Social identity and narrative perspectives[1]

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Abstract

Balázs Kézdi, in his work entitled Identity and Culture (2001), draws attention to the fact that the concept of identity is ambiguous and overdetermined not only in social science discourse but also in psychology because the concepts of "self" and self-definition are often mixed up with the concepts of self-definition. Different theories emphasise different characteristics depending on whether the self is a personal or a social self-definition and whether the process of identification is interpreted as static or situational.

Over the last few decades, the psychological literature on identity has increasingly emphasised the narrative nature of identity. This means that people form their interpretations of the world through narratives (including self-narratives), and these narratives are inseparable from the concept of self-determination (László, 2005). The following paper discusses the particular case of collective identity and significant group identification, including the issue of national identity and the role of collective memories. Accordingly, it focuses first on the psychological and cultural approach to the process of peer self-determination, followed by the group history and the resulting theoretical considerations.

Keywords: collective memory, social identity, self-determination

Social existence and identity

Social psychological approaches

The issues of group identity in social psychology are organised around two models: on the one hand, theories of social identity by Turner and Tajfel, which focus on the mechanism of the individual's belonging to a group, and on the other hand, the scientific narrative psychological paradigms of the content of collective or social identity, which emphasise the characteristics of group identity construction.

The social science discourse on social identity has been significantly influenced in the last few decades by the idea of Festinger (1954) that, in the absence of objective means, we evaluate specific abilities by comparing them with others and, beyond that, by seeking to compare them in ways that are advantageous to us. This line of thought has significantly impacted the development of self-categorisation theories on the one hand and explanations of how groups are formed on the other. In the Tajfelian and Turnerian paradigms of social identity, however, the focus is no longer on individual comparativity but on identification between groups in the dimension of evaluation.

Social identity theories place social categorisation in a key position in the mechanism of identity construction (Turner, 1980) because it helps the individual to organise the social environment, i.e. to adapt to a particular group and thus achieve a sense of social identity. On the other hand, they emphasise the emotional aspect because individuals can satisfy their positive self-esteem and self-esteem through their group affiliation (Tajfel, 1980). In the context of Tajfel's three-stage CIC model (categorisation, identification, comparison), the group is interpreted as a category with which the individual identifies and, if the category is positively evaluated, is incorporated into his sense of identity, i.e. identification is established.

On the one hand, the theory implies the context-dependence of peer identification, but at the same time, as Brewer (1999), for example, emphasises, identity construction takes place in the dynamics of the opposing tendencies of group identity and individual separation. Thus, the concept of social identity is understood as a multidimensional construct saturated not only with cognitive but also with affective content, and the dual determinacy of identification along group values and of defining something in terms of something implies a prominent role for intergroup emotions. [2]

In contrast, theorists of narrative psychology of social/collective identity do not focus on the mechanisms of individual group commitment and group formation

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[2] We can speak of intergroup emotions if four criteria are fulfilled: (1) if they can be distinguished from individual emotions, (2) if the intensity of their experience depends on the intensity of identification with the group, (3) if there is a correlation between group members in terms of the emotions experienced, and (4) if the emotions experienced have a regulating function in intra- and intergroup processes (E. R. Smith, Seger and Mackie, 2007). The fulfilment and verification of the last two criteria is problematic for negative emotions, which is labelled in the literature as the identification paradox. The paradox is that in the case of negative emotions, the most committed members of the group identify (Yzerbit, Durmont et al., 2003), but they are also the ones who are most motivated to maintain a positive self-image of the group because of their loyalty to the group (Janis, 1982, Staub, 1997), so strongly identifying group members are the most prone to alternative interpretations of events.

but primarily on the content of group identification, and by exploring different patterns, they capture the way narratives organise experience. In this respect, the collective memories of the group's history, the causal coherence of identity construction or the emotional content are strongly emphasised. The main difference between the two paradigms is that while social identity models do not deal with the states and qualities of group self-identity, social identity theories and methodological applications examine and draw conclusions from the construction of meaning in the group's self-definition, thus forming typologies of group identity constructions.

A cultural studies approach

In another approach to social identity - cultural studies - the connective nature of culture is emphasised. According to Jan Assmann's (1999) line of thought, this connectivity ensures the individual's attachment to the group on two planes, the social and the temporal, i.e. it creates a common space in the symbolic world of culture that both orientates and provides trust and creates a temporal continuity by shaping and preserving shared experiences and memories. The latter is the basis for mythic narratives of shared knowledge and memory and rules, which have the specificity of being identity-constructive in that they allow the individual to define him/herself in terms of the dimensions of the 'we'.

As a result of the inclusion of cultural theory, Kézdi, in his remarks on the Asmannian concept of identity, stresses that identity and culture are constituted in mutual reflection. An individual's self-determination is constructed through participation in the communicative patterns of one's group, within which group identity takes precedence over self-identity (i.e. identity is sociogenetic or culturally genetic in nature). At the same time, collective identity as such does not exist outside of the individuals who bear the group, i.e. collective self-determination is tied to individual consciousness. Another important aspect is that while the framework of collective self-definition may be changeable, i.e. an individual may give up belonging to a group, the abandonment or emptying of individual identity has pathological consequences (Kézdi, 1999, 2001).

Identity and narrative

As a new paradigm of Soft Syntheis (Runyan, 1988), narrative psychology views the human being in a dual field of power: both a causally determined and an interpreting being. One of the central insights of this approach is that human beings communicate their experiences, thoughts, emotions and interpretations of the world through constructed narratives and that these narratives are capable of

reflecting the complex and unique social, historical and cultural context of the individual, and are thus closely linked to the notion of identity (László, 2005). In other words, identity is fundamentally narrative; that is, it is articulated in and can be extracted from the process of narration (Ricoeur, 2001, 2004).

This is why identity studies in recent decades have emphasised, among other things, the linking of the individual and life history, i.e. the establishment of a scientific discourse of psychohistory. As a result of this linking, interest in the study of life history and life events as identity-constructing elements has grown since the 1980s (Sarbin et al., etc.), in which the specificity of episodic and summarising life-history narratives, which are organised from time to time into coherent formations, is an important aspect (Pataki, 2000).

This shift in the direction of scientific discourse has resulted in a new paradigm in which the role of biography has become crucial. McAdams (1988) has argued outright that identity is, in fact, a life history embedded in a socio-historical context, and as such, the dynamic process of identity construction encompasses the entire life cycle, thus de-emphasising the Eriksonian significance of adolescence in his argument.

The life story as a narrated text contains both episodic figures, life events schematised and summarised by repetition, and generalised stories, cleansed of episodic contingencies, and as such, is thematically inhomogeneous. (Kézdi, 2001) The significant life events that emerge from these have two basic characteristics: on the one hand, the events are the subject of personal interpretation, and on the other hand, the life story is permanently embedded in the (collective) past of some narrower and broader community, to which it also has a personal relationship. The Narrative's primary purpose and function are the social grounding of the individual's self-image and self-concept and the anchoring of further psychological processes (Pléh, 2008).

The narrative of the self must never be solely the work of the self but a dialogical product of the intersubjective relations existing at the moment of the narration. The consequence of this dialogical relation is that narratives never take the form of simple narratives; the texts produced always carry emotions and intentions at the linguistic level; they are distorted in some way by the subject, which is the key to their interpretability. In the context of this distortion, reference may also be made here to Bruner's distinction between paradigmatic and narrative mode, which denotes two forms of human thought. Whereas the paradigmatic mode seeks to justify truth using abstract concepts and causal proofs, the narrative mode justifies itself by means of lifelikeness, its organising principle being not

truth but lifelikeness (Bruner, 2001; id. Laszlo, 2008). This line of thought also fits in well, as the Gergen authors (2001) argue, that in storytelling since self-identity can be communicated within socially determined discursive rules, it is a culture that speaks through storytelling, which uses the subject to reproduces itself (Gergen, 2001).

Kézdi (2001) draws attention to the fact that there is no such thing as a life event as a pure entity in itself because if it does not fit into the flow of the life-history narrative, it does not become real and disappears without a trace (or is smothered in the unconscious). The flip side of the same argument is that human life itself is a narrative event insofar as it can only be articulated and understood within the narrative framework produced by the community (in more radical terms, the mental background can be seen as a consequence of the discursive process alone).

Moving on, narrativity is not only the creator of life but also its antecedent since when we think of an event, we always think of it as a narrative event with meaning. Bruner (2004) also refers to this when he argues that narratives play a significant role in processing and creating events. In line with this, of course, the main questions for narrative theorists are how people make sense of the world around them, i.e. how they construct their stories and the role of narrativity in general in the psychological and social development or construction of human beings.

In addition to the fact that narratives are constructed along narrative regularities defined for the individual, it is important to emphasise that their role is not only essential in the context of individual identity. The elements of individual and collective identities are in some respects intertwined, and accordingly, narratives are also a necessary part of the life of groups (László, 2012).

Social identity and memory

Just as individual identity can be expressed from the life story narrative, the group story becomes relevant for collective identity, i.e. the patterns in the group narratives form the information about the nature of social identity. The strength of a group identity always depends on the extent to which it is alive in the consciousness of its members (Assmann, 1999), and the most crucial role in this, as László (2005) points out, is played by group narratives.

A strong sense of identity derived from group membership lies in collective memories and historical narratives. What binds these groups together, in addition to instinct, is shared knowledge based on talk and communication. This means

that (in Assmannian terminology) collective identity is always founded and reproduced by the corresponding cultural formation.

Regarding literacy, Assmann sees repetition as the basic principle of the connective structure mentioned earlier: it ensures that actions are organised into recognisable patterns. Repetition is linked to representational memory, the latter through the interpretation of tradition. This dichotomy can be observed through rituals: in the case of strict adherence to a fixed order, repetition is given greater emphasis, while in the case of less rigid ritual occasions, the aspect of representation is given more significant space. The dynamic range of connectivity is structured between the two poles.

A change of emphasis and a new connective structure emerges with the writing down of traditions: repetition is replaced by representation, ritual coherence is replaced by textual coherence, and liturgy is replaced by hermeneutics. The connective structure of culture is reinforced by the written canon, by the memory narratives of a given society, thus making collective identity continuous. If certain events cannot be interpreted in the plausibility of the present, then, in the absence of a frame of reference, these events disappear from collective memory, thus making the concept of forgetting intelligible.

As regards the forms of memory, Assmann's theory formulates three criteria: the specificity of place and time (memories are rooted in a specific time and space), the specificity of the group (exclusive connection to the position of a real group, which can be made durable through memory), and reconstructivity as an autonomous process (memory does not preserve the pure past, but the contents that society can preserve/insert from it in its temporal frame of reference).

The group's memory narratives are definitive: in addition to being flexible for the group members (adapting to the group's goals), they also provide a framework for a communal way of being. As in the case of personal narratives, in addition to the facts narrated, a field of reference is constructed that provides a structure of plausibility for the present and the future, defines the elementary points of reference for "being in the world", regulates the possibilities of interpersonal and intergroup behaviour, and structures the interpretation of events. In other words, these memory narratives are adapted to the group's purposes and provide a framework for community existence (Bar-Tal, 2000; Liu & László, 2007).

Returning to the structure of collective memory, Assmann also makes a temporal distinction with the concept by separating recent events from events in the distant past. The reason for this separation is that the present or recent events can be

found in the experiential dimension of the group, while the more distant, historical narratives can be found in the memory dimension of the group.

The communicative memory, i.e. the events of the past 80-100 years, is activated in the group's communication, and therefore, as individual discourses are given space in the interpretation, their meaning is not fully developed. On the other hand, cultural memory transforms specific figures and historical events into shared memories that explain the present by condensing them into legends of symbolic significance. The symbolic content of the collective past, in the absence of individual experience, is recorded in the canonised texts of the group, although these recorded narratives may evolve as the group's position changes (Szilágyi, 2015).

However, the significance of the distinction lies not only in the characterisation and analysis of the different memory structures: despite the separation, the Assmannian idea sees the construction of the continuity of identity in the linking of the two kinds of memory, i.e. the present and the past. The actions of heroes/heroes and the events of the past constitute a point in time and space from which the individual and the community can define themselves and their current historical context, ensuring continuity. All these historical narratives are key elements of national continuity and national role conceptions, which are central to both group solidarity and social legitimacy (Bindorffer, 2002; Szilágyi, 2010; Szilágyi, 2011).

One of the most crucial points of the relationship between the two types of memory is that the recorded narratives of the past shape how the present/past is evaluated. Linked to this is the basic assumption of narrative psychology that past events and the emotional patterns associated with them are embedded and perpetuated in representations, thus becoming the carriers (and group-level shapers) of a kind of enduring emotional orientation, i.e. they contain, in a cumulative way, the emotional patterns that group members relate to themselves and represent towards other groups (Bar-Tal, 2005).

Collective identity and national history

The most obvious example of conscious social belonging is national consciousness. The concept of the nation and the questions of national identity associated with it are the subject of a wide-ranging polemic in the historical and social sciences, and the debate can be divided primarily according to the place in time and the elements that different views attach to the antecedents of the nation. In particular, the latter question is significant in accounting for the content of

national identity. For as long as the origins of the nation are derived from some common ethnic origin and territorial boundaries, identity studies reflect on these, and if the category of the nation is seen as a kind of artificial and modern construct, the study of identity contents is organised according to a real and symbolic network of constructed traditions (Hobsbawm, 1983).

Let's take a narrative approach to the question of national identity. We anchor national consciousness to its past events, examining the socio-psychological mechanisms that operate collective identity and how national history is represented in each group.

In terms of mechanisms, in the context of peer identity, the minimal group paradigm experiments have already well pointed out the behavioural manifestation of bias, i.e., that identification with one's own group seeks modes of comparison in which it can gain positive self-evaluation, with the result that one's own group is valorised and the outgroup devalued (e.g., Sherif, 1966; Tajfel, 1978).

The more complex emotional patterns for an external group are not monochromatic, i.e. not all external groups have the same emotional response. In his work *Stereotypes and Prejudices in Conflict* (2005), Bar-Tal argues that the emotional set is highly dependent on the particular context of the community, which is the context that denotes the forms of expression that are derived from the group's historical, cultural, geographical, economic or even political existence, and that can legitimise the group and help the integration of its members.

In other words, the narratives that bring us closer to exploring the emotional patterns of certain national groups are those linked to their own history, whether official historiography (history books), literary corpus texts or interviews that examine historical representations.

Emotional patterns

As Fülöp and László (2011) argue, events congruent with identity are preserved in the collective memory of the group. The narrative of events, the networks of actions that emerge within them, contain evaluative dimensions, emotions and coping strategies that are then transmitted transgenerationally. Historical stories provide the substance of the group, ensuring intergenerational interconnection, cultural continuity and emotional understanding.

Studies of cultural emotions in the historical scenario of individual nations and the verbalisation of the emotional structures that emerge in it have drawn

attention to how the basic narratives of the representation of collective history can be structured (e.g. Markus & Kitayama, 1991; László et al., 2002; McAdams, 2006; László & Liu, 2007), other research has shown that such dimensions of evaluation are also expressed in verbal form. (Szabó, Banga, Ferenczhalmy, Fülöp, Szalai, László 2010) In other words, if the context of a community is persistent, the evaluation of events is embedded in the group's narratives, and their transmission not only operates at the level of group identity (i.e., for the individual's integration and the group's survival) but also has a substantial impact on action tendencies due to emotional "ownership".

As Szabó, Banga and colleagues summarise in their study (2011), the theme of emotions related to group membership was introduced in social psychology by E. R. Smith (1993), and the theoretical context is derived from the triad of individual emotion evaluation theories (cognitive evaluation), social identity theories and self-categorization theories.

In the central questions of the intergroup theories, the patterns (evaluations) underlying the emotional experience and the patterns involved in forming the experience are the main focus. When enumerating the dimensions involved in the process of evaluation, the dimensions of agency, legitimacy, likelihood and pleasantness of the outcome should be mentioned, and, standing on the ground of self-categorisation theories, the inclusion of the group's point of view, perspective, which induces the interpretation of different events from the group's point of view, should be emphasised (Szabó et al., 2011).

In the case of studies of collective emotions, the focus is on the moral dilemmas of the group (and the emotions associated with them) and, by extension, on the history of the group, especially the question of types of identification with the group and instances of devaluation of the out-group (thus showing the "us-them" dichotomy in a plastic way). An example of the former is the study by Roccas, Klar and Liviatan (2006), in which the separation of attachment and glorification was complemented by considering the nature of intensity, thus interpreting the pattern of group identification in a four-dimensional typology.[3] In the latter case, Leyens et al. investigated an extreme form of devaluation of external groups, the phenomenon of infrahumanisation, and the associated exculpatory (and self-justifying) strategy (Leyens, Paladino et al., 2000).

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[3] Of these, three congruent and one non-congruent attachment patterns were identified (congruent: 1) strongly attaching and glorifying persons; 2) strongly attaching, non-glorifying persons; 3) weakly attaching, non-glorifying persons), non-congruent: weakly attaching, glorifying persons.)

Another highlight of the research on collective emotions concerns the historical dimension of intergroup relations, which is twofold in nature: on the one hand, it examines the impact of the past on current intergroup relations, and on the other hand, it analyses the current group's attempts to reinterpret the past. In both cases, empirical studies confirm that the past events of one's own group have a significant impact on the perception of the present (e.g. Wohl and Branscombe, 2008) and vice versa (e.g. Roccas et al., 2006, cited in Szabó et al., 2011).

In recent years, several studies on Hungarian history have demonstrated such properties of group narratives. The issues of own-group agentiality have been analysed by Szalai and László (2006, 2008), the dimensions of evaluation by László and Csertő (2011), and the patterns of emotions related to the historical trajectory of the own-group by Fülöp and László (2010). In these empirical studies, the theses of intergroup bias have been verified at the verbal level.

Further studies have also focused on the role of the narrative internal perspective in identity construction (Vincze, László, 2007, 2010; Tóth et al., 2006) and on the measurement of intentionality (Ferenczhalmy & László, 2010). The related results support group stories' identity-forming and identity-defining characters (László, 2012).

The narrative organisation of history

As already explained above, the set of emotions underlying contextuality varies from group to group; the primary reason for the high level of convergence between the emotions of group members is the specific historical trajectory unique to that group, which has the specific orienting function of serving as a landmark in the emergence of particular emotions in certain situations.

This also implies the idea of the narrative organisation of history, which has become prominent in historiography and social psychology in the last few decades. (White, 1973; Hull, 1975; Gyáni, 2000; László, 2003) In this interpretation, the historian, in his vulnerability to traces of unattainable reality, writes almost prose, and instead of authentic reality, we can speak of the relative truth of the talk about history, i.e. the canonised version of the past we know from history books is also only a narrative. Moreover, it is a narrative which - like all other texts - has narrative structures; that is, history is ultimately a historiographical construction, a created interpretation interspersed with different linguistic forms.

Summary

The relationship between social self-determination and narrative is, therefore, closely related. On the one hand, we have to consider that collective identity construction involves emotions, comparisons, and cognitive evaluations and that the relation to the external group(s) is as essential in the identification process as the mechanism and content of identification with one's group.

Identity is narrative in nature, i.e., constructed through narratives; at the individual level, it is expressed through life stories; at the collective level, through group stories.

In this interpretative framework, group history is now understood as a series of events and a narrative that gives meaning to facts. In these meanings, the basic rules of the group's functioning and the starting points of its relations can be found, thus forming the basis for the strategies for interpreting the events.

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