Needless to say, it is a treat to get extended comments on one's work from Debbie Larson, Karin Fierke, and Doug Blum. Just as Ted no doubt intended, the discussants' reactions contain all sorts of clever ideas, thoughtful objections, and points from which a discussion might depart. So many good points, in fact, that were I feeling more self-indulgent and less pressed for time, I'd be tempted to go off on long tangents in response and to take several more weeks to draft a reaction. Since it is clear that Ted did not intend for author responses to post-date the conference itself, I enclose the following with apologies for being a tardy anyhow and with the caveat that I still intend to go off on a few tangents.

I also want to begin by explaining in just a little more detail my rationale for sending around the chapter on social identity theory (SIT) and the Suez Crisis. Because Nick Onuf and I teach in the same department (along with several other "constructivists" — e.g., Lisa Prugl and Francois Debrix), we tend to attract students to our small graduate programs who have (or acquire) an interest in constructivism. In the seminars I teach, these students are also sometimes drawn to SIT. Collectively, however, they struggle to do anything interesting with either body of theory. And, mea culpa, I struggle to advise them. It's easy to find evidence of in-group and out-group identities, but the resulting masters theses and doctoral dissertations tend toward the descriptive. We can adopt the psychological language of efficient, simplifying stereotypes to tell the story of the sudden discovery by many Cuban-Americans during the Elian Gonzalez affair, for example, that they were themselves "other" for many Americans living elsewhere. (Typical reaction: "I never understood how racist Americans were until now." Note that "Americans" also become "other.") We can also comment on discourses of race, religion (e.g., Elian as Christ-child), Cuban-ness, family, and so on, that informed the evolving Cuban-American identity. Yet to note that people rely on simplifying categories to make sense of the world (psychologically and/or linguistically), that these categories are historically specific, and that they are often emotion- and value-laden, all seems pretty clear at the outset. It's usually presumed in the research question: Why were Cuban-Americans vilified? Why do Arabs and Jews (Turks and Kurds, Catholics and Protestants, etc.) hate each other? Gradually, I've become more and more skeptical about what looks like an obvious synergy. Or, at least, I've become more aware of the difficulty in connecting psychological and constructivist work on identity.
In my chapter on SIT and the Suez Crisis, I tried to argue that the minimal group paradigm (MGP) is indeterminate, predicting the emergence of social categories but nothing much about their content. I also meant to argue (though I don't think it really comes through) that constructivism typically gives us more nuanced accounts of social types, (thus, perhaps, content) but usually comes up short in spelling out mechanisms of "type" or identity construction. I did go on to say, in any case, that constructivism gives us a way of explaining how categories gain social standing. So each seemed to have something to offer the other. Since I wrote this, I've become more skeptical rather than more optimistic (the usual progression, I suppose). Rather than getting the best of both worlds, my chapter managed to have the failings of both. The evolution of the identities Eden's exaggeration of traits he attributed to Egyptians during the crisis, and his apparent attribution errors in explaining Egyptian motives, are consistent with SIT. But other British policymakers (and most American policymakers at the time) resisted the same inferences. Nor does constructivism seem to add that much to the picture. "Nasser=Hitler" was only one discursive possibility among (presumably) many.

In general, therefore, I'm inclined to think that the discussants were being kinder than they might have been. They knew (or certainly would have expected) before reading the chapter that Eden demonized Nasser during the Suez crisis. They also knew (or would have expected) that available stereotypes about Egyptians, and historical analogies (to Hitler, for example) fleshed out the identity ascribed by the British leaders to their Egyptian counterparts. This is what frustrates me about both bodies of theory: they're easy to employ descriptively, but provide less certain guides to prediction or the discovery of non-obvious practices. I shouldn't blame social identity theorists and constructivists for my own failings, of course, so please interpret this chapter as a self-interested plea for better integrative theory (not, of course, as proof of its impossibility). Now let me turn to a few other issues that emerge in the discussants' comments.

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1 I think Karin would object to how I put this here. Categories always, already have social standing because they're embedded in language. I agree, and this is a point on which it's hard to speak the language of psychology and linguistics simultaneously. Still, it doesn't seem unreasonable to suggest that a generative mechanism can operate at the individual level but rely on language (the social level) for raw material. Incidentally, I suspect I was being too generous about what "rule-oriented" constructivism can accomplish. I'm not sure that it does tell us how categories gain social standing. Rather, as just noted, it assumes that this question is meaningless since all categories already have social standing in language. On this score, constructivists like Wendt (1999), who rely on symbolic interactionism, seem to have much more to say than Onuf (1989) or Kratochwil (1989).

2 My impression is that the discussants reactions run the gamut on this point. Debbie Larson is "not optimistic" (for slightly different reasons than those I gave above, but I think we share many of the same concerns). Doug Blum also seems pessimistic, partly
Emotion, Reason, and Language

All of the discussants took my paper to task for its purely cognitive presentation of social identity. Debbie Larson points out, for example, that European SIT theorists such as Henri Tajfel (1981, 1982) reject the cognitive individualism of John Turner's (1982, 1991) "American school" (it seems that social psychologists themselves find it difficult to resist the lure of nationalist categories of identity) and place greater emphasis on the motivated desire to think positively of one's own groups. It's true that I relied most heavily on the purely cognitive version of SIT (because I take this to be the most "minimal" version of the MGP). And it's also true — that is, I agree with the discussants — that this seems to leave out something important. But where and how emotion is incorporated raises interesting questions.

Tajfel and his associates, so far as I know, don't argue that affect drives the process of social identification (what is minimal about the MGP is precisely that it doesn't assume any motivated "background"). On the other hand, emotion does contribute to how we think of groups: we want to associate positive things with our own group. So the emotional content of identities is a consequence of the category, combined with another psychological mechanism for positive or negative evaluation. Cottam (1977), for one, traces the relevant emotions to Heider's (1958) balance theory (and, thus, takes us into another debate about whether emotions rest on cognition or vice versa).

So far, however, none of this is necessarily inconsistent with my account of Eden and Nasser. It's pretty clear that emotion figures prominently in the story, but this doesn't mean that it's a cause of social identifications. The main point of SIT as I understand it (even European SIT) is that the mere presence of salient categories drives the process. Emotion seems to come later. On the other hand, some identity theorists do clearly take emotion as a starting point. Marilyn Brewer (1991) argues, for example, that the need to belong and the need for distinctiveness create a tension that gives rise to social identities. This could have been incorporated into my discussion of the Suez Crisis, but I'm concerned that it might amount to assuming what we want to explain. Doesn't it come close, in other words, to arguing that we have identities because we need identities?

because "cognitive and constructivist approaches attend to distinct analytical questions," and partly because of differences in methodology and even ontology (psychologists attend more to agency, constructivists to structure). Karin Fierke seems more guardedly optimistic, but not too impressed with efforts so far (no reason to disagree with that). Finally, Don Sylvan sees the greatest potential for each group to contribute to the other's research agenda. This should be fodder for an interesting discussion.
Now that I've raised these concerns, let me also say that I think it is probably language-oriented constructivists who have the most to gain from paying more attention to emotion. One can move back-and-forth fairly comfortably between discussions of cognitive and discursive categories. Social psychologists would probably accept Karin's argument that these categories cannot, themselves, be reduced to individuals. As she points out, learning these categories is a social process. And, likewise, speech act theorists recognize that language doesn't exist apart from speakers. Karin objects to my claim that "it is up to agents to determine categories," but I'll stand by it since I don't think it implies that agents do this de novo without any prior social-linguistic context. The existing structures of language are almost the only thing that agents can use to determine and invent categories (a process that is probably intrinsically evolutionary).

I say "almost," however, because I hesitate to treat speech as a synonym for all meaningful human activity. Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) developed a theory of how we use speech acts to convey meaning, but it doesn't follow that all meaningful acts are speech acts. This is where emotion might come in. Experiencing emotion is a meaningful act even if we have no words for it, right?

Many linguistic constructivists (both Onuf and Kratochwil, for example) also argue that language is intrinsically normative. Onuf thus rejects the distinction between constitutive and regulative speech acts (all speech simultaneously has both effects). But the mechanism that makes speech intrinsically regulative remains under-theorized. Perhaps emotion plays an important role here. Consider the difference between wanting to be virtuous and believing that we ought to be virtuous. Is this a cognitive difference, an emotional one, or something else?

From Language to Identity

Now that I've raised the issue of language, I should acknowledge that Debbie is right, of course, that my chapter is exceedingly schematic in its treatment of speech act theory. Partly, this is because other chapters in the edited book of which it was a part treated this in greater depth. But I think Debbie is still right to raise the issue, and I don't think my chapter handled it particularly well.

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3 Here's a brief summary. Onuf (1989), drawing on Austin (1962) and Black (1962) argues that we can do exactly three things with language. We can assert that something is the case (an instruction-rule), thereby fitting our words to the world. We can command others to do something about it (a directive-rule), which is an effort to fit the world to our words. Or we can promise to do something about it ourselves (a commitment-rule). There's a debate about whether this involves fitting our words to a
The only claim it specifically makes about the relationship between psychology and language is that the MGP explains how certain assertions (instruction-rules) can be translated into promises (commitment-rules) or commands (directive-rules). Knowing what kind of agent the "other" is, I argued, will affect our willingness to make promises and issue demands. That still seems reasonable, but the chapter doesn't return to this problem or show how social identification constrained language, in practice, in the Suez Crisis (which I think is an important failing). Still, even if I had demonstrated this in practice, the results might have seemed lackluster. As I argued at the beginning, "deductions" like this are nearly implicit in their premises (e.g., "Of course I'm not willing to do a deal with the devil").

Putting the problem in reverse now seems more promising to me. That is to say, I think it would be valuable to have a better theory of how to move from speech acts to social identity (rather than from SIT to the relevance of particular speech acts). The gap here is essentially the gap between what Debbie calls "the linguistic variant of constructivism as opposed to the symbolic interactionist variant proposed by Wendt." Wendt's categories of identity (enemy, rival, friend) are the products of social interaction within different logics of anarchy that presume these identities (e.g., a world of rivalry produces rivals). I'm being a little unfair to Wendt, but like Doug, I perceive a "certain theoretical circularity." With Onuf, on the other hand, there's no obvious link to social identities at all. That is, nothing bridges the gap between rudimentary speech acts and agent identities. Onuf starts out with a very basic process of linguistic construction, but has difficulty moving to specific postulates about identity (to be fair, this was never his objective). Wendt starts out on the other side of the gap and, finding himself already there, has enemies interacting with other enemies to produce further enmity. He also acknowledges the possibility of a fictional, neutral starting point, of course. But this is probably subject to the same sort of criticism as John Rawls' fictional "veil of ignorance." It's not clear what basis people would have for making real moral decisions behind a veil of ignorance. Likewise, it's not clear what basis people would have for assuming that symbolic interaction should lead anywhere, in particular, when the starting point is a fictionally neutral one.

Faced with this dilemma, I'm inclined to cast my lot with difficulty rather than tautology. That is, while it's certainly hard to see how one can move directly from speech act theory to social identity, it's no better to assume the relevant categories for the purpose of building a (consequently descriptive) account of symbolic interaction. One way out is to try to build intermediate theories connecting speech acts to discursive techniques that give rise, in turn, to various forms of agency. Katja Weber and I are trying to show, for example, that post-1945 German debates over the status of a divided future world, or whether it is an effort to fit the world to our words by binding our own actions.
Germany's proper role in Europe systematically opposed Lockean assertions about rights to Kantean commitments to a broader European community. They also systematically avoided a Hobbesian directive strategy (neither Bonn nor Berlin, of course, was in a position to issue directives). We see this as a way of connecting Onuf to Wendt.

Kinds of Interaction

Having been fairly critical of symbolic interactionism in my comments so far, I'd also like to raise a question about it. In different ways, all of the discussants express some concern about existing formulations of how social interaction works to ascribe identity. And they point out quite reasonably that my chapter on the Suez Crisis is careless (or, at least, overly relaxed) in moving back and forth between personal identities (Nasser as Hitler) and collective identities (the British Empire in decline). I won't bother to mount a defense, since I agree with the criticism. But even if I had been more careful, I suspect I would have been dissatisfied with existing accounts of how collective agents, in particular, "interact."

The two most straightforward possibilities, also alluded to in the discussants' comments, are mirroring and ascription. By mirroring, I have in mind the large body of work on mirror images that juxtaposes negative evaluations of the other with positive assessments of self (Bronfenbrenner 1961; Cottam 1977). The other possibility — I'll call it ascription, though I may mean something different than Karin does — is that one simply accepts categorizations of the self (the "me" in Debbie's terms, following George Herbert Mead) offered by others. If my friend compliments me on my stylish new jacket, for example, I think to myself, "Why yes, I am stylish." (At least, I would think this if anyone ever actually said it to me.)

But aren't there intermediate possibilities of social interaction — arguably, most interactions — that beg for more elaboration? Consider the plight of the French today. The US conveys a variety of negative signals to Paris, and I have no doubt that they (both the signals and Americans in general) are resented as a result. But this doesn't make Americans an enemy (not yet, anyway), and it doesn't mean that the French adopt a mirror image of themselves ("we are too a good ally!"). Instead, they reject the American message and suggest a different "menu" of social identities altogether: not realist identities of ally and enemy, for example, but late-modern identities of law-abiding international citizen. Nor does this quite seem like "sub-typing," which would be the standard SIT explanation (e.g., "we are a good ally, but we just disagree with you about this"). Instead, it transforms the discourse by substituting different terms altogether.

Debbie raises another example: the Arab reaction to Saddam Hussein's defeat. If it is demoralizing, this is because one at least partly accepts a negative imputation to
self-identity ("we are more powerless even than we feared"). This also looks like a different mechanism than those discussed above.

My impression, in short, is that symbolic interaction (as it is usually appropriated by constructivists, at any rate, to explain the "interactions" of collective agents such as states) is undertheorized. A fuller understanding of the possibilities (linguistically or psychologically) would probably help counter the criticism that constructivism and SIT both offer fairly simple, obvious propositions about the identities that can arise in international relations.

Concluding Points

I haven't managed to get to many of the other, excellent points raised by the discussants. One, raised by Doug and Karin especially, is the role methodological differences play in theoretical disputes between constructivists and psychologists. Personally, I'm inclined toward agnosticism and toward Don's injunction to embrace multi-method scholarship. But that just sidesteps the issue raised by Karin: is constructivism committed to post-positivist approaches and, if so, how do constructivists interpret positivist research? Since our panel will be followed, on Saturday, by one on "Methods and Identity," perhaps we'll find an occasion to pursue this problem.

In the meantime, I'm looking forward to seeing you all. Thank you for the wonderful, thought-provoking comments.

References


