

Essay Guidance

You are not being asked to write an essay about every theory of the self.

You are being asked to explain and evaluate how **social identity develops**, and whether that development is best explained by universal psychological mechanisms, cultural influences, or an interaction of both.

Identity (Broad Concept)

Identity refers to a person's overall sense of who they are.

It includes:

- Personal characteristics (e.g., kind, ambitious, intelligent)
- Life experiences
- Personal values and beliefs
- Individual goals and aspirations
- Group memberships

Identity is the answer to "Who am I?"

This broader identity includes both **personal** and **social** aspects.

Social Identity (Specific Concept)

Social identity refers specifically to the part of the self that comes from membership of social groups.

According to Tajfel and Turner:

Social identity is the part of an individual's self-concept derived from their membership in social groups and the value and emotional significance attached to those memberships.

Examples:

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Nationality
- Religion
- Political groups
- University affiliation
- Sports teams
- Occupation

These identities arise because people categorise themselves as members of groups.

The first half of 'The Self' lecture largely explores identity more broadly and focuses on understanding the self as an individual person.

The essay, however, is specifically interested in social identity, meaning the aspects of identity that arise from belonging to social groups.

Most relevant for the essay

- Social Identity Theory (Slides 17-23)
- Self-Categorisation Theory (Slide 24)
- Self-Concept (Slide 14)
- Culture & The Self (Slides 26-28)
- Contextual Identity (Slide 29)
- Intersectionality (Slide 31)
- Identity and Power (Slide 32)

Key focus of the essay

"How does social identity develop?"

- Universal psychological processes? For example:
 - Categorisation
 - Identification
 - Social comparison
- Cultural and social influences? For example:
 - Culture
 - Social norms
 - Group memberships
 - Social context
 - Power structures
- Or both?

Can you talk about self-concept?

Yes, but briefly.

You could define identity by distinguishing between personal identity and social identity, and briefly discuss self-concept. However, most of your essay should focus on social identity processes rather than broader theories of the self.

Can you use the first half of the lecture?

Only where it helps build the argument. Do not spend too much time/wordcount on this, as it does not answer the question. For example:

- Looking Glass Self - identity develops through interaction with others.
- Self-concept - identity is part of how we understand ourselves.
- Self-discrepancy - social and cultural expectations shape identity.

These should be supporting points rather than main sections.

Essay Focus

Universal Psychological Processes. Think about one/some of these:

- Social Identity Theory
- Minimal Group Paradigm
- Self-Categorisation Theory
- Social comparison
- Evidence that group processes emerge across contexts

Cultural and Social Contexts. Think about some of these:

- Markus & Kitayama
- Independent vs interdependent self-construals
- Cross-cultural research
- Contextual identity
- Culture and socialisation

Contemporary Perspectives. Think about some of these:

- Intersectionality
- Multiple identities
- Online identities
- Identity and power
- Limitations of universal theories

Strong conclusion that answers the essay question!