

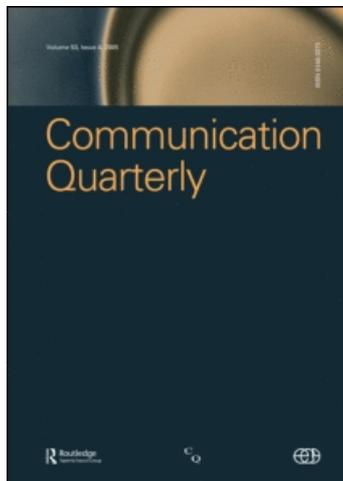
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Introduction: Theorizing and Analyzing The Nexus Between Cultural and Gendered Identities and the Body

Ronald L. Jackson II

Identities are the products of collective perceptions and individuated definitions of the self. They are “multi-layered” (Hecht, 1993), “deep-structured” (Daniel & Smitherman, 1990), “relational” (Hecht, Jackson & Ribeau, 2003), “plurisignant” (Jackson, in press), and discursively bound (Hall, 1997) social constructions. Identities are also about licensure, about proprietary access to one’s personal and communal self.

Identity negotiation is a natural extension of the metacommunicative dimensions of defining the self. To negotiate identity is to enact a process whereby one attempts to maintain, retain or retrieve custody and authority over defining the self despite knowing that one cannot control how one’s self is socially understood. When adding the prefix of race, culture, or gender to identity, there are values, norms, and worldviews at stake in the identity negotiation process. As with any negotiation, there is the possibility of gaining, losing and/or exchanging something. Although there is the possibility that one’s life may be expanded or ameliorated during an identity negotiation process, when most scholars speak of identity negotiation, they are talking about loss or exchange of something. In this case, that something that is at stake is identity. It is not that one may gain, lose, or exchange his or her full identity in a simple interactive episode. For example, an individual may feel at risk of having important values, norms and traditions that constitute his or her identity seized or attacked by a more dominant force; hence he or she may concede one or more of these dimensions to maintain some self-preserving aspect of life.

To crystallize this idea, let’s consider a female subordinate who is strongly advised not to wear kente cloth at work. Should this person choose to continue wearing kente cloth, she may be penalized, maybe even fired. That person has a decision to make. Is the kente cloth more important than the job? If so, then she will surely not mind taking the risk or simply not return to work. If the job is more important, then she will concede by not wearing the kente cloth during working hours. The identity issue concerns the symbolism the African cloth may represent for a culturally conscious individual. It may be a representation of her cultural identity, so by denying her the right to wear this kente cloth, the supervisor may be rejecting a part of her identity that may contribute to how she defines herself culturally. In this situation, the woman would be said to be negotiating her cultural identity.

Identity negotiation research is but one facet of identity studies. What is often im-

mediately recognizable in identity studies is the fact that many such investigations are devoid of certainty. They elucidate the unstable nature of defining the self. This does not mean they are ambiguous or somehow lack rigor, but that there is rarely any claim to a universal truth, to some epistemic foundationalism that undergirds all that we will become. Social predicates influence when and under what circumstances we negotiate our identities. All we can grasp, as identity scholars in the field of communication, is the socially constructed nature of our current experience. Clearly, this signals the death knell of paradigmatic conservatism, social determinism, and cultural hegemony as acceptable tools for sustaining intellectual milieus, since the crux of our experience can best be discovered using multiple methodological approaches.

The essays in this double-thematic issue courageously accept the challenge to be revolutionary, to approach the phenomenon of identity negotiation with intellectual tenacity and with brilliant insight. They should be widely celebrated and cited, not only because of their cogency and lucidity, but also because they do not present the typical homogeneous, and therefore solipsistic representations of cultural subjectivity that are pandemic to academic scholarship within and without the field of communication. In actively resisting the impulse to embrace ontological fixity, these essays energetically invite us to systematically unravel the multiple, complicated and communicative dimensions of our sociocultural selves.

The first seven essays of the double-thematic issue examine ideas pertaining to gendered, racial, cultural and performative identities. The first essay is authored by Patricia Parker, who is an organizational communication scholar interested in the confluence of race and gender in the workplace. In her study entitled, "Negotiating Identity in Raced and Gendered Interactions," she thematically analyzes the perspectives of fifteen African American senior executives concerning the communication strategies they employ when managing challenges. Parker found that these women reported "perceptions of exclusionary and oppressive tactics by their White male colleagues and by their African American colleagues and clients." During encounters where these perceptions and tactics were enacted, the African American women executives felt the need to assert themselves and negotiate their identities.

In the next essay by Diane Forbes, another organizational communication scholar, the issue of a sort of protean masculine disposition is explored. Particularly, Forbes offers a critical analysis of Jamaican women managers' discourses, which appeared to have assumed an "internalized masculine" posture. Her thematic analysis of the five participants' interviews revealed identity negotiation practices via the women managers' use of patriarchal and hegemonic language choices and values to strategically manage their segments of the workforce.

Nina Reich's essay, "Towards a rearticulation of women-as-victims," is the third article in this special issue. Using articulation theory, she systematically examines the discourses derived from semi-structured interviews of twelve well-trained crisis counselors who have experience working with women as victims. Her findings indicate that eight themes emerged pertaining to self-labels and other-labels as well as victim-blame versus offender-focus. One excerpt from Reich's essays nicely sums up the substance of the essay:

A rearticulation of the term victim necessitates an expansion of our current language practices...Therefore, women may be both victims and survivors, victims may be both women and men, victims may need help and simulta-

neously be strong, and the label victim may mean different things in different contexts and in different moments in time.

S. Lily Mendoza, Rona T. Halualani, and Jolanta A. Drzewiecka wrote the fourth essay entitled, "Moving the discourse on identities in intercultural communication: Structure, culture and resignifications." This conceptual-theoretic essay is the epicenter of the six essays in this issue. It nicely sutures the previous essays' themes related to subjective cultural identity processes and the subsequent essays' focus on performativity. This study explores various identity paradigms that contribute to "the constructing, construing, performing and negotiating of identities," then concludes with three case studies. In each case described, the authors are attentive to both the multifaceted representation and intricate politicization of identities in communicative contexts.

Next, Bryant Keith Alexander and John T. Warren discuss "The materiality of bodies: Critical reflections on pedagogy, politics and positionality." In the form of an autopoietic narrative, this most innovative thinkpiece accepts the task of resignifying (as does Mendoza et al.), deconstructing and decoding antidemocratic educational praxis, while dialogically engaging the politics of location, identity and materialized bodies. Perhaps, the most audacious exercise in this essay is the enactment of self-implicature. That is, the most difficult part of self-healing is turning inward and addressing how you as critic still reinscribe and Otherize the self on a canvas similar to the one you find too harsh and undermining. As readers, we are permitted to accompany the authors on a rather humbling and truly honest intellectual excursion that ends with a call "to explore the materiality of bodies, individually and collectively, searching the residue of experience for tracks that trail us back to ourselves and back to our humanity."

In Frederick Corey's essay, which I believe is one of the most insightful essays in the special issue, he performs a multi-dimensional Lacanian psychoanalysis of someone he names "Alexander." In a final return to materialism in this special issue, Corey conducts a critical inquiry akin to autoethnographic studies. Alexander is described as "a gay, White, American man who is concerned with gender and the boundaries between masculine and feminine. In exploring signposts of Alexander's sexuality such as shoes, Corey unpacks not only what gayness means to Alexander, but also the process through which Alexander's gay identity becomes negotiated.

The final essay in this section is entitled, "*It's a struggle but worth it: Identifying and managing identities in an interracial friendship*," is authored by Rhunette C. Diggs and Kathleen D. Clark. This autoethnographic study explores the personal discourses of two women who attended graduate school together. Utilizing Sense-Making self-interviews, Diggs & Clark offer a fascinating set of reflections about the preservation of interracial friendships and dialogues. Their honest and self-revealing interrogations included discussions of emergent and spiritual identities. Rather than run from relationships with each other, the two of them explain why it is more important to stay and confront each other and develop as a result of that co-constructed togetherness.

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN RELATIONAL AND MASS MEDIATED CONTEXTS

We are very proud to say the blind review process was judicious and the manuscripts you will read here are very thorough. It is very important for me to also acknowledge that a special issue of this sort cannot possibly cover every topic or disci-

plinary perspective in the field. Consequently, you will likely find that the essays do not address the concerns of many cultures and/or co-cultures. Additionally, we discovered that we received very few quantitative manuscripts and so on the surface there appears to be a bias toward qualitative methods and conceptual-theoretic work; however, I can assure you there was no such favoritism granted to any given approach during the process.

This second segment of the double-thematic issue features six essays beginning with my framing essay, which was written to offer segue into the discussion of identity negotiation. That essay is entitled, "Cultural Contracts Theory: Toward an understanding of identity negotiation." In it, I present a nascent paradigm coined "cultural contracts theory." This theory, as it implies, is an identity negotiation approach, which seeks to explore what is being negotiated when we use the phrase "negotiation of cultural identity." The fact is our identities are constantly shifting, but we also have a core component to our identities that does not change so readily. That core represents values, norms, beliefs, and assumptions that comprise our worldviews. When we negotiate our identities, we are often talking about negotiating the core. The other mini-negotiations of non-core items are virtually meaningless and are barely noticeable concessions. Core-identity negotiations can be figuratively understood with respect to cultural contracts. The "identity terms" are found within the contract types that are being presented and negotiated. There are three types of contracts discussed: ready-to-sign, quasi-completed and co-created, which refer to assimilation, accommodation, and adaptation, respectively.

The second essay of this second segment entitled, "In search of the power of whiteness: A genealogical exploration of negotiated racial identities in America's ethnic past" is written by Roberto Avant-Mier and Marouf Hasian, Jr. In their genealogical analyses of three Louisiana communities, they explore the underlying power of whiteness while being mindful of individual and communal identity negotiations. The essay traces ideological underpinnings of racial purity hypotheses and attempts of Blacks at "passing," then uses these as a catalyst for a discussion of the dynamics of institutional separation, negotiations of whiteness and social constructions of difference.

In the same vein of thinking with regards to institutionally sanctioned literatures of whiteness, Alberto and JoBeth Gonzalez co-wrote the essay, "The color problem in Sillyville: Negotiating White identity in one popular kid-vid." In this investigation, the authors question racial representations in children's television programming, with particular attention turned to one popular 1989 "kid-vid" called *Wee Sing in Sillyville*. They interrogate the confluence of race and power, and ask whether racial representations in this children's video reinforce or challenge the centrality and goodness of whiteness. The essay concludes with recommendations for presenting narratives related to race.

Kenton T. Wilkinson wrote the fourth essay in the second segment. His essay addresses "Collective Situational Ethnicity and Spanish-language television advocacy." In presenting a historically situated preliminary four-tiered model for media advocacy that fuses ethnic studies, political science, sociology and media studies, Wilkinson posits that the eventual results may be media market expansion and ethnic pluralism. His unabashed claim is that U.S. Spanish-language television is scarcely presented, except for monetary ends with little to no regard for the political and economic incentives inherent in reaching the nation's fastest-growing minority population.

In keeping with the culture and race-related trend in the articles discussed thus

far, Kim L. Purnell addresses another mass mediated venue—music. In “Listening to Lady Day: An exploration of the creative (re)negotiation of identity revealed in the life narratives and music lyrics of Billie Holiday,” Purnell presents an analysis that evolved from her dissertation research of the same topic. This critical-historical piece begins by explicating the “controlling images” of Black women as toms, coons, mammies, matriarchs, tragic mulattoes and exotics. Simultaneously, Purnell explains how Billie Holiday’s narrative constructions of her identity were active resistances to the controlling images around her. Ironically, those controlling images consumed descriptions of her life, forcing her to constantly renegotiate her identity.

The last, but far from least essay in the double-thematic issue is that of Leda Cooks. Her essay entitled, “Zonians in Cyberspace,” is a thoroughly enjoyable read that adopts a critical and performance ethnography approach to a “text-based imagined community created on the Panama-L listserv.” Zonians refers to natives and inhabitants of a 50-mile stretch called the Panama Canal Zone. Although Panama is an actual physical space, the subscribers to Panama-L listserv share cyber-space with imagined boundaries and constituted figurative spaces for members. Cooks begins by surveying the literatures concerning modern, postmodern, and postcolonial theoretic debates concerning space, place, location, migration, and boundary negotiation. Next, she conceptualizes a unique space for cyber-citizenship, where nationhood is re-formed and community is re-constructed. Finally, she takes a multidimensional critical and performance ethnographic approach to her examination of the Panama-L citizenry, examining the context, the rules for participation, the framing of commentary, and the interstices for reflection.

In each of these last five essays from Avant-Mier & Hasian to Cooks, we find an open dialogue about identity negotiation. It is curious that many identity negotiation scholars in the field, and certainly in this double-issue, are thick-descriptivists. They seek to explore the intense detail and structure of identity negotiation processes. We find ourselves being engaged by the analyses of identities in various media from children’s video and Spanish-language television to music and cyberspace. We are presented with various conceptual and methodological approaches once again. It was once said that wisdom is going through life and paying attention. This is just one catalyst for extending our wisdom—please accept it and share it!

There is no question in my mind that these essays refreshingly push the envelope in terms of what we ordinarily see in communication scholarship. They approach the identity negotiation theme from multitudinous standpoints, and they do not do so timidly. We have a richly diverse array of perspectives presented here that will serve to expand extant epistemologies and methodologies for years to come.

The double-thematic issue you hold in your hands is the result of a very extensive review process, one that was facilitated by both my editorial assistant Celnisha Dangerfield and the resources at my disposal provided by my department at Penn State University. Dale Bertelsen was a great person to work with on this project and I appreciate him lending me this space to present to the readership a most important set of cutting-edge scholarly essays. I am also immensely grateful to each and every scholar on the 87-member special issue editorial board. They are truly among the *crème de la crème* of our field. Each manuscript went out to 2-3 reviewers and I received extensive feedback from almost all of the reviewers. Celnisha and I received a total of 54 manuscripts ranging widely in methodology and conceptual frame. In the special issue, there are 15 essays, thirteen of which appear here and two others will be published outside

of the special issue. I am convinced each essay presented here is of superb quality. I would be remiss if I did not thank and congratulate the authors who made this all possible. I applaud your efforts and most of all your scholarship.

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