

*REVISED*

*Spring Semester, 2013  
The Graduate Center, City University of New York  
Doctoral Program, Critical Social/Personality Psychology*

### **First Year Doctoral Examination: Tracing the Course of an Idea**

This examination is an opportunity for first year students to develop their current research interests through a connection with historical aspects of social and personality psychology. Students are asked to identify and state a research idea presented in the work of a “classic” and “very influential” scholar from social/personality psychology’s past. They trace, across the decades to the present, what has happened to that idea as it has been carried forward by *other* psychological writers; specifically, by researchers in five later publications (e.g. a journal article, chapter, book). Students select five later works that reflect a balance of theoretical and empirical coverage of the idea.

For this essay students read and characterize that “classic” statement of the idea and then follow (via social science citation index or any other strategy they find suitable) how this idea has been expanded, narrowed, applied, and/or amended over time by subsequent generations of writers and researchers *within psychology*. The following list of classic or influential writers from which students can choose includes psychologists and other prominent intellectuals of the 20th century. For students’ five later choices, they follow their idea across and through the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the works of published psychologists. Students document the theoretical and methodological evolution, or turns, of a key psychological idea across time.

Students choose the initial statement of the research idea from the work of scholars such as the following:

Gordon Allport; Max Weber; Karl Marx; W.E.B. DuBois; George Herbert Mead; Jean Paul Sartre; William James; Sigmund Freud; Karen Horney; Melanie Klein; Kurt Lewin; Mamie and Kenneth Clark; Erving Goffman; Adorno; F.C. Bartlett; Carolyn Sherif and Muzifer Sherif; Robert White; Henry Murray; Herbert Kelman; Otto Klineberg; Henri Tajfel; Serge Moscovici; Donald Campbell; Solomon Asch; Claire Seltiz; Horace Mann Bond; Fritz Heider; Lev Vygotsky; Leon Festinger; Charles Darwin; Stanley Milgram; Stanley Schachter, Mort Deutsch; William McGuire; Robert Zajonc

Students may choose someone not on this list but need to consult their advisors and program head about their choice.

Students produce a well documented paper ranging in length from 30 to 35 pages (double spaced, 12 pitch font. 1” margins all around, including a bibliography). Faculty will not read more than 35 pages. Students should clearly (a) articulate the idea they are tracing: how it was originally conceived and how it has been studied across several decades; (b) evaluate on conceptual and

methodological grounds how the idea has been handled in research; and (c) forecast the research issues on the horizon for the next decade. *Please submit along with the paper one copy of each of the 6 basic texts that you used for your examination.*

## The Essay

Your essay, organized as you see fit, needs to do all of the following:

1. Identify and state a research idea that interests you. Students depict the idea as it was stated by their “classic” theorist and present their own understanding of it. In selecting a research idea to read and write about, students are helped by the exercise they’ve learned from the Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2003) text:

Topic: I am reading and writing about \_\_\_\_\_

Question: because I want to find out who/how/why \_\_\_\_\_

Rationale: in order to understand how/why/what \_\_\_\_\_

At the start of their essays, students present to the readers how they filled in these blanks during the initial stages of their reading and writing. Also, students describe what was at stake theoretically and, if appropriate, how methods and empirical research shaped the first writer’s presentation of the idea. By empirical, we mean research from a qualitative or quantitative stance that collects data to elaborate a theory or idea. Spend at least two to four pages developing the argument that s/he originally authored. When considering what was “at stake,” students may focus on the scholar’s specific point/thesis in the context of previous theory and research. Explain why the author’s statement is significant. Feel free to comment also on the significance of the author’s thesis about your idea in relation to public issues, policy, and/or practice, if stated by the original scholar.

2. Give the readers an overview of the five articles/books that you will bring into your essay. Describe the methods used to select the pieces: Why these five and not others? These five should be distributed chronologically across the decades, from the date of the original publication to the present. Summarize the transformations that the idea has taken in the selected readings over the course of its intellectual lifespan with which you are working. The works will, when seen as a set, cover conceptual and empirical contributions. At least three of the five pieces will contain an empirical (qualitative or quantitative) contribution. Research writing that is empirical typically states why and how data were examined systematically, according to the standards of some research paradigm (see, for example, Alford). Name that paradigm, and discuss how the empirical method operationalized the focal idea. This should take three to four pages.
3. Review each of the five articles/books in enough depth so that readers can see how the original idea has been refined through empirical and conceptual efforts. This requires more than a summary. Readers are looking for an analytic and critical review. With regard to empirical efforts, for each of the pieces that includes an empirical contribution, be sure to cover the kinds of methodological issues raised by each empirical piece, and discuss how methodological

decisions and results have affected the shape of the idea. Evaluate the (a) fit or appropriateness of the specific methods chosen to the study's conceptual framework and research questions, and (b) the effectiveness of the research design and the interpretation of evidence for the nature of knowledge stated or presumed in the study. (Ten to fifteen pages)

In the course of the review of the five articles/books, key moments are identified in which the idea takes a critical turn. Clarify any obvious revisions – revisions in definition, methodology, or scope, in contrast to the presentation of the idea with which you began. “Critical turns” include transformations of the idea through changes in (a) one or more of the concepts with which the idea is associated, (b) the ways in which the concepts relate to the contexts in which the idea has been examined, and/or (c) methods that affect the nature and/or operationalization of the idea, d) identify ‘roads not taken’ - research that is not covered that might (or might not) be relevant, and e) potential future directions of this research. (Three to five pages).

4. Analyze the current debates/splits/camps of research involved in work on this idea and project what research in the area might look like over the next decades. Be sure to cover both conceptual and methodological possibilities. Finally, restate the Booth et al model at the end of your essay, showing how you have now come to think about your research concern, given all the reading, thinking, and writing you have done about your idea. (Three to five pages)

### **Evaluation of the First Doc**

The first doc receives three possible grades: pass, fail, or revise. If a paper receives a grade of ‘revise,’ the committee will determine who will be involved in the revisions and the appropriate timeline.

Your paper will have three readers. The student selects the first and second reader from the social personality psychology faculty. The subprogram chair selects a third reader (i.e., an outside reader; not an advisor) to complete the committee.

As indicated in the timeline (see appendix), students are strongly encouraged to discuss the paper with the first reader and second reader as it develops over spring term. Once the silent period begins, students cannot discuss the paper with faculty.

Students submit to each of the 3 readers the first doc exam along with each of the five scholarly works you discuss. Please consult with your readers to ascertain how they would like to receive the exam during the summer (GC mailbox, snail mail, email, etc.).

Please note: Students are welcome to meet with the exam's readers after receiving an evaluation of the exam and after fall semester begins.

### **Criteria for grading:**

Does the paper show a:

1. Clear understanding of the original emergence of the idea. What were the critical elements as initially conceived? What was the role of methods in this original presentation?
2. Thorough description of how you tracked the thesis through the literature. What was your method for “tracing?” Be specific about what was included and what was left out (i.e., roads not taken).
3. Well-substantiated critical analysis of the five articles/chapters/books and demonstration of how the given references relate to each other and how they develop/amend the original idea.
4. Careful tracking of the ways in which the idea has retained its original form and the ways in which it has been transformed across the years. What of the original notion is still “current?” What issues have been dropped along the way? What issues have been added?
5. Scholarly treatment of the conceptual and methodological concerns, including the extent to which the student traces how methodological decisions have affected the development of the idea; and perhaps applied and ethical concerns that surround work in this area.
6. Creative consideration of the next decades of research that might emerge in the field.
7. Complete bibliography of all relevant citations.

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Briefly state the research idea that you have taken from your “original” source and will trace over five later publications:

Your original source: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list the five later publications:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

First Doc contract

Approved by

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX

### Tools for Preparing Exam Analysis

#### Grounding in your work

As a way of helping you identify and clarify the research idea and questions with which you will contend in the First Doc, the faculty ask you to begin filling in the blanks in the Booth et al (2003) model as soon as you start your work. This model is a good guide on “how to find your interests in a topic, how to find in that topic questions to research, and then how to signal the significance of your answer by describing its rationale:”

Topic: I am reading and writing about \_\_\_\_\_

Question: because I want to find out who/how/why \_\_\_\_\_

Rationale: in order to understand how/why/what \_\_\_\_\_

With this rationale in place, identify an argument/statement/hypothesis about your key idea in writing by your chosen focal “classic” scholar. This argument/statement/hypothesis should make a claim about some psycho-social phenomenon relevant to your idea in ways that have been subject to examination over the years.

Example of First Doctoral Examination Preparation Matrix

Use a form like this one to help you in your selection of texts for the exam. As you fill in the boxes in the matrix, you will complete key steps in your examination preparation. You want to be sure each article gives you something with which to fill in the cells. Also, the completed matrix enables you and your faculty advisors to see that you have chosen texts that are appropriate for the exam -- texts that will enable you complete the critical steps in the exam and meet the faculty's expectations for the exam. This is just one way this form might look. Feel free with your advisors to use it or one you construct for yourself to help you in your preparations.

	Conceptual Framework	Research Question or Hypothesis	Methods	Evidence Reported	How Methods Shape Theory/ How Theory Shapes Method	“Critical Turns:” How Your Idea Changes, Given the Evidence	Effectiveness of Design & Interpretation
Article 1							
Article 2							
Article 3							
Article 4							
Article 5							

Process and Timeline for First Doctoral Examination

January	Distribution of exam instructions
February 1 – March 14th	Meetings with faculty members to formulate the key idea for the examination and the initial “classic” text
March 15th	Written statement of idea for the examination – the topic area in which you are working, the questions you are asking, and the rationale for that question – submitted to at least one faculty advisor
March 16 <sup>th</sup> — April 6th	Meetings with faculty to identify texts along the path and refine the thesis
April 6 <sup>th</sup>	Selection and approval of “short list” of texts for the exam by two faculty advisors
April 6th – April 19th	Meetings with faculty around text selection
April 30th	Draft of completed matrix or a comparable form to the two faculty readers
April 30th— May 23nd	Continued discussions with faculty
May 24th	Contract signed by two faculty advisors and submitted to Program Head’s Office (Prof. Susan Opotow)
June 14 <sup>th</sup>	First doc exam is due

*[Updated 15 Feb 2013]*