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Ideal types: peacocks, chameleons, and centaurs

> ... every boy and every gal,
> That's born into the world alive,
> Is either a little Liberal,
> Or else a little Conservative!
> – W. S. Gilbert, *Iolanthe*

1. systems of categorization:
    1.1. accounts of the nature of reality
        e.g. the four human blood types O, A, B, AB
    1.2. descriptions of folk categorization (either explicit or implicit)
        e.g. folk racial classifications: Black+Brown vs. White+Yellow
    1.3. practical aids in dealing with the world
        e.g. classification of woody plants as trees, shrubs, or vines for the purposes of
        landscape design

2. *ideal types*, most referents within the relevant domain assumed to lie close to one of the ideal
   types; Bowker & Starr's (1999:10f.) requirements that a (satisfactory) classification
    2.1. be complete: Completeness
    2.2. have mutually exclusive categories: Exclusivity
    (2.3. rest on "consistent, unique classificatory principles in operation")
   not in B&S: (satisfactory) classification (esp. at the basic level – Rosch 1977) should
    2.4. be predictive, with a number of properties clustering together in the category,
        tending to mutually implicate one another: Predictiveness

3. grades on Completeness and Exclusivity:
    3.1. human blood types: high marks
    3.2. folk and practical systems: quite frequently, and famously, imperfect
    3.3. morphological typology (analytic vs. synthetic; isolating/analytic vs. agglutinating
        vs. inflectional/fusional; these three vs. polysynthetic/incorporating): ?

4. some examples:
    2-term: type A vs. type B personalities, transactional vs. transformational leaders,
        foxes vs. hedgehogs, liberals vs. conservatives
    3-term: ectomorphs vs. mesomorphs vs. endomorphs
    4-term: phlegmatic vs. sanguine vs. bilious vs. choleric temperaments
    multi-term: Meyers-Briggs personality types (Paul 2004), where 4 binary distinctions
        combine to allow for 16 ideal types.

5. Brekhus's (2003) research: formal interviews with 30 primary informants, shorter informal
conversations with 100 further – all gay men living in the outer suburbs of New York (232);
interviews open-ended; "grounded theory" (Glaser & Strauss 1967) "requires that theory emerge

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from data rather than a priori hypotheses and research questions shaping what data is gathered" (229); the "analytic fieldwork approach" (Zerubavel 1980) requires "that one abstracts generic patterns rather than factual peculiarities" (230)

that is: ethnography, producing an account of (implicit folk) categorizations used by the informants

6. "a central issue among informants was how much they dissociated from the public image of gay life presented by the more visible members of the gay ghettos of San Francisco and New York." (230)

7. categorization scheme, of gay male identities: intended as a scientific analysis, revealing unexpected structure (not encoded in existing scientific or folk classifications) in this domain

cf. existing (explicit) folk categories of gay men: bear, queen, leatherman, twink, party boy, activist, regular guy (or, possibly, straight-acting gay),...; neither complete nor exclusive; very much anchored in a particular social world, moment in history, etc. (cf. jocks and burnouts, Eckert 1989)

8. three ideal types, in slogans:

1 Everything about me is gay (ch. 2)
2 You have to drive somewhere just to be gay (ch. 3)
3 Gay defines only a small part of me (ch. 4)

labeled with four separate sets of terminology:

	creature metaphor	human metaphor	grammar metaphor	type of gay identity
1	peacock	lifestyler	noun	dominant
2	chameleon	commuter	verb	mobile (in time and space)
3	centaur	integrator	adjective	moderate (vs. pure)

 (Why not frogs, wolves, penguins, kangaroos, or woolly mammoths?)

9. further analytic step: three separate dimensions, with the three types characterized by their polar locations on these dimensions

	duration value	density value	dominance value
1	hi	hi	**HI**
2	**LO**	hi	lo
3	hi	**LO**	lo

10. mixed types, a great many of them: "Although as ideal types they are mutually exclusive, no one in the real world is located *precisely* at any one corner of the triangle. Thus, in the real world an individual can practice a combination of identity strategies." (223); low Completeness and Exclusiveness

11. the dimensions are continua (180), and the position of a man on these continua is not even constant over time or in different social contexts; low Predictiveness

12. factor analysis not necessarily a bad idea: the Big Five personality domains (agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, openness) (John & Srivastava 1999)

13. What, then, is the value of the ideal types? Their value is practical: "... even though identity grammars are more complicated and variable in actual practice than in theory, these types do resemble reality enough that people can recognize and find uses for them in understanding their own lives." (224). After all, people adore classifications, because they (seem to) simplify life.

14. a familiar progression, from a set of ideal types that might serve to establish a satisfactory classification, though the interpretation of the types as poles on underlying continua, to a system that is neither satisfactory as a classification nor constant over occasions but serves only to provide a feeling (however illusory) of understanding. Popular advice literature abounds in such attractive but unsatisfactory categorization schemes, usually involving ideal types. The case of Brekhus's scheme shows that even categorizations intended as scientific can run aground in the same way, so long as the posited underlying continua have no content outside of the analysis itself.

15. deeper problem: view of identities as fixed characteristics of individuals (even if these characteristics are specific to particular (sub)cultures, places, and moments in history)

16. view of identities as flexible (in political philosophy): "group identities are best conceived as multiple and fluid; except under conditions of tyranny, they do not comprehensively determine the identities of individuals. Free people have multiple and alterable identities." (Guttman 2003:194)

17. view of identities as performed and negotiated in social interaction, not (entirely) dictated by the culture (in sociolinguistics): Butler 1990, Eckert 2001

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