



**O.P. Jindal Global University**  
A Private University Promoting Public Service



**Jindal School of  
Psychology & Counselling**  
India's First Transdisciplinary Psychology School

## **THE STORIED SELF: NARRATIVE & IDENTITY IN PSYCHOLOGY**

**PCCU-04-BAP-SSNP4057**

**JSPC - B.A. (Hons.)/B.Sc. (Hons.) Psychology/M.Sc. Counselling Psychology**  
**School Specific Elective**  
**Course Syllabus- Fall 2026**

### **Course Information:**

***Course Duration: 15 weeks***

***Credit Hours: 4 credit points***

***Pre-requisites- None***

***Equivalent & Exclusive Courses- None***

### **Course Instructor**

***Name- Dr. Aneesha Verma***

***Biography-*** Dr. Aneesha Verma is an Associate Professor at the Jindal School of Psychology & Counselling. Her research and teaching are driven by a central question: how do people weave the disparate threads of experience, memory, and culture into a coherent sense of who they are? Her work focuses on the narrative construction of identity, meaning-making, and resilience, always situating these processes within specific cultural and social contexts.

Dr. Verma's intellectual journey is rooted in the conviction that the stories we live by are the very fabric of our psychological lives. This perspective bridges her long-standing interest in qualitative methods with a deep engagement in narrative psychology. She believes that to understand a person is to understand the story they tell about their life—a story shaped by cultural tools, social relationships, and personal history. Her doctoral training at the University of Delhi provided a foundation in understanding the socio-cultural dimensions of selfhood, a theme she has since explored through the lens of narrative.

In Spring 2026, she developed and taught *Lives in Context: The Craft of Psychological Ethnography*, a course designed to introduce students to the powerful, nuanced, and ethical practice of understanding people within their everyday worlds. That course reflected her commitment to ethnographic methods as a way to grasp how experience is embedded in culture. This semester, her new course, *The Storied Self: Narrative & Identity in Psychology*, extends that commitment by turning inward—to the internalized, yet culturally shaped, stories that give life meaning and purpose.

Drawing on the foundational works of Jerome Bruner and Dan P. McAdams, Dr. Verma invites students to explore identity not as a fixed entity, but as an ongoing narrative achievement. Her goal is to equip a new generation of psychology students with the theoretical tools and interpretive sensitivity to appreciate the profound power of the stories we tell about ourselves and others.

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**Course Section-** A & B

**Classroom -** TBD

**Office Hours-** On appointment basis only

### **Course Description:**

Who are we, really? This course explores the powerful idea that identity is not a fixed thing we possess, but a story we continually tell and revise. Drawing on the seminal works of Jerome Bruner (*Acts of Meaning*) and Dan P. McAdams (*The Stories We Live By*), we will examine how human beings construct meaning and a sense of self through narrative.

We will investigate how personal myths develop from childhood through adulthood, the cultural tools that shape our storytelling, and the role of narrative in fostering resilience, growth, and psychological well-being. How do we transform life's chaos into a coherent plot? What happens when our stories break down? By bridging psychological theory with lived experience, this course will equip you to analyse your own life story and appreciate the profound narrative fabric of human identity. Through critical discussion and reflective exercises, we will discover that to know a person is, above all, to know the story they live by.

### **Learning Objectives:**

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. **Articulate** the foundational principles of narrative psychology, including the distinction between the paradigmatic (logical-scientific) and narrative modes of thought, as outlined by Jerome Bruner.
2. **Analyze** the structure and function of personal myths, identifying key components such as narrative tone, imagery, thematic lines (agency and communion), ideological settings, and imagoes, drawing on the work of Dan P. McAdams.
3. **Critically** evaluate the role of culture and social context in shaping self-defining stories, recognizing that identity is not merely an individual construction but a shared, culturally mediated achievement.

4. **Apply** narrative concepts to real-world psychological phenomena, including resilience, identity change across the lifespan, and the therapeutic function of storytelling.
5. **Reflect** critically on their own life stories, identifying the dominant plots, characters, and meanings that inform their sense of self, while situating these narratives within broader cultural and relational frameworks.
6. **Compare and contrast** the narrative approach to identity with traditional, trait-based, or essentialist models in psychology, assessing the unique contributions and potential limitations of a storied perspective.

**Required Textbooks & Materials:**

Bruner, J. S. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Harvard University Press.

McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. The Guilford Press. (Original work published 1993)

**Student Responsibilities:** Students enrolled in this course are expected to:

1. Read all specified units in the textbook by the dates indicated.
2. View/download class materials (PDFs) as you read the assigned chapters.  
(Assigned chapters/pages listed under each scheduled session should be read or viewed prior to attempting any assignments or assessments for each unit).
3. Start working on assignments well in advance so that you get enough time for editing them.
4. Complete and submit all assignments by the date listed on the syllabus. Late submissions will not be accepted. No exceptions, please. However, students with medical emergencies can be allowed to do the late submission but at the sole discretion of the course instructor.

**Course Evaluation and Grading:** This course will use continuous assessment throughout the semester. The semester-long continuous assessment will lead to the term-end evaluation. Below is a break-up of grading:

Assessment	Marks
Class participation	10 marks
Quiz (in-class)	30 marks
Mid Term Exam (in-class)	30 marks
End-term examination	30 marks
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 marks</b>

**Description of Assignments:**

**Class Participation (10 marks)**

The classroom lectures will span over 15 weeks and each class will last for duration of 120 minutes. Students are expected to be regular and punctual. Please note that your eligibility to sit in the final examination requires a minimum of 70% attendance in this course.

This is a discussion-based course. Your active, thoughtful, and respectful engagement is crucial. This includes contributing to discussions, peer feedback, and in-class exercises related to observation and interviewing.

### **In-class Quiz (30 marks)**

**Format:** 45–50 minute in-class quiz consisting of multiple-choice, true/false, and very short-answer questions.

**Content Scope:** Foundational concepts from the first 3–4 weeks of the course, covering Bruner's *Acts of Meaning* (Chapters 1–2) and McAdams' *The Stories We Live By* (Chapters 1–3).

### **Sample Topics:**

- The distinction between the paradigmatic and narrative modes of thought (Bruner)
- Key features of a story (setting, characters, plot, initiating event, consequence)
- Narrative tone and the four mythic forms (comedy, romance, tragedy, irony)
- Attachment theory and its influence on narrative tone
- The role of imagery in early childhood and personal mythmaking
- Folk psychology as a cultural instrument

### **Question Distribution (30 marks):**

- 15 multiple-choice questions (1 mark each = 15 marks)
- 5 true/false questions (1 mark each = 5 marks)
- 5 very short-answer questions (2 marks each = 10 marks)

### **Mid Term Exam (30 marks)**

**Format:** 90-minute in-class exam consisting of short-answer questions and one longer analytical essay.

**Content Scope:** Weeks 1–7 of the course, covering Bruner's *Acts of Meaning* (Chapters 1–3) and McAdams' *The Stories We Live By* (Chapters 1–6), including topics such as folk psychology, narrative tone, imagery, motivational themes (agency and communion), the ideological setting, and imagoes.

### **End-term examination: (30 marks)**

A final examination will be held for 30 marks at the end of the semester. Entire syllabus will be covered. It will be a closed book examination. Format will be shared in class.

*Students are required to get a minimum passing grade in the internal assessments and end-term examination to be able to clear the course and earn necessary credits.*

### **Grade Definition**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Percent age of Marks</b>	<b>Grade Value</b>	<b>Grade Description</b>
<b>O</b>	80% and above	8	<b>Outstanding:</b> Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas,

			rules, and principles; and extraordinary critical and analytical ability.
<b>A+</b>	75 - 79.75%	7.5	<b>Excellent:</b> Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules, and principles; and critical and analytical ability.
<b>A</b>	70 - 74.75%	7	<b>Very Good:</b> Sound knowledge of the subject matter, organizational capacity; ability to synthesize ideas, rules, and principles; critically analyze existing material and originality in thinking.
<b>A-</b>	65 - 69.75%	6	<b>Good:</b> Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems; good critical and analytical skills.
<b>B+</b>	60 - 64.75%	5	<b>Fair:</b> Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems; reasonable critical and analytical skills.
<b>B</b>	55 - 59.75%	4	<b>Acceptable:</b> Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of the study; passable critical and analytical skills.
<b>B-</b>	50 - 54.75%	3	<b>Marginal:</b> Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials; poor critical and analytical skills.
<b>P1</b>	45 - 49.75%	2	<b>Pass 1:</b> Pass with a passable understanding of the subject matter; lacking in critical and analytical skills.
<b>P2</b>	40 - 44.75%	1	<b>Pass 2:</b> Pass with a rudimentary understanding of the subject matter; lacking in critical and analytical skills.
<b>F</b>	Below 40%	0	<b>Fail:</b> Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials. Requires the student to repeat the course.
<b>P/F</b>	Pass / Fail		<b>Pass or Fail:</b> Pass is awarded with a final grade of 40% or above. Fail reserved for the final grade below 40%. This option (selected at the start of the semester) is only available for semesters taught online during Covid.
<b>I</b>	Incompl ete		<b>Incomplete:</b> Issued due to extenuating circumstances that prevent the student from completing internal or external marks. If an 'I' grade is assigned, the JSPC Academic Committee will suggest a schedule for the completion of work or a supplementary examination.

### **Academic Integrity:**

#### **Classroom Punctuality and Conduct**

JSPC conducts all classes on a foundation of professionalism. It is expected that students will be present in class and seated within five minutes of the class start time. Students arriving after a ten-minute window from the designated start time will be refused entry/attendance. A classroom is a place for free expression and critical thinking—students must respect opinions expressed and actively participate in classroom discussions.

#### **Participation and Attendance Policy**

This course covers a lot of detailed information. There is no way to get a good grade without attending class. Students with less than 75% attendance will not pass this course.

### **Cell Phone Usage**

Cell phones are not allowed during classroom hours. The use of phones by students may result in their removal by the course instructor. Repeated violations may result in academic discipline.

### **Plagiarism**

In line with JGU policy, JSPC operates a zero-tolerance approach to plagiarism. The unacknowledged use of material authored by others within your own work is a violation of academic integrity and all reported cases will be investigated for potential disciplinary action.

### **Disability Support and Accommodation Requirements**

JGU endeavors to make all its courses accessible to students. The Disability Support Committee (DSC) has identified conditions that could hinder a student's overall well-being. These include physical and mobility-related difficulties, visual impairment, hearing impairment, mental health conditions, and intellectual/learning difficulties e.g., dyslexia and dyscalculia. Students with any known disability needing academic and other support are required to register with the Disability Support Committee (DSC) by following the procedure specified at <https://jgu.edu.in/disability-support-committee/>

Students who need support may register any time during the semester up until a month before the end semester exam begins. Those students who wish to continue receiving support from the previous semester must re-register within the first month of a semester. Last-minute registrations and support might not be possible as sufficient time is required to make the arrangements for support.

The DSC maintains strict confidentiality about the identity of the student and the nature of their disability and the same is requested from faculty members and staff as well. The DSC takes a strong stance against in-class and out-of-class references made about a student's disability without their consent and disrespectful comments referring to a student's disability.

All general queries are to be addressed to [disabilitysupportcommittee@jgu.edu.in](mailto:disabilitysupportcommittee@jgu.edu.in)

### **Safe Space Pledge**

This course may discuss a range of issues and events that might result in distress or provoke strong emotional responses in some students. To make sure that all students collectively benefit from the course, it is incumbent everyone maintains respect towards one another. This does not mean that you must feel restrained about what you feel and say—rather, it is about creating a safe space where everyone can speak and learn without inhibitions and fear. This responsibility lies not only with students but also with the instructor.

### **Mental Health Services**

The Centre for Wellness and Counseling Services (CWCS) provides comprehensive guidance and counseling services to the JGU community. If you are experiencing distress, be it personal, academic, social, or career-related, CWCS has a competent and well-qualified group of counselors available for consultation (personal and group). You can be assured that your confidentiality will always be protected. To schedule an appointment, call 83969 07312 or write an email to [cwcs@jgu.edu.in](mailto:cwcs@jgu.edu.in).

## Session Plan:

Week	Topic
1	<p>Introduction: Why Stories Matter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Key Concepts: Course overview; what is narrative psychology? The narrative turn in psychology; introduction to Bruner and McAdams</li><li>○ Bruner: Preface + Chapter 1 (pp. 1–4, 11–14)</li><li>○ McAdams: Chapter 1 (pp. 19–38)</li></ul>
2	<p>Two Modes of Thought: Paradigmatic vs. Narrative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Key Concepts: Bruner's distinction; meaning-making vs. information processing; the cognitive revolution and its discontents</li><li>○ Bruner: Chapter 1 (pp. 1–11, 14–18, 31–32)</li><li>○ McAdams: Chapter 1 (pp. 27–31)</li></ul>
3	<p>Folk Psychology as a Cultural Instrument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Key Concepts: What is folk psychology? intentional states (beliefs, desires, intentions); the canonical and the exceptional; narrative as meaning-making</li><li>○ Bruner: Chapter 2 (pp. 33–52)</li><li>○ McAdams: Chapter 1 (pp. 19–27)</li></ul>
4	<p>Narrative Tone and Mythic Forms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Key Concepts: Attachment and narrative tone; comedy, romance, tragedy, irony as mythic forms; early childhood origins of narrative tone</li><li>○ McAdams: Chapter 2 (pp. 39–53)</li><li>○ Bruner: Chapter 2 (pp. 47–50)</li></ul>
5	<p>Imagery and the Roots of Personal Myth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Key Concepts: Preschool fantasy and imagery; cultural sources of imagery; religion, media, and the family; the child's world of make-believe</li><li>○ McAdams: Chapter 2 (pp. 53–66)</li><li>○ Bruner: Chapter 3 (pp. 69–73)</li></ul>
6	<p>Motivational Themes: Agency and Communion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Key Concepts: Power and love as life themes; achievement motivation; intimacy motivation; thematic lines in personal myths</li><li>○ McAdams: Chapter 3 (pp. 67–76, 281–291 [Appendix])</li><li>○ Bruner: Chapter 2 (pp. 39–43)</li><li>○ <b>Mid Semester Quiz (30 marks, internal assessment 1)</b></li></ul>
7	<p>Adolescence and the Ideological Setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Key Concepts: Identity formation in adolescence; formal operational thinking;</li></ul>

	<p>personal fables; ideology as backdrop for the life story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ McAdams: Chapter 3 (pp. 76–91) + Chapter 4 (pp. 91–95)</li> <li>○ Bruner: Chapter 3 (pp. 85–87)</li> </ul>
8	<p>Imagoes: Characters of the Personal Myth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Key Concepts: What is an imago? personified and idealized self-concepts; warrior, traveller, sage, maker, lover, caregiver, friend, ritualist</li> <li>○ McAdams: Chapter 5 (pp. 117–133) + Chapter 6 (pp. 133–162)</li> <li>○ Bruner: Chapter 2 (pp. 50–55)</li> </ul>
9	<p>Entry into Meaning: Narrative Development in Childhood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Key Concepts: Prelinguistic readiness for meaning; how children acquire narrative competence; the push to narrate; Emily's soliloquies</li> <li>○ Bruner: Chapter 3 (pp. 67–98)</li> <li>○ McAdams: Chapter 2 (pp. 39–47)</li> <li>○ <b>Mid Semester Exam (30 marks, internal assessment 2)</b></li> </ul>
10	<p>Identity, Malaise, and Faith</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Key Concepts: When personal myths fail; stagnation and malaise; the role of faith and ideology in identity; conjunctive faith</li> <li>○ McAdams: Chapter 7 (pp. 165–194)</li> <li>○ Bruner: Chapter 4 (pp. 99–100)</li> </ul>
11	<p>Mid-Life and the Generativity Script</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Key Concepts: The mid-life crisis; reconciliation of opposites; generativity; creating legacies; endings and new beginnings</li> <li>○ McAdams: Chapter 8 (pp. 195–222) + Chapter 9 (pp. 223–250)</li> <li>○ Bruner: Chapter 4 (pp. 100–106)</li> </ul>
12	<p>Autobiography &amp; Self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Key Concepts: The self as storyteller; distributed self; cultural psychology of self; reviewing the personal myth; final reflections</li> <li>○ Bruner: Chapter 4 (pp. 99–140)</li> <li>○ McAdams: Chapter 10 (pp. 251–275) + Epilogue (pp. 277–279)</li> </ul>
13	<p>Narrative, Healing, and the Good Life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Key Concepts: Stories that heal; narrative truth vs. historical truth; psychotherapy as narrative reconstruction; the ethical dimensions of personal mythmaking; what makes a "good" life story? course wrap-up and final reflections</li> <li>○ Bruner: Chapter 1 (pp. 31–32) + Chapter 2 (pp. 52–55)</li> <li>○ McAdams: Chapter 1 (pp. 31–34) + Chapter 4 (pp. 109–114) + Chapter 10 (pp. 264–275)</li> </ul>
14-15	<p>Reading and Revision</p>

*This schedule is preliminary and is subject to change based on anticipated and unanticipated developments during the semester.*

**Conflict of Interest:** *The Course manual has been developed by Dr. Aneesha Verma.*