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*A Reference Handbook*



*Volume 2*

Edited by

John T. Ishiyama  
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## CONSTRUCTIVISM

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The last decades of the 20th century were marked by significant transformations on a global scale. The arrival of new forces created by discoveries in the realms of technology, transportation, and communications changed the patterns of social life and structures of international relations. The end of the cold war and ideological confrontation, decline in state sovereignty, and spread of globalization enlivened scholarly thinking about international relations and fostered academic debates about the nature of global politics and ways in which one can know and study it.

The arrival of constructivism in the late 1980s was precipitated by these earthshaking changes in international relations and lively discussions within the discipline. This novel heterodox approach imbibed the criticisms of the mainstream perspectives on international relations, particularly the theories of neorealism. The latter was faulted for its inability to account for changes in the global realm because of its neglect of the transformational power of knowledge and ideas. Instead of prioritizing the role of material factors in international relations, the constructivist perspective emphasized ideational forces. Instead of accepting relations and structures in global politics as the natural or given order of things, it maintained that a reality of international relations was contingent and dependent on people's thinking about it.

Beginning at the margins of the field, constructivist scholarship expanded rapidly throughout the 1990s. It developed its own program of empirical research focusing on identities, culture, institutions, knowledge, and norms. By shedding new light on the nature and impact of norms and ideas in international relations, interrogating identities and interests of states, and establishing ideational bases of the social order, constructivism has broadened theoretical confines of the discipline of international relations and contributed to reconceptualization of its key themes. Today, constructivist fortunes show no sign of waning, and the quality and depth of constructivist research has substantially improved.

The goal of this chapter is to take stock of constructivist work. It begins by explaining what constructivism is and laying out the main constructivist premises that hold this diverse perspective together and set it apart from other approaches within the discipline. Thinking about constructivism as a homogeneous approach obscures its rich philosophical roots that gave rise to numerous permutations within this approach. Therefore, the second section discusses various constructivisms and highlights divisions within the approach. Next, the chapter provides an overview of some of the seminal empirical works applying constructivist assumptions and methods, followed by a section discussing critical appraisals of the constructivist scholarship and directions for future research.

## What Is Constructivism?

There is no unanimous agreement among scholars of international relations on what constructivism is. There is, however, broad consensus on what it is not. Constructivism is not a theory of international politics (Checkel, 1998; Finnemore, 1996; Wendt, 1999). It does not put forward general explanations for what individuals and states do, why societies differ, or how the world changes. Neither does it advance any claims about the content of international norms and institutions or the nature of participants of world politics. "Constructivism is empty as far as assumptions, propositions, or hypotheses about international relations are concerned" (Jørgensen, 2001, p. 41). What constructivism does offer is a set of ideas about the nature of reality and the ways in which it can be grasped, and these ideas can inform people's understanding, interpretation, and theorization about world politics. In this way, constructivism can be thought of as an approach to studying social relations or a framework of propositions that lays the basis for social theories of international relations (Kratochwil, 2001).

Although in practice constructivist scholarship is very diverse and divided on a number of philosophical issues, most constructivists would agree that a defining aspect of this approach is the idea of the socially constructed nature of international politics. This idea encapsulates two interrelated processes: (1) The social environment makes individuals, states, and other actors of world politics into the kinds of beings and entities they are; and (2) conversely, individuals, states, and other actors of world politics make the world what it is through various forms of interaction with each other (Onuf, 1998).

First, for constructivists, the environment surrounding states and other actors of world politics is both social and material (Checkel, 1998; Jepperson, Wendt, & Katzenstein, 1996). The social world is composed of shared ideas and knowledge, whereas the material world manifests itself in the presence of nuclear weapons, the absence of world government, and other observable manifestations of international relations. However, the material aspects of world politics do not come classified. Material structures, beyond some biological characteristics, have certain meanings insofar as individuals and their collectivities create shared understandings of what those material structures signify, and individuals and groups attach this collective knowledge to physical reality (Adler, 2002). Things that individuals perceive as objective, such as money, human rights, or sovereignty, are made largely of ideas. They are the so-called social facts that depend on human agreement that they exist and make sense because people have imbued them with certain meanings (Ruggie, 1998).

Take, for example, human rights. They are the social constructions or inventions of the human mind that exist because of individuals' beliefs in human rights and practices

reinforcing their existence (Schmitz & Sikkink, 2002). The norms of sovereignty or the institution of self-help have been perceived as natural and taken for granted. But they are nothing more than the artifacts of what people collectively believe in and practice (Wendt, 1992). These shared beliefs, understandings, knowledge, culture, and norms constitute an ideational context, which, according to constructivists, exerts a powerful impact on world politics because it defines the meanings of what individuals encounter and experience. Meaningful behavior in international relations is impossible without these shared understandings because people and states act toward others on the basis of meanings that they ascribe to them (Hopf, 1998; Wendt, 1992). States' foreign policies toward other states, for example, will differ depending on whether their counterparts are perceived as enemies or friends. Nuclear weapons in and of themselves are less consequential for foreign policy choices than are our perceptions of states that possess them. The United States, for example, is not concerned with a sizable nuclear arsenal held by the British. However, North Korea's aspiration to join a nuclear club is a major cause for alarm (Checkel, 1998; Wendt, 1992).

The effects of ideas penetrate deeper than states' policies and behavior. Ideational context influences the basic character of states, the so-called state identity, the "relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self" (Wendt, 1992, p. 398). Actors' identities tell them and others who they are and predispose them to embrace a particular set of interests and preferences over choices of action. An identity of great power furnishes a particular set of interests different from those implied by the identity of a European state. Because actors have multiple identities, constructivism does not accept the notion of fixed interests (Hopf, 1998).

Wendt (1999), for example, speculates that the international system of states can have at least three kinds of ideational contexts—Hobbesian, Lockean, or Kantian—distinguished on the basis of what kind of roles—enemy, rival, or friend—dominates the system. Each ideational context predisposes states to take a distinct position or orientation toward each other with respect to the use of violence. For Wendt, the contemporary system of states has a Lockean structure in which states assume role identities of rivals, recognize each other's rights to life and liberty, and restrain their violence toward each other by observing the other's right to exist.

Constructivists describe norms, beliefs, and knowledge that serve as the foundational blocks of the ideational context as *intersubjective*. The quality of intersubjectivity implies that meanings ascribed to social facts are not simply the aggregations of beliefs of individuals. Rather, they represent collective knowledge. This knowledge is created through dialogical relationships and interaction of actors (Fierke, 2001). The second premise of constructivism is



that the meanings in terms of which individuals' and states' actions are organized arise out of interaction (Wendt, 1992). By doing what they do and saying what they say, individuals create intersubjective meanings, thus making the world (Onuf, 1998). The repetition of these processes leads to the reproduction of intersubjective meanings that over time solidify and become objective social facts that are not easy to change or transform.

To recapitulate, in the constructivist worldview, international relations are inherently social. They are made of intersubjective understandings about the world as well as material objects. The intersubjective ideational structures define international actors, shape their identities, preferences, and interests and influence their behavior. The ideational structures themselves arise out of the actors' interaction. Individuals participate in the production, constitution, and fixing of the social reality through their actions, interactions, and discourse (Hopf, 1998; Wendt, 1999). The simultaneity of the processes of production of collective meanings and knowledge and the impact of the knowledge structures on actors' behavior and identities is known as the *mutual constitution* of agents and structures in the constructivist parlance.

The mutually constitutive relationship is one of the most challenging constructivist ideas to grasp. An easier way to comprehend it is through comparison with a more familiar causal relationship. Causal relationships are usually postulated in the form  $X$  causes  $Y$  or  $X$  leads to  $Y$ : Toxins cause cancer, fluctuations in crime rates cause changes in housing prices, and a plurality rule electoral system leads to the creation of a two-party system (Duverger, 1972). Causal relationships typically answer the why questions: Why did the housing prices drop? Why does one country have a two-party system, while another one has a multiparty system? By formulating answers to these types of questions in the form of a causal relationship between two phenomena, one typically assumes that the cause ( $X$ ) and effect ( $Y$ ) are independent of each other; the cause, temporarily, precedes the effect; and the latter would not have taken place without the former (Wendt, 1998).

Constructivists study social facts made of shared ideas and intersubjective understandings. Because they are interested in ferreting out what gives the cause ( $X$ ) and effect ( $Y$ ) certain meanings and how the relationship between  $X$  and  $Y$  came to be defined, the constructivists' goal is to account for the properties of social facts by referencing ideas and practices in virtue of which they exist (Wendt, 1998). This goal is accomplished by asking "How" and "What" questions (Wendt, 1998): How is it possible that chemical and nuclear weapons have become regarded as illegitimate instruments of warfare (Price & Tannewald, 1996)? What is Eurasian regionalism? What makes a region (Mansfield & Milner, 1999)? The answers to these questions are based on a different kind of logic that explains how various ideational factors—norms,

identities, culture, and knowledge—define what the social facts are, not what determines them. The factors in a constitutive relationship are not independent and separated in time: The factors constituting Europe or human rights neither exist apart from Europe or human rights nor precede them in time. Democratic culture, traditions, geography, and individual states do not cause Europe just as an international law of human rights does not cause human rights. They are constituted by intersubjective understandings, ideas, and beliefs about what Europe is and what human rights are.

## Types of Constructivism

Thinking about constructivism as a homogeneous approach obscures the wide range of alternative conceptions of world politics and ways of studying it that exist under this rubric. There are numerous variants of constructivism—sociological, feminist, interpretive, emancipatory, and others. There are transnational constructivists who emphasize the influence of international norms, institutions, and other ideational structures (Boekle, Rittberger, & Wagner, 2001), and there are societal constructivists, also known as culturalists (Farrell, 2002), who stress the importance of domestic institutions, culture, and norms (Hopf, 2002; Katzenstein, 1996).

Although all variants of constructivism share their commitment toward denaturalization of the social world—that is, toward uncovering the socially constructed nature of institutions, objects, and practices that we perceive as objective (Hopf, 1998)—they disagree over the extent to which the empirically identifiable social relations can be discerned and studied (Barkin, 2003). One group, variously labeled as *thin*, *classical*, or *conventional* constructivists (Fierke & Jørgensen, 2001) to indicate that this group remains rooted in the classical or conventional tradition of viewing and studying international relations, maintains that an identifiable reality exists out there and can be examined and understood by applying appropriate methodologies for empirical investigation. Thin constructivists undertake to isolate sets of ideas, norms, and beliefs and specify a set of conditions under which one can expect to observe their impact on the behavior of states or other actors of international politics.

The other group, labeled as *thick*, *critical*, or *postmodernist* constructivists, contends that reality does not exist independently of individuals' or scholars' knowledge about it. It is apprehended in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions derived from social experience that may be specific or shared among many individuals and cultures. These constructions are neither false nor true; they are more or less informed and sophisticated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994). In thick constructivism, what exists (social reality out there) is entirely contingent on processes of social construction, in which an observer

inescapably takes part. Researchers contribute to the construction and reconstruction of reality through their scientific exploratory practices (Albert, 2001). They can never know for certain if what they observe really exists independently of their observation because the findings of social inquiry are literally created as the investigation proceeds. What can be known is inextricably intertwined with the interaction between an investigator and his or her object of study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The bulk of constructivist scholarship can be characterized as conventional or thin constructivism (e.g., Checkel, 1997; Finnemore, 1996; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Katzenstein, 1996; Wendt, 1999), albeit there are important differences and disagreements within this group. Some conventional constructivists grudgingly accept the dualism of a researcher and his or her object of inquiry and often use the language of causality and explanation in much the same way as positivists do. Others abandon dualism and think about human knowledge as being socially constructed and the relationship between an investigator and the objects of investigation as interactive with the values of an investigator inevitably influencing the inquiry. But instead of focusing on the matter of individual meaning-making activity of the individual mind as critical constructivists do, conventional constructivists concentrate on how people create intersubjective meanings and knowledge about the world in the process of social exchange (Schwandt, 1994).

### Constructivist Empirical Research Program

Constructivist insights about the role of ideas in world politics provided an impetus for a variegated and rapidly expanding research program. Since constructivists are primarily interested in the social construction of international relations, their focus of inquiry has been on a range of social phenomena, such as norms, institutions, principled beliefs, culture, and knowledge.

Constructivists' studies of norms remain the staple of their scholarship, and a comprehensive list of the literature in this analytical realm would be impossible to compile. Researchers have documented the impact of separate norms, such as norms prohibiting colonization (Goertz & Diehl, 1994) and slavery (Ray, 1989), or sets of related norms, such as norms prohibiting certain types of conduct in the situations of war (Raymond, 1997) on different international outcomes, decolonization (Jackson, 1993), international support for the termination of slavery, and the emergence of weapons taboo (Price & Tannewald, 1996). Other scholars have demonstrated how the emergence of global standards of appropriate behavior, such as the norm of racial equality (Klotz, 1995), women's suffrage (Keck & Sikkink, 1998), and human rights (Forsythe, 1991) have led states to redefine their interests and change their behavior even in the absence of material incentives to do so.

The constructivist approach to norms differs from the perspectives on norms maintained by other theoretical approaches to international relations, particularly the treatment of norms within the realist and liberal schools of thought. Realists do not ascribe an independent causal role to a norm, while liberals treat norms instrumentally as tools for maximizing utility of the gain-seeking actors. In contrast, for constructivists, norms are independent forces, the effects of which reach much deeper than simply constraining states' behavior. Norms not only regulate the behavior of actors in international relations, but also create and define their very identities and interests (Checkel, 1997, 1998; Finnemore, 1996).

Before a norm reaches the status of an independent and constitutive force, it usually passes through several lengthy and uneven phases of its life cycle. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) describe the pattern of the rise of a norm as a three-step process. The emergence of the norm is the initial stage. Norms are typically introduced and propelled by the norm entrepreneurs. The next stage is called the *norm cascade* when state actors begin to adopt the norm. This process culminates in a tipping point, at which a sufficient number of the relevant actors accept the norm. The last stage involves norm internalization. Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999) suggest an alternative spiral model that outlines five steps in norm adoption. During the early stages of the norm adoption cycle, a government does not acknowledge the existence of the norm and denies violations but may be pressed into tactical concessions by domestic and international social actors demanding compliance with the norm. In the last two stages of the cycle, the norm reaches a prescriptive status and, ultimately, becomes internalized by the state actors leading to their rule-consistent behavior.

Different stages of a norm's life cycle and steps in the adoption of the norm may involve different actors. Stages of a norm's life cycle are also characterized by different social processes, logics of action, and causal mechanisms connecting driving forces for the norm's emergence and adoption with certain outcomes. For example, constructivist studies illuminated the role of norm entrepreneurs—the networks of activists, knowledge-based experts, and “epistemic communities” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998)—at the initial stages of norm emergence and progression from the local to global level. The key processes at the early phase of the life cycle of norms are framing that aims to make the norm appealing and comprehensible to the public and engaging in persuasion to convince the leaders of states and international organizations to embrace new norms. When the norm reaches the global arena, it is the international organizations and like-minded states that serve as an organizational platform for advocating the norm and teaching new normative views to other states (Finnemore, 1996). They can exert international pressure or use legitimation as mechanisms for socializing the states into becoming the norm followers (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

The life cycle of a norm, or phases of norm adoption, is not a linear process. Internalization of the norm is never a guaranteed outcome. Constructivist scholarship offers an impressive catalogue of what are called the *scope conditions* under which norms are likely to fail or succeed (Zürn & Checkel, 2005). Some of these conditions encompass the properties of the norms themselves, such as norms' specificity, commonality, and durability (Boekle et al., 2001; Raymond, 1997), while others apply to the properties of actors and institutions that trigger socialization. Another group of conditions includes the properties of domestic political systems—the nature of political regimes, the strength of civil society, and the lines of political contestation—that can either facilitate or obstruct the implementation of norms. Finally, the content of issues (for instance, human rights or democratic governance) and the nature of interaction between socializing and socialized actors (for instance, intensity of contact and discourse) also condition the impact of norms (Zürn & Checkel, 2005).

Constructivist scholarship is not limited to norms. The burgeoning analyses of individual and collective identity, how it is created and sustained, and how it generates and shapes interests and policies of international actors constitute a big chunk of constructivist research (Cronin, 1999; Jepperson et al., 1996). Constructivists have broken new ground in the studies of institutions—that is, relatively stable collections of rules and practices prescribing and proscribing certain kinds of behavior for a group of actors (March & Olsen, 1998)—by showing how institutions not only help to coordinate, pattern, and direct behavior of states, but also partake in the creation of new collective identities, definition of shared interests, and promotion of new practices. Finally, constructivist analyses of nonstate actors and issues of international governance have made a substantive impact on the international relations discipline (Adler, 2002).

### Criticisms of Constructivism and Future Directions of Constructivist Scholarship

Constructivism has been subjected to scrupulous internal and external evaluation. Scholars within and outside constructivism have found important limitations and shortcomings of multiple substantive theories and empirical studies informed by this approach. The major criticisms of constructivism originate from those theoretical perspectives that fall under the rubric of positivism. The latter prioritizes causal laws and generalizations describing and explaining the reality that is assumed to be independent of people's thinking about it, even if this thinking is never complete and perfect (Fierke, 2001). Positivist tenets underlie the mainstream perspectives on international relations, such as realism and liberalism.

The critics of constructivism contend that its usefulness as a guide for studying international relations is limited. Theories informed by constructivist assumptions are not

parsimonious or elegant, their causality is indeterminate, and relationships are not clearly specified. Constructivists devise cumbersome models including different actors and describe complex mechanisms of influence and scope conditions that are difficult to apply beyond the situations and processes under their investigation.

A constructivist idea of the mutually constitutive relationship between actors and structures has become a target of many attacks. Constructivists have been faulted for their inability to disentangle the mutually constitutive relationships and establish their temporal sequence: What comes first, a norm that affects the identity of actors or actors' identities that influence the nature of norms? The simultaneity of interaction makes it very difficult to capture the self-reinforcing nature of norms, institutions, or culture and the ways in which states, individuals, and other social agents create and change the social order of things.

Grounding their explanations in unobservable (intersubjective) ideational structures, constructivists have to tackle two formidable methodological challenges. First, they need to demonstrate the existence of norms, and second, they need to prove their impact on the behavior of states (Farrell, 2002). To show the existence of shared beliefs, constructivists rely on the artifacts of actors' interactions, such as public statements, decisions of authoritative bodies, or official memoirs. The residues of the culture and norms have also been found in international and domestic legislation. To tease out the meanings that actors ascribe to social facts and situations, constructivists have employed interpretive methods and a narrative mode of explanation (Klotz & Lynch, 2007) that have been regarded as less methodologically robust tools of research.

Another complaint about the constructivist agenda is that it has tended to be liberal idealist, concentrated on Western liberal norms of democracy, human rights, or multilateralism (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Risse et al., 1999). Although constructivists have begun examining the so-called bad norms and pathological identities (Farrell, 2002; Rae, 2002), their research has overwhelmingly focused on so-called good norms. One of the implications of this selection bias is the erroneous representation of the West and Western organizations as promoters of good liberal norms that stimulate progress in international relations.

Excessive emphasis on the ability of the good norms and other ideational factors to change the world and insufficient attention to material coercion and political contestation in world politics has created an image of constructivism as an approach dismissive of the role of power in the creation and dissemination of norms and ideas (Barkin, 2003). By ignoring or downplaying advantages that material resources and power give to social actors of international relations, constructivists overlook significant interrelated effects of social and material inequalities on the nature, patterns of diffusion, and ultimate success of international practices and norms.

The ambivalence toward or neglect of the role of power and structures in international relations by some constructivists



can, to a certain extent, be attributed to insufficient attention to domestic politics and the lack of a theory of agency in constructivist research. Constructivism emerged on the wave of the growing dissatisfaction with the neorealist individualistic and systemic orientation. Yet it has been conspicuously inattentive to the state-level accounts of world politics. Certainly, there are constructivists who attend more closely to domestic power constellations and culture as mediating factors in the adoption of norms or domestic sources of foreign policies and international relations (see, for example, Checkel, 1997, 1998; Hopf, 2002). However, the bulk of constructivist scholarship has remained at the international level of analysis continuing to treat states as unitary actors.

Most of the failings identified by constructivism's critics are not terminal. They can be cured in future research that should respond to the needs of theory building and greater attentiveness to the role of power in the social world. As stated previously, constructivism is not a theory of international relations. For it to serve as a valuable guide into the exploration of the social world, its abstract philosophical categories and insights about the nature of social relations need to be translated into the middle-range theory with a more limited scope and aiming at explaining a set of specific social phenomena. Constructivist scholarship has seen laudable efforts to formulate and test middle-level theories specifying the actors and mechanisms of social influence and articulating conditions under which social influence occurs. There is still an unfortunate deficit of constructivist theory building in international relations, and there is a lack of conversation among constructivists of different genres (Checkel, 1998). Future studies inspired by constructivist propositions need to elaborate the causal pathways and transmission mechanisms that link norms, actors, and their policy choices in various social situations. There is also room for specifying the meaning of concepts and relationships and detailing conditions under which different mechanisms of normative influence can be observed.

Opening up the black box of domestic politics for theoretical and empirical exploration and attending more closely to the structures of power in domestic politics and international relations will facilitate constructivists' efforts at theory building and enhance their explanations and reconceptualizations of practices and structures in the international realm. Having demonstrated the importance of ideational forces in world politics, constructivists need to contemplate how and why certain norms and beliefs get successfully diffused, promoted, and adopted by international actors but others do not. What is the relationship between social and material power, how is it wielded, and to what end? Future constructivist studies should consider not only the impact of ideational factors on the structures and exercise of power in the international realm, but also the ways in which power and political contestation in domestic politics and international relations influence and condition the impact of norms (Barkin, 2003). The

accomplishment of these goals will require a synthesis of constructivist and other theoretical approaches and bridge building between constructivism and rationalism. Efforts at integrating constructivism with other theoretical perspectives are well under way (Barkin, 2003; Checkel, 1997; Risse et al., 1999), but there are obstacles toward the bridge building and reconciliation.

Furthermore, future constructivist studies should expand their research agenda to include norms, institutions, and identities that are not accepted as good and critically assess ethical implications of the diffusion of good norms. Constructivist scholars need to refine their research designs and hone their methods of empirical investigation. Much of the empirical constructivist work has focused on examining single countries or issues. Cross-national or longitudinal designs as well as considerations and tests of alternative explanations would help to reduce the problem of overdetermination that is evident in much of the constructivist research, where ideational factors are invoked as one of the explanatory factors, yet little consideration is given to other variables and how much of the outcome they can account for (Checkel, 1998).

## Conclusion

Constructivism in international relations is a fairly new approach that focuses on the social construction of world politics. It emphasizes ideational factors, such as ideas, beliefs, and knowledge, and their constitutive and regulative effects on the social reality and agents that create, reproduce, and reify it. Intersubjective ideational contexts influence actors' behavior and identities by embedding material objects, including other actors, with which they interact with certain meanings, and those shared meanings become the source of the agents' reasons, interests, and practices. Social actors themselves create intersubjective meanings through their discourse and interactions. For constructivists, a reality is always the product of human activity; therefore, it is never objective or given but is always historically bound and contingent. Constructivist scholarship is extremely variegated and divided along philosophical, theoretical, and methodological issues. However, all constructivists share their commitment toward denaturalization of the world—that is, discerning how material objects, practices, and institutions that individuals treat as given and natural are the products of social construction (Hopf, 1998).

One of the important strengths of the constructivist approach is its capacity to account for what the mainstream theoretical perspectives cannot—namely, change in the structures and agents of international politics, including visible shifts in the goals, behaviors, and strategies of states (Locher & Prügl, 2001). For constructivists, preferences and interests are the products of human activity; therefore, they can change with instantiation of new social practices, although this process can be incremental and



slow (Wendt, 1999). For realists and liberals, qualitative changes in interests and goals are difficult to explain because they are postulated as exogenous to the actors, and therefore, not variable.

Constructivist scholarship is not devoid of limitations and shortcomings. Future constructivist studies need to pay closer attention to the development of theory, the mediating role of power in the emergence and diffusion of ideas and norms, and the design of the empirical research. Despite the criticisms, constructivism's contributions to international relations cannot be underestimated. The constructivist approach has significantly broadened theoretical and empirical contours of the discipline. It has improved understanding of some of the conceptual foundations of international relations theory and suggested novel ways of thinking about key themes and concepts in international relations, such as anarchy, balance of power, and the security dilemma, to name a few (Hopf, 1998). By attending to the issues of identity and construction of interests bracketed by mainstream theoretical perspectives, constructivist studies have put forth alternative interpretations of international phenomena and offered new solutions for a number of puzzles of international relations (Checkel, 1998). Constructivism's empirical research on principled beliefs, culture, knowledge, and norms has filled in a clear lacuna in the contemporary international relations literature.

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