

SELF AND IDENTITY

SPRING 2015

MW: 4:30PM

CATHEDRAL OF LEARNING 208

INSTRUCTOR: KEVIN R. BINNING, PHD

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OFFICE HOURS: MW AT 3:30

OFFICE: 3301 SENNOTT SQUARE

COURSE OVERVIEW

Welcome! In this class we will be discussing a topic that philosophers have been arguing about for thousands of years: The self. I am trained as a social and quantitative psychologist, so we will be taking a decidedly psychological approach to the self. Rather than focusing on questions of pure theory and philosophy, or on questions of biology and neuroscience, we will be focusing on the role of the self in daily social experiences and we will do so by drawing on both theory and a large body of empirical research from social psychology. Our bi-weekly meetings will be a mixture of lecture, demonstrations, and discussion. The grading for the course will be based on two exams (non-cumulative), a reflective paper, and classroom participation. There are two course texts, which will be important in all three graded aspects of the course (exams, paper, and discussion), as described below.

COURSE TEXTS AND READING SCHEDULES (PURCHASE ONLINE THROUGH AMAZON):

Strangers to Ourselves, by Tim Wilson, Book Club on February 9 (Discussion seeds due on February 8)

Stigma, by Erving Goffman, Book Club on April 8 (Discussion seeds due on April 7)

These are not text books in the traditional sense, but non-fiction narratives that draw from empirical observation and are written to be accessible to a broad audience. Please read them carefully. In addition to these books, I will also occasionally send links to news articles and other pieces of media to provide background for lectures and discussion. These will be posted on the course website and emailed to your Pitt account prior to class. All of the course readings are fair game for the exams. They will also be important to your final paper (described below) and to your participation grade.

CLASS PARTICIPATION (20%): Your participation grade will be largely based around the two Book Club meetings mentioned above, however, additional consideration will be given for attendance, attention, and participation in class throughout the semester. There are two elements to each Book Club meeting:

1. A discussion seed on the book topic should be posted to the course website prior to the day of the meeting. The seed should be roughly 500 words and should contain your thoughts, comments, and or/questions for discussion. You will post them on the course website so that other students in class can read them and think about them prior to the book club. These seeds can take various shapes: You may stake a

new claim, you may relate aspects of the reading to other topics that have been covered in the course lectures or readings, you may relate the readings to a personal experience, you may criticize or challenge the arguments or conclusions in the book, or you can be creative and come up with another approach altogether. The main thing is to do the exercise! These seeds will provide the basis of the next day's discussion.

2. On the Book Club days, class attendance is mandatory. Although there is no test on these days, attendance is similar to exam days, and thus if you miss class that day, you must make arrangements with me beforehand and/or have a documented reason for your unexpected absence. On Book Club days, you will be expected to participate in the course discussion. We will begin the day by breaking into small groups for discussion and then expand out into a full class discussion. Thus, there will be multiple chances for all students to participate in the discussion. I strongly encourage and support dissenting views and opinions, and respectful disagreements are very welcome. As we will discuss, a basic axiom of psychology is that we all bring our unique histories and experiences to bear on how we perceive and interact with our world. Since we (and people like us) are the object of our scientific inquiry, the science can only survive and thrive if we share our diverse experiences and viewpoints.

REFLECTION PAPER (20%): Due on April 22 via email (kbinning@pitt.edu). For this 3 to 5 page assignment (double spaced, 12pt font), you will write a reflective essay about yourself that draws on the course readings, lectures, and/or discussions. There are a variety of forms the autobiographical content of these essays can take. For example, you might plan to use an upcoming experience as the basis of your essay. Maybe you have an upcoming event, a family gathering, or a vacation over Spring Break. You may decide to use that experience as an opportunity to reflect and attempt to understand yourself and your behavior using the tools and ideas from the class. Alternatively, you may attempt to make sense of an important event in your past. Maybe there was a traumatic or exciting episode for which you now have fresh insight. You should incorporate roughly four key ideas or concepts from the course. We will spend some time in class on writing tips and tricks for writing an effective essay, but the basic rules of writing apply (e.g., there should be a clear thesis statement and the following paragraphs should be used to bolster or expand upon the thesis, followed by a concluding paragraph).

EXAMS (60%). Exam I is on February 16 (30%). Exam II is on April 15 (30%). The course is broken into two sections and there is an exam at the end of each section. The final exam is not cumulative. Each exam will consist of a mixture of multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions. There will be a review session on the class meeting before each exam where we will discuss key terms and ideas that will be covered on the exam. These exams are designed to be very manageable if you have attended class, done the reading, and paid attention. Note that material from readings is fair game for the exam, even if it was not discussed in class.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Attendance is extremely important for this course. Please notify me in advance via email for any foreseeable absences. With the exception of Book Club days, attendance will not be taken on a daily basis. However, given the nature of the course, it will be extremely difficult for you to do well if you miss class. You are responsible for knowing any and all course material the days your are absent, so please plan accordingly.

MISSED EXAM POLICY: Attendance for exams is mandatory. If you are going to miss class on exam day, you must notify me before the exam so that alternative arrangements can be made. If you miss class on exam day without prior notice, documentation of the reason for your absence is required.

IMPORTANT DATES

February 9	Book club: <i>Strangers to Ourselves</i> , Tim Wilson
February 11	Exam review
February 16	EXAM I
March 9	SPRING BREAK
March 11	SPRING BREAK
March 18	NO CLASS
April 8	Book club: <i>Stigma</i> , Erving Goffman
April 13	Exam review
April 15	EXAM II
April 22	Reflective Paper is Due by 6pm (via email) (Note this is Finals Week)

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

DISABILITY SERVICES

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and

Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

ACCESSIBILITY

Blackboard is ADA Compliant and has fully implemented the final accessibility standards for electronic and information technology covered by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. Please note that, due to the flexibility provided in this product, it is possible for some material to inadvertently fall outside of these guidelines.

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STATEMENT ON CLASSROOM RECORDING

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.