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The identity/action relation

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Introduction

The Identity/Action Relation

Margaret Wetherell

“As the grandchild of a geologist I learned early to anticipate the absolute mutability of hills and waterfalls and even islands. When a hill slumps into the ocean I see order in it. When a 5.2 on the Richter scale wrenches the writing table in my own room in my own particular Welbeck Street I keep on typing. A hill is a transitional accommodation to stress, and ego may be a similar accommodation. A waterfall is a self-correcting maladjustment of stream to structure, and so, for all I know, is technique.” (Didion, 2006, p.220)

“... we conceptualise social identity as an understanding of one’s place within a categorical system of social relations along with the proper and possible actions that flow from such a position.” (Reicher and Hopkins, 2001, p.48)

This book explores the ways in which identity and social action articulate together. How are people mobilised, caught up, and actively engaged in social life? We examine the ways in which individuals are assembled, defined and positioned and how identities authorise, anticipate and guide social action. In reflecting on these issues and trying to comprehend the puzzles they pose, we follow up a wide range of social practices. These include the mundane, routine and habitual and those which are singular, dramatic and life-changing – actions such as caring, ‘passing’, segregating,

choosing, mixing, migrating, settling, travelling, campaigning, performing, complaining, fighting, bonding, including and excluding.

To a large extent the way researchers approach the identity/action relation depends on the research questions in play. This is vividly illustrated in the two extracts above.

Joan Didion's geological metaphor, rather unexpectedly, compares identity (the ego) to a hill. In a few words she sketches in for her readers an image of self as the outcome of movement, a deformation taking shape as an accommodation to force and pressure. Self is figured here as an upsurging, a relentless, resistant but responsive creation. Identity may appear solid and finalised but her image suggests it is continually in process, and subject to sudden jolts, even though, more usually, change is imperceptible and glacial. Didion's standpoint here is historical. She is interested in how people get to be the way they are and how self emerges as a feature. From a social science perspective this translates into questions about identity formation. Several possibilities are left open. Identity could be formulated as something which is relatively fixed but which can be pulled and pushed into new shapes or, more radically, as entirely relational, a 'fold' in lines of force.

Reicher and Hopkins' standpoint is very different. Their scholarly as opposed to literary definition focuses on social identities rather than on personal biography, ego or character. Self and movement are again seen as conjoined but the interest here is predictive and future oriented. Their account suggests that social identities provide templates for action and organise what can and should happen next. But self-understanding is also defined through the social actions seen as possible and legitimate. In this way identity and social action specify, entail and enable each other.

Reicher and Hopkins' perspective is cognitive in the sense that their definition focuses on current understandings. Identity is about actively making sense of one's circumstances and how one is placed. In contrast then to the questions Didion's metaphor raises, their focus is on what a sense of identity allows and encourages and what follows from it rather than how it is formed and how it got to be as it is.

Both these standpoints are exemplified in this collection. We are interested in personal identity, biography and trajectory and how people are made and change, and also we are interested in identity as a productive collective force. One of the central aims of the book is to highlight theory, and to encourage comparison and contrast between different accounts of the identity/action relation, highlighting the questions, methods and discoveries these accounts throw into relief. It is common-place in identity studies these days to stress mobility, complexity, entanglement and relationality. Scholars are now suspicious of stasis and the fixed traits and determining and unchanging essences, which were so crucial to the past history and etymology of 'identity'. Our interest in the identity/action relation is commensurate with these new directions. But the book is also the product of frustration because it is often not clear what is entailed when the traffic between identities and social action becomes the focus. What are the theoretical and methodological choices? What do current theoretical perspectives share and where do they differ?

To address the identity/action relation, the book draws on diverse disciplinary perspectives - those offered by geography, history, sociology and social psychology. The chapter authors review a rich range of intellectual resources to understand the social practices they analyse. The theories deployed range from Bourdieu's notion of

'habitus' to Winnicott's account of the formation of subjectivity; from Judith Butler's concept of performativity to Bakhtin's dialogical self; from conversation analysts and discursive psychologists' interest in mundane action and identity formulations to the focus on group relations found in social identity theory in social psychology and in other related approaches such as analyses of social capital and group contact. In introducing this work in this essay, I will first reflect further on the theoretical perspectives discussed in this volume and the points of commonality and difference between them, and then explain the organisation of the book.

Points of Commonality and Difference

The theoretical perspectives presented in this book differ markedly. What could be more different in some senses than, for instance, relational psychoanalysis, conversation analysis and social identity theory in experimental social psychology? But, as these theoretical perspectives become applied to identity and social action, as researchers bring these considerable theoretical and methodological apparatuses to bear on this relation, shared points of commonality emerge. Attention becomes drawn to the flow of social life and to participants' own perspectives and orientations. Perspectives built on binaries become less confident about usual dualisms and begin to recognise more indeterminate and open links between social phenomena.

In short, as attention switches to the *making of identity*, new ways of working come into view. The actor-network theorist Bruno Latour (2005) has clarified, recently and helpfully, what this emphasis entails. He argues (p.28) that it involves a shift from attempts to define and describe social aggregates in abstract to an investigation of the

ways in which people themselves work up, define and understand these aggregates. It is a move away from attempts to develop technical specifications and technical languages to concrete examinations of actual practice. The theoretical perspectives discussed in this volume have each made this journey and for some such as conversation analysis it was always part of the original mandate.

Developing this further, Latour argues that our experience of society as participating members is of being multiply called upon, categorised, classified, registered, enrolled and enlisted, often in highly contradictory and antagonistic ways. The *process* of group making and re-making, and the endless work of forming and dismantling, claiming, reminding, identifying, re-establishing, rejecting, and so on, is frequently what is most salient to the actual members of society and thus needs to become the main focus of research. Furthermore, when people are, willingly or unwillingly, captured, made solid and irremediably grouped, for longer or shorter periods, what they are most concerned about is not social scientists' specifications of social categories, social structures and social divisions. As participants, we are much interested in how these things immediately appear to us and how we, and those around us, make sense of, enlist and make capital out of the shame, embarrassments, delights and hindrances potent in how we are now placed.

If we re-frame this argument more thoroughly in terms of identity (c.f. Williams, 2000, chapters 6 and 7), then it is a case of recognising that participants in social life rarely can rest on their 'identity laurels'. In contrast, identity needs to be 'done' over and over. What 'it' is and who 'we' are escapes, is ineffable, and needs narrating, re-working, and must be continually brought 'to life' again and again. It is only in certain limited

contexts such as autobiographies, *Hello* magazines and in immigration halls (important as these things are) that identities become finalised and accomplished once and for all time (and usually not even there). Responding to this insight, the history of identity studies has become the gradual unpicking of the original meaning and project of identity as 'self-sameness' (c.f. Wetherell, in press) and the notion of identity as a fixed object. 'Staying the same' is, in fact, hard work and highly negotiable. Rightly then in recent years social scientists have become much more interested in how this is achieved. The authors in this volume are interested in how people get tripped up and called upon, put together, identified and narrated in ways which prove motivating and saturated with emotion and which have consequences for what happens next in social life and in biographical trajectories.

If this, then, is the broad orientation shared by the theoretical approaches guiding the research described in this book, what are the differences? These differences and the choices they set up come most clearly into view if we think of theoretical perspectives as varying, first, in terms the 'substance' they accord to identity, second, in terms their reverence for mundane surfaces and willingness to generalise beyond the social world constructed by participants, and, finally, in terms of the openness and indeterminacy or determinacy ascribed to identity/action relations.

Substance

Accounts of identity practices and identity/action relations differ in the kind of solidity, autonomous power and presence they accord identity. Recent work in the social sciences inspired by Deleuze, by the study of complexity and uncertainty, and by

advanced Foucauldian and Lacanian logics (c.f. for some examples, Blackman et al., 2008; Frosh, in press; Law and Mol, 2006; Nobus and Quinn, 2005; Sorenson, 2005; Rose, 1996) represents the most mobile and effervescent end of the continuum. These approaches eschew the idea of identity, identity groundings and formations in favour of the study of sensuous activity, technologies of the self, the assembling of actor-networks and the 'reality' of incoherence as primary analytics. To illustrate these kinds of decentering moves, Lee and Brown pull out Lyotard's argument as an example:

Lyotard makes a turn from the more or less stable possessive self to a more complex and mobile relational self. Decentering the subject involves a turn from an ontology of the individual, bounded subject to a more complex relational ontology. As Lyotard envisages it, this relational self is spatially complex, distributed across "communication circuits". It is the result of the disposition of messages. Crucially, on this view, the self has no ability to possess and can provide no harbour. With no boundary the subject can own nothing, not even itself. The humanistic characterisation of "experience" and "memory" as forms of property is put radically into question because what the subject seems to own, it is merely passing on." (2006, p. 259)

These accounts take the self as a site formed by or folded out of the crossing points of forces, movements and techniques. Here the focus is most dramatically, as in Judith Butler's (1990) early work on gender, on the practiced reiteration of performances which construct appearances of solidity (see Chapters 1 and 3 for a discussion of Butler's work). The thing itself (gendered identity) arises from the repeated practice alone.

This take on 'substance' can be contrasted with accounts of the identity/action relation which similarly focus on what is made and on what changes but which are more confident that identity can be form of property, that the psychological and the social is a meaningful if porous boundary, and which posit a social psychological infrastructure which independently predisposes and organises social action and practice. In these accounts the organisation of identity and its social psychological infrastructure need not necessarily be conceptualised as innate or universally human – it could be seen as the outcome of past practice - but nonetheless self and identity have a presence in these accounts which mean that identity is never simply 'passed on' as Lyotard suggests.

Both relational psychoanalysis (see Chapter 1) and social identity theory in social psychology (see Chapter 12 for an account of social identity theory and Chapter 8 for an example of an application of the theory in geography and politics) are approaches of this kind. They both suggest the self is organised so that certain templates for action are much more likely to occur than others. The mechanisms these two approaches propose, however, differ. Self-organisation occurs either through the force of unconscious identifications and the patterning of early relationships or, for social identity theory and other approaches in experimental social psychology such as analyses of intergroup contact and social capital (see Chapters 9 and 10), through the psychological concomitants of social categorisations and group memberships.

Here, for instance, is Livingstone et al.'s description of social identity theory:

In the sense that we use the term, there are several aspects to the sociality of social identity. These follow from a basic definition of social identity as “the individual’s knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him [or her] of this group membership” (Tajfel, 1972, p. 32). As such, social (as opposed to personal) identity is the psychological basis of intergroup behaviour ... acting in terms of one’s membership of a social group entails acting in terms of a *different*, equally valid and meaningful aspect of one’s self-concept. (Livingstone et al, this volume, Chapter 12, p. ?, emphasis in the original)

Like Reicher and Hopkins, in the definition noted earlier, Livingstone et al. go on to argue that social action and practice set the meaning of social identities – whether these are seen as privileged or disadvantaged, for instance and set the meaning, frames and limits for comparisons with other groups to determine the value of an identity. Social norms, representations and conventional practices define the possibilities for legitimate group action (competition, discrimination, cooperation etc.). In this way, social practices become embedded in self-concepts but this embedding, in interaction with the affordances of human psychology, conditions subsequent action.

In their work on practices of mothering and caring, Elliot et al. in Chapter 1 develop a rich theoretical framework which in fact combines Butler, Bourdieu and object relations theory. But here they explain the object relations strand in their thinking:

From a psychoanalytic perspective, when a woman becomes a mother she can access dormant infantile experiences from when she was a baby, embodied

experience that incorporates her own mother's handling. Through unconscious identification with this early mother, she can be attuned to her baby's needs without conscious knowledge. According to Winnicott, 'because she is devoted to her infant, [the mother] is able to make active adaptation. This presupposes (...) an understanding of the individual infant's way of life, which again arises out of her capacity for identification with her infant. This relationship between the mother and the infant starts before the infant is born' (1949:189 our emphasis). The psychoanalytic concept of unconscious dynamics works on a relational, rather than individual, terrain. (Elliot et al., this volume, Chapter 1, p. ?)

Again, as with social identity theory, the self is understood as formed relationally, in a sense, it is formed from past practice in the case the practices of child-rearing and family life. In both cases, despite the very significant differences in focus and analysis, identity, the sense of self and what is psychologically embedded are given substance and autonomous force.

Other perspectives on identity/action found in this volume such as Bourdieu's classic notion of 'habitus' (see Chapter 2) and Bakhtin's notion of the dialogical and relational self (see Chapter 3) are vaguer and more equivocal on questions of identity substance. These approaches get by instead simply with notions of shared practical understandings which orient social action. For Bourdieu these practical understandings are more embodied, while Bakhtinian scholars focus on the discursive and on identity constructed from heteroglossic multi-voicedness.

Bakhtin's interest is, of course, primarily in language and literature, becoming later in the West a theory of the discursive self (Maybin, 2001). While, as Schatzki (2001) notes, Bourdieu rejects the psychological, arguing that habitus and what becomes written into the body through repeated practice is sufficient substance to explain the process of 'carrying forward' evident in social life and the ways in which past action constrains and sets the context for future action. As Jane Martin (this volume, Chapter 2, p. ?) describes, "'habitus' is a system of durable, transposable dispositions that predispose individuals to do certain things." There is no need in Bourdieu's view to appeal to propositional knowledge, the cognitive, reasons and goals, self-concepts and subjectivities. Transposable dispositions are loosely specified but clearly these are not relational mobilities which fold to produce Lyotard's decentered self. But neither do they form a psychological infra-structure or accord much independent dynamism and energy to the self.

Mundane Surfaces

As noted, one of the most invigorating aspects of focusing on the pairing of identity/action is the emphasis it throws on to everyday life and the meaning-making of the participants in the areas of social life being investigated. Because action is seen as 'practiced' rather than instinctual, automatic or entirely reactive, people's own standpoints, their interpretations, their conclusions and their past histories are privileged over macro-structural determinations. The theoretical perspectives presented in this volume, while sharing this broad interest, differ, however, in the kinds of attention they pay to everyday life, in how interesting they find it, and in the methodological priority given to the close description of people's activities.

At one extreme lies conversation analysis and discursive psychology (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7) where researchers aim to focus entirely on participants' orientations and activities and indeed mandate against going beyond these (c.f. Schegloff, 1997, for perhaps the best known expression of this stricture). Conversation analysts argue that the world has already been interpreted and put together by the participants. The task of the researcher is to show how they do it and the patterns in their activities. Schegloff, for instance, argues as a consequence that it is hubris on the part of critical scholars to think we know better or can see more clearly. This work, as Part Two of this volume illustrates, takes the mundane surfaces of everyday life very seriously indeed, examining small slices from domains of everyday activity to demonstrate the patterned ways in which participants accomplish social life. These researchers like to collect examples of naturally occurring interaction in consequential settings and argue that only in these kinds of data can the doing of identity actually be found, in contrast, for example, to other qualitative methods which simply generate talk *about* identity. Stokoe and Edwards explain:

As a data-gathering source ... interviews are advantageous as they enable researchers to collect guaranteed 'content' about their research questions. However, as has been argued elsewhere, accounts elicited in interviews comprise post-hoc reflections on participants' own or others' identity memberships, rather than how they are occasioned within, and for, the practices of everyday life. As Sacks (1992: 27) observed, researchers end up "studying the categories Members use, to be sure, except at this point they are not

investigating their categories by attempting to find them in the activities in which they're employed" (this volume, Chapter 5, p. ?).

What is found, however, on the mundane surface can be truly startling as the micro-power of identity practices comes into view. This work demonstrates forms of empowering and disempowering which can have a profound impact on who people can be and on what happens next but which would be near impossible to notice or recognise as they rapidly pass in interaction and impossible also to articulate in an in-depth interview (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7 for examples). Once drawn to scholarly and practitioner attention, however, vaguely apparent 'problematic patterns with no names' become discussable and institutional practices can change. This work pays particular attention to participants' own categorisation schemes and thus the usual litany of social identities based on gender, race, class, nationality, etc is broadened to include local schemes e.g. parent, slag, nasty person, bully, etc in Stokoe and Edwards' work on neighbourhood mediation.

Other approaches to identity/action similarly focus on everyday activities, people's accounts and words but would strongly contest that reflections on identity in interviews are off the mark and to one side of actual social action. Many would argue that the study of people's biographical narratives, for example, through the gathering of oral histories (see Chapter 2) or through intensive ethnographic case studies (see Chapters 4, 8, and 11), reveals the patterning and trajectory in individual lives and reveals, too, the memorialising practices and meaning-making resources that would be carried through into new contexts (c.f. Lawler, 2007, for a lucid account of the connections between, narrative, memory, practice and identity). Similarly those interested in the ways in

which identities are valued and the types of cultural capital they accrue (see Chapters 8, 9 and 10) would similarly argue that interviews allow access to enormously consequential information about knowledge and evaluative practices and identity hierarchies.

With the exception of a possible ally in Erving Goffman, conversation analysts and discursive psychologists are alone in their reluctance to deploy academic, critical and theoretical machineries of representation to cast further insight on social life (Goffman's notion of performance is discussed further in Chapter 3). Goffman (1959), for instance, famously once said about his own work on the presentation of self in everyday life that although social theorists might argue that ordinary people are sleeping-walking social dopes, mystified by ideology and unable to perceive their real conditions of existence, he preferred himself not to cast judgement but instead to sneak in and study the way people snore. For theorists of identity practices such as Bourdieu and Butler and for researchers examining integration, intergroup conflict and political campaign-making using social identity and contact theory and analyses of social capital and invented traditions (see Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11), the mundane surface may be beguiling but it will never be enough to watch the people snore without attempting to explain why certain versions of the world come to dominate, where power lies and why some kinds of identity practices are so difficult and troubled, and others so untroubled.

Indeterminacy

Theories which focus on identity/action usually discover a kind of openness and indeterminacy to social life. There is constraint to be sure in the sense that past social

practice and forms of action sets the scene for future practice, and events typically unfold along the tram-lines of existing possibilities. But most analyses of identity and social action typically come to endorse the 'could be otherwise' nature of social life and expect that events might at any point jump the tracks being laid down. We have already noted Bourdieu's term 'dispositions' which holds in play both provisionality and ordering. But here again, there is room for different emphases. These no doubt are predictable from the positions and differences I have already presented and so my discussion will be brief.

Several of the researchers brought together in this volume favour quantitative methods (see Chapters 9, 10 and 12) – these of course typically work probabilistically even if the aim is high levels of certainty. But in experimental social psychology, for example, the goal is to detect causal relations and causal patterning, manipulating core variables, and excluding or holding constant others, to highlight ordered relationships. To the extent, however, this work looks to the social shaping of self-concepts, motivations, and perceptions of legitimacy and expected practice it is also open to social change. As noted earlier, Reicher and Hopkins (2001) argue that the kinds of comparisons group members engage upon with other groups and the ways in which they positively distinguish their groups from others will vary historically, culturally and across different scenes of collective action. This variability gives an openness to social identity theory, for example, which makes it reasonable to claim it as a theory of identity practices despite its continuing ambitious focus on cause and effect relations (see Chapter 12).

In effect, this and similar work such as the strands of psychosocial work discussed in Chapter 1 often relies on a process/content distinction. The content of people's identifications, the social and cultural resources which define identities and their consequences are malleable, provisional and ultimately indeterminate, but underlying identity/action relations are processes which are seen as more determinate, predictable and enduring. For object relations theory in psychosocial studies, as we have seen, processes are marked out rather differently but there is the same sense that phenomena like projection, identification, repression, and so on are seen as fixed mechanisms which provisional senses of identity will be built around (c.f. Wetherell, 2003, for a comparison of discourse and psychoanalytic theories in this respect).

Obviously, for other theorists of identity/action indeterminacy and negotiability extend in every direction. Here the particular detail of each case becomes much more salient. This specificity can be in conflict with generalisation and knowledge accumulation. The case by case emphasis can render the grounds for extending arguments to other contexts unclear and weak. For some, the concept of social practice itself sometimes provides the only stability. Other theories find robust repetitions (e.g. the patterns detected by conversation analysts and performativity theorists, see Part Two and Chapter 3) but are not sufficiently entranced by these to take them as a norm or a scientific ideal. Variations, the highly context specific, and twists and turns in manifestations are equally to be expected and equally of interest depending on the research questions and the focus set.

Organisation of the Book

These, then, are the kinds of theoretical perspectives and choices which the collection of research examples in this volume illustrates. The chapters in this collection, along with those in our companion volume (*Identity in the 21st Century: New Trends in Changing Times* also published by Palgrave), are based on the sustained period of intensive collective work which took place within the UK Economic and Social Research Council Programme on Identities and Social Action (see www.identities.org.uk). The 25 research projects which composed the programme worked with over 12,000 participants (see Appendix A for a list of the 12 projects informing this particular volume). The authors' conclusions about identity/action configurations are thus empirically rich and authoritative as a consequence. They derive from research adopting an extensive range of methods including quantitative surveys, 'street' ethnography, in-depth qualitative interviews, psychoanalytically informed longitudinal observation, participatory theatre techniques, oral history, studies of talk-in-interaction and archival research. Research in the UK predominates, with one chapter reporting from Puebla, Mexico, while investigative sites in the UK range from Northern Ireland to Wales and across a range of communities in England.

The book is divided into three Parts. We look first at the identity/action relation as it is played out in individual lives and within the domain of personal biography. Then, in Part 2, attention switches to the domain of talk-in-interaction in institutional settings and, finally, Part 3 takes up on identity/action relations in group, neighbourhood, community, city and national contexts.

Part 1, *Biographies and Personal Trajectories* consists of four chapters, each concerned with change, transition and movement in individual lives and how identity is configured

and re-configured as a consequence. Heather Elliott, Yasmin Gunaratnam, Wendy Hollway and Ann Phoenix take as their topic in Chapter 1 the transition to first-time motherhood. They demonstrate how the identity change which occurs when becoming a mother for the first time is not just a matter of performativity (repeating the new until it becomes an accustomed identity practice) but is also profoundly psychosocial involving layers of identification and investment in dialogue with the performances of previous generations. Chapter 2 by Jane Martin with John Kirk, Christine Wall and Steve Jefferys develops the generational theme further. These authors explore generations of teacher activists and investigate how a radical 'habitus' in Bourdieu's sense develops. Through case studies of particular teacher/activists, they show how individuals become engaged and mobilised in different historical periods. The mobilities considered in the third chapter from Nira Yuval-Davis and Erene Kaptani are those associated with migration. They explore through participatory theatre techniques the ways in which members of refugee communities develop and perform new narratives of belonging. This chapter explores the meaning of performance, and its implications for understanding the relations between identity and action from a number of different theoretical perspectives adding to Butler's work which was a resource for earlier chapters, Goffman's ideas and Bakhtin's emphases on the dialogical self. Finally in Part 1, Gareth Jones and Sarah Thomas de Benitez examine migration in a less conventional sense – the travelling and movement of Mexican 'street youth', demonstrating the ways in which their identities become fixed and unfixed but remain always provisional, blurred and open to further change.

Part 2, *Interactions and Institutions* consists of three chapters using conversation analysis and discursive psychology to illuminate identity/action relations in three

different institutional settings. Elizabeth Stokoe and Derek Edwards in Chapter 5 examine the social actions of disputing and mediating and the identity categories emergent in these. Their data consists of a rich set of tape-recorded phone-calls to neighbourhood mediation centres and recorded interviews conducted by police with suspects in neighbourhood crime. In Chapter 6, Susan Speer focuses on interaction between transsexual patients and psychiatrists in an NHS Gender Identity Clinic. This is an illuminating account of the details of 'passing' as a woman which rethinks what is at stake in gender performance. Finally in Part 2, Charles Antaki, Mick Finlay and Chris Walton present some of the data from their investigations in residential homes for people with learning disabilities. They focus on the everyday act of 'choosing' and show how the organisation of this activity constructs identities and presents staff with some major dilemmas as duties to empower residents conflict with other imperatives. Overall, these three chapters beautifully illustrate what fine-grain analysis can add to the study of identity practices and clearly demonstrate how interactions make identities and make institutions.

Part 3, *Communities, Cities and Nations* examines the identity practices at stake in relations between groups in neighbourhoods and communities, scaled up in political campaigns, in the scenes and rituals of urban public life and in contests over national belonging. The practices investigated here are those of mobilising, including, excluding, belonging, bonding, settling, segregating and mixing and the family of theoretical resources drawn upon range from social identity theory and other perspectives (such as contact theory) in social psychology, to analyses of social capital and 'invented traditions'. In Chapter 8 Jane Wills presents a powerful analysis of political mobilisation and how campaigns such as the London Citizens living wage

campaign work by 'enlarging' identity, creating super-ordinate identities, but also skilfully managing difference and diversity. Chapter 9 from Katharina Schmid, Miles Hewstone, Joanne Hughes, Richard Jenkins and Ed Cairns compares segregated (predominantly Protestant and predominantly Catholic) and mixed (Protestant and Catholic) neighbourhoods in Belfast in light of ideas about the role of contact between groups in breaking down hostility. Their work shows that mixing allows (and is sustained by) more complex patterns of identification. Their work disconfirms recent social capital analyses presented by Robert Putnam which suggest that community diversity decreases cohesion, and thus has crucial implications for policy. Chapter 10 from Charles Watters, Rosa Hossain, Rupert Brown and Adam Rutland then similarly explores issues of contact and social capital in this case to understand the identity/action relationships involved in settling and integrating. Their focus is on first and subsequent generation migrant children and again against current orthodoxy the findings suggest the importance of ethnic diversity for positive identity/action outcomes. In Chapter 11, Dominic Bryan and Sean Connolly switch attention back to city life and the longer historical story. Their chapter focuses on public rituals and use of public space in Belfast and demonstrates how these enable and reflect civic identities in play. Finally, in Part Three, Andrew Livingstone, Russell Spears, Anthony Manstead and Martin Bruder extend the discussion out to national identity and examine identity/action relations in Wales. Their chapter presents an incisive demonstration of social identity theory in social psychology and the light it casts on identity practices.

Conclusion

The research described in the chapters in this collection thoroughly embeds the study of identity in social life. Every chapter begins with action and investigates what subsequently happens to identity. This is a very different standpoint from traditional sociological and social psychological concerns with mapping types, traits, stereotypes, categories and groups. In this short introduction I have been able to contrast a wide range of intriguing perspectives on the identity/action relation. I have compared those which posit identity and action as separate substances and analytic frames to those which see identity and action as simply different facets of the same productive flow of social life. I have compared accounts of identity which conceive of the self as a site or meeting place for different, perhaps antagonistic, patterns of relationalities with accounts which understand identity and its psychology as more substantial and determining. Debate will continue, of course, but we hope the book will stimulate some new thought about these most basic questions concerning the identity/action relation.

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