.

Group presentations

Week 12, 4/4 & 4/6 Representing women and men
• Kilbourne, Can’t buy my love
• Douglas, “Introduction” & “Epilogue” in Where the girls are: Growing up female with the mass media.
• Guerrilla Girls, “Top stereotypes from cradle to grave” (pp. 11-38) and “Presenting our own ethnic doll collection” (pp. 84-88) in Bitches, bimbos and ballbreakers: The Guerrilla Girls' illustrated guide to female stereotypes.

Group presentations

**Week 13, 4/11 & 4/13 Technocultures**

- Livingstone, “The changing nature of audiences: From the mass audience to the interactive media user” (pp. 337-359) in A. Valdiva (Ed.), *A companion to media studies*.
- Rick Karr’s 3-part series on NPR: The future of television
- NPR: Everything bad is good for you

**Group presentations**

**Week 14, 4/18 & 4/20 Directions and Implications**

- Ritzer, “Societal implications and the future of the new means of consumption” (pp. 173-210) in *Enchanting a disenchanted world*, 2nd ed.
- Downing, “Where we should go next and why we probably won’t: An entirely idiosyncratic, utopian, and unashamedly peppery map for the future” (pp. 495-512) in A. Valdiva (Ed.), *A companion to media studies*.
- Rentschler, “Expanding the definition of media activism” (pp. 529-547) in A. Valdiva, *A companion to media studies*. 