Other

From RationalWiki

> " Father, Mother, and Me
> Sister and Auntie say
> All the people like us are We,
> And every one else is They. "
>
> —Rudyard Kipling[1]

The **Other** is a concept first coined by the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and popularized in more recent times in Edward Said's *Orientalism*.[2] The practice of "othering" generally leads to a polarization of people into two groups: An "us" group (or "in-group" in jargon), which normally includes the proponent of an idea, and his or her intended audience, and a "them" group (or "out-group") who are the people who are used as an object for hate or mistrust. It is a classic example of the false dilemma.

Othering starts as early as the schoolyard playground, when "we" won't play with "them" because "they" have cooties. (This early othering is generally associated with the "them" being a different and scary gender).[3] Teen girls in "cliques" are extremely good at "othering", laying the groundwork for them to pass on such attitudes to their own children.[*citation needed*]

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Philosophy

In philosophy, the Other is that which is not self. Early theory of mind focused at length on this idea of "self" and "other", and how you could tell one from the other. At what point do you end, and "Other" begin, and how do you cognitively know.[4] It is this primitive idea that there is a self and an Other that is extended to make an "ourselves" and "those others", and thus the "us" and "them."[5]

Literature

The "Other" in literature studies is a way of an author interacting with his or her yet unknown audience, in effect making a new book for each author. [6] In the course of doing this, you create dialogical discourse with the self and the other which assumes you necessarily define the other prior to writing your discourse, and that the Other necessarily co-defines the topic.[7]

Jonathan Swift satirized human tribalism in his novel *Gulliver's Travels*, with two nations (Lilliput and Blefuscu) going to war against each other over which end eggs ought to be broken on.

Dehumanization

Demonization through othering is a common occurrence in war - - by using derogatory language to make the enemy more of an "Other", killing them becomes easier. It is also a frequent ploy in conspiracy theories. For example, birthers other Barack Obama by positing that he is not a Real American[TM] as he was secretly born in Kenya and thus became a usurper of the presidency. Another claim attached to this conspiracy theory often includes the false belief that he is a crypto-Muslim. The emphasis on his middle name (i.e., B. **HUSSEIN** Obama) is another example of othering.[8][9] The "birther-lite" variant peddled by Dinesh D'Souza claims that Obama has a "Kenyan, anti-colonialist philosophy." However, his 2012 opponent Mitt Romney has also been accused of being "the other" and "different".

Psychology

The granfalloon technique

The social psychologist Henri Tajfel is famous for discovering that in-groups and out-groups could be created in experiments by completely arbitrary methods, such as dividing people into two groups by flipping a coin.[10] This is technically known as the "minimal group paradigm," but popularly known as the "granfalloon technique." A granfalloon, in Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, is a proud but meaningless association of humans.[11] An experiment using methods similar to Tajfel's was the "robbers cave experiment," in which a summer camp for boys was set up. The boys were divided into two groups and soon developed a heated rivalry, naming themselves the "Rattlers" and the "Eagles."[12]

Evolutionary psychology

Othering and race

A well-known phenomenon in psychology is called the "other-race effect" or "cross-race effect," in which people have more trouble differentiating the faces of people of other races.[13] The evolutionary psychologists Leda Cosmides, John Tooby, and Robert Kurzban studied the process of othering with respect to racism. They provided two possible explanations for racism as a by-product of evolved traits:

- Racism is a by-product of the evolved mechanism of essentialist thinking inherent in folk biology and/or folk sociology.
- Racism is a by-product of the evolved mechanism for determining coalitional alliances (i.e., kin groups, tribes, small in-groups).[14]

They also find that subjects shown stimuli presenting people of other races as part of their coalition reduces categorization by race.[15] Similar research has also shown a reduction in the other-race effect using this technique on children.[16]

Dunbar number and the monkeysphere

Anthropologist Robin Dunbar has placed the hypothetical mean size of human social groups at approximately 150 based on surveys of hunter-gatherer societies. He speculates that the mind has trouble conceiving larger numbers of people as "real" people.[17] This has been popularized as the "monkeysphere."[18]

See also

- Alien
- Bigotry
- Discrimination
- Stereotype
- Xenophobia

External links

- The Centre for Studies in Otherness (http://www.otherness.dk/) , Aarhus University
- Relations Break Down Between U.S. and Them (http://www.theonion.com/content/node/29441) , The Onion
- Dubya says: "You're either with us or with the terrorists." (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpPABLW6F_A)
- Beware of the Granfalloon (http://measureofdoubt.com/2011/04/27/beware-of-the-granfalloon/) , Measure of Doubt
- Othering as Informal Fallacy: The Case of the Mass-Noun Thesis (http://www.lc.dds.nl /wp/OtheringAsInformalFallacy.pdf) , Lajos L. Brons

Footnotes

1. ↑ http://www.kipling.org.uk/poems_wethey.htm
2. ↑ Key Terms in Gender Studies (http://visuality.org /genderandtechnoculture/keyterms.pdf) , Karyl E. Ketchum
3. ↑ Barrie Thorne and Zella Luria. Sexuality and Gender in Children's Daily Worlds. (http://www.umt.edu/sociology /faculty_staff/ellestad/documents /275_ThorneandLuria1986_sexualityandgenderinchildrensworlds_s10.pdf) Social Problems, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Feb., 1986), pp. 176-190
4. ↑ Modern Theory of Mind has in many ways set the "how do we know" aspect aside, as we have a good understanding of how the body and mind interact.
5. ↑ And after all, we're only ordinary men
6. ↑ Mikhail Bakhtin
7. ↑ No, I have no idea what that means either. I'm endlessly dubious that anyone understands literary criticism and dialogics.
8. ↑ The Politics of Othering (http://socialsciencelite.blogspot.com/2009/08/politics- of-othering.html) , Social Science Lite
9. ↑ See also The Obama Deception
10. ↑ Henri Tajfel. Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination. (http://homepage.ntlworld.com/gary.sturt/tajfel.htm) Scientific American, 223, 96-102.

11. ↑ Granfalloons etc. (http://www.heretical.com/miscella /granfall.html) , A.R. Pratkanis
12. ↑ The Robbers Cave Experiment (http://lesswrong.com /lw/lt/the_robbers_cave_experiment/) , Less Wrong
13. ↑ Understanding the Other Race Effect (http://arstechnica.com/science/news/2010 /11/understanding-the-other-race-effect.ars) , Ars Technica
14. ↑ Cosmides, Tooby, and Kurzban. Perceptions of Race. (http://www.sas.upenn.edu/psych/PLEEP /pdfs/2003%20Cosmides%20Tooby%20Kurzban%20TiCS. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* Vol.7 No.4 April 2003
15. ↑ Cosmides, Tooby, and Kurzban. [http://www.pnas.org /content/98/26/15387.full.pdf Can race be erased? Coalitional computation and social categorization.] PNAS, December 18, 2001, vol. 98, no. 26
16. ↑ S. Sangrigoli et al. Reversibility of the other-race effect in face recognition during childhood. (http://www.pallier.org/papers /SangrigoliPallier_finaldraft.pdf) *Psychological Science*, Jun. 2004
17. ↑ Communities of Practice and the Dunbar Number (http://www.blog.mopsos.com/archives/000075.html) , Mopsos blog
18. ↑ What Is the Monkeysphere (http://www.cracked.com /article_14990_what-monkeysphere.html) , Cracked

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Categories: Bronze-level articles │ Sociology │ Discrimination │ Philosophy │ Psychology │ Political terms

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Contents

Other

For other uses, see Other (disambiguation).

The **Other** or **constitutive Other** (also the verb **othering**) is a key concept in continental philosophy; it opposes the *Same*. The Other refers, or attempts to refer, to that which is other than the initial concept being considered. The Constitutive Other often denotes a person Other than one's self; hence, the Other is identified as "different"; thus the spelling is often capitalized.Wikipedia:Citation needed

Concept

A person's definition of the 'Other' is part of what defines or even constitutes the self (in both a psychological and philosophical sense) and other phenomena and cultural units. It has been used in social science to understand the processes by which societies and groups exclude 'Others' whom they want to subordinate or who do not fit into their society. The concept of 'otherness' is also integral to the comprehending of a person, as people construct roles for themselves in relation to an 'other' as part of a process of reaction that is not necessarily related to stigmatization or condemnation.Wikipedia:Citation needed Othering is imperative to national identities, where practices of admittance and segregation can form and sustain boundaries and national character. Othering helps distinguish between home and away, the uncertain or certain. However, it often involves the demonization and dehumanization of groups, which further justifies attempts to civilize and exploit these 'inferior' others.

The idea of the other was formalized by Emmanuel Levinas, and later made popular by Edward Said in his well-known book *Orientalism*.{Said, Edward. Orientalism. London: Penguin Group, 1978. Print.} Despite originally being a philosophical concept, othering has political, economic, social and psychological connotations and implications.

History

The concept that the self requires the Other to define itself is an old one and has been expressed by many writers:

Hegel was among the first to introduce the idea of the other as constituent in self-consciousness. For a direct antecedent, see Fichte.

Husserl used the idea as a basis for intersubjectivity. Sartre also made use of such a dialectic in *Being and Nothingness*, when describing how the world is altered at the appearance of another person, how the world now appears to orient itself around this other person. At the level Sartre presented it, however, it was without any life-threatening need for resolution, but as a feeling or phenomenon and not as a radical threat. Beauvoir made use of otherness — in similar fashion to Sartre (though it is likely he took the idea from herWikipedia:Citation needed) — in *The Second Sex*. In fact, Beauvoir refers to Hegel's master-slave dialectic as analogous, in many respects, to the relationship of man and woman.

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and the Lithuanian-French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas were instrumental in coining contemporary usage of "the Other," as radically other. Lacan associated the Other with the symbolic order and language. Levinas connected it with the scriptural and traditional God, in *The Infinite Other*.

Ethically, for Levinas, the "Other" is superior or prior to the self; the mere presence of the Other makes demands *before* one can respond by helping them or ignoring themWikipedia:Citation needed. This idea and that of the face-to-face encounter were re-written later, taking on Derrida's points made about the impossibility of a pure presence of the Other (the Other could be other than this pure alterity first encountered), and so issues of language and representation arose. This "re-write" was accomplished in part with Levinas' analysis of the distinction between "the saying and the said" but still maintaining a priority of ethics over metaphysics.

Levinas talks of the Other in terms of 'insomnia' and 'wakefulness'. It is an ecstasy, or exteriority toward the Other that forever remains beyond any attempt at full capture, this otherness is interminable (or infinite); even in murdering another, the otherness remains, it has not been negated or controlled. This "infiniteness" of the Other will allow Levinas to derive other aspects of philosophy and science as secondary to this ethic. Levinas writes:

> The others that obsess me in the other do not affect me as examples of the same genus united with my neighbor by resemblance or common nature, individuations of the human race, or chips off the old block... The others concern me from the first. Here fraternity precedes the commonness of a genus. My relationship with the Other as neighbor gives meaning to my relations with all the others.[1]

The "Other", as a general term in philosophy, can also be used to mean the unconscious, silence, insanity, the other of language (i.e., what it refers to and what is unsaid), etc.

There may also arise a tendency towards relativism if the Other, as pure alterity, leads to a notion that ignores the commonality of truth. Likewise, issues may arise around non-ethical uses of the term, and related terms, that reinforce divisions.

Imperialism

Before the modern world system in which the politics and economy of nation-states are relatively interdependent, there existed what is classified as the "system of world empires" up until the 1500s. In this world system, political and economic affairs of different empires were fragmented and empires "provided for most of their own needs... [spreading] their influence solely through conquest or the threat of conquest..."[2] The Dictionary of Human Geography defines imperialism as "The creation and maintenance of an unequal economic, cultural and territorial relationship, usually between states and often in the form of an empire, based on domination and subordination."[3] The maintenance of this unequal relationship wholly depends on the subordination of an "other" group or peoples, from which resources can be taken and land can be exploited. Other, then, describes the process of justifying the domination of individuals or groups in the periphery to facilitate subordination. The creation of the other is done by highlighting their weakness, thus extenuating the moral responsibility of the stronger self to educate, convert, or civilize depending on the identity of the other. Indeed, as defined by Martin Jones et al., othering is "A term, advocated by Edward Said, which refers to the act of emphasizing the perceived weaknesses of marginalized groups as a way of stressing the alleged strength of those in positions of power." Wikipedia:Citation needed Othering can be done with any racial, ethnic, religious, or geographically-defined category of people.

In keeping with the example of imperial Britain, the discussion of empire building through othering unfolds in a global context. Empire building stands in fundamental opposition to global community; instead of understanding groups of people, and consequentially their intellectual, economic, and political capability as vital and contributory to the global community, othering renders all but one culture's ideology and systems worthless. Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory is a more modern criticism of othering and the doctrine of discrimination and racism in society, economics, and all other fronts. Imperial Britain saw the values or good qualities of other cultures or powers as a threat to its own power—this was the case even with other economic and industrial powers such as Germany.Wikipedia:Citation needed

Knowledge

Scholars such as Michel Foucault, the Frankfurt School and other postmodernists have argued that the process of othering has everything to do with knowledge, and power acting through knowledge to achieve a particular political agenda in its goal of domination.[4] Edward Said quotes the following from Nietzsche,[5] saying what is the truth of language but

> ...a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are.[6]

The knowledge of this sheds much light on historiographies of other cultures created by the dominant culture, and by the discourses, whether academic or otherwise, that surround these written and oral histories. The cultures that a supposed superior ethnic group deems important to study, and the different aspects of that culture that are either ignored or considered valuable knowledge, relies on the judgment of the ethnic group in power. In the case of historiographies of the Middle East, and the Oriental discipline, another dynamic adds depth to this issue. Prior to the late nineteenth century, western (specifically European) empires studied what was said to be high culture of the Middle East, being literature, language, and philology; however, a reciprocal program and curriculum of study did not exist in the Orient which looked at European lands.[7] Distortions in the writing of history have carried over to the post-modern era in the writing of news. As mentioned before under examples of intranational othering, political parties in developing countries sometimes create facts on the ground, report threats that are nonexistent, and extenuate the faults of opposing political parties which are made up of opposing ethnic groups in the majority of cases.[8] Othering via ideas of ethnocentricity—the belief that one's own ethnic group is superior to all others and the tendency to evaluate and assign meaning to other ethnicities using yours as a standard[9] —is additionally achieved through processes as mundane as cartography. The drawing of maps has historically emphasized and bolstered specific lands and their associated national identities. Cartographers in early centuries commonly distorted actual locations and distances when depicting them on maps; British cartographers for example centered Britain on their maps, and drew it proportionally larger than it should be. Polar perspectives of the Northern Hemisphere drawn by recent American cartographers uses spatial relations between the United States and Russia to emphasize superiority.[10]

Gender studies

Simone de Beauvoir changed the Hegelian notion of the Other, for use in her description of male-dominated culture. This treats woman as the Other in relation to man. The Other has thus become an important concept for studies of the sex-gender system. Michael Warner argues that:

> the modern system of sex and gender would not be possible without a disposition to interpret the difference between genders as the difference between self and Other ... having a sexual object of the opposite gender is taken to be the normal and paradigmatic form of an interest in the Other or, more generally, others.

Thus, according to Warner, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis hold the heterosexist view that if one is attracted to people of the same gender as one's self, one fails to distinguish self and other, identification and desire. This is a "regressive" or an "arrested" function.Wikipedia:Please clarify He further argues that heteronormativity covers its own narcissistic investments by projecting or displacing them on queerness.

Beauvoir calls the Other the minority, the least favored one and often a woman, when compared to a man, "for a man represents both the positive and the neutral, as indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity" (McCann, 33). Betty Friedan supported this thought when she interviewed women and the majority of them identified themselves in their role in the private sphere, rather than addressing their own personal achievements. They

automatically identified as the Other without knowing. Although the Other may be influenced by a socially constructed society, one can argue that society has the power to change this creation (Haslanger).

In an effort to dismantle the notion of the Other, Cheshire Calhoun proposed a deconstruction of the word "woman" from a subordinate association and to reconstruct it by proving women do not need to be rationalized by male dominance.[11] This would contribute to the idea of the Other and minimize the hierarchal connotation this word implies.

Sarojini Sahoo, an Indian feminist writer, agrees with De Beauvoir that women can only free themselves by "thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as men; instead of seeking to disparage them, she declares herself their equal." She disagrees, however, that though women have the same status to men as human beings, they have their own identity and they are different from men. They are "others" in real definition, but this is not in context with Hegelian definition of "others". It is not always due to man's "active" and "subjective" demands. They are the others, unknowingly accepting the subjugation as a part of "subjectivity".[12] Sahoo, however contends that whilst the woman identity is certainly constitutionally different from that of man, men and women still share a basic human equality. Thus the harmful asymmetric sex/gender "Othering" arises accidentally and 'passively' from natural, unavoidable intersubjectivity.[13]

Quotations

- Søren Kierkegaard constantly stressed the relation between the you and the I and love.

  There are a *you* and an *I*, and there is no *mine* and *yours*! For without a *you* and an *I*, there is no love, and with *mine* and *yours* there is no love but "mine" and "yours" (these possessive pronouns) are, of course, formed from a "you" and an "I" and as a consequence seem obliged to be present wherever there are a *you* and an *I*. This is indeed the case everywhere, but not in love, which is a revolution from the ground up. The more profound the revolution, the more completely the distinction "*mine* and *yours*" disappears, and the more perfect is the love. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, Hong p. 266

- The poet Arthur Rimbaud may be the earliest to express the idea: "Je est un autre" (I is another).
- Friedrich Nietzsche, in *The Gay Science*, phrased it thus: "You are always a different person."
- Ferdinand de Saussure described language as, in Calvin Thomas' words, a "differential system without positive terms".
- Jacques Lacan argued that ego-formation occurs through mirror-stage misrecognition, and his theories were applied to politics by Althusser. As the later Lacan said: "The I is always in the field of the Other."
- Jean-Paul Sartre's character Garcin, in the play *Huis clos* (*No Exit*), states that "Hell is others," or, alternatively, "Hell is other people." ("L'enfer, c'est les Autres.")

References

[1] *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, p.159
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[3] Johnston, R.J., et al. The Dictionary of Human Geography. 4th Ed. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000. 375.
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[5] Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On Truth and lie in an extra-moral sense." The Portable Nietzsche. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954. 46-7.
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[7] Humphreys, Steven R. "The Historiography of the Modern Middle East: Transforming a Field of Study." Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century. Ed. Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer, and Y. Hakam Erdem. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006. 19-21. Print.
[8] Sehgal, Meera. "Manufacturing a Feminized Siege Mentality." Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 36.2 (2007): 173. Print.
[9] Fellmann, Jerome D., et al. Human Geography: Landscapes of Human Activities. 10th Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008. 179.
[10] Fellmann, Jerome D., et al. Human Geography: Landscapes of Human Activities. 10th Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008. 10.
[11] McCann, 339

[12] "Feminism is Humanism. So Why the Debate?" (http://sarojinisahoo.blogspot.com)

[13] Jemmer, Patrick: The O(the)r (O)the(r), Engage Newcastle Volume 1 (ISSN: 2045-0567; ISBN 978-1-907926-00-6) August 2010, published Newcastle UK: NewPhilSoc Publishing, Page 7, also see at "http://books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=YlN_kz8th4cC&oi=fnd&pg=PA5&dq=Sarojini+Sahoo&ots=EFtjSxyA3q&sig=qa7R"

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External links

- The dictionary definition of other at Wiktionary
- Definitions of Other/Othering (http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~ulrich/rww03/othering.htm)
- The Centre for Studies in Otherness (http://otherness.dk)

Identity (philosophy)

In philosophy, **identity**, from Latin: *identitas* ("sameness"), is the relation each thing bears just to itself.[1][2] The notion of identity gives rise to many philosophical problems, including the identity of indiscernibles (if x and y share all their properties, are they one and the same thing?), and questions about change and personal identity over time (what has to be the case for a person x at one time and a person y at a later time to be one and the same person?).

It is important to distinguish the philosophical concept of identity from the more well-known notion of identity in use in psychology and the social sciences. The philosophical concept concerns a *relation*, specifically, a relation that x and y stand in if, and only if they are one and the same thing, or *identical to* each other (i.e. if, and only if $x = y$). The sociological notion of identity, by contrast, has to do with a person's self-conception, social presentation, and more generally, the aspects of a person that make them unique, or qualitatively different from others (e.g. cultural identity, gender identity, national Identity, online identity and processes of identity formation).

Metaphysics of identity

Metaphysicians, and sometimes philosophers of language and mind, ask other questions:

- What does it mean for an object to be the same as itself?
- If x and y are identical (are the same thing), must they always be identical? Are they *necessarily* identical?
- What does it mean for an object to be the same, if it changes over time? (Is $apple_t$ the same as $apple_{t+1}$?)
- If an object's parts are entirely replaced over time, as in the Ship of Theseus example, in what way is it the same?

The Law of identity originates from classical antiquity. The modern formulation of identity is that of Gottfried Leibniz, who held that x is the same as y if and only if every predicate true of x is true of y as well.

Leibniz's ideas have taken root in the philosophy of mathematics, where they have influenced the development of the predicate calculus as Leibniz's law. Mathematicians sometimes distinguish identity from equality. More mundanely, an *identity* in mathematics may be an *equation* that holds true for all values of a variable. Hegel argued that things are inherently self-contradictoryWikipedia:Citation needed and that the notion of something being self-identical only made sense if it were not also not-identical or different from itself and did not also imply the latter. In Hegel's words, "Identity is the identity of identity and non-identity." More recent metaphysicians have discussed trans-world identity—the notion that there can be the same object in different possible worlds. An alternative to trans-world identity is the counterpart relation in Counterpart theory. It is a similarity relation that rejects trans-world individuals and instead defends an objects counterpart - the most similar object.

Some philosophers have denied that there is such a relation as identity. Thus Ludwig Wittgenstein writes (*Tractatus* 5.5301): "That identity is not a relation between objects is obvious." At 5.5303 he elaborates: "Roughly speaking: to say of two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of one thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing." Bertrand Russell had earlier voiced a worry that seems to be motivating Wittgenstein's point (*The Principles of Mathematics* §64): "[I]dentity, an objector may urge, cannot be anything at all: two terms plainly are not identical, and one term cannot be, for what is it identical with?" Even before Russell, Gottlob Frege, at the beginning of "Sense and reference," expressed a worry with regard to identity as a relation: "Equality gives rise to challenging questions which are not altogether easy to answer. Is it a relation?" More recently, C. J. F. Williams[3] has suggested that identity should be viewed as a second-order relation, rather than a relation between objects, and

Kai Wehmeier[4] has argued that appealing to a binary relation that every object bears to itself, and to no others, is both logically unnecessary and metaphysically suspect.

Notes

[1] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Identity (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity/), First published Wed Dec 15, 2004; substantive revision Sun Oct 1, 2006.

[2] The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 2nd Edition, CUP: 1995

[3] C.J.F. Williams, *What is identity?*, Oxford University Press 1989.

[4] Kai F. Wehmeier, "How to live without identity—and why," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90:4, 2012, pp. 761–777.

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External links

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Identity (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity/), First published Wed Dec 15, 2004; substantive revision Sun Oct 1, 2006.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Identity over time (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-time/). First published Fri 18 March 2005.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Personal identity (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-personal/). First published Tue Aug 20, 2002; substantive revision Tue Feb 20, 2007.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Relative identity (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-relative/). First published Mon 22 April 2002.

Identity (social science)

Not to be confused with personal identity.

In psychology and sociology, **identity** is a person's conception and expression of their (**self-identity**) and others' individuality or group affiliations (such as national identity and cultural identity). The concept is given a great deal of attention in social psychology and is important in place identity.

Description

Identity may be defined as the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group. Identity may be distinguished from identification; the former is a label, whereas the latter refers to the classifying act itself. Identity is thus best construed as being both relational and contextual, while the act of identification is best viewed as inherently processual.[1]

However, the formation of one's identity occurs through one's identifications with significant others (primarily with parents and other individuals during one's biographical experiences, and also with 'groups' as they are perceived). These others may be benign such that one aspires to their characteristics, values and beliefs (a process of idealistic-identification), or malign when one wishes to dissociate from their characteristics (a process of defensive contra-identification) (Weinreich & Saunderson 2003, Chapter 1, pp 54–61).

A *psychological identity* relates to self-image (a person's mental model of him or herself), self-esteem, and individuality. Consequently, Weinreich gives the definition "A person's identity is defined as the totality of one's self-construal, in which how one construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future"; this allows for definitions of aspects of identity, such as: "One's ethnic identity is defined as that part of the totality of one's self-construal made up of those dimensions that express the continuity between one's construal of past ancestry and one's future aspirations in relation to ethnicity" (Weinreich, 1986a).

An important part of identity in psychology is gender identity, as this dictates to a significant degree how an individual views him or herself both as a person and in relation to other people, ideas and nature. Other aspects of identity, such as racial, religious, ethnic, occupational… etc. may also be more or less significant – or significant in some situations but not in others (Weinreich & Saunderson 2003 pp26–34). In cognitive psychology, the term "identity" refers to the capacity for self-reflection and the awareness of self (Leary & Tangney 2003, p. 3).

The inclusiveness of Weinreich's definition (above) directs attention to the totality of one's identity at a given phase in time, and assists in elucidating component aspects of one's total identity, such as one's gender identity, ethnic identity, occupational identity and so on. The definition readily applies to the young child, the adolescent, the young adult, and the older adult in various phases of the lifecycle. Clearly, depending on whether one is a young child or an adult at the height of one's powers, how one construes oneself as one was in the past will refer to very different salient experiential markers. Likewise, how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future will differ considerably according to one's age and accumulated experiences. (Weinreich & Saunderson, (eds) 2003, pp 26–34).

Sociology places some explanatory weight on the concept of role-behavior. The notion of *identity negotiation* may arise from the learning of social roles through personal experience. Identity negotiation is a process in which a person negotiates with society at large regarding the meaning of his or her identity.

Psychologists most commonly use the term "identity" to describe *personal identity*, or the idiosyncratic things that make a person unique. Meanwhile, sociologists often use the term to describe *social identity*, or the collection of group memberships that define the individual. However, these uses are not proprietary, and each discipline may use either concept and each discipline may combine both concepts when considering a person's identity.

The description or representation of individual and group identity is a central task for psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists and those of other disciplines where 'identity' needs to be mapped and defined. How should one

describe the identity of another, in ways which encompass both their idiosyncratic qualities and their group memberships or identifications, both of which can shift according to circumstance? Following on from the work of Kelly, Erikson, Tajfel and others Weinreich's Identity Structure Analysis (ISA), is 'a structural representation of the individual's existential experience, in which the relationships between self and other agents are organised in relatively stable structures over time … with the emphasis on the socio-cultural milieu in which self relates to other agents and institutions' (Weinreich and Saunderson, (eds) 2003, p1). Using constructs drawn from the salient discourses of the individual, the group and cultural norms, the practical operationalisation of ISA provides a methodology that maps how these are used by the individual, applied across time and milieus by the 'situated self' to appraise self and other agents and institutions (for example, resulting in the individual's evaluation of self and significant others and institutions).

Use in psychology

Erik Erikson (1902-1994) became one of the earliest psychologists to take an explicit interest in identity. The Eriksonian framework rests upon a distinction among the psychological sense of continuity, known as the *ego identity* (sometimes identified simply as "the self"); the personal idiosyncrasies that separate one person from the next, known as the *personal identity*; and the collection of social roles that a person might play, known as either the *social identity* or the *cultural identity*. Erikson's work, in the psychodynamic tradition, aimed to investigate the process of identity formation across a lifespan. Progressive strength in the ego identity, for example, can be charted in terms of a series of stages in which identity is formed in response to increasingly sophisticated challenges. The process of forming a viable sense of identity for the culture is conceptualized as an adolescent task, and those who do not manage a resynthesis of childhood identifications are seen as being in a state of 'identity diffusion' whereas those who retain their initially given identities unquestioned have 'foreclosed' identities (Weinreich & Saunderson 2003 p7-8). On some readings of Erikson, the development of a strong ego identity, along with the proper integration into a stable society and culture, lead to a stronger sense of identity in general. Accordingly, a deficiency in either of these factors may increase the chance of an identity crisis or confusion (Cote & Levine 2002, p. 22).

Although the self is distinct from identity, the literature of self-psychology can offer some insight into how identity is maintained (Cote & Levin 2002, p. 24). From the vantage point of self-psychology, there are two areas of interest: the processes by which a self is formed (the "I"), and the actual content of the schemata which compose the self-concept (the "Me"). In the latter field, theorists have shown interest in relating the self-concept to self-esteem, the differences between complex and simple ways of organizing self-knowledge, and the links between those organizing principles and the processing of information (Cote & Levin 2002).

The "Neo-Eriksonian" *identity status* paradigm emerged in later yearsWikipedia:Manual of Style/Dates and numbers#Chronological items, driven largely by the work of James Marcia. This paradigm focuses upon the twin concepts of *exploration* and *commitment*. The central idea is that any individual's sense of identity is determined in large part by the explorations and commitments that he or she makes regarding certain personal and social traits. It follows that the core of the research in this paradigm investigates the degrees to which a person has made certain explorations, and the degree to which he or she displays a commitment to those explorations.

A person may display either relative weakness or relative strength in terms of both exploration and commitments. When assigned categories, four possible permutations result: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. Diffusion is when a person lacks both exploration in life and interest in committing even to those unchosen roles that he or she occupies. Foreclosure is when a person has not chosen extensively in the past, but seems willing to commit to some relevant values, goals, or roles in the future. Moratorium is when a person displays a kind of flightiness, ready to make choices but unable to commit to them. Finally, achievement is when a person makes identity choices and commits to them.

Weinreich's identity variant similarly includes the categories of identity diffusion, foreclosure and crisis, but with a somewhat different emphasis. Here, with respect to identity diffusion for example, an optimal level is interpreted as

the norm, as it is unrealistic to expect an individual to resolve all their conflicted identifications with others; therefore we should be alert to individuals with levels which are much higher or lower than the norm – highly diffused individuals are classified as diffused, and those with low levels as foreclosed or defensive. (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003, pp 65–67; 105-106). Weinreich applies the identity variant in a framework which also allows for the transition from one to another by way of biographical experiences and resolution of conflicted identifications situated in various contexts – for example, an adolescent going through family break-up may be in one state, whereas later in a stable marriage with a secure professional role may be in another. Hence, though there is continuity, there is also development and change. (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003, pp 22–23).

Laing's definition of identity closely follows Erikson's, in emphasising the past, present and future components of the experienced self. He also develops the concept of the "metaperspective of self", i.e. the self's perception of the other's view of self, which has been found to be extremely important in clinical contexts such as anorexia nervosa. (Saunderson and O'Kane, 2005). Harré also conceptualises components of self/identity – the "person" (the unique being I am to myself and others) along with aspects of self (including a totality of attributes including beliefs about one's characteristics including life history), and the personal characteristics displayed to others.

Further information: Self (psychology)

In social psychology

At a general level, self-psychology is compelled to investigate the question of how the personal self relates to the social environment. To the extent that these theories place themselves in the tradition of "psychological" social psychology, they focus on explaining an individual's actions within a group in terms of mental events and states. However, some "sociological" social psychology theories go further by attempting to deal with the issue of identity at both the levels of individual cognition and of collective behavior.

Collective identity

Main article: Collective identity

Many people gain a sense of positive self-esteem from their identity groups, which furthers a sense of community and belonging. Another issue that researchers have attempted to address is the question of why people engage in discrimination, i.e., why they tend to favor those they consider a part of their "in-group" over those considered to be outsiders. Both questions have been given extensive as part of the social identity approach. For example, in work surrounding social identity theory it has been shown that merely crafting cognitive distinction between in- and out-groups can lead to subtle effects on people's evaluations of others (Cote & Levine 2002).

Different social situations also compel people to attach themselves to different self-identities which may cause some to feel marginalized, thus traveling between different groups and self-identifications. These different selves lead to constructed images dichotomized between what people want to be (the ideal self) and how others see them (the limited self). Educational background and Occupational status and roles significantly influence identity formation in this regard.[2]

Identity formation strategies

Another issue of interest in social psychology is related to the notion that there are certain *identity formation strategies* which a person may use to adapt to the social world. (Cote & Levin 2002, pp. 3–5) developed a typology which investigated the different manners of behavior that individuals may have. (3) Their typology includes:

	Psychological symptoms	**Personality symptoms**	**Social symptoms**
Refuser	Develops cognitive blocks that prevent adoption of adult role-schemas	Engages in childlike behavior	Shows extensive dependency upon others and no meaningful engagement with the community of adults
Drifter	Possesses greater psychological resources than the Refuser (i.e., intelligence, charisma)	Is apathetic toward application of psychological resources	Has no meaningful engagement with or commitment to adult communities
Searcher	Has a sense of dissatisfaction due to high personal and social expectations	Shows disdain for imperfections within the community	Interacts to some degree with role-models, but ultimately these relationships are abandoned
Guardian	Possesses clear personal values and attitudes, but also a deep fear of change	Sense of personal identity is almost exhausted by sense of social identity	Has an extremely rigid sense of social identity and strong identification with adult communities
Resolver	Consciously desires self-growth	Accepts personal skills and competencies and uses them actively	Is responsive to communities that provide opportunity for self-growth

Kenneth Gergen formulated additional classifications, which include the *strategic manipulator*, the *pastiche personality*, and the *relational self*. The strategic manipulator is a person who begins to regard all senses of identity merely as role-playing exercises, and who gradually becomes alienated from his or her social "self". The pastiche personality abandons all aspirations toward a true or "essential" identity, instead viewing social interactions as opportunities to play out, and hence become, the roles they play. Finally, the relational self is a perspective by which persons abandon all sense of exclusive self, and view all sense of identity in terms of social engagement with others. For Gergen, these strategies follow one another in phases, and they are linked to the increase in popularity of postmodern culture and the rise of telecommunications technology.

Use in social anthropology

Anthropologists have most frequently employed the term 'identity' to refer to this idea of selfhood in a loosely Eriksonian way (Erikson 1972) properties based on the uniqueness and individuality which makes a person distinct from others. Identity became of more interest to anthropologists with the emergence of modern concerns with ethnicity and social movements in the 1970s. This was reinforced by an appreciation, following the trend in sociological thought, of the manner in which the individual is affected by and contributes to the overall social context. At the same time, the Eriksonian approach to identity remained in force, with the result that identity has continued until recently to be used in a largely socio-historical way to refer to qualities of sameness in relation to a person's connection to others and to a particular group of people.

The first favours a primordialist approach which takes the sense of self and belonging to a collective group as a fixed thing, defined by objective criteria such as common ancestry and common biological characteristics. The second, rooted in social constructionist theory, takes the view that identity is formed by a predominantly political choice of certain characteristics. In so doing, it questions the idea that identity is a natural given, characterised by fixed, supposedly objective criteria. Both approaches need to be understood in their respective political and historical contexts, characterised by debate on issues of class, race and ethnicity. While they have been criticized, they continue to exert an influence on approaches to the conceptualisation of identity today.

These different explorations of 'identity' demonstrate how difficult a concept it is to pin down. Since identity is a virtual thing, it is impossible to define it empirically. Discussions of identity use the term with different meanings, from fundamental and abiding sameness, to fluidity, contingency, negotiated and so on. Brubaker and Cooper note a

tendency in many scholars to confuse identity as a category of practice and as a category of analysis (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, p. 5). Indeed, many scholars demonstrate a tendency to follow their own preconceptions of identity, following more or less the frameworks listed above, rather than taking into account the mechanisms by which the concept is crystallised as reality. In this environment, some analysts, such as Brubaker and Cooper, have suggested doing away with the concept completely (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, p. 1). Others, by contrast, have sought to introduce alternative concepts in an attempt to capture the dynamic and fluid qualities of human social self-expression. Hall (1992, 1996), for example, suggests treating identity as a process, to take into account the reality of diverse and ever-changing social experience. Some scholars have introduced the idea of identification, whereby identity is perceived as made up of different components that are 'identified' and interpreted by individuals. The construction of an individual sense of self is achieved by personal choices regarding who and what to associate with. Such approaches are liberating in their recognition of the role of the individual in social interaction and the construction of identity.

Anthropologists have contributed to the debate by shifting the focus of research: One of the first challenges for the researcher wishing to carry out empirical research in this area is to identify an appropriate analytical tool. The concept of boundaries is useful here for demonstrating how identity works. In the same way as Barth, in his approach to ethnicity, advocated the critical focus for investigation as being "the ethnic boundary that defines the group rather than the cultural stuff that it encloses" (1969:15), social anthropologists such as Cohen and Bray have shifted the focus of analytical study from identity to the boundaries that are used for purposes of identification. If identity is a kind of virtual site in which the dynamic processes and markers used for identification are made apparent, boundaries provide the framework on which this virtual site is built. They concentrated on how the idea of community belonging is differently constructed by individual members and how individuals within the group conceive ethnic boundaries.

As a non-directive and flexible analytical tool, the concept of boundaries helps both to map and to define the changeability and mutability that are characteristic of people's experiences of the self in society. While identity is a volatile, flexible and abstract 'thing', its manifestations and the ways in which it is exercised are often open to view. Identity is made evident through the use of markers such as language, dress, behaviour and choice of space, whose effect depends on their recognition by other social beings. Markers help to create the boundaries that define similarities or differences between the marker wearer and the marker perceivers, their effectiveness depends on a shared understanding of their meaning. In a social context, misunderstandings can arise due to a misinterpretation of the significance of specific markers. Equally, an individual can use markers of identity to exert influence on other people without necessarily fulfilling all the criteria that an external observer might typically associate with such an abstract identity.

Boundaries can be inclusive or exclusive depending on how they are perceived by other people. An exclusive boundary arises, for example, when a person adopts a marker that imposes restrictions on the behaviour of others. An inclusive boundary is created, by contrast, by the use of a marker with which other people are ready and able to associate. At the same time, however, an inclusive boundary will also impose restrictions on the people it has included by limiting their inclusion within other boundaries. An example of this is the use of a particular language by a newcomer in a room full of people speaking various languages. Some people may understand the language used by this person while others may not. Those who do not understand it might take the newcomer's use of this particular language merely as a neutral sign of identity. But they might also perceive it as imposing an exclusive boundary that is meant to mark them off from her. On the other hand, those who do understand the newcomer's language could take it as an inclusive boundary, through which the newcomer associates herself with them to the exclusion of the other people present. Equally, however, it is possible that people who do understand the newcomer but who also speak another language may not want to speak the newcomer's language and so see her marker as an imposition and a negative boundary. It is possible that the newcomer is either aware or unaware of this, depending on whether she herself knows other languages or is conscious of the plurilingual quality of the people there and is respectful of it or not.

Use in philosophy

See also: Personal identity and Identity (philosophy)

Philosophers have also reflected on the identity concept. In many ways Philosophical reflection on identity predated psychological. Philosophical discourse on identity begins with Descartes. His famous mantra "I think, therefore I am", or later "I think, I exist", have left many to inquire what exactly "I" is, and if indeed we can derive an "I-ness" from doubt.Wikipedia:Citation needed

Hegel rejects Cartesian philosophy, supposing that we do not always doubt and that we do not always have consciousness. In his famous Master-Slave Dialectic Hegel attempts to show that the mind (Geist) only become conscious when it encounters another mind. One Geist attempts to control the other, since up until that point it has only encountered tools for its use. A struggle for domination ensues, leading to Lordship and Bondage.

Nietzsche who was influenced by Hegel in some ways but rejected him in others, called for a rejection of "Soul Atomism" in The Gay Science. Nietzsche supposed that the Soul was an interaction of forces, an ever-changing thing far from the immortal soul posited by both Descartes and the Christian tradition. His "Construction of the Soul" in many ways resembles modern Social Constructivism.

Martin Heidegger, following Nietzsche, did work on identity. For Heidegger, people only really form an identity after facing death. It's death that allows people to choose from the social constructed meanings in their world, and assemble a finite identity out of seemingly infinite meanings. For Heidegger, most people never escape the "they", a socially constructed identity of "how one ought to be" created mostly to try to escape death through ambiguity.

Many philosophical schools derive from rejecting Hegel, and diverse traditions of acceptance and rejection have developed.

Paul Ricoeur has introduced the distinction between the ipse identity (selfhood, 'who am I?') and the idem identity (sameness, or a third-person perspective which objectifies identity) (Ricoeur & Blamey 1995).

Implications

The implications are multiple as various research traditions are now heavily utilizing the lens of identity to examine phenomena. One implication of identity and identity construction can be seen in occupational settings. This becomes increasing challenging in stigmatized jobs or "dirty work"(Hughes, 1951). In a recent article Tracy and Trethewey state that "individuals gravitate toward and turn away from particular jobs depending in part, on the extent to which they validate a "preferred organizational self" (Tracy & Tretheway 2005, p. 169). Some jobs carry different stigmas or acclaims. In her analysis Tracy uses the example of correctional officers trying to shake the stigma of the "glorified maids" (Tracy & Tretheway 2005). "The process by which people arrive at justifications of and values for various occupational choices." Among these are workplace satisfaction and overall quality of life (Tracy & Scott 2006, p. 33). People in these types of jobs are forced to find ways in order to create an identity they can live with. "Crafting a positive sense of self at work is more challenging when one's work is considered "dirty" by societal standards" (Tracy & Scott 2006, p. 7). "In other words, doing taint management is not just about allowing the employee to feel good in that job. "If employees must navigate discourses that question the viability of their work, and/ or experience obstacles in managing taint through transforming dirty work into a badge of honor, it is likely they will find blaming the client to be an efficacious route in affirming their identity" (Tracy & Scott 2006, p. 33).

In any case, the concept that an individual has a unique identity developed relatively late in history. Factors influencing the emphasis on personal identity may include:

• In the West, the Protestant stress on one's responsibility for one's own soul;
• Psychology itself, emerging as a distinct field of knowledge and study;
• The growth of a sense of privacy;
• Specialization of worker roles during the industrial period (as opposed, for example, to the undifferentiated roles of peasants in the feudal system);

- Occupation and employment's effect on identity; Wikipedia:Citation needed
- Increased emphasis on gender identity, including gender identity disorder and transgender issues. Wikipedia:Citation needed

Identity changes

An important implication is related to identity change, i.e. the transformation of identity.

Contexts include:

- Radical career change (Ibarra 2003)
- Gender identity transformation
- National

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