



“Focus on the Self”: Guest Introduction to the Special Issue

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An introduction from our Guest Editor to this month’s special issue, “Focus on the Self.”

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The modern individual is often depicted as overly occupied with the “Self”—both in terms of how it is publicly presented and how it can be internally known and cultivated. This description is probably not too different from what people have been concerned with all throughout human history; however, contemporary self-presentation is now facilitated by the use of social media, which allows us to select the artifacts we want to exhibit as a form of self-presentation (Hogan, 2010). This self-presentation is well curated before being presented to the world (Suler, 2015) and serves as a means to receive positive feedback and increase our self-esteem, which in its radical forms is associated with narcissism (Andreassen, Pallesen, & Griffiths, 2017; Burrow & Rainone, 2017; Davenport, Bergman, Bergman, & Fearing, 2014; McCain & Campbell, 2018; Ong et al., 2011; Weiser, 2015). The prevalence of social media usage is further associated with new fears of missing out, leading to increased depression (Baker, Krieger, & LeRoy, 2016). It is not surprising that the same Self is increasingly using mindfulness and meditation to mitigate these continuous and limitless demands. For example, in recent years there has been an increase in the number of people in the United States who practice meditation and yoga to gain mental and physical benefits (Clarke, Barnes, Black, Stussman, & Nahin, 2018; Powell, 2018).

This image of the Self was what we set out to explore and better understand when inviting authors to share their work for this special issue. Little did we know that the world would soon experience a global pandemic, threats to millions of peoples’ livelihoods and well-being, long periods of lockdown, changes in work habits, physical isolation, and existential contemplations about the life led by this very Self.

Our issue opens with an invitation to learn about how the Self is molded by ancient traditions, namely, the effects of Confucianism on the modern Chinese Self. **Wei and Wang (this issue)** suggest that Zhongyong thinking, a Confucian doctrine of meaning that emphasizes interpersonal harmony, can be useful in transforming accumulated knowledge into wiser forms of behavior by approaching a conflict with a holistic view while seeking compromise. These dimensions of Confucianism offer comfort when considered as an alternative to a zero-sum-driven conflict.

Next, **Xiong and Wei (this issue)** explore the effects of Confucian thinking, philosophy, and ways of living on career choices in modern-day China. In a historically based analysis, the authors reveal there is a relationship between the spread of Confucian culture and entrepreneurial career choices, suggesting the deep-anchored roots of such traits. This unique link between cultural ancestry and the contemporary Self raises questions of the continuity and durability of ideals and how these affect modern-day economics. It echoes Max Weber’s work (1905/2002) *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism*, from a different historical, cultural, and religious perspective.

Moving from cultural effects to the more internal dimension of how the Self is perceived, **Yang, Ybarra, Zhao, and Huang (this issue)** question our subjective perception of similarities between who we are at present and our past Self, as a function of experiencing uncertainty. In two experimental studies the authors reveal that uncertainty increases the evaluated distance between the present and past self and observe that the effect is more prominent among participants with lower (vs. higher) levels of self-esteem, suggesting that this mechanism provides compensation in the form of self-certainty by facilitating self-enhancement.

A different form of self-esteem bolstering is suggested by **Sun, Li, and Hu (this issue)**, according to which the belief that our personal characteristics are unchangeable can increase conspicuous consumption. Consumption is found here to serve as a mechanism of self-enhancement by demonstrating more desirable qualities to avoid receiving negative assessment from others.

Our issue is also concerned with the values of morality and altruism, and **Yang, Cai, Yong, and Shi (this issue)** examined the associations between moral disengagement, moral identity, and altruistic attitudes and behaviors. In an experimental study the authors reveal that although we like to think of ourselves as having altruistic attitudes, this is not always associated with how we will act upon these beliefs in real-life scenarios. These findings emphasize the discrepancy often found between attitudes and behaviors (Fazio & Olson, 2003).

Looking at a different human characteristic, narcissism is addressed in two manuscripts. **Lee and Kang (this issue)** identify narcissists' need for control as a factor influencing their lack of empathy. These authors discuss the practical implications of managing this need to increase perspective taking and understanding of others among narcissists.

Ha, Lee, Byun, and Dai (this issue) follow this line of thought, offering a comprehensive view of narcissism in the context of leadership and suggesting that this trait can benefit organizational outcomes. Studying the unique context of the Korean armed forces, the authors shed light on the exchange relationship between the narcissistic leader and the subordinate as one that can positively affect the latter's change-oriented organizational behavior. In other words, narcissistic leaders' ambition for high performance may create a relationship with their subordinates that benefits the overall contribution of the latter to the organization.

The Self in the context of the work field, and its relationship with others, is at the core of the work by **Chae and Park (this issue)**, who examine how an individual's sense of self-efficacy interacts with coworkers' self-efficacy in affecting the work outcomes of task performance and willingness to share knowledge. Coworkers' self-efficacy is found to contribute to task performance but is negatively associated with knowledge sharing. The authors recommend that companies consider this aspect of the exchange between workers to achieve a better distribution of knowledge within the organization.

The next manuscript in this issue addresses psychopathology and addictions and provides a unique opportunity to learn in these issues about the relationship between the Self and one's motivation for abstinence in the context of a Chinese governmental drug treatment institution. **Chen, Zeng, Chen, and Wu (this issue)** reveal associations between self-concept, stress-coping style, and abstinence motivation, suggesting that a positive self-concept can contribute to one's stress-coping style, and to the general motivation for abstinence.

The issue concludes with a fascinating neuroscientific investigation of the role of the ventromedial prefrontal cortex in facilitating the processing of self-referential and emotional information. **Daley, Bowen, Fields, Gutchess, and Kensinger (this issue)** establish this function and suggest that the networks involved in the process differ as a function of age, as older adults use different networks to connect self-relevant information compared to those used by younger adults.

We are grateful to our wonderful authors who have found the mental time and space to share their work with us, and we hope you enjoy the selection provided in this special issue.

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