

Labels, Categories, and Names: The Anthropology of People “Out of Place”

Anthropology (NANT3655)
Wednesdays: 4:00pm-5:50pm
Building A, Room 701
The New School, Spring 2008

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Over 70 years ago, anthropologist Ruth Benedict, one of the leading figures in the cross-cultural exploration of diverse behaviors, made a declaration to her colleagues in the field of psychology that was extremely radical for the times: behaviors that many Americans considered abnormal, such as homosexual acts or going into a trance state, were regarded as normal elsewhere. Therefore, Benedict proclaimed, abnormalities were not caused by *individual* psychological or biological problems; rather, they were the products of a *society's* system of defining and classifying so-called normal behavior. In this course, we read anthropologists, autobiographers, and other social theorists who explore the extraordinary power of labels, categories, and names to include and to exclude, to create people in their image and to be altered by those same people, and to be both politically problematic and politically useful. We also ponder a critical question: do we *need* to categorize our worlds to be able to think about them?

Required Readings:

The following required texts are available for purchase at Shakespeare & Company (716 Broadway @ Washington Place, 212.529.1330). A coursepack of required reading materials is available for purchase at Advanced Copy Center (552 Laguardia Place @ 3rd Street, 212.388.1001). The texts and the coursepack are also being held on reserve at Fogelman Library (65 Fifth Avenue):

- Virginia Dominguez. 1986. *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Michel Foucault. 1980. *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Emily Martin. 2007. *Bipolar Expeditions: Mania and Depression in American Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- David Valentine. 2007. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Assignments and Grading:

Weekly Journal (30%): Each week during which there are outside readings, credit students are required to submit 1-page of writing (typed, single-spaced). These weekly journals are a chance for you to process your thoughts on the week's readings before our class discussion. The first couple of paragraphs should summarize the authors' key ideas and arguments. The final paragraph(s) may either discuss links to other weeks' readings or explore connections between issues raised in the material and your own observations of the workings of labels, categories, and names.

Your grades for these short writings will reflect your critical engagement with the reading material. **Because the weekly journals are an opportunity to organize your thoughts *before* class, they will not be accepted after the date on which they are due.**

Class Participation (20%): Your grade for class participation is not calculated by how much you speak, but rather how you participate in enabling a lively and useful discussion. At times this means bouncing an idea off the group or bringing up something that's puzzling you. At other times this involves asking one of your peers to elaborate more fully on a thought that they are sharing. And sometimes this entails sitting quietly and holding onto an idea that can best be entertained at a later point in the discussion. It is important that everyone get the chance to participate fully in our class discussions. We will be learning as much from each other as we will from our readings and our writing projects.

All credit students are required to attend our weekly classes, so I expect you to let me know if you are unable to attend. **Extenuating circumstances aside, your grade for the course as a whole will be lowered upon more than 2 absences.**

Writing Project: Each student will select a label, category, or name (or a combination thereof) about which they feel personally connected, passionate, or simply curious. You can dive deeper into an issue that we are reading about together in class, or you can select a topic of your own choosing. Students may decide, for example, to examine what it is like for someone growing up labeled with "Attention Deficit Disorder," or to investigate the unmarked racial category of "white," or to explore recent experiences for someone with a Middle Eastern name. Students will meet with me early in the semester to discuss their topics.

Your writing project will be divided into two separate, but connected formal essay papers:

- **"Experiences" Paper (20%):** This first paper describes in 5-6 pages (typed, double-spaced) the personal experiences for someone (who can be yourself...) who struggles with this label, category, or name. Your writing of this paper provides an opportunity for you to dive deeper into the processes, dynamics, and predicaments that we are reading about in the first half of the course. For example, have there been instances in which this person felt the "self-fulfilling prophecy" transforming their sensibilities? Were there moments in which the "looping effects of human kinds" occurred, such that their understanding of the label, category, or name transformed as they became a member of that "human kind"? While writing this paper, be sure to keep in mind that categories always intersect with other categories, making it nearly impossible to focus simply on one. For example, if your project is exploring the experiences for someone diagnosed with "borderline personality disorder," you'll need to address the fact that most people labeled as such are also subsumed within the gender category of "woman". Therefore, be sure to address how these categories interact and play off each other in the subtleties of everyday life. You are not required to do an outside literature search for this paper. However, should you choose to focus on a person other than yourself, you will need to conduct an interview. Be sure to draw on (and properly cite) at least two class readings for your analysis.

- **“Politics and Prospects” Paper (30%):** This second paper builds upon your discussion in the first part of your project, expanding it into an 8-10 page (typed, double-spaced) paper. In addition to incorporating feedback that you received on the first paper in regard to revisions, this paper integrates political debates and tensions concerning the label, category, or name that is the focus of your exploration. You will need to conduct outside research, drawing on at least 3 sources (such as academic journals, books, newspapers, magazines, or films) that enable you to map out divergent political perspectives on the topic. There is never a consensus about any issues, so provide at least two different or opposing viewpoints. Your discussion in this paper should also include an example of at least one activist intervention into the political implications and/or analytical framing of the label, category, or name that you are exploring. Do not forget to properly cite all of these sources, including class reading materials that you draw on for your analysis. On April 9th, we will be having a workshop with the head librarian, during which she will guide you through online resources for conducting your research.

Other Important Information:

University Writing Center: The University Writing Center offers students individual tutoring sessions that cover every phase of the writing process. Students can meet with a tutor to revise a paper, develop a rough draft, or discuss how to approach and organize an assignment. To find out more information or to make an appointment, go to <http://www.newschool.edu/admin/writingcenter>.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism will result in an F in the course in accordance with the University’s policy on plagiarism (see Student Handbook). Students should purchase *A Writer’s Reference* by Diana Hacker for information on proper citation format.

Students with Disabilities: In keeping with the University’s policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations should contact the office of Student Disability Services. All conversations will be kept confidential. Students requesting any accommodations will also need to meet with Jason Luchs in the office of Student Disability Services, who will conduct an intake, and if appropriate, provide an academic accommodation notification letter. Mr. Luchs’ office is located at 79 Fifth Avenue on the 5th floor. His direct line is 212.229.5626 x3135. You may also access more information through the University’s web site: <http://www.newschool.edu/student-services/disability>.

Incompletes: A grade of “incomplete” may be assigned under extenuating circumstances. If an incomplete is granted, you have a maximum of 4 weeks after the last day of class to complete and submit the outstanding work. An incomplete becomes an “Unofficial Withdrawal and Failure” (WF) if the work is not submitted in a timely fashion.

Class Schedule:

January 23: Introduction

- In-class film: “Tongues Untied” (1989)

January 30: Anthropology and the “Abnormal”

- Wells, H.G. 1971[1913]. “The Country of the Blind” in *The Country of the Blind and Other Short Stories*. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 536-568.
- Benedict, Ruth. 1934. “Anthropology and the Abnormal,” *The Journal of General Psychology* Volume X: 59-80.
- McDermott, Ray & Harvé Varenne. 1995. “Culture as Disability,” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 26(3): 324-348.

February 6: Is it “Normal” to Categorize, Classify, and Prejudge?

- Locke, John. 1959[1670]. “Of Discerning, and Other Operations of the Mind” in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Vol. 1. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 202-212.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. 1962. “Funes the Memoriosus” in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writing*. New York: New Directions, 59-66.
- Allport, Gordon. 1954. “The Normality of Prejudgment,” “The Cognitive Process,” and “Linguistic Factors” in *The Nature of Prejudice*. New York: Doubleday, 17-27, 161-183.

February 13: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy and Categorical Beliefs about Children

- Merton, Robert K. 1948. “The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,” *Antioch Review* 8: 193-210.
- Rist, Ray. 2000[1970]. “HER Classic: Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education,” *Harvard Educational Review* 70(3): 257-301.

February 20: Ambiguities, Anomalies, and People “Out of Place”

- Douglas, Mary. 1966. “Introduction,” “Secular Defilement,” “Powers and Dangers,” and “Internal Lines” in *Purity and Danger*. London: Routledge.

February 27: Looping Effects and the Transformation of Human Kinds

- Hacking, Ian. 1991. “The Making and Molding of Child Abuse,” *Critical Inquiry* 17: 253-288.
- Hacking, Ian. 1995. “The Looping Effects of Human Kinds” in *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Debate*, edited by Dan Sperber, David Premack & Ann James Premack. London: Clarendon Press, 351-383.
- Recommended film: “Capturing the Friedmans” (2003)

March 5: Hermaphrodites and the Sexual Order of Things

- Rabinow, Paul. 1984. “Introduction” in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 3-29.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*. New York: Pantheon.
- Recommended film: “Ma Vie en Rose” (1997)

March 12: Peer Review Workshop

- PAPER DUE: “Experiences”

- We will spend our in-class time workshopping each other's papers in small groups. We will brainstorm ways that each student might approach the issues that they focused on in their "Experiences" papers when they do research for their "Politics and Prospects" papers.

March 19: Spring Break – No Class

March 26: Bipolar Disorder and the Mania of American Life

- Martin, Emily. 2007. *Bipolar Expeditions: Mania and Depression in American Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, selections.

April 2: Racial Categories, Legal Definitions, and the Political Economy of Labeling

- Dominguez, Virginia. 1986. "Introduction," "The Legal Domain," and "The Political Economy of Labeling" in *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1-182.
- Recommended films: "Stuart Hall: Race, the Floating Signifier" (1996); "Race: The Power of an Illusion; Episode III: The House We Live In" (2003)
- Guest Speaker: Carolyn Berman, Acting Assistant Chair, Department of Humanities, The New School For General Studies

April 9: Library Research Workshop – Library Computer Lab, 65 Fifth Avenue, Basement

April 16: Colonial Categories, National Identities, and the Census

- Stoler, Ann. 1992. "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34(3): 514-551.
- Rafael, Vicente. 2000. "White Love: Census and Melodrama in the U.S. Colonization of the Philippines" in *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History*. Durham: Duke University Press, 19-51.

April 23: Wanderers, Drifters, and Drunks: Transnationalism as the End of "Vagrancy"?

- Peebles, Gustav. 2008. "A Geography of Debauchery: State-Building and the Mobilization of Labor Versus Leisure on a European Union Border," *European Journal of Anthropology*, forthcoming.
- Guest Speaker: Gustav Peebles, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Associate Director, Bachelor's Program, The New School for General Studies.

April 30: Imagining Transgender: The Production and Politics of Category Formation

- Valentine, David. 2007. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham: Duke University Press, selections.

May 7: Final Class

- PAPER DUE: "Politics and Prospects"