

Social Construction of Self and Identities: Psychology 792

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This course is a broad exploration of self and identities from constructivist and constructionist views: What is identity? What is self? What is the difference between self and identity? How does one develop a sense of identity? Is identity singular or multiple? How do multiple social contexts and constructions (including power) influence the perception and construction of identities?

This will be a student centered, discussion oriented seminar. The course begins with an introduction to various ideas of self and identity, as well as a brief (and by no means thorough) review of some constructivist/constructionist theory. We will then go on to explore in more depth specific identities/topics generated by students. Specific topics may include: specific racial and/or ethnic identities; gender identities; feminist identities; gay, lesbian and bisexual identities; class/SES identities; identities related to ability/disability, identity related to trauma; the more traditional ideas about general adolescent identity (or identities); etc. See attached for some examples of topics and associated readings.

Course Objectives

- To introduce/overview post-modern perspectives (constructivistic and social constructionistic theories) as they relate to clinical psychology, with a particular emphasis on their implications for minority populations. These theories are increasingly affecting the conduct and critical analysis of research and the development of therapeutic interventions (e.g. narrative family therapy, cognitive constructivism), particularly in relation to minority populations whose worldviews are frequently marginalized.
- To contribute to understandings of individual differences in a social context, highlighting the complexities of the interaction between individuals and social constructions, particularly for minority populations.
- To contribute to developing an understanding of the perspectives of ethnic minorities, low-income groups, and other people/groups experiencing systemic oppression.
- To support students' particular clinical and/or research interests by enabling in-depth exploration of student-chosen topics related to self and identities.

Foundational Readings:

Ashmore, R. D. & Jussim, L. (Eds.) (1997). *Self and Identity: Fundamental Issues*. Oxford University Press: New York.

Additional readings on reserve

Structure:

The first third of the semester will be used to create a foundation in some of the theory regarding constructivism/constructionism and self and identity. We will use this reading to explore issues and dilemmas and attempt to come to some tentative agreement or structure of understanding (co-constructed meaning) regarding self and identity.

The remainder of the semester will be student-centered. Each student will define a more specific area of interest related to identity and self. Students will be scheduled for particular sessions (hopefully 2) and will be responsible for providing readings related to their chosen topic for the class beforehand. Readings should consist of 2-3 articles/chapters (about 30-35 pages per student, per presentation). The majority of these readings should be current primary sources, although classic contextualizing research and theory is also acceptable for a part of the readings. Personal narratives, case examples, fiction, etc. directly relevant to the topic are encouraged but should account for no more than 20% of the readings used to fulfill the assignment requirement (feel free to include more as optional). Students will be responsible for preparing discussion questions and guiding the class discussion on their topic, demonstrating "expert knowledge" and critical thinking/integration. You are also responsible for writing up and disseminating a discussion summary after each class discussion on your topic. Some examples of past topics:

- Various racial and ethnic identities, sometimes intersecting with other identities such as gender or social class or with particular experiences such as delinquency in adolescents, or mothering
- Dissociation and identity
- Disability and sexual identity
- Twins and identity
- Straight-edge identity
- Feminist identity and issues related to why women do or do not identify as feminist
- Trauma and identity, related to developing a survivor identity or related to genocide
- Transcending identity
- Youth activist identity

Assignments:

Model/metaphor of self and identity: a model of your understanding of self and identity in whatever media you choose. Your metaphor/model should answer the question "What is identity (and or self)?" But, as a work in progress, it should not be definitive. One of the wonderful things about metaphors is that they are multifaceted, frequently richer in meaning than we first intend, and often open to co-construction due to their ability to encompass multiple (even contradictory) meanings. When thinking about how to approach this, consider not only the base question ("What is identity?") but also the framing of the metaphor: "Identity is like..." (sometimes its easier to explicitly put in the "like." 25%

Class presentation(s) (hopefully 2 depending on class size) as described above, including summaries. 30%

Final paper: The final paper for this class will be an exploration of your understanding of self and identity, based on issues discussed in class. The paper should integrate the collective knowledge gleaned from the different class perspectives as well as explore the specific research and theory associated with your particular chosen topic. 35%

Class participation including discussion/written feedback on shared papers. 10%

COURSE CALENDAR**Week 1: Introductions****Week 2: Historical Contexts****Required Reading:**

A&J: Skim Chap. 1: Introduction, Ashmore & Jussim
 A&J: Chap. 6: The historical formation of selves, Danziger
 A&J: Chap. 8: The self and society, Baumeister
 Neimeyer, R. A. (1995). Constructivist psychotherapies: Features, foundations
 Gergen, K. J. (2001). Psychological science in a postmodern context...
 Cox, L. M. & Lyddon, W. J. (1997). Constructivist conceptions of self...

Recommended Reading:

Marcia, J. E. (1994). The empirical study of ego identity.

Week 3: Development**Required Reading:**

A&J: Chap. 3: The case for unity in the (post)modern self, McAdams
 A&J: Chap 5: Me's and we's, Thoits & Virshup
 Akhtar, S., & Samuel, S. (1996). The concept of identity
 Blasi, A. (1988). Identity and the development of the self.
 Guidano, V. F. (1995). Constructivist psychotherapy...

Recommended Reading:

Rigazio-DiGilio, S. A. (1997). From microscopes to holographs...

Week 4: Social and Cultural Contexts**Required Reading:**

A&J: Chap.7: Selves as cultured, Holland
 Triandis, H. C. (1989). The self and social behavior...
 Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1994). A collective fear of the collective.
 Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self*. Excerpt from Ch. 6: From self to relationship

Recommended Reading:

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self...
 A&J: Chap.4: The personal self in social context, Harter

Week 5: Models and Metaphors***Models/metaphors due*****Required Reading:**

Suyemoto, K. L. (2002). Constructing identities...
 Suyemoto, K. L. & Kim, G. S. (2005). Journeys through diverse terrain...

Weeks 6-14 Specific Identities and Issues

Student Facilitated Topics

Final papers due May 10

Meet During Finals Week: Discussion and feedback

Student Facilitated Topics—some guidelines for readings

Readings should consist of 2-3 articles/chapters for each presentation (about 30-35 pages). The majority of these readings should be current primary sources, although classic contextualizing research and theory is also acceptable for a part of the readings. Personal narrative, case examples, fiction, etc. directly relevant to the topic is encouraged but should account for no more than 10% of the readings used to fulfill the assignment requirement.

Two examples for a single class presentation are below. Neither of these sample lists is exhaustive and of course, yours will reflect your interests.

Asian American Ethnic and Racial Identities:

Required Reading

Kibria, N. (2000). Race, ethnic options, and ethnic binds: Identity negotiations of second-generation Chinese and Korean Americans. Sociological Perspectives, 43, 77-95

Thai, H. C. (1999). "Splitting things in half is so White!": Conceptions of family life and friendship and the formation of ethnic identity among second generation Vietnamese Americans. Amerasia Journal, 25, 53-88.

Tse, L. (1999). Finding a place to be: Ethnic identity exploration of Asian Americans. Adolescence, 34, 121-138.

Diem, A. (1992). Looking American. In J. F. J. Lee's (1992). Asian Americans: Oral histories of first to fourth generation Americans from China, the Phillipines, Japan, India, the Pacific Islands, Vietnam and Cambodia. (pp. 107). New York: New Press.

Yee (1995). Little thoughts in America: To be the real me? In Our Time: An anthology of writings by Asian American students from the University of Massachusetts Boston (p. 35).

Optional Background

Omi and Winant chapters 1 & 4 as background—optional 30 pages

Tanaka, J. S., Ebreo, A., Linn, N., & Morera, O. F. (1998). Research methods: The construct validity of self-identity and its psychological implications. In L. C. Lee & N. W. S. Zane (Eds.), Handbook of Asian American Psychology (pp. 21-79). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Optional narratives

Chow, C. S. (1998). Ethnicity and identity: What it means to be Asian American. In Leaving deep water: Asian American women at the crossroads of two cultures. (187-191). New York: Penguin.

Iwata, E. (1997). Race without face. In N. Sattler & V. Shabatay (Eds.), Psychology in context: Voices and perspectives (pp. 286-291). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Identity and Trauma

Required Reading

Brison, S. J. (1997). Outliving oneself: Trauma, memory and personal identity. In D. T. Meyers (Ed.), Feminists rethink the self (pp. 12-39). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Root, M. P. P. (1992). Reconstructing the impact of trauma on personality. In L. S. Brown & M. Ballou (Eds.), Personality and psychopathology: Feminist reappraisals (1st ed., pp. 229-265). New York: Guilford.

Warner, S. & Feltey, K. M. (1999). From victim to survivor: Recovered memories and identity transformation. In L. M. Wilam and V. L. Barnyard (Eds.) Trauma and memory. (161-172) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pendergrast, M. (1995). Victims of memory: Incest accusations and shattered lives (chapter 9, 233-244)

Optional Background

Rind, B., Tromovitch, P., & Bauserman, R. (1998). A meta-analytic examination of assumed properties of child sexual abuse using college samples. Psychological Bulletin, 124, 22-53.

Optional Narratives

Lee, E. & Oberst, G. (1989). My mother's purple dress. In Asian Women United of California (Eds.) Making waves: An anthology of writings by and about Asian American women. (pp. 99-115). Boston: Beacon Press.

WEEK 2: Historical Contexts

- Neimeyer, R. A. (1995). Constructivist psychotherapies: Features, foundations, and future directions. In R. A. Neimeyer & M. J. Mahoney (Eds.), *Constructivism in psychotherapy* (pp. 11-38). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association. Pp. 16-24 is required (rest is recommended): ONLINE IN LIBRARY
- Gergen, K. J. (2001). Psychological science in a postmodern context. *American Psychologist*, *56*, 803-813.
- Cox, L. M. & Lyddon, W. J. (1997). Constructivist conceptions of self: A discussion of emerging identity constructs. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, *10*, 201-219.
- Recommend Reading: Marcia, J. E. (1994). The empirical study of ego identity. In Bosma, Graffsma, Grotevant & de Levita (Eds.), *Identity and development : an interdisciplinary approach*. (pp. 67-80 Thousand Oaks, Calif. : Sage Publications.

WEEK 3: Development

- Akhtar, S., & Samuel, S. (1996). The concept of identity: Developmental origins, phenomenology, clinical relevance, and measurement. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, *3*, 254-267.
- Blasi, A. (1988). Identity and the development of the self. In D. K. Lapsley & F. C. Power (Eds.), *Self, ego, and identity: Integrative approaches* (pp. 226-242). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Guidano, V. F. (1995). Constructivist psychotherapy: A theoretical framework. In R. A. Neimeyer & M. J. Mahoney (Eds.), *Constructivism in psychotherapy* (pp. pp. 93-108). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Recommend Reading: Week 3: Rigazio-DiGilio, S. A. (1997). From microscopes to holographs: Client development within a constructivist paradigm. In T. L. Sexton & B. L. Griffin (Eds.), *Constructivist thinking in counseling practice, research, and training* (pp. 74-97). New York: Teachers College Press.

WEEK 4: Social and Cultural Contexts

- Triandis, H. C. (1989). The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *Psychological Review*, *96*, 506-520.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1994). A collective fear of the collective. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *20*, 568-579.
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self*. New York: Basic Books. Excerpt from Chapter 6: From self to relationship, 156-170.
- Recommend Reading: Week 4: Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, *98*, 224-253.

WEEK 5: Models and Metaphors

Required Reading

- Suyemoto, K. L. (2002). Constructing identities: A feminist, culturally contextualized alternative to "personality." In M. Ballou & L. S. Brown (Eds.), *Rethinking mental health and disorder: Feminist perspectives* (pp. 71-98). New York: Guilford
- Suyemoto, K. L. & Kim, G. S. (2005). Journeys through diverse terrain: Multiple identities and social contexts in individual therapy. In M. Mirkin, K. L. Suyemoto, & B. Okun (Eds.) *Psychotherapy with women: Exploring diverse contexts and Identities*, (9-41). New York: Guilford Press.