Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

RAWI ABDELAL, YOSHIKO M. HERRERA, ALASTAIR IAIN JOHNSTON, and ROSE McDERMOTT (Eds.) Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, viii + 428 p., index.

Deciding upon an appropriate methodological approach to the study of identity is as difficult an undertaking as the task of defining identity itself. The editors of Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists take on the arduous task of compiling the expertise of academics whose work on identity spans a vast methodological spectrum in the hopes of developing a cohesive and comprehensive collection. In so doing, Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott present essays in which the methodological approaches of the authors range from survey research to cognitive mapping to discourse analysis. The underlying thematic framework running through each of the essays begins from the understanding that identity, in broad terms, is an intersectional (relating race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.) and collective concept for every social being. This understanding of identity encourages an array of methodologies – demonstrated within this collection – which exemplifies what is possible for identity studies as an emerging discipline. It is also through these methodological examples that readers are exposed to the complexity and difficulty that the study of identities invariably inspires.

Measuring Identity is divided into five main sections: definition, conceptualization, and measurement alternatives; survey methods; content analysis and cognitive mapping; discourse analysis and ethnography; and experiments. The editors provide the framework for the collection in their chapter titled "Identity as Variable." This essay frames the text insofar as the editors skilfully piece together the various ways in which "identity" is theorized as variable, cognitive, contested, relational, etc. within the social sciences. As this essay is written using dense theoretical language, it is not intended for those completely unfamiliar with the study of identities. Rather it compiles the scholarly literature in order for the authors to put forward their collective, comparative and relational framework of identity.

One of the most important insights from this collection is that the contributors' approach to their studies allows readers to envision a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies for studying identity. Furthermore, the contributors to this text also give readers an avenue to improve upon the techniques presented, as many authors acknowledge that their methods leave room for expansion and improvement by future scholars. The majority of the authors explain their rationale for having chosen a particular methodology, and yet they also speak to other methodologies that they could have used and why some others would have been inappropriate. This is particularly evident in Donald A. Sylvan and Amanda

K. Metskas' chapter in which they explore five measurement strategies that they have used in previous work on Israeli and Palestinian identities. Sylvan and Metskas address what they call "trade-offs" in identity research: the choices that researchers have to make in deciding upon which method is appropriate and most advantageous to undertake. For new social scientists, this function of the text would be particularly useful.

Taeku Lee offers one of the most compelling and poignant contributions found in Measuring Identity. Lee explores the ways in which surveys, such as the census, attempt(ed) to locate the "truth" of identity by having respondents select from options of race and ethnicity. In the academy, the focus on identity has been dominated by understandings of its fluidity and shifts based on individual contextualization. Lee's piece attempts to close this gap between theory and practice by proposing a new way for citizens to self-identify. This new approach to survey measurement aims to encourage respondents to choose the ways in which they understand their race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. by allocating "identity points" to the identities with which they most strongly identify. While Lee's attempts to formulate theoretical equations to explain the nuances of the proposed measurement can be confusing, the overall contribution of this chapter is strongest where Lee forces readers to question and critique the methodologies espoused within the taken-for-granted language used in common surveys on identity.

While the focus on quantitative methodologies is extensive, and indeed necessary, the limited emphasis afforded to qualitative approaches in Measuring Identity can be considered problematic. The overall tone of the collection privileges non-qualitative methodologies as though they are the most "scientific" (read: legitimate and/or useful) approaches available. In one of the two distinctly qualitative essays in the collection, Laura L. Adams provides an excellent and accessible teaching tool for how to use ethnography as a qualitative approach to studying identity. She skilfully demonstrates that her work necessitates an ethnographic approach while underscoring the steps through which it comes to fruition. This sense of the text as a teaching tool can also be found in Ted Hopf's discussion of discourse analysis and how he understands his theoretical framing of identity as a determinant for his method. These qualitative studies value the more interpretative and subjective approaches to the study of identity. In so doing, they expose the complexities of how notions of identity must consistently be interrogated in social research in order to avoid reliance on normalized and/or oppressive understandings of identity which pervade the social world.

Measuring Identity is a comprehensive amalgamation of various methodological approaches to the study of identity. It would primarily benefit sociologists and political scientists; and, to some extent, all new researchers in most of the social sciences. Importantly, the contributors pose many thought-provoking methodological questions inspired by their valuable and extensive experiences with the study of identity.

Victoria Kannen, University of Toronto.