

December 2020

Group identity: What makes us 'us'?



Research summary

*In this report, we highlight the "Group identity" topic, defined by keywords including, "multiple social groups" and "social group identification." Highly Cited Researcher, **Prof. Alex Haslam** summarizes this Research Front. Alex is a professor of psychology and ARC Australian Laureate Fellow in the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland.*

What would you call this Research Front and how would you sum it up?

Our work focuses on the importance of group-based connections and group-based identity. In very basic terms our work centers on "Us-ness". That's the term that best captures this front and is really what social identity all about.

What led to the development of this Research Front?

For the last 100 years psychologists have focused on the self as an "I" construct. Our work says this "I-ness" is an important part of psychology and of the self, but there's also "we-ness" or an "us-ness." How we develop as individuals is contingent on this sense of "us-ness" and upon the sorts of groups we are members of.

It's only in the last decade that a new wave of health research that explores these issues has come to the fore. There's maybe a dozen of us now. Research groups all over the world are now starting to contribute to

the literature by showing how group-based social connection is a key determinant of health trajectories and outcomes.

This is something that really comes through in the data. For example, when they retire, people potentially lose two meaningful groups from their life: their work and their professional group. They can also gain group membership at this point, however— for example, in recreational or volunteer groups.

These changes in social connection have major health consequences. For if you lose two meaningful group memberships when you retire, you are 24 times more likely to die in the next six years than if you gain two group memberships.

"These changes in social connection have major health consequences."

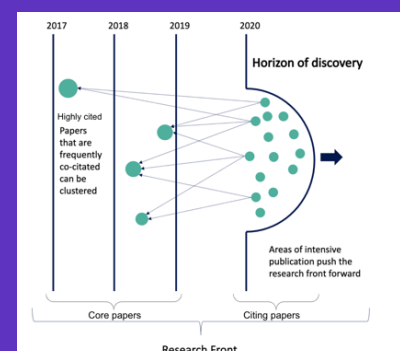
So, group-based and identity-based connection is foundational for both physical and mental health. But it's also incredibly important in organizational contexts and for leadership. This reflects the fact that, fundamentally, we're social beings.

About

A Research Front consists of a core of closely related papers and a frontier of recently published papers that are citing a paper in the core.

Core papers are highly cited papers published in the last 5 years. They are clustered together if frequently co-cited by the same publications.

This use of the citation network means that a Research Front provides an intuitive, powerful, and ever-evolving way to identify contemporary topics of high interest spanning the entire published literature.



We've evolved to live, work and function in social groups. That's what we are as an organism. We're not made to operate in isolation. That just doesn't work.

When you put a lot of these pieces together across the social, organizational and clinical domains, everything starts to make sense. But it makes sense in a very different way from the dominant models of psychology that have been handed down, in particular, from North American psychology.

Why is this Research Front particularly important today?

The COVID-19 virus has clearly been responsible for a significant increase in physical distancing and social isolation. At the same time, it has also motivated people to seek out social connection, and it's clear that during the pandemic, social connections have been a key social and psychological resource.

“It's clear that during the pandemic, social connections have been a key social and psychological resource.”

Leadership is absolutely critical here, and we see that leaders who have mobilized a sense of “us-ness,” have created psychological connections that provide a platform for coordinated, concerted, collective action.

This is something that looms very large on the world landscape at the moment. For example, some of the advisors to Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand and Nicola Sturgeon in Scotland are social psychologists schooled in the social identity tradition. It's not an accident that their leadership through the pandemic has looked to build and draw upon social identity.

All in all, then, this has created increasing appetite for what we refer to as a “New Psychology of Leadership,” that moves away from the traditional focus on “me” and “I.”

What other fields connect with your work?

Social identity is very much trans-field. It goes all the way from neuropsychology, right through to political science. It provides a new analytical language for understanding processes. Moreover, social identity research is characterised by theoretical and empirical depth which is relatively unique and provides a set of proven resources for people outside psychology. When I have conversations with geographers, political scientists and economists, for example, it is clear that researchers in those fields find social identity principles extremely relevant and useful for their own research.

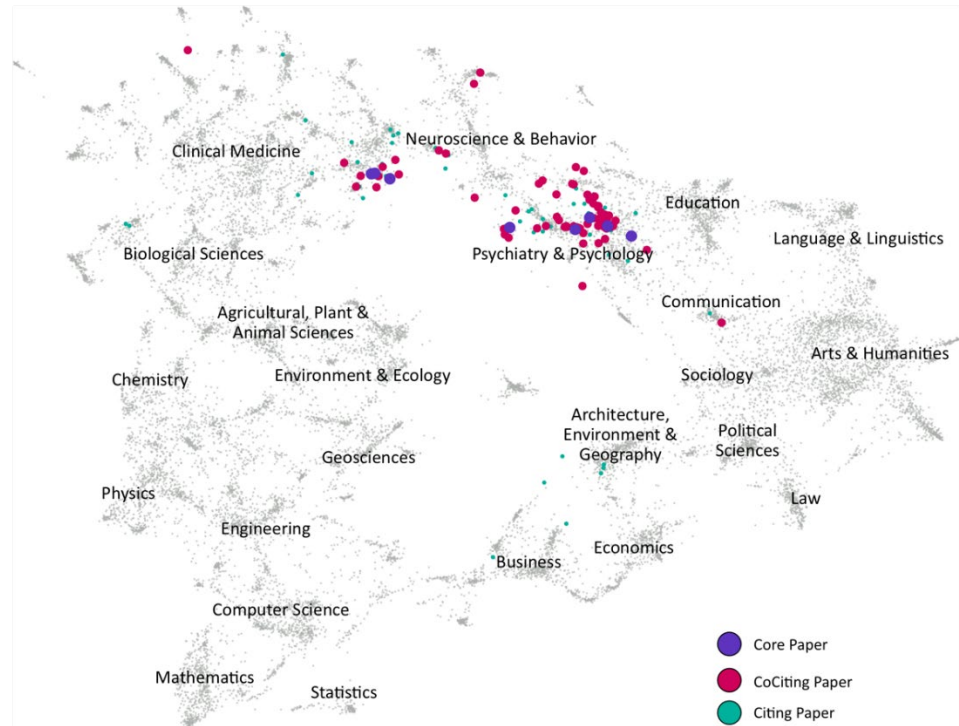
Where do you see this Front going?

The standard view of psychology is still incredibly strong. There are whole realms of fields and areas, and domains and problems to which a social identity analysis hasn't yet been applied—but clearly could be. I think this will happen as there's an appetite for what we're saying now.

I also hope our work will allow researchers to have an integrated perspective on psychology and see how psychology dovetails with other disciplines, enabling a sense of why this particular approach is so important and so necessary—particularly when it comes to tackling the huge range of challenges we now confront. If you look at things like the pandemic, climate change and our aging societies, it is clear that our capacity to chart a way forward will depend critically on our ability to come together in ways that cultivate connected rather than divided societies—and on the leadership that brings this about.

Specialty map

Figure 1. Cluster map of paper co-citations by research field



Source: The Web of Science

The specialty map clusters all papers in the Web of Science by co-citation; papers that are cited together frequently will be closer together on the map. The highlighted publications are a part of this Research Front and show the various fields this front interacts with.

As you can see, the Group Identity front spans two main areas: there is a major cluster in Psychiatry and Psychology, and a minor cluster towards Clinical Medicine. This is situated in Health Policy and Services.

*The definition of Core, Co-Citing and Citing papers can be found on Page 1.

Top key phrases

- multiple social groups
- additional important social groups
- social group identification
- large-scale social groups
- social identity theoretical approach

Core cited documents

Core papers are highly cited papers that been published in the last five years and are clustered together if they are frequently co-cited by the same publications. The papers are ordered by date of publication and the citation count is current as of December 2019, when the Research Front was calculated.

Authors	Paper	Citation count
Neff, HA; Kellar-Guenther, Y; Jankowski, CM; Worthington, C ; McCandless, SA; et al.	Turning disability into ability: barriers and facilitators to initiating and maintaining exercise among older men living with HIV, AIDS Care (2019)	6
Haslam, SA; McMahon, C; Cruwys, T; Haslam, C; Jetten, J; et al.	Social cure, what social cure? The propensity to underestimate the importance of social factors for health, Soc Sci Med. (2018)	20
Smith, GL; Banting, L; Eime, R; O'Sullivan, G; van Uffelen, JGZ	The association between social support and physical activity in older adults: a systematic review, International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (2017)	55
Haslam, C; Cruwys, T; Haslam, SA; Dingle, G; Chang, MXL.	GROUPS 4 HEALTH: Evidence that a social-identity intervention that builds and strengthens social group membership improves mental health, J Affective Disorders (2016)	64
Best, D; Beckwith, M; Haslam, C; Haslam, SA; Jetten, J; Mawson, E; Lubman, DI.	Overcoming alcohol and other drug addiction as a process of social identity transition: the social identity model of recovery (SIMOR), Addiction Research & Theory (2016)	65
Jetten, J; Branscombe, NR; Haslam, SA; Haslam, C; Cruwys, T; et al.	Having a Lot of a Good Thing: Multiple Important Group Memberships as a Source of Self-Esteem, PLOS One (2015)	72
Greenaway, KH; Haslam, SA; Cruwys, T; Branscombe, NR; Ysseldyk, R.	From We to Me: Group Identification Enhances Perceived Personal Control With Consequences for Health and Well-Being, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (2015)	97
Jetten, J; Haslam, C; Haslam, SA; Dingle, G; Jones, JM	How Groups Affect Our Health and Well-Being: The Path from Theory to Policy, Social Issues and Policy Review (2014)	100

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Selected co-citing documents

A co-citing paper cites two or more of the seven core papers in this Research Front. Selected and ranked by co-citation count, this table highlights the most recent and strongly connected papers on the leading edge. The counts reflect total co-cites as of December 2019, when the Research Front was calculated.

Authors	Paper	Co-citation count
Haslam, C; Steffens, NK; Branscombe, NR; Haslam, SA; Cruwys, T; et al	The Importance of Social Groups for Retirement Adjustment: Evidence, Application, and Policy Implications of the Social Identity Model of Identity Change, Social Issues and Policy review (2019)	6
Haslam, SA; McMahon, C; Cruwys, T; Haslam, C; Jetten, J; et al.	A Leak in the Academic Pipeline: Identity and Health Among Postdoctoral Women, Frontiers in Psychology, (2019)	4
Lindsay-Smith, G; O'Sullivan, G; Eime, R; Harvey, J; van Uffelen, JGZ	A mixed methods case study exploring the impact of membership of a multi-activity, multicentre community group on social wellbeing of older adults, BMC Geriatrics (2018)	4
Jetten, J; Haslam, SA; Cruwys, T; Greenaway, KH; Haslam, C; Steffens, NK	Advancing the social identity approach to health and well-being: Progressing the social cure research agenda, European Journal of Social Psychology (2017)	4
Cruwys, T; Steffens, NK; Haslam, SA; Haslam, C; Jetten, J; Dingle, GA.	Social Identity Mapping: A procedure for visual representation and assessment of subjective multiple group memberships, British Journal of Social Psychology (2016)	4
McIntyre, JC; Wickham, S; Barr, B; Bental, RP	Social Identity and Psychosis: Associations and Psychological Mechanisms, Schizophrenia Bulletin (2018)	3
Bathish, R; Best, D; Savic, M; Beckwith, M; Mackenzie, J; Lubman, DI	Is it me or should my friends take the credit? The role of social networks and social identity in recovery from addiction, Journal of Applied Social Psychology (2017)	3
Sani, F; Wakefield, JRH; Herrera, M; Zeybek, A	On the Association Between Greater Family Identification and Lower Paranoid Ideation Among Non-Clinical Individuals: Evidence From Cypriot and Spanish Students, Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology (2017)	3

Key Authors

Niklas Steffens University of Queensland Australia	David Best Sheffield Hallam University United Kingdom	Katherine Greenaway University of Queensland Australia
Fabio Sani University of Dundee United Kingdom	Renate Ysseldyk Carleton University Canada	Gabrielle Lindsay-Smith Victoria University Australia

Figure 2. Research Front overview



ESI Field/Country Diversity: measures the diversity of papers in the Research Front according to the assigned ESI Field/countries of the organisations that authors are affiliated with. A higher value means more variation in research fields/more international collaboration.

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