



Reclaiming Africa's Intellectual Futures

Develop a sense of self

Directorate Counselling and Career Development

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Define tomorrow.



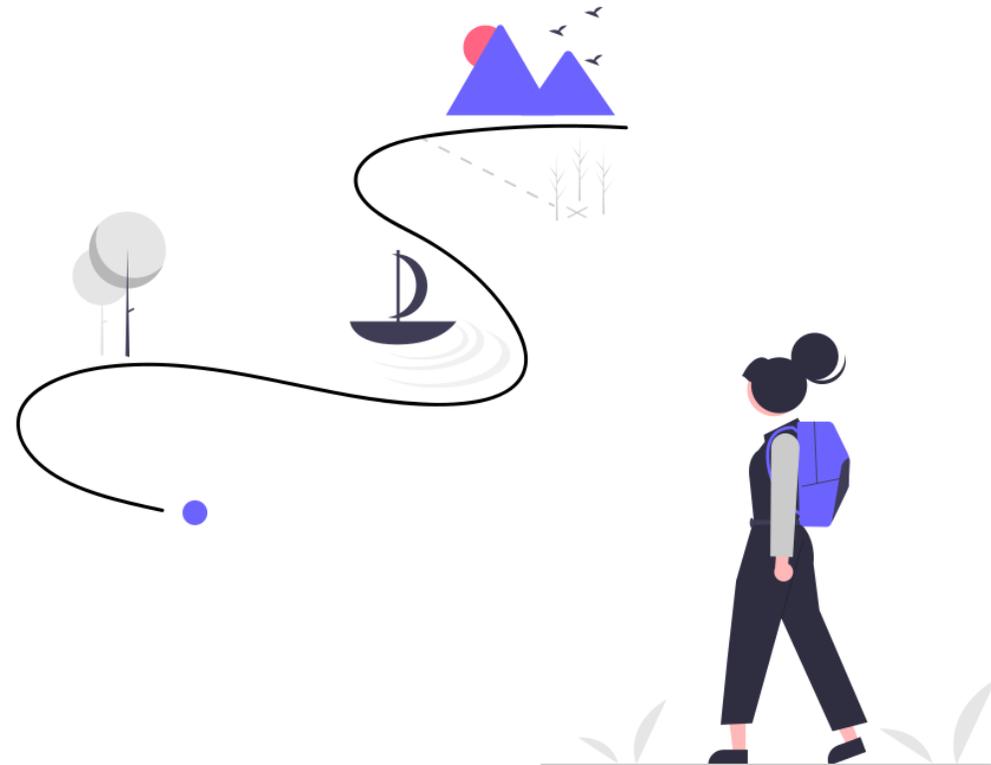
In this presentation

What is a sense of self?

Where does our sense of self come from?

Why is it important to have a sense of self?

How to develop a strong sense of self and healthy boundaries



What is a sense of self?

Views about your traits, beliefs and purpose

Begs answers to questions like, who am I? What are my values/beliefs?

When you have a strong sense of self then you know your goals/ values/ ideals

What is a sense of self?

Linked to a personal identity, self-esteem and self-efficacy

Also linked to self-concept: “What do I think about myself?”, “How do I perceive myself?”

Physical, social, relational (boundary setting) or spiritual aspects

Develops over time as we engage with the world around us and receive feedback from the world

Unisa context: career choice; academic achievement; developing a side hustle; applying for and keeping a job?

Psychological explanations for where our “self” comes from

Theorist	Theoretical focus
Psychosocial Theory (Freud)	Personality and sexual development are closely linked.
Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky)	Parents, caregivers, peers, and the culture at large are responsible for developing higher-order functions. According to Vygotsky, learning has its basis in interacting with other people.
Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura)	Social behavior is learned by observing and imitating the behavior of others.
Social constructivist/narrative Theory	Our language and meaning-making forms and structures our self, identity and the other.
Psychosocial development theory (Erikson's)	Personality develops in a predetermined order through eight stages of psychosocial development, from infancy to adulthood. During each stage, the person experiences a psychosocial crisis which could positively or negatively affect personality development.
Bowlby's Attachment Theory	Children come into the world biologically pre-programmed to form attachments with others, which will help them survive. A child has an innate (i.e. inborn) need to attach to one main attachment figure.

Reflection

Which theory would be most suitable in the SA context?

How does Unisa contribute to your development of self?

What is the role of culture in development of self?

What role does loss/ trauma play in developing a sense of self?

How did parenting impact on your sense of self?



What role does ill health play in development of the self?

How supportive was your environment growing up in developing a sense of self?

Warning signs: “Losing yourself”

Losing your sense of self in a romantic relationship

Co-dependent tendencies – your happiness depends on that of others

Enmeshment – hard to differentiate your thoughts/feelings from others (e.g. I want to be an accountant because my friend is an accountant)

Drift through life carried by other people’s circumstances without personal drive

Aimless and difficulty in setting goals

Group mentality

Inability to develop strong boundaries (energy loss)

Tend to be taken advantage of by others

Feel empty inside



The extreme

Issues related to personal identity, such as an unclear, frequently changing, or distorted self-image, can sometimes happen as a symptom of:

- Borderline personality disorder
- Histrionic personality disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Know when you need support



In the workplace

Highly differentiated individuals =
less job-related interpersonal stress

Differentiation of self = possible
protective factor that limits your
exposure to the more negative
aspects of the workplace, including
problematic relationships with co-
workers and supervisors.

Lack of differentiation of self = feel
constantly bombarded and stand
defenceless against the many
dysfunctional and often injurious
aspects of the workplace.



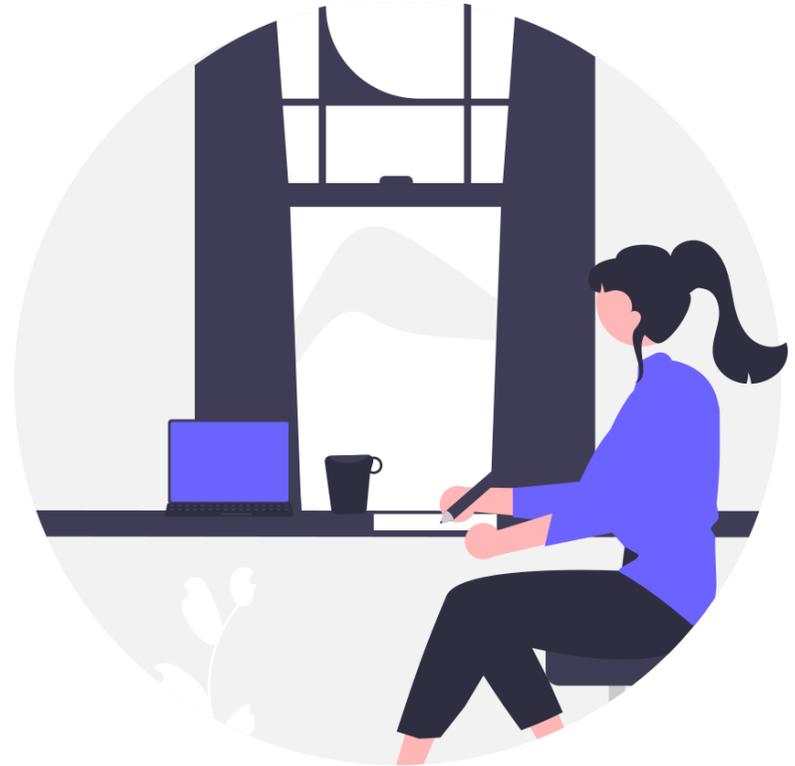
In the workplace

Differentiation of self benefits individuals in the workplace; it allows the individual to separate from the negative aspects of work by having a life outside work and not be enmeshed in its dysfunction.

Lack of autonomy at work means you may be more likely to become enmeshed and overinvolved with negative aspects of the workplace.

Differentiation of self allows you to “let in” the most positive aspects of the workplace while “keeping out” the more toxic elements.

If you are disengaged from your work OR enmeshed with your job you may feel greater dissatisfaction with your job.



Reflection

Do I:

often agree to make others happy?

find it easy to identify my strengths and maximise these?

know what brings me joy?

ensure my choices reflect my interests in studying with Unisa, not others

know who I am?

know what are my top five values and how these link to my qualification and future career?



feel that I changed over the past 5 years – am I becoming more of the person I wish to be?

understand my attachment style and how it plays out in relationships?

[Attachment Styles in Therapy: 6 Worksheets & Handouts \(positivepsychology.com\)](https://www.positivepsychology.com/attachment-styles-in-therapy-6-worksheets-and-handouts/)

Why spend time on your self?

Knowing who you are = living with purpose and meaning

Improved
differentiation =
effective coping
mechanism in
response to stress

Better psychological
adjustment

Healthier boundaries

Protect yourself

Manage your energy

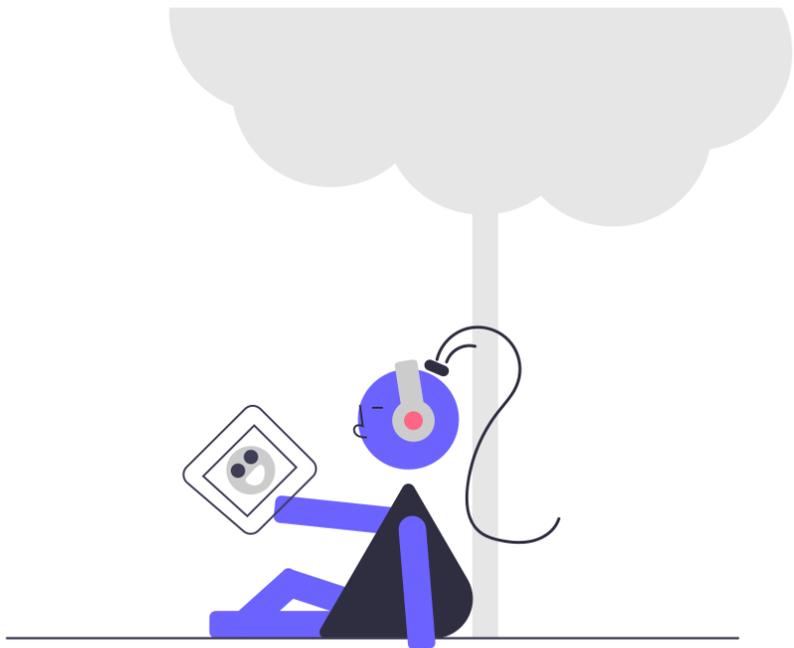
Live with passion
and drive

More focused

How to develop a strong sense of self



Develop healthy boundaries



- Listen to your gut – what is it telling you?
- You have the right to say no without feeling guilty.
- Practice assertiveness by using ‘I’ statements (www.therapistaid.com).
- Identify what needs to change and name your boundaries.
- Boundaries can be physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual & financial in nature
- Find ways to make your boundaries known and be clear and consistent about these.
- Reiterate and uphold your boundaries
- Be aware of others’ boundaries.

**Stay focused, no one said this
would be easy**



**Commit to living
differently to others**

Resources

South African Depression and Anxiety Group:

- PTSD resources

https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1818&Itemid=183#

- Borderline personality disorder resources

https://www.sadag.org/images/pdf/borderline_publication.pdf

<https://www.hopeforbpd.com/borderline-personality-disorder-treatment/self-help-bpd>

<https://www.borderlineintheact.org.au/living-with-bpd/bpd-diagnosis-and-traits/>

Histrionic resources:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/conditions/histrionic-personality-disorder>

References

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- [Sense of Self: What It Is and How to Build It \(healthline.com\)](https://www.healthline.com/health/sense-of-self#finding-support)
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- Differentiation of Self and Its Relation to Work Stress and Work Satisfaction <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jpoc.20092>
- Developmental Psychology by [Dr. Saul McLeod](#), updated 2017 <https://www.simplypsychology.org/developmental-psychology.html>
- Therapist Aid (2012). I statements worksheet "[I" Statements \(therapistaid.com\)](#)
- Positive Psychology.com (2023) [Attachment Styles in Therapy: 6 Worksheets & Handouts \(positivepsychology.com\)](#)

Contact us

- **E-mail to counselling@unisa.ac.za**
- **Online appointments on MSTeams:**
<https://bit.ly/DCCDbook>
- **Contact a counsellor at a regional office to make an appointment for counselling in person:**
<https://bit.ly/contactdccd>
- **Website: www.unisa.ac.za/counselling**
- **Youtube channel: www.youtube.com/unisacareers**