**Effectively Incorporating Music Videos in Sociology Courses**

**DRAFT – PAPER IN PROGRESS**

**By Tamara Sniezek, Ph.D.**

**ABSTRACT**

Music is a particularly powerful pedagogical tool because of its pervasiveness in student’s daily lives and the powerful emotional impact it tends to leave on the listener. Music videos have an added visual impact that enriches the interpretation of the lyrics – providing even more fertile ground for sociological analysis and application. However, this potent visual form of popular culture is not always utilized to its fullest potential in the classroom. A content analysis of *Sociological Cinema*, a relatively new and popular teaching resource website that provides music, lyrics, music video and film suggestions for teaching, reveals that instructors are choosing music and music videos that reflect musical tastes and knowledge that are a product of the instructor’s privileged social position and habitus. This paper will offer a critique of the music and music video choices instructor’s may over rely on in sociology courses and offer an alternative student-driven music video assignment that can render music videos in the classroom more effective and diverse.

The use of cultural artifacts such as; newspaper articles, film, television shows, novels or music to illustrate sociological theory, concepts or perspectives is a proven way to effectively engage students (see, for example, Austin 2005, Cardon 2010, Champoux, 1999 and Daniels 2012). Music is a particularly powerful pedagogical tool because of its ubiquity in student’s daily lives and the powerful emotional impact it can have (Reuter, Monica and David Walczak. 1993). Music videos have the added impact of a visual interpretation of the lyrics – providing rich ground for sociological analysis and application. The use of music has the added benefit of humanizing the instructor (the student and instructor share a part of her/his personal life) and music changes the dynamics of the classroom to a less formal and less intimidating place (Martinez 1994). With the pervasiveness of YouTube, music videos are assessable and widely watched by students and are easy to access in most classrooms.

Clearly instructors are using music and music videos in their classroom. The recent creation of the *Sociological Cinema* website, which is designed to help sociologists share ideas about illustrating sociological material via film, music and music video, is evidence of the increasing interest in using these resources in the classroom. Teaching journals and teaching guides have also provided insight about how to best use these recourses. Martinez (1994) for example, builds a strong case for using song lyrics as a discussion tool to illustrate a number of sociological concepts. However, upon initially reviewing the literature on this topic, I was struck by how narrow the range of musical examples the authors drew on. Perhaps it struck me this way, because they weren’t “my taste” or the music I grew up listening to in my working class and ethnically diverse family. The artists, for example, presented by Martinez in her introductory Sociology class were:

**Bruce Springsteen The Who, Indigo Girls, Police, Pink Floyd, Thomas Dolby, REM, Eric Clapton Puff Daddy, Jewel, Bush, No Doubt, Alan Jackson, Bebe and Cece Wynans, Sam Cook, Nirvana, Randy Newman, Sting, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Rush, Suzanne Vega Cranberries, and the Eagles**.

While there is one rap artist (Puff Daddy), and one R and B group (Bebe and Cece Wynans), the rest are largely white artists from the 80’s and 90’s whose most popular audience is largely white and middle class. Ahlkvist (1999) advocates using heavy metal music to illustrate a range of sociological perspectives. The artists he draws on are, again, are almost entirely white from the 80’s and 90’s including groups like; Iron Maiden, Megadeath and Black Sabath whose audience are typically white. Notably, though, heavy metal is popular amongst working class youth.

I was disappointed that I could find little mention of music popular amongst more racially and economically diverse audiences. For instance, I found rare mention of music from Regaeton, Jazz, Blue Grass, Country, hip hop, gansta rap, ranchero and zydeco genres. Given the small amount of literature in sociology on using music in the classroom, conclusions about the use of music in the classroom were not prudent. I decided to explore the issue further by conducting a content analysis of *the Sociological Cinema*, to find out if the sociologists offering songs and music video selections were using music that reflected a white, middle class, intellectually privileged music tastes.

**Methods**

-forthcoming

**Findings**

-forthcoming

**Diversifying Music Videos in the Classroom**

In order to more effectively use music videos in the classroom, I advocate using student-driven assignments that allow the student to research and present music videos of their own choosing. This has multiple benefits. One, the student must make the connection between the theory and/or concept on their own giving them greater opportunity to facilitate deeper learning. Second, the student can draw on music video examples that reflect their own music experience and tastes. Finally, when students present their music videos to the class, students can see a wider application of theory and better able to relate to the musical themes. I have made use of a student driven music video assignment for the past three years in my theory classes. In that time, I have found that students draw on a range of music , much of which I was thoroughly unfamiliar with and would have never utilized on my own.

-more on the implementation of the student-driven assignment is forthcoming.

**Conclusion**

-forthcoming

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