Ethnographic Studies of Positioning and Subjectivity: An Introduction

DOROTHY HOLLAND and KEVIN LEANDER

The social positioning of persons and groups, whether through everyday discourse, spatial arrangement, text, film, or other media, is now considered a primary means by which subjects are produced and subjectivity forms. Power relations, in particular, are thought to shape a person's self (or a group's identity) through acts that distinguish and treat the person as gendered, raced, classed, or other sort of subject. Likewise, regimes of power/knowledge are conceived to create social categories such as the "disabled," "troubled youth," or "attractive women." A person or group is "offered" or "afforded" a social position when a powerful body, such as a governmental agency proposes a particular sort of subject, a "felon," say, or a "sexual harasser," or an "at-risk" student and calls on an individual to occupy the position. Faced with such an offer, the person may either accept the position in whole or part, or try to refuse it (Bourdieu 1977; Davies and Harré 1990; Foucault 1975, 1988; Harré and Van Langenhove 1991).

Our endeavor builds on the recognition that positionings are pivotal moments in which social and psychological phenomena come to interanimate and interpenetrate one another. But it seeks to sharpen and extend our understandings of such events. We think about subjectivities as actors' thoughts, sentiments, and embodied sensibilities, and, especially, their senses of self and self-world relations. What more is there to learn about *how*—how subjectivities are created by experiences of being positioned and, in turn, contribute to the production of cultural forms that mediate subsequent experiences? These processes of positioning and their relationship to individual subjectivity and agency constitute the topic of this issue. The articles, based as they are on ethnographic and historical research, help fill out a larger, anthropological picture of positioning and its consequences for senses of self. For one, they take account of the fact that positionings occur in particular historically specific times and places. For

Sometimes cultural personas become important objects of school officials' efforts or of law enforcement agents, say, and so are articulated with institutional power relations. McDermott's article is especially suggestive in highlighting the contentious aspects of the production and institutionalization of such social identities. He not only traces struggles over "genius" since 1650 but he himself also participates, as have many anthropologists, in the contemporary struggle over this cultural persona. He is critical of the myopia of schools that privilege the few genius-like students, despite the negative subjective consequences of such privileging for the remaining many. His, and other articles such as Satterfield's and Hicks's, underscore the turmoil that often takes place in episodes of positioning, making understandable the changing nature of the cultural resources through which positioning is effected.

Together these articles suggest that positioning be seen as part of broader, *productive* processes. In these broader processes, people, problems, and places are culturally imagined, socially produced, and achieve (or not) a relatively durable existence in the social and personal lives of a population of people. Positioning, then, involves socially producing particular individuals and groups as culturally imagined types such that others and, even the person herself, at least temporarily, treat her as though she were such a person. Conceiving of positioning in this larger framework helps us recognize possibilities, albeit modest ones, of agency on the parts of the people who are the would-be subjects of positioning. It directs attention to how positions are produced in particular historical periods and to the social coordination necessary for successful positioning to be achieved, and it problematizes the subjective consequences of experiences of positioning for those who participate. This inclusive picture of positioning, especially as illuminated by the ethnographic and historical case studies, reveals its importance in the historical production of persons and personhood in practice.

ROPES, CYMBALS, AND LAMINATIONS IN A PRACTICE THEORY OF IDENTITY

"Theories of practice" come in several variations of which Pierre Bourdieu's (e.g., 1977, 1990) has been especially influential in anthropology. Other social practice theories have grown principally out of Marxist theorizing of praxis and the cultural Marxist developments at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Adding "social" to "practice theory" signals a redoubled effort to begin not from conceiving structure and subject as separate entities which then come together but, rather, to begin from everyday social life where social structure and subjectivity co-occur and are patently historically specific and spatially located. Dorothy

Holland and Jean Lave (2001) introduce a methodological strategy for moving toward this goal. (For an extensive discussion of different practice theories, see Lave in press.) Bruno Latour (1993), who conceives of rhizomelike relations between widely different actors in any social practice, has inspired here our conception of the hybridity of human and nonhuman, individual and social actors.

To extend a practice theory of identity, these articles describe how individuals draw on different cultural resources and structures and recast and transform available and organized social positions to shape their subjectivities. Moreover, these articles also strive, from different angles, to describe the *relationships* between available positions, individual subjectivities, and specific episodes of (positioning) practice. Presently, we draw in particular on the metaphor of "lamination" to describe the hybrid social/psychological entities created by positioning. Don Brenneis, who served as discussant when these articles were presented at the 2003 biennial conference of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, introduced this metaphor. He likened the complex phenomena explored in the articles to cymbals and other objects constructed by layering or winding layer on layer of like and often unlike substances. The shells of drums are often constructed by laminating multiple layers of wood. Cymbals, it turns out, are not simply cast in a one-time process using a single mold. Rather, they are laminated, layer on layer, but along a different axis than the drum, being wound from the inside of the cymbal outward. This layering or winding process affords the cymbal qualities that being a single, undifferentiated piece of molded metal would not, including patina, resonance, and strength. Additionally, the layered construction of the cymbal permits its sound texture to "thicken" over time, becoming both deeper and brighter. The lamination metaphor is also useful in cases in which materials of different substance—a driver's license and clear plastic, for example, are more or less durably affixed to one another. A multiplicity of resources is possible. Unlike other processes, such as that of creating alloys by melting different substances together, the layers retain some their original distinctiveness, although in a different configuration. Always on the lookout for good aids in thinking about the collective/personal/cultural formations that emerge in social life, we continue Brenneis's metaphor to discuss further the contributions of the articles.

Lamination has theoretical resonance: it is a good for thinking about the production of the sorts of hybrid social/psychological entities predicated by social practice theory. Episodes of positioning create what we might think of as a laminate. They leave memories laced through feelings, bodily reactions, and the words and glances of others (see Satterfield's article, for example, or Edberg's). Besides these traces in the minds/bodies of participants, the incidents also leave behind tangible artifacts, such as

a notation in a school record or a photograph of an angry logger in the newspaper. In them, a particular person or a particular group of people—maybe oneself or one's group, is brought into a suggestive association with a social position. The surviving artifacts, whether remembered feelings or words written down by a participant, can resonate with contemporary events. The taking of bridal photograph in Taiwan involves positioning in the moment, yet this practice is also a kind of mutually constitutive congealing of an artifact with time-space (i.e., with a culturally constructed sense of a particular point in history and a particular place; see Leander this issue) that is carried over, related to other time-spaces, and juxtaposed with other artifacts. These artifacts—the memory of being called ghetto or seeing oneself as a beautiful bride in a bridal album, can become important in mediating the person's sense of herself, or in others' senses of the person, or both. Together, these associations, especially in the case of numerous related episodes, can "thicken" (Holland and Lave 2001; see also Wortham and Satterfield this issue) acquiring more and more layers. The person and the category plus the memories and artifacts of past episodes of positioning become virtually laminated on to one another and so come to constitute a hybrid unit in social and emotional life.

Goffman (1974) used the idea of lamination as part of frame analysis. Frames, which tell us how to define situations, may be superimposed (laminated) on one another. For example, two individuals who are alone and cannot be overheard by others may nevertheless mark their gossip with a whisper. In this manner the whisper is "parenthesized and set in an alien environment" (Goffman 1981:154). Our use of lamination is distinct from Goffman's microsociological interests in that we focus upon social-psychological formations and practices: how widely circulating social and cultural resources are (re)produced and articulated with the formation of particular subjectivities. Equally important, we are concerned not just with the layering or embedding of structures and resources, but with the stabilizing or strengthening afforded by lamination practices. Our use of lamination is also distinct from the concept of "history-in-person" suggested by the metaphor of "sedimentation." While the sedimentation metaphor suggests material that has been washed out, sifted, transformed from its original configuration and settled or congealed into a new shape (perhaps layer on layer), the idea of lamination suggests the semimaintenance of configured layers as well as the ongoing and dynamic juxtaposition of these layers.

McDermott (1993) gives an excellent example of such a process in the daily life of a school. He describes how a boy he calls Adam becomes thoroughly entangled with the social category of learning disabled. In the article, he uses the metaphor of a rope instead of a lamination. In the making of a rope, short fibers (social demands, personal reactions, and

so forth) are twisted together eventually producing an entity qualitatively different from the original fibers. Those who encounter Adam in the school encounter a personification of a learning-disabled student. Moreover, McDermott is very clear that Adam is neither simply conforming to the label nor remaining aloof from it. He is neither the passive victim of the label nor immune to its consequences for him in the institution. In trying to circumvent the threat of being negatively labeled, Adam uses strategies that end up making him even more vulnerable to the label. In this sense he ends up participating in the making of himself as an LD student. Similarly, in Terre Satterfield's article on the spotted owl controversy in Oregon in the 1990s, we learn that the popular media and the environmentalists successfully positioned the loggers as inappropriately angry. The loggers were amalgamated to a cultural representation that discredited them. In the controversy, they were drawn into conflictual situations in which they were encouraged and interpreted as fitting the image of the cultural persona. At the same time, they were aware of this positioning, and their reactions to it became part of their experience of themselves in the controversy.

Adrian's case involves wedding photographs that focus on the bride and relegate the groom to a prop if he is in the photograph at all. This inferior position of the groom relative to the bride is not likely to continue into the later relationship of the husband and wife. Nonetheless, the monetary investment of the groom and his presence at the shoot, albeit with a studied lack of enthusiasm, are displayed via the bridal albums as a sign of his regard for her. The displayed photographs thereafter, as laminated with the feelings and dispositions of the wife and the viewers, act to make her a woman of status in the present. Edberg's article, with its specific focus on the development of the cultural persona of the "narcotraffiker," unravels the relationship between the *narcocorridos* (songs extolling the exploits of drug traffickers), the category of narcotraffiker, and those who identify with the persona. The songs are laminated to the persona and so provide a cultural script for a flamboyant death, for example, that sets social and intimate imaginations of the future of persons who successfully position themselves or are successfully positioned as narcotraffikers. These layers are part of a complex that, at least for now, has a life of its own, so to speak, on the Southwestern U.S.–Mexican border. Human and nonhuman actors (e.g., cultural forms such as corridos and collective personas) are networked (Latour 1993) or laminated together.

Common notions of social–personal relations in popular and even academic discourses portray the social and personal as though they were billiard balls, (to use an image from Wolf's [1982] critique of concepts of culture). They hit one another, imparting a force and leaving behind a deep scratch or an indentation perhaps, but, ultimately, they bounce off one

another as the same ontological entities they were before the encounter. Such concepts make it difficult to develop theories, such as social practice theory, which call for the study of hybrid social, cultural and personal entities "Ropes" and "laminations" are efforts to move us forward. They express how particular threads of the social, the cultural and the personal become thoroughly intertwined over time in Adam's school, in Latanya's classroom at the academy, in the relationships of Taiwanese husbands and wives, and over the course of the spotted owl controversy, such that an object with characteristics distinctive from those of the original ingredients results. A rope differs in form and behavior from the fibers that compose it. As layers accumulate, as laminates of the social affixed to personal experience thicken, they themselves become objects that mediate further action and, in the sense expounded by Law, Callon, Latour, and other actor network theorists, become actors in social and personal life. In other words, "ropes" and "laminates" help fill a void in our vocabulary. They point to ways of understanding how qualitatively different objects can emerge. As metaphors, they also lead us to think about the characteristics of these entities and the processes that they undergo.

The metaphor of "lamination" is especially notable for our purposes because the process of lamination allows for the continuing heterogeneity of materials. Characteristics of the original components can still remain. There is no need as in many social theories (e.g., structural Marxism, structuralism, older structural functionalist theories) to ignore the person and person-centered processes, or as in many psychological theories, to forget about social forces (see Henriques et al. 1998 who critique even Vygotsky and Mead for this omission). Furthermore, tensions and disjunctions between that which was joined together can be expected to continue. In Satterfield's case, the loggers continued to have feelings that differed from those purported by representations of them. They continued to react to the negative positionings offered them by the environmentalists. Yet they had become firmly linked to a qualitatively different entity, a complex of memories and artifacts, created from episodes of positioning that occurred in the controversy. The loggers as persons with emotions and subjective senses of themselves as loggers could no longer be cleanly separated from this new entity.

Leander's article directs attention to another possibility for the lamination of multiple resources. He shows how episodes, constructed as different time-space interstices, become layered on one another. For example, how one acts with a family as a child can be transported, semi-intact, and pressed together into identity-in-practice with other layers. This is a different way of conceiving of history than requiring its continual transformation to carry us to the present. His data on an episode of interactional positioning are unusual as they include students' own comments and

explanations of the episode in which Latanya was positioned as "ghetto." Some of the students, while watching a video of the incident, accounted for their reactions to Latanya's behavior by juxtaposing it with accounts of her past behavior. Other students focused on their spatial separation from Latanya during the interaction and invoked a figured, institutional relationship to time and space that reinforced this separation of identities. Although the interpretations differed—some discussed ghetto as personality, while others essentialized her behavior to a racialized geography—they contributed to a multilayered construction of Latanya as ghetto. Instances of Latanya's school behavior had evidently congealed for her classmates, layer on layer, such that any subsequent similar action of hers was likely to be taken as more of the same. And, layered with this particular person was the developing cultural persona of "ghetto," as well as a contrasting well-schooled persona, coolly distant from the situation of the moment. At the same time, attesting to the multiplicity of materials, Latanya herself acted from her own distinctive interpretation of the incident. Leander reports being surprised at her view, and considers how his initial interpretation of the interaction as uniquely concerned with Latanya's racial identity omitted the significance of her care-based and academically motivated positioning vis-à-vis her teachers.

This point about the lamination of different culturally constructed time-spaces has important implications. It helps us see how spatialities of disproportionate scale and temporalities of different periods are brought into intelligibility in personal lives and how the lives of individuals can be brought into the collective apprehension of large-scale historical events. Edberg, for example, finds links drawn between the cultural persona of narcotraffiker and historical figures from the Mexican Revolution. Images and narratives from the past are laminated together with present day people and events. In fact, it is difficult to imagine how abstracted social and personal "histories" or abstracted globalized spaces, could have any potency for persons except through their lamination onto contemporary events and people. And, in addition, as a result of this process, every laminate carries the traces of a particular *locale*, a particular space of practice, and the games and struggles that characterize it, whether drawn from an enduring struggle (e.g., race relations in the United States), seemingly personal dislikes, or competition with others in the kinds of games that Bourdieu (1990; see also Ortner 1996) describes. The apparent and different micro and macro extensibility of these layers does not automatically determine how they are joined, juxtaposed, or cointerpreted. Lamination, rather, is achieved in the everyday yet particularized social and psychological practices of identity formation. Satterfield's article, especially, is valuable for seeing how such trans-local struggles are brought into and laminated with local events. McDermott's work is another that explicitly

addresses the relationship between the cultural construction of genius, the changing political economy of the Western world, and shifts in the social infrastructure of gender, race, and class privilege.

Durable laminations of significance undoubtedly emerge over periods that are difficult to establish and study in the short term. Deborah Hicks' article presents narratives told to her in the context of a relation of trust that took considerable time to establish. The self-narratives generated by three girls from a background of poverty demonstrate the importance of long-term efforts of self-authoring, even in the face of powerful forces of positioning. Wortham's article makes evident the value of long-term ethnographic research for the study of positioning and its effects, especially as they unfold in real time. Such studies permit us to appreciate the microprocesses by which a person and a social category are durably affixed to one another. His case shows the effort and ingenuity that goes into the process on the parts of all participants, and not just the student who is successfully positioned. Several months of the school term passed before the lamination became entirely stable. Over time, as new experiences accumulated, the formation resonated in both the students and teachers' subjective senses of Tyisha and in collective memories. It was not until December, the fourth month of the school year, that Tyisha and the category of "disruptive student" were firmly affixed to one another in the context of the classroom.

Besides its careful documentation of these processes, Wortham's article highlights the improvisational character of lamination. A discussion of Aristotle's definition of courage, for example, provides Tyisha an occasion to tell a personal story that linked courage with the pursuit of an immoral action. Both the story world and the interaction around it was ultimately used by the teacher and students as a means of positioning Tyisha as immoral/disruptive, of further affixing her identity to a persona-in-the-making. Because of their improvisational nature, laminations are opportunistic, partaking of the peculiarities of the situation.

The way in which repetition works to stabilize identity over time is perhaps best captured at what Wortham terms an "intermediate timescale" of development (a period of months over which categories and identities developed within the social space of a classroom). Tyisha's social identity as a disruptive student is achieved through repeatedly correcting her for being such and through her own repeated and responsive uptake of this position. Just as much, however, Wortham and other authors remind us that the particularities of the events and settings of repetition matter, and not just repetition as an abstract process. The lamination appears to have a particular holding power not merely because it is repeated but also because the repetition happens on a particular sort of occasion when being positioned just so is especially marked or re-markable. The

repetition, therefore, is not simply an effect of being located in numerous temporal "containers," but an effect of the accrual or accumulation of particularly marked time-spaces that are constructed, collected and organized. This practice of marking particular occasions and accumulating them is also considered in Adrian's and Leander's articles. Additionally, Satterfield's piece is particularly important for how it suggests that occasions become marked and selected with respect to their emotional charge, which is strongly associated with how moral action and particular persona are constructed.

SUMMARY

Various disciplines and interdisciplinary efforts from cultural studies, to feminist theory, to cultural geographers to poststructuralist writings have been instrumental in highlighting positioning as a powerful means of creating subjects and shaping subjectivity (Butler 1990; Davies and Harré 1990; Foucault 1975, 1988; Hall 1996; Smith and Katz 1993; Thrift 1995; Yeager 1996). The articles in this issue contribute to a broader and fuller investigation of this insight, particularly as positioning is culturally mediated and has its effects on personal experience and subjectivity. These articles contribute to an expanded understanding of positioning and its effects on the formation of senses of self and identity. Considering them together, we move toward a robust picture of social positioning and its importance in constructing and producing historically specific persons as complicated social, cultural, and psychological beings. With the purpose of creating a more anthropological understanding of the production of persons, we see these articles as understanding positioning in relation to cultural production or meaning making *in practice* as well as in relation to social construction and the workings of power emphasized by poststructuralists and discourse theorists (see citations above).

Social practice theory insists that we somehow understand how social phenomena are simultaneously phenomena of the person and vice versa. It calls for language that goes beyond units that are mainly social, mainly psychological or mainly cultural. Bourdieu's "habitus," a component of "structuring structures," is among the best known efforts of practice theorists to provide vocabulary for understanding hybrid social/cultural/psychological forms. 'History in person' is another of the same family of concepts (Holland and Lave 2001, Holland et al. 1998). It frames identity and subjectivity as originating and continuing to develop in persons and in institutions in practice. Lamination is a move to conceive of "histories in person" and "histories in institution" (Holland and Lave 2001) as collections that have become coordinated and juxtaposed in practice.

These collections—memories in particular mind/bodies, and collective and personal artifacts—form laminations across different time-spaces. Such juxtapositions, which thicken as new components are added, may become part of a relatively durable concatenation that operates in social and personal life as a unit. The articles in this issue demonstrate the importance of ethnographic and historical research for extending practice theory in this regard. Through them, we gain an increased understanding of persons, their contributions to social life, and simultaneously the social and its contributions to the formation not just of persons as positions but also to persons as sites of subjectivity and agency.

DOROTHY HOLLAND is Cary C. Boshamer Professor of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. KEVIN LEANDER is Assistant Professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Vanderbilt University.

NOTES

REFERENCES CITED

Bourdieu, Pierre
    1977 Outline of a Theory of Practice. Richard Nice, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
    1990[1980] The Logic of Practice. English edition. Richard Nice, trans. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Butler, Judith
    1990 Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge.
Davies, Bronwyn, and Rom Harré
    1990 Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves. Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior 20(1):43–63.
Foucault, Michel
    1975 Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Alan Sheridan, ed. and trans. New York: Vintage.
    1988 Technologies of the Self : A Seminar with Michel Foucault. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, eds. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
Goffman, Erving
    1974 Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience. New York: Harper and Rowe.
    1981 Forms of Talk. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Hall, Stuart
    1996 Introduction: Who Needs Identity? *In* Questions of Cultural Identity S. Hall and P. du Gay, eds. Pp. 1–17. London: Sage.
Harré, Rom, and Luk Van Langenhove
    1991 Varieties of Positioning. Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior 21(4):391–407.
Holland, Dorothy, and Jean Lave, eds.
    2001 History in Person: Enduring Struggles, Contentious Practice, Intimate Identities. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
Holland, Dorothy, William Lachicotte, Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain
    1998 Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Latour, Bruno
    1993 We Have Never Been Modern. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Lave, Jean
    N.d. Changing Practice: Everyday Life and Learning. Unpublished MS.
Leander, Kevin M.
    2002 Locating Latanya: The Situated Production of Identity Artifacts in Classroom Interaction. Research in the Teaching of English 37(November):198–250.
McDermott, Ray
    1993 The Acquisition of a Child by a Learning Disability. *In* Understanding practice S. Chaiklin, and J. Lave, eds. Pp. 269–305. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Ortner, Sherry B.
    1996 Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
Smith, Neil, and Cindi Katz
    1993 Grounding Metaphor: Toward a Spatialized Politics. *In* Place and the Politics of Identity. M. Keith and S. Pile, eds. Pp. 67–83. New York: Routledge.
Thrift, Nigel
    1995 Mapping the Subject. *In* Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation. S. Pile and N. Thrift, eds. Pp. 13–56. London: Routledge.
Wolf, Eric R.
    1982 Europe and the People without History. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Yeager, Patricia, ed.
    1996 The Geography of Identity. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.