

## Analyzing Everyday Life: The Twenty Statements Test: Who Am I?

This exercise asks you to look at how social affiliations help to shape our self-concept.

*First complete Step 1, without going to or reading the Step 2!*

### Step 1: The Twenty Statements Test (TST)

Write down twenty different responses to the question “Who am I?” Don’t worry about evaluating the logic or importance of your responses—just write the answers as they occur to you. Give yourself five minutes to complete this task.

1. I am .
2. I am .
3. I am .
4. I am .
5. I am .
6. I am .
7. I am .
8. I am .
9. I am .
10. I am .
11. I am .
12. I am .
13. I am .
14. I am .
15. I am .
16. I am .
17. I am .
18. I am .
19. I am .
20. I am .

## Step 2

Now it's time to analyze your responses. Rate each one according to the four categories listed below. Evaluate, to the best of your ability, which responses fall into the A-mode, B-mode, C-mode, and D-mode categories.

- *A-mode* responses are the type of physical characteristics found on your driver's license: "I am a blonde"; "I am short"; "I am a Wisconsin resident."
- *B-mode* responses describe socially defined statuses usually associated with group membership of some sort: "I am a college student"; "I am a Catholic"; "I am an African American."
- *C-mode* responses describe styles of behavior or emotional states: "I am a happy person"; "I am a country music fan"; "I am a fashionable dresser."
- *D-mode* responses are more general than individual: "I am part of the universe"; "I am a human being." You may have some difficulty deciding how to categorize some of your responses—for example, where does "I am an American" go—in A, B, or D? Use your best judgment. Count the number of each type of response. Now compare the totals—which category got the most responses?

You may want to compare your findings with those of your classmates; where do your fellow students get their sense of self? We predict that, even if you yourself gave more B-mode responses, the predominant mode in your classroom is C. Those with more B-mode responses base their self-concept on group membership and institutional roles. Those with more C-mode responses see themselves as more independent, and define themselves according to their individual actions and emotions rather than their connections to others. It is likely that there are few (if any) people whose responses fall predominantly in the A or D mode. Those with more A-mode responses may feel that they have a "skin deep" self-concept, based more on their appearance to others than on their internal qualities. Those with more D-mode responses are harder to categorize, and may feel uncertain about the source of their sense of self. The TST was developed by social psychologist Manfred Kuhn (Kuhn and McPartland 1954) as a way of determining the degree to which we base our self-concepts on our membership in different groups. The test was used later by Louis Zurcher (1977) to study the changing self-images of Americans. Zurcher found that in the 1960s, individuals were more likely to give B-mode responses, but in the 1970s and 1980s, people were more likely to give C-mode responses. While you might think it better to be an independent actor than to be defined by your group membership, Zurcher and his colleague Ralph Turner became concerned about this trend away from group identification and toward a more radically individualistic sense of self. Why were they so concerned?

The primary characteristics of the C-mode, or "impulsive," self (Turner 1976) are the pursuit of individual satisfaction, an orientation toward the present, and a sense that the individual should not be linked to others and that group obligations

inhibit individual expression. The primary characteristics of the B-mode, or “institutional,” self are a willingness to adhere to group standards and to accept group obligations, as well as an orientation toward the future and a sense that the individual is linked to others. Zurcher and Turner worried that a society full of self-interested (and even selfish), impulsive individuals might no longer care about the common good, and would only work to satisfy their own needs.

Be sure to completely address all topics in the prompt above as well as the following questions paying specific attention to the outcome of your TST:

- I. Do you do things for your own benefit or for the benefit of the group? Provide examples.
- II. How did you get to have the self you have?
- III. What do you think are the consequences for a society overwhelmingly populated by one personality type or the other? What would society’s institutions look like if they were dominated by B or C mode only people?
- IV. Are these two orientations mutually exclusive, or can you combine the best parts of both? If the latter, what can you do in order to bring that about?

The test is unusual in utilizing an open-question methodology, making coding non-straightforward. Kuhn (1960) has stated that responses to the twenty statements test should be grouped into five categories:

- Social groups and classifications
- Ideological beliefs
- Interests
- Ambitions
- Self-evaluations.

[http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Twenty\\_Statements\\_Test](http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Twenty_Statements_Test)