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Researching Identities as Affective Discursive Practices

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Abstract

The study of identity has proved to be a capacious interdisciplinary meeting point for scholars working at the interface of social formations and individual psychologies. As many in the social sciences are stepping towards affect and emotion, and turning away from discourse, what are the implications for the study of identity? What place remains for the discursively-constituted subject in identity studies, and how might new investigations proceed? Taking up fresh theoretical developments, this chapter explores what an affective-discursive practice approach brings to the study of identity, and its potential for investigating the semiotic, social *and somatic* constitution of identity (Wetherell, 2012, p. 99). We begin by mapping out the development of an affective discursive practice approach in light of the turn of affect as well as longer standing trends in discursive psychology. From here, we outline the distinctive features of affective discursive analyses of identity, and reflect on the particular strengths of this approach for thinking through identity and identifications in their complexity, and responding to debates regarding the nature of agency and querying distinctions between "inner" and "outer" lives. In the final section of the chapter, we demonstrate how an affective-discursive practice approach enables rich, multi-layered investigations of embodied identity practices, with potential to connect the dots between the pushes and pulls of socio-historical regimes and the more idiosyncratic play of personalised affective patterns and situated practices.

Introduction

In this chapter, we outline what an affective discursive practice (ADP) view offers the field of identity research, and make a case for the particular utility of such an approach for identity studies, including theorisation and analysis of the social-psychological subject. Margaret Wetherell's (2012) ADP approach builds on her earlier breakthroughs in discursive research in critical social psychology, 'pull[ing] on a large number of threads germane to critical psychology and the study of the psychosocial and subjectivity more broadly' (Wetherell, McConville, & McCreanor, 2019, p. 3). With ADP, Wetherell demonstrates the centrality of affect and emotion when analysing identities. Additionally, creativity and innovation are encouraged, while remaining firmly oriented to clearly defined theories of power and agency. It offers a generous interdisciplinary view of what is recruited in the service of identity construction and everyday identity work: a rich spectrum of body states and practices entwined with personal meaning-making, habits and histories, unfolding through overlapping regimes of feeling and knowledge. Affective discursive identity practices range from the strained rehearsal of a cheery smile to the complex conversational "working up" of oneself in light of prevailing regimes of good personhood. ADP draws across scales to offer a fresh perspective on familiar debates regarding agency and structure, while illuminating productive ways forward for the field of identity studies, as well as affect and emotion research more generally.

We begin in Section I with an overview of the development of affective discursive practice, pointing to continuities with and divergences from other forms of critical social psychology, including *critical discursive psychology* (CDP), also developed principally by Wetherell (e.g. Wetherell, 1998, 2007, 2008). From here, Section II explores ADP in detail, introducing it as a highly productive intervention into the current "turn to affect" that is sweeping the social sciences. We outline how some of the most influential lines of such thinking were motivated by a turn away from discourse, coupled with a turn towards the body and feelings; we suggest that in many respects this was also a turn away from people's daily business of negotiating identities in interaction with their social worlds. We outline the strengths of ADP and discuss its particular utility for approaching thorny issues of agency in identity research. In Section III, we flesh out our key lines of argument in relation to ADP with an empirical example, and demonstrating its potential to extend and advance the empirical investigation of identities and identifications.

I. The development of affective practices and critical social psychology

One of the most common ways to understand identity in social psychology is to theorise it as having two discrete but interrelated components, personal identities and social identities (Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010). In contrast, discursive research within British social psychology was predicated upon finding ways to bring social and personal identities, or the "inside" and "outside" of identity work, into closer alignment. Influences contributing to these discursive approaches in critical social psychology were diverse and included postmodernism, social constructionism, psychoanalysis, Bakhtinian dialogism, Wittgensteinian philosophy, conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, where language and narrative are given a primacy in the process of constructing identity. Through critiques of mainstream behaviourist psychology in the 1970s onwards (Parker, 1999), a range of discursive approaches built a blueprint for understanding identity as more seamless, and not neatly divided into group-based and personal identities that individuals switched between. Critical social psychologists questioned dominant, cognitivist traditions in psychology that treat identities as relatively stable and measurable through attitudes, mental states, cognitions, motivations, dispositions and so forth, represented in language (Taylor, 2015). In these conventional understandings of language, realities inside people's heads are treated as separate from words, which neutrally convey aspects of their identities. In contrast, interventions from critical social psychologists illuminated how communicating through discourse does more than simply convey meaning; rather, this is how we make meaning. The constant telling and re-telling of memories, histories, or relationships, both individual and collective accounts, produces discursive resources for people to use when constructing their identities, over and above simply communicating them. Moreover, the way we talk about social objects and identities affects how they are organised hierarchically, making some identities more valuable and/or available than others. Meanings about, for example, how to be a good mother, friend or worker, may become more dominant than others in particular sociohistorical contexts.

In more recent developments in the social sciences, the turn to language is often presented as becoming eclipsed by a turn to affect, sparked by a perception that discursive methods are inadequate in capturing fleeting and unpredictable affect and emotion (e.g. Anderson, 2009; Clough, 2008; Sedgwick, 1997). However, the study of emotion has been an element of

critical forms of social psychology from the outset, predating the contemporary swell of interest. For example, within *discursive psychology*, which draws on micro, ethnomethodological insights and conversation analysis, emotions are studied as conventions of language use and social interaction (Edwards, 1999). Far from being mysterious and ineffable, emotions are shown to be ordered and normatively intelligible—or unintelligible, if people do not use the "correct" emotion (Campos, Ramos, & Bernal, 1999). Emotions are treated as conventions of social order, and are translated into technical knowledges to study identities. This does however leave discursive psychology open to charges of being inattentive to meanings that flow from sensing bodies. From this perspective, discursive psychology takes an overly techno-rational view of the power of emotions, losing an opportunity to feel with participants, and to attend to the subjective experience, including how particular constructions of self and identity become meaningful to people over a life-course.

In contrast, critical social psychological approaches informed by psychoanalysis, now often referred to as *psychosocial research* (Taylor, 2017; Walkerdine, 2008), could be characterised as deprioritising empiricism. These lines of enquiry developed via Lacanian psychoanalysis, systems theory, feminist theory, and phenomenology (Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopoulos, & Walkerdine, 2008; Frosh, 2014). Here, the discursive realm remains a significant analytic resource, but identities are theorised in relation to people's psychic lives and the dynamic unconscious. Although contested (Hollway, & Jefferson, 2005; Spears, 2005), a certain primacy is assigned to the "inner" and the development of one individual's psychobiography (this emphasis is also evident in Chapter xx where Habermas and Kemper outline additional psychoanalytic perspectives on identity). The specifics of one individual's unique account and sense-making tends to be the focus, rather than collective identity practices (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). Similarly, building up a knowledge of the conventions in constructing identity in talk are deprioritised.

We have provided a very brief sketch of the emergence of critical social psychology and outlined two divergent paths forged as a result, discursive psychology and psychoanalytic psychosocial research. Although our detailing of these two schools of identity theory simplifies many nuances and tensions, we have illustrated the stark differences between the poles of critical social psychology, to explain how CDP sits between them, and resolves the issues of each. Indeed, as can be gauged from Wetherell's productive exchanges with both discursive psychologists (Wetherell, 1998, 2007) and psychosocial analysts (Wetherell, 2003,

2005b), the positioning of CDP as a middle-ground approach within this spectrum was evident throughout its development. In common with psychosocial studies, CDP leans towards a feminist ethics where understanding the felt experience of living out certain identities is paramount, including identities that are routinely othered (Wetherell, 2006, 2008). In a similar vein, attention to how affecting experiences become meaningful to people over time and layer to form deep investments stays in the frame (Wetherell, & Edley, 1999). Simultaneously, however, the tools of discursive psychology may also be drawn on. The study of people's interactions at the micro level are also an important constituent part of a flexible kitbag of tools, offering identity analysts much choice in how to study identity practices across scales, the personal, interactional, cultural and historical. This flexibility also informs how identities are defined within CDP, where different orders of identity are delineated. Some orders of identity are smaller units of analysis. Discursive psychology for example typically examines the *identity positions* people make use of from one moment to the next in social interactions. While in CDP the identity positions people take on briefly may be relevant, their significance comes through linking them to broader ideologies outside the immediate conversation, which is avoided in discursive psychology. Thus, it should be noted that although CDP analysts often borrow the analytical tools of discursive psychology, they use them more flexibly. The implicit, ideological aspects of identity that may not be directly referred to by participants in the immediate interactional context are often integral components of CDP analysis. Indeed, analogous to identity positions are *imaginary positions* (Wetherell, & Edley, 1999) and *subject positions* (Davies, & Harré, 1990) in which the ideological force of positions is emphasised. A way of thinking about how identity positions are treated in CDP is as characters that we populate our stories with, and which come loaded with meanings (Seymour-Smith, 2002). Depending on their positive or negative connotations, which are also affected by the context in which they are deployed, we may choose to distance ourselves from them rather than identify with them. As such, occupying identity positions that are dynamic and variable involves active processes of meaning-making.

Within a CDP approach, analysing these identifications allows an examination of what positions are available, intelligible and evaluated as 'good' in any cultural moment or setting. Although identity positions may be taken on temporarily, lightly, or ambivalently, evaluations of such positions as they are put to use (as positive, negative, both or something in between) often point to deeper identity investments (Wetherell, 2003). That is, durable identities that people have attached meaning to over a longer period of time, akin to the order

of identities that psychosocial analysts are interested in. Though not relying on psychoanalytic theory as psychosocial research typically does, the concept of *psycho-discursive practices* brings attention to the continuity of particular identity positions. Wetherell argues that an individual's sustained use of identifications has implications for their psychology; this is how a vocabulary is acquired that comes to define "motives and a character with particular emotions, desires, goals and ambitions" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 353). An illustrative example that we touch on later is the naturalisation of an ideal working mother, a "supermum." The analogy with a superhero is reflective of the common-sense notion that being a supermum is inherently good. But as we will show in our data example, the supermum identity position can be used flexibly—to account for the potential failings relating to the cleanliness of one's house, success as a wife or as a host for visiting friends. Through a relatively brief social interaction, a supermum position is variously identified with and distanced from. With this ideal position, certain aptitudes are expected and desires and tensions become routinised (and gendered), but they require personalisation and become meaningful in the flow of social interaction. It becomes clear also that the process of sustaining supermum performances becomes a materially affecting process, intensifying the rhythm of daily life. In this sense, the affective work entailed in everyday identity practices are a form of practical engagement with the world (Scheer, 2012). Embodied, layered, intersecting affective performances get the business of identity work and organising social life done. Further, although psycho-discursive practices need to be continually performed, they often 'stick' through becoming entwined with other durable identities. Meanings of durable identity positions such as 'wife' or 'employee' may be relational to a supermum position for example. In this way, individuals can be thought of as sites of practice where, through psycho-discursive practices, meanings become organised in predictable ways and a personal style emerges. This *personal ordering* might be posited as 'personality' in conventional social psychological approaches, but within a CDP framework, there is always orientation to continuing and open-ended identity work, along with the active struggles that emerge as people are faced with different cultural resources, interactions and relations (Wetherell, 2007). Again underscoring the flexibility in a CDP approach, while the uniqueness of an individual's biography might be the unit of analysis, it is also possible to account for how less durable identities nudge personal orders in different directions.

So far, we have discussed the advantages of CDP in relation to more fine-grained discursive methods and psychoanalytic-informed psychosocial approaches in critical social psychology.

As we begin to move towards discussing the implications of the development of critical psychology in the context of the affective turn, it is worth outlining a few other staples that make up the CDP analytic toolkit, which, as we shall see, can be extended to incorporate an affective lens.

A foundation of critical discursive psychology is that identities are organised in and through *interpretative repertoires*, recognisable routines of descriptions and evaluations, such as familiar anecdotes or clichés (Seymour-Smith et al., 2002) that represent 'common knowledge' (Billig, 1991; Wetherell, & Potter, 1992). The making and remaking of identities through common sense assumptions requires tailoring for specific social contexts, and because they are ideological, social power differentials provide the logic behind them. Assumptions about who has the right or aptitude to behave in certain ways are rhetorically organised and presented as logical rationale (common sense), but what often goes unnoticed in the flow of interaction is the moral and affective aspects of these logics. For instance, we have seen a changed political party landscape in many Western nations in recent years, carried through on the basis of overt claims linking purported decreases of living standards to "invasions" of immigrants. Often, however, as the rhetorical context demands, claims about improving public housing and health care systems become the vehicle for this messaging. Although minority groups are the targets, they may not feature explicitly, and we can still access these parts of the argumentative chain and their moral force. As Sara Ahmed (2004) notes, emotions 'do things', giving the imagined position of migrant and refugee a 'sticky' quality, where some forms of sense-making and emoting become hegemonic (Wetherell, 2015b).

Another useful analytic tool in the CDP toolkit is the notion of *trouble* as it relates to identity practices. CDP rests on practice theory, where attention is drawn to the logic of situated human action. This may be highly patterned and habitual, while also flexible and open to customisation (Reckwitz, 2002). Identifying what becomes troubled, or remains untroubled, in social interactions can be useful in working out where the boundaries of particular fields of practice lie. When feelings of hesitation, the wish to guide interactions into another territory, or a flicker of confusion enter the interactional fray, they indicate more than just interactional trouble. Interactional repairs, the practical adjustments people make when speakers smooth out or self-right interactions gone awry, also signals social-psychological trouble (Wetherell, 2005a). The categories we identify with (woman, manager, person of colour etc.) are associated with particular social-psychological dispositions, emotional routines, levels of

authority etc, but that we routinely make part of narratives of self, and psycho-biography. Breaching interactional rules is also frequently a breaching or questioning of these personalised associations, and therefore implicates psychology. Further, the analysis of interactional or identity troubles is associated with *contradiction*, and moments where people become engaged in *ideological dilemmas* (Wetherell, & Edley, 1999). Theorisation of contradiction and ideological dilemmas in CDP draws on the work of Michael Billig (1991), who argued that discourse is primarily organised in conflicting ways, as a perpetual argument. Every position has a counter position and switching back and forth between them is part and parcel of answering everyday life questions. While in conventional social psychology contradiction in accounts might be problematic, where the accuracy of accounts is important, from a CDP perspective, they are analytically useful and highlight that identity performances are contextual.

In summary, pressing contemporary questions that have emerged in the social sciences about how to study the relationship between, the identity groups to which people belong, associated emotional practices, and issues of ideology and social power, bear a striking resemblance to earlier debates that occurred as forms of critical social psychology were developing. Then, as now, the central question is, how can we study the deeply felt, the seemingly inchoate sensations in being 'moved' by something, in methodical and evidence-based ways? By revisiting the emergence of CDP, the predecessor of affective discursive practices, it is apparent that there has been a longstanding impulse in Wetherell's work to disrupt dichotomies between thinking and feeling that blight emotion studies, which are relevant for identity research. In this context, it is unsurprising that ADP theory has developed in the form of intervention, questioning some of the assumptions propelling the turn to affect. As we shall see in Section II, ADP draws on and extends CDP, providing a stronger identities studies response to affect and emotions scholars, whose work, while immensely generative, might otherwise offer little to the empirical study of identity.

II. Identity, affect, and affective discursive practices

Fleshing out the 'turn to affect'

For more than a decade, the humanities and social sciences have been humming with new theoretical work foregrounding affect as a way into understanding the social world. Emphasising feeling and embodiment and with a distinct interest in the affectivity of bodies,

places and objects, this “affective turn” (Halley, & Clough, 2008) opens up tantalising questions and possibilities for exploring identity. Affect and emotion scholarship is wide-ranging and transdisciplinary (Ahmed, 2004; Brown, & Stenner, 2009; Burkitt, 2014; Cromby, 2015; Everts, & Wagner, 2012; Laurier, & Philo, 2006; Massumi, 2002; Reddy, 2001; Sullivan, 2018). Instead of attempting to review this disparate field in its full breadth, we take a sharper focus and consider two highly influential currents within the affective turn. Both of these currents of work entail a turn away from discourse and meaning-making (Wetherell, 2012, 2015b), precipitating a break with the empirically-oriented CDP tradition outlined above. They also raise some serious red flags for identity scholars.

The first line of scholarship we turn to is linked to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank. Sedgwick (2007) has been well known for her critique of paranoid discursive analytic strategies that produce ‘all or nothing’ (p. 631) accounts of social life and leave little room for questions of feeling, embodiment, and agency. It was Sedgwick’s contention that the majority of the humanities and social sciences had become stuck in a rut, where the formula for providing research conclusions was to deem any social object as good *or* bad. By disregarding feelings in their analysis, researchers could not reach nuanced conclusions where social objects could be both good *and* bad. As part of a broader movement towards the embodied and experiential, Sedgwick and Frank (1995) have taken up the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins, breathing new life and authority into his basic emotions paradigm (Sedgwick, & Frank, 1995). Tomkins (1995) is well known in psychological circles for theorising the existence of a set number of innate basic emotions or ‘affect programmes’ evolved to guide our responses to what he saw as universal human predicaments. Following Tomkins’ theorisation of a neat and fixed correspondence between neurophysiological activation and bodily registration of feeling (and despite their advantageous starting point of a clearly embodied account of affect), Sedgwick, and Frank (1995, as cited in Wetherell, 2012) advanced an agenda in which affects ‘unfold in an automatic, clunk-click, sequential manner’ (p. 37). When an appropriate prime is presented, a pre-defined emotion is felt. Furthermore, basic emotional states unfold prior to processes of cognition and evaluation, and are thus (somewhat ironically) outside the sphere of human agency. Critics have identified a range of issues with Sedgwick and Frank’s arguments, including the Anglophone framing (assuming that bodies ‘speak English’ and emote according to the “basic emotions” of the Western cultural canon; see Wetherell, 2015b) and its mismatch with cutting edge psychobiological thinking (Leys, 2011). Moreover, a basic emotions standpoint is problematic insofar as it

privileges a depersonalising, biological account that closes off social justice-oriented questions pertinent to identity studies: How do power, privilege and perceptible identity categories organise affective experience, and affectively-charged interactions?

A second cluster of work, associated with Brian Massumi (2002) and Nigel Thrift (2008), proceeds from a very different understanding of the nature of affect and emotion, but reaches similar conclusions concerning the division between thinking and feeling. For these scholars, affect is a form of excess, an instinctive, pre-cognitive force that both precedes and exceeds the disciplining domains of language and discourse. Affect strikes preconsciously and moves through the material world indiscriminately. It is a series of flows 'moving through the bodies of human and other beings' (Thrift, 2008, p. 236), a kind of electricity, entraining what it hits into a particular kind of response. Smells, objects, places and atmospheres pulse with affect just as fleshy bodies and body parts do. Rather than an interest in thoughts, interpretation and meaning, our attention turns instead to a different plane of preconscious movement, sensation, transmission and contagion. Once again, we arrive at a series of binary differentiations that cleave the discursive from the affective: bodies versus words, non-conscious activation versus conscious action. As Wetherell (2012, 2015b) has argued, the abandonment of discourse and meaning-making evident in Massumi's and Thrift's work obfuscates how cultural conditions of possibility and personal histories are profoundly entwined with our bodies' sensing and sensual capacities. It is also a turn away from identity and subjectivity. Curiously, in attending to the biological body, these theorists seem to lose their grasp of figuring, feeling personhood. As a corollary, they rule out a consideration of the role of identity process and identifications in how we are moved by events, scenes and people; but we will return to this point more fully later. Suffice to say that these binaries, and the analytic losses they precipitate, demand a response from identity researchers.

Theorising identity: An affective discursive approach

Encountering these new theories, identity scholars (particularly those affiliated with psychology) might be excused for eyeing the turn to affect with a twinge of unease. But this would be a mistake; for, as we will demonstrate, the turn to affect presents a generative and useful opportunity to clarify and refine the study of identity in a manner that explicitly takes account of domains that might more usually have been left to one side: for example, embodied experience, material objects, sounds and places. There are several exciting lines of

work taking up this challenge (Cromby, & Willis, 2016; McGrath, Mullarkey, & Reavey, 2019; Sullivan, 2018; Taylor, 2015) and finding ways to broaden the scope of identity-based inquiries without relinquishing the strengths and benefits of discourse and narrative-based approaches. We focus in particular on Margaret Wetherell's important theoretical work on 'affective discursive practices' (Wetherell, 2012, 2013, 2015a; Wetherell et al., 2019) which we argue offers a flexible and fruitful way forward for identity scholars.

Wetherell's work on ADP arises in conversation with the affective turn and some of the knotty problems that follow from the 'rubbishing of discourse' (Wetherell, 2012, p. 19). In particular, ADP helps to articulate and make visible the role that identifications play in the affective dimensions of social life. Arguably, ADP personalises affect and emotion, where the affect theory of Thrift, Sedgwick and others leaves it depersonalised. Building from her highly influential work in CDP, Wetherell makes a persuasive argument for a social practice approach to affective phenomena that considers thinking alongside feeling, meaning-making alongside embodiment. Rather than a delineating a rigid analytic process, Wetherell's practice approach is 'a way of thinking' about affect and emotion, one which spurs analysts to 'traverse the body, the discursive, social contexts, histories, personal stories and affect's movement' (Wetherell, 2012, p. 26). Thus, an affective discursive practice approach makes space for a truly expansive theorisation of identities and identity practices across multiple scales. This mode of analysis is sensitive to the way identities cohere and change through the enactment of an array of affective discursive practices over the life course. At the same time, analyses are attentive to the histories and resonances of these personally staged and inflected, affective-discursive identity practices. In this sense, an affective discursive approach recognises identities (and the processes of identification that give rise to them) are always-already social, indexing the self as well as the social world as they are produced in practice. As a consequence, Wetherell (2008) dispenses with conceptual divisions between the social discourses and norms that provision identities, and the subjective working up of these social identities in particular, individual lives, terrain sometimes referred to as 'subjectivity'.

The approach Wetherell (2012) outlines has strong continuities with CDP, and shares many of its tools, tenets and strengths. The fundamental unit of interest—identity practices—remains constant, as does the accompanying interest in balancing attention to habit, history and past identity practice alongside creativity and customisation. Vitally, for those concerned with affect, meaning-making and identity, Wetherell brings an interest in everyday and routine experiences to the study of affect and emotion, alongside the jolting, uncanny

affective phenomena favoured by others (Sedgwick, & Frank, 1995; Thrift, 2008). Thus, affect and emotion are made amenable to empirical investigation as practical knowledges that are constructed through experience and guide us through social life. These patterned, often familiar practices are the bread and butter of our affective lives—and, Wetherell contends, they must have a place in our inquiries, if we are to make the most of what feeling, affect and emotion have to offer us conceptually.[1]

Alongside these continuities are some important points of divergence and extension. Enriched through engagement with transdisciplinary thinking about the nature of affect and emotion, Wetherell's ADP approach brings new vocabularies and new realms of experience to the attention of identity scholars. Familiar concepts in discourse studies are stretched in new directions. For example, we are invited to explore how identity work unfolds within a generational 'regime' of emotions (Reddy, 2001), and a shared 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1977) guiding everyday practices. From here, we might explore how prevailing 'canonical emotions', familiar and orthodox procedures for emoting (McConville, McCreanor, Wetherell, & Moewaka Barnes, 2017), scaffold and privilege particular affective identities and performances. As we write, scholars are beginning to experiment with this new conceptual wardrobe, pushing identity studies in attractive and compelling new directions (Chowdhury, & Gibson, 2019; Martinussen, 2019; Scully, 2015; Van Der Merwe, 2019).

An affective discursive practice approach also dares discursively-minded identity researchers to broaden their understanding of what counts as data, and what matters for identity work. Drawing inspiration from multimodal work on affect and emotion in human geography and cultural studies (see Wetherell 2015a), ADP positions the material world—objects, places, sounds, smells—within the purview of identity studies. In part, this is enabled by ADP's stronger orientation towards the synchronic, in-the-moment dimensions of identity, such as claiming a 'victim' or 'expert' identity position during a quarrel, alongside the 'usual diachronic concerns' (Wetherell, 2015a, p. 85) with broader and more stable social formations. To concretise what this broadened view might look like in the context of an empirical research project, we find Bille, and Simonsen's (2019) theoretical work on atmosphere particularly helpful. Where places and artefacts are often cast as 'affect generators' that radiate atmosphere in and of themselves, Bille, and Simonsen (2019) argue

[1] We understand feeling, affect and emotion to gesture towards the same broad territory, albeit with different connotations. Feeling conjures subjective experience, emotion invokes discrete cultural categories such as 'pride' and 'disgust,' while affect is the more general term and is most favoured in recent theoretical work.

that atmosphere 'is not only something humans *feel*, or that conditions perception, but it also simultaneously positions the felt space as something humans *do'* (p. 10). Thus, atmospheric practices arise in the coming-together of the affective potentials of particular bodies, places and objects. In relation to the study of identity, this theorisation not only orients us to the potential of specific scenes, sights and sounds to invoke and act on identities, but also points out the active participation of figuring, feeling bodies in the structuring and perception of atmospheres. For example, in Wetherell, and colleagues' (2019) analysis of ANZAC Day commemorations[2], the multimodal artefacts assembled for the event—a hushed crowd, the civic building 'red-draped by floodlights' before dawn (p. 10), the lingering notes of *The Last Post*—combine differently for/with participant Juliet than the crowd at large. Juliet herself becomes a site of identity practice; her dissent goes against the grain of the larger system of solemn reverence in which she is situated. Kaupapa Māori researchers (Moewaka Barnes et al., 2017) have also shown how indigenous ways of being, knowing and feeling—often represented as primitive superstition in Western/settler knowledge systems—can be productively explored alongside multimodal discursive affect theory. This is a challenge to researchers to both widen interpretations of what counts as data, and to acknowledge how diversity in the identity positions that researchers hold can advance studies of identity and affect. Taking up this challenge might result in more researchers bringing "the gift of spirit into the heart of the academy" (Moewaka Barnes et al., 2017, p. 11), and a decolonising research agenda for identity studies in the 'West'.

This understanding of atmospheres as a social practice entangled with the work of identity practices, and the material world of objects, sounds, smells, places and spirit has, we believe, much to offer identity studies and identities studies researchers, as a field where the spiritual and material worlds as well as synchronic concerns have, historically, taken a back seat. Attention to atmospheric practices as part and parcel of the study of identity also plugs the field of scholarship into cutting edge conversations that are unfolding in other disciplines exploring the intertwining of the spatial and the social.

Identity, emotion and agency

[2] ANZAC Day commemorates the Australians and New Zealanders who served and died in all wars and armed conflicts, with a particular emphasis on World War I and II. The principle activity is a highly ritualised 'dawn service' held at war memorial sites across the country.

We conclude our discussion of what affective-discursive practice approaches have to offer identity researchers with some specific reflections on where this analytic strategy sits in relation to ongoing debates in identity studies concerning the nature of agency. In some identity scholarship, the question of agency is posed as a conflict between internal energies and the external forces that act to channel and constrain them. This sets up what we consider to be a rather unhelpful binary notion of the individual versus the social: inside versus outside. Unsurprisingly given Wetherell's impatience with 'either-or' thinking, an ADP approach sidesteps this binary and focusses instead on the imbrication of the psychological and the social. In doing so, it offers particular advantages for thinking through questions of identity, agency and the entanglement of our so-called 'inner' and 'outer' lives.

Identity is therefore an obvious site for ADP analyses precisely because it is the meeting place of the 'micro and macro, the exterior and interior' (Taylor, 2010, p. 3); a site where broader social formations are refracted through individual lives. In line with earlier CDP thinking and more contemporary psychosocial approaches, an ADP perspective rejects so-called "discourse determinism" (Wetherell, 2012; see also Wetherell, 2005b) arguing that broader cultural figurations and the subject positions they make available are not automatically or uniformly stamped onto people. Rather, identity practices are complex, intersectional and actively negotiated, reformulated and enacted by reflexive subjects in light of personal and social orders combined with the particular material and interactional possibilities at hand (Wetherell, 2012. At the same time, Wetherell's approach is wary of a heavy-handed focus on the voluntaristic and synchronic elements of practice, considering it to be similarly unpromising. As we have seen in relation to affect and emotion scholarship more broadly, a focus on the present moment risks obscuring the influence of personal and social histories leaving analysts struggling to account for pattern and continuity.

An emphasis on practice allows ADP to find a middle ground between these two perspectives on questions of agency and structure. Elsewhere, we have characterised ADP as an approach that probes what Sedgwick (2007) terms the 'middle ranges' of agency (Martinussen, & Wetherell, 2019). Analytic attention explores *relative* power as evident in choices, capacities and contingencies, alongside the constitutive qualities of the broader affective-discursive terrain. ADP is distinctive in its capacity to work across these registers, inviting attention to how identities are actively crafted, while also exploring the histories and resonances of the materials and resources that are being put to work. Rather than seeking to differentiate between 'inner' and 'outer' lives in a manner that privileges either agency or passivity,

analysts can take up the tools of ADP to investigate identities and identifications as simultaneously personally negotiated, embodied and often deeply felt, *as well as* thoroughly social (Wetherell, 2012).

This stance on agency and identity makes a helpful intervention into broader investigations of affect and emotion, which, as we have seen, can become unhelpfully depersonalised and deterministic. In seeking to understand collective action, for example, dominant accounts from outside psychology and identities studies have theorised the transmission of affect and emotion as a form of interpersonal contagion. For instance, in the work of Nigel Thrift (2008), affect moves as an undifferentiated series of flow, sliding from one object/person to the next in a precognitive manner, and entraining bodies together into joint action, as a flock of starlings in flight. While undoubtedly beguiling, Thrift's notion flounders when brought to bear on social life, as it entirely bypasses any agentic, individual figuring of collective emotions (see, for example, Sullivan, 2015). Wetherell herself (2015b, p. 154) is quick to point this out:

> analogies which compare the shared affective action of humans en masse with flocks of starlings are obfuscating. Worse still, these approaches close off promising lines of enquiry, and render processes of 'affective engineering' uncanny and deeply obscure. A key advantage of an affective practices approach to the social psychology of affect is that this approach can join together what is divided in Thrift's work.

As Wetherell (2015b) makes clear, an inattention to identity and meaning-making risks a kind of affective determinism, wherein contagious affect works on and passes through us irrespective of our identities, personal history and habit. The briefest reflection on one's own life demonstrates that this understanding of crowd psychology is implausible in the extreme (see Reicher, 1996, 2001). Passers-by are not automatically, preconsciously enlisted into jubilant celebration of a World Cup won, nor are they necessarily pulled into a fervent 'Pro-Life' demonstration, or a homophobic attack. Affect and emotions may be shared by members of a group, but are not necessarily. In some circumstances, the affective discursive practices in evidence may be highly coordinated; more often, we suggest, the practices crowd members take up are likely to vary considerably in form and intensity. To examine and explain such variation, we need tools that allow us to study how affect becomes personalised, and identity theory that can account for the crucial role of agency, identifications and

affiliations in parsing the ‘hit’ of affect. This is precisely what an affective discursive mode of analysis offers.

III. Identities and affective discursive practices: An illustrative example

In this final section, we aim to demonstrate the potential of affective discursive analyses to illuminate identifications and invigorate identity studies. To do so, we will focus on a single interview extract drawn from our current research investigating young women’s negotiations of positivity practices and “positive” identities in Aotearoa New Zealand. As part of this project, we interviewed 24 women aged between 18 and 35, drawn from three groups whose regular activities demand considerable emotional work: service and hospitality workers; mothers of young children; and Instagram influencers. Members of these groups are often expected to conform to a fairly constrained emotional repertoire for the benefit, approval and pleasure of others. Interviews lasted between one and two hours, and covered a range of topics including personal experiences with emotional management and positivity. The centrality of feeling and emotion in our discussions of personal, professional and maternal identities makes this work an ideal forum for showcasing affective discursive analyses of identity work (see, for example, Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019; Gill & Organ, 2018; Scharff, 2016).

After a brief orientation to the interview in question, we will work our analysis up in three directions, in order to illustrate three angles or entry-points into affective discursive analysis of identity practices that, we find, offer particularly compelling and useful insights into identity. The first, and broadest of these angles investigates identities, subject positions and identifications in light of structures of feeling (Williams, 1977) prevailing emotion regimes (Reddy, 2001) and feeling positions and the dominant discursive formations they articulate with(in) (Wetherell, 2012). The second angle interlocks with and personalises the first, asking how particular identities, identifications and investments take shape in context, and concretise or wither over time. Taken together, these two analytic entry-points highlight different identity “chronologies” or timescales, offering a vocabulary for macro societal and generational influences on affective identity processes, while also inviting attention to personal identity investments and affiliations, and the moment-to-moment positioning work of the interview itself. The third angle orients towards dimensions of experience that, while

undoubtedly implicated in the construction of identities, have tended to fall outside traditional investigations of identity within psychology: objects, places, sounds and images.

Before proceeding any further, a note to readers: The three entry points we identify are not discrete or mutually exclusive analyses, but angles that can, *and should*, be productively worked together to inform a single analysis. As we hope to illustrate below, a multifaceted analysis of the phenomenon of interest has potential to produce a rich and complex account of identity work that cuts across the embodied, the contextual, the interactional, the spatial/material and the socio-political.

Interviewing Mia

Our interview with Mia[3] took place on University campus, in a private room with a view of the Auckland harbour, hot drinks and biscuits. The interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. It began with the interviewer, Octavia, inviting Mia to talk about 'your experiences of being a mum, how it came about and how it has been for you.' Taking up this invitation with considerable gusto, Mia talked largely unprompted for the two-hour interview. At the time of the interview, Mia was pregnant and anticipating the imminent arrival of her second child. Raised in a South Asian country, Mia had moved with her husband to New Zealand several years earlier, prior to the birth of her first child. A fulltime working Mum, Mia had opted to begin her maternity leave in advance of her due date, which, she explained, allowed her some breathing space at home as well as free time to join the research.

A salient feature of the interview with Mia was her reflections on her initial difficulties in adjusting to the arrival of her first baby. The timing of this interview, and Mia's late-pregnancy embodiment, lent a particular affective intensity to our conversation. As Mia talked over maternal identity and experiences (and sipped on a *very* weak coffee), her posture and movements, as well as her baby's kicks and flutters, could draw our attention towards the newborn-to-be at any moment. In what follows, we draw on this interview to examine

[3] Mia is a pseudonym selected by the participant. Some details of this interview have been generalised or altered to maintain confidentiality.

affective discursive identity work across multiple chronologies, making use of multiple lines of evidence. While informed by our knowledge of Mia's interview as a whole, we focus our discussion on the single transcript extract[4] presented below. This talk came roughly 15 minutes into the interview, as Mia was responding in detail to the initial prompt noted above (talk about your experience of being a Mum).

1 Mia Um (.) as I said it was a very funny situation for me you know (.) for someone who is really
2 confident I I was pushed into a place where I wasn't confident at all.

3 *Int A huge yeah (.) shift* ***[Mia: Yeah]*** *for you?*

4 Mia And for someone who was (.) who was working for 12 years and then took a year break (.) so
5 again another external factor you know where .hhh at work it's pretty logical you're used to
6 .hhh meeting targets you're used to meeting goals and stuff and (.) With a baby (.) you (.) none
7 of that is possible (.) you know there there is no goal there's just surviving it (.) And you know
8 that mental shift you know like to draw you a comparison like for example at work you are able
9 to do five things (.) whereas at home you'll you'll be like I need to cook (.) I need to do my
10 laundry I need to clean the house and (.) whatever you know fold the laundry up (.) but but with
11 a baby none of those four things happen (.) so you're this new mum who's just sitting (.) there
12 looking at all the stuff (.) that has not happened .hhh And that sort of really um works on your
13 mind **[Int; mmm**] because you're used to success in in some small ways you know small things
14 and you know that feeling of ah achievement (.) oh I've achieved this. And I think um (.)
15 achieving a happy baby is amazing (.) *I I think the society does not understand how difficult
16 that is (.) **[Int: yeah]** just having a healthy baby (.) a healthy (.) mindset a dirty house (.) all
17 good you know* and having that sort of acceptance like .hhh like you feel oh god people are
18 going to come over to see me and the baby (.) and you'd really want them to come over because
19 you are craving for that adult stimulation you really are I was. And then you're like oh god
20 the house is a mess (.) maybe we shouldn't. And so you start sort of judging and isolating
21 yourself (.) Um (.) I wasn't one of those people *I was like you know if you are a friend of mine
22 you will come home and (.) load the dishwasher you know* because I would do that for you
23 sort of thing.

[4] A note on transcription notation: we use, (.) to mark a brief pause, .hhh to indicate an audible out-breath, underlined text to indicate emphasis, and * * signs around a passage of text to show that it was spoken with a 'laughing' voice. Interviews were audio recorded but not video recorded.

Feeling positions and affective discursive formations

A range of affective-discursive identity positions are evident in this short passage. In Mia's talk, we can see the "professional achiever" [lines 5-9] giving way to the "overwhelmed Mum" [lines 6-12] surviving the demands of new motherhood. A little later, the latent figures of the "failing Mum" and the "supermum" set the scene for the arrival of the "balanced Mum" [lines 14-17], who adjusts successfully to motherhood by recalibrating her expectations.

To make sense of the appearance of these figures within Mia's talk, we might usefully examine prevailing and affectively charged cultural resources that entwine with, and help to scaffold, these dominant identity positions (e.g., latent figures of the failing mum and the supermum). Such macro-level cultural resources, including structures of feeling (Williams, 1977), canonical emotions (McConville et al., 2017), and emotional styles (Reddy, 2001), are tuned to the broad emotional registers that lend particular generations, institutions and social groups a 'distinctive affective flavour' (Wetherell, 2012, p. 103). In current Westernised contexts, the affective flavour of young women's meaning-making and identity work is often heavily inflected with neoliberal, postfeminist and 'psy' discourses (Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019; Gill & Kanai, 2018; Scharff, 2016). These discourses are animated by a shared affective-discursive circuitry wherein confidence, resilience and an affective orientation towards self-management and self-improvement are leading and preferred emotional styles (Gill & Orgad, 2017, 2018). In turn, this circuitry makes a feeling of personal responsibility for one's successes and failures a powerful emotional common sense, or 'structure of feeling', which undergirds a great deal of meaning-making work.

This "responsibilised" structure of feeling and the winning emotional style it validates are evident in Mia's workplace disposition, the 'professional achiever' [lines 5-9]. This identity position centres on a confident affective discursive orientation to the world around her, wherein she formulates goals, meets targets and is rewarded with success and 'that feeling of […] *achievement*' [line 14]. Mia's loss of confidence after the birth of her child is thus comprehensible as a serious problem, one entangled with her initial struggle to translate an efficient, successful disposition into her new home life (as evidenced through 'mess' [line 20] and tasks left incomplete [lines 9-13]). Mia addresses this identity trouble by invoking an affective repertoire stemming from psy discourses: the "journey of emotional growth".

Through insight into the sources of her low confidence [lines 1-6], rejecting unhelpful social expectations and reaching 'acceptance' of her messy house [lines 15-17], Mia describes herself as able, now, to confidently prioritise her own and her baby's needs in a manner compatible with the affective discursive position of the "professional achiever" while also affirming her alignment with balanced, confident motherhood.

Identifications, investments and identity work

While the analysis above offers a broad picture of the meaning-making resources Mia has to hand to build and negotiate identities, it has less to say about how and why these particular affective positions and the emotional styles associated with them might have come to have particular meaning and resonance. To shed light on these matters of personalisation, so crucial to the study of identity, we return to Wetherell's (2012, 2013) concept of affect as practice.

While a theory of practice clearly underscores affective discursive modes of analysis as we have discussed them so far, some elements of practice theory are particularly useful for articulating the processes through which we are physically and discursively recruited into the kinds of broader social patterns of feeling, action and response outlined above. Practice, at once noun and verb, delineates a social phenomenon while also gesturing towards possibilities for repetition and revision, habit and innovation, pattern and specificity. Over a lifetime, particular habits of feeling are formed, re-enacted, laid down and concretised, shaped by highly specific contexts and resourced by a broader social materials. Thus, a personal order is built, embodied, carrying with it particular affective discursive dispositions while retaining enough elasticity to move—and be moved—in new directions.

In the interview with Mia, we can see traces of precisely this kind of patterning. Mia describes how, over her 12 year career, she became 'used to success,' [lines 13-14] comfortable in the pleasurable affective rhythms of professional goal-setting and achievement and the "professional achiever" favoured in neoliberal social orders. Mia paints a picture of how her everyday achievements prompted regular, satisfying moments of self-evaluation—'oh I've achieved this.' [line 14] Over time, these small moments of interpellation sediment into a prevailing feeling position for Mia as a capable, successful person, an identity she can carry forward. In other words, we can see how emotion and affect become personalised through psycho-discursive practices. Yet, these familiar patterns are always at risk of meeting

with competing interactional demands, or more sustained forms of trouble. In attempting to transpose this disposition onto her new life with a newborn, Mia's goals (cooking, laundry, cleaning, folding) are unachieved; she implies that, like other mothers, she is left 'just sitting (.) there looking at all the stuff.'[lines 11-12] A focus on the affective discursive dimensions of this extract tunes us in to the 'affective clout' (Sointu, 2016) of the original experience and its retelling in the interview, as Mia loses her grip on a familiar, valued identification.

Shifting our gaze from personal histories to the interpersonal present, we can see that a considerable degree of active figuring and identity crafting is also evident, as Mia asserts that 'achieving a happy baby is amazing,' articulating an alternative, more liveable vision of successful mothering in the form of a revised checklist: 'a healthy baby (.) a healthy (.) mindset a dirty house (.) all good.'[lines 15-17] Finally, Mia's feeling position of humour and reasonableness, conveyed jointly through her ironic checklist and her laughing vocal tone, work to affirm her interactional positioning as a balanced and genuine. Thus, an analysis of the affective-discursive is capacious enough to examine the texture of long-term identity investments, as well as more locally-oriented identity projects such as appearing reasonable, generous or just.

Objects, places, sounds, images

To conclude this section, we turn to domains that are less frequently considered in analyses of identity and identity practices: objects, places, sounds and images. We are interested, in particular, in demonstrating how one or several of these elements combine with social and personal histories to produce 'affective atmospheres' (Anderson, 2009; Duff, 2016; Wetherell et al., 2019) that entrain and engage particular identifications and feeling positions. We draw particularly on Bille and Simonsen's (2019) theorisation outlined in the previous section, wherein atmosphere is theorised as a relational practice that arises 'between people, places and things'.

We can trace one such affective atmosphere in Mia's account. In the short extract we present, Mia references the 'stuff' of her home life repeatedly: unwashed laundry, uncooked food, house cleaning, unfolded laundry, dirty house, mess. When Mia and these objects come together, a particular atmosphere seems to result: one of failure and shame. Although Mia concludes by distancing herself from 'those people' who judge and isolate themselves because of household mess, the prominent role of unruly household objects in her talk

nevertheless suggests their potential to trouble her performance of a nonchalant, confident maternal identity. Indeed, the affective atmosphere entrained between Mia and these objects appears to intensify at the prospect of a visit from friends: ‘oh god the house is a mess (.)’.

While we rely on the analysis of audio transcript data in this analysis, Mia’s use of affective discursive resources demonstrates the expansive reach of discourse and its capacities to mobilise in ways that exceed common sense understandings of thinking and speaking, into broader affective domains. This understanding of atmosphere—and its affective intensification when others assemble as witnesses—illuminates the specific affective potential of household mess, disorder and dirtiness to unsettle ‘good’ feminine and maternal identities. It also suggests why mothers, but not other participants, routinely warned interviewers and apologised for the ‘state’ of their houses before we visited. The gendered address of everyday household objects, and their capacity to reproach women, perhaps mothers especially, is a neat illustration of the imbrication of objects, identities and atmospheres. Again, although relying on the analysis of words, the difficulty of separating out meanings that have multi-modal and embodied effects comes into view. As women excuse themselves, they became sites of practice for the interplay of politicised organisation of meanings of household objects.

This understanding may, in turn, help us answer questions about how and why particular objects and scenes affect social groups differently, without reference to the purely physiological or biological. Atmosphere does not reside in a particular physical environment, nor is fixed in a particular object: It is instead the relational assembling of people, discursive regimes and the material world. As people move through an affecting field, they practice an ‘affective atmosphere’ (Bille, & Simonsen, 2019) differently. Returning to Mia, it becomes evident later in the interview that stray socks, grimy basins and piled up dishes do not produce the same feeling of failure and shame with/on her husband. An understanding of affective atmospheres might thus offer a richer account of heterosexual men’s purported ‘dirt blindness’ (Ruppanner, & Churchill, 2018). An affective discursive attention to objects, places, sounds and images underscores the value of multimodal inquiries to identity studies, as bodies, investments and artefacts come together to interpellate, and in doing so, become part of the identity ‘infrastructure’ or resources (Döveling, Harju, & Sommer, 2018) of everyday life.

Conclusion

Affect and emotion scholarship presents new opportunities and challenges for the study of identity. In this chapter, we have argued for the value of an affective discursive practice approach for the advancement of the field of identity research. Firstly, we have demonstrated how ADP provides a roadmap for identity researchers to capitalise on the wide-ranging, multi-modal interests of affect and emotion literature while maintaining focus on people's active meaning-making and practice. Remaining attentive to the co-construction of meanings about what can be felt by whom, and patterning in their forms, allows identity scholars to better track the ideological effects of affective practices. Additionally, ADP gets around the binaries of discourse and practice or words and bodies, by treating affect is a form of social practice that gets done and re-done through identity work. Secondly, through building on the discursive study of identity found in critical discursive psychology, ADP becomes a comprehensive toolkit for the empirical study of identity alongside studies of affect and emotion, which continue to develop at a pace. While apprehending identities—with all of their embodied, narrative and historical richness, across and modalities and scales—ADP helps us to keep hold of the complexities of identifications. Pulling apart the mobilisation of meaning as turbulent or searing affects are registered is not an easy task, but one that is likely to be increasingly expected of identity scholars in the turn of affect in the social sciences. An affective discursive practice approach points a way forward for surveying the discursive and the embodied through the same analytic frame, providing a set of practical tools with which to realise this ambition.

Thirdly, an affective discursive practice approach can help the field of identity studies advance future research agendas that orient to questions of collective feelings, actions and responsibilities. Current events punctuated with terror and political fragmentation, where violent, divisive and hateful feeling positions and identifications seem to be gaining new ground, highlight the urgent need to ask how affect mobilises and recruits through processes of political identifications (Wetherell, 2019). Identity scholars entering this territory will need the kind of capacious toolkit affective discursive practice offers: one that invites analysis of identities through the prisms of personal attachments, bodywork and atmospheric practices. At the same time, lastly, ADP provides new lines of enquiry for investigating longer standing political issues and inequalities. We have demonstrated how the gendering of affective practices associated with pervasive mandates to be responsible for the self can elide structural sexism in the home. We have pointed out also how colonial histories are being examined

through indigenous lenses with the aid of ADP, both inside and outside the academy. As we work towards more hopeful and decolonised futures, ADP might, in the right hands, offer an assemblage of tools flexible enough to bend outside the contours of Western emotional canons towards a broader territory of identification, feeling and spirit.

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