The Enactment of Hegemony through Identity Construction: Insights from ThePresentation of Self in Everyday Life

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Abstract: This paper uses Goffman's dramaturgical analysis to examine how hegemony maintains its power and influence in the life of the individual. The analysis reveals that the power of hegemony lies in the construction of particular identities that shape our interactions and limit our imagined futures.

The social justice tradition of adult education has long sought to understand how hegemony works, the means of counteracting its influence, and the role of adult education in this process. The increased interest in identity as a political position for challenging systemic oppression (Hall, 1997), as a means for understanding and engaging learners (Sheared, 1999), and as a product of hegemonic forces (Butler, 1988) suggests the need to better understand how individuals and social structures are intertwined, especially in the perpetuation and contestation of hegemony. As Brookfield (2005) notes, "hegemony saturates all aspects of life and is constantly learned and relearned throughout life. If anything can be described as lifelong learning, it is this" (p. 97).

Hegemony, Education, and Identity

The purpose of this study is to use Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical lens of identity construction to explore how hegemony maintains its power and influence in the life of the individual. Goffman uses techniques of theatrical performance to show how interactions within a given setting shape social structures through the construction of particular identities. In this paper, hegemony is defined as the process by which individuals are made subject, and subject themselves, to a system of beliefs and practices that is detrimental to their well-being but supportive of the interests of those in power over them (Brookfield, 2005; Hall, 1997). Hegemony is power, such as the power to create "a corpus of knowledge, techniques, [and] 'scientific' discourses" that promotes inequitable social relations as the natural order of everyday life (Foucault, 1995, p. 23). Gramsci (1971), in his quest to understand how hegemony worked, recognized the social institution of education as a critical means for promulgating dominant ideologies and fashioning the populace for assigned roles in society .For instance, the prevalence of the technical-rational discourse (Mayo, 1999) in adult education is underpinned by capitalism and neo-liberal ideology that privilege efficiency and marketability at the expense of social justice. Moreover, technical-rational thought—codified, for example, in accountability measures for adult education programs—fosters particular identities, including skills, behaviors, and ways of thinking and being (Gee, 2000), thereby creating learners, workers, and citizens ready to comply with an inequitable socio-economic order. However, adult educators can also foster other types of identities, such as citizens who are emboldened to challenge injustice.

Goffman's dramaturgical analysis is useful for understanding hegemony because it captures the technical, cultural ,political ,and structural aspects of social organization that collectively promote the dominance of a particular discourse and identity. These aspects

correspond to work, preservation of moral standards, power over others, and social distance, respectively. Although performance is often interpreted as the enactment of identity (Butler, 1988), in this case it provides a useful way to examine the enactment of hegemony, that is, the ways in which people play roles that serve to maintain an inequitable social order. This analysis reveals that the power of hegemony lies in the construction of identities, as taken-for-granted beliefs and norms shape the possibilities we imagine for ourselves, the scripts and roles available to us, and our daily interactions. Identity theorists such as Goffman adopt a social psychological approach that foregrounds roles as the key construct of identity and predictor of behavior, downplaying the importance of larger group categories such as race/ethnicity, class, and gender (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). This theory speaks to the enactment of identity and presents the individual as an actor instead of an object that is acted upon. For example, in performing the role of mother, the individual establishes her mother identity through the behaviors she associates with being a mother.

By contrast, social identity theory is anchored in a socio-cognitive approach that conceives of identity as internalized social behavior resulting in an interest in "conformity, collective action, stereotyping, group solidarity and ethnocentrism" (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 266). This approach emphasizes individuals' position within social structures such as race, class, and gender. Thus, social identity theorists seek to understand how societal structures, individual agency, and language contribute to the construction of identity. In construing hegemony as a group identity, we seek to demonstrate the interrelatedness of identity and social structures. That is, group identity is "intensely personal," yet also a historical and cultural construct that shapes "norms, values and beliefs" (Reicher, 2004). Group identity is a collective manifestation of "thinking, feeling, doing, talking, and belonging" (Wenger, 1998, p.56). However, the degree of identification with a particular group will determine the level of adherence to group norms and practices. Hall's (1997) definition of identity as a location from which we speak captures both the personal and social dimensions of identity.

Hegemony and the Performance of Identity

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) presents the enactment of identity as a performance people use to control situations for their benefit by means of impression management. He notes that the actor can define the situation by providing the kind of impression that will lead the audience "to act voluntarily in accordance with his plan" (p. 4). This impression elicits the desired response from the audience, in this case, marginalized groups, through the performance of the dominant group. At the micro level, enactment involves speaking, behaving, believing, dressing, doing, and using various tools to convey a particular identity (Gee, 2000). At the macro level, enactment involves strategies, such as institutional policies, to promote a particular identity as the norm. For example, school literacy, underpinned by White middle-class values, is valorized through testing, accountability measures, a discourse of its necessity for success, and the negation of other types of literacy as valuable. By viewing hegemony as the valorization of a particular identity that is lived out in our daily interactions, practices, and values at the expense of other identities (Brookfield, 2005), we see that impression management serves to orchestrate hegemonic identity. The latter refers to the establishment and dissemination of the dominant group's identity (White, middle- or upper-class) as the norm against which all others are compared, through the enlistment of media, educational systems, government policies, and other means. However, this is only successful if the intended audience receives and accepts these messages as self-evident truths. The performance, then, is the expression of the dominant group's ideology, legitimatized through institutional and communicative practices.

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Central to Goffman's framework is the performer's ability to "define the situation," which results in anticipated audience responses. Indeed, "the key factor in this structure is the maintenance of a single definition of the situation, this definition having to be expressed, and this expression sustained in the face of a multitude of potential disruptions" (p. 254). Thus, if we construe the "structure" as society, the "situation" as encounters between dominant and marginalized groups, the "single definition of the situation" as the world view and value system of the dominant group, and the sustenance of the single definition as forms of co-optation, manipulation, and coercion, then maintenance of dominant social positioning hinges on the perpetuation of their world view. Defining the situation, then, maintains the existing social order. For instance, in adult basic education the situation is being defined from a technical-rational perspective through testing that supports a functional, skills-based view of literacy, through the implementation of accountability measures that shape how adult educator and learners see themselves and are seen by others, and through a public and professional discourse that implies individual, communal, and national well-being hinges on the acquisition of these skills.

Goffman defines performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (p. 15). Therefore, the performance of hegemonic identity is achieved through the various actions it takes to shape the views and behaviors of other groups. The "front," as in the front part of the stage, refers to the part of the performance that is regularly seen and repeated in the same manner, conveying the reality of the performance. Goffman refers to this technique of staying in character as the "technical nature of the performance….the "expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (p.22). The expressive equipment includes the tools used to convey a particular impression or view of the world. As Freire (1970) notes, every practice of education implies a concept about the individual and the world.

According to Goffman, the "front" includes setting, appearance, and manner. The setting is the scenic front, the geography or environment in which the performance takes place, such as the classroom. The context determines the role-identity that will be displayed, such that a teacher will display the technical characteristics that define him as a teacher in the classroom. The "personal front" denotes the "other items of expressive equipment…that most intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect to follow the performer wherever he goes" (p. 24). These are the identity markers that to a lesser extent characterize personality and to a greater extent categorize group identity, including race and gender. "Appearance" refers to a person's status, for instance, middle-class or poor. "Manner" usually aligns with appearance and indicates the interactional behavior of an individual in a situation. Hegemony is maintained, in part, because individuals expect deference, or lack thereof, in accordance with their social status or authority. Goffman notes that the components of the front do not always align, reflecting the varied, conflictual nature of identities. For instance, class may allow certain privileges while race and gender may limit them. The roles assumed in the situation are anchored in socio-historical understandings that shape meaning, behavior, and expectations within a given situation.

Socialization Processes

Maintenance of the social order requires the perpetuation of mutual understandings, which in turn are supported by socialization processes. First is the presentation of abstract and general information to promote generalized characteristics of performance (hegemonic identity) across contexts, regardless of the specificity and uniqueness of the routine (p. 26). This is a key characteristic of the "front." Goffman suggests that this strategy establishes standards that the

audience begins to expect, even though they are not founded on truth. Consequently, the hegemonic identity takes on a meaning separate from individual acts and becomes a fact of collective identity. For example, the White middle class is positioned as the norm in the U S. Thus, poor and low-literate persons are often vilified for not having middle-class values such as independence and a strong work ethic, a perspective anchored in the ideology of meritocracy. This myth not only ignores the presence of these qualities in all socio-economic classes but also the structural factors that systematically limit opportunity and access.

The second component of socialization is "dramatic realization," or the enforcement of myths or grand narratives as truth through the use of signs and symbols (e.g., the acquisition of consumer goods associated with White, middle-class values, success, education and corresponding levels of employment). The display of material wealth promotes a positive correlation between middle-class values and wealth, and educational credentials and employment. These signs are part of the expressive equipment of the front. Goffman points out that an identity associated with status or social place is concretized through doing: "It is a pattern of appropriate conduct [that is] coherent, embellished and well articulated" (p. 75). Bourdieu's (2001) concepts of cultural, economic, and social capital are relevant here because they help to delineate facets of a particular experience or habitus. Through the accumulation of material resources and the establishment of social ties, the dominant group is able to promote its way of being, or cultural capital, as the norm. For example, dramatic realization occurs through teacher expectations and testing that rewards schooled literacy, the forms of oral and written communication (e.g., storytelling style) that are prevalent among White, middle-class families (Heath, 1983). Children with different home literacy practices are at a disadvantage because their literacies—their use of signs and symbols—are ignored or devalued.

The third aspect of socialization is an idealized view of the situation. Anything that would detract from the image is downplayed such as structural barriers such as racism and sexism. Thus, the myth of hegemonic identity becomes a social value and ideal that is embodied by the dominant group. In turn, individuals outside the dominant group are ascribed an inferior, undesirable status. Identity is built on difference and so requires the presence of the other (Hall, 1997). The ideal is only acceptable if there is an audience—a group that can be assigned a lesser identity. The characteristics of both groups are seen as inherent instead of being shaped by social, economic, and political factors. While success is symbolized by the White male, the illiterate person is symbolized as African American, stupid, poor, and lazy (Quigley, 1997; St. Clair & Sandlin, 2000), negating the diversity of experiences within these groups. .These formulations mediate the interactions, policies, and practices in the educational setting, thereby creating an unproblematized view that promotes a sense of "rightness" while deterring the pursuit of alternate perspectives and solutions. Brookfield (2005) notes, "whatever a society accepts as knowledge or truth inevitably ends up strengthening the power of some and limiting the power of others" (p. 136).

"Maintenance of expressive control" is the fourth dimension of socialization. Social control hinders the actor from giving a different definition of the situation than the official one (p. 52). Hegemonic identity is maintained through both internal and external restraints that hinder contradictory individual expression. External restraints entail the imposition of penalties against the offending member, whereas internal constraints reflect Foucault's panopticism, or the internalization of social norms that makes overt coercive action unnecessary. Indeed, "It is the fact of constantly being seen, of always being able to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in all his subjection" (Foucault, 1995, p. 187). In adult education, surveillance is achieved through "audit technologies" (Shore & Wright, 2000). The policies undergirding

accountability measures define program purposes and provisions and shape adult educator and learner qualifications and eligibility. In seeking to be recognized as professional and literate, adult educators and learners, respectively, may adopt practices that convey those identities. In essence, technical-rational discourse is perpetuated through funding criteria and institutionalized practices that act as coercive tools to promote a particular concept of adult education..

The last component of the socialization process is the control of information through social distance or regions, that is, "any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers of perception" (Goffman, 1959, p. 106), such as the separation of social classes. Goffman describes this separation as a process of "mystification." In equating contact and communication with a form of perception, he suggests, "control over what is perceived is control over the contact that is made" (p. 67). In addition, control over the setting such as an adult education site allows for the introduction of "strategic devices for determining the information the audience is able to acquire" (p. 93). Thus, the audience is kept at a distance to ensure credibility of the performance. Arguably, the technical-rational approach maintains the social order by limiting access to curricula that question the way things are. In essence, it prepares more "cogs for the wheel" of the free market.

Social stratification, or the region accorded to the dominant class, is guarded by control of information that would dispel the myth of dominance. Therefore, it is advantageous to control access to that knowledge. For example, the invisible ceilings of racism and sexism have historically limited access to good education and professional mobility that would engender economic independence. Institutional barriers work to limit the vision of the marginalized within the ascribed framework of the dominant. The myths perpetrated by the dominant group become a reality in the lives of the marginalized, whose actions are shaped by circumscribed expectations of who they can be rather and what they can accomplish rather than their hopes and aspirations for a better life (Gould, 1999).

Conclusion

The deployment of expressive equipment in the form of particular practices, beliefs, and ways of being constructs identities that support hegemony. Daily interactions and performances, shaped by legitimized discourse and practices, serve to maintain hegemonic identity. Individual acquiesce is achieved through the silencing of alternate perspectives and the deployment of economic, social, cultural, and political presentations of the rightness of hegemonic identity. The strength of hegemony is the often unconscious complicity of members of both dominant and subjugated groups in the domination process. Goffman's analysis reveals that actors are sometimes unconscious of the purpose and consequences of their actions.

This study indicates the need for continued vigilance in recognizing the influences that shape adult educators' worldviews and practices to avoid complicity in oppression. For example, adult educators might consider how the federal and state policies construct particular professional and learner identities and how our the roles we perform shape our perceptions and interactions with learners and each other. In being alert to hegemony's various forms, adult educators are better positioned to envision counteractive strategies. In sum, Goffman's analysis provides adult education scholars with a multi-faceted vision of the mechanisms of domination. It can help researchers and practitioners to understand how micro-level interactions and choices about identity may perpetuate or challenge hegemony.

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