Identities and Interests: Comments on Rawi Abdelal's *National Purpose in the World Economy* (Cornell, 2001), Ted Hopf's *Social Construction of International Politics* (Cornell, 2002), and Jutta Weldes' *Constructing National Interests* (Minnesota, 1999) by Audie Klotz (prepared for the "Identities Matter" workshop at OSU).

One of my biggest frustrations, as I've been reading about identities for the past few years, has been its conflation with interests. Rawi, Ted and Jutta go further than many in distinguishing between the two. I offer here some comments on how we might push their insights further, keeping in mind that this question of the relationship between identities and interests is not the center of any of their books. (Note that I reference Jutta's book, rather than the article she suggested, in order to give all three authors comparable treatment.)

Any discussion of the relationship between identities and interests, of course, will depend in part on conceptualizations of identity (and interests). All three authors agree that identities are social constructs and proceed to analyze identities in domestic societies. Yet they advance significantly different views about how identities become politically salient, because they draw on alternative models of the state-society relationship.

Abdelal, in his study of divergent economic trajectories of post-Soviet states, equates identity with nationalism; Russia occupies the role of the "other." Nationalists politicize economic policy debates, contending over the content of national goals. The balance between nationalists, communists and industrialists explains variations in policy outcomes. In European-oriented countries such as Lithuania, nationalists and communists allied in an aversion to on-going economic ties to Russia. In contrast, communists in Belarus dominated policy-making, leading to the continuation of a close relationship with Russia. Because of internal regional splits, neither communists nor nationalists prevailed in Ukraine, resulting in an inconsistent relationship with Russia. He argues that industrialists in all of these countries prefer decreased dependence on Russia, hence it's the alliances – or lack thereof – between nationalists and communists who determine the outcome.

In effect, Rawi reduces identity to coalition dynamics (or perhaps more accurately, a post-Soviet variant of European corporatism). A tension remains in the analysis whether identity matters in the form of the (contented) idea of nationalism at the societal level or as manifest in the agenda of a societal group which mobilizes around a specific notion of nationalism. To some extent Rawi recognizes this tension in his distinction between "nationalism" and "national identity," the former being what we would probably label national interest, the latter, ideology. [Perhaps this tension gets resolved in the case chapters, which I have not yet had time to read.]

Hopf concentrates more explicitly on the identities of decision-makers, rather than interest groups, in his study of Russian foreign policy. He seeks to understand how changes in domestic discourses affect Russia's key strategic relationships in 1955 compared to 1999. Rather than adopting a relatively uncontested notion of nationalism, he identifies different strains of thinking manifest in Russian society. Multiple discourses imply multiple potential "others," leading to a more fluid and contested understanding of identity. As different discourses dominate at various times, policies change. Contestation presumably happens within the bureaucracy of the state – and perhaps within the psyches of decision-makers who may embody multiple societal
discourses. (A comparison between Hopf's work and Neumann's *Uses of the Other* on these points would be worthwhile.)

Ted's approach avoids the tension in Rawi's work between identity as ideas or social groups by landing strongly in favor of identity as ideas. Yet the connection between societies and decision-makers remains too loose. He wants to synthesize social psychology and post-structuralism through the shared vocabulary of Self and Other, but I'm not sure he pulls this off ontologically. Are individuals, social groups, or states the actors? Apparently he rejects the notion of the state as an instrument of society's discursive identities (as in Rawi's analysis), because he refers to a state's identity, in addition to societal identities. But how do decision-makers learn, absorb, distill and institutionalize societal discourses into a state identity – and when might government discourse shape domestic identities (presumably more likely in 1955 than 1999)? Are there competing identities within the state, as well as society? [The case study chapters may resolve these questions.]

Weldes concentrates more explicitly than Hopf on the role of government leaders in the articulation of identities. They agree that, rather than trying to locate identities with particular actors (leaders, groups or the state), discourses manifest identities. Yet Jutta's leaders actively interpret the domestic and international contexts within which they act, whereas Ted's leaders are constructed by societal discourses. This is an ontological rather than simply methodological distinction (e.g., both adopt textual analysis). State discourse, in situations such as the so-called Cuban Missile Crisis, can shape societal understandings, even while leaders are constrained by their need for legitimation by that same society in order to pursue foreign policies (what Jutta calls "interpellation"). For Jutta, processes of "articulation" by policy-makers fix meanings (such as the nature of a threat); in Ted's conceptualization, this appears to be more of a (social-) psychological process. Furthermore, in Jutta's world, policy-makers draw on international as well as domestic discourses. The result is a more dynamic and balanced relationship between the international system, states and domestic societies than Ted's domestic societal approach.

One downside to this increased complexity and fluidity, however, is a blurring of the distinction between identities and interests. Because both identities and interests are socially constructed, Jutta in practice tends to conflate the two. The title of her book, for example, proclaims "interests" even though she refers to interests, identities and threats almost interchangeably. She uses the term "security imaginary," for example, in ways consistent with some notions of identity but leaves open questions such as whether there is one security imaginary or contending views. Her empirical application, at least, is precise. She lists four components of US identity: leadership, defense of freedom, need for strength, and credibility. But what makes these features of "identity" rather than components of "interests"? An implicit sequencing argument that takes these concerns (identities) as general precedents to the articulation of precise goals (interests) in response to specific actions (such as the placement of missiles in Cuba). But in practice do leaders use these more general linguistic resources of identity in qualitatively different ways than the more goal-oriented ones of interests? Are identities more (or less?) constraining than interests – or do they function as independent, potentially competing, sometimes complementary, discourses? Why might some linguistic resources be more powerful or lasting than others? (Another range of questions involves the extent to which identities get produced by outsiders, and how those external constructions factor into internal articulations and interpellations, e.g.
Soviet and/or Cuban constructions of the US. A comparison with Doty's *Imperial Encounters* might be fruitful.)

Jutta's multiple strands of identity and interest discourse share similarities with Ted's emphasis on the inductive "recovery" of competing visions in domestic Russian society. Ted in effect also blurs the boundaries between identities and interests, but he privileges identities rather interests in his research design. For Jutta, the two concepts are apparently embedded in a mutually constitutive relationship (though she does also periodically assert that identities create interests), whereas Ted's logic is explicitly unidirectional and linear: interests derive from threats and opportunities, which are defined by identities. In practice his book is all about identities. Pairs of chapters seek to demonstrate a correlation between societal identities and state identities, as manifest in foreign relations. Presumably interest formation would be a subsequent installment of the analysis which could explain Russia's particular policies; in the meantime, he basically ignores interests.

On this point Rawi's work departs significantly from the other two. While he agrees that identities are social constructions, he views interests in material terms. Like Ted, he adopts a linear logic, but identity becomes the intervening variable between interests and policy outcome, not the independent variable leading to interests (and then policy). Societal groups and hence governments, drawing on cross-nationally variable notions of identity but facing similar structural economic constraints, interpret interests differently; consequently, they advocate alternative policies. Nationalists are willing to bear costlier burdens, he argues, because they view the consequences of policies within a longer timeframe. By inverting the ordering of identities and interests, Rawi reminds us that diverse sequencing possibilities exist. No matter how important we think they are, we shouldn't presume that identities come first in some sort of linear model. We see more clearly in Rawi's work what analytical credit he gives to identity compared to other explanations, where Ted and Jutta care more about establishing the constructedness of identity/interests in contrast to arguments that ignore identity and/or take interests to be objective.

Rawi, Ted and Jutta all call for more attention to domestic dynamics as they distance themselves Wendt's international perspective. But I fear that they may be replicating the long-standing disconnect between those who pursue system-level theories and those who concentrate on domestic politics. We shouldn't presume that identities derive solely from internal dynamics to the exclusion of systemic (international, global, and/or transnational) sources. In our efforts to put identity at the center of IR research, I think we need more clearly articulated alternative (non-identity) domestic perspectives combined with studies which seek to understand the relationship between internal and external identities. (I leave aside for the moment the big issue of the limitations of the state-centric orientation of this whole discussion.) This next generation of work will enhance our understanding of when and how identities matter, building on the compelling and diverse evidence offered by these three scholars that identities must be taken seriously.