Self & Identity
Psychology 1557
Harvard University

Syllabus – Fall, 2005

Meetings: Thursdays 1:00 – 3:00, William James Hall

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Office hours: Tuesdays 1:00-3:00

Structure and Objectives

The overarching questions of this course are “What is a Self?” and “How does a Self function?” There are three qualities that seem thematic to much of the philosophical, social psychological, and other theoretical and empirical work that shape current understanding of the self. I have organized the course around these qualities, and the questions and assumptions they imply:

Question 1: What is a Self?
Reflexivity – we are the object of our own awareness
1. Is the self a concept? Models of the Self
2. Is the self a dialogue? Facets and Temporality
3. Is the self knowable? Biases and Breakdowns

Question 2: How does a Self function?
Constancy – we maintain and protect a sense of self over time
4. What am I without a narrative? The Role of Memory
5. What am I without my desires? Self-Regulation and the Body

Relativity – we develop and are shaped through others
6. How do I know that I am not you? Development of the Self
7. How do the people I am close to shape me? Social Construction of the Self
8. How does my culture affect me?
   a. Patterns of Identity: Culture
   b. Patterns of Identity: Personal Transformations

The primary objective of the course is to think through and discuss these questions and assumptions and for you to come away with an informed opinion about each of them. The discussions will be based on readings, but the goal is to synthesize, to gain a meta-understanding of the positions and the problems they raise, and to practice, as a group, deconstructing and constructing the arguments that underpin these positions and problems.

These goals will be accomplished through participation in class discussion, your work on a couple of assignments, and, most substantively, in a substantive, original paper that you will work on all semester. I anticipate that you will: 1) gain an understanding of selective but central concepts in defining self and identity; 2) develop expertise in a specific domain of interest related to self and identity; 3) explore new theoretical and/or research ideas; 4) improve your scholarly writing skills; 5) gain experience reviewing papers; and 6) gain experience revising manuscripts and “submitting” them.
Grading

There will be three components to your final grade:
1) participation, including a “seed” question to be turned in (days to be assigned): 25% of final
2) three manuscript-review assignments: 25% of final
3) your paper, including one mandatory draft, a second recommended draft, and the final paper: 50% of final

Participation
This is a discussion-based course. Attendance is mandatory.

For each substantive session of the course, several students will be asked to come prepared with a “seed” question that they will turn in. The “seed” question should reflect key themes in the readings for that week and be designed to prompt discussion. It should not be a question about the specifics of a particular reading: We will discuss each reading, but the purpose of the discussion is not to review them (everyone will have already read them). The purpose is to articulate the central idea of the argument/finding and then discuss its internal consistency, psychological appeal, ability to account for data and stimulate new research, and its connection to the questions and themes of the course.

Good participation is defined as appropriately frequent, thoughtful, and considerate contribution to the discussion. Contribution includes, of course, presentation of your thoughts. Evidence of good listening, though, is equally important, and will be clear in your responses to others. With this emphasis on consideration duly stated, note that this course is a sanctioned arena for exploration of interesting new ideas. You should not be afraid to betray your ignorance, express your enthusiasms, and share your likes and dislikes. All kinds of ideas can be expressed in class and many angles, including some seemingly irreverent ones, are at times appropriate.

Review Assignments
The art and skill involved in writing a good review is one worth practicing; thinking deeply about and having to articulate what works and doesn’t in a paper will help you to think critically about your own work and the work of others. You will do 3 reviews for this class. I will provide you with a handout outlining the typical structure for a review, some pointers for writing one, and examples of unhelpful reviews and helpful reviews that I’ve received when submitting a manuscript for publication.

The first review assignment, early in the semester, will involve looking at an already published paper of your choice, but related (surprise) to issues of self and identity. You should choose a paper that seems interesting to you and relevant to the topic you are considering for your own paper. The second and third review assignments will involve providing reviews to your peers on drafts of their papers. We will discuss in class the logistics of the peer-reviews.

Papers
The bulk of your “output” for this course is writing a scholarly paper. In keeping with the practices of psychological science, your paper will be peer-reviewed (see above), and receive a final evaluation (a grade, but also the equivalent of a “not publishable,” “revise and resubmit,” or “publishable with minor revisions”). The paper should represent an original idea, related to aspects of self and identity. Ideally, it will eventually be suitable for publication (e.g., in the journal Self & Identity, as a collected set of student essays, or on-line). Early in the semester I will ask you to “commit” to a topic (one of the topics of the course), and then to propose a question within that topic.

The paper should fit one of three forms. 1) An argument with full literature review, (2) An argument with brief literature review and well developed proposal for a study, or (3) An analysis of archival data with supporting argument and literature review. We will talk more about these options in class.
I subscribe to the philosophy that significant intellectual “projects,” of which this paper is an example, are best done with lots of emphasis on editing and re-thinking over time, with the aid of “dialogue” with others and yourself. Therefore, the first draft, although early in the semester, should be relatively complete—all the “pieces” should be there. Your second draft, for those of you who choose to do one, will be a revised, not new, and more complete paper that addresses the feedback you receive from your reviewers (peer reviews and my comments). Whether or not you complete a second draft you should meet at least once with me to talk through the ideas you are working on. Your final draft should be a clear distillation of your original idea, well-articulated, contextually situated in the relevant literature, and conveying the significance of your thesis in the “real” world.”

### Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Material assigned/optional movies</th>
<th>To turn in</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/22</td>
<td>Introduction 1: Portraits of Self Images &amp; William James excerpt (provided in class)</td>
<td>Lottery information (if necessary)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/29</td>
<td>Introduction 2: Big Terms and Papers Baumeister’s 1998 overview, divided up and assigned to groups</td>
<td>Proposed Topic Area, seed question sign-up and groups formed (in class)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/6</td>
<td>Models of the Self See reading list, The Talented Mr. Ripley</td>
<td>Review #1</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/13</td>
<td>Facets and Temporality See reading list, Adaptation</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/20</td>
<td>Biases and Breakdowns See reading list, The Spanish Prisoner</td>
<td>Abstract, Outline, and Annotated Bibliography</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/27</td>
<td>Role of Memory See reading list, Memento</td>
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<td>11/3</td>
<td>Self-regulation and the Body See reading list, The Invisible Man</td>
<td>First Draft</td>
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<td>11/10</td>
<td>Development of the Self See reading list, The Boy Who Could Fly</td>
<td>Review #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/17</td>
<td>Social Construction of the Self See reading list, one of the “Up Series” documentaries</td>
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<td>11/24</td>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/1</td>
<td>Patterns of Identity 1: Culture See reading list, Do the Right Thing</td>
<td>Second Draft</td>
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<td>12/8</td>
<td>Patterns of Identity 2: Personal Transformation See reading list, Mean Girls</td>
<td>Review #3</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/15</td>
<td>Summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/6</td>
<td>Final Paper Due</td>
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Reading List

9/22 Introduction 1: Portraits of Self

9/29 Introduction 2: Big Terms and Papers

10/6 Is the self a concept? Models of the Self
Baars, B. J. (1988). Self as the dominant context of experience and action. *A Cognitive Theory of Consciousness. Chapter 9, also Figure 2.3*, p. 88.

10/13: Is the self a dialogue? Facets and Temporality

10/20: Is the self knowable? Biases and Breakdowns
10/27: What am I without a narrative? The Role of Memory


*Note how this and the previous article are related to one another – don’t get bogged down in details.*


11/3: What am I without my desires? Self-regulation and the Body


11/10: How do I know that I am not you? Development of the Self


11/17: How do the people I am close to shape me? Social Construction of the Self


12/1: Patterns of Identity 1: Culture


Cohen, D., & Gunz, A. (2002). As seen by the other….: Perspectives on the self in the memories and emotional perceptions of Easterners and Westerners. *Psychological Science, 13*, 1, 55-59. [Downloadable.](#)


12/8: Patterns of Identity 2: Personal Transformations


**Notes about the readings**

(1) I suggest you read the readings in the order they are listed.

(2) I’ve noticed that the best discussions take place when readings have not been read passively, or with a dismissive attitude, or by being dissuaded or bogged down by jargon, citations, or statistics, but instead with an active, curious, approach that has a bottom-line (“what are they really saying here?”).

(3) All of the readings will be available to be photocopied in a box in the Social Relations Library. **DO NOT REMOVE THESE COPIES.**