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Subjectivities and the negotiation of identity: the possibility of multidisciplinary analysis of a mature born-again Christian studying in higher education

In the course of my doctoral research I worked with a mature student who was a born-again Christian. Her studies in sociology brought about a challenge to her sense of identity that had to be managed both in her academic writing and in conversation. A particular course on gender and sexuality gave rise to a conflict of interests in which considerations of the management of her personal identity were inseparable from the presentation of subjectivities in her academic work. At the same time that she was protective of her status as a recent convert to a religious faith, she also had to present her academic work as plausibly representing that of a sociology student.

This paper first recounts the events that contributed to this case. The material provides a very real and rich idea of the "institutional thing that she was up against", to paraphrase Garfinkel & Wieder (1992). Specifically, it is possible to see the student's account both a type of adaptive action, and as a tracing of her relationship with an institution in which there was a perceived power asymmetry. Features of the "conditions of possibility" of practices within the institution become clear through this account.

However, the materials presented allow for various analyses, and one of the most notable features of this collection of data is that it seems to support the adage that no one mode is suitable for the explication of all material. The main fault-line that I will present in this case study is that between what Hammersley (1997) calls "factual" and "critical" approaches.

As well as encouraging thoughts on the material, I hope that this paper will be a way into broader questions such as:

- What are the workings of identity when events leading to its social achievement are temporally distributed and multimodal in delivery?
- What are the possibilities of the coherence or 'hanging together' of multidisciplinary analyses to identity (or any other phenomenon)? Are there any ways that allow for various disciplines and methodologies to be applied, in concert, to the same material?