

# Literacy and Identity: Examining the Metaphors in History and Contemporary Research

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## ABSTRACT

In this review, the authors interrogate the recent identity turn in literacy studies by asking the following: How do particular views of identity shape how researchers think about literacy and, conversely, how does the view of literacy taken by a researcher shape meanings made about identity? To address this question, the authors review various ways of conceptualizing identity by using five metaphors for identity documented in the identity literature: identity as (1) difference, (2) sense of self/subjectivity, (3) mind or consciousness, (4) narrative, and (5) position. Few literacy studies have acknowledged this range of perspectives on and views for conceptualizing identity and yet, subtle differences in identity theories have widely different implications for how one thinks about both how literacy matters to identity and how identity matters to literacy. The authors offer this review to encourage more theorizing of both literacy and identity as social practices and, most important, of how the two breathe life into each other.

It is common, of late, to frame literacy practices as either precursors to and producers of identities or as the outgrowth of particular identifications with the world, as Norton and Toohey (2002) did in the following quote:

When a language learner writes a poem, a letter, or an academic essay, she considers not only the demands of the task but how much of her history will be considered relevant to this literacy act. Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to an utterance

are determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks. (p. 115)

Literacy study after literacy study refers to identity or, more popularly, to identities. But how much do literacy scholars really know about identity? How closely do literacy studies examine the relationships between identities, subjectivities, and language that Norton and Toohey (2002) indexed? What are the implications of the claims that literacy researchers make about identity and vice versa? In this review, we interrogate the recent identity turn in literacy studies by asking, How

do particular views of identity shape how researchers think about literacy and, conversely, how does the view of literacy taken by a researcher shape meanings made about identity? To address this question, we review various ways of conceptualizing identity by using five metaphors for identity we have documented in the identity literature: identity as (1) difference, (2) sense of self/subjectivity, (3) mind or consciousness, (4) narrative, and (5) position. For each metaphor, we examine its scholarly roots and its alignment with, or implications for, various stances on literacy.

As a result of our review, we argue two points, using our review of various metaphors for identity to bring these points to life. First, there are many different theories of identity, even under the same general identity banner. Yet few literacy studies have acknowledged the range of perspectives on and views for conceptualizing identity, even when they have taken the idea that identity and literacy are socially constructed as a given. Second, we argue that the subtle differences in identity theories have widely different implications for how one thinks about both how literacy matters to identity and how identity matters to literacy. We thus offer this review to encourage more theorizing of both literacy and identity as social practices and, most important, of how the two breathe life into each other.

Before we turn to the review of metaphors, we briefly discuss the question of why the field has paid so much attention to questions of the relationship between literacy and identity and offer a general discussion of what it means to talk about literacy as a social construct.

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## Why Identity and Literacy?

The move to study identity's relationship to literacy and literacy's relationship to identity, what we call herein *literacy-and-identity studies*, seems at least partially motivated by an interest in foregrounding the actor or agent in literate and social practices. This move appears to be explained in part as resistance to a skill-based view of literacy or to a view of literacy as cognitive processes enacted independently from people's motivations, interests, and other social practices (Street, 1984). That is, the social turn in literacy theory and research (Gee, 1994) over the last three decades has generated close, in-depth research on the literacy practices of actual people, a move that has turned researchers' and theorists' attentions to the roles of texts and literacy practices as tools or media for constructing, narrating, mediating, enacting, performing, enlisting, or exploring identities. In other words, recognizing literacy practices as social has led many theorists to recognize that people's identities mediate and are mediated by the texts they

read, write, and talk about (Lewis & del Valle, 2009; McCarthy, 2001; McCarthy & Moje, 2002).

Identity is also thought to matter as a theoretical and practical construct in literacy research and education because identity labels can be used to stereotype, privilege, or marginalize readers and writers as "struggling" or "proficient," as "creative" or "deviant" (Lin, 2008). Because the institutions in which people learn rely so heavily on identities to assign labels of progress, particularly in relation to reading and writing skills (S. Hall, 1996; Lewis & del Valle, 2009), these identity labels associated with certain kinds of literacy practices can be especially powerful in an individual's life. As Norton and Toohey's (2002) quote suggests, both what and how one reads and writes can have an impact on the type of person one is recognized as being and on how one sees oneself (Baker & Freebody, 1989; Davies, 1989; Nabi, Rogers, & Street, in press; Street, 1994). In other words, texts and the literate practices that accompany them not only reflect but may also produce the self (Davies, 1989). Moreover, some have also argued that texts can be used as tools for enacting identities (Finders, 1997; Moje, 2000b) in social settings, in addition to constructing self-understandings or developing consciousness amidst conflicted social arrangements (Anzaldúa, 1999a; Hicks, 2004). What is more, accepting the idea that literacy is more than a set of autonomous skills demands the acceptance of the idea that learning literacy is more than simply practicing skills or transferring processes from one head to another. Learning, from a social and cultural perspective, involves people in participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts, all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identify, and are identified.

Another spur to study identity can be found at what some might call the opposite end of the epistemological spectrum. That is, some literacy-and-identity studies appear to have been motivated by recent calls for attention to people's new media and popular cultural textual practices and, particularly, to the agency and power that people may demonstrate when they engage with new media and popular cultural texts (Lewis & del Valle, 2009). Thus, the turn to identity in those literacy studies may be seen less as a move to "rescue" the agent from a view of literacy as autonomous skill and more as a move to celebrate the agent as inventor of literate practice.

In sum, whether resisting the perspective of literacy as autonomous skill or celebrating the strategic agent as inventor of his or her own literate practice, the agent is foregrounded in studies of literacy as a social practice. This foregrounding of the agent is a move that may have dramatic implications for conceptions of literacy as social practice. Because literacy-and-identity studies focus on people as much as they do on processes or

skills, on agency as much as on subjectification, on the relationships between the social and the individual, and on the formation of the acting subject through relationships with texts and other people (Butler, 1997), they make an important contribution to the study of literacy. Moreover, if identity and learning are intimately connected, then it stands to reason that identity and literacy learning should be examined.

At the same time, there are some concerns that accompany literacy-and-identity studies. For one, the meanings of identity and related constructs are often taken for granted, resulting in a fair amount of slippage in how terms and constructs are used. Slippage is not surprising because, as Bronwyn Davies (personal communication, September 28, 2008) noted,

There are several meanings to identity (singular person, political or well-known person, cultural membership, etc.) that slide in and out of each other because one word is asked to carry so many meanings, meanings moreover that spill into each other in practice.

Identity does have multiple meanings, as does literacy; however, the recent outpouring of literacy-and-identity research suggests that it may be wise to examine how different conceptions of identity and of literacy shape how models of the subject and models of literacy are produced in and through research on identity and literacy and what those models mean for our conceptions of and practical implications of identity and literacy. In what follows, we provide an overview of identity as a social construct, briefly trace the construct's roots back to mathematical and analytical philosophical applications, and then offer our review of metaphors for identity in identity-and-literacy studies.

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## Identity as a Social Construct

Perhaps the best place to turn when trying to understand what it means to talk about identity would be to philosophy; after all, it is philosophers who attempt to understand what it means to be and, particularly, to be human. Much of the work in analytic philosophy stems from Aristotelian conceptions of identity, the essence of being, and from Aristotle's analysis of *de anima* (the soul; Aristotle, trans. 1993). Aristotle's view of the self, unlike most that guide contemporary literacy-and-identity studies, was that the self was a collection of properties that not only distinguished humans from lower animals but also distinguished one human from another. What made a being human was its distinctiveness from other human beings; thus, the human being did not share an identity with others. Each human, from Aristotle's perspective, possessed unique attributes constituted by both nature and by experience in and with the natural

world. Aristotle considered identity in terms of mathematical equality, or an exacting sameness. Indeed, identity is also a key concept in mathematics, used to refer to "a mathematical equation that is satisfied by all values of its variable for which the expressions involved have meaning" (Landau, 1975). In fact, the construct of identity came to life as a mathematical term to examine numbers and number sets (Leibniz, 2008) and to prove mathematical theorems. Analytic philosophers, in turn, took up the concept of identity for use in logic problems. In both domains, identity is established by virtue of the exactness of two entities. The sameness criterion is so well established among philosophers that volumes have been dedicated to distinctions such as relative identity (Geach, 1973), identity over time (Haslanger, 2003), identity across possible worlds, contingent identity (Gibbard, 1975), and vague identity (Evans, 1978), with debates over whether sameness should be defined in absolute, relative, or time-dependent terms. Identity was thus an epistemological term, not an ontological one, a categorical way of distinguishing similarity/difference as identical/nonidentical.

With this brief review of mathematical and philosophical underpinnings of the construct of identity in mind, we turn to contemporary literacy-and-identity scholarship. At least three assumptions appear to cut across literacy-and-identity studies, regardless of the metaphor from which they work. The first is that identities are social rather than individual constructions. This point about the social nature of identity does not mean that identities are not lived out by individuals; they most certainly are, and in fact, the individual living of identity is what may lead people to view identities as individual attributes of a given person. Most literacy research that concerns itself explicitly with identity studies, however, is dominated by the perspective that whatever one thinks identities might be—possessions, collections of attributes, or even processes or enactments—they are not individually constructed, produced, or possessed.

It is worth noting here that acknowledging identity as social does not automatically render it a process. Social identities could be considered shared possessions or attributes that are completely stable, or, in Erik Erikson's (1994) sense, achieved. Nor does recognizing identity as social necessarily make it fluid or multiple. What *social* means, in other words, is up for theoretical "grabs." Linking the words *social* and *identity* can suggest many ways that social memberships, contexts, or interactions shape identities. Seeing identity as social could mean that one theorizes identity as tied to sustained group memberships (e.g., social identities, such as those shaped by race or by social class, which might lead a student to take on an identity as *good reader* or *resistant reader* or to be positioned in one of these ways).

By contrast, sustained group memberships may be less important to a social view of identity than is the idea that identity is constructed, produced, formed, or developed in any and all social interaction, such as the interactions in classrooms that support or constrain the development of reading skills or the uses of texts that produce good or poor/resistant reader identities. Another view of the social might be that identities are stories told about and within social interactions, so that identities are narratives or histories that the individual produces about her or his past social interactions; that is, if a student tells a story about her history as a resistant or poor reader, she constructs an identity that is dependent on past social experiences.

Yet another view of identity as socially mediated or constructed could mean that one sees identity less as an interpretation of the person who has the identity and more dependent on other people's recognitions of a person. For example, the student identified as good reader is recognized and acted toward differently from the reader identified as resistant. Finally, a social view of identity might indicate that identities are enacted or performed for people. The same person may enact the identity of good reader in one context and the identity of resistant reader in another context, using discourse, body movements, gestures, or content of a conversation around a text to enact these different identities (e.g., the young person reading a passage from a required class textbook may slump in his or her seat and mumble half-heartedly through the text but may read with enthusiasm a text of his or her own choosing outside of school). These variations on social views of identity are subtle and nuanced. Moreover, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor are they always perfectly aligned in various takes on identity as social, as we will demonstrate in the review of metaphors for identity and literacy.

The second assumption about most literacy-and-identity studies is the oft-cited point that identity is no longer conceptualized as a single, stable entity that one develops throughout adolescence and achieves at some point in (healthy) adulthood. Instead, the plural *identities* is now often used to signal the idea that one person might enact many different identities, both across a developmental trajectory or within a variety of different contexts. There are several different takes on this idea of the multiplicity of identity; some scholars view identities as multiple and always in flux, from morning to afternoon or even moment to moment, as people see and represent themselves differently dependent on the interactions they are having (e.g., Mishler, 2004). Many see identities as stories people tell about themselves, with the story relatively coherent but changing to incorporate new experiences over time, a slightly different conception of fluidity from that which emphasizes

differences produced by contexts and interactions (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1999b; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Others view identities as enactments of self in activity, with the self always changing but also retaining histories of participation that shape how the self acts—that is, how it takes on or resists identities—in various relationships or contexts (e.g., Holland & Leander, 2004; Moje, 2004a). For example, the young women in Finders's (1997) study who carried with them texts they believed would identify them in particular ways, even as they privately read different kinds of texts, were enacting selves dependent on past participation to inform current or future interactions with others. Note that a key difference between fluidity of narrative and fluidity of enactments lies in the difference between representation of self or identity and the doing of self or identity. From these different perspectives, the doing of identity could be fluid, whereas the representations remain stable, or vice versa.

Another stance on the fluidity of identity is that of “core identity,” with multiple dimensions depending on the angle from which identities are viewed, arguing that what may appear to be different identities are actually situation-specific aspects of the core (e.g., Gee, 2001). From this perspective, the child who resists reading in one situation and not another is not enacting a different identity but rather is enacting an identity that is part of his or her core; the child is, at his or her core, resistant to school reading. Still others have argued that identities are the outward, visible manifestation of the self and are always fragmented, partial, and often in conflict, particularly with the subjectivity—or sense of self—that one builds over time (e.g., Davies, 2000; Hagood, 2002). Thus, from this perspective, the resistant reader is sometimes resistant but sometimes compliant and other times engaged. All are accurate representations of self, even as all are only partial representations. Finally, some scholars who have not necessarily used the term *identity*, nonetheless see the subject as produced, unconsciously, out of embodied practices over time as individuals negotiate shifting structures and fields of power (e.g., Bourdieu, 1980/1990; Luke, 2009), thus suggesting both a kind of stability born from structural constraints and a contextual and relational fluidity or agency marked by the acquisition of new kinds of social and cultural capital (Luke, 2009).

We take up and further exemplify each of these positions later in the article as we examine different metaphors for identity. The important point here is that although these perspectives represent different takes on identity, each acknowledges identity as something fluid and dynamic that is produced, generated, developed, or narrated over time. However, just as a view of identity as social does not necessarily reveal whether identity is a set of attributes, a sense of self, a story one tells, a

process, an action, or a possession, a view of identity as fluid or multiple does not necessarily convey how identity is conceived. Just what is it that is fluid? What does it mean to think about identity as a fluid process versus a fluid set of attributes?

A third commonly held assumption about identity is the notion that an identity is *recognized* by others (Gee, 2001). James Gee, for example, argued that identities are not inherent in individuals but are only brought into being when recognized within a relationship or social context. From this perspective, identity is seen as distinct from (but related to) subjectivity—or the experiences, beliefs, values, and histories of participation—of a given person (Davies, 2000; Hagood, 2002). An identity depends on the individual's understanding (or lack of understanding) of how that identity will be recognized in that relationship, time, or context. The person is called into an identity by the recognitions or assignments of others, and the meanings the person makes of the identities available to him or her serve to constitute a sense of self or subjectivity. This notion of identity as recognized also signals the conception of identities as situated in and mediated by social interaction and, more importantly, by relations of power, although the degree to which a person's identity/ies are determined by or simply mediated by recognitions varies by theorist. Adequately analyzing how literacy plays a role in identity formation, construction, or enactment requires some theorizing about the extent to which recognitions shape identities. For example, if a person is recognized as an excellent reader, then is that person more likely to develop an identity as reader, as good student, as worthwhile person? By contrast, if a person is recognized as illiterate, then what are the possible identities available to that person (cf. Nabi et al., in press)?

In sum, to acknowledge identities as social, fluid, or recognized is only part of the theoretical story; the *what* of identity can be represented in myriad ways, even when one accepts identity as social, fluid, and recognized. And the *what* of literacy is equally problematic. More important, what do the possible ways of conceiving of identity mean for how literacy-and-identities studies are conducted? What, if any, assumptions about literacy are embedded in these different views of identity as social, fluid, and recognized? What, if any, assumptions about identity are embedded in different views of literacy? To try to dig under the surface of such terms as *social* or *fluid* or *multiple*, we turn to what we identified as metaphors for identity, and as we explore these metaphors, we also examine how various takes on identities align with different stances on literacy.

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## Five Metaphors for Identity in History and in Contemporary Research

In this section, we examine five conceptions of identity that posit identities as (1) difference, (2) sense of self/subjectivity, (3) mind or consciousness, (4) narrative, and (5) position. The theories we draw on to illustrate these metaphors do not all refer explicitly to the term *identity*. Vygotsky, for example, whose work we examine under the metaphor “identity as mind/consciousness,” did not situate his work as identity theory or research. And yet, we would argue, these different metaphors are heuristic perspectives shaping how identity and its relationship to literacy practice, learning, and teaching might be conceptualized.

Each metaphor/perspective here assumes some level of the social, acknowledges the changing nature of identity, and builds in varying notions of recognition; none assumes that identities inhere solely in the individual, although all recognize that identities are lived out in individuals. It is worth noting that these metaphors overlap in interesting ways, a point that we put forward via the inclusion of the same studies in different categories. In this way, we resist reifying the categories, but we nevertheless allow for some important distinctions in purpose and emphasis to be made. Moje's (2004a) work, for example, framed identity as [enactments of] self in particular positions, typically defined or generated by cultural, racial, classed, or gendered differences, thus allowing it to be categorized within the “identity-as-self,” “identity-as-difference,” and “identity-as-position” metaphors.

Most of the work cited does something similar, and this should become clear through the review. Our larger point is to call for more attention to the central question of this review: What role does literacy play in this work or, conversely, what role do identities play in literate practice, if researchers work from a particular metaphor for identity? Concomitant with this central question are questions of how one chooses and explains a particular theoretical stance from which to work; how theories are integrated throughout studies, from conceptualization to presentation of findings to drawing of implications; and how identity and literacy are operationalized (i.e., how does one *know* identity when one sees it?), examined, and documented in research.

### *Identity as Difference*

Identity as difference is, perhaps, the way identity is most often conceptualized in contemporary and popular discourse, with a focus on national, raced, ethnic, or cultural identities (e.g., Sen, 2000). Identity as difference focuses on how people are distinguished one from

another by virtue of their group membership and on how ways of knowing, doing, or believing held or practiced by a group shape the individual as a member of that group. In other words, identity from the metaphor of difference is always articulated to group membership, even in psychological perspectives that distinguish between individual and group identities; identity as difference is also typically about differences among groups rather than about individual differences. Identity-as-difference metaphors situate literate practice as an artifact of the targeted difference, so that literacy itself is seen as differently practiced dependent on the group to which one's identity is tied.

Social psychological studies of social, or group, identity argue that there is no single thing called identity but rather that psychological representations of the self and the world (e.g., beliefs, values, and schemas related to country of origin, skin color, cultural norms and practices, sex, age, ability) are encoded in memory as the result of personal and vicarious experiences with those groups, as well as through the process of self-reflection articulated to groupness (Roeser, Peck, & Nasir, 2006). From this perspective, these encodings form relatively stable constellations but are nevertheless differentiated and integrated throughout development, particularly as people move throughout different contexts and interact with different groups. The contexts in which both children and adults live their lives continually expose them to new people, new ideas, new information—about themselves and the groups with which they identify. Despite the focus on difference, these encodings also tend to be activated by specific features of the social context, thus providing individuals with a relatively stable sense of self and enactment of identity, particularly if individuals interact within a relatively stable set of contexts.

Social psychological perspectives assert that individuals attach greater importance to their membership in some social groups than they do other social groups (e.g., racial group memberships vs. religious group memberships). From this stance, individuals select themselves into social contexts that they believe afford them the opportunity to enact important identity encodings. These group memberships can be either assigned (e.g., at birth, in social roles) or afforded (e.g., organizations, clubs, and cliques with which youths can affiliate). In both cases, individuals vary in the extent to which they feel a sense of belonging to and identification with the group, as well as in the specific aspects of that group membership with which they identify. But it is this process of negotiation—deciding for oneself how much one “fits” with a given group and in what ways—that provides individuals with what social psychologists tend to think of as a relatively stable sense of identity. In the case of assigned group identities, the

nominal identification with the group often remains stable for individuals across time and contexts, but the specific content and importance of encodings related to these group identifications, as well as the importance attached to social group membership, changes with development. Further, as individuals move across contexts, the specific identity encodings that have been activated by and enacted in their histories of participation should shift and change as people encounter variations in recognitions, assignments, and affordances available in the given context (Roeser et al., 2006).

Several psychological studies of social identity have focused on race and ethnicity and have suggested that social identities associated with racial or ethnic groups consist of multiple dimensions (e.g., Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Rowley, Chavous, & Cooke, 2003). Sellers and colleagues (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998) posited social identities in terms of ideology (e.g., beliefs about the uniqueness of being African American), regard (e.g., evaluations of blacks and beliefs about others' evaluations of blacks as a racial group), and centrality (e.g., the importance of being black to one's sense of self). Racial identity can include a multitude of beliefs and behaviors related to a variety of domains of life, social groups, or aspects of difference, such as gender (Stewart & Dottolo, 2005), peer or age-based groups (Allen, Bat-Chava, Aber, & Seidman, 2005), or social class (Davidson, 1996).

By contrast, cultural and sociocultural perspectives also offer a perspective on identity as difference, although in many cases, the word identity is only implied. A notable exception is Ferdman's (1990) coining of the phrase “cultural identity,” but in most cases, cultural and sociocultural scholars refer to cultural difference, at times noting that people draw identities from their cultural groups. Indeed, there is a fair bit of slippage around constructs of identity and culture. The boundary between identities and cultures is murky and remains unexplored: Where does identity stop and culture start? Does one presuppose the other? Are these synonyms? What is the difference between a social identity and a culture?

For example, in the recently published *Handbook of Adolescent Literacy Research*, the section on “Literacy and Culture” is framed by a review of “literacy and identity” (Lewis & del Valle, 2009). In the review, Lewis and del Valle argued that what they termed the “first wave” of identity-and-literacy research “theorized identity as constructed through cultural affiliation” (p. 311) and argued that in work from this wave or perspective, identities were tied to rather stable conceptions of culture—often racial or ethnic cultures but also other kinds of normed practices. Indeed, the chapters that follow in this section include a review of “Latina/o Youth Literacies” (Martínez-Roldán & Fránquíz, 2009), “Boys

and Literacy” (M.W. Smith & Wilhelm, 2009), and “Literacy Issues and GLBTQ Youth” (Martino, 2009), although it should also be noted that few of these chapters refer explicitly to identities, instead focusing on shared practices, or cultural norms, knowledge, and practice.

Lewis and del Valle (2009) spoke to this point when they argued that the second and third waves of identity research are less focused on cultural conflict than was the first wave and instead are more focused on identity as negotiated and performed (second wave) and on identity as hybrid, metadiscursive, and spatial (third wave). Cultural practices (i.e., commitments to particular cultural groups) play a role in these negotiated, performed, hybrid, metadiscursive, and spatial identifications, but the focus in such identity-and-literacy studies is that difference, rather than culture, is the key to identifications. Nevertheless, the chapters in the section denote groupness, or ways of being a particular kind of person that are defined by one’s membership in a group of people who share those ways of being, those practices, or those origins or phenotypes.

In addition to some murkiness around the division between studies of culture and studies of group or social identity, identity-as-difference metaphors have been widely critiqued in recent years as producing identity politics in which groups are pitted one against another. Such identity perspectives are often considered essentialist, reducing people to phenotype, country of origin, sexual orientation, and other qualities of difference. In fact, when Amartya Sen (2000) argued for moving “beyond identity” (p. 23), he was encouraging readers to move beyond linking themselves solely to one group on the basis of their perceived national or ethnic similarity to that group and distinctiveness from others toward the recognition that people can make many different group identifications depending on time, space, or relationships. Thus, some tension around the conception of identity as cultural or social difference has developed in recent scholarship, and yet the difference perspective remains relatively firmly rooted in identity-and-literacy studies.

### Literacy Studies From an Identity-as-Difference Metaphor

Beyond the general critiques of identity as difference, we are interested in what the identity-as-difference metaphor implies about literacy when used in literacy-and-identity studies. Consider, for example, Heath’s (1983) landmark study, *Ways With Words*, in which Heath demonstrated the distinct differences in how members of one cultural group spoke, read, and wrote when compared with members of another cultural group. Heath also examined what those differences meant for learning school literacy, the practices of which are tied to a particular cultural group’s “ways with words.” Although Heath’s study examined this as a matter of *cultural* difference

rather than of differences in *identities*, such work paved the way for those interested in how individual students in school take up literate practices of schooling, how they might or might not identify with those practices, and what such practices might mean for their learning.

Heath’s (1983) stance, however, was a key innovation in identity-as-cultural-difference metaphors in that Heath employed the concepts of symbolic and linguistic capital (cf. Bourdieu, 1980/1990), suggesting that language and literacy practices were valued in different ways in different contexts, and thus children whose language and literacy practices did not match school language and literacy practices were devalued and marginalized from school learning. Such a stance is different from earlier perspectives on language and literacy learning framed by concepts such as *communicative competence* (Gumperz, 1977; Hymes, 1994; Philips, 1983) in the sense that the competence perspective situates difference as a matter of skill or knowledge of cultural practices that stem from difference. Identity-as-difference perspectives in literacy studies, on the other hand, tend to situate decisions—conscious or unconscious—to participate in particular literacy practices, or in the reading and writing of certain kinds of texts, within the individual’s sense of self as tied to a social group.

Carol Lee’s (1993, 2001) work provides another representation of how language and literacy practices are specific to a group, in this case identified by race. Lee (1993, 2001) implicitly drew on a metaphor of cultural identity (Ferdman, 1990) to argue that the use of culturally responsive literacy practices as a link to canonical texts and academic literacy practices can provide access for young people to both a stronger sense of group identity and to the academic literacy practices taught in school. Lee (1993) used language and literacy practices, specifically an African American cultural practice known as “signifying,” both to provide access to and distinguish from the canonical practices of white mainstream literature classrooms. Lee’s (2001) argument for cultural modeling could also be said to have been built upon an understanding of identity as difference, despite the fact that the pedagogical practice privileges culture rather than identity. The cultural models Lee (1993, 2001) advances are based on students’ identifications with particular cultural practices, assumed to be central to their meaning-making skills and practices.

In sum, identity-as-difference metaphors employed in literacy studies often acknowledge the role of others’ recognitions, but they also leave a space for the learner to identify or not with literate practices (Blackburn, 1999; Ferdman, 1990; Gee & Crawford, 1998; Jiménez, 2000; Martínez-Roldán & Fránquíz, 2009). This space suggests the possibility of more agency for the subject than cultural-difference, symbolic/linguistic capital, or communicative-competence metaphors might acknowledge.

## **Identity as Self**

Closely related to the identity-as-difference metaphor is the identity-as-self metaphor, with the emphasis in this metaphor less on how selves or identities are different and more on how selves come to be at all. Indeed, it might be argued that the question of how and what constitutes a *self* is the question from which all identity studies—whether or not they involve literacy—have emerged. From Aristotle’s (trans. 1993) philosophizing about the essence of being to Erikson’s (1994) stage theory of identity—or self—formation; to G.H. Mead’s (1934) the *I*, the *me*, and the *generalized other*; to Bourdieu’s (1980/1990) conception of the *habitus*; to Althusser’s (1971) interpellated and Butler’s (1997) constituted subject. Western philosophers have theorized about what makes a person, a person and about what distinguishes the human animal from other animals. Some have argued that selves and identities are separate constructs, preferring to think in terms of subjectivities rather than identities (Butler, 1997; Weedon, 1987) or of the relationship between subjectivity and identity (Hagood, 2002). A full review of all the philosophical positions on the generation of the subject and its exact relation to identity is beyond the scope this review, but we review a few notable contributions and try to maintain the original authors’ precision in reference to self, subjectivity, or identities. It should be noted here that even the verb *generated* could be contested. Is the subject developed, produced, constituted, interpellated, formed? We chose *generated* to avoid invoking some of the more dominant theories of selfhood, but the word *generated* carries with it its own theoretical baggage, as well. We also note the distinctions among self, subjectivity, and identity—or the lack thereof—as potentially significant for conceptualizing the relationship between literacy and identity and the implications of identity-and-literacies studies for producing models of the subject.

## **The Self in Development**

No review of perspectives on the self related to literacy research could be complete without at least some mention of psychological perspectives on self and identity because explorations of self-concept, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and identity development are at the core of work in developmental psychology. What’s more, the research undergirding these perspectives is both temporally and epistemologically aligned with the cognitive research that forms the basis of much of the literacy research conducted over the past 50 years. The work of psychologists around identity development—most notably represented by the theories of Erik Erikson (1994)—has shifted from a generally individual perspective to a perspective on identities as both personal/

individual and social, largely because of Erikson’s nod to the role of social context. Erikson’s perspective was that the self developed along what was ultimately a linear path—on which one could move forward and backward, or simply stop and rest (what Erikson called “psychosocial moratorium”)—that must eventually be followed to an endpoint if one was to reach full maturity as a person (Erikson, 1994). Erikson’s theory was thus a stage theory, with the many variations over the past 40 years too extensive to detail here.

Erikson (1994) acknowledged that the self developed as a result of interactions with other people over time, but his view—which has dominated a good deal of psychological work on self and identity—was of the development of a unitary self that, although conflicted throughout adolescence, eventually reached a stable state—what Erikson labeled *achievement* (Erikson, 1994). Although Erikson’s work is quite ostensibly different from the majority of literacy-and-identity studies, it is nevertheless important to literacy-and-identity studies because his theories moved psychological studies from a predominantly individual perspective on identity to a more, if not fully, social stance. Much of his work focused attention on the adolescent, asserting that a great deal of the identity work people do in development happens during the period that had come to be defined as adolescence (G.S. Hall, 1904), thus helping to explain the predominance of literacy-and-identity studies conducted with adolescents and young adults (Erikson, 1968). The language of Erikson’s work, which emphasizes a goal-directed movement toward a coherent, stable self, implicitly pervades many literacy-and-identity studies, even those that articulate a view of identity as social, fluid, and plural. What’s more, Erikson’s view reflects the widely accepted societal view of identity—particularly of conflict in adolescence—and consequently has enormous implications for how literacy teaching is practiced and studied and for the kinds of policies generated, especially for adolescent and secondary school literacy development. In short, Erikson’s view contributes to a model of the conflicted, tortured self, for whom literacy practices and texts can be motivating, debilitating, or distracting.

## **Social Formation of the Self**

The social behaviorist perspective of George Herbert Mead offers a decidedly different perspective on the self from Erikson’s. The crucial difference is that Mead (1934) theorized the formation of the self as completely dependent on interactions with others and, as a result, as unpredictable. Mead offered an explanation of how mind, self, and society were constructed and acted in relationship to one another by arguing that the self came about through the development of what Mead called the *generalized other*. For Mead, the social process as a whole



enters into the experience of one individual; individuals are said to have minds, and thus, in concert with the Cartesian axiom *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore, I am), individuals also have selves. More than cognition is at work here; the self exists because people are aware of their relation to the social process as a whole and to the other individuals participating in it with them; they are reflexive, taking the attitude of the other toward themselves and consciously adjusting themselves to that social process. This does not necessarily mean that the individual accurately interprets the attitude of the other, nor is the action always positive, but mind and self, from Mead's perspective, consist of understanding the relationships of meanings in the social process or act.

For Mead, meanings result from the interpretation of gestures and the interpretation of the responses to gestures. In his perspective, reflective intelligence enables thought or consciousness and is only possible through a social exchange, which is dependent on the significant symbol or language. Mead suggested that the significant symbol (the gesture that calls out the response of another in the individual making the gesture, so that the individual, in effect, can talk to himself or herself) is the basis of communication/language. Communication of this sort allows the individual to be reflexive; that is, individuals can think about their actions, another's attitude, and their consequent action because they were stimulated to think about these actions and responses by the significant symbol. Mead, however, also distinguished between symbolic and nonsymbolic interaction. Some (both verbal and nonverbal) gestures merely call out a response for people; they do not represent significant symbols. Other gestures, however, call out in people the attitude of the "Other." People base subsequent action on what they believe the Other's attitude will be. This type of gesture/symbol allows humans to be thinkers, to be reflexive. Language is one type of significant symbol, and thus language—and literacy—from Mead's social behaviorist perspective, are central in the development of both mind and self.

A number of theories of self view the formation of self as a less reflexive, or self-aware, act than either psychological or social behaviorist theories appear to suggest. This branch of theorizing in sociology, poststructuralist theory, and feminist theory suggests that the self is produced or constituted in interaction but that people are less conscious of who they are and how they are coming to be than either psychological or philosophical theories might suggest. From these perspectives, people are subjects at the whim of institutional structures and relations of power. Bourdieu's (1980/1990) conception of the *habitus*, for example, assumes that the self is acquired as an effect of embodied practices. The *habitus*, or "systems of durable, transposable dispositions"

(p. 53), serves to "generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations" (p. 53). The *habitus* develops over time, embeds past experience in present action, and operates within, as Albright and Luke (2008) argued, "a complex system of generational and intergenerational exchanges of capital, the ongoing interplay of positions and position-taking in relation to the structuring fields of school, workplace, civic, and media cultures" (p. 3).

Bourdieu (1980/1990) himself did not seek to define identity, *per se*; in point of fact, the notion of *habitus* stands, at some level, in contradiction to most conceptions of selfhood or identity simply because *habitus*, formed through practice, is largely unconscious, nonagentic, and nonstrategic. The nonstrategic nature of the *habitus* thus provides an interesting challenge to what Lewis and del Valle (2009) referred to as third-wave identity/self-representations in literacy-and-identity studies:

Although youth may not be tuned in to the commercial content of digital media (Fabos, 2004), in terms of social identity and power relations, youth often are quite aware of the discursive fields that position them in particular ways, and they comment, at times with irony, on elements of this positioning (Knobel & Lankshear, 2004). (p. 317)

If, in fact, the *habitus* generally operates for the individual to shape "things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say, in relation to a probably 'upcoming' future" (Bourdieu, 1980/1990, p. 53), then how do we reconcile the argument that people—and youth, in particular—are "quite aware of the discursive fields" and "comment" on them? What do these contrasting stances on the relationship between literacy and identity mean for literacy-and-identity studies' claims to young people's strategic actions to use literate practices to craft identities?

Althusser (1971) argued a similar case when he posited that the subject is interpellated, or called into, being, into an identity, as one is called into a relationship with a speaker, often through text, and often without awareness of the process. In Althusser's account, the one doing the hailing is an officer of the law, and the one who responds to the call of the officer of the law is constituted as a guilty subject of the law when he turns around in response to hearing the policeman call out. By turning in response, a person accepts that the address applies to him or her, and in the process becomes a subject of the law and to the officer of the law. This particular subjectivity constitutes at least an aspect of self, which potentially produces an identity for the subject. Althusser's theory and vocabulary of interpellation offers another possible identity metaphor, but this one is a metaphor for the process of identity production: that of the call

and response. Key to interpellation is the power of the call to invoke a response that situates the respondent in a particular subject position embedded in particular ideologies and knowledge systems. Note the importance of others' recognition—or positioning—in Althusser's conception of the call and response of interpellation. The respondent's recognition of self is less critical than is the caller's recognition of the respondent because it is the caller's recognition that spurs the process.

Both Bourdieu and Althusser thus assume some lack of awareness in the constitution of the *habitus*/self and its accompanying identities. In *Identity Matters* (McCarthy & Moje, 2002), however, Moje wrote of what was for her a profound self/identity experience with her reading of *The Red Tent* (Diamant, 1998), an experience that demonstrates both the lack of awareness with which interpellation occurs and the possibility for moments of awareness, when a text or experience jars one's sense of self. The novel called out to Moje's feminist identity, but its religious context simultaneously made her aware of a self or subjectivity that had accepted the call of less-than-feminist biblical stories in the past. This tension highlights the possibility both for lack of awareness and for potential disruptions to one's *habitus* or subjectivity in the development of self and/or identity. When humans read a text, they are called by that text to assume or to step into this audience or readerly position (see Luke, 1995). In other words, because texts require readers to assume certain knowledge, to believe certain assumptions, and to have particular relationships to power to read meaningfully, texts demand that readers inhabit particular subject positions—even if temporarily. As Ellis, Moje, and VanDerPloeg (2004) argued in their analysis of how youth are interpellated into being with texts,

We find this concept [interpellation] useful because we see complicated issues of power between youths and the texts they read. On the one hand, youth are interpellated by texts into new knowledge and new ways of being that allow youth to be successful in different communities; on the other, this interpellation draws students into participation with a world that they have not had a hand in creating and may have no power to change. (p. 13)

Thus, although all of these theories of self, save Erikson's, posit subjectivities and, by extension, identities, that develop to some extent without our permission, all leave open the possibility for disruption of new interpellations. And that's where texts and literate practice can play a crucial role (Davies & Gannon, 2006).

### Literacy Studies From the Identity-as-Self Metaphor

The perspectives outlined here have implications for interpretations offered in a number of literacy-and-identity

studies that—explicitly or implicitly—call upon a metaphor of identity as self. Although many of the theories discussed here recognize the role of culture or social interaction; of the role of the Other; of larger structures; or of history, space, and time, research conducted from this perspective on literacy and identity runs the risk of producing a model of the subject as either independent meaning maker/agent or as nonagentic pawn of more powerful institutional structures and relations of power. Both the theories themselves and representations of identity and literacy in research, particularly in terms of the data used, risk producing these models.

For example, Moje and colleagues (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008) drew from Mead's perspective on the generation of the self in social interaction. They claimed that the adolescents who participated in their project read and wrote for multiple reasons, namely because their literacy acts were situated in social networks and because they stood to gain social and cultural capital by reading and writing. Their reading and writing practices provided the young people entrée into important social networks, access to information they needed to maintain those networks, and opportunities to build and understand the self. Thus, their literacy practices were engaged at least in part to develop the self as they answered the call of certain texts and used texts to construct the generalized other, maintain a resilient self, and write for self-presentation. However, these models of identity-self-literacy may be dangerous; in Moje et al., when youth are represented as choosing texts because they teach them how to be certain kinds of people, it is possible to read the data as if the youths' choices are their own, independent choices rather than choices situated in structured social and cultural worlds that tell them what counts as a "good person."

Similarly, Leigh Hall's (2007) study of three adolescents who resisted public engagement in reading/writing activities as a way of protecting their identities also builds on the metaphor of identity as self. According to Hall, the students silenced themselves and kept themselves from engaging in literacy activities that could have supported their development of skilled literacies. Hall attributed the students' silence and lack of engagement to their own strategic attempts to prevent other students from recognizing them as struggling. Implications offered as a result focused on how teachers might come to understand students' identities as struggling readers, a label that both the teachers and Hall assigned to the youth. Working from an Eriksonian identity-as-self metaphor, it is possible interpret the youths' desire to hide their identities as unskilled readers as their own choice rather than as a move situated in particular classroom activities and histories of participation as a reader. In both cases and in many more

not cited here, identities are posited as aspects of a self being consciously built by individuals.

By contrast, a Bourdieuan perspective on L. Hall's (2007) "struggling" adolescents could at some level deny the students or their teachers much agency, arguing that they have developed over time the disposition of struggle, lack of engagement, and lack of hope that regulates students' participation in classroom activities and teachers' dispositions toward the students as hopeless. Options for agency seem limited; although, to be fair, Bourdieu's sociological project was articulated to bring to awareness the power of the *habitus* as a "structuring structure" (Bourdieu, 1980/1990, p. 53), the means by which subjects both are constituted and control themselves according to the workings of a given relational field. Thus, Hall's argument for a different kind of pedagogy that could animate readers' identities might serve as a way to reshape the *habitus*, but such work would take the close and careful acknowledgment of the role that instruction played in helping to reconstitute already developed *habitus*es in the youth of the study.

### **Identity as Mind or Consciousness**

Closely related to the identity-as-self metaphor is the identity-as-mind (or consciousness) metaphor. This metaphor for identity in the modern world derives from Karl Marx, albeit through the learning theories of Lev Vygotsky and the sociohistorical, sociocultural, and activity theorists. In Marx's First and Third Theses on Feuerbach (written by Marx, but then edited by Friedrich Engels in 1845) Marx suggested that individuals, in activity, shape reality and in the process of shaping reality (nature), they shape consciousness:

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*. (Third Thesis on Feuerbach, p. x)

Because activity and consciousness exist in dialectical relationship, the changed consciousness in turn shapes new activity, which shapes reality (nature), which again, in turn, shapes consciousness (and, potentially, revolution in thought and activity). The process continues endlessly as long as humans engage in activity. Vygotsky (1934/1986) took up Marxist perspectives on the activity-consciousness dialectic in arguing that tool use—which includes language and other symbolic tools—shaped consciousness, or mind. Indeed, Vygotsky distinguished between tools and signs in the development of abstract thought. From a Vygotskian

perspective, signs—and particularly linguistic signs—are a kind of tool that allows for categorization, an essential quality of abstract thought, and thus the internal plane of consciousness comes into existence through the emergence of control over external sign forms (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, which does not explicitly name the construct of identity, the person comes into being as the mind or consciousness develops; consciousness in this view, although always growing, appears seamless and smooth, with each new activity leading to the use and generation of better tools, which lead to the generation of higher and higher levels of awareness, which lead to new activities, and new tools, in a kind of unlimited semiosis of activity, tool use, and consciousness (Witte, 1992).

In writing about her concept of a "New Mestiza consciousness," Gloria Anzaldúa (1999a) also saw the self as a matter of developing consciousness, but for Anzaldúa, consciousness, identity, the self—all words she used in reference to one another, if not interchangeably—is a bifurcated, borderlands, and contested affair and one that cries out for representation and communication. In the preface to the first edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa (1987) wrote the following:

Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element.... This book, then, speaks of my existence. My preoccupations with the inner life of the Self, and with the struggle of that Self amidst adversity and violation; with the confluence of primordial images; with the unique positioning consciousness takes at these confluent streams; and with my almost instinctive urge to communicate, to speak, to write about life on the borders, life in the shadows. Books saved my sanity, knowledge opened the locked places in me and taught me first how to survive and then how to soar. (n.p.)

Anzaldúa's conception of consciousness is an important one, as she brings together the metaphors of identity as mind/consciousness, identity as narrative, and identity as position, while also highlighting both the play of power in positioning people at borders and the power of literate practice for rewriting those borders. For Anzaldúa, writing is not merely an act of constructing identity; it is her identity, it builds the self (not just a sense of self, but the actual self), sustains the self, and emanates from it:

*La Prieta* is about my being a writer and how I look at reality, how reality gets constructed, how knowledge gets produced and how identities get created. The subtext is reading, writing and speaking.... The art of composition, whether you are composing a work of fiction or your life, or whether you are composing reality, always means pulling off fragmented pieces and putting them together into a whole that makes sense. A lot of my composition theories are not just about writing but about how people live their lives, construct their

cultures, so actually about how people construct reality. (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 237–238)

## Literacy Studies From the Identity-as-Mind Metaphor

What role does literacy play in this work or, conversely, what role do identities play in literate practice if researchers work from the identity-as-mind metaphor? From Vygotsky's (1934/1986) perspective, literacy is a tool for the development of mind, and it is in the development of mind that the self comes into being. Prior to that, the human being is just a body; Vygotsky, in particular, distinguished human animals from other animals on the basis of their ability to use language and other significant symbols (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). As Vygotsky argued, "The use of artificial means, the transition to mediated activity, fundamentally changes all psychological operations just as the use of tools limitlessly broadens the range of activities within which the new psychological functions may operate" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55). Thus, a tool is externally oriented, but the sign is internally oriented.

In *Mind and Society*, Vygotsky (1978) went further, attributing the ability to think abstractly or complexly to the written word in particular, and in studies with Luria in Uzbekistan, Vygotsky concluded that literate skill was responsible for the ability to reason through syllogisms and, thus, think abstractly (Daniell, 1990). A number of scholars, who came to be known as the "Great Leap theorists" (Goody, 1977; Goody & Watt, 1963; Ong, 1982), built on Vygotsky's perspective on literacy's power, claiming that not only were written symbols able to produce a higher order of consciousness—and thus a human animal, more distinct as an acting agent than the lower animals—but that alphabetic print, in particular, led to higher forms of thinking and ultimately to personhood.

In effect, literacy-and-identity studies that work from an identity-as-mind metaphor may position literate practice as a tool for the development of abstract concepts that allow the human being to evolve to higher levels of consciousness and thus run the risk of positioning those who do not demonstrate literate skill—particularly skill with alphabetic print—as living at a lower level of consciousness. A view of literacy as tool for developing the consciousness that elevates humans above other animals, together with a view of identity as mind, suggests an identity of savage (Goody, 1977) for those without alphabetic-print literacy. Consider, then, the implications of literacy campaigns for a model of the subject among the so-called illiterate of developing countries (see Street, in Blommaert, Street, & Turner, 2007).

At the same time, the identity-as-mind metaphor could also have powerful positive implications for the relationship of literacy and identity. Some studies

of "new literacies," for example, argue that using different media has changed minds by making possible new ways of interacting with print and image (Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), new ways of interacting with the medium that changes learning possibilities (Spiro, 2006; Spiro, Collins, & Ramchandran, 2007), and new ways of interacting with others and with the self (Black, 2006; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Warshauer & Ware, 2008). Although most of these scholars might not articulate their work as being framed by an identity-as-mind metaphor, the application of the metaphor suggests that uses of new tools should produce new minds and new activities, thus casting the subject as an active agent, constructing one's own reality and one's own subjectivity and identity (Steinkuehler, Black, & Clinton, 2005; Warshauer & Ware, 2008).

Smagorinsky, Cook, and Reed (2005) argued for a somewhat more conflicted view of identity-as-mind metaphor. They illustrated through an analysis of one high school student's architectural design work that the design served as a tool for both representing and making an identity for the youth:

Rick's data from his experiences designing a house within the confines of Bill's classroom and the state architectural competition, and the communities of practice in which these settings were situated, suggest that his production of architectural plans helped to integrate, configure, represent, and mediate his emerging identity and culturally mediated life trajectory.... In this sense the production of cultural texts reflects and contributes to one's ongoing identity development within the settings and through the mediational tools provided by culture.... We see, however, his design of this cultural text as both an embodiment of his vision of himself and as an opportunity to develop that vision. (Smagorinsky et al., 2005, p. 85)

At the same time, Smagorinsky et al. showed how the young man's teacher did not recognize (our word, not theirs) the student's work as appropriate within the larger cultural norms of architectural design class. In his zeal to support the student's potential success in the architectural competition, the teacher tried to constrain the young man's design, not recognizing the design work as either a representation of or tool for identity development.

Anzaldúa's (1999a) conception of literate practice as a way of coming to consciousness suggests not that literacy is a tool for enabling abstract thinking but that reading and writing allow the person to work through tensions and conflicts in a bifurcated (or multiply situated) consciousness. From this perspective, literacy is a medium for self-discovery and self-formation. We use the word *medium* rather than *tool* deliberately here to capture Anzaldúa's conception of writing, in particular, as one

and the same with the developing and tension-filled consciousness. The work of literacy in this view of identity as mind is to reflect, speak out against threats to self, and make a space for a hybrid consciousness. Indeed, here again is where scholars who work from a new literacies framework might feel some resonance, as this perspective allows for the acknowledgment of identity as difference, consciousness, narrative, and even position (Black, 2005; Lam, 2004; Steinkuehler et al., 2005).

### **Identity as Narrative**

Anzaldúa's perspective on how literate practice shapes consciousness, self, and identity overlaps with the metaphor of identity as narrative. This is a compelling and currently prominent metaphor for identity, with any number of theorists arguing that identities are not only represented but also constructed in and through the stories people tell about themselves and their experiences (e.g., Bamberg, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2007; Mishler, 1999; Wortham, 2004). For some theorists, the self develops over time and is only available for view in the stories one tells about that life (McAdams, 1997). In some cases, theorists even argue that identities *are* the stories that people tell about themselves and others (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

The popularity of the identity-as-narrative metaphor may stem from the attention to discourse and narrative analysis attendant on the social turn in literacy research; that is, as literacy scholars have attempted to document what makes literacy a social practice, they have focused on the role of language in all its registers and genres as a medium for communicating concepts, emotions, and experiences. Thus, attention to language and discourse makes sense for examining the relationship between literacy and identity as well, particularly because regardless of one's take on identity, it is difficult to argue against the idea that identities are at least in part represented in and through language. It is also probable that literacy researchers are receptive to identity metaphors that are discursive in nature, given that we trade in words and discourse or because it is the method by which many researchers "capture" identities.

Whatever the explanation, identity as narrative is a current and dominant metaphor in literacy research, and yet, the identity-as-narrative metaphor does not spring from a single story line. Identity as narrative is, in fact, highly contested in terms of both the mechanisms of narrating the self and the methods for examining the narrated self. Thorne (2004) described the breach in narrative-identity studies as a divide between the "personal-history approach to storied identity" (p. 362) and the "socially situated approach to storied identity." Wortham (2001), by contrast, represented it as a division between narrative as representation and narrative as enactment in interaction. Regardless of the label,

distinct differences exist in how those who work from an identity-as-narrative metaphor understand narrative to work. In sum, just about the only thing that those who study the self as narrated agree on is that narration matters. And what is important about this metaphor for literacy research and theory are the roles that oral and written language play in the concept of narrating the self and what those roles might mean for our understanding of literacy and our model of the subject.

For example, Sfard and Prusak (2005), who are not literacy researchers, argued that narratives can be considered identities: "Lengthy deliberations led us to the decision to *equate identities with stories about persons*. No, no mistake here: We did not say that identities were *finding their expression* in stories—we said they *were* stories" (p. 14).

Sfard and Prusak's (2005) reasoning for establishing identity and narrative as isomorphic was that identities are reifications of activity and experience. The transition, Sfard and Prusak argued, from a person who repeatedly *earns* high grades in school to a person who is bright (the transition from an action to a state of being) is accomplished in the stories we tell about ourselves and that others tell about us. According to Sfard and Prusak, this reifying process is only possible through language, and, in particular, through narrative.

In effect, narratives provide the "gel" to which McCarthy and Moje (2002) referred when they tried to push questions about what holds experiences together in a way that allows people to act as if they possess identities. From Sfard and Prusak's (2005) perspective, a narrative holds together multiple experiences of an individual, allowing for a sense of coherence. Furthermore, the narratives that get told reflect actual and designated identities, with the terms *actual* and *designated* signifying the space between the identity one claims through narrative "right now" and the identity one tells about (or is told about) one's future, thus allowing a coherent sense of self, even into the future.

This take on actual versus designated identities conveys a number of important assumptions that distinguish Sfard and Prusak's (2005) conception of identity from other variants on the identity-as-narrative metaphor. For one thing, the word *actual* conveys some sense of reality apart from the discourse that produces it, although Sfard and Prusak would be likely to argue that the discourse produces a reality; thus, when a child is described as "bright" or, conversely, as "dull," that child begins to live that identity in real ways. More telling—if the pun can be excused—is the sense teleology, linearity, and univocality conveyed in the movement from actual to designated identities; the goal-directed nature of the language suggests that one voice is dominant in the narrations of identity, leaving little room for multiple renderings of the self through multiple narrations. In many ways,

Sfard and Prusak's conception of identities as the stories themselves fits within what Thorne (2004) labeled the personal-history approach to storied identity.

Mishler (1999), for example, has also argued that identities are stories we tell about ourselves. At the same time, however, Mishler (2004) has also demonstrated just how much those stories can shift in even a short span of time by documenting how one slight change in a prompt to an interviewee who told a story of losing an expensive purchase shifted her self-narration in dramatic ways. Mishler (2004) argued that the first telling of the story was a performance rendered because the respondent was told that her story would be part of a film. The second telling was a response to the interviewer's question about whether the first telling was "what it felt like when it happened" and thus shifted in its enactment, although it nevertheless maintained a sense of performance. Mishler (2004, p. 118) thus characterized the second telling as carrying, "an evaluation of the first telling as lacking something—as being too 'upbeat' and not expressing her feelings." He went on to argue the following:

This does not, of course, mean that there are a false self and a true self; rather, each person has multiple perspectives on the same event, and the one that comes into play depends on variations in contexts, audiences, and intentions, that is, on how one positions one's self within that set of circumstances. (Mishler, 2004, p. 118)

Wortham (2001) made a similar case when he drew on Bakhtinian theory of the dialogic nature of all speech to argue that identities can be conceptualized in two ways: as represented in narration and as enacted in an interaction with the audience for whom one is narrating. Wortham maintained that the self is narrated, but like Mishler (2004), he articulated narration in less static ways than the personal-history approach to storied identity, in ways that more fully acknowledge the social and, indeed, dialogic nature of both identities and the word (oral or written). Wortham, again like Mishler but using different theories to push the argument, argued that it is the interaction—whether with an interviewer or with some other sort of audience—that shapes the narration of self in particular ways.

Such a stance not only has theoretical implications but also has dramatic implications for methods of data collection. The narrative as enacted in interaction with an audience cannot only be studied via the transcription of lengthy interview transcript; the context of the interview and the roles and relationships of interviewer and interviewee must be foregrounded and accounted for in the analysis. Conceiving of the enactment of identity in the interactional space of an interview (or even a conversation) is something different from acknowledging that a particular question generated a certain kind of response;

indeed, Wortham (2001) argued that the context of the interview and the representations made in the interview need to be examined in regard to how language is used by participants to situate themselves and others in ways that draw from the words (or discourses available), what the participants recognize will be understood, and what the participants predict will be said. This enactment in interaction—with attention to past, present, and future—"bridges the gap between past and current selves, and thus it helps construct a coherent identity for the narrator" (Wortham, 2001, p. 137).

In these enactments of self-in-interaction-with-others, the self is constructed. More important, according to Wortham (2001), a link is established between past and present (and possibly future) selves as the narrator both voices (names and represents) and ventriloquates (distances, examines, and even evaluates) the self. In this sense, this conception of a narrated self is not dramatically different from Sfard and Prusak's (2005) conception, except that Wortham sees the self constructed in these moments and, one assumes, identities enacted as a result of this construction of self, whereas Sfard and Prusak view the narrative itself as the identity, with enactment relegated to the discursive representation rather than to some sort of action. Indeed, Sfard and Prusak argue in opposition to Wenger (1998)—who claimed an important role for unmediated, unrepresented activity in the formation of identity—that activity is only meaningful in its representation in narrative. Wortham (2001, 2004) appears to sit between the two perspectives, suggesting that enactment and representation work simultaneously to construct an identity that can then be enacted in the next narrative turn.

Yet another perspective on narrative makes even more space for activity, that of scholars who write of the importance of "small stories" in understanding identity as narrative. Georgakopoulou (2006a, 2006b, 2007) and Bamberg (2004, 2005) each have argued for the importance of moving away from the "big stories," or the "grand" or "canonical" narrative (Georgakopoulou, 2006a), toward an analysis of small, or "non-canonical," stories that get told as people move through their everyday lives. Georgakopoulou (2006a) moves back and forth between labeling these narratives as "small stories" and "narratives-in-interaction," with the latter being, we think, an important discursive move to emphasize the fact that these are not only brief snatches of stories that may lack the teleological cast of canonical narratives (or big stories) but that they are also stories that live in activity.

In this sense, the focus on interaction is somewhat different from, although not contradictory to, Wortham's (2001) notion of narrating the self in interaction. An interactional perspective on narrating the self focuses the researcher on the interactional quality of any story, whether told in a moment of everyday

activity or in a sit-down interview with two people in a room; Georgakopoulou (2006a, 2006b, 2007) and Bamberg (2004, 2005) are both interested in the stories that get told as people move through life; in this sense, the small-story perspective on narrating the self moves toward the metaphor of identity as position, and yet it maintains the focus on the telling of self rather than on the enacting of self (see Moje, 2004b, on “doing identity”).

Despite naming himself as a narrative analyst, Bamberg (2004) was particularly critical of the discursive focus of narrative and identity studies, highlighting methodological and written-language constraints in our representation of the selves/identities of others.

The transformation of bodily interactions into written texts is an issue of theoretical and methodological importance.... When we engage in transcription, we yield to a view of discourse as language—the way we encounter it in the form of literate products and literary interpretations.... What can be ‘lost in translation’ is the non-fixity, the fleetingness and negotiability of the interactive situation as a whole. And what comes into focus is a world of individual intentions as ‘behind’ the individual contributions of individuals’ turns [Bamberg, in press]. (Bamberg, 2004, pp. 366–367)

An important aspect of Georgakopoulou’s take on narratives in interaction is that although she maintains a focus on the narrating of self, she saves the identity-as-narrative metaphor from the trap of a past-is-present orientation (and thus, an overly coherent narrated self) by emphasizing the possibility for uncovering future orientations in the small stories collected amidst people’s everyday interactions. This perspective on identity as activity calls up Roger Hall’s (2004) argument that “talk is always located in culturally and historically specific activity” (p. 359) and Thorne’s (2004) call for the “study of how individuals dynamically position themselves toward and against others and thereby construct their identities” (p. 365). Both perspectives move us toward the identity-as-position metaphor, but before turning to that way of seeing identity, we must ask the question of what role literacy plays in making identities from a narrative perspective. And, on the flip side, what role do identities play in literate practice if researchers work from the identity-as-narrative metaphor?

### Literacy Studies From an Identity-as-Narrative Metaphor

Literacy studies that work from an identity-as-narrative metaphor offer rich possibilities for examining the “gel” of identities, the stuff that holds identities together (see McCarthy & Moje, 2002), although they may offer less in the way of explicating the process of how these stories are built over time because stories are representations of one time and space offered in another time and

space. Blackburn’s (1999, 2002/2003) research with young women who identify as lesbians offers an excellent example. Blackburn (2002/2003) represented how one young woman presented a video about her experiences as a lesbian to her class, thus writing “herself into the world of school as a lesbian supported by the larger LGBTQ community” (p. 318). The narrative here functions at two levels: One is a representation of self—a way of claiming an identity—to peers, and the other is the researcher’s use of the narrative to identify the young woman not only as lesbian but also as activist, as she not only comes out to her peers but also demands their respect for her choice, thereby demonstrating Wortham’s (2001) notion of enactment in interaction. The case then produces multiple models of the subject and casts literate practice—in particular, a literal narrative of identity—as a primary tool for not only the claiming of identity (as lesbian) but also the construction of self (as out, as activist). Similarly, M.W. Smith and Wilhelm’s (2002, 2009) interview and profile-based analysis of the complex and multiple ways that young men approach literate practice serves to challenge stereotypes of boys resisting reading. At the same time, however, identity-as-narrative literacy studies that rely on interview or other spoken and written representations of the subject risk the representation of an overly coherent subject. Such studies tend to focus on identities as being woven from past storylines (Mishler, 2004) rather than on identities as being actively constructed for future purposes (Georgakopoulou, 2006a, 2006b, 2007).

Identity-as-narrative studies do, however, offer the possibility of documenting how people recognize others or respond to the recognitions of others via the telling of their stories. In Moje (2000a, 2000b), the representations of self and other are clear as young people narrate their school experiences with comments such as, “If teachers didn’t hate us so much it would be better” (2000a, p. 64) or “I just wanted to be part of the story” (2000b, p. 652). At the same time, these accounts can risk the possible neglect of how recognitions and the actions that follow recognitions, both by the acting subject and by others who view and position the subject, because the recognitions and actions of others are not always fully visible in people’s accounts of themselves or their experiences. In particular, such studies risk failing to account for the role of race, phenotype, gender, and other physical or material qualities that identify (Baker & Freebody, 1989; Luke, 2009) or lead to recognitions of people as a “certain kind of person” (Gee, 2001, p. 99) and to the actions people take either to constrain or enable certain kinds of people. Luke argued this point persuasively:

Some discourses kill people, take away their livelihood, others humiliate, others marginalize and shame. Some modes and plays of *differance* make a difference in people’s lives, others simply don’t matter much. In this way, the ubiquitous

poststructuralist observation that we can account fully for the world through discourse, or rather for the world's partiality and continually deferred (in discourse) meaning is at worst glib and at best partial. It is particularly unhelpful for those who find that some of their phenotypical features, their gender or sexuality, their language and accent are not chosen, not wholly malleable through discourse—however their relative value may be assigned by others through discourse categories.... all the discourse overlays and constructions in the world will not “undo” the social facticity of being white in a culture where yellow is the unmarked norm, or black in a white-dominated culture, or female in male-governed institutions. (p. 293)

Many would argue that those recognitions are not only constructed, represented, and communicated discursively but that people also “do identity” as they engage in the regular practices of everyday life (Cross & Strauss, 2003; Moje, 2004b; Wenger, 1998). Studying both the doing and representing of identities, as well as studying the narration of identities in action (Georgakopoulou, 2007), is likely to be a productive means of documenting how identities shape the take up or performance of literate practices and vice versa, in large part because people move from space to space, position to position, discourse community to discourse community, interaction to interaction, and text to text. As R. Hall (2004) argued, these movements need to be traced and the activity within them better understood—not just the telling about the activities but the actual activities in a variety of spaces and positions—for their power to shape how people make sense of self and the texts they encounter (Leander & McKim, 2003). This argument provides a useful segue into the metaphor of identity as position, a metaphor for identity increasingly taken up in what Lewis and del Valle (2009) labeled the third wave of identity studies in [adolescent] literacy.

## ***Identity as Position***

The social positioning of persons and groups, whether through everyday discourse, spatial arrangement, text, film, or other media, is now considered a primary means by which subjects are produced and subjectivity forms. Power relations, in particular, are thought to shape a person's self (or a group's identity) through acts that distinguish and treat the person as gendered, raced, classed, or other sort of subject.... A person or group is “offered” or “afforded” a social position when a powerful body, such as a governmental agency proposes a particular sort of subject, a “felon” say, or a “sexual harasser,” or an “at-risk” student and calls on an individual to occupy the position. Faced with such an offer, the person may either accept the position in whole or part, or try to refuse it (Bourdieu, 1977; Davies and Harré, 1990; Foucault, 1975, 1988; Harré and Van Langenhove, 1991). (Holland & Leander, 2004, p. 127)

This extended quote from Holland and Leander, published in a special issue of the journal *Ethos*, on subjectivity, identity, and positioning, captures eloquently the metaphor of identity as position, despite the fact that the quote only uses the word *identity* in relation to a group. The thrust of work that operates from this metaphor is that subjectivities and identities are produced in and through not only activity and movement in and across spaces but also in the ways people are cast in or called to particular positions in interaction, time, and spaces and how they take up or resist those positions (Butler, 1997, 1999; Davies, 2008; Davies & Harré, 1990). Positioning theories of identity build on the conception of self as interpellated (Althusser, 1971) but move beyond the initial act of interpellation to specify *how* positions get taken up and resisted and how those interpellations translate into identities over time. For example, the idea of “figured worlds” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), or the “sociohistoric, contrived interpretations or imaginations that mediate behavior and...inform participants' outlooks” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 53), helps to articulate a process of positioning and identity formation. As people experience certain positions—what one might think of as labels, although not necessarily articulated discursively—they come to imagine future positions and their future selves moving within and across those positions.

Holland and Leander (2004) have built on the idea of figured worlds in identity as position by drawing from both Holland and Lave's (2001) concept of “histories in person” and Latour's (1993) “laminations” to imagine how identities, as Holland and Lave (2001) argued, “thicken” over time as a result of the multiple subject positions a given person experiences in the practice of everyday life. Laminations, argued Holland and Leander (2004), help to explain how identities appear stable and yet are also multiple and, at times, conflicted. Laminations are constructed through the layering of identity positions one over the other; just as layers of varnish might stick or congeal, so do laminated identities. Moreover, just as one might see evidence of the layers of varnish on a piece of wood, so we might also see the layers of identity on a person. To play out the metaphor even further, those layers can be stripped away, reapplied, nicked, scratched, or even gouged. Thus, identity as layers of positions (i.e., as laminations) carries with it the histories (hence, the overlap with the concept of histories in person, or even possibly, of *habitus*) of past experiences.

A powerful component of the identity as position metaphor is the space it makes for other than discursive aspects of identity formation or even representation. Identity as position takes into account discourse and narrative (Hicks, 2004; Norton & Toohey, 2002) but also acknowledges the power of activities and



interactions (Leander, 2004; Wortham, 2004), artifacts (Holland & Leander, 2004; Moje, 2004a), space and time (Leander, 2004; Leander & Lovvorn, 2006; Moje, 2004a), and embodied difference (Davies, 1989, 2008; Davies & Harré, 1990; Luke, 2009).

The metaphor (or submetaphor) of laminations is both useful and constraining. The power of the metaphor is that it presents a way to conceive an extra-discursive way of constructing and representing identities because of the spaces the metaphor makes for activity, artifacts, and embodied experiences. Laminations also help us think about how the gel (McCarthy & Moje, 2002) of identities is produced, via the congealing or thickening of experience. And laminations also allow for layers to peek through, to be made visible in the enactment of identities.

Spinning out the metaphor a bit further, however, it is difficult to imagine how one represents dramatically different identities in different situations if, in fact, layers are added upon layers, gluing themselves together in some sort of unified block. How does a laminated identity explain, for example, the differences in practice, discourse, dress, and even consciousness of a female professor teaching a course and that same professor as a mother of a young child at a play date? Latour (1993) might argue that each new moment produces a new layer, and so with each moment of activity and experience, new practices, discourses, dress, and thinking emerge. Further, a history-in-person metaphor, or Bourdieu's (1980/1990) conception of the *habitus*, would allow for the memories of those layers to work going forward; the acting subject thus looks back over the layers of his or her experience even as a new layer emerges and is laminated to the last. That metaphor, though, fails to account for the moments of sudden shift, for the tensions one feels crossing identity boundaries as one moves throughout and across multiple spaces, as if the sheets of identity exist side by side rather than in some layered and congealing mass. In effect, the identity-as-laminations-of-position metaphor seems to privilege the temporal dimension of the time-space interactions to which Latour (1993) and Holland and Leander (2004) referred and suggests a production of identity that could remain trapped in a kind of unidirectional, past-present motion, much like that represented in narrative.

Another take on the laminations metaphor, however, might also be that considering identities to be laminations may require thinking of people as multi-dimensional, like a cube or a quilt (or an even more multiple-sided object), wherein different sides are comprised of differently ordered layers. This conception merges the concept of multiple identities with the idea of laminations, suggesting possible explanations for both seeming fluidity and seeming coherence in identity representations or enactments; the female professor might

layer multiple academic or professional experiences on one side of her identity cube, while layering experiences as a mother on another side. At times, these sides or compartments may overlap and layers begin to congeal across identity compartments, thus producing hybrid identities (S. Hall, 1996). Whatever the metaphor, a positioning metaphor, like that of an identity-as-narrative metaphor that casts identities as enactments in interaction, must account for the multiple and possibly conflicting positions that many people find themselves in on a daily basis.

In some ways, the identity-as-position metaphor brings together all of the previous metaphors. It recognizes the subject as called into being, invited to stand in certain positions, to take up particular identities. In a merging of Mead (1934) with Althusser (1971), positioning metaphors situate the developing or constructed subjectivity and its resulting identities (whether laminations, *habitus*, or enactments) in relationships with other human beings. A person calls out, another responds, meanings are made, identities assigned and acted upon in the next round of meaning making. Identity as position allows for people to tell stories about themselves, to represent themselves in narrative, but also to shift positions and tell new stories. At times, identity-as-position metaphors seem to make identities fragmented and in tension, but at other times coherent, dependent on the particular space, time, or relationship in which one is situated, recognized, and named. Finally, positioning metaphors allow for the doing of identity—or identity in activity—to be as powerful a means of self-construction and representation as the narrativizing of identity because positioning metaphors require that the researcher follow people through different physical/spatial and social/metaphorical positions of their lives, documenting activity, artifacts, and discursive productions simultaneously (Georgakopoulou, 2007; R. Hall, 2004; Hicks, 2004; Holland & Leander, 2004; Moje, 2004b; Thorne, 2004).

### Literacy Studies From an Identity-as-Position Metaphor

We turn once again to the key questions in this review regarding literacy's role in identity-as-position work and what identities as positions mean for how we think about literacy. Literacy from a positioning metaphor can play any numbers of roles. One might be as a disciplinary technology, in which texts provide practices and tools that systemize and order bodies in spaces (Davidson, 1996; Foucault, 1977), assigning labels and tools to reduce hybridity and to manifest coherence and stability. Another might be as an enabling tool, a device for making meaning of and speaking back to or resisting the call to certain positions. Herein lies a distinct difference between the narrative as producer of consciousness as

articulated by Anzaldúa (1999a), among others, and the narrative as a site of resistance (Hicks, 2004), a tool for saying no to interpellating forces.

Luke (1993) demonstrated how very young children were positioned as capable or not capable via their reading and other school practices (cf. Gee, Michaels, & O'Connor, 1992; McDermott, 1993; Wortham, 2004, for similar analyses of the positioning of ability identities). In each of these studies, identity-as-position metaphors suggest dramatically negative positions for youth, particularly in institutions of formal learning where evaluations are made as a matter of course.

A number of new literacies studies, however, put a different spin on positioning, associating positions with a shifting sense of agency and interpellation. Leander and Lovvorn (2006), for example, demonstrated how a young man engaged with massive, multiuser games took up the call of the game as an engaged and authoritative practitioner of the activity, whereas in his school history and language arts classes, he was positioned, and then identified, as disengaged, sloppy, perhaps even lazy. Likewise, Black's (2006) study of Latina youth identified as English language learners were repositioned as proficient writers and readers when writing fan fiction online. This study, as in several other studies of youth using new media (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Lam, 2000), illustrated how differently positioned the youth were both in terms of language and literacy skill and in terms of identities in the different spaces of the classroom and online worlds.

Similarly, in an analysis of Latina/o youths' literacy practices across multiple spaces, Moje (2004a) argued the following:

The access the youth had to particular kinds of space—most often to their ethnic community space—shaped the texts they consumed and produced, which in turn shaped the ways they chose to identify and were identified. The multiple spaces of their lives conjured up or enabled multiple ways of being, multiple tools—identity kits, in Gee's (1996) parlance—for enacting those ways of being, and, ultimately, multiple identities to be enacted. Whereas mall walking gave lessons in how to be mainstream, walking Virnot Street—one of the central neighborhood streets—provided the youth with ways of being Latino/a, and Mexican, in particular. (p. 30)

In each case, the subject is agentic in some spaces and not in others; literate practice plays a role in that agency, but the ways that youth are called by others in power and the ways they respond to those calls depends in part on the space and time they inhabit. The important point about literacy across all three of these variations on identity-and-literacy-as-position studies is that movements across time and space, relationships (including, but not limited to authority relations) in particular

spaces, and access to texts and other artifacts made identities and made literate practices. Whether understood as laminations, *habitus*, cubes, history in person, quilts, puzzles, or some other submetaphor of positioning that we cannot yet imagine, it is the shifting nature of these positions, as well as the call to inhabit them, that produces both the subjectivity and enactments of subjectivity that are subsequently identified (by self and others) and used for the next positioning act.

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## Conclusions

What becomes clear from this review of metaphors for identity is that although all assume identity to be socially situated, mediated, and produced, as well as fluid and dynamic, each metaphor carries with it subtly different assumptions about what it means to be social or fluid. Moreover, even within metaphors, debates about what identity is and how it is formed (or produced or constructed or developed) are ongoing. And finally, across metaphors, important points of overlap are evident: Metaphors of identity as self, for example, are not necessarily at odds with identity-as-narrative metaphors, depending on the version of the self and narrative metaphors one takes up. Identity as narrative can be integrated with identity as position, with the argument that identity-as-narrative metaphors clarify the “what” of identity and literate practice's role in building that what, whereas identity-as-position metaphors may clarify the processes of building identities, again, clarifying the role of literate practice, but in this case, in the process of identity building.

A key point is that it is simply not enough to say that identities are produced in social interaction, that they are multiple and shifting. It is not enough to say that identity and self are isomorphic, that identities are positions, that identities are the product of a developing mind. The key to rigorous literacy-and-identity studies seems to lie in the recognition of what particular theories can *do* for our understanding of how literacy and identity work to develop one another and of our awareness of the limitations of a given metaphor and its methods of analysis and representation. If scholars hope to take identity-and-literacy studies seriously, then we must clarify what it means to write about and study people's identities in relation to their literate practices.

It should also be clear that the different metaphors of identity carry implications for how literacy practice, skill, learning, or teaching is understood. Conversely, what we think of literacy shapes how we see identities working in people's literate practices or learning. Take, for example, the implications of closely associating literacy and identity formation (i.e., arguing that literacy is a tool for consciousness or a way of constructing the

self). What identity, then, does the so-called illiterate person have (Nabi et al., in press)? Similarly, if reading or writing certain kinds of texts confers certain identities, then what identities are conferred upon, say, readers of romance novels (Moody, 2009; Radway, 1984) or writers of online fan fiction (Black, 2008; Shultz, 2009). Of course, any question about implications of identity must also recognize that if we subscribe to the idea that identities are socially situated and mediated and are enactments of the self in particular time, spaces, and relationships, then we must acknowledge that the implications for identity or identifying are always dependent on the context in which the identities are made, represented, or enacted. Thus, even for the individual identified as illiterate (Nabi et al., in press) or as reader of “porn for women” (Moody, 2009) or as “plagiarist” (Shultz, 2009), any implication for identity is bound to the time, space, or relationship in which the particular individual engages. The implications, for example, of being labeled a fan-fiction writer on a fan-fiction website are all about productive power but may be about disabling power in a university composition classroom (Shultz, 2009). Here is where the identity-as-position metaphor is especially useful for literacy research.

We have attempted to show how different metaphors for identity have implications for how we conceive of literacy and what we might do with the relationship between literacy and identity, but we have left unattended questions of how the literacy-and-identity relationship might shape implications for practice or policy. One could imagine, for example, that educators or policymakers who buy the idea that texts and literate practices may serve as tools for identity construction could seek to constrain the types of texts, media, or even practices available to students. Indeed, such attempts to control the texts and practices of youth are part and parcel of our educational and social landscape and have been since our nation’s inception (N.B. Smith, 2002). In other words, what is new here? What do we learn from the field’s current—and overwhelming, if the sheer volume of theory and research we consulted is any indication—focus on the relationship between identity and literacy?

Some scholars would argue that this focus is crucial, not to control the identities that students produce, construct, form, or enact but to avoid controlling identities. Equally important, a focus on identity and literacy could help educators avoid making assumptions based on particular recognitions of students’ identities, assumptions that might diminish opportunities to learn (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005; L.A. Hall, 2007; McCarthey, 2002; Wortham, 2006). Just as the teacher in Smagorinsky et al. (2005) did not understand that the design work his student did was a critical aspect of and tool for his student’s identity development, any teacher might get in the way of critical

tools for naming, understanding, representing, or enacting the self. Thus, research on literacy is well served by the reminder that humans are constantly in the process of identifying and making meaning of identifications. Indeed, the relationship between learning (in/of literacy or anything else) and identity is inevitable (Bloome et al., 2005; Wortham, 2006).

As a result, literacy-and-identity studies provide ample evidence for the need to include multiple text types and media in our literacy curricula, as texts and new media tools provide multiple opportunities in a classroom to engage generalized others, interpellate readers into particular kinds of relationships and positions, build *habitués*, provide tools for developing consciousness, or narrate oneself into the world.

Literacy-and-identity studies can also offer insights into practice, particularly for educators working within a sociopolitical milieu that casts literacy learning (and all learning) as a matter of accrual of skills and information. Developing academic literacies—or any kind of learning, for that matter—of necessity involves shifting identities, whether as a requirement for the learning to occur or as a result of the learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). In contrast to a decontextualized, autonomous skills approach, an academic literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998) is “concerned with meaning making, identity, power and authority and foreground[s] the institutional nature of what ‘counts’ as knowledge in any particular academic context” (Street, 2009, p. 3). Indeed, Street (2009) outlined at least three key components of academic writing that we see as related to and shaped by identities and identifications: (1) articulation of a particular voice, one that is both meaningful to the writer and recognizable by the reader; (2) the ability to take, communicate, and defend a stance; and (3) signaling, or the author’s devices to help readers make their way through a text. Each of these “hidden features” (Street, 2009) suggests a sense of awareness of self and/or audience. Ivanič (1998) makes this point clearly as she introduces scholarly text, pointing to the ways that her voice and stance, her identities as scholar and person, matter:

Who am I as I write this book? I am not a neutral, objective scribe conveying the objective results of my research impersonally in my writing. I am bringing to it a variety of commitments based on my interests, values and beliefs which are built up from my own history. (p. 1)

Voice is essential to academic writing because, Street argues, it is “the capacity to make oneself understood as a situated subject” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 222, quoted in Street, 2009, p. 6). Stance is equally important because it “refers to the ways that writers project themselves into their texts to communicate their integrity, credibility, involvement, and a relationship to the subject matter

and their readers” (Hyland, 1999, pp. 99–101). Finally, although signaling may seem limited to the rather prosaic use of transition words and headers, signaling is possibly one of the more subtle and agentic identity moves in academic writing as it both demonstrates an awareness of the generalized other (Mead, 1934) and seeks to shape the reader’s sense-making in a way that conforms with the author’s sense of self and identity. The power in Street’s argument is that he demonstrates how the development of academic writing depends on more than mere skill, more than fluency with words and vocabulary, more than knowledge of how to organize a paper. Strong academic writing, from the academic literacies perspective, depends on knowledge of self and on awareness of one’s identity enactments. Literate practice is a dialogic activity in which the reader or author is always in conversation with another (Bakhtin, 1981); whether strategic or not, such conversation requires acts of identification and enactments of identity (McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Wortham, 2006).

The academic literacies perspective offers just one angle on why literacy-and-identities research may be important—even central—to enhancing educational opportunity for all people and on why we need to do such research well. Street’s (2009) perspective takes literacy-and-identities research beyond simple admiration for or celebration of the many ways that people write, speak, or read themselves into the world (indeed, some literacy-and-identity studies seem to border on voyeurism) into the realm of deep learning. By linking identity (whatever the metaphor) to learning in multiple domains, the power of the research becomes more visible as the material consequences become more evident.

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