

# Social Justice Consciousness and Personal Transformation (3 cr.)

NCLC 337

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Participants of this learning community will explore the many spaces—including cognitive, theoretical, philosophical, and sociopolitical spaces—at which the quest to strengthen social justice consciousness interacts with processes and commitments for personal transformation. Grounded in interdisciplinary and integrative considerations of critical theory, mindful learning, and reflexive praxis, we will consider what it means to have and maintain a social justice consciousness. We will analyze through the lens of the activist and in the spirit of bringing mindfulness to activism, how we come to see and experience the world. We will examine, based on the lives and life work of prominent U.S. social activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and critical reflection on our own lives and worldviews, how socialization informs consciousness. Finally, we will explore strategies for incorporating mindfulness, reflection, and other consciousness and transformation practices into social justice activism.

## Student Learning Outcomes

Students will:

1. Develop deeper understandings of the role of consciousness and mindfulness, from the perspective of the activist, in past and present social justice activism (**NCC Competency: Global Understanding**);
2. Strengthen critical analysis and critical self-analysis in regards to the ways in which socialization shapes consciousness which, in turn, informs the activist's work (**NCC Competency: Critical Thinking**); and
3. Learn and apply strategies for incorporating mindful and reflexive practices into social justice activism (**NCC Competency: Civic Engagement**).

## Required Texts

Anzaldúa, G. (1999). *Borderlands: La frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Johnson, A. (2006). *Privilege, power, and difference*. McGraw-Hill.

Leonard, A. (2010). *The story of stuff*. Free Press.

Twain, M. (1984). *The war prayer*. New York: Harper.

## Learning Activities (Assignments)

### Learning Activity 1: Class Participation (100 points)

Participation is not measured by the amount of airtime you consumes. Rather, it is measured by the extent to which you come to class prepared and contribute constructively to the discussion. The question is, within the context of your participation style, were you prepared and engaged? I will use this rubric as a general guideline:

- A. (180-200) Excellent Participation. Community Member attends class each week. Community Member consistently asks questions or makes observations that demonstrate deep reflection and analysis. Community Member engages actively and civilly in small group discussions and other in-class activities.
- B. (140-179) Decent Participation. Community Member attends class each week. Community Member sometimes asks questions or makes observations that demonstrate deep reflection and analysis. Community Member generally engages fairly actively and civilly in small group discussions and other in-class activities.
- C. (100-139) Lackluster Participation. Community Member misses two or more classes. Community Member rarely asks questions or makes observations that demonstrate deep reflection and analysis. Community Member fails to engage actively and civilly in small group discussions and other in-class activities.
- D. (99 or below) Poor. Community Member misses three or more classes. Community Member clearly arrives to class unprepared and remains disengaged during discussions. Community Member does not engage civilly.

### Learning Activity 2: Consciousness Journal (300 points)

#### ***To do each week, but final journal and reflection due May 3***

The purpose of this assignment is to help you become more aware, more conscious, of social phenomena and your responses, or lack of response, to them. In what implicit or not-so-implicit ways do you see injustice playing out around you? How does it make you feel? In what ways do you catch yourself participating in injustice, even if you don't mean to or don't realize you're doing it at first? In what ways are you encouraged to participate through habits of consumption, peer pressure, and other forces? If you see a subtly sexist interaction on TV, note it in your journal. If your friend makes a racist comment, note it in your journal. If you see an advertisement that supports, however vaguely, the destruction of the environment, note it in your journal. But also note your own responses, from no response at all to sadness to anger to anything else.

You will keep a Social Justice Consciousness journal in which you record reflections, observations, self-challenges, self-congratulations, a-ha moments, and other meanderings on these and related questions. Nobody will read these but you and me (the professor), and you even will have an opportunity to mark out anything you don't want me to read before you turn it in. Feel free to write, draw, doodle—whatever helps you practice noticing around you what you might not have noticed if you did not need to keep a journal.

The only requirement is that you make at least three entries per week.

Note that, at the end of the semester, we will be meta-reflecting on the journal entries, so whatever you need to do to make sure you'll be able to remember the particulars of what you've jotted in your notebook, do it.

I will not collect journals week to week, but I will begin class by asking a few people to share informally something they noticed and wrote in their journals.

Also, shortly after the last day of class, I will ask you to turn in your journal and a 1-page final reflection in which you take stock of everything you recorded there, noting patterns and curiosities.

Journals will be assessed on the extent to which you make thoughtful, substantive, entries at least three times per week.

### Learning Activity 3: Identity, Socialization, and Positionality (ISD) Essay (300 points)

#### ***Due midnight, March 6***

Drawing on course materials and discussions, you will compose an essay (around 1,500 words) about how you came to understand one dimension of your identity (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation, class) around which you experience some level of privilege. You will examine the way in which inhabiting that identity informs the lenses through which you see and understand a related oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, economic exploitation). For example, if I were to write this essay using my male identity, I might consider these questions:

- (1) How were you socialized to understand what it meant to be boy or a man? What were the social cues that informed your identity?
- (2) What were the repercussions, if any, if you decided not to inhabit male identity in the way that people expected?
- (3) How has your positionality as a male informed your understanding of sexism and movements for gender justice? In what ways, if any, might it have constrained your ability to see gender injustice?
- (4) What, if anything, do you see as your role, as somebody inhabiting a privileged identity, in struggling for justice around oppressions related to that identity?
- (5) How has, or how *can*, attention to consciousness and inward transformation prepare you to be a better ally to people who are more oppressed than you based on a parallel identity (such as woman-ness or transgender-ness)?

You do not need to answer all of these questions. Pick two or three that you find compelling and focus on them. Be sure to include an introductory paragraph with a thesis statement that lays out your intention for the essay. *But do be sure to address the fifth question!*

These essays will be assessed based on the extent to which you:

1. Identify and focus on a dimension of your identity *around which you experience some level of privilege*;
2. Provide a detailed, reflective, and mindful discussion of your identity development related to that identity;
3. Draw on concepts, readings, and exercises from class as analytical tools for examining your identity and experience; and
4. Compose a well-written, reflective, essay.

### Learning Activity 4: Macro-Aggressions and My Unintentional Exploitation Footprint (300 points)

#### ***Due midnight, April 24***

The purpose of this assignment is to help us think about our own patterns of consumption and behavior and how they contribute to the exploitation of people, the environment,

animals, or some combination of these. This is not about explicit bias and privilege, like Learning Activity 3, but about the more implicit, unintentional, ways we participate in systems of oppression through day-to-day behaviors and decision-making.

First, choose a type of exploitation on which you would like to focus your analysis. It might be a type of oppression, like racism or heterosexism, or it might be environmental or animal exploitation, or it might be an intersection of these various exploitations. Then write a reflective essay, 5-6 double-spaced pages, in which you explore how your patterns of consumption, daily decision-making, and other ways of being contribute to that form of exploitation. Remember, we're focusing in this assignment on *macro*-aggressions, so you'll need to do the work to make connections. Do you abhor violence against animals, but use a home product that is tested on animals? Do you hate racism, but purchase clothes made in sweatshops by children in southeast Asia? Are you an advocate for sustainability but eat meat raised on factory farms?

At the very least, your essay should include the following:

- a) descriptions of *specific* decisions, behaviors, and so on, that make up your exploitation footprint;
- b) your analysis of the implications of your footprint—who or what are they exploiting and how, specifically?;
- c) your reflections on the toll your footprint is taking on your own well-being and spirit, as you learn more about it; and
- d) your thoughts on how you might lighten your footprint related to the specific form of exploitation about which you've decided to write.

Remember that your journal can be a good resource for this assignment. You might decide, from the beginning of the semester, to place particular emphasis on a specific kind of exploitation in your journal, providing some content for this project.

Also remember that this is your opportunity to challenge yourself to align your day to day decisions and behaviors with your values or ethics. Push yourself. Dig deeply. Hold yourself accountable for your footprint, not as punishment, but because the process of being honest with ourselves is triumphant and good for our souls.

Your footprint analysis will be graded based on the extent to which you:

- (1) identify *specific* macro-aggressions in which you participate, even if unintentionally;
- (2) thoughtfully, using course concepts and ideas, describe the implications of your footprint, beyond the obvious;
- (3) reflect thoughtfully on the toll your macro-aggressions are taking, or might be taking, on your own well-being and soul, and
- (4) describe specific steps you can take to lighten your footprint.

### Grading

|              |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| A = 940-1000 | A- = 900-939 |              |
| B+ = 870-899 | B = 830-869  | B- = 800-829 |
| C+ = 770-799 | C = 730-769  | C- = 700-729 |
| D = 600-699  | F = >599     |              |

**Tentative Schedule**  
Tentative Course Schedule

- January 23            Introductions and Concepts
- introduction of class
  - introduction of each other
  - exploration of “what we know” regarding basic concepts: consciousness, transformation, reflection, social justice

*Reading for January 30:* Johnson Ch 1-5

- January 30            Understanding the Power/Privilege Continuum
- reflection activity
  - conceptualizing privilege and oppression
  - spheres of justice and injustice

*Reading for February 6:* Johnson Ch 6-9; “Black Defendants”; “Color-blind”

- February 6            Race and Racism
- reflection activity
  - Key Concept: Institutional vs. Interpersonal
  - spiritual toll of racism
  - racial biases and prejudices
  - racial justice

*Reading for February 13:* “Rags to Riches” article; “The Lovers of the Poor”; essay TBA

- February 13            Class and Economic Injustice
- reflection activity
  - Key Concept: Deficit Ideology (and ideologies in general)
  - poverty in a land of plenty

*Reading for February 27:* “Manhood and Violence”; “Pink Brain, Blue Brain”; essay TBA

February 20            NO CLASS

- February 27            Gender, Gender Identity, and Sexism
- reflection activity
  - Key Concept: Hegemony
  - patriarchy, machismo, and its spiritual toll
  - feminist and womanist movements

*Reading for March 6:* “Homophobic?”; “Homophobia” from *Conservapedia*; essay TBA

- March 6                Sexual Orientation and Heterosexism (***ISD essay due – midnight***)
- reflection activity

- Key Concept: -normativity
- the continuum of sexual orientations
- heteronormativity

*Reading for March 20: Anzaldúa*

March 13            SPRING BREAK

March 20            Immigration, Borders, and Xenophobia

- reflection activity
- Key Concept: Code-Switching
- “a nation of immigrants”

*Readings for March 27: “A Universal Truth”; “Brave New Farm”; essay TBA*

March 27            Animal Exploitation

- reflection activity
- Key Concept: Factory Farming
- dangers of profit-centeredness
- who controls the policy?

*Readings for April 3: Leonard Ch 1-2; essay TBA*

April 3              Environmental Destruction

- reflection activity
- Key Concept: Environmental Justice
- how we participate (without knowing it)

*Reading for April 17: Leonard Ch 3-5; essay TBA*

April 10            NO CLASS

April 17            Consumerism

- reflection activity
- Key Concept: Consumer Culture
- our consuming habits and the media

*Reading for April 24: Twain; essay TBA*

April 24            Nationalism, Imperialism, and War (***Footprint essay due, midnight***)

- reflection activity
- Key Concept: Socialization patriotism and war

May 1                Final Reflections (***Final journal and reflection due May 3***)