

Mindshaping and Constructing Kinds

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Abstract

In this chapter, I juxtapose the mindshaping research program with the literature on the metaphysics of social construction. I suggest that these research programs are remarkably congenial. The practices of interest to mindshaping theorists are more or less straightforward instances of the processes that are taken to be essential to social construction. As such, a constructionist metaphysics of psychological kinds is readily available. I discuss some recent constructionist treatments of particular psychological kinds against this backdrop, before considering how the constructionist outlook interacts with more orthodox viewpoints in the metaphysics of mind.

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Human beings affect one another. Of course in one sense, this is obvious. We live in societies that involve pervasive interaction. We make each other happy and sad, we teach and learn from one another, we cooperate and compete. But we also affect each other in less obvious, more profound ways. We make each other who we are. Many of the kinds we care most about wouldn't exist—at least not as they do—absent the social context that shapes and constructs them. For some kinds, this observation is commonplace. Money offers a paradigm. Clearly, money is very important to people, and manifestly it is explained metaphysically by features of social organization. Core aspects of our identity—saliently race and gender—are arguably, but less obviously, also best-understood as social constructions. What about the core kinds of interest to philosophers of mind? The standard dialectic taught to undergraduates leaves out the possibility that e.g. beliefs and desires are constructions. Perhaps this is an oversight.

To explore this possibility, this chapter juxtaposes two research programs and considers how they bear on a constructionist metaphysics of mind: mindshaping and the

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metaphysics of social construction. After briefly introducing the basics of these research programs, I'll suggest that those who find both appealing have direct motivations for accepting a thoroughly constructionist view about mental kinds. Then I'll discuss a handful of case studies—particular psychological kinds that have been given constructionist treatments. Finally, I'll consider how the resulting picture relates to more orthodox views on the metaphysics of mind.

1 Mindshaping

As I think about it, 'Mindshaping' refers to a big tent research program, organized around a vague idea. The vague idea is that social cognition—the cognitive basis of our distinctive forms of social intelligence—is in substantial part a matter of our actively influencing others (Andrews, 2015; McGeer, 2007, 2021; Zawidzki, 2013). This vague idea stands in direct contrast to—and is historically a reaction against—the orthodox conception of social cognition. As the potted history goes, Jerry J. A. Fodor (1987) forcefully argued for a conception of social cognition as a theory—belief–desire psychology, which I'll call 'mindreading'—that enabled us to predict others' behavior. Fodor's conception invited a picture on which we meet each other as theorists, from an 'observational stance'. By contrast, the mindshaping theorist urges, often(/predominately/normally/almost always) we meet each other in an active mode. We don't merely theorize in a detached way about what others think and will do, we *make it the case* that they think and behave in ways that conform with our expectations.

This vague idea characteristic of mindshaping can be precisified in a variety of ways, resulting in mindshaping theses ranging from blandly uncontroversial to radically revisionary. It should be uncontroversial that we do engage in various sorts of mindshaping. Here I am, writing this chapter, in an effort to change what you think, not figure out what you already think. On the other hand, it certainly seems as though we often engage in mindreading as well. At times, mindshaping theorists seem inclined to doubt this, arguing that mindreading only occurs when social interactions break down in some way. Alternatively, they may grant that we do mindread regularly, but insist that mindshaping is, in some sense, 'prior' to mindreading. Perhaps mindreading is 'scaffolded' by prior mindshaping practices, rendering mindreading more tractable, either evolutionary or ontogenetically (or both). Or, finally, they may grant that social cognition involves both mindreading and mindshaping, but hold that the orthodox emphasis on theoretical prediction has been substantially distorting and requires a reorientation to correct for.

For my purposes, we can work with a moderate mindshaping thesis, that elides claims about the relative rarity of mindreading, or the evolutionary or ontogenetic priority of mindshaping. As will become clear, what matters to developing a constructionist metaphysics of mind is not the rarity or derivative nature of mindreading, but the prevalence of mindshaping. We'll assume that social interactions are regularly characterized by shap-

ing and regulative practices, and that these practices target not only behavior but also psychological kinds themselves, e.g. beliefs, desires, emotions, memories, etc. I'll suggest that if this moderate mindshaping thesis is true, interesting things follow concerning the construction of psychological kinds.

2 Social Construction

Social construction involves new kinds being created (or old kinds being transformed) by the patterns of thought and action characteristic of members of a society. We can distinguish between overt and covert social construction.¹ Overt social construction involves kinds that are manifestly constructed. Examples include money, laws, companies, governments, and so on. Covert social construction, by contrast, concerns kinds that are, in some sense, 'presented as natural'. Most saliently, work on the metaphysics of race and gender very often treat these kinds as socially constructed, despite widespread and persistent beliefs that they are 'natural', i.e. not metaphysically dependent on the thoughts and actions of people in the society.²

One common popular misconception is that socially constructed kinds are somehow 'not real'. This is not the intended view. If one were a metaphysical reductionist in general, and so thought that only fundamental things really exist, then it would turn out that socially constructed kinds don't exist, but not, crucially, *because* they are socially constructed. Rather, the explanation for the unreality of social kinds, for the reductionist, is that social kinds are not fundamental. For those of us who are not reductionists, and so are happy to admit non-fundamental kinds in our ontology (Schaffer, 2016), there's no obvious reason to exclude socially constructed kinds. The difference between constructed and non-constructed is not to be understood in terms of how real they are, but in terms of an interesting difference in the sorts of features they depend upon for their nature and existence. The socially constructed kinds depend upon features of thought and action of people in a society. As Elizabeth Barnes (2017) puts it:

[S]ocial structures are real—as real as anything—but they are *made*. (Barnes, 2017, 2421, emphasis original)

As I think about it, the reason to include socially constructed kinds in our ontology is because they are ineliminable elements of our best theories and explanations across a range of social sciences. As such, they ought to be included in our ontology insofar as we are scientific realists. This outlook contrasts with constructionist rhetoric familiar from

¹This terminology comes from (Mallon, 2016).

²Insofar as human thought and action is itself part of the natural world, a terminological opposition between 'natural' and 'constructed' kinds is somewhat inaccurate, but the distinction between kinds that are, and those that are not, metaphysically dependent on thoughts and actions is a good one. I'll generally say 'non-constructed' rather than 'natural'.

the science wars, where constructionism was generally opposed to scientific realism and naturalism. However, more recently, social construction has been recognized as a species of realism, and motivated in a conventionally naturalist way.³

3 From Mindshaping to Constructed Minds

For those who endorse mindshaping, a rather straightforward argument exists that psychological kinds are constructed. To see why, it's useful to consider Ron Mallon's account of social construction in some detail. Mallon offers a schematic explanation of how kinds can be constructed naturalistically. It turns out that mindshaping theorists are already committed to instances analogous to Mallon's schema with respect to mindshaping practices. So psychological kinds meet the conditions for being constructed, and mindshaping theorists should be constructionists.

Mallon's focus is on kinds like races and genders, so he develops his account in terms of *social roles*. I'll explain his account, and then suggest the mindshaping theorist ought to accept analogous claims about what I'll call *psychological roles*, occupied by e.g. beliefs and desires. Mallon defines a social role like this:

SR1. Representation There is a term, label, or mental representation that picks out a category of persons *C*, and that representation is associated with—and figures in the expression of—a set of beliefs and evaluations—or a conception—of the persons so picked out.

SR2. Social Conditions Many or all of the beliefs and evaluations in the conception of the role are common knowledge in the community. (Mallon, 2016, p. 58)

For Mallon, the existence of a social role alone is not sufficient for a social role to *matter*—many, many social roles exist, that need not ground any particularly interesting set of causal generalizations about the category. However, in some cases, the existence of a social role can structure individual (and collective) behavior in important ways. For example, certain actions may become possible or salient for occupants of a social role (Hacking, 1986), and those engaging with occupants. When this happens, occupants of the social role become increasingly differentiated, and stably so. As a result, our patterns of representation and action entrench the social role, and deepen its explanatory power. Ultimately, Mallon argues, social roles can become homeostatic property clusters (Boyd, 1999), and hence important kinds that figure in causal explanations.

When information about a putative kind is broadcast by a credible source it can create common knowledge and a social role. Some such social roles, in turn, become entrenched, producing a range of effects that further differentiate

³See, for example (Barnes, 2017; Epstein, 2015; Haslanger, 2012; Mallon, 2016).

putative members of the role. . . As these property clusters grow in significance, reference to them may become increasingly important to understanding the social world. (Mallon, 2016, p. 93)

So the core features of Mallon's account are a representation of a social role that is common knowledge, and 'differentiation processes', whereby occupants of the role come to share additional properties, thereby entrenching a homeostatic property cluster that can ground causal explanations.

I suggest an analogous story is available for psychological kinds. Rather than social roles, the operative categories are psychological roles—beliefs, desires, etc. The representations of psychological kinds are those found in social cognition, and, insofar as we treat other agents as social agents as well, we can assume that they are common knowledge. The differentiation processes in these cases are primarily the mindshaping practices theorists have drawn our attention to. We actively shape features of each other's minds, and enforce norms about psychological categories, rewarding conformity and punishing deviance. We are also aware of these practices, and act accordingly. We make ourselves more predictable, both in our actions themselves and relative to our known mental states. These practices entrench psychological kinds, and stabilize their causal character, deepening their explanatory power. Put another way, the mindshaping theorist articulates an instance of Mallon's schematic explanation of constructing 'kinds that matter' with respect to psychological kinds. So I think mindshaping theorists should be constructionists.

4 Case Studies

The discussion thus far has been quite abstract. Constructionist accounts of psychological kinds are not unheard of however. Indeed, such accounts have been offered with respect to a variety of psychological categories. In this section, I discuss some examples. These accounts are not generally developed in explicitly mindshaping terms, but mindshaping theorists have resources to bolster many of them, especially in light of the abstract connection between constructionism and mindshaping described above.

4.1 Emotion

Lisa Feldman Barrett has argued at length that emotions are constructed (Barrett, 2014, 2017a, 2017b). In Barrett's view, all we experience unconceptualized are informationally sparse affect and arousal, together with bodily phenomenology. These experiences substantially underdetermine what 'emotion we are experiencing'. Subjects (automatically, without conscious deliberation) make fallible inferences on the basis of these sparse signals, together with features of the situation about which emotion they are experiencing. This 'conceptual act' of labeling our sparse experience as an instance of one emotion or another is what *makes it the case* that that experience *really is* an instance of that emotion.

Emotions are the result of a conceptual self-attribution—taking myself to be e.g. sad is what *makes it the case* that I am sad.

Barrett draws explicit inspiration from John Searle’s (1995) influential discussion of social construction. Objects can become ‘real in the social world’ in virtue of being categorized in a particular way, and thereby acquire novel functions not explicable in terms of their physical properties alone (Barrett, 2014, p. 292). So, for example, the very same plant might be categorized as a weed in one garden, but as a flower in another. Though its physical and biological properties are the same, the act of categorization transforms its social reality, and with this transformation the plant comes to have new properties, e.g. being disposed to be removed. Barrett suggests the very same bodily changes can similarly take on one or another ‘social reality’ in virtue of a subject’s act of categorization.

Barrett makes a number of scientific and philosophical claims that are controversial, and upon which a constructionist theory of emotion does not depend.⁴ For example, as stated, the view seems to rule out, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, that subjects could ever be incorrect about their own emotional state. This is because the subject’s conceptual judgment to the effect that they are experiencing an emotion is what *makes it true*, so the judgment is metaphysically self-verifying.⁵ Additionally, Barrett at times evinces broadly antirealist sympathies, e.g.:

I also do not speak of perceiving someone’s emotion “accurately.” Instances of emotion have no objective fingerprints in the face, body, and brain, so “accuracy” has no scientific meaning. It has a social meaning—we certainly can ask whether two people agree in their perceptions of emotion, or whether a perception is consistent with some norm. But perceptions exist within the perceiver. (Barrett, 2017a, p. 40)

My own view is that the best version of a constructionist account of emotions jettisons these controversial claims, and I believe we have the resources to do so. A more thoroughly *social* constructionist theory of emotions—one that does not privilege the first person, or lapse into subjectivism—has the resources to explain the possibility of error. Brian Epstein (2015) offers a useful account, on which facts about social organization set the standards something must meet to be an instance of the kind (what Epstein calls ‘anchoring’), but people can nevertheless be wrong about which things meet those standards. (As when we are fooled by counterfeit money.) This also offers a straightforward anchoring of literal realism about constructed categories (as do the outlooks of e.g. Haslanger and Mallon, discussed above), which many will find preferable to the broadly antirealist perspective Barrett seems at times friendly to.

⁴See especially (Barrett, 2017a) for a development of the view from within a predictive processing framework, which I take to be one framework among many in which one could develop a constructionist view.

⁵This problem about the possibility of error has also been noticed by Jeremy Pober (2018, p. 649).

As expounded by Barrett, the constructionist view of emotions does not make substantial reference to mindshaping. But it's easy to see how such a view could be elaborated incorporating mindshaping insights. The crucial move would be to argue that our learning of emotion concepts is subserved by natural pedagogy (Csibra & Gergely, 2009) and other mindshaping practices. As a result, which episodes we take to be episodes of e.g. sadness come to reflect features of social organization and common knowledge about what sadness is and what it is like. Moreover, our performances of sadness themselves contribute to our own and others' evolving understanding of emotions, feeding back into categorizations over time. Such a view has the resources to explain both contingency of actually existing emotion categories, and their relative stability.

4.2 Belief

One debate in cognitive ontology concerns whether belief is a unitary kind. According to some theorists, what we indifferently call 'belief' actually refers to two interestingly different cognitive kinds, one broadly characterized by evidence-responsiveness and implicated in fine-grained action guidance, and another broadly characterized by defining our identities and group affiliations (Luhmann, 2020; Mercier, 2020; D. Munro, 2023; Van Leeuwen, 2014, 2023). Others argue instead belief is a unified cognitive kind (Bendaña & Mandelbaum, 2021; Porot & Mandelbaum, 2021; Quilty-Dunn & Mandelbaum, 2018).

Saliently for us, Evan Westra (2023) argues that whether or not belief is a unitary cognitive kind, we have good reason to believe that *folk psychology* marks a distinction between these two kinds of beliefs. He associates this folk psychological distinction—between what he calls 'epistemic belief' and 'symbolic belief'—with the distinction between mindreading and mindshaping. In Westra's view, we predominantly engage in mindreading when we are trafficking in epistemic beliefs, and predominantly engage in mindshaping when we are trafficking in symbolic beliefs. Because symbolic beliefs function to signal group affiliations, they generate normative expectations about how those who avow them will behave, and group members will engage in regulative (i.e. mindshaping) practices to enforce these normative explanations. For example, they will be motivated to punish hypocrisy (Westra, 2023, p. 401).⁶

As Westra notes at the end of his discussion, a folk psychological distinction between two kinds of belief is significant for cognitive ontology whether or not it reflects an underlying architectural distinction. As he puts it:

The mindshaping processes that drive individuals to adopt and convincingly

⁶An alternative construal would be that both epistemic and symbolic belief are predominantly subject to mindshaping rather than mindreading practices. On this approach, both kinds of belief quantified over by folk psychology are best-understood *vis a vis* the mindshaping practices that target them, but these practices are characterized by distinct normative expectations. This disagreement is, in my view, best-understood as operating within the big tent of the mindshaping research program, and so is best flagged, and left unresolved in this context.

profess symbolic beliefs create a powerful set of social incentives that have profound effects on cognition and behavior. . . these effects are likely to become engrained as habits, and come to play a major role in explaining why people think and act as they do. . . even if the attitudes underlying symbolic beliefs are not a psychological natural kind distinct from the broader category of belief, it is highly likely that symbolic belief constitute a robust *social kind* with “looping effects” on human psychology (Westra, 2023, 403, emphasis original)

So, even supposing a unitary view about belief as a kind in cognitive psychology, if we distinguish between two kinds folk psychologically, and submit them to interestingly different mindshaping practices, they might become differentiated *qua* social kinds.

4.3 Episodic Memory

A major theme in the philosophy of memory is the relation between episodic memory and imagination. Should we think of these as two distinct cognitive capacities, or as one more generic cognitive capacity? One reason to opt for the latter understanding is empirical work suggesting substantial neurocognitive overlap in remembering the past and imagining the future (Addis et al., 2007; Szpunar et al., 2007). Hence, some theorists endorse ‘continuism’, on which what we call ‘episodic memory’ and ‘imagination’ are just different functions of a common underlying system (De Brigard, 2014; Michaelian, 2016a, 2016b). We can neither distinguish episodic memory and imagination architecturally—since they rely on a common system for flexible episodic representation—nor in terms of whether a deployment aims at representing the actual, since imagination can do so as well (D. J. Munro, 2021).

Supposing the continuists are right about the architecture, we can ask how we nevertheless draw a distinction between (episodic) remembering and imagining (Mahr, 2024; Robins, 2020). On Mahr’s account, a variety of individual and collective features contribute to ‘mnemicity attributions’. Individually, phenomenal features like fluency and vividness serve as inputs to learned, inferential processes that produce metacognitive construals of episodic simulations as memories. These construals have complex conceptual contents, the details of which Mahr remains somewhat neutral on. Though, saliently, for our purposes, he grants that there may be individual or cultural variation in the exact conceptual content associated with mnemicity attributions (Mahr, 2024, p. 232). Additionally, Mahr argues that mnemicity serves distinctive social functions. For example, mnemicity tracking enables us to distinguish which things we know on the basis of personal experience, as distinct from social sources like testimony (Mahr, 2024, p. 234). Moreover, the kinds of inferences subjects make are themselves learned socially (Heyes et al., 2020). By practices like joint remembering, children’s developing conception of mnemicity is taught and regulated *via* social feedback.

Mahr is explicit that his concern is with subjective *attributions* of memory, rather than

the ontology of memory (Mahr, 2024, footnote 1). However, situating his discussion *vis a vis* the metaphysics of social construction and mindshaping offers a straightforward argument for a metaphysical conclusion. The social learning Mahr appeals to in underpinning mnemonic attributions are both recognizably mindshaping processes, and serve the differentiation and entrenchment functions characteristic of Mallon-style social construction. Put more abstractly, mnemonic attributions become common knowledge in a society through collective mindshaping practices, and bear substantial social significance, especially related to the social functions of knowledge attribution (Fricker, 2007; Nagel, 2019). So, despite lacking an underlying *architectural* distinction, episodic memory and imagination come to be different kinds metaphysically, in virtue of mindshaping and constructive processes that play out socially.

4.4 IQ and Other ‘Non-Ideal’ Kinds

Devin Sanchez Curry (forthcoming) has recently argued for an explicitly constructionist account of IQ. The broader ambit of Curry’s argument is to suggest that the correct mental ontology outstrips our best scientific ontology. IQ proves a useful case study. On Curry’s view, social cognition is best-understood as a suite of ‘diverse folk crafts’, where a folk craft is a way of attributing mental phenomena to people (Curry, forthcoming, p. 4). Many of the mental phenomena attributed do exist in that they correspond to ‘real patterns’ (Dennett, 1991). Insofar as our folk crafts shape our own behavior—e.g. which models we conform our actions to, which shaping practices we engage in interpersonally—and behavior feeds back into our folk crafts, we can expect ‘looping effects’ (Hacking, 1995a). By way of illustration, he writes:

If Kyra aspires to be a great military strategist—and her general-purpose model associates the strategic mind with the tendency to have a no-nonsense attitude on the battlefield—she may feel compelled...to avoid frivolities in order to cultivate a stern demeanor. Imagine that Kyra and the other strategists of her generation find that purposively perfecting their game faces requires developing a sort of stoic attitude towards life in general... This stoicism sets Kyra and her cohort apart from the earlier generation of strategists, who tended to be quick tempered... Folks who now take Kyra to be an archetypical strategist thus revise their models, excising the tendency towards anger from their conception of the strategic mind, and instead associating strategic prowess closely with the capacity for emotional control. Under the influence of these revised models, the next generation of aspiring strategists focus their efforts on tempering their passions. (Curry, forthcoming, p. 7)

Against this theoretical backdrop, Curry argues that IQ is plausibly not an ideal way of thinking or talking about mental phenomena, either *qua* scientists or *qua* folk, but it is nevertheless real.

A substantial virtue of Curry's discussion is the detailed history of the development and dissemination of IQ measures, which I won't reproduce here. One can practically *see* the differentiation and entrenchment characteristic of significant socially constructed kinds. As Curry writes:

[I]ntelligence has culturally evolved. . . [F]olk psychological models of intelligence have culturally evolved too. IQ tests didn't merely passively reflect the manners in which people became smarter over the course of the 20th century. By influencing how folks thought about intelligence, IQ tests actively spurred people to become smarter in those particular manners. (Curry, forthcoming, p. 12)

The naturalistic social constructionist should want IQ in their ontology, because IQ explains robust real patterns in our society. These patterns, I should stress, are the result of contingent human action that has differentiated and entrenched correlations between how people perform on IQ tests and various other measures. This is the case, Curry thinks, *even if IQ is not a posit in our best scientific theories of the mind*.

One complication is that Curry makes substantial metaphysical assumptions in articulating his view. It's not obvious how far others who don't share his metaphysical outlook ought to go with him. It's also worth considering just how inclusive the resultant ontology is. Suppose someone had rather higher ontological standards than Dennettian real patterns. Should they also accept the reality of IQ, or not?⁷ One option is to argue, in a Mallon–Haslanger spirit, that IQ really does causal–explanatory work at the level of social explanation. So, though it may not be a posit of our best *psychology*, it may nevertheless earn its ontological keep in the social sciences more broadly, in a way analogous to racial categories.⁸ This option will not be congenial to Curry, given his broader argumentative ambitions. Curry argues that ontological disputes are not to be resolved by reference to what our best theories posit. This brings us to how permissive Curry's ontology is.

On Curry's view, scientific psychology can be understood as 'R&D' for folk psychology.⁹ So, 'cognitive technologies' developed in scientific psychology can be exported to folk craft, where mindshaping and looping effects differentiate and stabilize a constructed kind, despite the technologies not figuring in our best scientific theories. Curry briefly mentions some examples he takes to meet this description:

⁷A further complication: what things are the raw materials out of which patterns emerge? Curry characterizes real patterns as 'patterns that exist in people's thoughts, feelings, capacities, tendencies, and behaviors' (Curry, forthcoming, p. 6). This is naturally read as positing *some* psychological kinds—e.g. thoughts—as enjoying a more fundamental reality that *grounds* the relevant real patterns. As I read Dennett, psychological kinds like that are not admissible raw materials, but are the sorts of things we give accounts of *as* real patterns in e.g. neural or behavioral 'data'.

⁸Whether IQ in fact *does* earn its keep in social scientific explanations of social organization is a further empirical question.

⁹Cf. (Westfall, 2024, Section 6).

- grit
- type-A personality
- anal-retentive personality
- ADHD
- Big Five personality traits
- priors (Curry, forthcoming, p. 14)

Curry remains broadly neutral on how ‘theoretically fruitful’ any of these posits are to cognitive science (Curry, forthcoming, p. 14). Nevertheless, they all are exported to folk craft, and in virtue of that facilitate shaping practices that differentiate and entrench them to different degrees. So, our folk craft tracks (and partly explains) real patterns associated with all of them. Hence, we should admit them in our ontology.

I wonder whether Curry’s ontology shouldn’t ultimately be a bit more permissive still. After all, it does not seem as though scientific psychology is the only ‘R&D lab’ for folk craft. Here are some other ‘kinds’ that, I take it, do not figure in our best scientific understanding of the mind:

- Myers–Briggs personality types
- astrological signs
- having excess yellow bile
- alpha, beta, or sigma males
- Hogwarts houses
- being a ‘Miranda’ or a ‘Carrie’
- love languages

Do they, nevertheless, figure in folk craft? The answer will of course depend on the ‘kind’, and the society we consider. Excess yellow bile isn’t so popular nowadays, either among the scientists or the folk. But as to astrology and Myers-Briggs types, it seems clear that the answer is yes. Indeed, I suspect some of these archetypes are rather more widely deployed in folk craft than many of Curry’s examples. The ‘scientific’ progeny of the technology plays no role in how it stabilizes as a real pattern—aside from the incidental way in which ‘scientific *bona fides*’ lend credibility that facilitates adoption. And the widespread adoption of e.g. astrology indicates that such *bona fides* are not necessary. So the same story about the emergence of real patterns is available for this even more expansive ontology.

Anecdotally, many people act under these descriptions in their ordinary lives.¹⁰ Those of us who have been told we are being a ‘classic libra’ will be familiar with the mindshaping processes non-hypothetically.

Whether we should be happy with such an inclusive ontology, or instead find some limiting principles that enable us to non-arbitrarily keep our ontology a bit more exclusive is an interesting open question.

4.5 Persons

In my own work, I’ve argued for a constructionist account of the personal–subpersonal distinction (Westfall, 2024). The argument, in short, is that the personal level is pluralistic—containing many different cognitive kinds. This pluralism proves resistant to informative unification, and rules out many otherwise attractive accounts of the personal level. I call this ‘the plurality problem’. However, others have argued on independent grounds that folk psychology itself is pluralistic (Andrews et al., 2020). So, if what makes states personal is that they are quantified over by folk psychology, we can predict and explain the plurality that was otherwise puzzling.

By itself, this is a modest form of constructionism, that doesn’t turn on mindshaping theses. In contrast to Curry’s more permissive constructionism, the kinds I had in mind *were* those posited by our best scientific theories. Cognitive psychology (ideally) delivers to us a catalog of cognitive kinds, but does not offer any obvious resources for distinguishing between the personal and the subpersonal ones. My proposal fills this lacuna by offering a principled distinction that unifies the personal kinds, consistent with the heterogeneity among them revealed by cognitive psychology.

But it’s easy to see how the view could be enriched with mindshaping premises. For example, suppose that the limits of folk psychology are malleable, and responsive to regulative practices concerning e.g. what psychological features we hold each other responsible for. As others begin holding us responsible for features of our psychology that were until now foreign to folk psychology, we become incentivized to monitor them ourselves, in order to avoid reprimand. And in monitoring them, we gain new mindshaping affordances with respect to others. If so, then which psychological kinds are personal is itself partly determined by social practices of holding one another responsible, i.e. mindshaping practices.¹¹

¹⁰Cf. (Hacking, 1986, 1995b).

¹¹I suspect, though I cannot explore here, that such a view is interesting for e.g. debates about whether people are responsible for their implicit biases (Holroyd et al., 2017).

5 Construction and the Metaphysics of Mind

The traditional dialectic in the metaphysics of mind offers three options: Fodor's realism, Churchland's eliminativism, and Dennett's 'quasi-realism'. This chapter has been exploring constructionism as an interesting and often neglected view about the metaphysics of psychological categories. The relation between constructionism and the traditional dialectic is delicate, though. In my view, one could combine constructionism with any of the traditional views about the *underlying* metaphysics. That is, we might accept constructionism, while agreeing with Fodor (or Dennett, or Churchland) about what the materials out of which we construct psychological kinds are like. We've already seen a Dennettian perspective from Curry, so I'll focus on Fodor and Churchland, who both seemingly present distinctive challenges for constructionism.

For Churchland (1981), the best scientific theory of mind is (or, at least, will be) one that jettisons folk psychological categories. Eventually, these categories will be replaced by proprietary (and heretofore unknown) categories derived from mature neuroscience. Supposing Churchland is right, it might appear an especially inhospitable worldview for the kind of constructionism I've been exploring. After all, our best science of the mind doesn't have anything at all *like* e.g. beliefs, emotions or memories.

However, I think this appearance is misleading. Compare an uncontroversially constructed case like money. Is it a problem that money has properties very unlike properties recognizable in the realization base? I take it that the answer is 'no'. Indeed, one of the interesting things about social construction is that it enables the emergence of kinds quite unlike the kinds that exist outside of a social context. So the fact that e.g. beliefs are quite unlike solids in a four- or five-dimensional phase space (Churchland, 1981, pp. 84–5) is no obstacle to the one being constructed out of the other.

One might instead worry that our current best theories of social construction are all posed in broadly folk psychological terms, e.g. in terms of 'common knowledge' (Mallon, 2016). Where will these theories be left after a mature neuroscience excises these kinds? At some level, I think we simply need to wait and see. Predicting the intellectual consequences of a scientific revolution ahead of time is a mug's game. On the other hand, part of what it would take for Churchland's neuroscientific kinds to supplant folk psychological kinds would be an ability to predict and explain at least broad swaths of what is currently covered by folk psychology. Insofar as we can expect the neuroscientific revolution to do this, we should expect it to capture—one way or another—the phenomena that constitute the basis of social construction. So rather than undermining our best accounts of social construction, I think there's some reason to be optimistic that the neuroscientific revolution—should it eventually occur—will provide a deeper grounding for the very same theories of social construction.

Finally, J. A. Fodor (1987) argues that folk psychology—at least propositional attitude psychology—is vindicated by empirical psychology. One might think that this competes with constructionist treatments. Put informally, if we have propositional attitudes in our

empirical psychology, we don't *need* to appeal to construction in explaining them. We've already seen Westra (2023) responding to a thought like this about belief, but let me say something slightly more general.

One role for belief is in our best theory of the internal dynamics of the mind, a project that Fodor argues should respect 'methodological solipsism' (J. A. Fodor, 1980). Another role for belief, though, is in explaining broader features of social organization of the sort of interest to theorists of social construction. It may turn out that the generalizations of interest to these social theorists are rather more abstract than the generalizations of interest to the cognitive psychologists. For example, the most useful notion of 'belief' for the social theorists may be agnostic about whether beliefs have a map-like or language-like representational format, whereas that will mark a difference in kind for the cognitive psychologists. If so, scientific realism and non-reductionism counsels accepting that there are two kinds of beliefs, at different 'levels' in the explanatory hierarchy.¹²

This last thought, ironically, has a Fodorian spirit. Elsewhere in his work, Fodor argued vigorously that special sciences are 'autonomous': they enjoy their own proprietary kinds and discover explanatory generalizations in terms of their kinds that more 'fundamental' sciences are insensitive to (J. Fodor, 1997). Fodor was primarily interested in fending off reductionist threats to cognitive psychology from below, but the same lesson holds when we view cognitive psychology from above. Just as the details of physical or neural goings-on are not a threat to cognitive psychology as a genuine and explanatory special science, cognitive psychology is not a threat to more thoroughly social sciences, that may also find use for kinds like belief.

So I think wherever one comes down on the 'fundamental' metaphysics of mind, there is space for a rich and well-understood notion of constructed psychological categories.

6 Conclusion

I've been considering how the mind looks when we juxtapose mindshaping with the metaphysics of social construction. As we've seen, these research programs are remarkably complimentary. Viewed from the metaphysics of social construction, mindshaping offers a detailed account of the processes that are schematically taken to subservise social construction. For an interesting variety of specific psychological kinds, this affinity has been appreciated. Ample space remains to explore a more comprehensively constructionist perspective on the mind, and many open questions come to mind. Clearly, though, that exploration will draw substantially from ongoing work on the varieties of mindshaping.

¹²This view is distinct from the view that there are two kinds of belief *at the level of cognitive psychology*, discussed above.

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