

7.2.2 Individual Categories

Individual categories are created in an organizing system to satisfy the *ad hoc* requirements that arise from a person's unique experiences, preferences, and resource collections. Unlike cultural categories, which usually develop slowly and last a long time, individual categories are created by intentional activity, in response to a specific situation, or to solve an emerging organizational challenge. As a consequence, the categories in individual organizing systems generally have short lifetimes and rarely outlive the person who created them.^{400[Arc]}

Individual categories draw from cultural categories but differ in two important ways. First, individual categories sometimes have an imaginative or metaphorical basis that is meaningful to the person who created them but which might distort or misinterpret cultural categories. Second, individual categories are often specialized or synthesized versions of cultural categories that capture particular experiences or personal history. For example, a person who has lived in China and Mexico, or lived with people from those places, might have highly individualized categories for foods they like and dislike that incorporate characteristics of both Chinese and Mexican cuisine.

Individual categories in organizing systems also reflect the idiosyncratic set of household goods, music, books, website bookmarks, or other resources that a person might have collected over time. The organizing systems for financial records, personal papers, or email messages often use highly specialized categories that are shaped by specific tasks to be performed, relationships with other people, events of personal history, and other highly individualized considerations. Put another way, individual categories are used to organize resource collections that are likely not representative samples of all resources of the type being collected. If everyone had the same collection of music, books, clothes, or toys the world would be a boring place.

Traditionally, *individual categorization* systems were usually not visible to, or shared with, others, whereas, this has become an increasingly common situation for people using web-based organizing system for pictures, music, or other personal resources. On websites like the popular Flickr, Instagram, and YouTube sites for photos and videos, people typically use existing cultural categories to tag their content as well as individual ones that they invent.^{401[Ling]}

[400] [Arc] The personal archives of people who turn out to be famous or important are the exception that proves this rule. In that case, the individual's organizing system and its categories are preserved along with their contents.

[401] [Ling] The typical syntactic constraint that tags are delimited by white space encourages the creation of new categories by combining existing category names using concatenation and camel case conventions; photos that could be categorized as "Berkeley" and "Student" are sometimes tagged as "BerkeleyStudent." Similar generative processes for creating individual category names are used with Twitter "hashtags" where tweets about events are often categorized with an ad hoc tag that combines an event name and a year identifier like "#NBAFinals16."