

## Racial Identities

Reading:

S. Haslanger, "You Mixed?"

I. Hacking, "Making Up People."

### I. Distinguishing Race and Racial Identity

1. What do we need the notion of "identity" for? More specifically, what work is it doing in a theory of race?
2. What are "identities"? How are they related to social roles, social norms, social practices?

### II. Functionalism

One strategy for thinking about racial identity would be to focus first on the social and political institutions in which racial injustice is materially implemented, and to view racial identities as the normative subjectivities that are deemed appropriate for (and help sustain) those institutions. (Haslanger, 275)

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this view?

### III. Hacking's account of "social kinds"

"The claim of dynamic nominalism is not that there was a kind of person who came increasingly to be recognized by bureaucrats or by students of human nature, but rather that a kind of person came into being at the same time as the kind itself was being invented. In some cases, that is, our classifications and our classes conspire to emerge hand in hand, each egging the other on." (106)

"Except when we interfere, what things are doing, and indeed what camels are doing, does not depend on how we describe them. But some of the things that we ourselves do are intimately connected to our descriptions. Many philosophers follow Elizabeth Anscombe and say that intentional human actions must be "actions under a description" (Anscombe 1957). This is not mere linguisticism, for descriptions are embedded in our practices and our lives. But if a description is not there, then intentional action under that description cannot be there either: that, apparently, is a fact of logic." (108)

"Thus the idea of making up people is enriched: it applies not to the unfortunate elect but to all of us. It is not just the making up of people of a kind that did not exist before: not only are the split person and the waiter made up, but each of us is made up. We are not only what we are but what we might have been, and the possibilities for what we might have been are transformed." (110)

"...we might think of two vectors. One is the vector of labeling from above, from a community of experts who create a "reality" that some people make their own. Different from this is the vector of the autonomous behavior of the person so labeled, which presses from below, creating a reality every expert must face." (111)

See also p. 11 of *The Social Construction of What?*

"I used to call kinds of people, kinds of human action, and varieties of human behavior by the made-up designation "human kinds." It is an important feature of human kinds that they have effects on the people classified, but also the classified people can take matters into their own hands. I called this phenomenon "the looping effect of human kinds" (Hacking 1995a). I now prefer to talk about interactive kinds." (*The Social Construction of What?* p. 59. See also p. 103-8)

1. What is Hacking's account of social kinds? Does it offer a good account of "social kinds"? Does it provide a good account of "identity"?
2. Hacking claims that "Making up people changes the space of possibilities for personhood." (107) Is this helpful in thinking about social constraints on behavior?
3. Does Hacking's dynamic nominalism provide resources for thinking about the social construction of waiters, homosexuals, refugees, etc.? Are homosexuals socially constructed? Is there a history of homosexuality?

#### IV. Appiah's view

[a racial identity] is a label *R*, associated with *ascriptions* by most people...and *identifications* by those who fall under it (where identification implies a shaping role for the label in the intentional acts of the possessors, so that they sometimes act *as an R*), where there is a history of associating possessors of the label with an inherited racial essence, even if some of those who use the label no longer believe in racial essences. (Appiah and Gutmann, 83-4, quoted in Haslanger 276)

#### V. Cross

In a generic sense, one's identity is a maze or map that functions in a multitude of ways to guide and direct exchanges with one's social and material realities. (Cross 1991, 21, quoted in Haslanger 283)

1. Is this an adequate definition? How do we connect it to race, specifically?
2. Does it allow us to develop a theory of mixed identity? How?

Hacking, Ian. "Making Up People." In *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*. Edited by Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, et al. Stanford University Press, 1986. © Stanford University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <http://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

Haslanger, Sally. "You Mixed? Racial Identity without Racial Biology" Chapter 9 in *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*. Oxford University Press, 2012. © Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <http://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

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