

**An Alternative Construction of Identity:
A Study of Place-based Identity and Its Implications**

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This paper discusses an alternative construction of identity based in phenomenology that includes the affects of place. The aim of the paper is to provide a way to rethink constructions of identity broadly, but more specifically, to think about how identity contributes to our views of ourselves, the world, and our relationship to it. It presents the results of an ethnographic study of rural farmers to show how the natural world, which includes non-human Others, can be a critical part of our identities. This understanding may be helpful to scholars interested in environmental communication and social change as well as those who theorize more broadly about the philosophical nature of communication.

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One of the biggest challenges facing us today is that of global and environmental change. Necessarily, experts from different disciplines and methodological research approaches investigate solutions to this problem but still come up against what seems to be an intractable issue: How can those trying to solve this problem encourage people to recognize the seriousness of it AND take real steps to change their behaviors so that we might head off or lessen the negative environmental consequences? This action is particularly important in developed countries where people's consumer lifestyles have the most negative impacts.

Writers such as Bill McKibben have clearly described the danger (*The End of Nature*, 1989) and even proposed ways of changing our lifestyles and practices to move away from our detrimental effects on the environment (*Deep Economy*, 2007), but even he, who has spent most of a lifetime on this project, is at a loss to explain why more people, particularly in industrialized nations, such as the U.S., have not been more proactive in pursuing solutions to the problem of global climate change and environmental degradation, even though it has been a topic of discussion at least since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* of the 1950s.

This paper suggests that knowledge and interrogation of particular constructions of identity may be one approach to addressing these issues in a more proactive (as opposed to reactive) way. It will first examine the topic of identity construction and how it is addressed in existing literature, propose a framework for an alternative construction of identity based in phenomenology, then provide an example of an as-yet undocumented construction of identity by examining a rural culture based in the Intermountain West and discuss how knowledge of these types of identity construction might be useful in theoretical and practical ways.

Theories of Identity

There are numerous theories that describe and try to explain identity construction; this issue is made more complex by the fact that different disciplines have their own definitions of identity and their own terms for discussing it. Even within disciplines, the discussion of identity and its components may be contested. For example, within the psychological literature alone, the discussion of identity formation might be divided into five categories of thought: psychodynamic theories (such as Freud's psychoanalysis) that focus on unconscious conflicts and motivation, inferiority feelings, defense mechanisms and psychosocial crisis; cognitive theories that focus on how self-relevant information is stored, structured and retrieved (Leary & Tangney, 2003); social learning theories that focus on agency, self-efficacy, locus of control and self-regulation; humanistic/existential theories that focus on self-actualization, personal constructs, meaning, responsibility and personal myths (McMartin, 1995); and interpersonal theories that focus on social and cultural influences on our self-perceptions (Leary & Tangney, 2003). Communication scholars tend to rely upon the latter category to explain the construction of identity (Imahori & Capacach, 1993, 2005; Ting-Toomey, 1988, 1993, 2005; Collier, 2005). It should be noted that the borders between these broad categories are vague and that there are many common features among them.

It is also important to note that some of these theories are controversial. One of the common sparks for controversy is the issue of free will versus determinism and moral responsibility. For example, social learning theories focus on agency, locus of control and

agency in their discussion of identity formation, while contemporary extensions of psychodynamic theories and those focusing on the influence of culture might question whether and how agency is even possible. These are not unimportant questions for those interested in the dynamics of social change.

One approach to the problem of agency has been put forth by some poststructuralist theories of subjectivity. Such theories might be considered reactions to modernist notions of self as a unified rational instrumental agent, a construction that has been criticized for ignoring how selves are created within social and cultural formations that include certain power relationships that constrain agency. Some poststructural theorists have thus attempted to deal with the problem of agency by proposing that the subject is not unified but is instead a process, which is continually creating itself, fabricating its self-understanding, and undergoing constant change (Kristeva, 1980; Young 1990). Poststructuralist views of the subject are not without criticism themselves, however. For example, criticism has been leveled at the writing of Judith Butler (1990), who draws upon the insights of psychoanalytic theory to claim that gender identity is primarily an effect of an ongoing series of gender performances, which are representational or symbolic in nature. Her *Gender Troubles* (1990) evoked anxieties among many readers that the bodies given shape in her work had been “emptied of their materiality, lost in discourse, if not also from space and time” (Matlock, 1997, p. 212).

However, the poststructuralist view of the subject must be recognized for its resonance, particularly in consumer cultures, such as the United States. This resonance might be attributed to the enormous changes that have occurred in the past century that have altered our views of ourselves, our relationships to others and the objects around us, and our conceptions of reality. Many poststructuralist scholars agree that in modern societies “bodies are maps of meanings and power” (Haraway, 1990, p. 222). The body becomes a point of capture, where the dense meanings of power are animated, where cultural codes gain their apparent coherence and where the boundaries between the same and the other are created and naturalized (Douglas, 1966; Butler, 1990, 1993). The ways that these encounters between self and other map the subject into discursively-constituted, embodied identities differ slightly depending upon the theorist, but for all, the encounter provokes the subject into mapping subjectivity in a dual sense: the sovereign subject and the subjected subject, or the subject-object relation (Pile & Thrift, 1995).

This problem of the subject-object relation seems to be the critical area of interrogation if we are to understand the depth of the challenge that confronts us as we look to our relationship with nature and the natural world. That is because the subject-object relation is a serious impediment to our ability to value the natural world and to pursue social justice. It involves a power relationship, which can operate in a variety of ways: the object or Other can be reduced to the same, as an axis which places the Other within inter-subjective exchanges; and through axes that define the subject in terms of class and race (Thrift & Pile, 1995). The subject-object relation thus maps people into power-ridden, discursively-constituted identities, where such interactions place them in complex positions in relation to power and meaning, where the latter two elements are policed by bi-polar oppositions.

How does this subject-object relation operate in life? I will give two examples here that show how class, as one element of identity, might operate. A number of scholars have written

about the middle-class' efforts to distinguish itself from those perceived as "the lower classes". Historian Richard L. Bushman (1992) claims that certain features of houses, cities, and manners in early American history were attempts by common people to ape European aristocrats, and that the advent of industrial capital and the resulting increase in wealth made such patterning possible. Bushman's theory hinges on the development of capitalism, on the economic effects of making it possible for the middle-class to buy what had once been reserved for the aristocracy. Such acquisitions protect the middle-class from "invasions from below," or more plainly serve to distinguish it from others, specifically those who were perceived as marginal (Bushman, p. 438).

The anxiety created by the subject-object relation also affects how certain identity formations interact with the natural world. Levine (1988) and Stallybrass and White (1986) argue that the middle-class also attempts to elevate its status by separating itself from the natural world, from "dirt" and animals, which are considered lowly. Thus, the generally subconscious operation of the subject-object relation can be an impediment to valuing the natural world and a more environmentally and socially just system.

Place and Identity

Communication scholars concur with poststructuralists to the extent that they agree that identity is interpersonal or constructed through interactions with others in their cultural group. Through these interactions, our identities are shaped through multiple channels, including family, gender, culture, and ethnicity. These assumptions accord with many identity theories in that they recognize that personal identities are socially constructed by gender, race and ethnicity, class and sexual orientation.

What is missing from much of the literature on identity formation, however, is the effect of the physical environment (Hauge, 2007). Twigger and Ross et al (2003) have found that social identity theory can be further developed to include aspects of place. A place can be defined as a social entity or "membership group" providing identity. A place is often associated with a certain group of people, a certain lifestyle and social status. In relation to maintaining a positive self-esteem, this means that people will prefer places that contain physical symbols that maintain and enhance self-esteem and avoid those that don't (Hauge, 2007). It should be noted that such a theory implicitly involves the operation of the subject-object relation in its desire to pursue status in that it involves a perceived lack by the subject (*a la* Lacan) that is assuaged by the pursuit of status.

In addition, although the work of these scholars has extended social identity theory to potentially include the influence of place, they have not escaped the potential criticism aimed at poststructuralist theories that see the world as being primarily symbolic in nature and thus detached from any sense of what Lacan might call "the Real." In other words, the embodied, day-to-day activities that affect us and our perceptions of ourselves and the world are, to some extent, missing.

Both of these issues, the subject-object relation and the reduction of the world to symbols, can be problematized by looking to the work of phenomenologists, such as Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, who conceptualize the role of place differently. Phenomenology focuses on the subjective experience and perception of a person's life world (Giorgi & Giorgi,

2004; Husserl, 1970). Phenomenology is particularly concerned with place and home due to the centrality of these topics in everyday life. “To dwell” has been described as the process of making a place a home (Heidegger, 1962). “Place” gained prominence in phenomenological research, architecture and geography through Norberg-Schultz’s (1971) work on the existence of “genius loci,” meaning the spirit of a place, Relph’s (1976) work on “sense of place” and “placelessness”, and Tuan’s (1974, 1977) work on positive affective ties to place described as “topophilia”. Tuan (1974, 1977) differentiated the terms “sense of place” and “rootedness,” describing sense of place as an awareness of a positive feeling for a place and rootedness as a feeling of being home.

In the field of cultural geography, Massey (1994) interrogates the difference between the concepts of space and place. Space is seen as a timeless, absolute dimension, while place might be thought of as space integrally intertwined with time. Conceived of in this way, place is a situated practice constructed of social relations. Such a view is phenomenological inasmuch as the observer is inevitably within the world being observed. Place is thus alive because it is composed of its interactions with the living beings that help to create it as it works to also create them. Such an understanding of place allows for the placement of living beings in relationship to one another in such a way that new social effects may be produced. More specifically, Massey’s conception of place allows us to think about how a place might allow for the creation of identities that are particular to it. Like other identity theories, social relations are important in their role of creating the subject, but place is included as a critical, additional element in shaping identities.

The purpose of this paper is to describe a culture in which place is essential to the formation of its inhabitants’ identities. It is drawn from a critical cultural ethnography of a woman farmer in south central Idaho and her interactions with her family and community, including non-human Others. The study took place over the course of two summers, during which I spent my days with the farmer, Rosie, and her family, doing fieldwork. I used a heuristic approach to develop the themes of the study, which I believe are the foundational features of the cultural epistemology and ontology of the North Shoshone culture.

Because of the integral nature of place to the epistemology and ontology of the North Shoshoneans and its effect on their relationships with others, I attempt to show how a relationship with a place can create identities particular to it. An understanding of this until-now-overlooked culture and identity formation provides evidence for including the dimension of place in the study of the subject but also might be practically used to address global environmental issues.

The Place of North Shoshone

It should probably be noted that the reason I chose North Shoshone as the site of my study is that it is the culture in which I grew up. I had a very normative view of the culture until I started my doctoral studies with an emphasis in critical cultural studies. It was then--when I started reading theories about culture, gender, and identity--that I began to realize that my own experience of the world was not completely described by this work. That realization was the impetus for this study.

But because I had a normative, uncritical view of my own culture, I was not certain exactly what these omissions in the theories I was reading consisted of precisely. I was thus immediately thrust into a reflexive space, one in which I began to understand that I was a “border” person, as described by Gloria Anzaldua (1987), a person who lives between two cultures, the rural culture of my formative years and the middle-class, professional, suburban culture of my adulthood. Bennett (1993) calls this phenomenon “double consciousness.” It was my experiences of both cultures that helped me to better understand the components of my “first” culture. Through my analysis, I identified place as the critical factor in determining to a large degree other important elements of the culture that contributed to the identity formations of its inhabitants of North Shoshone. In this section, I will first describe the place that is North Shoshone and how this place contributes to the existence of particular lifestyle elements--namely, the role of physical labor, economic constraints, lack of institutional affiliations, and the central role of animals--that help to constitute the identity formation of its inhabitants.

Idaho is still a rural state, although, it has experienced some of the recent rapid growth of the Intermountain region. Its largest city is Boise, the state capital, which has a population of less than 200,000, according to 2005 U.S. Census figures. The entire state, according to 2006 Census estimates, has a population of less than 1.5 million people but more land mass than New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire combined. It has 83,557 square miles of land. Lincoln County, the county where I grew up and the site of my study, is an area of 1,206 square miles with a population of 4,522 (2006 estimate). That equates to about 3.4 persons per square mile.

Shoshone is the county seat of Lincoln County and the area of my study was a farming community north of the county seat that residents call “North Shoshone.” North Shoshone is characteristically western in geography and climate in that it is a harsh, inhospitable environment. It is high desert, about 4,000 feet in elevation, on the western edge of the Snake River Plain. This means that it is not uncommon to have great variations in temperature during a single day. In the summer, the thermometer might register 100 degrees during the hottest time of the day, but once the sun goes down, a heavy sweater or jacket might be in order to fend off the chill of the night that extends into the early morning hours. A 50-degree difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures is not uncommon in the summer months. In the dead of winter, the temperature barely rises above freezing, whether daylight or dark. A couple hours drive to the north lies Stanley, Idaho, which commonly registers the coldest temperatures in the continental United States during the winter months.

Not only are the temperatures extreme, but seasons are short, except for the winter, which seems to occupy half the year—from November to April. This summer is often too short to dependably grow food crops for humans, not even those famous Idaho potatoes. The only crops that can be grown with much success are feed for animals: pasture, alfalfa, grain. The soil also is poor, alkaline, what there is of it. That’s because the farms of North Shoshone are located on a narrow strip of shallow soil between two lava flows. Scientists believe that repeated volcanic eruptions and lava flows occurred on the Snake River Plain up to 17 million years ago. The evidence of that period is everywhere available to the naked eye: lava rock ridges mark the land as do piles of hand-picked lava rocks from the fields. Lava tubes crisscross the area and form

dozens of caves. Not far from the farm where I grew up is Mammoth Cave, which is large enough to drive a semi-truck through, and the Shoshone Ice Caves, which is cold enough to grow a wall of ice and other ice formations that last throughout the year. About an hour and a half away from Shoshone lies The Craters of the Moon National Monument, which comprises the largest basaltic lava field in the continental United States. The monument covers 618 square miles. Most of the lava to be found inside the boundaries of the park flowed in the past 10,000 years, during the Holocene period. Early pioneers avoided the blackened landscape with its towers formed by molten lava because of its unearthly features. The geologic area that the Snake River Plain covers extends to the geysers in Yellowstone and the Island Park caldera west of the park.

The lava rock makes farming in North Shoshone unique from many farming communities of the U.S. and suited only to the most determined and often, least capitalized, those who can't afford better land. Picking rocks each spring from the newly plowed fields is the worst of farm chores but dealing with the rocks is not just limited to the spring planting. Rocks break farm equipment through the summer and fall harvests—stopping to remove and replace broken sickle guards and blades on the swather is a daily occurrence. The only time the farmer is not faced with the ordeal of rock is in winter when the lava shards are buried in snow.

North Shoshone is an inhospitable place for farmers. It is difficult to scratch a living from the land. To succeed often takes the contribution of everyone, men, women, children, and animals. This need for cooperation and community has often been overlooked in our views of the West. One version paints the West as a landscape peopled by those who “settled” the land only until the resources were depleted; then the settlers moved on to “greener pastures” (or the city, if they couldn't hack it). This narrative of exploitation serves an ideological purpose in rationalizing capitalist development. Such tales were often not told by the settlers themselves—such people did not have the power, know-how, time, energy, or inclination to get their stories told. These stories were conveyed by those who had a stake in developing the West—newspapers, railroads, utility companies, and the coal, mining and timber industries. In fact, the town of Shoshone itself was born from the publicity machine of the Union Pacific Railroad, as was the case of many communities in southern Idaho, including the resort of Sun Valley. The railroad hired writers to visit the West and to paint pictures of the “milk and honey” to be found there and published those articles in Eastern newspapers and broadsides. Probably more than a few gullible Easterners, lured by the railroad writers' grandiose claims, were more than a little disappointed in the lava rock and sagebrush expanses that greeted them. In fact, the wife of one such pioneer was horrified by the lawlessness of Shoshone in its early days. In her letters, she wrote that gunshots rang throughout the night in the streets of the small town. The first “jail” in Shoshone was a pit in the street near the railroad tracks. The edges of the pit were patrolled by deputies day and night to ensure that those who had been “jailed” stayed inside.

But not everyone who came out West was an opportunist. Many were looking for a place to put down their roots and make their homes and a better way of life. What they found was a hard life on the mostly arid deserts of the West. Such a life called for self-reliant, independent people. But it also required a willingness to help out the neighbors, however far flung they might be. Such an account of community can be found in the letters of Elinore Pruitt Stewart (1961), who homesteaded in Wyoming in 1903. In *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, Pruitt writes of her horseback trips, in which she traveled miles just to visit her homesteading neighbors, including

an Irish woman, Gavotte the Frenchman, and a family of Mormon polygamists. The Irish and the Mormons are examples of people displaced from their homes who came West to find new ones free from poverty and persecution.

In *Country of Exiles: The Destruction of Place in American Life*, William Leach (1999) acknowledges that “place-making” has not received its historical due. Leach claims that “place-making” distinguished early Americans because they “simply did not inherit the world they lived in but created it themselves and often under great duress” (p.16). This sense of making something new and of choosing to do so as free individuals “without bootlicking” also bound diverse individuals together (Leach, p. 16).

Place-making, as Leach describes it, is a common feature of North Shoshone. The difficulties of making a living in the harsh environment require that people—and animals--work together. On the first day of my study, in fact, I observed Rosie spend the afternoon with a neighbor, helping him to cut yearling cattle from the herd so that they could be sent to market. (I also participated in completing that task.) She often extended help to others in the community without the expectation of getting paid, even though repaying is integral to community because it entails individual responsibility and reciprocity. In fact, a week after Rosie helped the neighbor cut cattle, she borrowed his backhoe to make some crossings across ditches so that another neighbor, who she had hired to cut her hay, could get his equipment into the field. On another occasion, one of the neighbors called Rosie to ask her to help some newcomers ready their 4-H sheep for the fair. The family had recently bought a small piece of land, and their two children had joined the 4-H club and were going to show sheep. Up until that time, the family had lived in town and knew little about farm animals. Again, Rosie drove over to their house and spent the afternoon showing the woman and her daughter how to gentle the sheep and explaining how to fatten them for the fair. Later at the fair, the woman helped Rosie and her daughter prepare their sheep to be shown, even though their children were competing for the same prize. The woman brought a wire brush and bucket of water to wash the mud and manure from the sheep’s hooves. Rosie told her she didn’t have to help out (a sign of self-reliance), but the woman said, “We should help each other.”

The community that I observed in North Shoshone was formed in part because of its members’ commitment to the place. “Stick-to-it-tiveness,” as Rosie called it, was highly valued. Stick-to-itiveness, or commitment, is the initial piece necessary to begin to develop the relationships that are crucial to creating place.

As should be obvious through this discussion is that much of the work that is required in North Shoshone involves physical labor. Because of limited financial resources--most of the farms are small, 80-acre plots, although some farmers over the years have amassed several hundred acres--the individual farmer must be skilled in doing numerous kinds of physical activities and chores. Consequently, the farmers not only help each other, but they must also be self-reliant and resourceful. Rosie was skilled and knowledgeable about agricultural science, animal husbandry, heavy equipment operation, irrigation systems, and machinery repair. During the summer, her days consisted of feeding and attending to the medical needs of cattle; planting, tending and harvesting agricultural grassland and crops; irrigating farmland; operating heavy machinery and diagnosing equipment breakdowns and repairing them. None of this knowledge

and skill was acquired through the formal education system but was instead acquired from growing up in the culture. The knowledge was passed down through family members and neighbors and acquired through trial and error. Thus, knowledge acquisition is primarily embodied and not always articulated in language.

The acquisition of knowledge points to another key feature of the North Shoshone culture—limited institutional affiliations. Because of the requirements of the work—farming is a 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week, three-hundred-and sixty-four-days-a-year commitment--farmers in this area often do not have the time to devote to church or consumption of mass media, nor do most of them hold formal educational attainment beyond a high-school diploma. This is important to note because, although they are not immune from the effects of the dominant culture in the U.S., they have limited exposure to some of its more powerful institutional components.

The final element of the culture of North Shoshone that shapes its unique contours is the farmers' intimate knowledge of the land, plants, and animals, a knowledge that enables them to interact with all. For a farmer to be successful in North Shoshone, he or she must be able to communicate with the land, the plants, and the animals in order to understand and meet their respective needs. They, in return, help sustain the farmers; it is thus a reciprocal relationship. When sowing in the spring, for example, the farmers must be able to “read” the land in order to properly corrugate the fields so that the water will flow for proper irrigation. The farmers can tell when plants need water (the leaves of thirsty corn and wheat plants will roll up to preserve water from evaporating from their surface) or whether they are infested by disease or insects.

They can tell when animals are sick or in pain and they can diagnose their symptoms to care for them. I saw evidence of this numerous times while I was conducting my fieldwork in North Shoshone. One incident stands in my mind as I arrived one day to find Rosie helping one of the neighbors deliver baby goats or kids. The female goat, or nanny, was giving birth to twins. The goat was having trouble with the delivery so Rosie rolled up her sleeve and stuck her arm inside the animal to find out what was wrong. She said the kid needed to be turned. The neighbor said, “Just pull it out.” But Rosie said no, the kid’s legs would break. “They are just like pencils.” After a bit of struggle, she was able to turn the kid and get its head out. When the kid was born, it wasn’t breathing, so Rosie thumped on its chest with her finger and blew in its mouth. Finally, the kid bleated and kicked its legs. Even though the kid was breathing, it was weak. Rosie said he was probably born too soon; like a human infant born prematurely, its lungs were probably not well developed.

Since the farmers have raised most of the animals from babies, they also know their individual temperaments and know how they will respond to a variety of situations. All of this knowledge is largely embodied rather than articulated. On one of our trips to check the cattle being pastured off of the ranch, I observed as Rosie walked among them, counting to make sure they were all there and looking for signs of injury or disease. I ask if the cows are dangerous—cattle left on the range often will attack to protect their calves—but Rosie says, “No, these cows are all bottle babies.” This means that she raised them all by hand, starting with a bottle then moving progressively to a bucket and then a feeder. To prove her point, Rosie points to one cow and says, “She’s the river rat.” The cow had gotten its name because she had had her first calf on

a small island in the middle of the Little Wood River and the family had gone out to get the calf because they feared the cow might panic bringing the calf back through the water by herself.

Animals are central to the culture of North Shoshone; they are often the focus of work as well as play and community building. This centrality becomes apparent during the highlight of the year, the county fair, when the community comes together to show the animals they have nurtured all yearlong.

In fact, it might be claimed that Rosie's intimates were the pack of five cattle dogs that she always had with her. During the time of my study, the only time she was without her dogs was in situations where they were not allowed by the rules of the dominant culture, which barred animals in most establishments, except service dogs. They followed her around the farm and accompanied her on the tractor as she was sowing and harvesting the fields. They also traveled with her in the truck when she did errands and slept with her at night. They were her constant companions.

But probably the most telling characteristic of the farmers was that they were not disgusted by the natural world. To them, it was indeed "natural." They didn't mind exposing their bodies to the dirt, manure, and blood that is a part of the living world. Their relationships with the animals and the place where they lived expanded their community beyond their human neighbors.

The picture I have tried to paint here in this short space is that of a culture that creates a particular identity formation. The place involves a particular kind of labor that is sustained by a particular kind of knowledge acquisition—largely embodied—and often imposes limits on the inhabitants' financial resources as well as exposure to institutional effects. The place also creates particular relationships between it and its inhabitants, including people, animals and plants.

Discussion

The purpose of the above discussion is to provide an example of a subject formation that is primarily derived in practice. This notion is in line with the thinking of phenomenologists, who have tried to conjure up the situated, prelinguistic, embodied states that give intelligibility (but not necessarily meaning) to human action. Heidegger called this state the primordial or preontological understanding of the common world or our ability to make sense of things, Wittgenstein referred to this state as the background, Merleau-Ponty conceived of it as the space of the lived body, and Bourdieu called it the habitus. All of these thinkers were interested in reconceiving being as "the social with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing and which we carry with us inseparably before any objectifications" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 362).

Reconnecting with this prelinguistic state is useful in that it helps us to recognize that not all of the world is symbolic or representational, one of the weaknesses of some of the theories of identity that were discussed earlier in this paper. "To situate our understandings in practices is to see it as implicit in our activity, and hence as going well beyond what we manage to frame representations of" (Taylor, 1993, p. 49). Even though we also frame representations, much of our intelligent action is usually carried out unformulated. "It flows from an understanding which is largely inarticulate" (Taylor, 1993, p. 50).

Such a basis of understanding of the subject problematizes other theories of identity and allows us to contemplate its four main characteristics. First, the subject's understanding comes from the ceaseless flow of conduct, which is always future-oriented (Pile & Thrift, 1995). In other words, this understanding helps to undermine the subject-object relation because understanding does not come from individual subjects moving deliberately and intentionally through spaces in serial time, but rather from subjects who display absorbed coping or use of comportment, to use Heidegger's term. Comportment differs from an action-oriented view of understanding in a variety of ways, first of which, it is an open mode of awareness that "is not mental, inner, first-person, private, subjective experience. . . separate from and directed towards non-mental objects" (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 68).

A second characteristic of the subject's understanding of the world is that it is intrinsically corporeal (Pile & Thrift, 1995). The socialized body is not an object but the repository of a generative, creative capacity to understand. Embodiment also creates temporality and spatiality.

A third characteristic of the subject's understanding is that it is worked out in joint action. Many actions require co-operation to complete and assume the presence of others. Thus all actions are bound together by mutual dispositions and shared understanding, which they both take from and contribute to. Or as Taylor (1993) puts it, "my embodied understanding doesn't exist only in me as an individual agent; it also exists in me as the co-agent of common actions" (p. 53).

According to Latour (1993), co-agents may include non-human Others, including tools, as part of the process of the creation of agency. This view comes from actor-network theory, which treats agents as relational effects; the agents themselves are not unified effects but are rather contingent achievements. Achieving agency thus requires the mobilization of all manner of things, leading actor-network theorists to argue for a "symmetrical anthropology", which is more likely to recognize and value the contribution of the non-human by shifting our cultural classifications of entities (Pile and Thrift, 1995). As Latour states, "all collectivities are different from one another in the way that they divide up beings, in the properties that they attribute to them, in the mobilization they consider acceptable" (1993, p. 107). When viewed in this way, Latour claims that if we look at our historical method of constituting actors, we have left out the role of the non-human.

The fourth characteristic of the subject's world is that it is situated. The subject can only "know from". Thus, abstracting subjectivity from time and space becomes an impossibility because practices are always open and uncertain and depend to some degree upon the immediate resources available at the moment to it in time and space. Consequently, place is constitutive of the subject's understanding of the world.

What should be clear from this discussion is that the subject's understanding of the world, with its emphasis on the flow of practice, embodiment, joint action and situations, produces its own epistemological stance. In other words, it is useful in getting away from the intellectual bias of so much social theory, which tends towards the objectifying gaze associated with seeing the world as a set of significations to be interpreted, towards theory which grasps the

world as a set of situated concrete problems to be solved practically. Although, Heidegger was not interested in how the understanding of being was instituted and passed on, he does posit that “everyday coping is taken over by each individual by socialization in the public norm and this forms the clearing [understanding of being] that governs people by determining what possibilities show up as making sense” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1993, p. 37).

What I have attempted to lay out is that place and our relationship to it can be a critical determinant of the practices that create subjectivity; place matters in how we understand ourselves, the world, and our relationship to it. The identity formation of the inhabitants of North Shoshone provides a way of understanding the subject in a non-dualistic way, one that is not separate from the elements of the natural world, but a subject that is dependent upon, emersed in and interrelated with that world.

Conclusion

In proposing an alternate identity formation, I would highlight one of its elements, what Massey (1994) calls the difference that “makes a difference” or the emphasis on relationship, the recognition of interconnectedness between personal identity and identity of place (p. 122) as compared with the subject-object relation mechanism from which arises the inconsolable separation from the Other.

As de Certeau (1984) argues, such a connection—between place and its inhabitants—molds people identities. I have attempted to show in this paper that an alternate identity construction exists, one that is not characterized by a separation from the Other but rather by a connection to the Other, in a complex web of interrelationship. What I propose here takes social identity theory further by claiming that relationships with non-human Others also may have profound effects on identity construction. And just as those scholars that claim identity is a mutual product that is negotiated and mutually formed in relationships through communication, I claim that interaction with non-human Others—the land, plants, and animals—also creates identities, such as those of the North Shoshoneans described in this paper (Hecht et al, 2005). Key to supplanting this subject-object relationship is a phenomenological understanding of the world as being immersed in the elements of a particular place.

In describing this particular identity formation, I am not attempting to valorize the particular lifestyles of the North Shoshoneans but am trying to highlight a particular relationship to the world and kind of being that I believe is useful for theoretical and practical purposes. In other words, I am not suggesting that we should all become struggling farmers, a view that many progressive liberal and certain moralistic views might condemn. However, I think that the identities I have described are useful not only in a theoretical but a practical way for interrogating our own relationships to the natural world and to others, for reconceiving our way of being in the world. More specifically, I am speaking about the other culture in which I currently reside, the consumer culture of the U.S. It should be noted here that I do recognize that sub-cultures do exist within the consumer cultural framework.

Leach (1999) claims changes have occurred over time in the United States, changes that have damaged or reduced a sense of place, including the commodification of life in the form of consumer culture and the creation of systems of transportation and communication that have

helped to create a worldwide economy that marginalizes local places and creates a kind of sameness regardless of the place we find ourselves. Industrial and financial capitalism was the critical impetus behind the migratory nature of culture in the U.S., according to Leach. The competitive success of the capitalist system has always depended upon a reliable, flexible pool of cheap labor. But industrial capitalism did more than change labor; it also laid the foundation for “mass consumer society” (Leach, p. 12). This latter development also changed the way those in the U.S. understood place. “Intrinsic to it was the cult of the new, the need to overturn the past and begin again, and to disregard all attachments in the interest of getting the “new and improved,” whether goods, jobs, entertainment or places (Leach, p. 13). Consumer culture has to a large extent commodified place, extracting from it its lived qualities and thereby often reducing it to an object for investment purposes.

Consumer culture tears space away from place “by fostering relations between ‘absent’ others,” as Anthony Giddens (1990) claims (p. 213). What is missing in consumer culture is “presence”, or localized activity, which dominates the dimensions of social life in societies that are not predominantly formed by consumerist values (Giddens, 1990). Such localized activity is characteristic of North Shoshone, where people develop strong bonds of community but also relationships with the land and non-human Others. These relationships are primarily missing in consumer society because of our mobility and our disconnection from the natural world, living in the concrete and asphalt landscape of the suburbs and the city.

As Bushman illustrates, wealth also has its downsides for it gives us the ability to move from a system based upon (to use Marxist terms) “use” value to that of “exchange” value, in which the symbolic nature of commodity exchanges take precedence over the functional value of the commodity. The mechanism of exchange value supports the construction of identities based upon subject-object relations. Looking to the farmers of North Shoshone this mechanism might be better understood. Because of the farmers’ limited exposure to dominant institutions and their limited financial resources, use value guides much of their commodity decisions rather than exchange value. Examples are the use of food, clothing, vehicles and homes. Although enjoyed, the consumption of food is not used as a way of seeking status but is either functional—nutritional—or community-building. Clothes are not thought of as a way to declare an identity or too separate from others but are considered a functional need to provide protection from the sun or the cold. Farmers drive pick-up trucks, a functional vehicle, rather than sports cars or SUVs, which often help to bolster certain identity constructions. Even their homes are not objects to be used to distinguish themselves from others as Bushman as described but are primarily functional in that they are a place to cook, sleep and bathe. This is not to argue that exchange value does not have a place within the culture of North Shoshone, only that it is not the predominant operator.

Perhaps a better illustration of the operation of exchange value is put forth by the writing of Frank (1991), who attempts to recuperate the body as a way of working against theorists who reduce the world to symbols. Frank (1991) claims that the body in consumer culture is monadic in its appropriation, or consumption, of the exterior world, even though it is open to that world. By consumption, Frank does not mean “use” in the classic Marxist sense but rather “the endless assimilation of the world’s objects to one’s own body, and of one’s own body to the world’s objects” (1991, p. 62). In the world of the consumer body, or what Frank calls “the mirroring body”, projection and introjection take place in “seamless reciprocity” (1991, p. 62). Consequently, the mirroring body projects its desires onto others and, at the same time, introjects

those desires. According to Frank, consumption for the mirroring body “is the monadic representation of the world through its assimilation of a world [sic] which exists only for its own assimilation: (1991, p. 62).

Frank proposes an alternative type of embodiment that has a dyadic relationship to others. This dyadic relationship is not one of mirroring but one instead of realization. What is realized is simply the body itself, “producing itself, recursively, through the variations of a life which is no longer appropriated by institutions and discourses but is now the body’s own” even though the body continues to be formed among institutions and discourses (Frank, 1991, p. 80).

These practical understandings of the various mechanisms of the subject-object relation and the effects of a dislocation from the natural world might provide insights into how we might more self-reflexively interrogate our own identities and the basis of their construction and perhaps open the door to other possibilities that produce a different kind of relationship to the world and its inhabitants and a different belief system, one that might be in greater harmony with the natural world and less seduced by consumer practices that threaten to destroy our planet through global warming and other kinds of environmental degradation.

Implications for Communication

As may be apparent in the preceding discussion, an understanding of the identity construction described here and its epistemological stance may have several implications for communication scholars. The first implication is for scholars who study the construction of identity. Including the role of place in the social construction of identities can help us to reach a deeper understanding of particular identities. For scholars interested in environmental communication, this awareness may be used to better understand mechanisms of positive social change, such as redefining the way that agency is created. That is, if agency arises from networks of collectivities that include non-human others, we may be better able to recognize the role of the natural world in the creation of identities and ways of being. Ultimately, the goal of Latour was to conjure up the idea of a world in which the human is highly decentered and is unable to be placed in opposition to the non-human. Thus, some of our favored dualities, such as nature and culture, might fall away to be replaced by new hybrid representations and, perhaps, more importantly, new ethical considerations.

More generally, the embodied ways of knowing can help us to complicate our thinking about what it means to communicate and how that process takes place. If we take a phenomenological approach to the world, we experience ourselves in the company of others. Therefore, we are co-beings. We share this understanding of co-being through communication and through communication we understand our common situatedness. Communication is thus central to our understandings of ourselves but the means of that communication may differ, depending upon the Others who are part of the process. According to Merleau-Ponty, there is constant interaction and interdependency between our bodies and our biological and social environments. Our language and our perceptions are thus interdependent and may thus be highly situated, a view that has not been well documented or interrogated in the study of communication.

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