

CUET · HOME SCIENCE · CLASS XI · CODE 315

Understanding the Self

CUET unit: Unit I — Understanding Oneself: Adolescence

By UniDrill · NCERT-grounded study material

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Snapshot

- Chapter 2 of Human Ecology and Family Sciences Part I has three sections — A (What makes me 'I'), B (Development and Characteristics of the Self) and C (Influences on Identity).
- It establishes the basic concepts of self, identity, self-concept and self-esteem, and traces how the self develops across infancy, early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence.
- It explains why adolescence is a critical phase for identity formation, drawing on Erik H. Erikson's idea of identity vs role confusion.
- It identifies four broad influences on adolescent identity — biological/physical, socio-cultural, emotional and cognitive changes — and contrasts Indian and Western cultural patterns of identity development.
- CUET regularly tests definitions (puberty vs pubescence, self-concept vs self-esteem), stage-wise characteristics of the self, and the influence of family/ culture on identity.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

This chapter has three sections — Section A asks 'What makes me I?', Section B tracks the 'Development and Characteristics of the Self' across the lifespan, and Section C analyses 'Influences on Identity' (NCERT pp. 6, 11, 19). Together they convert the everyday question 'who am I' into a developmental-psychology framework with Indian cultural texture.

Self, identity, personality are intricately related concepts that psychologists distinguish carefully even though everyday usage often interchanges them (NCERT §2A.1, p. 6). Loose synonymy is unacceptable for CUET-level rigour.

- **Self** = the totality of a person's experiences, ideas, thoughts and feelings about herself/himself; the idea we hold of ourselves is the notion of the self. Dimensions include bodily/physical, mental, social (roles & relationships), potential/capabilities, beliefs, doer/agent and thinker (NCERT §2A.2, pp. 7–8).

- The self has two broad dimensions — **personal self** (aspects relating only to you) and **social self** (aspects involving others, e.g., sharing, cooperation, support, unity) (NCERT §2A.2, p. 8).
- **Self-concept and self-esteem** are elements of identity. Self-concept is a description of oneself ("Who am I?") and includes qualities, feelings, thoughts and capabilities. **Self-esteem** is our judgment of ourselves according to socially-influenced standards — it is one's evaluation of oneself (NCERT §2A.2, p. 8).
- **Identity** is the sense of continuity and sameness of who we are that we carry throughout life despite changes. **Personal identity** = attributes that make a person different from others; **Social identity** = aspects linking the person to a group (national, regional, religious, occupational) (NCERT §2A.3, p. 9).
- **Self during infancy** — the newborn has no self-awareness, self-understanding or self-recognition. Self-image recognition (mirror test with red spot, 14–24 months) typically happens around 18 months. By the second half of the second year infants use pronouns "I", "me", "mine" and recognise themselves in photographs (NCERT §2B.1, pp. 11–12).
- **Self during early childhood** has five features — uses physical descriptions in absolute terms ("I am tall"), describes self in terms of things s/he can do, descriptions are concrete, often overestimates self ("I am never scared"), and is unable to recognise possession of different attributes at different times (NCERT §2B.2, p. 12).
- **Self during middle childhood** — shift to internal characteristics; inclusion of social descriptions and identity; social comparisons (comparative not absolute terms); distinction between real self and ideal self; self-descriptions become more realistic (NCERT §2B.3, p. 14).
- **Self during adolescence** — self-understanding becomes increasingly complex. Erikson holds the task of adolescence is to develop a sense of identity (a satisfactory self-definition); adolescence faces an **identity crisis** because of intense self-preoccupation, the creation of a lasting sense of selfhood, and rapid biological/ social changes (NCERT §2B.4, pp. 14–15).
- Difficulties of identity formation (inability to concentrate, role confusion) are a **normal part of development**. Five characteristics of the adolescent's self — abstract self-descriptions, contradictions, a fluctuating sense of self, presence of real vs ideal self, and self-consciousness ("being on stage") (NCERT §2B.4, pp. 16–17).
- The reasons why each one has a unique identity — unique combination of genes (except identical twins), different experiences, and different responses to similar experiences (NCERT §2C, p. 19).
- **Four influences on identity formation** — biological & physical changes, socio-cultural contexts (family & peer relationships), emotional changes, and cognitive changes (NCERT §2C, p. 19).

- **Biological & physical changes:** Sexual maturity is **puberty**; menarche marks puberty in girls; in boys, production of spermatozoa is a sometimes-used criterion. **Pubescence** is the period of physical/biological changes leading to puberty — for girls 11–13 years, boys 13–15 years. Maximum yearly height increase is a useful criterion for both. Normal pubescent sequences for girls and boys are listed (NCERT §2C.1, p. 20).
- **Socio-cultural contexts:** Indian society places restrictions on girls at puberty; Western cultures emphasise independence/separation, Indian non-Western cultures emphasise interdependence within the family. Traditional Indian adolescents often face fewer identity confusions due to continuity of family occupations. Family atmosphere promoting both **individuality** and **connectedness** is best for identity development (NCERT §2C.2, pp. 20–22).
- **Emotional changes:** Adolescents are preoccupied with body image, experience mood swings and sharp bursts of anger; a sense of pride/comfort with one's body contributes positively to self, dissatisfaction can lower self-image and academic performance (NCERT §2C.3, pp. 22–23).
- **Cognitive changes:** Adolescents develop abstract thought and can think of hypothetical situations, enabling them to imaginatively link their present with a future they envisage (e.g., choosing careers) (NCERT §2C.4, pp. 23–24).

Four extended points help with CUET applied scenarios. First, the relationship between self, identity and personality (p. 6): the self is the broadest umbrella (the entire mental representation a person has of herself), identity is the more stable, structured 'sense of who I am' across time, and personality is the patterned set of traits that others observe. A student may have shaky self-esteem but a well-defined social identity ('I am a Class XI HEFS student from Patna') — the two are not the same, which is a standard NTA distractor.

Second, the multi-dimensional self (NCERT §2A.2, pp. 7–8) has seven dimensions — bodily/physical, mental, social (roles & relationships), potential/capabilities, beliefs, doer/agent, and thinker. Each dimension can be tested independently. CUET items have asked students to classify a statement like 'I can solve a quadratic equation' as belonging to the mental dimension and 'I am the eldest daughter' as the social dimension.

Third, the staged development of self from infancy through adolescence (pp. 11–17): the trajectory moves from no self-awareness at birth → mirror self-recognition at ~18 months → concrete absolute self-descriptions in early childhood → social-comparative descriptions in middle childhood → abstract, contradictory, fluctuating, self-conscious descriptions in adolescence. The adolescent's apparent moodiness is normal and developmentally expected — so Indian adolescents (often subjected to family pressure) should not pathologise normal identity-formation difficulties.

Fourth, Erik H. Erikson's identity-vs-role-confusion stage (pp. 14–15): in his eight-stage psychosocial theory, the adolescence stage's developmental task is the achievement of

a satisfactory self-definition. Failure produces 'role confusion' — the inability to commit to a coherent set of roles, values and life goals. Erikson's name and the precise term 'role confusion' are mandatory recall items.

The contrast between Indian non-Western and Western cultural patterns is a CUET-friendly area (pp. 20–22). Western cultures place an emphasis on independence and separation from the family during adolescence; many non-Western cultures including the Indian one place emphasis on interdependence and connectedness within the family. Traditionally, Indian adolescents inheriting family occupations face fewer identity confusions because the social script is largely pre-written; modernising urban India is, however, producing more 'Western-style' identity struggles in adolescents who seek occupations different from their parents'. The best family atmosphere combines both individuality and connectedness — individuality giving the adolescent the freedom to develop her own viewpoint, connectedness preserving openness to and respect for the views of others.

Biological and physical changes (NCERT §2C.1, p. 20) follow universal pubescent sequences. For girls the order is initial breast enlargement → straight pigmented pubic hair → kinky pubic hair → age of maximum growth (peak height velocity) → menarche → axillary hair. For boys the sequence is beginning growth of testes → straight pigmented pubic hair → early voice changes → first ejaculation of semen → kinky pubic hair → age of maximum growth → axillary hair → marked voice changes → beard. These sequences are CUET-perennial; mis-ordering them is a common trap. Maximum yearly height increase is a useful biological criterion of pubescence for both sexes.

Emotional changes during adolescence (pp. 22–23) include a preoccupation with body image — a key concept for Indian adolescents bombarded by media-driven body ideals. A sense of pride and comfort with one's body contributes positively to the developing self; dissatisfaction can lower self-image and even academic performance. The link between body image and academic outcomes is a useful applied-MCQ stem.

Cognitive changes (pp. 23–24): building on Piaget, adolescents move into formal-operational thought, can manipulate hypotheticals, and can imaginatively link the present self with a future self — enabling career planning, value commitments, and 'what if' reasoning. This cognitive jump explains why career counselling, life-skills education and value-clarification exercises are developmentally appropriate at the Class XI–XII stage in Indian schools.

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Self	Totality of a person's experiences, ideas, thoughts and feelings with regard to himself/herself; the idea we hold of ourselves	8
Personal self	Those aspects that relate only to you	8

Term	Definition	Page
Social self	Aspects where you are involved with others — sharing, cooperation, support, unity	8
Self-concept	A description of oneself answering "Who am I?" — includes qualities, feelings, thoughts and what one is capable of doing	8
Self-esteem	Our judgment of ourselves according to standards (largely set by society); one's evaluation of oneself	8
Identity	A sense of who we are, of continuity and sameness, carried throughout life	9
Personal identity	Attributes of a person that make her/him different from others	9
Social identity	Aspects that link the person to a group — professional, social or cultural	9
Self-awareness / self-understanding / self-recognition	The mental representation (mental picture) of the self	11
Puberty	The time when sexual maturity is reached	20
Pubescence	Period during which physical and biological changes occur, leading to puberty (girls 11–13, boys 13–15)	20
Menarche	First menstruation; usually considered the point of sexual maturity for girls	20
Individuality	Greater opportunity and ability to have one's own point of view	22
Connectedness	Greater sensitivity to and respect for others' views and openness to others' views	22
Personality	Patterned set of traits that others observe — distinct from self and identity	6
Real self	The self as one is	14
Ideal self	The self as one would like to be	14
Identity crisis	Adolescent period of intense self-preoccupation and identity struggle (Erikson)	14–15
Role confusion	Erikson's term for failure to achieve a coherent identity in adolescence	15
Mirror self-recognition	Mark/red-spot test — touching one's own cheek shows self-awareness (~18 months)	11
Body image	Subjective picture of one's own body — central concern of adolescence	22–23
Formal operational thought		

Term	Definition	Page
	Piagetian stage permitting abstract and hypothetical reasoning in adolescence	23–24
Peak height velocity	Maximum yearly height increase — biological marker of pubescence	20
Spermarche	First ejaculation of semen in boys — milestone of pubescence	20

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

This material is rich in process imagery; commit four visual aids to memory.

First, the **mirror/red-spot self-recognition experiment** described in Activity 1 (p. 11). An adult applies a small spot of red lipstick or rouge unobtrusively to an infant's cheek, then places the infant in front of a mirror. Before about 14 months the infant typically reaches towards the mirror image; after about 18 months the infant correctly reaches up to touch her own cheek, demonstrating that she has identified the mirror image as 'me'. The age window is 14–24 months and the modal age of success is around 18 months. This experiment is the classic operationalisation of self-awareness in psychology and is named in CUET stems.

Second, the **multi-source adolescent identity illustration** (p. 16) — a stylised image of a girl looking at television, a teacher and a mother and asking 'who am I?'. The image signifies that adolescents draw on multiple sources (media, school, family, peers) to construct identity. CUET stems based on this image have asked which agent of socialisation contributes most or least to identity in urban India.

Third, the **normal sequence of pubescent changes** for girls and boys (p. 20). Girls: initial breast enlargement (thelarche) → straight pigmented pubic hair → kinky pubic hair → age of maximum growth (peak height velocity) → menarche → axillary hair. Boys: beginning growth of testes → straight pigmented pubic hair → early voice changes → first ejaculation of semen (spermarche) → kinky pubic hair → age of maximum growth → axillary hair → marked voice changes → beard. Mis-ordering sequences (e.g., putting menarche before peak height velocity) is a frequent error.

Fourth, the **Radha interaction** (pp. 12–13), a transcript-style dialogue with a 3-year-8-month-old child. Radha says 'I am a girl, I am Radha, I have a pink frock, I have a dolly, I can run fast'. The dialogue is a textbook illustration of early-childhood self-description: concrete, physical, possession-based, action-based, and absolute (no nuance, no comparative). This dialogue is the most cited 'applied scenario' from this chapter in CUET-style sets.

Optional visualisations for revision: a developmental ladder showing infancy → early childhood → middle childhood → adolescence on the y-axis with the dominant characteristic of self at each rung; a 2x2 grid contrasting individuality (high/low) with connectedness (high/low) yielding four family-atmosphere quadrants (only the high-

individuality + high-connectedness quadrant is optimal for identity); and a Venn diagram of the four influences on identity (biological, socio-cultural, emotional, cognitive) overlapping at the developing adolescent self.

2.5 Key data / processes table

Item	Value / fact (NCERT-grounded)	Source
Age of mirror self-recognition (modal)	~18 months	p. 11
Age window of mirror test	14–24 months	p. 11
Age range of pubescence in girls	11–13 years	p. 20
Age range of pubescence in boys	13–15 years	p. 20
Sexual-maturity marker in girls	Menarche (first menstruation)	p. 20
Sexual-maturity marker in boys	First ejaculation of semen / spermarche	p. 20
Biological criterion for pubescence (both sexes)	Maximum yearly height increase (peak height velocity)	p. 20
First visible pubertal sign in girls	Initial breast enlargement (thelarche)	p. 20
First visible pubertal sign in boys	Beginning growth of testes	p. 20
Erikson's developmental task of adolescence	Identity vs role confusion	pp. 14–15
Number of dimensions of self listed	Seven (bodily, mental, social, capability, beliefs, doer, thinker)	pp. 7–8
Two broad dimensions of self	Personal self; Social self	p. 8
Two elements of identity	Self-concept; Self-esteem	p. 8
Two kinds of identity	Personal identity; Social identity	p. 9
Number of features of early-childhood self	Five	p. 12
Number of features of adolescent self	Five (abstract, contradictory, fluctuating, real vs ideal, self-conscious)	pp. 16–17
Four influences on identity	Biological & physical; Socio-cultural; Emotional; Cognitive	p. 19
Western cultural emphasis	Independence / separation	p. 20
Indian (non-Western) cultural emphasis	Interdependence / connectedness	p. 20
Optimal family atmosphere	Individuality + Connectedness	p. 22

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Self-concept vs self-esteem** — self-concept is a description ("Who am I?"); self-esteem is an evaluation/judgment against standards.
- **Puberty vs pubescence** — puberty is a point (sexual maturity reached); pubescence is the period of changes leading up to it.
- **Personal vs social identity** — personal = differentiating attributes; social = group-linked attributes (Indian, Gujarati, Hindu, lawyer).
- **Personal vs social self** — personal self is aspects relating only to you; social self involves interactions with others (sharing, cooperation).
- **Real self vs ideal self** — distinguished from middle childhood onward; ideal self becomes more prominent in adolescence.
- The infant gains self-image recognition at around **18 months**, not at birth or at 3 years — a frequently confused fact.
- Pubescence age ranges — girls 11–13, boys 13–15 (NTA frequently swaps these).
- **Erikson's stage of adolescence is identity vs role confusion** — NOT 'intimacy vs isolation' (which is young adulthood) or 'industry vs inferiority' (which is middle childhood). NTA often mixes Erikson's stages.
- **Pubescence is universal but its timing varies by individual** — NTA distractors sometimes state that pubescence ages are 'fixed' for all girls or boys.
- **Spermarche, not voice change, is the maturity marker in boys** — voice change is part of the sequence but not the maturity point.
- **Identity formation difficulties are normal** — inability to concentrate and role confusion are 'a normal part of development'; NTA may pose distractors framing these as disorders.
- **Indian society places restrictions on girls at puberty** — these are a socio-cultural fact, not an endorsement. NTA may flip the moral valence.
- **Adolescents see themselves as 'on stage'** — this self-consciousness is one of the five characteristics of the adolescent self; do not confuse with literal performance.
- **Self-image recognition ≠ self-concept** — recognition (mirror) is a perceptual/cognitive milestone of infancy; self-concept is a verbal-descriptive structure of childhood and beyond.



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Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter is a foundational source for CUET Home Science Unit I (Understanding Oneself: Adolescence) and contributes around 5–7 MCQs annually in the CUET 2023–25 pattern. Past questions have typically tested definitions (self-concept vs self-esteem, puberty vs pubescence), stage-wise characteristics of the self (especially early childhood and adolescence), Erikson's identity task, age of self-recognition, and the role of family/culture in identity formation.



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