HNRS 130 Conceptions of Self: Social Inequality and the Self

Instructor
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Class Hours/Location
Monday/Wednesday
Thompson Hall L004

Office Hours
Tuesday: 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Friday: by appointment
Location: Buchanan Hall D205

Description
Drawing from appropriate works in the social sciences, arts, and humanities, Honors 130 examines different conceptions and definitions of the self from diverse cultures and historical contexts.

The special topic for this section is “Social Inequality and the Self.” In this course we will ask: How do we conceive of ourselves and how do we understand ourselves in relation to others in an unequal society? In responding to this question, we will consider how inequality impacts the social construction of the self in the contemporary United States. Inequality takes a variety of forms that manifest in disparities in lived experiences. Students will explore how culture is used to make sense of, combat, and reinforce these disparities. Throughout the semester, we will examine the ways social location – understood through the lens of race, class, and gender theory – influences our conceptions of self and our conceptions of what it means to be “other.” We will also look at perceptions of similarity, difference, identity, and status as well as processes of inclusion and exclusion. To do this, the course will employ an interdisciplinary perspective at the intersections of sociology, psychology, and philosophy.

Course Objectives
In this course, students will:
• Examine the relationship between conceptions of the self and society,
• Develop an understanding of how inequality shapes conceptions of the self,
• Analyze theoretical, philosophical, and empirical texts
• Use evidence-based reasoning,
• Understand the role of culture in influencing conceptions of the self,
• Discuss variation in conceptions of the self by race, class, and gender,
• And apply concepts from the course to an understanding of personal experience.
Required Texts


Assignments

- Participation (attendance, discussion, in-class activities, etc.): 25%
- Discussion Facilitation: 10% total
  - 5% for the facilitation plan
  - 5% for the in-class facilitation
- Analytical Reading Responses (x5): 5% each
- Midterm Exam: 25%
- Autoethnography: 15%

Grading scale

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
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<td>D-</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
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Submitting Assignments

All assignments should be submitted via Blackboard by the due date listed on the syllabus. Occasionally students find that uploading an assignment to Blackboard takes longer than expected. To avoid having an assignment be marked “late” in the Blackboard submission system, you are encouraged to submit the assignment at least an hour in advance of the deadline. Should you encounter technical difficulties, you may also submit your assignment via e-mail before the listed deadline.
Late Work Policy
Assignments submitted late will receive a 10% deduction in grade with an additional 10% deduction per day afterward.

Participation
The quality of our classroom community and your course grade depend on your active participation. Please come to every class session prepared to contribute to the discussion and share your questions and ideas. Your participation grade will be determined through a combination of attendance, discussion, and class activities. An “A” grade in this category will require (1) attendance at nearly all classes (two excused absences are built in), (2) active and consistent discussion in both small groups and activities, as well as (3) active and consistent engagement in discussions with the class as a whole.

To prepare for class participation on days where there is a discussion facilitation taking place, please read the questions and/or activities posted by your peers on the discussion board on Blackboard prior to class. Reading these questions in advance will help you to think about the readings as well as contributions you might like to make to the class discussion. If you have concerns about the participation policy, please let me know at the beginning of the semester so that we can develop a strategy for your course participation.

Discussion Facilitation
An important goal of this class will be to create a learning community in which all members have the opportunity to contribute to in-class discussions. Toward this goal, you will be asked to generate content to facilitate a portion of a class discussion. Typically, this content will be in the form of four or five questions about the assigned reading for the day. However, there is some room for creativity here. You might instead have one or two questions and lead a brief in-class activity (i.e. a debate, thought experiment, or other activity, etc.) that relates to the reading.

You will sign up for a discussion date during the second week of class. Detailed instructions on the steps to follow for the discussion facilitation will be posted to Blackboard prior to the sign-up date.

Analytical Reading Responses
Over the course of the semester you will write four analytical reading responses. These are brief (2 pages, double-spaced) essays that analyze the reading for a given day. A strong analytical essay should accomplish three things. First, it should demonstrate that you have read and thought critically about the assigned reading. Second, the response should include an analysis of the author’s claims and key points. Finally, a strong essay should also connect the reading to others we have read previously, placing the texts in conversation with one another. In addition to these three elements, you may also want to consider additional strategies such as proposing questions that you would like to raise in relation to the reading, discussing limitations or shortcomings of the reading, outlining possibilities for further research or theorizing, etc. For literary texts, you may want to select a key passage you found to be important for a close reading.
As with the discussion facilitation, you will sign up for days for your analytical reading responses at the beginning of the semester. Please take care not to sign-up for a reading response on the same day as your discussion facilitation. The full instructions for this assignment will be posted to Blackboard.

**Midterm Exam**
The midterm exam for this class will be held on March 29 during our regular class session. The midterm will cover readings and key concepts from the first portion of the semester. To study for the midterm you should read over your notes from the assigned reading and class discussions. The exam will be a mixture of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

**Autoethnography**
Your final assignment for the semester will involve writing an “autoethnography” examining your own life in relation to the theory and empirical research we have encountered over the course of the semester. A strong autoethnography should engage with at least 4 of the texts we have read and discussed over the course of the semester. The final product will be a 6 to 8-page paper. We will discuss the autoethnography genre in advance of this assignment. Detailed instructions for this assignment will be posted to Blackboard.

**GMU Honor Code**
Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the Office for Academic Integrity for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated seriously. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt please ask for guidance and clarification.

Because this is a research methods course, it is important that you are familiar with the required procedures for giving credit to your sources. The use of material or information that is not your own without proper citation (i.e. plagiarism) is a serious offense. Plagiarism can result in a grade of “F” for the assignment or even expulsion from the university. For more information on the University’s Honor Code and academic integrity, refer to [http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/](http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/)

**Accommodations**
If you need an accommodation for your academic work, you will need to furnish appropriate documentation to the Office of Disability Services. If you qualify for accommodation, the ODS staff will give you a form detailing appropriate accommodations for your instructor. In addition to providing your instructors with the appropriate form, ODS suggests that students discuss the accommodation with them at
the beginning of the semester and as needed during the term. If you have contacted the Office of Disability Services and are waiting to hear from a counselor, please tell me.

**Diversity**

George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty, and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study, and personal growth. An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, and ability. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and an environment where diverse perspectives, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

The reflection of Mason’s commitment to diversity and inclusion goes beyond policies and procedures to focus on behavior at the individual, group and organizational level. The implementation of this commitment to diversity and inclusion is found in all settings, including individual work units and groups, student organizations and groups, and classroom settings; it is also found with the delivery of services and activities, including, but not limited to, curriculum, teaching, events, advising, research, service, and community outreach. Acknowledging that the attainment of diversity and inclusion are dynamic and continuous processes, and that the larger societal setting has an evolving socio-cultural understanding of diversity and inclusion, Mason seeks to continuously improve its environment. To this end, the University promotes continuous monitoring and self-assessment regarding diversity. The aim is to incorporate diversity and inclusion within the philosophies and actions of the individual, group and organization, and to make improvements as needed.

**The Writing Center**

The George Mason University Writing Center staff offers a variety of resources for students who want to improve their writing skills. Tutorial services include graduate and undergraduate tutors, ESL specialist tutors, the opportunity to meet with tutors either face-to-face or via email through the Online Writing Lab, and writing workshops offered throughout the semester. We can all work to improve our writing, so all students are encouraged to make use of these services.