

PLATO'S EU

Philosophical Learning
Applied To Online
Surroundings
in EU

**“Is My Online Identity
Real?”**



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Author(s):	<i>Mateja Centa Strahovnik</i>	
E-mail address:	<i>mateja.centastrahovnik@teof.uni-lj.si</i>	
Contributors to document:	<i>Vojko Strahovnik, partnership</i>	
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WORKSHOP:

“Is my online identity real?”



1. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

The question “Is my online identity real?” can be tricky. Because usually, after trying to answer that question, our mind gets quickly filled with related questions: “Real in relation to what?”; “My offline identity?”, “I must then first know who I am offline... right?” These two sets of questions seem to presuppose a division of one’s identity into two, the one that is online and the offline one. But does this assumption make sense?

In one sense, identity can be understood as sameness. An ancient philosophical question concerning personal identity was usually put in terms of persistence through or over time: in what sense are we the same person today as we were yesterday (or, alternatively, what are the conditions under which we survive as ourselves or remain the same persons that we are today in the future)? When we consider the internet or online space, this question gets transposed into the following: In what sense are we the same online as offline? Another aspect of personal identity is the aspect of which of my properties or characteristics are those that I feel a special connection, attachment, or ownership over. Do these need to be the same online and offline?

As part of this workshop, students will have an opportunity to reflect on the notions of offline and online identity and experience the reaction to the creation of “the identity”. During the workshop, students must also be able to allow for the possibility that their identity (online and offline) is not something that is set in stone either by external fact or by their own decisions and the decisions of somebody else but rather is something that they are evolving by critically and creatively thinking about themselves.



2. LESSON OVERVIEW

The subject of the reality of one's online identity in the workshop is addressed through experiential learning, followed by reflection and discussion. The basic methods used in the workshop are creative design, associative thinking techniques, (self)reflection, and guided discussion.

One simple and direct way to address one's identity is through a picture. In the workshop, students will create their own self-portraits from different materials. They will use the created collage for the creation of their identity cards.

The overall aim of the workshop is to get students to be aware and reflect on the fact that they are different perspectives on one's identity and that it is common that they see each other differently than they see themselves. They will discover how to creatively express their own perspective and think more deeply about it. Students will learn how and why differences between people can enrich and improve them, their lives, and the world around them. This workshop also gives them the opportunity to understand in what way they influence others and how others influence them. Another central aim is to recognize what they feel or how they can express themselves in the world while being respectful and respecting the boundaries of others. Students will learn to critically and creatively think about ethical questions or dilemmas that online and offline identity, as well as the interaction between both, can lead to. Students will understand that offline or online identity is something that they are evolving by critically and creatively thinking about themselves.

The duration of the workshop ranges from 45 to 90 minutes, given the time available. The workshop is best conducted in person but can also be carried out online (in a virtual classroom) with slight modifications.



Materials that should be made available to students: sheets of white paper (A4), sheets of larger white paper (A3), post-it stickers, pens, leftover paper (e.g., magazines, candy wrapping paper, etc.), glue, and scissors.

Learning outcomes that will be attained through the workshop:

- The student understands the concepts of offline identity, online identity, and digital identity and the relevant differences between real and online environments.
- The student recognizes that there can be different perspectives on one's identity and different expressions of identity.
- The student knows how to reflect and respond respectfully to different perspectives.
- The student understands how to express his or her identity while respecting the boundaries and the identities of others.
- The student knows how to creatively express their own perspective and identity.
- The student understands how he or she can influence others and how others and the environment influence him or her.

3. LESSON BREAKDOWN – WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

1. The workshop begins with the moderator saying or displaying (on a whiteboard, poster, or screen) a question: “Who am I?”.



Source: Pixabay

2. The moderator then distributes big sheets of white paper and pens to students. Students are invited to think on their own and quietly about this question and then write on the paper three to five essential things that answer the question “Who am I?”. They can help themselves by answering additional questions: What am I experiencing? What makes me – me? What are my values, roles, responsibilities, distinguishing characteristics, etc? The moderator can also explain that the answer is not fixed. That is what they are experiencing now as their identity is an open question with the potential to evolve and change. This step should not take more than 5 minutes.
3. The moderator presents (on the floor or on a centrally placed table) some wastepaper, old magazines, etc., scissors, and glue. Students are now being invited to turn over the big white paper where they wrote 3 to 5 answers and to make a self-portrait from the displayed materials on the left side of the paper. They are instructed to make a collage out of three to five pieces that they can choose among available materials. (How many pieces they are allowed to take, depends on how many essential things they wrote about themselves in step 2.) When



looking for and selecting materials, students should think about how each piece or an arrangement of pieces that they will glue on the paper will represent a part of the identity they have chosen and written down before. They are free to do the self-portrait as they wish. After they finish making their self-portraits, they are instructed to write down imaginary or made-up names and surnames at the right side of the paper. This entire step should last for about 10 minutes.

4. It is preferable that students do not see their fellow student's collages before this step. The moderator, with the help from students, prepares a few tables to display all of their collages. Next to each collage, there should be a white sheet of paper and a pen. On that white paper, there are written unfinished sentences that students will fill in and complete when visiting and looking at each collage. The sentences are the following
 - a. The gender of this person is ...
 - b. This person definitely has ... (e.g., a sibling, a pet, a tent, a set of drums, ...).
 - c. This person definitely does not have ...
 - d. This person is ... (write down a personal trait).
 - e. This person is very good at ...
 - f. This person spends most of his or her time ...
 - g. Looking at this image I feel ... (write down an emotion that you feel when looking at the collage).

Students are invited to look at each collage. They should take some time at each one to stop and think about what they see and experience. Then they write down their answers, that is finish sentences they see written on the paper. They do not read what others wrote before them. For that purpose, they can use post-it papers to cover what they have written and then the next person writes the answer and



again covers it with another post-it sticker. They visit their own collage at the last and look through the answers written by their peers. This part should take about 15 to 20 minutes, depending on how many students there are.

5. The moderator invites students to sit with their own collages. They are invited to quickly reflect on how others see, understand, and feel about their self-portraits. They can mark each completed sentence with one of the following signs. “+” represents, that what is written is true, “-” represents, that what is written is not true or that it is not relevant to them, and “?” represents, that they are intrigued in some way by the answer and that what is written could be a part of their identity. This step should take around 5 minutes.
6. The moderator invites students to form pairs. In pairs, they share their self-portraits. Each student introduces themselves through their self-portrait. One at a time they share how they have experienced the activity so far and what are their thoughts on how others see them. Questions that can help them with this are the following. Did they find out something that is true about them, or do they agree with it? With what they did not agree, did not like or is not true? Were they surprised about something? What are their insights? ... etc.; While one student is sharing the other just listens. He or she does not comment. After the first student finishes with his or her representation, the other student now speaks and first wishes something to the first one by finishing the sentence “I wish...”. Then they switch their roles and the second student in the pair is next to share. This part takes about 10 minutes, 5 minutes for each student in the pair.
7. At the end, the moderator invites students to sit in a circle and share their thoughts on what they experienced through the steps of the workshop. In particular, they should try to explain in what way their understanding of identity has changed. Then a discussion takes place using the prompt questions that are listed under section



4 below. It is not necessary to use all of the questions, and additional questions can be added given the direction of the discussion. The moderator can then conclude with a general remark e.g., “Your self-portraits represent parts of your identity that are true for you at this moment. At least you believe that is so. It can be the same with online identity. But you should always have in mind that how others see you is not always under your control, in particular when you are online.” After that, all students are instructed to share their thoughts by finishing one of the sentences: “Now I understand....” or “Now I know....” or “I take with me...” This part should take about 15 to 30 minutes.

4. DISCUSSION CHECK

These are possible follow-up or discussion questions that can be used to deepen and expand on the topics explored through the course of the workshop:

- What is identity and in which ways it is important in our lives? Can somebody be without identity? What is an identity crisis? What is fluid identity? What happens if you cannot prove your identity?
- How can different perspectives you noticed during the workshop improve your identity or help you? Why can different perspectives help others or why not?
- Can you become somebody else whenever you decide? Do you know who would you like to become?
- How can one recognize a problematic (dangerous, fake, dodgy, etc.) (online) identity or person? Are there some specific traits or characteristics that are always bad? Why? Would you follow, like, help to popularize, etc. such a problematic person (online), why yes and why not?



- Do you know the difference between online identity and digital identity? In which way is the latter useful?
- When you have, for example, two persons sharing one Instagram or Facebook account are their identities the same?
- Is there a limit to what you can share online (about yourself)? Who or what decides what goes online or not?
- Can we trust artificial intelligence or not to confirm our identity? How does AI know that we are not robots when we check the box: “I am not a robot.” On a certain website? How would you know, online, that somebody on the other side of the chat is not a robot?
- How can you prove your identity (online, offline), that is, that you are really you?
- Do you know about the consequences of online fraud related to identity?
- Are your online friends the same as the ones you have in real life? Why yes, why not?
- If you have a different account or profile name online than in real life (with no picture of your face), how do your friends recognize you (if you do not tell them about it)?
- Is it easier or harder to tell a person something bad if they do not know who you are?

5. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Anti-Fraud Education: <https://www.cifas.org.uk/insight/public-affairs-policy/anti-fraud-lesson-plans>
- Chapter “Online and Offline Relationships” from the book *How the World Changed Social Media*. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1q69z35.14>



- Common Sense Education: <https://www.commonsense.org/education>
- The Case for Better Governance of Children's Data: A Manifesto
<https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/1771/file/UNICEF%20Global%20Insight%20Data%20Governance%20Summary.pdf>