

To boundaries and beyond: An introduction to the past, present and future of identity research

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Editorial

Commenting on histories of Victorian Britain that excluded cricket, noted post-colonial theorist CLR James said, “I can no longer accept the system of values which could not find in these books a place for W.G. Grace” (James 2005 [1963]: 208). As we near the end of 2012’s ‘summer of sport’, can any of us contest that James’ words are any less true today – that sport, society, and self do not intermingle and co-construct in fascinating and unexpected ways? At the Olympic Park in Stratford, Somalian-born and American-based Mo Farah is hailed as a British national hero at the same time that Olga Butkevych, a Ukrainian-born Olympic wrestler, is accused of being a ‘plastic Brit’. Meanwhile, just across the River Thames, the England cricket team takes the field with four South Africa-born players among their number. How can such seemingly disparate understandings of national identity be consistently held together? Or perhaps the more sensible question: is any form of consistency even possible or desirable?

Questions considering the negotiation, employment, and maintenance of individual and collective identities formed the basis of the fourth *ENQUIRE* postgraduate conference, held in the University of Nottingham’s School of Sociology and Social Policy on the 6-7 September, 2011. At this conference, researchers from 15 different institutions and multifarious backgrounds presented research on cultural, historical, and biological notions of identity, encompassing topics from trainers, prison guards, and neuroscience to the future of sociology itself. The construction of identity may well be (essentially) contested, but the amount of high-quality research on the concept that is being undertaken by postgraduate and early-career researchers across

numerous disciplines was immediately apparent.

The editors are delighted to present four papers emerging from that conference which reflect some of the wealth and breadth of research on identity. The articles in this issue approach the topic in diverse and interdisciplinary ways. Two consider museums as sites of identity; Helen Wilkinson examines changes in museum curators' professional identities while Alan Kirwan considers how, in contemporary multicultural contexts, Irish museums represent Ireland's post-colonial national identity. Kristoffer Halvorsrud explores issues of belonging and citizenship among white South African migrants in the United Kingdom, while Caroline Williamson uses the concept of posttraumatic growth to analyse changes in self-perception among female survivors of the Rwandan genocide.

It is fitting that these four papers represent a range of sites and disciplines, as this special issue is being launched to coincide with the fifth *ENQUIRE* conference, which focuses on the increasingly prominent academic theme of interdisciplinarity. It is hoped that papers from this latest conference will form another special-edition journal almost entirely written, edited, and reviewed by postgraduate and early-career researchers. The editors hope that this current edition will inspire contributors to write, edit, and review for the next edition of *ENQUIRE*; those who are interested should e-mail enquire@nottingham.ac.uk.

Reference

James, C., 2005. *Beyond a boundary*, London: Yellow Jersey Press.