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# The Social Construction of Winston Churchill: How Life Experiences Shaped the Identity of a Wartime Legend

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**The Social Construction of Winston Churchill:  
How Life Experiences Shaped the Identity of a Wartime Legend**

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of International Studies

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Molly Elisabeth Smith

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The field of international relations is defined through a set of theories and viewpoints, the most common of which are rooted in presupposed patterns, guidelines, and trends. These theories accept that certain international dynamics exist inherently and define global order. However, if one digs deeper, it is not difficult to see that the entirety of the world has been uniquely shaped and constructed over time based on the potential for shifts in the identities and interests of actors in the international system. The theory of social constructivism makes it possible to challenge commonly held beliefs and assumptions about history and about the behavior and structure of states and institutions in the international system. Constructivism is essential in looking beyond the “objective reality” created by other theories in an effort to discover deeper meaning and perspective.<sup>1</sup> It addresses the formation of identities and interests at the level of state interaction in international relations. However, if paired with both the theory of social identity and elements from the field of political psychology, one can observe constructivist principles of identity development at the individual level, particularly for those in the field of politics.

Winston S. Churchill was a pivotal political figure throughout several decades of both British and world history, particularly in his views and actions throughout the development of the Second World War and in his leadership during the war itself. Scholars have long recognized his unique brand of thinking and guidance that distinctly set him apart from other minds and ideologies of the time, and that supplied the force behind Great Britain’s wartime success and the Allies’ overall victory. His ability to foresee threats and events was without equal. Such distinctness from his contemporaries is undoubtedly attributed to the principles behind social constructivism, social identity theory, and political psychology, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Pease, Kelly-Kate S. “Critical Theories and Approaches.” *International Organizations*, 106.

Churchill's one-of-a-kind life story and experiences that ultimately shaped him into an unmatched political and intellectual mind.

Study has been done on the worldview of the Winston Churchill of later years, citing his life and experiences following the Second World War as examples and support. It was at this point in his life that he began to fit the mold of predetermined international political theories, and thus scholars did not find it difficult to define his identity and his interests in light of international relations theory. However, it was the pre-war era that inarguably illustrates Churchill's unparalleled character and skill that set him apart from his contemporaries. While the Second World War itself certainly played an important role in shaping Churchill throughout the rest of his life, it is essential that study be done not on how the war prepared him moving forward, but rather on how his unique life prepared him for the war.

Social constructivism, along with social identity theory and political psychology – can be used to fill in gaps in the scholarly analysis of pre-war Churchill. Without question, this theory serves as a better explanation than other theories of the field; constructivism allows for the potential for change in actors' identities and interests, and acknowledges these ideational factors as essential elements in defining the world as it is known. While the most popular international relations theories recognize actors' identities and interests as fixed, unchangeable realities, social constructivism suggests that such factors can fluctuate and develop in unpredictable ways. Therefore, such a theory proves valuable not only in the study of how and why unique experiences and interpersonal relationships shape the identity of a man in a way that distinguishes him from others, but also in acknowledging that this development continues throughout his entire life.

It is through constructivist analysis of the pre-war version of Churchill that one can understand that it is not about confining such a man within the boxes of traditional theories, but exploring how he stepped out of such boxes to change the world in a way that no one else of this era could. In reflecting on his own wartime leadership, Churchill observed: “I felt as if I were walking with destiny and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and this trial.”<sup>2</sup> Winston Churchill’s unique life experiences shaped him into a man, a politician, and a leader unprecedented for his time, enabling him to guide his nation and the Allies through the Second World War with great influence and success.

## **I. An Introduction to International Relations Theory**

There are many theories that seek to explain the functioning of the world system through various perspectives. Such theories generally encompass their own unique worldviews built upon arguments concerning what they consider to be the driving forces behind global systems, structures, and actors’ actions within the international community. While the dozens of international relations theories are as diverse as they are numerous, a majority of the most well-established and commonly-argued viewpoints can be categorized into two primary schools of thought: rationalist and interpretive.<sup>3</sup>

### **Rationalist Thought: Realism and Liberalism**

Arguably, the most commonly defended, studied, and accepted worldviews are that of neorealism and neoliberalism, both of which fall within the realm of rationalist thought.

Although the two may occupy the same subcategory, much of the history of international relations theory has consisted of the ongoing debate between these two drastically opposing

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<sup>2</sup> *Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms*. London: Imperial War Museum, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Adler, Emanuel. “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics.” *European Journal of International Relations* 1997, 319.

viewpoints.<sup>4</sup> Rationalism may continue to dominate international thought; however, rationalist thinking provides answers to only a fraction of the necessary questions, “treating the identities and interests of agents as exogenously given and focusing on how the behavior of agents generates outcomes.”<sup>5</sup> Both realism and liberalism tend to center on self-invested states and other international actors, focusing on behavioral changes while ignoring shifts in interests and identities.<sup>6</sup> In short, realism consists of an every-man-for-himself mentality that chooses to emphasize the importance of state security, sovereignty, and military strength. The assumption is that this model is a state’s default setting; states will consistently and inherently chase the ideals of self-interest and power every time. On the other hand, liberalism assumes that the desires to compromise, cooperate, and appease are the inherent nature of international actors; states will do all that they can to avoid conflict, whether by way of working together, compromising sovereignty, or creating orders in an effort to maintain global peace.<sup>7</sup>

Although the theories of realism and liberalism are deeply opposing in their standpoints, each maintains the rationalist mindset of pre-existing identities and interests and respects the existence of a functioning state as given. Within the foundation of both theories is the claim that certain interests, attitudes, and structures exist inherently, thus shaping the actions of international actors in particular ways. Through this lens, the identities and interests of actors are viewed as “given.”<sup>8</sup> As both realism and liberalism consider the self-centered state to be the “starting point” of theory, all actions are viewed through this understanding; all decisions are

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<sup>4</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization*, 391.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 391-392.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>7</sup> Carlsnaes, Walter, Thomas Risse-Kappen, and Beth A. Simmons, eds. *Handbook of International Relations*, 227.

<sup>8</sup> Ruggie, John Gerard. “What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge.” *International Organization*, 862.

seen to be made based on inherently self-focused identities and interests with absolutely no consideration for the possibility of a shift away from the self-interested motivation.<sup>9</sup>

The strength and argument of this way of thinking depends on the consistency and the reliability of actors' unwavering identities and interests; however, this is also where the critical limitations and weaknesses of rationalism become evident.<sup>10</sup> Rationalists "explain international relations as simple behavioral responses to the forces of physics that act on material objects from the outside;"<sup>11</sup> constructivism can provide a solution to this restriction. While constructivists do not seek to disprove the role and importance of such behavioral responses, they argue that these responses are not the only significant factors in the functioning of the international system. Furthermore, rationalists' insistence that the world must be judged from predetermined starting points of so-called inherent tendencies establishes false limits on the identities, interests, and actions of actors within the international system. In contrast, the constructivist viewpoint stipulates that no such limits exist, and that it is precisely this freedom of transformation that accounts for the ever-evolving nature of actors and of the global system as a whole.

### **Interpretive Thought: Postmodernism and Poststructuralism**

On the other side of the spectrum of theory, interpretive thought tends to focus entirely on the importance of ideational factors. Such theories "propose to debate the nature of international social relations" and focus on the various possibilities of the ways in which it can be studied.<sup>12</sup> According to their interpretation of the "social and interpreted world," "only ideas matter and

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<sup>9</sup> Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization*, 392.

<sup>10</sup> Ruggie, John Gerard. "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge." *International Organization*, 863.

<sup>11</sup> Adler, Emanuel. "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics." *European Journal of International Relations* 1997, 321.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



can be studied.”<sup>13</sup> Though not quite as popular or widespread as the theories of rationalism, it is necessary to consider the leading interpretive theories of postmodernism and poststructuralism in the big-picture study of international relations theory. Although it has many variations, postmodernism is consistently built on a distrust of well-revered global systems.

“Postmodernists deny that the state exists as a ‘real’ institutional or material form. All states are imagined.”<sup>14</sup> While still considered proponents of interpretive theory, poststructuralists prefer to consider their perspective as less of a theory in its own right and more of a unique approach to criticism. This school of thought views criticism as a positive force that allows for considering variety and alternative approaches.<sup>15</sup> Each theory places all of its focus on the ideational factors and theoretical potential within the international community.

It is important to note that a common misconception is the classification of constructivism within this interpretive school of international thought. While constructivism does seek to place more emphasis on the importance of ideas, interests, and identities than the rationalist approaches, it is incorrect to categorize it alongside these more extreme interpretive theories.<sup>16</sup> Constructivists do not wish to ignore outright the behavioral responses emphasized by the realists, whereas this is, in fact, the goal of the postmodernists and the poststructuralists. In this hyper-focus on ideational factors, one can see the issues of interpretive theory. While the opposing rationalists place too much importance on behavioral responses, interpretivists tend overemphasize the importance of theory and lack the necessary consideration of practice and

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<sup>13</sup> Adler, Emanuel. “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics.” *European Journal of International Relations* 1997, 321.

<sup>14</sup> Hobson, John M. *The State and International Relations*, 164.

<sup>15</sup> “Post-Structuralism.” *New World Encyclopedia*.

<sup>16</sup> Adler, Emanuel. “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics.” *European Journal of International Relations* 1997, 320.

evidence.<sup>17</sup> While the issues of rationalism must be addressed, one cannot go too far in the other direction and risk overcompensating through an overemphasis on ideational factors.

## II. An Introduction to Constructivist Theory

The theory of social constructivism, as it is known today, emerged during the post-Cold War era. Considering that constructivism does not assume the existence of an inherent global system and that all events will occur in concordance with this system, its ideals provide an explanation for the unpredictable fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in a way that realism and liberalism cannot.<sup>18</sup> Instead, constructivism focuses on the creation of various identities and interests that in turn shape the conditions, institutions, and norms of the international system with the goal of understanding the “full array of roles that ideas play in world politics.”<sup>19</sup> Whereas neorealism and neoliberalism have the ability to take from pre-existing economic theories, constructivism has no comparable counterpart. Though significantly impacted by “the sociological tradition,” constructivist theory essentially had to be developed from scratch.<sup>20</sup>

Constructivism provides a unique and valuable approach to the study of the international system. Often overlooked, it inhabits what Emanuel Adler calls the “middle ground” between the rationalist theories and the more interpretive approaches,<sup>21</sup> offering a balance between the emphasis on behavioral responses to external factors on the one hand, and the power and influence of ideational factors on the other: “While accepting the notion that there is a real world

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<sup>17</sup> Baylis, John, and Steve Smith. *The Globalization of World Politics*, 287.

<sup>18</sup> Sterling-Folker, Jennifer, ed. *Making Sense of International Relations Theory*, 115.

<sup>19</sup> Ruggie, John Gerard. “What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge.” *International Organization*, 867.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 862.

<sup>21</sup> Adler, Emanuel. “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics.” *European Journal of International Relations* 1997, 319.

out there, constructivists nevertheless believe that it is not entirely determined by physical reality and is socially emergent.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, constructivism’s advantages include its allowance for the “possibility of rapid, radical change.”<sup>23</sup> In fact, constructivism’s role in defining the seemingly inexplicable end of the Cold War is not only attributed to its ability to explain why certain events transpired, but also to its explanation for the speed at which the fall of the Soviet Union occurred.<sup>24</sup>

Constructivism does not entertain the idea of pre-existing structures, patterns, or tendencies within the international community; thus it can be said that constructivists greatly value the concept of anarchy in explaining how such systems can form. In the field of international relations theory, anarchy is defined as the “absence of a sovereign” or government and generally “implies chaos or disorder.”<sup>25</sup> Alexander Wendt, one of the great pioneers of constructivist theory in the second half of the twentieth century, famously wrote “anarchy is what the state makes of it;”<sup>26</sup> it is a situation in which states must build a “common lifeworld” from the ground up.<sup>27</sup> While one could argue that self-interest and power-focused systems prove the most popular throughout the international community, Wendt points out that this is not because such structures exist inherently, but rather that such a mentality is “socially constructed under anarchy.”<sup>28</sup> This is to say that if a state were to start with nothing in a state of anarchy, how its interests and identities would develop is entirely open-ended. Whatever environment the

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<sup>22</sup> Adler, Emanuel. “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics.” *European Journal of International Relations* 1997, 324.

<sup>23</sup> Sterling-Folker, Jennifer, ed. *Making Sense of International Relations Theory*, 115.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Milner, Helen. “The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique.” *Review of International Studies*, 69-70.

<sup>26</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization*, 395.

<sup>27</sup> Risse, Thomas. “Let’s Argue!’: Communicative Action in World Politics.” *International Organization*, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization*, 395.

state creates will ultimately shape its actions and decisions, and self-interest and a focus on power and security are just two of the many possible factors that can form into systems and norms. Therefore, constructivist study is not interested in how a system functions after norms and patterns have already been established but instead focuses on what happens prior to the establishment of certain standards and models.<sup>29</sup>

The constructivist approach differs from those of the mainstream theories in a variety of ways. A central component of constructivism is its assertion that “people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them.”<sup>30</sup> Collective meaning can be referred by many names, including collective understanding and collective knowledge, as well as intersubjective understanding, knowledge, or meaning.<sup>31</sup> Regardless of the specific terminology, collective meaning is at the center of constructivist theory; such shared understanding is the foundation of the creation of identities and norms within the international community. The concept of state sovereignty is often cited as an example of collective meaning at work in the global system. Today, although sovereignty is accepted as a well-established and unquestionable norm, this has not always been the case. Sovereignty – like any international norm or institution – is what the actors make of it. Early on, the definition of state sovereignty was collectively defined on the basis of territorial rights and has remained unchanged ever since. Therefore, it endures as an important element in the identities of state actors.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ruggie, John Gerard. “What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge.” *International Organization*, 867.

<sup>30</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization*, 396-397.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 397; Adler, Emanuel. “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics.” *European Journal of International Relations* 1997, 324-325; 327.

<sup>32</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization*, 412.

Collective meaning is crucial to the social construction of the international system, self-help or otherwise. States may forever be concerned with notions of power and security, but how they conduct themselves in such an environment relies entirely on the “distribution of knowledge” that builds upon their intersubjective understanding and creates their perceptions of themselves and one another.<sup>33</sup> However, it is important to note that collective meaning is completely dependent upon actor interaction. The identities and interests that result from collective understanding are “inherently relational;”<sup>34</sup> no knowledge or understanding of the self or of others can truly exist without interaction. Thus, if one claims that states inherently hold particular security interests, or that they exist innately as individual, sovereign bodies, he or she “assume[s] too much,” because such things cannot be created nor identified prior to interaction, which allows for the necessary collective meaning to form.<sup>35</sup> It is these collective understandings that also bear responsibility for the creation and maintenance of the identities and interests of actors:<sup>36</sup> “Identities and interests are constituted by collective meanings that are always in process.”<sup>37</sup> It is interaction and experience that allow for the formation of identities, which in turn form the basis of interests. The actor can assess a situation and its potential outcomes based on this experience, which determines the amount of interest and motivation devoted to it.<sup>38</sup>

It is impossible for identities and interests to exist apart from their respective situations, and thus they depend entirely on context. Such context – and appropriate identities and interests

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<sup>33</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization*, 397.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>36</sup> Adler, Emanuel. “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics.” *European Journal of International Relations* 1997, 324.

<sup>37</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization*, 407.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

– are socially constructed through interaction.<sup>39</sup> While realists argue the inherent existence of certain security dilemmas and concerns, constructivists instead point out that such dilemmas are created through actor actions, establishing identities and interests that “interact in particular ways with one another so that these [dilemmas] appear to be inevitable.”<sup>40</sup> If a self-help or competitive system evolves, it is built entirely on the unique interaction between states. This leads to the “development of identities...which can become entrenched over time and reinforced by continued interaction that appears to confirm the identit[ies] as true.”<sup>41</sup>

International norms play essential roles in both upholding and dictating actor behavior as well as in the creation of new interests, institutions, and actors. Norms are “standards of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity.”<sup>42</sup> Such standards and rules for international behavior rely entirely upon the collective meaning determined by the actors. If the identities of states result from interaction, norms are directly built upon these identities. In turn, it is the norms that define a state’s specific interests. However, norms also hold the power to influence the very identities that brought them into existence;<sup>43</sup> “interests and identities are no longer fixed, but subject to interrogation and challenges and, thus, to change.”<sup>44</sup> It is the process of socialization that is responsible for the establishment of global norms. It engages “diplomatic praise or censure, either bilateral or multilateral, which is reinforced by material sanctions and incentives,” with the goal of turning norm violators into rule-followers.<sup>45</sup> “Persuasion is the

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<sup>39</sup> Sterling-Folker, Jennifer, ed. *Making Sense of International Relations Theory*, 116.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>42</sup> Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.” *International Organization*, 891.

<sup>43</sup> Hobson, John M. *The State and International Relations*, 146.

<sup>44</sup> Risse, Thomas. “‘Let’s Argue!’: Communicative Action in World Politics.” *International Organization*, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.” *International Organization*, 902.

process by which agent action becomes social structure, ideas become norms, and the subjective becomes the intersubjective.”<sup>46</sup>

There are two different kinds of norms – or rules – that exist in the international system in light of constructivist theory. Regulative norms “order and constrain behavior,” while constitutive norms “create new actors, interests, or categories of action.”<sup>47</sup> While regulative norms are meant to have “causal effects,” constitutive norms work to set the definitions of actions and practices that make up an activity.<sup>48</sup> According to constructivists, it is in the consideration of norms that theories such as realism and liberalism fall short. Rationalism focuses entirely on regulative norms because it is built upon the assumption of existing actors and patterns of behavior.<sup>49</sup> However, this is exactly why such theories fail in explaining the fall of the Soviet Union. The structure collapsed when “the system of status-functions [assigned by constitutive rules]...was no longer accepted.”<sup>50</sup> Without a consideration for the existence and role of constitutive norms, international relations theory is at a loss without constructivism.

Some norms are so well-ingrained and taken for granted that it is often easy to forget that they are simply socially-constructed rules and patterns. The norm of sovereignty is a good example: “When norms become internalized in actors, actors are no longer choosing to conform to them in any meaningful way.”<sup>51</sup> A point has been reached where sovereignty is essentially no longer a choice for states; it has existed as an international institution for so long that it is nearly

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<sup>46</sup> Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.” *International Organization*, 914.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 891.

<sup>48</sup> Ruggie, John Gerard. “What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge.” *International Organization*, 871.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 873.

<sup>51</sup> Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.” *International Organization*, 913.

impossible to question it or to imagine an alternative. It is institutions such as sovereignty that add another layer to the socially constructed reality of the world.

Norms work alongside institutions to create a functioning world system. While norms “isolate single standards of behavior...institutions emphasize the way in which behavioral rules are structured together and interrelate.”<sup>52</sup> An institution is a relatively fixed “structure” comprised of interests and identities, kept in place through collective meaning and norms. It is therefore impossible for institutions to exist without the ideas, the knowledge, and the identities of actors;<sup>53</sup> both institutions and identities are reliant upon the actions of actors. Without action and interaction, there is no space for the creation or maintenance of collective meanings and norms that are essential in the existence of institutions.<sup>54</sup>

It is the process of socialization that is the driving force behind norms; however, institutionalization is the internalization process of institutions. Socialization deals with both cognitive and behavioral aspects, while institutionalization addresses the behavioral effects in the creation of new identities and interests.<sup>55</sup> Norms function within an institution; for example, the realist ideal of a self-help system is an institution. It is simply one of many different “structures of identity and interest” that is possible under anarchy.<sup>56</sup> Many of the international structures that are considered to be “immutable” are, in fact, simply “embedded social relationships” rooted entirely in state identity and interaction.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.” *International Organization*, 891.

<sup>53</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization*, 399.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>57</sup> Sterling-Folker, Jennifer, ed. *Making Sense of International Relations Theory*, 118.



Constructivism allows for actors to evolve and to create the world in which they live. Through collective meaning, the socialization and internalization of norms and institutions, and the formation and evolution of identities and interests, the international community constructs its system. “Social reality emerges from the attachment of meaning and functions to physical objects; collective understandings, such as norms, endow physical objects with purpose and therefore help constitute reality.”<sup>58</sup> The consideration of actors’ identities and interests is vital to achieving a full understanding of how the world functions, for it is upon these identities and interests that everything known is built. “The constructivist project has sought to open up the relatively narrow theoretical confines of the field [of international relations] – by pushing...back to problematize the interests and identities of actors.”<sup>59</sup> Until the introduction of this way of thinking, the roles and importance of norms, institutions, and ideational factors were often disregarded due to the fact that they are more difficult to measure and study.<sup>60</sup> However, it is exactly these elements that, according to constructivism, hold the greatest influence in the decisions and actions of state and non-state actors alike.

Theoretically speaking, the majority of discourse on international relations theory uses state actors as examples, depicting them as the only significant players in the global community. However, it is essential to both recognize the importance of other types of international actors, as well as apply these theories to their actions and interests as one would an entire state. After all, states are comprised of, and led by, individuals, each occupying their own unique viewpoints that greatly shape the world system. The same principles of identities, interests, institutions, and

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<sup>58</sup> Adler, Emanuel. “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics.” *European Journal of International Relations* 1997, 324.

<sup>59</sup> Ruggie, John Gerard. “What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge.” *International Organization*, 862.

<sup>60</sup> Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.” *International Organization*, 889.

norms relate to individuals just as they do to states and to collective bodies of international actors. A person's decisions, actions, and motives can all be traced back to his or her identity and interests, formed as a result of unique experiences, life events, and influences. An individual's norms are established and regulated either in favor of society's norms or against them. One could study any individual throughout history, and, through the lens of constructivism, analyze his or her life, interpersonal relationships, decisions, political and religious views, and interests and identities.

Winston S. Churchill is perhaps best known as Great Britain's fearless leader during the Second World War. Yet his compelling life story up until that point could illustrate and explain the manner in which he differed from his contemporaries and from the prevailing views of the time in a way that shaped his successful wartime leadership and decisions. An analysis of his early life through the lens of constructivism has the potential to reveal the truth and the power behind the way in which one's ever-evolving identities, interests, and environment can shape decisions, actions, and personality. In order to explain the formation of Churchill's identity and interests using the principles of social constructivism, one must first take into account two additional schools of thought: social identity theory and political psychology. In adopting these theories into the study of Churchill's identity construction, one can observe the overlaps between social constructivism and the formation of a political leader's identity.

### **III. The Role of Social Identity Theory and Political Psychology**

Social identity is "a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group."<sup>61</sup> Social identity theory centers on an individual's identity within the context of a particular group and interpersonal relationships. Stets and Burke assert that having a certain

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<sup>61</sup> Stets, Jan E., and Peter J. Burke. "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 225.

social identity is to be “at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group’s perspective.”<sup>62</sup> These relations within particular groups are rooted in processes of categorization, identification, and comparison. This has the tendency to create an “us” versus “them” mentality among differing groups, as each attempts to “understand the social environment.”<sup>63</sup>

Social identity theory can provide insight into how an individual’s environment and relationships play significant roles in shaping aspects of his or her identity and interests. Marilynn Brewer proposes four different ways in which one can view social identity: person-based, relational, group-based, and collective.<sup>64</sup> It is the final type – collective identity – that best allows for a connection between the realm of social identity theory and that of social constructivism. In constructivism, institutions – comprised of the identities and interests of the actors within them – are stabilized through collective meaning and norms.<sup>65</sup> The interaction between the state actors allows for the creation of such essential collectivity.<sup>66</sup> In the theory of social identity, the idea of collective identity centers on “shared representations of the group based on common interests and experiences [and] also refers to an active process of shaping and forging an image of what the group stands for and how it wishes to be viewed by others.”<sup>67</sup>

Social identity “provides a link between the psychology of the individual...and the structure and process of social groups within which the self is embedded.”<sup>68</sup> While this theory

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<sup>62</sup> Stets, Jan E., and Peter J. Burke. “Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory.” *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 226.

<sup>63</sup> McLeod, Saul. “Social Identity Theory.” *Simply Psychology*.

<sup>64</sup> Brewer, Marilynn B. “The Many Faces of Social Identity: Implications for Political Psychology.” *Political Psychology*, 117-119.

<sup>65</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization*, 399.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

<sup>67</sup> Brewer, Marilynn B. “The Many Faces of Social Identity: Implications for Political Psychology.” *Political Psychology*, 119.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

studies identity formation through the lens of groups and interpersonal interactions, political psychology takes such research a step further to observe identity formation at an individual level. Such analysis is essential in drawing connection between the principles of social constructivism in international relations and the unique shaping of an individual's identity and interests, such as that of Winston Churchill. This allows for overarching concepts traditionally used in reference to state interactions and behaviors to also be applied at the individual level.

Political psychology “applies what is known about human psychology to the study of political behavior, focusing on individuals within a specific political system.”<sup>69</sup> It takes from many different areas of the field of psychology, addressing politicians’ “personality, motives, beliefs...leadership styles...judgments, decisions, and actions in domestic policy, foreign policy, international conflict, and conflict resolution.”<sup>70</sup> It is through the psychological study of political elites that one may be able to identify the particular characteristics that contribute to who they are both as people and as leaders. Furthermore, political psychology has the potential to recognize the roots of these character traits, therefore explaining the manner in which the experiences and interactions that occur shape the identities and interests of individuals in politics in a way that greatly influences their personalities, actions, and decisions while in office. “Individual differences grounded in early socialization, genetic makeup, social context, and personality” can be held responsible for the evident differences among politicians, even those who are contemporaries.<sup>71</sup> Experiences throughout the lives of politicians undoubtedly influence how they “interpret and respond to events.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Huddy, Leonie, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy. “Introduction: Theoretical Foundations of Political Psychology.” *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 1.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>72</sup> Hermann, Margaret G. “Political Psychology.” *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, 127.

There is research that specifically examines the application of political psychology to political leadership. In her article on political psychology in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, Margaret G. Hermann writes that “information about leaders’ backgrounds [and experience] can...provide insights into the kind of leadership they are likely to exercise.”<sup>73</sup> More specifically, it helps to have an understanding of the experiences, times, and political climates in which leaders were “socialized.”<sup>74</sup> Political leaders – like any individual – are “products of their times.”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, it is essential to study what was occurring during their most formative years and take such events and trends into consideration when recognizing leaders’ unique identities and interests. “Common generational experiences have an effect on those who become leaders, helping to shape the[ir] norms and beliefs.”<sup>76</sup>

It is primarily through this study of psychology of political leadership that one can begin to see the potential for a connection between social constructivism in the realm of international states and identity formation at the level of individuals. As previously stated, political psychology allows for the argument that social constructivism can be implemented in the study of individual political leaders such as Winston Churchill. For example, political psychology acknowledges that “individuals do not act within a vacuum. Their behavior varies with, and responds to, differences in political institutions, political cultures, leadership styles, and social norms.”<sup>77</sup> It is at this normative level that one can see social identity theories and political psychology at work alongside concepts of social constructivism.

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<sup>73</sup> Hermann, Margaret G. “Political Psychology.” *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, 124.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>77</sup> Huddy, Leonie, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy. “Introduction: Theoretical Foundations of Political Psychology.” *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 3.

There are many ideas that appear across the fields of social identity theory, political psychology, and constructivism; norms, interaction, institutions, and socialization are each important components to these overlapping schools of thought. The concept of collective identity and interests that create norms which constitute institutions – which in turn shape individuals – is a central component of all three. Moreover, the process of socialization is essential in such patterns of identity and interest formation that are evident across all three fields of study.

Equipped with an understanding social identity theory and political psychology, one can observe the logical connections between constructivism at the state level of international relations and the process of identity formation that occurs for individuals. Such development is specialized for each and every person, and Winston Churchill is no exception. His unique life experiences and relationships unquestionably contributed to his particular process of identity formation which clearly influenced his personality, decision-making, and actions during his time as Great Britain's Prime Minister during the Second World War.

#### **IV. Winston Churchill: A Brief Overview**

Winston Spencer Churchill was born on November 30th, 1874 in Oxfordshire, England to Lord and Lady Randolph Churchill.<sup>78</sup> Lord Randolph occupied his time entirely with politics, while Lady Randolph devoted all of her time and energy to the life of a fashionable socialite. Despite this, Winston never gave up on trying to connect, especially with his mother. In his autobiography *My Early Life*, Churchill recalls: “My mother always seemed to me a fairy princess: a radiant being possessed of limitless riches and power....She shone for me like the

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<sup>78</sup> Churchill, Randolph S. *Winston S. Churchill: Youth 1874-1900*, 1.

Evening Star. I loved her dearly – but at a distance.”<sup>79</sup> There is no doubt that the loneliness experienced as a result of such a family dynamic shaped Churchill, particularly during these critical and formative years. Winston’s relationships with his brother, Jack, and his nanny, Mrs. Everest, were essential parts of his childhood. Winston dearly loved Mrs. Everest, who emotionally stood in for the roles of both father and mother in addition to that of nanny.<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of Churchill’s life was his time at school. Keeping in time with the standards of his social class, he was sent to the finest and most fashionable schools. However, young Winston struggled both behaviorally and academically; he was a notorious troublemaker, constantly causing problems and missing lessons. Despite his consistently low marks, Winston demonstrated a passion for learning well beyond his years. He was eventually allowed to switch schools, where he found that he could prosper under the right circumstances. With this transition, his entire attitude and performance changed for the better; young Churchill discovered how to best succeed academically in his own unique way.<sup>81</sup> In addition to his difficulties both in and out of the classroom, Churchill continued to wrestle with feelings of abandonment by his parents. The emotional and physical distance made it all the more challenging for him to make it through every term and most likely contributed to his poor performance and attitude.<sup>82</sup> However, while his parents may have remained distant, Lord Randolph did speak into his son’s life on one occasion: to express his desire that Winston would join the military upon finishing school.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life, 1874 - 1904*, 4; 5.

<sup>80</sup> Churchill, Randolph S. *Winston S. Churchill: Youth 1874-1900*, 34.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-46.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

Churchill's poor performance and lack of focus in school almost kept him from the military altogether, as he originally failed the entrance exam twice.<sup>84</sup> However, after succeeding on his third attempt, Churchill was accepted into the Cavalry at the Royal Military College in Sandhurst. Here, Churchill was finally in his element; he was able to take subjects that better fit his interests and talents, leading to improvement in his academic performance. Very passionate about his work, Churchill rather enjoyed his eighteen months at the College. Despite this enthusiasm, Churchill longed for the hands-on action of the battlefield over the theoretical discussion of wars and conflicts.<sup>85</sup>

In addition to seeking recognition on the battlefield, Churchill sought popularity through his many articles written from and about the battlefield. His work as a war correspondent in India and in the Sudan helped pave the way for his future.<sup>86</sup> Long before he was set to lead Great Britain through the terrors of the Second World War, Churchill led an active and interesting life in the political sphere, beginning with this time in journalism and war correspondence. His goal in both the combat itself and in the articles that he wrote was "to establish his reputation for a political career."<sup>87</sup> The glory gained from his writings as well as that from his famed escape as a prisoner of war in South Africa helped to launch his career in politics.<sup>88</sup>

Churchill's service in the British Parliament began on February 14th, 1901, as a member of the conservative Tories.<sup>89</sup> However, as his dissatisfaction with mainstream Conservative

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<sup>84</sup> Churchill, Randolph S. *Winston S. Churchill: Youth 1874-1900*, 178.

<sup>85</sup> "Winston Churchill's Military Career." National Churchill Museum.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Churchill, Randolph S. *Winston S. Churchill: Young Statesman 1901-1914*, 1.



policy grew, Churchill switched to the Liberal Party in 1904.<sup>90</sup> It was on this side of the aisle that he quickly rose through the political ranks, serving in the Cabinet as Head of Home Office, Board of Trade, and the Ministry of Munition, War, and Air. As First Lord of the Admiralty during the First World War, Churchill was blamed for a critical failure in taking the land that was the gateway to the Mediterranean and Black Seas; this prevented necessary aid from getting to Russia and led to increased slaughter in Western Europe. This poor decision left a large black cloud over Churchill's career in politics.<sup>91</sup> In addition, the War Council denied ever supporting his plan, forcing the role of scapegoat upon Churchill. What might have been simply a bump in the political road for Churchill had grown into a "unique disaster."<sup>92</sup> He was dismissed from his Admiralty post, but continued to attend sessions of the House of Commons.<sup>93</sup>

In 1922, Churchill lost his seat in Parliament for the first time since the debut of his political career.<sup>94</sup> With the election of the first non-coalition Conservative government in almost a quarter of a century, the Liberal Party suffered greatly. After failing to win re-election twice, he returned to Parliament in 1924, this time as a member of the Conservative Party again. During this time he also served a Chancellor of the Exchequer; he oversaw Britain's return to the gold standard. After the defeat of the Conservatives in 1929, Churchill began distancing himself from the party over increasing disagreements. During this period, he dedicated much of his time to his writings.<sup>95</sup>

With the dawn of the 1930s, Churchill began to speak out on issues that were of particular importance to him. During the first half of the decade, he adamantly opposed the

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<sup>90</sup> Churchill, Randolph S. *Winston S. Churchill: Young Statesman 1901-1914*, 78.

<sup>91</sup> "Winston Churchill - The Politician." National Churchill Museum.

<sup>92</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 69.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>94</sup> Gilbert, Martin. *Winston S. Churchill: The Prophet of Truth 1922-1939*, 1.

<sup>95</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 147.

movement to grant India its independence. In his zeal to speak his mind, he upset many within the Conservative leadership. Throughout the second half of the decade, Churchill's focus was centered primarily on his deep-rooted concern of the potential for German rearmament.<sup>96</sup> He had spoken of this dangerous possibility since the end of the Great War, during which time he had an extensive role in the postwar discussions.<sup>97</sup> However, by the mid-1930s, he voiced these thoughts with more vigor and determination. He seemed to be able to see something that his contemporaries could not – or chose not to – see. This set him apart from others in government and power at the time in a unique, fascinating, and important way.

The final chapter of Churchill's prewar political career includes his sudden appointment to the post of Prime Minister in 1940. As Adolf Hitler began his transcontinental ransacking of Europe, then-Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain resigned, and Churchill was asked by the King himself to take over the position.<sup>98</sup> Armed with an abundance of political, military, and life experience, Churchill was truly the man for the job at such a pivotal and daunting time in history. He led his nation through five years of war, the first of which without any international allies. Great Britain and the entire international community owe a great deal to the knowledge, courage, and determination of Winston Churchill, without whom the world would be a very different place.

## V. The Shaping of a Wartime Leader

In studying the Winston Churchill of the late 1930s and early 1940s – the era of the outbreak of the Second World War – it is difficult to truly identify in him a single, clear worldview. Rooted particularly in his extensive and diverse political experience, Churchill's

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<sup>96</sup> Gilbert, Martin. *Winston S. Churchill: The Prophet of Truth 1922-1939*, 550.

<sup>97</sup> Gilbert, Martin. *Winston S. Churchill: The Stricken World 1916-1922*, 181.

<sup>98</sup> "Winston Churchill - The Politician." National Churchill Museum.

ideals and opinions encompassed elements from many different points of view; it is clear that he was influenced by both his social environment and the many elements of his life that contributed to his political psychology. For example, one can find evidence of both internationalism and isolationism in his outlook and decision-making.<sup>99</sup> Each aspect of Churchill's worldview was taken from various political parties, life experiences, and countless other influences that each worked to mold him into the wartime leader he was destined to become. As the war continued, it became evident that Churchill's philosophy consisted of a combination of "selfish interests, the principle of opposing tyranny, and condemning bad faith."<sup>100</sup> None of these elements are necessarily rooted in specific theories of global politics, but each illustrates how his identity and interests were uniquely shaped and constructed throughout his life up until this moment in history. Unquestionably, each season and experience of Churchill's life influenced and prepared him for how he would think, lead, act, and decide both in the immediate build-up to the war and as Great Britain's wartime leader. Each constructed his worldview in a way that better equipped him for such a task that his contemporaries could not have handled.

### **A Childhood of Neglect**

Winston Churchill lived a lonesome childhood. While it was quite common for upper-class children in Victorian England to be raised primarily by nannies and to see little of their own parents, Winston's youth was "particularly alone, even for his class," with parents "deeply involved in the whirl of politics and the exacting demands of society."<sup>101</sup> His faithful nanny, Mrs. Everest, stood by his side until her death in 1895 as his primary confidante and closest

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<sup>99</sup> Thompson, Kenneth W. *Winston Churchill's World View: Statesmanship and Power*, 30.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>101</sup> Thompson, R.W. *Winston Churchill: The Yankee Marlborough*, 9.

friend.<sup>102</sup> Living a life of isolation led to many difficulties and problematic traits that pervaded Churchill throughout both his youth and his adult life; there is no doubt that the sting of rejection from his parents left its mark. Although Winston showed nothing but loyalty and admiration for his father, Lord Randolph remained remarkably indifferent to his son.<sup>103</sup> His mother, wrapped up in society, only began to reach out to her son after the deaths of both Mrs. Everest and Lord Randolph.<sup>104</sup>

The clear negligence of his parents and the resulting isolation did more than plant seeds of rejection into young Churchill's mind. It also allowed for the intense fueling of a self-centeredness that would haunt him for the rest of his life. Certainly, Churchill was a part of multiple, overarching social groups; his socioeconomic class and the time period overall are two such examples. However, it is clear that at least in the early part of his life, young Winston lacked the critical interpersonal relationships that play a substantive role in the shaping of one's identity. It could be argued that, in this way, Churchill's early life exemplified the opposite of social identity theory; he did not have the opportunity to take part in forming unique collective meaning through interaction with others. Moreover, without the crucial sense of belonging, Churchill was not exposed to the same opportunities for emotional growth and identity formation as others. Frequently alone, it is not difficult to imagine how he came to believe that he was truly at the center of his world, adopting a strong 'me versus them' mentality typically seen in overall group identities as 'us versus them.' "All the burgeoning forces of his powerful personality were concentrated inwards upon himself, and the vivid and romantic dreams of battles and glory,

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<sup>102</sup> Churchill, Randolph S. *Winston S. Churchill: Youth 1874-1900*, 34

<sup>103</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study of Greatness*, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Churchill, Randolph S. *Winston S. Churchill: Youth 1874-1900*, 34

fashioned his egocentricity and nurtured the seeds of his innate desire for power.”<sup>105</sup> Such self-focus stayed with Churchill, causing him to never truly grow up in some ways. He was known by those he worked with later in life to be a bit childish in his behavior.<sup>106</sup>

The neglect and rejection instilled in Churchill the need to take care of himself. Moreover, his incessant need to be noticed, to be praised, and to seek approval certainly stems from the same place. It is particularly important to note the fact that this is rooted in the experiences of his youth, the most formative time for the mental and emotional growth that are essential in identity development. More than any other, this time in a person’s life is influential in shaping who he or she will become. What makes a person differ from others is “grounded in early socialization, genetic makeup, social context, and personality.”<sup>107</sup> Such socialization of an individual is not unlike that which occurs in the social construction of norms at the international level.

This childhood characteristic of self-focus affected the future leader in both positive and negative ways. It gave him the unique and empowering ability to defy popular opinion, to listen only to himself and to his gut when it mattered most, and to stand firm in unpopular or controversial opinions and decisions. Churchill certainly had no trouble challenging “popular illusions,”<sup>108</sup> particularly throughout the 1930s as he clearly understood the inevitability of conflict with Germany. He tirelessly advocated for the abandonment of appeasement and pacifism policies in the name of improving security, regardless of popular opinion. In his extensive *Memoirs of the Second World War*, Churchill acknowledges that without a doubt, it

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<sup>105</sup> Thompson, R.W. *Winston Churchill: The Yankee Marlborough*, 9-10.

<sup>106</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 36.

<sup>107</sup> Huddy, Leonie, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy. “Introduction: Theoretical Foundations of Political Psychology.” *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 5.

<sup>108</sup> Thompson, Kenneth W. *Winston Churchill’s World View: Statesmanship and Power*, 120.

was “the passionate desire for peace which animated the uninformed, misinformed majority of the British people” that scared politicians into these policies; it “seemed to threaten with political extinction any party or politician who dared take any other line.”<sup>109</sup> After becoming Prime Minister, Churchill made a controversial – yet necessary – decision on May 28th, 1940. In office only three weeks, Churchill stood firmly in his convictions to not negotiate with Hitler and chose instead to lead the nation to fight on.<sup>110</sup> Not long after the popularity of appeasement throughout the preceding decade, such a decision was truly courageous.

During the winter parliamentary session of 1934, Churchill directly addressed the need to leave behind political safety and to take on the duty of the government: protecting the people.

When his turn came, he confidently asserted:

Even now we are not taking the measures which would be in true proportions to our needs. The Government...must face the storm. They will have to encounter every unfair attack. Their motives will be misrepresented. They will be...called warmongers. Every kind of attack will be made upon them, by many powerful, numerous, and extremely vocal forces in this country. They are going to get it anyway. Why, then, not fight for something that will give us safety?<sup>111</sup>

It is throughout these years leading up to the war that the differences in Churchill’s approach in comparison to those of his contemporaries are most notable. He remained at all times unafraid to speak on behalf of what would best protect his nation. Though often called a “militarist” by many in the government,<sup>112</sup> Churchill was, in fact, showing concern for the wellbeing of Great Britain and a great desire for peace through his logic and reasoning. Regardless of the political

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<sup>109</sup> Churchill, Winston. *Memories of the Second World War: An Abridgment of the Six Volumes of The Second World War*, 57.

<sup>110</sup> Churchill War Rooms and Museum. Imperial War Museums, London. Visited 19 February 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Churchill, Winston. *Memories of the Second World War: An Abridgment of the Six Volumes of The Second World War*, 62.

<sup>112</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 16.

institutions and norms of the time, Churchill called upon his personal experiences and relationships to provide a foundation for his actions and thought processes.

However, these same traits of defying authority, ignoring popular opinion, and seeking a constant need for approval also meant that Churchill had a tendency to adopt childlike attitudes and behaviors when he did not get his way. He detested “equals in his own camp,” and was known to “pout like a baby” when challenged.<sup>113</sup> Some scholars point out so adamantly his struggles with self-centeredness as to claim that although never purposefully egocentric, he served only life and himself, and that “if he served others it was solely as a means to his own advancement, to the realization of the personal power he sought.”<sup>114</sup> Churchill never outgrew his tendency to throw a fit when he was upset, and had the tendency to hurt others thoughtlessly, as a child would.<sup>115</sup> He often would use people until they were no longer useful to him, and then quickly forget about them, making it oftentimes difficult to work for or with him.<sup>116</sup>

Young Winston lived in this way of isolation and neglect year after year until the age of seven, when he was forced to abandon the fascination of his toy soldiers, the comfort of Mrs. Everest, and the familiarity of routine in exchange for the harsh reality of formal education. Winston hated school almost instantly, which was worsened by the fact that his first school, St. James’, was for him an especially cruel and difficult experience. Churchill recalls that he used to “count the days and the hours to the end of every term, when I should return home from this hateful servitude and range my soldiers in line of battle on the nursery floor.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Thompson, R.W. *Winston Churchill: The Yankee Marlborough*, 10.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>117</sup> Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life, 1874 - 1904*, 12.

Victorian schools, responsible for molding the future of the Empire, were certainly not environments for encouraging or inspiring imagination; “there were no games and certainly no concept of fair play.”<sup>118</sup> Norms at these schools were firmly established and resistant to change to accommodate those who did not conform. Small for his age, sickly, and struggling with both a stammer and a lisp, Churchill was a “natural target” for school bullies.<sup>119</sup> It is quite clear that although life at school exposed Churchill to his first true group setting and social identity, he remained an outsider. So, at the young age of seven, he “deliberately set out to change his nature, to prove that biology need not be destiny.”<sup>120</sup> Churchill may have had the help of his family name and connections later on in life; however, through dedicated determination – most likely motivated by the rejection felt both at home and at school – Churchill set out to write his own narrative and to shape his own destiny. The toughness he would become known for later in life would come from will power, not from physical strength.<sup>121</sup>

Churchill suffered many emotional and physical challenges throughout his youth. Prone to illness, he caught pneumonia as a child and “suffered from chest ailments” throughout the rest of his life.<sup>122</sup> Dark clouds of depression would visit him periodically. He found ways to endure the “Black Dog,” as he called it, managing each bout of depression rather successfully.<sup>123</sup> However, it certainly contributed to his need to seek approval from others. Without a sense of belonging or the confidence that comes from being a part of a group, Churchill insecurely sought his fulfillment from others. “He always pursued acclaim. Depressives, more than most people,

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<sup>118</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 55.

<sup>119</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 6.

<sup>120</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 17.

<sup>121</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 6.

<sup>122</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 18.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.



are dependent upon external sources of self-esteem.”<sup>124</sup> While this gifted him with the ability to trust his own mind above all others, one can also see the unhealthy effects of such patterns. In defining his self-worth using external sources, Churchill fell into the habit of finding his identity using the words and opinions of others in a negative way rather than allowing such things to productively mold him in a constructivist way.

Undoubtedly, someone who must strive to overcome physical or psychological difficulties will grow into a stronger person, and Churchill is no exception. No matter how he excelled in his career, “the man who as a boy had been bullied and bruised could always identify with the underdog.”<sup>125</sup> This could explain how, despite the norms of his aristocratic upbringing, he displayed empathy for the common man. It also empowered him with a thicker skin, a confidence to remain firm in his convictions, and an ability to push ahead, even when giving up would be the easier option. Such traits served him well, particularly throughout his political career, when oftentimes he found himself out of others’ good graces.

More likely to cause trouble than to excel academically, Churchill struggled throughout his school years. He stubbornly regarded the majority of subjects as unimportant. Term after term, he consistently received poor marks in almost every course; history – particularly that of the imperial age – was one of the few areas in which he found interest, applied himself, and did well.<sup>126</sup> While he did not enjoy or excel at reading materials for class, he read books well “beyond his years” in his free time, as it was the only thing he truly enjoyed.<sup>127</sup> Theories of social identity and constructivism tend to focus on the interactions between outside forces and norms and institutions with the internal elements of identity; however, one cannot ignore the

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<sup>124</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 24.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>126</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 71.

<sup>127</sup> Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life, 1874 - 1904*, 13.

ways in which personal interests can interact with and shape one's identity. His love and talent for history clearly appears later on in his life as part of his formulated identity, interests, and worldview.

What is perhaps most useful in discerning Churchill's identity construction, however, is not his academic performance on paper, but rather how he approached the overall process of learning. In *My Early Life*, Churchill reflects upon his first lesson in Latin grammar:

What on earth did it mean? Where was the sense of it? It seemed absolute rigmarole to me. However, there was one thing I could always do: I could learn it by heart. And thereupon proceeded, as far as my private sorrows would allow, to memorize the acrostic-looking task which had been set me. In due course the Master returned. 'Have you learnt it?' he asked. 'I think I can say it, sir,' I replied; and gabbled it off. He seemed so satisfied with this that I was emboldened to ask a question. 'What does it mean, sir?'<sup>128</sup>

Winston goes on several more times to ask what the Latin *means*, receiving no answer satisfactory to him and serving only to exasperate his teacher. One can sense his immense frustration at the fact that he seemed to be expected only to memorize the information rather than learn it. In fact, truly learning it appeared to be frowned upon, as his teacher accused him of being "impertinent."<sup>129</sup> Most children simply followed the rules and did what was expected of them, but Churchill was no ordinary young boy. His hunger for knowledge and his unique brand of critical thinking may not have been the norm for children his age; however, such traits provided insight into his future political leadership and undoubtedly shaped his identity and interests.

While he may not have dedicated himself to learning the more technical skills of critical thinking, Churchill arguably possessed better dexterity in this than others who thought within the confines of predefined and presupposed guidelines. Some even argue that the Allied victory can

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<sup>128</sup> Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life, 1874 - 1904*, 11.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

be attributed to Churchill's unique way of thinking. During the war, he advocated a need for "corkscrew thinkers" – people who were able to break out of the mold of traditional thinking. He understood and saw the value in unconventional thought processes and ideas, and was quick to put these critical elements into play as part of his overall wartime strategy. Churchill believed that victory was impossible without untraditional thought and approaches; the plan of the enemy would always be predictable if strategies were limited to those of a conventional nature.<sup>130</sup>

Many British plans and operations during the war – including *Operation Mincemeat* – serve as examples of Churchill's corkscrew thinking. The year was 1943, the Allies had secured North Africa, and they had their eyes on Sicily. However, such a strategy was far too obvious and dangerous to approach conventionally; critical thinking was needed. After much planning, Churchill's secret corkscrew thinking task force, the XX Committee, developed a strategy to get fake information into the hands of the Nazis declaring that Sicily would not be the next Allied objective. The twist: they created an identity for a fake soldier – using a dead body from a local morgue – and conveniently left him to wash ashore and into the hands of the Germans.<sup>131</sup> Being able to think quickly and creatively in this way are outstanding qualities of any man, but particularly of a talented leader. In the case of Churchill, such qualities greatly accelerated the fall of the Nazi Regime.

### **A Lifelong Passion for War and the Empire**

Churchill's success in leading his nation through the deadliest and most significant war in history is deeply rooted in a long-established interest – and perhaps even a love – for war. Only

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<sup>130</sup> Finnie, Neil. "Corkscrew Thinking Won the War. Here's How to Use It in Business." *The Guardian*, April 7, 2017.

<sup>131</sup> MacIntyre, Ben. "Operation Mincemeat." BBC.

a child, he “concluded that the great issues of his time would be decided on the battlefield,”<sup>132</sup> and taught himself how to arrange his toy soldiers with “unusual skill,” so as to learn and play out past British battles.<sup>133</sup> In *My Early Life*, Churchill writes that his career in the military was “entirely due to my collection of soldiers.”<sup>134</sup> While many young Victorian boys were captivated by the glory and honor of fighting for the great British Empire, young Churchill seemed to be enraptured by it more than most; it was clear that he was a product of his time, but that he also possessed something more that took his military passion to the next level in the development of his identity. He did not simply act out battles, but memorized specific, great ones of times past. It became quite clear that Winston was doing more than entertaining himself as children do. The hours and hours arranging his toy soldiers instilled in him “a historical sense” that managed to catch the eye of both his American grandfather, as well as his difficult-to-impress father.<sup>135</sup>

The development of this historical sense and keen awareness of important trends, influential patterns, and key events – especially those of military nature and significance – is one of the most important and fundamental elements in providing an explanation for Churchill’s identity and interests in the form of his unique views and actions in both the years leading up to the war and during the war itself. It explains his aptitude for wartime leadership and his ease in understanding battle strategies, planning, and objectives. When the Americans entered the war, innocent, naive, and eager for action, they pressured for an invasion of Europe as soon as possible. Churchill, better understanding the risks and dynamics involved, hesitated. He acknowledged that the Allies were still relatively weak, while Hitler continued to build up his

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<sup>132</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 14-15.

<sup>133</sup> Thompson, R.W. *Winston Churchill: The Yankee Marlborough*, 9.

<sup>134</sup> Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life, 1874 - 1904*, 19.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

defenses in central Europe.<sup>136</sup> After all, the leader of a nation is also head of the military, and Churchill certainly possessed a vast understanding of, and interest in, leading his great country into battle. Paired with his passion for history and his acquired understanding of world politics, Churchill was truly an unstoppable force, the perfect man to face the enemy.

Churchill's captivation with war did not cease with his coming of age. His passion for war became a "lifelong study of strategy,"<sup>137</sup> developing further during his personal research as well as throughout his experiences as a soldier himself. He saw war as an "exciting, problematical, natural phenomenon." Throughout the Second World War, he would frequently go to the roof during air raids to catch a glimpse of the action out of his pure, childlike excitement.<sup>138</sup> His interest evolved throughout his life from a childlike obsession, to development through military experiences, finally resulting in a matured understanding of what he believed to be the truth, stating: "The story of the human race is war."<sup>139</sup>

Coupled with this persistent fascination with the events and the effects of the battlefield was Churchill's enduring, Victorian adherence to the greatness of the British Empire during its most glorious years. Born during its prime, young Churchill was naturally fascinated by the grandeur, loyalty, splendor, and vastness of Britain's nineteenth-century Empire.<sup>140</sup> It is only through understanding this "spell" of the British Empire that one can "begin to grasp the Churchillian essence."<sup>141</sup> All Victorians "responded quickly to calls of Duty [and] the Flag,"<sup>142</sup> but Churchill kept this at the centerfold of his worldview and his identity in a way that none of

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<sup>136</sup> Harmon, Christopher C. "Winston Churchill's Vision of Victory." *World War II*, March 2005.

<sup>137</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 15.

<sup>138</sup> *Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms*. London: Imperial War Museum, 5.

<sup>139</sup> Best, Geoffrey, *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 16.

<sup>140</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 44.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

his contemporaries managed, or desired, to do. In his firsthand account of the Empire's campaigns in the Sudan, *The River War*, Churchill writes:

What enterprise that an enlightened community may attempt is more noble and more profitable than the reclamation from barbarism...what more beautiful ideal or more valuable reward can inspire human effort? The act is virtuous.<sup>143</sup>

In light of the concepts of social identity theory, Churchill undoubtedly was shaped by the processes of categorization, identification, and comparison. While his youth may have lacked the element of interpersonal relationship, his sense of belonging to a group larger than himself certainly allowed for constructivist patterns of identity formation to occur at his individual level. His adherence to the glory of the Victorian Empire is a prominent example in which his adherence to his social class as a group molded his identity. If possessing a particular social identity is to be “at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective,”<sup>144</sup> there can be no doubt of the fact that Churchill's individual identity was heavily influenced by the collective identity of his social group.

Furthermore, Victorians overtly conveyed a strong ‘us versus them’ mentality, especially when dealing within the realms of colonization and war. As seen in Churchill's account above, Great Britain viewed its well-developed Victorian society as the best and only acceptable form of civilization, regarding those in other parts of the world as uncivilized or ‘barbaric;’ the British saw it as their duty to ‘correct’ them. Without question, Churchill was a product of his time in this way. As a young man caught up in the glory and excitement of his Empire, he was quite impressionable to the events and prevailing trends of the era. Considering such influence in light of the principles of political psychology, one should examine Churchill's Victorian life as a

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<sup>143</sup> Churchill, Winston. *The River War: An Account of the Reconquest of the Sudan*, 10.

<sup>144</sup> Stets, Jan E., and Peter J. Burke. “Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory.” *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 226.

formative time during which his unique identity and interests were formed and solidified; “common generational experiences have an effect on those who become leaders, helping to shape the[ir] norms and beliefs.”<sup>145</sup>

Churchill’s steadfast loyalty to the ideals of his youth remained evident throughout his careers in both the military and in politics. “Grand and even grandiose concepts of this great Empire...went on coloring Churchill’s mind throughout the rest of his long life.”<sup>146</sup> Churchill’s fiery devotion to war and to his great nation lends itself to the claim that perhaps he would not have been as effective, as outstanding, or as celebrated a leader had he been brought to the helm during peacetime: “When war was in view, and especially when the safety of Britain and its Empire were at risk, the intensity of his interest was liable to boil over into excessive excitement.”<sup>147</sup> Churchill was as patriotic and loyal as one could be, and such devotion was much needed during wartime.

### **“The Yankee Marlborough”<sup>148</sup>**

A product of both the American upper class and the English aristocracy, Churchill was gifted from the start with an experience and a point of view different from the majority of his contemporaries. In *The Yankee Marlborough*, author R.W. Thompson writes:

Churchill was a Yankee and a Marlborough, a child of two worlds, the old world of Britain and Europe; the new world of the United States of America. It was a dual heritage of immense significance. It combined in him the possibilities of two kinds of power. It accounts for his tremendous impact upon his times, for it became his single vision to unite the old and the new, not merely as allies, but in indissoluble union, and thus in a sense to unite himself.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Hermann, Margaret G. “Political Psychology.” *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, 125.

<sup>146</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 1-2.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>148</sup> Thompson, R.W. *Winston Churchill: The Yankee Marlborough*.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Churchill himself recognized that this desire to bring together elements of both the Old World of Europe and the New World of the United States stemmed from his blend of American and English influences. This union was to him a critical element in achieving peace in the face of the German threat, greatly solidified after the horrors of Dunkirk in 1940. His vision of a joining together of English-speaking peoples and powers<sup>150</sup> illustrates significant difference between the thinking of Churchill and that of his contemporaries, as well as an example of his one-of-a-kind ability to seemingly predict the future of this worldwide conflict. Thus, although Churchill was clearly influenced by his times, he interpreted and processed the contemporary trends and values through the lens of his unique identity shaped by the norms and the institutions of his early-life experiences.

The rescue at Dunkirk occurred in May 1940, nineteen months before the United States was to reappear on the international stage in full force with its highly-anticipated entrance into the war. While President Franklin D. Roosevelt had only months before made the purchase of military goods available to the Allied powers, the country had absolutely no intention of truly getting involved at this point in time. Americans still preferred to cling to policies of isolationism and nationalism and to stay out of Europe's complicated difficulties. Therefore, although any democratic leader of the time surely hoped and prayed for American involvement, they abandoned the idea when it became increasingly clear that the United States was determined to remain isolated. Churchill shared these hopes, yet took it a step further, truly getting at the root of why transatlantic teamwork and shared ideals were the only solutions. While his contemporaries may have fallen under the spell of Hitler's words of peace and of the newly

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<sup>150</sup> Thompson, R.W. *Winston Churchill: The Yankee Marlborough*, 3.



popular ‘solution’ of appeasement, Churchill held to his convictions<sup>151</sup> and predictions rooted firmly in a good understanding of both history and international relations. Such thinking drove his opinions, his actions, and his decisions throughout the entirety of the war.

There is no doubt that Churchill’s added American influence from his mother gave him a profound appreciation for global community and perhaps even inspired him to dig deeper into international history and current affairs. Such tools were essential for him in taking the position of Prime Minister in May 1940. However, great influence also came from his father’s family, a history rich with aristocratic ideals and military and political greatness. Churchill inherited many traits from Lord Randolph himself. Geoffrey Best, author of *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, points to a broad range of characteristics that passed from father to son:

Egotism, boldness, a need to be noticed, political ambition, bouts of depression, the ability to master complicated subjects, quickness of conception, energy, loquacity, cheek, humor, oratorical talent, impetuosity, irreverence, and sometimes disastrous tactlessness and failure of judgement.<sup>152</sup>

It is difficult to say whether this resemblance is genetic, the result of Winston’s glorification of his father, or a combination of the two.<sup>153</sup> However, regardless of the explanation, it is clear that despite his perceived indifference by his son, Lord Randolph played a significant role in the establishment of many of Churchill’s traits that would remain with him throughout his life. It is easy to see how both the positives and negatives of his formative years and family history affected his approach, attitude, successes, and failures in politics and in leadership.

Throughout his ‘wilderness years’ in the 1930s, Churchill was steadily researching and writing *Life of Marlborough*, a detailed biography of his paternal ancestor, John Churchill, the

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<sup>151</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 150.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

first Duke of Marlborough.<sup>154</sup> As he learned more about the first Duke, he began to recognize that his ancestor's success was largely built upon a foundation of "political foresight [and] strategic and tactical brilliance."<sup>155</sup> Identifying these traits in his heritage by means of his hunger for history - joined with his lifelong passion for the study of war - created the perfect blend of inspiration and motivation for Churchill as he neared the Prime Ministership. During his years at Chartwell in the 1930s, Churchill readied himself for the inevitability of war, his advisers and friends by his side. However, it could be said that more than anything else, it was his investment in *Life of Marlborough* that "made it possible for him to take command of the nation."<sup>156</sup> Inspired and strengthened by the blood of his great heritage, Churchill prepared himself for the daunting task that lay before him.

One might argue that a man's distant heritage, no matter how great, cannot possibly be the reasoning behind his abilities, his decisions, nor his actions. It is also possible that such ancient ancestry is too distant to have significant effects on the shaping of one's identity and interests. However, in pouring himself into the research of his noble roots, Churchill himself used his interests and talents in research and history to take charge in shaping his own identity in a way that the institutions of his modern day never could. Exploring the greatness of John Churchill had a tremendous psychological impact on Great Britain's wartime Prime Minister. It empowered him to dig deeply into himself and find the familial characteristics that had carried his family through history, shaping him into a unique and effective leader.

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<sup>154</sup> Churchill, Winston. *Memories of the Second World War: An Abridgment of the Six Volumes of The Second World War*, 22.

<sup>155</sup> Thompson, R.W. *Winston Churchill: The Yankee Marlborough*, 21-22.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

It is important to note, however, that in addition to his achievements, Churchill's "blind spots" can be also attributed to his aristocratic ancestry.<sup>157</sup> For example, he proclaimed: "I was brought up in that state of civilization when it was everywhere accepted that men are born unequal," which would certainly explain his overall distrust and dislike of more leftist, socialist, and Labour Party policies and ideals.<sup>158</sup> The effects of being raised in the institutions that constituted the Victorian aristocracy combined with the egocentricity developed out of childhood neglect could have the harmful potential of shaping his worldview in a very self-centered and superior way.

### **A Man of the Past**

Winston Churchill was in every sense "a child of the Victorian era,"<sup>159</sup> a fact that contributes greatly to his identity, his interests, and his political decisions and actions. While many may criticize the Victorians for their blatant racial superiority, classism, and patriotism, it was exactly these characteristics, for better or for worse, which enabled Churchill to effectively take charge of his nation and lead them through the Second World War. It also greatly shaped his overall approach to Britain's foreign politics throughout his political career. For instance, the hint of his adherence to the Victorian standard of racial superiority dictated which issues he viewed as the most important. He would often examine situations through the lens of race in order to prioritize which parts of the Empire to tend to first.<sup>160</sup>

Churchill's allegiance to the past stops not with his Victorian roots, but in fact continues further into the depths of history. So important was history to Churchill that, when accused of

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<sup>157</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 27.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life, 1874 - 1904*, XXI.

<sup>160</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 24-25.

being too focused on times past, he would respond with wit: “The longer you look back, the farther you can look forward. This is not a philosophical or political argument – any oculist can tell you it is true.”<sup>161</sup> Churchill well understood that historical trends and ideas always come back around. They may present themselves through different events, perceptions, or in a different light; however, the fundamental patterns remain the same. Additionally, the fact that he believed and acted upon this in a nonpolitical way was key to his success. The politicization of any aspect of life can easily occur, but in actively standing by such a crucial concept in an overtly nonpolitical way, Churchill set himself apart from other politicians as one who was governed by his moral compass rather than by popular opinion or politics. However, his affinity for the Victorian past was not built on “the accidents of nineteenth-century leadership and letters.”<sup>162</sup> Instead, he relied on the “fundamentals of international politics” and therefore “never yielded to disillusionment with the present.”<sup>163</sup> His contemporaries failed in their pre-war policies in their tendency to focus on what could be rather than learn from the past in a practical way. In contrast, Churchill embraced the ideals of political psychology in allowing himself to be shaped by the events and trends that either occurred during his earlier and more formative years, or those that he passionately studied during those years.

By the time he had advanced to the Prime Ministership, Churchill had a keen eye and a gifted understanding of international politics. His ability to seemingly see into the future and predict the evolution of Nazi Germany both before and during the war was truly unmatched. There is no doubt that his firm belief in using the past to shape the future greatly influenced this essential ability that permitted Great Britain’s survival, especially during the tumultuous year of

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<sup>161</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 12.

<sup>162</sup> Thompson, Kenneth W. *Winston Churchill’s World View: Statesmanship and Power*, 113.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

1940, when his nation stood alone as the sole defender of Europe. His “firm grasp of world politics” was grounded in history.<sup>164</sup> For example, his vision for the Big Three powers of the war – Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union – “was based on the lessons of the coalition that resisted Louis XIV” of France.<sup>165</sup> However, Churchill often faced objection from his contemporaries regarding his historically-rooted views. His “philosophy and thought, grounded in certain historic views of man and politics, represent[ed] a counterforce to the prevailing trends of the times.”<sup>166</sup> These trends were fueled by visions of international cooperation, the potential for peace without war, and appeasement, whereas Churchill’s views were deeply rooted in traditional philosophies – such as power politics – that he would develop extensively during his time as a soldier and as a war correspondent overseas.

### **The World Traveler, the Soldier, and the War Correspondent**

As a young man, Churchill had the opportunity to travel to many different countries during his time in the military, both as a soldier and as a war correspondent, and then again as a renowned journalist. He was exposed to a variety of new ideas, interests, and cultures, which each played a vital role in shaping his worldview and identity. His service as a soldier of the British Empire provided him with a “series of military experiences molding his views of man and politics.”<sup>167</sup>

The colonial struggle between the British Empire and India provided the backdrop for a significant portion of Churchill’s military service. The campaigns in India played a pivotal role in the shaping of young Churchill’s philosophy. Churchill learned four valuable lessons during

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<sup>164</sup> Thompson, Kenneth W. *Winston Churchill’s World View: Statesmanship and Power*, 6.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 5..

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 62.

his time in India. Firstly, he recognized that statesmen must know how to make decisions in situations of “indeterminism and uncertainty.”<sup>168</sup> As a student of history, Churchill quickly realized that “the statesman must cope with events that the historian merely records.”<sup>169</sup> His second observation was that of the relationship between politics and the military.<sup>170</sup> Later on in his life, Churchill would stand firm in his belief that “military and political elements [were] joined and that one could never be exclusive of the other.”<sup>171</sup> Thirdly, Churchill took note of the fact that a critical relationship existed between war and religion.<sup>172</sup> Finally, Churchill was exposed to what he observed as “uncivilized warfare” on the Indian front, and discovered his hatred for it.<sup>173</sup> Churchill’s wartime approach embodied the experience gained from these lessons.

At the root of these lessons was something even more important in Churchill’s evolution: a desire to learn. Churchill later recalled: “It was not until [the] winter of 1896...that the desire for learning came upon me. I began to feel myself wanting in even the vaguest knowledge about many larger spheres of thought.”<sup>174</sup> He was introduced to the subject of Ethics, and poured himself into learning all that he could:

I knew of course that the youths at the universities were stuffed with all this patter at nineteen and twenty, and could pose you entrapping questions or give baffling answers. We never set much store by them or their affected superiority, remembering that they were only at their books, while we were commanding men and guarding the Empire. Nevertheless I had sometimes resented the apt and copious information which some of them seemed to possess, and I now wished I could find a competent teacher whom I could listen to and cross-examine for an hour or so every day.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Thompson, Kenneth W. *Winston Churchill’s World View: Statesmanship and Power*, 68.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>173</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 12.

<sup>174</sup> Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life, 1874 - 1904*, 109.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

This example illustrates simply one of the many times in Churchill's life in which he was marked as different for that fact that he had not attended university. As he struggled throughout school during his youth, the idea of learning never grasped his attention. This in combination with his father's destiny for him to enter the military meant that Churchill never considered university as an option until this point in his life.

A few years later, as he first set out on his political path, he wrote of similar struggles in having to rely on his unique brand of self-teaching – in comparison to the university-educated – as a new member of the House of Parliament:

In those days, and indeed for many years, I was unable to say anything (except a sentence in rejoinder), that I had not written out and committed to memory beforehand. I had never had the practice which comes to young men at the University of speaking in small debating societies impromptu upon all sorts of subjects. I had to try to foresee the situation and to have a number of variants ready to meet its possibilities. I therefore came with a quiverful of arrows of different patterns and sizes, some of which I hoped would hit the target.<sup>176</sup>

While Churchill was certainly rather bitter at his lack of higher education, especially after developing the desire to learn, having to undergo the dedicated and rigorous process of self-teaching undoubtedly molded him into a man with a unique ability to think critically, problem-solve, observe, and absorb information. Additionally, he had the opportunity to simultaneously pair his newfound knowledge with the practical experience of military and political life. This enabled him to approach situations in a way that could be considered more effective than that of those who learned merely theoretically from books, as seen through his self-identified methods of corkscrew thinking during the Second World War.

Throughout his early years in the military, Churchill decided to dedicate himself wholeheartedly to self-improvement through education. He read economics, history, and

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<sup>176</sup> Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life, 1874 - 1904*, 365.

philosophy from books sent to him by his mother. He spent the winter of 1896 reading extensively each day, from the likes of Gibbon and Macaulay,<sup>177</sup> who would later greatly influence his writing style.<sup>178</sup> With help from his mother's connections, he got involved in war correspondence, sending pieces he wrote to English newspapers.<sup>179</sup> Continuing to benefit from his family's societal status, Churchill frequently made use of his mother's leverage. He never seemed content in any of his official military assignments, and his mother would often use her influence to relieve him from duties he did not enjoy or to get permission for him to participate in his preferred campaigns.<sup>180</sup>

Moreover, Churchill went on to write his first book during this time, combining his experiences in the Frontier War with his newfound love and talent for writing. The first positive review he received on his work opened his eyes to the possibilities of life beyond the military:

I was thrilled. I knew that if this would pass muster there was lots more where it came from, and I felt a new way of making a living and of asserting myself, opening splendidly out before me...I resolved that as soon as the wars...should be ended...I would free myself from all discipline and authority, and set up in perfect independence in England.<sup>181</sup>

Not only did this experience launch Churchill's famous literary career, but his response illustrated his overall mindset that had developed during his years in the military. His desire to be free from discipline and authority reflected the somewhat self-centered mentality that is clearly exemplified throughout his life and which greatly shaped him as a politician and as a leader.

Churchill's stint defending the Empire in the Sudan was also a notable influence on his future worldview. It was here where Churchill observed the principles of the balance of power at

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<sup>177</sup> Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life, 1874 - 1904*, 111-112.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-152.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.



work.<sup>182</sup> Particularly as the Second World War loomed throughout the 1930s, the concept and importance of the balance of power greatly dominated Churchill's political and military views and interests; he would always evaluate circumstances in consideration of how Europe's balance of power might be affected.<sup>183</sup> In a speech to the Conservatives during his 'wilderness years,' Churchill asserted: "Let us remember this: our weakness does not only involve ourselves; our weakness involves also the stability of Europe."<sup>184</sup>

Churchill soon discovered while serving in the Sudan that active military service was not what he once glorified it to be, and he instead took to his writings as a campaign historian and a war correspondent. Despite the judgments and criticisms he received, Churchill, with the help of his mother, nevertheless altered his role in the military to focus primarily on writing and publishing books and articles influenced by his experiences.<sup>185</sup> During this time as a correspondent, he was exposed to the many aspects of warfare through the lens of the critical eye of a journalist, giving him a fresh perspective and view. This experience with critical thinking, observation, and writing served to launch his long and respected literary career.<sup>186</sup>

The effects of military experience are undeniably clear when studying the identity and the interests of Churchill. Not every one of his contemporaries had tangible military experience to point as a factor of identity development; however, Churchill did have such an experience, and the results speak for themselves. Even as a youthful soldier, he "grasped...truth that philosophers through the ages have struggled to understand."<sup>187</sup> His personal experience on the battlefield helped to shape his worldview and opinions, but it did not lure him away from his understanding

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<sup>182</sup> Thompson, Kenneth W. *Winston Churchill's World View: Statesmanship and Power*, 73.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>184</sup> Churchill, Winston. *Memories of the Second World War: An Abridgment of the Six Volumes of The Second World War*, 59.

<sup>185</sup> Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life, 1874 - 1904*, 161.

<sup>186</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 14.

<sup>187</sup> Thompson, Kenneth W. *Winston Churchill's World View: Statesmanship and Power*, 75.

of “certain timeless principles for the conduct of war which remain constant.”<sup>188</sup> By the time he was set to lead his nation into the Second World War, warfare had greatly changed since his duties as a soldier had ended almost forty years earlier. While he took note of the changes in technology and in national attitude, he stood by his enduring principles of “national unity, the role of chance and accidents, and the effects of moral constraints”<sup>189</sup> in taking action and making decisions. He was a firm believer in placing emphasis on these elements to ensure victory, regardless of the technological and political changes that may have occurred since he last actively participated in war. “It is a sign of Churchill’s wisdom that he should make [these three truths] explicit to his countrymen, just as it was a mark of understanding that he appreciated so well the revolutions which had transformed mid-twentieth-century conflict.”<sup>190</sup>

### **The Political Powerhouse**

“If one measures Churchill’s political career in the mirror of conventional political behavior in England, it does not correspond to well-accepted patterns.”<sup>191</sup> The real importance of studying the social construction of Winston Churchill lies within this truth; he differed greatly from those around him based on his unique life experiences that shaped his identity and his interests. For almost four decades, Churchill’s unpredictable and busy political career armed him with unconventional experiences and opinions that would come into play as the threat of a second global conflict loomed over Great Britain.

Upon first entering his career in politics, Churchill was set to follow in his Conservative father’s footsteps. It seemed a fitting fate for the young aristocrat trying to pursue a career in the

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<sup>188</sup> Thompson, Kenneth W. *Winston Churchill’s World View: Statesmanship and Power*, 190.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 20.

political arena. After losing his first attempt at election to the Oldham constituency in 1899, he returned to the military and war correspondence front; however, he would soon be back to make his grand entrance into British politics. The following year, he campaigned for and won the Conservative seat from Oldham. By way of his stirring stories from the front and his fervent support of the Boer War, he rallied patriotic support in his country.<sup>192</sup>

In his autobiographical work, *My Early Life*, Churchill recalls a much more glorified and dignified time in politics, where candidate battles were real and respected.<sup>193</sup> He writes:

I must explain that in those days we had a real political democracy led by a hierarchy of statesmen, and not a fluid mass directed by newspapers. There was a structure in which statesmen, electors, and the press all played their part.<sup>194</sup>

It is not difficult to see Churchill's sentimentality and respect for the past. As he himself prepared to step onto the political stage, he glorified Victorian leaders. For Churchill, "the political leaders in the twilight of the Victorian era were persons of greater stature because, to him, this was the golden age in the struggle for political office."<sup>195</sup>

However, Churchill did not stay with the Conservatives for long before converting to the Liberal party in 1904; however, he would return to the Conservatives again two decades later.<sup>196</sup> He served in a variety of different governments, political eras, and positions, and was viewed as a "traitor to his class" upon joining the Liberals.<sup>197</sup> His fellow aristocrats were also judgmental of his decision to remain in the House of Commons, rather than choosing to make the move to the House of Lords like many from his social class. "The Great Commoner"<sup>198</sup> chose to remain

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<sup>192</sup> Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life, 1874 - 1904*, 358.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>195</sup> Thompson, Kenneth W. *Winston Churchill's World View: Statesmanship and Power*, 89-90.

<sup>196</sup> *Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms*. London: Imperial War Museum, 24.

<sup>197</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 3.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

as such, claiming that he didn't really care to "understand his constituents' minds."<sup>199</sup> Thus, from the beginning, Churchill has always been distinctly different in the face of his contemporaries, making choices that we often deemed bizarre or uneducated. However, as evident in the 1930s and 1940s, such unconventional opinions and ways of thinking proved to be exactly what Great Britain and the democratic world needed in order to rise to the challenge. Time and time again, Churchill was "rejected by his countrymen," and "never won their love and confidence until they faced disaster."<sup>200</sup>

As a result of his party-jumping, many accused Churchill of being an opportunist; he seemed to change his interests and his identity to match the prevailing trends of the times,<sup>201</sup> violating the precious British political tradition of party and class loyalty.<sup>202</sup> However, one could argue that it was through the experience gained on both sides of the aisle that his informed, well-rounded identity was formed and matured. After all, such diverse experience is rare in the world of politics, and there is no doubt that this played a role in Churchill's unique ability to think critically and to consider innumerable possibilities and points of view. Additionally, it is through exposure to and experience with prevailing trends of the times that politicians are uniquely shaped. This does not mean that such exposure and experience has to result from acting in accordance with the times; one can interact with trends and patterns through challenging them or choosing to choose an alternate path. While social constructivism stipulates that actors are shaped by norms and institutions, one must not forget that those very norms and institutions are shaped as well – by the actors. This unique relationship in which both sides have the potential to mold and affect the other is perfectly illustrated in a politician's relationship with his times, such

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<sup>199</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 26.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>202</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 22.

as Winston Churchill to the pre-war era. This combined with his life experiences, observations, and educational background made him a necessary element in Great Britain's pre-war and war politics.

On account of his historically-rooted views, Churchill's contemporaries often regarded him as an imperialist, who thought him to have an "old-fashioned concept of world affairs."<sup>203</sup> While his contemporaries followed the predominant trends of appeasement and world peace, Churchill believed in the inevitability of war – no doubt fueled by his personal experience and passion – and that peace "was the product of wars averted."<sup>204</sup> In *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory*, Churchill biographer William Manchester asserts that such a viewpoint is difficult to understand in today's world: "It is wholly at odds with a central doctrine of his contemporaries, sanctified by the conventional wisdom of generations since. They hold that peace is the norm and war is a primitive aberration. Churchill held otherwise."<sup>205</sup> Such theories and beliefs no doubt explain how and why Churchill was both willing and able to foresee the rising threat of Nazi Germany in the 1930s, as well as convey the secret to his success as a wartime leader when his contemporaries failed. He himself once said: "Those who can win a war can rarely make a good peace, and those who could make a good peace would never have won the war."<sup>206</sup>

### **The Wilderness Years**

The years between Churchill's withdrawal from the political scene at the beginning of the 1930s and his triumphant return as Prime Minister a decade later are often referred to as his 'wilderness years.' In his *Memoirs of the Second World War*, Churchill writes that during this

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<sup>203</sup> Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, 24.

<sup>204</sup> Thompson, Kenneth W. *Winston Churchill's World View: Statesmanship and Power*, 219.

<sup>205</sup> Manchester, William. *The Last Lion: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932*, 14.

<sup>206</sup> *Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms*. London: Imperial War Museum, 14.

time he “meditated constantly upon the European situation and the rearming of Germany.”<sup>207</sup> It can therefore be said that his time at Chartwell was the final – and essential – influence on his distinct and effective wartime approach.

During this season, Churchill was greatly shaped by several friends that would come to visit for extended periods and discuss with him the events of the times. For instance, Churchill and Frederick Lindemann, Oxford Professor of Experimental Philosophy, would spend hours contemplating the “dangers which seemed to be gathering upon [them].”<sup>208</sup> Churchill writes that the Professor “became [his] chief adviser on the scientific aspects of modern war.”<sup>209</sup> Additionally, although Churchill was removed from the political realm, he had a window into current events thanks to two close friends, Desmond Morton and Ralph Wigram. Morton, who had served in Intelligence, had permission from the Prime Minister to “talk freely” with Churchill and to “keep [him] informed.”<sup>210</sup> Wigram was at the center of the affairs of the Foreign Office, and thus with well-supported opinions shared Churchill’s views on the impending dangers of what was occurring in Europe at the time. Churchill recalls: “Like other officials of high rank, he spoke to me with complete confidence. All this helped me to form and fortify my opinion about the Hitler Movement.”<sup>211</sup> While he may have been temporarily removed from the interactions of his routine social group, Churchill’s identity and interests were continuously shaped by the prevailing trends and dynamics of the times by way of his communication with certain individuals. One does not necessarily need to be physically involved within a group to still be shaped by group dynamics and social identity.

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<sup>207</sup> Churchill, Winston. *Memories of the Second World War: An Abridgment of the Six Volumes of The Second World War*, 39.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 40.

As Churchill himself admitted, such time with his thoughts and his friends greatly influenced his views on the rising Nazi Regime and how to best handle it. While he certainly did not know at the time that he would eventually need to recall such knowledge as Prime Minister, Churchill did not choose the path of inaction in watching as his nation's government took misstep after misstep in addressing the threat of Hitler. He actively spoke his mind, expressed his views, and spread his unique wisdom on the manner in which things should be done. In addition to the impact of his connections, Churchill "gathered and contributed a great deal of information from foreign sources," making use of his contacts in both France and Germany.<sup>212</sup> His domestic connections supplied him with information on issues of air defense. He writes: "In this way I became as well instructed as many Ministers of the Crown."<sup>213</sup> All of this was in combination with the knowledge and expertise he had gained during his own time in the government:

From my own long experience in high office I was also possessed of the most precious secrets of the State. All this enabled me to form and maintain opinions which did not depend on what was published in the newspapers.<sup>214</sup>

It is easy to see that while Churchill may have not been actively participating in politics during these years, he was far from passive or out of touch. Although certainly isolated from mainstream political life and communications during this time, Churchill's 'wilderness years' arguably had the greatest contribution to his socially constructed identity as Britain's wartime leader. He may not have been socialized in the prevailing norms of the times in the most traditional manner, but there can be no doubt that in light of the concepts of political psychology, Churchill's identity was socially constructed throughout the 1930s. "Individuals do not act

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<sup>212</sup> Churchill, Winston. *Memories of the Second World War: An Abridgment of the Six Volumes of The Second World War*, 40.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 41.

within a vacuum. Their behavior varies with, and responds to, differences in political institutions, political cultures, leadership styles, and social norms.”<sup>215</sup> Churchill may not have been actively involved in politics during this era, but he could not escape the formative effects of the norms and institutions at play; they continued to shape both his identity and his worldview as his interests evolved.

It was also during these years that Churchill researched and wrote *Life of Marlborough*. Such work inspired in him the power and success of his ancestors, helping to prepare him for the great task that lay ahead. However, it also provided him with critical technical knowledge. In order to conduct thorough research, Churchill visited the old battlefields of his ancestors, many of which were located within the Low Countries and Germany, recalling: “As we wended our way through these beautiful regions from one ancient, famous city to another, I naturally asked questions about the Hitler Movement, and found it the prime topic in every German mind. I sensed a Hitler atmosphere.”<sup>216</sup>

Even before Hitler officially began to conquer his European empire, Churchill pushed for the West to “reexamine the popular doctrine of opposition to every form of imperialism.”<sup>217</sup> With his imperialist history and known preference of military strength over passive attempts of peace, it is not surprising that Churchill suggested resorting to viewing the situation through the lens of imperialism. He was indeed alone in his views, commenting on the prevailing trends of British politics at the time:

This was one of those awful periods which recur in our history, when the noble British nation seems to fall from its high estate, loses all trace of sense or purpose, and appears to

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<sup>215</sup> Huddy, Leonie, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy. “Introduction: Theoretical Foundations of Political Psychology.” *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 3.

<sup>216</sup> Churchill, Winston. *Memories of the Second World War: An Abridgment of the Six Volumes of The Second World War*, 41.

<sup>217</sup> Thompson, Kenneth W. *Winston Churchill’s World View: Statesmanship and Power*, 94.



cover from the menace of foreign peril, frothing pious platitudes while foemen forge their arms.<sup>218</sup>

Churchill was frustrated that his contemporaries chose their policy based on what would keep them popular and in office rather than what would save Great Britain from destruction. “It is much better for parties or politicians to be turned out of office than to imperil the life of the nation,”<sup>219</sup> he writes, reflecting back on the golden years of Victorian era which he held in such high regard and which clearly shaped how he approached the politics of his time.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy elements of Churchill’s worldview during this time comes from a single statement of his: “it is always wise to try to understand another country’s point of view.”<sup>220</sup> This was certainly something that his contemporaries did not take into account. Perhaps it was his diverse history in the realm of politics, or his experience overseas as a soldier and a correspondent. Whatever the reason, Churchill’s wisdom to stop and consider not only Great Britain’s potential actions and reactions but also those of the other side is undoubtedly the key in truly understanding the nature of any war in which one hopes to reach victory by way of successful and unique leadership.

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Through the lens of social constructivism, one can study international relations in light of the formation and evolution of identities and interests among states in the global community. Such a theory allows scholars to challenge commonly-held beliefs about how the world works and how actors will think, decide, and act within that world. Paired with the theory of social identity and studies in political psychology, the principles of constructivism can be taken from

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<sup>218</sup> Churchill, Winston. *Memories of the Second World War: An Abridgment of the Six Volumes of The Second World War*, 42.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

the international state level to that of the individual, particularly those involved in the political sphere; Winston S. Churchill is one such individual. Without question, he was an extraordinary figure in both British and world history, particularly in regards to his successful wartime leadership. His one-of-a-kind brand of political leadership and critical thinking can be attributed to his unique identity and interests developed over time throughout the various experiences and relationships of his life. His time as Great Britain's leader during the Second World War illustrates how the ideals of constructivism shaped him in a way that distinctly set him apart from his contemporaries. It was precisely this difference in the formation of his identity and his interests that provides an explanation for the successful leadership that only he could provide.

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