

Psychology 83: The Self Spring 2013

A unitary sense of self that exists across time and place is a central feature of human experience. Understanding the nature of self - what it is and what it does - has challenged scholars for many centuries. Although most people intuitively understand what is meant by the term self, definitions have tended toward the philosophical and metaphysical. Efforts at creating more formal definitions have largely been unsuccessful, as many features of self are empirically murky and difficult to assess using objective methods. Yet the phenomenological experience of self is highly familiar to everyone. So, at issue is not whether the self exists, but how best to study it. This course will survey contemporary approaches to understanding the self, with a strong emphasis on approaches from social psychology. We will consider self's development, its cognitive and affective components, motives related to it, and how it is regulated. We will consider its functional basis, examining both its adaptive and maladaptive consequences. We will also examine its neurological basis, including case studies of people with disorders of self.

Required Readings

Leary, M. (2004). *The Curse of Self*. Available at Wheelock Books.

Other readings will be provided via pdf files on Blackboard (typically one week before class).

Assignments and Evaluation

Participation - 10%

Brief Papers - 10%

Research Brief - 25%

Presentation - 25%

Final Paper - 30%

Participation - A successful seminar relies on the participation of students and discussion of divergent views and opinions. Each class there will be 3-5 readings (including from Leary's book) that **all members of the class should know**. Each person should generate at least one discussion question for each reading. That is, what question(s) comes to mind as you read the papers that you would like to see the class discuss? Include your discussion question in your email containing your brief paper (due by 10 a.m. day of class). These will help facilitate our class discussions. Be prepared to discuss these questions in class.

Note – There is growing controversy over the use of laptops in the classrooms. Students overestimate their multi-tasking abilities. It is obvious when students are using laptops/cell phones to engage in activities such as email, Facebook, etc. Please respect your classmates by using laptops only for activities closely related to the class (i.e., reading articles, taking notes). Failure to do so will count against your participation grade.

Brief Papers - For each class from March 28 to May 14 you will write a very brief (1-2 pages) thought paper on the readings. You should select one issue that you find particularly interesting. Perhaps you believe that there are unanswered questions or that the conclusions in the papers are misguided. Perhaps the material relates to some important issue in your own life. In any case, these should not simply be summaries of the articles. Please send me your brief paper via email by 10 a.m. on the day of class. This will allow me to scan them for potential discussion questions for class. Class will not meet on April 11th.

Research Brief – You will choose a topic that is relevant to the course content and then conduct preliminary research on that topic. You should check the topic with me to make sure it is appropriate. Your task is to provide an annotated bibliography of five journal articles on the topic you select. Rather than simply describing the article, you will write a one to two paragraph description of each paper that highlights its strengths and weaknesses and gives me some sense of why you selected the paper. You will also propose at least one research hypothesis that would test some hypotheses about the topic. You should feel free to be creative. State the hypothesis clearly, describe the study that would test it, and then give some predictions about what you might expect to find. To be clear, you need to write one or two paragraphs for each of five journal articles and an additional section that describes a research idea. The research brief is due by 5pm April 26th (via email). This allows me to give you feedback well in advance of your presentation.

Class Presentation - You will provide a 20-25 minute presentation to the class (May 16 – May 28). This is most often based on the topic you selected for your research brief. You will select one article for the class to read and you will make this available to me in pdf form one week prior to your presentation (so that it can be posted on Blackboard for the rest of the class). The format of your presentation is open, although it should incorporate a background review, summary of important issues, and some opportunity for class discussion (at least 5 minutes). You may choose to use audiovisual resources (e.g., video or PowerPoint), but it is your responsibility to notify me well in advance of any special equipment requirements. Feel free to be creative in how you encourage class participation. Select an article that is brief and interesting.

Final Paper - The paper should be on the topic of your major presentation. Papers should be 8-12 double-spaced pages. You should build on your annotated bibliography and research proposal. The paper is due on May 30th via email. A 5% penalty will result for each day the paper is late.

Tentative Weekly Topics

Topic 1	Is having a “self” adaptive?
Topic 2	How does brain activity give rise to a sense of self?
Topic 3	Do we know ourselves?
Topic 4	How are we motivated to understand our selves?
Topic 5	What is self-esteem and what does it do for us?
Topic 6	How do we present the self?
Topic 7	How do we control the self? Who is in control?
Student Presentations	

Questions? Feel free to contact me by email if you have any questions or concerns. Additional course information will be distributed via Blackboard or email. Students requiring disability-related accommodations must register with the Student Accessibility Service office. Once SAS has authorized accommodations, students must show the originally signed SAS Accommodations/Consent Form and/or a letter on SAS letterhead to their professor. As a first step, if students have questions about whether they qualify to receive accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions about accommodations will remain confidential.