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IDENTITY

Within the academy, approaches to identity differ largely in relation to the relative emphasis on the individual versus the social. Within psychology and adjacent disciplines, identity may refer to an intrapsychic, subjective sense of continuous being, and secondarily to a sense of oneself in a social and collective framework. In this view (associated with Erik Erikson and others) identity is something individuals develop over time: infants lack it, adolescents struggle to find it, and adults come to rely on it to guide their choices. Adults experiencing deficiencies in this sense may be said to have an 'identity crisis'. The evidence for the existence of this sense of oneself is derived mostly from introspection, interviews and experiments. An important focus of this approach is on *continuity and discontinuity* of identity over time.

At the other pole of analysis, a more sociologically oriented way of looking at identities examines them as *types* of individuals, such as professor, daughter, European or Hindu, arrayed within an institutional field. While these identities are shared and classify a person as a position in a particular group, any given individual may possess several of them at a time, selectively invoking them as *roles* depending on the context. This approach examines identity from an extra-individual, social perspective, asking with whom and how these identities are shared. Evidence for these identities is derived from classical sociological documentary and survey methods; this approach was articulated in anthropology by Ralph Linton (1936), in terms of a distinction between 'status' and 'role'.

Unlike the idea of identity, the concept of self

harbours connotations of continuity, and in common parlance, the self *is* what one is in a privileged sense. While some argue that there are varieties of self, together these kinds of self make up an intrapsychic, integrated and more or less continuous identity. Yet another term is *role*, defined as the expected behaviour associated with a social position. Analysis of roles focuses on its types, and how they are enacted and function in social situations. One *plays* a role; it is something one enacts. Identities alone are concerned with media by which distinctiveness and differentiation are established – one holds 'identity cards' to distinguish oneself from others. In English, one does not talk about 'self' cards, nor 'role' cards.

Most other approaches fall between these two poles, and attempt to integrate a macrosociological approach with a more individual or intrapsychic perspective on identity. One such effort is the sociohistorical approach of Anthony Giddens (1991). For Giddens, identity is variably negotiable depending partly on the historical epoch in which one operates, traditional, modern, post-modern or globalized. According to Giddens, in traditional societies, identities are passed down from one generation to the next, and one grows into them. If the identity does not fit, then another is provided, but relatively little negotiation is involved. In the modern order, identity is an ongoing reflexive undertaking – a project that we continuously negotiate, reflect on and revise. A key genre through which we carry out this endeavour is the biographical narrative. This is because modern identity requires a flexible, revisable story that we tell ourselves and others about who we are, how we got here and how we project our future identity. Thus identity is no

something imposed, or a fixed set of behavioural features; rather it is a symbolic construct by which we perpetually situate ourselves in space and time. It is not infinitely malleable, however; it is constrained by cognitive, social and cultural limits on narrative coherence. Among these narrative constraints are the need for continuity, classification and contrast. Stability in identity is largely derived from the capacity to keep the narrative going.

An important question is the extent to which constructions of identity are subjective and internal, or external and 'objective'. Emphasizing the individual's subjective feelings, Tanya Luhrmann (2001) states that 'simply described, a person's identity is his or her psychologically salient individuality, the way he or she feels different or similar to other people'. On the other hand, there are obviously key areas in one's identity that are in the custody of others. Charles Taylor (1992), for example, sees a common theme of competing demands for recognition of the legitimacy or value of different identities. This 'politics of recognition' – exemplified in nationalism, ethnic politics, feminism and multiculturalism – is an outgrowth of the modern valuation of self and ordinary life, but depends on the acknowledgement of others. It is not clear, however, to what extent such recognition is a requirement in modern life. Many contemporary communities of practice (in work, play and other activities) seem to operate perfectly well without being accompanied by conscious, or at least explicit, identification at all. Just because people engage in common forms of work, periodically align their interests in political contexts, or even share distinctive forms of DNA, need not imply or require a subjective sense of common identity.

Postcolonial scholars argue that a fundamental disruption in identity occurred when Europeans invaded non-Western countries, colonized their societies and began to displace local conceptions of self. Colonial subjects began to model themselves on their colonizers, learning about their pasts, speaking their languages and internalizing their aspirations for the future. Even as the colonial subjects' identification with their own pasts diminished, their mobility within colonial and postcolonial society remains problematic, leading to frustration and a 'double consciousness'. While they increasingly participate in mainstream society, they nonetheless identify

with traditions of critique, resistance and subversion (Nandy 1983).

Scholars of postmodernity contend that the time-space compression associated with telecommunications, air travel and international global commerce are key to understanding identity (Harvey 1989). As computers, television and other devices of simulation and virtual reality bring previously disparate worlds into rapid, intense financial, aesthetic and emotional interaction with one another, constructing an identity requires flexibility. Turkle (1995) describes the mostly male world of virtual reality, Internet-based games in which players from many different countries construct identities and interact violently in vivid, intense, virtual environments, with its virtual systems of accountability. Identities are 'in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction' where 'the test of competence is not so much the integrity of the whole but the apparent correct representation appearing at the right time, in the right context, not to the detriment of the rest of the internal "collective"' (Harvey 1989: 256–7). The flexible self is made up of individual fragments that interact with each other and the outside world in a state of continuous cycling and reconstruction. Given the multiple possibilities for identity constantly clamouring for adoption, it should be no surprise that the quest for identity so often takes a negative, oppositional form.

If postmodern manipulations of identity with computer-assisted simulacra can be a source of ludic pleasure, so-called 'identity theft' through manipulation of credit cards, bank accounts, credit histories, and even health, insurance, legal and educational records is an increasingly common means of causing very real pain and destruction. The media through which modern identities are inscribed – paper records, photographs, drawings, paintings – are giving way to digital simulacra that can be used not only for personal and/or criminal gain, but also for governmental surveillance and control. The hit film *The Matrix* draws on such real and imagined fears. It describes a world in which not only the fixed inscriptions of identity, but the very day-to-day experiences by which we reflexively monitor our identities, are under the power of a vast 'matrix' of central control.

While discussions about the possibilities for technological and social displacements of identity have multiplied, Brodwin (2002) asks whether

this very process does not signal a growing movement to stabilize, inscribe and essentialize identity using genetic technology. In courtrooms, laboratories, even parliamentary chambers, the use of such evidence is increasingly debated, evaluated and often found authoritative. 'Why,' he wonders, 'is [genetic evidence] so easily accepted by some groups, but the target of suspicion by others?' Genetically based identity claims are likely to challenge the reflexive anti-essentialism of contemporary social science.

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SEE ALSO: multiculturalism; person; role; self-concept

IMPERIALISM

Imperialism has acquired so many meanings that the word ought to be dropped by social scientists, complained Professor Hancock in 1950. 'Muddle-headed historians in Great Britain and America use this word with heaven-knows how many shades of meaning, while Soviet writers are using it to summarize a theory and wage a war.' Alas, these errors continue, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Autocratic rule over a

diversity of otherwise roughly equal peoples goes back in time at least as far as the Indo-European empire of Alexander the Great, but nowadays imperialism is also used as a label for the triumph of (mostly Western European) monopoly finance capital over a still larger array of non-European peoples at the end of the nineteenth century, a very different kind of empire indeed. For some writers, the term is simply synonymous with capitalism in general. Demythologizing imperialism is therefore a slippery but necessary task.

Marxist theories of imperialism were first fleshed out during the 1900s and 1910s principally to explain why the expected final collapse of capitalism was taking so long to happen. Later the outbreak of the First World War, and the promptness with which European working peoples attacked one another rather than their bosses, added fresh urgency to thought. Nationalism, in retrospect, seems to have had something to do with this, as well as the autonomy of political choice at the time of outbreak of war from anything approaching economic rationality. But Marxist writers mostly looked elsewhere for explanations. Just before the war Rosa Luxemburg provided in *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals* (1913) an analysis of imperialism that is still read respectfully because of its pioneer probing of articulations between expanding capitalism and precapitalist social formations outside Europe. But during and after the First World War it was her advocacy of the mass revolutionary strike in order to speed up the final collapse of capitalism, otherwise given a new lease of life by imperialist expansion, that excited more immediate attention.

Marx himself had seen the expansion of capitalism outside its original heartlands as both a less important phenomenon and a more benign one than Luxemburg: it was a marginal matter in at least two senses. Luxemburg, however, considered that capitalism could survive only if it continually expanded its territory. One problem with this view, as Mommsen (1981) pointed out, was that

Rosa Luxemburg's basic adherence to Marx's complicated and controversial theory of surplus value, which by definition accrued to capitalism alone, prevented her from considering whether, if the consumer capacity of the masses were increased, internal markets might