International Studies Review (2020) **22**, 325–346

ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Varieties of Social Construction

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This article presents social construction as a research framework, rather than an explanatory theory in constructivism, to outline different research strategies. Varieties of constructivism thus far conceived in international relations prefer cleavages where scholars are regarded as thin/thick, conventional/critical, or mainstream/radical. In contrast, I introduce a new landscape of social construction to show unique mechanisms for socially constructing international politics. The new landscape varies on two dimensions. The first, source of socialization, asks whether scholars treat social context as fixed in discrete, observable forms or as fluid in indiscrete, shifting arrangements. The second dimension, focus of analysis, asks whether scholars primarily study social structures, social subjects, or some interaction of the two. The dimensions make visible a multitude of research strategies with implications for the stability of social processes and the potential for causal analysis. Moreover, within this landscape, the article focuses on four processes of social construction—aggregating, assembling, internalizing, and performing—as seen inductively through examining prominent constructivist projects. Disaggregating the many processes avoids the misuse of social construction as a catchall mechanism. Finally, the article applies the select processes to the social construction of international norms to better grasp the relative payoffs of constructivist IR scholarship for research and teaching.

Keywords: constructivism, norms, typology

International relations (IR) scholars borrow “social construction” from sociology to argue that international politics is socially constructed[1] in a broad range of issues.[2] Social construction means our social context informs identity and action, or who we are and what we do. However, where sociologists use a variety of research strategies to study social construction (for instance, there are as many ways to study the social construction of race as there are sociologists of race), IR scholars have been limited by treating social construction as an explanatory theory in constructivism. But

[1] For prominent engagements of social construction for international relations theory, see Ashley 1986, 1987; Kratochwil 1989, 2000; Onuf 1989, 1998; Hollis and Smith 1990; Wendt 1992, 1995, 1999; Dunne 1995; Adler 1997, 2002; Hopf 1998; Checkel 1998; Ruggie 1998; Risse 2000; Finnemore and Sikkink 2001; Smith 2001; Fierke 2006; Hurd 2008.

[2] Diverse uses of social construction for empirical examinations in international politics include: Campbell 1992, 1998; Klotz 1995; Weber 1995; Biersteker and Weber 1996; Finnemore 1996, 2003; Katzenstein 1996a, 1996b; Kier 1997; Hall 1999; Koslowski 1999; Neumann 1999; Weldes 1999; Philpott 2001; Bukovansky 2002; Crawford 2002; Hopf 2002; Carpenter 2003; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Hansen 2006; Hurd 2007; Jackson 2007; Epstein 2008; Tannenwald 2008; Nexon 2009; Towns 2010; Phillips 2011; Reus-Smit 1999, 2013.

Srivastava, Swati. (2019) Varieties of Social Construction. *International Studies Review*, doi: 10.1093/isr/viz003
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there is no singular "constructivist theory of international relations" because social construction, by definition, does not lend itself to monolithic explanations of social life (Fearon and Wendt 2002, 56). Instead, theories, like actions, depend on social context. For instance, the social construction of war involves many social constructions: distinguishing war from other forms of violence, determining preferences for war, recognizing actions in war, and living as war-making and war-surviving peoples and states. To say that war is a social construct leads to many kinds of inquiries. We can inquire how war is socially structured in terms of asking what effect society, economics, history, or politics have on constructing war. We can also inquire how war is a social structure in terms of asking what effect war has on constructing society, economics, history, or politics. None of these inquires point to a constructivist theory of war. Instead, these inquiries reflect processes of social construction where war as a social context generates a variety of actions and identities.

This article thus pivots from a focus on constructivism as a theory to better understand social construction as a research framework. In other words, it asks: How does "social construction" happen? How do IR scholars *show* social construction? Moreover, how do projects of social construction differ? For instance, how can we distinguish the mechanisms of social construction of national identity in Hopf (2002) from Wendt (1999) or the social construction of foreign policy in Campbell (1992) from Finnemore (2003)? These basic research questions are surprisingly difficult to answer, especially in a comparative context. Existing ways of thinking about different constructivists as thin, thick, moderate, radical, conventional, or critical[3] offer limited guidance on the research strategies of social construction. Moreover, given the anti-essentialist spirit of social construction, there is no one-size-fits-all answer. Instead, there are varieties of social construction.

In this article, I present a new typology of social construction based on the choices IR scholars make about the "inputs" and "outputs" of social construction. The first dimension of the typology, *source of socialization*, asks whether scholars conceive of the social context as fixed in discrete, observable forms (which may change but only into other discretely observable forms) or as fluid in indiscrete, shifting arrangements. For instance, scholars may present religion as part of a fixed social context for constructing national identity (Hassner 2009) or treat religion as a fluid social context whose definition itself is a political phenomenon (Hurd 2015). The research strategies use religion differently as social context in social construction. The second dimension, *focus of analysis*, asks whether scholars primarily study social structures, social subjects, or some interaction of the two. For instance, scholars may study gender as an international structure (Sjoberg 2012) or the reification of gendered subjects in international policy (Carpenter 2003). The studies analyze gender differently as social outcome in social construction. The two dimensions then combine to create a landscape where different processes of social construction are made visible: *aggregating* social structures from a fixed social context, *internalizing* social subjectivity from a fixed social context, *assembling* social structures from a fluid social context, and *performing* social subjectivity from a fluid social context.

Varieties of social construction show how seemingly monolithic approaches representing "ideas matter" are actually embedded in complex and diverse examinations of social structures and subjects. Disaggregating these varieties avoids the misuse of social construction as a catchall mechanism doing the same work for distinct problems while producing different outcomes. In addition, the new typology promotes diverse constructivist commitments to ideas *and* material facts, structures *and*

[3] See, for example, Keohane 1988; Adler 1997; Hopf 1998; Ruggie 1998; Wendt 1999; Finnemore and Sikkink 2001; Checkel 2004; Reus-Smit 2005; Hurd 2008. McCourt (2016) argues that a new constructivism now includes practice theory and what he calls "relationalism."

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agents, identity *and* interests, and power *and* politics.[4] The article thus clarifies powerful tools for examining the social construction of international politics.

As a caveat, the same anti-essentialist spirit that defies a singular constructivist theory of international politics also warns against the academic exercise of classifying social construction into a neat typology without reference to political and social context. In fact, the treatment of social construction as an explanatory theory in constructivism is structured by a specific American IR context. In this context, realism, liberalism, and neopositivism demand that any social construction approach fit their standards of a "good theory," regardless of whether the process of turning social construction into constructivism comes at the expense of subverting the meaning of social construction. The article is driven in part to recover the logics of social construction within the highly stylized constructivist scholarship constrained by the demands of American IR theory.

Moreover, while the four processes do not exhaust the possibilities for social construction in international politics, they do provide a more useful starting point than existing accounts that underspecify *how* social construction actually happens. Consider Campbell's (1992, 1) influential *Writing Security*, which alerts how foreign policy involves the perpetual construction of state identity through threat perception since "danger is not an objective condition." Moving beyond Cold War thinking for a post–Cold War world, Campbell poses the quest for national security as the paramount product and producer of the state. Campbell also uses a discourse of otherness to articulate the importance of a socially constructed reality through foreign policy-making. For example, "containment" served beyond American self-defense abroad to domestic social control in the form of McCarthyism and loyalty oaths (Campbell 1992, 170–71). If we are interested in distinguishing Campbell's analysis of social construction from others, is it more helpful to pronounce him a "radical, thick, critical" constructivist or one who analyzes the performance of security?[5]

The article makes three contributions to the study of international relations. First, it makes existing constructivist projects more legible by better situating varied uses of social construction. Second, it offers a guide to better understanding international politics as socially constructed. Finally, it shows payoffs of the different processes by examining the social construction of international norms, an enduring field of study.

First, the article promotes that there are many legitimate ways to engage in social construction analysis in IR. It engages closely with over twenty constructivist monographs with original empirical contributions to international politics. Nonconstructivist IR does a poor job recognizing the variety of substantive constructivist contributions, often reducing social construction to "ideas matter."[6] Meanwhile, reviewers extol the virtue of constructivists *finally* turning to empirical study.[7] The stereotype of an "unscientific" unempirical constructivism runs parallel to the exponential addition of new substantive contributions. It is not surprising that parts of IR have ignored constructivists engaged in substantive empirical inquiry throughout the past two decades. In fact, it follows directly from portraying constructivists not on the strength of their research questions but on their alignment with mainstream orthodoxy. As the next section shows, even among constructivists,

[4] For instance, Phillips (2011, 10) relies on realism to analyze violence and constructivism to analyze norms. On urging multiple overlapping constructivist commitments, see Zehfuss 2002.

[5] Relatedly, distinguishing John Mearsheimer as an "offensive realist" better captures a distinct substantive claim about state interests than "thick realist."

[6] Mearsheimer 1994/1995 is the classic example, but see also Keohane 1988. IR considers itself as having moved beyond the "ideas matter" debate of the 1990s, and yet roundtables such as "Where Ideas Matter" endure at major conferences (APSA annual conference, 2016).

[7] For instance, Dessler 1997 on Finnemore 1996; Doty 1996 on Weber 1995; Wildenthal 2003 on Crawford 2002; Spruyt 2005 on Finnemore 2003.

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existing ways to distinguish these contributions are often limited to forwarding thick/thin, radical/moderate, or critical/conventional positions and promoting one variant over the other.[8] I do not dispute the serious differences that exist among constructivists.[9] But I clarify the sources of disagreement behind epistemological commitments—how we evaluate knowledge claims—that become methodological choices. For instance, why do some social construction projects better lend themselves to causal analysis? The article helps answer this. Furthermore, the typology places existing differences in a more legible landscape that provides equal footing to *all* types of social construction rather than privileging one *over* the other.

Second, the article traces differences in social construction as a matter of research strategy rather than scholarly identity. In other words, the typology identifies varieties of social construction, not constructivists. One implication is that scholars may use different research strategies across different projects. Consider the social construction of international norms. While Finnemore in *The Purpose of Intervention* (2003) uses a fixed social context to understand normative structures for the use of international force, Finnemore in *National Interests in International Society* (1996) deploys a fluid social context to examine the contextual assembly of normative structures, for example the robust diffusion of United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) bureaucracies. Some scholars switch between strategies during the same timeframe. Katzenstein in *The Culture of National Security* (1996a) focuses on the fixed socialization of aggregating norms on international security and national identity, while Katzenstein in *Cultural Norms and National Security* (1996b) evaluates a particular conception of Japanese national security and the processes of internalizing norms to understand pacifist subjectivity. To better capture these differences and the fluidity of the research process, varieties of social construction in this article focus on projects and questions rather than scholars. Also, understanding such variety enables us to better evaluate research strategies on their own terms and make more informed comparisons with other projects of social construction.

Finally, the article clarifies the processes of social construction as reflecting different logics to analyze problems in IR. By specifying four different mechanisms of socially constructing international relations, scholars are armed with more precise tools to observe and analyze phenomena. Scholars can evaluate and situate more socially constructed actions, relations, processes, and outcomes featuring a variety of global actors. Scholars who focus on acts of *aggregating* social structures may show how structures socialize behavior across levels of analysis (individual, state, system, local, regional, etc.) from discrete, fixed social contexts. Scholars who focus on acts of *internalizing* social subjectivity may highlight how subjects are socialized from discrete, fixed social contexts. Scholars who focus on acts of *performing* social subjectivity may depict how subjects are socialized from indiscrete, fluid social contexts. Scholars who focus on acts of *assembling* social structures may map how structures socialize action across levels of analysis from indiscrete, fluid contexts. While critics often generalize Wendtian constructivism that aggregates social structures to stand in for all constructivism,[10] this article promotes other kinds of social construction to increase analytical clarity. Also, constructivists do not monopolize the use of social construction. Social constructions of international politics resonate with liberal underpinnings of the democratic peace (Russett 1993), threat perception and

[8] Adler 1997; Hopf 1998.

[9] For overviews, see Price and Reus-Smit 1998; Smith 2001; Zehfuss 2002; Barnett 2005; Barkin 2010. For critiques of "conventional" constructivism from a "critical" perspective, see Delanty 1997; Onuf 1998; Dessler 1999; Milliken 1999; Sterling-Folker 2000; Steele 2007.

[10] For example, see the reviews of Wendt (1999) as the prototypical constructivist work in Copeland 2000; Doty 2000; Keohane 2000; Krasner 2000; Kratochwil 2000; Lebow 2001; Guzzini and Leander 2006. For typical appropriations of Aggregation beyond constructivism, see Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990; Goldstein and Keohane 1994; Fearon and Laitin 2000; Katzenstein 1996a; Lewis 2003.

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signaling (Jervis 1976), or differentiating levels of analysis (Waltz 1959). The article, then, challenges all IR scholars to be more specific about their use of "social construction." As such, the varieties of social construction offer an expanded tool-kit for interpreting, understanding, and explaining more *of* international politics.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section surveys how different constructivisms appear in IR and demonstrates the need for a new approach. The third section introduces the new landscape of social construction based on the dimensions of *source of socialization* and *focus of analysis*. The fourth section illustrates four processes of social construction—a*ggregating*, *internalizing*, *performing*, and *assembling* social structures and subjectivities—in the new landscape. The fifth section deploys the four processes of social construction to better understand the different analyses of the social construction of norms. The sixth section concludes with payoffs of the new typology.

Constructing Constructivism

This section briefly defines social construction and illustrates how constructivists talk about it with an eye on capturing differences within constructivism.

From sociological sources like Berger and Luckmann (1966), IR scholars theorize the "constructedness" of international reality. Three points stand out. First, social construction starts with social action, not actors in presocial forms. Second, social interactions constitute actor identity and interests, where we do not know what we want without social inputs. Third, material facts must be socially interpreted, meaning objects do not speak for themselves. Prominent scholars converted the insights of social construction into explanatory theories of IR constructivism. Wendt (1992, 406) argues that it is "through reciprocal interaction that we create and instantiate the relatively enduring social structures in terms of which we define our identities and interests." Ruggie (1998, 33) shows that "ideational factors have normative as well as instrumental dimensions." Adler (1997, 322) flags how "interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world." Finnemore and Sikkink (2001, 392–93) bring in "the role of ideas, norms, knowledge, culture, and argument in politics." Within this broad umbrella, differences exist.

The dominant difference within constructivists is usually portrayed as a commitment (or lack thereof) to neopositivist social science. Epistemological commitments "affect the questions we ask, the methods we use to answer those questions, and ultimately the kinds of knowledge that we produce" (Wendt 1998, 101). For instance, Ruggie (1998, 35–36) thinks of constructivist variants as neoclassical, which "focus[es] on a set of analytical tools necessary to make sense of intersubjective meanings and a commitment to the idea of social science," postmodernist, where "the linguistic construction of subjects is stressed, and little hope is held out for a legitimate social science as causality is considered chimerical," and naturalistic which is "is grounded in the philosophical doctrine of scientific realism . . . that stress that scientific inquiry of both material and social." Hopf (1998, 182–83) echoes Ruggie in separating constructivism on epistemology: "Conventional constructivism, while expecting to uncover differences, identities, and multiple understandings, still assumes that it can specify a set of conditions under which one can expect to see one identity or another," where "in contrast, critical theory rejects either the possibility or the desirability of a minimal or contingent foundationalism." Finnemore and Sikkink (2001, 395) add postmodernist constructivists who "reject efforts to find a point from which to assess the validity of analytical and ethical knowledge claims." Meanwhile, modern constructivists "accep[t] that the world is always interpreted does not imply that all interpretations or explanations are equal" (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001, 395). Adler (1997, 335–36) also differentiates constructivism based on a perceived difference in ways of knowing (e.g., "narrative"), objects of study

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(e.g., "international law"), or methods (e.g., "genealogy"). Constructivists do not agree on classifications. For instance, Adler groups Ruggie and Tickner together as representing narrative knowing, whereas Wendt (1999, 3–4) situates Ruggie in a modernist stream and Tickner in a feminist stream.

Another difference between constructivisms is regarding social ontology, or the building blocks, of international politics. Constructivists differ in starting with "ideas," "norms," "rules," "episteme," "practices," or "culture" as the basic stuff of what international social interactions are made of. The different ontologies may feed into different methodologies. For instance, Klotz and Lynch (2007, 15) claim that particular social objects, such as identity and norms, are more susceptible to causal analysis ("why?" questions), whereas others, such as discourse and roles, are better suited for interpretive analysis ("how possible?" questions). Checkel (2004, 230–31) differentiates conventional constructivism, which examines "the role of norms and, in fewer cases, identity in shaping international political outcomes," against interpretive and critical/radical variants that "typically ask 'how possible' questions as opposed to the explanatory 'why' sort." For Jackson and Nexon (1999, 293–302), the difference in social ontologies is about some social referents reflecting what they call a "substantialist" stance reifying essential characteristics, like norms that have a regulatory force on behavior, whereas other referents reflect a "processual relationalist" stance without essentialism, like culture that is constitutive of identity.

By articulating different constructivisms based on epistemology and ontology, some scholars present their work as a bridge or via media between the extremes. For instance, one question is whether international politics is really "ideas all the way down." Wendt (1999, 1–2) claims to overcome this ideational/materialist divide:

> The version of constructivism that I defend is a moderate one that draws especially on structurationist and symbolic interactionist sociology. As such it concedes important points to materialist and individualist perspectives and endorses a scientific approach to social inquiry. For these reasons it may be rejected by more radical constructivists for not going far enough; indeed it is a thin constructivism. It goes much farther than most mainstream International Relations (IR) scholars today, however, who sometimes dismiss any talk of social construction as "postmodernism." Between these extremes I hope to find a philosophically principled middle way.

Wendt appeals to mainstream IR scholars by "conced[ing] important points to materialist and individualist perspectives" at the expense of being "rejected by more radical constructivists for not going far enough." Portraying constructivism as a middle way is motivated by the need to transcend pigeonholing constructivism into "unscientific" postmodernism. Adler (1997, 330; emphasis in original) also envisions: "Constructivism seizes the middle ground because it is interested in understanding how the *material*, subjective and intersubjective worlds interact in the social construction of reality, and because, rather than focusing exclusively on how structures constitute agents' identities and interests, it also seeks to explain how *individual agents* socially construct these structures in the first place." Meanwhile, Onuf (1989, 58) wonders whether a different kind of four-way bridge is possible in Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration across objectivist-subjectivist epistemology and individualist-collectivist ontology. For Wight (2002, 36), constructivism seizes the middle ground in Hollis and Smith's (1990) explanation versus understanding dichotomy. Thinking of constructivists as a middle ground ends up becoming its own variant of constructivism.

Varieties of constructivism thus far conceived regard scholars as differing in *degree* by being more or less conventional or critical in their epistemological and ontological commitments. The differences in degree approach creates "us versus them" camps, raising questions like: "Has mainstream IR fixed its limit of

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permissible debate at the border of 'conventional constructivism,' as rendered by Wendt, Checkel, Adler, and others? And is there any prospect for a productive dialogue not only between mainstream IR and critical theory but also between the different kinds of constructivism?" (Jacobsen 2003, 40–41). Yet, many constructivists are committed to maintaining distinctions based on degrees, especially to avoid lumping all sorts of "non-mainstream" projects together (Wendt 1995). As such, Adler (1997, 332) claims his "primary goal is to distinguish between [postmodern, poststructuralist, critical theory and (postmodern) feminist theory] approaches and the constructivist approach, because much of the confusion about constructivism lies in the conflation of constitutive and meditative epistemologies." The distinctions based on degree can also privilege one approach over the other as the "better" constructivism, like when "a constructivist theory of progress in International Relations, which explains the emergence and consolidation of practices that enhance human interests within and across political communities . . . offers a better, more pragmatic and more even-handed alternative to critical theories that mark their favorite discourses for emancipation" (Adler 1997, 334). Hopf (1998, 197) similarly deems conventional constructivism "nonpareil" in the "richness of its elaboration of causal/constitutive mechanisms in any given social context and its openness (and not just in the last instance, as in critical theory) to the discovery of other substantive theoretical elements at work."[11] Such exclusionary criteria seek to validate "conventional" constructivism as the one "true" representative of social construction in IR.

In contrast to privileging differences in degree, the varieties of social construction presented here build on differentiating *kinds* of social construction, especially based on social ontology (Jackson and Nexon 1999; Checkel 2004; Klotz and Lynch 2007; McCourt 2016). A focus on social ontology reveals choices about research process and better illustrates how social construction actually works, by telling us what researchers assume is social and what is being constructed. Crucially, variants based on social ontology do not result from methodological failures to live up to an ideal version of social construction. I update the ontological framework to avoid the exclusionary ends of the differences in degree approach. First, I assume all social construction begins with a collectivist ontology, leaving out individuals appearing by themselves as fully formed actors. The constructivist research program is different from the rationalist one on precisely the terms that actors do not appear as presocial atomist individuals capable of rationally allocating preferences. Instead, who we are and what we want are inextricably linked. Second, I move beyond the material/ideational divide as a core component of social construction. Constructivists can incorporate material facts into structures of social meanings without creating problems. For instance, Weldes (1999) does not deny the existence of Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba to argue that their threat to American national security was just one out of many possible responses. Finally, I do not treat constructivism as a via media or a bridge between any extremes. Since the varieties of social construction are differences in kind, each type is working on a separate logic that cannot be bridged with another type working under completely different commitments. These logics may not always be competing and certainly appear alongside each other, but they also retain their unique wagers about what matters in social construction. The next section introduces the landscape in more detail.

Landscape of Social Construction

This section presents a new landscape of social construction by focusing on social inputs and outputs of analysis.

The landscape proposes two dimensions of social construction for capturing major research strategies: first, *the source of socialization*, or whether the social context

[11] For a critique, see Jacobsen, 2003, 51–54.

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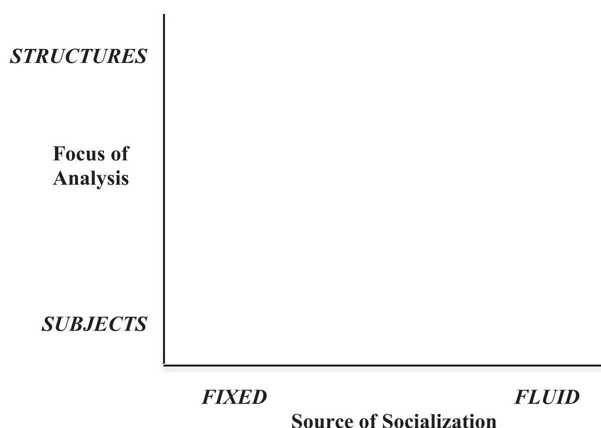

Figure 1. Landscape of Social Construction.

appears as fixed or fluid, and second, *the focus of analysis*, or whether the analysis centers on social structures or social subjects. According to Weber (1949, 78), researchers select presuppositions about social reality as otherwise "a chaos of 'existential judgements' about countless individualized events would be the only result of a serious attempt to analyse reality 'without presuppositions.'" The landscape of social construction makes explicit some of these background presuppositions (Figure 1).

Briefly, the source of socialization asks whether researchers regard social context as discrete and observable in a fixed way or whether researchers treat social context as indiscrete and shifting in a fluid way. The difference often comes down to reifying a version of social context to be stable enough to analyze or to examine shifting ambiguities within a social context. The focus of analysis asks whether researchers target the study of social construction on social structures, social subjects, or the interaction of the two. Scholars may often study multiple dimensions of analysis, and the aim here is just to recognize that sometimes they prioritize the construction of structures and other times the construction of subjects.

Source of Socialization

The first dimension of the landscape concerns "social inputs" and asks whether the source of an actor's socialization is fixed or fluid. Constructivists regard action and social context as mutually producing the other. However, the source of socialization can differ. Some presuppose the source of socialization within an actor's fixed social context, where social context appears in discrete forms, whereas others presuppose the source of socialization within an actor's fluid social context, where social context appears in indiscrete arrangements. For instance, scholars often disagree about using race as a fixed or fluid social construct, with different strategies for examining the social construction of race. We can look at the changing effects of and on race, where the social meaning of race remains fixed in a set way to be comparable, or we can look at the changing expressions of race, where the social meaning of race is fluid in uncertain ways. Both approaches agree that race is a social construct but go about examining its social construction in uniquely different manners. Fixed socialization does not mean that actors or structures themselves are fixed in place or unchanging or that in fluid socialization actors or structures are changing all the time. Instead, the difference is whether scholars locate the processes of socialization in a fixed, discrete social context. Fixed and fluid socialization is ultimately the difference of researchers reifying a particular social context as stable enough

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to study or deciding to explore instead the ambiguities and instability of social contexts. Both are viable research strategies of social construction. Three implications of identifying different sources of socialization are the outcomes of social construction, the stability of identity, and using social context as an independent variable.

Locating socialization in fixed contexts suggests that the social is for learning through the transfer of social meaning. If race is conceived as a fixed social context—if researchers treat race as a discrete, observable, social phenomenon—then it makes it possible to see the social construction of race as one where racialized meanings are transferred from one social context to another, for instance through biases and oppression. Locating socialization in a fluid context suggests that the social is for discovery through the recreation of social meaning. If race is treated as a fluid social relation—if researchers regard race as an indiscrete and shifting phenomenon—then it makes it possible to see the social construction of race as one where racialized meanings are reconfigured within a social context, for instance through power and knowledge. The difference between learning and discovery is ultimately about what social construction *does*: for learning, actors with fixed context use social construction to learn and transfer discrete meaning; for discovery, actors with fluid context engage with social construction to discover and reconfigure indiscrete meaning.

The different sources of socialization also have consequences for how we imagine identity or the subject of socialization. Fixed contexts may accompany stable identities and subjects, and fluid contexts may accompany unstable identities. Recall Campbell in *Writing Security*, where the social context of the US national security apparatus appears as an organized but fluid discursive practice.[12] For Campbell, it is only through repeated performances that something resembling American "state identity" coheres. There, identity is unstable and "performatively constituted," meaning it is viewed as a work-in-progress that does not respond expectedly to social context (Campbell 1992, 8). Alternatively, one might begin with a fixed social context of the American national security apparatus with a defined interest, like containing the Soviets, and then seeing how this social context interacts with a threat environment to change US identity abroad. Here, state identity is stable in that it is viewed as a finished product that responds, perhaps predictably but at least expectedly, to a social context. Our expectations for the reification of identity and subjects flow quite directly from our expectations for the reification of social context.

Finally, both potential sources of reification (social context and social identity) have implications for using social contexts as independent variables in causal analysis. Typically, the distinction between causal and constitutive analysis is portrayed as the difference between "explaining" or "understanding" the world from an outsider or insider perspective (Hollis and Smith 1990, 1). Another way of stating the distinction is that causal analyses ask "why" and "how" questions, whereas constitutive analyses ask "how possible" or "what" questions (Wendt 1998, 104–5). Fearon and Wendt (2002, 58) further argue that constructivists may prefer constitutive explanations over causal ones. However, two conflations emerge. First, social construction projects may assume different types of causal and constitutive insider positions, where the goal is "to make us understand what the events mean, in a sense distinct from any meaning found in unearthing the laws of nature" (Hollis and Smith 1990, 1). Second, nothing precludes social construction analysis from producing equally powerful causal inferences as interpretive ones.[13] The new landscape escapes these binaries to offer novel foundations for social construction. If the source of socialization is fixed and discrete and social identity is assumed as stable,

[12] Discursive practice means performing a discourse through practice. For instance, saying the American pledge of allegiance to the flag in classrooms is a nationalist discursive practice.

[13] One recent engagement with methodological pluralism in constructivist IR is Barkin and Sjoberg 2017.

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any change that covaries may be attributable to the fixed social context. If the source of socialization is fluid and indiscrete and social identity is assumed as unstable, change cannot be attributable to a clearly discrete fluid context. The social context is endogenous to, meaning internal to the functioning of, actors in fluid socialization. In contrast, fixed socialization maintains that social context can be discrete enough to be measured, which enables scholars to dress it up in various independent variable guises.

Scholars may then deploy fixed or fluid social contexts for various understandings and explanations of the constructedness of international politics. For instance, it is now common to agree that the social context of a state matters for threat perception. In Wendt's (1992, 397) succinct formulation, the presence of British nuclear weapons does not automatically make them threatening to the United States. What matters as a key intermediating factor is the social context where Britain is allied with the United States in a "special relationship." However, from the same starting position, scholars may engage in different projects of social construction. We can assume that alliances form a fixed social context for a state and then extrapolate how a state might learn to adapt to threat perception given its alliance commitments. A change in alliances might reflect a change in the state's threat perception (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990). Or we can assume that alliances are part of a fluid social context with many other indiscrete contexts, for instance colonial legacies and collective memory, where it is difficult to extrapolate any independent effect of alliances, over other social meanings, on a state's threat perception (Hansen 2006). These differences may elsewhere appear as "mainstream" versus "critical" oppositions, but it is important to recognize *why* they differ to better develop our research strategies.

The source of socialization, seen as whether the social context appears as fixed or fluid in our analyses, matters for setting different pathways in a landscape of social construction. Another key dimension in the landscape is what we study as the targets of social construction.

Focus of Analysis

The second dimension of the landscape concerns social outcomes and asks whether a scholar's focus of analysis lies with social subjects, social structures, or somewhere in between. The landscape treats social construction as informing the coproduction of social structures and social subjects therein, where structures and subjects do not appear by themselves unmoored from social interaction. This is a basic feature of all constructivist scholarship and separates it from a rationalist approach to politics. For instance, constructivists "account for the properties of things by reference to the structures in virtue of which they exist" (Wendt 1998, 105). Therefore, social structures and relations are a defining feature of social construction analyses. However, researchers often choose to focus on particular social outcomes, sometimes devoting their energies to examining social structures and other times to examining social subjects. This may seem like an artificial boundary, but research often involves artificiality where scholars cannot study everything of interest all the time because of resource constraints. We prioritize and refine our questions and scope conditions, specializing our area of study, often to some mocking from nonacademics. In any case, research projects show traces of these hard choices in narrowly specified dependent variables, questions, or puzzles. The social outcomes or phenomena of interest are malleable to change. Therefore, the landscape does not identify particular scholars as falling into its various dimensions as it does particular research projects and questions at hand.

Structures are organized social relations. They may be big, small, formal, informal, ideational, material, or some combination of the above. An analysis focused on social structures may conceptualize features of social structures or trace the

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histories of those features or analyze the effects of those structures. There is no one standard approach to conducting research on social structures, but these efforts generally share a desire to privilege structural features or effects. For instance, scholars may study race as a social structure, theorizing various forms of racial structures or evaluating how race structures political interaction. Scholars may also study what structures race as a category or compare how race is produced differently. In other words, social structures can explain politics or be representative of the politics to explain. A focus on social structures does not mean the accounts foreground structural determinism or that they neglect agency. Michel Foucault studied structures in a decidedly antistructuralist way that focused on agentic practices and discourse. This dimension then just suggests that, for many scholars, social structures are the focus of analysis without any presupposition of what ultimately structures *do* in research questions.

Subjects are socialized actors. They may be individuals, states, organizations, or any other unit of analysis of interest for politics. The use of *subject* versus *agent* signals precisely that in the landscape of social construction actors do not appear by themselves independent of social context. *Subjects* denote a relationship where the units of analysis are subject *to* social context or subjects *of* social context. Subjects also possess subjectivity or their underlying experience of being a subject. Therefore, an analysis focused on social subjects may conceptualize what makes a social subject or study the history of particular social subjects or evaluate how subjects and subjectivities endure or change over time. Again, there are numerous ways to actually study the social construction of subjects. For instance, scholars may theorize forms of racial subjects in terms of what it means for race to structure social and political actors, or analyze the effect of different types of racialized subjects, like those who are criminalized and those who are not. Scholars may also study how subjects of racial structures interact with those structures or how they may assume new subjectivities.

Two implications of the different foci of analysis are appreciating the diversity and flexibility of research options when determining the scope of social construction. As previously mentioned, the portrait of social construction by its critics in IR is often reduced to nebulous outcomes like "ideas" or "identity." Moreover, "ideas" are further reduced to "norms" and "identity" to "culture" (Keohane 1988; Mearsheimer 1994/1995). Pivoting to social structures and subjects concretizes *exactly* what social construction provides leverage for examination. For instance, social structures of interest to IR scholars may include the many iterations of democracy, capitalism, or colonialism; social subjects may then include democratic, capitalist, or colonial states, organizations, and peoples. In these examples, there are no particular ideas or identities or norms or cultures that point to specific constructivist claims about the world as realist or liberal theories do. Within these structures and subjects, scholars can analyze power politics and cooperation, war and peace, markets and interdependence, or any other range of interests in international politics. This point has been made before but again bears repeating: social construction is not a "theory" of international politics; it is an approach within which scholars may generate theories. The landscape of social construction, then, further clarifies that the bounds of social construction are not issue-specific but oversee a vast diversity of political phenomena.

Furthermore, while the first dimension of the source of socialization shows some flexibility, in that scholars may assume a fixed social context in one project and switch to a fluid social context in another, the second dimension takes this a step further where the very same research project can flip between different social construction outcomes. That is, scholars may alternate between treating structures, subjects, or their interaction as the main social outcome under analysis. This emphasizes that social construction features research options and strategies that do not overly commit scholars to one way of seeing the world, as thick or thin

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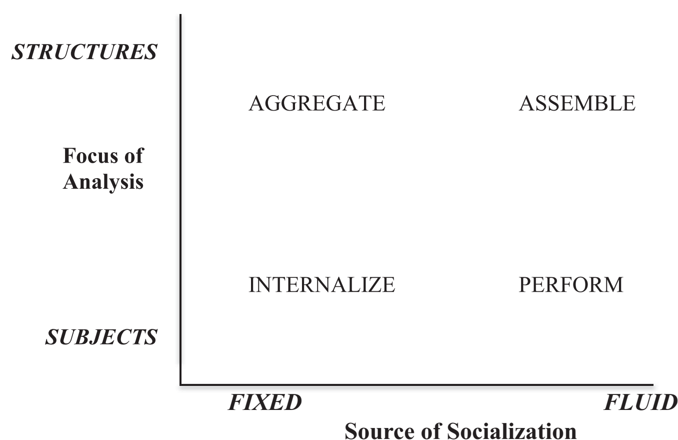

Figure 2. Processes of Social Construction.

constructivisms suggest. Again, taking *Writing Security* as an example, Campbell (1992, 105–6) alternates between an analysis of social structure in the US national security apparatus—by asking *how* it is coherently constructed, for example, looking "at some of the foreign policy practices in the pivotal moments of discovery, colonization, and founding of the republic" —and an analysis of the social subjects of this national security apparatus, for instance by evaluating more closely the targets of loyalty oaths. The potential oscillations between social structures and subjects is like switching between the forest and the trees for complementary vantage points of political analyses.

Deciding whether the source of socialization is fixed or fluid matters for any research strategy on social construction, as does deciding to focus the analysis on social structures, social subjects, or some relationship of the two. These choices, however, do not make scholars more or less constructivist or better or worse equipped to handle inquiry on social process. They reflect tradeoffs akin to any research method, where some provide sharper insights on particular phenomena over others. However, determining these tradeoffs are particular to empirical questions, as I show in the penultimate section of constructing norms in international politics. Before that, I identify distinct processes of social construction within this landscape.

Processes of Social Construction

This section surveys major works of constructivist IR to identify where research projects fit in the landscape of social construction introduced in the previous section. In doing so, I excavate four illustrative processes of social construction (Figure 2).

The processes are illustrative of the range of starting points for various research options when scholars are interested in any "social construction of x." Returning to the study of race as a social construction, the four processes reflect what a given position in the landscape might imply for types of research strategy one uses. We can focus our analysis on racial structures, such as white supremacy. Here we may treat race in a fixed social context that aggregates to white supremacy or treat race in a fluid social context that assembles around white supremacy. In the aggregating process, we may ask what effect white supremacy has on constructing politics (e.g., social welfare spending), whereas in the assembling process one may inquire what effect politics has on constructing white supremacy (e.g., colonial legacies). We can also focus our analysis on racialized subjects, such as white identity. Here

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we may treat race in a fixed social context that one internalizes as white subjects or treat race in a fluid social context that one performs as whiteness. In the internalizing process, we may ask what effect white identity has on politics (e.g., attitudes on immigration), whereas in the performing process we may ask how certain subjects are ascribed as being white (e.g., Hispanics of different national origins). Similarly, social construction of international relations is about constructing many different political phenomena, including processes where researchers aggregate, internalize, assemble, or perform social context into constructions of social structures and subjectivity.

If relying on a fixed social context, actors may socialize behavior by *aggregating* context across social structures. Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999) refutes conventional IR accounts of anarchy as a sufficient condition for conflict. Wendt (1999, 251–54) shows how specific notions of "the other" as enemy, rival, or friend inform distinct cultures of anarchy, producing different outcomes for war and peace. As previously mentioned, the United States and Great Britain operate within a different culture of anarchy than the United States and North Korea, and this difference means the possibility of conflict from nuclear weapons possession varies from low in the former to high in the latter. Wendt conceives of identity as relatively fixed and scalable, meaning the understandings one has about their relation with "the other" aggregates smoothly to a societal structure that forms a "culture of anarchy." Philpott's *Revolutions in Sovereignty* (2001) asks what kinds of ideas gave rise to the sovereign state system. Philpott follows revolutions in political authority—like the Protestant Reformation and anticolonial nationalism—to track how revolutionary ideas shape identity on two levels: popular imagination and elite incentives. In the analysis, Philpott shows how ideas aggregate across the two levels to account for the social construction of sovereignty. For instance, once Protestant beliefs took hold in early modern central and northern Europe (popular imagination), the newly reformed people used their "social power" to side against the Catholic Church in favor of secular monarchs (elite incentives) (Philpott 2001, 69). This ideational shift ripened just in time for the Peace of Westphalia, which for many began the era of modern sovereign states. Wendt and Philpott scale the space between individual ideas and societal structures. Aggregating across fixed social context allows them to show this leap.

If focusing on a fluid social context, actors may *assemble* context into social structures. Assembling structures invokes a prominent "assemblage" strand in critical theory,[14] and while the spirit of those claims is present here, one can also pursue the study of assembling structures without subscribing to assemblage theory. Nexon's *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe* (2009) attends to the origins of sovereign states in Europe by examining the transformative authority struggles brought on by the Protestant Reformations. The Reformations allowed new alliances among subjects and changed their relations with rulers who had to abandon "polyvalent signaling," or multiple discourses, in favor of a single language (Nexon 2009, 109). Nexon (2009, 14) adopts a "relational-institutionalist" approach to assemble diverse actors and identifies the structural effects of their changing relations. For example, confessional solidarity ushered in new translocal linkages among subjects that were not possible before and changed how rulers governed their newly networked subjects. Reus-Smit's *Individual Rights and the Making of the International System* (2013) traces the role of individual rights, articulated as resistance to empire, in motivating independent sovereign states. Spanning from the Westphalian peace to post-WWII decolonization, Reus-Smit (2013, 11) emphasizes the historical lineage of individual rights in assembling the international system, conceived as a reimagined world

[14]Assemblage is used to identify a way of thinking about structure and agents, most prominently in actor-network theory (ANT), where structures and agents always appear together as actor-network, forever hyphenated, rather than as stand-alone actors or networks. See Latour 2005 for a review and Srivastava 2013 for an assemblage approach to international organizations.

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society: "As historical actors encountered, interpreted, and claimed as their own new ideas about individual rights, they developed a repertoire of new interests." Reus-Smit evaluates the diffuse networked structuring relations of identity and interests where notions of individual rights were intrinsically part of the imperial assemblage. Nexon and Reus-Smit *assemble* social structures out of shifting and fluid social contexts that rearrange dominant relationships in the international system.

If focusing on a fixed social context, actors may also *internalize* context into social subjectivity. Hopf's *Social Construction of International Politics* (2002) argues that Soviet and Russian identity, as in how elites see themselves, is inextricably tied to their foreign policy. Hopf highlights competing representations of domestic identity using popular media and official discourse, piecing together the projection of national interest at home and abroad. In particular, Hopf emphasizes the dynamics behind a "social cognitive structure" that made possible the softened and hardened Russian policy postures in 1955 and 1999, respectively. For instance, an analysis of 1955 content reveals that Soviet identity rooted in class, modernity, nation, and "new Soviet man" influenced foreign alliance structures, especially regarding Yugoslavia (Hopf 2002, 83). Hopf's social cognitive structure is formed by policy elites internalizing fixed national identity, typifying their roles as "hawks" or "doves" in foreign policy. Crawford in *Argument and Change in World Politics* (2002) explores how ethical arguments undergirded and made possible decolonization at the peak of empire. In particular, ethical considerations about the "other" persuaded moral leaders to pursue and defend colonialism, while different but equally persuasive ethical arguments led others to delegitimize colonialism (Crawford 2002, 104). Crawford tracks how some anticolonial ethical ideas were institutionalized and deploys counterfactual analysis to test these claims. Crawford emphasizes the internalization of roles like "colonizer" or "decolonizer" as important for the arguments ultimately pursued for colonial and anticolonial strategies. Hopf and Crawford then motivate their respective puzzles around social subjectivity acquired by policy elites ("hawks" or "colonizers") through *internalizing* some fixed context.

Finally, if focusing on a fluid social context, actors may also *perform* context into social subjectivity. Weldes' *Constructing National Interests* (1999, 226) argues that the mere presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis did not have to invoke an American response or its resulting crisis. Instead, the United States' "security imaginary" triggered a threatened state identity that made nonresponse unthinkable. Weldes (1999, 98–103) specifies how a security imaginary summons various ideas and positions so they cohere into something resembling national interests. For instance, the American response missed recognizing the missile placement as part of a Cuban-Soviet defensive alliance against American aggression. Perceiving the deployment as strictly offensive limited the options for the American response to the missiles. Jackson's *Civilizing the Enemy* (2007) considers the stakes of rehabilitating an uncivil and hostile Germany into a central member of the "civilized" West following World War II, which in 1945 was far from inevitable. Using official postwar debates in Germany and the United States, Jackson argues that deploying Western Civilization as a "rhetorical commonplace" was central to German reconstruction, especially the end of American occupation and West Germany's inclusion in NATO. Jackson (2007, 15; emphasis added) employs "transactional social constructionism"[15] where the "analytic focus is on social ties and transactions rather than *putatively solid and stable actors with relatively fixed interests*" to show how the public discourse of Western Civilization made possible policy practices that would be unthinkable without it. Discourse informs how policymakers know what is worth preserving and sets up their games to determine what is inside the realm of possibility and how to join allies and break opponents (Jackson 2007, 44–45). For Weldes and Jackson, security imaginaries and rhetorical commonplaces do not simply offer

[15] Notice here that Jackson claims "constructionism" not "constructivism."

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fixed social context for internalizing roles like "hawk" or "civilized." Instead, the fluidity of social context means that subjects are unaware which role to aim for, so they end up *performing* hawkish or civilized subjectivity through discursive practices.

The new landscape of social construction specifies how to show (and observe) social construction at work. It also introduces new comparisons based on research questions and strategies in constructivist IR. For instance, the difference between Philpott and Nexon's approaches to ideational change in sovereign statehood is better captured by aligning them with different sources of socialization, where Philpott assumes fixed social structures and Nexon assumes fluid social structures. In addition, the landscape and the underlying processes reveal new disagreements that are traditionally papered over. For instance, Crawford's and Weldes's work is often thought of as belonging together in a thicker, critical, version of constructivism, but the projects differ in their sources of socialization for social subjectivity (fixed for Crawford and fluid for Weldes). The advantage of foregrounding these distinctions is to make evident the unique payoffs for particular social constructionist research. This allows better engagement for consumers of scholarship by opening new ways to probe and apply constructivist work, as well as for producers of scholarship by identifying more relevant models for answering questions and reproducing work on the social construction of international relations.

This section introduced some processes underlying social constructions that aggregate, internalize, assemble, and perform social structures and subjectivities. In order to show these mechanisms in a different context, the next section illustrates the processes of social construction using the norms literature.

Processes of Norm Construction

Any new framework on social construction should offer new insights on the norms scholarship in particular.[16] This section applies the preceding landscape and processes of social construction to the research on the social construction of international norms as a further illustration of the utility of the approach presented here.

There are at least two classic definitions of norms: regularities of behavior among actors and prescribed patterns of behavior (Hurrell 2002, 143). The most common way to refer to norms is as a "broad class of prescriptive statements—rules, standards, principles—both procedural and substantive that are prescriptions for action in situations of choice, carrying a sense of obligation, a sense that they *ought* to be followed" (Chayes and Chayes 1994, 65; emphasis original). Norms play three significant roles in international relations, by affecting actor identity (who they are), preferences (what they want), and resources (how to get what they want). Regulative norms order and constrain behavior by demarcating the resources available to actors. Constitutive norms affect actor identity by structuring how actors see themselves and inform actor preferences. Constructivists argue that norms are socially constructed and in turn socially construct international relations. However, the processes of social norm construction are not the same across different research projects. They involve unique processes that are obscured when portrayed as interchangeable projects of "social construction of norms."

Normative structures are social structures with particular normative content for action. For instance, a liberal international normative structure would promote democracy, or a Marxist normative structure would dismantle capitalism. Some projects look at fixed socialization of normative structures through processes of aggregating norms to assume the force of structural effects. Finnemore, in *The Purpose of Intervention* (2003), asks how the justifications for military intervention have changed since the seventeenth century and discovers that what it means to intervene is different now than it used to be. Finnemore looks at the normative

[16] Much like any new realist theory must explain the cause of World War I.

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valence behind the use of force to collect debts, provide humanitarian relief, and safeguard international order. In the current period, some intervention practices stop (debt collection) while others rebrand (humanitarian relief) or privilege multilateralism (international order). Throughout, the change in why and how states intervene is tied to states' understanding of themselves and their performances of appropriate conduct, which is susceptible to "strategic social construction." For instance, Finnemore highlights that while explicitly declared interstate war has dramatically declined since 1945, the use of force has not. What has changed, then, is the shared understanding of what counts as "war" and what counts as "intervention," which makes certain kinds of international violence permissible. Katzenstein and contributors in *The Culture of National Security* (1996a) articulate norms as the cultural components of national security in the wake of the end of the Cold War. The volume considers security dilemmas, alliances, intervention, weapons proliferation and use, and security communities through various norms as socializing state behavior and, at times, identity. One reviewer notes the volume's general strategy: "document the presence of the social structures; note a correlation between these and new state interests; examine changing discourse as further evidence of these normative effects; and, finally, strengthen the case by considering alternative explanations, usually drawn from neorealist and neoliberal theories" (Checkel 1998, 334). Finnemore and Katzenstein et al. use international normative structures as fixed social sites to understand and explain state behavior. To do so, they may draw on the processes of norm aggregation to connect social context and structures.

Normative structures are not just fixed explanatory sites but are also sites to explain the assembly of fluid, in-progress social structures. Epstein's *The Power of Words in International Relations* (2008) charts how a powerful antiwhaling discourse emerged so that the same states practicing widespread commercial whaling turned to save-the-whale policies. Epstein (2008, 2–17) uses the language of discourse as a "cohesive ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations" to "draw out the unity of a social system within which discursive and material practices constitute each other. This shows how an individual is connected to broader structures of normalization that are deployed from the individual to the global level." Epstein focuses on the assemblage of actors, institutions, tactics, and practices constituting and constituted by the antiwhaling discourse diffused around the world. Through historical reconstruction and discourse analysis, Epstein presents the case of a dramatic normative reversal in international politics. Towns's *Women and States* (2010) analyzes the changing position of women in public civic life and argues that their greater inclusion, for instance in national legislatures, is attributed to the hierarchical effects of norms. Towns (2010, 41) specifies these normative effects as when "states are socially ranked and ordered" based on political markers, like the status of women, as a means to differentiate and not just converge state behavior. State rankings, in turn, inform leaders' decision-making at home and abroad. Ultimately, Towns presents several waves of norm diffusion, where the "ranking effects" of gender inclusivity in politics result in stratified classes of states. Interestingly, across diverse issues, like legislature quotas and the right to vote, Towns shows the early adopters were more likely to be on the "periphery" of the core "advanced" countries and might therefore have been motivated to increase their rank. Epstein and Towns discover the strategies of building international normative structures that are in flux. To do so, they may draw on the processes of norm assemblage to weave together social context and structures.

Normative subjectivity features subjects interacting with normative structures to create meaning for themselves. Some scholars focus on processes of internalizing where actors use fixed social context to learn and update subjectivity. Tannenwald's *The Nuclear Taboo* (2008) examines the nonuse of nuclear weapons since 1945 despite nuclear proliferation and crisis opportunities. Unconvinced by its deterrent effects, Tannenwald (2008, 59) instead forwards the development of a nuclear taboo

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as a widespread "and de facto non-use norm" against nuclear weapons. Tannenwald (2008, 69) asks how the restraint on nuclear use was internalized and became expected behavior of American leaders in responding to crises in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq. Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson in particular had internalized the taboo to the greatest extent. But even in cases where leaders showed great interest in using nuclear weapons, like Eisenhower, Nixon, and Kissinger, and even when facing humiliating defeat, like in Vietnam, the taboo remained. Klotz's *Norms in International Relations* (1995) considers the difference that norms make in policymaking by focusing on the international pressures on the United Nations (UN), United States, UK, and Zimbabwe to place apartheid-related economic sanctions on South Africa. Klotz relies especially on constitutive norms in articulating how the "moral norm" of racial equality gained momentum and was internalized to change the interests and identities of powerful actors. A transnational coalition of actors, from the UN General Assembly to nonstate actors, succeeded in turning around the previous hostility to such sanctions in Reagan and Thatcher's administrations by changing their legitimation strategies. Tannenwald and Klotz investigate the stickiness and effectiveness of international normative subjectivities. To do so, they may draw on the processes of norms internalizing from social context into subjects.

Normative subjectivity may also be understood through processes of performing where actors experiment with a fluid social context to discover new or changing subjectivities. Kier's *Imagining War* (1997) looks at the role of organizational culture on the production of military doctrine, especially the preference for defensive doctrines in Great Britain and France in the interwar period. Kier (1997, 39) shows how the French self-understanding of military capacity and conscription, fueled by a 1928 law on short-term conscripts, created the conditions for switching from offensive to defensive doctrines against Germany. Treating defensive doctrine as a cultural norm, Kier provides the tools to inquire how it was performed by the French and British militaries. Price's *The Chemical Weapons Taboo* (1997) considers why the condemnation of chemical weapons persists when, like other weapons, we should expect them to gain gradual acceptance. Price follows the chemical weapons taboo from its emergence at The Hague Conference in 1899 to its formalization in the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention. The taboo was violated—for instance by the Germans in WWI and Iraq in the first Gulf War—and upheld—for instance by nonuse in WWII—throughout this period. But even in the instances of violation, Price argues the users practiced initial restraint and then justified their actions in recognition of the taboo. Price shows the discourse of "civilized nations" as undergirding the taboo against chemical weapons (Price 1997, 107). Weber's *Simulating Sovereignty* (1995) looks at the justifications for the emerging norm of intervention in the Concert of Europe and in the Wilson, Reagan, and Bush administrations to inquire about the political and symbolic construction of state sovereignty. Weber considers how sovereignty does not simply exist in a pre-given state but has to be discursively produced when justifying intervention, like when the Concert of Europe intervened in Spain and Naples. Weber also identifies a manipulated simulation in sovereignty discourses evident when the boundary between sovereignty and intervention breaks down in multiple and contrasting justifications, like in the US interventions in Grenada and Panama. Kier, Price, and Weber examine various innovations and changes in international normative subjectivity. To do so, they may draw on the processes of norm performativity from social context as subjects.

This section surveyed some diverse dynamics in the social construction of norms to highlight differences rooted in substantive research strategies. The final section concludes with the payoffs of specifying varieties of social construction.

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Conclusion and Payoffs

By introducing a typology of social construction that focuses on differences in kind between constructivist projects, this article aims to reinvigorate discussions on the dynamics of social constructions of international relations. The article's efforts produce three payoffs for IR scholars.

The first payoff is research clarity. The new landscape is not another labeling exercise. Rather it treats distinctions as doing important work in research strategy. The mechanisms of social construction in research questions about aggregating international politics are different from research questions about assembling international politics. Whether we see social constructions through performative use or interaction is a useful distinction that enables constructivists to better answer their research questions and to generate future research. Scholars better answer their research questions when they specify the meaningful work social construction is doing in their accounts of international politics. For instance, Wendt's (1999) three cultures of anarchy presuppose mechanisms where structures *aggregate* from social context. Similarly, Hopf's (2002) connections between Soviet elites and foreign policy presuppose mechanisms where subjects *internalize* social context. Moreover, scholars generate better future research when there are more opportunities to identify and compare across research strategies. That is, it is more productive to engage with processes that center on aggregating and internalizing than labels proclaiming constructivists as conventional or critical. For instance, while endogeneity is not a problem for Reus-Smit's (2013) assembling approach to ideological structures, it may be a problem for Philpott's (2001) aggregating strategy to do the same. Scholars with endogeneity concerns, then, have more useful references to compare strategies across social constructions.

The second payoff is pedagogical clarity. Distinctions are useful for research but also for learning. Typologies help simplify complex thinking and articulate how similar sounding contributions may differ. Teaching constructivism is easier with a landscape that focuses on substantive questions and mechanisms. The stakes of different projects are clearer because it is more apparent what distinctions of analyzing social construction are *doing* for scholars. Projects pursuing aggregation are asking different questions than those pursuing assemblage, even though both center on the construction of social structure. For example, Epstein's (2008) argument about the construction of the antiwhaling discourse in the latter half of the twentieth century relies on *assembling* global practices and discourses, which through performative use actively construct meaningful structures. When teaching Epstein's contribution, it is more useful to show how her conception of social structure is based on a fluid social context than Ikenberry and Kupchan's (1990) rather than deem one radical and the other mainstream. The proposed mechanisms are also not exhaustive, but these variants serve as benchmarks to better situate extensions in more productive ways than the existing distinctions of thick/thin, radical/moderate, or critical/conventional constructivisms. In short, scholars have a richer vocabulary to guide research programs for themselves and their students.

The third payoff is political clarity. In terms of politics of the discipline, this landscape does not politicize varieties of social construction as another neopositivist/postpositivist debate about what makes for proper scientific study. Unlike treating social construction as a catchall term, or as "us versus them" code between rigid camps, varieties of social construction in this article turn to the many substantive questions that drive constructivist scholarship. These questions are not thick or thin, radical or mainstream, European or American; they are questions about how we variously construct international politics. The article also moves beyond privileging one type of constructivism as better for social science or empirical investigations. By deeming particular constructivist contributions in absolutist categories, the existing distinctions reify outdated stereotypes of unempirical and unscientific

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constructivism. As shown throughout this article, scholars treat diverse questions of social construction with equal analytical rigor in empirical research. In terms of international politics, this typology uses the language of how social worlds are actually created—by aggregating, internalizing, assembling, and performing—rather than how scholars term themselves and each other. This vision of varieties of constructivism, then, is *about* international politics in a way that the conventional approaches are not. Finally, moving beyond labels to strategies also helps spur collaboration to understand, interpret, and explain more of the many social constructions of international politics.

Acknowledgements

I thank Ian Hurd, Nick Onuf, Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, Samuel Barkin, Laura Sjoberg, Sidra Hamidi, Joshua Freedman, Lejla Dervisevic, four anonymous reviewers, and participants in panels at ISA 2014, ISA-Northeast 2013, and MPSA 2014 and workshops at the Northwestern IR Working Group and the University of Chicago's PIPES.

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