

September 5, 2000 -- WCP 131/133.H: Self and Identity

Assignment 1. Due Monday, September 11, 2000 at 9 a.m. in your instructor's office. Late papers are docked a letter grade; papers three days late receive a zero.

Topic and structure of the paper

In the course to date we have considered three readings reflecting psychological perspectives on self and identity formation. These readings differ along many lines, but they can help us to begin to grapple with an important question: *what makes the psychological "take" distinctive and useful?*

Your paper (2-3 pp.) should consist of two parts. First, you should compare and contrast these three readings according to **one** of the following issues:

1. What kinds of *evidence* do they marshal to support their ideas about self and identity formation?
2. What does each author propose a self needs to develop and flourish?
3. What does each seem to want to accomplish through their work?

It should be clear from your writing which **one** of these dimensions you have chosen to use as an axis of comparison. After reflecting on the similarities and differences of the readings in this way, you should devote a second and substantial part of the paper to the following set of questions:

Taken together, what do these readings begin to indicate about the discipline of psychology? Where do psychologists look to find the source of self and identity? If you had to define the "psychological outlook," given what you know from these readings, how would you define it? What makes this perspective on issues of self/identity potentially unique and powerful?

(Don't panic, but...) This assignment is difficult in many respects. You must find a way to present these two discussions as part of an integrated, single essay. You must make some educated guesses based on what you know so far... And, last but not least, you must do all of this in a small amount of space. Sometimes it seems that short papers are "easier" than long ones, but generally the opposite is true. In a short paper, every word and every example counts. Be sure to write in drafts, leaving time between each draft. This will give you the opportunity to look at the essay with fresh eyes and see how it can be developed or deepened. The goal--**for your final draft**--is to be concise and focused, avoiding repetition, and incorporating specific and targeted examples from the readings.

Technical issues

The paper should be typed double-spaced in a 12-point font with 1-inch margins all around. Pages must be stapled together! Type your name, the instructor's name, and your seminar meeting time at the top of the first page.

Be sure to spell-check your document. But spell-checking is not enough! You should read through a *printed* version of the document to check for typographical and grammatical errors. (You might want to ask a friend to help you proofread.) Remember: *it is difficult. For the reader to concentrate on the point you are making, if there are a lot of mechanical problems.*

Academic etiquette

In this and all academic papers, you *must* cite the sources of your ideas, as well as all direct quotes or paraphrased material. This is very, very important. If, for instance, you rely on Erikson's concept of "identity crisis," do not simply *repeat* this idea as if it were your own, or as if it represented an "obvious fact." Acknowledge that Erikson pioneered the idea, and cite the work you have read in which he develops it. *The same holds true for any original ideas, quotes, or paraphrased material from any source that is not your own, whether or not you encountered it in this class.*

Lots of informal lore circulates surrounding paraphrasing, including the idea that "if you change every seventh (sixth, fifth, twentieth...) word, it's not *really* plagiarism." This is a faulty line of reasoning. If you find yourself deliberately tinkering with someone else's language so that you can present the material without attribution, then you are plagiarizing. Your goal is to describe and explain other works in ways that reflect your own unique style of thinking, reasoning and writing. If you believe the original wording in a particular passage will help illustrate a point that you are making, then go ahead and quote it, *but be sure to cite it.*

Finally, be careful to avoid a related pitfall: relying on strings of quotes to make your points, without interpreting or reflecting on the quoted material. If you cite these quotes, you are not technically plagiarizing. But you are undermining the strength and originality of your own work, and this will be reflected in your grade.

Hey, and in case that wasn't enough advice:

Remember that you are in a community with lots of resources—faculty, peers, residential staff, tutors!

And forget about the icing. (The icing is too sweet anyway.) (Unless it's that really good, buttery icing and you've got a lot of milk...)