

## Questions and the Spirit of Inquiry: What is Identity?

Honors 120-FR9  
Fall 2021  
T/R 12:30 PM-1:45 PM  
Founders Hall 2211

Jessica A. Hutchins, Ph.D.  
Email: jesshut@siue.edu  
Office: Lovejoy Library 2105  
Office Hours: T/R 3:30-4:30 PM & By Appointment

### Course Description:

This seminar examines the contested nature of identity and the value and structure of lived experience, seeking to provide tools to help us make sense of the contemporary political and cultural moment. We will explore and defamiliarize the concept of identity within a community of inquiry, with the goal of better understanding our own identities, while at the same time learning how to discuss uncomfortable topics, listen, and converse with those with whom we may disagree. The following questions will guide our inquiry: Who are you? And how do you know? Are you one or many? And, if many, how do your identities intersect? How is identity formed and contested? How are individual identities related to collectively identities? How does power enable and frame identity?

**Learning Outcomes:** After completing this course, students will be able to:

- Assemble multiple perspectives on a problem or in relation to a question/topic.
- Recognize the limits of their knowledge and act humbly.
- Demonstrate the ability to write effectively in analytic or creative situations.
- Demonstrate the ability to speak persuasively in one-on-one or group situations.

**Required Texts:** All available on Blackboard (Bb) at <https://bb.siue.edu>

We will read two novels in this course. PDF copies will be provided; however, students may find it more convenient to purchase copies of the books. Bookfinder is a great website for low-cost books: <https://www.bookfinder.com/>

Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*  
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

**Readings & Assignments:** Due on the dates indicated.

Instructor may announce additional short readings or preparatory assignments in class or through Blackboard.

### Introduction: Inquiry and Lived Experience

#### Week 1:

T 8/24 Introductions to the course and to each other

R 8/26 Daniel C. Dennett, "Making Mistakes," from *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking* (2014) p 19-28

### Unit I: Cultural Identity and Performance in Postcolonial England

#### Week 2:

T 8/31 Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* p 3-45 (Chapters 1-3)

R 9/2 Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* p 46-109 (Chapters 4-7)

**Reading Journal Collected**

Week 3:

T 9/7 Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* p 110-143 (Chapters 8-9)

R 9/9 1st Honors First-Year Transition Module: "Building"  
Readings: Michael Roth, *Beyond the University* & Pew Research Center "The Future of Jobs and Jobs Training"  
**Guest Instructor: Mr. Ian Toberman, Honors Program Assistant Director**

Week 4:

T 9/14 Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* p 144-195 (Chapters 10-12)

R 9/16 Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* p 196-242 (Chapters 13-16)

Week 5:

T 9/21 Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* p 243-284 (Chapters 17-18)

R 9/23 Maria Mackinney-Valentin "The Devil's Playground: Fashion And Subcultural Identity," from *Fashioning Identity: Status Ambivalence in Contemporary Fashion* (2014) p 1-10

Week 6:

T 9/28 Unit I Synthesis

R 9/30 **No Class – Dr. Hutchins travelling**

**Unit II: Our Bodies, Our Minds, Our Selves? Memory, Genetics, and Identity**

Week 7:

T 10/5 In-class film viewing: *Memento*, Directed by Christopher Nolan (2000)

R 10/7 Kieran O'Driscoll & John Paul Leach, "'No longer Gage': an iron bar through the head; Early observations of personality change after injury to the prefrontal cortex" (1998)

Week 8:

T 10/12 John Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity" from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (excerpts) p TBA

R 10/14 **No Class – SIUE Reading Day**  
**Reading Journal Collected**

Week 9:

T 10/19 View video before class: *This American Life* "If By Chance We Meet Again" 2:18-16:00  
Kevin Moffat, "Biological Identity" from *Reconstructing Identity: A Transdisciplinary Approach* (2017) p 61-78

R 10/21 Unit II Synthesis

**Unit III: Perception, Power, and Race in America**

Week 10:

T 10/26 Ian F. Heaney López, "Social Construction of Race," from *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (1995) p 191-200

R 10/28 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* p 1-32

Week 11:

T 11/2 Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* p 33-93

R 11/4 Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* p 94-131

Week 12:

T 11/9 Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* p 132-163

R 11/11 Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* p 164-206

Week 13:

T 11/16 Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" from *Questions of Cultural Identity* (2011) p 1-12

R 11/18 Unit III Synthesis  
**Reading Journal Collected**

Week 14:

T 11/23 **No Class – Thanksgiving Break**

R 11/25 **No Class – Thanksgiving Break**

Week 15:

T 11/30 Final Project Work

R 12/2 Final Project Work

Week 16:

T 12/7 Final Project Work

R 12/9 Final Presentations  
**Final Project Due**

## Course Requirements:

**Attendance & Participation:** In this seminar, we come together in a community of inquiry to explore the topic of identity. As such, we are all responsible for the success of this course. We have to come here prepared: having read the material, reflected on it, done some writing about it, and prepared to ask questions, listen, and speak to others in the seminar. We have to acknowledge what we don't understand, ask critical questions of each other, and own the limits of our knowledge. We must also, and all times, respect the differences in knowledge and experience that each person brings to the community of inquiry.

Identity is an expansive topic; it is permissible to talk about it in so far as it touches on any domain of our lives and experiences. That said, we will tether our conversation to the material we are collectively reading. Therefore, you must always bring the assigned text to class, annotated, and ready to discuss. In addition to readings, daily homework assignments will include writing exercises, short answer questions, brainstorming activities, etc. These assignments will be collected periodically, at the instructor's discretion, and will contribute to the class participation grade. Class participation is worth 30 points.

**Reading Journal:** You will be required to keep a journal this semester in which you reflect on the readings, conversations and experiences that we share. Reflection means that the journals involve analysis and interpretation. Analysis means breaking complex things down into their component pieces and exploring their meaning. Interpretation means making claims—hypotheses—about possible meanings. Your journals should go beyond

recording your immediate responses and perceptions. While you can begin with your immediate perceptions and emotional responses (you have no choice but to begin with them), the journal is an opportunity to push through them and reflect on the literary and scholarly material we will be examining. The reflection journal allows you to record responses to readings and conversations and develop them, to explore uncertainties, to explore connections, to make interpretations (and later modify them), and to reflect on how your understanding of the topic of identity is changing and evolving over the semester. It will be challenging precisely because it is informal, but it also provides you a freedom from constraints—a freedom to explore, play, and make mistakes. Just as the journal must go beyond merely recording your first impression, the journal is not merely notes made in class (although you may of course use a note made in class as a launching point for a reflection in the journal).

There is no single way to develop the reading journal and integrate it into your examination of the texts and the conversations we have in seminar. I recommend that you begin with this model and then allow yourself to find your own stride as you progress through the semester: make two entries per week, one prospective, the second retrospective. The prospective entry should be about what you are reading for the coming week's seminars; it should provide you an opportunity to experiment with claims and ideas before we discuss the texts; the retrospective entry should look back at the week's readings and discussions and pick up ideas that were undeveloped or new ideas that you learned from your peers in the seminar. It is hard to say how long the journals should be: a minimum would be 1-2 typed, double-spaced pages, 2 times per week. All entries must be dated. All entries must briefly quote and comment on some texts we are examining together. The highest grades will go to those who show consistent, inquisitive illumination, detailed, patient analysis, and attentive and honest self-reflection. I will collect (electronically) reflection journals three times during the semester: Thursdays of Weeks 2, 8, and 13. Altogether, the reflection journal is worth 30 points.

**Discussion Leader Presentation:** Each student will prepare and deliver a 5-minute presentation to serve as a point-of-departure for class discussion. The presentation should connect assigned readings/texts to broader issues or topics in the news, media, art, and/or culture. This is an opportunity to draw connections and comparisons between scholarly and literary content of the course with lived experience and the wider world. Your Reading Journal will be a tool that helps you develop ideas and build connections toward a presentation topic. The reflexive relationship between the Reading Journal and the Discussion Leader Presentation is intentional and is designed to help you develop a process of inquiry that builds iteratively upon readings, initial reflections, further explorations, and analytical engagement with your peers. Students will sign up for a presentation date and are strongly encouraged to discuss their proposed presentation topic with the instructor in advance of their assigned date. The Discussion Leader Presentation is worth 10 points.

**Final Project and Presentation:** Our semester together will culminate with a final project that synthesizes our inquiry into "What is Identity" and generates new material for others considering the question. We will create a digital, online anthology of works that represent the various ways we have come to understand the concept of identity this semester. Our anthology will curate online texts that represent the various ways we understand identity, perhaps creative content that we produce, as well as introductory statements that explain the rationale for the selected texts. By "text" I mean a piece of writing, an image, a video, a song, etc. (preferably something that can be linked to on the internet). The project will be both creative and analytical, involving both individual and group work. Our time after Thanksgiving will be devoted to this project work and in-class presentations of the final projects. The Final Project and Presentation is worth 30 points.

**Course Evaluation:** You must turn in all required work to pass the course

Attendance & Participation	30
Reading Journal	30
Discussion Leader Presentation	10
Final Project & Presentation	30
Total	100

**Course Policies:**

**Attendance & Participation:** Attendance is mandatory and unexcused absences can result in a substantially lowered grade. Your grade will begin to be lowered after two (2) unexcused absences. If you miss more than four (4) classes before Week Ten, you will be administratively dropped from the class; if you cross that threshold after Week Ten, you will fail the course. Please talk with me if you know you have to miss a seminar meeting. Please arrive on time out of respect for your classmates and myself; please talk with me in advance if you know you will be late.

**Technology Policies:**

- **In-Class Technology:** You are invited to use laptop computers and electronic devices for normal and appropriate classroom activities. These include writing, note-taking, reading, and instructor-directed active-learning activities. Inappropriate uses include texting, social media, shopping, keeping up with the Kardashians, and anything that distracts from class content and objectives. Inappropriate use of technology in class can hinder learning for both the technology user and other students in the class (Sana, Weston, & Cepeda, 2013).
- **Digital Etiquette:** You are expected to uphold the highest standards of professionalism and collegiality both in-person and in digital interactions through Blackboard, email, in-class polling, and all other forms of communication with classmates, peer mentors, and instructors.

**Academic Integrity:** Ethical behavior is an essential component of learning and scholarship. Inform yourself of the University's policies on Academic Misconduct (3c2 - <https://www.siue.edu/policies/3c2.shtml>) and Plagiarism (1i6 - <https://www.siue.edu/policies/1i6.shtml>). Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. Anyone caught plagiarizing will receive a sanction in accordance with university policy, up to and including failing the course.

Generally, people plagiarize because they are unaware of academic expectations, leave too little time to complete an assignment properly, or are afraid to ask questions. If you are unsure of what constitutes a violation of the plagiarism policy, or any other issue related to academic integrity, please ask your instructor. Guidelines for this course:

- Always cite your sources when you present ideas and/or language that you have not developed yourself, including material from class lectures and discussions.
- Violation of this policy includes collaborating on assignments where collaboration is not allowed and/or utilizing notes, texts, etc. on any assignment where use of such materials is not allowed.

**Inclusive Learning Environment:** The best learning environment is one in which all members feel respected while being productively challenged. In this course we are dedicated to fostering an inclusive atmosphere, in which all participants can contribute, explore, and challenge their own ideas as well as those of others. Every participant has an active responsibility to foster a climate of intellectual stimulation, openness, and respect for diverse perspectives, questions, personal backgrounds, abilities, and experiences, although instructors bear primary responsibility for its maintenance.

## University Resources:

**Disability Resources:** ACCESS: Students needing accommodations because of medical diagnosis or major life impairments will need to register with Accessible Campus Community & Equitable Student Support (ACCESS) and complete an intake process before accommodations will be given. The ACCESS office is located in the Student Success Center, Room 1270. You can also reach the office at [myaccess@siue.edu](mailto:myaccess@siue.edu) or 618.650.3726. For additional information, see <https://www.siue.edu/access/>.

**Writing Assistance:** The SIUE Writing Center is available to help you with your writing process. Make an appointment with a Writing Tutor by emailing [wcenter@siue.edu](mailto:wcenter@siue.edu), or schedule an appointment online at <https://www.siue.edu/lss/writing-center/>.

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Antiracism (DEIA):** Robust diversity, equity, inclusion and antiracism (DEIA) initiatives have expanded and increased across the University. Educational programming is available through a variety of institutional units and welcomes participation from students, faculty, staff, and the external community. More information: <https://www.siue.edu/about/announcements/anti-racism/programs/index.shtml>.

**Counseling Services:** Life can be challenging and adding the additional role of being a student can certainly intensify those challenges. Counseling Services is dedicated to supporting students in reaching their counseling goals. We strive to provide culturally sensitive services that are respectful of your diverse identities. A variety of services and treatment models are available:

- **Life Skills:** Solution-focused, skills-building sessions. These sessions occur over 1-5 weeks.
- **Counseling Groups:** A group format is often the most beneficial option for many student concerns. This usually involves 4-12 students and 1 or 2 group facilitators. Most groups meet every week at the same time for 1 ½ hours. Topics include Adulting 101, Self-Compassion, Mindfulness Practice, Support for First-Generation College Students, and more.
- **Individual Counseling:** One-on-one work with a counseling provider is reserved for students experiencing higher levels of distress that are severely impacting functioning (e.g., how you interact, your ability to perform academically and occupationally). Students in individual counseling are seen biweekly.
- **Referral to community providers:** If concerns exceed the scope of our brief counseling focus, or if recommended resources are not available within the University, the student will be referred to community providers/resources. The Assessment and Triage Counselor can support you in making your first appointment (e.g., navigating choice and location of provider, cost, transportation, insurance coverage).

More information: <https://www.siue.edu/counseling/>

**Bias Reporting:** The [Bias Incident Response Protocol](#) (BIRT) has been established to provide assistance and support to the victims of bias incidents. If you feel that you have been subject to a verbal, written, physical, or psychological threat on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, civil union status, domestic partnership status, atypical heredity or cellular blood trait, military service or veteran status, report the incident to a member of BIRT: <https://www.siue.edu/misc/birt/index.shtml>

**Disclaimer:** The instructor reserves the right to make modifications to this syllabus throughout the semester.