

Identity and Film

(High-Impact Practices Course)

Psyc 4085-11

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Instructor

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Course Description

This course provides a multicultural and interdisciplinary analysis of identity in its psychological, social, political and cultural forms, as these are illuminated through film. Films will be selected from various countries and will thus represent a primary source and multi-ethnic/racial integration of material and perspectives. The format will be a seminar style structure, where students will co-facilitate in-depth weekly reflection and conversations around a range of challenging films.

We will approach film as art. If we approach a topic, like identity, artistically, then we approach it a certain way. We approach it through the lens of art. We are *not* approaching it *theoretically* (where questions of modernism, postmodernism, etc might be tempting) or empirically (where identity is something we can measure. Films are unique and distinct *vocabularies* for understanding identity (way of talking/thinking/feeling about identity). By using film, we are approaching identity *artistically*—as art, films reveal the interrelationships between culture and society. Characters are the ways identities get brought to life—but “characters” are more than just people; they are embodiments of ideas, of movements, of time itself. They are dynamic, usually. Landscape can be a character in a film. Film reveals a wealth of information about how our culture works and even indicates cultural trends. Good film is good art when it disturbs our sense of structure and forces us to ponder the mysteries that have confounded humankind from the beginning, mysteries that have to do with identity.

Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? These are the identity questions that great films force us to consider.

And the novel thing is that with film, we get to consider these questions from multiple perspectives: from the perspective of the film’s story, it’s aesthetic formal qualities, its use of time, music, and sound; cinematography is crucially important. The goal of doing this is to help promote your own growth as change agents in a complex, ever changing world.

Things to think about when viewing a film for human identity:

1. What is the director doing here? *Nothing is accidental*

2. What ideas do the characters represent? Characters are individuals, but they are also motifs (they are meta-narratives). Identities are as much individual as they are cultural.
3. Editing—editing is everything. *Babies* is an excellent example.
4. What message about values/morals does this film send? A movie is always hinting “this is good” and “this isn’t good”, but often which is which is ambiguous and unclear.

Course Objectives/ Learning Outcomes

- 1) To develop a capacity to reflect upon and analyze identities against the broad backdrop of culture and human sociality, and to be able to demonstrate this understanding through in-depth weekly writing and discussion, especially as related to critical psychology.
- 2) To critically evaluate films from diverse perspectives, which will require the ability to engage in higher order abstract thinking.
- 3) Demonstrate the ability to connect your analysis of prevalent themes in the films to real world issues and challenges, and to thereby not only critically address those issues but also make practical suggestions.
- 4) Use a range of interdisciplinary resources to craft your analyses and commentary of thematic elements related to each film. You must demonstrate an ability to integrate primary source material. Your commentary will be informed by extant scholarship, not simply your own personal opinions. Proper citation will be required.
- 5) To develop an appreciation for the unique modality of film and a capacity to understand its methodologies and contexts of presentation.

Class Format

This course will be conducted primarily in a seminar format, in which discussion and student presentations will predominate. Students are expected to participate actively and regularly at high level.

Texts

This course will use as its primary texts a variety of films—all widely recognized as being outstanding (see Course Schedule). These films will provide the exemplar cases for our concrete analyses of gender and identity. In addition to the films, there will be supplementary primary source readings posted on Course Den. It is your responsibility to read these articles and chapters for the relevant classes. You are required to cite these readings in your take-home essays.

Course Requirements

Film Analysis Reflection Papers (*Writing-to-Learn Assignments*)

Students will write a total of 5 Film Analysis Reflection papers. These are about 1000 words each. They are in-depth reflections and analysis of how the film illustrated the theme of identity from your own perspective (you may use external sources in your analysis; if you do, please cite them using APA style). These papers must be emailed to me by 11:59 p.m. on the Sunday following the viewing of the film in class via Course Den. Late papers will lose 10 pts per day

they are late. After 2 days, it is an automatic zero. Students may select any films for their essays with the condition that they must write at least 2 papers on films shown before the mid-point of the semester (March 11th).

Final Paper (and Draft of Final Paper) (Writing to Communicate Assignment)

Each student will write a research paper that is due at two points during the semester (see Course Schedule for dates). Late papers will lose 10 pts per day they are late. After 2 days, it is an automatic zero. A first draft will be due where you will receive feedback and 50 pts for turning it in and following directions. You will then incorporate that feedback and submit a final version of the paper during finals week accompanied by a short ½ page statement that describes what changes you made based on the feedback you received. Each version (draft and final) of the paper should be a minimum of 4,000 words and should include at least **five** references to published material about their subject (references must be cited and accurately documented). Students will select any films from the course or from the list of “Supplementary Films” to be the subject of these papers. I will say more about this assignment in class.

Class Facilitations

(At least) twice during the semester each student must select a film for which to serve as a discussion leader/facilitator. Those student(s) will present a brief contextualization of the film immediately prior to its classroom viewing. During the following class, that student(s) will lead the seminar’s discussion of the film. Handouts and notes/questions for discussion are highly encouraged. Please prepare an engaging class discussion.

Class Participation

Each class will begin with a discussion of the film viewed in the previous week. The student(s) who are responsible for presenting that film will be responsible for leading the discussion; **however, all students will be expected to participate in the discussion for every class. You may miss one class without penalty. However, if you miss another class you will automatically lose 10 pts from this assignment. After two absences, you will receive zero points for this assignment.**

GRADING CRITERIA

The grade for this course will be determined on the following basis:

Film Analysis Reflection Papers (5 @ 50 points each)	=	250
Draft of Paper	=	50
Final Paper	=	100
Class Facilitations (2 @ 25 pt each)	=	50
Overall Class Participation	=	<u>50</u>
Total Points Possible		500 pts

Course Outline

- Jan 8 Introduction: Identity and Film
Film: *Under the Skin* [USA, 2014, 1 hr 48 min] +
- Jan 15 No class – I am away at a conference
- Jan 22 Discussion: *Under the Skin* _____ & _____
Film: *Y Tu Mama Tambien* [Mexico, 2002, 106 min] +
- Jan 29 Discussion: *Y Tu Mama Tambien* _____ & _____
Film: *Persona* [Swedish, 1967, 83 min] +
- Feb 5 Discussion: *Persona* _____ & _____
Film: *Off the Map* [USA, 2003, 108 min] +
- Feb 12 Discussion: *Off the Map* _____ & _____
Film: *Lars and the Real Girl* [USA, 2007, 95 min] +
- Feb 19 Discussion: *Lars and the Real Girl* _____ & _____
Film: *Exit through the Gift Shop* [Great Britain, 2010, 86 min] +
- Feb 26 Discussion: *Exit Through the Gift Shop* _____ & _____
Film: *Three Burials of Melquiadas Estrada* [USA, 2005, 121 min] -
- Mar 4 Discussion: *Three Burials...* _____ & _____
Film: *Hoop Dreams* [USA, 1994, 2 hrs 55 min] -
- Mar 11 Discussion: *Hoop Dreams* _____ & _____
Film: *Her* [USA, 2014, 126 min] -
- Mar 18 No class – Spring Break
- Mar 25 Discussion: *Her* _____ & _____
Film: *Everything is Illuminated* [USA, 2005, 1 hr 46 min] -
- Apr 1 Discussion: *Everything is Illuminated* _____ & _____
Film: *Enemy* [USA, 2013, 1 hr 35 min] -
First Draft of Final Paper Due (by 9pm)
- Apr 8 Discussion: *Enemy* _____ & _____
Film: *La Mala Educación* [Spain, 2004, 106 min] -
- Apr 15 Discussion: *La Mala Educación* _____ & _____
Film: *American Beauty* [USA, 1999, 122 min] -
- Apr 22 Discussion: *American Beauty* _____ & _____

Final Paper Due on **Apr 29** by 9pm

Supplementary Readings

Below are readings for film studies:

- Agee, James. (2000). *Agee on film: Criticism and comment on the movies*. New York: Modern Library.
- Corrigan, Timothy. (1998). *A short guide to writing about film*. New York: Longman.
- Kael, Pauline. (1991). *5001 nights at the movies*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Kauffmann, Stanley. (2001). *Regarding film*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University.
- Klee, James. (1982). The cinema as a symbolic form. In J. Klee *Points of departure*. (pp. 131-137). South Bend, IN: And Books.
- Lindsay, Vachel. (2000). *The art of the moving picture*. New York: Modern Library.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. (1964). The film and the new psychology. In M. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and nonsense* (pp. 48-59). Evanston: Northwestern University Press. [Original work published 1945]
- Monaco, James. (1977). *How to read a film*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- O'Brien, Geoffrey. (1993). *The phantom empire. Movies in the mind of the 20th century*. New York: Norton.
- Stromgren, Richard & Norden, Martin. (1984). *Movies: A language in light*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Full List of Relevant Films:

Tomboy
XXY
Under the Skin [USA, 2014, 1 hr 48 min]
Y Tu Mama Tambien [Mexico, 2002, 106 min]
Boy A [UK, 2007, 106 min]
Three Burials of Melquiadas Estrada [USA, 2005, 121 min]
Off the Map [USA, 2003, 108 min]
Her [USA, 2013, xx min]
Brokeback Mountain [USA, 2005, 134 min]
Boys Don't Cry [USA, 1999, 118 min]
Ma Vie en Rose [France, 1997, 88 min]
In the Company of Men [USA, 1997, 97 min]
La Mala Educación [Spain, 2004, 106 min]
American Beauty [USA, 1999, 122 min]
Dead Man Walking [USA, 1995, 122 min]
The Master
Capote
25th Hour
Magnolia
Rebel without a Cause
Mud

Spring Breakers
Lovely and Amazing
Trance
Prince Avalanche
The Straight Story
Blue is the Warmest Color
The Best Years of our Lives
Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring
Undertow (Peru)
Welcome to the Dollhouse
Kept and Dreamless
Show me Love
Maria Full of Grace
Turn me on, Dammit!
Fish Tank
Fight Club
The Straight Story
Man's Job
There Will be Blood
The New Girlfriend
Beautiful Boxer
Persona
Jiro Dreams of Sushi
Capturing the Friedmans
Affliction
Lars and the Real Girl
3:10 to Yuma
Barbershop
Brotherhood (Denmark)
The Man Who Wasn't There
American History X
Goodfellas
Casino
Heat
Gangs of New York
A Serious Man
Conversations with Other Women
The Diving Bell and the Butterfly
Hoop Dreams
King of Kong
Riding Giants
Grizzly Man
Bigger Stronger Faster
Hedwig and the Angry Inch
Mysterious Skin
Pulling John
The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert

The Wrestler
The Smashing Machine
Shawshank Redemption
Taxi Driver
Talk to Her
The Last Samurai
The Mission
Apocalypse Now
Magnolia
A History of Violence
Big Kahuna
This is England
Tough Guise
An Emasculating Truth
Mansome
The Truth about Men
Don't Move (Italian)
Quiet Chaos (Italian)
The Apostle
Broken Flowers
The Lives of Others (German) (2006) (2 hr 18 min)
Vertigo
In Bruges
Elegy
The Searchers
The Motorcycle Diaries
Unforgiven
Pale Rider
Giant
Saving Private Ryan
Patton
In the Heat of the Night
Raging Bull
To Kill a Mockingbird
Stand by Me
Away from Her
About Schmidt
High Noon
Boyz N' the Hood
Zorba the Greek

Common language link:

http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf