

HON: Psychology of the Self

NPCs and Main Characters: The Psychology of the Self from Buddha to BeReal

Fall 2026

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Office: A201, Psychology A Building

Office Hours: F 3:00–4:00 PM or by appointment

Meeting Time: TR 6:35–7:50 PM | Location: HSF 2008

Course Description

Do you have main character energy? This course bridges psychology, philosophy, and media studies to examine identity performance. Students analyze competing frameworks to understand what it means to “be yourself” amidst challenges like performative behavior on social media, deepfakes, and the rise of artificial intelligence. Students will translate identity research into a communication tool that helps incoming FSU students navigate the psychological challenges of university life.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Integrate concepts from psychology, philosophy, sociology, and media studies to construct nuanced definitions of selfhood and identity.
2. Evaluate the social mechanisms behind modern identity phenomena, like code-switching and online profile curation.
3. Examine how today’s rising technologies (e.g., social media algorithms, artificial intelligence) influence or constrain human personality and agency.
4. Create accessible resources (e.g., podcasts, guides) that apply course theories to the real-world challenges of the college transition.

Required Materials

There are no required textbook purchases for this course. All readings and materials will be made available on Canvas.

Succeeding in This Course

Teaching Philosophy

As your instructor, I am here to support your learning; I sincerely want you to succeed in this class. More than that, I hope you leave this semester with a deeper appreciation for the questions we address and a stronger desire to continue learning and thinking in the future.

The working assumption in this course is that students are inquisitive and self-directed learners. The student-instructor relationship is construed as a partnership: I will work to cultivate active learning opportunities rather than merely impart knowledge. Students will get more out of this course if they focus on learning for its own sake rather than checking off boxes en route to earning a degree. I will do all that I can to support your learning, but it is incumbent upon students to ask questions if expectations become unclear.

Communication

Our main channel of communication outside of class will be email. I will try to reply to all emails within 24 hours during the workweek. An email sent Friday may not receive a response until

Monday. If your question is relevant to the entire class, I may answer it through a Canvas announcement rather than by individual email. If you don't hear back from me in 24 hours, please feel free to send a reminder.

Class Preparation

Much of the learning in this class will come from careful engagement with the assigned materials. You will encounter a variety of source types: philosophical texts, empirical research articles, popular press pieces, and videos. In each case, train yourself to identify the core argument. What point is the author trying to convey? How does it relate to other materials we have encountered? Remember that assigned readings are to be completed by the date indicated on the course schedule. Bring questions about material you don't understand to class.

Electronic Devices

Laptops/tablets may be used if they assist the student in discussion (e.g., if a student has annotations on a PDF). Phones should not be used in class and their use may impact your participation grade.

Class Contact

Please exchange contact information with a classmate to serve as a resource if you are absent. I am happy to discuss course materials during office hours, but it is impossible to recap all that happens during class meetings.

Discussion Guidelines

This course will include a significant amount of class discussion, and everyone is expected to maintain a certain level of decorum. Some things to keep in mind:

1. It is OK to be wrong and make mistakes. This is how you learn.
2. Education is a marketplace of ideas and works best in an open exchange. Prepare to have your ideas challenged and be prepared to challenge the ideas of others.
3. Arguments should be based on reason and evidence.

Discussion will take place both as a full class and in small groups.

Recording

I'm a graduate student instructor, and as part of preparing for the academic job market I would like to record our class sessions to assemble a teaching demonstration video. The purpose is to document how I teach, so the camera will be pointed at me, not at you. Even so, your voice and possibly your image may be captured incidentally.

Florida State requires your written consent before any recording takes place. You will receive a consent form on the first day of class. **Consent is entirely voluntary and has no effect on your grade, your participation evaluation, or anything else in this course.** You may revoke it at any time, for any reason, by telling me, no explanation needed, and I will not use any footage in which your image or voice appears. The finished video will remain in my possession,

will be used only for job applications and teaching portfolio purposes, and will not be posted publicly. Mid-semester elevator pitches and end-of-semester presentations will not be recorded.

Assessment

Assignment	Weight	Due
Attendance	10%	Ongoing
Participation	10%	Ongoing
Reading Responses	15%	Ongoing
Code-Switching Tracker	10%	9/29
Media Fast Reflection	10%	10/20
Final Project Prospectus	5%	10/22
Awe Journal	10%	11/19
Final Project Artifact	20%	12/1
Final Project Reflection	10%	12/1

Engagement (35%)

Attendance (10%) & Participation (10%)

Attendance. This course is built on discussion, so your active presence at all class sessions is expected. At the end of every class, you will turn in an exit slip containing your name and your answer to the daily question posted on the board at the end of the class session. Turning in your exit slip is worth one attendance point, and **your three lowest attendance scores are automatically dropped.** These are your three free absences, no explanation needed.

Documented excused absences (see University Attendance Policy below) are excused from the calculation entirely and do not consume your three drops.

Participation. Your participation grade is not just “how much did I talk in class.” A thoughtful exit slip response, contributing meaningfully in small-group discussions, and bringing a question to office hours can all count as participation. That said, you should not worry too much about your participation grade. If you make a good-faith effort to contribute in multiple ways over the course of the semester, you can likely feel good about your participation grade. I will upload mid-semester and end-of-semester participation grades for all students.

Participation Rubric (50 points per checkpoint)

46–50 (Very Strong): Your contributions make the discussion better. You engage specific passages rather than general impressions, and you build on, or otherwise genuinely respond to, what classmates have said. You leave room for others, meaning that when you notice you’ve spoken several times running, you hold back so someone else can enter. In small groups you draw quieter members in.

41–45 (Strong): You contribute regularly and with evident preparation, though your comments sometimes stay at the level of reaction rather than engaging the text closely, or connect less often to what others have said.

36–40 (Adequate): You contribute occasionally, often when directly prompted. Preparation is uneven. You may be present and cooperative in small groups but rarely drive them.

30–35 (Minimal): You may rarely speak, in either the full class or small groups. Little evidence of engagement with assigned material.

Below 30 (Insufficient): Consistently disengaged, unprepared, or disruptive to others' learning.

Reading Responses (15%)

There are 12 reading response exercises, and your lowest two scores will be dropped. These assignments are designed to keep you engaged with the material between class sessions and to provide opportunities to practice the analytical skills assessed in larger assignments. The first reading response exercise is due at 12 pm on Thursday, August 27, and each subsequent exercise will likewise be due on Thursday at noon. The one exception to this rule is the final reading exercise, which will be due on Tuesday, November 10, at noon.

Reflective Assignments (30%)

Each reflective assignment calls for the curation of a week-long journal or log. You'll keep the journal/log for yourself; only the reflection is submitted. The log is what makes a good reflection possible, so keep it honestly, but I don't collect it.

Code-Switching Tracker (10%)

For one week, students will keep a log of their own code-switching behavior: moments where they shift how they talk, dress, or present themselves between different social contexts. Students will attempt to record at least two instances per day, noting the context, what shifted, and whether the switch felt voluntary or automatic. A brief written reflection (500–750 words) accompanies the log.

Media Fast (10%)

For one week, we will reduce our media consumption and remove the algorithm from our lives. Our goal is to abstain from media to understand its psychological grip on our sense of self. Over the course of the week, students will fill out a reflection log to track their withdrawal symptoms, boredom levels, and changes in social interaction. Students will be encouraged to eliminate their social media use altogether for the week, but if that feels unreasonable or infeasible, they may set a limit (e.g., 30 minutes per day). If a student does not use social media, they may choose to limit their consumption of another kind of media (e.g., YouTube, podcasts, news sites). I will participate in the project alongside students. A brief written reflection (500–750 words) accompanies the log.

Awe Journal (10%)

For one week, students will journal about moments when they experience awe. Each entry should describe the trigger and the response (e.g., emotional, physiological, spiritual). Guided

instructions for cultivating and noticing awe will be provided on Canvas. A brief written reflection (500–750 words) accompanies the journal.

Reflective Assignment Rubric (100 points)

Theoretical engagement (60 pts). The reflection uses at least one specific course concept to interpret what you observed. This doesn't mean adding concepts for the sake of adding them but instead applying a framework where it's actually relevant and seeing what it reveals or fails to reveal.

Quality of observation (30 pts). The reflection is grounded in specific, concrete moments from your own log rather than generalities about how the week went. Details that are boring or inconsistent with theories from class are still welcome. Don't write what you think the assignment should include; instead, write what you actually noticed.

Care in execution (10 pts). Meets the 500–750 word range, proofread.

These assignments are first-person accounts of your own experience. Generative AI may not be used for any part of them, including the reflection.

Final Project and Prospectus (35%)

Final Project Prospectus (5%)

A written proposal (500–750 words) accompanied by a brief elevator pitch in class. Student pairs will identify a challenge associated with the transition to college and connect it to relevant theory or science from the course. The prospectus will also provide a clear picture of the format for the pair's communication tool and a justification for why that format is well-suited to the topic and audience. Students may select from a list of common challenges on Canvas or propose their own topic with instructor approval. This is a joint assignment, so both students in a pair receive the same grade.

Final Project (30%)

The capstone of the course. Student pairs will produce a communication tool that translates course theory into an accessible resource for incoming FSU students. Pairs are self-selected and must be finalized by 10/8. Each pair will present their project during the final two class sessions (roughly 7 minutes per presentation, followed by 2–3 minutes of Q&A).

The final project has two components:

The Artifact (20%). The communication tool itself, in whatever format the pair has chosen. The artifact should demonstrate genuine engagement with course material, be clearly designed for its intended audience, and reflect care in its execution.

Both members of a pair receive the same score on the artifact. If a partnership is not working (e.g., if your partner has become unresponsive or is not contributing), contact me **as soon as it becomes a problem, not at the deadline**. I can restructure the project's scope, reassign, or make other arrangements if I know in time. There is very little I can do about it on December 1st.

The Reflection (10%). Each student will individually submit a short written reflection (750–1000 words) explaining the theoretical foundations of the project, the reasoning behind the chosen format, and the pair’s creative decisions. This reflection is submitted individually, not as a pair, so that each student demonstrates their own understanding of the course material. The reflection should address the following: What challenge did you identify, and why does it matter? Which course frameworks did you draw on, and how do they illuminate the problem? Why did you choose this particular format, and how does it serve your intended audience? What did you learn through the process of making this project?

Possible Formats

Students are encouraged to choose a format that plays to their strengths and fits their topic. The following list is meant to inspire, not constrain—if you have an idea not listed here, pitch it in your prospectus.

Audio: podcast episode (interview, narrative, or explainer format); guided meditation or mindfulness audio; scripted radio drama; playlist with liner notes explaining the curation.

Video: short documentary; explainer video or YouTube-style video essay; animated video (hand-drawn, whiteboard, or digital); TikTok series or short-form vertical video series; mockumentary or scripted short film.

Written / Long-form: zine; magazine-style article or feature; op-ed or essay for a student publication; short story or creative fiction that dramatizes the psychological concepts; letter written to a future or past self; illustrated children’s book (with an adult subject).

Visual / Graphic: illustrated guide or booklet; infographic or poster series; comic strip or graphic narrative; photography series with explanatory captions; illustrated journal or workbook with prompts.

Interactive / Digital: website or landing page; interactive quiz or self-assessment tool; slide deck designed as a standalone navigable resource; digital story map; choose-your-own-path narrative (Twine or similar).

Physical / Tactile: card deck (reflection prompts, coping strategies, etc.); board game or tabletop game; physical workbook or journal; poster or wall art designed for a residence hall.

Performance / Event-based: workshop curriculum (submitted as materials and facilitator guide); lesson plan designed for an orientation or first-year seminar; stand-up set or spoken word piece (submitted as script and recording); monologue.

Hybrid / Unconventional: newsletter (designed as an ongoing resource, submitted as 2–3 issues); Instagram or social media content series (submitted as designed mockups or actual posts); museum-style exhibit (physical or digital) with interpretive labels; annotated playlist with accompanying essay.

Final Project Evaluation Criteria

The final project will be evaluated holistically according to the following criteria. These criteria apply equally to all formats. The criteria describe the project as a whole (artifact, reflection, and

presentation). The artifact score includes the presentation. The reflection is scored against the same criteria individually.

The Superior Project (A/A-)

The project identifies a specific, well-defined challenge of the college transition and connects it to course material in a way that demonstrates genuine intellectual engagement. Multiple theoretical frameworks are applied to illuminate the problem rather than simple surface-level summary. The analytical reflection articulates a clear argument about why the chosen frameworks matter for this challenge, and the reasoning is persuasive. The chosen format is well-suited to the content and audience, and the pair can articulate why this format serves the project better than alternatives would. The artifact itself is clearly designed for its intended audience: an incoming FSU student encountering this resource would find it accessible and genuinely useful. The pair has executed the project with evident care and attention to detail. The work reflects thinking that has deepened over the course of the semester, not just material recited from early weeks. The presentation demonstrates command of the material and invites thoughtful questions from the class.

The Good Project (B+/B)

The project identifies a relevant challenge and connects it to course material, but the theoretical application may be somewhat surface level. The pair demonstrates understanding of the frameworks but may not push beyond straightforward application. The analytical reflection is competent but may lack a strong argumentative thread or rely on summarizing theory rather than using it. The format is reasonable for the topic, though the pair may not have fully exploited the possibilities of their chosen medium. The artifact is functional and reasonably well-suited to its audience, though it may have rough edges that occasionally distract from the content. Execution is solid but uneven in places. The presentation communicates the project clearly but may not generate deep discussion.

The Borderline Project (B-/C+)

The project addresses a challenge associated with college life, but the connection to course material feels thin or forced. Frameworks may be name-dropped rather than genuinely applied. The analytical reflection may lack coherence or read more as summary than analysis. The relationship between the chosen format and the content is unclear or unconvincing. The artifact's usefulness to the intended audience is questionable: it may be too abstract or insufficiently developed for a first-year student to benefit from it. Execution shows uneven effort, with some elements polished and others clearly rushed. The presentation covers the basics but does not demonstrate deep familiarity with the underlying material.

The Needs Help Project (C/C-)

The project is complete but demonstrates minimal engagement with course material. The challenge identified may be vague or generic, and the theoretical connections are superficial at best. The analytical reflection is brief, underdeveloped, or largely disconnected from the artifact. The format choice appears arbitrary, with no clear rationale for why this medium serves this topic. The artifact does not function well as a resource—it may be unclear in its purpose,

inaccessible to its intended audience, or poorly executed. The presentation suggests that the pair did not invest significant time or thought into the project.

The Unsatisfactory Project (D/F)

The project is incomplete, incoherent, or shows no meaningful engagement with the course. The analytical reflection is missing or perfunctory. The artifact does not function as a communication tool. Little to no preparation is evident in the presentation.

Grading Scale

A (93.0–100) | A- (90.0–92.99) | B+ (87.0–89.99) | B (83.0–86.99) | B- (80.0–82.99) | C+ (77.0–79.99) | C (73.0–76.99) | C- (70.0–72.99) | D+ (67.0–69.99) | D (63.0–66.99) | D- (60.0–62.99) | F (below 60.0)

All assignments will be graded on a numerical scale, with no rounding.

Late Work

Late assignments will not be accepted without documentation from Case Management and/or medical documentation showing that the student was unable to complete schoolwork for at least one week. If you anticipate being unable to complete work in time (for example, because of an upcoming surgery or other unavoidable conflict), let me know as soon as you can. I can offer more flexibility when you come to me before the deadline has passed.

Academic Misconduct

I encourage you to study and discuss in groups, but any work you submit for this course must be your own. Any form of plagiarism or cheating will not be tolerated. If you attempt any kind of academic dishonesty and I catch you, you will automatically fail the assignment and the Academic Honor Policy process will be initiated.

Artificial Intelligence in This Course

The use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, etc.) is permitted in this course for brainstorming, refining your ideas, checking grammar and style, and acting as a reading scaffold for dense texts.

My goal in this class is to facilitate rich discussion on both classic and contemporary perspectives on selfhood. My goal is not to sort the class into people who understood the primary text and those who got lost. I welcome the tools that level the playing field to make that discussion possible.

There will be times when we use very old or dense texts in class. Use AI as a reading scaffold according to these guidelines:

1. **Grapple first.** You should always make an initial, honest effort to read primary sources.

2. **Translate, don't summarize.** However, sometimes, you may find it helpful to translate some passages into modern English. You may do so by copy-pasting a passage (a few paragraphs at a time) into an LLM and asking for a re-write that uses clear, modern language without losing the author's argument. An example prompt could be: "Translate this passage into clear, modern English sentence-by-sentence without losing the core argument or technical precision." Do *not* simply ask for a summary; when text is simplified, too much nuance is often lost.
3. **Cross-reference the output.** If you do use AI for a re-write of a passage, you should compare each sentence of the AI's output to the primary source material. This will ensure the tool hasn't subtly distorted the author's meaning while helping you better understand the original material.

The use of generative AI tools is not permitted for generating drafts of writing assignments, writing entire sentences, paragraphs, or papers to complete class assignments, or impersonating you in classroom contexts.

When in doubt about permitted usage, please ask for clarification.

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change with advance notice. All readings and materials will be posted on Canvas.

Date	Topic	Preparation	Organizing Question	Due
Unit 1: What is the Self?				
8/25	Syllabus & Introductions	Syllabus		
8/27	Hume	Treatise of Human Nature, Book 1, Part 4, Section 6 Sam Harris video	Is there a self that really exists? David Hume says no.	
9/1	Harry Frankfurt	Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person	Suppose Hume is wrong. What would a real self have to look like?	
9/3	Sartre	Existentialism is a Humanism	Are we responsible for creating ourselves?	
Unit 2: How is the Self Constructed?				
9/8	Evolutionary Perspectives on the Self	Leary, 2012 Kenrick et al., 2010 (pp. 297–298) Krems et al., 2017	Is the self a product of natural selection?	
9/10	Self-Actualization	Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person, ch. 8–9	Do evolutionary psychologists miss something about self-actualization?	
9/15	Emotional Labor and the Connection to Self	Arlie Hochschild, The Managed Heart, chs. 3, 9	How is identity performed?	
9/17	Double Consciousness	The Souls of Black Folk, Ch. 1 The Costs of Code-Switching, HBR	What happens when performance is compelled by society?	Code-Switching Tracker assignment begins
9/22	Gender as a Verb	Martin & Slepian, 2021 Optional: “Why Taking Gender Out of the Equation Is So Difficult”	How is identity shaped by perception itself?	
9/24	Cultural Perspectives on the Self	M Markus & Kitayama, 2010	How does culture affect our sense of self and identity?	Code-Switching tracker assignment ends
9/29	The Moral Self	Haidt, 2007	To whom does the self belong? How do our moral intuitions reveal whether we see the self as independent or interdependent, as belonging to the individual or to the group?	Code-Switching Tracker due
10/1	The Narrative Self	McAdams, 2001	How do the stories we tell ourselves create our sense of identity?	
10/6	The Relational Self	Slotter et al., 2010 Optional: Larson & Sbarra, 2015	What happens to our sense of identity when we break up with someone?	Mid-semester participation grades entered
Unit 3: How is the Self Challenged?				
10/8	Postman	Amusing Ourselves to Death, ch. 1 & 2 In class: Discuss the experiential log, parameters, and questions; media audit	How do technology and media combine with culture to shape the self?	Media Fast begins; Student pairs formed by this date
10/13	Postman	Amusing Ourselves to Death, ch. 4, 7, 11	Continues from 10/8	

10/15	Media Fast Reflections + Evolutionary Mismatch Theory	Li et al., 2018	What happens when evolved adaptations collide with modern environments?	Media Fast ends
10/20	Artificial Intelligence and the Self	"What is Claude?" (New Yorker) Hass et al., 2026 The Conversation (two very short articles)	Postman didn't live to see artificial intelligence. What would he say about public discourse and selfhood in the AI era?	Media Fast Reflection due
10/22	Pride	Mere Christianity, Book III, ch. 8	Pride is a "self-conscious emotion." Does pride challenge our ability to accurately know ourselves?	Prospectus
Unit 4: How is the Self Cultivated?				
10/27	Ralph Waldo Emerson	Self-Reliance	Does society make it harder for us to become ourselves?	
10/29	Aristotle	Selections from the Nicomachean Ethics	Is the self to be found in pursuing virtue?	
11/3	Jung, Part 1	Jung's Map of the Soul, ch. 5, 6 (select passages)	What does Jung think we are hiding from ourselves?	
11/5	Jung, Part 2	Jung's Map of the Soul, ch. 7, 8 (select passages)	Continues from 11/3	
11/10	Self-Transcendent Emotions (Awe and Humility)	Keltner & Haidt, 2003 Tangney, 2000 Optional reading: Shiota et al., 2007	Is the purpose of life just about forgetting the self, over and over?	Awe Journal begins
11/12	Flex Day	Reserved for schedule disruption; if unused, we will revisit favorite topics or discuss secondary readings		
11/17	Flex Day	Reserved for schedule disruption; if unused, we will revisit favorite topics or discuss secondary readings		Awe Journal ends
11/19	Course Reflection	Review previous readings and videos		Awe Journal due
11/24	Final Project Workshop			
11/26	Thanksgiving — No Class			
12/1	Presentations			Final Project
12/3	Presentations			End-of-Semester participation grades entered

Note: Specific readings, videos, and (when necessary) preparation instructions for each session will be posted on the corresponding Canvas module. The organizing questions above are designed to guide your reading and frame our class discussions.

University Policies

University Attendance Policy

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

Academic Honor Policy

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "be honest and truthful and strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University."

Americans with Disabilities Act

Florida State University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities in a manner that is consistent with academic standards of the course while empowering the student to meet integral requirements of the course. Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services; (2) request a letter to be sent to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type; and (3) meet with the instructor to review approved accommodations. Instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations until appropriate verification from the Office of Accessibility Services has been provided.

Office of Accessibility Services

874 Traditions Way, 108 Student Services Building

Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167

(850) 644-9566 (voice) | (850) 644-8504 (TDD)

oas@fsu.edu | <https://dsst.fsu.edu/oas>

Academic Success

Your academic success is a top priority for Florida State University. University resources to help you succeed include tutoring centers, computer labs, counseling and health services, and services for designated groups, such as veterans and students with disabilities. Please check with your advisor or the Department of Student Support and Transitions to learn more.

Confidential Campus Resources

Various centers and programs are available to assist students with navigating stressors that might impact academic success:

Victim Advocate Program: University Center A, Rm. 4100 | (850) 644-7161 | Available 24/7/365 | <https://dsst.fsu.edu/vap>

Counseling and Psychological Services: Askew Student Life Center, 2nd Floor, 942 Learning Way | (850) 644-8255 | <https://counseling.fsu.edu/>

University Health Services: Health and Wellness Center | (850) 644-6230 | <https://uhs.fsu.edu/>

Syllabus Change Policy

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the grading statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.