This is test to your understanding of the course materials. The questions listed below cover the various units in the course. Choose two of the questions to answer for this assignment.

* Your essay answers must begin with an introductory paragraph that includes a thesis statement. Then select two or three supporting arguments and develop them in some detail.

It is unlikely that you will be able to address all of the possible issues in this brief essay, so be sure to select your supporting points carefully and bring them together in the form of a modest conclusion. You should reference the course materials in these essays, as part of the evaluation will be based on your engagement with the course discussion.

1. Are cultures of everyday life worthy of study?
2. Are traditional gender roles still reflected in the home?
3. Are centralization and bureaucratization still central characteristics of the social organization of the modern workplace?
4. In your view, do Bourdieu’s observations on the gendered and classed nature of recreational activities reinforce stereotypes?
5. Has our understanding of what constitutes “community” changed over time?
6. How has the course changed your understanding of the distinction between things deemed to be cultural and things assumed to be natural?
7. How is everyday culture a site of contestation?

Culture and Community

**Objectives**

should be able to achieve the following learning objectives.

1. Analyse the ways in which the activities of everyday life construct communities.
2. Discern how (often culturally diverse) communities intersect and overlap.
3. Recognize that our understandings of what constitutes “community” may change over time.

**What is Community?**

As is the case with most descriptors of ongoing patterns of human existence, the meaning of the term “community” has changed over time. While for much of our collective history, the term community was linked with geographical location, this was never exclusively the case—universities were described and thought of as “communities of scholars,” and members of religious communities were often scattered across a range of locales. Clearly communities (especially in rural areas) may be based on a physical territory, but this need not be the case in all, or even most, instances.

Protestors at the Seattle Gay Pride Parade, June 24, 2007. Photograph by Bryan Gosline, [Wikimedia Commons](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASeattle_gay_parade-protesters.jpg).

We often tend to think of communities as cultural, as in common references in the media and elsewhere, to “ethnic communities,” yet there is also the underlying assumption of more universal, sometimes even utopian values, having to do with equity, inclusion and “the Common Good”. The word “community” carries connotations of a population living together in harmony, yet at the same time communities can sites, and in some cases flashpoints, for tensions between individual rights and group rights.

*Cultures and subcultures*: The idea that communities can be aggregated on the basis of a common culture in turn raises questions about what types of groups might be defined (or define themselves) as “cultural communities”. Even in the most visible and obvious example, communities defined by racialization or ethnicity, there are possibilities for cultural syncretism and diversities of various kinds. In speaking of wedding rituals, Shirley Fedorak notes the tension between the traditions inherent to a given culture and the external influences imposed by changing times and places:

In most cultures, wedding rituals are both sacred and secular, a meshing of religious symbolism, consumer culture, and romanticism, which often makes for difficulty in separating the economic, social, political and religious reasons for wedding rituals from the popular. Wedding rituals are dynamic, and given to some hybridity, with modern weddings incorporating some ancient traditions, modifying others, and adopting new, often foreign practices to create glocalized weddings. This is evident in contemporary Japanese weddings that combine traditional Shinto rituals with western components such as three-tiered frosted wedding cakes [and] white wedding gowns. (103)

A Shinto bride in white, a non-traditional colour for wedding attire in Japan, June 2004. Photograph by Dave Jenkins, [Wikimedia Commons](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AWedding_kimono.jpg).

Another term used to describe a “community within a community,” and one which has received extensive attention from cultural studies scholars, is “subculture”. The idea of subculture is premised on their being a larger, over-arching, or “dominant” culture, within which smaller groups find it desirable—or necessary—to come together to express their difference from (or, sometimes, in the case of so-called “counter-cultures, opposition to) the cultural mainstream. Dick Hebdige has written extensively about post-war youth cultures, with particular emphasis on the role that style (especially of dress and music) played in late 1970s punk culture in the UK:

Objects borrowed from the most sordid contexts found a place in the punks’ ensembles: lavatory chains were draped in graceful arcs across chests encased in plastic bin-liners. Safety pins were taken out of their domestic “utility” contexts and worn as gruesome ornaments through the cheek ear or lip. “Cheap” trashy fabrics (PVC, plastic, lurex, etc.) in vulgar designs (e.g. mock leopard skin) and “nasty” colours, long discarded by the quality end of the fashion industry as obsolete kitsch, were salvaged by punks and turned into garments . . . which offered self-conscious commentaries on notions of modernity and taste. (1260)

Siouxsie Sioux in concert in NYC, November 10, 1980. Photograph by Malco23, [Wikimedia Commons](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASiouxsie_sioux.jpg).

As is the case with many subcultures, and especially youth cultures, punk was seen as a rebellion against the status quo or, as Hebdige puts it, it was through punk’s unique style that “certain sections of predominantly working-class youth were able to restate their opposition to dominant values and institutions” (1264).

Hebdige is well aware that styles can be co-opted (some would say they almost invariably are) and stripped of any critical, or counter-cultural significance. There is, as well, the “baggage” that symbols such as the swastika bring with them, as witnessed by their very different appropriations, by punks on one hand and by neo-Nazi skinheads on the other. Hebdige concludes that “the meaning of subculture is, then always in dispute, and style is the area in which the opposing definitions clash with most dramatic force” (1259). Similarly, in her discussion of practices such as tattooing and piercing, Fedorak notes that body art frequently designate membership in a subcultural community, it is also about expressing a style:

Through body modification and adornment, the body becomes a theatrical site of display, demonstration and even resistance that may be read and interpreted by multiple audiences. Thus body art is performance. (79)

It is worth noting that not all subcultures or micro-communities are about making a political or cultural statement directed at the status quo. There are many instances of groups of like-minded individuals who have simply withdrawn from mainstream culture in order to fulfill their own vision of what it means to be a community. Examples include (but are not restricted to): religious communities (e.g. Hutterites, polygamous Mormon sub-groups) or cults (e.g. Jonestown, David Koresh’s compound in Waco, Texas); the “back to the land” movement of the nineteen-sixties counterculture; and, more recently, colonies of libertarian self-proclaimed “survivalists”.

Hutterite women preparing corn. Photograph by Stefan Kuhn, [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File%3AHutterer-Frauen_bei_der_Arbeit.jpg).

*Mediated and Virtual Communities*: As we saw in the preceding unit, recreational activities (e.g. sports and popular music) play a role in the identity formation of participants and spectators. What was not discussed was the extent to which this process occurs in *mediated* form, i.e. via television, and digital delivery, via such things as podcasts and live-streaming of movies and music. In Unit 2 we discussed the extent to which engagement with new (and, in the case of television, older) media has permeated domestic culture, but the influence of new technologies extends far beyond the home. In fact, many argue that the extent to which we experience the world as mediated is changing our perceptions of what constitutes “reality”. In the case of television, this question has been foregrounded by the rise and popularity of so-called “reality” programming:

When we hear the term “reality television” many of us would think of *Survivor*, or perhaps the even more popular European-born *Big Brother*, but in addition to these globally successful game-doc formats, there are also docu-soaps, and a range of life-style programming, including makeovers and, more recently, life-experiment programs. (Hughes-Fuller 96)

According to Annette Hill:

There are a variety of styles and techniques associated with reality television such as non-professional actors, unscripted dialogue, surveillance footage, hand-held cameras, and seeing events unfold as they are happening in front of the camera. (Hill 41)

“The Real Housewives of Orange County,” Lynne Curtin, Tamra Barney, Vicki Gunvalson, Jeana Keough, and Gretchen Rossi, April 29, 2009. Photograph by Gina Hughes, [Wikimedia Commons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File%3ARealHousewivesOCVALaunchApr09.jpg).

While reality television has been criticized for its tabloid-style trashiness and “dog-eat-dog/every man (or woman) for himself” ethos, perhaps the most seductive aspect of reality television is the fact that it offers ordinary people the opportunity to become celebrities, if only (in the case of *Survivor*) until they are voted off the island. But the presence of non-professional actors, ostensibly “being themselves” really does blur the boundaries between the TV world and our own.

**Thought Question**

Would you describe the contestants in a show such as *Survivor* as constituting a community? Why or why not?

**Global and Virtual Communities**

In Chapter 4 of *Culture and Everyday Life*, David Inglis summarizes the phenomenon of globalization as being a condition in which:

 . . . social relationships are no longer primarily tied to ‘local’ areas and within the boundaries of states. The people you work and do business with, the friends you have, the acquaintances you know—all could be located in geographically distant locales. A person’s relationships and forms of interaction become increasingly unconstrained by geography and are no longer necessarily ‘local’ or ‘national’ in nature. (114)

Inglis also points to the cultural impact of the above, which he terms “globality,” and equates it to a new form of consciousness whereby “we come to see our individual lives as being thoroughly connected to, and dependent on, events . . . that encompass everyone and everything on the planet” (115). In short, we are part of a global *community* and nowhere is this more evident than in interconnectedness of the internet and the impact of new social media such as Facebook and Twitter. According to Douglas Kellner and Richard Kahn:

. . . the internet and other new media represent ‘contested Terrains’ in which alternative subcultural forces and progressive political groups are being articulated in opposition to more reactionary, conservative and dominant forces. It is not that today’s internet is either a wholly emancipatory or oppressive technology but rather that its future meaning is constituted by an ongoing struggle that contains contradictory forces. (708)

However, as Howard Rheingold points out:

Advances in personal mobile informational technology are rapidly providing the structural elements for the existence of fresh kinds of highly informed, autonomous communities that coalesce around local lifestyle choices, global political demands, and everything in between. (qtd. in Durham and Kellner, 711)

Whether the internet and the rise of digital media are primarily a contributing factor to the advent of globalization or one of its many results, is something of a “chicken-and-egg” argument. Unquestionably, and for better or worse, the two are inextricably linked.

Egyptian activists with Facebook sign. Photograph Tweeted by [@richardengelnbc](http://www.movements.org/blog/entry/what-can-facebook-do-to-better-support-activists/).

Social media have not only expanded our notion of what constitutes community, they have also been instrumental in enabling collective action and societal change. Social movements have used Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of digital communication to organize protests against both the excesses of transnational capitalism (e.g. Seattle 2000) and to overthrow authoritarian regimes (e.g. Cairo 2011). While new media do not determine human activity, they have had an enormous impact on the context in which we collectively live our daily lives.

***“Non-Spaces” and Border Troubles***

Bicycle courier on Oxford Street, London, UK, May 2008. Photograph by ProfDEH, [Wikimedia Commons](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ABicycle_courier_552.JPG).

Does all the above mean that physical space is no longer relevant? In his analysis of commuting and the time spent in vehicles, Joe Moran argues that driving can reveal “a class conflict not perceived as such” (67) Moran contends that commuting and traffic gridlock invite us to view one another through the lens of a range of stereotypes, such as “white van man” who is “an aggressive driver who tailgates, never signals, overtakes on the left [in Canada this would translate as “passes on the right”] and harasses what he sees as his incompetent or hesitant fellow road-users”(67). He continues:

In the congested streets of London the national mythology of the “white van man” has been supplemented by myths about other types of driver that are inflected with issues of class, age, and race. According to these myths, motorcycle courier riders are paid-by-the-mile youthful yobs who weave dangerously between lanes; drivers of four-wheel ‘onroaders’ . . . are over-privileged hoggers of road space; cyclists are smugly, eco-friendly “lycra louts” who ignore red lights . . . [and] minicab drivers are rude, incompetent crooks and potential rapists (a racialized construction, since many of them are recent immigrants from countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Iraq). (67)

**Thought Questions**

1. Have you ever found yourself stereotyping other drivers in terms of such things as age, race, or type of vehicle?
2. What does the phenomenon of “road rage” say about drivers as a community?

An Israeli checkpoint in the West Bank, near Abu Dis, August 2004. Photograph by Justin McIntosh, [Wikimedia Commons](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ACheckpoint_near_Abu_Dis.jpg).

Moran also devotes an entire chapter of *Reading the Everyday* to a discussion of what he refers to as “non-spaces,” places where we would never really choose to go, but where the pressures and constraints of our day-to-day living may compel us to be. These include locations ranging from service stations, to commuter highways, to designer “new towns” that lack the “sense of identity, community and tradition”(115) produced by “an older, slower history” (116).

The term “community” suggests inclusiveness, but every boundary or line of demarcation includes some while excluding others. There are also communities that are considered to be non-spaces because they are not acknowledged or are marginalized, even ghettoized, by mainstream society, hence we speak of “the homeless” or “the rez,” or (more generically) the “wrong side of the tracks”. Trailer parks, as just one example, have long been associated with living on the economic margins, and indeed are frequently located on the outskirts of cities or towns. But while trailer parks are often associated with poor “white trash” (Berube; Hughes-Fuller) many groups are marginalized because they are ethnically or religiously “other”.

In ancient times, actual brick-and-mortar walls were built to keep out those who were perceived to be barbarians—we are familiar with such well-known examples as Hadrian’s Wall, built by the Romans in Britain, and the Great Wall of China. However more recently, in the Cold War era of the last century we had the Berlin Wall (a physical manifestation of the so-called “iron curtain”) and more recently still we have witnessed the construction of walls to separate Palestinians from Israelis and, closer to home, to prevent “illegal aliens” from crossing the US/Mexico border.

**Learning Activity**

1. Listen to Tom Russell’s song “Who’s Gonna Build Your Walls”. What kind of statement is he making, and who do think is his intended or “target” audience?

**A More Cosmopolitan Future**

The idea of “community” is a complex one and has changed over time, never more so than today, given our rapidly transforming and increasingly globalized world. We’ve discussed the importance of new media in communicating our awareness of common issues, and so doing transcending spatial and temporal distance and difference, yet social and cultural marginalization and exclusionary politics continue to exist. One possible approach to learning to live together in a truly inclusive global community is to embrace “cosmopolitanism” a term that embraces both fluidity and hybridity and is characterized by “a combination of different elements which neither blends nor assimilates, but which maintains the sense of difference of the component parts”(Turner, 2003). Cosmopolitanism is an idea that David Inglis approaches with caution:

For a person of my leftist political persuasions, it would be nice to conclude that everyday life was becoming ever more characterized by ‘cosmopolitanism’, a mindset made up of respect for and interest in the cultures of ‘others’ and an open-minded sense of cultural experimentation and a liking of fusions and hybrids (Hannerz, 1990; Fine and Cohen, 2002). But liking different ‘national’ types of food and going to fusion cuisine restaurants is not necessarily linked to doing something concrete about Third World debt, global warming and a whole host of other problems that are global in scope. (135)

In contrast, Shirley Fedorak takes a more optimistic view:

The process of creolizing and hybridizing various forms of popular culture are not as dire as many think. . . . What *is* of concern is the rapidity with which these changes are occurring today. . . . [but] My research has led me to believe that highly valued, tightly embedded popular culture is likely safe, perhaps not from some hybridity but certainly from loss. People tend to be highly selective and adopt only those elements from another culture that they see value in or that they prefer over their own. (111)

For Kwame Anthony Appiah, however, cosmopolitanism is about more than culture defined narrowly. Rather it is “a notion of global citizenship” (90) and is based on shared mutual responsibility:

. . . conversation is a metaphor for global citizenship; [but] it’s a metaphor that has to be interpreted and applied. I think of it as, first of all, involving actual literal conversation, that is, people talking to each other who are from very different backgrounds, whether we’re in the same society or across social boundaries, but also consisting of an engagement with the cultural lives of other places, through anthropology, through literature, through movies, through the arts, through following the news on the Internet and on television. All of these are ways of taking up the cosmopolitan insight that we will be enriched by knowledge and ideas from other places, and other places can be enriched by knowledge and ideas from us. (110)

Furthermore, Appiah sees the need for cosmopolitanism as both an ethical imperative, and a necessity for survival:

You cannot be partial to some tiny group and live out your moral life there; it’s simply not morally permissible. But you cannot abandon your local group either, because that would take you too far away from your humanity. So what we have to do is to learn how to do both. (113)

In Appiah’s cosmopolitan future, there is both an ethical and a practical imperative for knowledge and understanding to ultimately lead to action.