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one's own personal identity. The notion of social act is key to social construction with the following scholars functioning as exemplars of the interplay between social construction and identity.

Erving Goffman used the scenario that the social actor operates on a stage with props and plays to a particular audience. In this case, the social actor performs on the front stage while interacting with others; however, the actor also can withdraw to a back stage where his or her identity remains out of the view of others. While on stage, each actor performs with other actors in unique ways.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann were the first scholars to coin the term *social construction* with their proposition that knowledge and people's conception of what reality is (i.e., meaning) arises from people interacting with one another over time. Typifications are formed that eventually become habitualized into reciprocal roles played in relation to each other. Meaning and the way people define themselves (personal identity) occurs through a dialectical and reflexive relationship between individuals and society.

Kenneth Gergen refers to the *relational self* as occurring when a person loses his or her own personal identity to seeing the self and his or her identity in terms of the rendezvous with those surrounding them. For the relational self, the traditional view of identity created between the individual and society is replaced with an emphasis on the individual's relationships with others.

Conclusion

Personal identity develops and evolves as an individual internalizes the attitudes of the generalized other and makes them his or her own. This social process occurs through significant communication, play, and the game. The *I* and the *me* live in a dynamic relationship with one another, and identity emerges from the social encounters where ideas of *I* and *me* are negotiated. The *I* restructures the *me* with every ongoing interaction with society. With every interaction, both individual autonomy and social norms are essential for the emerging personal identity. Identity is the by-product of social construction.

Naomi Bell O'Neil

See also Development of Identity; Development of Self-Concept; Face/Facework; Looking-Glass Self; Psychology of Self and Identity; Reflexive Self or Reflexivity; Socialization; Symbolic Interactionism

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Social Constructivist Approach to Political Identity

A *social constructivist* approach to political identity assumes that we create realities—and make these realities meaningful—by way of interaction. We come to know society by interacting with culturally significant others (such as parents, teachers, and doctors), institutions (such as churches, schools, and governments), and symbolic universes (such as capitalism, patriarchy, and Christianity). The approach frames knowledge as learned, situational, and fallible, and, as such, partial, consequential, and sometimes problematic.

Social constructivists attend to the processes in which realities—and knowledge of these realities—are developed by, maintained by, and transmitted to cultural members. Social constructivists focus on the ways in which a group's beliefs, attitudes, and practices metaphorically crystallize into objective, authorless, seemingly natural and seemingly necessary matters of fact. By way of socialization, these matters, consequentially, also come to be

perceived of as correct, valuable, normal, and therefore, unquestionable; they become phenomena we must understand and negotiate to be perceived as competent, legitimate cultural members.

A social constructivist approach to identity recognizes that we experience life being particular kinds of people. These kinds often take the form of categories and are kinds both personally chosen and determined by culturally significant others, institutions, and symbolic universes. Categories influence how we interpret ourselves and others, and when we do not enact the appropriate characteristics relevant to the kinds of people we claim or are perceived to be, questioning, conflict, and relational strife can result.

We come to understand ourselves by the categories of people always already present in the culture(s) in which we're immersed, and we learn, via interaction, how to and why we fit particular labels. However, we can never know, definitively and completely, what categories others may demand of us or what kinds of people others will consider us as; we can try to pass as particular kinds of persons but may not succeed or know if we succeeded. And even though we may consider some categories pivotal to our being, this does not mean that others will recognize these categories always and everywhere or that we will forever consider these categories pivotal. A social constructivist approach to identity thus recognizes that identity requires constant care and negotiation, and understands that the kinds of people we claim or are perceived to be can change with context and relationship.

The kinds of people we claim or are perceived to be can influence interpretations of what we say and do, perceptions of our character, and how we are evaluated; who speaks affects what is said and who listens influences who speaks, what is spoken about, and how a speaker and her or his discourse is perceived. These sense-making processes around identity—the interpretations, perceptions, and evaluations that correspond to claiming or being perceived as a particular kind of person—are what make identity political.

Political Implications

From a social constructivist approach, making identity political means asking *what happens when* we claim or are perceived to be a particular kind of person: What material circumstances develop or shift, what assessments are made, what opportunities are gained or lost, what relationships begin or end. It means discerning the consequences and benefits of identifying, or being identified, as belonging to certain categories. It means recognizing that we, as different kinds of people, have different discursive baggage—different histories, prejudices, perspectives. And it means recognizing that when we are marked as a particular kind of person, we can be evaluated based on this kind's baggage as well as on how this baggage is understood.

Consider, for instance, the categories of female and male. When we enter society, culturally significant others, institutions, and symbolic universes classify us as one or the other. We must understand and negotiate these categories to be perceived as competent and legitimate cultural members, and the labels will follow us throughout our existence regardless of what we say or do; we cannot live outside of or uninfluenced by the female-male classificatory system. These categories often seem objective, authorless, seemingly natural, and necessary, and, consequentially, are often perceived as correct, valuable, normal, and unquestionable.

When this happens—when sex is perceived as correct, valuable, normal, and unquestionable—then a person who does not align nicely with the appropriate sex-requirements—the interpretations, perceptions, and evaluations of how persons should be sexed—can experience questioning, conflict, and relational strife as a result. Babies born with characteristics of both sexes may undergo corrective surgery, and persons who do not enact appropriate feminine and masculine behaviors that correspond to their (classified-at-birth) sex may be physically harmed, fired from jobs, forced into traumatic therapeutic situations, or ostracized by friends and family. Such acts are what make sex, as an identity, political.

The act of categorizing also makes interpretations, perceptions, and evaluations of people possible. Categories that are binary (such as female and male) function differently than do categories that are not (such as Catholic, Baptist, and atheist); in binaries, one term is usually privileged over the other. For instance, across many contexts within the United States, feminine traits are inferior to masculine ones; blackness is made inferior to whiteness; Western cultures are discursively defined as better than those considered Eastern;

heterosexuality is framed as a more beneficial identity and preferred type of relationship than homosexuality is; able-bodied-ness is referred to as more valuable and productive and thus better than disabled-ness; and young and youthful qualities are better than old and aged things. Though each term is not necessarily superior or inferior to its binary-other, the terms used to define people can have corresponding logics that influence how people marked by such terms are understood.

The ways in which a category is understood can also facilitate human interpretation, perception, and evaluation. If a category is understood as innate (and, consequently, unable to change), then evaluating a person as good or bad, right or wrong based on her or his identification with this category becomes irrational, particularly because she or he could not choose to be this kind of person (and thus cannot be judged for identifying in this way). Conversely, a person who claims, or is perceived, to be an identity that is understood as innate may negate her or his personal responsibility for engaging in particular acts (that is, if she or he justifies the acts as a result of being a kind of person). Furthermore, if an identity is understood as innate—particularly one rooted in genetics—then medical intervention becomes possible; doctors can find ways to change a person from one kind of (bad) person to another (better, more normal) kind. And eugenics and genocide—both attempts to control the presence of a particular kind(s) of person—are premised on the possibility that the targeted population(s) is connected by blood, by biology.

However, if a category is understood as chosen (and, consequently, conducive to change), the person identifying with this category may be viewed as having made a good or bad, right or wrong choice. A person's responsibility for acts related to being this kind of person also become indisputable. Attempts to medically alter a person's (chosen) identity are futile as well (since the identity lacks genetic roots), and eugenics and genocide are unfathomable in that no shared biology or common blood exist among the undesired population(s); a society can never be cleansed of the identity.

Real-World Example

The following real-world situation illustrates a variety of assumptions about identity as well as the ways in which identity can work in interaction. It illustrates the importance of and consequences for claiming to be, or being perceived to be, particular kinds of people. It illustrates that identity, though often assumed to be something a person possesses, is something others can influence and decide. And this situation illustrates that identity can change with context and relationship.

In 1952, Christie Littleton was born in San Antonio, Texas. At this time, she was named Lee Cavazos and classified as male. In 1977, she legally changed her name from Lee to Christie Lee. In 1979 and 1980 she underwent sex reassignment surgery, and, in so doing, was able to legally change her birth certificate from "male" to "female." In 1989, she married Jonathan Littleton in Kentucky, a (legal) heterosexual consummation that reinforced Christie's female status (that is, because same-sex marriages were, and are, illegal in the state). In 1996, Jonathon died because of medical error. In 1999, Christie, acting as Jonathon's spouse, filed a malpractice suit against Mark Prange, the doctor responsible for the error. In his defense, Prange argued that Christie was and would always be male because of her original sex-at-birth classification, and, as such, had no right to marry a person of the same sex, and, as such, could not file a suit as Jonathan's (female) spouse. The court ruled in favor of Prange, thus invalidating the once-legal bond between Christie and Jonathan, invalidating a bond often indicative of legitimate commitment and love.

Markers Engaged

The understood innate- or chosen-ness of categories—and humans marked by these categories—becomes political when such understanding influences interpretations, perceptions, and evaluations of people. For instance, the one-drop rule in the United States categorized a person with non-White (primarily African American) ancestry as non-White. Such categorization understood race as innate and rooted in biology. Consequentially, such understanding fueled arguments against interracial marriage, against the relational mixing of blood. Or consider the example of Christie Littleton. Even though Christie changed her name, underwent sex-reassignment surgery, and got married—acts that constituted her as female—understanding

sex as innate, as something incapable of change, marked her as male.

A social constructivist approach to political identity treats categories as phenomena with which we must contend, embrace, and use for a variety of purposes. Identity becomes something we can manipulate and use for a variety of social purposes; the approach allows us to learn ways of positioning ourselves as particular kinds of people while distancing ourselves from being marked as something other.

A social constructivist approach to political identity attends to the ways in which identities emerge in unstable, slippery relational processes as well as how these identities, and the humans marked by these identities, are interpreted, perceived, and evaluated.

A social constructivist approach to political identity suggests that we can never know, completely or definitively, the ways in which innate or chosen characteristics of an identity, and the humans marked by this identity, affect interaction. Rather, the approach maintains that, in interaction, we can only *infer* another's innate or chosen characteristics. We cannot test another person's biology or blood to determine who she or he really is nor can we engage in a rigorous, all-inclusive analysis of the processes involved in her or his coming to be a particular kind; all we can ever do is attend to what might happen if and when a person comes across as a certain kind of person at a particular time and place.

A social constructivist approach to political identity recognizes that the people we claim to be, or are perceived to be, matter.

Tony E. Adams

See also Face/Facework; Identity Negotiation; Identity Uncertainty; Masking; Passing; Queer Theory; Social Constructionist Approach to Personal Identity; Society and Social Identity

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Social Economy

The economic, philosophical, and practical relevance of the social economy has been considered across disciplines, cultures, and historical moments. With its origins arguably established thousands of years ago in Chinese dynasties and its contemporary roots often cited vis-à-vis the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Karl Marx, the significance of this interpretive economic framework continues to deepen in the global marketplace of the 21st century. Specifically, as the world's economy experiences unprecedented change and growth the conversation about economics and its relationship to the human condition likewise experiences unprecedented visibility and engagement. More than simply a textbook term, the social economy is being advanced to bring about greater public accountability for the economic enterprise and its impact on people, especially how economic resources shape people's individual and shared sense of identity. The common thread among those researching and actively engaging the social economy in the marketplace is a directive to invest an otherwise scientific discipline with a distinctly human perspective.

Conceptualizing the Social Economy

As a complement to traditional economics, the *social economy* is a term characterizing an approach