1 Identity: With or Without You?

Perspectives and Choices Guiding This Handbook

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The conception of this handbook goes way back, taking us more than five years until completion.[1] It all began with an early plan to organize a symposium for the 31st International Congress of Psychology (ICP) for July 2016 in Yokohama, Japan. The intention was to bring together a group of international identity researchers, from within psychology and from neighboring disciplines, to see whether there were any new developments in identity theory and empirical research, and whether they had a common center or were drifting pieces moving in all kinds of directions (cf., for example, Nochi, 2016, or Watzlawik, 2016). This was the original idea. So, in the summer of 2015 we started contacting researchers we knew (and whom we did not know up to that moment), asking whether they would be interested in joining us for the symposium. Preparing the symposium was as stimulating as the actual gathering that took place on the afternoon of July 28 one year later under the header *Identity and Identity Research in Psychology and Neighboring Disciplines*. Janka Romero, the Commissioning Editor for Psychology at Cambridge University Press, had contacted us beforehand with the offer to talk about the potential to turn this into a book project, and we, the symposium participants, started following up the same night over dinner – not knowing that this would keep us busy for the next five years. We went through the usual editorial routines: developing a proposal, revising the proposal, and contacting old and new colleagues in the field, up to the point of delivering the full set of manuscripts in January 2021.

   This is the brief story of the book's conception. Its emergence, the process from conception to print, is telling. First, we started out with the – what we thought *original* – idea of seriously bringing together different theoretical frameworks and different conceptualizations of how to do empirical identity work. What had guided us was our own recognition that the use of the term identity, even in our own work, had been not only fuzzy but often confusing, probably mystifying important phenomena rather than elucidating and yielding research in a rather straightforward and fertile way. Thus, it was

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[1] Victor Krusborg Olesen has played a central role in the finalization of this book (e.g., by formatting the manuscripts and creating the index). We would like to take this opportunity to say thank you, the support was greatly appreciated!

our intent to thoroughly assess whether (and if so, how) current research on identity centered around one or a small number of key notions, or at least whether it could be organized around a number of different centers which may point in different directions for empirical work and applications. Our second incentive to take on a handbook of this magnitude was, in our conviction, that identity theory and research over the last ten years had taken a turn – a turn that had been inspired by the theoretical and editorial work of Margaret Wetherell (2009; see also Wetherell & Mohanty, 2010) with summaries ten years ago of how the field of identity studies had been reshaped and where it seemed to be headed for the next decade. This handbook here and now is where we feel we are, ten years later, in the form of a new synopsis and a new outlook that had been called for. It was our conviction that psychology was turning more toward the realms of cultural, contextual, and socially relevant work, and away from traditional information processing and experimental work. This is what we originally had hoped to capture and convey, but also document and illustrate.

The advice we received from reviewers of our first proposal presented the first hurdle, but turned out ultimately to be extremely helpful. Basically, we were advised to put together a collection that was more balanced and gave voice to traditional approaches and quantitative empirical methodologies as well. So, there went the original impetus to be avant-garde and keen on new directions and developments. With a revised proposal six months later, we struck a compromise; something we now, retrospectively, view as a fortunate turn of events: the volume has become rounder and readers are better positioned to judge for themselves where possibilities lie for innovation and progress in theorizing identity and turning it into empirical studies.

We also have to realize that the world over the last decade has changed – and probably even more so from when we started this volume, and definitely, and most profoundly, in the year 2020. If we consider the question of *who-we-are* – or more concisely, *Who-am-I?* – as forming the core around which identity studies revolve, this question has undergone deep scrutiny, and new identity categories have emerged. Ten years ago, national identity, gender and sexuality, as well as immigrant identity had settled as the kinds of themes/ categories through which identities were navigated and investigated. By 2018, immigration had transformed into a new topic (again) that had to deal with new dimensions of massive uprootedness – especially by refugees and asylum seekers in Europe, and globally. While it may be fair to say that ethnicity and race have surely been themes covered by identity researchers in the past, they have taken on radically new proportions and a different depth over the last five years, but particularly in 2020: race and ethnicity have experienced a transposition to systemic issues of equity, inequality, and injustice. Newly emerging discussions around the histories of colonialism and indigeneity propel the who-am-I question with new force and intensity. Again, while Asian identity *under a header of collectivism* has been on the horizon of

identity research for a while, particularly in contrast to so-called Western *individualistic* identity, a recent shift to black, brown, and indigenous identities has transformed former research on race and ethnicity and moved it into the vicinity of critical issues regarding inclusion and diversity, and again equity and justice. Finally, whiteness, by and large ignored in identity studies, and lingering only on the very fringe of interest to identity researchers, has charged, again especially in the year 2020, into the frontline of principled and urgent identity matters.

All this is not to mention a virus that posed the who-am-I (and collective who-are-we) question in the form of a worldwide experience of uncertainty – a continuous identity threat for which the answers are yet to be determined (cf. Bamberg, 2021a). Civil unrest, food insecurity, and unemployment, topics only on the horizon for identity research in underprivileged populations and nation-states with a less developed industrial base and more authoritative infrastructure, suddenly struck "much closer to home" in 2020 in Europe and North America. A number of additional, brand-new and pressing identity challenges – and we will return to them in our concluding section to this handbook – are emerging in the face of disinformation, cybersecurity, and surveillance. For us as authors, taking together the impact of these rather new and drastic challenges to our social consciousness and our sense of who we are, as individuals, as organizations, and as collectives, constituted one of the driving forces to join and pursue bringing together a new collection of thoughtful investigations of identity matters.

When surveying the contemporary field of traditional developmental takes on how identities form and change over the lifespan, we came to the conclusion that not too much had changed over the last two decades. Surely, identity research has contributed to deeper and better insights into how to conceptualize change (and constancy) during childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and aging. Some even may claim that since the turn of the century a new kid on the block (Arnett, 2000) has joined the ranks of well-established identity stages in life.[2] The covering of developmental identity status work and neo-Eriksonian expansions will have to be covered in a volume like ours. One aspect of developmental approaches that stood out to us from early on was an assumption that seems to run in the blood of developmental stage theories: once a new phase or stage has been achieved and its identity finalized, the next – often *higher* and more accomplished – stage becomes the built-in theoretical implication for what changes and how change takes place. Transformation and change are the foci of empirical developmental identity research; and, as such, *having* a certain identity, e.g., *being* an accomplished adolescent or emerging

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[2] It may be noteworthy that Arnett questioned the meaningfulness of stages when it comes to describing individual developmental trajectories. Arnett (2016, p. 290) proposes "the idea of life stages as *master narratives* . . ., as a way of explaining how life stages provide the raw material for individuals to construct a personal identity narrative."

adult, is the presupposition to *becoming* what comes next. Doing the actual work it takes to remain *adolescent*, or *adult*, including its claims and contestations, navigations, iterative practices, negotiations, and all the relational work to maintain these identities, becomes backgrounded, if not hidden. Collecting and putting contributions together in this handbook, we decided to balance these issues carefully against more recent developments in other identity domains that seemed to be at least equally if not more compelling.

Another important aspect for our original plan for the 2016 ICP symposium in Yokohama was to check deeper into Foucauldian approaches to identity and subjectivity and see how they could be bridged with traditional approaches. Here again, one of the few who had already tried to test these waters, i.e., differentiate certain aspects and integrate others of Foucault's approach to discourse with critical discourse analysis (cf. Fairclough, 2013) and with social identity psychology (which was emerging out of the Loughborough School), was Margaret Wetherell (1998, 2001). Our attempt for our symposium was to focus more strongly on the role of the subject and subjectivity, a discussion that had come out of sociology under the header of subjectification, and had entered psychology with Henriques et al. (1984), Venn (2002), and a new journal, *Subjectivity* (see Blackman et al., 2008). Alongside this tradition, the subject had been theorized as on one side of the coin being subjected to social, cultural, and contextual forces (*socially* constructed), but also on the flip side as being an agent *in the world* (self-constructed). This dimension of how to theorize identity and make it relevant for empirical investigation, when compared with developmental identity formation processes and issues of social relatedness, i.e., the integration/differentiation of individual, organizational, and collective identities, had traditionally been given short shrift. Although there had been attempts to conceptualize agency as one dimension of self-construals with the two end poles autonomy and heteronomy (the second dimension being interpersonal distance, with the two end poles separation and relatedness) in cross-cultural psychology (Kagitçibasi, 2005), developments over the last ten years in social theory in general, and in cultural psychology more specifically, offer a different and wider examination of agency, especially in terms of a research orientation that integrates the world-to-person dimension of experience in identity formation processes, and no longer simply juxtaposes it with self-discovery or self-construction. To us, it seemed as if a wider integration of the being-subjected dimension into identity research could have particularly positive repercussions when confronted with new identity challenges such as inequality and social justice.

When we drafted this handbook and were looking back at identity studies over the first decade of the twenty-first century, a theoretical shift became apparent that had made its way into identity studies, and was to a large degree still in full swing: identity had been decentered – or better, destabilized – and was undergoing a number of reconceptualizations. Most identity research

appeared to be still reminiscent of and committed to some form of core, from where stability and constancy to persons or organizations was radiating. However, it seemed to us that considerations of change – or at the very least adaptations to the experience of a changing world – had started to penetrate the center stage of identity concepts. At the same time, identity was blurring more and more with self, subjectivity, and other neighboring concepts, and terms such as self-identity (cf. Widdicombe & Marinho, this volume), role identity (cf. Kaplan et al., this volume), voices (cf. Bertau, this volume), or identity as a form of self-interpretation (cf. Brinkmann, this volume) mirrored this blurring. Even in our own writing, we started referring to people as having a *sense* of self or *identity* – a further softening of identity, pushing it to where self and identity were used almost interchangeably (Bamberg, 2011). All this had led to what some outside the discipline of psychology had referred to earlier as a *crisis* of identity (cf. Hall & du Gay, 1996). Stuart Hall (1996) himself – like many others (e.g., Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) – had called into question whether we actually still need the term/concept of identity. However, almost all – in the same breath – answered that the current use and popularity of the concept, and the ways it had ensued inquiry, had made it close to *indispensable* (cf. Wetherell, 2010).

Alongside and in concert with the slow process of decentering identity over the last three decades ran a process of opening psychology to theorizing and a closer investigation of culture – in one way in the form of studies of crosslinguistic/cross-cultural variation (cf. Demuth & Keller, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 2010), paralleled by in-depth descriptions and explications of single cultures (cf. Lutz, 1988; Schwartz, White, & Lutz, 1992), especially by use of ethnographic in combination with other qualitative methodologies. It is noteworthy that this clearly signaled a move away from aggregating and comparing large-scale data sets on people's assumed shared beliefs or attitudes toward more fine-grained and in-depth studies of shared repertoires that people actually put to use in their everyday routines and practices. Simultaneously, it juxtaposed assumptions about identity as something fixed, inalienable, and inherent to persons with something that was enacted and performed, and at the same time situated in contexts that mostly were relational and interactional. Similarly, this was paralleled in the role that was attributed to language, including how to analyze language. While traditional identity studies would view language as a window on what is *behind* performance and how beliefs and attitudes are *represented*, culturally context-sensitive studies started to turn to investigate bodily practices with which people are assumed to make sense of each other – and in doing so, make sense of themselves. Language practices became focal points as practical concerns in ways the relational business between people as a different kind of identity business was viewed as coordinated and navigated.

When contrasting these two kinds of positions this way, we realized that we basically had four principled strategies for identity research at hand that

we wanted to collect in this handbook, and – as far as that was possible – have to speak to one another. The first consists of assuming identity as (metaphorically) located and accessible inside the person, requiring methodological tools to mine and pull out what is hidden from clear sight. An alternative view locates identity as external to the person – as surfacing and empirically discernible in *identity work*, the way it is performed by people (or organizations, for that matter) in actions taken (cf. Sveningsson, Gjerde & Alvesson, this volume). The third position would be to assume identity as both: located – and by the researcher locatable – inside the person as well as outside, in their performance/behavior (Bertau, this volume, takes this point of departure). The fourth way would be to characterize the interior–exterior distinction as unfounded, if not false, and approach identity without any claims toward interiority and/or exteriority.

Facing the task of outlining and representing positions that display the spectrum of centering and decentering identity the way we tried to frame recent research trends in identity studies in the previous paragraphs, when more concretely designing the substance and new perspectives we wanted to offer with this handbook, we faced a second important and ongoing transformation that has impacted the field of identity studies. Methodologically, over the last decade, we have experienced a tremendous increase in, together with a much more widespread acceptance of, qualitative research in identity studies (cf. Watzlawik & Born, 2007). With the integration of qualitative guidelines into the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2019 – see also Levitt et al., 2018), qualitative methodologies have moved away from the status of an underground or subversive methodology and entered the recognition of researchers who had thus far been invested in experimental or large-scale survey research (Demuth, 2015b, 2015c; Demuth & Schjødt Terkildsen, 2015). Recent calls have emerged that consider qualitative methodologies as better situated to go beyond the integration of new and thus far underserved populations and pursue issues of social inequity and justice (cf. Bamberg, 2021a, 2021b). It was these trends that we were hoping to collect and give voice to – originally with the Yokohama symposium, and now that these issues had become more pressing, within our role as editors of this handbook.

With the imperative to promote what runs under the header *qualitative methods*, and to integrate it into a handbook that attempts to call attention to newly emergent trends as well as to a broad representative methodological spectrum, the question emerged: Which ones should we select (and which ones should we omit), especially in regard to the broad range of newly (qualitative) methodologies making an appearance in psychology? In addition to biographical identity research (see Habermas & Kemper, this volume), we decided to include a number of methods that thus far have had little exposure to identity studies but are committed to capturing the microgenetic aspects of identity as unfolding under the microscopic looking glass of identity researchers. Under

the umbrella of discursive studies, these approaches comprise a wider scope of methods such as conversation analysis (Wilkes & Speer, this volume), research that can be broadly located within the Loughborough School of discursive psychology (Locke & Montague, this volume), as well as Foucauldian-informed discourse analysis (Riley, Robson & Evans, this volume), and critical discursive psychology (Calder-Dawe & Martinussen, this volume). We have also included narrative approaches (Berry, this volume; see also Hydén, this volume) comprising newer developments that stress the performing nature of storytelling (Giaxoglou & Georgakopoulou, this volume). Some of the chapters represent the recent developments of turning away from discourse (alone) as the predominant way to produce identity (Calder-Dawe & Martinussen, this volume, see also Freeman, this volume) and away from an individualistic conception of identity (e.g., Norris & Matelau-Doherty, this volume).

1.1 Organization of the Book

The book is divided into five parts.

Part I: *The Origin and Development of the Concept of Identity*
Part II: *New Perspectives and Challenges*
Part III: *Methodological Approaches*
Part IV: *Current Domains*
Part V: *Where Is Identity?*

The individual parts are presented below to give insight into the structure and logic of the book.

Part I: The Origin and Development of the Concept of Identity

As mentioned, lining up the first three chapters for the handbook, we intend to introduce readers to the complexities that identity studies are facing. All three chapters in this section circle around three central themes:

(i)   temporal identity: how we as persons or organizations claim to exist throughout time, i.e., claim to be the same in the face of change, and claim to undergo change in the face of permanence;

(ii) sameness/difference: how people and organizations align and disalign vis-à-vis others, i.e., claiming to be the same as others and simultaneously being different, if not unique; and

(iii) agency: being a product of the world and simultaneously making and producing the world.

Michael Bamberg and Martin Dege in their chapter on **decentering histories of identity** start with an investigation of where the notion of identity came

from – its history and the way it found entrance into late-modern use in American English. They sidestep the challenge any historiography faces, namely not having a clearly established and accepted definition of what to look for in history books or historical records, and therefore start out by probing into the way identity is being used in contemporary everyday English language. Delineating meanings of identity – in contrast to and as partially overlapping with what they call *neighboring terms* (e.g., self, subject, individual, and conscious/conscience) – they condense identity into five aspects that they subsequently subject to historical scrutiny, i.e., how these aspects took on shades of meaning over time and became what they identify as central to identity. In their tour de force through the histories of how this conglomerate term *identity* came into usage in late-modern English, they pick apart and interrogate its Eurocentric origin and contemplate its constrictions and potential occlusion of alternative theories and empirical methodologies for the field of identity studies.

Sue Widdicombe and Cristina Marinho in their chapter on **challenges in research on self-identity** follow suit and document the repercussions for each of the above three key aspects of self-identity. They prefer the term self-identity, owing to the slippage and partial intersection between identity and self, and rename the three realms for identity maneuvering identified in the previous chapter by Bamberg and Dege, respectively: (i) continuity, (ii) uniqueness, and (iii) agency. They cycle through ways researchers – coming from different theoretical and methodological perspectives – have taken these three domains and rendered them researchable. For each aspect they summarize and to a degree juxtapose exemplars of traditional, positivist approaches with a social constructionist perspective and a poststructuralist perspective, showing how the three constructs (continuity, uniqueness, and agency) are differently defined in those respective approaches, and how they lead to different kinds of questions and, for obvious reasons, result in highlighting different outcomes and relevancies for practical purposes. Weighing carefully the pros and cons of approaching identity from different perspectives, Widdicombe and Marinho equip readers of the subsequent chapters of this handbook as well as their own research with tools to distinguish more clearly between the assumptions and decisions that inform us – and, if at all possible, to consider what alternatives could have been chosen, and reflect on the reasons why those have been ruled out.

Mark Freeman, in his concluding chapter of the three that are aiming to interrogate the concept of identity from different angles, introduces **the mystery of identity** with a profound challenge: identity, he argues neither has a "firmly agreed-upon conceptualization of the phenomenon" nor does it bespeak "a singular phenomenon" (**p. 77**). He raises what he calls **fundamental questions, elusive answers** and demonstrates strikingly well, in a section entitled "Excursion: Coming to Terms with the Mystery," how impossible it is to give a sensible answer from a personal experiential point of view to the

who-am-I question. Instead of helping to develop strategies to make what is unknown about identity known, he calls for making the little we know about our identities *unknowing*. What Freeman clarifies in his chapter are the seemingly unsurmountable difficulties when engaging in identity studies, especially when attempting to address temporal identity issues (what Widdicombe and Marinho call *continuity*) and sameness/difference, for which Freeman employs the term *otherness* (*uniqueness* – for Widdicombe and Marinho).

As such, it is telling how all three introductory chapters seem to zoom in on and tackle very similar issues, but having started from different points of departure, and employing vocabularies that have different implications. Another aspect that is equally elucidating is that all three introductory chapters interrogate identity by using different rhetorical styles: while Bamberg and Dege present a mix of semantic and historical analysis, Widdicombe and Marinho employ the genre of summary reports of contemporary identity studies (aiming for methodological classifications). In contrast, Freeman's chapter resembles an essayist writing style that is embraced methodologically by identity researchers who proceed autoethnographically (see Berry, this volume). Overall, opening the handbook with these three introductory chapters serves the function of a first attempt – and from a rather general angle – to sort through developments, commonalities, and differences between research traditions within the broad field of identity studies.

Part II: New Perspectives and Challenges

While Part I offers general reflections on the construct of identity and takes up some theoretical approaches by way of example, these are explored in greater depth in the second part. Part II thus aims to provide an overview of different (theoretical) approaches to identity – in many cases starting with their historical roots and taking specific cultural contexts into account.

Svend Brinkmann opens this part by introducing **identity as moral** as well as ethical **self-interpretation**, showing that individuals continuously interpret themselves in light of values and moral commitments, which leads the author to contrast his approach with the striving for value-*neutrality* often found in psychology and the social sciences. For Brinkmann, identity "implies both morality and narrative and is never purely individual, but intertwined with various layers of society" (**pp. 101–102**). Octavia Calder-Dawe and Maree Martinussen stress the same when describing identity as a potential *interdisciplinary* meeting point for scholars striving to understand identity at the interface of social formations and individual psychologies. While Brinkmann emphasizes the moral and ethical aspects of identity, Calder-Dawe and Martinussen explore the *affective* turn in identity research, introducing an **affective discursive practice approach**. With the help of an empirical example, the authors show how, while still maintaining focus on the individual's active meaning-making processes in a certain societal and cultural framework,

(i) affect and emotion can enter analysis, and (ii) the discursive as well as the embodied can be examined in the same analytic frame. On this basis, the authors give an outlook on future research agendas that may focus on the individual *and* (not only *Western*) collectives, more explicitly potentially connecting the dots between the pushes and pulls of socio-historical regimes and the more idiosyncratic play of personalized affective patterns and situated practices.

Following this idea, a non-Western perspective is then introduced in Ramiro Gonzalez Rial and Danilo Silva Guimarães's chapter. The cisgendered men,[3] both psychologists/researchers from Brazil and Chile, invite the readers to reflect on their roles when examining the identities of others by introducing an ethnographic **identity study of indigenous Mapuche women weavers in southern Chile**. The example is used to demonstrate (i) how societal power relations constitute identities as well as lead to the emergence of identity formation (and/or survival) strategies that allow the individual to negotiate change and consistency, and (ii) how certain theoretical convictions of what identity is (not) can blind us to alternative approaches.

Marie-Cécile Bertau also stresses the latter in her chapter, in which she presents a **language-dialogical take on identity**. She advocates a fundamental opening to plurality, to dynamics with incessant change as well as to context-ualizing any phenomenon – potentially leading to the decolonization of psychological science. She lays out two potential paths or *logics* to reach this goal: (i) *adding* others, emotions, bodies, contexts, etc. to the individual-focused take on identity, and (ii) reformulating the self-other-related self as *mediated* by language-as-activity, thereby allowing for the analysis of dialogical, dynamic, sociocultural practices in and through which identities emerge. From her perspective, we need to give up on the traditional understanding of homogeneity (sameness) to be able to assess internal differences as well as contradictions (polyphony of voices). In this regard, "[o]therness is crucial to [the] self who is in constant negotiations with others' voices in order to form. Hence, identity as matching with oneself is neither assumed, nor necessary" (**p. 190**) – a conclusion Gonzalez and Guimarães draw as well.

Bertau vividly shows that identity is nothing static, but something that is constantly constructed and negotiated, an understanding of identity that also appeared in the psychoanalytic framework, as Tilmann Habermas and Nina Kemper show in their chapter. They argue for a **narrative** and co-narrative conception of **identity from a psychoanalytic perspective**, providing an over-view of historical changes that lead to its emergence. After briefly describing the work of Freud and Erikson, they move to more clinically oriented analysts before describing changes that occurred in the 1990s. By returning to Erikson,

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[3] Cisgender (from Latin *cis*, meaning *on the same side*) refers to a person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. Being cisgender (non-transgender) is an aspect of a person's gender identity.