



Self and Identity

Instructor Manual

Editors: Dr. Regan A. R. Gurung and Dr. Aaron Richmond

Contributing Authors: Dawn Albertson, Bethany Fleck, Travis Heath, Phil Kreniske, Linda Lockwood, Kristy Lyons, Aliza Panjwani, Janet Peters, Kasey Powers, Amanda Richmond, Anna Ropp, Jeremy Sawyer, Raechel Soicher, Sunda Friedman TeBockhorst, Courtney Rocheleau

This module, *Self and Identity*, focuses on how a person understands and comprehends who he or she is. It also reviews the concepts of the self as a social actor, motivated agent, and autobiographical author.

Learning Objectives

- Relevant APA Learning Objectives (Version 2.0)
 - Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology (1.1)
 - Develop a working knowledge of psychology's content domains (1.2)
 - Describe applications of psychology (1.3)
 - Demonstrate psychology information Literacy (2.2)
 - Engage in innovative and integrative thinking and problem solving (2.3)
 - Build and enhance interpersonal relationships (3.3)
 - Interact effectively with others (4.3)
 - Apply psychological content and skills to career goals (5.1)
 - Exhibit self-efficacy and self-regulation (5.2)
- Content Specific Learning Objectives: Self and Identity
 - Explain the basic idea of reflexivity in human selfhood—how the “I” encounters and

makes sense of itself (the “Me”).

- Describe fundamental distinctions between three different perspectives on the self: the self as actor, agent, and author.
- Describe how a sense of self as a social actor emerges around the age of 2 years and how it develops going forward.
- Describe the development of the self’s sense of motivated agency from the emergence of the child’s theory of mind to the articulation of life goals and values in adolescence and beyond.
- Define the term narrative identity, and explain what psychological and cultural functions narrative identity serves.

Abstract

For human beings, the self is what happens when “I” encounters “Me.” The central psychological question of selfhood, then, is this: How does a person apprehend and understand who he or she is? Over the past 100 years, psychologists have approached the study of self (and the related concept of identity) in many different ways, but three central metaphors for the self repeatedly emerge. First, the self may be seen as a social actor, who enacts roles and displays traits by performing behaviors in the presence of others. Second, the self is a motivated agent, who acts upon inner desires and formulates goals, values, and plans to guide behavior in the future. Third, the self eventually becomes an autobiographical author, too, who takes stock of life—past, present, and future—to create a story about who I am, how I came to be, and where my life may be going. This module briefly reviews central ideas and research findings on the self as an actor, an agent, and an author, with an emphasis on how these features of selfhood develop over the human life course.

Class Design Recommendations

This module should be taught in less than a single class period (especially if you are on a time crunch), with the unit as a whole taking 1-2 class periods. If you are pressed for time, consider omitting this module.

Please also refer to the Noba PowerPoint slides that compliment this outline.

1st class period (50 min – 75 min):

- Overview
 - I vs. Me
- Social Actor
- Motivated Agent
- Autobiographical author

Module Outline

Introduction

- The central question of human selfhood: How does a person know who he or she is?
- We often try to manage, discipline, refine, improve, or develop the self.
- There are into three broad psychological categories of how you might reflect upon and try to improve the self. The “I” may encounter the “Me” as (a) a social actor, (b) a motivated agent, or (c) an autobiographical author.

The Social Actor

- Evolution has prepared us to care deeply about social acceptance and social status, for those unfortunate individuals who do not get along well in social groups or who fail to attain a requisite status among their peers have typically been severely compromised when it comes to survival and reproduction. It makes consummate evolutionary sense, therefore, that the human I should apprehend the Me first and foremost as a social actor.
- For human beings, the sense of the self as a social actor begins to emerge around the age of 18 months. Many children begin to use words such as “me” and “mine” in the second year of life. Around the same time, children also begin to express social emotions (e.g., embarrassment or pride). These emotions tell the social actor how well he or she is performing in the group. At age four, children begin to make attributions about themselves. By age 10, the attributions are more complex. By late childhood, self-conceptions also

include important social roles.

- Taken together, traits and roles make up the main features of our social reputation, as we apprehend it in our own mind.

The Motivated Agent

- Observers can never fully know what is in the actor's head, no matter how closely they watch.
- By age 1 year, infants show a strong preference for observing and imitating the goal-directed, intentional behavior of others, rather than random behaviors. Still, it is one thing to act in goal-directed ways; it is quite another for the I to know itself (the Me) as an intentional and purposeful force who moves forward in life in pursuit of self-chosen goals, values, and other desired end states. Attaining this kind of understanding means acquiring a theory of mind, which occurs for most children by the age of 4. During the age 5-to-7 shift, children become more planful, intentional, and systematic in their pursuit of valued goals. Goals and values become even more important for the self in adolescence, as teenagers confront the challenge of identity. Establishing an adult identity has implications, as well, for how a person moves through life as a social actor, entailing new role commitments and, perhaps, a changing understanding of one's basic dispositional traits.

The Autobiographical Author

- The self typically becomes an autobiographical author in the early-adult years, a way of being that is layered over the motivated agent, which is layered over the social actor. In order to provide life with the sense of temporal continuity and deep meaning, we must author a personalized life story that integrates our understanding of who we once were, who we are today, and who we may become in the future. The story helps to explain, for the author and for the author's world, why the social actor does what it does and why the motivated agent wants what it wants, and how the person as a whole has developed over time, from the past's reconstructed beginning to the future's imagined ending.
- It is not until adolescence, that human beings express advanced storytelling skills (i.e., autobiographical reasoning). In autobiographical reasoning, a narrator is able to derive substantive conclusions about the self from analyzing his or her own personal experiences.
- Contemporary research on the self as autobiographical author emphasizes the strong effect of culture on narrative identity. Culture provides a menu of favored plot lines, themes, and character types for the construction of self-defining life stories (e.g., the prominence

of redemptive narratives in American culture).

Conclusion

- For human beings, selves begin as social actors, but they eventually become motivated agents and autobiographical authors, too. The I first sees itself as an embodied actor in social space; with development, however, it comes to appreciate itself also as a forward-looking source of self-determined goals and values, and later yet, as a storyteller of personal experience, oriented to the reconstructed past and the imagined future.

Difficult Terms

- Self as social actor
- Self as motivated agent
- Self as autobiographical author
- Narrative identity
- Redemptive narratives
- Reflexive
- Theory of mind
- Autobiographical reasoning
- Ego
- Identity
- Self-esteem

Lecture Frameworks

Overview

How does a person know who he or she is? It's a really interesting question that students can easily relate to. However, given the realistic constraints faced by many teachers, if you are

short on time, this might be the module that you consider cutting out of your lecture (as part of a survey course, personality via the Big 5 and personality assessment are important to introduce).

- Discussion/warm-up
 - You can begin this module by asking students about who they are (see class activity, below). You can then use this as a springboard for discussing the person as a social actor, motivated agent, and autobiographical author.
- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:
 - To talk about self as a *Social Actor*. Here, you are highlighting a person's role as part of a bigger picture. You can start by discussing the developmental trajectory of the self as a social actor. To show that toddlers beginning to recognize themselves as unique beings set apart from others, you could show a clip of a toddler looking in the mirror and recognizing him or herself. If you want to take a more humorous approach, you could show them the toddler's list of possessions (e.g., <http://parents.berkeley.edu/jokes/t-odderrules.htm>...). The idea is that toddlers begin to see themselves as a separate, unique individual (thus, everything is theirs).
 - You can also take the mirrors example and extend it. That is, as we age, other people become our mirrors - they reflect who we are back to us. When we don't like the reflection, we might feel shame or guilt.
 - The last part of the self as a social actor is to talk about social reputation. This can be a fun one, as most students feel they have some sort of reputation (if nothing else, they may feel that they have a reputation to protect). Therefore, after conveying the information, it might be fun to have a class/group discussion about reputations (see next bullet point).
- Activity: Discussion (class or small groups)
 - It can be helpful to ask students to generate ways in which a celebrity (or a public figure well known to the class) might calculatedly alter their public perception. Essentially, the students must act as a publicist, providing ideas for their celebrity to improve his/her social reputation. For example, Charlie Sheen might begin holding charity events, show up at parties and actively/publically resist temptation to consume alcohol or behave poorly, or even begin playing roles in movies that promote/exhibit healthy behavior (he is often typecast as a gambler/substance user/womanizer in movies).

- Students can engage in several discussion topics:
 - How easy is it to change reputation?
 - What happens if there is a discrepancy between a person's sense of self and their reputation?
 - Why might people desire a "negative" reputation (e.g., many believe that both Miley Cyrus and Justin Bieber attempted to alter their wholesome social reputation by calculatedly behaving in unwholesome ways).
- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:
 - To talk about the concept of the *Motivated Agent*. Similar to the Social Actor section, you can frame your discussion on the motivated agent around the developmental trajectory, from theory of mind to the movement towards identity.
 - One important piece of the motivated agent topic is the concept of "theory of mind." Astute students will remember this concept from earlier modules (eg. social and personality development in childhood) but it is nice to have a refresher here.
 - Here, the students might be most interested in the establishment of identity in late adolescence and early adulthood (since this is where most college students are, developmentally). You could discuss the shifts that often occur in early adulthood: changing religious and personal values, deciding on a career, how to navigate personal relationships, etc.
 - To talk about the concept of the Autobiographical Author. Here, you will be explaining the narrative identity that we have – our reconstructions of the past and anticipation of the future.
 - Optional opening: To start this section out, you could find a clip of a famous athlete/actor/musician/scientist/etc. that shows them explaining how they got to where they are now (most celebs have some sort of interview where they describe their own autobiographical narrative).
 - After you've established the idea of narratives, you can talk about a common theme for narratives (in the US at least): the redemptive narrative. To illustrate this, you could use a pop-culture case study (e.g., Robert Downey Junior) or a case study from literature where a character redeemed themselves (e.g., Snape in Harry Potter; Beast from Beauty & the Beast).

- Activity: Personal Narrative In-Class Mini-Writing
 - See below for directions

Activities & Demonstrations

Identity: In-Class activity

For this activity, students will brainstorm about who they are as a person and then use concepts from class to reflect on their identity. The goal of this activity is to help students apply the material from the module.

- Time: 10-15 minutes (a few minutes to write the list; then 5 - 10 minutes for the writing)
- Materials: Paper and pen
- Directions:
 - Before discussing the content from this module, have students take out a sheet of paper and write "I Am..." on the top. Instruct them to list 10 things that would fit after "I Am." Tell them not to worry about logic or importance, just list them in order of how they occur.
 - After discussing the content from the module, have students apply the information by having them reflect on the list they created at the beginning of class
- Sample Prompts
 - How do these roles illustrate the self as a social actor? As a motivated agent? As an autobiographical author?
 - How has your identity changed over the years?
 - Can you remember how you saw yourself at an earlier stage? (a difficult thing to do). Is that still part of the way you see yourself?

Narrative: In-Class activity

For this activity, students will write about their own personal narrative. The goal of this activity is to help students apply the material from the module.

- Time: 5-10 minutes
- Materials: Paper and pen
- Directions:
 - Have students take a few minutes to write down the key points of their autobiographical narrative up to the present-day (see prompts, below). You might ask a few students to share their responses with the class or get students to split into small groups and discuss their answers. If you feel that the nature of the conversation may be too intimate, he or she may simply allow the students to keep their answers for personal use only.
- Sample Prompts
 - What themes do they notice?
 - Is there a redemptive narrative?
 - What themes do they wish to be present in the future? How do they intend to keep the current themes present moving forward (if they are desired) or alter the themes in the future?

Additional Activities

Fernald, P. S., & Fernald, L. (2008). The Sentence Completion Test: Assessing personality. In L. R. Benjamin (Ed.), *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 196-200). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- This is an excellent vehicle for discussing the nature and application of personality testing. Students are exposed to a real test in an engaging yet safe and ethical way. Advance preparation is minimal, and no prior knowledge of psychology is necessary. The activity is appropriate for classes of any size.

Kerber, K. W. (2008). What is personality? A personal appraisal. In L. R. Benjamin (Ed.), *Favorite*

activities for the teaching of psychology (pp. 193-195). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- This activity helps students identify and examine their implicit personality theories and makes personality theories concrete and understandable. Advance preparation is minimal, and the activity is appropriate for classes of all sizes. This can be done in-class or outside of class with a writing assignment.

Leck, K. (2006). Teaching personality theories using popular music. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33(1), 34-36. doi:10.1207/s15328023top3301_8

- Previously, psychology instructors have used popular music to illustrate psychological concepts in the classroom. In this study, students enrolled in a personality theories class heard 13 popular songs that demonstrated various concepts. Students then selected and analyzed their own songs that contained elements of personality theories. Test grades and student evaluations of the demonstration provided support for the use of this activity for teaching personality theories

Miserandino, M. (2007). Heeeeere's Johnny: A case study in the five factor model of personality. *Teaching of Psychology*, 34(1), 37-40. doi:10.1080/00986280709336648

- Students used the Five Factor Model of personality to analyze the personality of entertainer Johnny Carson through his The New York Times obituary. Students evaluated this assignment highly: A majority indicated that the assignment was interesting, enjoyable, and useful in helping them to understand and apply the Five Factor Model, and all agreed that the assignment was thought-provoking.

Russo, N. (2008). Personality tests. In L. R. Benjamin (Ed.), *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 203-207). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- This activity illustrates what is often called the Barnum effect in personality testing, that is, an individual's tendency to believe in the validity of personality descriptions that are vague enough to apply to virtually everyone. This activity can be used in any size class and involves all the students in the class. It requires about 10 minutes in one class period and 20 to 30 minutes in a subsequent class.

Outside Resources

Web: The website for the Foley Center for the Study of Lives, at Northwestern University. The site contains research materials, interview protocols, and coding manuals for conducting studies of narrative identity.

<http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/foley/>

Evidence-Based Teaching

Dollinger, S. J. (2004). Predicting Personality-Behavior Relations: A Teaching Activity. *Teaching of Psychology*, 31(1), 48-5.

- This article presents an activity using in-class personality inventories and a behavior checklist to generate discussion items for a class activity later in the semester. Specifically, students attempt to predict Personality X Behavior correlations based on the class's self-reports and then learn the outcomes for their predictions. The activity allows instructors (a) to deepen and apply students' understanding of the 5-factor model of personality (or any other traits used); (b) to explain Type I and Type II errors and the contingent nature of research; (c) to clarify the nature of correlation, particularly negative correlations; and (d) to explore students' implicit personality theories. Students seemed to value the activity on the 8 occasions of its use and 2 formal evaluations.

Kaplan, S. A., Stachowski, A. A., & Bradley-Geist, J. C. (2012). A classroom activity to demonstrate self-other agreement in personality judgments. *Teaching of Psychology*, 39(3), 213-216. doi:10.1177/0098628312450441

- This article describes a classroom activity to demonstrate (dis)agreement in personality judgments, using an exercise derived from Watson's research on the accuracy of rating strangers' personalities. On the first day of class, undergraduate students in psychology courses rated their own personality and the personality of a classmate, using items from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP). Across five samples, self-other correlations were strong for extraversion but varied for the other four traits. Comparisons with control groups on relevant test items provided preliminary evidence that the exercise promotes learning of relevant material.

Miserandino, M. (2006). I Scream, You Scream: Teaching Validity and Reliability Via the Ice Cream Personality Test. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33(4), 265-268.

- This exercise uses the Internet-based "Ice Cream Personality Test" to help undergraduates

understand the principles of personality testing including reliability, validity, Barnum statements, and generalizability. Results indicated that the Ice Cream Personality Test, although great fun, lacked reliability and validity. Students found this exercise enjoyable, useful, thought provoking, and apt to make them skeptical about personality tests they might encounter on the Internet or elsewhere.

Paddock, J. R., Terranova, S., & Giles, L. (2001). SASB goes Hollywood: Teaching personality theories through movies. *Teaching of Psychology*, 28(2), 117-120.

- In this article the authors describe a technique for teaching personality theories to undergraduate psychology students. The method shows students segments from feature films that illustrate key concepts. They present qualitative and quantitative data supporting the utility of this teaching technique.

Suggestions from the Society for Teaching's Introductory Psychology Primer

Leder, S. (2013). Personality. In S.E. Afful, J. J. Good, J. Keeley, S. Leder, & J. J. Stiegler-Balfour (Eds.). *Introductory Psychology teaching primer: A guide for new teachers of Psych 101*. Retrieved from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology web site: <http://teachpsych.org/e-books/intro2013/index.php>

POSSIBLE ACITVITIES (In Class)

Design Your Own Personality Test:

- Students should work together to generate a list of what they deem to be the most important personality variables. Then, ask them to develop items to assess these different constructs. Students can administer their test to volunteers and then analyze the results of their study. This helps to provide students with hands-on experience related to generating theories, creating assessment items, conducting research, and examining data.

Act Out Your Favorite Defense Mechanism

- After learning about Freud's defense mechanisms, students should be split into small groups and asked to select a defense mechanism to demonstrate to the class. Classmates can use their knowledge to determine what is being acting out. Having students perform should help to break the uniformity of a lecture class and be a fun way to help student distinguish concepts that may otherwise blend together and/or be difficult to distinguish.
- For a variation on this activity, see: Inman, M. L. (2000). Defense Mechanism Miniskits. Published in M. Bolt's Instructor's Manual that accompanies David Myers, Introduction to Psychology, (6th Ed.). New York: Worth Publishers. [http://www.macmillanhighered.com/r-resources/1429244364/IRM/PDF/Bolt AP TRB10.pdf](http://www.macmillanhighered.com/r-resources/1429244364/IRM/PDF/Bolt%20AP%20TRB10.pdf)

Uncover Your Unconscious:

- Present students with sample depictions of projective assessments, such as the Rorschach Test and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). Have students report their gutlevel feelings. Then, have students assess themselves and their classmates using Freud's model of personality. Learning about these concepts from a personal vantage point should allow for more meaningful acquisition of knowledge, and students tend to find this interesting and fun. The diverse responses should also help to identify some of the flaws with the psychoanalytic theory, including the inability to prove or disprove claims.
- For an ink blot generator and other useful tools see: http://www.makingthemodernworld.org.uk/learning_modules/psychology/02.TU.04/?section=13

Participate in Online Personality Inventory:

- Have students examine their own personality traits by completing an online questionnaire. This activity will allow students first-hand experience with the items that comprise empirically-sound, previously established inventories, as well as allow them to apply relevant findings to their understanding of their own personality. Used in combination with projective measures of personality, this activity should provide a nice contrast between the different forms of assessment.
- Sample online personality inventories can be found at: <http://www.personalitytest.org.uk/> for the Big Five, and for the NEO-FFM see: http://www.class.uidaho.edu/psyc310/lesson-lesson03/lesson03-1_homework.htm

Zodiac Signs and Personality:

- Students are given a list of personality descriptions based on astrology and zodiac signs. They then have to choose which one best describes them. The class discussion focuses on the difference between empirically tested theories of personality and zodiac signs. A discussion of the Barnum effect and illusory correlation help students understand the theoretical basis for personality inventories. http://www.teachpsychscience.org/pdf/316-201165139AM_1.PDF

POSSIBLE ACITVITIES (Out of Class)

Reflection Paper

- Have students apply the concepts presented in class to someone they have experience with outside of the classroom. Ask students to analyze the personality characteristics of a popular television character, a family member, friend, or explain a celebrity's public behavior in terms of their specific traits. This helps to make concepts from class more relevant and relatable to their lives outside of the classroom. For videos of interesting characters to use as subjects for the reflection papers, see <http://www.clipsforclass.com/personality>

Practice Quiz

- Students can test their understanding and comprehension of Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality by participating in this online quiz. Feedback is immediately administered. This is a quick and easy supplemental review of concepts to assure students are grasping the finer details of Freud's theory and are prepared for upcoming examinations
- <http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/persquizfreud.htm>

Links to ToPIX Materials

Activities, demonstrations, handouts, etc.:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981026/Personality%20in%20the%20Classroom>

Current events/ news:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/23137146/Personality%20in%20the%20News>

Video/audio:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981025/Personality%20Videos>

Teaching Topics

Teaching The Most Important Course

https://nobaproject.com/documents/1_Teaching_The_Most_Important_Course.pdf

Content Coverage

https://nobaproject.com/documents/2_Content_Coverage.pdf

Motivating Students

https://nobaproject.com/documents/3_Motivating_Students_Tips.pdf

Engaging Large Classes

https://nobaproject.com/documents/4_Engaging_Large_Classes.pdf

Assessment Learning

https://nobaproject.com/documents/5_Assessment_Learning.pdf

Teaching Biological Psychology

https://nobaproject.com/documents/6_Teaching_Bio_Psych.pdf

PowerPoint Presentation

This module has an associated PowerPoint presentation. Download it at https://nobaproject.com//images/shared/supplement_editions/000/000/278/Self%20and%20Identity.ppt?1475874393.

About Noba

The Diener Education Fund (DEF) is a non-profit organization founded with the mission of re-inventing higher education to serve the changing needs of students and professors. The initial focus of the DEF is on making information, especially of the type found in textbooks, widely available to people of all backgrounds. This mission is embodied in the Noba project.

Noba is an open and free online platform that provides high-quality, flexibly structured textbooks and educational materials. The goals of Noba are three-fold:

- To reduce financial burden on students by providing access to free educational content
- To provide instructors with a platform to customize educational content to better suit their curriculum
- To present material written by a collection of experts and authorities in the field

The Diener Education Fund is co-founded by Drs. Ed and Carol Diener. Ed is the Joseph Smiley Distinguished Professor of Psychology (Emeritus) at the University of Illinois. Carol Diener is the former director of the Mental Health Worker and the Juvenile Justice Programs at the University of Illinois. Both Ed and Carol are award-winning university teachers.

Acknowledgements

The Diener Education Fund would like to acknowledge the following individuals and companies for their contribution to the Noba Project: The staff of Positive Acorn, including Robert Biswas-Diener as managing editor and Peter Lindberg as Project Manager; The Other Firm for user experience design and web development; Sockeye Creative for their work on brand and identity development; Arthur Mount for illustrations; Chad Hurst for photography; EEI Communications for manuscript proofreading; Marissa Diener, Shigehiro Oishi, Daniel Simons, Robert Levine, Lorin Lachs and Thomas Sander for their feedback and suggestions in the early stages of the project.

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Contact Information:

Noba Project
www.nobaproject.com
info@nobaproject.com