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978-0-521-73209-3 - Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists

Edited by Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston and Rose McDermott

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Introduction

Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott

This volume outlines a variety of definitions and methodologies for studying social identities in a diverse set of contexts within American politics, comparative politics, and international relations. As such, we hope it will serve as a primer on the analysis and methodology of identity scholarship for a wide range of interested researchers. Political scientists have long enjoyed access to many excellent guides to mainstream theories and methods, yet those wanting to do research on social identities have had to synthesize enormous literatures on their own, with no practical guide to the alternatives they might employ in their scholarship. This volume aims to be such a road map, both analytically and methodologically. The chapters include a broad array of definitions as well as methodological options available for scholarly research on identity, including methods currently in use and some promising newer ones.

The chapters of this volume demonstrate concretely how to conduct identity research using several different methodological options. Each chapter shows how the ideas that underlie identity are applied in the context of individual research and what sorts of insights such projects can yield. In this way, the combined chapters create a whole greater than the sum of its parts; by aggregating the various specific methodological approaches, the text provides a coherent basis for the general examination of identity in the study of political science.

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IDENTITY

Comparison to Previous Work in Other Fields

Political science is not the only field that has examined and attempted to define and measure identities rigorously. Other disciplines, most prominently psychology, have long invoked, measured, and tested various models of identity in their attempts to create and establish internally valid and reliable instruments and hypotheses about human behavior.¹ Many important conceptualizations have evolved from this tradition, some of which focus on adolescent development, where various aspects of identity are often assumed to remain in flux until later consolidation.² Most adult identity measurement scales, however, have focused predominantly, if not exclusively, on measures of ethnic or cultural identification, and several measures have been devised.³ Many of these attempts to develop identity scales have been designed for specific utility in assessing and treating various clinical populations.⁴

In this volume, we build and expand on this work in identity in three important ways. First, rather than restricting ourselves to an individual or intrapsychic definition, we examine identity as a collective concept. In this way, we hope to explore how individuals establish social and political identities, which can overlap between and among different people and groups. Second, we explore established identities in adults. Although our investigations can easily be applied to younger members of society, we do not focus on the developmental aspects of

¹ Numerous studies of identity can also be found in psychiatry, management, and substance abuse research.

² These include the Extended Objective Identity measure of Ego Identity States (EOM-EIS-II) (Bennion and Adams 1986). This measure is typically used to assess identity in late adolescence and appears best utilized to take repeated or continuous measures of identity statuses over time. The Utrecht-Groningen Identity development scale (Meeus, Iedema, and Maassen 2002), for example, focuses on how teens explore various relational and social identities before making identity commitments.

³ For example, the Orthogonal Cultural Identification Scale (OCIS) (Oetting and Beauvais 1990–1991) allows an individual to demonstrate independent identification with more than one culture – for example, minority and white American cultures. Similar attempts at such assessments are presented in the Citrin and Sears and Lee chapters in this volume.

⁴ One of these, the Sun-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (Ownbey and Horridge 1998), is based on a successful earlier scale designed to help assess underserved Hispanic populations. In another example, some intriguing work examining the interaction between cognitive, emotional, and situational factors in explaining attributions for success among African American students has also used identity scales, in this case the African American Acculturation Scale (Smith and Hopkins 2004), to help assess educational outcomes. Interestingly, even white identity has been examined from this perspective, using implicit association measures (Knowles and Peng 2005) to measure response latency to predict the degree of in-group identification. This model of dominant group identification sheds light on the way in which individuals link evaluations of themselves to evaluations of their in-group.

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identity formation and consolidation. Third, we expand the definition of social identity beyond ethnic and cultural identifications to include other forms of social and political identification. While racial and cultural identifications remain central to our concerns, such interests do not exclude other important social identifications, including religious, gender, and class associations.

Identity as Independent and Dependent Variables

Throughout this volume, most of the authors treat identity as an independent variable, a factor to be measured and examined for its impact on other important variables and outcomes. This notion raises at least three important considerations that merit acknowledgment from the outset. First, the assumption of identity as an independent variable rests on a notion that individuals indeed possess certain identities that can be better understood with improved and more accurate measurement techniques and strategies. Even if it is the case that improved measurement can help scholars access identity in a more reliable and valid fashion, it is also theoretically possible that certain individuals do not have clear and stable identities in the way we conventionally suppose. Rather, like individuals who create a response to satisfy a pollster and answer a question without really having a strong opinion, some people may not feel strong identifications with the particular social or political groups we select to interrogate. Certainly, it is likely that many people espouse stronger attachments to certain groups, perhaps racial or gender categories, that are harder to change than others, such as class, which may be more amenable to change over time with education or employment. Nonetheless, we should remain aware of the fact that identity may not always be as real as apparent.

Second, identity often exists as a dependent variable as well as an independent one. In conducting research, scholars must be clear about whether they want to know if identity is causing a person to do a particular thing (an independent variable), or if something else is causing a person to adopt a particular identity (a dependent variable). Certain measures can be used to assess identity as either type of variable, but analysts must be clear about the nature of their causal model in investigating their phenomena of interest.

Identity and Action

Identity, like any form of categorization, proves intrinsically interesting. But the question remains: how does holding an identity translate into a particular type of action or behavior? Just because a person holds a particular identity does not necessarily mean that she will act in a particular way because of it. Motivation remains a key component in the urge for any individual to act on the basis of any

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given identification. Some differences in motivation may reflect individual temperament; others can indicate strong powers of social persuasion and support; and still others may demonstrate institutional incentives and support. But in any model that examines the impact of identity on particular outcomes, the motivation to transform identity into action cannot be ignored, and many of the chapters in this volume – by empirically and theoretically connecting social identities with outcomes – go some way toward addressing the issue of motivation or the link between identity and action.⁵

METHODS FOR MEASURING IDENTITY

In our survey of the scholarly literature on identity, we found that surveys, content analysis, discourse analysis, and ethnography were the most widely used methods for measuring identity. We did not discover any systematic links between these methods and the types of identity they were used to measure, although nearly all studies of identity included some sort of case study. We also identified two additional methods – cognitive mapping and experiments – that offer great promise to supplement the dominant methods, although the research agendas for their widespread incorporation into identity research are still being formulated. Here we briefly review these methods and offer a few reflections on the tools available to scholars who are interested in measuring identity.

Surveys

Surveys provide the backbone of a great deal of research on public opinion and political behavior. Structured interviews of large numbers of people offer information that may be difficult to extract using alternative methodologies. These techniques can be adapted to great benefit in identity research as well because they allow individuals and groups to offer and establish their own self-definitions.⁶ Open-ended survey and interview instruments in particular allow

⁵ Social identity theory (SIT), discussed in some detail in Chapter 12, is one area of identity research that squarely addresses the question of motivation. SIT presents an advance over previous models of social categorization because it includes notions of motivation and does not rely solely on cognitive biases and processes. Rather, SIT assumes that people are motivated to see both themselves and others in distinct ways and to feel better about themselves as a result of these social comparisons. SIT thus attempts to explain stereotyping and prejudice as not simply the result of cognitive bias or misunderstanding but rather as a motivated process designed to help people feel better about themselves.

⁶ For guidance on surveys and interviews related to identity research, see chapters 3–5 in Bauer and Gaskell 2000; on interviews, see Briggs 1986; McCracken 1988; Rubin and Rubin 1995; and Gubrium and Holstein 2002; on surveys more generally, see Fink 2003.

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respondents to present their own notions of who they are, what matters to them and why, and how they decide who is or is not included in their group, without being classified according to the researcher's prior biases and interpretations. Surveys and interviews have the obvious advantage of allowing researchers to ask specific questions about identity. These techniques allow interested researchers to address directly questions of content and contestation.

As a general rule, surveys have been fairly straightforward in how they tap into the content of identities. The questions are often a direct inquiry into self-described attributes, attitudes, and practices that respondents believe that they should express as a member of a particular social group. Early work on party identification done by the Social Survey Center at the University of Michigan, for instance, simply asked respondents how important it was to them to think of themselves as members of a political group. This type of question was adapted to the analysis of social identity (Hooper 1976). Other surveys ask equally straightforward questions. The World Values Survey asks about how proud respondents are to have an identity as, say, a particular nationality.⁷ The use of surveys to analyze the content and contestation of identities has since been well established.⁸ Not only may surveys be combined with interviews, but experiments may also be embedded in surveys (e.g., Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). The scholarly record makes it clear that survey research has been and will continue to be a critical method for measurement of social identities.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is, according to Neuendorf (2004a: 33), “a summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method.” The “message component” is the unit of analysis, and those components are frequently summarized quantitatively. Whereas discourse analysis relies on the interpretive skills of the scholar to mediate between the reader and the text or practice under study, content analysis is designed to limit mediation. The critical step is the creation of a coding scheme that is written out in great detail in order to ensure reliability among coders of the text.⁹

⁷ For an application of these questions in developing measures of nationalism and patriotism, see Furia 2002. See also the measures for national identity and pride in Smith and Jarkko 2001; their paper draws on a 1995 cross-national survey on national identity conducted by the International Social Survey Programme (<http://www.issp.org/natpride.doc>).

⁸ For examples, in various subfields of political science, see M. Barnett 1999 for international relations; Citrin et al. 1994 and Jones-Correa and Leal 1996 for American politics; and Laitin 2002 for comparative politics.

⁹ Recently there have been advances in computer-aided content analysis, but most research is still based on human coding.

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Content analysis can perform two basic functions.¹⁰ Its first function is the provision of frequency counts of both key words and categories of terms. The former is self-evident. The latter allows the virtually unlimited categorization of a text into multiple meanings. Words can be clustered along shared dimensions, and the categories themselves can be analyzed in terms of relative frequency. The content of these categories can be almost anything the researcher requires. Because the researcher is in charge of building these dictionaries, the meanings are, in a sense, imposed by the researcher and his or her dictionary.

The second function entails the provision of concordances, also known as keyword-in-context (KWIC) analysis. A KWIC analysis lists all instances where a particular term is mentioned in a given text. This method can be very useful for examining what the semantic, grammatical, or substantive context of identity language is. The software for performing quantitative analysis has improved substantially in recent years and can now be adapted to texts in multiple languages.¹¹

Unlike discourse analysis, which is used to place texts and practices in their intersubjective contexts, content analysis is based on the idea that the individual text is meaningful on its own and that a summary of the messages within it is the desirable outcome (see Hardy, Harley, and Phillips 2004; Neuendorf 2004a). So, whereas scholars employing discourse analysis rely on their close readings, those who undertake content analysis seek to count statements of being and purpose associated with a group identity and the other groups against which it may be defined, as well as to analyze the semantic qualities of such statements of being and purpose (Roberts 1997; Neuendorf 2002). Content analysis has not been used as widely as discourse analysis and surveys for the measurement of identities, but the usefulness of the method has been demonstrated.¹²

Discourse Analysis and Ethnography

Discourse analysis is the qualitative and interpretive recovery of meaning from the language that actors use to describe and understand social phenomena.¹³ Most

¹⁰ For guidance on conducting quantitative content analysis, see Neuendorf 2002; chapters 8, 16–17 in Bauer and Gaskell 2000; Titscher et al. 2000; Popping 2000; and Wetherell 1987.

¹¹ For further discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of different content analysis software for the analysis of identity, see Lowe 2002. In addition, see the free software developed by Will Lowe for the Harvard Identity Project at <http://www.yoshikoder.org/>.

¹² For examples, see Herrera 2005; Eilders and Luter 2000; and Laitin 1998.

¹³ We recognize that discourse analysis is a contested notion (Herrera and Braumoeller 2004; Hardy, Harley, and Phillips 2004; Crawford 2004; Hopf 2004; Laffey and Weldes 2004; Neuendorf 2004a; Fierke 2004). Here we offer a broad conception of discourse analysis that inevitably elides some difficult questions of ontology and epistemology but is designed to include all those scholars who explicitly adopt discourse analysis as well as those who implicitly do so by analyzing texts to establish for readers their sense of the intersubjective context.

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scholars who employ discourse analysis in their research attempt to contextualize the texts they are studying among other texts or the larger social context.¹⁴ The very notion of discourse is usually understood as a collection of related texts, constituted as speech, written documents, and social practices, that produce meaning and organize social knowledge. Scholars have relied on structured and semistructured interviews and their own informed interpretations of a variety of texts, including policy statements, political party platforms, newspaper articles, classic texts of prominent public intellectuals, speeches of political leaders, and the minutes of government meetings, as well as less explicitly political texts such as popular novels.

As with other methods, discourse analysis places unique demands on the analyst. Rather than statistics, programming, or modeling, deep social knowledge and a familiarity with interrelated texts are required for an analyst to recover meanings from discourse. The critical task is for an author to convince his or her readers that a particular reconstruction of the intersubjective context of some social phenomenon – in our case, a collective identity – is useful for understanding an empirical outcome. For our purposes, scholars who write rich descriptions of cases are engaged in discourse analysis, especially in the sense that they are relying on their own interpretive skills and social knowledge to write convincingly about the content and contestation of an identity. Discourse analysis thus can be considered the qualitative contextualization of texts and practices in order to describe social meanings.

Ethnography can be understood as discourse analysis in its richest, most intensive, and most anthropological form. Because ethnography involves the scholar being situated within a social context to become part of its discourse – its language and its practices – the research that results has the advantage of conveying social meanings as they are experienced. Although many scholars who implicitly or explicitly use discourse analysis to study identity are concerned about the ways in which they themselves mediate the data they extract from texts and practices, ethnographers embrace the challenge of revealing and correcting for their own mediation of the social meanings of the society under study.¹⁵ Discourse analysis and ethnography have been important tools for the study of social identities, and in some disciplines, namely anthropology, have been the dominant method.

Cognitive Mapping

Cognitive mapping is an alternate method to either content or discourse analysis for measurement of social identities. Rather than the subjective

¹⁴ For guidance on conducting discourse analysis, see Phillips and Hardy 2002; Wodak and Meyer 2001; chapters 9–12 in Bauer and Gaskell 2000; and Titscher et al. 2000.

¹⁵ For a few examples of ethnographic discourse analysis, see Blee 2002; Field 1999; and Noyes 2003.

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interpretation involved in discourse analysis or the calculation in quantitative content analysis, cognitive mapping entails the description of cause-effect relationships that are both implicit and explicit in a text.

Cognitive mapping entails breaking down selected texts from a decision-making process into all of their component cause-effect relationships (Axelrod 1976). The researcher then determines whether these causal relationships are negative or positive – that is, whether a change in direction in the causal concept leads to a similar or dissimilar change in the effect concept (e.g., does an increase in arms lead to an increase or decrease of security?). The technique can help uncover the deep structure of an argument – the presence or absence of certain cause-effect assumptions, and the consistencies and inconsistencies across cause-effect arguments. These maps can be compared across actors within an identity group, or aggregated within the group and compared with the maps of out-groups, to determine what cause-effect relationships are shared by actors and, if so, the degree to which they are shared. Cognitive mapping can be done either “by hand” using human coders or by computer, as discussed in Chapter 8 of this volume. Cognitive mapping is not yet widely used in identity research, but we think it has great potential.

Experiments

Experiments, another methodology by which to measure identity (Tajfel 1970, 1981a, 1982; Aronson et al. 1990), offer the advantage of unparalleled control and assessment of causality. They have been used a great deal in psychology to examine questions related to personal and social identity, including the development of social identity theory, mentioned earlier. Experiments begin with a particular question that the researcher seeks to answer. A particular experimental protocol that demands the random assignment of subjects to various conditions is then designed. Each condition typically manipulates only one variable of central interest or a very few. This allows the experimenter to determine what caused any observed changes in outcome between individuals and groups. Random assignment ensures that any differences that emerge derive from the experimental manipulation and are not merely the consequence of preexisting or systematic divergences between individuals and groups. In this way, experimental procedure allows true leverage in making causal arguments. Because nothing else except the variable of interest shifts in a well-designed experiment, observers can assume that the manipulation itself caused any changes that are witnessed.

Social psychology possesses a long tradition of experimental investigation into various aspects of personal and collective identity. Although political

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scientists examining identity have tended not to use experiments as a method, most work on social identity theory (SIT) within social psychology rests on experimental evidence, and SIT has been one of the most successful research paradigms for studying identity, at least in terms of the quantity and quality of research it has generated.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE VOLUME

Identity scholarship has so far limited itself to a somewhat narrow methodological band, taking little notice of newer, less traditional options. We are proponents of methodological eclecticism, particularly with regard to identity work. Addressing the range of options, this volume advocates use of a variety of methodologies for studying identity and highlights, in particular, surveys, content analysis and cognitive mapping, discourse analysis and ethnography, and experiments. The book's chapters cover this wide range of methodologies, outlining through example the particular benefits of each.

Part I considers identity definition, conceptualization, and measurement alternatives. The first chapter, by Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott, presents a definition of identity, where identity is a social category that varies in terms of content and contestation. Content describes the meaning of a collective identity, and the content of social identities may take the form of four nonmutually exclusive types: constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons, and cognitive models. Contestation refers to the degree of agreement within a group over the content of the shared category. This analytic framework thus enables social identities to be compared according to the agreement and disagreement about their meanings by members of the group.

The next two chapters demonstrate how various methods can be combined to define and measure identity in useful and creative ways. Chapter 2, by Henry E. Brady and Cynthia S. Kaplan, considers the conceptualization and measurement of politically relevant social identities, such as ethnic identity, which have figured prominently in motivating and shaping political action. They argue that a variety of methods and data – history, demography, surveys, primary source materials, content analysis, and discourse analysis – are necessary in order to fully comprehend the political role of ethnicity at the mass public and elite level. They illustrate the utility of combining methods to construct group-based social identity measures by considering seven groups in four Soviet republics around 1990: Estonians and Russians in Estonia, Tatars and Russians in the Republic of Tatarstan, the Komi and Russians in the Komi Republic, and (to a lesser extent) Russians in Russia.

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Similarly, Chapter 3, by Donald A. Sylvan and Amanda K. Metskas, considers a range of methodological options, but in this chapter the focus is on the case of Israeli-Palestinian relations. Focusing on five research projects that used experimental, survey, interview, narrative, and text-based data, Sylvan and Metskas consider the trade-offs between alternative approaches to measuring identity in this context. This chapter argues that the nature of the question and the role of elites can help determine the appropriate measurement strategy to use. As the chapter shows, many real-world identity-related puzzles require multimethod approaches because each approach to measuring identity has its own strengths and weaknesses.

The remaining chapters all proceed by presenting a measurement method that the authors have applied to a particular empirical issue. In essence, these chapters represent extended methodological discussions based on the individual authors' experiences using identity as a variable in larger research projects. Each of these chapters details the workings of a particular definition and method, discussing both its advantages and disadvantages. The chapters are divided into four sections: surveys, content analysis (including cognitive mapping), discourse analysis and ethnography, and experiments.

The first section applying various measurement methods to the definition of identity concentrates on surveys. Chapter 4, by Taeku Lee, examines the conspicuous gap between social theory on race and ethnicity, which stresses its fluidity, multiplicity, and contingency, and quantitative, survey-based studies of race and ethnicity, which remain focused on finding a common, fixed set of categories that reliably and validly reflect how individuals think of themselves in racial or ethnic terms. This chapter proposes a new approach to measuring ethnoracial self-identification. "Identity point allocation" gives respondents latitude over how many groups to identify with and how to weight the strength of their identification with each group. This approach, tested in a 2003 study of adult Californians, shows a demonstrably more graded and multiracial portrait of ethnoracial self-identification than that found in standard survey measures, including the 2000 U.S. Census. Importantly, the chapter argues that the demographic and attitudinal characteristics we infer about a given racial or ethnic group may vary, sometimes quite substantially, by how we ask respondents to self-identify by race or ethnicity.

Chapter 5, by Jack Citrin and David O. Sears, explores the implications of holding multiple identities, concentrating on how individuals balance national and ethnic identities in multiethnic states. Citrin and Sears's case study considers the United States and the current demographic and ideological challenge to the idea of *E pluribus unum*. By reviewing alternative measures of identity and some of the obstacles to systematic measurement, the chapter argues for the