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Abstract

In order to identify an individual, participants and analysts must interpret signs uttered or displayed by that individual, or signs uttered or displayed by others with respect to that individual. At the moment of utterance or display, however, participants and analysts often do not know what context is relevant for interpreting a sign of identity. We can interpret signs of identity only as they get recontextualized by subsequent discourse (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Goffman, 1976; Silverstein, 1992). Although there are of course many formulaic, predictable interactions, participants and analysts can generally identify an individual only over time, as a pattern of mutually-presupposing indexical signs comes to establish that the sign of identity in question did in fact have a determinate meaning (Silverstein, 1998; Wortham, 2001a).

Comments

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Social Identification Beyond the Speech Event

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In order to identify an individual, participants and analysts must interpret signs uttered or displayed by that individual, or signs uttered or displayed by others with respect to that individual. At the moment of utterance or display, however, participants and analysts often do not know what context is relevant for interpreting a sign of identity. We can interpret signs of identity only as they get recontextualized by subsequent discourse (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Goffman, 1976; Silverstein, 1992). Although there are of course many formulaic, predictable interactions, participants and analysts can generally identify an individual only over time, as a pattern of mutually-presupposing indexical signs comes to establish that the sign of identity in question did in fact have a determinate meaning (Silverstein, 1998; Wortham, 2001a).

In a classroom, for example, when an adolescent says something like “if I go shoot you in the head” to a teacher during discussion of an academic point, we might think that we can identify the student as threatening or at least as disruptive. With more information about the context, however, our interpretation of the sign might change. If the utterance is embedded in a hypothetical discussion, in which the teacher and other students have also imagined immoral acts of this sort in order to clarify an academic argument, the student may be a productive contributor. Other utterances from the conversation, in addition to nonverbal signs, will be essential to interpreting any such sign of identity. In most cases, a set of signs will come consistently to presuppose one meaning or another for the sign—because several signs will all indicate a similar sort of identity for the participant in question. At that point, a plausible interpretation for the signs of identity will gel.

But plausible interpretation of a sign of identity does not depend only on other signs from within the speech event. It also matters, for instance, how that student has been identified in the classroom up to this point in his or her academic career. Has the student been identified as hostile and disruptive, or as congenial and promising? Answering this question requires data from earlier in the academic year, and perhaps data about decades-old institutionalized mechanisms for sorting and identifying students. We might imagine a radial geometry of potentially relevant context, centered on the speech event and the focal sign of identity. Identifying the speaker identified by that sign will require indexical links to various aspects of the context, aspects located at different points in the radial geometry.

This speech event-centered view of social identification has limitations, however, because the social identification of an individual is rarely accomplished, outside of ritual events, in one discursive interaction. Individuals get socially identified across a chain (Agha, 2003; in press) or trajectory (Dreier, 2003) of events, as subsequent events come increasingly to presuppose identities signaled in earlier ones. This view focuses not on one utterance or one event, together with context relevant to that focal point, but on the trajectory across which an individual moves. The interpretation of each point in the trajectory only occurs with respect to a set of mutually-presupposing indexical signs that co-occur within a speech event. But the chain of events across which an individual gets identified is more than just several pieces of the relevant context as seen from the perspective of one utterance or speech event. The chain or trajectory must itself be the focal point of analysis, at least when analyzing the process of social identification, because identification generally occurs across events.

Just as signs of identity cannot normally be interpreted at the moment of utterance, without subsequent relevant context, events of identification often cannot be interpreted without reference to prior and subsequent events along a trajectory. In order for participants and analysts to interpret whether an event of identification in fact characterizes an individual more generally, they must attend to subsequent events in which that individual gets identified. Only as interpretable signs of identity from several events come to presuppose each other does a robust identity for an individual emerge. This chapter describes how social identification can become increasingly robust, across discursive interactions, by tracing the identification of an American high school student in one classroom across an academic year. The chapter describes unexpected twists in the identity development of this student, twists that emerged across several months in a ninth grade classroom. It shows how she develops from being a typical student to being an outcast in the classroom, as the teachers and other students come consistently to position her this way.

1. Beyond Macro and Micro in Social Identification

Once we leave the boundaries of the speech event as the focus of analysis, we seem to have opened Pandora's Box. Many have warned against units of analysis that go beyond what we can observe empirically in a speech event and its immediate context (Garfinkel, 1967; Rampton, 1999; Schegloff, 1998). Macrosociological accounts that use analysts' categories to obliterate participants' realities are a real danger. In order to see how analysts can go beyond the speech event in an empirically warranted and theoretically coherent way, we must briefly examine contemporary "macro," "micro" and "practice" accounts of social identification.

Individuals behave in certain ways or manifest certain characteristics, and those behaviors or characteristics are interpreted by the individual and by others as signs of identity, as indicating that the individual belongs to some recognized social type. Even though countless events of social identification happen unproblematically in everyday life, however, it is not easy to explain how this process occurs. Any sign of identity can be interpreted in more than one way, and the behavior of any individual contains many potential signs of identity which might support conflicting identifications of that individual. This creates indeterminacy in social identification: participants and observers might attend to different signs, or interpret the same signs differently, such that the focal individual would be identified differently. Given this indeterminacy, how do individuals get routinely identified in practice?

This indeterminate relation between signs and categories of identity is never overcome in principle—despite various proposals about how a “grammar” of mental intentions or rigid rules of language use determine what a sign of identity means (e.g., Searle, 1969). In practice, as more signs of identity emerge and index relevant context, the signs do tend to presuppose converging things about individuals’ identities. A sign of identity generally comes to have a clear meaning over time, as subsequent signs recontextualize it in a configuration of signs, relevant context and presupposed categories of identity that solidifies over an interaction (Silverstein, 1992; Wortham, 2001a).

This process of social identification happens only in actual events, and signs of identity can be interpreted only with respect to particular contexts of use. But a sign cannot contribute to social identification if it does not index a more widely circulating model that includes categories for types of people and types of events. Holland and her colleagues (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998) refer to these models as “figured worlds,” culturally shared, often idealized types of events that involve recognizable sorts of people engaged in characteristic sorts of actions.

The most common account of social identification proposes a “dialectic” between macro-level models and categories of identity and micro-level events of identification. “Dialectic” here is not used in the more complex Hegelian sense, but simply to mean the mutual constitution or moving back and forth between two poles. On such an account, more widely circulating categories of identity constrain acts of identification, but particular acts either reinforce or help to transform the macro-level categories. This position is often credited to Giddens (1976), who called it “structuration,” but many others have adopted a similar position (cf., e.g., Linger, 2001).

This “macro-micro dialectic” account of social identification captures some essential aspects of the process. Identification cannot occur unless people presuppose more widely circulating categories and models of identity, but these models only exist in particular events, in which they are always recontextualized and often inflected in specific ways. Despite its apparent plausibility, however, many have recently criticized the macro-micro dialectic model (e.g., Bourdieu, 1972/1977; Holland & Lave, 2001; Urban, 2001). At its worst, the model presupposes macro-level properties of groups or institutions, without explaining how these are created and maintained—except with the vague claim that they are “constituted” in actual events, a claim which means simply that macro-level categories repeatedly appear in actual events. But a deterministic macro-level account would agree with this claim too. Theories of the macro-micro dialectic risk masking macro-level determinism with vague assertions about practice and agency.

Many have recently sought to avoid these shortcomings, while preserving the strengths of macro-micro accounts, by studying “practice.” Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave (Holland & Lave, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991) have begun to do this with their concepts of “community of practice” and “history in person.” Instead of describing individuals and events as already formed and “affected by” or “creating” social categories and institutions, they study the constitution of selves, events and institutions in practice. Practices are sociohistorically produced, but they are not just derived from macro-level categories. Holland and Lave redescribe macro-level categories and institutions in terms of “enduring struggles,” to emphasize how they are contested and constituted in practice. Particular events and actions can intervene in and transform these struggles, but such acts and events are always mediated by sociocultural forms that pre-exist particular events.

Practice theory promises a more specific account of how micro and macro interrelate. By examining the third realm of practice, analysts can explore how categories of identity and events of identification are jointly produced in context. This approach only works if “practice” gets specified, however. One sometimes hears the word invoked, as if its proponents have identified the fundamental level at which social life operates—even though the word gets used to describe widely differing levels, from types of human activities that recur over decades (e.g., Taylor, 1985), to particular sets of events involving similar people that take place over months (e.g., Gregory, 2001), to particular events that take place over a few minutes (e.g., Rampton, 1999). If “practice” is to be where various components come together to produce social identities, so that we can analyze how the process actually works, we must know more specifically what it looks like.

Cole (1996) and Lemke (2000) provide a useful concept here: “timescales.” A timescale is the spatiotemporal envelope within which a process happens. The emergence of capitalism, a process which in some respects has taken millennia, and in other respects centuries (cf. Postone, 1993), occurs at a very long timescale. In contrast, individuals develop their capacities and live their lives at an ontogenetic timescale, across decades. Particular groups develop relationships and local habits, like those that emerge within a classroom, at a “meso-level” timescale that covers the weeks, months or years that a group interacts together. And particular events take place at shorter timescales, taking minutes or hours. “Macro,” “micro” and “practice,” then, abstract away from a diverse continuum of timescales.

“Practice” cannot be one particular, privileged timescale. “In practice” does not mean only events that happen across months but not decades, for example, or across months but not days. One could posit an indefinite number of intervening timescales, from the life of the universe to nanoseconds, and it would be empirically false to claim that some timescale, or some particular combination, was naturally basic to human activity (Lemke, 2000). If “practice” is to help us specify how various relevant components (“macro,” “micro,” “meso” and other) constitute a process like social identification, it must be understood more generically, as something like: the set of processes, drawing on components from various timescales that are relevant to constituting a focal phenomenon.

The timescales relevant to explaining a social phenomenon cannot be determined in advance, but depend on the particular phenomenon being explained. In order to explain the development and spread of Received Pronunciation in Britain, for instance, Agha (2003) shows that the relevant processes took place over a couple of centuries, with crucial developments (e.g., involving the increased circulation of popular novels containing extensive quoted speech) at the timescale of years and decades. Although some processes at both longer and shorter timescales played some role, Agha shows that the key processes in this case involve centuries, decades, and particular events of writing, reading and interactionally circulating the relevant metapragmatic models. In this chapter I argue that, in order to explain the emergence of identities in a classroom, we must attend to a somewhat different set of timescales. We must attend particularly to the locally emerging models and categories of identity in the classroom over the year, as these interrelate with more widely circulating conceptions of gender, race and schooling. And we must attend to how these widely and locally circulating models occur in two particular kinds of events—explicit metapragmatic labeling of students and “participant examples” (Wortham, 1994) that include these students as characters in the example. These two cases, of Received Pronunciation and classroom identity development, illustrate how the relevant

timescales for explaining any social phenomenon depend on the particulars of the case. We cannot develop a general social theory that specifies the primordial timescales from which all phenomena can be explained, because different phenomena will best be explained using different configurations of timescales.

The analyses below illustrate how one student gets identified contrary to some important macro and meso-level models of gender in a classroom, and how she struggles with and against her emerging identity. The analyses show how meso-level processes, like the development of categories within a particular classroom over several months, play an essential role in constituting the social identification of a student. I do not claim that the particular timescales that I cite in this case are always the right ones for studying social identification. The relevant processes and timescales will vary depending on the focal phenomenon being analyzed. Nor do I claim to have analyzed all timescales relevant to the social identification of this student in this classroom—to do so would require much more space. But I do claim to show that adequate analysis of social identification in this case must attend to how processes at various timescales interconnect. I emphasize the meso-level processes of teachers' and students' months-long development of categories and identities, in order to highlight how micro and macro by themselves will not suffice as analytic tools.

2. Methods and Ethnographic Background

Colleoni High is a large three-story brick building that occupies an entire city block. When it was built about 50 years ago, Colleoni enrolled primarily Catholic children from Irish and Italian backgrounds. The neighborhood has become predominantly African American, together with growing populations of Latino and South Asian immigrants. In the early 1990s, when I was there, the student body was ethnically mixed and mostly working and lower class. 50% of the students were black, 25% were Latino, 15% were white, and 10% were Asian. The faculty contained many whites, some blacks, and a few Latinos.

I spent 128 hours at Colleoni over two years, more than 100 of them in classes. Three-quarters of those classroom hours came in the final year, when I audiotaped most classes that I observed. Throughout my time at Colleoni I took fieldnotes, I had many informal conversations with teachers after classes, and I conducted interviews with teachers, administrators, and students. I spent about 50 hours in one particular class across the final year. Fifteen of the 19 students in this ninth grade class were black, and 14 were female.

Like many other schools in the city, Colleoni participated voluntarily in desegregation by offering a special educational program to students throughout the district. At Colleoni, the program was based on guidelines from *The Paideia Proposal* (Adler, 1982). Parents and educators considered this program to be academically superior to most neighborhood schools, but not on par with the prestigious magnet programs. About one quarter of the students at Colleoni participated in this special program. Most of these students did not live in the neighborhood, and some commuted substantial distances. Following Adler's advice, the teachers at Colleoni tried to engage student with "genuine questions." They encouraged "seminar" discussions in which students presented and defended positions on complex questions, instead of simply parroting back the teacher's preferred answers. The two ninth grade teachers that I observed in the final year, Mrs. Bailey and Mr. Smith, ran

joint history/English classes twice a week, when they had 80-minute seminar discussions with the nineteen students. The other three days a week each teacher ran more conventional didactic lessons for 40 minutes each. Increasingly over the year, they engaged students in rich discussions of complex texts—discussions in which students came to recognize issues of enduring human concern and to formulate their own arguments about these issues.

I made contact with Colleoni through the administrator who ran the special program. I told him I was interested in observing the program itself, as well as classroom language use. He selected certain teachers for me to talk to. I spoke with these teachers, received permission from them, and then began visiting their classrooms. I introduced myself to teachers as someone who had read a lot about classrooms in books, but who did not know much about them in practice. I tried to minimize any authority I brought with me from the university, by presenting myself as a novice who wanted to learn how teaching and learning actually happen. Nonetheless, teachers were initially uncomfortable with me in their classrooms. I received many sidelong glances, as well as indirect requests for information on what I was doing and what I thought of them. Like the teachers, at first the students wondered who I was and what I was doing. After a few weeks, however, teachers and students came to ignore me during class. They clearly knew I was there, especially when I began recording classes. After a particularly bad joke someone would occasionally comment “and that was recorded for posterity.” But after the first few weeks of recording, I noticed few differences between the classes I had observed without recording equipment and those I taped.

The analyses for this chapter involved two types of speech events: explicit metapragmatic descriptions of the focal student and “participant examples,” in which this student herself becomes a character in examples used to discuss the subject matter (Wortham, 1994). In analyzing the tapes and fieldnotes from Mr. Smith and Mrs. Bailey's class, I focused on such examples. I transcribed all examples that included the focal student and analyzed them for any implications they might have for students' social identities. The methods of discourse analysis, which identify types of cues that often serve as signs of identity, are described in Wortham (2001a). In addition, I have gone through all tapes and notes, looking for explicit statements about, and implicit positioning relevant to, the focal student's identity. The data analyses in the next section present representative instances from across the year in which the focal student (“Tyisha”) gets socially identified, plus one extended participant example that contributed to her emerging social identity in the classroom.

3. Tyisha the Disruptive Student

Almost from the beginning of the year in Mrs. Bailey and Mr. Smith's class, teachers and most students presupposed that girls and boys have different social identities with respect to school. As Mrs. Bailey said explicitly one day in November, girls are easier for teachers to deal with, because they conform to school expectations, and thus they are more likely to succeed in school and in adulthood. Boys are more difficult to deal with, because they resist school expectations, and they are less likely to succeed both in school and in later life. This expectation about identity draws on circulating sociohistorical patterns, like those that identify adolescent boys as disdainful of school success (Newkirk, 2002) and those that identify black male students as particularly concerned with respect and more likely to resist participation in school (Anderson 1999; Ferguson 2000). But the gender difference was especially salient in this classroom, for two reasons. First, Mrs.

Bailey believed what she said—she both explicitly and implicitly stated it throughout the year, and the girls took many opportunities to remind the boys about these presupposed gender differences. Second, from early in the year the boys all tried to sit together in the back of the room, and all but one of them generally refused to participate, while many girls participated actively and dominated classroom discussions.

3.1. *From Normative Girl to Disruptive Student*

At the beginning of the year, Tyisha fit this gender stereotype: she was an active, successful female student. She was very engaged, offering her opinions on many subjects related to class discussion. Most of the students started the year trying to figure out and parrot back what the teachers wanted them to say. Because Tyisha rarely did this, but instead offered her own opinions, the teachers initially identified her as a student who made her own arguments. In a Paideia seminar this is desirable, so they identified Tyisha as a good student.

The following segment comes from a class on October 9. (“T/B” stands for Mrs. Bailey; “FST” stands for an unidentified female student; “TYI” stands for Tyisha; other abbreviations in subsequent transcripts stand for the pseudonyms of other students; transcription conventions are in the appendix).

- T/B:** okay, we've got women having ba:bies. how does that relate to having women goddesses?
- 40 **TYI:** it doesn't, to me.
- T/B:** it doesn't to you. how about you?
- FST:** maybe they think that that's supernatural.
- T/B:** that that's supernatural? having a baby is supernatural.

At line 40 Tyisha fails to give an answer the teacher is looking for. She also emphasizes her opinion, by adding the phrase “to me.” But Mrs. Bailey does not evaluate Tyisha negatively. In fact, the teacher repeats Tyisha’s utterance and goes on to ask for another student’s opinion. Mrs. Bailey often asks several students in turn for their opinions on issues raised in the text, and here we see how Tyisha’s habitual personalization of her opinions fits with the teacher’s expectations. Especially early in the year, the teachers reacted positively to Tyisha when she offered her own opinions, because they wanted other students to do the same.

Later on in the October 9 class, Tyisha says something deliberately off-topic, apparently as a joke. In the following segment they are discussing bees, in order to understand a Chinese myth that compares humans to insects.

- T/B:** bees do what?
- TYI:** kill.
- 290 [laughter]
- MRC:** some bee pollen, they raise[pollen
- T/B:** [they fertilize=
- FST:** flowers.
- T/B:** what do spiders do? they fertilize plants. bees are
- 295 people who, are insects who ahh, Cassandra?

At line 290, several students treat Tyisha's comment as a joke, by laughing. It was a small joke, but apparently successful. Note that the teachers do not discipline Tyisha for this. Mrs. Bailey simply ignores Tyisha's comment and continues with the discussion. Tyisha then reenters the conversation more constructively.

T/B: how long do insects live?

CAN: maybe ten days, about[a week

MRC: [a week.

T/B: a day, a couple of months, alright.

320 **TYI:** some of them a day because you know, if they bite you, they die.

T/B: okay some of them as soon- as soon as they, they, they put their stinger in it, they're dead. okay, now put that back to Pampu. why might the Chinese believe or feel that ma:n

325 comes from the earth as an insect. that ma:n is similar to an insect?

At lines 322-3, Mrs. Bailey restates and thus ratifies Tyisha's comment as a useful contribution, one which allows Mrs. Bailey to go on to her analogy between the mortality of bees and the idea of humans as like insects (at lines 323-326).

At the beginning of the year, then, the teachers treated Tyisha as a normal student. They appreciated her opinions and they did not discipline her when she made jokes. After a month or two, however, several other students learned to offer arguments and give evidence as the teachers wanted. At this point, the teachers increasingly distinguished between Tyisha's comments—which they began to characterize as “opinions” offered without supporting evidence—and more successful students who gave better arguments. Tyisha's behavior had not changed much. But relative to the teachers' expectations and to other students' increasingly successful participation, it looked as if Tyisha was acting differently. In December and January, her social identity began to shift from being a good student to being a disruptive one. Both teachers and other students began to treat her this way.

Evidence for this comes from the teachers' increasingly blunt evaluations of Tyisha. Right before the following segment (from January 18), Mrs. Bailey had just given an interpretation of Aristotle's text. Aristotle is not saying that women are slaves to men, only that the relationship between a man and woman is partly analogous to the relationship between a master and a slave.

TYI: okay, when- um Sylvia was talking about the slave and the ma:ster, the master, okay, the slave, he uses

430 his hands and stuff but- they won't give him a chance to use his- to teach him to read and stuff and the master know how, so he using his mind. why does he [[4 unintelligible syllables]

T/B: [okay, didn't- you

435 just missed the connection, the con- the thing is that- do not look at this as saying that slaves are manual workers, slaves- women are slaves. look at these as four distinct relationships.

Tyisha's reasoning may be wandering a bit from lines 428-433, but she is apparently struggling with issues relevant to the text. Nonetheless, Mrs. Bailey interrupts to tell her that "you just missed the connection" (lines 434-435).

This incident alone might have been momentary impatience on the teacher's part, but the following evaluation follows immediately.

- T/B:** and in Greeks- in Greece, there certainly were slaves that used their mind. yeah?
- 445 **FST:** I'm talking about going back to what Tyisha said about how slaves that- well- if, okay if a master didn't teach the slaves how to read, how did they learn how to read? how did we know how to read and talk ourselves?
- T/B:** o[kay, you just missed-
- 450 **TYI:** [right, thank you.
- T/B:** you just missed the point.
- JAS:** you missed the point. we're not compari[ng them.
- TYI:** [I know, but I'm talking about-
- 455 **T/B:** okay, look at this again, mental, manual workers, are mental workers

At line 445 a student refers back to the earlier comment by Tyisha, building on Tyisha's comment to ask a question. Normally, these teachers encouraged students to refer to each other's comments, as a way of developing more complex arguments across the group. And at line 450 Tyisha explicitly thanks the other student for referencing her point and asking the question.

But Mrs. Bailey immediately jumps in (at line 449) and returns to her earlier evaluation of Tyisha's point, with similar phrasing: "you just missed the point." The speed of Mrs. Bailey's intervention, and her blunt characterization of Tyisha's (and the second student's) point, is uncharacteristic for this class. These teachers want students to develop their own arguments, and they generally help students who are struggling to articulate something. But by January they have started to presuppose that Tyisha's points will not contribute to the conversation—that her comments are disruptive and not substantive. Note that another student (Jasmine) echoes Mrs. Bailey's evaluation of Tyisha, at line 452. Other students, too, have come to presuppose that Tyisha is disruptive. Jasmine also uses "we" in line 452, probably to distinguish Tyisha and her one defender from the teachers and the other students.

This split between Tyisha and the rest of the girls broadened over time, as Tyisha was increasingly identified as a disruptive student. The teachers continued to react quickly and harshly to many of her comments, presupposing that her contributions were intellectually unproductive and disruptive. The following segment, for instance, comes from January 25.

- T/B:** okay. well I think that he's talking more not about not being with people, but that he: will not have to have people bail him out at any point. he
- 1055 can make it on his own.
- TYI:** so you gonna be the only person living there?

T/B: no. that's not what he's saying, Tyisha.
CAN: he's saying that he can live without people
 1060 helping him.

At lines 1052-1055, Mrs. Bailey is summarizing her interpretation of a point. Tyisha offers a gloss at lines 1056-1057, a gloss which misstates Mrs. Bailey's point, and the teacher reacts immediately by telling Tyisha she's wrong. This quick and blunt response contrasts with the teachers' habitual reaction to other students, and to Tyisha earlier in the year, when they would have explored her point or been more gentle in evaluating her response—as they were on October 9 when reacting to her joke about the bees. Another student gives a more accurate gloss at lines 1059-1060 and the class goes on discussing the point, ignoring Tyisha.

By February, Tyisha's identity as a disruptive outcast had solidified. It was then generally presupposable that she was disorganized, prone to offer comments that took the class off-topic, and concerned with her own ideas more than with helping the group develop a coherent discussion. Thus Tyisha became an exception to the gender stereotype that teachers and students continued to presuppose. She was a girl who nonetheless was not a good student and was not likely to succeed.

By early February, Mr. Smith ("T/S") was characterizing Tyisha explicitly as a bad student who does not listen. The following segment comes from February 11.

50 **T/S:** I will do a spot check, spot check your notebook.
 the notebook, and you better listen Tyisha, because you
 have a habit of never listening to me. °Tyisha°
TYI: I know what you're talking about[
T/S: [no.
 55 **TYI:** you're talking about[the notebook
T/S: [°your ears are unfortunately
closed sometimes.°
 ...
T/S: number five. who made the laws?
 65 **FST:** the assembly.
T/S: okay[what page?
TYI: [°the king°
T/S: no. you're wrong. because you're guessing without
looking. and that is=[
 70 **TYI:** [no way.
T/S: =exactly what you do as a bad[student.
TYI: [no I wasn't
T/S: halt.

At line 52, Mr. Smith says that Tyisha never listens to him. And at line 71 he calls her a bad student. Mr. Smith had a temper, and he sometimes made inappropriate comments like this about other students. But Tyisha was much more likely to be the target, because teachers and students had presupposed that she was a disruptive student.

My data contain at least a dozen other telling examples, from December through May, of how Tyisha was explicitly identified as disruptive by the teachers and students. They accused her of not listening, of being wrong, and of making comments that led discussion

off-track. These comments collectively show that the teachers and students had begun to identify her differently than they did earlier in the year. From September through November she was just another student, but by December and January she had become a disruptive student. As such, they often assumed that her comments were incorrect or off-topic. Instead of taking time to explore the reasoning behind her comments—and, it must be said, there was only sometimes defensible reasoning discernible behind them—the teachers and other students quickly dismissed Tyisha and moved back to their own discussion.

In addition to these explicit metapragmatic characterizations of Tyisha, I have also identified eight segments from classroom discussions (lasting on average more than half an hour), from November through February, in which Tyisha plays a major role. She herself becomes an example in each of these cases, an example that gets discussed as analogous to the text and as analogous to the curricular issue on the table. Tyisha becomes the favored example when a text includes an outcast—someone who acts for his or her own good without considering the good of the society. As teachers and students discuss more of these examples, Tyisha's identity as an outcast in the classroom becomes more and more heavily presupposed. Tyisha's identity certainly gets presupposed and reinforced in other classroom events, but I argue that these eight classroom discussions carry particular force because of the extended focus on her as a topic and because of the power that such participant examples can have (cf. Wortham 1994, 2001b).

All of these eight cases—which I argue play an important role in Tyisha's identity development—are participant examples (Wortham 1994, 2001b). Participant examples include, as a character in the example, at least one teacher or student who is participating in the classroom discussion. Such examples double the roles played by those teachers or students, because they become characters in the example as well as participants in the classroom discussion. This doubling of roles makes participant examples rich sites for socially salient interactional positioning. Discussion of participants' hypothetical identities within the example can communicate things about the actual participants, as a sort of double entendre.

Furthermore, it turns out that the content represented by a participant example and the interactional patterns enacted through that example can sometimes *run parallel* (Wortham 1994, 1997). That is, in discussing certain events as the content of an example, teachers and students sometimes *enact* analogous events in their classroom interaction. Examples involving such a parallel between representation and enactment are particularly likely to contribute both to social identification and to academic learning (Wortham 2001b). The following section analyzes a participant example that involved Tyisha, in order to illustrate how this type of classroom discussion facilitates her social identification in the classroom.

3.2. Tyisha the “courageous liar”

Tyisha did not become a disruptive student solely through the teachers' intervention. Tyisha herself often embraced an oppositional identity. Sometimes she did this in ways that the teachers themselves identified as productive, when she challenged arguments made by the teachers and authors of the texts. Sometimes, however, her penchant for defending unpopular positions took her too far, and she wasted class time while refusing to admit a mistake. She also made arguments and interrupted the teachers in apparently deliberate attempts to antagonize them.

The following example illustrates these behaviors. This discussion occurred on January 18, while the two teachers and the students were exploring Aristotle's definition of courage as articulated in his *Politics*. Specifically, at this point in the discussion, Mrs. Bailey had asked whether a person could courageously obey as well as courageously resist. She suggested that one could obey courageously, and she gave brief examples like overcoming anxiety to give a presentation in class. Tyisha then volunteered her own participant example, supposedly to support Mrs. Bailey's point, saying "Mrs. Bailey, I think I have one."

As it turns out, however, Tyisha's example does not illustrate Mrs. Bailey's point and it leads the class off track. Given that Tyisha laughs while giving the example, and that she defends her example with increasingly outrageous claims, it may well be that she intended to make a joke and take the class off topic. She did similar things at other times during the year. This example illustrates how Tyisha interactionally positions herself, and gets positioned, as a disruptive and marginal member of the class. Tyisha introduces her example as follows.

- TYI:** okay, I(hhh)- I had a friend. and she was like,
sneaking out with a boy, and she lied and said that she was
going with her friends. (hh) a(h)nd she told me, if my
270 mother call, to tell her she was at the zoo with her friend
Stacey. now that took her courage to te(h)ll me.
FST: (hhh)
TYI: and it took c(hh)oura(h)ge for me to tell her
mother that.
275 **FST:** °mhm°
T/B: did it take courage for[her to tell her mother tha[t?
FST: [no [I
don't think so
T/B: why would th[at
280 **TYI:** [yeah it took courage to tell my
mother
FST: [3 unintelligible syllables]
MRC: I don't think it took courage.

Tyisha gives her example at lines 267-271, and then at lines 273-274 she claims that it took courage for her to lie to her friend's mother. Since they are discussing Aristotle's definition of courage, this might be a relevant example to explore—even though it does not illustrate the concept of "courage through obedience" that Mrs. Bailey had asked for.

But the example presents interactional problems for the teachers, as Tyisha probably intended. Because the example involves immoral behavior (at least from an adult's point of view), if Tyisha's behavior was in fact courageous then the teachers would have to acknowledge her courage while condemning her behavior. We might speculate that Tyisha is using this discussion of subject matter to put the teachers in an awkward position, or at least to slip illicit topics into an academic discussion in such a way that she cannot be sanctioned for it. She is both adopting and reveling in an oppositional identity, as an adolescent who helps her friend get away with illicit dates and who can also manage to talk about this in an academic discussion—perhaps even in such a way that her oppositional behavior gets classified as courageous. Thus she gives an example of herself

being oppositional in relation to her friend's mother, and she herself acts oppositional in class by giving this as an example.

By laughing several times while she gives her example, Tyisha (at lines 267, 269, 271 and 273) and another student (at line 272) seem to support this interpretation of her example as partly a joke, or as an attempt to trap the teachers between illicit topics and academic content. At line 276, Mrs. Bailey implies that Tyisha's behavior was not courageous, and a student agrees with her at lines 277-278. Tyisha interrupts Mrs. Bailey's next comment, to restate that it did in fact take courage on her part. Another student (Maurice, or "MRC") then sides with the teacher at line 283, denying that Tyisha's lie took courage. So Mrs. Bailey's initial reaction to Tyisha's challenge is to deny that Tyisha was courageous.

Mr. Smith, however, gives Tyisha another opportunity to make her case in the next segment. He interrupts Mrs. Bailey's attempt to change the topic, saying (at lines 287-288) "let her finish...". Then he asks:

- 295 **T/S:** then, which is courage?
T/B: shhh
FST: [so you gonna sit there and lie to[her face
T/S: [lying [to lie: or to tell the
truth be[cause you=
300 **FST:** [°to tell the truth°
T/S: = knew that she was wrong.
CAN: °cause its wrong°
FST: tell the truth. tell the truth
TYI: both of them=
305 **JAS:** =both of them take courage [to me
TYI: [=both of them take
cou [rage, you all wrong
T/S:[explain how both.

Mr. Smith calls for Tyisha to elaborate her example, perhaps hoping that she will provide something more for them to work with in interpreting Aristotle's account of courage. He also explicitly describes Tyisha as "lying," for the first time. When Tyisha gave the example, she used the metapragmatic verb "tell" to describe her own act of speaking (lines 270, 273), although she said her friend was "sneaking out" and "lied" to her mother (lines 268).

In a segment not shown here Tyisha then elaborates her example, somewhat unclearly, and several students speak over each other. In Mr. Smith's response, however, it becomes clear that he was not really siding with Tyisha. At lines 295 and 298-299, Mr. Smith asks whether it was really courageous to lie, or whether it would in fact have been more courageous to tell her friend's mother the truth. At lines 300, 302 and 303, other students side with Mr. Smith, claiming that lying is wrong and that telling the truth would have been more courageous. But at line 304 Tyisha claims that both lying and telling the truth could have been courageous, and at line 305 Jasmine agrees with her. Tyisha ends with a characteristic utterance at line 307—"you all wrong." Note how she is separating herself off from the rest of the class and defending an unpopular position. This separation is not only *enacted* in her argument against the teachers and other students in the classroom, but also presupposed in the *content* of the example. By describing herself as someone who

breaks moral rules, which the teachers and many of the students adhere to, Tyisha also marginalizes herself from other members of the group.

Mr. Smith then asks Tyisha to explain how both lying and telling the truth could be courageous. So she continues.

TYI: because (hhhh[h])

310 **FST:** [because

T/S: let her

TYI: if I lyin'- If I'm sittin' here lying in another person
mother face, that took courag(h)e. [and if I'm=

T/S: [why?

315 **TYI:** =telling her because you don't-

FST: lies.

T/S: have you never lied to your mother?

FST: °hnuh°

TYI: no- not- not to no one else's momma, no.

320 **T/S:** have you ever lied to a teacher who is a mother?

FST: uh(hhh)

TYI: that's different.

FST: aw man.

STS: [2 seconds of laughter]

325 **TYI:** that's very different um- I mean that's different. I'm
always over there visiting this friend and her mother, might
have had trus- trust in me and I come over and tell her this
big, bo:ld faced lie.

From lines 309-315, Tyisha reiterates her claim that lying to her friend's mother took courage. Mr. Smith then takes control of the conversation, asking her questions at lines 314, 317, and 320, although his questions still do not make clear how this example illuminates Aristotle's definition of courage.

Mr. Smith's question at line 320 brings the example closer to students' and teachers' real identities in the classroom, when he asks whether Tyisha has "ever lied to a teacher who is a mother." Everyone knows that Mrs. Bailey is a mother—in fact, the mother of a teenage girl. So Mr. Smith's question highlights the interactional tension that Tyisha's example raises. Tyisha is proud of the fact that she lied to her friend's mother, even though Mrs. Bailey and other adults would clearly identify with the friend's mother and consider this wrong. Tyisha thus opposes herself to Mrs. Bailey and people like her.

Tyisha revels in this oppositional identity, as illustrated in the sequence of increasingly colorful metapragmatic terms that she uses to describe her lie. As noted above, she started by using the verb "tell" to describe what she said to her friend's mother (at line 270). Mr. Smith reframed this as a "lie" at line 288, and opposed such lying to "telling the truth" (line 298). Another student spiced this up a bit: "so you gonna sit there and lie to her face" (line 297). Tyisha herself embraced this characterization of her act at lines 312-313: "I'm sitting here lying in another person mother face." And she ends up with: "her mother might have had trust in me and I come over and tell her this big bold-faced lie" (lines 326-328). Far from euphemizing what she did, Tyisha ends up embracing the non-normative character of her action and proudly flaunting social norms. This clearly opposes her to Mrs. Bailey, who might well be worrying about her own daughter's friends doing the same thing to her.

In addition to embracing an oppositional identity here, Tyisha has also embedded this assertion of oppositional identity within an academic discussion about Aristotle's concept of courage. This hijacking of the discussion itself constitutes an oppositional act. Mr. Smith nonetheless continues to pursue the discussion as if it had academic merit. Perhaps he thinks that he can win the argument about whether Tyisha was in fact courageous. Or perhaps he recognizes that her argument does have some merit (it is at least arguable that one *can* sin courageously). If Tyisha's purpose is to hijack the discussion, however, his pursuing the example furthers her agenda.

- T/S: did you feel courage or did you feel guilty?
 330 TYI: I felt both of them ° [2 unintelligible syllables] °
 T/S: courage to be guilty? [quizzical intonation contour, mid-low-mid]
 TYI: (hhh) nah, but it took courage to do that.
 JAS: [it do take
 335 courage to be guilty.
 FST: [1 second of laughter]
 TYI: I know. like we goin' to [steal something. it took=
 T/S: [you should be guilty
 TYI: =courage for me to go sneakin out of the store, right?
 340 FST: hahaha
 T/S: courage to be guilty.
 JAS: you thief.
 STS: [1 second of laughter]
 JAS: cause- and you- okay, you go in the store. and you steal
 345 something, I mean [that take courage =
 TYI: [it took courage to do it
 JAS: =to steal something, and then you gonna be guilty
 afterward, right? right?
 TYI: s- say it. go ahead.
 350 STS: [2 seconds of laughter]

At line 329, Mr. Smith returns to the question of whether Tyisha felt courage or guilt while lying. Tyisha claims she felt both at line 330. Mr. Smith then seems to be making fun of her argument with a “quizzical” intonation contour. Students laugh a bit after his remark. After Tyisha reiterates that her lie was courageous at line 333, Jasmine apparently makes fun of Tyisha at lines 334-335, saying “it do take courage to be guilty.” Students laugh at the joke.

It is ambiguous here, however, whether the other students are laughing at Tyisha or with Tyisha. If my reading has been correct, Tyisha has all along intended for her example to be at least partly a joke. So it may be that she has succeeded at getting other students to laugh. Jasmine's comment at lines 334-335, however, seems to follow up on Mr. Smith's quizzical comment and to make fun of Tyisha. Tyisha responds with a second example, one involving more serious transgressions than the first, at lines 337-339. She may be trying to build on the success of her first example, which managed both to make a joke and to condone oppositional behavior. But Mr. Smith's echoes Jasmine's tease at line 341, and then Jasmine herself laughingly calls Tyisha a thief.

It appears for a moment as if everyone is laughing at Tyisha, but then Jasmine sides with her in the argument against Mr. Smith. At lines 344-348, Jasmine agrees with Tyisha (and her own earlier comment) that moral transgressions like stealing take courage. Tyisha echoes this at line 346. It is relevant here that Jasmine is the most verbally skilled of the students. She won the school-wide student talent competition that year, and she regularly had the class rolling with laughter. Her comments here contribute to the academic argument but are also very funny.

At this point, in several lines not included here, a student objects that stealing is wrong, while Tyisha and Jasmine defend their claim that stealing can be both courageous and guilt-inducing. Then another student claims that stealing is wrong and brings the discussion back to the concept of courage.

- LIN:** I don't think that's courage to go and steal a candy bar
 385 [because courage- right=
MST: [it's stupid
LIN: =cause courage, the virtue of courage, what we read
 of courage was to do something- something goo:d, not to
 do something and go and do something [evil.
 390 **TYI:** [that's not
 true
FST: [yeah that's
 right
TYI: courage is not just doing something goo:d.
 395 [students talking at once]
TYI: if I go[shoot you in the head
T/B: [shhhhhh
 [students arguing]
T/B: ahh, if we can- if we can talk about courage as being
 400 something good, the virtue of courage, and go back to that
 definition, and I know you never bought into it, but the rest
 of us seem to be, using this as a definition, so therefore,
 we'd ask you to kind of go along with it.
FST: okay.
 405 **T/B:** the idea of courage, was not just doing things you're
afraid to do, but doing things that- overcoming your fear
 for a good reason. Linda?
LIN: I was saying what Tyisha said, if you go shoot
 somebody in the head, you gonna call that courage? or you
 410 is gonna call that stupid?

While Linda disagrees with Tyisha and Jasmine's claim that stealing requires courage (at line 384), one of the male students ("MST," an unidentified male student) slips in a characterization of stealing: "it's stupid" (line 386). One might infer that people like Tyisha who defend such behavior are also stupid. Linda then gives an even more highly presupposing evaluation of stealing and other moral transgressions: they are "evil" (line 389). This casts Tyisha and Jasmine as defending something unforgivable.

Tyisha continues to argue that one can courageously commit immoral acts. But at line 396 she chooses an example that does not seem well-designed to pursue an academic discussion. "If I go shoot you in the head" is provocative, because of the second person

pronoun and because shooting someone is even more unethical than lying and stealing . By escalating the immorality of the topic, Tyisha seems to be pushing the discussion toward what Goffman (1974) called “flooding out”—bursting out of its character as an academic discussion and becoming simply an occasion for laughter or confrontation.

Mrs. Bailey’s reaction at lines 399-403 frames Tyisha’s comments as an attempt to disrupt the classroom discussion. Mrs. Bailey could have said: “that’s an interesting argument Tyisha, but how can an act be both virtuous and immoral at once? Would Aristotle have agreed with that?” Instead, she skillfully frames Tyisha’s comment as moving against the will of the rest of the class, without baldly asserting her own authority. She starts at lines 399-401 by establishing *her* version of the contested issue as a “definition.” Tyisha has argued that immoral acts can require courage, and this is a defensible position. But Mrs. Bailey asserts that courage is something good, by definition. Tyisha and Jasmine “never bought into” this definition, “but the rest of us” did. Tyisha and Jasmine, then, get positioned outside the teachers’ and others students’ group, as people who adopt idiosyncratic definitions and thus hinder the group discussion. Mrs. Bailey acknowledges their dissent, and asks them to go along instead of imposing her will. It would violate her pedagogical philosophy to tell students what to think. But in fact she has characterized Tyisha and Jasmine not only as outcasts, but also as the sort of people who refuse to accept agreed-upon definitions, and who thus disrupt the productive work that the rest of the class is pursuing.

In this discussion of lying, stealing and shooting, then, Tyisha both embraces an oppositional identity and also skillfully manages to insert discussion of these illicit topics into discussion of the curriculum. She both describes herself as and enacts an identity as clever and counter-hegemonic (or, from the teachers’ point of view, as annoying and disruptive)—thus creating a parallel between her narrated and her enacted identities. The teachers and other students follow Tyisha’s lead and identify her as morally suspect. Their discussion excludes Tyisha from the group of teachers and other students in two ways. First, Tyisha gets (willingly) described as the sort of person who would baldly lie to a friend’s mother, unlike the rest of them. Second, she positions herself in the discussion, and gets positioned, as a student who makes jokes, takes the class off-topic, and refuses to accept generally agreed-upon definitions. Her identity as a disruptive student thus gets further solidified—at Tyisha’s own initiative, but also with the help of the teachers and students.

4. Conclusions

The teachers and students discussed several examples like this one across the academic year, in which Tyisha was both described and interactionally positioned as a disruptive student (cf. Wortham, 2003, for another case and Wortham, 2004, for another perspective on this same case; Wortham, in press, offers a detailed account of Tyisha and other students across the whole academic year). These examples, together with explicit metapragmatic descriptions of her as disruptive, established this identity for Tyisha. From September through November, she was a normal student. But in December, January and February she increasingly became a disruptive one. This social identification emerged in contrast to the macro and meso-level presuppositions about girls as more likely to succeed, and in this respect Tyisha’s identity was unexpected.

Teachers and students did draw on macro and meso-level categories to identify Tyisha. The concept of a disruptive student presupposes well-established macro-level models of

appropriate classroom behavior and the authority of teachers, and the category of “loud black girls” also circulates more widely (Fordham, 1996). Note, however, that all the students identified as cooperative, intelligent and promising in this classroom were also black girls. In order to account for why Tyisha in particular was identified as disruptive, as opposed to all her black female peers, we need a more complex account that shows how macro-level categories were appropriated and transformed as teachers and students built local models of identity, and how these local models were presupposed in particular events of identification that involved Tyisha. Tyisha’s trajectory of identification must be explored, across the months in which it emerged, not simply derived from macro-level patterns or individual micro-level events.

Social identification, then, emerges across a trajectory of events. There can be no general formul for how to explain the emergence of a social identity—one that explains all social identification in terms of certain timescales and processes. In this case, local classroom models of identity played a central role, but only as part of a configuration including more widely circulating and shorter timescale events. It is an empirical question in each case what configuration of timescales is relevant to explaining social identification.

Appendix: Transcription Conventions

| | |
|---------|---|
| '.' | abrupt breaks or stops |
| '?' | rising intonation |
| '.' | falling intonation |
| '_' | (underline) stress |
| (1.0) | silences, timed to the nearest second |
| ' ' | indicates simultaneous talk by two speakers, with one utterance represented on top of the other and the moment of overlap marked by left brackets |
| '[...]' | transcriber comment |
| '.' | pause or breath without marked intonation |
| '(hh)' | laughter breaking into words while speaking |

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