SO249-15 Becoming Yourself: The Construction of the Self in Contemporary Western Societies

24/25

Department
Sociology
Level
Undergraduate Level 2
Module leader
Maria do Mar Pereira
Credit value
15
Module duration
10 weeks
Assessment
100% coursework
Study location
University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module seeks to examine sociological conceptualisations of the self and subjectivity, discuss the historical and cultural specificity of current Western conceptualisations of the individual's relation to society, and empirically examine how in contemporary Western societies identity and a sense of self are produced for example through media interpellation, through (apparently free) choice and consumption, through the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility, competitiveness, flexibility, and entrepreneurialism, through public and expert discourses about the 'normal', through intense and constant work, and through identification and disidentification with 'others'.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

By articulating theoretical and empirical engagements, and bringing together a range of topics and levels of analysis, the module will sensitise students to the inter-relations between identity, on the

one hand, and society, politics and culture, on the other.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

SECTION 1: Theorising the Self in Neoliberal Societies
Week 1: Who are you? Studying the Self and Subjectivity Sociologically
Week 2: Theorising our Selves: some Key Approaches
Week 3: The Century of the Self: Subjectivity in Neoliberal Times
SECTION 2: To Be or Not To Be: Everyday Interpellations in Contemporary Western Societies
Week 4: Be Normal! ...
Week 5: …but be Unique and Express Yourself!
(Week 6: Reading Week)
Week 7: Think and Choose for Yourself! (but do what you are supposed to)
Week 8: Don't be like them!
Week 9: Be outstanding! Improve yourself! Do not fail! Work hard! Party hard! Live life to the full!
Week 10: Take care of yourself! Sort yourself out!

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- identify and distinguish the basic principles of key sociological approaches to the study of the self, and explain how these sociological approaches have changed over time;
- identify links between the formation of individual identity and broader processes of social, political, cultural and economic change;
- offer a basic characterisation of conceptualisations of the self in contemporary Western societies;
- provide examples of how conceptualisations and constructions of the self intersect with key axes of social difference and inequality such as gender, class, 'race', sexuality, or (dis)ability;
- identify and analyse examples of 'interpellation' and construction of the self in their own lives (through the production of a reflexive journal) and in popular cultural, educational or policy texts (through the production of a research essay), drawing on key module concepts and relevant scholarly literature.
- - understand the relationship between neoliberalism and subjectivity, and explain the key characteristics of neoliberal ideals of subjectivity
- define, explain and provide examples of key concepts such as 'self', 'identity', 'interpellation', 'discourse' or 'normal';

Indicative reading list

Althusser, L. (1970). Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. [online]. Available at http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm
Arendt, H. (1963), Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil, London: Penguin Books.
Asch, S. (1955) "Opinions and Social Pressure", Scientific American, Vol. 193, No. 5, pp. 31 - 35.

Burkitt, I. (1991). Social Selves: Theories of the Social Formation of Personality. London: Sage.

Butler, J. (1988) 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', Theatre Journal, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 519 - 531.

Butler, J. (1990) Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1991) "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" in Diana Fuss (ed.) Inside/ Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories, New York: Routledge.

Davis, M. (2008). Freedom and Consumerism: A Critique of Zygmunt Bauman's Sociology. Hampshire: Ashgate.

Elias, N (2000) The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations. Oxford: Blackwell.

Elias, N. (2001). The Society of Individuals. New York: Continuum.

Elliot, A. (2008) Concepts of the Self, Cambridge: Polity.

Ewald, F. (1990). Norms, Discipline and the Law. Representations 30 (Spring), pp. 138-161.

Foucault, M. (1977) Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1998) History of Sexuality Vol1: The Will to Knowledge. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (2003) Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France, 1974-75. London: Verso.

Gill, R. (2008). 'Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Post Feminist Times.' Subjectivity. 25. 432---445.

Gould, S.J. (1996) The Mismeasure of Man. London: Norton.

Hanson, F.A. (1993) Testing Testing: Social Consequences of the Examined Life. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Harvey, D. (2005). A Brief History of Neoliberalism. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lyle, S. (2008), "(Mis)recognition and the middle-class/bourgeois gaze: A case study of Wife Swap", Critical Discourse Studies, Vol. 5, issue 4, pp. 319 — 330.

Mansfield, N. (2000) Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway, New York: New York University Press.

McRobbie, Angela (2009) The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change. London: Sage.

Mead, G.H. (1934) Mind, Self and Society. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Meyers, D. (2010) "Feminist Perspectives on the Self" in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, available online at http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/feminism-self

Milgram, S. (1992) The Individual in a Social World: Essays and Experiments, New York; London: McGraw-Hill.

Miller, P. (2008) Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life. Cambridge: Polity.

Morris, B. (1991) Western Conceptions of the Individual. New York: Berg.

O'Flynn, G. and Peterson, E. (2007). "The 'good life' and the 'rich portfolio': young women, schooling and neoliberal subjectification.' British Journal of Sociology of Education. 28 (4). 459-472.

Rose N (1992) 'Governing the Enterprising Self.' In: Morris, P., and Heelas, P. (eds). The Values of the Enterprise Culture: The Moral Debate. London: Routledge.

Rose, N. (1996). Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N. (1999) Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self. London: Free Association Books.

Saeed, A. (2007) "Media, Racism and Islamophobia: The Representation of Islam and Muslims in

the Media", Sociology Compass, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 443 — 462.

Scharff, C. (2011). `Disarticulating feminism: Individualization, neoliberalism and the othering of 'Muslim women''. European Journal of Women's Studies 18(2):119-134.

West, C. and Zimmerman, D. (1987) "Doing Gender", Gender & Society, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 125 ¬151.

[View reading list on Talis Aspire](#)

Subject specific skills

knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles and concepts involved in the study of gender and subjectivity

an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.

use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis
effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis in a variety of forms
to specialist and non-specialist audiences and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively
undertake further training, develop existing skills and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations.

Transferable skills

the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making to include communication skills, self-reflection and empathy

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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Private study	72 hours (48%)
Assessment	60 hours (40%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Students are expected to read set texts each week in preparation for the seminar.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A3

	Weighting	Study time
Research Essay + Reflexive Journal	100%	60 hours

Assessment in two parts: one research essay presenting a discourse analysis of a case-study of the student's choice (2250 words, worth 75% of the mark) and one reflexive journal about the learning experience on this module (750-1000 words, worth 25% of the mark)

Feedback on assessment

Feedback will be provided via Tabula.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
  - Year 2 of L301 Sociology
  - Year 2 of L301 Sociology
  - Year 2 of L301 Sociology
- Year 2 of USOA-L314 Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 2 of UHIA-VL15 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with a term in Venice)