

The Burden of Self Spring 2010

We like to think of selves as something we have, something deep inside us that we work to discover. It may be more revealing, though, to look at selves as something we achieve, a performance that we stage for and with others as we make claims about who we are in the places we find ourselves.

A number of writers have profitably taken this perspective: Erving Goffman made it famous with his *Presentation of Self*, R. D. Laing employed it in psychotherapy, Toni Packer talks about the need to stop making ourselves so hard so that we can respond more authentically to circumstances. This course will examine how we create and maintain selves, how we vary our self-presentation strategically, and the cost of believing too strongly in our own performances. We will read from these authors, do little social studies of our own, write illustrative dialogue, and talk a lot about our existential limitations and the nature of self-consciousness. We will read Goffman, Laing, and Packer, as well as Ram Dass, J. D. Salinger, Ken Wilbur, and others.

Your Professor

Kelly Coyle
651-699-1523
skcoyle@gmail.com
<http://burdenofself.blogspot.com/>

Expectations

Your job in this course is mostly to read and talk, and the assignments are designed to facilitate that. Most weeks I will provide an activity for you – an essay, reflection, or something else – to do during the week. You may skip one of these assignments without any consequence. You may, if you wish, trade some number of the weekly assignments for something more ambitious that fits your needs better.

We will have a site for online discussions. You will be expected to check in regularly, and write something a couple of times a week. Feel free to make any observations, ask questions, answer questions, and just have fun with it.

You will be asked, in small teams, to “enhance” two of the class sessions during the term. You may provide further information about the authors, discuss the reception of the text, bring in supplemental material related to the themes of the text, take a particular topic from the text and explore it further, review criticism of the text, create a puppet show dramatizing the text, whatever you think will enliven the evening. I will want you to work with different team members for your two turns.

Past that, you are expected to show up, to have read the material, to find ways to contribute to the class (some people excel at discussion; others are better online; still others are wonderful librarians or archivists or webmasters/-mistresses), and to overall, find a way give the rest of us your attention and energy.

Materials in this course may veer toward the personal. Please share appropriately, consider what you have to say carefully, and respect both the tone and content of what others are offering. Please consider

anything said by others to be confidential. At the same time, don't rely on that. Finally, do not share what you have not handled. You may always excuse yourself from the room to collect yourself.

Grading

Since this is graduate school, and since Hamline grad students are wonderful, I just assume that you will do quality work as we make our way through the term. If, for whatever reason, I come to feel that you aren't doing your part I will make that known to you, and we'll see if we can find a way to address it. One of the ways we can address it is through a lower-than-"A" grade, but more-than-likely we'll figure out something else. So far in my part-time Hamline career this has come up only once, so I expect there won't be any problems.

Schedule

- 2/4 Introductory session
- 2/11 *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*
- 2/18 *Stigma, Class*
- 2/25 *A Sociology of the Absurd, Politics of Experience*
- 3/4 *The Undiscovered Self*
- 3/11 *A Handbook for Constructive Living*
- 3/18 *What Really Matters, Enlighten Up!* (film)
- 3/25 *Be Here Now, Fierce Grace* (film)
- 4/1 No class this evening
- 4/8 *Franny and Zooey, Nine Stories*
- 4/15 *The Experience of No-Self*
- 4/22 *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism, Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?* (film)
- 4/29 *The Integral Vision*
- 5/6 *The Work of this Moment, Bare Bones Meditation*
- 5/13 Plenary session

Required Texts (Available at the bookstore, online, etc. Any edition of these books will do.)

Ram Dass, *Remember, Be Here Now*

Paul Fussell, *Class*

Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

---, *Stigma*

C. G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*

R. D. Laing, *Politics of Experience*

Lyman and Scott, *A Sociology of the Absurd*

Toni Packer, *The Work of This Moment*

David K. Reynolds, *Handbook for Constructive Living*

Bernadette Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*

J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey*

---, *Nine Stories*

Tony Schwartz, *What Really Matters*

Joan Tollifson, *Bare Bones Meditation*

Chogyam Trungpa, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*

Ken Wilbur, *The Integral Vision*