Syllabus

Winter 2004
HDPS 302: The Human Personality
T, Th 2:00-3:20 P.M.
Kresge 4420

Professor Dan P. McAdams
Annenberg Hall 209
491-4174; dmca@northwestern.edu
Office Hours: T, Th 3:30-5:00 P.M.

The course is an intensive introduction to the psychological study of human personality based on the premise that major ideas in personality psychology can be discerned in works of literature as well as through scientific research. Personality psychologists use empirical methods of behavioral science to understand the whole person in biological, social, and cultural context. The course focuses on approaches to personality that emphasize individual differences in personality traits and life stories. Whereas personality psychologists employ trait concepts to help them predict behavior over time and across situations, they can employ the concept of personal narrative to understand the meaning of the individual human life set in time, place, and history. Personality traits and life stories are examined through two recent and much heralded literary works: Zadie Smith’s (2000) novel about personality, ethnicity, and social class – White Teeth – and Carol Shield’s (1995) Pulitzer-Prize-winning story of a woman’s life from childhood to old age – The Stone Diaries. This course is limited in enrollment and is designed as an intensive discussion seminar.

TEXTBOOKS AND REQUIREMENTS

Three books are required for purchase:


The grade in this course is based on one in-class midterm examination (February 10) and a final paper (due March 15). The midterm, which covers Zadie Smith’s novel and material in the first half of the course, will consist of short-answer and essay questions. The final paper will apply narrative personality theory to Shields’s novel. The paper should be approximately 10-12 pages in length. More details on the paper assignment will be forthcoming. The midterm and the paper are each worth 40% of the course grade. The remaining 20% of the course grade is based on in-class participation. Because a main part of this course is discussion of Smith’s and Shields’s novels in the
context of personality theory and research, it is essential that students come to class prepared each time. This means that the assigned readings for the course must be done by the date designated in the Course Schedule below.

COURSE SCHEDULE

PART I: PERSONALITY TRAITS AND THE PREDICTION OF BEHAVIOR.

T, Jan 6    (Introduction to personality).
Th, Jan 8   Smith, Part 1.
T, Jan 13   Text, Chpts. 1 and 5. (What are traits?).
Th, Jan 15  Smith, Part 2.
T, Jan 20   Text, Chpt. 6. (The Big Five traits).
Th, Jan 22  Smith, Part 3.
T, Jan 27   Smith, Part 4.
Th, Jan 29  NO CLASS (Professor McAdams is out of town.)
T, Feb 3    Text, Chpt. 7. (Continuity and change in traits.)
Th, Feb 5   Review.
T, Feb 10   MIDTERM.

PART II: PERSONAL NARRATIVES AND THE MEANINGS OF LIVES IN TIME.

Th, Feb 12  Shields, Chpts. 1-2.
T, Feb 17   Shields, Chpts. 3-5.
Th, Feb 19  Text, pp. 554-589. (The life course and the problem of identity).
T, Feb 24   Text, Chpt. 11. (Identity as a life story).
Th, Feb 26  Shields, Chpts. 6-8.
T, Mar 2    Shields, Chpts. 9-10.
Th, Mar 4   Text, pp. 166-184. (Problems in interpreting stories.)
T, Mar 9   Text, pp. 695-714. (Interpreting lives as stories).

Th, Mar 11  Review.

M, Mar 15   PAPER DUE