

Psychology 488-01 (Senior Seminar)/WGSS 405-1
Lives in Context: Psychology and Social Structure
Fall 2013

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 2:30-4 p.m.,
and by appointment

Course overview:

In this seminar we will explore the relationship between individual lives and broad social systems in the United States. We will read theory, research, and case material from psychology and other disciplines about the individual and interpersonal implications of social organization/social structure (in the domains of social class, gender, race, physical ability, sexuality, etc.). We will explore the ways in which oppressive messages and experiences (based in classism, sexism, racism, homophobia, etc.) are experienced and sometimes internalized by individual members of particular social groups, thereby shaping our “personalities” and influencing our psychological perceptions and expectations about the world and about other people. We will also spend some time thinking about how being in a “dominant” or privileged position in the social structure (e.g., middle or upper class, white, straight, etc.) can inform our psychological experiences.

In addition to the above, this course will also allow us to think about HOW best to study and understand the relationship between individual lives and social structure. How can we really understand lives in their myriad contexts? What’s the best strategy for doing this? Is it even possible? What are some of the methodological, conceptual, and ethical dilemmas and challenges involved in such an undertaking? Because feminist psychologists have played a critical role in shaping methodology and research in these areas, we will read a considerable amount of work by feminist psychologists and other feminist academics.

Although these are some of the ideas that have formed the basis for how I’ve thought about and organized the class, there is an opportunity in the structure of a seminar for the class to evolve in a variety of different ways over the course of the semester. The topic for the course is huge and the concepts are often not easy to wrap our minds around – we could spend an entire semester on one aspect of social structure and not read or think about everything there is to read or think about. And, of course, you’ll notice plenty of things that are left out of the course that you (and probably I!) might wish were there. In keeping with the department’s goal that senior seminars include substantial student-generated ideas for course content, in order to give you a chance to expand on an area of the class that you find particularly interesting (or to introduce an area that the class doesn’t cover), and because once you graduate you’ll likely spend a lot more time having to lead things than you will sitting in a class in which someone else is the leader, you’ll sign up in pairs to lead one of the classes during the semester. We’ll spend more time figuring out the logistics of how this will work during the first couple of classes. In general, though, you will work with me and your partner to develop a topic, will do some research on that topic and assign the day’s readings, and will lead class on the day for which you sign up.

Some of you may find that this course introduces you to a way of thinking about psychology and psychological research that is quite different from what you’ve encountered so far;

for others of you, this material may seem quite familiar. This variety in our backgrounds and our experiences is part of what makes this course engaging and rewarding (at least for me, and I hope also for you). If you are someone for whom this material feels quite foreign, I do hope you'll be willing to think about psychology differently as you take this course, regardless of whether or not you decide you "like" it or whether or not it has any impact whatsoever on what you do in – or outside of – psychology when the course is over. If you are someone for whom it feels pretty familiar, I hope the course expands your perspective as well, and allows you to engage more deeply with this way of thinking about psychology. To all of you, and to those of you who find yourselves somewhere in between: welcome to Lives in Context!

Requirements:

It is your primary responsibility to come to class prepared, having read and thought about the readings for the day. Participation may mean a lot of different things – sharing your ideas and thoughts; listening well to others' ideas; asking questions; connecting the course material to issues in your life or the lives of other people you know, and/or to issues on campus and in the world, etc.

In addition, the course has the following requirements:

- *Essays* – There will be two personal essays, and one more formal, midterm essay due during the semester. The more personal essays will be a chance for you to reflect – at the beginning and at the end of the semester – on the social structural contexts that you think have most influenced your own life (especially on why and how they've influenced you). You may pick one dimension of social structure (e.g., gender, class, race, etc.) and explore how you think it has affected you, or you may focus on more than one dimension. If you'd prefer not to write about yourself, you may choose another person whom you know well, but I encourage you to use this as an opportunity to understand the ways in which learning is about personal as well as intellectual transformation. This essay should be about 4-6 pages in length and should be well-written and contain no grammatical or typographical errors. The formal midterm essay question(s) will be available later in the term and will be a chance for you to integrate the course material and to think "on paper" about what we've been learning and thinking about in class.
- *Leading class* – This is an opportunity for you to work with one other person in class to prepare and lead one section of the class. The "slots" for student-led classes are listed in the syllabus. By the time you will be leading, we'll have read and talked about some theoretical frameworks for understanding the relationship between individual psychology and aspects of the social structure, and will have read a few examples of how psychologists (and others) have actually gone about studying this relationship. We will talk more about this and about how to pick an effective topic during the semester. You will need to hand in a proposal for your presentation, and will meet with me after you hand in the proposal and again right before you lead class. You will be responsible for picking two articles to assign to the rest of the class. You'll need to get a copy of the articles to me **at least 4 days before your class** so that I can post them on Moodle.
- A *final paper/project* will be due **Friday, Dec 13th, by 11 p.m.** I want this to be an opportunity for you to explore in depth an issue that you are interested in, and I want to provide you with a variety of possible formats in which to do this. We'll talk about this more as the semester goes on, but a couple of possibilities include: 1) An interview project. This would be a chance to explore one particular "life in context" by interviewing someone whose life you think

is interesting, and providing an analysis of the ways in which various aspects of the social structure have had an influence on his or her “psychology;” 2) An archival case study. This would be similar to the interview project, but would be about someone to whom you do not have direct access for an interview but about whom you can collect other information (biographies, autobiographies, etc.) that would be sufficient for writing about their life from the perspective of how their social structural position(s) influenced them as people; 3) A literature review. Perhaps you are interested in how social class influences personality. You could review the psychological (and perhaps sociological) literature on this topic and provide a critical summary of the findings, including your assessment of both the strengths of particular pieces of research as well as your suggestions for future work in this area.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percentage of final grade</u>
Participation	10%
Personal essay 1	5%
Personal essay 2	10%
Midterm essay	30%
[Leading class proposal	Subtract 2 pts from leading class grade if not turned in]
Leading class	10%
[Final proposal	Subtract 5 points from final project grade if not turned in]
Final project	35%

READINGS:

The following required books are available at the college bookstore:

- Aries, Elizabeth (2013). *Speaking of race and class: The student experience at an elite college*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Gladwell, Malcolm (2008). *Outliers: The story of success*. NY: Little, Brown and Company.
- Torres, Andrés (2009). *Signing in Puerto Rican: A hearing son and his Deaf family*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

Articles are available on the course Moodle site.

CLASS SCHEDULE [subject to change]:

NOTE: *Readings* are to be completed for the day they are listed
 Assignments must be submitted via the Moodle site by 11:55 p.m. on the day
 they are due; Moodle will not accept late submissions (see late work policy
 below)

Tues, Sept 3 – Introduction to the course and each other (start reading Gladwell, in addition to the readings for next Tuesday)

Thurs, Sept 5 – no class (Rosh Hashanah)

PART I: UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE: EXAMPLES, THEORIES, EXAMPLES...

Tues, Sept 10 – First example: Social class (and race... and gender... and...)

- Maher, F. A. (1999). Coming out. In C. Zmroczek & P. Mahony (Eds). *Women and social class: International feminist perspectives* (pp. 115-131). London: UCL Press.
- Kuriloff, P. & Reichert, M. C. (2003). Boys of class, boys of color: Negotiating the academic and social geography of an elite independent school, *Journal of Social Issues*, 59, 751-769.
- Ostrove, J. M., & Long, S. M. (2007). Social class and belonging: Implications for college adjustment. *The Review of Higher Education* 30, 363-389.

Thurs, Sept 12 – Looking beyond individual variables to explain success: The importance of context

- Gladwell (please read the entire book for today – it's a quick read)

Tues, Sept 17 – Theorizing the relationship between social structure and psychology I

- Kohn, M. L. (1989). Social structure and personality: A quintessentially sociological approach to social psychology. *Social Forces*, 68, 26-33.
- Cortina, L. M., Curtin, N., & Stewart, A. J. (2012). Where is social structure in personality research? A feminist analysis of publication trends. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 00(0) DOI: 10.1177/0361684312448056
- Greene, B. (2010). 2009 Carolyn Wood Sherif Award address: Riding Trojan Horses from symbolism to structural change: In feminist psychology, context matters. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 34, 443-457.

Thurs, Sept 18 – Psychological meanings of social class

- Sanders M. R., & Mahalingam, R. (2012). Under the radar: The role of invisible discourse in understanding class-based privilege. *Journal of Social Issues*, 68, 112-127.
- Kadi, J. (1996). Chapter 2 from *Thinking class: Sketches from a cultural worker*. Boston: South End Press.
- View first part of *People Like Us: Social Class in America* [in class]

Tues, Sept 24 – Psychological meanings of social class, continued

- Finish viewing *People Like Us*
- Aries (Chapters 1-4, to page 78)

***** PERSONAL ESSAY #1 DUE *****

Thurs, Sept 26 – Race and class in a college context

- Aries (to end)

Tues, Oct 1 – student led

Thurs, Oct 3 – student led

Tues, Oct 8 – Second example: Social and psychological meanings of disability

- Linton, S. (1998). Chapters 1 and 2 from *Claiming disability: Knowledge and identity*. NY: NYU Press.
- Shuttleworth, R. P. (2004). Disabled masculinity: Expanding the masculine repertoire. In B. G. Smith & B. Hutchison (Eds). *Gendering disability* (pp. 166-178). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Rousso, H. (2013). Section I from *Don't call me inspirational: A disabled feminist talks back*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Thurs, Oct 10 – student led [or international roundtable]

Tues, Oct 15 – Internalization of and resistance to oppression

- Russell, G. M. (1996). Internalized classism: The role of class in the development of self. *Women & Therapy, 18*, 59-71.
- Russell, G. M., & Bohan, J. S. (2006). The case of internalized homophobia: Theory and/as practice. *Theory & Psychology, 16*, 343-366.
- Pyke, K. D. (2010). What is internalized racial oppression and why don't we study it? Acknowledging racism's hidden injuries. *Sociological Perspectives, 53*, 551-572.

Thurs, Oct 17 – student led

Tues, Oct 22 – (More) quantitative and qualitative examples of research on psychology and social structure

- Tawa, J., Suyemoto, K. L., & Roemer, L. (2012). Implications of perceived interpersonal and structural racism for Asian Americans' self-esteem. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 34*, 349-358.
- Jackson, B., Twenge, J., Souza, C., Chiang, J., & Goodman, E. (2011). Low subjective social status promotes ruminative coping. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 41*, 2434-2456.
- Dottolo, A. L. & Stewart, A. J. (2008). "Don't ever forget now, you're a black man in America": Intersections of race, class and gender in encounters with the police. *Sex Roles, 59*, 350-364.

Thurs, Oct 24 – **no class** (Fall break!)

Tues, Oct 29 – student led

***** FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE *****

PART II: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS, STRATEGIES, AND COMPLICATIONS

Thurs, Oct 31 – Some strategies for taking account of social structure when doing research

- Stewart, A. J. (1994). Toward a feminist strategy for studying women's lives. In C. E. Franz & A. J. Stewart (Eds.). *Women creating lives: Identities, resilience, and resistance* (pp. 11-35). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Landrine, H. (1998). Cultural diversity, contextualism, and feminist psychology. In B. M. Clinchy & J. K. Norem (Eds). *The gender and psychology reader* (pp. 78-94). NY: NYU Press.
- Olkin, R., & Pledger, C. (2003). Can disability studies and psychology join hands? *American Psychologist, 58*, 296-304.

Tues, Nov 5 – student led

***** MIDTERM ESSAY DUE *****

Thurs, Nov 7 – Ethical and personal considerations in studying lives

- Frank, G. (2000). Chapters 1 and 6 from *Venus on wheels: Two decades of dialogue on disability, biography, and being female in America*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Hornstein, G. A. (1994). The ethics of ambiguity: Feminists writing women's lives. In C. E. Franz & A. J. Stewart (Eds.). *Women creating lives: Identities, resilience, and resistance* (pp.51-68). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Pitman, G. E. (2002). Outsider/insider: The politics of shifting identities in the research process. *Feminism & Psychology, 12*, 282-288.

Tues, Nov 12 – student led

Thurs, Nov 14 – Deaf identity and the social context of being D/deaf

- Leigh, I. W. (2009). Chapters 1 and 3 from *A lens on deaf identities*. NY: Oxford University Press.

Tues, Nov 19 – Hearing and Puerto Rican identities in a Deaf context: A memoir

- Torrès (please read the entire book for today)

Thurs, Nov 21 – student led

Tues, Nov 26 – The “other side” of social structural relations: Studying privilege

- Pratto, F., & Stewart, A. L. (2012). Group dominance and the half-blindness of privilege. *Journal of Social Issues, 68*, 28-45.
- Stewart, T. L., Latu, I. M, Branscombe, N. R., Phillips, N. L., & Denney, H. T. (2012). White privilege awareness and efficacy to reduce racial inequality improve White Americans' attitudes toward African Americans. *Journal of Social Issues, 68*, 11-27.
- Coston, B. M., & Kimmel, M. (2012). Seeing privilege where it isn't: Marginalized masculinities and the intersectionality of privilege. *Journal of Social Issues, 68*, 97-111.

Thurs, Nov 28 – **no class** (Thanksgiving break)

Tues, Dec 3 – student led

***** PERSONAL ESSAY #2 DUE *****

Thurs, Dec 5 – last day of class: review, wrap up, reflect, think ahead

***** FINAL PAPER DUE via MOODLE BY 11:55 P.M. ON FRIDAY, DEC 13TH *****

Course policies:

- Academic integrity: I expect all of you to follow the College's [guidelines regarding academic integrity](#), outlined in the Student Handbook. Please talk to me if you are not clear how these guidelines apply to the course. If you are unsure about what might constitute a violation of academic integrity, the link above to the Student Handbook section on academic integrity should help. I will report any violation of academic integrity to the Director of Academic Programs. Academic dishonesty usually results in at least a failing grade on the assignment, and a second instance of dishonesty may result in a failing grade in the course.
- Late work: You may not receive extensions on work in the class, except in the most extraordinary circumstances (in which case you will need documentation from the Dean of Students Office or Health Services). Work that is turned in late for any other reason will have a third of a grade taken off for each day that it is late (e.g., a B+ would become a B if you hand in an essay or your final paper any time after the exact time that it is due – the “day late” begins immediately after the time the assignment is due; you may not turn in late work via Moodle so I strongly encourage you not to turn in late work as you will have to negotiate an alternative arrangement with me).
- Incompletes: I will only grant incompletes under extraordinary circumstances that occur in the second part of the semester. This will not include being really busy at the end of the semester.
- Written assignments: Please type, double-spaced with 12-point font, all of your written assignments for this course. Please do not use margins that are larger than 1 inch – all around. Don't use smaller margins, or smaller font, either – length is not necessarily strength!
- Religious observance: If you will miss class because of a religious observance, please let me know in advance to make alternate arrangements.
- Cell phones: Please turn your cell phones and other mobile devices off or to a (completely) silent (vibrate is not silent!) mode while in class. Except under extraordinary circumstances, you may not make or accept phone calls or text messages during class. If you know you are expecting a call or text in an emergency situation, please try to let me know in advance of class that this may happen. If you must take a call, do so quietly outside of the classroom.
- My commitment to accessibility: I am committed to creating an accessible and inclusive class that ensures that every student can participate fully in course activities and benefit from course materials. I would be happy to talk to any of you about how to maximize your experience in this class. Please don't hesitate to be in touch with your requests and suggestions.
 - What I will do for every student:
 - Post assignments at least three weeks in advance of when they are due (when possible)
 - Share PowerPoints and other materials used in class lectures (where applicable)
 - Meet with you individually during office hours for extended study or discussion time
 - Facilitate your connection to the MAX Center or other sources of study/writing support
 - Provide an extra 20 minutes to complete an exam (where applicable)
 - Submit an Early Academic Warning and/or contact the Dean of Students when your academic performance slips or I notice a pattern of frequent absences
 - Be as flexible as possible in the event of a crisis or emergency
 - Read drafts of major assignments, under the following conditions:
 - I receive the draft *at least five days* before the assignment is due

- The draft is complete and represents your *best work*
- What you can do if your needs are not met by the above:
 - If you know you have a disability that affects your learning process, you must meet with Associate Dean of Students Lisa Landreman in order to receive any kind of accommodation. The [Disability Services website](#) within the department of Student Affairs is your best guide to this process. The Associate Dean of Students will provide me with a confidential letter detailing your accommodation request.
 - Meet with me after you've met with Lisa Landreman so that we can work together to ensure that I can meet your accommodation request successfully.
- What I cannot do for you if you are not registered with Disability Services:
 - If you wait to self-advocate until you are in trouble in this course, you may be out of luck: I cannot accommodate you retroactively
 - Without a letter from Lisa Landreman:
 - I cannot offer a flexible schedule of assignment deadlines
 - I cannot offer a flexible attendance policy

Grading Guidelines

Below are the guidelines I follow when assigning grades to essays and final papers. I use pluses and minuses when the work falls in between the qualities associated with each letter grade. Grades are based both on content and on writing style. I encourage you to ask for help from me, the MAX Center, or any other reasonable source if you'd like assistance with writing. Please acknowledge resources you use in a footnote to your paper.

- “A” grades are assigned to outstanding papers. These papers reflect a deep engagement with ideas, insightful analysis, and excellent mastery of the material from the course. Argumentation is logical and coherent, as well as well-documented. The paper addresses all aspects of the assignment fully and clearly. Finally, these “A” papers are well-written with respect to style and grammar.
- “B” grades are assigned to papers that demonstrate good understanding of the material, are coherently written, and that contain some insightful ideas. Sometimes “B” papers contain some really good ideas, but do not put things together as elegantly as they could. Other times all of the aspects of the assignment are there, but the ideas are not particularly innovative.
- “C” grades are given to papers that do not adequately cover the assignment, demonstrate that the material was not fully understood, and/or have problems with writing style. Sometimes “C” papers have some really good parts, mixed in with some parts that seem like they were not well-thought out. Papers with consistent grammatical or stylistic problems may receive a “C.”
- “D” grades are assigned to papers/essays that have serious problems – parts of the assignment are totally missing or are really incomplete, the writing is full of errors, the material was seriously misunderstood.
- “NC” grades are hardly ever given if a student has put even some work into the paper/essay. However, if the content is totally irrelevant, or the writing is such that it is simply impossible for me to follow the arguments, then I would assign a failing grade.