

School of Interdisciplinary Studies
Western College Program
MIAMI UNIVERSITY

WCP 131/133 (Social Systems I)

Fall, 1997

Semester Topic: **Who Am I? Self and Identity in Contemporary American Society**

Instructors: Eugene W. Metcalf, 125 Peabody Hall, 529-5668
Office hours: 1:30 - 3:30 Tuesday and Thursday; 2-3 p.m. Wednesday

William H. Newell, 123 Peabody Hall, 529-2213
Office hours: 1-2 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday; 9:30-noon Wednesday

Class Schedule:

Lecture	1:00 - 1:50 p.m.	Wednesday	Leonard Theater	
Staff				
Section A	9:30 - 10:20 a.m.	Tuesday/Thursday	31 Peabody	Newell
Section B	9:30 - 10:20 a.m.	Tuesday/Thursday	29 Peabody	
Metcalf				
Section C	11:00 - 11:50 a.m.	Tuesday/Thursday	31 Peabody	Newell
Section D	11:00 - 11:50 a.m.	Tuesday/Thursday	29 Peabody	
Metcalf				
Section F	2:00 - 2:50 p.m.	Tuesday/Thursday	31 Peabody	Newell
Section G	3:30 - 4:20 p.m.	Tuesday/Thursday	29 Peabody	
Metcalf				
Media Night	7:00 - 9:30 p.m.	as needed	Leonard Theater	Staff

General Course Description:

The initial Social Systems course, “the individual in society,” aims to sensitize students to the impact of society on who they are, what they value, how they think, and what they do. It introduces key social science perspectives, identifies ways they are distinguished from the humanities or natural science, and includes perspectives outside the mainstreams of American culture. Attention is given to regularities rather than idiosyncrasies in behavior and to contrasting or conflicting interpretations of that behavior. Subject matter is treated as unresolved issues to be explored rather than finished knowledge to be learned, in a seminar format emphasizing student discussion over faculty presentation. Improvement of written and oral communication is an important goal, and evaluation is normally by papers and discussion. Both the topic and pedagogy emphasize tolerance and sympathy for people who think or value differently than the characteristic ways students bring to the course. Historical treatments explore processes of social, economic, and religious change; nondominant perspectives such as race, gender, and ethnic background are included. These are joined with methodological issues of prediction, control, and ethics; philosophical issues of free will and determinism; and consideration of key disciplinary assumptions from anthropology, economics, education, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. Students are encouraged to see that they cannot rely on authority or status alone but must make judgments for themselves, and seminar groups are invited to engage in self-evaluation.

Topic:

This course is about you. In it, we probe the core of your being -- your sense of self and your very identity. We examine whether there is an inner 'you' apart from the roles you play, the products you purchase, and the relationships you develop. Or are you merely a product of your family and friends, your gender and race, and your church and school, shaped as well by tv advertisements, American society, and Western culture?

Why does the answer to that question make a difference to you? Why are your identity and sense of self so important to you? Why do you value having control over who you are? Why is it so tough to be an individual in a society that places such a premium on individuality? Why is it so hard to grow up and create your own identity? Why do Americans buy so many self-help books?

How would your answers change if you were of a different gender? a different race?

How can these insights be applied to popular behaviors such as collecting that seem at first far removed from issues of self and identity?

To answer these questions we will see what several different social sciences have to say about self and identity. The disciplines of psychology, economics, sociology, and anthropology each turn out to have something important to tell you about your self and your identity. We will also seek input from feminism and Black studies that cut across disciplines. Unfortunately, the contributions from these various perspectives are as contradictory as they are insightful, leaving us the challenge of pulling together their insights into a richer, more complex understanding of our selves and our identities.

Thus we will learn something about the disciplines themselves, their perspective or world view. Through classroom discussions and a sequenced set of assigned papers, we will look explicitly at the process of interdisciplinary study as well the disciplines from which it draws the insights that it integrates.

Evaluation:

All assignments due in class on date indicated. All papers must be spell-checked. Late papers are docked a letter grade; papers three days late receive a zero. You are encouraged to share drafts of your papers with other students. See Peer Review below for suggestions on how to provide feedback. For an explanation of academic misconduct, see Part V, Sections 501-507 of the Student Handbook. You are also encouraged to make regular use of the Writing Center, especially for pre-drafts and first drafts; do not ask tutors to serve as copy editors.

• **Weekly Journal** (hand in each Tuesday), 20%

One-paragraph summary (key idea/s of week's reading); and one-paragraph response (connect to personal experience, to previous course readings, or to your evolving understanding of self and identity).

For the first assignment, narrate and describe in one page a past event that helped to shape your identity or your sense of self, so your reader can feel and understand why it was important. Narration aims not to tell about an event but to give the event. Description gives the object instead of telling about it. In order to show instead of tell, use specific details, especially sensory details that appeal to your reader's sense of taste, touch, sound, sight, and smell, so your reader experiences what you experienced.

• **Paper #1:** Analysis of Psychology as a Discipline (September 11), 15%

A 2-3 page essay on the perspective of the discipline of psychology, based on Section 1 of Osborne's text. Think of each discipline as providing a lens through which to see the world. What characterizes the lens of the psychologist, where does one stand when wearing it, and at what should one look? Back up your contentions using explicit references to the text. Carefully consider the following questions about the text before writing, though you may not answer all of them directly in your paper:

- * What counts as evidence? (e.g., introspection, support from Biblical passages)
- * What kind of language is used? (e.g., lots of emotionally charged words)
- * What assumptions does the author make? (e.g., humans are innately good)

- * What biases does the author have? (e.g., pro-capitalist) Alternatively, what values does he hold?
- * What are the goals and purposes of a psychological experiment? (e.g., to test a general model)
- * On what do psychologists focus their attention? (e.g., irrational human behavior) Alternatively, what phenomena do they ignore or find uninteresting? (e.g., group behavior)
- * How do psychologists construct a theoretical model?
- * Altogether, what is the world-view of psychologists?

• **Paper #2:** Comparison-Contrast of Disciplines (October 16), 15%

A 4 page essay in which you compare and contrast the perspective of sociologists and anthropologists. Use the directions and questions for paper #2 as prompts to your thinking.

• **Paper #3:** Interdisciplinary Application, 30% total

A. First Version (November 11)

A ten page paper on the potential of the Western community for helping all students (of both genders and varying races or ethnicities) shape their identity and clarify their sense of self. What larger lesson/s can be drawn (e.g., for late adolescent development or for the construction of academic communities)? Make use of at least three disciplinary perspectives and at least one gendered or racial perspective to develop a clear, coherent thesis backed by logical arguments made up of sequences of steps and connected explicitly to relevant course readings. The grade on the final version will be docked if the first version is late.

B. Peer Review (November 18), 5%

A one page review of your assigned peer's first version. Please provide your peer with honest, tactful, and specific advice. Cover larger concerns such as organization and logic before you begin to address minor ones, such as spelling and diction. Attempt to pinpoint the precise problem or the exact place where you think the argument becomes unclear. In your review, address the following:

- * State the thesis in a sentence or two. If you can't, why not? Is it insightful or too obvious?
- * Explain the logic of the organization. Does one point move smoothly to the next?
- * Identify meaningful and appropriate references to the course readings.
- * Are the sources incorporated smoothly and purposefully, or do they appear "tacked on?"
- * Is the prose clear? Is your interest maintained throughout the paper? At what point does it

wane?

Return the paper along with your review to the author.

C. Final Version (December 2), 25%

Reread your first draft and your peer's review of it carefully. Put on your most careful and critical mindset; and consider deeply what changes you should make to create the most persuasive and powerful paper you have ever written. Then revise your paper at least once (hopefully twice), basing the changes on comments you feel are most valid. Remember the most important revisions (that lead to the highest grade) are the most substantive and consequently require the most time and thought. Submit all three portions of the assignment (first draft, peer feedback, final version) to your instructor. Grades will reflect how much your paper improved in response to peer feedback as well as the quality of both versions.

• **Paper #4:** Self-Evaluation (take-home final, due at scheduled final exam time), 20%

A 5 page personal essay which explores the way your view of self & identity and of interdisciplinary studies has developed over the semester. In other words, make sure that this essay discusses the way in which your knowledge of the course topic has expanded, been altered or been reinforced, and the way in which your understanding of interdisciplinary learning has deepened. Integrate course reading material

(through quotations and paraphrasings) when relevant and appropriate. Since this is a personal essay, you may use the first-person pronoun judiciously and incorporate relevant anecdotes and personal experience to support your claims. In preparation for this essay, review your weekly journal for the course.

Required Texts:

*Who Am I? Self and Identity in Contemporary American Society: **Reader #1*** (Oxford: Oxford Copy Shop, 1997)

*Who Am I? Self and Identity in Contemporary American Society: **Reader #2*** (Oxford: CopyNation, 1997)

Randall E. Osborne. *Self: An Eclectic Approach*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996.

Peter L. Berger. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1963.

Ralph Ellison. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage Books, 1947.

Semester Schedule:

WEEK ONE

Meeting 1 (Aug. 26) Go over syllabus

WHY ARE WE STUDYING THE SELF?

Meeting 2 (Aug. 28)

Peck, M. Scott. The Road Less Traveled. Pp. 15-34, 39-50, 64-68. Readers #1 and 2.

WEEK TWO

Meeting 1 (Sept. 2)

No class. Monday-Tuesday exchange day.

Meeting 2 (Sept. 4)

Baumeister, Roy F, "The Self and Society," pp. 191-217. Reader #1

HOW DO WE DEFINE THE SELF?

WEEK THREE

Meeting 1 (Sept. 9)

Osborne, Randall E. Self: An Eclectic Approach. ch. 1, pp. 5-20.

Meeting 2 (Sept. 11) [Paper #1 due]

Osborne, ch. 2, ch. 3, and "Wrapping it Up," pp. 21-48.

THE SELF AS PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL

WEEK FOUR

Meeting 1 (Sept. 16)

Osborne, Introduction to Section 2, pp. 49-52.

Osborne, ch 4, pp. 53-63.

Meeting 2 (Sept. 18)

Osborne, ch. 5, pp. 64-77.

WEEK FIVE

Meeting 1 (Sept. 23)

Berger, Peter L. Invitation to Sociology, ch. 4.

Meeting 2 (Sept. 25)

Berger, ch. 5.

IDENTITY, ECONOMICS AND THE MARKETPLACE

WEEK SIX

Meeting 1 (Sept. 30)

Sichel and Eckstein. "Indifference Analysis," pp. 146-52. Reader #1

McKenzie and Tullock. "The Meaning of Economics," pp. 5-11. Reader #1

Meeting 2 (Oct. 2)

Belk, Russell. "Possessions and the Extended Self," pp. 139-168. Reader #1

THE CULTURAL MEANING OF THE SELF

WEEK SEVEN

Meeting 1 (Oct. 7)

Osborne, ch. 6, pp. 78-86.

Holland, Dorothy. "Selves as Cultured," pp. 160-90. Reader #2.

Meeting 2 (Oct. 9)

Douglass, Mary & Baron Isherwood. "The Uses of Goods," and "Exclusion, Intrusion," pp. 56-81.

Readers #1 and 2.

WEEK EIGHT

Meeting 1 (Oct. 14)

Kondo, Dorinne K. Ch. 1 "The Eye," pp. 3-26. Reader #1.

Meeting 2 (Oct. 16) [Paper #2 due]

Kondo, Dorinne K. Ch. 1 "The Eye," pp. 27-48. Reader #2.

COLLECTING THE SELF

WEEK NINE

Meeting 1 (Oct. 21)

Muensterberger, Werner. Ch. 1, 2, and 3, pp. 3-48. Readers #1 and 2

Meeting 2 (Oct. 23)

no class

WEEK TEN

Meeting 1 (Oct. 28)

Clifford, James. "Collecting Ourselves," pp. 216-229. Reader #1

Metcalf, Eugene. "Folk Art, Museums, and Collecting the Modern American Self," pp. 12-22. Reader #1

Meeting 2 (Oct. 30)

Jones, Suzi. "Art by Fiat, and Other Dilemmas of Cross Cultural Collecting," pp. 243-274. Reader #1.

THE FEMININE SELF

WEEK ELEVEN

Meeting 1 (Nov. 4) Friday, Nancy, Ch. 1 "Mother Love," pp. 19-46. Reader #1.

Meeting 2 (Nov. 6)

Simonds, Wendy. "All Consuming Selves," pp. 15-29. Reader #1

THE BLACK AMERICAN SELF

WEEK TWELVE

Meeting 1 (Nov. 11) [Paper #3, First Version due]

Ellison, Ralph. "Prologue" and Ch. 1 and 2, Invisible Man.

Meeting 2 (Nov. 13)

Ellison, Ralph. Ch. 24 and 25 and "Epilogue," Invisible Man.RESOLVING THE MODERN DILEMMAS OF THE SELF

WEEK THIRTEEN

Meeting 1 (Nov. 18) [Paper #3 Peer Feedback due]

Osborne, ch. 13, pp. 163-76.

Meeting 2 (Nov. 20)

Osborne, chs. 14-15, pp. 177-98.

(THANKSGIVING VACATION - WEEK FOURTEEN - Nov. 25 & Nov. 27)

WEEK FIFTEEN

Meeting 1 (Dec. 2) [Paper #3 Final Version due]

Stevens, Richard and Margaret Wetherell, "The Self in the Modern World," pp. 340-67. Reader #1

Meeting 2 (Dec. 4)

Magolda, Peter. "Life as I Don't Know It," pp. 16-22. Reader #1

REVIEW AND SUMMATION

WEEK SIXTEEN (Dec. 9 & Dec. 11)

Berger, Ch. 3 "Excursus in Autobiography," *Invitation to Sociology*.

FINALS WEEK [take-home final -- Paper #4 due at scheduled final exam time]

Reader #1 (Oxford Copy Shop)

M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978. Problems and Pain, Delaying Gratification, Sins of the Father, Problem-solving and Time, Responsibility. Pp. 15-34.

Roy F. Baumeister, "The Self & Society: Changes, Problems, and Opportunities," in Richard D. Ashmore & Lee Jussim (eds.), *Self & Identity: Fundamental Issues*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. 191-217.

Richard Sichel & Peter Eckstein, "Indifference Analysis," *Basic Economic Concepts*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1977. Pp. 146-152

Richard B. McKenzie & Gordon Tullock, "The Meaning of Economics," *The New World of Economics*. Homewood, IL: Richard D, Irwin, 1975. Pp. 5-11.

Russell Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 15 (September, 1988). Pp. 139-168.

Mary Douglas & Baron Isherwood, "The Uses of Goods," *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1979. Pp. 56-70.

Dorinne K. Kondo, sections from Ch. 1 "The Eye," *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. The "Setting" Trope, How the Problem Emerged, Japanese Selves and their Challenge to the "Whole Subject." Pp. 3-26.

Werner Muensterberger, Ch. 1 "Passion, or the Wellsprings of Collecting" and Ch. 2 "First Possessions," *Collecting: An Unruly Passion, Psychological Perspectives*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. Pp. 3-24.

James Clifford, "Collecting Ourselves," *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. Pp. 216-229.

Eugene W. Metcalf, "Folk Art, Museums, and Collecting the Modern American Self," *Contemporary American Folk, Native, and Outsider Art: Into the Mainstream*. Oxford: Miami University Art Museum, 1990. Pp. 12-22.

Suzi Jones, "Art by Fiat, and Other Dilemmas of Cross-Cultural Collecting," in John M. Vlach and Simon J. Bronner (eds.), *Folk Art and Art Worlds*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986. Pp. 243-274.

Nancy Friday, Ch. 1 “Mother Love,” *My*
Pp. 19-46.

Mother, My Self. New York: Delacourt Press, 1977.

Wendy Simons, “All Consuming Selves: Self-Help Literature and Women’s Identities,” in Debra Gronin and Thomas R. Lindlof, *Constructing the Self in a Mediated World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996. Pp. 15-29.

Richard Stevens and Margaret Wetherell, Ch. 7 “The Self in the Modern World: Drawing Together the Threads,” in Richard Stevens (ed.) *Understanding the Self*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996. Pp. 340-367.

Peter M. Magolda, “Life As I Don’t Know It,” *About Campus* (May/June, 1997). Pp. 16-22.

Reader #2 (CopyNation)

M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978. Escape from Freedom, Dedication to Reality, Transference, Balancing. Pp. 39-50, 64-68

Dorothy Holland, “Selves as Cultured: As Told by an Anthropologist Who Lacks a Soul,” in Richard D. Ashmore & Lee Jussim (eds.), *Self & Identity: Fundamental Issues*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. 160-190.

Mary Douglas & Baron Isherwood, selection from “Exclusion/Intrusion,” *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1979. Pp. 71-81.

Dorinne K. Kondo, selections from Ch. 1 “The Eye,” *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. Displacing the Binary: Anthropological Studies of The Self. Pp. 27-48.

Werner Muensterberger, Ch. 3 “Of Toys and Treasures,” *Collecting: An Unruly Passion, Psychological Perspectives*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. Pp. 25-48.

LINKS TO OTHER COURSE MATERIALS:

- [Assignment One](#)
- [Opening Lecture](#)
- [Lecture on IDS](#)