

Sociology of Identity

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This course is orientated around four concepts. IDENTITY, NARRATIVE, DISCOURSE COMMUNITY and, COMMUNITY OF SOCIAL ACTORS. IDENTITY is clearly the central concept, for the semester, but as it will become quickly apparent, that concept is usefully seen as a site of contention rather than as an ontological reality which can be easily seen or defined. Despite the competition around identity, however, it is possible to locate those characteristics which are common to those competing for control. A fair amount of the class lectures will be spent attempting to isolate those common characteristics. NARRATIVE is an important concept for this class because it conveys the sense that identity is a social construct rather than an objective reality. From the narrative perspective, identity is subjectively, conceptually, carved out of a mass of interacting entities. As such, an identity is one out of a wide range of unfulfilled possibilities. DISCOURSE COMMUNITY is an important concept for us in three respects. Like narrative, discourse community calls our attention to the conceptual aspect of identity. It is also the case that discourse community broadens the insights we will gain from the concept narrative by concentrating upon the significance of symbols in facilitating stable interactions among social actors. The assertion from this perspective therefore is that to understand IDENTITY, however defined, requires an understanding of the central concepts with which social actors consistently structure their relations. Lastly, discourse community is important to us because it orientates us towards thinking about our relationship to the discourse community which I call Identity scholars. The focus here, therefore is on the concepts connected to the identity community which we are about to embrace. Much of your efforts during the semester will be spent locating a concept across the literature. As we tell each other what we have found, we will be engaged in informing each other about ideas which link the identity discourse community. COMMUNITY OF SOCIAL ACTORS (Institutions, Social Organization, Structure) is distinct from discourse community in that community of social actors, at least superficially, makes reference to the behavior (interaction) of social actors rather than on their ideas. This distinction between ideas and behavior is clearly artificial. In fact we will find throughout the literature efforts at keeping the two together (capturing the complexity of the social world) while being forced to separate them for analytical purposes.

Keep in mind then that this course is concept driven. The idea is that we are in search of the concepts and issues which are central to the discourse community of identity scholars. The approach we are taking is therefore similar to that involved in learning a foreign language. There will thus be a fair amount of concept repetition, which we will welcome. By our ability to locate some of the central concepts and issues, even when authors are relying upon their own dialect, of the identity community.

You will notice that this discussion of identity encompasses all levels of analysis (micro// I// Self to macro/ nation// Society) as well as an extremely broad range of substantive areas. These aspects of the literature provides us with the opportunity to encompass

virtually every aspect of the discipline of sociology. At the same time, however, because of our focus on IDENTITY, we are able to keep from becoming overwhelmed by the mass of information which is the concern of the discipline.

(INTRODUCTION - Sept. 3)

Structure of course (around themes/write every week/ read for depth/follow leads) Locate the discourse community. Much of this discussion will be around ideas from Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (chapters. 1-7). You are not required to read those chapters, but there are benefits to be had from your doing so.

(DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES - Sept. 10)

Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman. "Social Context and Socially Constructed Texts: The initiation of a Graduate Student into a Writing Research Community"

Bourdieu, P. Chapt. 3 "Authorized Language: The Social Conditions for the Effectiveness of Ritual Discourse" and Chapt. 4 "Rites of Institution" (Questions how discourse communities arise. He sees them as systems of stratification)

(NARRATIVE - Sept. 17)

Ricoeur, P. "Life in Quest of Narrative" (Chapt. 2 of Wood, D. (ed.) *On Paul Ricoeur* "Narrative Identity" (Chapt. 11 of Wood, D. (ed.) *ON PAUL RICOEUR*)

Somers, M. and Gibson, G. (Chapt. 2 of Calhoun) "Reclaiming the Epistemological "Other": Narrative and the Social Constitution of Identity"

(AROUND THE SELF - Sept. 24 - Oct. 8)

Goffman, Stigma

Coates, G. 1995. "Is this the end? Organizing identity as a post-modern means to a modernist end" *Sociological Review* Vol. 43. Nov.

Burkett, I. 1994. "The Shifting concept of the self" History of the Human Sciences. Vol. 7, #2.

Lemert, C. (Chapt. 3 of Calhoun) "Dark Thoughts about the Self"

Wiley, N. (Chapt. 4 of Calhoun) "The Politics of Identity in American History"

Abrams, P. "The Historical Sociology of Individuals: Identity and the Problem of Generations" (Chapt. 8 of his Historical Sociology)

(Mid-term: Locate the specific data (project) which you will use in order to investigate your concept) Discuss what you have found out about your concept/issue through your engagement of the readings. This should be a systematic product, not just notes. Draw connections between what you have found and a specific project idea (brief). This is the basis for an office discussion with me.

(GENDER - Oct. 22 - 29)

Butler, J. Gender Trouble (1st Part)

Butler, J. Gender Trouble (2nd Part)

Ault, A. Ambiguous Identity in an Unambiguous Sex/Gender Structure: The case of Bisexual Women" The Sociological Quarterly Vol. 37. #3

(RACE/ETHNIC IDENTIFYING - Nov. 5 - 19)

Readings from (TBA) Gates, H. L. Race, Writing, Difference (RWD)

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Jenkins, R. 1994. "Rethinking ethnicity: Identity, categorization and power" Ethnic and Racial Studies Vol. 17 #2 (April)

Stubblefield, A. 1995. "Racial Identity and non-essentialism about Race." Social Theory and Practice Vol. 21 (Fall)

Diawara, M. (Chapt. 8 of Calhoun). "Malcolm X and the Black Public Sphere: Conversionists v. Culturalists"

Wacquant, Loic (Chapt. 9 of Calhoun). "The New Urban Color Line: The State and Fate of the Ghetto in PostFordist America."

Le Rider, J. "Reflections on Viennese Modernity" (Chapt. 1 of his Modernity and Crises of Identity (MCI))

Le Rider, J. "Individualism, Solitude and Identity Crisis" (Chapt. 2 of his MCI)

Le Rider, J. "The Assimilated Jews of Vienna" (Chapt. 10 of his MCI)

Le Rider, J. "Conclusion: The (Post)Modern Indeterminacy of Identity" (MCI)

(NATIONALISM - Dec. 3)

Anderson, B. Imagined Communities

Cohen, A. The Symbolic Construction of Community

Bauman, Z. 1992. "Soil, blood and identity" The Sociological Review Vol. 40 (Nov.)

Mennell, S. (Chapt. 6 of Calhoun) "The Formation of We-Images: A Process Theory"

Scheff, T. (Chapt. 10 of Calhoun) "Emotions and Identity: A Theory of Ethnic Nationalism"

Calhoun, C. (Chapt. 11 of Calhoun) "Nationalism and Civil Society: Democracy, Diversity and Self-Determination"

(PULLING THE SEMESTER TOGETHER - Dec. 10)

White, H. "Introduction to Identity and Control" (Chapt. 1 of his Identity and Control" (IC))

White, H. "Rhetoric and Theory" (Chapt 7 of his IC)

Branaman, A. 1994. "Reconsidering Kenneth Burke: His Contributions to the Identity Controversy" *The Sociological Quarterly* Vol.35. #3

Final paper due: Dec 15th

Grading

Class Participation:

By the end of the second week of the semester each of us will decide upon a concept/issue which we will follow throughout the semester. I use 'follow' to indicate that we will be concerned with locating a concept (how defined under various circumstances; how used by various writers; points of conflict among authors; points of commonality among authors) and keeping track of it during the semester. "Keeping track" will take the form of writing (2-4 pages) on the readings for each class. It is these writing which will be the basis of the writeups and the final paper.

During approximately 30 minutes of each class we will engage in a general discussion of where our concept fits (supports or conflicts with) with the specific reading(s). In essence, we will be educating each other about the place of our concept in the identity discourse community. This discussion will be part of the overall evaluation for the semester. The greatest weight will go towards your writing on the concept, however.

A additional benefit of relying upon this approach of evaluation is that it will allow us to more readily see the significance to intellectual productivity of focusing narrowly (on specific concepts and specific issues) when approaching work. .

Writeups:

As indicated above, writeups are a way by which to become absorbed in some of the central concepts/issues of the identity discourse community. They also provide us with the experience of using concepts in the same manner that those operating in that community use them. In this manner we will be moving towards the production of a coherent paper, which might become the basis of an article, while at the same time helping each other learn the language of this world. These writeups will also operate as a means by which I can give you feedback during the semester. In particular, for the mid-term I will have an office meeting with each of you based upon your writeups.

Final paper: (approx. 20 pages)

This should be a coherent paper. In addition, you are required to produce an abstract of the paper you would like to write based upon your current sense of the identity discourse community. Is it the same project that you proposed at the mid-term? Discuss some of the changes you have made between that time and now regarding your specific desire for location in this community. Here it will be important to demonstrate that you have learned how to operate in the Identity world by being able to use the language of the discourse community.

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Readings

*Abrams, P. 1982. *Historical Sociology*

Anderson, B. 1983. *Imagined Communities*. Verso

*Ault, A. 1996. "Ambiguous identity in an unambiguous sex/gender structure: The case of bisexual women. *Sociological Quarterly*. V. 37, Summer. Pp. 449-63.

*Bauman, Z. 1992. "Soil, Blood and Identity." In *Sociological Review*. V. 40, Nov. pp.675-701

*Bourdieu, P. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*

*Branaman, A. 1994. "Reconsidering Kenneth Burke: his contribution to the identity controversy." In *Sociological Quarterly*. V. 35, Aug. pp.443-55.

*Burkitt, I. 1994. "The shifting concept of the self." *History of the Human Sciences*. Vol. 7, #2, 7-28).

Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble*

Calhoun, C. (ed.) 1995. *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*

Cohen, A.P. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*.

*Coats, G. "Is this the end? Organizing identity as a post-modern means to a modernist end." In *Sociological Review*. V.43. Nov. p.828-855.

Gates, H.L.(ed.) 19xx. Race, Writing, Difference

Goffman, E. 1986. Stigma

*Jenkins, R. 1994. "Rethinking ethnicity: identity, categorization and power", Ethnic and Racial Studies, vol. 17, pp.197-223.

*Le Rider., J. 1993. Modernity and Crises of Identity

*Stubblefield, A. 1995. Racial Identity and non-essentialism about Race., In Social Theory and Practice. V. 21, Fall. Pp.341-68.

*White, Harrison, 1992. Identity and Control.

*Wood, D. (ed.) On Paul Ricoeur. NY: Routledge

(*)= Xerox

Ongoing Debates

The assertion of a fundamental distinction between 'individual' and 'society' / The assertion that they are the same.

Essentialism (Self in the abstract) / Socially imposed constraints upon the articulation of alternative subjectivities

Unsocialized (pre-discursive) self/ Identity defined in terms of social categories

Individual /Environment

Self (non-social)/ Identity (social)

Essentialism

Non-essentialism

Identity As adopted

As formulated and negotiated

As the complex formulation of lifeworld experience

Formation of

Narrative

Not as a single-site construct of self

With (an external entity/ an internal entity)

Post-modern forms of

De-centered

Connection to meaning

Narrative (construction of)

Triggered by contingencies and contentions

As having an unproblematic continuity

Relationship to control/ power

Relationship to action and counteraction

Identity relationships

Identity-less

Multidimensionality

Social institutions as the stable foundations of personal identities

Achieving membership

Ontological security

Existential formation

Dominant language (categories)

Hegemonic symbols of authority

Counter-hegemonic ends

Inclusion (Identity)

Exclusion (Difference)

Intention

Stability

Change

Ontological integrity