

Me, Myself, and Why: Explorations in Human Identity
Spring 2016
Tuesday/Thursday 8:00-9:15
Murphey Hall 0314

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Contact with Instructors: The best way to communicate with us is by email. Monday through Friday, we will respond to your email within 24 hours. On the weekends, we may not be available, so please plan accordingly. We are available by appointment to meet with you in our offices.

Course Description:

From an animal past to visions of a cyborg future, the question of what it means to be human has long spurred reflection and ignited controversy. This seminar is designed to be an interdisciplinary investigation into the various, and sometimes contradictory, ways human identity is explained. By focusing on the questions *Who am I?* and *Why am I this way?*, we will conduct an inquiry into the biological, personal, and social aspects of identity. To explore these questions and others, we will examine key issues surrounding identity with an eye toward the contexts in which individual and social identities come to be formed and interpreted. Over the course of the semester, we will study popular and scholarly articles, films, visual arts, oral histories, media artifacts, and material culture to engage with both historical and contemporary perspectives on aspects of identity such as the human animal, gender, race, sexuality, cultural diversity, and the ethical and moral implications of identity formation. Through class discussions, writing assignments, group presentations, and student-designed creative projects, first-year students will have an opportunity to hone the active inquiry, critical thinking, and communication skills necessary for future academic endeavors.

This course fulfills a UNC undergraduate General Education requirement in philosophy and moral reasoning.

Course Objectives:

This course is designed to familiarize you with some of the terms and concepts that apply to the study of identity from various perspectives. By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Understand a variety of frameworks in which identity can be studied and interpreted;

- Understand the personal, social, and ethical significance of different perspectives on identity;
- Explain and speculate on aspects of identity as they pertain to human life in the past, present, and future;
- Apply various perspectives and theories on identity to contemporary culture;
- Write succinct essays that apply course readings, lectures, and discussions; and
- Analyze and create media that reflect critically on narrative, sonic, and visual expressions of self.

As a class, we will critically reflect on and attempt to answer the following questions:

- What does it mean to be human?
- Who or what am I?
- What types of influences have made me what I am?
- Why am I the way I am and not something/someone else?
- What are the social and ethical implications of different interpretations of identity?
- What is the future of human identity?
- *How do media create and interact with personal and social identities?

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: This schedule is subject to change! Some readings may take us longer to cover and comprehend than others, and we will adjust the schedule accordingly. When there are changes to this schedule, you will be informed on Sakai. *If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to check Sakai for any alterations in readings and/or due dates for assignments.*

Week 1: INTRODUCTION TO COURSE

T 1/12 **Syllabus Review and Getting to Know Each Other**
Please bring syllabus to class. No reading assignment.

Th 1/14 **Introduction to Identity and Generating Class Norms**
Assignment Due: Definitions of Identity

SECTION 1: IDENTITY OF THE HUMAN BODY

How is human identity constructed by science?

How is bodily identity socially constructed?

How is bodily identity represented in media?

Week 2: THE BIOLOGICAL BODY

T 1/19 **The Origin of *Homo Sapiens*: Evolution of Human Identity**

Read: A Primer on Science, Religion, Evolution and Creationism; Genesis 1-2;
Excerpts from *Evolutionary Analysis* on Sakai

Th 1/21 **Nature and Nurture: The Biological Basis of Human Identity**
Class Activity: CrashCourse Heredity, Human Growth and Development videos
Read: Excerpts from *The Mirage of a Space between Nature and Nurture* on Sakai

Week 3: **SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED BODIES**

T 1/26 **The Social Construction of Sexed Bodies**
Read: Excerpts from Thomas Laquer's *The History of Sexuality* on Sakai

Th 1/28 **The Social Construction of Race**
Read: Excerpts from Nel Irvin Painter's *The History of White People* on Sakai

Week 4: **IDENTITY IN MEDIA**

T 2/2 **Advertising and Bodily Identity**
Class Activity: Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture
Read: Ch. 1 and 7 from Sturken and Cartwright's *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* on Sakai

Th 2/4 **Listening to Identities: Oral Histories**
Class Activity: damali ayo's "Paint Mixers" and Pablo Duarte's "Who Remembers My Father's Voice?"
Homework: Listen to interview from UNC's Mapping the Long Women's Movement on Sakai

Week 5: **STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**
Guidelines for student presentations are posted on Sakai under "Resources"

T 2/9 **Student presentations**

Th 2/11 **Student presentations**

SECTION 2: CULTURE AND IDENTITY

What distinguishes human identity from (other) animal identity?
How do cultures contribute to identity formation?
How do media portray and contribute to cultural identity formation?

Week 6: **ARE "HUMANS" UNIQUE ANIMALS?**

T 2/16 **Human and Other Animal Cultures**

Read: Laland's 2003 article on animal culture on Sakai

Th 2/18 **Biological Transmission of Cultural Identity**
Read: Excerpts from *The Selfish Gene* and *The Meme Machine* on Sakai

*****ESSAY 1 DUE!*****

Week 7: **CULTURAL TRANSMISSION OF IDENTITY**

T 2/23 **Performing Gender Identity**
Read: Judith Butler's "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" on Sakai

Th 2/25 **Identity as Shared Social Narrative**
Read: Excerpts from Foss, Domenico, and Foss's *Gender Stories: Negotiating Identity in a Binary World*, ch. 1 and 3 on Sakai. Read pp. 10-15; 53-79.

Week 8: **SOCIAL MEDIA AND IDENTITY**

T 3/1 **We Are What We Post**
Read: James Franco's "Selfie Lucida" and "The Meanings of the Selfie," Selfiecity.net on Sakai

Th 3/3 **Identity in Social Spaces and Digital Spaces**
Read: *The Western Gaze: On Photography in the Two-Thirds World*; AND
Choose 2 Articles: "The Other Side of the Infamous Auschwitz Selfie,"
"Instagramming Africa," "Modern Romance," "NSA Facial Recognition"

Week 9: **SOCIAL PORTRAYALS OF IDENTITY**

T 3/8 **Field Trip to Nasher Museum - The Reality of My Surroundings**
Instructors will arrange a time for students to visit the Nasher Museum on Duke's campus. This will be an interactive visit during which you will explore identity in art and complete a worksheet.

3/10 **Portrayals of Race in Media and Literature: A Brief History**
Class activity: View and discuss "Color Adjustment"
Read: James Baldwin's *The Devil Finds Work*, ch. 1 on Sakai

*****ESSAY 2 DUE!*****

Week 10: **SPRING BREAK**

T 3/15 **NO CLASS**

Th 3/17 **NO CLASS**

Section 3: SOCIAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF IDENTITY

What are the ethical implications of defining when human identity begins and ends?
What are the political and social consequences of identity formation?

Week 11: THE BEGINNING AND END OF HUMAN IDENTITY

T 3/22 When Does Human Identity Begin?

Read: "Was I ever a fetus?" and "Identity and Disability" on Sakai

Th 3/24 When Does Human Identity End?

Read: "Brain Death and Personal Identity" and "Personal Identity and Brain Death: A Critical Response" on Sakai

*****RESEARCH PROJECT TOPIC FINALIZED!*****

Week 12: ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF IDENTITY IN VISUAL MEDIA

T 3/29 Tropes of Identity in Media: Mistaken Identity and Identity Theft

View before class: *Enemy of the State* (1998), available online

Th 3/31 Visit the Ackland Study Gallery

This will be an interactive visit during which you will explore identity in art and complete a worksheet.

Week 13: ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF IDENTITY IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

T 4/5 Intercultural Identity

Read: Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* on Sakai

Th 4/7 Visit the Ackland Study Gallery

This will be an interactive visit during which you will explore identity in art and complete a worksheet.

Weeks 14: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Guidelines for student presentations are posted on Sakai under "Resources"

4/12 Student Presentations

4/14 Student Presentations

Section 4: WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF HUMAN IDENTITY?

How is the future of human identity being conceived of scientifically, artistically, socially, and politically?

Week 15: DESIGNING HUMAN IDENTITY?

4/19 Genetic Engineering and Identity
Read: Excerpt from *Designer Genes* on Sakai

4/21 Cyborgs: Future Identities
Read: Excerpts from Simon Young's *Designer Evolution* and Ray Kurzweil's *The Science Behind Radical Life Extension: Fantastic Voyage* on Sakai

Week 16: COURSE WRAP-UP *Research Projects Due!*****

4/26 Independent Research Project Showcase

4/28 Independent Research Project Showcase

COURSE POLICIES

Course Materials: All required readings, videos, etc. will be made available to you on Sakai. You are expected to come to class having read and/or watched all assigned materials. Please print the readings and bring them to class.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all class meetings and be on time. The university attendance policy allows students to miss up to **three** class meetings without penalty. Chronic absenteeism beyond three class meetings may result in a final penalty of **one full letter grade**. Chronic lateness will also result in a penalty on your final grade. Participation points cannot be made up unless you have a documented, university-approved absence in the case of illness or personal issues. If you expect to have attendance or participation issues, see us immediately.

Classroom Decorum: During all class sessions, cell phones are to be turned off and stored (and *never* visible on your desk). If you have an emergency need to make or receive a phone call or text, please inform one of the instructors before class. Unless you are given prior notice that computers are needed for a particular class meeting, they will not be used during class and should be kept stored away.

Our commitment is to create a climate of mutual respect where students feel comfortable sharing information, asking questions, and trying out new skills. We ask that you make a similar commitment. Please give classmates and instructors your full attention, treat others and their opinions with courtesy and regard for difference, and avoid all racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise offensive language.

Honor Code: UNC's Honor Code is in full effect for the duration of this course.

GRADING:

Attendance/Participation	10%
Presentations (2)	30%
Essays (2)	30%
Research project	30%

Grading Scale:

A	94-100%	B-	80-83%	D+	67-69%
A-	90-93%	C+	77-79%	D	64-66%
B+	87-89%	C	74-76%	D-	60-63%
B	84-86%	C-	70-73%	F	0-59%

Participation (10%): This is a highly interactive class and you are expected to contribute to class sessions. The following activities will contribute to your participation grade:

Readings/preparation: Students will prepare before each class to discuss assigned readings. Minimally, this preparation *includes* identifying key words or concepts from the reading and forming a question or reflection based on that material. Specific instructions will be provided for each preparation assignment.

Identity in the Wild: Starting the second week of class, we will begin each session by discussing current dynamics in the world around us that exemplify the material we are covering in class. Each class, you should come prepared to share an observation from your own life (for example, an interaction you have had or something you have seen in media) and relate it to course concepts. Not all students will present in every class, but presenters will be chosen at random. Therefore, you should be prepared to give an example each class period.

Class Discussions: Students will come to class prepared to critically analyze and discuss all assigned material.

Presentations (30%): Working in small groups, students will give two, 15-20 minute presentations during the semester. Use of various media is encouraged. Guidelines for presentations will be posted on SAKAI.

Essays (30%): Over the course of the semester, you will write two 5-7 page essays in which you will analyze a social dynamic or media artifact using course concepts. In this course, you will use MLA format. Papers that do not adhere to MLA format (including all in-text citations and bibliographic material) will lose points. See the syllabus for due dates. All writing assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date indicated. Late assignments will not be accepted unless under exceptional circumstances, and doctors notes or other verification may be required. On all written work, include your name, the course name or number, and an honor code signature verifying that you have not given or received any unauthorized aid on your assignment. All written work should have a title, although not a title page. Please use 12pt font, black ink, and double space the text.

At UNC, plagiarism is defined as “the deliberate or reckless representation of another’s words, thoughts, or ideas as one’s own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise.” Please be sure that you have read and understand the UNC--CH writing center’s handout on plagiarism (at <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/plagiarism/>). If you have any questions concerning this document or plagiarism in general, be certain that you get them answered. Please note that **plagiarism is grounds for automatic failure of this course.**

Research project (30%): You will be required to conduct and present a self-proposed project on identity. Options include a traditional research paper (minimum 10 pages) or alternative approaches such as a collage, short film, short story, performance etc. All proposed projects must be approved by instructors.