Chapter 23. The Implementation of Identity Intentions: A Motivational-Volitional Perspective on Symbolic Self-Completion

P. M. GOLLWITZER

In a recent historical analysis of human identity, Baumeister (1986) maintains that society no longer assigns identities to its members, but instead expects individuals to create their own identities. In his view, identity achievement has turned into a struggle for self which necessitates the making of *choices* and the execution of *effort*. For instance, becoming an athlete, a physician, or a religious person all require the making of a decision, as well as the willful implementation of the decision made.

The scope of modern identity theories reflects Baumeister's contention. Basically, one encounters two types of theories: those concerned with the decisional aspects of identity formation and those focusing on its implementational aspects. With respect to the former, the most prominent theory is based on Erikson's (1956) ideas and presented by Marcia (1966) and his colleagues. There, it is assumed that identity formation originates with the experience of an identity crisis, which is conceived of as a state of vigorous deliberation. The individual is torn between possible options and therefore continues weighing alternatives until definite identity commitments are formed.

A theory of the latter type, that is, a theory addressing the willful implementation of such commitments, is symbolic self-completion theory (Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985b; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Self-completion theory has focused primarily on people's efforts to substitute for identity-related shortcomings. In analyzing such compensatory efforts, valuable observations were made with respect to how people go about implementing their identity commitments.

In the present chapter a motivational-volitional analysis of self-completion processes is attempted. To this end, a distinction between motivational and volitional phenomena is introduced, as suggested by Kuhl (1983c) and again by Heckhausen and Kuhl (1985). Furthermore, Heckhausen's (in press c) ideas on volition are presented, along with pertinent research findings. By applying these to the phenomena discussed under the rubric of self-completion theory, the question of whether theoretical development in the realm of identity achievement potentially benefits from a motivational-volitional perspective is explored.

Max-Planck-Institute for Psychological Research, 8000 München 40, Federal Republic of Germany

Motivation, Intention, and Volition
Edited by F. Halisch and J. Kuhl

Symbolic Self-Completion Theory

Self-completion theory provides a body of ideas on how people pursue the identity goals to which they feel committed. The core assumption of the theory is that indicators of a given self-definition (e.g., psychologist, feminist) can be substituted for one another. Individuals who are made to face the lack of a relevant indicator are expected to engage in *self-symbolizing* efforts, that is, they attempt to conceal this weakness by pointing to the possession of alternative indicators. The theory can be summarized by explicating its core concepts of *symbols, commitment to a self-definition,* and *social reality,* as well as the associated *postulates.*

Commitment to Self-Defining Goals

Self-completion theory applies the term *self-definition* to refer to people's ideal conceptions of themselves as possessing a readiness or potential to enact certain content-specific classes of behavior. If the self-definition is, for instance, "jogger," the related activities involve running, wearing the appropriate clothes, associating with runners, and so forth. *Commitment to a self-definition* means that the individual intends to reach the ideal condition, which embodies all of the qualities pertaining to the self-definition. Most importantly, the theory states that its postulates (to be listed below) only hold true for individuals who are clearly committed to a particular self-definition.

Symbols of Completeness

Symbols are seen as the building blocks of self-definitions. To acquire the self-definition to which one feels committed, one needs to accumulate its symbols. Each self-definition is said to be composed of a whole set of various symbols; accordingly, self-symbolizing can take a variety of different forms. It is possible, for instance, to self-symbolize through the exercise of identity-related social influence (e.g., an academic psychologist may engage in teaching psychology), by displaying material symbols (e.g., a pious person may wear a golden cross), through the fulfillment of the daily duties associated with a particular identity (e.g., a baker bakes bread), by simply making a verbal claim to possession of a particular identity (e.g., "I am a psychologist"; Gollwitzer, Wicklund, & Hilton, 1982), or through the acquisition of the skills and tools associated with a specific identity (e.g., a musician acquires an educational background in music theory and a fine-quality instrument).

These various forms of self-symbolizing obviously differ in terms of their accessibility. For instance, showing off relevant symbols one already pos-

sesses, as well as making self-descriptions that imply a claim to possession of the intended identity, are readily accessible and easily achievable approaches. This is less true for the actual acquisition of relevant symbols, such as attaining a sophisticated education in the respective area of commitment. From the perspective of self-completion theory, accessibility of self-symbolizing is not a crucial variable, since not only the forms of self-symbolizing that are easily attainable, but also those that are difficult to achieve, potentially indicate to others one's claim to possession of the intended self-definition. In other words, what matters is whether the chosen form of self-symbolizing effectively indicates the implied identity-related claim to others.

Social Reality

Self-completion theory asserts that the possession of a relevant symbol in and of itself is not sufficient for the generation of a sense of identity-related completeness. Instead, the symbols associated with any given self-definition are assumed to serve an indicative function, regardless of whether they consist in providing self-descriptions, acting out the role associated with possessing the self-definition, or acquiring materials or objects appropriate to the self-definition. All of these activities potentially signify to the social community that one does indeed possess the particular self-definition, and it is this indication to others that strengthens one's sense of identity-related completeness.

The Postulates of Self-Completion Theory

Given the conceptual classifications described above, the three primary postulates of self-completion theory can be spelled out as follows.

Postulate 1: Individuals committed to an identity goal attempt to compensate for an experienced lack of a relevant symbol by engaging in self-symbolizing efforts. This postulate has been corroborated repeatedly in various experiments and correlational studies (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). As a rule, subjects are placed in a position in which they have to face the lack of a specified identity-related symbol. In the terminology of self-completion theory, subjects are made "incomplete." Usually, the quality of the symbol is such that subjects cannot readily change their standing with respect to it (e.g., amount of relevant educational training or the possession of relevant personality attributes). Subsequently, in a different social context, subjects are given access to other sources of symbolic support, namely, symbols that are more easily accessible (e.g., relevant positive self-descriptions). Finally, it is observed whether subjects make use of these symbols.

The following experiment is a typical application of this procedure (Gollwitzer, 1983, Study 1). Subjects were highly committed business

students eager to become business managers. The experiment was divided into two supposedly independent parts. In the first part, run by a purported personality psychologist, subjects were either given relevant positive or negative personality feedback. That is, after a personality testing session, they were told that they possessed or did not possess the personality attributes commonly found among successful business managers. After half of the subjects had been made "incomplete" in this manner, they were given an opportunity to self-symbolize. For this purpose, subjects were assigned to a so-called social psychologist, doing research on the simulation of business committee meetings. He explained to the subjects that they would have to play the role of people that usually participate in such conferences, and then presented the available positions or roles, varying from chairman to keeper of the minutes. Subjects were asked to choose the role they personally wanted to play.

It was found that subjects who had received negative personality feedback opted for more prestigious positions (e.g., chairman, president) compared to subjects who had received positive feedback. Thus, the former more frequently chose roles that clearly indicated the possession of the identity of successful business managers. In the terminology of self-completion theory, having to face a lack of business-related, positive personality attributes was compensated for by ascribing to oneself highly prestigious, business-relevant titles.

Postulate 2: Self-symbolizing that is recognized by others is more effective in terms of furnishing the individual with a sense of identity-related completeness than self-symbolizing that remains unnoticed. This postulate has also received ample empirical support. Experiments conducted on this issue were patterned after Mahler's (1933) substitution-resumption paradigm. Self-symbolizing was first induced, and these efforts were then either taken notice of by others or remained unnoticed. Thereafter an additional route to self-symbolizing was offered, and it was observed whether subjects were inclined to engage in further self-symbolizing.

In a study with female undergraduates who had expressed the intent to raise a family (Gollwitzer, 1986a, Study 1), subjects were asked to write down personal skills relevant to succeeding as a mother (e.g., I know how to cook). Subjects were then either told that their self-descriptions would be carefully studied by a partner subject, or they were shown that their self-descriptions had been discarded, and therefore would not become known to others. By placing subjects' self-descriptions under these two conditions, it was varied whether subjects' self-symbolizing activities were noticed by others, and consequently, whether these efforts became a social fact. Thereafter, subjects were given the opportunity to engage in further self-symbolizing by indicating whether they possessed the ideal personality attributes of motherhood. It was found that subjects whose initial self-symbolizing had *not* been recognized by the partner subject indicated possession of such

qualities to a lesser degree than subjects whose initial self-symbolizing had been recognized by the partner subject.

Later experiments on the social-reality issue took a different form. These studies (Gollwitzer, 1986a, Studies 3 and 4) focused on subjects' initiative in turning self-symbolizing into a social fact. Assuming that "public" self-symbolizing is more effective in furnishing people with a sense of possessing the identity to which they aspire, subjects who are forced to face an identity-related shortcoming, and thus start to engage in self-symbolizing, should be eager to make these efforts known to others. Accordingly, I conducted experiments in which subjects were first made to face either an identity-related weakness or strength. Subjects then were allowed to engage in activities that qualify as self-symbolizing efforts. Finally, subjects were given the opportunity to make these efforts public, and their inclination to make use of this opportunity was observed. As expected, subjects who had been confronted with an identity-related shortcoming, and thus sought concealment of this weakness, were particularly eager to turn their self-symbolizing into a social fact.

Postulate 3: An orientation toward self-symbolizing leads to a neglect of the thoughts and feelings of the audience addressed. This postulate has also been supported by the results of various experiments (Gollwitzer, 1984; Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985a). In these studies subjects were first made to face either an identity-related shortcoming or strength, thus varying their readiness to engage in self-symbolizing activities. Subsequently, an opportunity to self-symbolize in front of an audience making certain requests was provided. Compliance with these requests meant that the individual had to reduce his self-symbolizing activities. That is, in order to meet the audience's needs and wishes, one had to refrain from exploiting the situation with respect to one's identity-related pursuit.

The most typical of these studies (Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985a, Study 2) was conducted with male athletes, who were told that they either possessed the personality attributes of successful athletes or that they did not possess these valuable attributes. This was done in the course of a so-called personality testing session, which was then immediately followed by an experiment on first impressions, conducted by a supposed social psychologist. In this experiment, subjects were expected to engage in an informal conversation with an attractive female partner subject. So as to guarantee a smooth flow of conversation, the male subject and his female partner subject were asked to provide each other with some personal information prior to the conversation. Whereas the female partner subject informed the male subject that she either liked or did not like people who describe themselves positively, the male subject was asked to inform the female partner subject about his self-perceived competence as an athlete. Clearly, when the female partner subject indicates that she prefers modest individuals over self-enhancing individuals, male subjects who receive negative personality feedback should experience a conflict of interest. On the one hand, their orienta-

tion towards self-symbolizing should compel them to write down positive self-descriptions with respect to their competence as an athlete. On the other hand, they should be inclined to avoid such self-descriptions, since the attractive female partner subject is known to dislike people who engage in self-enhancing self-descriptions. As it turned out, subjects with negative personality feedback were significantly less willing to comply with the female partner subject's request for modest self-descriptions than subjects with positive personality feedback.

Similar findings were obtained in experiments in which the wants and wishes of the audience were made less explicit (Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985a, Study 1). However, even in experiments where the audience was particularly clear about its disinterest in lending an ear to the subjects' identity-related concerns (Gollwitzer, 1984), subjects who had been made to face an identity-related shortcoming showed a striking neglect of the audience's thoughts and feelings. In the terminology of self-completion theory, this phenomenon has been referred to as the *pseudo-social orientation* of the self-symbolizing individual. Although self-symbolizing individuals do turn to others and do benefit from doing so in terms of winning a sense of identity-related completeness, they do not show any concern for their audiences' actual thoughts and feelings.

Summary

Self-completion theory has developed a number of conceptual tools that allow the formulation of various postulates. Even though these concepts and the associated postulates may strike the modern researcher on human motivation as somewhat astonishing or even strange, they appear to describe people's striving for identity quite accurately, as demonstrated by the empirical corroboration of the hypotheses derived from these postulates. However, the somewhat counterintuitive predictions of self-completion theory (e.g., committed musicians' interest in teaching others musical skills is expected to be inversely related to their actual competence; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981) become compelling hypotheses if one incorporates *will psychology*, a body of ideas on postcommitment phenomena that has remained largely forgotten by modern psychology of human motivation.

The Rediscovery of Volition in the Modern Psychology of Human Motivation

Research on human motivation encompasses two distinct traditions. The older tradition was primarily concerned with the issue of how people go about implementing their intentions. It experienced its heyday in the early 20th century when Narziss Ach (1905, 1910) introduced the concept of a *determining tendency* into the emerging European psychology of will. Ach con-

ceived of this tendency as a force originating from the mental representation of an intended goal that guides human functioning toward its implementation. This force was assumed to operate whether the implied goal was consciously represented or not.

Throughout its history, will psychology has not addressed predecisional issues, such as *how* a certain intention becomes established. The more recent tradition, however, has focused upon these issues, such as the conditions and processes that result in the making of a choice, a resolution, or a decision. Expectancy-value theories (see Atkinson, 1964; Feather, 1982b) have provided the conceptual framework for this type of research. Although questions of a postdecisional nature were occasionally confronted, the answers provided drew upon the same conceptual framework applied to explain predecisional phenomena. For example, a person's expenditure of effort, task persistence, or quantity and quality of performance on a given task were explained by referring to the very same motivational tendency that compelled the person to choose the task in the first place (Atkinson & Raynor, 1974).

The Motivation vs. Volition Distinction

Kuhl (1983c) drew attention to the common observation that people frequently persist in goal-directed behavior even in the face of comparatively more attractive, easily accessible behavioral alternatives. Since expectancy-value theory claims that an individual will always pursue the motivational tendency of greatest strength, this theory fails to explain such phenomena. Thus, Kuhl reintroduced the concept of *intention* to motivation psychology and developed a theory of action control which focuses upon how people implement their intentions.

Drawing on Ach's psychology of the will, Kuhl (see also Kuhl, this volume) defines an intention as an activated action plan to which an actor feels committed. Its successful execution is said to be dependent on (a) whether the action plan is sufficiently spelled out and (b) whether individuals focus their attention on this plan (i.e., show an action orientation), as opposed to concentrating on a psychological state of the past (e.g., a recent experience of failure) or a desired future state (e.g., a goal state which is difficult to achieve), both of which are indicative of a state orientation. In addition, the smooth implementation of an activated plan is said to be dependent on (c) whether the individual is in command of self-regulatory skills, such as ignoring aspects of the current situation that are irrelevant to the momentary actional pursuit, or avoiding distractive emotions such as sadness, and so forth.

In the course of his analysis of the individual's potential to execute intentions, Kuhl recognized that there are basically two types of motivational problems that are qualitatively different. Motivational problems of choice (*"Selektionsmotivation"*) entail deliberation on the subjective importance and likelihood of potential outcomes and consequences associated with tak-

ing a particular course of action. Motivational problems of implementation (*"Realisationsmotivation"*), however, involve addressing the question of when and how to act on the decision made in order to accomplish desired ends. Accordingly, Heckhausen and Kuhl (1985) recast motivational processes into two successive psychological states, labeling the predecisional state "motivation," and the postdecisional state "volition."

Subscribing to a straightforward functionalist point of view, Heckhausen and Gollwitzer (in press) contend that because of the deliberative orientation of the state of "motivation," an accurate view of reality should prevail that facilitates the proper weighing of incentives and accurate estimation of probabilities of potential outcomes and their consequences. In contrast, the implementation orientation characteristic of the postdecisonal state of volition should turn people into narrow-minded partisans of their plans of action. That is, after a decision has been made, deliberative thoughts should completely subside, and the individual should become primarily concerned with how and when to implement the decision made. This transition from deliberative to executive thought is assumed to function somewhat like *crossing the Rubicon* (Heckhausen, in press c). That is, once the implemental mode of thought has been entered, one finds it difficult to return to the preceding, deliberative motivational state.

In two experiments employing the same paradigm, these contentions were tested. Subjects had to choose between different means (i.e., two sets of pictures) of achieving a certain goal (i.e., writing a creative story on the basis of the set of pictures chosen). Upon probing into subjects' spontaneous stream of thought (Experiment 1) prior to and after having made a decision, predecisional thought was found to be preoccupied with incentive values of goal options, expectancy of performance outcomes, and self-directives to continue deliberating (i.e., metamotivational thoughts), whereas postdecisional thought was concerned with questions of how to implement the pursued goal. Subjects in a motivational state of mind were also found to exhibit a greater short-term memory span (Experiment 2) for irrelevant words (irrelevant with respect to making a decision, as well as implementing this decision) prior to, as opposed to following a decision. This finding was understood to represent not only a state-dependent increase in receptivity with respect to incoming information, but also a greater impartiality with regard to information processing. That is, motivational-state processes may actually be less biased in nature than volitional-state processes.

Action Initiation

Heckhausen (in press c) recently argued that making up one's mind to strive for a certain goal (i.e., forming a *goal intention;* in German, *"Absicht"*) should not be confused with committing oneself to a plan of action that serves the attainment of the intended goal (i.e., forming an *intention* with respect to

when or *how* to act; in German, *"Vorsatz"*). These phenomena are said to be qualitatively distinct and guided by different principles. Whereas forming a goal intention is preceded by contemplation on the valence of the desired goal state, as determined by the probability of the desired goal state and the value of potential consequences, the formation of *implemental intentions* necessitates attention to the intricacies of executing intended actions with respect to when and how to act (e.g., I'll write him a long letter at Christmas). Such implemental intentions are seen as mental efforts (i.e., metavolitional cognitions) designed to remedy overdue action initiation or faulty action execution in the service of a particular goal intention (e.g., I intend to show my thankfulness).

Forming an implemental intention should, therefore, not be confused with the formation of a goal intention (which propels the individual from a motivational to a volitional state of mind). Goal intentions specify what is to be achieved, and furnish the individual with a commitment to this goal state. Implemental intentions, on the other hand, further attainment of the intended goal state by committing the individual to relevant opportunities to act (or to appropriate action plans that "tell" the individual how to act). Such implemental intentions may be formed in conjunction with goal intentions or at some later point in time. In any case they are designed to avoid careless forfeiture of favorable opportunities to act and to overcome difficulties with respect to the execution of an intended action.

In addition, it is suggested that the amount of *volitional strength* associated with a given goal intention (i.e., the individual's readiness to pursue the intended goal state) is primarily related to the strength of the motivational tendency that led to choosing this goal in the first place. Yet, a number of additional variables are assumed to affect an individual's *momentary volitional strength.* For instance, the experience of failure when attempting to reach the intended goal state is expected to increase volitional strength. A rise in volitional strength is also expected to occur when the individual feels a sense of urgency, that is, when time is scarce or the situational context changes, thus making the attainment of the intended goal state more difficult. Foregoing relevant opportunities to act, on the other hand, may weaken an individual's volitional strength.

The initiation of actions designed to bring about the intended goal state is not seen solely as a function of the respective momentary volitional strength. Rather, it is equally important whether the individual perceives a given situational context as favorable or unfavorable to the respective actional pursuit. Accordingly, low volitional strength may prove sufficient for the execution of goal-directed actions when the given situational context is highly favorable to the action in question, whereas high volitional strength may lead to the initiation of the respective actions even when the situation is clearly inopportune. Heckhausen, therefore, suggests that whether a given goal intention is acted upon depends on the associated *fiat tendency* – as conjointly determined by the momentary volitional strength of

the goal intention *and* the perceived quality (opportune vs. inopportune) of a given situational context. Accordingly, a goal intention can be expected to be acted upon when its fiat tendency is higher than those of competing goal intentions.

Summary

Recent theoretical endeavors concerning the concept of intention suggest that it is necessary to differentiate between goal intentions and implemental intentions. The formation of goal intentions is conceived of as a transition from a motivational, deliberative state of mind to a volitional, implemental state of mind (*Rubicon* metaphor). In addition, it is assumed that the principles which determine a person's functioning are qualitatively different for each of these states.

The Struggle for Identity and the Rubicon Metaphor

In the following section the *Rubicon* metaphor is applied to people who are in the process of committing themselves to a self-defining goal. Individuals just prior to forming an identity commitment are assumed to be in a motivational state of mind. The evidence presented appears to support this contention. More importantly, people who have succeeded in forming identity commitments are said to be in a volitional state of mind, and self-completion research supportive of this assertion is presented.

Motivational Aspects of Identity Achievement

Identity achievement is first and foremost a question of choosing personally appropriate identity goals from the entire array of conceivable self-defining goals. For instance, individuals may attempt to choose precisely those professions that best fit their capabilities and interests. Adolescents who experience an identity crisis are in the process of solving this task. Choosing a particular profession implies giving up some attractive options, which, in turn, creates feelings of bewilderment, discouragement, or even anxiety (Marcia, 1967). Most interestingly, however, intensive rumination on the meaning and implications of one's actions (Keniston, 1965), as well as a critical examination of one's personal values, is observed (Newman & Newman, 1973). In addition, adolescents who are in the midst of such an identity crisis are found to show an enhanced "integrative complexity" (Slugowski, Marcia, & Koopman, in press) with respect to incoming information, and appear to be very receptive to various kinds of external informational sources, except when the source is an authority figure (Podd, Marcia, & Rubin, 1970; Toder

& Marcia, 1973). Finally, the resolution of such an identity crisis is seen as tantamount to the formation of a *commitment* to one of the many goal options under consideration (Baumeister, 1986, Chapter 9).

These observations strongly suggest that individuals who are in the process of choosing among identity goals are in a full-blown motivational state of mind. That is, they deliberate thoroughly on the value of achieving one or the other identity goal, and engage in metamotivational thought with respect to the critical assessment of their personal values as criteria for choosing an appropriate goal. In addition, they are very receptive to relevant information, assuming that it does not issue from sources that might hinder unbiased analysis, such as authoritative sources. In other words, individuals who are choosing among identity goals entertain the kind of deliberative thoughts and evidence the type of cognitive functioning that is postulated for individuals caught in a motivational state of mind (Heckhausen & Gollwitzer, in press). Thus, with respect to the "motivational bank" of the *Rubicon* river, the application of this metaphor to the problems of identity formation seems justified. Is it, however, correct to assume that people who have formed a commitment to a self-definition are situated on the "volitional bank"?

Volitional Aspects of Identity Achievement

Heckhausen and Gollwitzer (in press; see also Heckhausen & Kuhl, 1985) maintain that people in a volitional state of mind respond to upcoming difficulties with respect to mastering an intended task by mobilizing additional effort, thus keeping up persistence. This proportionate increase in volitional strength elicited by an increase in task difficulty was coined by Ach (1910) as the "Difficulty Law of Motivation." In considering the self-completion studies reported above, it becomes apparent that this law also applies to individuals committed to identity goals. Whenever an identity-related shortcoming is encountered, committed individuals step up their self-symbolizing efforts instead of suspending further goal striving. This phenomenon has been amply demonstrated (see Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982) for a variety of self-definitions (e.g., catholic, athlete, businessman, mathematician, vintner), and a variety of self-definitional symbols (e.g., relevant positive self-descriptions, influencing and teaching others, displaying status symbols, associating with successful others). Recognizing any signs of weakness along one symbolic dimension consistently led to an increase in "self-symbolizing" along an alternative symbolic dimension. It appears, then, that the central postulate of self-completion theory (i.e., falling short with respect to the possession of relevant self-definitional symbols stimulates efforts to substitute "alternative" symbols) describes the functioning of individuals caught in a volitional state of mind.

Individuals in a motivational state are still deliberating on whether to commit themselves to a certain identity-related goal and therefore should *not* respond to identity-related shortcomings by stepping up their self-symbolizing efforts. According to expectancy-value considerations – which govern motivational states – hindrances to self-definitional progress should even reduce the motivation to strive for identity-related symbols. Data from early self-completion studies (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981) actually support this line of thought. In these studies committed as well as noncommitted subjects were asked to participate. Only the committed subjects stepped up self-symbolizing efforts after a relevant failure experience; the noncommitted subjects tended to reduce such efforts.

There is further evidence that individuals committed to an identity goal are *not* characterized by a motivational state of mind when an identity-related shortcoming is encountered. According to Heckhausen and Gollwitzer (in press), the motivational state of mind is associated with an unbiased *reality orientation.* People in this state of mind attempt to answer the question of whether they are suited for the particular goal pursuit (or whether they find the particular goal state to be valuable or not) as accurately and objectively as possible. Assuming that incomplete individuals are no longer in a motivational state, but instead in a volitional, implemental state of mind, they should not be inclined to find an accurate answer to the question of whether they are suited for the chosen identity. As a consequence, incomplete subjects who set out to compensate for an experienced identity-related shortcoming by exerting positive self-descriptions (e.g., I am a highly competent . . .) should not try to express their identity-related standing as accurately as possible. Rather, they should focus on indicating the possession of the intended identity as convincingly as possible.

This lack of reality orientation of incomplete subjects was clearly demonstrated in a study (Gollwitzer, Stephenson, & Wicklund, 1982) with college students committed to various activity areas (e.g., dancing). At the outset of the semester, we asked potential subjects how many years ago they had taken up the activity area and how many years of relevant formal education they had received. When subjects arrived at the laboratory, they were either made incomplete (by negative identity-related personality feedback) or not. Then, in a presumedly unrelated second experiment, subjects were told that they had a chance to teach others in their activity area. Ostensibly for this purpose, subjects were required to hand in self-descriptions to their presumed students. These self-descriptions comprised an estimate of their identity-related competence (e.g., percentile standing as compared to other college students).

We found that incomplete subjects did not evidence a reality orientation. Neither the experienced incompleteness manipulation nor subjects' actual identity-related competence (i.e., the amount of education and experience) was reflected in their self-descriptions. That is, they reported more positive self-descriptions than the group of subjects who were not made incomplete

(control group). In addition, a negative correlation between positivity of self-descriptions and actual identity-related competence was observed for incomplete subjects, whereas a positive correlation was found for the control group. Most interestingly, this lack of reality orientation observed with incomplete subjects vanished when these subjects had to write their self-descriptions in front of a mirror (i.e., a classical self-focusing device; Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Wicklund, 1975). Subjects of this additional experimental group actually evidenced the same amount of reality orientation as observed with control subjects.

As Wicklund (1982) pointed out, individuals who are asked to make self-related judgements try harder to be accurate when highly self-aware as compared to being low in self-awareness. It appears, then, that the self-focus manipulation of the present study made incomplete subjects apt for more accurate judgements of their identity-related competence. As a consequence, they considered the available sources of information, that is, their educational background and experience as well as the received personality feedback, and thus arrived at more veridical self-descriptions. This finding implies that the self-symbolizing actions of incomplete subjects generally do not reflect their identity-related competence. Rather, it takes drastic measures (e.g., self-focus manipulations) to reverse this lack of reality orientation.

Apparently, when individuals committed to an identity goal are forced to experience a relevant shortcoming, they are caught in a state of mind that is volitional in nature and thus incompatible with deliberative concerns such as correctly estimating one's identity-related competence. This finding, along with the many corroborations of the first postulate of self-completion theory, strongly suggests that such individuals are no longer in a motivational state of mind but have crossed the *Rubicon*. They have advanced to a volitional state of mind oriented toward willful implementation of the chosen identity goal.

Summary

Research findings with respect to the issues of choosing as well as implementing identity goals seem to justify the application of the Rubicon metaphor to problems of identity achievement. Utilizing this metaphor reveals that self-completion research actually throws some light on the functioning of individuals who are in a volitional state of mind. This implies that hypotheses on volitional processes need not necessarily be studied by making subjects form goal intentions in a laboratory setting (e.g., the intention to perform one or the other type of creativity test; see Heckhausen & Gollwitzer, in press). Analyzing individuals who are known to be committed to a self-defining goal provides a viable alternative.

A Motivational-Volitional Perspective on Self-Completion Theory

The final section of this paper will explore the question of whether theorizing on self-completion processes will potentially benefit from employing a motivational-volitional perspective. For this purpose two issues vital to self-completion theory will be discussed. First, the concept of commitment to a self-defining goal is reconsidered; second, the so-called pseudosocial orientation of self-symbolizing individuals will be scrutinized.

The Concept of Identity Intentions

Conceiving of commitments to self-defining goals in terms of goal intention raises the question of what type of goal state is specified by such intentions. A motivational-volitional perspective suggests the following answers. People who are still in the motivational state of choosing among identity goals contemplate whether they want to and/or are able to achieve such goals. However, as Vallacher and Wegner (1985) have pointed out in their theory of action identification, goal pursuits may be conceived of at different levels of abstraction. High levels of identification define goal pursuits in terms of their ultimate purpose, whereas low levels of identification refer to the implied implemental steps. Similarly, Heckhausen and Kuhl (1985) assume that the goals that guide a person's course of action may at the lowest level refer to the intricacies of the actions to be executed, at an intermediate level to the intended outcome, and at the highest level to the consequences that this outcome potentially mediates.

It seems reasonable to assume that people who deliberate on identity goals will tend to contemplate such goals at these various goal levels. Accordingly, a person who is tackling the question of whether to become a physician, for instance, not only thinks of what is implied by being a physician (e.g., high income, but hardly any spare time) but also reflects on more practical issues (e.g., whether one is ready to go through a vigorous training at medical school, and so forth). If such motivational considerations lead to the intention to become a physician, on what goal level does the commitment come to rest? On the abstract level of a consequence, or on the more concrete, subordinate levels of identity-related actions and their outcomes?

As the many corroborations of the self-completion theory's substitution principle (Postulate 1) suggest, this commitment should not be limited to the various concrete, identity-related actional pursuits and their outcomes. Individuals committed to self-defining goals obviously do not engage in a self-symbolizing activity for the sole purpose of successfully completing this very course of action. Since they engage in alternative forms of self-symbolizing when hindrances are encountered, there must be a superordinate goal. I have argued elsewhere (Gollwitzer, 1986b) that the mentally represented goal of

individuals who feel committed to a specific identity (e.g., physician) is probably best characterized as the self-related consequence of "incorporating the intended identity." In addition, this goal seems to be located on the plane of social reality (Mahler, 1933) since a sense of approaching this goal requires that others be aware of one's goal striving. The latter quality can be inferred from the results of experiments conducted to test the self-completion theory's second postulate (see above).

Endurance of Identity Intentions. The presented line of thought implies that commitments to identity goals are actually identity intentions, that is, intentions that specify the goal of possessing a certain identity. This commitment to a superordinate goal (i.e., a self-related consequence) endows identity intentions with a striking permanence that makes them persist over time and across situations. There is a simple reason for this contention: Whenever individuals who entertain identity intentions successfully use an opportunity to indicate possession of the respective identity (i.e., complete lower level goals), the identity intention which is located on a superordinate goal level is not deactivated. The commitment to the superordinate identity goal specifies a claim to possession of the potential to enact *all* kinds of identity-related actions. Accordingly, execution of one of these actions will not extinguish this claim; rather, it will live on and guide the individual toward further identity-related efforts. Even if the execution of identity-related actions leads to an outcome that is enduring in nature (e.g., a physician becomes rich), the claim to possession of the respective identity should not vanish. Again, it is not just one outcome (or indicator/symbol) that is implied by a given identity. Rather, for each identity there exist numerous, alternative indicators, and the claim to possession of a certain identity embraces all of its indicators. Accordingly, having acquired one of these indicators will not suffice to deactivate the claim to possession of the respective identity.

It appears, then, that identity intentions, once formed, are hardly ever deactivated. Although this contention has never been explored in detail by self-completion research, there is evidence that identity claims do not vanish easily. Baumeister (1986) reports various studies which show that identity claims start losing their grip on the individual *only* when new identity intentions are formed that hinder the pursuit of the original identity intention (e.g., when a female physician commits herself to becoming a mother).

Emergence of Identity Intentions. The presented ideas also provide some clues with respect to the question of how identity intentions originate. As pointed out by Marcia (1967), people tend to suffer emotionally when they are caught in a full-blown motivational state with respect to choosing appropriate identity goals. For example, a college student might become totally absorbed in the question of whether to become an academic or applied psychologist. How does he terminate this unpleasant, paralyzing state of mind

and form one or the other identity intention? In a recent experimental study, we (Gollwitzer, Heckhausen, & Ratajczak, 1986) explored the question of how college students who are undecided over issues such as moving to a new apartment (parting with one's boyfriend, switching one's major, and so forth) can be helped with respect to making up their minds. It was found that encouraging these students to imagine themselves as being in the process of implementing the respective intention (to move, to part with one's boyfriend, etc.) actually led to approaching the *Rubicon,* that is, they showed a greater readiness to make up their minds to become active on these issues. Could this procedure also benefit individuals who are hesitant with respect to forming one or the other kind of identity intention? The foregoing discussion on the quality of the goals specified by identity intentions raises some doubts that this will be the case. For the purpose of forming identity intentions it seems more appropriate to direct people's attention to the superordinate goal level of possessing an identity, rather than focusing their attention on lower, implemental goal levels. Even if the latter strategy succeeds in forming respective low-level goal intentions, such intentions should become deactivated as soon as they are carried out.

It seems possible to instigate identity intentions by furnishing individuals with relatively imperishable, identity-related symbols (Gollwitzer, 1986c). Such symbols stay with the person even after corresponding actions have been executed, thus representing a constant claim to possession of the respective identity and focusing the individual's attention onto this superordinate goal. An example may help to illustrate this procedure: let us assume that the college student of the previous example is invited by his psychology instructor to put his name on an experimental paper for which he contributed the statistical analysis. Being a coauthor of a publication in a scientific journal qualifies as a very stable indicator (or symbol) of the identity of scientist. It represents a claim to being a scientist and there is a good chance that the student will take the claim upon himself and form the respective identity intention. The alternative procedure of focusing the student's attention on low-level goals (e.g., motivating the student to perform the statistical analysis at hand, but refusing to put his name on the experimental paper) should be less effective in terms of creating an identity intention. Even if one succeeds in making the student form the intention to compute the statistical analysis, the completion of this piece of work should deactivate the respective intention. As a consequence, there is nothing left that potentially represents a claim to being a scientist.

Identity Intentions and Related Concepts. The outlined concept of identity intention bears close similarity to the concept of "current concern" (Klinger, 1975, this volume). Klinger describes how people become attached to certain limited classes of incentives, and how difficult it is to disengage from them (disengagement cycle; Klinger, Barta, & Maxeiner, 1980). Typical current concerns are, for example, spending more time with one's girlfriend, losing

weight, or getting a better job. Little (1983) calls such concerns "personal projects." He claims that these projects develop over a number of phases, which characteristically entail a beginning phase that starts with an initial awareness of the possibility of the project and ends with a tacit or explicit decision to undertake it. In addition, there is a planning phase, an action phase, and a termination phase where the undertaken project is finally shut down. Both Klinger's current concerns and Little's personal projects refer to superordinate goals, and both concepts imply a commitment to such goals. These concepts differ from the concept of identity intention in that the latter always refers to *identity-related* concerns or projects. In addition, identity intentions are especially long-lasting and often may never be completed.

At first glance, the concepts of "life tasks" and "possible selves" as recently suggested by Cantor, Markus, Niedenthal, and Nurius (1986) also bear some similarity to the concept of identity intention. However, life tasks refer to the opportunity structure encountered by the individual at a particular period in life. For instance, the individual who enters college is in the position to shoulder a series of tasks that cannot be addressed while attending high school. Accordingly, the concept of life tasks allows one to predict the type of possible selves people entertain during a certain period of their lives. With the concept of possible self, Cantor et al. refer to self-related wishes and fears. As Heckhausen and Kuhl (1985) convincingly argued, it is a long way from wishes to action. Along this way individuals need to form intentions, otherwise their wishes will fail to affect behavior. Accordingly, self-related wishes are at best precursors of identity intentions and should, therefore, never be confused with identity intentions.

Self-completion theory, Klinger's ideas on current concerns, and Little's work on personal projects are all of a postintentional nature, whereas the approach of Cantor et al. focuses on preintentional processes that might potentially lead to the formation of one or the other identity intention. In this respect the approach of Cantor et al. is in line with other recent self-theories, such as Swann's (1983) self-verification theory and Tesser and Campbell's (1983) self-evaluation maintenance theory. A recent review of the latter self-theories by Raynor and McFarlin (1986) shows that the phenomena addressed by these theories can be accounted for by (slightly extended) expectancy-value considerations. It seems safe to assume, therefore, that these theories are dealing with motivational issues in the realm of the self. This sets them apart from self-completion theory which is dealing with the volitional issues implied by the implementation of identity intentions.

The Initiation of Identity-Related Actions

How do identity intentions affect the initiation of relevant actions? Applying a motivational-volitional perspective suggests the following answers. As has been stated for other goal intentions, identity intentions are expected to carry

volitional strength that gears the individual toward seeking and using appropriate opportunities to act. The basic volitional strength of a given identity intention is related to the motivational tendency that led to choosing the respective identity goal in the first place. But volitional strength may vary. For instance, the experience of self-definitional hindrances immediately enhances volitional strength. Whether a given identity intention leads to the initiation of related actions depends on whether the accompanying *fiat tendency* is stronger than the fiat tendencies associated with competing goal intentions. In general, the strength of the fiat tendency related to an identity intention is conjointly determined by its current volitional strength *and* the individual's perception of the situational context at hand, that is, whether it is perceived as favorable with respect to enacting identity-related behaviors.

Competing Goal Intentions. Self-completion theory specifies in its third postulate that an orientation toward self-symbolizing leads to a neglect of the thoughts and feelings of others. This postulate has been corroborated repeatedly in experiments where subjects were asked to get to know another person (i.e., a partner subject) during an informal conversation. Incomplete individuals consistently showed self-symbolizing efforts despite their knowledge that this is disapproved of by the partner subject (see above). Interpreting these findings from a motivational-volitional point of view suggests that Postulate 3 of self-completion theory is actually subject to a more general psychological principle.

Taking this perspective one could argue that subjects who agreed to participate in these experiments had formed the goal intention to get to know the partner subject. In addition, the opportunity to pursue this intention seemed rather favorable. Accordingly, the fiat tendency associated with this "interactional" goal intention should have been comparatively high, much higher than the fiat tendency related to subjects' identity intention. Thus, subjects generally should have initiated behaviors in line with the socially oriented goal intention; this prediction was actually supported by the data collected. For incomplete subjects, however, the fiat tendency associated with their identity intention should have been higher than the fiat tendency associated with the goal intention to get to know the other person. This is because the experience of a hindrance to their identity pursuit raised the respective volitional strength. Not surprisingly, then, incomplete subjects turned out to (ab)use the social situation at hand in the service of their identity intention, even though the situation at hand was not particularly conducive to self-symbolizing.

This interpretation implies that similar phenomena should be observed regardless of whether the goal intentions that compete with the individual's identity intention are of a prosocial quality or related to any other content areas. In other words, the quality of the competing goal intentions is of no importance; what matters is whether – in a given situation – competing goal intentions are associated with fiat tendencies that are stronger or weaker

than the fiat tendency associated with the individual's identity intention. Whenever the latter is the case, competing goal intentions will fail to affect subjects' actions.

This view of the initiation of identity-related actions also allows for a new understanding of self-completion theory's substitution principle (Postulate 1). One could argue that in the classical self-completion paradigm subjects' identity-related volitional strength is first increased by use of an incompleteness manipulation. Subsequently, subjects are offered an opportunity highly favorable to self-symbolizing. Accordingly, incomplete subjects facing this opportunity are characterized by a strong, identity-related fiat tendency unrivalled in strength by the fiat tendencies associated with competing goal intentions. It is thus not surprising that incomplete individuals readily make use of the opportunity at hand by engaging in self-symbolizing.

Impatience to Self-Symbolize. These ideas can be carried a step further and applied to the individual's selection of opportunities to self-symbolize. It was said above that the fiat tendency associated with an identity intention is determined by both the intention's momentary volitional strength and the individual's perception of the opportunity at hand. Accordingly, even in situations that are not perceived as very opportune, a rise in identity-related volitional strength may increase the appertaining fiat tendency to levels that are higher than those of the fiat tendencies associated with any competing goal intentions. It follows that individuals whose current identity-related volitional strength is heightened by the experience of a self-definitional shortcoming may start to self-symbolize even in comparatively unfavorable situations. In other words, they fail to wait for favorable opportunities, but instead show impatience and settle on the less favorable opportunity at hand.

These considerations led to a recent experiment (Flüge & Gollwitzer, 1986) where students committed to the identity of physician were asked to complete a series of medical tasks. After their identity-related volitional strength was varied by use of a classical incompleteness manipulation, subjects were given the opportunity to present their task solutions to a board of evaluators. This board entailed substitute evaluators that could be chosen instead of those originally offered. It was arranged that the originally offered evaluators represented an unfavorable opportunity to self-symbolize, whereas the substitute evaluators represented a rather favorable opportunity. Our results revealed that incomplete subjects preferred the original evaluators over the substitute evaluators, whereas complete subjects favored the substitute evaluators. This readiness to jump at the first opportunity to self-symbolize was also observed in a previous study conducted with committed dancers (Gollwitzer, 1983). There it could be shown that heightening identity-related volitional strength by use of a classical incompleteness manipulation led to impatience to appear in public, even though it seemed wise to postpone public performance in order to win time for necessary preparatory exercises.

Awareness of Identity Intentions. Are people always aware of their identity intentions? When do they become conscious of them, and with what effect? In a recent analysis on slips of action, Heckhausen (in press b) points out that superordinate goal intentions, once formed, hardly ever burden our consciousness. If anything, people are aware of the lower-level goal intentions implied by their superordinate intentions. But even these need not necessarily become conscious to be effective. Whenever a high degree of automation is reached, the execution of behavior in a given situation runs off smoothly without conscious representation of the implied goal states (in German "*voluntionale Objektion*;" Ach, 1935).

However, there is reason for assuming that people do become aware of their identity intentions (a) whenever they encounter identity-related hindrances or shortcomings, and (b) whenever they have successfully completed a self-symbolizing activity. It is functionally useful that the individual become aware of the intended identity goal whenever a relevant shortcoming or hindrance is encountered. This awareness of the superordinate goal (i.e., possession of a certain identity) allows the individual to reflect upon what is implied by such a claim. Thus, alternative routes to self-completion become salient and can be taken into consideration. It is equally functional to become aware of the superordinate goal whenever a relevant self-symbolizing activity is completed. If this were not the case, a sense of possessing the intended identity, that is, a sense of self-completion, could not accrue. Instead, the individual would only be able to experience a sense of completion with respect to the executed self-symbolizing activity.

During the execution of self-symbolizing activities, however, there should be no awareness of the superordinate goal intention, since this would only be distractive. There, focusing on relevant lower-level goals facilitates the execution of the self-symbolizing activity at hand, especially if completion of this activity implies a series of distinctive steps (e.g., publishing a manuscript for a scientist). However, if the self-symbolizing activity implies only one single step, automaticity easily develops (e.g., showing off one's published works) and, therefore, conscious representation of superordinate as well as lower-level goals becomes superfluous or even distractive.

All of these ideas have not been tested as yet and the same is true for the following speculations on people's successful execution of self-symbolizing activities. Does an increase in identity-related volitional strength hinder or help the successful execution of initiated self-symbolizing activities? At least three answers readily come to mind. First, it seems possible that heightened volitional strength overly energizes the individual so that the execution of complex self-symbolizing activities starts to suffer. Second, heightened volitional strength may bind the individual's attention at the superordinate goal level (i.e., the identity goal). Accordingly, the associated lack of attention with respect to monitoring initiated self-symbolizing actions may cause problems whenever their execution is not yet automatized. Finally, a rise in identity-related volitional strength may increase people's readiness to

employ action-control skills that support the smooth execution of initiated self-symbolizing activities.

There is some evidence suggesting that incomplete individuals actually use action-control skills more efficiently than complete individuals. In a typical self-completion experiment (Gollwitzer, 1983), incomplete and complete dancers were offered a route to self-symbolizing in the form of an opportunity to dance in public. After subjects had indicated that they wanted to make use of this opportunity, they were asked whether they would experience audience anxiety with respect to their forthcoming public performance. As it turned out, incomplete dancers reported significantly less audience anxiety than complete dancers. As Kuhl (this volume) has pointed out, holding down distractive emotions qualifies as an efficient skill to improve control over one's actions. Accordingly, at least in the present study, heightened identity-related volitional strength led to the employment of strategies that potentially improve performance. Whether this generally holds true for all forms of self-symbolizing will have to be explored in future experiments.

Summary

In this concluding section a motivational-volitional perspective was employed to discuss self-completion phenomena. This perspective was found to be helpful in exploring the question of what type of goal is specified by identity commitments. In addition, it generated new ideas with respect to the emergence and endurance of identity commitments. Finally, the pseudo-social orientation of self-symbolizing individuals as postulated by self-completion theory was recast as an action initiation problem. This view led to raising additional questions regarding incomplete individuals' impatience to self-symbolize and their use of relevant regulatory skills to allow for a smooth execution of self-symbolizing activities.

Motivation, Intention, and Volition

Edited by
Frank Halisch and Julius Kuhl

With 38 Figures

Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg New York
London Paris Tokyo