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## **Authentic Identity as an Achievement: A View from Discursive Psychology**

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### **Abstract**

This chapter outlines a discursive psychological (DP) approach to authentic identities. DP is the study of *how* and *for what* people manage psychological issues such as category membership, identity and authenticity within sequences of interaction. It assumes that discourse (claims, descriptions, accounts) is constructed and constructive, action-oriented, and produced in and for the local context. A DP approach is thus not concerned with who a person ‘really *is*’, but how the authenticity of an identity is worked up and what this achieves. We illustrate this approach by (re)analysing extracts drawn from published studies of youth subcultures, football fans, online discussion forums and support groups. We identify common discursive strategies, such as drawing contrasts with non-genuine members and ascribing the ‘right’ (or wrong) motives or attributes to self, and show how they are used to claim (or reject) the authenticity of various identities. We explain that such claims are ‘recipient designed’: they require ratification by the interlocutor. They are also ‘action-oriented’ in that they attend to members’ concerns such as interactional and inferential issues. We conclude by summarising DP’s potential contribution to understanding authentic identities.

### **Keywords:**

Discursive Psychology, Category Membership, interaction, discourse, social identity, participants’ orientation

## **Authentic Identity as an Achievement: A View from Discursive Psychology**

This chapter will outline Discursive Psychology (DP) and show how it provides a conceptual and analytic approach to authentic identities. A distinguishing feature of DP is that it is thoroughly empirical and data-driven: rather than starting with assumptions of what authenticity is, or by distinguishing different types (e.g. self- versus social authenticity), it puts these issues *in the hands of participants*. It asks: how do speakers or posters make authenticity relevant to claiming to be this or that type of person *here*? At the same time, DP makes descriptions, reports, and assertions the focus of analysis rather than the individual (Potter 2012). It aims to identify the discursive strategies used to establish authentic grounds for claiming to be a certain kind of person, by examining verbal or textual interactions in which people do these things. DP treats these discursive features as tacit skills rather than evidence of underlying decisions or beliefs. Put another way, DP is agnostic concerning possible underlying cognition; its focus is linguistic strategies and their use. To highlight our interest in discursive strategies and what they achieve, in this chapter we will (unusually) present a DP analysis of extracts from various published studies in which participants orient to the authenticity of various identities. We will conclude by asking what, if anything, we can say about authenticity as participants' concern.

### **Reconceptualising categories and identities**

To begin, it is useful to outline DP and its approach to category membership and identity. DP is the study of how and for what purposes people manage broadly psychological issues such as category membership, identity and motivation within sequences of talk as they interact with others (Potter and Edwards 2001; Wiggins 2017). It provides an alternative 'lens' through which we can understand psychology not as something 'inner', but as activities or practices that are situated in social interactions. Discourse (talk or text used in interaction) is thus at the heart of DP.

DP makes particular assumptions about discourse. It assumes that it is constructed (built from a range of resources such as words, grammatical structures, conversational practices) and constructive (used to build versions of psychological worlds and social actions). These constructions are produced in and for the local context, wherein they work to achieve some business. Analytically, DP aims "to reveal the complex and delicate work that goes into this seemingly effortless building" (Potter 2012:108), but it is also concerned with how we manage our accountability for things we say, the reports or descriptions we produce, so that they are not undermined as biased or 'interested'.

From this perspective, identities are treated as descriptions of someone, or as claims by someone, to being a particular type of person or a member of a category, however informal or specific (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998). Categories are associated with further resources (category-bound attributes, entitlements, activities). So, by 'casting' someone into a particular category, it may be assumed that what is conventionally known about the category also applies to that person. Conversely, describing someone in terms of particular attributes can make relevant their category membership. However, it isn't the case that these features are fixed: categories and category-bound features are *indexical* and *occasioned* in that their meaning is derived from and depends upon the context in which they are used or ascribed to someone. For example, the meaning and attributes of the category 'teenagers' are likely to differ depending on whether we are talking about road accidents (teenagers are too busy on their phones to notice the traffic) or holiday resorts (they are noisy, lively and like partying). Moreover, unless someone has to be described in a particular way (e.g. calling someone

British in Passport Control), then the use of a particular category label may be treated as meaningful. For instance, the fact that ‘teenagers’ is used in describing a ‘road accident’, rather than ‘cyclists’ or ‘pedestrians’, implies that the accident has something to do with the characteristics of teenagers.

DP examines how these constructions work to bring off some action within the turn-by-turn unfolding of interaction. Rather than relying on their own judgement or cultural knowledge, DP researchers look at how *participants* treat the ongoing action and interaction. That is, how they respond to what is said (or written) and whether it has a visible effect on how the interaction proceeds (Antaki and Widdicombe, *op cit*). Do they affirm, acknowledge or resist the implicated identities? Do they treat the attributes described as relevant, or problematic, or not credible? This will be revealed in the next turns of talk. Moreover, attending to the ongoing turn-by-turn sequences of interaction provides a particular benefit for analysts; the way that a turn is responded to in the following utterance provides some evidence of what it is taken to be doing, and this interpretation may be corrected or affirmed in the subsequent turns. For example, the response ‘yes please’ to ‘would you like a biscuit?’ shows that the first part is treated as an offer. The response, ‘how dare you’, indicates that the action is treated as something quite different (e.g. an insult or criticism) and this understanding may be corrected or confirmed by the first speaker. It follows that there is a preference for analysing interactional data that occur naturally, such as face-to-face talk or technology-mediated communication where interactions are not driven by the researcher’s agenda. Nevertheless, much DP work on authentic identities has been derived from interviews and this means that the interview questions themselves merit analytic attention for the role they play in co-producing the answers (Potter and Hepburn 2012).

In this chapter, we extend the observations above and show that these features of identity can provide both discursive and analytic resources for seeing how people create, negotiate, and/or reject identities as authentic.

### **Achieving authenticity through claiming the ‘right’ basis for category-bound attributes**

Early discursive psychological research on authentic identity was concerned with how interviewees constructed their authenticity as members of youth subcultures. By way of exemplifying the approach and the discursive resources used, consider the following excerpt from an interview in which the respondent is asked about how he became a hippy.

Extract 1. 1M:H:T5SA (RRF) (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995:142)<sup>1</sup>

- 1 I: wh-when and how did you sort of  
2 get into (0.8) being a hippy  
3 (1)  
4 R: err dunno someone lent me an Iron Maiden  
5 tape yeah? (.) and I really liked it so (.)  
6 an’ then I got into Rush an’ stuff,  
7 then I started going to concerts (0.1)  
8 an’ sort of sa:w everyone around you  
9 and you didn’t really fit in at the concerts  
10 an’ that (0.4) an’ it (.) just felt li-  
11 I’ve always felt like growing my hair long  
12 since I was little (.)  
13 I: >mmhm<  
14 R: so I jus decided to grow it long



genuinely positive assessment of that kind of music. Notice, too, that on line 7, he breaks off ('an they-') to insert the report of his previous negative view of heavy metal music. Insertions are significant in that they can be heard as extra, relevant information which provides for particular interpretations of what follows (and discounts others). Here, the insertion, 'an' I said oh heavy metal's rubbish', portrays his earlier, independent view of the music and thus reinforces the subsequent claim that change was due to knowledge rather than influence. Finally, notice the way he describes this as the start of getting into heavy metal rather than an immediate conversion (2:12).

Using a DP lens, we see several ways in which speakers construct the sincerity of the change in their musical allegiances by describing this as due to knowledge rather than the influence of friends, and they do so in the context of a question which asks about the acquisition of a subcultural identity. Musical taste, then, is treated as an attribute of that identity. At the same time, developing a preference for such music is related to personal taste and knowledge rather than (say) a desire for subcultural identity (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995). This helps to construct the authentic basis for their subsequent affiliation.

DP also seeks to identify sequential and other patterns in the data. Going back to extract 1, the respondent claims a further category-bound attribute, having long hair. Again, we can see the delicate way it is handled (1:7-15 as the speaker describes how he began changing his appearance after having got into the music. Notice how he begins describing a progression, from going to concerts, seeing the other people attending the concert, and not fitting in at the concerts. However, he does not continue his description of progression. Instead, there is a noticeable pause of 0.4 seconds before he starts saying something ('an' it (.) just felt li-'; 1:10). However, he breaks off from what he was about to say ('li-'), and repairs this by providing an alternative description 'I've always felt like growing my hair long' (1:11).

Repairs are a useful analytic resource. They can be inspected for the likely projection of the utterance, the inferential problems this might bring about, and how the amended utterance addresses these problems. In the context of his account of not fitting in at concerts, it is reasonable to assume that his first utterance might have continued by describing something he did to fit in (like growing his hair long). This would, in turn, make available the inference that he was simply copying others; a rather shallow basis for changing appearance (at least in Western societies). His repaired claim, in which he attributes his change in appearance to longstanding feelings, addresses this inferential problem. We can begin to identify a pattern here, by considering the following:

Extract 3. 3G:2M/F:T17SA [KHS] (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995:144)

- 1 MR1 it's like I was always int'rested-
- 2 I know it sounds a cliché looking like this- but
- 3 I was always interested in the::: (.) things like
- 4 horror (.) horror stories and horror and I was always writing
- 5 horror stories at school ever since I can remember (.)
- 6 I: ahha
- 7 MR1: and it's like (.) it was just a (.) an escape from
- 8 everything else and I was interested in things like the
- 9 supernat'ral (.) and I I just
- 10 *((few lines omitted where he talks about the supernatural))*
- 11 and that's why: it started to show with clothes, and hair,
- 11 and make up n everything as ↓well

This speaker refers to a category-bound feature of the gothic subculture: an interest in horror and the supernatural. He uses an extreme case formulation ('always interested', Pomerantz 1986) to describe his longstanding or deep-rooted interest which, he claims, preceded subcultural affiliation. This is reinforced by stating that his interest was manifest in the activity of 'always writing horror stories at school ever since I can remember' (3:5). In this way, he portrays his interests as an expression of his intrinsic self, rather than a result of category membership. His claim is further warranted by describing other ways that his preoccupation with the supernatural 'started to show' (3:10), again implying that his choice of clothes, hair, and wearing makeup, is an expression of self, not membership of the gothic subculture or wanting to fit in with friends. As in the example above, authenticity is achieved by describing an individualistic basis (expression of self) for attributes bound to subcultural affiliation (and in answer to a question about acquiring that identity).

Similar claims can be found elsewhere. The following extract is taken from Williams and Copes' (2005) study of how participants self-identified as straightedge, articulate and express subcultural identities and boundaries in an online forum.

Extract 4. Marcus (Williams and Copes 2005:79)

- 1 I told someone a while back that I was straight edge. . . . [...] I
- 2 have my own reasons for being "straight edge," that is, not
- 3 drinking, not smoking, and not fucking around. I had those
- 4 reasons even before I knew what "straight edge" was. [...]

Here, Marcus claims a longstanding commitment to attributes (not drinking, smoking or 'fucking around') that are category-bound to the straightedge culture. He claims explicitly that these preceded membership (4:3-4). He thus offsets the possible inference that these interests are motivated by membership, or others' influence, and thereby claims the 'right' (individualistic) grounds for membership; that is, an authentic identity.

To summarise, discursive psychology looks for sequential and linguistic patterns in the data. It asks what actions are achieved, what issues participants are orienting to, and it locates these claims in the details of what is said and how. In relation to authenticity, we have shown that speakers attend to the delicacy of claiming category-bound attributes; for example, the way that describing the influence of friends is treated as a threat to authenticity. Claiming the authenticity of identity is therefore not just about claiming the right attributes, it is also about portraying the 'right' grounds for possessing those attributes (e.g. acquiring knowledge, expressing longstanding interests or feelings).

### **Achieving authenticity through making comparisons**

We have seen that claiming authentic or individualistic motives for category-bound attributes is one discursive strategy for achieving authenticity, but it is not the only one. Another resource for establishing authenticity of identity is to undermine the authenticity of other people's membership (e.g. Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1990). Consider the following extract.

Extract 5. 2G:F:T1SB [KHS] (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995:152)

*The speaker has just been giving a brief history of Gothic. The Mission were a rock band with a large gothic following.*

- 1 I: have you noticed changes, in this time



2 R1: um (0.2) well, there's been The Mission that's just started and so  
3 it's become a lot more popular [especially with younger people  
4 R2: [yeah  
5 R1: there's mini-goths now hah hah  
6 I: what are mini-goths  
7 R1: mini-goths are young goths who follow The Mission around (.)  
8 and (.) I don't know, I think people who've dressed like this  
9 for a bit longer tend to look down on The Mission a bit  
10 cos like it was a splinter group of a better group and (.)  
*((some lines omitted in which she describes The Mission as a commercial  
splinter group of The Sisters of Mercy))*  
11 R1: a:nd so, the mini-goths tend to be the people who've  
12 only just recently cottoned on to the Mi[ssion  
13 R2: [°yeah°  
14 R1: >'cos they're only about< a ye:ar [old now  
15 R2: [they're very sh- (.)  
16 they're shallow (.) s-sort of they've just got into the-  
17 you know they're just dabbling in the (.) the outskirts of the music  
18 (so) y' [know huh huh  
19 R1: [you kno:w they throw away the white stilettos  
20 and buy buckle boots a:nd (0.3) I dunno  
21 it's jus quite funny

In this extract, the speakers are asked about changes in the gothic subculture. They describe changes in the music and in the membership, due to its increased popularity with younger (or newer) members. Three key ways can be identified in which these speakers undermine the authenticity of the younger members. First, they are labelled as 'mini-goths' (5:5) and mini, with its connotations of smallness, works to derogate the members so labelled. In other interviews reported by Widdicombe and Wooffitt, some members were described as 'pseudo goths' and 'plastic goths' to implicate their 'not-real' status; and Sala, Dandy and Rapley (2010) observed that some Italian-born Western Australians used the label 'wogs' to categorize and undermine some people as 'not real Italians'.

A second way of undermining others' authenticity is to describe members using terms that construct their shallowness. In the extract above, mini-goths are described explicitly as shallow (5:15-16). This is reinforced by saying they are 'dabbling in the outskirts of the music' (5:17, rather than immersing themselves more deeply in it). Their inauthenticity is also achieved through the description of the way in which they developed their music interest; 'recently cottoned on' (5:12) suggests an attachment to something because it is trendy or popular rather than through knowledge or a genuine preference for the music.

Third, the speakers ascribe prototypical attributes to the mini-goths (music taste, footwear) and the way they do this again builds their insincerity. They are described as liking 'The Mission' which in turn is characterised as relatively new, commercial and not as good as its predecessor. Furthermore, mini-goths' transition to adopting the style is artfully constructed as them throwing away one item of footwear (white stilettos) and adopting another (buckle boots), which is stereotypical of goths. By so doing, mini-goths are portrayed in a way that treats the gothic subculture as a fashion, and membership as a matter of simply buying a particular kind of footwear. This, R2 suggests (5:15-16), is a shallow motive for membership.

R1 differentiates herself from these members and she does so in a subtle way on lines 8-10. She refers to ‘people who’ve dressed like this for a bit longer’, and attributes to them a negative attitude towards the band favored by mini-goths (they ‘look down on’ it). Her subsequent description displays a knowledge of the predecessor of *The Mission*, and an assessment of that group, *The Sisters of Mercy*, which she refers to as a ‘better group’. She thus implicates her status as an ‘older’ goth and establishes her own authenticity through the implicit contrasts with younger members.

We can make further observations about how speakers manage their stake or interest in drawing contrasts that favor their own status. First, note that R1’s account is constructed as a factual report of the current state of affairs (‘there’s been the Mission’; 5:2) rather than a personal account (e.g. of what I have experienced, what I think of the bands). Second, she simultaneously avoids explicitly labelling herself in drawing this comparison. This indirectness is functionally significant in that a direct claim to authenticity (for example, claiming that ‘I am a real Goth’) may be challenged or rejected as interested or big-headed. Third, her reference to older members is preceded by the phrases, ‘I don’t know’ and ‘I think’, which can be used to display a lack of commitment to, or interest in, the statement that follows (Potter 1997).

Similar strategies are discernible in Williams and Copes’ (*op cit*) study. The extract below is a response to the question posed by one of the authors in an internet discussion forum, of why participants felt straightedge was important to them.

Extract 6. *Ethical Underground* (Williams and Copes 2005:78)

- 1 Unfortunatly, kids are sometimes attracted to sXe for the label itself.
- 2 I see kids trying to be as “edge” and “hardcoare” as possible. I myself
- 3 don’t claim the label. I don’t feel I need it. You will see a lot of new kids
- 4 on this forum asking “is this edge?” and shit like that. People are trying
- 5 to fit into the label of “edge”, rather than let being edge fit into
- 6 themselves. This is what is wrong with sXe.

In this extract, some members are referred to as ‘kids’ and ‘new kids’ (6:1, 2, 3). Their motivation for being (or wanting to be) members is described as attraction to ‘the label itself’ (6:1) or ‘trying to fit into the label’ (6:4-5), suggesting that their motivation is superficial because it is driven by their desire for the image. Moreover, they are described as ‘*trying to be as “edge” and “hardcoare” as possible*’ (6:2), a phrase that is often used to convey lack of success (people do not usually say ‘I tried and succeeded’ unless emphasizing effort or achievement; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995). Finally, the kids are constructed as uncertain and as having a lack of knowledge (they need to ask, ‘is this edge?’; 6:4).

The poster employs implicit and explicit contrasts here to convey his own authenticity. For example, whereas ‘the kids’ treat the label as desirable, he says he does not ‘claim the label’ (6:3). In doing so, he is able to suggest its applicability while avoiding the problematic inferences that might attend claiming, wanting or liking a label: namely, that membership rests on what you call yourself rather than, say, what you do or who you are. Moreover, he provides an account for not labelling himself: not feeling he needs it (6:3). In the context of comparison, this suggests that the younger, superficial members do need it (for belonging, coolness or whatever), whereas he ‘has’ whatever they need without recruiting the label.

These descriptions establish certain motives for membership as superficial (wanting to fit the label), in contrast to a more individualistic (and unmotivated) account in which the subculture is allowed to 'fit into' self. In the following extract, reported in a focus group study conducted by Dedman (2011), Adam deployed similar (contrast) strategies to dissociate the 'purists' and 'peripherals' in hip-hop culture.

Extract 7. *Adam* (Dedman 2011:515)

1 Go into the street now and ask all the kids if they can rap and  
2 most will put their hands up. All the little kids are doing it  
3 these days but they ain't doing anything new. Like, I don't  
4 know . . . they're copying someone else's flow or just spitting  
5 the lyrics they've learnt from a track. That's different to what  
6 we do. We're trying to push things on and push ourselves.  
7 Those kids out there spitting bars in the shopping centre or  
8 wherever don't have the balls to get up on stage.

Here, *Adam* uses 'kids' and 'little kids' to refer to some members: ascribing an age-related category to them portrays them as immature. In addition, they are described as 'putting their hands up' when asked if they can rap; a description that is characteristic of children's responses to questions in the classroom and this reinforces their immature status. Adam then draws contrasts between their actions ('they're copying' or 'spitting' someone else's lyrics; 7:4-5) and 'what we do' (7:5-6), namely, creating ('push things on' or doing something new). He also describes their activities: they are 'spitting bars in the shopping centre or wherever' and this is contrasted with 'hav[ing] the balls to get up on stage'. So, there is an implicit contrast between the location of and associated courage in doing hip hop; this contrast works to further undermine these members. At the same time, it makes relevant 'getting up on stage' and, in the context of his prior claim regarding the difference in their activities, it is implied that we do (and have the courage to) get up on stage. Notice too that he invites the recipient to 'go out into the street and ask'. His characterization of some members' activities is thereby presented as 'out-there' or available to anyone who asks. In this way, he is also able to address the potential charge of being biased: his views are constructed as a feature of the world rather than a product of his interests.

To summarize, we have observed several strategies used by speakers to construct the authenticity of some members (including themselves) through contrast to other members who are portrayed as immature and lacking the 'right' grounds for affiliation.

### **Validating authenticity through interaction**

In the extracts above, establishing authenticity is done in interaction with a researcher or other posters, and we have identified how respondents' claims are sometimes designed and constructed in ways that allow recipients to draw particular conclusions without being explicit. We argue that this functions to inoculate claims against being challenged or undermined as 'big headed', arrogant or biased. In the extract below, we see further evidence of the interactive business of achieving authenticity. This is taken from Miller and Benkwitz' (2016) study of how participants claimed the authenticity of their identity as football fans. The authors observe that this speaker addresses a live concern: he says he cannot attend games regularly, and this admission potentially undermines his claim to be an authentic fan. Of particular interest here is how he makes several attempts to have his status as such ratified.

Extract 8. Int 21 <Newcastle United; male; age 24 years; times as “fan” 19 years>  
(Miller and Benkwitz 2016:48)

- 1 R: =Yeah (.) to be fair (0.2) e:r (0.4) it's about love (.) eh?  
2 I: °Mm: °?  
3 R: Ah: mean (.) mah family love Newcastle United and (.) ah  
4 love them ya know?  
5 I: °Yeah°  
6 R: Ah mean I knock around here with these dicks who support  
7 Man U and Chelsea and (.) °tha° (0.2) and ya know they'll  
8 win shit an tha (0.4) but they don't feel it the way we do  
9 ya know=  
10 I: °Yeah°  
11 R: =all of us (.) we'll tell you that ah (.) once you've been to  
12 Saint Jameses (0.4) win or lose (0.2) it'll be in ya:h bones ((continues))

The speaker builds his identity as an authentic Newcastle United fan by describing his intrinsic love for the club (Miller and Benkwitz, op cit). Our interest here is in his use of ‘eh?’ (8:1) and ‘ya know’ (8:4, 7, 9), which function to seek affiliation and ratification from the interviewer. Although it is to an extent forthcoming, the agreement is initially muted (‘°Mm: °?’; 8:2), minimal (‘°Yeah°’; 8:5, 10), and said quietly. These minimal responses are treated by the fan as indicating that his initial account of love as the basis on being an authentic fan are somehow insufficient. Further evidence of the speaker’s authenticity is therefore produced in subsequent turns in several ways. First, he expands his claim of ‘love’ by constructing it as a feeling he shares with significant others (‘mah family love Newcastle United’; 8:3). Second, he states explicitly his love for the team (8:4). Third, he produces a contrast with supporters of two other clubs (‘dicks’; 8:6), whose grounds for affiliation with their clubs are winning things rather than feelings (8:6-9). Fourth, he describes the depth of feelings, it is ‘in ya:h bones’ whether the team wins or loses (8:12). This illustrates nicely the DP principle that authentic identities are co-produced through interaction and require some level of approval or agreement from the recipient. Moreover, it is interesting to note that this occurs even in an interview situation where there is little at stake for the speaker (other than immediate self-presentation; see Potter and Hepburn 2012). In the following extracts, we examine the joint establishment of authenticity in situations where there is more at stake for the participants.

We have noted that the interactive nature of talk means that we produce descriptions and make claims in ways that anticipate the interlocutor’s response; this is known as ‘recipient design’. A similar phenomenon is also found in online interaction. For example, studies of posts to online support groups and forums show that responses to initial posts depend in part on constructing identity in ways that clearly establish the poster’s credentials as a member of the particular forum (e.g. Giles 2006; Stommel and Koole 2010). For example, Horne and Wiggins’ (2009) study, *Doing being ‘on the edge’*, shows how forum posters work up their identities as genuinely suicidal; how this is acknowledged; and how members of the forum interactively co-construct their authenticity. The following extract provides an example.

Extract 9. *Kath*. Posts: 108. 01:15pm (Horne and Wiggins 2009:175)

- 1 I've been suicidal for a couple days now. Yesterday I went out  
2 driving with an xacto blade knife in my glove compartment,  
3 with all intentions of parking somewhere and doing it . . . a number  
4 of things happened and I didn't . . . i don't know what im doing.

5 I've been down this road too many times . . . i'm fed up. I  
6 feel helpless . . . im just so tired. ☹

Horne and Wiggins identify a number of linguistic devices through which posters construct their identity as authentically suicidal. First, there is an explicit claim to being suicidal (9:1). This is reinforced in two ways. One is through the details of her description which includes the occasion ('Yesterday I went out driving'), of having a specific type of knife ('an xacto blade knife'), in a specified location ('in my glove compartment'), and an explicit intention ('parking somewhere and doing it'). These portray the immediacy and urgency of the threat. The other way is by producing statements which work up an identity of someone 'on the edge' or as more than depressed (here, 'i'm fed up', 'i feel helpless' and 'i'm just so tired'). A second feature is the construction of self as being rational (e.g. able to reflect on not knowing what she's doing). A third is that she does not ask for help but leaves open the possibility of receiving help or advice. As the authors note, asking for help could have suggested a different purpose (seeking help) rather than simply expressing suicidal intentions, and this would undermine the authenticity of her identity as suicidal. This pattern, of three features, is found in other posts too, adding further evidence for their claim that achieving a suicidal identity 'can involve specific discursive practices' (p.176).

The authors also show how replies to posts picked up these features, thereby confirming their significance, as well as the interactively contingent, co-constructed nature of authentic identities (they need to be validated). The extract below is a reply to one of the suicide posts they examine.

Extract 10. *Reply to Caroline*, Leo, Posts: 335; 12:16 p.m (Horne and Wiggins 2009:176-177)

1 Darling,  
2 you can hang on. You can. Last week I was in the same place  
3 and I reached out for help from A + E  
4 It's been the worst week of my life but through some weird-ass  
5 things (I dunno why) I managed to pass through it.  
6 Keep holding on, please, right now it doesn't seem like it will  
7 get better but I swear it will  
8 Who's fault? Maybe if you simply let go and type everything  
9 on your mind it may help.

They observe how Leo here ratifies Caroline's identity as imminently suicidal through the instruction to 'hang on' (10:2) and 'keep holding on' (10:6), while also treating the state as temporary ('it will get better'). Leo also constructs himself as sharing the identity and experience. He does so through his description of being 'in the same place' the previous week, and by saying that he sought help from A & E. He also portrays knowledge of her state and certainty of its trajectory ('it doesn't seem like it will get better but I swear it will') on the basis of his own experience ('I managed to pass through it'; 10:5). It is only after his delicate work of establishing these shared experiences, that he produces his advice (10:8-9). Leo's authentic identity is thus used to legitimize both his advice and the giving of it.

In summary, constructing an authentic identity is done in and through interaction, using a variety of linguistic devices, and it has potentially far-reaching consequences (such as receiving support or not). In the final part of this chapter, we want to show how similar devices are used to achieve the opposite effect: that is, to reject a potentially relevant identity.

## Rejecting membership by claiming inauthenticity

In this section, we consider cases where category-bound activities or attributes are invoked to disqualify the speaker from membership on the grounds of not being authentic. The following extract comes from an interview with a Russian who took part in protests in Russia (2011-2012). Just prior to this extract, he was asked about his identity as a member of the opposition or ‘opponenter’, a term used commonly by the media to refer to people who were anti-Putin and/or involved in the demonstrations.

Extract 11. Protester 30, male, Volgograd (Lukyanova 2017; translated from the original Russian)

- 1 P: am I the opposition?  
2 I: mmhm  
3 P: for example I mean (.) rather, I’m a civic activist yeah because  
4 the opposition in a narrow sense of the word  
5 I: mmhm  
6 P: after all it’s something political (.)  
7 um political movement party group that fights for power  
8 I: mmhm aha  
9 P: I’m not a member of any like party group that fights for power  
10 I: aha aha  
11 P: so um (0.5) in that sense £ what sort of opposition am I? £I- (.)

In this extract, the interviewee (P), does not provide a direct answer to the question; instead, he recycles it (‘am I the opposition?’) and hedges (‘for example I mean’) before producing an alternative category label (‘rather, I’m a civic activist’), and an account (11:3-7). These features indicate some difficulty with the question or the identification it invites, which the alternative label and account are designed to address. With this in mind, observe that in his account, the interviewee defines the attributes of the opposition, ‘it’s something political’, and expands it to ‘political movement party group that fights for power’. It is interesting to note that at various points, the interviewer could acknowledge the participant’s implicit rejection of the categorical identity, but she does not. Instead, she produces continuers (‘mmhm’, 11:5, 8; ‘aha’, 11:8, 10), and does not take a turn during the brief pause (at line 6). She thus fails to acknowledge or take up the claim that he is not a member. He then rejects membership explicitly on the grounds of not possessing the attributes he had just defined as criterial (‘I’m not a member of any like party group that fights for power’, 11:9). He also produces an upshot: ‘in that sense what sort of opposition am I?’. The idiomatic expression, ‘what sort of an x am I?’, treats the person description (here, opponenter) as not legitimate or even ridiculous. It is notably produced in a non-serious way (indicated by the smiley voice). This displays a sensitivity to the interactional difficulty of rejecting the offered identity, and thus the interviewer’s assumption about the basis of his protest action. Here, then, we see how a discursive strategy which is used to claim authenticity of identity can also be used to deny membership on the grounds of not being authentic or ‘proper’. Similarly, in the following extract speakers reject membership of a potentially relevant subculture.

Extract 12. Three NS:F:T3SA (FP) (Widdicombe 1998:58)

- 1 I: WOULD you, would you say that you were punks  
2 or anything like that  
3 R3: n[o

4 R1: [no  
5 R2: [no  
6 R3: no  
7 (.)  
8 R2: mmhm ah.hh cos we haven't got an attitude like, I mean,  
9 when you think punk you think, you think punk is .hh  
10 is not just the way you dress like you have to have  
11 a certain way of thinking you know to be a punk and  
12 we haven't got- well I certainly haven't got it anyway  
13 you know I'm just .hh

These speakers reject membership of the punk subculture directly when asked. However, their denial is not taken up by the interviewer (12:3-7) and it thus becomes or is treated as accountable. To explain why, it is useful to think about the structure of interaction. Sacks (1992) observed that the most basic conversational sequence is an adjacent pair of actions, which are ordered such that the first part of the pair (e.g. a question) anticipates a second part or a range of second parts (e.g. an answer). Once the second part is produced, the sequence may be concluded, and a new action or sequence initiated (although the first speaker can also respond to the answer in the third turn). Here, the interviewer asks a question ('would you say that you were punks?'), and the interviewees answer it ('no'). Instead of moving on to the next question or action at line 7, or the interviewer responding to their answer, there is silence. This is taken to indicate that the answer is insufficient; we can see that this is how R2 treats it because she produces an explanation. She says she does not possess a particular attribute ('we haven't got an attitude like', 12:8). This claim is reinforced by then explicitly constructing having 'a certain way of thinking' (12:10-11) as criterial for being punk whilst discounting other potentially significant category-bound attributes ('the way you dress', 12:10). It is interesting to note that R2 begins to reject possession of a way of thinking on behalf of the group ('we haven't got-') and repairs this to a personal claim ('I haven't got it', line 12). Repairs alert the analyst to some problem (Fox, Benjamin and Mazeland 2012); here perhaps the way that making claims on behalf of the collective could invoke a category membership, which R2 is working to reject.

## Concluding Remarks

We have presented and re-examined from a DP perspective extracts from the literature in which speakers and posters construct identities as authentic. In this way, we hope to have shown that authentic identity can be fruitfully conceptualised as a situated practice, that is, as worked up using tacit skills in the context of interaction to achieve some end. We have built our arguments to this effect in the following ways.

First, we identified a number of linguistic devices or skills used in the service of achieving authentic identities. These included claiming to have the 'right' attributes, or the 'right' grounds or motives for those attributes. They also included drawing contrasts with members who were labelled and described as shallow, and the use of descriptive terms (e.g. to implicate being 'on the edge'). We showed that similar strategies were used to reject an ascribed identity (opponenter or punk) by establishing the inauthenticity of that category membership. Moreover, these devices were observed across studies, with different groups, in

different contexts and with different kinds of data, thereby indicating their status as shared, transferable skills that can be used to claim an authentic identity.

Second, we showed that authenticity was achieved in the context of interaction. More specifically, we showed that claims were recipient-designed and (sometimes) depended on recipient-validation or co-construction; for example, speakers and posters invited agreement and approval from their interlocutors. In addition, claims to being authentic were often indirect: speakers did not for example claim 'I am a real punk'. Instead, we showed how they allowed others to draw this conclusion, for example, by presenting the urgency of the suicide threat; by producing implicit contrasts with shallow others; and by portraying self as knowledgeable and authoritative in relation to the category. In this sense, authenticity was achieved jointly or collaboratively. Indeed, we can argue that the turn-by-turn sequences of interaction afford the means through which people co-produce shared meanings and knowledge and establish shared understanding regarding authentic identities. To put this another way, sequences of interaction provide an 'architecture of intersubjectivity' (Heritage 1984) for participants and a useful resource for analysts interested in psychological phenomena such as identity and authenticity.

Third, we showed that constructing authentic identities in the specific ways they were constructed displayed an action-orientation. Thus, we have seen that features of the construction design can inoculate claims to be authentic against potential discounting as bragging. They can enable speakers to disapprove of some members by labelling them inauthentic. They can disqualify certain groups and their members. They can establish standards of being an authentic member, and they can accomplish the task of seeking supportive responses. We also showed that establishing identity as inauthentic can be used to resist category membership and the assumptions made about a person on the basis of category membership.

In short, DP provides a detailed, systematic, empirical approach that helps us see the delicate and collaborative work that goes into claiming and rejecting the authenticity of one's identity, and the actions thereby accomplished.



## Footnote

<sup>1</sup> Where relevant, Jefferson's (2004) transcription system is used to show *how* and what is said. Other extracts are reproduced in their original form. The transcription notation can be found in the Appendix at the end of the chapter.

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## Appendix: Jefferson (2004) Transcription Notation

Symbol	Use
[ text ]	Indicates the start and end points of overlapping speech.
=	Indicates the break and subsequent continuation of a single interrupted utterance.
(# of seconds)	A number in parentheses indicates the time, in seconds, of a pause in speech.
(.)	A brief pause, usually less than 0.2 seconds.
↓	Indicates falling pitch.
↑	Indicates rising pitch.
-	Indicates an abrupt halt or interruption in utterance.
>text<	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more rapidly than usual for the speaker.
<text>	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual for the speaker.
°	Indicates whisper or reduced volume speech.
ALL CAPS	Indicates shouted or increased volume speech.
<u>Underline</u>	Indicates the speaker is emphasizing or stressing the speech.
:::	Indicates prolongation of an utterance.
Hhh	Audible exhalation
.hhh	Audible inhalation
(( <i>italic text</i> )).	Contains author's descriptions
'[...]'	indicates omission.
£	Indicates suppressed laughter or smiley voice