

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: New Issues, New Directions

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ABSTRACT

The study of identity forms a critical cornerstone within modern sociological thought. Introduced by the works of Cooley and Mead, identity studies have evolved and grown central to current sociological discourse. Microsociological perspectives dominated work published through the 1970s. Sociologists focused primarily on the formation of the "me," exploring the ways in which interpersonal interactions mold an individual's sense of self. Recent literature constitutes an antithesis to such concerns. Many works refocus attention from the individual to the collective; others prioritize discourse over the systematic scrutiny of behavior; some researchers approach identity as a source of mobilization rather than a product of it; and the analysis of virtual identities now competes with research on identities established in the copresent world. This essay explores all such

of structural locations. A collective's members were believed to internalize these qualities, suggesting a unified, singular social experience, a single canvas against which social actors constructed a sense of self.

Recent treatments of collective identity question the essentialism of collective

follows the one drop rule in action, itemizing its role in the struggle to maintain the slave system. He also contrasts the US classification experience with racial categorization in other nations. Davis concludes with thoughtful speculation regarding the one drop rule's impact on the future of US race relations—particularly in light of developing demographic shifts. In another arena, Balibar considering race in conjunction with nation and class. Blending constructionist premises with the socioeconomic lenses for which the authors are renowned, Balibar & Wallerstein thoughtfully analyze both imposed racialization and self-racialization, variantly considerft205(racial)-205(identity)-205(and)-205(collecti)24(v)14(e)-f—rewards, she argues, that prove negligible Euro-descendents individual cost.

In another arena, Joann Nagel (1995) examines ethnic identity shifts as a sociopolitical phenomenon. Using US Census figures (1960–1990), Nagel

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Indian policy, increased American ethnic politics, and growing American Indian political activism. Nagel argues that these factors raised Native American ethnic consciousness, and she traces the ways in which policy and politics encouraged an ethnic renewal. (Also see Blakely 1993, Conzen et al 1992, DeVos 1992, Dyson 1993, Farley 1991, Frankenberg 1993, Hout & Goldstein 1994, Ignatiev 1995, Jewell 1993, Shively 1992, Smedley 1993, Wade 1993, Williams 1990.)

Social constructionism drives a multifaceted literature on national identity. A rich collection of sociohistorical works on commemoration, narrative, and symbolization chart the ways in which actors, particularly elites, create, manipulate, or dismantle the identities of nations, citizenships, allies, and enemies (e.g. Agulhon 1981, Beaune 1991, Berezin 1997, Brubaker 1992, Corse 1996, Fine 1996, Gillis 1994, Griswold 1992, Hobsbaum 1992, Hobsbaum & Ranger 1983, Kubik 1994, Lane 1981, Schudson 1992, Schwartz 1987, 1991, Spillman 1997, Wagn0(s19(-P)14(acifici)-299(&)-299(Schw)9(artz)-299(1991,)-312(Y)-299(Zer

Yet, more than any arena before the identity scholar's eye, national identity work presents a multivoiced excursion. Works probing nationalism with reference to the state and world markets continue to thrive (e.g. Armstrong 1982, Gellner 1983, Giddens 1984, Tilly 1990). The institutionalism brings middle-range questions to bear, examining political structures and citizenship. Soysal examines the different strategies by which Western European nations incorporate guestworkers into the national citizenry. She argues that citizen collectives increasingly are defined not by their primordial ties to a territory, but according to entitlements emerging from both a transnational discourse and a of structures celebrating rights (also Shapiro & er 1995).

continuity emerges from pre-existing ethnic identity and community; conscious manipulation is achieved via commemoration, ideology, and symbolism. Smith compliments this duality with a social psychological dimension, citing a “need for community” as integral to identity work. In Smith’s view, this tri-part combination distinguishes national identity, making it the most fundamental and inclusive of collective identities. (Complimentary positions 1990, Greenfield 1992, Hutchinson 1987. Calhoun 1993 and Hutchinson & Smith 1994 offer extensive literature reviews.)

Postmodernism: Deconstructing Categories

While supporting the antiessentialism that drives constructionist inquiry (Tajfel 1997, Gilman 1985), mistakenly suggesting “a multidirectional flow of influence and agency” (Calhoun 1995:199). These weaknesses leave postmodern identity theorists skeptical of social constructionism’s trajectory, fearing that the paradigm ultimately approximates the very essentialism it fights against. Fuss elaborates “specifying more precisely these subcategories” (Fuss 1991).

Despite their differences, the issues raised by social constructionists and post-modernists alike direct scholarly attention to a collective's struggle to self-name, self-characterize, and claim social prerogative. Such concerns underscore the politics of identity.

Identity Politics and Collective Mobilization

Collective identity and the political movements it spurs constitute an important

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lumping and splitting to life. Authors chart these complementary sociomental processes as they explore identification and distinction in monetary exchange, fetal classification, the construction of sexual identities, and other interesting areas (also see E Zerubavel 1991, 1997b). Among social psychologists, John C Turner presents *depersonalization* as a process enabling collective identities. His work maps the ways in which depersonalization permits social stereotyping, group cohesiveness, ethnocentrism, cooperation and altruism, emotional contagion and empathy, collective action, and other processes (Turner et al 1987, 1994). Finally, James Aho (1994) invokes Berger & Luckman's five steps of *reification* to elaborate both the construction and deconstruction of political enemies. Aho situates his analysis in a variety of recent incidents, including the Ruby Ridge affair, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and a case study of a

in spite of their physical isolation. Television has given women an outside view of their incarceration in the home. Television has weakened haible authorities by destroying the distance and mystery that once enhanced their aura and prestige. And telehaion has been able to do this without requiring the disabled to leave their wheelchairs, without asking the housewife to stop cooking dinner, and without demanding that the average citizen leave his or her easy chair (1986:309).

constraints and opportunities in their working environments is critical to what actually constitutes an 'environment' " (p. 32). For Boden, the micro-pts of talk become the macro-structure of the organization. (Snow 1987 offers a similarly interesting ptoject on talk and identity.) In another arena, Cerulo (1997b) pursues macro-micro linkages in analyzing narratives of violence. She explores the institutionalization of storytelling formats in this area and documents the impact such formats can have on audience evaluations of violent acts. In essence, her study elucidates the conditions under which macro-social identification. Among social psychologists, Peggy Thoits & Lauren Virshup (1997) ptopose a macro-micro merger that hinges on social theories of the mind. Specifican, they suggest ways in which self-schema theory might unify inquiries on individual and collective identity.

In the cause of synthesis, scholars of collective identity also might revisit traditional micro-levels0(l)-334(studies)-334(in)-334(the)-334(area.)-334(Much)-334(comm) perience (see e.g. Burke & Franzoi 1988, Stryker 1980, Thoits 1986). To be sure, collective and micro-level inquiries pursue different elements of "human experience." Yet, knowledge of the cognitive pts social pactices, and

cultural products and rituals associated with such experience, the sociology of

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