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3. NEGOTIATING INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES IN A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

A Dialogical Self Perspective

INTRODUCTION

In a globalized world, differences between individuals are salient as they belong to various social, cultural, and historical backgrounds. This salience is particularly prominent in the United States, wherein mainstream ideologies and socio-political structures that undergird the diversity of a global world, contribute towards the intricacies of individual identity evaluation by encapsulating various ethnic, cultural, migratory, and geopolitical scenarios. Thus, the supposition of what it means to be "I", from a "self-I" or a "self-other" perspective, derives itself from complex ways of being that the individual finds themselves situated in. While philosophers and psychologists acknowledge the aspects of positionality, agency, and identity fluidity in individuals, existing intrasubjective experiences between individuals may highlight identity fluidity as a conflict between the self-I and self-other perspectives. This highlights the contextuality of the I-positions of the self and power structures that the individual participates in.

Evaluating the self and extrapolating the implications of the "I" for intersectional identity from various theoretical lenses, is fraught with ideological issues, linguistic applications, and underlying assumptions that may be difficult to assuage. Viewed through philosophical and psychological perspectives, the Dialogical Self Theory (DST) attempts to explain the complexity of the individual self. While it may be impossible to reconcile issues that arise in each discipline, I will attempt to bring together concepts that explain the ways in which the dialogical self may provide a framework for negotiating intersectional identities in a classroom community of inquiry. In this modest initial exploration, I seek to understand the relationship between the dialogical self and intersectional identities in a classroom community of inquiry- specifically the ways in which students from minority and immigrant backgrounds navigate their intersectional identities from the various I-positions of the dialogical self. The question that frames this evaluation is, "In what ways are the Intersectional Identities of immigrant and minority students negotiated in a Classroom Community of Inquiry?" For the purposes of this exploration, I will juxtapose dialogical self theory (henceforth DST) with intersectional identity as a viable framework to further explore the negotiations between these concepts in a classroom community of inquiry (henceforth CI).

DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY FRAMEWORK

The vagueness of the term "Self" allows theorists from philosophical, psychological, and psychoanalytic fields to define its meaning through various core/relational perspectives. The meaning of the self is evaluated based on implicit understandings of these theoretical fields, underscoring the viability of the self as an indispensable construct, for evaluating facets of individual identity, and as a way of making sense of one's experiences and one's place in the world.

An evaluative view of the self showcases the disparity in its meaning when considering various theoretical perspectives. For instance, the individualistic conception of the self is sometimes characterized as a centralized "I"; rational, autonomous, and solitary (Clarke, 2003; Dumont, 1985; Sampson, 1988). In other words, the individual self is sometimes seen as protecting the person (psychologically) and differentiating oneself from others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). While Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell (1987) provide the perspective that the collective self is a "shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person" (p. 50). From the social narrative lens of the self, individuals are seen as 'inter-subjects' (Crossley, 1996), and conceptualized through social interactions that are reflexive, ecological, and interpersonal (Neisser, 1997).

In his groundbreaking work *Principles of Psychology,* James combines and extends the subject-object relationships into the environment. In this perspective, the self is seen as responding to stimuli from the environment. The "me" is "the known," the empirical self; the "I" is "the knower" or the thinking self (James, 1890, 1981, p. 196). James suggests that the "me" comprises material, social, and spiritual aspects of the self. Thus identity is expressed through material possessions, social relationships with others, and through the core subjective of being. Similarly, George Herbert Mead (1934), from a psychological perspective, asserts:

> Selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves. No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others, since our own selves exist and enter as such into our experience only insofar as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience also. (Mead, 1934, p. 164)

While Mikhail Bakhtin, in the translated version of *The Dialogic Imagination,* asserts that individuals don't exist in themselves, but rather that; existence is understood in and through their relations with others. In his view, the self is not a fixed "I", it is changeable, multi-voiced, shifting, and unfinished. Stressing plurality and intersubjectivity in dialogue, Bakhtin cited in Wortham (2001) states:

> To become a self, one must speak, and in speaking, one must use words that have been used by others. In using words that echo with the voices of others, one must take a position with respect to those others. (p. 147)

As evidenced from Bakhtin's perspective, the uniqueness of individuals is understood spatially, dialogically, and relationally. From this perspective, individuals begin to view themselves through the perspectives of others (Holquist, 1981).

In combining psychological and social perspectives from Bakhtin and James, Hubert Hermans and Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka extend the argument by asserting that changes in current social realities affect individual's identities and their dialogical relationships, both within the self and between individuals in unique ways. In this regard, Hermans and Kempen (1993) assert that although James acknowledges the multiplicity of the self, he views the "I" to be distinct, holding the parts of the self together, thereby ensuring identity continuity, while Bakhtin's "multivoicedness" according to the theorists emphasizes more the idea of identity discontinuity. Thus bringing together the "I" of the self and the dialogical "position" of the self.

Inspired by Bakhtin's notions of self, Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon (1992), describe the self as dialogical, navigating several I-positions in the individual self at any given time. Hermans (2014) asserts the "dialogical self can be conceived as a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions in the society of mind. As in the larger society, these I-positions can receive a voice and address each other in a variety of ways" (p. 139). These voices are continually in dialogue with each other, each "I" considered a point of unique narration, taking positions of domination, silence, or counter positions, in response to contextual or societal factors (Hermans, 2001, 2014; McAdams, 2001). While the interlocutors of the multiple-I are many, they are but different selves of the same person. Thus the theorists assert that the "I" has the capability to move spatially and temporally causing fluctuations and oppositional positions within the individual self, as it speaks and acts relationally and dialogically from different voices or 'I-positions' (Hermans, 2001; Hermans-Konopka, 2012).

While the DS negotiates various I-positions of the self, the identity of the individual fluctuates in response to its internal tensions. If we consider the various voices or I-positions of the individual self from the lens of the self-other, i.e. the dialogical "I" of the self as a response to others perspective, it does seem to imply a consciously negotiated impact on the individual's identity explicitly portrayed in that given situation. Indeed, when individuals seek to define and interpret their self "I," they do so through a navigation of personal traits, relationships with others, including group membership subscription, as in the case of immigrants and individuals of minority descent.

Specifically relating this perspective to individuals of immigrant or minority descent, the very basis of one's I-positions, the acceptance, and rejection thereof, speak of power relations the individual finds themselves in. In such a scenario, the centering and decentering of the I-self takes place as the individual faces challenges, achieving dominance or facing subjugation, when adapting to various ideological perspectives and inherent social structures of society. When the individual responds to situations from the multiplicity of I-positions accessible within the self, the relational

juxtaposition affects and modifies their identity consciously and subconsciously. From a societal viewpoint, this is further complicated due to intersections in identity negotiations.

In the educational context, students from immigrant and minority backgrounds experience intersectional identities as an ongoing and continuous process. The situated experiences of students, the fluidity of identities, mainstream ideologies, and the structural constraints of power and structural inequality present in the school environment problematize the traditional processes of identity categorization. For these students, the synthesis of the dialogical self with intersectional identities may be marginalizing or empowering, depending on the various mitigating influences present in the school environment. How might these intersectional identity negotiations look like in a classroom community of inquiry? This evaluation may provide a useful analytical framework to conceptualize the effects of various forces and counterforces of society on the identity and the self of immigrant and minority students.

IDENTITY AND THE DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY

Drawing from James' and Bakhtin's perspectives, Hermans and Geiser (2012) combine the internal and external perspectives of the self, one that happens within the person and the other in dialogue with others stating "the between is interiorized into the within and reversibly, the within is exteriorized into the between" (p. 2). Viewed through this lens, DST is a useful umbrella concept, a "bridging theory" bringing together various theoretical perspectives and postmodern research strands.

From the DST perspective, identity is not based on a centralized core or a self-I, rather, it is the dialogue between the many voices and multiple I-positions of the self (Stiles, 1999; Hermans, 2001). Identity conceptualized this way is dependent functionally on space and time as an ongoing dialogical interchange between the I-positions in the self in relation with other I -selves (Hermans, 1992, 2001). This view asserts that identity doesn't come from a single "I", rather, it is embedded in a complex set of factors and elements emerging from varied lived experiences of the individual. Viewed through this perspective, identity is the outcome, the internalized perspective, the expectation held by each I-position, stemming from the socio-cultural positioning and the power relations the individual finds themselves. Therefore,

> the theory of the dialogical self pivots on an acceptance of the fact that an individual's identity is composed of a variety of different 'I' voices, each constructed from the situational and often context-specific dialogic interaction that takes place between the individual subject 'I' and multiple or even imagined 'others', as long as these 'others' have meaning to the individual in question and are deemed worthy of attention. (Coakley, 2014, p. 54)

Consider, one's position in society as an individual of immigrant or minority descent. This social positioning tends to account for the tension and complexity, especially when refraining from or engaging in voicing opinions in a societal context. This is due to the imposition of perspectives by the host country on the immigrant individual. Therefore, Coakley (2014) asserts, that most immigrants seem to switch 'I' positions to negate exclusionary experiences, thereby contributing to the creation of intersectional identity spaces. From this lens, immigrants or minority individuals may very well embrace hybrid identities and a multiplicity of I-positions in order to negate feelings of alienation and difference.

For instance, the silencing of one's voice due to individual positionality as a response to others' perspectives may create tensions and identity confusions. Take for example the status as a second generation individual of minority background, perceived as not being American. Although born in the U.S. and categorized as American due to nationality, "I" as an individual of immigrant descent is perceived to be the "other" due to racial and ethnic identifications, the interplay of power dynamics in society, and in-group subscription. This self "I" contains many voices in dialogue with each other, each an I-position that positions and counter-positions the individual self, due to the silencing or empowerment of lived experiences that stem from others' perceptions. In some situations, identities that specifically address the dialogical self, tend to be more important than others. For instance, consider "I am a mother" may take precedence over "I am an immigrant." Both are parts of the individual self, based on context one may take precedence over the other causing internal confusions and tensions between the I-positions due to intersecting identities each as equally important as the other.

Thus, the identities of the self as suggested in the examples are contextual, dependent spatially in time. The intersection of identities and I-positions, therefore, occurs in such mediated situational contexts. As social constructivists assert, identity is influenced by various forms of intersecting social mediations, each affecting an individual's social positioning. Indeed Appiah (2006) explains, "…your individuality, defines your ambitions, determines what achievements have significance in your own particular life" (p. 163). This observation may be an eventual outcome of the internalization of dominant I-positions. It may not necessarily be the DS influencing the myriad ways in which the narrative of the self is constructed and navigated, a process of "becoming" an "authoritative" discourse, or an internal subconscious "persuasive" one (Bakhtin, 1981; Tappan, 2005). Regardless, if the positionality and social status of the individual, the notion a particular dominant I-position of, i.e. immigrant, mother, researcher, a student of minority background become internalized, it may remain the lens through which other identities are filtered and constructed.

INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES AND THE DIALOGICAL SELF

The DST provides a useful framework for evaluating intersectional identities of individuals. It accounts for the personal, relational, and social positioning due to

the dialogical negotiations of the I-positions within the individual self in any given sociohistorical context. In emphasizing hybridity, DST provides a fertile ground to analyze nuanced notions of intersubjectivity and subjective experiences of an intrinsically situated social self.

Similarly, Kimberle Crenshaw's groundbreaking articles titled, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics* (1989) and *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color* (1991) were seminal in providing the tools for theorizing about intersectional identities. From a feminist standpoint, intersectional identity is a dominant paradigm through which individual differences stemming from race, gender, nationality, SES, etc. are analyzed.

Intersectionality argues that all identities are intersectional, they are lived and individually experienced, rendering itself to a fluidity based on contextual situations. McCall (2005), asserts that intersectionality is "the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with other fields, has made so far" (p. 1771). Applying an intersectional perspective to immigrant and minority students' identities, it seems evident that students belonging to historically marginalized populations are left with few narratives to communicate effectively the ways in which their various identifications and I-positions are simultaneously formed and informed by dominant conceptions of ethnicity, class, nationality, etc. (Crenshaw, 1991). This is particularly true for those who live between "two cultures", specifically those affirming marginalized or dominant discourses of society. Since immigrants and individuals of minority backgrounds often speak from different I-positions within the self and tend to negotiate switching between various collective voices based on contextuality, DST provides a helpful analysis in evaluating their intersectional identities.

RECONCILING INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE DIALOGICAL SELF

Research investigating dominance of identities over others is increasingly recognizing the salient role of multiple positions and voices of the "I" within the individual dialogical self. Taking on significant new identities is to appropriate or acquire abilities that deal with the uncertainties and tensions of the various I-positions or multiple voices of the dialogical self. Here each articulation claims multiple situational intersectional identities, such as my identity of being a woman of color in academia. In this circumstance, Bakhtin's view of identity development seems applicable as it is premised on "multivoicedness", the assumption that the development of the individual self occurs in a shared social context, one that is continually mediated through various forms of discourse.

As suggested prior, for minorities and other disenfranchised groups, the external social world can impose and ascribe stereotypical identities based on ideology and hegemonic perspectives (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Considering the existing

diversity in societal perspectives, the individual negotiates individualistic and social roles through various I-self positions. In this framework, the formation of identity becomes a continual dynamic process of orchestrating voices within the dialogical self from different I-positions. Extending Bakhtin's view, Hermans (2001) asserts that "dialogue opens the possibility of differentiating the inner world of one and the same individual in the form of an interpersonal relationship" (p. 245). The individual finds their voice while remaining in constant dialogue with other voices in the self, thereby speaking in a "polyphony" of voices.

Indeed this complexity highlights inherent tensions when defining oneself according to a set paradigm, especially when considering the salience of individual voice. Such voices are often embedded in specific repertoires to which individuals simultaneously belong. As such "the idea of identity already has built into it a recognition of the complex interdependence of self-creation and sociability" (Appiah, 2001, p. 320). Consider my position as a woman of color, of minority descent in academia. The tension manifests itself in the recognition of the various I-positions, a spectrum that may include academic dominance and subordination as a woman of color in academia and society. Further nuanced layers may reveal that the situational positioning of a woman of color in academia may be a response to hegemonic socio-political structures the I-self negotiates, spatially and contextually. In this case, the corresponding identity positions are intersectional and fluid, dependent on context, and negotiated through self and social frameworks.

Further complicating matters, certain historical events in the US, specifically post 9-11, render intersectional identities with further complexity when considering individuals of immigrant and minority backgrounds. As asserted prior, Hermans (2003) maintains that the particular identity positioning, reconstruction, and deconstruction of self is but a response to the various perspectives these individuals take on, due to the challenges of a new environment in a new geopolitical environment. Negotiating such intersectional I-positions involves the navigation of various voices that may be silenced or trivialized, while others being more significant, privilege some identities over others.

DIALOGICAL SELF AND CI

The CI may provide a valuable space, one that provides safety in the articulation of the individual I-positions as a response to situational factors. The Community of Inquiry (CI), is a pedagogical tool that aims to open a critically just, equitable, and democratic educational space in the classroom. It is uniquely designed to foster critical habits, attitudes, and behaviors by providing a safe space to explore through communal dialogue ideas that may seem strange or unfamiliar. Matthew Lipman (2003) asserts that in a CI:

> …students listen to each other with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to

> identify one another's assumptions. A community of inquiry attempts to follow the inquiry where it leads rather than be penned in by the boundary lines of existing disciplines. (pp. 20–21)

In this setting, students eventually internalize characteristics of being reasonable, open-minded, caring, and democratic. In short, a critical thinker who cares about the process of thinking. For students of minority and immigrant descent, the CI would is an important avenue that validates the individual's lived and situated experiences, a space of fluidity, where their views and perspectives are valued. Here students "… learn to inquire together about issues that are of mutual interest in a non-competitive fashion and in the process foster their own cognitive, reflective, emotional and social growth" (Sharp, 2007, p. 5).

THE DIALOGICAL SELF, INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES, AND CI

In a community of inquiry (CI), individuals have the ability to explore and examine events from various multiple perspectives. David Kennedy (1999) posits that the CI is a "transitional space," where individual subjectivities are constructed and deconstructed, a transformation of the self that takes place through the communal process of shared inquiry. In theory, every student in this space shares a commonality, a willingness to explore multiple subjectivities, question ideologies construed as truth and other belief systems. Here, "…the self is inalienably interactive with the environment, and that all experience is a form of transaction, and constructs the classroom experience accordingly" (Kennedy, 2004, p. 209). Viewed through this lens, CI acts as a mediating educational endeavor that enables the promotion and the intentional shaping of a student's identity, this through the negotiation of various voices or I-positions within the individual dialogical self. Thus,

> students learn to attend to each other, to use their emotions as a guide to further inquiry, to listen to each other, to share perspectives by entering compassionately each other's worlds, to build on each other's ideas, and eventually come to the point where they can attempt to bridge the multiplicity of perspectives by creating and/or discovering a story that makes some sense to all participants. (Sharp, 2007, p. 5)

In addition to navigating the various I-positions of the self, the individual negotiates the I-position in response to perspectives of the other. Such reflection provides and fosters "… a kind of power that is usually associated with freedom, the freedom to think for oneself and to do what we think is best after having the opportunity for discourse and reflection" (Sharp, 2007, p. 8). The active examination and scrutiny of one's thinking based on individual experiences is radically reflexive and empowering.

Consider students from immigrant and minority backgrounds in a classroom community of inquiry. Here, their racial-ethnic identity intersects with the schooling

environment and with the identities of other students of similar or different backgrounds. Accordingly, their positionality shifts or changes responding to the situated contexts they find themselves in. Some may find themselves subconsciously stressing factors, specifically those related to their ethnicity, into the nuanced multi-voicedness of the self. This defines crucial issues of their identity, as a functioning of I-positions stemming from the social dynamics structure they belong to.

In a classroom setting when an individual from this background navigates communal inquiry, it is done through their particular lens/perspective. Here a presentation of their "I" self in the group would reflect their situated identities of ethnicity, status, religion, etc. from various I-positions, each a voice intersecting with each other (Bhatia, 2011). Such a contextual negotiation of identity, one that is fluid, hybrid, or hyphenated, necessitates considering the associations of the dialogical self across groups and in particular contexts.

Crisis in intersectional identities may occur resulting from this situation, especially when the individual feels unsettled in negotiating the various positions of the dialogical self. Some perspectives of ethnicity or categorical schemas may be completely ingrained in the Self-I, structuring perception and individual action. For example responding to essentialist images and meanings present in the group of an "immigrant" or a "minority" impacts the intersectional identities of the individual, as they tend to navigate the multiple I positions of the self, all in an effort to minimize the difference. In such a case, the scrutiny of one's thinking may be less empowering than previously considered. The student may be left with few narratives to contest the dominant discourse of the group, thereby committing oneself to communal action, actively co-constructing the voices, while maintaining a certain unease about oneself from the perspective of the other. Thus, the self-I subordinates itself to the self-other. This is due to the simultaneous positions of submission and domination the individual holds internally in the self, and externally through dialogue in relation with multiple others.

However, the CI does provide the genuine capability for negotiating and reconciling intersectional identities and I-positions of the dialogical self. All participants in a CI are co-authors of their individual lived experiences. And as such, it demands the recognition of other co-authors who are spatially present. From a Bakhtian lens, "co-authorship demands evaluation of the other, struggle with the other and judgment of the message of the other" (Markova, 2003, p. 256) thereby allowing the transformation of all voices, of the self, and the other. When individuals articulate their voice, they do so through the lens of the self and worldviews of groups they belong too. The voices are therefore orchestrated from shifting I-positions. As Coakley (2014) asserts, the ability of the immigrant and minority individuals' shifting 'I' voice and I-positions even in the face of conflict and difference suggests the creation of new hybrid spaces of intersectional identity, one that requires further exploration. Indeed with globalization, the boundaries of societies are marked by porousness and fluidity which according to Bhatia (2011), necessitates a careful

examination of the different voices and I-positions within the self, each seeking balance, each contributing to the negotiation of identity.

CONCLUSION

A modest attempt to connect the dialogical self to intersecting identities wherein individuals speak from various I-positions within the self, switching between voices that are sometimes internalized, often draws attention to conflicting contexts the individual is part of. Students of immigrant and minority backgrounds constantly navigate various I-positions in their dialogical self that at times conflict with their intersectional identities. The community of inquiry does provide a safe space for navigating intrasubjective differences and individual agency. However, there may arise situations when conflict is inherent due to the dynamics of group conformity, internalization of mainstream perspectives, and the undergirding ideologies of society. While the individual experiences conflict in privileging or masking some I-positions over others from the dialogical "I" perspective and the relational self-other perspective, the group may be unaware of the identity tensions present in the individual whose background does not match that of the group. As the immigrant or individual from a minority background speaks from the shifting I-positions and multivoicedness, it (re)shapes their identity intersectionally and dialogically.

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