Author: Rusty Schnellinger, Kent State University

**Applying the Twenty Statements Test to Culture and Self-Concept**

**Abstract**

   This activity allows students to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the sociological understanding of the self through direct application of a classic sociological instrument. While the Twenty Statements Test instrument (Kuhn and McPartland 1954) is available to instructors online and is often used in introductory and upper-level sociology courses, this innovative activity provides a clear means through which instructors will effectively implement the tool in the classroom. Students evaluate and discuss their responses based on past empirical literature (Kuhn and McPartland 1954; Turner 1976). As many undergraduate students are being introduced to ideas of the self for the first time, it is important that students develop a working understanding of social psychological concepts from the sociological perspective as covered in introductory and upper-level courses. With classmates, students will work with theirs and each other's responses to reflect upon the nature of the self. In order to gain understanding of the construction of the self, students will organize responses according to past empirical literature, and compare and discuss responses in light of generational and cultural trends observed in the research base. The activity extends past uses of the Twenty Statements Test by teaching students to code and evaluate their responses in accordance with the methods of Kuhn and McPartland (1954), as well as Turner (1976). This process engages students with related sociological concepts to increase the effectiveness of the exercise. This activity is designed for classes of all sizes and can be incorporated in introductory courses, as well as upper-level social psychology courses.

**Notes**

   *Before incorporating this exercise into the course, students should be familiar with the idea of the self from the sociological perspective, and have a basic understanding of the symbolic interactionist perspective as a whole. This will differ among students because of educational background and the course level, but should still be covered and emphasized preceding the activity for maximum student engagement.*

   *Further, the Twenty Statements Test could be limited to fewer statements. The handout provided is consistent with the original instrument used by Kuhn and McPartland (1954). Reducing the number of statements required may save time, but could also detract from the value of the activity and overall student engagement with the concepts.*

**Goal 1**
 Students will develop understanding of self-concept from social psychological perspective.

**Assessment**
 In separate discussions in pairs or small groups, students will discuss their own responses and responses of others the Twenty Statements Test (TST) (Kuhn and McPartland 1954), identifying similarities between each other's responses. Understanding is also assessed through a minute paper written at the conclusion of the class meeting.


**Goal 2**
 Students will compare self-concepts between generations and between different cultures.

**Assessment**
 Students will code their responses to the Twenty Statements Test (TST) according to Turner's (1976) institutional and impulsive categories. Students will then discuss in pairs or in small groups their responses in light of these categories with regard to general and cultural implications as discussed by the instructor.


**Materials Needed:** Printed handouts, writing utensils


**Estimated Time:** 50-70 minutes, depending on level of depth of background lecture


**Procedure**
 Students can begin this exercise with varying degrees of familiarity regarding the self. Ideally, students at the introductory level will be familiar with the sociological imagination, as the activity emphasizes the construction of the self. Students in introductory as well as upper-level courses should have a basic understanding of self-concept and, ideally, symbolic interactionism. Prior to beginning the activity itself, the instructor should cover basic tenets of the interactionist perspective, either directly before the activity as a refresher, or in class meetings leading up to the activity. These concepts include construction of the self through interaction with others, the reflexive nature of the self, and the importance of role-taking in interaction. Students at the introductory level may need to be reminded that self-concept is distinct from self-esteem, since conflation of these terms seems to be an issue at the introductory level. Instructors should be familiar with the Twenty Statements Test (TST) and the surrounding literature regarding trends revealed in Turner's (1976) research on institutional and impulsive selves. This reveals generational differences in Americans constituting a shift from the former to the latter in orientation of the self-concept. Further, cross-cultural research has used the instrument in highlighting differences in self-concept between cultures and societies internationally. Together, this pool of literature provides an interesting and easily understood background that will help students tackle the notion of the social self and self-concept, often

confounded with other distinct sociological and social-psychological terms and ideas, especially at the introductory level.

*Part I (5-10 minutes): Handouts*

Pass out handouts of Twenty Statements Test. Read aloud the directions for responding to the test and instruct students to take their time in responding. Students should answer the question "Who am I?" alone. Remind students that this is part of an exercise and they will be sharing their responses with a partner. Reassure them that the test does not necessarily need to fully be completed, as students may express anxiety regarding writing in all of the blanks provided.

*Part II (15-30 minutes): Think-pair-share*

After giving students ample time to provide answers on the handout, instruct students to pair up with someone near them. Instruct students to share and discuss their responses to the handout using the following prompts:

- Do you notice any similarities between your responses?
- What seems to be different between your responses and those of your partner?
- What types of descriptions are more prominent for you? What about for your partner?

After giving students time to discuss these prompts with a partner, bring the class back together and ask students to share their information with the class, again using the above prompts

*Part III (10-15 minutes): Coding*

Briefly present and discuss Turner's (1976) research using the Twenty Statements Test instrument. This research finds generational differences between Americans, observing a shift from institutionally-oriented to impulse-oriented selves. Institutional responses indicate group membership (e.g., I am Catholic), while impulsive responses refer to individual states (e.g., I am smart). Instruct students to organize their own responses using these two categories, labeling each response.

*Part IV (10-15 minutes): Think-pair-share*

After giving students time to code and organize their initial responses as being institutionally or impulsively oriented, instruct them to return to their partnership to share and discuss their results, using the following prompts:

- What types of responses are more common among you and your partner?
- What seems to be different between your responses and those of your partner?
- What types of descriptions are more prominent for you? What about for your partner?
- Do you notice any patterns regarding the position of institutional and impulsive responses in each of your lists?

After giving students time to discuss these prompts with a partner, bring the class back together and ask students to share their information with the class, using the above prompts.

*Part V (10-15 minutes): Cross-cultural application*
        Briefly present and discuss the use of the Twenty Statements Test instrument in cross-cultural research (e.g., Bond and Cheung 1983). The instrument has been used in the past to gain understanding of self-concept in different cultures. Remind students that these findings serve to highlight the social construction of the self, as individuals within different cultures respond differently to the test. For example, family-oriented responses are commonly listed higher among respondents from the United States and China than those from Japan (Bond and Cheung 1983).

*Part VI (5 minutes): Minute paper*
        To conclude the exercise, instruct students to reflect upon and consider the key takeaways from the activity. Students should now write a brief "minute" paper regarding the key takeaways of the exercise. For the purposes of this paper, students may create a bulleted list if they choose to. Ask students to consider the following prompts when writing their short paper:

- What are the key takeaways from this activity?
- Does the individual create his or her own self-concept?
- On what is self-concept based?
- Is self-concept based on the same ideas across cultures and societies? Why or why not?

**Possible Extension**
        The described activity could be reworked for adoption in a criminological theory or social psychology course to help students organize their understanding and learning of the labeling theory perspective. To aid in this reworking, instructors may wish to "flip" the Twenty Statements Test (TST) instrument and instead instruct students to write "not me" statements, using self-concept to understand labeling theory and deviance from the interactionist perspective.

**References**

Bond, Michael H. and Cheung, Tak-Sing. 1983. "College Students' Spontaneous Self-Concept: The Effect of Culture among Respondents in Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 14(2): 153

Kuhn, Manford H. and Thomas S. McPartland. 1954. "An Empirical Investigation of Self-Attitudes." *American Sociological Review* 19(1): 68-76.

Turner, Ralph H. 1976. "The Real Self: From Institution to Impulse." *American Journal of Sociology* 81(5): 989-1016.

There are twenty numbered blanks on the page below. Please write twenty answers to the simple question 'Who am I?' in the blanks. Just give twenty different answers to this question. Answer as if you were giving the answers to yourself, not to somebody else. Write the answers in the order that they occur to you. Don't worry about logic or 'importance.' Go along fairly fast, for time is limited.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

15. _____

16. _____

17. _____

18. _____

19. _____

20. _____