1 *Identity: Interaction and community*

Identity is who and what you are. But while this is a simple enough statement to make, how we experience and manage our sense of self is far more complex. This is because we tend to see ourselves as unique individuals with a 'true', stable identity locked away deep inside us, yet we also recognise that our behaviours, affiliations and even our ways of talking shift through encounters with different people, often creating tensions and conflicts. Added to this there is also a range of different ways of theorising identity, each producing a different definition and way of approaching it. The current centrality of the concept of identity in the human and social sciences, in fact, suggests something of this slipperiness. So for some observers identity is what unifies our experience and brings continuity to our lives; while for others it is something fragile and fragmented, vulnerable to the dislocations of globalisation and post-industrial capitalism.

There is, however, general agreement on the idea that there are various forms of identity that people recognise, and so identity involves *identification*. In identifying myself as a man, for example, I am identifying myself with a broader category of 'men', or at least some aspects of that category. At the same time, or more often at other times, I may be identifying myself as a vegetarian, a hiker or a son. No one has only one identity, and, for a subset of the population, an important aspect of who they are relates to their participation in academic disciplines: they are physicists, historians or applied linguists. These different identities have to be managed because they impact on each other rather than simply add to each other, so the way I enact an identity as a teacher is influenced by my identity as middle-aged, British and so on. This book explores what academic identity means: how it is constructed by individuals appropriating and shaping the discourses which link them to their disciplines.

This chapter reviews some of the work on identity to set out a view which argues for the importance of interaction and community in identity performance, but I want to begin by presenting some key ideas up front.

1.1 Connecting *disciplines* and *identities*

The link between disciplines and identities might not seem immediately obvious. After all, things generally get done in universities without thinking too much about what our activities mean for the way we see ourselves. We go along to meetings, seminars or lectures and write essays or papers with a good enough working sense of who we are and who the others in our lives are, and they in turn seem to relate to us in the same way. People are generally accustomed to seeing themselves as having a nature and an identity which exist prior to their participation in social groups and the roles and relations they establish in these groups. Such a view implies that a discipline is just an aggregate of individuals, something distinct and independent from the people who comprise it.

Identity and other people

A very different view sees identity not as belonging *within* the individual person but *between* persons and *within* social relations; as constituted socially and historically (Vygotsky, 1978). Identity is not the *state* of being a particular person but a *process*, something which is assembled and changed over time through our interactions with others. Here the self is formed and developed within the structures of understandings, allegiances and identifications which membership of social groups, including disciplines, involves. It emerges from a mutual engagement with others in 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991), the 'ways of doing things, ways of thinking, ways of talking, beliefs, values and power relations' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 464).

This kind of mutual engagement in community activities is accomplished every day in universities, of course, as in this example from an undergraduate biology tutorial, where a tutor leads a group of students over an extended interaction to construct shared understandings through shared language.

(1)

> **T:** okay you take D-N-ase, mkay that kills D-N-A. and if D-N-ase wipes out the D-N-A do you see transformation occurring?
> **S1:** no
> **T:** no. what about protease that kills the protein?
> **S2:** it still transforms
> **T:** mkay. still transforms, and therefore what did, Avery conclude?
> **S2:** the D-N-A was the uh,
> **S1:** transforming agent
> **T:** mkay, D-N-A is the transforming principle and not protein.
>
> (MICASE: DIS175JU081)

Building on one another's turns, repeating the same words, overlapping and interrupting, the tutor guides the students to the conclusion of the transforming principle as a shared account. By participating in interactions such as this, students learn the practices and beliefs of a discipline. They slowly take on its discourses and understandings to construct a self which gains recognition and reinforcement through use of these discourses. In other words, learning to use recognised and valued patterns of language not only demonstrates competence in a field, but also displays affinity and connection. Identity in this sense therefore refers to 'the ways that people display who they are to each other' (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 6) so that *who we are*, or rather *who we present ourselves to be*, is an outcome of how we routinely and repeatedly engage in interactions with others on an everyday basis.

The view taken here therefore frames identity as an ongoing project as opposed to a fixed product and has little to say about any underlying core dispositions. It does, however, draw attention to the importance of language, which is central to our interactions with others and our participation in communities. Seeing identity as constructed by both the texts we engage in and the linguistic choices we make relocates it from the private to the public sphere, and from hidden processes of cognition to its social construction in discourse. Our preferred patterns of language, in both writing and speech, index who we are in much the same way that our clothes and body language index our social class, occupation and age group, making the study of discourse a legitimate means of gaining insights into self-representation. Analysis of disciplinary discourses can therefore complement existing approaches to understanding identity as discursively constructed by revealing something of how they function to articulate the relationship between the self and the world.

1.2 Identity and interaction

Current post-structuralist theories are deeply suspicious of the durable, unitary notion of identity summed up in Descartes' aphorism 'I think therefore I am.' While a consciousness of self may provide the basis for the sense that we are the same person from one day to the next, it is also true that identifying ourselves and others involves meaning – and meaning involves interaction. Agreeing, arguing, comparing, negotiating and cooperating are part and parcel of identity construction, so identities must be seen as *social* identities. Cameron puts this view succinctly:

A person's identity is not something fixed, stable and unitary that they acquire early in life and possess forever afterwards. Rather identity is

shifting and multiple, something people are continually constructing and reconstructing in their encounters with each other in the world.

(Cameron, 2001: 170)

Identity is therefore an ongoing venture, responsive to social stimuli, and created through interaction, a view I will develop in this section.

Identity as a social construct

Social constructionism is perhaps the best-known view of identity as something created between people (e.g. Berger and Luckman, 1967; Burr, 1995). Shotter (1993), for example, talks of 'joint action' to emphasise that identity is constructed in tandem with others rather than somehow emanating from internal psychic structures. Constructing an identity as a competent academic writer, for example, involves an often protracted dialogic process of socialisation into the expectations of a new community. Something of this can be seen in the responses language teachers make on undergraduate students' essays, as this example from a recorded protocol suggests (Hyland and Hyland, 2001) (italics = student text; bold = teacher written comment; other = teacher's self-talk):

(2)

> *In a free market economy there are more productive efficiency than in a planned economy and consumers are happier for they can choose and get the goods they want and are willing to buy most by themselves.* Ha ha she clearly knows which one she wants, but a very sudden end – Ok – **the conclusion is a bit abrupt – you need to re-state some of the main points – the essay is rather** – it's way too much – **middle heavy. The conclusion is the place in an academic essay where you reinforce your main point and bring the reader round to your ideas.**

Here the teacher is responding to a student writer rather than to a student text, engaging with her as a novice writer in a dialogic process of instruction. Behind the feedback comments is an assumption that the student is learning to identify with the community and that this is aided through interactions of this kind with experienced members.

Social constructionism's view of identity as a form of social action rather than a psychological construct is not really new. Its seeds are evident in the symbolic interactionism of Mead (1934) and Cooley (1964) who saw identity as produced through socialisation, and then made and remade in people's dealings with others throughout their lives. We form our individual identities by seeing ourselves as other people see us, the image we get of ourselves that is reflected back from other members of our communities. Seen from this perspective, the self is thoroughly

a social product, an emergent ongoing creation that we construct over time in our attempt to form a consistent orientation to the world.

In this Symbolic Interactionist work, there is therefore a close link between self and society, but the link seems altogether too smooth and unproblematic, as if the self is simply the product of others' approval. The use of language allows individuals to become self-conscious agents acting in their communities by taking on its values, roles and norms, but there is no space here for other elements of experience. Not only does this view neglect individual desires and aspirations, but it conflates the personal and social to a degree where social control seems to actually constitute identity. In other words, it is difficult to see how conflicts might arise between the self and one's community and how individuals might cope with exclusion.

Managing an impression

Erving Goffman's (1971 and 1981) well-known work on 'impression management' follows Mead (1934) in seeing the self as situated in every-day life but represents this as an altogether more strategic enterprise. Goffman argued that the self consists of the individual's awareness of the many different roles that are performed in different contexts. These roles involve individuals in continually monitoring the impressions they make on others from behind a public mask, consciously stage-managing how they engage with them in order to achieve particular goals. People move relatively effortlessly, for example, between contexts which demand either highlighting or downplaying occupational, family, gender, class and ethnic roles, and perform these seriously, playfully, self-consciously or ironically at different times. Identity in this view is the outcome of collaborative interactions in particular situations where performances are treated as if they represent the real person.

At the centre of Goffman's detailed analysis of process and meaning in interaction is the relationship between performance and front stage. An actor performs in a setting which is constructed of a stage and a backstage, using parts of the physical context as props (such as a wall of books in an office) and watched by an audience at the same time as the actor is an audience for the plays of that audience. The actor's main goal is to maintain the coherence of a performance and to adjust to different settings. The process of establishing social identity is therefore closely linked to the concept of 'front', or 'that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance' (Goffman, 1971: 22). The front acts as a vehicle of standardisation, allowing others to understand the individual on the basis of projected traits.

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A clear example of this is the conference presentation, where the speaker seeks to achieve rapport through informality and an explicitly interactive stance while meeting expectations of competence associated with an academic presentation. In this (slightly edited) extract, we see a speaker seeking to diffuse potential criticism of her research by establishing an identity as a junior academic (up to the third round of audience laughter), then presenting the purpose and method of her research in a way which meets the audience members' definition of what they expect to find in this genre:

(3)

> **Speaker:** hi. uh good morning. uh it's a great pleasure to be here to give a talk uh, in front of all these people, um. I, uh have to acknowledge the great work of John Swales um, he used to I think he is the first scholar to introduce, uh citation analysis into applied linguistics. his paper appeared in applied linguistics in 1984 I think. and, uh, I didn't read it when it was published, but I later I read it.
> **Audience:** 'laugh'
> **Speaker:** it was very useful I I it was a huge sort of field. my appeal to me to get into this citation analysis but to me it was very useful for my dissertation so I very briefly touched on citation analysis then later I was very, interested to do more then I applied for this Morley scholar and then they kindly gave me but unfortunately when I came in 2001 um, I was really overwhelmed by the amount of data so I did just photocopying all the time
> **Audience:** 'laugh'
> **Speaker:** and I felt a bit guilty of giving a kind of short um showed uh, I'm going to say, I didn't give him a well I didn't do things which i was supposed to do so now I'm trying to pay the debt in instalments
> **Audience:** 'laugh'
> **Speaker:** okay. I'm going to start. so citation analysis is a very useful view and I was very interested in the difference between English speakers' writing and Jap- because I'm Japanese um I thought there might be some well lots of difficulties for Japanese. so I was comparing the differences between Japanese writing and, um English speakers' writing. and because I did my dissertation in the U-K I interviewed the British academics and of course no Japanese and I compared. Then now, when citation analysis came in, I thought oh maybe I can compare sort of papers highly cited sort of very well known written by very well known established scholars, possibly. so I created three categories one um highly cited papers and another one papers written by English speakers, and the other one is papers written by uh Japanese. and then I tried to see some differences …

> (JSCC06)

To present a compelling front, to effectively engage in 'impression management', the actor needs to both fill the expectations of the social

role and consistently communicate the characteristics of the role to others. In addition to content selection, the use of 'contextualisation cues' (Gumperz, 1982) such as changes in voice quality, intonation, gesture and so on can signal in-group bonding and engagement with an audience, thereby indicating particular identity positions (Archakis and Papazachariou, 2008). The audience, in turn, verifies the honesty of the performance though monitoring these unconscious non-verbal signals which are inadvertently 'given off' rather than given. Although we cannot know with certainty how our signals will be interpreted, we attempt to present an 'idealised' version of the front consistent with the norms of the group.

Roles and performances

Impression management therefore draws attention to the *performative* aspects of identity and to the fact that individuals consciously pursue personal goals in attempting to be seen as a certain kind of person. It would be wrong to take the dramaturgical image too far as this is not a pre-learnt and delivered 'script'. Rather, individuals are socialised through habitual experience to 'fill in' and manage the positions they adopt so that actions derive from 'a command of an idiom' which they enact from one moment to the next and become more comfortable with over time. In other words, we consciously *improvise* performances to assume identities as good students, hard-working lab technicians, Nobel scientists, contentious researchers or whatever. We need to enact and re-enact our selves again and again:

A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished and well articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized.

(Goffman, 1971: 75)

The question obviously arises about where this leaves our sense of a single coherent self. Is there a 'real me' hidden on the inside which views these performances with a coherent and unifying eye? Goffman (1975) flatly denies the existence of a character behind the performer and sees the self as 'a stance taking entity' of shifting alignments, strategically adjusting to different communicative events. So by focusing on the analysis of interaction, Goffman avoids the trap of seeing roles as normatively determined behaviour patterns where individuals automatically become the role they play. Roles can be played with more, or less, attachment or antipathy, and actors can conform to or resist the

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roles that are situationally available to them. Many students, for example, resist taking on the kind of objective, author-evacuated stance their academic writing asks of them. In other words, self-conscious decision-making allows actors to distance themselves from expected conventions so that they can 'play at' rather than 'play' a role or bring other aspects of their experience to style the role in their own way.

Goffman (1981) coins the term *footing* to describe the different ways people can take up recognised identities. The choice of footing depends on the combination of three speaking roles available at any moment in talk: the *animator* is the one who speaks or writes the words, the *author* is the one who originates them and the *principal* is the one who believes them. Usually, there is congruence between the three roles, but speakers can make delicate shifts in epistemic or affective stance, changing their commitments and articulating different identities or positions. Such changes capture something of the sparky qualities of interaction and suggest how actors can inhabit roles in individual ways to perform distinct identities so that in a lecture, for example, a speaker may reframe a serious utterance as irony or move from a formal delivery to a personal aside by a change in footing.

One option speakers have is to manipulate the tenor, or interpersonal attitude, they take to their audience. In this extract from a MICASE undergraduate presentation, for example, the speaker seeks to display knowledge and a presentational competence to the tutor for a class grade and also to speak directly to a group of classmates who may be critical of the academic literacy conventions the genre requires. He does this in a way which avoids the ideologically inscribed identity the discourse makes available by separating the *animator* from the *principal*, the presenter from the believer, by mixing the authorised discourse with a more conversational style of delivery:

(4)

> Okay we just went through that. Alright so basically how is this all found out? They um, did a lot of work on mice and rats obviously and they're they have O-B O-B mice which um are lacking the O-B gene and these mi- so these mice they don't produce um, a lot of leptin and they were found to be obese as um, was hypothesized by the researchers. So then they went and they took out the gene that makes neuropeptide Y as well as the gene that makes leptin. And these mice so they thought okay since we're taking out both these genes there's not gonna be any leptin, but there's not gonna be any neuropeptide Y to stimulate feeding. So they thought that these mice um, should show decreased um decreased weight like, lower than normal or like about normal. But what actually ended up happening was these mice were, heavier than the normal mice, but they were, lighter than the mice that were lacked in leptin altogether.
> (MICASE: STP175SU141)

While footing is often communicated prosodically, we can see that the speaker's alignment, or projected self, is at issue here as he is animating a message while keeping some distance from it. Although he takes responsibility for selecting the words and ideas as an author, he frames information about the methodology of obesity experiments as a narrative. By foregrounding the actions of scientists rather than the wider concerns which drive the work, and by adopting conversational features of anecdote, hesitations, repetitions, fillers, projected quotes and vagueness, he separates himself as a *speaker* from the *institution* whose position is represented.

The idea that identity is generated in concrete and specific interactional occasions has been picked up by those who emphasise its *performative* nature. Thus Judith Butler (1990) famously theorises gender identity as endlessly played out in discourse, while Brubaker (2004) shows how an apparently stable identity category such as ethnicity is a product of identification, rather than something people can be said to have. Both reject essentialist models of identity so that Butler, for example, asserts that there is no gender identity behind its expression in actual performances. For post-modern theorists such as Laclau (1990), this transient view of identity suggests that individuals have multiple or hybrid identities and that they can switch between them at will. I would want to argue, along with Butler, however, that identities are not limitless but are constrained by the authority of historical repetition. The ways that we perform our particular identities involve a considerable accumulation of unconscious practices which allow for new elements in each new iteration, but which also structures how we project ourselves in interaction.

1.3 Identity and community

The accumulation of these practices is continually co-constructed and re-constructed in interactions with others in social communities. The idea of *community*, and of some collective identification with a community, is vital to understanding both disciplines and identities. This adds the dimension of routine engagement to identity construction, as it is through relationships with significant others that we identify similarity and difference and so generate both group and individual identities. Behind every individual's engagement in a professional existence lies an institutional identity constructed through countless interactions. Community, in fact, helps us not only to better understand language use but also to appreciate the ways it works in the construction of identity.

The individual and the group

Some theorists believe that group membership is central to identity because it offers a basis for marking out differences and similarities with others though social comparisons. The social psychological perspective of Social Identity Theory or SIT (Giles and Coupland, 1991; Tajfel, 1982), for example, distinguishes between personal identity and social identity and sees both as constructed through processes of categorisation. *Personal identity* refers to the unique personal attributes which differentiate us from others and which are generally based on a sense of self-continuity and uniqueness. S*ocial identity*, on the other hand, is an individual's perception of him- or herself as a member of a group, particularly in terms of value and emotional attachment. Social identities imply that we invest in the identity positions which our groups make available and build a self based on a dichotomy between *us* and *them*, creating in-group identification and out-group discrimination (e.g. Tajfel, 1982).

SIT therefore suggests that group membership provides actors with ways of categorising both others and themselves so that they can perform a recognisable identity, but it also sets up a tension between personal and social identities. This is because awareness of a personal identity inhibits the perception of in-group similarities, while a social identity limits the perception of individual differences among group members. We need to be cautious in creating an arbitrary division between personal and social identity, but this is nevertheless a potentially useful distinction. Both similarity to and difference from others, or assimilation to the group and differentiation from it, are central to identity, but they need to be seen *together* to understand how identities are shaped in interaction. An overemphasis on individuality can easily underestimate the reality and significance of our communities to us, and so how we relate meaningfully and consistently to other members, while too great a focus on similarity can encourage a slide into conformism.

The fact that we generally experience a continuity and coherence in our sense of self makes it important to account for the dual presence of personal and social identities and avoid privileging one over the other (Alvesson et al., 2008). Goffman, Mead and the Symbolic Interactionists attempted to resolve this duality by exploring the relational aspects of identity and foregrounding the ways we adopt consistent alignments to others. It is, for example, difficult to experience oneself as an inspiring supervisor or teacher without a group of devoted students. However, SIT's neglect of interaction in favour of experimentation leads to a narrow concentration on the individual