Editorial

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Since antiquity, the notions of ‘self’ and ‘identity’ have fascinated scholarly thinkers of various persuasions as well as lay people. Within ancient philosophical deliberations the quest for self-knowledge has been regarded as a pursuit of the highest form of knowledge. The *Upanishads* stated that one should try to know oneself (*Atmanam viddhi*—Know thyself) and the same has been stated in different words in the texts of other traditions. This discourse reflects human efforts to encompass the physical, social, and spiritual levels of self-experience. Informed by a desire to confront the vagaries of fragile life and the immanent reality of decay and death, thinkers through the ages have embarked upon analyses of pure consciousness, higher self, God, and the issues of life after death and salvation. In the modern age, with the emergence of a systematic study of social and psychological phenomena, this domain has received nuanced attention from many vantage points leading to diverse conceptualizations.

Indeed, self is an obvious part of immediate experience but it is always mediated by a reflexive self-consciousness. ‘Selfhood’ is rooted in a kind of universal experience by making the self an object and forming images and ideas about it, and then using them in conducting oneself. These are inherently human engagements involving selfhood. We create and recreate selves and thus engage in the task of *selfing*, or constructing a notion of the self. The self-image is then enacted and functions as having dual membership:

on the one hand it is clearly connected with the ‘body’, while on the other, it has a psychological structure based on reflections and imagination about self. Furthermore, as members of communities and groups, we are also interpersonal beings and therefore form social and relational identities of various kinds. We use these derived notions of self and identity to make choices, initiate action, and exert control over ourselves and the external world. Thus, the self has visible manifestations as well as a certain kind of inner content, and the two are always in dialogue with, and constitute, each other. Capturing the various facets of the overarching concepts of self and identity in their entirety has proved to be a gigantic task.

The nature of self and identity constitutes a conceptual puzzle of vital interest for scholars from many disciplines. Within modern psychology, early efforts by William James and Sigmund Freud touched upon many issues of self and identity. However, early twentieth-century psychological theorization, being dominated by behaviorist thought, marginalized the concerns for self-understanding and no heed was paid to the insights of James. Similarly, Freud’s concerns were distant from the then prevailing conceptualizations of academic psychology. Notwithstanding these paradigmatic constraints, the study of self was enhanced through contributions of symbolic interactionists such as Mead, Cooley, and Blumer, post-Freudians such as Adler, Horney, Sullivan, and Erikson, humanists such as Maslow and Rogers, and the analyses of self-related constructs such as self-awareness, attribution, prosocial behavior, and self-esteem. Also, self was implicated in memory, motivation and a number of social psychological processes. It may, however, be noted that in all these efforts, self assumed different connotations including the experiencing subject, self-beliefs (perceptions, thoughts, feelings) and agency (self-regulation).

During the last three decades, self and identity have been rediscovered and have emerged as one of the most active areas of research. They offer a unifying theme of study in

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which scholarship has flourished in many directions, with publications in many specialized journals. In this research literature, we find a spate of constructs involving the self. It is agreed upon that selfhood is an achievement based on reflexive consciousness and social participation. We form self-schemas and engage in self-verification, self-presentation, self-evaluation and self-enhancement. The reciprocal influences of self and interpersonal processes have also attracted attention, with detailed study of the socio-motivational functions implicated in the notions of self-efficacy, interpersonal perception, self-continuity, self-regulation, ego-depletion, self-defeating behavior and self-relevant emotions. Broader conceptualizations concerning human enlightenment have linked selfhood with the themes of individualism, self-actualization, human potential, individual freedom, and equality. And more recently, approaches to self have reflected a multitude of cultural, discursive, social constructionist, dialogical, relational-feminist, critical psychological and post-colonial perspectives.

In the wake of globalization and the emerging world order, many new challenges are emerging and the cultural context of the self is becoming increasingly significant. Within mainstream psychology, the understanding of self in cultural context has been informed by dimensional analyses of individualism-collectivism, and of interdependent versus independent self-construals. In fact, any effort today to explicate what self is and how it is expressed will probably involve a consideration of culture. However, despite these advances, culture and self both have become contested notions. There is an urgent need to consider the role of self and identity not only in our *interpersonal* interactions, but also in the crucial *intergroup* interactions that dominate the world's socio-political landscape.

Although the growth in psychological research on self over the last few decades has been impressive, a close scrutiny of this burgeoning literature shows that its treatment has become increasingly fragmented. Moreover, the issues of self and identity have been separated, and even within the realm of identity, multiple personal and social identities have often been investigated in isolation. We believe the time is right for us to critically examine the threads running across different lines of inquiry—across ages, nations, and cultures—and bridge the gaps. This special issue of *Psychological Studies* brings together diverse theoretical and empirical approaches with a focus on presenting a renewed understanding of the field, informed by the latest advances in research. It invites critical engagement with the discourse on self and culture by contextualizing and theorizing them within and across different disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological paradigms. The combination of papers, briefly introduced below, provides a valuable opportunity for readers to connect many themes and to embark on new explorations.

Facets of Self and Their Cultural Configuration

Baumeister opens the series of papers by locating the self at the interface of the physical body and the social system, inclusive of culture. He attends to the puzzle of the unity of self, drawing attention to the way in which major psychological resources—multiple inner processes and representations—are integrated in the service of different facets of self. Baumeister provides a thought-provoking consideration of the distinctive qualities of the human self, captured memorably in his analysis of how self-control and willpower are at the heart of transforming multiple self-related processes into agentic action.

While the first article takes on the challenge of unifying differentiated conceptualisations of self, the second contribution by *Kashima, Koval, and Kashima* provides an overview of the growing field of culture and self. They explicate the theoretical connections between culture and self, and offer a programmatic approach by drawing in research on conceptions of what it means to be *human*. The paper raises the question of how to embed our theorizing about culture and self within a broader understanding of psychological processes.

In the third contribution by *Menon*, we see an illustration of the complex interplay of self and culture articulated in the previous two articles, expertly induced from the experiences of Indian women. The Indian (Hindu) notion concerning the relative permeability of the human body and its potential for transformation results in an interdependent conception of the self. Menon examines the temporal dimension within this self-construal among adult Oriya Hindu women in India. The reported experiences of these women provide a compelling account of how three phases of adulthood—young adulthood, mature adulthood, and old age—may be discerned in this cultural context, each with a distinctive variant of the interdependent self that is closely linked to the cultural goals and meanings of that life-phase.

Social and Cultural Identity in the Contemporary World

'Identity' occupies central territory in our social-psychological understanding of the contemporary world. Extending theoretical work on social identity into the cross-cultural domain, *Hopkins and Reicher* examine group processes and put forward the idea that group identity is a key foundation for social power. Critically building on the advances made by previous theorists, Hopkins and Reicher argue that the behavioural consequences of social identification are moderated by the ways in which group identities are constructed and defined. Explicating the dynamics of identity construction in this way not only acknowledges the salience of the

cultural context for people's identities, but also shines a powerful light on the role of identity in social and political conflict.

Al Ramiah, Hewstone, and Schmid continue the theme of examining identity in socio-cultural context, with a careful examination of the link between social identity and intergroup relations. Their fine-grained analysis reveals the different effects of establishing common identities on members of minority versus majority groups, reminding us that the socio-historical context of conflict and inequality is highly potent in shaping the psychology of social identification. The paper poses a major challenge for both researchers and policymakers seeking to understand and influence intergroup relations.

With the rise of globalization, the contemporary world brings diverse cultural conceptions directly into contact with each other. Under these circumstances, the issue of cultural identity development in immigrant populations assumes great significance. The paper by *Abreu and Hale* illustrates the complexities of this issue through a revealing investigation of the experiences of Portuguese youths in England. They set out a framework for understanding processes of identity development, with regard to both situated and symbolic activities and the role played by significant others.

Following on from the theme of the previous paper, *Jensen* also emphasises the way in which contemporary social interactions bring adolescents into contact with people from diverse cultures. The article addresses potential risks in terms of 'cultural identity confusion', in relation to behavioural problems, as well as inter-generational gaps between adolescents and parents. Yet, positive opportunities for youth civic involvement are also perceived as a potential consequence of globalization. The paper underscores the importance of supporting young people in their efforts to navigate a rapidly-changing world.

The forces of globalization are nowhere more apparent than in the growth of consumerism across the world. In this context, *Dittmar and Kapur* examine identity processes and emotion regulation as mediators of the link between materialistic value orientations and well-being in UK and Indian samples. The results show not only that individual differences in materialism are connected to well-being, but also that this can be understood in terms of motives for consumption related to the goals of achieving a desired identity and enhancing emotional states. It is striking that even though the penetration of consumer culture is lower in India than it is in the UK, psychological engagement with consumerism in this study was equally, if not more, evident in India.

An illustration of how the reach of social identification extends into many domains of activity can be found in the study by *Sissons Joshi* of attitudes regarding organ

donation among young UK South Asians. Her data from surveys of South Asian and White British students attending institutions of higher education in the UK showed that a far smaller proportion of South Asian respondents had a donor card. Moreover, a range of factors were identified as underlying this disinclination, including family opposition and religion. *Sissons Joshi* argues that efforts to promote organ donation in the South Asian population must take into account the interdependent conception of self—and particularly the role of the family—in what might otherwise be misconstrued as a 'personal' decision to help anonymous others.

Construction of Selfhood

Next, we return to broader conceptualisations of the construction of self. *Sedikides, Gaertner, and O'Mara* review a large body of work, utilizing multiple methodological approaches, in order to address questions about the relative importance of different components of the self-concept—the individual self, the relational self, and the collective self—in serving as the 'motivational hub of human experience'. Building on numerous findings that point to the primacy of the individual self, *Sedikides* and colleagues introduce a theoretical model (the 'boomerang' model) to arrive at an innovative and potentially valuable framework for research on how the different components of self are balanced in everyday life.

A thought-provoking consideration of the social construction of self is provided by *Gergen*. He presents the key assumptions of contemporary social constructionist perspectives, alongside traditional conceptions of self, and shows how constructionist inquiry can give rise to an alternative conception of self. In doing so, he takes on criticisms of relational views, arguing that private actions and subjective experiences—however 'personal' they might be—are inextricably linked to public, relational, and social processes.

Reminding us of the need to understand the emergence of identity construction much earlier in development, *Bennett and Sani* share the major findings of a substantial program of research on social group identities in childhood. They start by carefully elucidating what is involved in subjective identification with a social group. Building on this theoretical analysis, they proceed to review empirical evidence showing that meaningful identification with social groups—including gender, family, and age groups—can be discerned in even young children's responses to various, innovative methodological manipulations.

The question of what motives guide our ongoing construction of identity is taken up by *Eriksson, Becker, and Vignoles*, who present a paper investigating patterns of

‘distinctiveness-seeking’ in Sweden and Britain. Moving beyond a simple individualist-collectivist contrast, Eriksson and colleagues evaluate potential differences in identity motives between two societies with important variations in conceptions of self (particularly with regard to the relative priority given to individual autonomy versus egalitarian attitudes). Their results, involving a dissociation between explicit and implicit measures of distinctiveness-seeking, raise truly intriguing questions about the multiple facets of identity construction.

The Dynamic Self: Changes and Consequences

In the final set of papers in this special issue, we are provided with new insights into the nature of changes in self-concept, as well as the consequences of self for relationships and behaviour. *Gore and Cross* present some valuable suggestions regarding strategies for measuring changes in self-concept, and report on empirical work indicating systematic individual differences in the likelihood of self-concept change. Importantly, their analysis gives rise to key questions about how social dimensions of self-construal in many cultures might be responsible for an ongoing process of self-concept change.

A dynamic analysis of the process by which self-related goals impact on social relationships and emotional well-being is provided by *Crocker*. In a compelling account of psychological processes involved in the relationships between US college roommates, she contrasts ‘self-image goals’ focused on establishing desired impressions of the self with ‘compassionate goals’ focused on supporting others. The paper reports on longitudinal work showing that self-image goals appear to be counterproductive, resulting in poorer rather than more positive social and psychological outcomes. The findings stimulate our thinking about how goals that lead to the best outcomes for the self may paradoxically be goals that focus our attention on others.

Kwan and her colleagues provide further insights into the nature and consequences of self-enhancement. They demonstrate the value of partitioning person perception into a number of specific components, showing how psychological

adjustment can be better understood by a consideration of the perceiver, the target being perceived, and the interaction between the two. A key benefit of this work is that it moves us forward from blanket generalizations about the adaptiveness of self-enhancement, helping us make a more nuanced assessment of the consequences of self-enhancement.

The final paper of this special issue, authored by *Leary, Toner, and Gan*, considers the potent influence of self in promoting human behaviours even where such behaviours appear to have little impact on a person’s self-interest. With particular attention to pro-environmental behaviour, Leary and his colleagues show that self-relevant processes—concerning identity, self-evaluation, and self-presentation—are instrumental in motivating and sustaining positive behaviours in the absence of concrete benefits for oneself. The incisive analysis highlights the prominence of self in human activities even when the consequences for oneself are not immediately obvious.

Concluding Remarks

The articles in this special issue show how researchers have approached self and identity from a number of different directions. Although the treatment of the theme cannot be claimed to be exhaustive, we sincerely hope that this issue represents a coming together of a variety of significant endeavors taking shape in this field. We think that the fruits of future research will depend to a large extent on how theoretical understanding will advance to capture the complexity of self-related processes within a framework that integrates consideration of evolution, development, self-functions/processes and culture. We offer this issue of *Psychological Studies* with optimism that it will spark a productive and useful dialogue among researchers to nurture and enable such integrative conceptualizations of self and identity.

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