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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Levitan, J., Mahfouz, J., & Schussler, D. L. (2018). Pragmatic Identity Analysis as a Qualitative Interview Technique. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 19(3), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-19.3.3032>

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Pragmatic Identity Analysis as a Qualitative Interview Technique

Joseph Levitan, Julia Mahfouz & Deborah L. Schussler

Key words:
identity; qualitative
research;
interview;
collaborative
methods; reflective
methods;
pragmatic identity
analysis

Abstract: In this article, we examine a qualitative interview and analytical technique for exploring the influences of identities on an individual's experiences. The technique, pragmatic identity analysis (PIA), relies upon a collaborative, reflective, contextually oriented, and relational approach to interviewing. For the purposes of this technique, "identity" is understood as a unique collection of dynamic identities that manifest in diverse contexts. Through narrative dialogue the interview pair jointly reflects upon the identities of the interviewee. They then analyze how identities play a role in the individual's experiences and the formation of values, dispositions towards enacting values, and the sense of wellbeing in different contexts. To examine the efficacy of the technique we present a case study of a first year teacher's growing awareness of her identities and the influence of her identities on her transition to a teaching role.

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1. Introduction

Research on issues of identity has grown increasingly popular in the past two decades (CÔTÉ, 2016; STETS & SERPE, 2013 [2006]), and with good reason. Identity is part of our core sense of self, so it immediately holds personal interest. Identity issues also extend to practical, social phenomena that can have a profound influence on everyday life. For example, identity research has helped uncover political issues of representation, as well as issues of personal wellbeing (HOGG, TERRY & WHITE, 1995; KOC & VIGNOLES, 2016). Yet, the possibilities of understanding identity and the ways identity influences daily life are still not fully realized. [1]

In this article, we present an integrated analytical strategy to build understandings of individuals' identities as relational and contextual, which we call pragmatic identity analysis (PIA). We see this technique as useful for research on underlying causes for an individual's values, behaviors, dispositions, and wellbeing—a persistent question in identity research. Building on current developments in scholarship on identity (e.g., BERNHARD, 2014; CONTRERAS, ELACQUA, MARTINEZ & MIRANDA, 2016; HOLLAND & LACHICOTTE, 2007; STETS & SERPE, 2013 [2006]), we explore how identities, understood pragmatically, are underlying influences for these phenomena. We extend a pragmatic understanding of identity into research practice to create an analytical technique for narrative-based, collaborative, qualitative research about human values and behaviors in context. [2]

We have divided the article into nine sections. First, we discuss the need for such a technique (Section 2), and then elaborate on the integrated analytical framework that informs the technique (Section 3). We explain the interview process (Sections 4 and 5), and then discuss the case study method (Section 6) and findings (Section 7). Using the case study as an example, we demonstrate how PIA can facilitate understanding the dispositions of a new faculty member. Finally, we discuss the implications and possibilities of this analytical method, its limitations, and avenues for further development (Sections 8 and 9). [3]

2. Advancing Identity Research Further

Identity research has developed in fields as diverse as literary studies, psychology, gender studies, history, biological sciences, anthropology, sociology, and political science (BENWELL & STOKOE, 2006; BOTTERO, 2010; BUTLER, 2011; DAVIES, 2006; HOGG et al., 1995; KORNIENKO, SANTOS, MARTIN & GRANGER, 2016; VARGAS, PARK-TAYLOR, HARRIS & PONTEROTTO, 2016; ZIRKEL & JOHNSON, 2016). The theoretical foundations of identity formation can be broken down into two loosely defined camps, with various theories of identity residing on a spectrum between them. The first is the psychogenetic, or an internal, personal identity development that harkens back to ERIKSON (1968, 1980) and holds sway in certain psychological, biological, and political science circles (BARTLETT, 2005; VAN MEIJL, 2006). The other camp is sociogenetic identity research that is often based upon the works of VYGOTSKY

(2012 [1978]), MEAD (1913, 1925, 1934), and many others in social psychology, sociology, and anthropology (e.g., FISKE, GILBERT & LINDZEY, 2010; HOGG et al., 1995; HOLLAND & LACHICOTTE, 2007; STETS & SERPE, 2013 [2006]; TURNER & REYNOLDS, 2010), who see identity development as primarily socially determined. Each paradigm is valuable for understanding phenomena in their respective fields of study, but more work is needed in identity literature for understanding the relationship of personal issues of identity with that of socially constructed issues of identity, and their implications for behavior, values, and wellbeing (NELSEN, 2015). We see the difference between psychogenetic and sociogenetic orientations as not mutually exclusive but instead compatible epistemological stances that give different weight to aspects of human experience. Pragmatic Identity Analysis seeks to transform understandings of personal and social identities in order to advance deeper and more comprehensive understandings of identity and identity development. This allows researchers and practitioners to better understand how individuals and identities interact in relation and in context. [4]

PIA also provides a new twist to qualitative approaches in identity research (EGAN & PERRY, 2001; KRAUS, 2000; LUCIUS-HOENE, 2000; STETS & SERPE, 2013 [2006]; VARGAS et al., 2016). This qualitative interview technique can complement quantitative studies to enhance contextual understandings of identity. The underlying epistemology of quantitative studies is that identities can be isolated and exist outside of specific contexts. Although this epistemological assumption is not often stated, large-scale studies remove specific contexts from considerations of identity, as they look at mathematical trends. We see qualitative methods as incorporating the important influences of context (JEROLMACK & KHAN, 2014) to identity analysis. Narrative research allows for the complexity of identities to be understood in a way that can help researchers and practitioners better work with their identities on the various contexts in which they find themselves. [5]

PIA is especially suited for teaching and teacher education research (ALSUP, 2006; BARTLETT, 2005; McLEAN, 1999; MERRILL, 2009; OLSEN, 2008; TISDELL, 2001, 2006). Educational investigation has developed avenues of research on teacher self-awareness and dispositions (SCHUSSLER, STOOKSBERRY & BERCAW, 2010) as central aspects of quality teaching, which is defined as worthwhile content and successful, morally grounded pedagogy. Teacher dispositions are seen as predictive patterns of action (BORKO, LISTON & WHITCOMB, 2007), through which, when teachers become self-aware of their dispositions as well as values and biases, they can more effectively assess their influence on others (BORICH, 1999). SCHUSSLER and colleagues have examined the ways in which the subtle aspects of self come into the classroom and affect pedagogy, quality of teaching, and teacher burnout (PALMER, 2010; SCHUSSLER, BERCAW & STOOKSBERRY, 2008). The key to understanding dispositions and behaviors, they argue, is self-knowledge and self-awareness, in essence, an unmasking of the "subjective educational" theories (KELCHTERMANS, 1994, p.94) that drive educational decisions. NELSEN (2015) has argued for the need of collaborative inquiry in teacher education institutions

to better understand teacher dispositions and how to cultivate the desired "intelligent" dispositions of expert teachers. Connecting dispositions and self-awareness to identity is a logical step, as identities can be seen as underlying influences of dispositions (CARR-CHELLMAN & LEVITAN, 2016). Researchers studying the self of the teacher (see BULLOUGH & BAUGHMAN, 1996; KELCHTERMANS, 1994; TICKLE, 1999) have suggested a number of mechanisms (e.g., exploration of "critical incidents," analyzing personal teaching metaphors, writing life histories/educational autobiographies) for addressing these tensions; however, the methods sometimes lack structure or they lack the opportunity for collaborative reflection offered in PIA. [6]

Becoming self-aware is important for anyone who works in social contexts, including education, social work, business, or politics (ALSUP, 2006; OLSEN, 2008). PIA builds on the need for creating avenues towards self-awareness and self-knowledge through a collaborative analytical process of uncovering the many identities that comprise one's dispositions, values, and behaviors. This research builds on the work of teacher self-awareness and dispositions to offer researchers and practitioners a way to better understand underlying reasons for their values and choices. This can assist teachers, lawyers, politicians, and others to understand how and why they might encounter tensions during their transitions to new roles. It may also help leaders identify an individual's strengths, to facilitate smoother transitions to new jobs. [7]

3. Theoretical Framework

Pragmatic identity theory (CARR-CHELLMAN & LEVITAN, 2016) is the underlying framework of pragmatic identity analysis. Pragmatic identity theory posits that identities are both personal and social dynamic constructs that are essentially held in complex relationships with each other, both internally and intersubjectively, as well as in complex relationships with the social and physical world. It is conceptually based on a fundamental observation: existence is relation. To *be* is to *relate*, symbolically, intersubjectively, physically and affectively. A necessary corollary to this observation is that an individual's interpretation and internalization of her existence is founded on and formed through symbolic and intersubjective relations (JAMES, 2013 [1890]; BERNHARD, 2014). In other words, the development and formation of identities is a fundamentally relational, contextual, and reflexive process. Understanding distinct identities is valuable, but only when those distinctions are conceptually integrated into the interactive whole of a world in process. [8]

In this theory identity is understood pragmatically as any characteristic that can be used as a marker for an individual (DUBOIS, 2007 [1903]; CARR-CHELLMAN & LEVITAN, 2016; JAMES, 2013 [1890]), such as "caring," "athlete," "woman," "doctor," "Latina," etc. This broad concept of identity allows for a more holistic analysis of the identities individuals carry with them. Based on this conception of identity, there are four major premises in pragmatic identity theory. [9]

3.1 Premise 1: Identities are constructed via 3 influences

Identity is constructed through the synthesis of three influences: 1. self-concept, 2. responsive semi-conscious feelings (the internal desires, feelings of self-hood, and values), and 3. societal meanings, or the collective understandings of identity (CARR-CHELLMAN & LEVITAN, 2016; JAMES, 2013 [1890]; KUHN & McPARTLAND, 1954; PEIRCE, 1966, 1995 [1868]; SNOW & ANDERSON, 1987; STETS & TRETTEVIK, 2014; WILSON, 2004). Though identity can be seen as singular, SNOW and ANDERSON (1987) have shown how the different influences need to be maintained as analytically distinct, as they encompass different and sometimes competing or contradictory identities. In addition, we argue that the relative power of each of these influences and the consequent constructions of identity, as well as whether the identities align or are in competition, affect individuals' wellbeing. [10]

For example, a person, who we will call "Norm," might be seen in society as funny, which is the source of his "funny" identity. However, internally, Norm's self-concept is as a serious person. The relative strength of each of these sources of identity influences Norm's behaviors and wellbeing. In many contexts the strongest influence for identity expression is social perceptions, which would mean that the identity that appears in the most contexts (Norm's most prevalent identity) is as a funny person—due to societal pressures. However, Norm might feel very attached to his self-conception as a serious person (so that is a more salient identity), even though he engages in humor most often because of social expectations. In addition, to demonstrate the complexity of individuals, internally, Norm's impulses are to demonstrate care for others, as a caring person. These feelings may be suppressed to make space for his social identity and his self-concept. Therefore, Norm might feel as though his wellbeing is affected by the misalignment of these different sources of identity. [11]

3.2 Premise 2: Each individual has a unique collection of identities

An individual's "identity" is a unique collection of many identities. Each identity is understood as a node in the collection, but each node may change, appear, or disappear, depending upon context. For example, Norm might see himself as very peaceful in work and at home, but have no problem seeing himself as aggressive on the sports field. These identity nodes have different levels of salience, prevalence, and longevity that manifest in different contexts (STETS & SERPE, 2013 [2006]). Salience is defined as those identities that have stronger feelings associated with them (other scholars use the term "centrality," e.g., STRYKER & SERPE, 1994). Prevalence is defined as those identities that are more likely to be present in any given situation. Finally, longevity is the length of time certain identities last. [12]

Identities also have three different types: role identity, group identity, and personal identity (McGALL & SIMMONS, 1978 [1966]; STRYKER, 2002 [1980]). Role identities are constructs such as "parent," "caregiver," or "sibling" (MCGALL & SIMMONS, 1978; STRYKER, 2002 [1980]). Group identities are the groups

with whom one identifies, such as New Yorker, Southerner, Jewish, Catholic, Latino, White, etc. (BURKE & STETS, 2009). Personal identity refers to the characteristics of the self in relation with or as compared to others, such as intellectual, artist, and athlete (BURKE & STETS, 2009). Personal identities can overlap or be distinct from group or role identities and can only be identified through contextual analysis. For example, Norm might see himself as an intellectual as an individual identity, even if he does not feel that he belongs to a group that identifies as intellectual. This is because an individual identity can be used to contrast individuals from the groups to which they belong and roles that they play. However, there exist groups that see themselves as intellectuals, even if Norm is not part of that group. These different identity types with different levels of salience, prevalence and longevity influence values, behaviors, and decisions. [13]

3.3 Premise 3: Emotions are inextricably intertwined with identities

Inherent in identity is an emotional affect (DUBOIS, 2007 [1903]; STETS, 2005; STETS & TRETTEVIK, 2014). The value individuals place (or do not place) on the characteristics that make up their identities affects their self-concept, efficacy, and overall wellbeing. For example, Norm may not have a strong sense of wellbeing because he does not see himself as funny, but feels pressured to perform as a funny person, so he does not have an emotionally healthy self-concept. Healthy self-concept plays an important role in overall health, motivation, mental wellbeing, and willingness to change (STETS & BURKE, 2014). It is difficult to separate emotions from identity. Emotions are part of the internal impulses that react to negative, positive, or neutral characterizations of identities. [14]

3.4 Premise 4: Identities have varying levels of fluidity and permanency

Identity values can be fluid. However, identities themselves have different degrees of plasticity. Some identities are very easily changed, while others are stable and difficult to alter (CARR-CHELLMAN & LEVITAN, 2016). Identity values and identity are intimately connected but not the same. Identity values are as important as the identity itself in regards to emotions. For example, left-handedness, once seen as a sign of deviancy, is now regarded as an asset in activities such as organized sports. The change from deviancy to asset in left-handedness values is a sign of fluidity. However, being biologically left-handed is a fairly stable identity. As an example of the plasticity of identities, teenagers often go through a variety of identities, such as "punk," "jock," and "nerd," and their associated dress and behavior patterns within the span of a few weeks or months. Adults might shift from "lawyer" to "teacher" and the associated communication and dress patterns, or from "single" to "in a relationship" and the associated affective and care patterns in the span of a few weeks or months as well. So, some identities are very fluid, while others are less so. It is important to note that there are both fluid and non-fluid identities because it allows for important political and social understandings of, for example, the permanence of sexual orientation (for some), while also recognizing the fluidity (for some), of other (or even the same) identities. [15]

As an analytical orientation for understanding identity, these four premises can help uncover the many identities inherent within each person, as well as help to understand the continual process of self-making and relational negotiation that a person engages in when *they*¹ enter different contexts, which in turn affects behavior, values, and wellbeing. From this theory, we have created a method that allows individuals to better make meaning out of, uncover, and understand how their identities influence values, decisions and wellbeing. [16]

4. Pragmatic Identity Analysis Technique

Building upon pragmatic identity theory to develop a qualitative method for understanding identity as an influence on behavior, values, dispositions, and wellbeing, PIA uncovers relationships between identities through a reflective, collaborative, discussion-based approach and analysis of a person's life-story (BULLOUGH & BAUGHMAN, 1996; KELCHTERMANS, 1994; LASSITER, 2005; SUÁREZ-ORTEGA, 2013). Identity is relational and contextual, so to uncover identities the researcher enters into a dialogical relationship with the collaborator to delve into *their* life history and values. This approach builds on a range of methodologies (MANNAY & MORGAN, 2015), including VAN MANEN's (1990) methodology of phenomenological human science, ethnographic interviewing (SPINDLER & SPINDLER, 1987; SPRADLEY, 2016 [1979]), the life history interview (ATKINSON, 1998), and narrative research methods (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 1996; STANLEY & TEMPLE, 2008; STRIANO, 2012). The method contains three research and analytical steps to ensure that enough data has been collected to create a meaningful identity profile. [17]

4.1 Step 1: Narrative life-story interviews

The first step is a pre-reflective/reflective interview or series of 1-3 interviews, depending upon time and the interviewer and interviewee's relationship/rapport (VAN MANEN, 1990). This first set of interviews covers the interviewee's/collaborator's life-story (HIRSCH & LAZAR, 2014).² In the life story process, the interviewer asks open-ended questions to begin the conversation, and to understand the interviewee's narrative account of *their* history, *their* self-understandings, and important incidents that have influenced *their* values and behaviors. Introductory questions such as "How did you end up becoming a teacher, (lawyer, construction worker, etc.)?" are icebreakers for delving into a deeper discussion about self, history, and decision-making. The deeper discussion utilizes the broad narrative story as material to funnel down into specific questions about the individual's identity, such as asking about specific instances mentioned in the narrative, and how that influenced the participant's identities. For example, one could ask, when talking about an instance in early adolescence, how others' words and opinions influenced them, if at all. [18]

1 In this article we use the term "their" or "they" to discuss a singular person as a gender-neutral designator. This way, we are better able to be inclusive of the many ways individuals define themselves.

2 The interviewee is also a collaborator in the PIA interview process, so the terms are used interchangeably below.

To begin, the initial narrative recounting acts as a pre-reflective review of events in *their* life. During the interview the researcher facilitates a reflective discussion on how the collaborator arrived at *their* current state of being, as well as the values, feelings, decisions, and contexts that led to *their* current state. During the flow of the conversation, the interviewer asks more pointed, reflexive questions about the interviewee's self-views in different periods of *their* life to understand the longevity and salience of different identities, as well as asking about the feelings inherent in those important incidents to uncover *their* identities inherent in their responsive subconscious while in different contexts. [19]

The interview process also involves asking a third kind of follow up question about the collaborator's life-story related to the four premises, in order to facilitate reflection and analysis. For example, to help uncover information related to Premise 1, the interviewer might ask, "In what ways did your friends' opinions about school influence your decision to become a teacher?" The interviewer can also ask reflective questions about the collaborator's self-concept, and *their* general feelings about *their* life at different points in time to uncover the interviewee's internal impulses. Questions and discussions about the emotional affects related to *their* identities are also important to follow up with during the first interview. For example, "it sounds like being a teacher was looked at positively by those around you, is that accurate? Did that influence any of your feelings about being a teacher?" This interview should be audio recorded, or if the interviewee is comfortable, it might also be video recorded to gain more sense of the emotional affect during the interview. [20]

After the first interviews, the researcher then analyzes the narrative data collected, looking for mentions of role identity, personal identity, and group identity, as well as the salience, prevalence, and longevity of the collaborator's different identities. These can be uncovered through looking at sentences such as "when I was twelve I was a tomboy, but by the time I turned 15 I became more feminine," or "I feel like the point of my life is to be strong and successful." In the analysis, these kinds of sentences are highlighted and considered in the context of the narrative to see what identity nodes emerge, and then where each of these nodes will be placed in relation to each other and to the person. [21]

The interviewer may also benefit from analyzing the narrative to discern if during certain parts of the storytelling the interviewee distances *their* self or *their* self-conception from a specific role identity, social identity, or group identity; and/or if the interviewee embraces *their* self-conceptions with these other identities (SNOW & ANDERSON, 1987). This analysis will offer insight into whether there are tensions or conflict within the individual's many identities. It also offers insight into the interviewee's emotional affect about *their* identities, in line with Premises 1 and 3 of pragmatic identity theory. It may also be valuable to analyze whether during the narrative the collaborator is embellishing or down-playing certain actions or activities that do or do not align with *their* self-conceptions and social identities. The interviewer can note this analysis in the narrative and return to it with the collaborator to discuss and provide more insight into how the individual

thinks and feels about certain identities, and how those identities influence *their* dispositions. [22]

The researcher then creates an identity profile report that includes a graphic with the interviewee's constructed identities analyzed through the narrative. Based on this analysis, simple designators, such as "teacher," "funny," and "athlete," are placed on a continuum of relative prevalence and salience to the individual. They then analyze the longevity of each of these identities and look for relationships that the interviewee mentioned between identities (conflict, tension, or coherence). Then, the researcher reads the narrative again to uncover the originating influences of each of these identities and the type of identity that the interviewee constructed (role, personal, or group). All of this analysis is placed on the graphic of the identity profile using different visual representations, as well as being noted for follow-up questions. This completes the first step of PIA Analysis. For the purposes of testing the efficacy of the PIA technique and analysis, the researchers would make hypotheses or predictions about sources of tension, as well as sources of strength for the individual in a particular context, such as transitioning to a new job, or moving to a new country. [23]

4.2 Step 2: Reflective re-visiting for deep analysis

There are two possibilities for the second step in the process.

1. The second step can help uncover an individual's identities at two points in time for deeper analysis. In the second step, the interviewer meets with the interviewee a second time, and discusses any of the interviewee's other thoughts or ideas about *their* identity. This step should take place after a few weeks, so that the collaborator can think about the prior interview. Providing a space to let the reflection of the first interview "sink-in" allows the interviewee to reconsider and come to new insights about themselves. The interviewee can then share these new insights with the interviewer to gain more depth. During this interview, the interview pair would also discuss any changes the interviewee experienced since they last met. This can help create a second identity profile at a different time and context to compare with the first identity profile. The interviewer would also ask follow-up questions from the first round of analysis.
2. To test the efficacy of the PIA findings, the researcher speaks with the interviewee to see how *their* transition or new experience went. The interviewer does not ask questions about specific hypotheses, to not unduly lead the conversation, but instead has an open conversation with the interviewee to ascertain whether the interviewer's hypotheses emerge as something salient for the interviewee. [24]

4.3 Step 3: Collaborative examination of the identity profile

In the third step, which can happen right after the second interview or a few days later, the interviewer presents the identity profile to the collaborator, as well as *their* predictions, hypotheses, and findings. The researcher and collaborator then analyze the identity profile and findings together. The third interview serves two purposes; first it allows the interviewee to see and reflect upon how an informed other has come to understand *their* identities, which can be revealing. The findings may align with the interviewee's self-understandings, and/or it may uncover identities that the interviewee was not aware of. Second, it allows the interviewee to make changes to *their* identity profile for the identities discussed that do not "ring true" to them. This adds a collaborative layer to the endeavor. We assume that individuals have the best access to their internal states, when engaging in the process of open, unencumbered dialogical reflection, and we see PIA as necessitating that they have an active, conscious voice in their identity profile. [25]

If the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee had been framed in an equitable and caring way, then it may be appropriate for the interviewer to discuss or debate identities that the interviewee finds going against *their* self-concept. The interview process, when undertaken with the care, openness, and empathy necessary for this method, should be a space where the interviewee feels the safety to confront, reject, and accept identities hypothesized by the interviewer, especially those identities that do not align with *their* self-concept. The discussion would include reflection upon whether identities hypothesized by the interviewer "ring true" but are uncomfortable to confront, or if they do not actually "ring true" to the interviewee and therefore should be discarded. This third interview is a kind of reflective member checking (CRESWELL & MILLER, 2000; LINCOLN & GUBA, 1985). [26]

5. The Role of Reflection in PIA

The theory and analytical technique of PIA are structured so as to guide content creation and reflection through storytelling, balancing direction and openness to be created and negotiated between the researcher and the interviewee. The PIA method is a process of dialogue and analysis that leaves the researcher and interviewee much room in which to play (in the reflection of one's whole life experiences), which means that the researcher's role and rapport with the interviewee is of the utmost importance. There is no recommended interview protocol, as such, for this method. Instead, the orientation of the researcher is best described as deeply and sincerely trying to get to know the interviewee and discuss *their* life history as they see it and feel it. The researcher's job is to take a respectful, curious attitude and to co-explore digging deeper into how the feelings, actions, and thoughts of the collaborator's life create *their* identity constellation. Assumed in this process is that the collaborator is willing and interested in speaking about *their* self and exploring *their* identities. [27]

For the researcher, then, a reflective empathetic capacity of respect for an individual's life should be cultivated. Skills in rapport building are essential for this kind of work (BRENNER, 2006). Also, the researcher's role is to be a sounding board and discussion participant in the individual's agential revealing of *their* self; in other words, the researcher is most effective when she or he is a good listener who attends and reflects during the interview (JACOB & FURGERSON, 2012). The researcher is meant to create a space for the interviewee to comfortably uncover, create, and discuss *their* identities and *their* relationships in as many aspects as are feasible. [28]

Critical consciousness of issues of class, race, and power differentials is important in most research contexts (APPLE, 1995), and especially so in this one. In the particular case of the research example for this article, the researcher and interviewee were on "even-footing" as colleagues (both being emerging scholars). However, most research is not done between people whose social situations are the same. This means that the researchers' affective and interpersonal ability, knowledge of critical social issues, and intercultural competence will be put to the test in order to have a meaningful conversation and interview. We recommend naming and openly uncovering potential issues of class, race and culture to be discussed, as they are essential parts of identity. The reflective capacity of the interviewer is also important, and we recommend that researchers work with a partner to uncover *their* own identity profile before engaging in PIA. This allows the researcher to have a reflexive understanding about how *their* identities and positionality may influence *their* interpretations and affect the construction of identities, and to incorporate this reflexivity in the collaborative interview and analysis process. For this research Joseph, the first author performed PIA on himself with a partner to help uncover his positionality and identity influences, as well as a first test of the efficacy of the method before exploring its possibilities for research with others. [29]

Related to critical consciousness, as part of this method there are certain ethical obligations that need to be considered. First, the process of talking about one's past falls along a continuum of an enjoyable and shared experience that offers new insights into one's life and identities, to an interview that is awkward, and potentially painful. The responsibility of the researcher is that they be supportive and non-judgmental—i.e., not imposing *their* values on others, or asking questions that belie *their* opinions—while also being discerning and forthright in "trying to get to know" the person. This can be a difficult position for both researcher and collaborator. We found that if the researcher also shares openly about him/her self, it is helpful in making the conversation dialogical. However, there is a fine balance between sharing enough to allow the interview to be open and flow, and over-sharing, which takes time away from the interviewee. If the researcher begins to dominate the conversation with *their* own thoughts in such a relational space, he/she runs the risk of influencing the construction of the interviewee's sharing of her or his ideas. [30]

6. Case Study Method

The case study presented below is meant to demonstrate the efficacy of the process discussed above. The research questions for this case study are: *What is Daniela's collection of identities, and how might they influence her transition to teaching?* [31]

6.1 Step 1: The life-story interview

For the first step of PIA, Joseph and Julia met with Daniela (a pseudonym), our collaborator, for one session of 90 minutes. Then Joseph followed up with two back-to-back sessions of discussion for steps two and three. In the first session interviewers asked open-ended questions about Daniela's life, background and professional roles before she became a formal teacher in a university course. This first interview was part of a larger study on a mindfulness intervention at the University level led by Julia, in which the PIA questions were used as the interview protocol. We created the open-ended interview questions based on Joseph's PIA exploration of himself. [32]

During the first interview, the interviewers premised the conversation with Daniela as a dialogical space in which we wanted to get to know who she is and how she ended up entering into the higher education teaching profession. The tone of the conversation was relaxed, collegial, and open. We were conscious of being transparent and sharing our process of question forming with her, to ensure that she felt comfortable being transparent with us. This allowed for a pleasant interview, in which Daniela thanked us at the end for the "reflection" time. Although we had a few open-ended questions, the interviewers also adapted follow-up questions based on the answers that Daniela gave. The interviewers prepared for the interview through cultivating a sense of curiosity to get to know her. Joseph studied and held in his mind the premises of pragmatic identity theory to ensure that we asked certain follow-up questions to help facilitate uncovering identities, based on the content of Daniela's story. [33]

The first session conversation was audio recorded. The interviewers wrote reflective memos, separately, directly after the interviews about their first impressions of Daniela, and what identities they noticed during the interview. The interview recording was transcribed and coded based on a two-part coding scheme. First, we looked for emergent, important quotes from Daniela about herself, and labeled them using her terms (emic coding). We then found themes about identity and analyzed the interview transcript using the four premises of pragmatic identity theory to construct a second coding scheme. [34]

6.2 Step 2: Predictions based on PIA analysis

Based on the interview analysis that used the premises of pragmatic identity theory Joseph utilized PIA to predict where and in what ways Daniela might experience tensions in her transition to university teaching and potential strengths to help resolve those tensions. In future work, discussing potential tensions and strengths based in the PIA framework could be done collaboratively with the interviewee during follow-up interviews. He then received feedback about the predictions and analysis from Julia and Deborah, and created an identity profile to better understand how Daniela's identities related to each other. [35]

After Daniela's first semester teaching, she and Joseph met for a second interview to discuss her experience as a teacher. The second interview was focused on general questions about Daniela's experience in the first semester to see what emerged, and if any of the predictions of tensions and strengths emerged without prompting. The conversation lasted about 60 minutes and was audio recorded. During the interview, Joseph marked confirmations of the predictions for the third step. [36]

6.3 Step 3: Collaborative analysis and insight generation

In the third interview session, directly after the second session, we went over the predictions and the confirmations or disagreements with those predictions that emerged unprompted from the second interview. We then collaboratively analyzed and reviewed the analysis of identities to refine the findings and member-check. Daniela and Joseph also discussed the method's feasibility and accuracy based on the two interviews, utilizing the information we constructed directly before. In this third interview, which lasted about 45 minutes, Joseph asked Daniela to view the write up the researchers undertook of her identity profile, and our predictions. In future iterations of this method, the interviewer could explain to the interviewee the identity profile creation process and the interviewee might make *their* own profile to compare it with the researcher for more collaborative identity analysis. This process would require more research. As this was the first development of this analysis process, we undertook the creation of the profiles ourselves to test the feasibility of the analytical technique. We asked Daniela if she had anything to amend or change in the profile, and we made those changes. Daniela offered keen insights in each conversation, amending and adding context to her statements. This process allowed us to uncover the complexity and the layers of depth inherent in identity. After this third interview, we wrote up the findings and identity constellation profiles and sent the full analysis to Daniela to ask for changes and find out if the work resonated with her, as another layer of member-checking. She confirmed our work before we engaged in publishing the research. [37]

7. Findings

Daniela is a first-year professor in her late thirties. She is originally from Eastern Europe, and has lived and worked in three countries, two of which are in the Americas, by the time of the interview. She first started her career as a therapeutic counselor in hospitals and in-home services, and then changed careers to perform research and teach at a university. She speaks four languages and presents as white. Before her first semester teaching, Daniela agreed to explore her identities with us as a way to test the PIA technique. [38]

7.1 Identity profiles

Presented below are Daniela's two identity profiles. The first representation shows thirteen identities Daniela discussed relevant to her transition to teaching. She also discussed a number of other identities during the interview, but only the thirteen identities that played the most significant role in our discussion are included in the analysis.

Figure 1: Identity profiles before and after teaching. Click [here](#) to download the PDF file [39]

The first figure is Daniela's identity profile based on the first interview, before she started teaching, and the second figure is based on the second interview, after her first semester teaching. Interview three was the collaborative construction and member checking of her profiles. The figures are organized in a way to quickly understand the source of each identity node and *their* relative salience, prevalence and longevity. The identity nodes are named based on a content analysis of the interviews. For example, Daniela identified herself as a developmental psychologist during the interview discussion:

"[I] felt that clinical or counseling psychology was too focused on therapy session[s]. So development [psychology] made a lot more sense because in developmental [psychology] you can study how a person develops; how we as human beings unfold and what are the conditions that we can promote [...] how we can promote well-being and health." [40]

So the construct "developmental psychologist" became one of the identity nodes in the collection. The position of the nodes is based on the premises of the theory. So, the vertical line represents the degree of prevalence that a particular identity has, based on the interview data, Daniela's active participation, and interviewer observation. The higher the identity node on the vertical axis the more likely that node will appear in any particular context. [41]

The horizontal axis is the degree of salience that the identity nodes consist of. Salience is the value that Daniela gives to each of her defined identities. The identities that are closer to the outline of the person are more salient, while the identities that are further from the figure are less salient. So, for example, the identity construct "being of service" was the most salient, based on quotes such as, "So that deep connection with that core essence of the only thing that makes

sense in life, is to be of service," while "researcher" was much less salient, although it was more prevalent. For example, quotes such as "I thought like 'wouldn't it be cool if I studied [mindfulness and wellbeing] as part of my job?' And one of the intentions around it was not even academic or research" suggested lower salience, but contextual analysis showed high prevalence. For example, Daniela is known on campus as the "mindfulness and wellbeing researcher." [42]

Analyzing Daniela's identity profile as a means for understanding her transition to teaching shows that her identity as "not teacher like" was important, and would likely create some tension for her, as she transitioned to being a teacher. To create this node, we analyzed content about her ideas of teaching:

"One funny part for me is that I never wanted to be a teacher ... it never crossed my mind. [I was more interested in] being with people, [in] some helpful, supportive ways, therapeutic ways. And even I would like, maybe the idea of having groups. But teacher? That sounded, it's still like, I don't see myself as a teacher" [43]

In fact, she later said that she saw teachers as "boring," "giving answers," and authoritarian as a child in school, so some of her identity construction was to not see herself as a teacher. This description of herself as "not teacher like" and the feelings she had about herself as not a teacher, allowed us to place the identity node and the source as a self-concept, as well as stemming from her social perceptions of teachers. When we discussed this identity node with Daniela, she laughed and said that where we placed it was in the correct location in relation to her other identities. [44]

The relative size of the symbols on Daniela's identity profile represents the longevity of each node. So, for example, the "meditation and yoga practitioner" node was larger than the "development psychology" node because Daniela mentioned that she began practicing yoga and meditation before she enrolled in developmental psychology courses: "I was interested, when I was in my early twenties, in mindfulness retreats, but more guided towards experiencing nature and yourself and things like that," but she started university studies in economics and business psychology "because at that time that was easy to do." We hypothesized that the longevity of each identity node is important because we understood that the duration of an identity would likely mean that it was more embedded in the habits and patterns of thought for Daniela, so her ability to change or shift that identity, if she wanted to, would be more difficult. For example, it may be psychologically difficult for Daniela to change from being a developmental psychologist to a lawyer, depending upon her other identities. These nodes also show a lower prevalence salience and longevity of a teacher identity, because it was so recent. This means that this identity could go through a variety of changes. Her "Not teacher like" identity however, is not very recent, as she grew up in a communist country, and did not like the rigidity and didactic nature of her teachers in primary and secondary school, so that might be more difficult to change. [45]

The lines between different identity nodes are the relationships between identities, representing observations that the identities are going to interact with each other. So, for example, the relationship between "not teacher like" and her nascent "teacher" identity is a clear example of two identities that are in a relationship with each other. When one of the identities moves, such as Daniela's teacher identity in the second identity profile, it is helpful to see what happens to the "not teacher like" node, relative to the "teacher" node. [46]

7.2 Predictions based on the identity profile

The value of this technique is its capacity to uncover identities to help understand where individuals might find tensions or sources of strength during significant moments or changes in their life, such as personal or professional transitions. In the case of Daniela, the first figure paints an analytical picture of a person who has a strong self-concept as a meditation and yoga practitioner. This topic was discussed the most during the interview and, in her narrative, Daniela mentioned that she has been practicing for over fifteen years, lending to this identity's longevity. The identity of a meditation and yoga practitioner is also a social conception that Daniela has cultivated, and one that she sees as her social identity as well. This identity points to possibilities in instructional leadership to ensure that Daniela has the space to continue her practice to maintain her wellbeing when she is teaching. [47]

Likewise, the recency of Daniela's teacher identity along with its low salience and low prevalence, in relationship with her identity as "not teacher like" point to tensions in performing aspects of the role of teacher, such as creating structure in the course syllabus, assigning course work and grading those assignments—this was based on content analysis of what "not teacher like" meant to Daniela, which meant not "giving answers [...] lecturing [...] being] authoritarian [...] strict." In the second interview Daniela, who did have a successful semester teaching, said that she was "uncomfortable" giving out assignments and grading the assignments, unprompted. For instructional leadership, this implies facilitating a conception of "teacher" with Daniela that is non-traditional, so that she can find comfort in her practices as a teacher. Offering her examples of pedagogy that are more collaborative and based on facilitation, instead of lecturing, would be a helpful instructional support. Also, providing examples of assignments that are group-work oriented, and consciously geared towards critical thinking, might help facilitate Daniela taking on her teacher identity. [48]

8. Limitations and Avenues for Further Development

This technique allows researchers and practitioners to get to know an individual in a non-intrusive, collaborative manner, so that both the interviewer and interviewee can understand how identities interact with the environment and either support or create tensions in various circumstances. There are some limitations to this method, however. First, the interviewer requires a number of interpersonal skills that are difficult to develop without practice. For example, he/she needs a significant amount of sensitivity, comfort with at times awkward revelations, and compassion to engage in this process productively. This limitation is related to two larger issues in qualitative research, more generally. First, there is the peril of misinterpretation as well as the interviewer coercing inaccurate responses from the interviewee because of power-dynamics (LINCOLN & GUBA, 1985). The second peril is the danger of the interviewee's self-deception when discussing deeper aspects of identity (CALDWELL, 2009). Self-deception is especially prevalent when individuals enter new contexts, although it is almost always present. The PIA approach attempts to walk the fine line of mitigating both in the method. However, the truth is that in interview practice both of these perils are always present. Therefore, this technique requires humility and reflexivity, ensuring that the interviewer, who will most likely embody a position of higher power, recognizes that the interviewee is ultimately the expert. [49]

Second, PIA analysis for each individual requires significant time, though the depth of the analysis is the main strength of the PIA method because it allows for a degree of complexity and subtlety often only found in autoethnographies or biographies (LEVITAN, CARR-CHELLMAN & CARR-CHELLMAN, 2017). Therefore, the current method of PIA is meant for academic research to help build theory about identity development. The research team is working to streamline the process of PIA analysis through a combination of pre-interview, self-reflective prompts and by creating a way to provide a canvas on which interviewees can create visual representations of their identity profiles for professional induction. We see the presentation of the findings allowing for comparison of identities in a quickly understood format, as valuable to develop self-awareness, so we are simultaneously working to refine the academic PIA process, which we find useful for research and building theory, and a professional induction PIA process. [50]

9. Conclusion

In this article we have introduced a qualitative, collaborative, technique for better understanding individuals' identities and the various relationships identities have with the self and the environment. The need for a qualitative technique for professional development has been noted in a number of recent studies (e.g., GHANIZADEH & OSTAD, 2016; NELSEN, 2015), and we are taking steps towards that goal. There is also a need for a qualitative method of identity research to develop theory that offers a more comprehensive understanding of the role of identity in individual's lives, which is what we have begun to develop here. [51]

More discussion and research utilizing this technique are necessary to refine and build trustworthiness of the technique, and to challenge the ways in which it can be utilized in research about identity and professional development. Testing the technique with participants is a valuable way to assess the reliability and trustworthiness of this approach for understanding identity, and the role identity can play in professional development and theory construction. [52]

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the group of practitioners and researchers at Just Breathe and Learning to Breathe for their support of this endeavor and for working with us to test and develop the PIA technique. We also thank Kayla JOHNSON for her feedback and Mimi TSIRKIN for her assistance.

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Levitan, Joseph; Mahfouz, Julia & Schussler, Deborah L. (2018). Pragmatic Identity Analysis as a Qualitative Interview Technique [52 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 19(3), Art. 18, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-19.3.3032>.