

Editorial: Affirming the Self, as Construct and Journal

Work on self and identity has a special place in the study of human nature, as self-concerns are arguably at the center of individuals' pursuit of well-being and essential to making sense of their lives. Life goals develop and are influenced by one's view of what one is like, the way one would ideally like to be (or would like to avoid being), as well as one's perceptions of what is feasible. Furthermore, conceptions of self and the world affect how one's progress towards these goals is monitored, evaluated, redirected, re-evaluated, and pursued again. Thus, the "self" as a construct has far-reaching implications for behavior, self-esteem, motivation, experience of emotions and the broader world, and hence for interpersonal relationships, society, and culture.

Nevertheless, despite this centrality and the clear importance of the construct, like the previous editor Mark Leary, I too was among the skeptics, when the idea of a new journal specializing in theory and research on self and identity was first proposed at the Self Preconference of the International Society for Self and Identity in St Louis in 1999. A look at the pages of this journal over its first two years, however, shows that the skeptics were wrong. This is in no small way due to the leadership and accomplishment of the previous—and inaugural—editor Mark Leary who did a phenomenal job in stewarding this journal through the difficult initial stages to turn it into a premier outlet for some of the newest and most exciting work in this area. For me, *Self and Identity* has become the journal that I await most eagerly, and it is the one that I leaf through immediately, instead of letting it accumulate on my desk together with the various other journals that arrive regularly in the mail. Thus, I was more than pleased (even if simultaneously daunted by the magnitude of the job), when I was approached with the request to serve as its second editor. My intention is to continue along the path, so well prepared by Mark Leary, towards the goal of making *Self and Identity* the outlet of choice for researchers studying social and psychological processes of self and identity broadly defined. As such, this journal publishes work on the full spectrum of the Jamesian self, including both its agentic aspects (e.g., motivations, goal-processes, and self-regulation), as well as the perceived and construed aspects reflected in its mental representations and processes (e.g., social cognition, self-concept, and self-construals).

The unique and exciting niche for *Self and Identity* is that, as the official journal of the International Society of Self and Identity, it is the sole central forum for research on self and identity, independent of disciplinary perspective or research tradition. The journal aims to bring together work on self and identity undertaken by researchers across different subdisciplines within psychology (e.g., social, personality, clinical, development, cognitive), as well as across other social and behavioral disciplines (e.g., sociology, family studies, anthropology, neuroscience). In the same vein, research using a variety of different methods is welcomed (e.g., experimental, correlational, simulations, computer modeling), as well as work using

a range of populations—including work on different age groups, different cultures, and animal work. In addition, the journal is international, as reflected in our editorial board, ad hoc reviewers, and even our publisher and editorial assistant who reside in Great Britain, indicating our desire to encourage submissions and appeal to readers from many different countries. In short, I will encourage any work of high quality that advances the understanding of self and identity processes in a substantive way.

This is easily said, but not so easily implemented, nor so easily defined. Moreover, just what qualifies as a substantial and important advance to our science will undoubtedly be defined differently by each editor, journal, or even area of research. Thus, I will take a moment here to try to spell out my view of the mission of this journal and what I see as constituting a significant contribution in this context. My primary goal for *Self and Identity* is that it become the place for new ideas and new directions. Special emphasis will therefore be placed on theories and research that are generative in opening new terrain for future investigation. In this vein, I especially encourage studies that begin to provide an answer to something new and thus lay out the path for future work. Accordingly, studies with interesting findings will not be required to provide a definite answer to a question, so long as the finding(s) is(are) solid enough to be at least part of an answer; and importantly, so long as such findings are clearly presented as preliminary and do not pretend to be definite.

This does not mean that *Self and Identity* will accept work that is “half-baked” or clearly flawed. It does mean that a serious attempt will be made to weigh genuine promise and potential excitement against the size of faults, and to try to rule with a tendency toward creativity, if imperfections are small and/or can clearly be pursued in subsequent research. In other words, *Self and Identity* is less interested in mundane “unassailable iotas of information” (I am indebted to Ed Diener for this term), and instead will favor creative and intriguing pieces that will stimulate further research on a topic, or move things in new directions. These kinds of contributions can come in many forms. To be sure, the mainstay of our content will be original empirical pieces, but on occasion we will also publish theoretical articles. Papers can be of varying lengths—we will continue the tradition of publishing shorter contributions mixed in with longer articles without labeling them as “brief reports.” The length of a paper should be determined by the number of experiments or studies reported and by the complexity of the ideas or findings presented. Longer papers, with multiple studies, are not necessarily better, as even these often do not provide the ultimate, or even penultimate answer to a question. Solid, one- or two-study/experiment papers with intriguing findings can expect to receive equally favorable treatment in service of the goal of publishing findings in a timely fashion, which is a hallmark of good science. Only by putting our ideas and findings on the table for others to support or refute can we hope to move our science forward in a cumulative manner.

This question of what represents an advance of knowledge in self and identity processes, also requires a brief discussion about the nature and boundaries of the self as a construct—at least as pertains to this journal. Obviously, it is impossible in this brief editorial to address in depth the nature of the self. So, I will just underline what Mark Leary said in his editorial of the first issue of *Self and Identity* in 2002 (see also Leary & Tangney, 2003), namely that there are many uses of the self that are all acceptable, but that as far as concerns this journal what must be addressed has something to do with *processes* of the self that underlie, influence, or are the response to how people reflect on or feel about themselves and how they behave. Thus, mere

descriptions of differences between people will be inadequate; papers will need to address the self-mechanisms by which these differences are brought about. This is equally true for both empirical and theoretical papers; each of which must spell out clearly how they contribute to our understanding of self and identity mechanisms and processes. In addition, theoretical papers need to make explicit how the ideas provide a basis for future empirical work.

Moreover, the various self-processes are organized within in a coherent self-system, in which they influence each other and act conjointly (e.g., Hoyle, Kernis, Leary, & Baldwin, 1999; Mischel & Morf, 2003). As such, another continual motivating goal of the journal will be to support work that offers integration at the level of these basic self-processes. Nevertheless, I am in accord with Mark Leary that it is not useful to employ self as a synonym for person or personality, as these constructs encompass more than just a person's self-system. Instead, I reiterate his plea for people to think carefully about what they mean by the term self and to use more precise terms in its place, such as the hyphenated "self-" terms that describe the specific processes of interest. As long as one then puts these hyphenated terms in relation to other such processes within the self-system, one avoids the dangers of a self-zoo (Tesser, Martin, & Cornell, 1996) or a spreading prefix disease (for a discussion see Mischel & Morf, 2003), which refer to a heterogeneous, ever-growing collection of assorted concepts to describe the self. Conceived as a coherent organized self-system, however, one can understand what guides the interactions of the various self-processes and how they work.

The journal's mission is ambitious, and demands much of its reviewing body, if it is to be open to innovative and new ideas, yet simultaneously value rigorous methodology. Thus, I am gratified to have on board an exceptional team of very experienced associate editors. These associate editors were chosen in the conviction that their long-term editorial expertise would allow them both to see the big picture and also to make the fine-tuned discriminative evaluations required to provide the constructive guiding feedback needed in working along with me in continuing to steer this journal in the direction outlined above. They were also chosen because of their own contributions to research on self and identity in a variety of domains and for their breadth of knowledge of the field, all of which makes each of them eminently able to serve as the editor for the papers that they take on.

We began receiving manuscripts in July of 2004, and it has been a very smooth transition. I would like to thank Rohays Perry who has taken over the guidance of the journal at Psychology Press, and facilitated this process. In addition, we are especially indebted to Caroline Schulte, our editorial assistant, who carried out the monumental task of developing, and continues to implement and manage, the new electronic submission procedure at Psychology Press. Based on the flow and quality of manuscripts that have been submitted, I am confident that the future of research on self and identity is bright. The area is vibrant and thriving, and it is becoming more and more clear that Constantine Sedikides' foresight was right that a new journal on self and identity was needed and would flourish—for this we thank him. I would also like to take this opportunity to express on behalf of us all our gratitude to all the reviewers and the consulting editors who have given selflessly of their time over the years to make this happen. As the field continues to evolve and develop and the journal grows along with it, we as a field will come to define the self more and more, laying to rest Mark Leary's apprehension, raised in his last editorial, in which he writes that the myriad of uses of the term could lead one "to begin to despair at times about whether the term 'self' at times means anything at all." There is no

reason to despair—we are well underway to affirm the self, and the journal that is dedicated to its illumination!

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