
Editorial

The Organized Self: Structure, Evaluation, and Functioning

A coherent and valued sense of self has long been associated with healthy functioning. When individuals can articulate who they are, what they stand for, and how they make sense of experience, they are better positioned to maintain emotional balance and constructively navigate social life. Contemporary research does not consider this a static trait. Indeed, it frames this navigational capacity as a dynamic system of meaning and self-organization that integrates affect and self-perception which, in turn, influences behavior (Campbell et al., 1996; Kernis, 2003). From this perspective, selfhood reflects an ongoing process through which people maintain continuity, cultivate meaning, express identity, and function in the external world.

This volume brings together archival and new contributions that explore how the self becomes organized, evaluated, and enacted. These studies involve samples of mostly young adults, a developmental period marked by identity formation, making these questions especially salient. In addition to reflecting content (e.g., a narrative of memories), a coherent self reflects the capacity to incorporate and understand positive and vulnerable experiences, all within the context of one's values (Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Archival works in this volume illuminate the lived and interpersonal dimensions of these processes. In *How identity is constructed: An analysis of four case studies*, Dinkha and colleagues (2008/2022) present qualitative accounts demonstrating how identity emerges as individuals weave experience into personal meaning. Their cases illustrate that selfhood is narrative, iterative, and situated in culture and relationship. Identity is created and revised through reflection, value clarification, and negotiation of roles; processes central to forming a coherent inner life.

In *Exploring the relationships among hurt reactivity, social adjustment, and psychological well-being*, May et al. (2007/2022) highlight the self as a site of emotional interpretation. When confronted with interpersonal hurt, some individuals direct emotion inward in self-critical ways, while others externalize it through anger. Such patterns reflect deeper assumptions about self-worth, responsibility, and interpersonal meaning. These findings suggest that responses to relational threat serve as a window into underlying self-representations: the ways one protects internal integrity, assigns blame, and holds oneself accountable in emotionally charged contexts.

Rounding out the reprints in this volume, *Psychosocial correlates of overt aggression in intercollegiate athletes* by Storch et al. (2005/2022) moves from internal experience to social behavior. In this study aggression and peer rejection were linked among college athletes. This underscores that difficulties in meaning to the self and resultant self-regulation may become visible in high-stakes social environments. Here, the self is enacted behaviorally and through the lens of belonging (e.g., Maslow, 1954). Storch and colleagues' findings suggest that competencies in internal organization manifest as interpersonal competence or strain. This leads to the possibility that emotional experience, clarity of self-structure, and regulatory resources intertwine to shape the ability to manage competitive demands while maintaining constructive relationships.

The new contribution in this volume by Daughtry et al. (2022), *Sense of self and ego resiliency as predictors of psychological distress and adjustment*, complements the archival findings by differentiating structural and functional components of selfhood. A cohesive sense of self correlated strongly with lower psychological distress and better adjustment, while ego resiliency, a flexible capacity to adaptively modulate behavior and affect (Block & Block, 1980), predicted adaptive functioning primarily when grounded in coherent self-structure. These results reinforce clinical speculations emphasizing that flexibility is most beneficial when anchored in a well-organized internal framework (Kohut, 1977). Freedom to respond adaptively is meaningful when guided by clarity of purpose, personal values, and stable internal organization.

Finally, Bai's (2022) new contribution, *From inner fortitude to self-worth: How ego strength shapes self-esteem through self-concept clarity*, examines how internal capacity for self-regulation and inner strength relates to clarity of self-knowledge and global self-esteem. Consistent with past work linking self-structure to adjustment (Klohnen, 1996), ego strength predicted higher self-esteem only through the mediating effect of self-concept clarity. Rather than fostering self-worth directly, internal fortitude appears to support the development of a clear and organized self-view, which then is a springboard for better self-regard.

Together, these contributions advance a view of the self as an organized psychological system; one that integrates clarity, value, emotional meaning, and behavior. The emerging picture is nuanced: coherence supports self-worth and emotional stability; clarity enables flexibility to operate effectively; and self-evaluative and regulatory tendencies shape patterns of hurt, care, and social engagement. Individual differences in self-organization therefore matter not only for internal experience but also for real-world functioning, particularly in developmental periods when identity is being actively formed and tested.

As interest in the architecture of the self continues to expand, the research featured here highlights that psychological health involves internal processes and cannot be reduced to surface-level traits. The foundations lie in inner organization: knowing oneself, valuing oneself, and interpreting and navigating experience in ways that sustain continuity and expression. These articles trace the contours of that endeavor, each offering insight into how people build and maintain personal coherence amid complexity. In doing so, they affirm the promise of continued inquiry into the development, vulnerabilities, and capacities of the organized self.

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