The conspect for the lecture

WEEK 4

**Uniqueness and Differences.**

**Self and collectivity**

**The concept of "stigma"**

Just a brief reminder from the previous lecture

Jenkins:

- 'Identity' denotes the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their relations with other individuals and collectivities.

- 'Identification' is the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference.

- Taken – as they can only be – together, similarity and difference are the dynamic principles of identification, and are at the heart of the human worldy

But starting with the identity [social] deconstruction, we can't avoid the phenomenological perspective on looking at it. So, let's look at the Identity from the perspective of uniqueness and differences of those, who imply, implement, and execute it.

Identity turns on both sameness and uniqueness, what is it that makes each of us unique?

UNIQUENESS THE INNER SELF

One answer might be that nobody has exactly the same life: even siblings – even identical twins – do not share every aspect of life. But, more commonly, uniqueness is seen as something which belongs to the person in question and is nothing to do with the social world. The social world might impact upon it and shape it, but (it is generally assumed) it does not make it. What the 'it' in question is depends on the position taken. In some versions, it might be a unique combination of genes; in others, it is a 'soul'. However, in every case that posits some notion of some part of a person that is not produced by the social world, what is being posited is an essence: something that makes the person what she or he is. It is often seen as what lies 'inside' and is understood as being 'deeper' or 'truer' than what is 'outside'. So, although Western persons are probably comfortable with the idea that the social world produces part of who they are, and indeed with the idea that who they are can and will change, this is often accompanied by a notion of a 'true' or 'deep' self, which is seen as somehow outside all the social.

**Essentialists**

(1) they all in some sense presupposed antecedently existent minds or selves to get the social process under way;

(2) even in respect to the phases of mind or the self which they did attempt to account for socially, they failed to isolate the mechanism involved. The magic hat of the social, out of which mind and the self were to be drawn, was in part loaded in advance; and for the rest there was merely a pious announcement that the trick could be done, while the performance itself never took place.

Mead's endeavor is to show that mind and the self are without residue social emergent; and that language, in the form of the vocal gesture, provides the mechanism for their emergence.

Mead (1934) proposes a distinction between two dynamic aspects of the self: the 'me' who moves through the social world, existing in complex social relations (Mead uses the analogy of play), and the 'I' whose exact definition proves difficult, but which represents a *post hoc* reflection on the actions, perceptions and understandings of the 'me'. As Robin Williams (2000) notes, the 'I' cannot

be grasped since, as soon as we become aware of it, it becomes an object: it becomes, in effect, a 'me'.

Mead writes:

> If you ask, then, where directly in your own experience the 'I' comes in, the answer is that it comes in as a historical figure. It is what you were a second ago that is the 'I' of the 'me'. It is another 'me' that has to take that role. You cannot get the immediate response of the 'I' in the process. (Mead, 1934: 174)

Yet without the concept of an 'I' there would be no way to explain the reflexive, self-scrutinizing aspect of the self: persons would be reducible to a series of roles.

For Mead, all aspects of identity are interrelated, all are processual (Williams, 2000) and all are social. Both 'I' and 'me' are forged out of language and communication and interaction with others – all profoundly social phenomena. As Stevi Jackson notes, the American pragmatist tradition – in which Mead was writing – was important in developing the concept of a social self: 'a product of relations with others' (Jackson, 2010: 124). Mead was concerned, then, to show how identities are in process, and how self-consciousness – and identity – are produced through the interpretation of experience (Williams, 2000). His work shows how people both live and reflect on their existence, and how the process of reflection in turn reworks and reinterprets experience (Jackson, 2010) (an issue explored further in chapter 2). Jackson argues: For Mead, time, self and sociality interconnect: the self is a social phenomenon and also a temporal one, reflecting back on itself, in time, and forward from the present in anticipating others' responses and orienting future action in the world. It is always in the process of becoming as well as being. (Ibid.: 125).

Norbert Elias (1994 [1939]) has argued that it is impossible to have a satisfactory sociology of persons while seeing 'the individual' or some part of the individual as standing outside 'society'. Elias recognizes that there is a widespread perception that one's 'true identity' is somehow 'locked away inside', and that one is a bounded, self-contained individual. He is concerned, however, to question whether this perception is an adequate foundation for analysis; after all, if we relied on

perception as an adequate decider of truth, we would be left with the view that the sun does indeed go round the earth. For Elias, this view of a true, 'inner core' is so taken for granted that questions are rarely asked of it. As a result, identity becomes a 'black box', unknown and unknowable, and this is true for much social scientific knowledge (including sociology) as well as for literary representations and generalized 'lay' assumptions. Elias writes:

> The question is whether this self-perception, and the image of man [sic] in which it is usually crystallized quite spontaneously and without reflection, can serve as a reliable starting point for an attempt to gain adequate understanding of human beings … Is it justified – that is the question – to place at the foundation of philosophical theories of perception and knowledge, and of sociological and other theories in the human sciences, as a self-evident assumption incapable of further explanation, the sharp dividing line between what is 'inside' man and the 'external world', a division which often appears directly given in self-awareness, and furthermore has put down deep roots in European intellectual and linguistic traditions, without a critical and systematic examination of its validity? (Elias, 1994: 206)

Instead of starting with this perception, Elias starts with the social conditions that give rise to the perception. In other words, instead of taking the perception of a unique inner core to be the basis on which the social world works, he asks what it is about the culture and history of the social world that has given rise to such a widespread belief and perception.

For Elias, this notion of an 'inner' 'hidden' core to the self, experienced as 'inside' (even if we could not quite say what is the border between 'inside' and 'outside'), is not an inevitable feature of the human condition but a consequence of what he famously calls 'the civilizing process' in the West. This process – from about the time of the Renaissance – involved increasing emphases on notions of self-control. Manners must be observed; people ought not to act on sensory or other bodily impulses. In important senses, for Elias, manners make the person; that is, Western persons became self-controlled beings as a result of injunctions to self-control. This notion of the need to

manage 'internal' states has led to a perception of 'true identity' being contained 'inside', while the social world is firmly 'outside': 'What is encapsulated are the restrained instinctual and affective impulses denied direct access to the motor apparatus. They appear in self-perception as what is hidden from all others, and often as the true self, the core of individuality' (Elias, 1994: 211). So, for Elias, the notion that the 'true self' or a 'true identity' is 'inside', and is fundamentally separated from the social world, is an effect not of any innate feature of human identity itself, but of social processes of (self-)control. In turn, the notion has become reified so that it has become a feature of various modes of understanding identity. In other words, Elias suggests, how we understand ourselves is an effect of knowledges or truths that circulate about the self. This 'inner/outer' split identified by Elias also has other effects, one of them being to mask human interdependency. As Elias notes, Westerners are accustomed to thinking of themselves as their own little self-enclosed world – homo clausus, as he terms it. But – and as I suggested above – this process involves the suppression of an alternative perception, one which understands the person in terms of their relations with others, and hence understands identity as formed between rather than within persons. This view, to quote Elias again, conceptualizes the person as being

> fundamentally oriented toward and dependent on other people through-out his [sic] life. The network of interdependencies between human beings is what binds them together. Such interdependencies are the nexus of what is here called the figuration, a structure of mutually oriented and dependent people … [People] exist, one might venture to say, only as pluralities, only as figurations. (Elias, 1994: 213–14)

> identity is always particular, as much about difference as about shared belonging . . . identity can help us to comprehend the formation of the fateful pronoun 'we' and to reckon with the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that it cannot help but to create. This may be one of the most troubling aspects of all: the fact that the formation of every 'we' must leave out or exclude a 'they', that identities depend on the marking of difference. (Gilroy 1997: 301–302)

To identify something as an A is to assert that it has certain properties in common with all other As, and that it differs from Bs, Cs and so on. The conventional solution to the problem of competing the sameness and difference antagonism is to use the concept of 'identity' to denote relationships of similarity, and to say that 'identity' and 'difference', although utterly distinct, should be thought about together, a view that can be traced back at least as far as Locke in the late seventeenth century (see Anthias 1998; Benhabib 1996; Taylor 1998; Woodward 1997b).

[People] can make tacit or even explicit choices, adapt or adopt ways of living so as to fit or get away from the very classifications that have been applied to them. These very choices, adaptations or adoptions have consequences for the very group, for the kind of people that is invoked. What was known about people of a kind may become false because people of that kind have changed in what they believe about themselves. (Hacking, 1999: 34)

DISCOURSES OF DIFFERENCE

There is an influence part of the contemporary social theory that explores and distinguishes "identity" and "difference" as a separate phenomenon. In these disputes **the pre-eminence of the difference is emphasized**, where the identification and identity plays the supportive role, based on the concept of similarity.

The difference paradigm has roots in a varied range of debates. For instance, Derrida's *differance* and theoretical alternatives to the structuralism and psychoanalysis approach of the dissociation from ego's earliest significant others (parents, families, responsible adults, siblings). We put the difference between us (I) and them (others). Then the postmodernists' critic on the modernists' grand theories and universalism [Postmodernism developed in the mid- to late-twentieth century across many scholarly disciplines as a departure or rejection of modernism. As a critical practice, postmodernism employs concepts such as hyperreality, simulacrum, trace, and difference, and rejects abstract principles in favor of direct experience]. And as one more example, the development of the "identity policy" as a result of the reconstruction of the broad left, following the changes and collapses of the state socialism and the rightward reorientation of the politics.

**The campaigns of a range of interest groups and movements – women, ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, disabled people, for example – have asserted the positivity of diversity and difference, and the ethical and political value of pluralism.**

The significant theorists, who develop the "discourse of difference" are:

Seyla Benhabib (1996),

Judith Butler (1990),

Paul Gilroy (2006),

Stuart Hall (1996),

Luce Irigaray (1993),

Steven Seidman (1997)

Charles Taylor (1994).

If nothing else, this brief roll call suggests that theoretical discourses focusing on difference are, characterised by intellectual and political heterogeneity *(for useful surveys, see du Gay et al. 2000; Taylor and Spencer 2004; Woodward 1997a).*

Knowing who I am is a matter of distinguishing and distancing myself from you and you, and from that person over there. The recognition of 'us' hinges mainly upon our not being 'them'.

I will remind you the words of S.Hall. He summarized the point that knowing "who is who" is primarily a matter of establishing and marking the differences:

> [identities] are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity... Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference . . . identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude. (Hall 1996: 4–5)

In Benhabib's words,

> 'Since every search for identity includes differentiating oneself from what one is not, identity politics is always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference' (1996: 3).

Note that identification with and differentiation from are seen as dissimilar processes: 'differentiation from' permits 'identification with' to happen, and is thus logically prior and apparently more significant. Difference almost appears to have become the defining principle of collectivity, the fulcrum around which the human world revolves.

STIGMA

Erving Goffman distinguishes, in his work on stigma (Goffman, 1968), between three forms of identity: personal identity (the unique characteristics of the person, both in themselves and in terms

of their relations with others); social identity (what we might call a 'categorical' identity – an identity that persons have by virtue of their membership of social categories); and ego identity or felt identity. This last refers to a subjective sense of 'who we are' or who we believe ourselves to be. It is about how the person thinks of themselves as a person. For Goffman, 'ego identity' does not represent a true core of an authentic identity: it might be more accurate to think of it as what people make of themselves, drawing on the raw materials to hand, which will inevitably include their membership of social identity categories organized around race, gender, nation, age, sexuality, bodily ability, etc.: 'Of course the individual constructs his image of himself [sic] out of the same materials from which others first construct a social and personal identification of him, but he exercises considerable liberties in regard to what he fashions' (Goffman, 1968: 106).

Stigma is an attribute that conveys devalued stereotypes. Erving Goffman (1963, 3) classically defined stigma as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting." A discredited attribute could be readily discernable, such as one's skin color or body size, or could be hidden but nonetheless discreditable if revealed, such as one's criminal record or struggles with mental illness. For Goffman, stigma is a general aspect of social life that complicates everyday micro-level interactions—the stigmatized may be wary of engaging with those who do not share their stigma, and those without a certain stigma may disparage, overcompensate for, or attempt to ignore stigmatized individuals. Most people, Goffman (1963, 138) argued, experience the role of being stigmatized "at least in some connections and in some phases of life." Indeed, Goffman's broad definition of stigma incorporates many contemporary discredited attributes, including what he defined as "tribal stigmas" (e.g., race, ethnicity, and religion), "physical deformities" (e.g., deafness, blindness, and leprosy), and "blemishes of character" (e.g., homosexuality, addiction, and mental illness).

Sociological approaches to stigma in the ensuing fifteen years have considered the different types of, as well as the meso- and macro-level causes, consequences, and responses to, stigma (see Table 1). With respect to type of stigma, sociologists have focused not only on stigmas related to

character, but also—and with greater emphasis than psychologists—on stigmas related to heritable, bounded social categories such as race and ethnicity ("tribal stigmas"). These stigmas are related less to deviance and the violation of social norms and more so to processes of exploitation and domination (Phelan, Link, and Dovidio 2008). Sociological research on the causes of stigma has considered the role of the law and institutional practices in the maintenance of stigmatization. Such practices enable stigmatized individuals' exclusion from social networks, neighborhoods, labor markets, the law, and politics. Here, stigma has been understood as both cause and effect: it justifies exclusion of devalued others and, through such exclusion, reifies devalued stereotypes.

With respect to stigma's consequences, research in public health has considered the role of stigma as a fundamental driver of population-level health disparities through various mechanisms; for sociologists, one main mechanism is the unequal distribution of material resources given discrimination against stigmatized groups. Sociologists studying responses to stigma have considered collective responses, such as social movements and legal change, as well as what could explain variations in responses across stigmatized groups, interactional contexts, and societies (Lamont et al. 2016)

- Ervin Goffman, Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity, Touchstone 1986.

- Jenkins R. Social Identity, Key ideas, 2014.

- Lawler S. Identity: Sociological perspective, Polity press 2013

- Lamont, Michèle, et al. Getting Respect: Responding to Stigma and Discrimination in the United States, Brazil, and Israel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.