

To Cite:

Lin, A. M. Y. (2008). The identity game and discursive struggles of everyday life. In A. M. Y. Lin (Ed.), *Problematizing identity: Everyday struggles in language, culture, and education (pp.1-10)*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.

1. The Identity Game and Discursive Struggles of Everyday Life: An Introduction

The history of the development and uses of the notion of "identity" has not been an innocent one, if we are alert to the observation that it is usually the powerful who are entitled to and have both more and the right kinds of capital and resources for constructing for themselves advantageous identities. Although people who find themselves in subordinate positions can attempt to construct positive identities for themselves in their struggles to gain recognition, it is often the dominant regimes of the powerful that dictate the identity game to them on the basis of a rigged and stacked text. Very often the subordinated peoples' need to affirm an identity, and thereby constructing a hegemonic essentialized structure for *oneself* to fit into (in dichotic opposition to an essentialized *Other*), in a specific symbolic and political struggle is somewhat like what postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak calls the need for "strategic essentialism". There are therefore at least two driving psychological motivations for identity: *being-for-the-self* and *identity-for-the-other*. As postcolonial critic R. Radhakrishnan observes:

For too long, oppressed groups have been forced to constantly militarize their sense of identity, (1) as though their identities had no truth or significance beyond the expediency of polemics and strategy (when did we last hear of the practice of "strategic essentialism" by Western white Europeans?), and (2) as though the meaning of their lives has to be perennially played out in the context of dominant identities who supposedly have transcended the strategic and the political in the name of their successful and "natural" history. (Radhakrishnan, 1996: xxvi)

Identity as a notion therefore needs some more theorizing and problematizing so that it does not easily become neutralized and universalized as just another chic term (which carries academic capital) in contemporary academic literature. For different subjects (or social actors) located in differential socioeconomic and sociopolitical positions, the notion of identity is double-edged and is a weapon with risks and dangers (and often with far greater risks and dangers for subordinated groups). It can be used by both sides to reify different positions for different interests, and very often it is the powerful groups who have more resources and capital to construct powerful identities for themselves and dictate the rules of the identity game to subordinated groups. As such, the subordinated groups' engagement in identity politics seems to be a reaction to or a result of the colonial encounter, and is not necessarily a native form of life or way of being for these groups (i.e., prior to the colonial encounter). It is in this sense that "identity" is forced upon these groups from the Western tradition of possessive individualism (see Beverley Skeggs' argument in Chapter 2, this volume). Subordinated peoples often find that they have to *collude in order to resist*—they have to learn to play along in this game of identity politics in order to resist and strive to gain recognition, which however might not in the long run work to the benefit of them. It is in this sense that "identity" is not innocent and is problematic—it presupposes certain cultural (e.g., Anglo-European possessive individualism, as argued by Beverley Skeggs in this volume) forms of knowing, acting, and orientations towards social relations. It is in short not necessarily a universal form of life prior to the colonial or oppressive encounter.

The collection of papers in this volume all deal with some form of symbolic struggle which is mediated through language (e.g., the Thai language/lexicon and how it encodes and thus makes available and culturally acceptable different gender categories including the trans-gender), discourse, and social interactions. They all bear upon the theme of language-, discourse-, and interaction-mediated (and hence, *symbolic*) struggles (*the war of position*—the struggle around positionalities, in Gramsci's sense), which also have serious *material* (*socioeconomic and sociopolitical*) consequences (e.g., see Ingrid Harrington's chapter on Discourses of Schooling, Constructions of Masculinity, and Boys' Non-completion of Secondary School, this volume). As cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall observes:

My own view is that events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effects, outside the sphere of the discursive; but that it is only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed within meaning. Thus while not wanting to expand the territorial claims of the discursive infinitely, how things are represented and the 'machineries' and regimes of representation in a culture do play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event, role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation—subjectivity, identity, politics—a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life. (Hall, 1996, p. 443)

The goal of this book is then one of describing and illustrating how different symbolic struggles in the world's different contexts (e.g., in different languages, cultures, societies, institutional and non-institutional settings) are being engaged in by different social actors (located in different sociopolitical positions), all using certain forms of symbolic resource as medium to wage their identity battles (chiefly through language and public, official discourses, as well as performed through social interactions in different public spheres, educational institutions or the mass media). As such it is a textbook about symbolic struggles, who (has the capital to) do them, how they do them, and with what consequences for different groups situated differentially with differential capital and resources to forge differential (and hierarchical) identity categories for themselves and others in these struggles.

These symbolic struggles revolve around the linguistic, discursive, institutional and cultural processes of fixing/essentializing identities and subject positions for subaltern *others* and attributing negative values to those positions while constructing multiple, mobile, fluid, favorable identities and subject positions for *selves*, attributing and reproducing privilege and positive (moral) values to these subject positions. However, these papers are also about some of the local creative ways of contesting such processes, usually through mobilizing and drawing on other available positive identities and resources to forge more fluid and empowering identities (e.g., as an ethnic minority English faculty member, Joseph Eng draws on his writer identity to re-position himself in the white-dominated academy; see Joseph Eng's chapter, this volume). Albeit often with local, temporary or limited successes, social actors engage in such symbolic struggles as an unavoidable part of their everyday lives. The degree of success often also depends on what other kinds of capital are available to the social actors. This seems to point to the irony that those subaltern social actors who can achieve some (limited) success in the identity game are not those who are subalterns in most social fields. For instance, a middle-class, well-educated ethnic minority social actor has much more capital than a working-class, less well-educated ethnic minority social actor in playing the game of identity politics. Being ourselves academics and/or intellectuals who are likely to be occupying various both privileged and subordinate positions, we also

have a moral responsibility to critically reflect on our own checkered repertoire of positions, and our own implication in processes of essentializing/fixing others' identities in our own privileged positions. What such critical reflexive analyses would lead us towards morally, politically and educationally is a question I would like to ask each of our readers and contributors to continue to think hard and work hard on. The anthology is thus meant to be one of the beginnings of many continuing critical explorations; it is not meant to have the last words on issues revolving around the different identity games in our everyday lives.

The papers collected in this book have come from a range of diverse contexts located in different parts of the world (Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, Australia, US, UK, Sweden). The papers are divided into three parts. **Part 1 (Identity, Class, and Difference)** consists of three papers on theoretical issues revolving around the problems with identity fixing/essentialization and liberalist plurality discourses found in Western democratic societies. Beverley Skeggs conducts a historical excavation (in Foucault's sense) into Western possessive individualism inherent in the political and socioeconomic contexts in which the practices of assuming, desiring, narrating and constructing (legally, commercially and later literarily) a coherent identity and generating a resourceful self (assembled out of otherwise fragmented experiences and affects). "This translation of affect and experience into a social position that relies on history, power and inscription places the debate within a symbolic economy", Beverley observes. Drawing on Foucault's notion of technologies of the self and Bourdieu's notion of the symbolic economy of different types of capital, Beverley aims at showing how the technologies for producing a self become central to how the concept of identity is forged and used, but not equally available to all:

I want to show how identity is a particular form of inscription, a discursive position that privileges those with access to specific cultural resources to both know and produce them-selves. (Skeggs, 2003, p. 2)

The second paper, also by Beverley Skeggs, goes on to use concrete media and discourse examples taken from the public media and discourses of the US and UK to show how global capitalism of our times continues to appropriate and rob the black and white working classes of their cultural experiences, affective energies and re-attached them to white middle class bodies, thereby commodifying them and selling these new cultural products (images, projected identities, desires, pleasures and even resentment) back to the working classes (as well as the middle classes). Such cultural exploitation of our post-modernist global capitalism (what Beverley calls hypercommodification and industrialization of culture) pushes the traditional Marxist sense of labor exploitation into the cultural and affective arenas: not only is their physical labor being exploited but also their experiences, feelings, sexualities, and cultures. On the other hand, these feelings, sexualities and cultures when they appear in the working class bodies, continue to inscribe them with "decadent", "hyper-sexual", and "morally inferior" identities in the dominant discourses of the privileged middle classes.

The third paper by Lena Martinsson and Eva Reimers critically examines three specimens of official and religious discourses on social diversity in Sweden and shows how these seemingly liberal, multiculturalist discourses obscure inequality and affirm capitalism as a common good. Their analysis shows that these discourses presuppose essential identities as economic resources for business companies and the nation. The authors stress the importance of deconstructing the processes in which essentialized, binarized differences are produced and how different subjects (or social actors) are made into fixed positions, and propose a notion of a self-reflexive deconstructive solidarity that focuses on non-essentialized difference and the conditions under

which certain identities and positions are created that induce subordination of other identities and positions. The authors propose the need for a shift from identity politics to a continuous self-reflexive examination and questioning of (one's own as well as others') identity discourses. This echoes with the task that Stuart Hall posed to us:

This does not make it any easier to conceive of how a politics can be constructed which works with and through difference, which is able to build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities, and which can effectively draw the political boundary lines without which political contestation is impossible, without fixing those boundaries for eternity. ... But the difficulty of conceptualizing such a politics (and the temptation to slip into a sort of endlessly sliding discursive liberal-pluralism) does not absolve us of the task of developing such a politics. (Hall, 1996, p. 444)

Part 2 (Gender, Ethnicity, and Education) consists of three papers which focus on symbolic struggles revolving around gender and ethnicity in educational institutions which serve as apparatuses for hegemonic production of identity categories and subjectivities. Joseph Eng uses personal narratives to look into his seventeen years of experience as a non-white, English faculty member in different US higher institutes and reflect on the different marginal identities and positions he has been locked into. In contesting these imposed positions of otherness, Joseph proposes for himself and us alternative ways of imagining and re-imagining more favorable identities, roles, and positions for non-native, non-white English professors:

Non-native, non-white English professors might occupy a rather crucial position that, at the same time they negotiate their non-traditional identities or unimagined roles as English faculty, their own reading and writing could in turn help students develop their marginal voices and further engage their learning interest.

Claiming a passionate and reflective role in composition instruction, I now seize the opportunity of transforming the pedagogy by admitting that I am, afterall, marginal and marginalized, but meaningfully so.

(Eng, 2003, p. 1 & p. 7)

So, instead of re-imagining a mainstream faculty member position for himself (which is quite beyond his reach), Joseph chooses to remain in the “margins” but also chooses to infuse the margins with different (more empowering) meanings by inscribing such a “marginal” position with pedagogy-transforming practices and enriched cultural meanings which give both moral and positive social values to his re-imagined “marginal” position. The extent to which this re-imagining is successful will partially depend on the power circuits through which this re-imagining discourse can successfully circulate, reach, and persuade the desirable audiences. It is in this sense that the proposed book is in itself both a textual strategy and a political and cultural act of symbolic struggle.

The second paper by Jan Connelly on a white female teacher's response to issues in the education of Australian

Indigenous students begins with the announcement of the author's own privileged social location: that of a white Australian woman academic with a strong sense of social justice. Jan offers an extract from an inquiry she undertook in a field of difference – an Australian Indigenous educational context. The inquiry involves the construction of her own and five other teachers' lived experiences reported via narratives. The inquiry focuses on seeking an answer to the question: How a white woman responds to a localised Indigenous educational setting? Closing her paper, Jan writes:

Through the few snippets of data and narrative analysis I share here, it maybe possible to 'see' white teachers juggling enormous identity and subject position tensions. These in turn impact on their enacted pedagogy. Mindful of the knowledge created through the discourse of these narratives the educational implications are to ask the question what now must be done. How can this knowledge generate different understandings and possibilities for the education of Australian Indigenous students? In closure in the words of Derrida I ask of government policy makers, teacher educators, Indigenous educators and communities who work in fields of difference, 'What now must be thought and thought otherwise' (Derrida 1994, p. 59).
(Connelly, 2003, p. 12)

While Jan does not want to mislead us into thinking that there can be easy answers to such difficult questions, she does help us to start thinking hard on how social actors located in relatively more privileged positions (e.g., white Australian teachers) can respond both honestly and morally to the suffering of people in less privileged positions. One step forward is perhaps for people located in relatively more privileged positions to actively engage in dialogues with others and in creative co-explorations of situated ways in which they can help transform some of their institutional structures/policies to enable those in less privileged positions to have more access to the valued resources and capital that they already enjoy. This takes both bold imagination and moral determination—to forge a situated postcolonial ethics and politics.

The third paper by Ingrid Harrington looks into the interlinks among discourses of schooling, constructions of masculinity and Australian school boys' non-completion of secondary school. Ingrid found that under the distinctive dominant schooling discourses and processes of positioning most boys were left with little space to express their displeasure with school. Their opposition strategy led them to discourses of anti-authority and oppositional practices not too dissimilar from those studied by Paul Willis (1977). These rural young boys' essentialist, dichotic construction and mobilization of non-school-based working class masculine identities as "Self" in opposition to a school-based "Other" (e.g., teachers, those students who work hard to remain in school) ultimately lead to their non-completion of school in North Queensland, Australia. Forced into this identity game with little alternative capital, these young boys' essentialist self-other constructions only serve to lock them into further disadvantage and stereotyped working class masculine subject positions. What such an analysis leaves us towards morally, educationally and politically is a difficult and troubling question we hope to invoke both ourselves and our readers to start to embark on. For instance, what institutional and structural changes in the schooling system and discourses need to happen to have made things different? *Who* can contribute to initiating such structural changes and *how* they can do so?

Part 3 (Gender, Ethnicity, and Language) consists of four papers all looking into some aspects of situated language use and the construction, contestation, or reproduction of gendered, ethnicized, or sexualized

identities and subject positions. The first paper by Sam Winter looks into the more flexible and relatively less binary linguistic (and thus social and cultural) space offered in the Thai language and the Thai society for transgenders. Through looking into Thai cultures and Thai (Buddhist) religious values as reflected in the Thai language vocabulary referring to different sexes, one can come to appreciate the constructed nature of our existing gender categories, including the deeply naturalized, taken-for-granted, rigid, binary gender system (and the rigidly fixed, binary gender subject positions), found in many languages, cultures, and societies of the world. As Sam Winter puts it, "I am not suggesting here which road is right. For the present I am just trying to suggest that different roads [or different gender subject positions] are offered by different cultures." (Winter, 2003, p. 12).

The second paper by Maya Khemlani-David and Janet Yong analyses the linguistic and discursive features of the public responses of eleven successful men and eleven successful women in journalistic interviews conducted and published by both local and international magazines. Distinctive differences are found between the women's and the men's self-representations. The women seem to assert a sense of self, which, however, seems to be dependent on others. The men, on the other hand, seem to project an image under which they inhabit an impersonal milieu where there is little talk about spouse and where the focus is on work, risk-taking, clients and themselves. In contrast, the women seem to inhabit a personal world of family and friends. The multiple (traditionally essentialized) roles and identities (e.g., wife, partner and mother, career woman and homemaker) that the women publicly assign to themselves result in crediting success to these "important others" in their lives and insisting that their priorities are both work and family, properly apportioned. The authors conclude:

For all the progress women have made in the workforce – and men have made in accepting them there – many people of both sexes are uncomfortable with the outright reversal of gender roles. More and more women are wrestling with gender roles as high-powered jobs come within their reach. The dividends for these working wives – peace of mind, no distractions, the ability to focus single-mindedly on work – are precisely the ones their male counterparts have always had.
(Khemlani-David and Yong, 2003, p. 15)

It seems that women themselves (and most ironically successful women who occupy important, advantageous positions in circuits of power) do not necessarily want to contest and change the discourses that continue to reproduce traditional gender roles and subject positions. The success enjoyed by this handful of successful women will continue to be restricted to just a privileged few—those with class-based social and cultural capital that facilitates their success despite multiple gender role demands on them. Here we can see that there are problems to an essentialized feminist identity politics: not all women occupy similar socioeconomic positions or have similar interests. The end of the essential feminist subject also entails the recognition that the central issues of gender always appear historically in connection with other categories and divisions and are constantly crossed and re-crossed by the categories of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on.

The third paper by Jette Hansen looks at the occupational trajectories, values, and identities of a Vietnamese husband-and-wife immigrant couple in the US and what consequences the subject positions and job decisions taken up by each have on their respective English language learning opportunities. As the story of the Tran

couple illustrates, gender categorization and identification may be a factor in determining which work roles – and family roles – are available for immigrant husbands and wives. Because of Anh (the wife)’s perception that in her role as a filial daughter she had to bear a large part of the responsibility for the financial caretaking of her maiden family, she took a job in a nail salon as this was a relatively easy job to find for Vietnamese women because of Vietnamese social networks in the US. Though she was unhappy in her job, she stayed in that profession in order to continue earning money to help her maiden family become financially independent. Anh is not happy remaining in the identity of a nail technician. The work context does not give her the opportunities she feels she needs to practice her English so that she can pursue her real dream of becoming a computer programmer. On the other hand Nhi (the husband) seems to have fairly limited opportunities to practice English if measured time-wise – his only chances are during short breaks and his lunch hour. However, he does have a fairly supportive work environment in terms of English language practice. He has four good friends at work, two American and two Mexican, all men. He talks with them everyday during their break times and lunches, and as he says, “they teach English...if I if I speak wrong they correct for me.” They teach him job terminology and they often joke during breaks, as he says, “when... break time...we have we talk we talk together funny.” He understands everything when he speaks with his friends at work as they tend to speak very slowly so he can follow and join their conversation. The author has led us to ask the question of whether this is simply a matter of luck or systematic social positioning disadvantaging immigrant women. Although both are ethnic minorities, the ethnic minority women seem to have less opportunities to access a wider range of work types than the ethnic minority men. For instance, do the kinds of work (and communities and public identities) available to immigrant women provide little access to English (and other important skills) and thus locking these women in their low status job and subject positions? Do women’s self-internalized moral and cultural values/ideologies (e.g., to sacrifice one’s aspired career/professional identity to take up the financial burden of her maiden family) lead to their self-limiting job decisions (and role identifications)? These critical questions concern not only socioeconomic structures (e.g., differential kinds of jobs for women and men) but also ideological, cultural and moral value/ideological questions (e.g., are women expected to fit into certain familial identity positions that exert hegemonic/moral expectations of her to sacrifice more for their families in many cultures?).

In the last paper in Part 3, Winne Cheng conducts a discourse analysis of two conversational exchanges on sensitive topics, each between a Hong Kong Chinese and an English-speaking Westerner in Hong Kong. In both exchanges, the Hong Kong Chinese is seen to be accommodating the prejudiced talk of the English-speaking Westerner. As the talk develops, the Hong Kong Chinese collaborates with the English-speaking Westerner in constructing essentialized, disparaging, ethnic and gender stereotypes of “other less civilized” peoples in Asia, e.g., the “traditional” Japanese woman, or the “dog-eating” “horrible” Mainland Chinese. It seems that by *othering* remote (actually not-too-remote) others, the Hong Kong Chinese interactants seem to be clearing for themselves a relatively safe and superior identity space from which to project to the Westerner their more modern Hong Kong identities, as opposed to the traditional Japanese woman identity or the uncivilized dog-eating Mainland Chinese identity. Using such strategies of identity fixing (fixing the remote “Other”), both parties manage to find enough (superior) common ground to establish rapport or a friendly interpersonal relationship in what would otherwise be a threatening situation as a potentially face-threatening, sensitive topic is raised (e.g., women’s role in Asian society, dog-eating) by a seemingly self-proclaimed more “modern/civilized” Westerner. As an intercultural communication strategy, this co-constructing of essentialized and denigrated subject positions and identities for “the remote Other”

(and simultaneously the superior "Self") seems workable and successful, as can be seen in the exchanges. What the author leads us to think hard on is the question of how we can have interacted differently, how face-threatening topics can be dealt with without adopting such a strategy of *othering* remote others. This seems to be one of the continuous moral and symbolic struggles that many of us will find ourselves faced with in our everyday lives.

Coda

Symbolic struggles exist in our everyday lives but we are often not able to become critically aware of them and reflect on them, especially when we occupy the privileged space and positions. The present volume aims at providing the reader with some of the meta-language and theoretical, analytical tools to embark on such a practice of making the familiar strange, problematizing the taken-for-granted, and uncovering the linguistic, discursive, and cultural processes which serve to subordinate some people while privileging some others, locking some people up in essentialized/fixed subject positions and negatively valued identities while creating mobile, fluid, valued, multiple identities and subject positions for the powerful.

It is my hope that this volume will be useful to both undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, and educators in sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, discourse analysis, sociology, education, gender studies and cultural and media studies. The diverse sociocultural contexts in which the data and analyses are situated help to illustrate symbolic struggles and identity politics that are being engaged in by peoples in different cultures, languages and societies of the world, offering insights from multidisciplinary, trans-cultural and trans-local perspectives. It is meant to be a book about the world's symbolic (and political) struggles and their material consequences for different peoples. The question of how we can deal with these struggles in our own respective positions in ways that do not help reproduce privilege and essentialized binarism (e.g., ethnicized, racialized, genderized, sexualized "Self and Other") will continue to come back to haunt us and help keep us grounded in a continuous search for different ways of constituting a situated postcolonial ethics in our own everyday textual, cultural, and political practices and struggles.

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