# Identities should be viewed as dynamic and multiple, rather than as fixed and sta...

Literature, Russian Literature

Identity provides the structure for personality, equipping the individual with a sense of purpose and direction for one's life, it is in part an intrapsychic activity, but it takes place within a larger socio-cultural framework. Theories of identity have drawn heavily on the writings of Erik Erikson (e. g. 1968 1980). Erikson's (1968) construct of identity formation centers on the resolution of certain crises that arise in each stage of development. A fundamental theme underlying the crisis experienced in each stage appears to be the conflict between identifying with and being emancipated from various influences, e. . , parents, teachers, peers, expectations.

Thus, Erikson seemed to believe that it was almost essential for adolescents to go through an identity crisis in order to resolve the identity issue and move on to the formation of a stable fixed adult identity. Adolescents " are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others" (Erikson, 1968, p. 128). " The estrangement of this stage is identity confusion" (Erikson, 1968, p. 131).

Adolescence is the last stage of childhood. The adolescent process, however, is conclusively complete only when the individual has subordinated his childhood identifications" (Erikson, 1968, p. 155) It appears that young lives are spent identifying with others, being identified with others, and then, in adolescence, pursuing individuation by seeking emancipation from the shell of expectations created by such identifications. As Erikson, (1968) states " Identity formation, finally, begins where the usefulness of identification ends" (p. 159).

The final identity, then, as fixed at the end of adolescence, is super-ordinated to any single identification with individuals of the past: it includes all significant identifications, but it also alters them in order to make a unique and reasonably coherent whole of them. (p. 161. ). Erikson (1969) assumed that there are some important differences between males and females in identity development: females develop a sense of identity later than males, allegedly because they realize that their identity and social status will depend very much on the type of man that they choose to marry.

In support of this theory some studies have addressed the issue of sex differences in identity formation. Douvan and Adelson (1966) obtained support for Erikson's position . Adolescent girls had greater problems than adolescent boys with identity development, and this seemed to be because they focused on the changes in their lives that would result from marriage . In contrast, Waterman (1985) reviewed several studies , and concluded that there was only " weak and inconsistent evidence" that boys and girls follow different routes to identity achievement.

A criticism of Erikson's work in relation to gender, is that most of his theorizing was about male adolescents, and he had relatively little to say about female adolescents. This led Archer (1992, p. 29) to argue as follows: " A major feminist criticism of Erikson's work is that it portrays a primarily Eurocentirc male model of normality. " In the vast literature on identity and gender, several approaches have found it useful to regard women and men as members of social categories (e. g. Deaux, 1984; Deaux & Major, 1987; Sherif, 1982).

For example, gender stereotypes are pervasive, and carry relatively well-defined prescriptions for typical male and female behavior (Fiske & Stevens, 1993). Postmodern and post-structuralist feminists argue that gender is not a stable category but temporary, fluid, and shifting. The meanings attached to gender therefore are not universal; rather they are specific and are derived from particular social contexts and in relationship to other subjects.

The traditional view of gender in psychology is that gender is essentially fixed this has important implications as, gender is associated with deeply entrenched power and status differentials; that is, in terms of a variety of social, political and economic outcomes, men can be regarded as the more advantaged group. For this reason, just as there have been parallels drawn between sexism and racism, women have been viewed as occupying a disadvantaged position comparable with that of minority racial groups (Reid, 1988).

Social identity is the concept of individuals labeling themselves as members of particular social groups- such as social class, ethnicity and gender (Wikipedia 2004). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), the self-concept is comprised of both personal and social identity, with social identity being ' that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel, 1978, p. 3).

Because group membership contributes to self-conception, the individual is motivated to maintain a positive social identity by engaging in social comparisons that preserve the favorability and distinctiveness of the in-group relative to relevant out-groups. If social comparisons result in a negative social identity (e. g. because of low status in the intergroup hierarchy) then, according to Tajfel and Turner (1979), individuals may adopt a number of strategies. Briefly, these are: social mobility, social creativity and social competition.

Given that features of the strategy of social competition are inherent in feminist critiques of existing social arrangements, a number of researchers have viewed social identity theory as a potentially useful framework within which to analyse contemporary gender-related attitudes and behaviour, particularly those of women (e. g. Breinlinger & Kelly, 1994; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Skevington & Baker, 1989; Williams & Giles, 1978). A crucial aspect of this theory is the fluctuating nature of identity.

While people tend to identify with many social groups, based on various factors such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, national origin, and so on, these factors become salient at different times and in different ways. According to social identity theory, if and when a particular group identity becomes salient at a particular time – for whatever reason – the sentiments, emotions, and behaviors of any given member of the salient group will tend to be affected and guided by the norms and aspirations of that group. It is now commonplace in the social identity literature to assess individual differences in group identification.

Moreover, there is agreement that social identification is appropriately regarded as a multidimensional construct that incorporates both cognitive and affective elements (cf. Tajfel's deffnition cited previously; see Brown et al. , 1986; Hinkle, Taylor, Fox-Cardamone, & Crook, 1989). Indeed, Hinkle et al. (1989) found some support for such a conception. However, factor analyses by various authors involving a number of intergroup contexts have also yielded factors that simply correspond to item directionality (Brown et al. 1986; Kelly, 1988), or found no evidence of distinct cognitive and affective components (Karasawa, 1991).

An intriguing complication of contemporary Western gender-related identity is that it can be derived not only from sex-category membership, but from attitudes and beliefs regarding sex roles and the nature of gender relations. For example, a woman might identify herself as ' traditional', or ' non-traditional', or ' feminist', depending on her beliefs regarding sex-appropriate roles and the nature of group relations between women and men (Gurin and Markus (1989).

Because a feminist orientation represents a challenge to the (collective) status quo, applications of social identity theory to gender relations often contain the assumption that feminist women are more strongly gender-identified than more traditional women (e. g. Williams & Giles, 1978), and indeed there is empirical support for this (e. g. Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995). However, the notion of a necessary link between identification and social-change orientation has been criticized (e. g. Condor, 1986) in light of

research indicating that traditional women also can exhibit strong attachment to their gender group (Breinlinger & Kelly, 1994; Condor, 1986).

Virtually all of the relevant research to gender relations and social identification has focused on women. Although social identity theory is particularly suited to examining the identity and behavior of low-status group members, it also suggests that high-status group members will be motivated to preserve their dominance if they perceive it to be legitimate (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Thus, a parallel analysis of men might be equally important to understand psychological processes that facilitate or deter social change (e. g. Kimmel, 1987). Although there is some evidence that individual-difference variables such as authoritarianism (Haddock & Zanna, 1994) predict men's attitudes toward women, few investigations have explicitly addressed the nature of men's social identification in relation to gender-related beliefs. Indirect evidence, however, suggests that traditional men exhibit stronger identifcation than non-traditional men (Abrams, 1989).

In one relevant study, Thomas (1990) used a Q-sort methodology to investigate men's gender identity and gender ideology, and found that the ' pro-feminist' attitudinal pro les were characterized by a rejection of masculinity in terms of both self-definition and cultural stereotypes. This suggests that non-traditional men identify less strongly with their gender, although men's accounts of their identity were generally uninformed by the

political dimensions of gender relations and were more often characterized by a preoccupation with personal masculinity.

Identity theorists conceptualize identity in a manner similar to social identity theorists. Identity theory consists of a set of general ideas about self and society and two main variant theories (Stryker and Burke 2000). Identity theory, in both variants, conceptualizes the self as a collection of identities. The identities each consist of a complex of role-related phenomena, including expectations, performance , competence , enactment, behavior and meanings. The identities are situated in a network of relationships among actors, for example, boy or girl, or teacher or student.

Each identity generates some of what is variously called self-evaluation, self-esteem, self-worth, self-efficacy, and so on. The sex/gender distinction also came to be discussed as a difference between essentialist and anti-essentialist perspective. Essentialist arguments noted that there are innate differences between men and women and rejected the notion that gender is socially constructed. Feminists like Mary Daly argued for a unique female identity while some French feminists have supported the concept of a unique female mode of discourse.

In North America, such thinking came to be known as " women's way of knowing," " women's knowledge," and " women's experiences. " Anti-essentialists, however, asserted that patriarchy positions women as other, which signifies difference. Judith Butler, one of the foremost theorists of deconstructive feminism, in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of

Identity argues that gender distinctions only have meaning within a phallocentric order built on a system of " binary differences" (1990).

Butler argued that gender and gender identity should be seen as fluid, variable; the way we behave at different times and in different situations rather than who we are. Butler suggested that by ' deconstructing' the way we think about gender we might move towards a new equality where people are not restricted by masculine or feminine gender roles. Like feminists before her, Butler is concerned with reaching greater equality between men and women. Many of Butler's arguments and ideas are interesting and compelling but she also has critics who see several limitations with her work.

Conventional theory states that our sex (male/female) produces our gender (masculine/feminine) which causes our desire towards the opposite sex. According to Freud, certain identifications are primary in forming a gendered self and others are secondary. For example, relations with the mother are primary and those with other people such as siblings are secondary. The primary identifications happen first and the secondary identifications follow on from them.

Thus, the Freudian explanation for how we gain our gender identities is linear; all influences happen in a set order. Butler, however, rejects this uncompromising explanation because it does not leave any room for variation, for alternative influences on different people in different situations. Butler concludes that our gender is not a core aspect of our identity but rather a performance, how we behave at different times. Our gender

(masculinity and femininity) is an achievement rather than a biological factor.

Butler suggests that we should think of gender as free-floating and fluid rather than fixed: " When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one. " (Butler, 1990, p. 6) Butler argues that the way we perceive gender roles lies at the very root of inequality of the sexes. Her argument is that if we deconstruct the way society views gender roles, this might lead to changes in political culture.

In other words, if there were no longer conventional roles for either gender, it would not be unusual for a woman to be in a position of power at work or for a man to stay at home and look after children. Gradually, the patriarchal society which exists would change to become a truly equal one: " If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old. (Butler, 1990, p. 149)

Butler's ideas are vague and she gives no concrete examples of exactly how people should go about subverting ideas of gender identity. She implies that gender identities can be made and re-made at will, an idea that many people, would reject. Again, this is an unrealistic proposal for the majority of

people to carry out. Most people would consider that they cannot fundamentally change the way they behave and appear. Butler's ideas seem particularly unhelpful when considering the problems which women face outside the developed West.

Trying to challenge the sex-gender-desire link is unlikely to rank very highly in Middle Eastern countries for example. In developed countries, such as Britain, however, perhaps Butler's ideas do have a part to play. After all, in Britain today, most of the legislative obstacles to female participation in public life have been removed, yet inequalities still persist. Identities referring to groups or roles are motivated by self -esteem, self-efficacy, self-consistency and self-regulation.

Indeed recent research in social identity theory and in identity theory appears to be moving in a common direction; both are considering multiple motives that lead one to act in keeping with that which most clearly represents the group or role. Individuals may catogorise themselves in particular ways (in a group or role) not only to fulfill the need to feel valuable and worthy (the self esteem motive) but also to feel competent and effective (the self efficacy motive) (Cast, Stets, and Burke 1999; Stets 1997).

Yet, although the group, role and personal identities provide different sources of meaning, it is also likely that these different identities overlap. Not only are identities socially constructed, but they are also synthetic creations. In the words of A, L, Epstein, the act if identity formation " represents the process by which the person seeks to integrate his various

statuses and roles, as well as his diverse experiences, into a coherent image of the self. " The link between culture and identity is integral to understanding identities.

Anthony Cohen cogently argues that " culture is the means by which we make meaning, and with which we make the world meaningful to ourselves, and ourselves meaningful to the world. Rather than being a monolithic determinant of behavior, culture is a versatile metaphor that functions as an " eloquent representation of identity. " The integration of Western concepts like ' lesbian' and ' gay' tend to redefine traditional categories, while retaining some cultural dignity in the way in which identities are experienced.

Identities and cultures involve tremendous complexities and the above mentioned gender identities and social values have been taken as a still fragment, in a singular space-time. Stuart Hall's observations on the topic of identity provide an appropriate point form which to assess the paradigms of the self-definition. Hall argues that an identity is best understood as a " process of identification… something that happens over time, that is never absolutely stable, that is subject to the play of history and the play of difference.

Because people reformulate their self-definitions in relationship to historical contingencies and, therefore, their identities are in a constant state of flux, Hall advises us to think of an identity as a " production is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside,

representation. ” The postmodern idea of identity is opposite to that of modernity. The postmodern idea of identity knows no fixed boundaries between people and labels. When identities are relativised, they are consequently diminished to a contingent construct.

The ultimate conclusion is that we are free to shape and choose our own identity. On the other hand, in modernist terms, one is an engineer, a student, a man or a woman- or a combination of these social roles, and possibilities and identities are relatively fixed (Ott 2003, 57). From the literature I would argue that today that the majority view identity as being dynamic and fluid. The postmodern concept of social identity argues that there is no fixed concept of identity; we are not simply defined by our profession, gender or any other social categories.

However by educating and providing us with social, political, economic, national, religious and cultural milieu, society offers us a wide spectrum of roles to play, and we are rewarded if we play these roles as well as possible. The traditions, the dispositions and the country where we live – push us to play certain roles. Each role inevitably epitomises some fixed identity. Society prefers to operate with fixed identities – they help to divide people into groups.

However individually we prefer to see ourselves as dynamic and go through a process of self-definition, which can be understood as a person's attempt to determine a " fixed point of thought and being" from which to orient oneself. Stuart Hall writes that " identities are a kind of fixed point of thought

and being, a ground of action, a still point in a turning world. " Most people would recognize that our identities have changed over time, but this is gradual and is influenced by a number of individual and cultural factors.

What we are working towards is identity as a moving category where old categories and binary oppositions can be challenged and deconstructed, and the end result the formation of hybrid identities which can promise, in one sense to move beyond identity at least as we have known it in the modern world. To close, " There are no identities, but only processes of identification. The identities to which we pompously refer, as if they existed independently of speakers, become (and disappear) only through such acts of identification, in short through their utterance. "