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Identity through a Psychoanalytic Looking Glass

Stijn Vanheule & Paul Verhaeghe
Ghent University

Abstract. This paper examines how "identity" can be conceptualized and how the experience of "oneself" is influenced by the interplay of forces inside the mind and the body. We address three psychoanalytic approaches: Freud's topological views on the mental apparatus; Lacan's theory on the mirror stage, his optical model of the ideals of the subject, and his theory on the object *a*; and the theory of Fonagy and colleagues on how the self develops and how affect regulation takes place in the context of attachment relationships. We outline similarities and differences in how identity is conceptualized within these perspectives and we discuss clinical implications.

Key Words: attachment, Freud, Lacan, identity, psychoanalysis

The notion of "identity" is not only a commonsensical term used to reflect self-understanding and experiences of collective belonging, but also a term that is frequently used in the social sciences and in the humanities. The ongoing discussion about whether or not it is a useful or interesting concept tends to function on a fundamental assumption that identity implies a categorical membership of a group. Such group membership includes gender, ethnicity, age, conviction, and life-style. Existing discussions on identity characteristically revolve around the social, political and power dynamics connected with category membership, and around the individual's subjective experience of identity in terms of affinity, conflict, or disturbance (e.g., Alcoff, 2006; Andacht & Michel, 2005; Connell, 2006; Jansz & Timmers, 2002; Kernberg, 2006).

From our perspective, one of the effects of such category-based thinking about identity is its normative reasoning: by selecting certain qualities within categories, they function as norms. People compare themselves and others to those norms and end up with a state of conviction, or doubt, about whether or not they correspond to them. This is expressed in typical questions, such as *am I masculine enough to be a real man? Is my child displaying age-appropriate behavior?*

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In this paper we explore a non-categorical approach to identity. Our point of departure is the idea that a category-based approach to identity neglects a number of questions that we regard as crucial. When considering the work of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the question of identity is approached from a logical point of view. Particularly in his seminar on *Identification* (Lacan, 1961–1962), Lacan indicates that identity can be defined as an entity that is equal to itself (i.e., A = A). Punning on this logical formula, he asks how it comes about that someone can start experiencing one as "one-self": how does it happen that I consider the idea of a "me" as part of my own self? And why in fact do we say "my-self"? Is it not self-evident that this "my" is a part of the "self"? And isn't it curious that the word "self," which we use to make auto-references, is in many languages also used to refer to sameness? Along these lines, Lacan indicates that the experience of identity is a result of the mechanism of "identification," which functions as an answer to a question that lies at the basis of subjectivity: "Who am I?" In saying and believing that "I am me" and that "I" mirrors "myself," people produce answers to this question.

In what follows, we discuss these questions further and examine how the subjective experience of one as oneself can be thought of. We highlight how this experience is influenced by the interplay with other forces inside the mind and the body. We will attempt an understanding of how the subjective experience of identity comes about, and how it is limited by other subjective experiences. We do so by exploring differences and similarities in three psychoanalytic approaches—Freudian, Lacanian, and psychoanalytic attachment theory within the tradition of Fonagy and Target. We discuss Freud's topological views on the mental apparatus; Lacan's theory on the mirror stage, his optical model of the ideals of the subject, and his theory on the object *a*; and Fonagy and colleagues' theory on how the self develops and how affect regulation takes place in the context of attachment relationships. We also discuss what these theories imply in conceptualizing the aim of psychoanalysis as a clinical praxis.

In contrast to a number of other psychoanalytic schools (see Abend, 1974; Kernberg, 2006) and the contemporary category-based approach, identity is not a core concept in the psychoanalytic perspectives we study. We nevertheless chose these perspectives deliberately as all three present clear ideas on how the experience of one as oneself can be thought of. They also illustrate how the comprehensiveness of this experience is limited by forces that cannot be thought of as parts of oneself. Through these perspectives, we aim at understanding identity in a non-normative and process-like direction. We have chosen Freud because we think that his theory on the development of the Ego is far too neglected today. Through the multiple interpretations of his work, the innovative character of his ideas has become diluted. We have chosen Lacan because of the combination of his "return to Freud" and his own theory on identification and on the becoming of a subject, which have made certain implications of Freud's theory far more obvious. Finally, we have chosen psychoanalytic attachment theory for its novel approach to classic psychoanalytic

questions—we concentrate on the ideas with respect to the development of the self and the role of mirroring in this process—and for its ample connections to contemporary cognitive and developmental psychology. Obviously, other choices could be argued for, especially in the Anglo-Saxon tradition (Winnicott and object relations theory, Stern and infant research, Benjamin and intersubjective analysis, Kohut and self-psychology). It is our familiarity with the perspectives we chose that guided us in selecting them. The option for addressing other perspectives remains open.

A Freudian Perspective on the Question of Identity

Traditionally, Freud's theory is studied in terms of his double topology, usually highlighting the fact that his second topology turns the Ego into one of the three constituting elements of the psyche, along with the Id and the Super-Ego. At the time of his first topology—the Conscious, the Preconscious, and the Unconscious—the Ego is considered a general concept, almost synonymous with identity or personality. From our point of view, such a reading is wrong, if only because it neglects what we consider to be the core problem for which both topologies try to produce an answer. Freud is preoccupied with this problem from the beginning: how can we understand the inner division in mental functioning? His early concepts of "*Abwehr*," "antithetical ideas," and "splitting" all testify to his first attempt (Freud, 1894/1962a, 1896/1962b). In our reading, this is the original starting point of psychoanalysis, and at the same time one of the most important divergences from mainstream academic psychology and its ideas on an undivided personality. Moreover, the initial simple opposition between an outside and an inside (conscious versus unconscious, Ego versus object, subject versus other, self versus primary caregiver) is problematic right from the inception of psychoanalysis (Freud, 1925/1961b; Freud & Breuer, 1895/1955).

Freud's theory on the Ego is far from univocal. Developmentally, he describes it from both a phylogenetic and an ontogenetic perspective. Phylogenetically, it amounts to the development of an adaptive apparatus, with the focus on perception and consciousness (Pcpt.Cs) and the aim of survival. Ontogenetically, it is the product of successive identifications, resulting in the production of a love object for another agency (i.e., the Super-Ego). A topological, dynamic, and economic point of view is described within this ontogenetic perspective. Topologically, the Freudian Ego only has relative autonomy, as it has to meet the requirements of the Id, the Super-Ego, and external reality. Dynamically, the Ego represents the defensive side of the neurotic conflict, as it is the seat of the defensive mechanisms and the signal anxiety (Freud & Breuer, 1895/1955, p. 116). Economically the Ego has to take care of the function of synthesis.

This latter function is without doubt the most problematic one. In Freud's early theories, the internal division already holds a central place, and a simple binary opposition is wrong. In his two seminal papers on "The

Neuro-psychoses of Defence" (Freud, 1894/1962a, 1896/1962b) and the *Studies on Hysteria* (Freud & Breuer, 1895/1955, p. 269) he puts forth the idea that the cause of psychopathology is the fact that certain representations are incompatible with the dominating (i.e., the accepted) part of the Ego, and that the former are therefore repulsed by this dominating Ego part. The result is that the warded-off part operates in a pathogenic way. Nevertheless, Freud has to admit even at this early stage of his theory that the representational group that has been warded off by the Ego remains part of this Ego, however "incompatible" it might be (Freud & Breuer, 1895/1955, p. 290). Obviously, there is no black-and-white division and the split is internal to the Ego itself.

Here we meet three basic characteristics of human identity right from the start of psychoanalytic theory: the Ego is constituted by *representations* that contain an *internal division* caused by a *defensive process* that is installed by the Ego itself.[1] This division will be elaborated in terms of conscious and unconscious, albeit with the same problem. Conscious and unconscious are not mutually exclusive terms; on the contrary, they present a dynamic mixture. Freud tries to understand this in one of his most important metapsychological studies, *A Project for a Scientific Psychology* (Freud, 1950/1966).[2] In this book-length work he describes the Ego as an organization of associatively linked representations that are invested with endogenous energy, whose function is to inhibit primary processes in order to avoid the production of unpleasure. The further elaboration of his theory mainly presents the developmental history of this Ego. In this respect, the obvious questions are: Where do these representations come from? What is the cause of this ever-present division and of this necessity for a defense? In the meantime, it is clear that Freud's implicit assumption is that there is no such thing as an a priori identity: the Ego is constructed via an interactive process. Three of Freud's papers are seminal in this respect, with narcissism, melancholia, and, finally, the Ego as central themes (Freud, 1914/1957a, 1917/1957d, 1923/1961a).

In his paper on narcissism, Freud writes explicitly that the Ego is not present from birth, in contrast to the auto-erotic drives (Freud, 1914/1957a, p. 77). Originally, the infant is preoccupied with the satisfaction of the latter, simply in order to survive. Therefore, the child needs the other—basically the mother—resulting in what Freud calls the "*Anlehnung*" (attachment). This is a double process: the sexual drives are grafted upon the self-preservative vital functions and the mother becomes the first sexual object (Freud, 1914/1957a, pp. 87–88).[3] Primary narcissism is then replaced by the installation of a division between the actual Ego and the Ego-Ideal. Freud hypothesizes the existence of yet another psychical construct whose function it is to constantly measure the distance between the actual and the Ideal Ego (Freud, 1914/1957a, pp. 93–96). He repeats this idea in "Mourning and Melancholia" (Freud, 1917/1957d, p. 247), and refers to it in "The Ego and the Id" as the Super-Ego (1923/1961a, p. 28). Both of them (Super-Ego and Ideal-Ego) go

back to the original critical voice of the parents, later complemented by important others and public opinion (Freud, 1914/1957a, p. 96).[4] Freud understands the development of the Ego as a never-ending attempt to return to the state of primary narcissism, albeit via the ideal criteria as put forward by other(s) (1914/1957a, p. 100).

Notice that his theory puts the origin of the Ego (both the actual and the Ideal) in the other. This idea is implicit in Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," particularly where he situates the origin of the Ego in identificatory processes. The central thesis of this paper is well known: in certain cases of depression, there is a regression from object choice to identification with the lost object, which changes the Ego (Freud, 1917/1957d, p. 249). At this point, we have to introduce the difference between a primary identification and subsequent secondary ones. In Freud's developmental reasoning, there is a primary identification that is "the earliest and original form of emotional tie" (Freud, 1921/1955b, p. 107) that is indistinguishable from object choice (Freud, 1923/1961a, p. 29). The first description he produces in this respect concerns the identification of the son with the father (Freud, 1921/1955b, p. 105), but he adds later, in a footnote, that it would be safer to talk about an identification of the child "with the parents," as the child at this early stage is not able to make a distinction between the mother and the father (Freud, 1923/1961a, p. 31, n. 1). From this perspective, the Ego starts with an original identification and is subsequently enlarged by successive identificatory layers, each one going back to a specific object relation. In "The Ego and the Id" Freud states that these layers are the basis of one's character (Freud, 1923/1961a, pp. 28–29). Moreover, in that same paper he returns to his original idea about the inner division of the Ego, explaining this split by the contradictions between the different (secondary) identifications that constitute it (Freud, 1923/1961a, pp. 30–31).

In our reading, the latter paper is especially important because of Freud's elaborations of his idea that the Ego is constructed through representations. Here he addresses the subject of consciousness. His starting question is the relation between what he calls the "internal perceptions," arising from the Id, on the one hand, and the Ego and the process of something becoming conscious, on the other (Freud, 1923/1961a, p. 21). His answer is quite clear: it is the connection of these internal processes to verbal representations that transforms these processes into conscious perceptions, making their actual perception possible "as if they came from without" (Freud, 1923/1961a, p. 23).[5] The Ego is precisely the construct that is based upon these perceptions, on top of the Id, via the connection to verbal representations and the direct influence of the external world. In Freud's perspective, the function of the Ego is to pass on the external requirements to the Id. In his new terminology, the Id is the drive source, whereas the Ego is that part of the Id that is changed because of and through the direct influence of the external world through the Perception-Consciousness (Pcpt.Cs) system (Freud, 1923/1961a, p. 25).

A Lacanian Perspective on the Question of Identity

Lacan's conception of human subjectivity can best be understood within the context of Freud's (1914/1957a, p. 77) claim in "On Narcissism" that only auto-erotic drives are there from the very first, and that the Ego comes into existence as the result of later development. Lacan clearly endorsed this thesis, and a consequent major theme that runs through his work is how this development can best be understood (see also Malone, 2000).

A first and best-known elaboration is given in his papers on the mirror stage (Lacan, 1953, 1949/2006a), and in his first seminars (1978/1988a, 1978/1988b). In line with insights from ethology on how animal development is triggered and shaped by the "Gestalts" animals are confronted with, Lacan stresses that images guide human development as well. In this context, the basic problem he attributes to the infant is its organic disturbance and discord, which are an effect of the infant's lack of sensory and motor coordination. This results in a fragmented experience of the body. Add to this the thrust that libidinal drives imply and we have a perfect cocktail for a generalized state of malaise and helplessness (see also Lacan, 2004, pp. 75, 162). In Lacan's interpretation the Ego comes into being as a reaction against this troubling state. Based on mirroring (i.e., qualifying images, be they self-images or images of others as mirror images), a subject identifies with a body image and regards this image as its own. Thus considered, the primitive Ego in essence corresponds to the body image that offers the infant an opportunity to see itself as a unity, and thus to achieve self-mastery.[6] This is the psychic function Lacan attributes to the Ego in his first elaborations: it is an instance that offers a feeling of unity and that enables humans to anticipate a state of subjective completion. The drawback he links to assuming an Ego by mirroring with an Ideal Ego is that this deludes the human subject: the feeling of unity the Ego provides is an illusion that blinds us to everything that does not fit the image. Phrased differently, this first mirror-stage logic states that the development of the Ego, and more broadly the possibility of experiencing one as identical to oneself, arises against a background of chaos in the infant, caused by somatic immaturity and the claims of the drive. In the Lacanian logic, the answer presented by the other during the mirror stage, "Thou art that," evokes retroactively the question "Who am I?" (Lacan, 1949/2006a, p. 81). Mirroring is the process that calls the Ego into existence and comes down to the adoption of a body image that was first actively captured by the subject in the external world as something ideal—as an Ideal Ego. It is only to the extent that the alien image has a value in integrating inner chaos that a subject discerns this image as something ideal with which it is favorable to identify. Although Lacan describes the process of mirroring as a necessary stage in human development, he also strongly emphasizes that it implies a more generalized deluded stance vis-à-vis reality, others, and one's own drive. It results in "mihilism": the violent tendency to consider everything from the perspective of me (Lacan, 1961–1962, lesson November 15, 1961).

Later in his thinking, as he elaborates his concept "object *a,*" Lacan discounts the adequacy of this first answer to the problem of how the experience of identity develops. We will discuss the idea that precisely at the level of his basic assumption (i.e., mastery of corporeal processes through the development of a mental image of the body), Lacan grew increasingly critical.

However, in a second and intermediate stage of his thinking, Lacan still clung to the idea that by mirroring elements from the outside world, the Ego and the experience of one's own identity develop. He still conceptualizes the mirror process as an activity the subject actively engages in, but the problem that it apparently functions to answer and the modalities through which it takes place are framed differently. This intermediate conceptualization can be found in the works that deal with the "schema of the two mirrors" (Lacan, 1978/1988a, 1978/1988b, 2004, 1960/2006c). The problem now postulated at the basis of Ego development and of one's experience of identity is located at the level of desire.[7] Lacan starts from the axiom that the other's desire is essentially enigmatic to a subject. It comes across as a threatening riddle. He assumes that in their contact with others, human subjects invariably, but not necessarily consciously, ask themselves the question: "What does she/he want from me?" The fact that no ready-made answers for this question exist disturbs the subject and indeed evokes anxiety, yet also constitutes a challenge for human development. Lacan considers the creation of Ego-Ideals as the preeminent solution we all construct to solve this basic problem. Answering the question "Who am I?" thus functions as a response to the problem of what the other intends in relation to me. By molding one's own Ego, and by observing the way the other reacts to it, a subject tries to see which object it is in relation to the other's desire, and tries to make sure that the other desires the content one tries to be identical with.

Within this two-mirror logic, the development of an Ego goes beyond the creation of a self-image in relation to perceived other images; it exceeds the process of bringing the Ego to perfection by continuously tuning it into Ideal Egos mirrored from the outer world. Directly in line with his development of a theory on the role of the signifier in mental functioning, Lacan claims that the process of identification is symbolically mediated: symbolic elements determine the adoption of self-images. The symbolic elements that fulfill this function are the Ego-Ideals. In Lacan's interpretation, Ego-Ideals are symbolic elements that a subject takes from the discourse of the other.[8] This means that they are nothing but privileged discursive elements: specific traits and characteristics of others that arrest a subject's attention, and are unconsciously adopted to the extent that they are considered to imply an answer to the riddle of the other's desire. We can illustrate this seemingly complex idea by referring to the basic development of a child. For example, it is likely that a little boy will identify with specific characteristics of his father or grandfather to the extent that these characteristics don't leave his beloved mother unaffected. Traits which, in the boy's interpretation, are thought to organize

the mother's desire will most probably crystallize in his identifications. In this process, the Ego-Ideals fulfill a double aim. They are the supports by means of which a subject can obtain an idea of who she/he is, and of who she/he wants to be. In line with the enigma of the other's desire, they also function to obtain recognition. Within this line of thinking, knowledge of what the other desires and likes in me works as an anxiolytic agent: if one feels confident that the other's desire is organized by specific characteristics of oneself, this desire loses its threatening qualities. Lacan (1973/1998, p. 257) says that through identification with Ego-Ideals a subject feels "both satisfactory and loved" in relation to others. This is one of the reasons Lacan (1958/2006b) claims that man's desire is the other's desire. Certainty of the fact that one is desired by the other introduces organization into this relationship.

Typical of this second, double-mirror logic with respect to the development of the Ego and the experience of one's own identity ("I am what I am") is that these are no longer understood solely as a cherished solution for inner chaos, but more significantly as the landmarks by means of which a subject orients itself in the domain of the other's peculiar desire. However, later in his thinking Lacan again leaves this line of reasoning behind. Starting with his 10th seminar (Lacan, 2004), he gradually concludes that the essence of human subjectivity is something other than what he has attempted to describe thus far. In this seminar he deconstructs his own schema of the two mirrors and indicates a new problem that can no longer be thought of within this logic. He concludes that the most essential dimension of subjectivity cannot be understood within a symmetric logic of mirroring, and he gradually loses interest in mirror processes.

The issue he stresses in this new, third logic is that the effect of mirroring is only partial. Although it is true that through mirroring the libidinal drives obtain a degree of organization in the body image and in relationship structures, an important aspect of the drive remains untamed and untamable by means of images and signifiers. The concept Lacan invents for this "real" or non-representable remainder of the libidinal drive is the "object *a*." From now on this concept becomes the central construct around which he organizes his thinking on the nature of subjectivity (see Lacan, 1973/1998). He defines the object *a* as one that cannot be mirrored or represented; it does not have an image as its counterpart. It is a fleshly urge, an auto-erotic residue of the drive that cannot be thought in relation to a classic psychoanalytic object. "The [object] *a* is what remains irreducible in the advent of the subject at the locus of the other, and it is from this that it is going to take on its function" (Lacan, 2004, p. 189). Characteristic of the object *a* is that it produces a breach in the experience of our identity; essential aspects of our being, having to do with the drive, are at odds with the mental representations we construct of ourselves. An example he gives to illustrate this dimension is the subsidence of the male sexual organ after an orgasm. Man's powerlessness in relation to this subsidence shows how the body remains obstinate in relation to a subject's intentions.

Within this new logic, concepts like identity, Ego, or personality become highly problematic as they only reflect the organized or mirrored side of subjectivity, that side organized by the imaginary and the symbolic registers. In Lacan's interpretation these dimensions obfuscate the real of the object *a.* Furthermore, they constitute a defense against it. The net result of the third shift in Lacan's thinking is that he now conceptualizes subjectivity as essentially divided. From his 11th seminar onward (Lacan, 1973/1998), he combines his previous theories with the concept of the divided subject (Verhaeghe, 1998). The human experience of identity is constructed via identification with the signifiers of the desire of the other. In order to stress the impact of the other on the experience of identity, Lacan refers to this process as alienation. As these signifiers present conflicting desires, the subject is essentially divided between and through them. Nevertheless, this alienation is never a total one because the signifiers of the desire of the other can never represent the real of the object *a*, meaning that there is a structural lack in the chain of signifiers. This opens the possibility of separation for the subject. At the same time, this lack indicates an even more essential division: that between the signified part of the subject and the real of the drive. The conflicting relation between the real, on the one hand, and the symbolic and imaginary elements of subjectivity, on the other, is a structural characteristic of the human being; it is unbridgeable by any efforts.

An Attachment Perspective on the Question of Identity

Psychoanalytic attachment theory within the tradition of Fonagy and Target (Fonagy & Target, 1996, 2000, 2007; Target & Fonagy, 1996) is the most recent conceptualization of how people's experience of identity comes about. As explained in our introduction, we chose this approach because it permits bridges to cognitive and developmental psychology. The Freudian Ego and the Lacanian divided subject meet here with the idea of the "self." In this theory, the focus is explicitly on the combination of self-development and affect regulation. In spite of the different denomination—affect and embodiment—their starting point is very close to Freud's (1915/1957b): "somatic processes, occurring in an organ or part of the body" (p. 123; Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002, pp. 82–96). For Freud (1915/1957b), these processes are "sources of the drive," the drive being defined as "a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body" (pp. 122–123). We should not forget that in Freud's theory the drives are attached to "self-preservative" Ego-drives. The German word "*Anlehnung"* is semantically close to the English "attachment," which was unfortunately distorted by the English translation into the neologistic "anaclitic" (Freud, 1914/1957a, pp. 87–90).

In psychoanalytic attachment theory, a description of the development of self-experience is presented in an empirical tradition and can, as stated above, be considered an endorsing expansion of what Freud postulates in "The Ego and the Id."

The Ego ("self") is the product of the connection between the perceptions of what is going on in the inside and the representations presented by the external world, the function being reality testing. The main difference is that Fonagy and colleagues (2002) "see the self as originally an extension of experience of the other" (p. 266), whereas Freud seems to take the opposite position.

Based mainly on research from developmental psychology, Fonagy and colleagues (2002) claim that intersubjectivity is not a priori present in the infant. From birth onward, the child displays a clear tendency toward "contingency detection and social biofeedback" (p. 221). The perception of the internal states, in combination with the regulating mirroring of these states by the primary caregiver, results in the construction of a representational system that is rooted in language (Fonagy et al., 2002; Fonagy & Target, 2007). Because of the specific nature of this mirroring—in normal circumstances a combination of caregiving and regulating—this representational construction is not only self-development but also affect regulation.

This empirical reasoning is based on the social biofeedback theory of parental affect-mirroring (Fonagy et al., 2002, pp. 145–203; Gergely & Watson, 1996). This theory explains how empathic affect-regulative mirroring interactions within an attachment relation lead to the construction of second-order representations of affect states and to their adaptive use in affective self-regulation. At moments of alarm (i.e., arousal), the infant performs attachment behavior such as proximity-seeking and proximity-maintaining in an effort of self-preservation and protection. Social biofeedback theory postulates that the infant is instinctively driven to express dynamic changes in its internal affective states, whereas the caregiver is driven to reflect the infant's state-expressive behavior, albeit in a soothing and regulating way. Hereby functions "the mother's empathic face as the signifier and his [the infant's] own emotional arousal as the signified" (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 126). As a result, the infant becomes able to detect and group together the sets of internal state cues that are indicative of its categorically distinct dispositional affect states. Based on this reflective mirroring, the infant establishes secondary representations of its own primary affective states. The internalization of the mirrored presentations associated with these primary unconscious affect states provides the infant with a sense of self as a self-regulating agent (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 174). What thus takes place is a transition: the constitutional self (i.e., "an individual's biologically determined experiences associated with emotional expressivity as well as temperamental manifestations of affect", p. 11), transforms into a complex of self-representations. The underlying mechanism is the innate sensitivity of the child in detecting contingencies between its automatic state-expressive behavior and the affect-reflective facial and vocal displays of the caregivers. In order to maximize this contingency, the child will reduce or refine its emotional expressions and by such means gain control over the other's reaction. Moreover, at the very same time and through the very same process, the child's internal state improves in that the establishment of the self implies the establishment of affect regulation as well.

The child's secondary representations of its own affective states form the basis for mentalization, that is, thinking about oneself and about the other (Fonagy et al., 2002, pp. 253–291). As a result of mental development during the first years of life, psychic reality is structured in two separate modes: the equivalence mode and the pretend mode. In the psychic equivalence mode, a child expects that its own and the other's internal worlds correspond completely to the external situation; there is no difference between representation and reality. In the pretend mode, ideas are felt to be only mental and the correspondence to reality is absent. Whereas the equivalence mode of functioning permits the establishment of a firm sense of self, the pretend mode permits a safe exploration, a "playing with reality" in which there is no consideration of the real consequences of this playing.[9] The integration between these two modes depends largely on the quality of the mirroring provided by the caregivers. The mirroring has to be congruent with, but certainly not identical to, the emotional state of the child. It is the receipt of one's own experience back in a modulated form that makes it manageable. In this regard, Fonagy and Target (1996, 2000) emphasize the importance of communicating a contrasting affect. On the other hand, it is important for the child to realize that the reaction of the other is not real, but merely a reflection of the child's inner state. This occurs through "marking," an exaggerated parental imitation of the child's experienced emotions (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 177). The anchoring of the latter to its own state finally results in the child's construction of a separate, second-order representation of the primary affect experience, which has the effect of making it manageable. The integration of both modes, at the time of the oedipal conflict, leads to the establishment of a "truly representational order," that is, a reflective or mentalizing mode (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 267).

Summarizing, it can be said that the self is mainly the product of the other's behavior in the interaction (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 135), which is apparent in the case of deviant mirroring styles which can result in pathological identity development, characterized by the idea of the "alien self." The latter is the internalization of a misattuned mirroring. Although to a certain extent present in every one of us, it is normally neutralized through what is called "narrative smoothing of the basic gaps in the self-structure" (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 13; see also pp. 130, 198). In case of a pathological mirroring, the gap between the alien self and what is called the "constitutional," "bodily," "physical," "core," or "true" self is unbridgeable, and the typical results are projective identification and splitting. In matters of the development of the experience of identity, this means that the child does not gain access to its constitutional self-states and that it will not be able to think about its real thoughts and wishes (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 15). Moreover, the child will not be able to read correctly the mental states of the other, meaning that the function of mentalization is impaired in both directions. More specifically, a congruent but unmarked parental mirroring in infancy is important in the development of borderline personality disorder, whereas an incongruent mirroring lies at

the base of narcissistic personality disorder (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004, p. 83). The therapeutic goal is to create a working alliance by which the patient gains access to his or her own mental states.

Discussion

In this paper we have explored the questions of how the subjective experience of one as "one-self" can be thought of, and how this experience is influenced by the interplay with other forces inside the mind and the body. We have explored these through Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic attachment theory. Current thinking about identity strongly turns around categorical membership to groups; people judge themselves and others based on qualities implied in identity categories, resulting in a number of social and subjective effects, of which normative thinking is an important one. We have aimed at a re-conceptualization of the notion of identity in a non-normative and process-like direction. As a result, we believe that at least three common themes can be put forward which, in the different psychoanalytic traditions we have examined, obtain specific interpretations. Each theme has a number of clinical implications as well. As we will indicate, in our reading the differences among these three approaches have more often than not to do with a different focus in their conceptualization. Nevertheless, in matters of clinical praxis, differences are more substantial.

A first common theme we detect is that the experience of identity is not innate, but rather a construct that comes into being in relation to the other. As such the three approaches are all in line with the etymological meaning of the Latin "*identitas*": we become ourselves based on similarity and resemblance. Each theory elaborates this idea with its own focus. It is least present in the Freudian line of thinking, which accentuates the development of the drives in the child. Freud does indicate that self-representations are adopted within the context of object relations, a theme that is later elaborated in the Lacanian model and in contemporary psychoanalytic attachment theory. Lacan qualifies humans as agents who actively identify with elements from others by considering others as mirrors of themselves. Consequently, the experience of subjective identity is fundamentally alienated, inevitably constituted by alien elements derived from the other. Psychoanalytic attachment theory emphasizes the active role of the other in the development of the experience of identity. The other mirrors the child's constitutional states, and the child develops secondary representations on its own as a self. In contrast to Lacan, Fonagy and his associates accentuate the fact that mirroring can be both adequate and inadequate, respectively, resulting in adequate self-representations or in alien self-states.

A first clinical implication of this theme concerns Freud's ideas with respect to the so-called "choice of neurosis," the way in which someone contributes to his or her own development of pathology. We think Freudian theory on this issue is unclear. Lacanian and psychoanalytic attachment theory give an answer

that at first glance is quite different, even to the point of being opposite to Freud's. Lacanian theory accentuates the agential qualities of the subject: how it actively adopts representations via the other and how it interprets the other's desire. Attachment theory focuses instead on the agential role of the other: how the other mirrors the experiences of the infant. In a naïve reading, both theories attribute the main responsibility for the development of psychopathology to a different agency—either to the subject or to the other. However, we believe that the differences between both approaches are less radical than they might seem at first, and that the interaction between subject and other should not be underestimated. Given Lacan's assumption that the experience of one as oneself is radically alienated and based on the other, it can only be composed of what the other has offered to a subject. As such it is no wonder that peculiarities in what is offered by the other will be reflected in peculiarities at the level of the subjective identity experience. In psychoanalytic attachment theory, reactions of a child are conceptualized as contributory in the creation of an environment. In other words, a child shapes his/her environment as a reaction to the way in which it is shaped by the other, which also makes that interaction an important theme. The key to both theories is that subject and other, or child and caregivers, are not strictly separate entities, but rather dynamically intermixed.

A second clinical implication is that psychopathology can be thought of both in the context of an organized, complex self-experience that has been developed in relation to others and in which answers to the question of "who am I" have been acquired, and in the context of a loosely integrated self-experience that is characterized by a lack of established answers to the question of who one is as well as by an obvious deficiency of other-based organization. The first possibility concerns neurotic pathology. In this case psychopathology is thought of as a conflict *within* the experience of identity; it goes back to an unconscious conflict based on incompatible parts of the Ego, grounded in incompatible identifications with significant others concerning drive and desire.

The following clinical vignette of Laura, a 40-year-old woman who was in psychoanalytic treatment with the second author for three years, illustrates this. Laura grew up in a family where her Don Juan-like father first called her "the princess," and later regarded her as a sexually attractive woman, while simultaneously rejecting his wife, her mother, as a domestic drudge. As an adult, she identified with the position defined by her father, meaning that she behaved like an adolescent at the age of 40. Superficially, Laura was happy but feelings of guilt toward her mother were always present, in combination with an underlying sense of dissatisfaction. When she became pregnant at a rather late age, the division and the underlying conflict leapt massively into the foreground. It was impossible for her to reconcile becoming a mother with the dominating identification with the desire of the father. Nevertheless, she was not consciously aware of this conflict and it was expressed in obsessional symptoms about the possible presence of germs in her house and an insistent anxiety about her inability to be a good mother.

The other possibility we indicated concerns a case where the other hardly functioned as a stable and stabilizing agency, as a result of which *a chaotic self-experience* is the problem rather than a conflict within the experience of identity. This situation is typical for borderline pathology, where the issue of "who one is" is not addressed through answers that divide mental life, but is rather evoked through a series of brute enactments. The lack of subjective embeddedness is enacted in often destructive ways that jeopardize the subject's existence (as a living being, as a sexual being, as a parent, as a child …) (see Verhaeghe, 2004). An illustrative example of this type of pathology is given by Fonagy and colleagues (2002, pp. 388–410) in the case description of Emma, a woman who entered psychoanalytic treatment at the Anna Freud Centre at the age of 19 and remained in therapy for six years. The patient was referred by a diabetologist because of her mismanagement of her diabetes, which frequently resulted in keto-acidosis. Without discussing the case in detail we first notice a lack of stability in the patient's self-experience, which is evident in the partial representation of her mental experience. Emma is frightened of her own aggressive thoughts and she avoids mentalizing activity with respect to these thoughts. Aggression is warded off in radical and dissociating ways (e.g., at one time during the treatment she shields her eyes from the head wound her therapist just sustained; later on it becomes clear that the wound evoked her anxieties) and the effect is its reappearance in externalized and split-off ways (e.g., in the gross diabetic mismanagement by means of which she harms her body). Emma's life history and the memories she evokes during the treatment make clear that attachment to significant others is an old problem. From early childhood onward her parents were unavailable for her as mirrors for her distress. Both were preoccupied with their own mental problems and thus hardly functioned as points of orientation for their child. On the contrary, Emma herself had to provide them some organization; she was the "peacemaker in the family" (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 389).

A second common theme in the three theories is that the development of answers to questions of identity and the process of drive regulation are two sides of the same coin. The experience of identity develops in the interplay between the urge arising from the body, the resulting demand of the infant, and the mirroring in relation to the other. This idea is already obvious in Freud, who considers auto-erotic drives or impulses from the Id as the impetus for the whole development of the Ego. Freud conceptualizes the Super-Ego and the Ego Ideal as drive-regulating instances, with the Ego as the mediator between the claims of the drive and those of the external world. In psychoanalytic attachment theory a very similar idea is prominent. Its scholars assume a constitutional self underlying the psychological self. This constitutional self refers to the biological and temperamental characteristics of affect. It is by mirroring these constitutional states in a regulatory way that the development of an affect-regulating self takes place. Lacan, too, states that the construction of the Ego can be thought of as an attempt to master the partial drives. However, for a

Lacanian point of view the idea of a "constitutional self" is a contradiction in terms. In Lacan's theory, there is an essential division between the real of the drive (object *a*) and the symbolic and the imaginary elements that constitute our self-representations. For him the process of mastery is only partial, and certain aspects of the drive remain unrepresented. He compares the constitution of the ego to the layered nature of an onion: as you peel the skin, you will not discover a hidden kernel, but will eventually end up with nothing (Lacan, 1978/1988a, p. 171). This representational "nothingness" is the object *a.* It is a dimension that cannot be represented but is a quantity of drive that thus exerts a disturbing effect. Notice that in Lacan's theory, the basic split between the real, on the one hand, and the symbolic and the imaginary, on the other, returns at the level of the symbolic as well, where he indicates a division between the different signifiers that are the materials of identity (see Lacan, 1973/1998). This last idea can be linked to the Freudian idea of conflict between different identifications, which are the cause of splitting in the Ego itself, and to Freud's two topological models. In psychoanalytic attachment theory the idea of a basic gap between identity and drive is only mentioned indirectly. However, the claim that the alien self is omnipresent and the stress attachment theory rests on the importance of narrative smoothing for stable mental functioning can be read as a confirmation of the ontological status of the subjective division.

For both psychoanalytic attachment theory and Lacanian theory, the idea that the experience of identity and drive regulation are two sides of the same coin has important clinical implications. However, their focus in dealing with them is radically different. Psychoanalytic attachment theory stresses the importance of attuning both dimensions, whereas Lacanian theory builds upon the idea that a final reconciliation between both dimensions is illusory. This difference may be explained by the different types of patients the respective approaches start from: borderline disordered patients in institutions for psychoanalytic attachment theory and neurotic patients in private practice for classic Lacanian psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, this difference goes further than that, as it expresses an essential Lacanian thesis. As we argue below, for Lacan a final attunement is impossible because of the unbridgeable gap between the real and the symbolic. All attempts to attune both registers are an expression of the imaginary tendency of reconciling and miscognizing antagonistic elements. From very early on, Lacan (1949/2006a) considers this imaginary tendency as typical of neurosis and as something that should be overcome during psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalytic attachment theory focuses on bringing representations in touch with drive expressions. Again the case of Emma discussed by Fonagy and associates (2002, pp. 388–410) is illustrative of a depleted capacity for affect regulation by means of mentalization. The process of mentalization, which can transpose bodily experiences into mental representations, is warded off and replaced by direct manipulation of bodily functioning. Warding off signals from the body is apparent from the patient's discourse: "I just can't listen to my body, I want to ignore it. My mind gets in the way. I can't bear to hear

what it is saying to me. It's just no use for anything, it's worthless" (p. 399). Emma refuses to link mental representations to bodily signals and intervenes physically on her body instead. A clear implication of this split between the affective states and the mental representations is that establishing a link between them becomes one of the therapist's direct goals. Central to this type of therapy is mirroring and mentalizing affective states. Fonagy describes the essence of his own technique in working with Emma in these terms: "I attended carefully to her body movements and from time to time commented on what I thought these said about her current mental state" (p. 391).

Lacan repeatedly stressed the fundamental gap between the object *a* and the represented side of subjectivity that obtained its organization in relation to the other. According to him, phantasies like the one discussed by Freud (1919/1955a) in "A Child is Being Beaten" or in his case of the Wolfman have a psychic function in filling the gap. Lacan conceptualizes phantasy as a typically neurotic strategy of integrating and reconciling the drive with the subject. From a Lacanian point of view this strategy is illusory and throws the subject into a cycle of repetition. In the 1960s, Lacan (1973/1988) considered the aim of a psychoanalytic treatment to "traverse the phantasy." This means that the compulsory way a subject repeats the scenario of phantasies over and over again is something to break through. In the process, another type of relating to both the drive and the other should become possible. Yet in his later theory from the 1970s, Lacan (2005) concluded that such a traversal is impossible as long as a treatment operates via signifiers, as these necessarily endorse the structural gap between the real of the drive and whatever form of representation exists. He then advocates the construction of what he calls a "sinthome"[10] as a purely private way of dealing with the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic that gets around the dominance of the other as well as around the insisting urge of the drive (see Verhaeghe & Declercq, 2003). Within this new logic the analyst is a figure who endorses the bursts in the identity attributed to him/her in the transference relation, and who actively incarnates the dimension of the object *a* in relation to the analysant.

Beyond these different approaches to handling the relationship between drive and identity, a common idea can be discerned. The theories at hand do not define the aim of psychoanalytic treatment in terms of a return to, or a discovery of, a supposedly original authentic identity. Furthermore, starting from the fact that a developmental origin is attributed to identity through mirroring, neither theory assumes that the representational process could ever fully represent drive arousal. Even in cases where mirroring has been optimal (in terms of Fonagy and colleagues, 2002: congruent and marked), there will be a remainder of the drive (in Lacanian terms: object *a*) that representations cannot grasp and that continues to have disturbing effects on all experience of identity.

A third and final common theme we detect across the theories discussed is that identity must not be restricted to its content, as is usually the case in categorical approaches of identity, but must be understood in terms of functioning. In matters of content, identity comes down to representations, understood by

Freud as thing and word representations, by Lacan as imagos and signifiers, in attachment theory as representations. But even with Freud, the focus is already on the functional aspect; what he calls the "binding" of thing presentations by and via word representations is the basis for the transition from primary process to secondary process thinking (Freud, 1915/1957c, pp. 201–202; 1911/1958, p. 221). It is precisely this transition that makes it possible to handle the drives more adequately. Clinically speaking, this implies that the process of free association and interpretation that takes place during psychoanalytic treatment is especially important. Freud described this process with the term "analytic work." The importance of it was obvious in the clinical work with Laura. It was only as a result of analytic work that the link with an underlying identification with her mother came to the fore, that the dominating Ego Ideal she developed in relation to her father became conscious, and that she was able to face her new identity (as a mother) in a more positive way. With respect to psychoanalytic attachment theory the very same can be said about the integration of the equivalence mode and the pretend mode into the reflective mode. Fonagy and colleagues (2002) stress that the content of interpretations is less important than the process in which the patient can experience another (mirroring) human mind—the therapist's—which has the patient's mind in mind (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004, p. 141). Hence, the originally failed process of identity development via mirroring and the accompanying affect regulation will be restored during the clinical situation. We believe that this type of focus on the subjective experience of identity marks the central difference between psychoanalytic and cognitive-behavioral clinical work, as the latter approach limits its interventions to (cognitive) representations only. In Lacanian thinking, the focus is explicitly on the relation between subject and object *a*, mainly because of Lacan's differentiation between the imaginary and the symbolic order, on the one hand, and the real, on the other. Compared to attachment theory and Freud, Lacan does not elaborate this difference in terms of different functioning; instead, he stresses the necessity of a transition from the imaginary to the symbolic order during psychoanalytic treatment. The analysant has to recognize the lack in his or her own functioning. Lacan calls this recognition "symbolic castration." It means accepting that one will never be able to meet the desire of the other fully or to integrate the drive in one's identity experience. In terms of attachment theory, it means that both the reflective mode and the "truly representational order" become possible only if the subject is able to take his or her distance from coinciding with his or her "self," that is, from the interiorized images presented by the other.

Notes

1. This is already stated by Breuer, who recognizes the same division in the nonclinical population (see Freud & Breuer, 1895/1955, p. 234).
2. This paper—in fact, it is a book—was Freud's last attempt to reconcile the neurology and the psychology of this time with his clinical experience; he presented the manuscript to Wilhelm Fliess but he never took it further than that. We had to wait

until 1950 to have a first edition of it. Although the work is highly speculative, it is fascinating to see connections with present-day theories. Concerning the Ego, the focus in the "Project" is on the combination of the (development of) consciousness and perceptions.

3. At this point, we disagree with Strachey, who wants to limit Freud's idea of "*Anlehnung*" to the connection of sexual drives with the Ego drives, and "not of the child to its mother" (Freud, 1914/1957a, p. 87, n. 2). Freud's paper permits a more extended reading, including the attachment to the mother. This is all the more the case because he explicitly discusses object choice as being either narcissistic or based upon attachment (Freud, 1914/1957a, p. 90). This transition—from a merely instinctual functioning to a focus on the need for the other in order to get an answer to the internal need—is already present in Freud's "Project" (1950/1966).
4. Here we can recognize the Freudian roots of the Lacanian notion of "the Other."
5. In Freud's opinion visual mnemonic traces can only be rendered partially conscious (1923/1961a, p. 21).
6. At this stage of his theory, Lacan uses the term "*Je*" in order to differentiate his theory from Ego psychology. Later in his work he abandons the concept as he introduces the idea of the divided subject.
7. It should be noted that in this context Lacan does not abandon the idea from his mirror-stage logic that Ego development concerns the integration of lack of motor coordination and of the drives in the body image. The difference is that now it is presented not as an aim as such, but as an intermediate step in dealing with desire.
8. Note that at this point Lacan often uses two notations for the concept other: "other" written with a lower-case "o" is used to refer to the Gestalt-like figure someone is in relation to the Ego; and "Other" written with capital "O" is used to refer to the corpus of language and to the sociocultural conventions that a subject's entourage incarnates and transmits. However, in Lacan's writings the notion of "Other" is far more complex than this. For example, he also uses it to refer to a subject's unconscious, which is why we prefer not to complicate the text by using both notations.
9. The equivalence mode is quite close to what Freud (1914/1957a, p. 75) describes as the "omnipotence of thoughts" during primary narcissism. There is an obvious analogy between the equivalence and pretend mode and the Lacanian imaginary order as well, whereas the Lacanian symbolic order can be understood as the reflective mode or the "truly representational order."
10. The concept of the sinthome has to do with nomination and self-nomination. How this nomination differs from the adoption of an ideal ego and ego ideals through the other is something we will discuss in a later paper.

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STIJN VANHEULE is Associate Professor of Psychoanalysis and Clinical Psychodiagnostics at Ghent University (Belgium). His research focuses both on the role of language and the social bond in regulating affective states in mental disorders and on Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. ADDRESS: Department of Psychoanalysis and Clinical Consulting, Ghent University, H. Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent, Belgium. [email: Stijn.Vanheule@UGent.be]

PAUL VERHAEGHE is Professor of Psychoanalysis and Clinical Psychodiagnostics, and chair of the Department of Psychoanalysis and Clinical Consulting, Ghent University (Belgium). His research interests are reflected in his books: *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics* (Other, 2004), *Beyond Gender: Froms Subject to Drive* (Other, 2001), *Love in a Time of Loneliness* (Other, 1999), and *Does the Woman Exist? From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine* (Other, 1999). ADDRESS: Department of Psychoanalysis and Clinical Consulting, Ghent University, H. Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent, Belgium. [email: Paul.Verhaeghe @UGent.be]