MODULE 1:
The concepts of personal and social identity

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Learning goals

After this unit you will be able to understand:

• Psychological bases of personal and social identity
• Conceptual relations between personal and social identity
• Methods for the study of personal and social identity
Overview

• Personal identity
  – From Erikson’s psychosocial theory to Marcia’s identity status paradigm
  – Shifting to Process-Oriented Models: Identity as an Iterative Dynamic

• Social identity
  – The social identity approach
  – From a dichotomous ingroup-outgroup approach to social identity complexity

• Integrating personal and social identity
Personal identity

Elisabetta Crocetti
Erikson’s (1950, 1968) psychosocial theory

Individuals can move between two opposite poles:

- **identity synthesis** (they combine and integrate relevant earlier identifications in a unique and personal way)
- **identity confusion** (they do not hold yet meaningful identifications that could provide them with a sense of direction)
Marcia’s (1966) identity status paradigm

• Marcia proposed to consider four identity statuses, each of them representing an individual’s style of coping with the identity crisis described by Erikson.
Marcia’s (1966) identity status paradigm

The statuses are based on the presence/absence of:

• **exploration** (i.e., the active questioning and weighing of various identity options before assuming decisions about the values, beliefs, and goals that one will pursue)

• **commitment** (i.e., making a relatively firm choice about an identity domain and engaging in significant activities aimed at implementing that choice)
Marcia’s (1966) identity status paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Exploration</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Identity achievement</th>
<th>Moratorium</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Foreclosure</th>
<th>Diffusion</th>
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Marcia’s (1966) identity status paradigm

• The identity status paradigm has been the basis for extensive research on interindividual differences shown by youth that face the identity task in different ways (for a review, see Kroger & Marcia, 2011)

• However, this model has been criticized since it has not offered a theoretical framework for understanding the process of identity development (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999).
Shifting to process-oriented models

Since the Eighties several scholars (see Schwartz, 2001 for a review) emphasized the importance of:

• disentangling the process of identity formation

• rather than focusing exclusively on the identity statuses as various outcomes of the adolescent period described in Erikson’s theory
Shifting to process-oriented models

Bosma (1985) and Meeus (1996)

Commitment making ≠ Identification with commitment

Exploration in breadth
past exploration: its function is to find new commitments ≠

In-depth exploration
present exploration: its function is to maintain and validate existing commitments
Process identity models (Meeus, 2011)

• Luyckx et al. (2008): 5-factor model
  – Commitment making
  – Identification with commitment
  – Exploration in breadth
  – Exploration in depth
  – Ruminative exploration

• Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus (2008): 3-factor model
Three-factor identity model (Crocetti et al., 2008)

- **Commitment**: choices made in identity relevant areas and self-confidence derived from these choices

- **In-Depth Exploration**: represents the extent to which individuals deal with current commitment actively, reflecting on their choices, looking for information, and talking with others about them

- **Reconsideration of Commitment**: refers to comparisons between current commitments and other possible alternatives and to efforts to change present commitments
Three-factor identity model (Crocetti et al., 2008)

- Cycle 1: dynamic of identity *formation* (making a choice and questioning that choice)
- Cycle 2: dynamic of identity *maintenance* (consolidating the choice)
- 3. From cycle 2 to cycle 1

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Three-factor identity model (Crocetti et al., 2008)

• Whereas commitment and in-depth exploration imply attempts to develop and maintain a sense of self (i.e., identity coherence or synthesis)...

• ... reconsideration represents questioning and rethinking this sense of self (identity confusion).

Cf. Erikson’s continuum
From 3 processes to 5 statuses (Crocetti et al., 2008)

Achievement (10.5%)  Foreclosure (33.2%)  Moratorium (21.4%)  Searching Moratorium (10%)  Diffusion (24.9%)

Commitment  In-Depth Exploration  Reconsideration of Commitment

N = 1952, Age 10-19

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Increase and decrease of statuses between age 12 and 20 (Meeus et al., 2010)

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Stability and changes in statuses over time (Meeus et al., 2010)

Progression
Regression
Stability
Identity domains

The three-factor model can be applied to study:

- Overall identity
- Specific identity domains
  - Educational identity
  - Interpersonal identity
  - Job identity
  - Religious identity
  - Regional identity
  - etc.
- Identity configurations
Measure of personal identity

Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS; Crocetti et al., 2008; 2015)

• 26 items, response scale from 1 (completely untrue) to 5 (completely true).

• Sample items:
  – “My education gives me certainty in life” (commitment)
  – “I think a lot about my education” (in-depth exploration)
  – “I often think it would be better to try to find a different education” (reconsideration of commitment).

• Possible applications:
  – 1 or more domains / overall identity
  – To focus on processes and/or to classify participants into identity statuses
Take home message

• Identity is a life long developmental task
  – Particularly urgent in adolescence

• Identity formation dynamics can be captured by the interplay of identity processes
  – Commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment

• Identity statuses (person-centered approach) can be obtained from specific combinations of identity processes
  – Achievement, early closure, moratorium, searching moratorium, diffusion

• Identity developmental patterns are described by
  – Stability
  – Progressions
  – Regressions
Group task

Generating examples of identity statuses and identity transitions
Group task

• Form five groups

• Generate examples, based on your own experience, corresponding to different identity statuses (achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, searching moratorium, and diffusion).

• Provide examples, based on your own experience, of
  – identity stability (i.e., remaining in the same identity status over time)
  – identity progressions (i.e., transition toward a more mature identity status)
  – identity regressions (i.e., transition toward a less mature identity status)
Social identity

Monica Rubini
The social identity approach

• Henri Tajfel and John Turner’s social identity and self-categorization theories together constitute the social identity approach (for a review see, Brown, 2000).
• Their contributions concern how people define themselves as members of a social group.
• Social identity, in fact, refers to “...the part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978; p. 63).
The interpersonal-intergroup continuum

- Tajfel and Turner (1979) in their interpersonal-intergroup continuum posited that social behaviour varies as a function of whether interactions are defined by people’s personal (e.g., intimate relations between girlfriend and boyfriend) or social identity (e.g., relations between football supporters during a football match).

- Most social situations call for a compromise between these two ends of the spectrum.
Social identity processes

Core processes at the basis of social identity include

• social categorization
• social identification
• social comparison
• positive group distinctiveness
Social categorization

• Social categorization, defined in terms of “nouns that cut slices of the human group” (Allport, 1954), helps individuals to navigate the social world by distinguishing between ingroup and outgroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

• It is a fast and efficient way of providing information about others, economizing social perception, and reduces uncertainty, by providing a clear set of expectations about others and the self (Turner et al., 1987).
Social categorization

• A series of experimental studies with the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) showed that the mere act of categorizing people into groups was enough to lead to ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation.
Social identification

• Social identification represents the internal, psychological criteria of a group existence that is distinct from the external attribution criteria (Tajfel, 1982).

• It relies on three components (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999):
  – the cognitive component captures the awareness of membership
  – the evaluative component refers to the value attributed to one’s membership
  – the emotional component refers to the affective experience linked to one’s group membership.
Social comparison

• Individuals learn about themselves through social comparison with others (Festinger, 1954).

• Social comparison processes are fundamental to understand who we are, what are our positive qualities, and we do this by exchanging feedbacks in the interactions with meaningful others.
Positive group distinctiveness

- Ingroup-outgroup comparison along meaningful dimensions allows group members to appreciate their own ingroup (Tajfel, 1972)
- This appreciation forms the basis for achieving, maintaining, and enhancing group distinctiveness, which is the main motivation for individuals to join social groups
- Positive distinctiveness, in turn, augments individual self-esteem
From a dichotomous ingroup-outgroup approach to social identity complexity

• Most of research within the social identity approach has been conducted in the context of a dichotomous ingroup–outgroup categorization.

• An exception to this is represented by the works on crossed categorization (Deschamps, 1984).
  – In evaluating others, the criss-crossing of two or more categorical dimensions (e.g. gender and age), compared to a single categorical dimension (e.g., gender), weakens category differentiation processes (females versus males; Tajfel, 1978), eliciting the shift to a more individuated mode of perception (decategorization).
Multiple categorization

- Greater amount of research on the role of multiple categorization (for a review, see Crisp & Hewstone, 2007)
  - In the perception of others
  - In the perception of the self
Social identity complexity

Social identity complexity refers to the way in which individuals *subjectively* represent the relationships among their multiple ingroup memberships (Roccas & Brewer, 2002):

- individuals with low social identity complexity see their ingroups as highly overlapping and convergent
- those with high complexity see their different ingroups as distinct and cross-cutting membership groups.
Social identity complexity

Four alternative forms of identity structure (Roccas & Brewer, 2002):

a) *Intersection* represents a relatively simplified identity structure, in which individuals define their primary social identity in terms of the compound combination of multiple categories.

b) *Dominance* arises when individuals adopt one primary group identification to which all other group identities are subordinated.

c) *Compartmentalization* represents the condition in which more than one group identity is important for individuals depending on the context.

d) *Merger* is the most inclusive structure of social identity, that is the configuration of individuals’ combined group identifications.
Measure of social identity

Social identification scale (Thomas et al., 2017)

• 6 items, response scale from 1 (completely false) to 5 (completely true).

• Sample items:
  • “I feel loyal towards the group of my friends”
  • “Belonging to the group of my friends is very important for who I am”.

• The same items can be used to measure identification with multiple social groups (e.g., peer group, family)
Take home message

• Social identity refers to how people define themselves as members of social group(s)

• Core social identity processes:
  – Social categorization, identification, comparison, all contributing to positive group distinctiveness

• From a dichotomous ingroup-outgroup approach to
  – Consideration of multiple categorizations and social identity complexity
Group task

Generating examples of social identity complexity
Group task

• Five groups
• Reflect on your multiple social identifications and on how they are organized, in order to generate examples, based on your own experience, of various degrees of social identity complexity
Integrating personal and social identity

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Attempts to integrate personal and social identity

In recent years (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011), there have been various attempts to integrate personal and social identities:

– the optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991)
– the integration model (Reid & Deaux, 1996)
– the theory of identity fusion (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015)
• Overall, these contributions suggest that individuals can rely more on personal or social identity according to contextual and motivational demands.
Crocetti, Prati, and Rubini (2018)

Communalities between personal and social identity processes:

- personal identity commitment and social identification with groups have similar roots in the individual need to be meaningfully connected to the world
  - E.g., choosing a profession means being committed to a certain type of job and becoming a member of a professional group
Crocetti, Prati, and Rubini (2018)

• Both in-depth exploration of current commitments as well as consideration of alternatives imply processes of social comparison at the interpersonal level and at the intergroup level

• Social comparison is necessary in order to share personal experiences and feelings about current commitments (Crocetti & Rubini, 2017).

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Crocetti, Prati, and Rubini (2018)

- These processes can be active when positive ingroup distinctiveness is threatened. It may be the case that group members start to perceive the outgroup as more appealing:
  - if group boundaries are seen as permeable, they can move to another group (social mobility strategy)
  - if boundaries are less permeable, they can implement strategies of collective social change

(Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).
Conclusions

• The integration of personal and social identity is made by the self in an incessant effort to adapt to the multiple demands of the social contexts with which individuals interact.

• Personal and social identities form a fundamental symbolic tool that individuals use to adapt to the multiple domains of their lives.

(Crocetti, Prati, & Rubini, 2018)
Module readings


Complementary readings


Complementary readings


Complementary readings

Complementary readings

Complementary readings


