

Autumn 2014
COMM8940: Special Topics in Mass Communication
Understanding the Parasocial



Instructor: Dr. Jong-Eun Roselyn Lee
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When emailing, please be sure to include our course number (Comm8940) in the subject line
Time/Location: Tue & Thu 9:35-10:55am (Derby 3116)
Office Hours: Tue & Thu 11:30am-12:30pm or by appointment (Derby 3026)

Course Description and Objectives

Since the seminal work by Horton and Wohl (1956), parasociability has been studied in a variety of contexts for nearly six decades, revealing rich insight into the dynamic relationship between the mass media and their audiences. In this course, we will survey the literature on parasociability to fulfill the following objectives:

- ✓ To gain basic knowledge about how parasociability has been conceptualized
- ✓ To learn about various contexts in which parasocial interaction/relationship has been examined
- ✓ To locate theoretical and/or empirical gaps in the literature on parasociability
- ✓ To reflect on methodological issues and limitations and to explore possibilities for improvement
- ✓ To pursue new opportunities for broadening the scope of research on parasociability/parasociality within the rapidly changing media environment

Course participants are expected to actively contribute to reading discussions and to work toward producing a solid research proposal by the end of the semester.

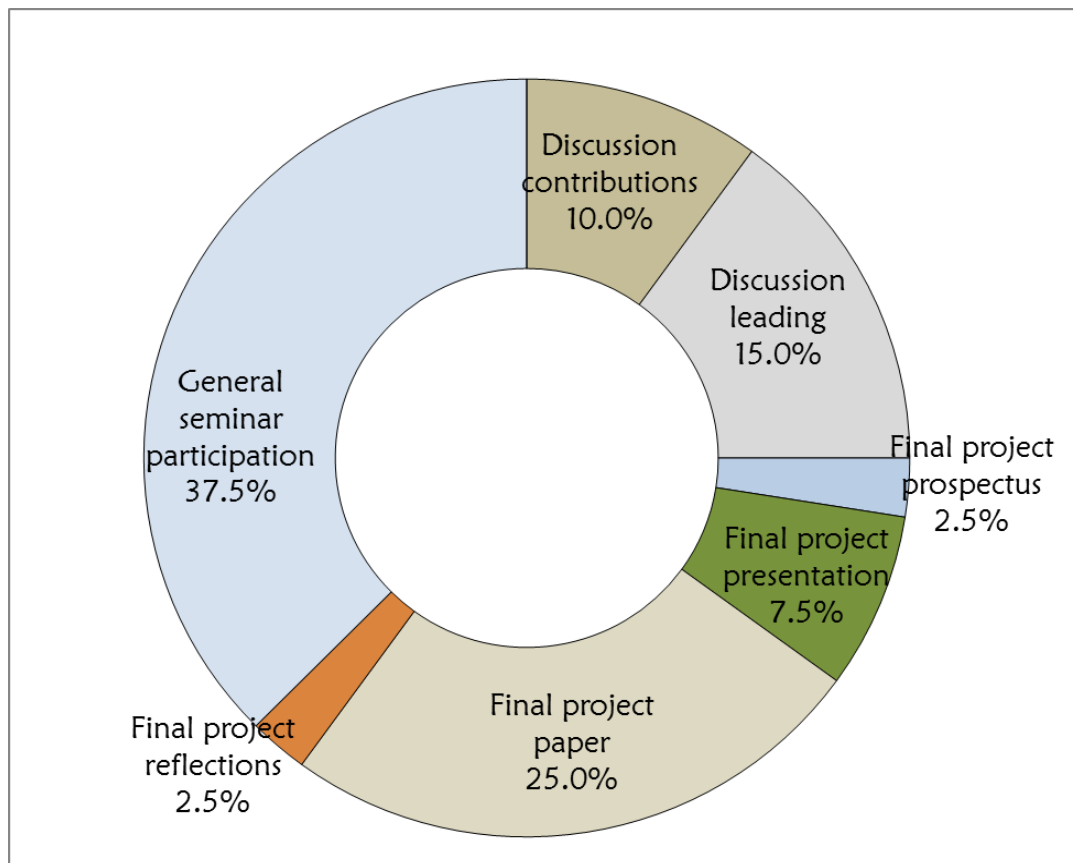
Special Accommodations

This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request. Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to the instructor and seeking assistance in a timely manner. Any student who feels he/she may need accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs, or contact the office for disability services at 292-3307 in Room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate your documented disabilities.

Course Readings

We will revisit the seminal articles co-authored by Horton and his colleagues on parasociability in Week 2. During Week 3 through Week 6, we will cover a selection of readings that could serve as important building blocks for us to understand parasociability (Round 1). Then, from Week 7 through Week 10, we will be reading a selection of research articles that have given an intriguing twist to parasociability with important theoretical and practical implications (Round 2). Of course, the readings selected for Round 1 and 2 are not fully representative of the whole universe of parasociability research. By the time we will have completed Round 1 and 2, you might have found an article on parasociability outside of our required reading list that perfectly lies in your area of interest or a reference that pertains to your final project. Round 3 will provide you with the opportunity to share and discuss such an article with the seminar participants. More instructions about the MFA sessions will be provided mid-semester. All of the course readings will be made available to you in PDFs on Carmen.

Course Requirements (200 pts in total)



Discussion contributions (1 pt per posting x 20 = 20 pts; 10%)

Starting in Week 2, seminar participants will contribute questions or comments about the assigned readings for each class period on the discussion board available on *Carmen*. This posting should be completed by noon on Mondays/Wednesdays – the day before class.

Discussion leading (10 pts x 3 = 30 pts; 15%)

For each session during Round 1, 2, and 3, we will have discussion leaders deliver a short presentation (10~15 minutes) on the key ideas presented in the assigned readings and lead the discussion based on the discussion questions/comments provided by the seminar participants. Discussion leaders should (1) read the assigned readings thoroughly (and be ready to raise their own questions), (2) carefully review the discussion questions/comments contributed by the seminar participants, and (3) prepare Power Point slides so that the reading presentation and discussion leading could be performed in a well-organized manner. The slides should be emailed to the instructor by 11:59pm on Mondays/Wednesdays – the night before class. (Please do not use *Prezi* for the presentation). Discussion leaders will be waived from the discussion contribution assignment for the day they are leading the discussion.

Final Project (75 pts; 37.5%)

As your final project for this course, you will propose a theory-driven, empirical research study on parasociability. In this project, you should formulate research questions/testable hypotheses grounded in the literature and design a study that could advance our understanding of the parasocial. As part of your project, the following will be required. **For specific due date/time information, see the Course Schedule table.**

1) Prospectus (5 pts)

In this written assignment, you will be asked to provide a brief (3~4 pages) outline of your final project addressing the following.

- (1) Motivation: Why do you want to investigate the topic of your proposed study?
- (2) Background: What theoretical frameworks/lines of extant research inspire and guide your proposed study?
- (3) Hypotheses (or Research Questions): What hypotheses do you aim to test? (Or what research questions do you want to posit?)
- (4) Method: Content analysis, survey, or experiment? What measures (and stimuli if you are planning to do an experiment) do you plan to use?
- (5) Implications: What possible contributions could your proposed study make theoretically and practically?

2) Final presentation (15 pts)

Seminar participants will present their project proposals. The presentation session will take the format of academic conference panels: Following each presentation, there will be time for Q&A and comments. More details to follow (We will discuss scheduling of this presentation session to secure at least two full hours for the presentations).

3) Final paper (50 pts) & reflections (5 pts)

3-1) The final paper (recommended length of 10~15 pages, double-spacing, excluding references and appendices) should include (1) a complete research proposal and (2) appendices of research materials (e.g., description of stimuli, measures).

3-2) Apart from the final paper, students will also be required to submit a short (200~250 words) self-reflection on the overall project experience.

General seminar participation (3 pts x 25 = 75 pts)

Last but not least, your active participation and engagement with the reading materials and discussions are essential to the success of this course; therefore, I will evaluate and grade class participation with all seriousness in each session.

1) I expect seminar participants to attend all class sessions. If extenuating circumstances prevent you from coming to class, please notify me as soon as possible and submit proper documentation for the absence so that your participation grade will not be penalized.

2) I expect that all students fully participate in the seminar by actively exchanging ideas and attentively listening to others.

3) During each class session, participation will be rated based on the following rubric:

- **3 pts:** Active verbal contribution (both high in quantity and quality) accompanied by attentive listening throughout the session
- **2 pts:** Some verbal contribution during the session accompanied by attentive listening
- **1 pt:** Attentive listening but little or no verbal contribution
- **0 pt:** Unexcused/undocumented absence; no verbal contribution and repeated behaviors signaling disengagement (e.g., extensive fixation of eye gaze on the laptop screen during presentations/discussions)

Grading Scale (with maximum possible points of 200 pts)

Final Letter Grade	Percentage	Points
A	93-100%	186-200
A-	90-92%	180-184
B+	87-89%	174-178
B	83-86%	166-172
B-	80-82%	160-164
C+	77-79%	154-158
C	73-76%	146-152
C-	70-72%	140-144
D+	67-69%	134-138
D	60-66%	120-132
E	Less than 60%	Less than 120