CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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Over the years, the topics of self and identity have received a great deal of attention in the field of psychology. The literature is replete with investigations into self-concept, people's perceptions, ideas, and feelings about themselves, and into identity, people's perceptions of their own sameness and continuity (Oosterwegel and Wicklund, 1995). Although researchers in the field choose to focus on different facets of self and identity, broad theoretical trends can be identified.

Traditionally, theorists have conceptualized self and identity as cognitive structures (Hattie, 1992; Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, and Orlofsky, 1993). These structures have mostly been regarded as stable mental representations that – once they have become crystallized through the repeated processing of personal information – control our further behavior (e.g. Markus and Wurf, 1987). As a result, the phenomena that are seen as indicative of self and identity are implicitly reduced to a self-concept: a set of beliefs about oneself. This set of beliefs, moreover, is considered to have dynamic implications for the regulation of our actions. The self-concept is thought to serve as an interpretative framework that integrates our personal experiences and as a regulative basis to guide further behavior. However, since the mental representations that constitute the self-concept are seen as stable carriers of personal information, deeply engraved in our memory, the traditional approaches are more suitable for accounting for aspects like stability and continuity than for the dynamics that emerge in self and identity. For instance, how do aspects of self and identity develop over time, why do they change with different situations and circumstances, how are they affected by emotional states or emotions as such? Cognitivists have tried to solve this dilemma by postulating increasingly complex representational structures underlying the self-concept, operating through intra-individual mechanisms of information processing. At this point, however, a purely cognitive approach to self and identity runs into serious conceptual problems. Neither the supposed representational complexity, nor the supposed information processing mechanisms can be inferred directly from what people tell about themselves.

Thus, the self-concept is no longer what people feel, think, or say about themselves, but has become a hypothetical, almost homunculary construct with a life of its own. This comes close to a kind of ''agency smuggling,'' as Gergen once put it (1984). In fact, a cognitivistic view turns us into rule-instructed operators without clarifying how we adapt to the ever-changing contexts of everyday life or even initiate changes (e.g. Bruner, 1990). Concepts like self and identity have thus become abstracted from the behavior that we exhibit in relation to the natural circumstances in which we have learned to function.

Empirical research also suggests that the common conceptualizations have strong limitations. Given the assumed functional importance and personal relevance of self and identity, the empirically found relations between cognitive representations about oneself and constructs such as well-being, adaptation, motivation, and performance behavior, turn out to be less straightforward than theoretically expected. One reason may be that the prevailing approach is too static and cognitivistic. If we consider how opinions about oneself may play a role in psychological functioning, it is quite clear that cognitive opinions alone do not indeed tell the whole story. For example, negative self-evaluations are important only if they concern topics that matter to us (Harter, 1999; James, 1890; Tesser, 1988). We could happily admit that we are very bad at playing tennis, as long as we do not care about our tennis performance. For someone else, the evaluation that he is not as good as the top-ten players in the world may be devastating.

Thus, self-evaluations appear especially important if they are about our basic concerns, and, thus, are connected with emotions. The type of emotions involved may differ greatly. Take, for example, an ambitious player who is uncertain about his capacities. Baumeister, Smart, and Boden (1996) describe how people with a high but brittle self-esteem may act aggressively in situations that are perceived as threatening to their self-esteem. A certain player may present himself as a great player and become very angry if he loses a game, attributing the loss to anything but himself. Another may feel sad and see himself as a lousy player, after losing an important match. But even for the most ambitious tennis player, his evaluation of his tennis performance or his identity as a tennis player does not matter always and everywhere. In his relation with his intellectual mother, for instance, he might even be a bit embarrassed about his tennis reputation. Whether it matters, depends on the situation, has to do with the specific relationship involved. Thus, opinions about oneself are intertwined with emotions, arise in relations, and may be more or less stable. They emerge, become relevant, motivate, and change in the ever-changing relations. Focusing

solely on non-contextual cognitive statements about oneself may be too narrow an approach.

From the history of thinking about self and identity it becomes evident that the cognitive approach has not always predominated. Founding fathers of self and identity psychology, such as William James (1890) and Erik Erikson (1950, 1968), described much broader concepts. They perceived self and identity as dynamic phenomena, which include cognitions, but also emotions and perceptions, and which are always embedded in the person's relationship with the context. The more restricted, cognitive focus became dominant afterwards, in all probability as a consequence of the demands of formalization and standardization since the time of behaviorism. Since then, self-related research has focused mainly on self-representations, often in written form. In identity research the structuralistic status approach of Marcia (e.g. Marcia, 1980) has dominated for more than thirty years. The recent chapter of Harter in the *Handbook of Child Psychology* (1998) clearly shows the dilemma. Harter begins by stating that emotions do play an important role in the self-concept, and that research should pay attention to them. However, the current knowledge in this field, as Harter notices, mainly concerns cognitive aspects. That is why her overview of the research and her further elaboration are cognitive too.

But, things appear to be changing. Newer approaches to the study of self and identity have challenged aspects or implications of this cognitive approach and now focus on factors that have been hitherto neglected. Demo (1992), for example, criticized the notion that the self-concept is always stable. Identity researchers such as Bosma, Graafsma, Grotevant, and De Levita (1994) have begun to conceptualize identity as a process of ongoing adaptation and have made suggestions for a relational and interdisciplinary approach to identity development. Recent research efforts (e.g. Baumeister, 1998) started to investigate the role of emotions and situational influences on the development of self and identity. In a similar way many other authors have begun to address the limitations of a merely cognitive approach to self and identity (see chapter 2 for a comprehensive overview).

Although these recent developments have resulted in new insights and have provided new perspectives, fundamental questions remain. For example, the role of emotions in self and identity requires further explanation. How do emotions and cognitions influence each other? What direction or directions does this influence take? In terms of contextual factors, what kinds of events tend to be relevant to an individual's sense of self and why do the same events often impact on different individuals in different ways? Furthermore, we lack insight into the processes that can account for stability and change in

self-perception and self-evaluation over different time spans. What processes are responsible for long-term developmental change from infancy into adulthood? Is fundamental and enduring change possible in adulthood? If so, what mechanisms are responsible for such change?

These fundamental questions remain largely unanswered. One major impediment for addressing them is the lack of a framework in which the role of emotions, the role of the context, and issues of stability and change in self and identity are considered in combination. The more recent approaches offer new perspectives, but it is unclear how they relate to each other. Moreover, a majority of these approaches are still firmly rooted in the conventional view of self and identity as a cognitive, internal structure. Emotions and context are primarily regarded as correlates of this structure or influences upon its expression. And for these structures increasingly complicated conceptualizations have been suggested (compare Higgins, 1987; Markus and Wurf, 1987).

Recently, conceptualizations of self and identity as an internal, entity-like structure have been criticized more radically. Several theorists have begun to tackle self and identity from a completely different perspective. Instead of working with an established construct of ''self'' or ''identity,'' and trying to relate emotions and context to it, they start from the opposite direction: emotions and context are seen as formative conditions from which self and identity emerge in a self-organizational process. Fogel (1993), for example, considers relationships fundamental to all development and discusses how the self evolves in a social and emotional context. Hermans (1996) also takes relationships as a starting point and has argued for a ''dialogical interchange'' instead of an ''information processing'' perspective on the self. Lewis' (1995) theory of personality development is based on principles of self-organization, and it describes how stable characteristics emerge from feedback and coupling in cognition–emotion interactions. Haviland (Haviland, Davidson, Ruetsch, Gebelt, and Lancelot, 1994) and Magai (Magai and McFadden, 1995) turn to emotional processes to explain identity and personality development. Most of these authors apply principles of non-linear dynamic systems theory, e.g. the notion of self-organization, to the study of developmental processes. Groundbreaking work in this area has recently been done by Van Geert (1991, 1994).

These new and more radical perspectives provide promising insights that may serve to begin to answer many of the questions listed earlier. They also offer intriguing opportunities for the integration into a much broader theoretical framework based on self-organizational perspectives. The aim of this volume is the discussion and further elaboration of these new ideas. In fact, according to many of the authors in this volume, emotions – central in one's self-experience – emerge, change,

and dissipate in relationships as a dynamic, self-organizing system. The authors suggest conceptualizing self and identity as rooted in emotion, emerging in relationships, and developing as a dynamic, self-organizing system.

Most of the authors of the chapters in this book share an active interest in a dynamic perspective on self and identity. In such a perspective the various elements – cognitions, emotions, and context – need no longer be considered separately, but can be viewed as a complex, interacting network. Processes within such a network may give rise to ''self'' phenomena: conscious and non-conscious, reflective and non-reflective self-experiences. If these experiences become stabilized in this network, and relevant for the person, they can be seen as part of the identity. Such a process approach has the advantage that the embeddedness in the context and the changeability are inherently given. This approach has yet to explain stability. Several chapters in this volume will explicitly focus on this topic. Here we wish to warn against a source of conceptual confusion. ''Self-organization'' in psychology can have two completely different meanings: it can refer (a) to the structure/organization of the self, and (b) to a very general process in which higher-order phenomena emerge from interacting lower-order components (Lewis and Granic, 1999a). The first meaning is most common in psychology, the second stems from Dynamic Systems Theory and could also be referred to as ''auto-organization.'' These two meanings have as much in common as ''wine table'' and ''table wine'' (Marc Lewis, personal communication, April 2000). Although most authors in this volume use ''self-organization'' in the sense of ''auto-organization,'' it is sometimes used in the sense of ''the organization of the self.''

A conceptualization of self and identity as rooted in emotion, emerging in relationships, and developing as a dynamic, self-organizing system has implications for the methods that are used for assessing them. Most current operationalizations of self and identity are based on the idea of a stable cognitive structure, most clearly exemplified by questionnaires and standardized interviews with questions concerning the person's ideas and opinions about him- or herself (see Byrne, 1996, for an overview). More open methods, such as open essay questions and ''Who are you?'' interviews, are also common. In contrast to the standardized questionnaires and interviews, the more open methods allow the subjects to give their own self-description. Identity measures mostly concern semi-open or fully standardized interviews and questionnaires also (e.g. Marcia et al., 1993). The assumptions behind most of these instruments are that the construct to be measured is context-independent, stable, and mainly cognitive. Such instruments can hardly be of use

when self and identity are seen as dynamic, self-organizing systems. Measurement will therefore be a recurrent issue throughout this book. In some chapters alternative measurement methods will be presented that are more in line with the new conceptualizations. In the concluding chapter we will come back to this topic and discuss suggestions for methodology and methods that are more appropriate.

Another recurrent issue concerns the terminology that is used with regard to self and identity. This terminology has always been a source of inconsistency and confusion (e.g. Bosma, 1995). As the reader of the different chapters will note, there is a huge diversity of concepts that all have to do with how people perceive themselves within their context. All these concepts can be classified in two main groups with very different theoretical backgrounds. The first group consists of a broad collection of ''self'' terms: self-concept, self-system, self-schema, the self, the Self, self-evaluation, self-esteem. James, Cooley, and Mead are seen as the founding fathers of this theoretical stream. Different ''self'' terms connote different theoretical backgrounds. The term ''self-concept'' refers to a cognitive construct, while self-system definitions suggest broader and more dynamic connotations. The other group consists of ''identity'' terms, like ''ego'' or ''self,'' but the most frequently used term in this group is ''identity'' itself. Erikson (influenced by Freud as well as by James) is the founding father of this theoretical stream. In the ways these concepts are used (also in this volume) it is often not very clear what the differences are between self and identity. Regardless of the different and often completely separate theoretical backgrounds, however, there are good reasons to assume that, in fact, both groups of theories and concepts concern more or less the same empirical phenomena. This is quite evident when the focus is on self-conception problems and identity problems (Van der Werff, 1990; Van Halen, in preparation). For this reason ''self'' and ''identity'' will be used interchangeably in this book.

The aim of this book is to discuss and elaborate a dynamic systems perspective of self, identity, and emotion. We think that the application of such a perspective can help to overcome certain limitations of the cognitive approach. It can help to integrate emotions and the context in the study of self and identity and it offers promising possibilities for the conceptualization of stability and change. To achieve this aim, the book is organized according to a certain ground plan.

After this introduction the book continues with a contribution (chapter 2) about three problematic issues in recent self-concept theory and research. In this chapter, Van der Meulen will show that the perspectives from which the authors in this book approach ''the self'' are not merely applications of modern paradigms in psychology to a particular

domain, ''the self.'' They can (also) be understood as a continuation and extension of recurring arguments within self-concept theory and research over the years in different branches of psychology. Van der Meulen discusses how the former conception of a stable cognitive self-concept has been challenged, and how the role of emotions and of context, and the issue of stability versus variability have become three major issues in the theoretical discussion. The overview makes clear that all these new ideas have resulted in a shattered picture with many loose ends at this moment. She concludes that till now the emotional, dynamic, and relational aspects of self-concept and identity have been addressed in isolation.

We see the integration of the three issues in theory and research as one of the major challenges in the psychology of self and identity. The discussion of such an integration is the main aim of this volume. Chapter 2, thus, sets the agenda for the rest of the book. It is followed by chapters 3 and 4 focusing on emotions and dynamic systems theory in a general way, and by chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 offering theory and research, in which the issues are integrated in a particular way.

In chapter 3, Frijda discusses emotions. Emotions, according to Frijda's componential emotion theory (1986), are always about something: they emerge in the person's relationship with the world. In addition, emotions signal that one's own person is at stake. Moreover, emotions can be conceptualized as fluid processes rather than structures or entities. Frijda addresses the nature of emotions and discusses how emotions are related to the self. He argues that emotions do not require a representation of self, because they include responses to perceived events in which the self is not explicitly appraised. However, from an early age emotions imply what William James called a notion of ''I'' – the center of experience and action.

Van Geert (chapter 4) presents a general and non-technical introduction to some of the major concepts of dynamic systems theory and its application to developmental psychology. Various contributions in this book rely heavily on the theory of dynamic systems. Readers unfamiliar with either dynamic systems theory or its application to developmental psychology will probably find the proliferation of technical terms confusing rather than revealing. Because dynamic systems theory fits in naturally with the basic concepts and models of developmental psychology, it may serve as an adequate theoretical and methodological tool in the study of developmental phenomena. Van Geert's main aim is to demonstrate that these concepts and models, exotic as they may seem, function as convenient and handy tools for conceptualizing and studying processes of development and of the development of self and identity in particular.

Chapter 5 is about the intrinsic relatedness of person and context, in other words, about a relational perspective of self and emotion. The premises in Fogel's chapter are that psychological experience always implies a relation, and that this experience is always dynamic and changing. Still, people have a sense of uniqueness and permanence through time, because they experience their changing relationships according to different types of emotions. These emotions provide them with information about the self. The experience and the type of emotional process varies at different time scales. This chapter forms a bridge to the following chapters. Its main focus is on social-relational processes, but ideas about emotions, self, and the dynamics of change are incorporated as well. This chapter, therefore, also offers a recent approach which integrates the emotional, dynamic, and relational aspects of self and identity.

The following three chapters each describe a specific approach to the dynamics of self, identity, and emotion and provide illustrations of and empirical support for the model by means of examples and case studies. Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (chapter 6) consider the relationship between self – viewed as multivoiced and dialogical – and emotion. They argue that during human development a person's affective responses are increasingly influenced by the relationship the person has with him- or herself. In chapter 7, Haviland-Jones, Boulifard, and Magai discuss the function of emotions in identity. Both emotional experiences and identity show discontinuous and non-linear developmental changes. The authors assert that the application of dynamic systems modeling will give a better insight into these processes. In chapter 8, Lewis and Ferrari address the problem of the continuity of identity despite ongoing change in the person and the world. On the basis of principles of self-organization which can be observed in natural systems, they discuss personality and identity self-organization. Central in this process is the developmental consolidation of recursively interacting cognition–emotion elements.

Each of the chapters 2 through 8 will be followed by a commentary, written by a distinguished scholar with regard to the topic addressed in the chapter. These scholars were asked, first, to comment on the ideas expressed in the chapter in the light of the aims of the volume, and, second, to give their own ideas about these aims. As a consequence of this twofold request some commentaries have the form of real discussions, while others mainly present perspectives in addition or complementary to the topic of the chapter and the book. Some authors have replied to the commentaries on their chapters. These replies are not included in the book, but their main points are discussed in the final chapter. They are referred to in the text and included in the list of

references. As the combination of chapters and commentaries will show, the attempts to combine emotion theory, dynamic systems thinking, and recent developments in theory and research on self and identity are very new and still leave much room for debate. We do not want to give the impression that with this volume all of the problems in this domain have been solved. On the contrary, the critical commentaries of outstanding scholars on the various contributions to the book are meant to broaden the discussion beyond the work and ideas of the authors of the different chapters. By asking the commentators to discuss the ideas in the chapter, we hope to get an overview of discussion points, contradictory viewpoints, unsolved problems, and unanswered questions. In this sense, the commentators can be seen as a forum of highly specialized colleagues. Because the topic is so new, it is important to get an overview of the diversity of the many viewpoints, before boiling down our thinking about the topic into a comprehensive body of theoretical statements.

In chapter 9, the final chapter of the book, we will discuss how emotion, dynamic systems thinking, and a relational perspective are related to each other in the different theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of self and identity development. The various authors all have their own focus and the chapter will elaborate how their approaches, in combination, offer a broad and lively picture of how self and identity can be seen as rooted in emotion, emerging in relationships, and developing as a dynamic, self-organizing system. The chapter will also discuss to what extent they complement each other, and to what extent contradictions exist between the different viewpoints. The resulting overview will present the current knowledge in this new field.

CHAPTER 2

Developments in self-concept theory and research: affect, context, and variability

Matty Van der Meulen

Theory and research on constructs such as the self-concept, which have a considerable history in psychology, are inevitably influenced by prevailing scientific opinions and developments at a particular point in time (Baumeister, 1987; Logan, 1987). In the sixties and seventies the self-concept was a rather unproblematic construct, predominantly handled as a trait: a relatively stable, generalized, cognitive set or system of descriptive features, characteristic of a particular individual. The majority of methods still used to investigate the self-concept, mainly variations of self-esteem questionnaires, underline this view (Byrne, 1996; Wylie, 1989).

This solid picture has, however, been questioned during the last two decades from different angles. Markus and Wurf's (1987) proposal for a dynamic self-concept, in which situational influences are taken into account, has been very influential in this process. Not surprisingly, the focusing on situational aspects of the self-concept undermines its supposed stability. Furthermore, the strictly cognitivistic interpretation of the self-concept has been differentiated (Byrne, 1996; Damon and Hart, 1988; Greenwald and Pratkanis, 1984), most explicitly by Epstein (1993a).

In this chapter the attention is focused on the foregoing three issues. The traditional conceptualization of the self-concept will be examined in the light of recent developments: (a) the cognitive view of the self-concept will be confronted with the role of emotion, (b) the idea of a generalized construct faces the problem of how to take the context into account, and (c) the assumed stability of the self-concept has to stand up against observed situational and temporal variability of the self-concept. These issues were originally highlighted by James (1890), Cooley (1902), and Mead (1934), the nestors of self-concept literature. The renewed interest in self-concept psychology on these issues can further be placed within the broader context of current psychological theorizing and empirical research. Emotion, context, and variability are topics of general interest in developmental, social, and personality psychology, as will be indicated below.