Postmodernist Identity - Construction and Consumption*

Prof Dr. İrfan ÇAĞLAR[1], PhD. Candidate Reyhan KARABABA[2],

[1,2] Hitit University, Corum, Turkey

Abstract. With the shift from modernism to postmodernism, identity as a concept began to be redefined in the sociological literature. The goal of this study is to show that postmodernism and symbolic interactionism are fused together to delineate both the scene as well as an actor's identity. In that way, the interaction of a social structure with a culture that won't be completely ignored, and, with the opinion that the categorized roles can be shaped skillfully and diversified by actors, it is possible to refrain from a pure determinism. But transformation to enter different roles does not make sense. Individuals pay more attention to their appearance than who they are in order to be accepted by each group. In this manner, a metaphysical shell game begins. In the following study, the "Social Appearance Anxiety" was used as an indicator of this game. And to determine who is willing to play the game, cultural parameters were utilized.

This study was based on the analysis of the data collected through two questionnaires given to 181 students studying at Hitit University. The INDCOL questionnaire [Singelis et al., 1995] measuring cultural values and "Social Appearance Anxiety" scale developed by [Hart, 2008] were used in the study.

Keywords: Post Modernism, Identity, Cultural Values, Social Appearance Anxiety, Consumption.

JEL Codes: M19

1. Introduction

In recent years, in the social sciences, the ideas of identity and character continue to be located at the center of the debate. Interdisciplinary science adopted an eclectic method and a postmodern trend, producing effects on self-concept and identity debate nowadays. These new sciences have not been affected by symbolic interactionism, which is the dominant theory found in sociology dealing with identity. "According to Lemert, symbolic interactionism has found an irrelevant place to postmodernism, as pragmatism. The reason for this may be sought in the approach of the symbolic interactionism to pragmatism, while postmodernism dissociates from pragmatism. However, due to the structural loyalty of symbolic interactionism to the real world, it seems to be a relative of postmodern theory" [Callero, 2003: 116]. Symbolic interactionists maintain that social order occurs as a result of meaning being attributed to objects, events, and actions. Therefore, this study used the symbolic interactionism to understand

---

individual consumption orientation. Today, individualists gives a lot of meaning the clothes they wear and the products they use, and have the belief that their appearance provides them with more power which makes them feel safe. This may lead to an excessive social appearance anxiety. To manage this process, they tend to indulge in over-consumption, and this trend provides new tools to advertisers.

The main effort of this study was to make clear the extent to which the postmodern consumer, considering an individualistic value that places himself in a spotlight, is affected by the external reference and how this can lead to manifestations of social anxiety.

In the marketing field, concrete examples of this can be seen clearly in the new generation of advertisements. For example, a man using a roll-on deodorant belonging to an X mark can increase his attractiveness in the eyes of women, while a woman using toothpaste belonging to Y mark can become the focus of attention in a party. In this regard, brands present their products as a magical power making people more attractive and heroic.

2. The Interpretation of Identity

According to Rosenberg [1989], identity, as a common concept of psychology, sociology and psychoanalysis, is the sum of the thoughts and feelings associated with the identity. Identity is a main component of individual consciousness in psychology, it is a social product and social power in sociology, and it is a source of psychological stress and conflict in psychoanalysis. Watson's [1913] "Behavioral Paradigm" embodied the approach which see individual as an object observed in a laboratory and evaluate the findings with statistical tools, adopting deductive method in North American psychological approach.

Snygg's [1941] Alternative Phenomenology Paradigm focusing on investigating phenomenal and the perceptual world of individuals has been accepted in German-Speaking Countries. This paradigm gave birth to the thought of reality which is interpreted, perceived, organized by the internal frame of reference more than an external one.

Phenomenological paradigm in which identity is centered hasn't been a dominant paradigm because of irrelevant to experimental psychology. While identity is a social product, the concept identified by Phenomenological Paradigm could not find a place in sociology too. However identity mentioned in the main sociological paradigms and it occurred as a concept in 1902. Cooley's metaphor of the looking glass describes identity as a concept which is a product of social interaction. In other words, identity is a twin of society in this metaphor. A detailed definition of identity concept based on society was made in "Mind, Self and Society", Mead's lecture notes, published in 1943 [Rosenberg, 1989].

According to Mead, identity occurs in a series of cognitive events. When an action is taken against others, a set of reactions was born in the mind of the actor. These responses can be attributed to social identity (me) or common behavioral patterns. How other social agents' respond to past similar acts are learned by observing or the roles of social agents are adopted. In other words, social identity is constituted by keeping the responses of other actors to similar situation in mind. When a reaction against the responses of social identity (common behavioral patterns) occurs in the inner world of an individual, the individual will organize her/his actions. In this situation, "individual identity" (I) will emerge. Organizing social actions and the occurrence of internal dialog with identity are the result of learning social interaction patterns [Kashima et al., 2007].

Mead emphasizes that individuals began to perceive themselves in the eyes of others and internalize society as a whole [Rosenberg, 1989]. For that reason, Mead positioned in the interaction approach, maintaining that identity should be described in the definite context [Burrel and Morgen, 1979]. In postmodernism the contexts are so narrow. Because postmodernism isn't the pursuit of giving meaning to collective behaviour, this approach concentrates more on fragmented segments and group behaviour.

Each group requires different roles and when people are motivated to enter a new group with so little information, they prefer to reorganize their image which is way easier than changing their identity to comply with the group. They use clues like culture, clothes, speech patterns etc. These clues are found by giving meaning to the interactions of the members of the group and their roles in a symbolic interactionist account [Stryker, 2008: 22]. The easy way to switch the role of the same member of different groups is to change their appearance with the popular brands among the members of the group. This tendency or weakness is manipulated by marketing gurus.

Especially the impacts of postmodernism on marketing can be assessed under five headings [Firat, Venkatesh, 1993]:

1. Hyperreality;

2. Fragmentation;

3. Reversal of consumption and production;

4. Decentering of the subject; and

5. Paradoxical juxtapositions (of opposites)

This paper especially focus on social appearance anxiety as a result of fragmentation. Fragmentation indicates the existence of different consumer segments. These segments are so flexible to permit consumer to switch their role from one to another according to the groups which they are member of. Therefore marketing efforts focus on these roles and the questions like the following one; what are businesspeople supposed to consume? We can replicate these questions for a caring mother, efficient manager, and gourmet homemaker. Each one represents a different style, different image and personalities [Firat, Venkatesh; 1993:232].

3. Identity from the Perspective of Social Culture and Postmodernism

Postmodernist Foucault explain that the endless research made to quest for the fundamental truths of human existence has oriented the Europeans to explore the depth of life constructed by the great hidden forces of history. According to Foucault who is a critic of structural determinism, these hidden structural or historical forces give us reasons to tell compelling stories about our existence. At the same time, development historians have constructed a frame of identity by identifying concepts in that way. Also, development historians, against modern scientific studies that don't reveal any definite evidence when the human being history began, promise indefinite synthesis, predictions and forecasts. In that way, it built a privileged sanctuary for dominant consciousness [Brigg, 2009]. In the last decade, researchers aiming to make common estimations of individuals' behavior frequently use the social culture concept comprising

history as well as dominant consciousness and common experiences.Culture means at the same time,motives,values,beliefs,identities,representations i.e. events and shared experiences that are passed from one generation to another. Operational definition of culture includes the concepts of common language, ideological belief systems (religious and political), ethnic heritage and history [House and Javidan, 2004: 15].

Culture manipulates our behaviour. Social culture is in the domain of social psychology. Cultural patterns which can be very different give us the opportunity to compare groups and nationals. We realize that we are different from other cultures when we encounter with the other ones [Triandis, 1994]. Hence, an individual's identity who grew up in a definite context can be different from others having different cultural values of the other contexts.

From the point of Mead's social identity concept, culture is a common feature of individuals who see themselves like the others attached to the same group. At this point, the question is supposed to arise in one's mind: by what factors are boundaries of a group's culture determined? According to Cornell and Hartmann [1998], some groups have power to determine their boundaries and therefore they can categorize themselves in the dominant system. The groups devoid of power to struggle with the dominant system try to conform to the system. The conformation efforts can't reflect real transformation toward the dominant system. The anti-essentialism approach integrated with post-modernism provides effective tools to manipulate the meanings in order to have power and to pretend to conform to the society. The approach describes a theoretical classification deprived of intrinsic meaning and a common denominator. In other words, the groups in the society are open to different perspectives and deprived of intrinsic meanings [Sementelli, 2009].

Social constructionism adopts cultural perspective to interpret collective behaviour. There isn't such a concern in post modernism and it focuses on solipsism, describing everyone as unique. But solipsism has a big problem, relativism. To address this problem of solipsism, social constructionist approach define the "metaphysical shell game" [Hansen, 2010]. In this century brand marks provide power and similarity to individuals in search of a sanctuary.

In light of the above discussion, the aim of the paper to fuse the cultural approach as a tool of symbolic interactionism and social constructionist concern and appearance anxiety as a child of postmodernist loneliness. As a result, this paper is based on the relationships between artificial similarity and individualism, emerging values of modern times, and in pursuit of the clues to prove this assumption.

4. Research Methodology

This study was based on the analysis of the data collected through two questionnaires given to 181 students studying at Hitit University. The INDCOL questionnaire [Singelis et al., 1995] was used to determine the cultural values of students in four dimensions; namely, vertical individualism-collectivism, and, horizontal individualism-collectivism. The validity of the questionnaire in Turkish was confirmed by Wasti and Erdil [2007] and replicated by Karababa [2010]. Vertical dimension, both for individualism and collectivism corresponds to tolerance for hierarchy, inequality, ranking according to privileges. In the horizontal dimension the sense of equality is dominated. The difference between individualist and collectivist individuals on vertical dimension is the importance given to in-group. Vertical collectivist individual devotes him/herself to in-group objectives and is competing against out-groups. While horizontal

individualists see themselves equal with the others, they want to preserve their distinctive identity [Triandis, 1995]. The Social Appearance Anxiety was measured by using the Turkish version of Hart's [et al.] scale [2008] that has been validated by [Doğan, 2010]. The main hypothesis examined in the study is that there is a significant relationship between "Social Appearance Anxiety" and the dominant concern of individualism which emerged with post modernism.

5. The Analysis

First, were used as sample descriptive statistics on cultural values as well as some aspects of social anxiety. Then, to measure the scales' reliability, they were evaluated using the Cronbach alpha coefficients. This co-efficient is usually used in social sciences and in literature, with 0.70 and above being acceptable. For the sample which was studied, the value for both of the scales was about 0.90. Finally, both regression and correlation analysis were used to examine the effects of cultural values on social appearance anxiety.

6. Results

The results of the analysis are supported by literature. The relationship between the collectivist dimension and the social appearance anxiety is negative. In other words, the social appearance anxiety decreases for individuals with a more collectivist values. The findings also show that individuals with a greater vertical individualistic value are more malleable to have social appearance anxiety. Also, horizontal individualism, not including status difference and competition, has a negative relation with social appearance anxiety too. However, there is a positive relation between vertical individualism emphasizing competition and social appearance anxiety.

Table 1: Correlation Results

		social appearance	Horizontal Collectivism	Dikey Toplulukçuluk
social appearance anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-,213[**]	-,164[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,004	,027
	N	181	181	181
Horizontal Collectivism	Pearson Correlation	-,213[**]	1	,691[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,004		,000
	N	181	181	181
Vertical Collectivism	Pearson Correlation	-,164[*]	,691[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,027	,000	
	N	181	181	181
Horizantal	Pearson Correlation	-,280[**]	,622[**]	,664[**]

Individualism	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000
	N	181	181	181
Vertical	Pearson Correlation	,632[**]	,097	,172[*]
Individualism	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,195	,021
	N	181	181	181

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors' Research

In a nutshell, by regression analysis, it is found that the social appearance anxiety is significantly influenced positively by vertical individualism. Therefore, individuals tend to have more anxiety when they are more vertically individualistic.

Table 2: ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40,638	1	40,638	143,969	,000[a]
	Residual	50,527	179	,282		
	Total	91,165	180			

a. Predictors: (Constant), dikeyBireycilik

b. Dependent Variable: sosyalGörünüşKaygısı

7. Conclusion

In our world, which is changing and developing faster every day, culture has a tendency to lean towards polymorphism rather than simplicity. In the process of modernization, it can be seen to have universal values with different local forces or cultural patterns coming together. This situation may cause an individual to reach a synthesis rather than choosing one for themselves. The emergence of different and

hybrid cultures in the same context can be an indicator of that. On one hand, symbolic interactionism evolved approaching an interpretation which allowed to find its place in a postmodern world. Therefore, culture can be used as a medium to reach the meaning of our world. On the other hand, symbolic interactionism is not denying the collective identity, on a micro-level, which can suppress the diversity concerns of postmodernism. In the study, the use of two approaches combined in one unit can be more descriptive to help explaining identity. The goal of this study, in the modern world, shows that common features and certain variables shared by individuals, will shed light on both business and marketing policies. Indeed, the convergence of solipsism with postmodernism demonstrates that the main issue is the power. Using this motivation, we can see that individuals tend to indulge in over-consumption.

8. References

[1] T. M. Singelis, H. C. Triandis, D. S. Bhawuk, and M. J. Gelfand. *Horizontal and vertical dimensions of individualism and collectivism: A theoretical and measurement refinement. Cross-Cultural Research. 1995, 29 (3), pp. 240-275.*

[2] T. A. Hart, D. B. Flora, S. A. Palyo, D. M. Fresco, C. Holle & R. C. Heimberg. *Development and Examination of the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale. Assessment. 2008, 15, p. 48-59.*

[3] P. L. Callero. *The Sociology of the Self. Annual Review of Sociology. 2003, 29, p.115–33.*

[4] M. Rosenberg. *Self-Concept Research: A Historical Overview. Social Forces. Sept. 1989, 68(1):34-44.*

[5] J.B. Watson. *Psychology as the behaviorist views it. Psychological review. 1913, 20(2), p.158.*

[6] D. Snygg. *The need for a phenomenological system of psychology. Psychological Review. 1941, 48(5), p.404.*

[7] Y. Kashima, A.K. Gurumurthy, L. Ouschan, T. Chong and J. Mattingley. *Connectionism and self: James, Mead, and the stream of enculturated consciousness. Psychological Inquiry. 2007, 18(2), pp.73-96.*

[8] G. Burrell and G. Morgan. *Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis. 1979, (Vol. 248). london: Heinemann.*

[9] S. Stryker. *From Mead To A Structural Symbolic İnteractionism and Beyond. Annual Review of Sociology. 2008, 34, pp.15-31.*

[10] A.F. Firat, and A. Venkatesh,. *Postmodernity: The Age of Marketing. International Journal of research in Marketing. 1993, 10(3), pp.227-249.*

[11] M. Brigg. *The Developers of Self: A Non-Deterministic Foucauldian Frame. Third World Quarterly. 2009, 30(8), p.1411-1426.*

[12] R. J. House, M. Javidan. *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies by Dr. Robert J. House, Dr. Paul J. Hanges, Dr. Mansour Javidan, and Peter W. Dorfman (Edts) London: Sage Publication. 2004, pp. 9-26.*

[13] H. C. Triandis. *Cultur and Social Behavior, New York : McGraw-Hill, 1994.*

[14] S. Cornell, D. Hartmann. *Ethnicity and Race, Making Identities in a Changing World, Pine Forge Press / A London: Sage Publication Company, 1998.*

[15] A. J. Sementelli. *Antiessentialism, Parrhesia, and Citizenship. Administrative Theory & Praxis. September 2009, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 360–376.*

[16] J. T. Hansen. *Inner Subjective Experiences and Social Constructionism: A Response to Rudes and Guterman (2007). Journal of Counseling & Development. 2010, Volume 88, pp. 210-213.*

[17] A. Wasti, S. E. Erdil. Bireycilik Ve Toplulukçuluk Değerlerinin Ölçülmesi: Benlik Kurgusu ve INDCOL Ölçeklerinin Türkçe Geçerlemesi, Yönetim Araştırmaları Dergisi. 2007, 7 (1-2), pp. 39-66.

[18] R. Karababa. Örgütsel Tutumlar Üzerinde Kültürün ve İş Çevresinin Göreli Etkileri: Türkiye'de ve Almanya'da Çalışan Türk İşçiler Üzerinde Karşılaştırmalı Bir Araştırma, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Başkent Üniversitesi, Ankara, 2010.

[19] H. C. Triandis. Individualism and Collectivism. Boulder: Westview Press Inc. 1995.

[20] T. DOĞAN. Sosyal Görünüş Kaygısı Ölçeği' nin (Sgkö) Türkçe Uyarlaması: Geçerlik Ve Güvenirlik Çalışması, Hacettepe Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi (H. U. Journal of Education). 2010, 39, p. 151-159.