

Culture and Psychology
PSYCHOLOGY 4350
University of West Georgia
Distance Learning (Online version)

Instructor:

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Nature of an Online course:

I will utilize D2L. It is 100% your responsibility to familiarize yourself with all of the technological requirements to complete an online course. If you have questions about anything technology related, please contact Distance Education (<http://www.westga.edu/~distance/>) or call 678-839-6248. You will need Microsoft Office for this course, which is provided free by UWG at Student ITS.

INTRODUCTION

“Are not the processes of culture rapidly creating a class of supercilious infidels, who believe in nothing?”

--Walt Whitman

The purpose of this course is to help you gain a better appreciation for the ways in which human culture shapes our everyday interactions, assumptions, prejudices, and identities. To achieve these goals, we will review some of the key psychological issues and controversies surrounding a cultural approach to human socialization. We will discuss the mounting evidence suggesting that many psychological processes are culture-specific, theory-driven, and context-dependent. We will discuss several basic questions of cultural psychology, such as, "What is culture? What does it mean to study culture? Where is culture? What is ethnocentrism? Are there such things as 'individualist' and 'collectivist' cultures? We will borrow Richard Shweder's concept of "*postmodern humanism*" in trying to teach ourselves to adopt a "cultural view from manywheres". We will also discuss (and practice!) *ethnography* as a tool for examining culture.

As a special focus of the class, we will look closely at the relationship between culture and **humor**. This class begins from the premise that humor is an excellent site for the study of culture. Humor is one of the most important forms of creative human communication and expressive culture. If you want to really gauge the cultural mindset of a people, then pay close attention to precisely what is making them laugh. Humor is a social and cultural fulcrum, one that acts as a divisive and coalescing agent. We will explore how humor, as a way of 'doing' culture, effects people's norms, values, and beliefs on such social issues as race, ethnicity, gender, class, group identity, natural disasters, etc. We will consider various forms of humor, including interpersonal joking behavior, contemporary sitcoms, stand-up comedy, and staged

performances, across a range of societies. Because humor is tricky and can confuse and even offend some people, we all MUST be ultra sensitive when sharing and discussing humor. I expect all of us to be at our most mature and self-aware when doing this.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

“The primary cultural reality is persons in conversation”
-- Rom Harré

- Introduce the basic ideas and controversies surrounding a cultural approach to psychology.
- Explore the relationship between culture and identity
- Focus on ethnography as a tool for examining culture
- Explore how HUMOR reflects and constructs cultures
- Explore gender as a cultural phenomena

Please note: In looking at humor, we will often deal with contentious issues. As such, I ask that students who take this course be prepared for a mature examination of difficult and adult issues. Also required: the ability to laugh at oneself!

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

“Humor is not resigned; it is rebellious”
--Sigmund Freud

Humor Journal (4 entries @ 25 pts each for total of 100pts)

As a means of opening our eyes to the culture of humor that surrounds us, all students are asked to keep a humor journal. When we begin the section on Culture and Humor (see course schedule), you will upload to the Discussion board one humorous event per week to which you were witness or in which you participated in. When writing an account of a humorous event (or an attempted humorous event), try to remember and record as much of the context of the event as possible: who said what to whom, where, and when; what happened prior to and after the telling; who laughed; who didn't; what kind of laughter did the event elicit; and anything else that strikes you as important to the telling/event. The instance of humor should be “live” for these entries, i.e. not a list of jokes you downloaded from the internet, or a joke from a TV sitcom or movie (unless this proved the trigger for a “live” incident among a particular viewing audience). You must submit 5 entries over the course of the semester, and each posting counts for 20pts. Have fun with this!

When writing up your journal entry, try to remember and record as much of the context of the event as possible: You must answer the following questions:

- 1) Where did it take place?
- 2) Who was involved?
- 3) What was said or done that was funny? Report the dialogue if you can remember it
- 4) Why do you think you **personally** found it funny?
- 5) What does it reflect about our culture (**this is the most important question**—make sure you answer this)!!!

Each entry should be approximately 1 page (double spaced).

Fieldwork Project (100pts)

You will attend an appropriate cultural or ethnic event that is new or different for you. Please try to choose a place you are completely unfamiliar with!! You could go to a new type of religious service, volunteer at a Hispanic outreach program, go to a bowling alley, observe social interaction at a coffee house, laundromat, etc. Excluded are concerts, restaurants, or bars. It must be a place where you can interact and get to know the people. Spend at least 1-2 hours at your venue per visit (you will need to visit *at least* three times). You will write a paper on this (details are at the end of the syllabus). The paper must be typed (1 inch margins, Times New Roman font), double-spaced, and submitted on the date specified on the syllabus. The paper should be at least 4-6 pages but can be longer.

Midterm Exam (100pts)

The format will be multiple choice and short-answer. It will cover the first half of the class material only. There will be no final exam (you're welcome :)).

Film Analyses (50 pts each, for 100 total pts)

You will watch two documentaries that feature highly interesting micro-cultures (or subcultures). You have 4 to choose from, and you must pick and watch 2 of them. It is your responsibility to find these movies online. The films are:

I like Killing Flies

Babies

RIZE

King of Kong

Born into Brothels

You might go to Youtube to watch the trailers for each to determine which look most interesting to you. You will write a 2-3 page (double-spaced) analysis of each film that critically discusses the ways that the culture works (its rules, membership obligations, rituals, etc). One film essay is due by the midpoint of the class (see syllabus for date) and the other is due by the end of the semester (see date on syllabus). Your instructions are to simply write an in-depth analysis of the subcultures being portrayed in the film. Topics to address in your essay are:

What are the values, norms, and implicit rules that govern the subcultures?

How do things work? How do they not work at times?

Are their hierarchies? Who has the power? Who doesn't?

How does change occur?

This is very open-ended. I simply want a solid and smart analysis of the film from a cultural psychological perspective. Have fun and enjoy. There are no additional instructions other than what is written above. I want you to be creative and open-minded when writing your analysis.

Overall grading

Humor Journal entries = 100 (4 entries at 25 pts each)

Fieldwork Project = 100

Midterm Exam = 100

2 Film Analyses = 100 (50 pts each)

Total Points Possible = 400

CLASS READINGS

“Our laughter is always the laughter of a group; it always appears in need of an echo”
-- Henri Bergson

2 Required:

1. *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Critical Thinking and Contemporary Applications, 6th edition* by Eric Shiraev and David Levy.

ISBN-13: 978-1138668386

ISBN-10: 1138668389

(called “S&L” on syllabus)

You can buy this at the bookstore or order off of Amazon. Any edition from the 3rd edition to the 6th will work fine.

2. Supplemental readings (I have uploaded these to our class Course Den page).

GENERAL CLASS POLICIES

“Whatever else an American believes or disbelieves about himself (sic), he is absolutely sure he has a sense of humor.”
-- E.B. White

EXTENSIONS & MISSED DEADLINES

There will be no un-penalized extensions for any of the assignments, unless there is a serious illness or family/personal emergencies (this does not apply to attendance points). In all other cases, all late assignments will be penalized 10 pts per day late. After two days of being late, you will receive an automatic zero. This policy applies to all assignments.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All individual written work is expected to be your own, and plagiarism is highly unacceptable. Proper documentation and citation is required when attributing ideas/information. Please see the honor code in the student handbook me if you have questions, or come see me. If you are caught cheating in any way, you will receive zero points for that assignment and it will be reported to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs for possible probation or suspension from the University.

ACCOMODATIONS FOR DISABILITIES

Accommodations and modifications can be made for all assignments for those with specific learning disabilities (university documentation required).

All Students Please Note:

For important policy information, i.e., the UWG Honor Code, Email, and Credit Hour policies, as well as information on Academic Support and Online Courses, please review the information found in the **Common Language for Course Syllabi** documentation

at http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf. Additions and updates are made as institution, state, and federal standards change, so please review it each semester.

Course Schedule:

Week 1 (Jan 7-11)

Purchase textbook. Review syllabus. Begin reading.

SECTION 1 – KEY IDEAS AND CONTROVERSIES IN CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Week 2 (Jan 14-18)

S&L, Ch 1: What is culture? Psychology and Culture? Collectivism vs. Individualism?

S&L, Ch 1: Ethnocentrism

Shweder, R – “What about Female Genital Mutilation?” from *Why Do Men Barbecue*

Review any notes or PPT lecture associated with these readings

Week 3 (Jan 21-25)

S&L, Ch 2: Methodology of Cultural Research: An overview of two approaches

Ratner, C: Chapter 1: *Shortcomings of Positivist Methodology...*

Ratner, C: Chapter 2: *Principles of Qualitative Methodology for Psychology*

Review any notes or PPT lecture associated with these readings

Week 4 (Jan 28-Feb 1)

S&L, Ch 3: Critical Thinking in Cross-Cultural Psychology.

Review any notes or PPT lecture associated with these readings

SECTION 2 – DOING ETHNOGRAPHY (FIELDWORK)

Week 5 (Feb 4-8)

Fetterman: Ch. 1 – Ethnography, Step by Step

Make sure you review your Fieldwork assignment and get started

Review any notes or PPT lecture associated with these readings

Week 6 (Feb 11-15)

Choose your 1st Film to analyze. Watch it. Write up the essay.

Film Essay #1 Due Friday Feb 15 by 11pm

Week 7 (Feb 18-22)

Midterm Exam – available to take from Thurs Feb 21st at 9am until Fri Feb 22 at 11pm

SECTION 3 – HUMOR, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY

Week 8 (Feb 25-March 1)

Gergen, K: Ch 1-2 from *The Saturated Self*
Hacking, I: Ch 1 from *The Social Construction of What?*
S&L, Ch. 6
Boskin, J: Introduction
Review any notes or PPT lecture associated with these readings

Humor Journal #1 Due by Fri March 1 at 11pm

Week 9 (Mar 4-8)

Apte, M.L.: Ch 4: Humor, Ethnicity, and Intergroup Relations
Boskin, J: Ch 4: *Outsiders/Insiders*
Review any notes or PPT lecture associated with these readings

Humor Journal #2 Due by Fri March 8 at 11pm

Week 10 (Mar 11-15)

Boskin, J: Ch 9 *Undeclared Joke Wars*
Boskin, J: Ch 10-11 *Comedic Correctness* (Culture and Political Correctness)
Review any notes or PPT lecture associated with these readings

Humor Journal #3 Due by Fri March 15 at 11pm

Week 11 (Mar 18-22) – Spring Break!! (just relax)

Week 12 (Mar 25-29)

Apte, M.L. – Ch 2 *Sexual Inequality in Humor*
Review any notes or PPT lecture associated with these readings

Humor Journal #4 Due by Fri March 29 at 11pm

SECTION 4 – CULTURE AND GENDER

Week 13 (Apr 1-5)

S&L Ch 7 & Ch 11
Review any notes or PPT lecture associated with these readings

Week 14 (Apr 8-12)

Tannen, D. Ch 7-8 from *That's Not What I Mean't!*

Tannen, D. Ch. 9: "The Intimate Critic" from *That's Not What I Mean't!*

Review any notes or PPT lecture associated with these readings

Week 15 (Apr 15-19)

Tannen, D. Ch 7 "Who's Interrupting?" from *You Just Don't Understand*

Tannen, D. Ch 8 "Damned if you Do" from *You Just Don't Understand*

Review any notes or PPT lecture associated with these readings

Week 16 (Apr 22-26)

Choose your 2nd Film to analyze. Watch it. Write up the essay.

Film Essay #2 Due Friday Apr 26 by 11pm

Fieldwork Assignment Due by Wed May 1st 11pm

Fieldwork (Ethnography) Project Instructions

You will attend an appropriate cultural or ethnic event that is new or different for you. You could go to a new type of religious service, volunteer at a Hispanic outreach program, etc (see list below for ideas), go to a bowling alley, observe social interaction at a coffee house, laundromat, etc. Excluded are concerts, restaurants, or bars. It must be a place where you can interact and get to know the people. Spend at least 2-3 hours at your venue per visit (you will need to visit at least 3 times). You will write a short paper on this.

Your job is to figure out what the “social practices” are of the people who occupy that space. By “social practices”, I am referring to the habits, topics of conversations, behaviors, ways of relating, ways of dressing, ways of talking, the visible and invisible norms, the actual physical environment, and the characteristics of the actual people who make that space what it is. What is ‘cultural’ about it, if anything? How cultural issues relevant there? What is required of you (or anyone else who goes there) to “get by”. What would ‘fitting in’ mean? You are to casually spend time there, **taking lots and lots of notes**, talking to people, and taking pictures if you want (and if it is allowed).

This is a creative project, which means you determine how meaningful it is for you. And you determine how much energy and enthusiasm to give to it. There is no one “objective” way to do well on it. I am not looking for anything really specific. I am looking for you to engage, to struggle a bit (at first), and to figure something out about a “cultural space” that you did not already know...and something about yourself in the process.

Keep a detailed notebook. Take notes when you go to the setting. It can be notes about anything...conversations you overhear, conversations you have with people, drawings of the physical space, notes about the “artifacts” (or ‘things’) in the place, your own personal feelings about being there, etc. As you take more and more notes, I want you to begin to focus on answering the broad question of “what is going on here?” and “what do these people see *themselves* to be doing?” You may come up with more than answer to these questions (in other words, it may not be one thing in particular).

If anyone asks, tell them you are doing an “observation project” on that place. Don’t lie or pretend that you are just hanging out. But don’t be pushy or intrusive in asking millions of questions. If they signal that they are uncomfortable with you doing that, try to reassure them that it is harmless...if they still feel weird, then leave. And talk to me.

Some ideas of places to go:

Barbershops	Food Pantry / Homeless Shelter
Beauty Salons	Emergency Room
Diners	Jewelry Store
Coffee shops	Hospital
Bus stations	Pool hall
Grocery stores	Train station
Bowling alleys	Bookstores
Churches / Religious services	Riding on a Bus
Shopping mall	Butcher Shop
Cafés	Music shop

* In order to get to your place, you may need to take a taxi or a bus...or walk. It is up to you. The one rule about getting around is this: **YOU ARE NEVER TO GO THERE AFTER DARK BY YOURSELF. TRY TO NEVER GO THERE AFTER DARK AT ALL...BUT IF YOU HAVE TO, IT MUST BE WITH SOMEONE ELSE.** No exceptions!

Places absolutely forbidden: No places that service alcohol or that require you to be 21 to get into, No adult-entertainment places, No places of law-enforcement/government control, No places where people are changing clothes or using the bathroom, No places that lack sufficient social interaction.

The place you choose MUST have:

- 1) A sufficient amount of social interaction taking place.
- 2) A means by which you can observe somewhat inconspicuously, without making people nervous.

Guidelines for Final Paper

By the time you write up your Final Paper, you should have observed at **LEAST 3** total hours (across at least 3 visits; please go more often if you can).

Your final paper should be divided into 4 main sections:

Section 1 – Findings (approx. 2 pages)

In this section, I want you to detail the central social practice that you focused on. Be sure to give considerable detail and examples (refer to your notes so I can see where you are pulling your claims!!).

What I don't want to see in this section: No lengthy introduction. Your first paragraph should begin right into the discussion of your social practice. It should read: "The social practice that I focused on in my ethnography of ____ was _____").

Section 2 – What I learned about myself? (approx. 1 page)

In this section, I want you to personally reflect on what you learned about yourself as an ethnographer going into a new or different environment. What are your strengths and weaknesses as an ethnographer? What obstacles did you personally have to overcome to get the job done? What moral dilemmas did you personally feel, if any?

What I don't want to see in this section: Do not talk about whether you "liked" it or "hated" it (although this will come across). What I want to see is **HOW** you personally invested yourself in it. Did you? If so, how? If not, why not?

Section 3—What I learned about ethnography? (approx. 1 pages)

In this section, I want you to reflect on what you learned about the method of doing ethnography *at the site you chose*. How could ethnography be used at your site to get good results? In other words, what is required of someone to do a good ethnography at

your site? What challenges does your site present? If you had to do your project over again, how would you do it differently? What changes would you make?

Section 4 -- Note from all of your observations (as many pages as you need). **MAKE SURE THEY ARE VERY NEAT AND IN ORDER BY DATE.** The top of each observation should have the following information:

Place

Date

Time in –Time out

Also include any pictures you have taken (or drawings)

If you want to do well on this, aim to impress me. Make your notes look highly organized, neat, and thorough. The same goes for your final write up (sections 1-3).

I am proud of all of you!! Doing qualitative fieldwork is not easy...and few undergraduates get the chance to do it. Congrats! You are all budding ethnographers!! I hope this project has open your imaginations a bit, widened your interpretive lens, and inspired you to more fully scrutinize the social and cultural settings in which you live.