


## The epistemics of authentication and denaturalization in the construction of identities in social interaction

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### ABSTRACT

This study merges sociocultural linguistic work on identity construction in interaction with the study of epistemic management in conversation analysis (CA). While some CA scholars have examined identity without relying on epistemics, and others study epistemics without a focus on identity, I hope to contribute to a renewal in the exploration of identity and epistemics in interaction, building on a few recent studies. I examine the discursive processes through which an individual actively and assertively constructs his identities as a New York City resident, a Jewish person, and an actor. I focus on epistemics in the relational identity processes of authentication and denaturalization. I show how a speaker uses authenticating epistemic stances to legitimize his claims to knowledge and related identities, while also denaturalizing others' rights to knowledge, constructing their identities as inauthentic relative to his own. I argue that epistemics and relational identity processes may be fundamentally intertwined. (Epistemics, identity, conversation, discourse analysis, place, religion, ethnicity, actors)\*

### INTRODUCTION

Scholars have produced a robust body of work on the linguistic construction of social identities (e.g. Ochs 1993; Schiffrin 1996; Bucholtz & Hall 2005), establishing that social identity is indeed constructed; it is not a pre-given characteristic that inherently exists within individuals, but rather it emerges through interaction. Interactional identity relations have been explored in tandem with epistemics and epistemic rights—what we know and how we establish our rights to that knowledge—by Raymond & Heritage (2006) in a foundational study on epistemics and social relations. However, while some CA scholars have continued to examine identity construction in interaction without relying on epistemics (e.g. Cashman & Raymond 2014; Raymond 2016), and other CA scholars continue to study epistemics without a focus on identity (e.g. Heritage & Raymond 2021), a renewal in the exploration of identity and epistemics seems possible with the relatively recent publication of a few key studies (e.g. Raymond 2014; Sierra & Botti 2014; Sierra 2016, 2021; Takei & Burdelski 2018; Raymond & Cashman 2021). In this article, I focus



on the relevance of epistemics in the relational identity processes of authentication and denaturalization (Bucholtz & Hall 2005), arguing that epistemics and these relational identity processes may be fundamentally intertwined. I argue that by studying both knowledge and relational identity processes in conjunction, scholars of discourse analysis can arrive at a deeper understanding of how the two are implicated in the same fundamental process. More broadly, I demonstrate how what we know and how we express that knowledge shapes who we are as social beings. The methods and findings I present here can be extended to examine individuals and groups in different contexts across the world.

In this article, I analyze the emergence of one individual's three partial, yet related, identities which he assertively constructs in two different conversations. The emergence of three specific identities—as a New York City resident, a Jewish person, and an actor—are best explained against the context in which the data emerged and the individual's own biographical background. In the analysis, I show how this speaker actively constructs these identities in relation to the context and his interlocutors, and how their construction depends greatly on this individual's assertive display of epistemic stances. In establishing his epistemic rights, this speaker frequently engages in the process of authentication to legitimize his claims to knowledge and thus his identity, while also sometimes engaging in a process of denaturalization that downplays others' rights to knowledge and constructs their identities as partial or inauthentic relative to his own.

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Ochs (1993:288) describes social identity as covering a 'range of social personae, including social statuses, roles, positions, relationships, and institutional and other relevant community identities one may attempt to claim or assign in the course of social life'. Social identity is rarely explicitly stated in discourse, but speakers encode their identity using various linguistic strategies. Ochs (1993) focuses on how speakers establish social identities through verbally performed social acts and stances. A social act is any socially recognized, goal-directed behavior (making a request, contradicting someone, interrupting, etc.). A stance can occur in at least two formulations: an epistemic stance is a formulation of one's epistemic attitudes, such as how certain or uncertain a speaker is about something, and an affective stance is a formulation of one's affective attitudes, such as intensity or kind of emotion about some referent or proposition (Ochs 1993:288). By analyzing social acts and stances, social identity can be examined.

Another important point that Ochs (1993:289) makes is that there is no strict mapping of certain acts and stances onto certain identities and that people may use different kinds of acts and stances to construct themselves variably within some particular social context. Ochs (1993) encourages a social constructivist approach to identity, where researchers should ask, 'What kind of social identity is a person attempting to construct in performing this kind of verbal act or in verbally

expressing this kind of stance?', which is a question also posed by Gumperz (1982). Ochs (1993:298) also stresses the active role that individuals play in constructing their social identities, stating that these 'evolve in the course of social interaction, transformed in response to the acts and stances of other interlocutors as well as to fluctuations in how a speaker decides to participate in the activity at hand'.

This transformation and fluctuation of social behavior and identities in interaction has influenced many scholars to take up the study of stance and social identities. Hunston & Thompson (2000) explore stance as 'evaluation' in linguistics; for them, 'evaluation is the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance toward, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about. That attitude may be related to certainty or obligation or desirability or any of a number of other sets of values' (2000:5). Stance has also been examined within systemic functional linguistics in the appraisal framework (Martin 2000; Martin & White 2005), designed to provide a systematic way of identifying options for expressing stance and evaluation in discourse. Within this framework, appraisal consists of three interacting domains: attitude, engagement, and graduation. With a focus on social identities in stance, Jaffe (2009:24) presents a volume proposing a 'sociolinguistics of stance', 'concerned with two broad issues: the social processes and consequences of all forms of stancetaking and how sociolinguistic indexicalities are both resources for and targets of stance'. Jaffe (2009) argues that stance and stances may index both singular and/or multiple social selves in the interactional work of identity construction.

Building on previous work on identity construction more broadly, Bucholtz & Hall (2005) outline five principles that provide a framework for examining identity: emergence, positionality, indexicality, partialness, and relationality. The emergence principle describes how identity is not an internal psychological phenomenon, but emerges in interaction. The positionality principle states that identities may consist of macro-level demographic categories, but also local and temporary roles. The third principle, indexicality, provides the ways through which indexical processes can construct identity, including stance-taking. The partialness principle states that identity constantly shifts across interaction and contexts, and thus is always partial.

The 'heart of the model' is the relationality principle, which describes how identities are constructed through complementary relations. One of the identity relations named by Bucholtz & Hall is authentication/denaturalization, which are 'the processes by which speakers make claims to realness and artifice, respectively' (2005:601). Authentication is a social process in which authentic identities are verified in discourse. Bucholtz & Hall (2005) illustrate authentication by referring to Bauman's (1992) analysis of a telling of an Icelandic legend, in which the narrator authenticates his story and himself as the teller of it at the opening and closing of the narrative. The complementary relation to authentication is denaturalization, which 'foregrounds untruth, pretense, and imposture' (Bucholtz & Hall 2004:498) and is any process in which identity is constructed as 'crafted, fragmented, problematic, or

false' (Bucholtz & Hall 2005:602). As an example of denaturalization, Bucholtz & Hall (2005) present Bailey's (2000) data of two Dominican American teenage boys collaboratively denaturalizing one of the boys' identity claims of being Black, as a kind of prank. Bucholtz & Hall (2005) stress that authentication/denaturalization are active processes which speakers perform in interaction.

Authentication has now been examined in several studies (e.g. Bucholtz 2003; Goebel 2008, 2012; Gokgoz-Kurt 2017; Lopez & Bucholtz 2017; Weninger & Williams 2017; Kelleher 2019). Additionally, Bucholtz & Hall (2004) point out that the process is exemplified in other studies, particularly in ones on sexuality (e.g. Hall 1995, 2005; Manalansan 1995; Lucas 1997; Kulick 1998; Jones 2016; Sauntson 2018). While Bucholtz & Hall (2004) note that there has been much less work on denaturalization, this (often alongside authentication) has been increasingly explored in recent years (e.g. Jaworski & Coupland 2005; Higgins 2007; Goebel 2008, 2012; Sauntson & Morrish 2012; Hachimi 2013; Lopez & Bucholtz 2017; Weninger & Williams 2017; Baran 2018; Lee & Su 2019; Milani & Levon 2019). Indeed, Bucholtz & Hall (2004) state that disruptions of authentic identity are far more prevalent than they might seem.

Bucholtz (2003:409) draws attention to the importance of denaturalization:

Perhaps more than any of the other tactics of intersubjectivity, denaturalization highlights the value of conceptualizing identity relations as polar, for this arrangement forces analytic attention to precisely those aspects of identity practice least examined by sociolinguists: those that emphasize the gap between a performed identity and an assumed target reality.

As a further example of denaturalization, Bucholtz & Hall (2004) re-analyze data from Bucholtz (1999) where a group of self-described 'nerd' friends denaturalize the identity of two other friends as nerds by decrying their new intimate relationship as being inappropriate for nerds. Bucholtz & Hall (2004) thus conclude that denaturalization may also occur when the authenticity of an identity is challenged or questioned due to the perception of a rupture of that identity. This finding further underscores Ochs' (1993) assertion that identities can become transformed in response to others' behaviors and stances.

Furthering the study of authentication and denaturalization and bringing in a focus on stance, Hachimi (2013) argues that it is essential to understand how these processes are accomplished by speakers' stance-taking. I take up this argument here, but even more specifically, I assert that it is *epistemic* stance-taking regarding knowledge claims that can play a major role in the ways that speakers construct their identities in the processes of authentication and denaturalization.

I analyze stance as described by Du Bois (2007:169):

a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of value in the sociocultural field.

I argue that epistemic stance-taking as part of epistemic management can play an important role in interactional identity construction. The management of epistemics in interaction has been thoroughly studied in recent years within the field of conversation analysis (CA). As Heritage (2013:370) writes, the study of epistemics in CA ‘focuses on the knowledge claims that interactants assert, contest and defend in and through turns-at-talk and sequences of interaction’. Raymond & Heritage (2006:678) define the ‘epistemics of social relations’ as ‘methods for managing rights to identity-bound knowledge in self-other relations’, and they demonstrate that epistemic claims enacted in turns-at-talk around assessments are central to management and maintenance of relevant social identities. They show how two women friends negotiate epistemic stances around one of the women’s grandchildren, thus managing interactional identities regarding their rights to assess the epistemic territory of the grandchildren.

While Raymond & Heritage (2006) launched interest in the epistemics of social relations in interaction, some CA scholars have examined social identity construction in interaction without relying on epistemics (e.g. Cashman & Raymond 2014; Raymond 2016), and other CA scholars continue to work on epistemics without a focus on identity (e.g. Heritage & Raymond 2021). Meanwhile, however, a renewal in the exploration of identity and epistemics seems possible with the relatively recent publication of a few key studies. Examining institutional roles and identities, Raymond (2014) examines ‘epistemic brokering’ in accomplishing medical interpreters’ various roles such as co-diagnostician, gatekeeper, advocate, and so on, while Raymond & Cashman (2021) demonstrate how epistemic management is implicated in the collaborative construction of institutional roles and identities in sports commentary. Focusing on everyday family talk, Takei & Burdelski (2018) examine how epistemic stances in a bilingual family’s dinner conversation constitute ‘expert’ and ‘novice’ roles with respect to knowledge about the two languages being spoken. In Sierra (2016, 2021), I analyze everyday interaction among friends and find that their quotation of media in talk contributes to epistemic management, ultimately constructing speakers’ identities as friends who share epistemic access to the same media. Finally, Sierra & Botti (2014) examine the epistemics of identity and place, which is incorporated into the current article.

In the present study, I hope to contribute to this renewal in the study of epistemics and social relations (and argue for its continued theoretical development) by bringing epistemics together with Bucholtz & Hall’s (2005) sociocultural linguistic framework for analyzing identity construction. I show how epistemic management can play an important role in the relational processes of authentication and denaturalization in the construction of identities. To show this is the case, I examine the discursive construction of three emergent identities of one individual in two conversations: his place identity as a New York City resident (which is also related to social class and race), his Jewish identity, and his occupational identity as an actor. I focus on these identities precisely because they are the ones that emerged most saliently and repeatedly in these conversations in the form of epistemic

stances, rather than other potential identity categories such as gender, sexual orientation, age, and so on. Some of these other identity categories, such as sexual orientation and age, might have been assumed to be shared among the interactants, and therefore the participants felt no need to take epistemic stances regarding these identity categories. Place identity, in comparison, is highly contested in the data I collected.

### *Place identity*

Place can be understood as a physical environment, but at the same time orientation to place is not necessarily fixed (Eckert 2004; Johnstone 2004). Place can also be conceptualized as a sociological variable, and indeed place has been a key topic of study in variationist sociolinguistic work (e.g. Labov 1963, 1966; Trudgill 1974; Nagy 2001; Schilling-Estes 2004; Johnstone & Kiesling 2008; Zhang 2008; Becker 2009; Nycz 2018). Place has also been argued to be both a social construct (Massey 1994) as well as a discursive construct infused with social meaning (Johnstone 2011) and thus open to transformation. As such, researchers have analyzed place as socially and interactionally constructed in discourse (Schegloff 1972; Modan 2008), with different aspects of place identity emerging as talk unfolds (Myers 2006; Starks & Taylor-Leech 2018). Taylor & Wetherell (1999) similarly demonstrate that both place and time are resources that speakers draw upon to construct identities. Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff (1983) define place identity as an assortment of ideas, memories, experiences, and feelings about the physical world in which one lives. Proshansky and colleagues (1983) observe that real, potential, or perceived detachment from a certain place results in a heightened awareness of place. This is apparent in the data I present in this article, where speakers are conversing in Washington, DC but speak extensively about New York City.

Within CA, Schegloff (1972) focuses on the sequential analysis of ‘place formulations’ and Sacks (1992) discusses the use of place names in developing topics. Myers (2006) builds on this work by analyzing responses to the question ‘Where are you from?’, which is also replicated by Starks & Taylor-Leech (2018). Housley & Smith (2011) additionally show that membership categorization analysis (Sacks 1992) reveals that a relational understanding of place is accomplished in interaction through references to people, activities, things, and temporal changes. Thus the literature has demonstrated that place takes on meaning via human beliefs and behavior (Myers 2006) and is a resource for identity construction. In this article, I show how speakers use place names as resources in the epistemic processes of authentication and denaturalization to construct their identities. I build on previous work to demonstrate how place identity can be interactionally constructed via the intertwined processes of authentication and denaturalization in epistemic management; I also show how social class and racial categorization can be implicated in constructing place identities.

*Jewish identity*

Much of the discourse analytic research on Jewish identity has focused on an argumentative style and a high tolerance, or even a preference, for agonism in interaction (e.g. Tannen 1981; Schiffrin 1984; Perelmutter 2018). Tannen (1981) examines New York Jewish conversational style specifically as consisting of particular 'high-involvement' features. Although the speaker I focus on in this article is originally from Boston rather than New York, his speaking style still exhibits many of these features. In particular, directness, persistence in raising topics, avoidance of inter-turn pauses, faster turn-taking, cooperative overlap, and participatory listenership are all present in the data. High-involvement conversational style likely contributes to the relatively assertive display of epistemic stances in the data.

On constructing Jewish identities in discourse, Modan (2001) finds that Jewish speakers may assign different weights to ethnic culture, marginality, and skin color, complicating binary discourses of ethnicity. Modan (2001) also argues that focusing on ethnic labels can provide insight into speakers' ideologies of ethnicity, along with explicit talk about identity within which such labeling occurs (Schiffrin 1996; Bucholtz 1999), as speakers are performing, negotiating, reinforcing, or contesting their own and others' identities within interactions. In this article, I show how speakers use ethnicity labels as epistemic resources, and specifically how one of them uses authenticating epistemic stances towards such labels to validate his ties to the Jewish community.

*Actor identity*

While there is a sociolinguistic body of work on performance, style/stylization, and audience design, particularly among radio announcers (e.g. Coupland 1980, 1985, 2001; Bell 1984), there is somewhat of a dearth of linguistic research on actors specifically, and practically no work on actor identity construction. What little research there is on the topic of actors' discourse coalesces around a finding that actors tend to rely on intertextuality and polyphony, in their performances and also in other interactional contexts, such as in delivering (performative) narratives. For instance, Barrett (1999) describes the polyphonous identity construction of African American drag queens, examining specifically how they use a 'white woman' linguistic style in their performances. Similarly, Trester (2012) analyzes how a group of improv theatre actors engage in the intertextual processes of entextualization, de-contextualization, and recontextualization (Bauman & Briggs 1990) for humorous effect in their offstage interactions, as part of member socialization. Good (2015) additionally analyzes how actors/comedians engage in storytelling and reported/enacted actions for entertainment purposes on a talk show, of which reported speech is a part. In this article, I show how one speaker constructs his identity as an actor by denaturalizing others' actor identities in a narrative involving intertextual reported speech.

## DATA AND METHODS

Working within the methodological tradition of interactional sociolinguistics, I use audio-only data collected from two different conversations among friends (one of which I am also a participant), recorded in separate contexts in late 2012 and early 2013. I draw upon both of these conversations for my analysis because each includes two of the same speakers (Alex, my former co-author, and Mike, her romantic partner). Here I focus on the identity construction of one of these speakers, Mike, as it emerges through interaction in both of the conversations. I focus primarily on Mike since he actively and rather assertively constructs his identity across these two conversations via epistemic stances, most frequently authenticating his own identity but at times also denaturalizing the identity claims of others via his talk, which in turn, further authenticates his own identity.

I audio-recorded the first conversation (3 hrs, 10 mins) in the living room of my friend Alex's rented house, in Washington, DC in late 2012. Alex, Meg, and I had met only a few months prior to this conversation, as first year graduate students in the same linguistics department. Before moving to DC, Alex had been living in Boston, her hometown. Alex is a white French-American with dual citizenship. Meg is a first-generation American with Middle Eastern and South Asian heritage (non-white), who spent most of her childhood in India and had lived in New York City for five years before moving to DC. I was born on Long Island, New York but grew up in different parts of the US, living in Virginia for high school and college. I am a second-generation white Polish American with Hispanic heritage. We were all in our early twenties at the time of recording.

On the evening the first conversation was recorded, Alex had invited Meg and me over for dinner and a movie to meet her boyfriend, Mike, for the first time. Mike identifies as white and of Jewish heritage. He is originally from Boston, but had moved to New York City three years prior to this conversation to pursue a career in acting. On this occasion he was visiting Alex over the weekend in DC. The fact that Mike was new to Alex's friends might contribute to how he actively asserts his epistemic rights to engage in identity construction in this conversation. The second conversation (1 hr, 9 mins) was recorded in New York City in early 2013 while Alex was visiting Mike, a few months after the first conversation. There are three speakers present in this conversation: Alex, Mike, and Mike's friend and roommate Ryan, who is an experienced Shakespearian actor. This second conversation takes place in Mike and Ryan's living room of their shared apartment.

These conversations were originally recorded without the intent of analyzing them together. However, once Alex and I realized that we had two of the same speakers in our combined data, we worked together to study the emergence of identities across these two contexts. We focused on Mike's place identity construction (Sierra & Botti 2014), while I further explored his related identities as a Jewish person and as an actor. For the present analysis, the framework provided by Bucholtz & Hall (2005), especially the partiality and relationality principles, are



used in analyzing the data, specifically the application of the relational processes of authentication and denaturalization. I combine the application of this framework of identity construction with Raymond's & Heritage's (2006) work on the epistemics of social relations to show how the two work in tandem in this data. Following Raymond & Heritage (2006), I identify epistemic stances as sequences of action in which participants offer assessments (or evaluations) of states of affairs. These evaluations in turn construct the speakers as knowledgeable or ignorant, whether by assertion or inference (Du Bois 2007). Epistemic stances were examined throughout the entire data set, and all instances were carefully considered for inclusion in this article. In the end, there was space to include all of the examples which contributed most saliently and repeatedly to identity construction in the data set. Following Tannen's (1984/2005) methods for interpreting conversation, I present an analysis based on both internal evidence of recurring patterns in the data and external evidence that was collected via playback interviews and follow-up discussion with the participants. Like Tannen, I acknowledge that there exists a multitude of possible interpretations, and that I simply provide one interpretation based on certain internal and external evidence. Furthermore, this interpretation has been checked, in part, by my former co-author Alexandra Botti, by both informal and formal readers and reviewers of this analysis for presentation at conferences and for publication, and by audiences at conferences.

A potential drawback to the method of recording and analyzing one's friends talk is that doing any kind of critical analysis of issues around race and class in such conversations can be ethically fraught. Through the process of analyzing some aspects of race and class that appear in this data, I experienced the impact of personal and relational face risks involved in critically analyzing one's friends' discourse practices. On the one hand, I now understand why interactional sociolinguistic studies, often consisting of data among the researcher's friends or family, do not often approach this territory. On the other hand, I realize that the recordings of everyday conversation among my friends have much to offer in terms of understanding the ideological implications of racial and class categorization in talk. As such, I attempt to focus on the discourse practices of the individuals, rather than on the individuals themselves. Additionally, most participants (besides Alex and I) have all been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

## ANALYSIS

In this analysis, I show how three of Mike's relevant identities emerge according to the context, interlocutors, and the topic of conversation. I demonstrate that his identity construction is dependent on the management of epistemics, which is integral here in the processes of authentication and denaturalization. In many cases, a single epistemic stance simultaneously contributes to both of the inter-related functions of authentication and denaturalization. While Mike's various identities emerge at different points in the conversations and are constructed uniquely through separate

processes of authentication and denaturalization, all three emergent identities are interrelated. Mike's place identity emerges as that of a New York City resident, one that is knowledgeable about the city, its neighborhoods, and the people who reside there. Throughout the data, this is the identity that most clearly and most frequently emerges. Another identity that emerges in Mike's discourse in a much subtler way is his identity as a Jewish person. Mike was raised in a Jewish family, and he participates in most Jewish holidays and traditions. Both of Mike's identities as a New York City resident and as a Jewish person have been affected by a third identity, which is the identity of a professional actor. Mike's choice to pursue a career in acting resulted in Mike moving from Boston to New York City, thus affecting his place identity. This career ambition also resulted in Mike changing his Jewish surname to a name he perceived as more 'Anglo-sounding', along with changing specific aspects of his physical appearance, in hopes that he would not be typecast as a Jewish character.

Here I analyze Mike's three identities in the order just described, following the order in which they emerge throughout the data. I begin with analysis of the first conversation, where Mike's New York City resident identity and his Jewish identity emerge. I then continue to analyze the second conversation, where his actor identity emerges.

#### NEW YORK CITY PLACE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

In the first excerpt, Mike constructs his place identity as a current New York City resident in contrast to his new acquaintance Meg's identity as a previous New York City resident. Here Mike and Meg make claims about the risk of being "mugged" (robbed) in New York City and evaluate the neighborhoods of the city and their safety. In this talk, they take epistemic stances about the city in a process of identity authentication as knowledgeable New York City residents.

(1)<sup>1</sup>

- 11 Mike: It depends where in New York...  
 12 If I lived in Brooklyn (I probably would've).  
 13 Meg: Well it depends where in Brooklyn too.  
 14 If you live in DUMbo,  
 15 the HIPsters aren't gonna mug you.  
 16 Sylvia: [Hahaha  
 17 Mike: [Right, but if you live in BED-Stuy,=  
 18 Meg: =They don't have money to like,  
 19 buy guns haha.  
 20 Mike: If you live in Bed-Stuy...  
 21 Sophie: (That s-)  
 22 That sounds to me like that=

In line 11, Mike opines that a potential mugging "depends where in New York", asserting that he has knowledge of different areas within New York City. He

specifies his knowledge further in line 12, stating “If I lived in Brooklyn (I probably would’ve)”. This epistemic stance evaluates the borough of Brooklyn as a place where a mugging would have been more likely to occur. Meg projects disagreement with Mike on this point with “well” (line 13) (Schiffrin 1987). Then, taking an even more place-specific epistemic stance, Meg asserts that a potential mugging “depends where in Brooklyn too. If you live in DUMbo, the hipsters aren’t gonna mug you” (lines 13–15). With Meg’s more specific place reference to Dumbo, an area in Northwestern Brooklyn, she also makes the epistemic claim that “the hipsters aren’t gonna mug you” (line 15), referring to gentrification by white residents (“the hipsters”) of this neighborhood, while also distancing herself from them. In line 17, Mike first affirms Meg’s epistemic claims regarding the membership categorization device (MCD) (Sacks 1972a, b, 1992) “hipsters” with “right”, but follows this affirmation with “but” and contrasts his knowledge of the predominantly white Dumbo neighborhood with “if you live in BED-Stuy [Bedford-Stuyvesant]”, thus naming, contrasting, and evaluating a traditionally Black and increasingly Hispanic neighborhood within Brooklyn, as unsafe (Mike repeats this utterance in line 20). Then Meg expands on her assessment of the hipsters in Dumbo by saying, “They don’t have money to like, buy guns” (lines 18–19). This epistemic stance makes it clear that Meg considers the residents of Dumbo lacking in economic resources, and therefore unlikely to purchase guns and engage in muggings. Both “DUMbo” and “BED-Stuy” feature marked stress on the first syllable, which signals that these are intended to be shared place references (Sierra 2021). So, in this example, both Mike and Meg engage in a process of authentication. They use ‘insider’ place names as resources in epistemic stances towards these places to authenticate their identities as knowledgeable New York City residents. In doing so, they demonstrate that they are able to compare and contrast different neighborhoods and their relative safety (based on assumptions about the racial and class demographics of residents) within Brooklyn.

However, in the next example, Mike denaturalizes Meg’s previous epistemic claims as an authentic resident of the city by dismissing the proposition that the affluent neighborhood in which Meg lived ‘counts’ as part of New York City, in contrast to Dumbo and Bed-Stuy.

- (2)
- 23 Meg: =I lived in Forest Hills.  
 24 That’s like...  
 25 Alex: Is that good or bad.  
 26 Mike: That doesn’t count.  
 27 Meg: Haha it really doesn’t count.  
 28 (isn’t normal.) (*quietly*)  
 29 It’s ‘Je:wville’.  
 30 Sylvia: Oh [wow. (*quietly*)

In line 23, Meg suddenly states where she lived in New York City: “Forest Hills”, a wealthy neighborhood in Queens. Mike evaluates her neighborhood, stating, “That doesn’t count” (line 26). With this unmitigated epistemic stance, Mike’s utterance dismisses Meg’s claims to an authentic New York City place identity, based presumably on the social and class demographics of her neighborhood, which contrast considerably with Bed-Stuy (which had just been evaluated by Mike as unsafe). In denaturalizing Meg’s place identity, Mike’s stance simultaneously authenticates his own identity as a knowledgeable New York City resident who knows enough about the authenticity of the various neighborhoods within the city that he can make the judgment of what “doesn’t count”. Meg aligns with Mike and his stance in line 27—“haha it really doesn’t count”, thus playfully denaturalizing her own identity claims to being an authentic New York City resident. However, like Mike’s first position stance, her aligning stance can also be analyzed as simultaneously authenticating her epistemic rights to assess what does and doesn’t “count” as New York City. Meg furthers this assessment by uttering what sounds like “isn’t normal” (line 28) and then “It’s Je:wville” (line 29). Meg’s construction others the kind of residents (Jews) that she perceives as making this place (“-ville”) not “count” and not “normal”, a sense that seems to rely on this neighborhood being too wealthy to ‘count’ as an authentic part of New York City (in contrast to the speakers’ earlier evaluations of Bed-Stuy and Dumbo). Meg’s distancing statements about Jews, and apparent stereotypes about Jews being wealthy, will become relevant again later.

Later in the same conversation, Alex and Meg are discussing a university talk they had attended which referred to the demographics of the MCD ‘Spanish speakers in New York City’. This talk about Spanish-speaking groups within the city eventually prompts Mike to say, “You haven’t been to Queens”. This example illustrates another complex instance where both authentication and denaturalization of place identity are evident.

(3)

- 1 Alex: Apparently um.=  
 2 Meg: =M[hm.  
 3 Alex: [So Dominicans are the primary..  
 4 Spanish speakers in New York, apparently, which I didn’t. realize.  
 5 Meg: Puerto Ricans, actually,=  
 6 Alex: =Oh!  
 7 Mike: [Mexica:ns.  
 8 Alex: [>No no no! Remember [that-?<  
 9 Sylvia: [Puerto [Ricans!  
 10 Alex: [Were you at that-?  
 11 Meg: I wasn’t at [that.  
 12 Alex: [is it?  
 13 Mike: Yeah, Puerto Ricans, I would [say (??)  
 14 Alex: [I thought it was Dominicans! cuz wh-

- 15                   remember when we were at that DC Language and Communication  
thing?
- 16                   Were you [there?]
- 17   Meg:                   [I think the most Dominicans are in New York?..]
- 18   Alex:                   Oh but most Spanish [speakers=]
- 19   Mike:                   [You haven't been to-]
- 20   Meg:                   =but [the most Spanish-speaking are Puerto Ricans.
- 21   Mike:                   [You haven't been to- Queens.
- 22                   You haven't been to [Queens.
- 23   Alex:                   [No I'm not going off of what I obSER(h)VED,
- 24                   I'm going off of- a- [presenTATION.
- 25   Meg:                   [A talk they were doing.

Throughout this excerpt, all of the speakers make epistemic claims about the MCD of 'Spanish speakers in New York', naming categories within this MCD that they believe to make up the largest percentage of this broader group such as 'Dominicans', 'Puerto Ricans', and 'Mexicans'. Here, Mike constructs Meg's and/or Alex's rights to make epistemic claims about the MCD of 'Spanish speakers in New York' as insufficient, by persisting across overlapped utterances in making the unmitigated and denaturalizing assertion, "You haven't been to Queens" (lines 19, 21, 22). This kind of persistence is analyzed by Tannen (1981) as a feature of New York Jewish conversational style. By using the pronoun "you", he creates a contrast between Alex's and Meg's experience and his own, which serves to authenticate his own place identity as a knowledgeable New York City resident. He uses the place name "Queens" as a resource to show his own knowledge and rights to evaluate New York City residents, and with this statement he also demonstrates that he knows enough about the city to know about the demographics of Queens, specifically. Alex goes on to clarify and to defend her epistemic stances by explaining with exasperation that she is not referring to what she might have "obSER(h)VED" (line 23) in New York City, but rather to a presentation at her university (lines 24–25). In sum, these examples show how the management of epistemics regarding place, which is associated here with race and social class, plays an important role in the intertwined processes of authentication and denaturalization that Mike uses to construct his identity as a knowledgeable New York City resident.

#### JEWISH IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Continuing the analysis of the first conversation, I now turn to consideration of Mike's Jewish identity construction. This identity emerges in a much subtler way than his New York City place identity, yet it is also related to his place identity. In the next excerpt, Meg brings up "Jewish kids" in discussing the demographics of her high school in New York City, constructing this group as 'other'. It might be relevant to mention that Meg did not know at this point in the conversation that Mike was Jewish (later, he attempts to inform her of this fact).

- (4)  
 139 Meg: If you wanna go to MY high school it was SO cool to speak Spanish,  
 140 and like all these Jewish kids would fool me to-  
 141 Like they would FOOL me,  
 142 into like,  
 143 pretending that they were Hispanic..

In line 139 Meg claims that in her high school it was “SO cool to speak Spanish” which sets up her mention of “all these Jewish kids” in line 140. These utterances construct both Spanish-speakers and ‘Jewish kids’ as ‘other’, which is furthered by her assertion that “these Jewish kids would fool” her in high school by “pretending that they were Hispanic” (lines 140–143), tying back to her initial mention of speaking Spanish in line 139. This mention of ‘Jewish kids’ and perhaps the way in which Meg’s construction others them, as well as the fact that she is talking about the demographics of her high school in New York City, spurs Mike to speak next and engage in epistemic authentication that involves both of his identities as a New York City resident and as a Jewish person.

- (5)  
 144 Mike: Well Brooklyn, [yeah.  
 145 Sylvia: [how’d they do that?  
 146 Mike: Brooklyn has an incredibly Jewish heritage.  
 147 Meg: Mhm.

Here Mike authenticates his knowledge of Jewish culture and its place in New York City. In line 144, he takes an evaluative epistemic stance, saying, “Well Brooklyn, yeah”. Mike’s use of the discourse marker “well” (Schiffrin 1987), projects disagreement with Meg. Mike’s stance shows that he makes the connection between Meg’s mention of “Jewish kids” and Brooklyn, again using the place name Brooklyn as an epistemic resource to authenticate this knowledge. His epistemic stance indicates that he finds the idea that there would be Jewish people in Brooklyn to be expected, punctuated by his affirmative “yeah” at the end of his statement.

Mike’s evaluation of Brooklyn in line 146 indexes his epistemic and affective stance, showing both his knowledge and his feelings on the topic. He authenticates his knowledge by stating, “Brooklyn has an incredibly Jewish heritage”. This epistemic stance is authenticating in that Mike uses the adverb “incredibly” to positively evaluate Brooklyn’s Jewish heritage, constructing a positive assessment that might index his ties to the Jewish community. Bucholtz & Hall (2005:602) mention that there is a temporal dimension in the process of authentication, in the sense that it ‘often relies on a claimed historical tie to the venerated past’. While Mike does not make any explicit claim to a historical tie here, his positive description of “an incredibly Jewish heritage” in Brooklyn functions in the

process of authentication of his identity as a Jewish person with knowledge of and respect for Jewish heritage.

Mike's statements are only greeted with Meg's minimal response of "Mhm" in line 147, and Mike continues to epistemically evaluate the Jewish community in Brooklyn.

- (6)
- 148 Mike: (They're [very Orthodox])  
 149 Meg: [But I lived in Forest Hills that's th-  
 150 THE Jewish area.  
 151 (That's th)-  
 152 That's THE: Jewish area in New York.  
 153 Mike: That's like Orthodox, right?=  
 154 Meg: =Mhm.=  
 155 Mike: =Yeah.

In line 148, Mike evaluates the Jewish community in Brooklyn by using another MCD, saying, "They're very Orthodox". Here, Mike evaluates the nature of the Jewish community while also demonstrating that he is knowledgeable about this community in a more specific way—that he knows they practice Orthodox Judaism. Meg overlaps with his speech, countering that her neighborhood, Forest Hills in Queens, rather than Brooklyn, is "THE Jewish area" in New York City (lines 150, 152). Considering that these speakers had evaluated Forest Hills earlier as 'not counting' as part of New York City, due presumably to its high wealth concentration in contrast to the previously mentioned neighborhood Bed-Stuy, and Meg's evaluation of the residents of Dumbo not having money, there might be a subtle reinforcing of a stereotype here that since Forest Hills, a wealthy neighborhood, is "THE Jewish area", Jews are wealthy. In line 153, Mike orients away from this implication and back to religious practices instead, asking Meg, "That's like Orthodox, right?" This first position downgraded epistemic stance with a tag question (Raymond & Heritage 2006) seems rhetorical, inviting agreement. When Meg responds accordingly with "Mhm" in line 154, Mike affirms his own knowledge, with "Yeah" in line 155, again authenticating his identity as someone with knowledge about the Jewish population in New York City.

In a portion of the conversation soon after this, Mike actually authenticates that he is indeed Jewish, but Meg does not seem to hear him.

- (7)
- 176 Meg: YOU look Jewish.  
 177 Mike: Huh?  
 178 Meg: You would look Jewish.  
 179 [You would look like a Yuri.  
 180 Mike: [Oh I AM.  
 181 Meg: You look like a YURi!

Meg tells Mike “YOU look Jewish” (lines 176, 178). In response, Mike explicitly authenticates his Jewish identity for the first time by stating “Oh I am” in line 180, using “oh” to confirm the declaration (Heritage 1984) that he looks Jewish. However, Meg overlaps with Mike’s speech and does not seem to hear him, continuing instead to exclaim that he looks “like a Yuri” (lines 179, 181), in other words, that he looks like a Jewish person who would go by the name Yuri (both of these assumptions seem to be based on broader stereotypes about what it means to look and sound Jewish).

The analysis of these excerpts has shown how Mike uses epistemic stances in the process of authentication to construct himself as knowledgeable about the Jewish population in New York City, and in turn, as a Jewish person. While this identity is the most subtly constructed of the three, and it only emerges in this one stretch of talk (being tied to the topic in which it emerges), it is interesting in that it relies most heavily on authentication and not at all on denaturalization. This may be due to the fact that no one else in the conversation is making claims to a Jewish identity, and so there is no need to denaturalize an identity claim here. In fact, the ways in which Meg affectively distances herself from Jewish identity and culture, seemingly drawing on various stereotypes, might be what spur Mike to take authenticating epistemic stances towards the Jewish community, and by association (and most explicitly in line 180), his own identity as a Jewish person.

#### ACTOR IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

In order to analyze Mike’s emergent occupational identity as an actor, I now turn to data from a second conversation, which occurred in New York City with Alex, Mike, and Mike’s actor friend Ryan. In contrast to Mike’s Jewish identity, which relied entirely on the process of authentication, I show how Mike’s actor identity construction relies heavily on denaturalizing epistemic stances towards other actors.

Mike’s actor identity emerges when he tells his friend Ryan about a screening for well-known actor Robert De Niro’s latest film that he and Alex had attended earlier that night. Mike starts this topic by taking an epistemic stance and initiating the process of denaturalization.

- (8)
- 90 Mike: So, the, person doing the Q&A for tonight’s [screening was such an idiot.
- 91 Alex: [Haha.
- 92 Mike: And asked the question, or- I dunno, somebody asked the question,
- 93 what’s like your worst audition,
- 94 Ryan: Mhm.=
- 95 Mike: =To De Niro. And..he was just dancing around it.
- 96 ‘Cause like ha you knew he like, he like never=
- 97 Alex: =He like, couldn’t think of a bad audition.
- 98 [Haha.
- 99 Mike: [Probably, like, never didn’t get the part.



In line 90, Mike asserts that “the person doing the Q&A for tonight’s screening was such an idiot”. Through evaluating this person (a journalist) as “such an idiot”, Mike engages in the process of denaturalization, portraying this person as unknowledgeable about their job and/or acting. At the same time, taking such a strong epistemic stance also positions Mike as an expert in this field who has the knowledge to make such a judgment. Mike describes Robert De Niro as “dancing around” (line 95) an audience member’s (another actor) question about a bad audition because, as Alex says, “He like, couldn’t think of a bad audition” (line 97). This is rephrased by Mike as “Probably, like, never didn’t get the part” (line 99). Thus Alex and Mike show that they have enough knowledge about Robert De Niro’s acting to understand his motives for not answering the audition question. So here Mike epistemically authenticates his familiarity with and knowledge about the acting abilities of Robert De Niro. This epistemic authentication constructs Mike’s identity as more knowledgeable about acting than both the “idiot” Q&A person and the actor who asked Robert De Niro the audition question.

In the following lines, all three friends engage in denaturalization when they mock and make fun of yet another actor who asked Robert De Niro a question. Bucholtz & Hall (2005:602) state that denaturalization is present ‘most clearly in parodic performance’, which is apparent in this excerpt.

- (9)  
 100 Alex: No but the best was at the very beginning the woman comes in and →  
 101 she’s like,  
 102 “I have to tell you...like, you know are you- are you actually a →  
 103 football fan?”  
 104 ‘Cause, like, there’s- he’s like this crazy football fan in the movie.  
 105 And he go- he goes,  
 106 “Oh, no, no, I had to, like, learn all the stuff.”  
 107 And she goes,  
 108 “Well, it was VErY believable!”  
 109 And, like, everyone around is like,  
 110 “(pff) it’s fuckin’ Robert DeNiro!  
 111 Don’t tell him he’s a believable [football fan!”  
 112 Ryan: [Yeah, yeah, that’s funny.  
 113 Mike: “Good, good work, [Robert!”  
 114 Ryan: [Fuckin’ idiot.  
 115 Alex: [It was SO awkward.=  
 116 Mike: =“You were really good at acting!”  
 117 Ryan: “You, you- I think you’re very good.” (*lowered pitch*)  
 118 Alex: Hahaha.  
 119 Ryan: “I hope you like my opinion.” (*lowered pitch*)  
 120 Mike: “Robert, R[obert, you-, Robert you did a swell job in THIS film.”  
 (*lowered pitch*)  
 121 Ryan: [(pff) Yeah, yeah.

- 122 Alex: [Hahaha  
 123 Ryan: ["Oh, gee"... (*lowered pitch*)  
 124 Alex: I just feel like a room full of actors is not the audience to, like, →  
 125 make stupid comments like that [in front of.  
 126 Mike: [Yeah but it was like, it was like, →  
 127 all background. Ha.

Here Alex initiates denaturalization in lines 100–111, mocking another actor who had asked a question at the Q&A. Alex uses constructed dialogue (Tannen 2007) to mimic this actor's perceived vapidness. Mike joins in the denaturalization in line 113, continuing the mocking constructed dialogue. In line 114, Ryan aligns with Alex and Mike, referring to the actor as a "Fuckin' idiot". Mike continues to mock the actor in line 116, and Ryan joins in this parodic performance and denaturalization in line 117, which continues in lines 119–123. Mike responds to Alex's feeling that "a room full of actors is not the audience to, like, make stupid comments like that in front of" (lines 124–125), by taking a final epistemic stance that "Yeah but it was like, it was like, all background" (lines 126–127), meaning that everyone at the Q&A were background actors, or extras. This epistemic stance functions to denaturalize these actors' identities as authentic actors, by attributing their "stupid comments" to their relatively low status as compared to Mike and Ryan. In turn, this authenticates Mike's and Ryan's identities as 'real' actors.

Denaturalization is the primary process in this actor identity construction. There are a few possible reasons for this. First, Mike's interlocutors are two people he knows very well, and one of them is also an actor. Therefore, Mike might not feel the need to actively authenticate his identity as an actor when this is already established with both of his interlocutors (although this is achieved indirectly via denaturalization). Another possible explanation is that the denaturalization that occurs in these examples is directed towards external referents—the Q&A person and the other actors in the audience are not participants in this conversation and are not present, and therefore this denaturalization can be used in a more critical manner without detriment to any present party's face. At the same time, scholars such as Tovares (2006) have demonstrated how gossiping among friends and family members can serve for in-group solidarity, and it is likely that the denaturalizing gossip that occurs among Mike and his friends also serves this function.

This analysis of the emergence of Mike's three interrelated identities as a New York City resident, Jewish, and an actor, has shown how each identity is constructed through the use of epistemic stances, which play an important role in the processes of authentication and denaturalization of his identities. Through this analysis, I have shown how certain identities relied more heavily on authentication or denaturalization in their construction, and how these two processes themselves are intrinsically related and act as two parts of the same mechanism.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Here I have shown how the emergence of one speaker's three inter-related identities across two different conversations relies on the expression and management of epistemics, arguing that this is crucial in the intertwined processes of authentication of Mike's own identities and the denaturalization of others' identities. Through the analysis, I discovered that certain identities relied more on authentication or denaturalization, and this was related to the context and interlocutors in each conversation. This analysis has shed light on how one individual may construct partial, yet related identities for themselves using epistemic stances and the processes of authentication or denaturalization to affirm their identity and/or disaffirm the knowledge or identity of others.

The identities that emerged in these conversations were embedded in Mike's life experiences—the Jewish traditions he was raised with, his career ambitions as an actor, and his relocation to New York City. Considering Mike's life story is useful in understanding his display of epistemic stances and his engagement in authentication and denaturalization to construct his identities. The fact that Mike is not originally from New York City, but chose to move there three years prior to these conversations to pursue a career in acting, might have something to do with his rather assertive display of epistemic rights about the city in authenticating his chosen place identity and denaturalizing a new acquaintance's epistemic claims to the same identity. Additionally, although Mike changed his stage name (and appearance) to distance himself from his Jewish identity in his acting career, Mike's display of epistemic stances towards the Jewish community are evidence that he still identifies with that community. Finally, if we understand Mike as an actor who is less well known than, say, Robert De Niro, we can understand why he might engage in denaturalization to disaffirm other novice actors' identities in this career field to authenticate his own identity as an actor among his friends. Thus considering an individual's life story may be useful in better understanding the motives for engaging in specific kinds of identity work in discourse. While I focused on one individual here, the same kind of examination of epistemic management and relational identity processes could be conducted on conversations of other individuals, with different constellations of identities, in more global or international contexts as we strive to understand how different kinds of knowledge intersect with various types of identity construction.

Future research on identity construction should thus consider taking a local, historical, or biographical approach to the data, depending on what is appropriate. Combining sociolinguistic interviews with recordings of more informal unstructured conversation could be a further step in studies like this one, in an effort to bring a more biographical approach to analyzing discourse by merging methods from variationist sociolinguistics with methods from interactional sociolinguistics. Additionally, the study of epistemics in identity construction could be applied to other relational identity processes, in the way that I have applied epistemics to

the processes of authentication and denaturalization. Future research could shed more light on these processes, as well as analyze how identities that emerge in discourse may overlap with and interact with one another, further developing the ideas laid out in Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) relationality principle.

As described at the outset of this article, the inter-related processes of epistemic negotiation and identity construction have been receiving increased interest in recent years. Here I have shown that the interplay of epistemics, social relations, and identity construction in discourse is a rich and dynamic process that can help us better understand the role language plays in social life, and it is a worthwhile effort to continue to explore the various mechanisms involved in this process. In this article, I hope to have contributed to a renewal in this endeavor by demonstrating how the management of epistemics and the relational identity processes of authentication and denaturalization may be fundamentally intertwined. Understanding that our knowledge and how we wield it constructs who we are in everyday social life benefits all of us as we navigate our everyday social interactions.

#### APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

?	rising intonation at the end of a unit
!	expressive intonation
,	continuing intonation
.	falling intonation
..	noticeable pause
...	significant pause
=	latching (second voice begins without perceptible pause)
[	overlap (two voices heard at the same time)
(??)	inaudible utterance
(h)	laughter during a word
(words)	uncertain transcription
( <i>sound</i> )	details about speech or non-speech sounds
>fast<	accelerated speech
CAPS	emphatic stress
:	elongated vowel sound
-	abrupt stop in speech; truncated word or syllable
→	speaker continues on next line (not a new intonation unit)

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Transcription conventions are listed in the appendix.

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