

The Web of Identity

Identity Research in Networked Learning



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Outline

- Why study identity?
- Elements of self
- A social constructionist perspective on identity
- Managing impressions of self
- The web of identity
- Resolving impressions
- Implications for networked learning
- Overview of schools of thought
- Constuctionism & Connectivism
- Related work

Why study Identity?

- Personal experience
 - Online master's
 - I felt disconnected
 - I felt no urgency to connect
 - Few “aha” moments from forums
 - Looked for feedback from persons of status
 - One engaging experience with fellow student (email)

Why?

- I focused on reading and writing papers
 - The characteristics fellow students shared about themselves were not of interest to me
 - I did not have a sense of myself as a “self” among others
 - I did not “relate” to the other students
-
- = identity issue

Theories of identity

- Presume the pre-existence of roles, groups, social structures, and cultural aspects.
- Few discuss how these elements form and shape each other.
- Few focus on the *individual's* identity.

Elements of self

- Ricoeur (1992)
 - Idem / ipse
- Mead (1934)
 - I / me
- Ferreday, Jones, and Hodgson (2006)
 - Relational dialogue
- Iterative relationship between self and group
- The emergence of self is collaborative

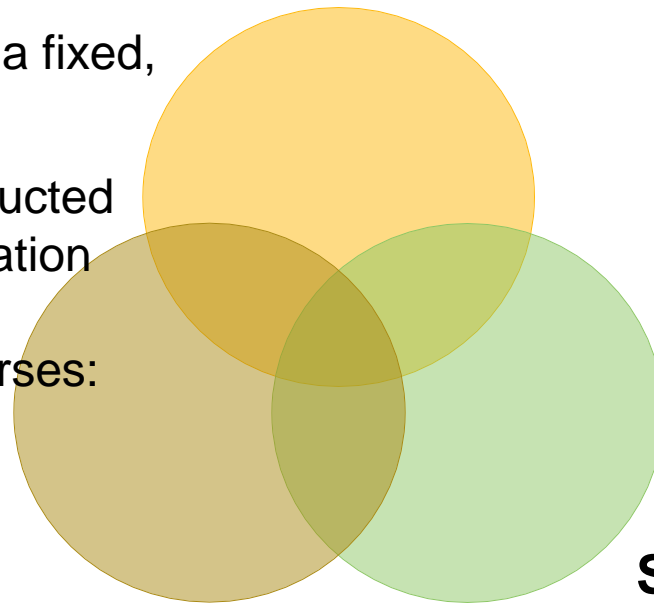
A constructionist perspective on identity

Relational or Narrative Identity

- Rejects the idea of a fixed, stable, objective 'self'
- Identities are constructed and interpreted in relation to others through conversations/discourses: narratives on identity

Context

- Identities are situated in relationships between an individual and varied social contexts



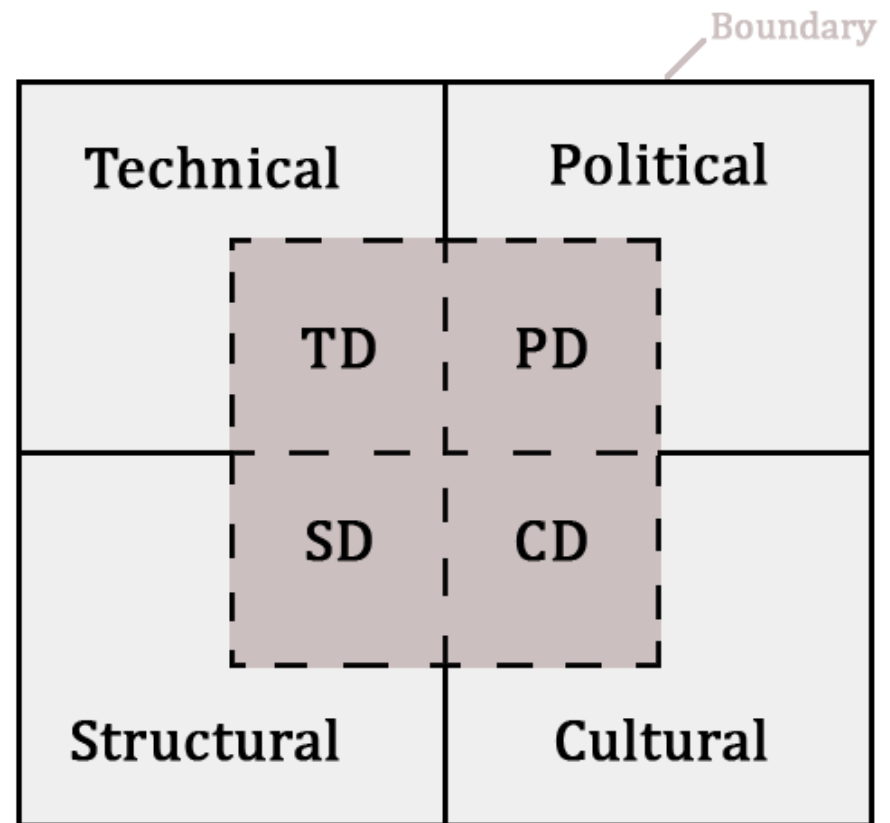
- Post-modernist perspective
- Roots in Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Goffman

Structure-Agency

- Interplay between expected social practices and individual choices & actions

Presentation of the Self

- Goffman (1959)
- Impressions management
- Perspectives to examine social establishments



Technologies of the Self

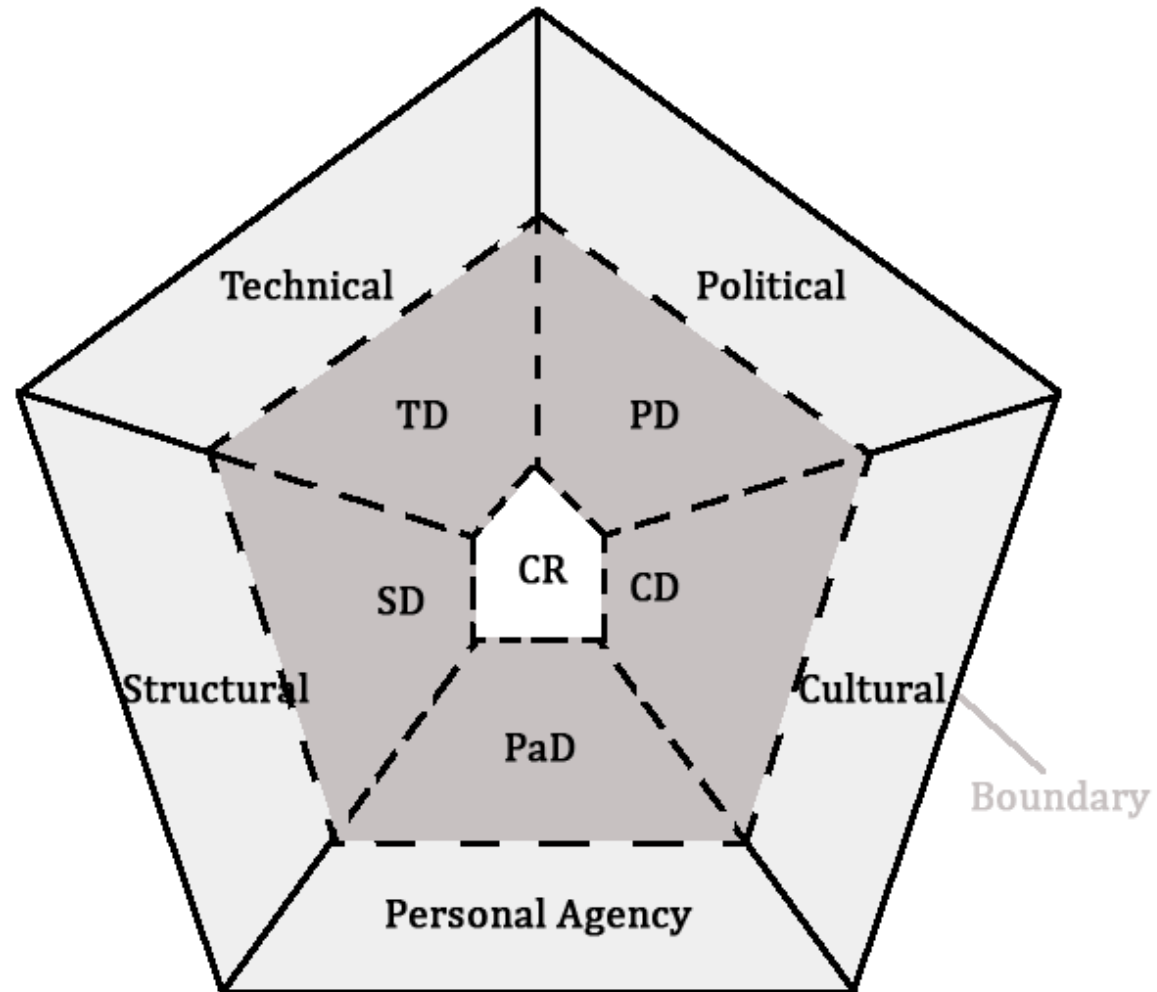
- Foucault
 - Recognized the importance of individual agency which was missing in Goffman's dramaturgical strategies.
 - So, while you are looking at social establishments, you put a mirror up and you see a reflection of self.

Managing impressions of self

Goffman	Foucault	Strategies of impressions management
Technical- Dramaturgical (TD) Perspective	Technologies of Production	Display of quality, competency, and standards.
Political- Dramaturgical (PD) Perspective	Technologies of power	Display of persuasion, manipulation, authority, threat, punishment, coercion, rewards, and control.
Structural- Dramaturgical (SD) Perspective	N/A	Display of status, level of formality, maintenance of social distance, restriction of contact, gossip, ostracism.
Cultural- Dramaturgical (CD) Perspective	Technologies of sign systems	Maintenance of moral standards and cultural values.
N/A	Technologies of the Self	Display of individual needs, motivations, and idiosyncratic abilities and tendencies.

(Koole, 2009. Adapted from the work of Foucault, 1988 and Goffman, 1959.)

The Web of Identity



Cognitive Resonance (CR)

- CR – an individual's identity as reflected or refracted through the strategies.
- The Wol strategies continually modulate/filter social enactments.
- Goal: achieve a comfortable level of resonance, harmony.
- Such concept threshold points (Land, Cousin & Meyer, 2005) may result in rejection and/or ontological adjustment of self or community.
- The individual may, at times, choose to behave in discord **with his/her self identity** or **with expected social practices.**

Networked Learning

Connections between learners

- Learning takes place in relation to peers through negotiation of meaning, knowledge construction, and peer review

(Jones, Ferreday, & Hodgson, 2008);
(McConnell, 2007);
(Zenios, 2010);
(Parchoma, 2011, 2010)

Connections between learners and tutors

- Learning takes place in relation to tutors through negotiation of meaning and of quality

Connections between learners and resources

- Learning takes place in relation to critical engagement with texts

Implications for Learning

- Technical-Dramaturgical Strategy
 - Provide “symbolic” resources
 - Dependent of wealth, class, gender, etc.
 - Can networked learning or an awareness of Wol strategies help learners determine the authenticity and reliability of resources?
 - Will learners identify with members of networks if ontological security cannot be established?

Implications for Learning

- Political-Dramaturgical Strategies
 - Discourse – vehicle of social control, rules
 - In traditional learning communities, the expert condones or rejects ideas that he/she deems inappropriate.
 - This is a source of discomfort for traditional teachers as online networks may alter the behaviour of teachers and learners, and hence, the enactment of their identities and their ability to control information and behaviour itself.

Implications for Learning

- Structural-Dramaturgical Strategy
 - Maintenance of social hierarchy
 - As learners and experts enter into dialogue with multiple online contacts in a variety of networks, how might their status change?
 - Quality and quantity of network connections (friends) may contribute to an individual's sense of importance or relevance.

Implications for Learning

- Cultural-Dramaturgical Strategies
 - Rituals & norms aid in sustaining relationships
 - Online interaction requires a set of skills and knowledge of online rituals and norms. Non-observance of such rituals may result in exclusion.
 - Spelling conventions, grammar, text messaging codes, and ambient availability may provide new ways for learners to differentiate each other and identify themselves with one another.

Implications for Learning

- **Personal-Agency Dramaturgical**

- Each person → a unique narrative
- Choice is not completely eliminated
- Online environment → the great equalizer?

- What forms of bias and judgment are arising in online networks? What characteristics cannot be hidden from other members of these networks?

Implications for Learning

- Cognitive Resonance
 - The learner must constantly evaluate his/her interactions to assess the authenticity and reliability of their perceptions of these networks.
 - Learners must constantly adjust their strategies in an effort to manage their appearance, and hence, their membership in these communities.
 - Learners may constantly seek access to and exit from networks that may or may not resound with their sense of self.
 - To what extent does the quest for harmony with self and perceptions of community traits contribute to or distract from the learning process?

Overview of Schools: Epistemological C'/Schisms

School of Thought	Cognitive Constructivism	Social Constructivism Sometimes AKA: Collectivism	[Social] Constructionism (Sans Papert's "learning by making")	Connectivism
Origin of Knowledge	Individual knowledge structures / mental models, created from observation & experience	Knowledge is socially constructed from individuals' interactions with socio-cultural environments	Knowledge is constructed within ongoing conversations influenced by hegemonic and critical discourses	Knowledge is distributed across a network of connections. Learning is the ability to construct and traverse those networks.
Disciplinary Roots	Psychology	Psychology	Philosophy / Sociology	Transdisciplinary
Major Contributors	Piaget Jonassen (early work) Driscoll	Vygotsky Bruner (later work) Jonassen (later work)	Foucault Derrida Lyotard Latour	Seimens Downes

A bit more detail on...

Constructionism vs Connectivism

Constructionism

Epistemological underpinning:

- **Knowledge is** produced in ongoing conversations, which relate to hegemonic and critical discourses
- **Knowledge and identities are** constructed within discourses that categorize the world and bring phenomena into sight

(Talja, Touminen, & Savolainen, 2004;
Roy-Chowdhury, 2010;)

Connectivism

Epistemological underpinning:

- **Knowledge is** distributed across a network of connections. Learning is the ability to construct and traverse those networks.
- **Knowledge is not** acquired, as though it were a thing
- **Knowledge is literally** the set of connections formed by actions and experience.
- **Knowledge may consist** in part of linguistic structures, but it is not essentially based in linguistic structures, and the properties and constraints of linguistic structures are not the properties and constraints of connectivism.

(Seimens, 2004; Downes, 2007)

Further work on identity

Koole, M., & Parchoma, G. (In press). The ethical and practical implications of systems architecture on identity in networked learning: A constructionist perspective. *Interactive Learning Environments*.

Koole, M., & Parchoma, G. (In press). The web of Identity: A model of digital identity formation in networked learning environments. In S. Warburton & S. Hatzipanagos (Eds.), *Digital identity and social media*.

Parchoma, G. (2011). Toward diversity in researching teaching and technology philosophies-in-practice in e-learning communities. In B. Daniel (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Methods and Techniques for Studying Virtual Communities: Paradigms and Phenomena*, Vol. 1, 61-86, Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

- This work examines the potential interplay between individuals' relations with philosophies of teaching and learning, philosophies of technology, and schools of thought around online teaching and learning environments (eg., TEL, CSCL, BL & NL) as sites for political, social, technological, pedagogical, and philosophical creativity.

Related work in-progress

Supervising the Doctorate Experience (Gale Parchoma and Jeffrey Keefer)

The purpose of this research is to better understand the experiences of faculty members who work with doctoral students, at least in part via information and communications technology or technology-enhanced learning or e-learning, who have identified threshold concepts (i.e., aha moments, trouble spots, breakthrough areas, or defining moments of epistemological or ontological shift that may be pivotal in one's identity development) for their students and were successful helping these learners through this troublesome knowledge.

- We have interviewed 14 doctoral supervisors from 5 countries.
- Interesting ideas around the development of researcher identity are beginning to emerge from the data.

Related work in-progress

- Identity of students on professional graduate courses
 - Threshold concepts (Land & Meyer)
 - Social positioning theory (Harré)
- Key aim:

to explore how networked learners on professional graduate courses re-position themselves when confronted with discourses that challenge their established identities, norms, and relationships.

Thank you

- Questions?
- Contact:
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