

PS547

Identity Politics

9/27/05

Intro Lecture

I. What is an Identity?

A name, label, categorization, classification...

Personal v. Social

Congealed Reputation

II. What does an Identity Do?

A. Acts to simplify reality in a predictable fashion through making one set of ideas about yourself, other people, groups, societies, cultural, social, religious, political, and other phenomena much more imaginable to yourself than a range of other collections of ideas. It bounds your attention.

B. It leads you to pay attention to similarities and differences, inducing you to categorize what and who you know into ingroups and outgroups

C. It helps you locate or situate people in society, put people in their places, shortly put, and thereby inform yourself what actions/behavior are appropriate when interacting with them.

III. Where do identities come from?

A. Self

1. Primordialist, genetic, sociobiological, evolutionary; these theories are very good at accounting for similarities, but not for our many differences, and since the same physical material is assumed to account for both, it isnt a very convincing place to start.

2. Need for group membership

3. Need for predictability and order, the cognitive model we will use

4. Need to find Self in Other, the logical necessity to always compare to know who or what you or anyone else is. Eg, to say you are a New

Yorker must mean you are not an Ohioan, and a host of other things. Indeed to identify yourself as a New Yorker means not only listing all the things one has in common with other New Yorkers, but things that are not in common with other, non-New Yorkers.

- a. The Other can represent merely difference or real danger, if just difference then it is treated merely as cognitive material or info for construction of the Self. Hair length, eg.
If danger, then explains reactions of oppression
- b. Difference is associated with tolerance, variety, orthogonality or incomparability, and
irrelevance
- c. Danger is associated with racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, nationalism
- d. A range of relationships between the Self and Other:
accommodation, assimilation, therapy, oppression, and nihilation.
Columbus, eg. Any other examples of each? Or the entire range of relationships between the same pair?
- e. Symbolic interactionism: you find yourself in an Other through that person's understanding of yourself. Our choice of actions is made in anticipation of what we expect that Other to do....an iterative process of requited expectations. A dialogic process. Eg, if I were to address u w/obscenities....
- f. What about Others that are not human? Can one find oneSelf in an idea, a history, in one's imagination?

B. Two Different Selves

1. The Western view of the Self as an individual threatened by difference. Assumption of a 0-sum relationship between Self and Other. Self as owner of all values, beliefs, and identities. Critical to maintain the

boundary between what is Self and what is Other. The Other, and/or its meaning must be controlled, via the techniques discussed above. The question for us then is how to embrace the Other without the loss of oneSelf? The Western Self fears the loss of its own autonomy and individuality if it admits that the Other is its own co-creator. R feels of vulby....getting lost in someone else.... Be Yourself!

2. The non-Western Self is a relational, not individualistic Self; it is understood in relationship, not in opposition to, Others. This Self is not caused by one's own personality, but rather is caused in interaction with Others. In a series of surveys of 10s of 1000s of subjects across the globe, its been found that US, Britain and Australia are the homes to the Western individualistic Self, with Asia and Latin America being characterized as most collectivist, or relational. Southern Europe and Scandinavia are someplace in between.

The collectivist, relational Self tends to define itSelf in terms of relationships with in-groups, i.e, with groups within which it counts itself as a member. But while apparently inclusive on its face, as the Self is willing to sublimate its own identity within that of the group, this very inclusivity excludes. With respect to Others, i.e., Others outside the ingroup, relational, collectivist, inclusive Selves tend to Otherize entire outgroups. So eg, to the extent a person finds himself in the Nation, he is also more likely to treat as out-groups entire other Nations! Meanwhile, the individualistic Self, when thinking of Others, tends to think of them as individuals, not groups, so is less likely to develop a fear of them, rather than a fear of him or her.

C. Political Power and the Self

To the extent a dominant group, let's say the rich, get the dominated group, let's say the lower-middle class and poor, to believe in the individualistic Self, its domination is masked.

The promise of the Enlightenment was to reduce intergroup conflict through homogenization and anonymity and equality, as if humans are all the same, as if identities have no meaning because we are all autonomous, equal individuals. Postmodern turn

Q: Is it possible to escape from the identities that Others give you? Where? Where, for example, can you be just you, your personal identity? Anywhere? That is power.

A critical question becomes which identity becomes the standard against which you, and others, are compared? Is it always the most powerful in a society who become this standard, or who determine what the standard should be?

IV. Finding Identity in a Group

- A. The need for a group membership (What do we call people who don't belong to groups? Do you think these kinds of words would be used in Asia, Latin America, or Scandinavia?)
- B. Minimal intergroup setting with salient and meaningful distinctions lead to differential treatment of ingroup and outgroup members. Levels of trust, affect, valuation, and willingness to cooperate all vary across in and out groups. This has particularly interesting implications for politics on issues of solving prisoners' dilemmas, collective action problems, origins of social movements (linked fate), and concern for absolute v. relative gains. Give examples, and ask for more.
- C. Having a group identity implies a need to police the boundaries of the group, to keep members in and Others out.

D. But there is no necessary connection between valuing your own ingroup highly and derogating, or devaluing, an outgroup.

So, pride in one's own group neednt equal chauvunism, racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.

(Q: Where do relevant refernce groups come from anyway?)

E. The Contact Hypothesis: how to reduce intergroup hostility

1. Acquaintance Potential
2. Equal Status
3. Social and institutional support
4. Cooperation
5. Decategorization as individuals, a very Western solution
6. Recategorization as a common ingroup
7. Superordinate identity
8. Cross-cutting identities

(Paper topic: pick some intergroup conflict, and see whether these mechanisms have reduced it)

V. The Self and Society

A. What holds society together?

1. Coercion, violence, force, self-interest
2. Legitimacy
3. Taken for granted social practices, habits and customs, naturalization, logics of unthinkability, unimaginability, im/possibility

(Q What are some examples of actions that are virtually unimaginable to you, given your own identity?)

B. Intersubjective v. Objective Realities

C. Available Stock of Knowledge, practical knowledge, common sense

D. The constraining structure of language, syntax, grammar, vocabulary, conversations as the most powerful of structural forces. In/formal verb forms?

Language speaks you; prisonhouse of language; language as social structure: all pomo insights, the linguistic turn

Q: Is there anything you can think that you cant say? Does anyone ever say anything to you that you cannot understand?

E. Social Construction of Identity

1. Habitualized action by types of actor = Institutionalization

Q What is institutionalized racism? Note how actors themselves are unaware and can honestly declare they are not racists, while engaging in actions that reproduce racial identities. This is critical.

2. Institutions work because they are experienced as objective, despite the fact that they are made by us, humans.

Q: Whats the word for that? Reification, making human products into the products of nature, natural law, or divine will.

3. Next step is internalization, or rehearsal

4. Institutions are legitimized as traditions and myths, not through rational deliberative discourse that characterizes conscious deliberate choice.

So, by now response to the why are you doing that question is a startled and puzzled look. So, why are you wearing those pants?

Q Can you think of anything that you or anyone else does that would provoke that kind of response if questioned about? How about historical examples, like women's right to vote. What were the arguments used against it? Against her nature, not God's will, mentally incapable.... Did the argument begin by stipulating that women and men are equal, as, we recall, the Enlightenment view of individualism promised?

5. Primary socialization begins in childhood where we are taught THE world, with no choice. Secondary socialization, which is occurring right now in your lives, is the exposure to sub-worlds. To the extent de-reification occurs at all, it happens in adulthood

Q: Which subworlds did you find upon leaving home? How did you react to them? We will discuss a variety of possible attitudes toward sub-worlds or sub-cultures that challenge the identities you develop during primary socialization in a moment.

6 Sources of Identity Change

- a. Institutional collapse, ala Great Depression (Q, and yours?)
- b. Contact with other societies, liberal contact hypothesis, perhaps? (Q: and you?)
- c. Social marginality, living on the edge

7. Threats to Identity and Responses to Them

Threats to one's identity are what disrupts the everyday taken for granted world. Difference and incommensurability are the two prime disruptors, but the biggest challenge of all comes from an alternative symbolic universe, a subworld that promises to replace your own, eg a religious conversion, or changing a political party (Q And yours?)

- a. Accommodation, changing yourSelf in response to the Other
- b. Therapy, to return Other to normalcy, or to a kind of idy thts safe for yourself
- c. Assimilation, making the Other more like yourSelf
- d. Differentiation, reading the Other into irrelevance, making him foreign or alien
- e. Suppression, denying the Other's existence
- f. Nihilation, destruction of the Other, either physically or through dehumanization

VI. The Self and the State

States, or more precisely, the political forces in control of states, have an interest in producing particular kinds of identities for residents of their country. First, is the citizen, non-citizen divide; who is in and who is out? Second is to unite the

country under some kind of national identity so as to counter the claims of other states. This can be done either through an ethnic national identity, or ethnonational identity, or alternatively, through a civic national identity.

The ethnonational identity tries to unite the citizens on the basis of their ethnic heritage. Eg, Japan, Germany, France. The downside of course is that minorities are left out of the project unless they assimilate, and in many cases, such as the three just mentioned, it is not enough to become a member of the ingroup.

The civic national project, exemplified by the US and the USSR, tries to create a supranational identity as an American or a Soviet, a transcendent identity that treats ethnonational identities as subordinate and irrelevant. The downside here is the slow but sure erosion of ethnonational distinctiveness. Although, as the collapse of the Soviet Union showed, it is not hard to resuscitate them.