PSYC411: Post-Structural and Critical Psychology

Spring 2015

Dr Derek Hook


Times: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 10-10:50. (First day of class: Friday January 9th at 10am)

Office hours: Fridays, 11.20 – 12.20 (at Duquesne Starbucks)

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PREScribed TEXT:

Du Gay, P., Evans, J. & Redman, P. (Eds.) (2001). Identity: A reader. London: Sage. (We will read this text in its entirety during the course, so it is worth buying!).

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The topic of identity represents a point of convergence for a variety of critical, philosophical and sociological perspectives on what remains an irreducibly psychological concept. PSYC411, Post-Structural and Critical Psychology focuses on introducing and critically evaluating a series of influential conceptualizations of identity developed within the general domain of post-structural, psychosocial and critical social theory.

The course is based upon the text Identity: A Reader (edited by Du Gay, Evans and Redman), and covers the three main sections of the text, and approaches identity particularly via the perspectives of:

1) Language and Ideology
2) Psychoanalysis and the Psychosocial
3) Critical Historical Approaches.

A rich cross-section of critical theorists is considered including, amongst others: Jessica Benjamin, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Norbert Elias, Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Melanie Klein, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, Marcel Mauss, Jacqueline Rose, Kaja Silverman and D.W. Winnicott.

COURSE GOALS:
By the end of the course students should be able to apply and critique a variety of approaches to the concept of identity. This over-arching objective can be broken down into three crucial components.

1. **Applying theory to the real world**

The course aims to equip students with a vocabulary of critical concepts, derived from the theorization of identity, which can be applied in the analysis and critique of multiple facets of everyday life and popular culture. Students will be encouraged to move between the worlds of theory and empirical reality, and to make challenging theoretical ideas practicable. This goal will be assessed in class participation and written work, by paying attention to how students apply concepts introduced in the course in real-world settings. This objective links to one of the learning goals specified for psychology majors, namely that of being critically and socially engaged with the contemporary world, and appreciative of its many forms of diversity.

2. **Developing and conveying ideas through interaction**

A second objective lies with enabling students to communicate ideas effectively in a way that contributes to collaborative learning. This goal will be assessed by in-class participation, in terms of how students explain and explore ideas in a cooperative manner, and by means of supportive debate and joint questioning.

3. **Thinking creatively and critically about ‘the psychological’**

A further objective of the course is to grapple with the complexity of identity as a simultaneously psychological, political and historical phenomenon. This goal flows from the critical psychological impetus to investigate how the psychological is always conditioned by society and power. It links to one of the learning goals specified for psychology majors, that of thinking critically and creatively about human psychology and life as a whole. This general goal will be assessed in class participation and written work, by attention to students' capacity to stretch themselves, to think counter-intuitively, to test and interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions.

**ASSESSMENT:**

Students will be evaluated on the work they have done that shows how they have worked with the texts assigned for class; in terms of the role they have played in class discussions; and in view of how they have tried to apply the concepts to everyday life and popular culture.

Given that the course is based on a key text, a crucial requirement will be that students have thoroughly read and studied the relevant chapters for each session. To stress the point: STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE READ CAREFULLY AND IN DETAIL THE REQUIRED TEXTS FOR EACH WEEK’S SESSION PRIOR TO CLASS! This does not necessarily entail a
full 'understanding' of the text, but it does involve the attempt to develop speculative ideas as a result of a sustained engagement with the readings.

Good grades will be awarded to students who have attempted precisely this – to work with, and produce ideas in relation to the prescribed readings. Important also will be attempts to utilise and critique these understandings, efforts to find examples within the domain of everyday life and popular culture, and the capacity to reflect on the shortcomings of the theories in question.

**Class presentations**

Each student will have two opportunities to offer a 15-minute presentation on a prescribed reading to the class. The aim of the presentation is for students to make a given reading more accessible to their peers, to extract a set of basic ideas from a text, and discuss the ideas they have formed as a result of working with the text. Presentations may include attention to: ‘quotable quotes’ within the text; ideas about the particular values or shortcomings of the reading; ‘eureka’ moments; examples of how the text may be applied to everyday life or popular culture.

The class presentation mark will also be influenced by the general class participation of each student. Special attention will be paid to how students help one another engage with, expand upon, apply and critique involved ideas. Consistent attendance is vital.

**Note about Blackboard Portfolios:**

If you are a psychology major and you have already taken or are currently taking PSYC 102 (Orientation to the Psychology Major) you **must** upload at least one assignment from this class to your Blackboard portfolio. You may do this at any time during the semester, but it must be done by the end of classes. You cannot receive your grade from this class until you have done this. For this course, the most appropriate document to upload will be the notes you prepare for your in-class presentations.

*Note: For the first session, students should have read Peter Redman’s ’Introduction to Section 1′ + Stuart Hall’s ‘Who needs identity?’*

It is worth noting here that many of the texts we will be dealing with in the course are challenging, to say the least; many are stylistically obscure and/or densely theoretical, resistant to easy assimilation. Students shouldn’t thus be demoralized if many of the texts seem difficult, impossible to reduce to a series of elementary components. What matters here then is not so much being able to elucidate every facet of the text, but having worked on the text, and developed ideas in response to it.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Your grade will be made up of three components:

1) Class presentation (40%)
2) Mid-term exam (essay question) (20%)
3) Final exam (40%)

GRADING SCALE:

A = 92-100; A- = 90-91; B+ = 88-89; B = 82-87; B- = 80-81; C+ = 78-79; C = 70-77; D = 60-69; F = below 60.

Deadlines:

Mid-term exam: 27th February
Final Exam: 30th April 8.30 – 10.30

SESSION BY SESSION BREAKDOWN OF CONTENTS:

Fri 9th Jan: Hall: ‘Who needs identity?’
Mon 12th Jan: Althusser: ‘Ideology interpellates individuals’
Wed 14th Jan: Benveniste: ‘Subjectivity in language’
Fri 16th Jan: Lacan: ‘Mirror-Stage’
Wed 20th Jan: Student presentation and discussion (1)
Fri 23rd Jan: Rose: ‘Feminine sexuality’
Mon 26th Jan: Kristeva: ‘Revolution in...language’
Wed 28th Jan: Silverman: ‘Suture’
Fri 30th Jan: Student presentation and discussion (2)
Mon 2nd Feb: Derrida: ‘Difference’
Wed 4th Feb: Bhabha: ‘Interrogating identity’
Fri 6th Feb: Foucault: ‘Domain’
Mon 9th Feb: Student presentation and discussion (3)
Wed 11th Feb: Butler: ‘Critically Queer’
Fri 13th Feb: Klein: ‘Schizoid mechanisms’
Mon 16th Feb: Winnicott: ‘Mirror-role of mother and family’
Wed 18th Feb: Student presentation and discussion (4)
Fri 20th Feb: Winnicott: Transitional objects
Mon 23rd Feb: Lyth: 'Defense against anxiety'
Wed 25th Feb: Rustin: 'Racism and anti-racism'
Fri 27th Feb: Mid-term exam
Mon 9th March: Fanon: 'The negro & psychopathology'
Wed 11th March: Lasch: 'Culture of Narcissism'
Fri 13th March: Benjamin: 'The oedipal riddle'
Mon 16th March: Student presentation and discussion (5)
Wed 18th March: Giddens: 'Trajectory of the self'
Fri 20th March: Craib: 'What happened to mourning?'
Mon 23rd March: Elias: 'Homo clausus and the civilizing process'
Wed 25th March: Student presentation and discussion (6)
Fri 27th March: Bourdieu: 'Biographical illusion'
Mon 30th April: Marshall: 'Note on 'status”
Wed 1st April: Rose: 'Identity, genealogy, history'
Tues 7th April: Student presentation and discussion (7)
Wed 8th April: Mauss: 'A category of the human mind'
Fri 10th April: Weber: 'The profession and the vocation of politics'
Mon 13th April: Foucault: 'The use of pleasure'
Wed 15th April: Student presentation and discussion (8)
Fri 17th April: Hadot: '...cultivation of the self'
Mon 20th April: Rorty: 'Persons and personae'
Wed 22nd April: Student presentation and discussion (9)
Friday 24th April: Additional reading TBC
Mon 27th April: Conclusion