

Studying identity in social psychology

Some thoughts on the definition of identity and its relation to action

Xenia Chrysochoou

University of Surrey

The present paper discusses the concept of identity in social psychology. It is suggested that identity is a particular form of social representation that mediates the relationship between the individual and the social world. Identity makes the link between social regulations and psychological organizations (i.e. identifications/self-categories) and constitutes the organizing principle of symbolic relationships. Its functions are to inscribe the person in the social environment, to communicate peoples' positions and to establish relationships with others (social recognition). Thus identity is a cyclical process constituted by three actions: knowing, claiming and recognizing. Social psychologists have started their investigations of identity by emphasizing different aspects of this process: self-knowledge, claims and recognition and have focused on processes of socialization, communication and social influence.

Finally, it is argued that through their active participation in the social world (by knowing, recognizing and claiming), individuals construct a set of knowledge about the world and themselves: their identity. To protect from, provoke or respond to changes to this knowledge people act in the name of identity. Thus, identity constitutes the social psychological context within which worldviews are constructed, through which these worldviews are communicated and for which battles are fought.

Keywords: identity, social psychology, socialisation, communication, social influence, self-knowledge, recognition

Identity is a concept that occupies a prominent place in the literature of social sciences and psychology. In particular during the last 30 years identity has been a central focus of research in European Social Psychology (Brown 2000) whilst

American theorists have been concerned with the study of Self (Ashmore and Jussim 1997; Neisser and Jopling 1997, Sedikides and Brewer 2001). The object of this paper is not to review the extensive literature on the issue. I have discussed elsewhere how identity has been theorized by two major social psychological schools of thought, namely Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1974; Tajfel and Turner 1986) and Identity Theory (Stryker 1980, 1992, Stryker and Burke 2000) and, drawing upon the Theory of Social Representations (Moscovici 1961/76, 1984, 1998 2001), I have argued against the reification of identity (Chrysochoou 2002). My aim here is to develop further this discussion and to propose some thoughts on how we could theorize the concept of identity and on how identity relates to social action. This paper is divided into three parts. In the first part I make an attempt to define identity. In the second part I suggest a typology of how identity is studied giving examples of existing perspectives. Finally I discuss why identity, as a concept, is thought to be linked to social actions.

Defining identity

In a nutshell, one could say that the main recent social psychological concerns around identity evolved around five main directions. The first one, inspired by the tradition of social interactionism (Mead 1934), focused on how and why people enacted different roles in everyday interactions (Stryker 1992, Stryker and Burke 2000). The second one considered the role of identity-driven motivations on intergroup behavior and discrimination (Brewer 1991; Hogg and Abrams 1993; Tajfel 1974, 1981, 1982). A third approach, also within the motivational perspective, is concerned with the acquisition of self-knowledge and the individual strategies used to protect self-knowledge and to incorporate new knowledge, in particular when changes occur (Breakwell 1983, 1986, 2001). A fourth approach was interested in the processes by which people categorize themselves as members of particular categories according to the comparative context and the consequences of these self-categorizations for group behavior (Turner et al. 1987; Turner and Onorato 1999). Finally, a fifth approach looks at how subject positions are constructed and argued in discourse and language in order to promote particular visions of the world (Burr 1995; Harré 1987, 1998; Wetherell and Maybin 1996)

But identity has now left the exclusive framework of the scientific universe and has become part of common sense. Like scientists, people use identity as an

explanatory concept for motivations and actions. It can be argued that its transition from the scientific to the common sense universe transformed the concept into a social representation (Moscovici 1961 and 1976 2nd edition), a system of common sense knowledge about the self and its enactment that is collectively constructed and shared.

The concept of social representations originates from Moscovici (1961 and 1976 2nd edition) who expanded the Durkheimian concept of collective representations (1898) to understand the production and elaboration of common sense knowledge and to capture social change. In his seminal work concerning the transition of psychoanalytic discourse from the scientific universe to common sense, Moscovici (1961 and 1976 2nd edition) argues that when a conceptual scientific framework becomes the object of communication and of influence in the broader society it is transformed into a representation. These representations are social in the sense that they constitute collective elaborations of social knowledge that are shared among people of the same community. The shared character of representations however does not mean that each individual has the same “picture” of the object under consideration. Sharing a representation means that individual thinking is organized by principles that this person shares with other people.

What I am arguing here, is that identity has become a social representation. The concept of identity is now part of the public domain and discourse and the principles that organize the way people think of themselves are shared with those who are part of the same culture (Markus, Mullally and Kitayama 1997; Ozyerman and Markus 1998). Therefore, identity, to be a fruitful tool in order to understand social phenomena, should not be seen as an individual property from which actions and behaviors originate. Identity encapsulates simultaneously the way we think about ourselves and about the world in which we live. In this capacity it acts as an organizing principle of symbolic processes and represents the relationship between cognitive organizations and social relationships (Doise 1990). Thus, identity constitutes a particular form of social representation that represents the relationship between the individual and others (real or symbolic, individuals or groups). Within this perspective the knowledge about oneself is fundamentally social in the sense that it constitutes a particular form of social thinking concerning the self.

But how does thinking become social? According to Moscovici, the way people think is a social phenomenon thanks to the simultaneous operations of two systems. Common sense knowledge is the outcome of an operational system that performs all the basic cognitive operations (i.e. categorizations,

inclusions, associations, discriminations, deductions etc.) and a metasystem that guides these operations by controlling, verifying and selecting the informational material according to social rules (logical or not). The metasystem is characterized by the social regulations of the society/culture in which we live. The interplay between system and metasystem results in common principles that are socially marked and organize thinking and common sense knowledge (Doise 1990). To do so the operations of the metasystem are performed through two processes (Lorenzi-Cioldi and Clemence 2001). A process of *objectification* transforms abstract concepts into concrete images and a process of *anchoring* names and classifies new knowledge and unfamiliar events into familiar frameworks. Identity can be considered as resulting from the simultaneous operation of these systems. At the level of the metasystem social regulations are objectified into concrete images, categories and symbols and anchored into familiar knowledge. For example, the European Union can be objectified into concrete images: the flag, the new passport, the European Commission, the EURO and so on and so forth. These images might change the representation of the categories “Europe” and “European” that now can be defined using other criteria than geographical location. This new knowledge can be anchored in already existing knowledge about the functioning of the nations both as political and cultural entities (Chrysochoou 2000ab). Thus, being “European” acquires a shared meaning and to claim or reject this identification as part of one’s self-concept depends on the cognitive organization and the content that the processes of objectification and anchoring produced. Being “European” however is not only a matter of individual self-knowledge and willingness to claim it. It is also a matter of social recognition from others who can be members of the same group or not.

Identity in fact expresses a relationship, the relationship between the individual and the world and can be seen as having three components. It includes an element of *cognition* (self-knowledge), answering the question “what do I know about me?”, an element of *self-action* pertaining to the *claims* I want to/can make about myself and an element of *Other(s) actions* that recognize me and allow me to make the claims I wish to make about myself and to be who I want/think myself to be. Thus identity is a threefold concept, constituted by Cognition-Claims-Recognition (ME-I-Others). Through its identity, a person can be the object of knowledge (knowledge about ME), the agent of actions (the claims one makes with affirmations such as “I AM...”) and the active recipient/partner of others’ actions in relation to one’s claims. In particular the interplay of identity claims and recognition refers to what we use to call *identity politics*.

These three aspects of identity are geared towards answering three main questions: “Who am I?”, “Who are they?” And “What is our relationship?” The question referring to the self includes attributes that people feel that they are combined in a unique and individual way (i.e. personal attributes) and attributes they know they share with others (i.e. collective memberships). In relation to the second question, “they” might refer to people similar or dissimilar to oneself, to people before oneself (ancestors), contemporary to oneself or after oneself (future generations). It refers to people close to oneself or distant from oneself, to people that share or not the same fate with oneself, to people that have good or bad intentions towards oneself etc. Social psychological theorists have emphasized the importance of perceptions of similarity, continuity, proximity and common fate in one’s relation with others, in feelings of belongingness and in constructions of otherness (Campbell 1958). Finally the question referring to the relationship with others includes perceptions that qualify this relationship as either a cooperative or competitive one, a relation of separation, of indifference, of love/hate, of inclusion/exclusion from resources, of affection, of power etc.

The above three questions, *Who are they?*, *Who am I?* and *What is our relationship?*, are the fundamental questions whose answers constitute the lenses through which people see the world and establish their relationship to it. In other words, we need to study the relationship that people establish with real or symbolic others in order to be able to understand the meaningful categories and concepts used by people to describe the world. Such decisions involve for example to decide “who is good and who is bad?”, “who is with us and who is against us?”, “whether a person is a terrorist or a freedom fighter?”, “which are the freedom-loving countries and who is the enemy?”. Identity, as a social representation, mediates the relationship between the individual and the social world. The interplay between identity claims and recognition feeds the knowledge people establish about themselves and this knowledge impacts on the possible alternatives of action, of claims and recognition, producing a particular vision of the world from the standpoint of the individual speaker/participant /agent.

Investigating identity

Having discussed the conceptualization of identity within a social representational perspective it is important to emphasize that research can focus on each of the three components of identity: the acquisition and construction of self-

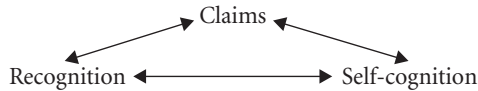


Figure 1. Identity as a dynamic process

knowledge, the strategic use and consequences of identity claims, the processes of recognition. Depending on their research question and interests, scholars can focus on each one of these aspects keeping in mind that these components act interdependently to represent the relationship between the individual and others that mediates the relationship between the individual and the social world.

I would argue that identity could be studied at three different levels. Firstly, one could investigate the *processes of socialization* and study how self-knowledge is developed and anchored in what is “already-there”. In that perspective one can study how the active interaction with the social environment produces self-knowledge, how this knowledge manages to include people within the already existing communities practices and symbolic meanings or to exclude them from these communities, and practices. Here self-knowledge interacts with the past in order to locate the person at present time in the social environment but also contributes to the future construction of the social world.

The work of Lloyd and Duveen (1990, 1992) on the acquisition/construction of gender identity presents an example of these considerations. The question raised by their research concerned how children, born into a world where meaning already exists, became participants in this world. Before it is even born a child is the object of representations, expectations, beliefs and images of his/her parents and of the community in which he/she will be born. Once born the child is named and categorized into familiar frameworks (process of anchoring) (Duveen 2001). One of these frameworks is gender. Before even giving birth to a child, parents are able now to know the gender of the baby. Further, babies are ascribed with gender-marked names. The framework into which a child is born already exists. Studies have shown that adults would propose different toys to 6-months old infants depending on their assumptions about the child’s gender (C. Smith and Lloyd 1978). Thus, the child’s world is structured in terms of gender very early on. The actions and representations of others guide the knowledge that children acquire about themselves. In their research Lloyd and Duveen (1990, 1992) have shown that children at a very young age use objects to construct their identities within the socially marked framework (in this case by gender representations). Boys and girls in different contexts assert their identities by using objects that they know

are gender-marked. Although both boys and girls, if assessed separately, have an equal knowledge of the codes of gender-marking, Lloyd and Duveen observed that girls, aged between 18 months and 3 and ½ years old chose toys that are incongruent in terms of gender more often than same-age boys did. The authors remarked that boys used the material culture of objects in a way that allowed them to express a differentiated identity whereas girls did not to the same extent. Duveen (2001:258) concludes “individuals or persons or agents come to have a sense of who they are through a recognition of their position within the symbolic space of their culture”.

These observations suggest that if knowledge about oneself is contingent upon the representations and actions of others, there is a moment where this knowledge will be used to locate oneself within the social framework. Therefore, looking at identity from a “socialization standpoint” means that we start by looking at how the actions of others impact on self-knowledge and how self-knowledge is transformed into claims. In other words, we look at identity in terms of Recognition → Self-Cognition → Claims →. It should be noted that the linearity of this assertion is only apparent and signifies only the particular standpoint of the researcher and not the way identity dynamics work.

At a second level, research can focus on the *processes of communication* of identity. In other words, we can study the strategic construction of claims and the dialogue between self and others that enables both the construction of self-knowledge, the positioning of the self within social relationships and the simultaneous construction of versions of the social world. Communication is one of the primary functions of social representations. Thus, identity, as a particular form of social representation, fulfils this function. Communicating self-knowledge means communicating relationships and establishing new ones (Moscovici 2001). Although communication is considered a central aspect in social representations theory, there is not much work on the processes of communication in general and in particular regarding self-knowledge within a social representational perspective (for few exceptions see Markovà and Foppa 1990, Markovà, Graumann and Foppa, 1995; Markovà 2000). However, one can draw on social constructionist perspectives on identity, such as work by discourse and conversation analysts and positioning theorists, that focus on the identity-claims people make through the use of language to position oneself and others. This work aims to find traces of constructions of particular versions of reality and to investigate auto and hetero self-construction *in situ*. It concerns the present insertion of the individual in particular interactions and more generally in the social world. Thus, focusing on communication means to look

at how claims about particular aspects of the self are communicated. These claims interact with social processes of recognition to constitute different positions within society. These positions subsequently constitute resources of self-knowledge. Thus the path followed here becomes Claims → Recognition → Self-Cognition →. It is important to note, however, that there are different discourse analytic approaches and it is beyond the scope of this paper to detail them (for an interesting discussion see Törrönen 2001). The multiplicity of theoretical positions about the nature of selfhood in discursive approaches, however, obliges me to refrain from giving here specific examples of research (for examples see DeCillia, Reisgl and Wodak 1999, Maguire, Phillips and Hardy 2001) Some researchers consider that there is no such a thing as self-knowledge. In this theoretical tradition, knowledge about the self is communicated in interaction and context. From what is communicated one can have access to the cultural repertoires that inform communication (Wetherell 1998). I do not consider this approach as incompatible with my general argument here in the sense that I do not position self-knowledge as the end result of a process and I describe identity as being cyclical. I would agree more, however, with other researchers in the discursive perspective who, without refuting the multiplicity of subject positions, are accepting that “each identification comments on earlier identifications and frames forthcoming identifications by binding us to the worldviews and traditions that exceed here and now situations (Törrönen 2001:319). This approach is closer to a social representational perspective that considers anchoring as the mechanism whereby new elements are incorporated into existing frameworks to produce knowledge. In addition Harré (1998:5), who proposes a discursive approach to personhood, suggests that people have a sense of self. He distinguishes “three aspects of personhood in focus at the same time”. Self 1 reflects “the idea or point of view from which one perceives the material environment and acts on it”. Self 2 is “the idea of the self as the shifting totality of personal characteristics” and Self 3 concerns “the totalities of personal impressions we make on other people”. This typology is close to the definition of actions that I am suggesting here as constituting identity. Self 1 would correspond to the claims one makes about one self; Self 2 refers to the knowledge about the self whereas Self 3 refers to the recognition. My argument would be that the three components of identity are in fact actions and not mere aspects of identity/personhood. Identity constitutes the experience of oneself in the world that is the outcome of the interaction between actions of Claiming, of Recognizing and of Knowing/Constructing. These actions interact with each other and generate each other within processes of

socialization, communication and social influence. It is in their relationship that we could capture how identity functions.

Following a third research path one can focus on *processes of social influence*. This perspective is closely linked to the second research path. At this level, the focus is on the use of self-knowledge and its strategic transformation to specific claims in order to impact on the actions of others and to promote particular versions of reality and specific political and social projects. This level of research pertains to how identities act upon the future context and to the possible reactions to these attempts of change. The work of Reicher and Hopkins constitutes a good example of this approach. Drawing upon self-categorization theory, the point of departure of their argument is that self-categories are central to the process of social influence. They argue that those who are seeking to influence will construct social categories in a way that would include both themselves and their audience as part of the same category. Analyzing the speech that an anti-abortionist campaigner, member of the British Parliament, gave in front of a medical audience, Reicher and Hopkins (1996a) remark that the speaker attempts to reconstruct the medical identity in a way that supports his argument and allows him to form an ingroup with the audience. In a similar study, they analyze the party conference speeches of Conservative (Thatcher) and Labour (Kinnock) British leaders during the miners' strike in the '80s. In their analysis Reicher and Hopkins (1996b) show that the electoral aims of the leaders are reflected in the way they represent the strike and seek to mobilize their audience. To do so the leaders have to construct their party identity (claim) as encompassing the whole British population. Finally, a recent analysis (Reicher and Hopkins 2001) of identity construction in the political speeches about nationhood constitutes a prime example of how identity is constructed and argued in the public sphere in order to persuade, proselytize and lead to social action. Self-cognitions are constructed and strategically used to exert influence and to impact upon processes of recognition. As Reicher and Hopkins (1996a: 309) remark "if the success of particular constructions of self-categories depends upon being able to organize people according to those categories, then it will depend upon the ability to secure compliance or else overcome resistance from other groups holding other versions of social reality [...] the context in which one group acts is always at least partially constituted by the actions of other groups based on their own self-understandings". This quote explains well the interaction between self-cognitions, claims and recognition. Thus, investigating identity in this perspective means to focus on the construction of self-knowledge transformed strategically into claims in order to influence recognition:

Self-Cognition → Claims → Recognition →. In this perspective, although claims are constructed and argued *in situ* in a strategic way, they draw upon existing knowledge and aim to influence processes of recognition through the alteration of categorical boundaries. Of course, the path continues to be circular in the sense that the reaction of others and the success or the failure of these projects influence subsequent construction of self-knowledge.

By choosing any of these paths to research identity one needs to take into consideration issues of power at every step of the process. As far as socialization is concerned, power intervenes clearly in the process of recognition. During socialization, there is the power of the social environment to propose/impose self-categorizations, to give meaning to them and to shape the opportunities for claims. In the communication process the power of the speaker/agent who makes the claims and sets the scene for recognition and the production of self-knowledge is very prominent. Finally processes of social influence are by definition linked to power issues. The construction of self-knowledge in a strategic way in order to project particular visions of the world and to promote specific projects (that might require the alteration of categorical boundaries or the reconstruction of their content) means to exert power over others and the social environment.

To conclude this argument, it is important that I should emphasize that these three paths of research have been separated for presentational reasons. I believe that they constitute a useful typology of the levels on which identity can be investigated. It is important therefore to specify that the three processes of socialization, communication and social influence are taking place simultaneously to produce people's identity. Identity constitutes a cyclical process (see also Figure 1). We, researchers, break this circular movement to start our investigation.

In the name of identity: Acting upon the world

One of the issues that fuelled debates in social psychology is the distinction between personal and social identity. The hypothesis of discontinuity originating from Sherif (1966) has been developed further in the work of social identity and self-categorization theorists (Turner et al 1987). However, the original idea that intergroup behavior is linked to people's perception of themselves as group members has unfortunately led to the construction of a "reified entity", social identity, and has generated a distinction between personal and social aspects of identity. This division has been heavily criticized either because it separated aspects of identity that are in fact indistinguishable and interdependent

(Breakwell 2001; Deaux 1992) or because this distinction hides the social regulations associated to the emphasis on the personal versus the social aspect of the self (Lorenzi-Cioldi and Doise 1994; Lorenzi-Cioldi 1995). Furthermore, the division between personal and social identity seems to reflect research choices to investigate identity either as an individual (Zavalloni and Louis-Guerrin 1984) or as a shared experience (Tajfel 1974). The point I would like to make here is that the elicitation of personal or social aspects of the self constitutes a response to different research questions and does not express an underlying reality for the concept of identity. Research can focus on the phenomenological aspects of self-perception and presentation, on the narratives and life stories, on the consequences of the salience of particular memberships, on the relationships between self-categorizations, on the content and use of self-categories, on motivations that shape the structure of self-knowledge. The choice depends on our hypotheses about the role of identity and the consequences of its enactment in a particular context.

A common perception of all these approaches is that identity is linked to actions and behaviors and this is a belief that can be also found in common sense discourse. An assumption of research on identity is that when identity is devalued, hindered etc people will engage into coping strategies to restore it (Branscombe and Ellemers 1998; Breakwell 1986, 1988; Tajfel 1974, 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Thus different types of behaviors might be displayed. Furthermore, we seem to imply that the meaning given to different identifications and the construction of self-categories is linked to particular projects of action. Identity is understood to be the point from where actions and behaviors originate and people seem to explain their actions “in the name of identity”.

However, identity, as a threefold process of self-cognition, claims and recognition is in itself an action. It asserts a particular vision of the social world from the position(s) of the observer/speaker/participant/agent. It represents the claims one is allowed to make about his/her relationship to this world and constitutes the outcome of negotiations in order to be recognized. It is generated through processes of socialization, communication and social influence and justifies people's attempts to reproduce or change the world.

I believe that it is too late, not least because the belief is part of common sense knowledge, to doubt whether identity is linked to actions and behaviors. However, we should avoid falling into the trap formed by the belief that identity is a property of people that needs to be nurtured and which people are intrinsically motivated to protect. My point is that we need to unpack this motivation for identity protection.

When people say that they acted in the name of their identity what in fact they are doing is responding to a perceived threat to their vision of the world, a vision that they happen to share with others. We know from the literature on social identity that people start acting in the name of their (devalued) identity when they perceive that their efforts are frustrated by discrimination (Taylor and McKirnan 1984), when they perceive the social structure to be unjust and when they feel that there are possibilities for improvement (Ellemers 1993, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 1999, Tajfel 1974). They also act in the name of their (advantaged) identity when they feel that their privileged position can be lost. In fact they act when their vision of the world is challenged and subject to change. The content of particular memberships, the relations between groups, the boundaries of groups, the beliefs associated with memberships are subjected to the changing social conditions that oblige people to deal with these changes because they are part of them. At that point self-knowledge needs to be reconstructed and unfamiliar situations to be domesticated. It is possible that in their effort to anchor the novelty in the existing frameworks, people's reaction is to protect a version of what already exists: their identity.

Another situation where people act in the name of identity is when they make claims about who they are. Each claim is in itself an action upon the world. Identity claims represent positions that one has or seeks to achieve and simultaneously they describe the desired content of these positions. Thus, claims include or exclude, impose or accept different visions of the world. Inevitably, when claims are frustrated or imposed, when their meaning is subject to change or when people do not manage to convince others about the meaning of their claims, people will act to assert the claims they want to make. By challenging claims one challenges people's position in the world and all the symbolic and material power that position entails. It is not surprising, therefore, that people who cannot claim to be full citizens (i.e. immigrants), or on which a new identification (i.e. Europeans) is bestowed upon, or for whom the meaning of an identification is changing (i.e. men) or is rejected and misunderstood (i.e. Muslims), will act in the name of identity.

In addition, it is also possible that people act in the name of identity when they sense that they are not recognized and respected (Lind and Tyler 1980). In this case it is their relationship with the other(s) that is challenged. Not having social recognition is considered to be an important loss in modern times (Markovà 2000). The absence of respect indicates to people where they stand in the social structure, whereas the absence of recognition constitutes a breach in people's relationship with their environment because it excludes them from

participating in society. No wonder that people would act to change their relationships with others and obtain recognition and respect at a symbolic level that would give them access to the material resources.

Finally, identity might be linked to action because a new configuration of identity is needed due to changes at a micro or macro social level. As said earlier, these changes might impact on the content of existing self-knowledge (i.e. sexual orientation), the categorical boundaries or their meaning (i.e. political identities), they might impact on what one can claim to be by creating or frustrating possibilities (i.e. parenthood, citizenship), they might impact on patterns of recognition (i.e. gay or women identity). It is possible that these changes are important enough to present the need for a new identity or a re-configuration of the structure of identity, a new vision of the social world. In such contexts, new identifications are created to crystallize these changes.

The argument here is that people act to protect themselves from, to provoke or to respond to change. The threefold concept of identity (self-cognition, claims, recognition) is linked to these actions because changes have an impact on its components but also because a new identity might emerge due to these changes. Acting in the name of identity is the outcome of people's attempt to incorporate novelty into existing frameworks, to communicate their position in the world, to establish a relationship with it, and to become active participants in their environment. In that respect identity functions as a social representation and constitutes a specific "placeholder" of knowledge, actions and relationships for which battles are fought.

In conclusion

I have argued here for a definition that considers identity as a particular form of social representation that mediates the relationship between the individual and the social world. Identity constitutes the organizing principle of symbolic relationships between the individual and the social environment in the sense that it constitutes the link between psychological organizations (i.e. identifications, self-categories) and social regulations. As a social representation, identity has the same functions that social representations have, namely to inscribe an object in the social environment (here to socialize the individual), to serve communication purposes and to establish relationships with others. These relationships are subjected to processes of influence. As it is the case with other representations, identity is formed through processes of objectification and

anchoring that transform abstract knowledge into concrete images and incorporate them into existing frameworks. Through their active participation in the social world (by knowing, recognizing and claiming), individuals construct a set of knowledge about the world and about themselves: their identity. To protect from, provoke or respond to changes of this vision of the world that includes them, people act in the name of their identity. Thus, identity constitutes the social psychological context within which worldviews are constructed, through which these worldviews are communicated and for which battles are fought.

Social psychological research has captured the dynamics of identity at various moments of its enactment. We should continue working on identity keeping in mind that the process is cyclical in order to avoid making of identity a naturalized and reified concept, an essence.

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Author's address

Xénia Chrysochoou
 Social Psychology European Research Institute
 Department of Psychology
 University of Surrey
 Guildford GU2 7XH

E-mail x.chrysochoou@surrey.ac.uk

About the author

Xenia Chrysochoou obtained degrees in Psychology from Athens (State University) and Paris (University Rene Descartes Paris V). In 1996 she has obtained her PhD on National and European Identity doing comparative research among Greek and French nationals. She has worked in France as an associate Lecturer at the Universities of Lille and Paris and the Institute for Teacher Training in Reims before moving in 1997 at the University of Surrey. Her research concern the social-psychological processes involved in the cohesion of multi-cultural societies. In particular she is interested in understanding processes of construction of identities in bi-cultural environments as well as processes of construction of superordinate identities (i.e. European Identity). Her research interests include investigating the social psychological processes of mobility and migration in modern societies, justice issues and resource allocation between different groups especially in the context of intergroup conflict. She is particularly concerned with examining such processes in the context of social change and potentially threatening environments. Further she is interested in the construction of common sense knowledge and beliefs and the interplay between social representations and identities. She has recently edited a special issue around these topics for the *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*. She has participated in research projects funded by the EU and the European Science Foundation and co-organised a network working on the processes involved in the construction of citizenship and European Identity among young people.