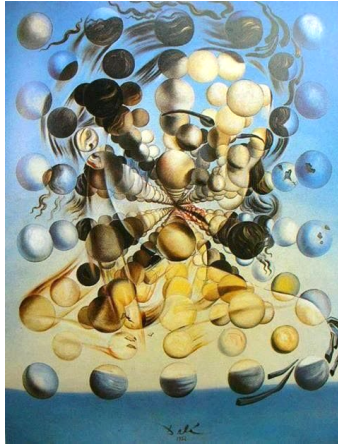


Me, Myself, and I

Exploring Senses of Self from a Multidisciplinary Perspective

COST 1082 / CLPS 1782



Times: Thursdays, 4-6:30pm
Location: Sayles Hall 105

Course Description

It seems that nothing could be more apparent than our own existence as a person, as an agent, and as a self. Yet across time and culture, human beings have puzzled over how to conceptualize and understand what it is we are. Is the self stable or in flux? Is it singular or multiple or nothing at all? How is the self related to others and to the world? Is the self informed by our social and personal identities, or is it independent of such identities? Does it have fixed characteristics, or is it amenable to change?

These (and many other) questions have informed the speculations of philosophy, the doctrines of religion, the trajectories of self-cultivation among contemplative traditions, and the therapeutics of psychology. They also explicitly or implicitly, deeply or shallowly, inform our social relationships, our behaviors, and our senses of worth and potential.

In the attempt to explain the relationship between mind and body, contemporary cognitive science has also had to contend with the question of what the self is and where—if anywhere—it might be located. These investigations—often in tandem with the modern philosophical method of phenomenology—has led to a rich interdisciplinary dialogue on the self and its relationship to brain, body, and world. This conversation has also extended into other disciplines, especially psychology, anthropology, and religious studies. Importantly, in the attempt to correlate abstract concepts with lived experience, a greater emphasis has been placed on the various *senses of self* that underlie our various self-concepts.

Shifting the focus from concepts of *the self* to the *senses of self* allows for a particularly rich multidisciplinary dialogue. Drawing upon psychology, we can ask: What happens when our sense of self is distorted in psychopathologies such as schizophrenia or depersonalization? Engaging with anthropology and cross-cultural psychology, we can ask: How are senses of self shaped in different societies? Are any self-concepts and senses of self universal? With contemplative and religious studies, we can ask: In addition to providing various ideas about the self, what practices have humans used to change their sense of self? What meaning or value do they attribute to such changes? Finally, we can ask: what insights can phenomenology provide for coming to a comprehensive understanding of how notions of “the self” are construed from more basic senses of self?

Course Objectives

- to become familiar with *some* of the conceptions of self that have existed across time and culture
- to identify how various normative frameworks are associated with self-concepts and methods of self-transformation
- to engage in first-person experiential investigations of the self and the senses of self
- to challenge the conceptions of self that we take for granted by studying the self from multidisciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives
- to explain how conceptions of selfhood are predicated on more basic *senses of self* that emerge from embodied, perceptual, emotional, motivational, cognitive, and social experiences

Course Instructor



Nicholas K. Canby, Ph.D.

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About Your Professor

Professor Canby obtained his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Clark University in 2022. His doctoral dissertation examined the characteristics and impacts of experiences involving a loss of self or a dissolution of its boundaries across multiple contexts. He has also conducted research on challenging states of mind – which include changes in sense of self - within mindfulness-based programs, classic psychedelics, and Buddhist meditators. In this course, students will have opportunities to learn about these research projects and to grapple with the conceptual issues they raise, which through illuminating the complex dynamics of the sense of self, also challenges some of our assumptions and expectations about projects of self-transformation in contemplative traditions.

Special Guests

Willoughby B. Britton, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Psychiatry and Human Behavior

Affiliated Faculty

Contemplative Studies Initiative

Credit Hours Statement

Over 13 weeks, students will spend 2.5 hours per week in class (32.5 hours total). Required reading for the seminar meetings and writing weekly response essays is expected to take approximately 8 hours

per week (104 hours total). In addition, researching and writing the final paper (and completing related assignments) is estimated at total of approximately 40 hours over the course of the term.

Assessment

- **verbal and social self:** participation in weekly seminar discussions (25%)
- **evaluative and critical self:** weekly reading response assignments / quizzes (30%)
- **introspective self:** occasional journal entries (5%)
- final project:
 - **self-initiative:** project proposal (abstract + annotated bibliography) (5%)
 - **self-confidence:** project presentation (10%)
 - **self-determination:** final written paper of 12-15 pages (25%)

Required Texts

- Ananthaswamy, A. *The Man Who Wasn't There: Investigations into the Strange New Science of the Self* (Dutton, 2015)
- various articles and book chapters through the Online Course Reserves system

Recommended Texts

- Gallagher, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of The Self* (Oxford, 2011)
- Siderits, Thompson, and Zahavi, eds. *Self-No Self?: Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions* (Oxford, 2011)
- Leary and Tangney, eds. *The Handbook of Self and Identity* (Guilford, 2012)
- Baumeister, *The Self Explained* (Guilford, 2021)
- Seth, *Being You* (Dutton, 2021)

Fall 2024 Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings:

Part 1: Investigating the Self: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives

9/5 - Week 1: Introduction to the Course

required reading [43 pages]:

Gallagher and Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*, Ch. 10: "Self and Person," pp. 219-229

Northoff, "Brain and Self: A Neurophilosophical Account," pp. 261-270

Ananthaswamy, *The Man Who Wasn't There*, Ch. 1

further reading:

Gallagher, "Philosophical Conceptions of the Self: Implications for Cognitive Science"

Smith, *Experiencing Phenomenology*, Ch. 7: "Experiencing Oneself"

9/12 - Week 2: Narrative Self and Social Identity

required reading [48 pages]:

Ortega, *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self*,
selections from Ch. 1 and Ch. 2

Goldie, *The Mess Inside*, Ch. 6: "The Narrative Sense of Self," pp. 117-124

Vignoles, "Identity: Personal AND Social" in *The Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology* (2nd edition), pp. 289-299, 301- 304

further reading:

Baumeister, *The Self Explained*, Chs. 20-22

Strawson, selections from *Things That Bother Me*

Ananthaswamy, *The Man Who Wasn't There*, Ch. 2

Diamond et al., "Transgender Experience and Identity"

9/19 - Week 3: Self in Psychology: From Self-Esteem to Hypo-Egoic States

required reading [50 pages]:

Leary and Tangney, "The Self as an Organizing Construct in the Behavioral and Social Sciences," in *The Handbook of Self and Identity*

Orth and Robins, "The Development of Self-Esteem"

Leary and Terry, "Hypo-egoic Mindsets: Antecedents and Implications of Quieting the Self," in *Handbook of Self and Identity*

McAdams, "The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent, and Author," pp. 272-286

further reading:

Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Arndt, "Freedom versus Fear Revisited"

Part 2: Self-Cultivation and Self-Deconstruction in Contemplative Practices and Psychedelics

9/26 - Week 4: The Rhetoric and Efficacy of Selflessness in the Mindfulness Movement

required reading [57 pages]:

Lin et al., "A Mind Full of Self: Self-Referential Processing as a Mechanism Underlying the Therapeutic Effects of Mindfulness Training on Internalizing Disorders"

Bernstein et al., "Decentering and Related Constructs: A Critical Review and Metacognitive Processes Model"

Britton et al., "From Self-Esteem to Selflessness: An Evidence (Gap) Map of Self-Related Processes as Mechanisms of Mindfulness-Based Interventions"

further reading:

Samuel, "The Contemporary Mindfulness Movement and the Question of Nonself"

Giommi et al., "The (In)flexible Self: Psychopathology, Mindfulness, and Neuroscience"

10/3 - Week 5: Theory and Practice of Not-Self in Theravāda Buddhism

required reading [41 pages]:

Hamilton, *Early Buddhism*, Ch. 1: "Setting the Scene"

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *Me and Mine*, pp. 88-99, 107-114

Dahl, Lutz and Davidson, "Reconstructing and Deconstructing the Self"

further reading:

Anatta-lakkhana Sutta

Albahari, "Nirvana and Ownerless Consciousness" in *Self, No Self?*

Mahasi Sayadaw, *Practical Insight Meditation*

10/10 – Week 6: Psychedelics and Mystical Experience

required reading [62 pages]:

Barrett and Griffiths, "Classic Hallucinogens and Mystical Experiences: Phenomenology and Neural Correlates"

Taves, "Mystical and Other Alterations in Sense of Self"

Williams et al., "Indigenous Philosophies and the "Psychedelic Renaissance"

further reading:

Yaden et al., "The Varieties of Self-Transcendent Experience"

Milliere et al., "Psychedelics, Meditation, and Self-Consciousness"

10/17 - Week 7: Senses of Self in Meditative and Psychedelic Experiences

required reading [54 pages]:

Lindahl and Britton, "I Have This Feeling of Not Really Being Here: Buddhist Meditation and Changes in Sense of Self"

MacKenzie, "Meditative Experience and the Plasticity of Self-Experience"

Canby et al., "Clarifying and Measuring the Characteristics of Experiences that Involve a Loss of Self or a Dissolution of its Boundaries"

further reading/listening:

Ataria, "Where Do We End and Where Does the World Begin?"

Lindstrom ... Cardena, "Dissolution of What? - The Self Lost in Self-Transcendent Experiences"

Nave et al., "Self-Boundary Dissolution in Meditation: A Phenomenological Investigation"

Gallagher et al., "The Self-Pattern and Buddhist Psychology"

Part 3: Variations in Selfhood in Psychopathology and Culture

10/24 - Week 8: Psychopathology: Depersonalization and Schizophrenia

required reading [49 pages]:

Simeon and Abruget, *Feeling Unreal*, Ch. 2 (read your choice of 3 out of 5 cases)

Sierra, *Depersonalization*, Chs. 2 and 11

Ataria, "When the Body Stands in the Way"

Sass et al., "Varieties of Self Disorder"

Sandsten, Zahavi, Parnas, "Disorder of Selfhood in Schizophrenia: A Symptom or a Gestalt?"

further reading:

Ananthaswamy, *The Man Who Wasn't There*, Ch. 5

Ciaunica, Charlton, and Farmer, "When the Window Cracks: Transparency and the Fractured Self in Depersonalisation"

Sass et al., "Anomalous Self-Experience in Depersonalization and Schizophrenia"

Borda and Sass, "Phenomenology and Neurobiology of Self Disorder in Schizophrenia"

10/31 - Week 9: Cross-Cultural Psychology and Cultural Neuroscience of the Self

required reading [66 pages]:

Marcus and Kitayama, "Cultures and Selves: A Cycle of Mutual Constitution"

Han, "Understanding the Self: A Cultural Neuroscience Perspective"

Trommsdorff and Heikamp, "Socialization of Emotions and Emotion Regulation in Cultural Context"

further reading:

Kitayama et al., "Self as a Cultural Mode of Being"

Han and Ma, "Cultural Neuroscience Studies of the Self-Reflection"

Part 4: Explaining Senses of Self through Cognitive Neuroscience

11/7 - Week 10: The Bodily Self, part I: Ownership and Agency

required reading [57 pages]:

Ananthaswamy, *The Man Who Wasn't There*, Ch. 3

Balconi, "The Neuropsychology of Senses of Agency: Theoretical & Empirical Contributions"

Babo-Rebelo and Tallon-Baudry, "Interoceptive Signals, Brain Dynamics, and Subjectivity," in *The Interoceptive Mind*

further reading:

Christoff et al., "Specifying the Self for Cognitive Neuroscience"

Tsakiris et al., "Having a Body Versus Moving Your Body: Neural Signatures of Agency and Body-Ownership"

Ciaunica et al. "I Overthink—Therefore I Am Not: An Active Inference Account of Altered Sense of Self and Agency in Depersonalisation Disorder"

due Sunday 11/10: abstract + annotated bibliography

11/14 - Week 11: The Bodily Self, part II: Environment, Emotion, and Action

required reading [31 pages]:

Heersmink, "Varieties of the Extended Self"

Paul, *The Extended Mind*, Ch. 5: "Thinking With Built Spaces"

Krueger, "Schizophrenia and the Scaffolded Self"

further reading:

Ananthaswamy, *The Man Who Wasn't There*, Ch. 7

Blanke and Metzinger, "Full-Body Illusions and Minimal Phenomenal Selfhood"

Qin, Wang, and Northoff, "Linking Bodily, Environmental and Mental States in the Self"

Gerrans, "All The Self We Need"

11/21 - Week 12: Final Discussion and Student Presentations, part 1

required reading [6 pages]:

Gallagher, "A Pattern Theory of Self"

further reading/viewing:

Henry and Thompson, "Witnessing from Here: Self-Awareness from a Bodily Versus Embodied Perspective," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*

Zahavi, "The Enigmatic Self: From Buddhism to Neuroscience"

11/28 – NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Holiday)

12/5 - Week 14: Student Presentations, part 2

no readings: work on final project

Glossary entries due (at least four entries per student)

12/12 - Final Paper due to Canvas by 11:59pm

**schedule of classes and assigned readings are subject to change*

Course Policies and Perspectives

Attendance & Participation

Attendance in class and participation in class discussions and in group activities is expected. In order to be able to participate in these discussions and activities, it is essential that you come to class prepared—that is, you carefully read any assigned materials and you bring those materials with you to class. If you bring a laptop computer, *it is expected that you will use it only for class-related activities such as accessing assigned texts and note-taking*. Because participation is graded at every class session, each unexcused absence will have an effect on this portion of your grade.

Sense of Self Glossary

A glossary of terms related to various senses of self will be maintained in a google document that is linked to Canvas. Each student will be required to write *at least four* definitions in the glossary over the course of the semester. Glossary entries will be factored into the final participation grade.

Reading Responses

In preparation for each class meeting, each student will prepare a thoughtful response to the assigned reading. Reading responses will be submitted on the course Canvas site in the quizzes section as answers to the questions posted there to guide your reading. Your response should contain a balance of careful summary of key points along with reflections and critical questions evoked by the reading. Reading guide questions can be opened before starting the assigned reading. *Late reading responses will not count*.

Journals

Students should keep a journal throughout the semester in which they will work out their own views and opinions on topics related to the senses of self. The journal will also serve as brainstorming opportunities to facilitate your final project. Occasionally, the instructors will identify specific prompts that will shape online journal entries, but students should also use the journal to ponder further questions and issues that arose in class discussion or issues of personal interest that were not explicitly addressed in class. Formal journal entry assignments will be submitted on Canvas.

Final Project

The final project is designed to allow you to explore a topic of your own choosing. The topic can be a deeper exploration of material covered in class or can go beyond the assigned readings and course offerings. *Your final project must engage at least two methodological or disciplinary approaches taken in this course*. All students will present their work to the class through a short (~6-9 min) presentation, depending on the final enrollment. A final paper of 12-15 pages is due during the scheduled final exam period. Further details about the final project and the scaffolding assignments will be provided around week 4.

Statement on Academic Integrity and AI

“A student’s name on any exercise (e.g., a theme, report, notebook, performance, computer program, course paper, quiz, or examination) is regarded as assurance that the exercise is the result of the student’s own thoughts and study, stated in his or her own words, and produced without assistance, except as quotation marks, references, and footnotes acknowledge the use of printed sources or other outside help” (Brown University Academic Code, p. 5). The use of artificial intelligence to assist in writing is strictly prohibited in this course.

Resources

Writing Center

The Writing Center is located in the Sheridan Center on the 7th floor of the Sciences Library, where you will find a well-trained crew of tutors ready to assist you with your papers for this class. They can assist you in the pre-writing process as well as in revising an existing draft. Please be sure that you bring a copy of the assignment and a copy of any work you have started. Schedule your sessions online at:
<https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/programs-services/writing>

Accessibilities Services

Any student needing academic accommodations on account of a disability should contact the Student and Employees Accessibilities Services (SEAS) office by email (SEAS@brown.edu) or phone (401-863-9588) to request a SEAS Registration form and Documentation Guidelines.