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CHAPTER 3: Identity as difference: On distinctiveness, cool and inclusion.

Mihalis Kakos and Paul Cooper

Introduction

Based on our shared interests in identity, group membership and inclusion and on previous work which explored the appeal of negative affect in adolescents (Cooper & Kakos, 2013), the discussion in this chapter focuses on questions about the significance of difference and individuals' distinctiveness and its relevance to inclusion. The aim of this chapter is to share some of the steps in this jointly developed thinking which led us to a juxtaposition of the interactionist perspectives to identity to those suggested by intersubjective approaches and from there to the exploration of the role of differing in group membership and belonging.

Drawing from our experience in education we reflect on the assumption often embedded in inclusive and especially intercultural education programmes that views diversity in school communities as a challenge which needs to be managed in order for social cohesion to be established or protected (Pagani, 2014). Such view of diversity reflects the understanding of social cohesion as a desirable aim which is associated with the development of generalised trust among members of the group which is known to be negatively impacted by diversity and difference (Hooghe et al., 2009). In the chapter we will suggest that the above views which are largely in agreement with the interactionist approach to identity, effectively promote a model of interculturalism and inclusion which assumes that individuals are in a constant battle with an internalised diversity and in a continuous effort to handle and prioritise multiple identities.

Departing from a problematisation of the interactionist dyadic conceptualisation of individuality based on the distinction between the 'I' and the social selves, we will move to an exploration of the psychoanalytical perspectives in the construction of identity and the process of subjectification. From that angle and reflecting on evidence drawn from short informal discussions with two groups of adolescents, we will initiate a discussion on the prevalence of the concept of distinctiveness and of resistance in subjectification. We will then suggest that the recognition of the significance of distinctiveness may lead our understanding of identity construction much closer to individuals' lived experience, especially in adolescence.

Interactionism: Identity as the embedment of the 'other' in the construction of Self

Symbolic interactionism, the theory upon which interactionist approaches are largely based, considers the development of individuals' understanding of social norms and the construction of self and of self-perception as the result of the interaction with others. (see Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934). Engaged in human interactions, individuals build up "their perspective lines of conduct by constant interpretation of each other's ongoing lines of action. As participants take account of each other's ongoing acts, they [..] arrest, reorganise, or adjust their own intentions, wishes, feelings, and attitudes; similarly, they [..] judge the fitness of the norms, values, and group prescriptions for the situation being formed by the acts of the others" (Blumer, 1969, p.66) and evaluate the fitness of their own behaviours to the norms. Interactions, therefore, lead individuals to a process of constant evaluation of behaviours and constant reorganisation of their self-perception and effectively of the 'self' as a social object which arises from the interaction with others (Mead, 1934, p.138-140).

At the heart therefore of the process that forms the self is a process of adoption of roles, of performance, of analysing perceptions and expectations, of embedding the 'other' in the construction of the self. Turner describes this as the internalisation of "self-designations associated with positions that individuals occupy within various social contexts", and this coincides with the identity construction process (Turner, 2013, p. 333). Multiple identities emerge from individuals' involvement in multiple social settings and the corresponding internalisation of "expectations attached to particular networks of social relationships" (Serpe and Stryker, 2011, p. 232).

In our discussions the above suggestion led us to pose and then to problematise the interactionist responses to two interrelated questions. The first stems from the suggested direct relationship between identities and the interactions within particular social settings. The question concerns the ways that individuals maintain coherence of the self when performing different roles. Interactionism's answer to this question is based on the suggestion about the interplay between the social self and what lies in the core of individuality and referred in symbolic interactionist literature as the 'I' (4Blumer, 1969;). Social actions are in fact initiated by the "I". The aim of such actions is to maintain the balance between what lies in the core of individuality and the social self which is prone to the changes resulting from the performance of different identities. The 'I' guides the action of the social self, the action changes the situation and the social self internalises the new situation. The process does not leave the 'I' unaffected but forces it to change through the acting experience. Human agency is located within this process which allows individuals to manipulate their environmentand in the interplay between the social self and the 'I' which does not allow individuals to remain unaffected by their own actions. As mentioned above, this interplay is also what secures the sense of continuity in individuals' self-perceptions as they are engaged in the performance of different identities.

The second question is about the cases of role interference (Van Sell et al., 1981) in which "the pressures of one identity interfere with the performance of another identity" (Settles, 2004, p. 487). For the 'I' to manipulate the situation in a way that leads to the resolution of the conflicts that are caused by role interference there needs to be some hierarchy

of identities that guide the action. This hierarchy is based on the evaluation of the importance or psychological attachment that individuals place on their identities and leads to some identities having a more central role in self-perception than others. Research literature attributes a close relationship between this 'role centrality' and individuals' wellbeing (Settles, 2004, p. 487). Structural interactionism, which is a more modern evolution of interactionism, describes the significance that individuals attribute to their identities as identity 'commitment' (Stryker and Serpe, 1982Stryker 2007). "Commitment is defined as the degree to which the person's relationships to specified sets of others depends on his or her being a particular kind of person, i.e. occupying a particular position in an organised structure of relationships and playing a particular role. […] Commitment affects identity salience which in turns affects role-related behavioural choices" (Stryker and Serpe, 1982 p. 207).

From an interactionist perspective therefore the construction of multiple identities is the result of the internalisation of multiple and often conflicting norms, expectations and perspectives, and the handling of these identities is dependent upon the significance that individuals attribute to each of them. Responsible for handling of identities is what lies in the core of individuality, and this exists separately from to the social roles that individuals perform. This core resolves conflicts between identities and guides the social selves to actions which bring changes to the social environment and to themselves. At the root of individual's' socialisation is a process of constant, internalised negotiation of identities and of social roles which represent the norms and the participants' perspectives from and about different social environments, therefore different cultures. Individuality is the host and handler of these identities and cultures, the outcome of multiple conformations and the dialogue between them.

"At the individual level, culture[s] exists in the form of internalised individual-level characteristics" (Chiu et al., 2010, p. 482) stemming from individual's social relations and interculturalism in the internalised dialogue between these cultures. At its best, the project of intercultural education for social inclusion should commence with the support to individuals to develop awareness of their "individual-level multiculturalism as a tridimensional spectrum of the degree to which someone has knowledge of, identification with, and internalization of more than one societal culture" (Vora et al., 2019, p. 500).

From an interactionist perspective, this individual-level multiculturalism can then lead to the development of "intercultural individuals' who 'exhibit a range of more positive personal attitudes towards diversity" (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 151) through their conscious engagement and handling of their own identity conflicts and of their internalised diversity. Interculturalism, therefore, seen from an interactionist perspective, targets the internalised dialogue between and commitment to identities which aims always to bring balance between the 'I', the multicultural social selves and the social environments with which they interact.

During our discussions which have led to the development of this chapter we followed and then unravelled the interactionist route that leads from the construction to identity to personal interculturalism. Our starting point was a problematisation of the rationale of the significance of the 'Other' to individuality and of the internalisation process, especially as this is perceived by adolescents. By doing so, we integrated in our discussion our doubt about the scope and functionality of the duality that interactionism suggests between the (social) self and

the core of individuality (I). Besides, not only in recent literature (see Kögler, 2012) even at the early stages of symbolic interactionism and particularly in Goffman's thought about the 'social self' (1959) there are clear emerging doubts about this duality of 'self' (Bramanan, 1997.).

Aborting the dualism and doubting about the 'I'

As it has mentioned above, the purpose of the distinction between 'Me' and 'I' is the sense of continuity and coherence that this dualism allows interactionism to explain and the 'running current of awareness' which Mead attributes to the interplay between the two (Mead, 1913). This is of course of major significance since the desire for coherence is essential for survival (see: Guidano & Liotti, 1983; Conway et al., 2004; and many others. See also Thomson's case in Sacks, 1986). However, in such case it is worth exploring the sort of understanding that is to be constructed in case that we decide to think outside the confines imposed by the desire for coherence.

We think that such suggestion about the absence of the 'I' brings with it a shift in the role of the Other and arguably elevates the significance of this role. Having lost its 'ground' the concept of self has to be re-defined in reference to the Other and the new concept that seems to be emerging is one that introduces the self as a form of response to the Other. This may not cause problems in understanding the self in the present, but it hinders our understanding of the self as a coherent entity with continuity from the past to the future. The memory of the self could be the link that brings the multiple selves together but the narrative should also depend on an otherness, that which occupies the self at the moment of remembering (Grele, 11979, p. 213-; McMahan, 1986, The state of this constant otherness portrays then a picture of the self which is essentially a negative one: the self exists as a projection of the Other and occupies the void constructed by multiple othernesses. Individuality does not require the solid presence of the interactionist 'I' but exists intersubjectively within the "larger system created by the mutual interplay between the subjective world" (Stolorow & Atwood, 1996, p. 181). Intersubjectivity suggests that since social behaviours "invariably take place in relational contexts and should be understood as responses to socially constructed meanings", any attempt to explain "social behaviours cannot be reduced to individual psychology" (Chiu et al., 2010, p. 483). Indeed, the attention can move away from the individual and focus on the discursive, realised by language concept of the 'subject' (Henriques et al., 1998). In the discursive world which subjects inhibit the self remains in a state of constant subjectivation and otherness and the sense of continuity is not sought in the presence of the 'I' but in the process of subjectivation and in the relationship between the subject and the Other. It is in Butler's (1993) suggestions about this relationship that we would like to discuss for the remaining of the theoretical part of this chapter.

For Butler (1993) "while [..] subjects appear, at least at the level of the everyday or commonsense, to precede their designation, this apparently pre-existing subject is an artefact of its performative constitution" (Youdell, 2006, p. 515). The birth of the subject is located within the process of the disavowal of its dependency to the discourse within the subject exists, a discourse which "we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency" (Butler, 1997, in Davies, 2006, p. 427). As Davies notes, "…the agentic subject disavows this

dependency, […] because the achievement of autonomy, however illusory it might be, is necessary for the accomplishment of oneself as a recognisable and thus viable subject" (Davies, 2006, p. 427). Davies' observation about the process of disavowal of the subject's dependency brings up the link between autonomy, recognisability and viability of the subject. Indeed, central in Butler's conceptualisation of subjectivation is its contextualisation within a social milieu and the process of recognition of the subject by other subjects (Butler, 1997). It is within this intersubjective context that subjects are recognised and therefore constructed. Such intersubjective understanding of the subject lies very close to Levinas's suggestion: "For Levinas, our very subjectivity […] is a function of an existentially prior responsibility: one becomes an 'I' by being subject to the other" (Chinnery, 2003, p. 10). A "dynamic, inter-subjective, constructed moment by moment through social interaction, and, at the same time, subject to existing ideologies and perceived social constraints" (Mayes, 2010, p. 195) understanding of the formation of the subject could integrate the conceptualisation of subjectivation as the subject's birth process and as a discursively constructed confinement of this subject. Unlike individuality, subject can therefore be understood "not as a known entity, but […] in process, unfolding or folding up, being done or undone, in relation to the other, again and again" (Davies, 2006, p. 436).

Butler's (?1993?) suggestion offers an explanation of the subjectivation process and the kind of relationship developed among the subject and the Other (i.e. among subjects). By doing so she offers a description of the void that self-occupies as the outcome of the resistance of the (existing in discourse) subject to other subjects. This resistance is not the method that leads to autonomy but the reason for the development of the sense of autonomy which, similarly to the subject itself, exists discursively. The subject, therefore, *cannot but resist* and *differ* because it is through this resistance that the subject seeks recognisability and because of which it (intersubjectivity) exists.

Identity, from such intersubjective perspective "can only occur in an interpersonal context because having an identity is a matter of differentiating oneself from others" (Fowers, 2015, p. 265). Identities are performed as forms of differentiation and recognition and cultures offer the discourses, which contain the scripts, the settings and the roles for such performances. Unlike interactionist approaches, which support a view of interculturalism at individual level as the internalised dialogue and management of identities and of the cultures that they represent, intersubjectivity locates this dialogue in the discursive space of the subjects. While in interactionism the aim of the dialogue is the re-establishment of the balance between the 'I' and the social selves, in intersubjectivity the aim is the differentiation of the subject from other subjects and the recognition. The 'identity commitment' and the resolution of identity conflicts do not need to be based on a premeditated centrality of a particular identity but on the evaluation of the extent to which identities secure recognition. The identity that prevails in such conflicts is not necessarily the one that lead to the re-establishment of a balance but one that offers the greatest recognisability. This is often the identity that is mostly challenged and provokes resistance.

Group discussions

At this part of this chapter, we will turn our attention to the implications that the suggestion about subjectification and the prevalence of difference might have for identity construction in adolescence, for group culture and intergroup relations. An implication of such suggestion about the central role of difference in the sense of self concerns the understanding of human social behaviour and individuals' affiliations with groups and the sense of 'belonging' which is often at the heart of theories about group membership and identity. We chose to use this sense of 'belonging' and the relationship of individuals with their groups as our entry point in the attempt to build an evidence-based exploration of the role of differing in the ways that young people experience their identities.

Our evidence was collected during short discussions with two groups. The first group was comprised of five sociology students studying the university-entry exams (sixth-form) in a secondary school in North England and the second of four undergraduate students who are members of a University sports club. The discussion with the sixth-form students took place in their school during the lunch break and the discussion with the university students at the university café after a training session. In both cases, our discussions began with an exploration of their affiliation to their groups and the extent and circumstances that this affiliation becomes stronger or weaker. At the second part of the discussions, we outlined our assumption about the significance and role of difference in identity construction and asked for their reflections on the relevance of our assumptions to the ways that they experience their identities.

Belonging as experienced by students in our two groups was clearly dependent on external challenges or comparisons. The members of the sports team described a strong sense of belonging with their group (sports club) which is being heightened during tournaments. The sixth-form students were referring to their identity in contrast to the school pupils and to their distinctiveness in terms of space (their classes occupy the top floor of the school building) and appearance (they are not required to wear school uniforms).

In both groups the discussions led to descriptions of further differentiations. In the case of the sixth form students, participants started describing their distinctiveness to students from other sixth-form courses in the same school, while the university students described sub-groups based on the courses that students attended and their place of origin. In all cases the sub-groups' identities were emerging as a response to questions that were interpreted as attempts to attribute significance of the particular group identity to individuals:

Consistently to the theoretical discussion in this chapter the discussions with the two groups showed the role of recognition in the significance that individuals attribute to identities. Group membership therefore appear to be based less on direct commitment to the group but it seems to be experienced as *affiliations of recognition* that is based on differentiation: Identity is valued when it secures recognition and the corresponding group membership appears as a shared differed to those who are outside of the group (or in other groups). In the words of one of the University students:

- "*I usually wear the* [University teams'] *uniform when we are out of town. I like it, it's like .. you stand out but you don't seem that you show off or anything because we all wear it'.* […]
- *Q: Is it important to stand out?*
- [Laughs]
- *It is!*
- *You don't want to be like .. to copy anyone* […]
- *Not too much though.*
- *You want to stand out, but the uniform shows that you stand out for a reason, that you did not try too much. And you are together with others so you all stand out.*

The claim about the importance of *differing* is not new. Brewer (1991, 2003) has developed an evolution-based argumentation that individuals' behaviour and membership in groups responds to two competing human needs: the need of differing and of belonging. Brewer places the basis of her Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) on the "premise [...] that the two identity needs (inclusion/assimilation and differentiation/distinctiveness) are independent and work in opposition to motivate group identification" (2003, p. 483). Applied in the analysis of intergroup relationships, ODT has led to suggestions about conditions for groups to achieve the optimal balance between inclusivity and differentiation, avoiding either the detachment of individuals from the group or their assimilation. According to ODT, "group members will identify most strongly with groups that are neither too differentiated nor too inclusive. That is, the extent to which a group meets either need should also have a curvilinear relation with group identification" (Leonardelli et. al., 2010, p. 77).

The theory attributes successful inclusion to the groups' characteristics (more notably size) an suggests that the "balance between inclusion and differentiation is achieved at the group level, through identification with groups that are both sufficiently inclusive and sufficiently distinct to meet both needs simultaneously" (ibid, p. 67). Groups can either achieve or not the balance in satisfying individual's competing needs while "the higher the level of inclusiveness at which self-categorisation is made, the more de-personalised the self-concept becomes" (Brewer, 1991, p. 477).

Our discussions with the students did not aim to confirm or reject Brewer's suggestion. However, what we noticed from our discussions is that participants' references to their relationship and affiliation to their groups has little to do with the characteristics of the groups and more to do with the groups from which individuals differentiate: "*I am sixth-from[er] [when I am] in the school canteen* [which is also used by the school pupils] and [I am] a *humanities student when I'm up here [in sixth-form ward]"*. Viewed from such angle, the forces that define inclusion as measured in the level of affiliation of individuals to groups may be predominantly external to the group rather than internal as ODT suggests. Moreover, the dualism that ODT brings forward (competing needs) and the solid point of reference that it suggests in order to explain their function (evolution / human needs) may not be necessary: Differentiation as a key element of subjectification could be considered as the force behind both inclusion and individuality.

Individuals may experience stronger affiliation to certain groups and certain subjects may become dominant in particular stages of individuals' lives. Individuals' response to others' expectations and perceptions that lead to commitment to particular identities may not be based on acceptance as interactionist approaches implies or on the balance between distinctiveness and inclusion as ODT suggests but on a continuous act of resistance and differing which is shared among individuals resisting. Culture, as defined in groups' shared language, sense of humour, history, interpretation of shared experiences can be considered as the outcome of these affiliations of difference and identity may be understood as the affiliation that subjects share since they are produced from the same difference. The dominance of one subject over others and of identities over others depends on the strength of the difference that gives birth to this subject. To follow the course of thought suggested by Butler 1993), the dominance of one identity over others depends on the level of resistance that subjects invest to gain visibility. Or, to describe this differently, we could suggest that the more functional is the difference (in terms of subjects' recognition) the stronger is the subject that is constructed (in terms of dominance over other subjects performed by the same individual). We could therefore suggest that the identity that is resisted (threatened / attacked etc) is the one that gains in strength and significance for the individuals.

Some implications

Normal, abnormal and 'cool'

Distinctiveness and the Need for Uniqueness is a concept which exists in psychology since 1977 (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977) and one which has been applied to a variety of settings including marketing (Pfiffelmann et al., 2023; Ruvio et al., 2008). The conceptualisation of self and the element of difference we think that compliments and explains the need for uniqueness. It can also offer a framework for the understanding of 'cool', an identity-based construct which relies heavily on the balance between distinctiveness (Oyserman, 2009), originality and appeal (Sundar et al., 2014) and is equally significant for consumer research (Sundar et al., 2014) and for studies of adolescence behaviour (Rudolph et al., 2011). Following our analysis, cool can therefore be associated to the behaviour which sits comfortably on the borderline between 'sameness' and 'difference', in a way that is implied in students' quotes about the significance of standing out but 'not too much'. Approaching the concept from an angle that avoids the dichotomy of factors that refer to either desirable or non-desirable attributes (Cachet & Contrarian cool, Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012) we suggest that cool incorporates both. If seen as a personality trait (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012; Dar-Nimrod et al., 2018) cool can describe the distinctiveness that does not alienate individuals from their groups. For this reason, cool does not only change with time (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012) but it can be experienced differently in different settings even by the same individual. Furthermore, cool may be associated with the appeal and persistence of certain models of behaviour which may be considered as 'dysfunctional' or 'abnormal'. (See: Cooper & Kakos, 2011, 2013).

Inclusion as differing

Understanding belonging and group membership as affiliation to common differing, could provide fresh explanation of the effectiveness of particular interventions for inclusive and intercultural education. The effectiveness of Physical Education (PE) with the engagement of

students in team sports in intercultural communication which is well evidenced (Carter-Thuillier et al., 2018; Gieß-Stüber, 2010; Grimminger, 2011) but without sufficient recognition of the significance of the role of competition and of shared opposition (Liu & Kramer, 2019). Shifting our attention from the often-unproblematised assumption about the prominence of individuals' need for belonging in explaining participation in groups and intergroup relations to the significance of individuals' constant engagement to resistance and recognition could offer a new perspective and a fresh dynamic to such educational inclusive practices. Such shift can also allow educationalists to recognise processes of exclusion that remain hidden when the inclusivity is sought in the groups' attitudes towards diversity than on the recognition that identification in a given group may grant to its members.

Conclusion

The discussion about identity, is often grounded on the assumption that apart from the social roles performed within such structured or unstructured social groups and beyond the variety of 'senses of similarity' or identities that these assume, there is a solid, autonomous self which guarantees the (sense of) continuity and coherence for the individual. Even in influential theories on identity in adolescence such as that of Erikson (1968) the formation of identity appears as an achievement related to the construction of a solid entity accomplished through a period of psychological moratorium. The failure of achieving this is related to the maintenance of the diversity and flexibility of self-perception described as 'identity diffusion'. Such understanding of identity often justifies the efforts of agents involved with the education of or provision of care to young people to direct them so that they make the 'right identity choices'.

The discussion in this chapter, departing from the problematisation of a core principle of the interactionist approaches to identity construction has raised some questions about the soundness of such understanding of identity. From an intersubjective point of view, the sense of the self as well as the sense of the self's continuity and coherence appear as intersubjective constructions. In the context of such understanding, 'difference' and 'resistance' appear as being the reasons for the experience of 'self' and 'identity' as the projection of self on others who appear to differ similarly. With difference at the heart of self-perception, the choice of identity seems to lead to those perceptions which are associated with recognition of distinctiveness and with resistance. Adolescence does not appear to be a psychosocial moratorium but a factory and a test house of identities and a battleground for the protection of those attracting the most attention. Identity formation in that respect seems not to be the process of 'narrowing down' possible identity choices but the process of identifying the forms of differing which justify such battles.

The analysis in this part is based on limited evidence collected almost opportunistically. Our ambition has been to support the problematisation of the traditional approaches to identity and the assumptions that are often dominant in the conceptual frameworks of inclusive and intercultural education programmes. Further research is necessary to examine the intersubjective lived experiences of young people with regards to the development and performance of their identities based on appropriate (broadly ethnographic) methodologies that allow "lived intercultural experiences of all involved parties to emerge" (Holliday & MacDonald, 2020, p. 635).

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