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Schlüsselwörter	Subjectivity - Subjectivation - Agency - Narrative - Positioning - Narrative practices

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Positioning the Subject Agency Between Master and Counter

Michael Bamberg

Abstract

Entering debates around subjectivity and subjectivation the subject is argued to face two opposing agency-directions: (i) experiencing effects and forces as undergoer, and (ii) experiencing oneself as agent in world construction. In storytelling activities, I suggest to investigate positioning at three levels: (a) between speaker and interlocutor, (b) as character and content construction, (c) vis-à-vis dominant discourses—reflecting an empirical sense of self. Finally, positioning analysis targets three areas of *sense-of-self* navigation: (i) sameness and change across time; (ii) difference and sameness vis-à-vis others; and (iii) agency in a world-to-person versus a self-to-world direction of fit.

Keywords

Subjectivity · Subjectivation · Agency · Narrative · Positioning · Narrative practices

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1 Introduction

Entering debates around subjectivity and subjectivation through the lens of psychology requires stepping out of conventional, mainstream psychology that starts from a Western individual's interiority as the center where the threads of defining the subject theoretically feed into its empirical investigation. Subjectivity and its subject, from a critical psychological perspective, I think it is fair to say, are relatively new topics, originating with the 1984 publication of *Changing the subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity* (Henriques et al. 1984) and the subsequent foundation of the journal Subjectivity (see Blackman et al. 2008)—with the authors' explicit aim to "reprioritize subjectivity as a primary category of social, cultural, psychological, historical, and political analysis" (ibid.: 1). It also lies within this newly emerging movement (within psychology) to decenter the autonomous human subject, that questions of critique and change could become re-defined and tackled in empirically innovative ways (cf. Venn 2002, 2020).

In this contribution, I will make the argument that within psychology, particularly in this newly emerging, non-mainstream and critical tradition, the subject is theorized as interlinking what I call two opposed directions of fit between self and world: On one hand, subjects refer to and make sense of their subjecthood as 'being subjected,' i. e., being the undergoer and experiencer of effects and forces impinging on them and out of their control. On the other, subjects experience themselves as agents in their construction of world, which effectively and ultimately includes their own self-construction. The former depicts the relation between person and world as a world-to-person direction of fit, while the latter portrays it as a person-to-world direction of fit. It will be argued that the tension between these two opposing directions of meaning construction account for one of the cornerstones for positioning theory and its empirical counterpart, positioning analysis, which both to be laid out in more detail in the next parts of this chapter. As indicated with the title of this contribution, theorizing the subject and subjectivity and making use of positioning theory (in the form of rigorous empirical analyses) are intimate friends—who go hand-in-hand in their call for what we present in the form of positioning analysis.

I shall start out with a brief survey of terms that all seem to circumscribe aspects of what is taken to be central to people making sense of themselves, i. e., their sense of who they are as a person. Of the wide range of terms circulating in everyday English as proxies for 'person' and 'personhood' (self, identity, subject, character, persona, individual, psyche and mind—to name a few) I will rely on previous reasoning (summarized in Bamberg und Dege, 2021) that all

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of them gravitate around three basic contradictions that are sought to be sorted out and 'navigated,' which we characterized as "dilemmatic spaces" or "arenas" (cf. Bamberg 2011a, 2020a). These three contradictions consist of, and they will be detailed below under the header of 'positioning,' (i) that we are considering ourselves as same and different vis-à-vis others; (ii) that we are the same in what we consider our past and present here-and-now, but also, and simultaneously, that we have changed; and (iii) that we are the product of world (our parents, communities, biological and material conditions that shaped us), but that we also (and simultaneously) impact and form world and make it ours (constituting the above two 'directions of agency-fit'). While the differentiation and integration between self and other typically is dealt with in branches of social psychology (eg. ingroup versus outgroup bias and prejudice), developmental psychology has tackled how people maneuver the space between constancy and change (as in, for instance, biographical memory, life-stories, and autoethnography). When it comes to the third dilemmatic arena, the exploration of agency as originating-from-person versus originating-from-world, I believe it is fair to argue that psychology in its traditional disciplinary boundaries of individual psychology is trapped in theorizing the person's interiority as the essential center from where identity and the meaning-of-life seem to emanate, with its counterpart in the form of sociological challenges theorizing and empirically interrogating 'the subject' as being constituted by environmental and especially social (organizational, institutional, cultural, and socio-historical) forces. And although recent shifts from cognitive to cultural psychologies may be interpreted as openings to overcome the interiority-exteriority dichotomy, I also believe it is fair to say that these occasions more routinely turned into continuations of individual psychologies, holding onto the person's interiority as the essential center from where meaning emanates, with culture and context as (impinging) variables. Positioning theory and positioning analysis, locating the empirical subject as constituting itself, while simultaneously being constituted, will be presented as an alternative to this trap of an either-or, i. e., 'having' an interiority, that is to be investigated as 'expressing itself,' versus mechanistically put together—without agency and at the mercy of external effects and forces.

2 Subjects and Their Agency

In a recent attempt of sorting through some of the differences and congruities between 'self' and 'identity', the way these terms are currently made sense of in our everyday use in common English, we realized that other terms, such as

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'individual' (*individuality*), 'subject' (*subjectivity*), character and personality, and even consciousness, might equally have to be included to develop a deeper and more complete understanding of their contemporaneous currency in everyday discourse.[1] In a nutshell, and grossly simplifying, we (Bamberg und Dege, 2021) argued that all three, 'self,' 'individuality,' and 'subject/subjectivity,' serve, though in different ways, to set the stage for our everyday understanding of 'identity:' *Self* as providing the propensity to self-reflect and account for itself—and thereby as positioning itself as potentially different (versus similar or same) in relation to others. As a result, a self is empowered *(empowers itself?)* to self-augment—and becomes prepared to begin to work toward temporal continuity—with an aptitude for coherence and unity, striving for identity across the life-span (cf. Ricoeur 1992). *Individuality,* in contrast, focalizes predominantly on the differentiation between self and other, and as such paves the way for the assumption of individual uniqueness, and the latently corresponding reference to 'subjective experience.'

In our attempt to settle for a balanced account for how subject and subjectivity (and its relatives *subjecthood* and *subjective*—as in *subjective* experience) configure in everyday English, we faced complications that stem from a range of diverse and partly antithetical meanings. First, and relying on dictionary entries, the term *subject* in its most common usage can best be related as coinciding and overlapping with the use of the English nouns *topic/topicality* or some kind of *thematic centrality.* The following may serve as examples for this usage:

- Let's change the subject of the conversation
- Math was my favorite subject in school
- Van Gough often used landscapes and flowers as subject
- Today's subject is on narrative and its role in strategic branding

Whether this type of usage was the original one, only subsequently applied to particular events and persons is contentious, though there seem to be added (or just expanded) components of being or becoming subjected, as in:

[1] Approaching theoretical terms from the vantage point of how they surface and function in pre-theoretical, everyday discourse opens up insights into their often unclear and debatable origins and versatile connotations. In addition, this perspective is openly centering on particular language-games in use, thereby attempting to avoid global, pan-cultural (philosophical) assumptions about the history of self, identity and related psychological concepts (cf. Bamberg und Dege, 2021).

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- All of them were British subjects
- He became a subject of an investigation
- They were (served as) subjects in clinical trials
- Prices may be subject to change
- Classes today are subject to cancellation

Note that both connotations (thematic centrality and being-subjected-to-something) share an essential passive (non-agentive) component, seemingly working from a world-to-person direction of fit as vantage point for making sense of subject.

In stark contrast, the agency direction of fit from world-to-person is reversed when we turn to how the term *subject* is used to designate the syntactic category 'subject' in the business of linguistic analysis. In English, an SVO (subject-verb-object) language, the noun (or noun-phrase) that precedes the verb is the subject of the clause, and the noun-phrase that follows the verb the object. Although this categorization is designed to apply strictly to word-order (as syntactic arrangements) for English, it has taken on widespread generalized connoting semantic overtones in the form that the subject in English (as well as other languages that place their subjects in sentence-initial position[2]) typically connotes an agent (doer), and the object marks the entity to which the action has been conferred. In short, subjects, due to their English clause-initial position, are generalized to typically transfer aspects of the *subject*'s action onto an experiencer or undergoing entity. And while this generalization may be a feasible overgeneralization by native language speakers of an SVO or SOV-type of language, it does in no way rely on universally established principles. It should be noted that this assumption of '*the subject*' as agentive, as originally grounded in everyday English perception, and its agency direction of fit from person-to-world, has taken off from its origins and become widely accepted in everyday English, though thus far little reflected in current dictionary entries.

Yet a third, and only partly overlapping meaning of the terms subject and subjectivity unfolds in their contrast to object and objectivity. Here, subjectivity is calling up personal, individualized and experiential ways of giving meaning to experience, especially to personal affective experience, in contrast to depersonalized, objective, and 'true' ways of making sense of self, the world, and the relationship between them. As part of the subjectivity-objectivity contrast,

[2] …such as German, which follows a SOV-typology.

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subjectivity and 'the subject' galvanize aspects that differentiate the person not only as different from others, but—in alignment with a focus on the individual and individuality, heighten the subject's potential uniqueness—the utmost differentiation within the self-other same/different-dimension.

These three connotations of subjectivity—(i) viewing the subject as the recipient and undergoing end of the world-to-person direction of fit, (ii) turning the direction of fit around and providing the subject with agency to act upon the world, and (iii) giving the subject a center for personal experience and demarcating it off as different from others in its potential for uniqueness—do not easily match up with each other and may lead to ambiguity and confusion. For the purpose here, it may suffice to be cognizant that the latter two heavily rely on the concept of a person's interiority: recognizing one's capacity for agency and uniqueness seems to imply choices that go along with appropriations of freedom, rights, ownership, duties and liabilities (cf. Harré und Moghaddam 2015). In contrast, the meaning complex of subjects as theme-centered entities with a direction of fit from world-to-person that we discussed briefly above, does not require the assumptions of an interiority and psychological center; the agency direction of fit goes from world-to-person.

Thus, what our discussion of subject and subjectivity thus far could 'reveal', is its potential contribution to the overall spectrum identity/self/individuality, as being the least psychologized—in terms of an interior center from where the others are assumed to be organized. At the same time, subject and subjectivity conserve the potentially fruitful contradiction between the two directions of fit—being constituted within this tension—whereas identity, individuality, and self traditionally are made sense of as products of a person's interiority.

3 Positioning, Interaction (Discourse) + Narrative Practices

To start with, the notion of positioning originally had not been designed for the analysis of narrating as an interactive activity. Rather, it aimed to strategically employ the notion of plots and story lines as guiding templates for human sense-making. Building on Foucault's notion of "subject positions" (Foucault 1969), Hollway (1984) argued that "discourses make available positions for subjects to take up;" and, applying it to the category of gender, "women and men are placed in relation to each other through the meanings which a particular discourse makes available." Davies und Harré (1990) built on these connections between discourses and positioning and defined positioning as a discursive practice "whereby

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selves are located in conversations as observably and intersubjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines" (ibid.: 48). Thus, in conversations, due to the intrinsic interactional forces of conversing, people position themselves in relation to one another in ways that traditionally were defined as roles. And consequently, in doing so, people are said to "produce" one another (and themselves) situationally as "social beings". This in mind, positioning explicitly addresses language and language practices under the header of how people relationally attend to one another in interactional settings, whereas stories and storytelling originally being confined to address what stories are referentially "about", i.e., the sequential order of events and their evaluations (cf. Labov & Waletsky 1997). In a somewhat contrastive but complementary move, we (Bamberg 1997, 2020b; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008; Georgakopoulou 2007) suggested to apply the notion of positioning more productively to the analysis of storytelling by linking and merging the emphasis on interaction with the more traditional approach to themes and content and proposed the process of positioning to take place at three different levels as three arenas of *"positioning vis-à-vis."*

First, in our daily practices, speakers mark themselves off as different, similar, or same with respect to others. Integrating and differentiating a sense of who they are vis-à-vis others takes place in moment-by-moment navigations; and stories about self and others are good candidates to practice this from early on. Navigations of a sense of self and identity contribute strongly to a sense of communal belonging on one hand, and of individuality and even uniqueness on the other. A second arena of constructing a sense of who we are relates to the navigation of agency, the way we touched on above. And although it seems as if agency exists as an a priori in the form of a human capacity, i. e., as if selves or organizations seem to be born with "*having*" an identity or sense of self, we suggested to better theorize agency as the space in which we navigate the two opposing directions of fit: the one going from world-to-person, the other from person-to-world, the way we discussed above. While it is possible to view oneself as a passive recipient of external forces (typically natural/biological or social—such as climate change or tsunamis on one hand, and parents, teachers, culture or nationality on the other), it also is possible to view the world as a product of the self. In this case selves or institutions position themselves as forces that impact and agentively change and even produce world. The navigation between agency and passivity becomes particularly relevant in presentations of selves as involved and responsible—as for claims to success and aggrandizement—versus denials of culpability in mishaps or wrongdoings. Again, speakers sharing stories about (past or future) actions practice navigations of this sort. Third, when relating past (or future) to present, speakers can either highlight the constancy

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of characters, i. e., declare them to be the same they used to be; or they can present a sense of who they are as having undergone some gradual (continuous) or radical (discontinuous) change—resulting in a different, new persona or entity. The space for how to navigate the connection of past (or future) selves with a sense of who they are for the here-and-now, is often seen as coupled to acquiring a sense of worth, or as having lost it and becoming useless (Bamberg 2011a). While the navigation between sameness and difference and between the two directions of fit (of person and world) do not require diachronic temporality as an essential prerequisite, navigations of constancy and change do require the correlation of two events in time—which narrative inquirers have taken to be a minimal definition for story (cf. Labov & Waletzky 1997). Thus, it appears that navigations of constancy and change make a good argument for a privileging of storytelling as an opportune space for positioning practices.

In addition to positioning practices within these three navigation-arenas, positioning theory draws heavily on how speakers bring off and position themselves vis-à-vis so-called master and dominant narratives—thereby engaging in practices that may have enduring repercussions. In a general sense, the use of the term master narrative, also called dominant or capital-D discourses, goes back to the assumption of a necessity for a horizon or background against which human sense-making becomes possible. While this horizon or background has been theorized as based on a *collective consciousness* (and a 'social mind' or 'intersubjectivity'), Searle (1994, 2010) started to use the term *background* more categorially to refer to something that is '*deeper*' and more general, such as the human ability to walk (upright), a front (from where we visualize the world) and a back, and being equipped with arms (left and right) and using our hands. Searle juxtaposes this *deep* background with a collective/cultural background providing for what is assumed to be implicit to cultural routines and practices, allowing for the subtleties of particular kinds of language games. We have tried to appropriate the term master narrative for a linkage to the navigation of the above discussed directions of fit—for individual as well as institutional sense-making strategies (Bamberg 2005: 287), and thereby alluding to an affinity to what had been called *story lines* or *narrative threads* with an intrinsic temporality. In addition, we added to Searle's two backgrounds a third set of assumptions that springs from interlocutors' bodily engagement in local, situated contexts through which meaning microgenetically is brought into existence. Relevant for this discussion is that interlocutors, but particularly storytellers in narrative practices, are assumed to be situated in vis-à-vis positions vis-à-vis preexisting assumptions—providing arenas for navigating sameness/difference, the two directions of fit, and in case of available storylines, the temporal contours of constancy and change.

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Now, we would like to suggest that the span from deep-seated assumptions that are profoundly woven into our language habits, to the communal/cultural assumptions that are more easily reflective and changeable, down to the situated bodily engagement between interlocutors, forms a continuum. For instance, critical considerations of language habits that reflect gender or racial biases may lead to changes in language practices with more ease than assumptions that are much harder to reflect and reconsider—such as our understanding of spatial dimensions of our human up-right posture and forward-movement; or our understanding of temporal dimensions as based on our understanding of spatial relations. It is against this backdrop that we can more firmly argue that speakers, and particularly storytellers, by necessity are forced to navigate continuously their vis-à-vis positions in terms of what of 'the background' continues to 'go-without-saying,' and what stands out as special and unique to the circumstances of the here-and-now of the interaction. And although this definitely holds for all interactive positioning, in storytelling activities this necessity of taking position prompts speakers/narrators to take position and navigate the three positioning arenas (agency/passivity, sameness/difference, constancy/change), and do this at three levels: (a) at the level of interaction between speaker and interlocutor, (b) at the level of character construction within the story-realm, and (c) at the level of positioning vis-à-vis background assumptions and dominant discourses—which we argued to simultaneously reflect practices that are taken to be highly relevant for the construction of an empirical sense of self. Thus, engagement in narrative practices requires interlocutors to engage in a continuous navigation between having faith and aligning with, and maintaining existing background assumptions on one hand, and testing or re-scripting—up to the possibility of challenging and openly countering—them on the other. Both being complicit and countering are at work in interactive narrative practices simultaneously and in concert.

Having clarified that storytellers inevitably position their alignments and divergence vis-à-vis assumptions that can be taken to filter into their narrative (and non-narrative) local and situated practices, and as we will argue in the next session that these positions are analytically accessible, we finally can turn and take issue with a particular interpretation and application of the term master narrative. Changing the focus from master narratives as enabling individual local interactive and storytelling practices to their constraining and limiting powers, especially when said to be experienced as hegemonic and subjugating, i. e., as ruling out potential other (counter)discourses, gives the term counter a special and more concerted force. It is this particular contrast that I originally dwelled on when arguing "that countering dominant and hegemonic narratives is the flip-side of being complicit" (Bamberg 2004b: 351). However, in the same breath, I tried

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to put forth that neither master nor counter-narratives exist uniform, monolithic or pure, but rather that both are plagued by inconsistencies and contradictions, and both also require to be interrogated by the same methodical means as when the lens is not on the master-counter dichotomy. And it is in this context that the analysis of counter-narratives gains its attraction for opening potentially diverging gates into the analysis of power relationships and social change. Notwithstanding this incredible potential, our main bid for analyzing narratives as narrative practices, and thus as processes, and not solely as the product of narrative practices, remains central to our approach.

Returning to the role of counter-narratives, we now are better positioned to specify counter-narratives as uniquely distinguished by the aim to transform background assumptions which typically align with master narratives. In other words, master and counter-narratives are identifiable through the foundational illocutionary criterion of distinction. Which narratives "master" and which "counter" remains to be determined situationally and contextually, relative to the organization of social and political power in a given context. However, a variety of subcategories of narrative beyond master and counter can be delineated and may prove useful for analytic work with both master and counter-narratives. Unlike master and counter-narratives, parallel, alternative, and intersecting narratives are not identified through illocutionary intent and social context, but rather on the sole basis of content. Elsewhere, we have illustrated the differences between and utility of these constructs, with a discussion of the alternative narratives of falling-in-love versus arranged marriages (cf. Bamberg und Wipff 2021).

4 Positioning analysis

Due to space limitations, it is not possible to demonstrate in a characteristic exemplar fashion how positioning theory is put to work. Instead, I will detail the principles of positioning analysis, followed by pointing the reader to illustrations of the analytic procedures available in previous publications and work presented online.

In a nutshell, positioning, as an analytic framework, combines textual-thematic analysis with its traditional focus on what seemingly was captured in interview-transcripts (positioning level I), with the analytic attempts to capture and describe what is happening in the local and relational context of the interaction (positioning level II). Thereafter, both in concert are taken to move the analysis toward our particular interest at positioning level III, i. e., the navigation between master and counter background assumptions—thereby constituting an individual

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sense of one's subjecthood. It should be noted and underscored that this kind of analysis does not rely on any recourse to the meaning-construction process as springing off from a psychological interiority (a *soul* or *mind* or *brain*). While we, as positioning analysts, in alignment with certain ethnomethodological principles, strongly oppose traditional psychological theorizing that starts from internal constructs and considers them to function as engines for action and behavior, we nevertheless posit that the interactive narrative practices in which people engage each other sediment in repetitive and routinised communal and cultural practices that may have repercussions in future practices.

In the first analytic step, the question is addressed how characters are constructed in position to one another within the specific sequence represented at the textual level, irrespective whether the text stems from life-stories, interviews, newspaper-clips, or naturalistic, everyday interactions between people. More concretely, positioning level I analysis aims at the linguistic and paralinguistic means (i. e., expressive, non-verbal behavior) that do the job of navigating the characters created in the text through the three identity spaces discussed in the previous section: sameness/difference, agency/passivity and continuity/change. Special emphasis here is attributed to the navigation of the agency, i. e., how speakers design their textual characters in terms of the direction of fit between world and person. While the traditional interest in psychology typically is in speakers' self-revelations, especially in the form of analytic self-disclosure, it should be noted here that the analysis of character-positioning other than the self is equally (often more) revealing than talk about oneself. In addition, the navigation of sameness/difference and constancy/change will be made relevant for how characters are presented as accountable and responsible personae, i. e., as traversing power relationships and social (and individual) change.

At a second level, the analysis will turn to how speakers position themselves vis-à- vis their interlocutors. At this level, linguistic, paralinguistic and bodily means (facial, gesture, proximity) are scrutinized for their contributions to the discourse mode that may be "under construction". Does the speaker, for instance, attempt to instruct their listener in terms of what to do in the face of adverse conditions, or engage in apologies for actions and attribute blame to others (or both)? This level of analysis typically aims to develop an understanding of why a particular turn was taken at this point in the conversation. This is where the reading of linguistic and non-linguistic markers at positioning level I is reinterpreted in terms of what John Gumperz (1982) termed "contextualization cues"—how linguistic and non-linguistic, affective signals become interpretive cues for where co-conversationalists are in conducting their relational affective business, and where they are headed. On one hand, it appears as if at positioning

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level II we as analysts/interpreters *are leaving* the seemingly safe grounds of what actually has been said (and arguably can be captured in transcriptions) and enter the layer of multimodal performance features of discourse performance (with all its slopes and bumps that on the surface invite a multitude of interpretations). However, what we gain is that the positioning approach takes this level of the interactive co-construction of talk serious as foundational and constitutive for what is *textualized* at level I, and also what becomes the constitution of a sense of the subject at level III (below). To clarify, the local and situated relational business at hand between co-conversationalists is the foundation from where themes and content are making it to the surface for level I analysis. And, in the same vein, this also holds for the construction of a sense of subjectivity positioned at level III—to which we will turn next.

Having opened up for empirical investigation how speakers position characters vis-à-vis one another (level I) and position themselves *vis-à-vis* their audience (level II), the final step attempts to address an arguably trickier problem, namely whether and how speakers may position a sense of their subjectivity *vis-à-vis themselves.* More succinctly, this question attempts to explore whether there is anything in positioning practices that we as analysts can interrogate in the form of claims or stances (see our discussion of claims-making analysis and stance taking below) that goes above and beyond the local conversational situation. In other words, at level III, positioning analysis interrogates whether and how the linguistic devices and bodily maneuvers employed in narrative practices actually point to more than the content of what the narrative is "about" (level I), and directives *vis-à-vis* the interlocutor in their interactional business (level II). For the dealing of level III positioning, it is argued that in constructing content *and* audience, speakers observably appeal to dominant discourses (master narratives), align with or undercut them, and construct local answers to the question: "Who am I?" (Bamberg 2011a). To be clear, however, attempted answers to this question are not generalizable across contexts, as personality theory or other psychological trait theories would like to; rather, they are *projects of limited range.* Nevertheless, we as analysts assume that these repeated and continuously refined navigation practices rub off, produce and transmit a sense of how to engage effectively and productively in sense-making procedures that endure and may turn into habits—and this also to the extent of a sense of subject and subjectivity that is perpetual (and analyzable) at positioning level III.

There is a good number of instances that demonstrate how this type of analysis is carried out. The first worth mention involves a very superficial (but short and engaging) demonstration (available on YouTube) of how consumers are positioned in TV-ads in the midst (May 2020) of the first peak of COVID-19 in

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the US (Bamberg 2020a). A more sophisticated micro-analysis of Edison Chen's (an Asian singer, rapper and movie producer) verbal and visual positioning after a photo-scandal in 2008 is available in Bamberg (2020b)—again with visual data online. Other material used to perform detailed positioning analyses consists of videotaped police interrogations (Bamberg 2011b), closing arguments in the courtroom (Bamberg & Wipff 2020), 10-year-old males sharing stories around a campfire (Bamberg 2004a), or the politician John Edwards in a televised interview (Bamberg 2010). What becomes apparent is that positioning analysis over the last two decades has increasingly integrated and sophisticated the analysis of visual cueing in interaction data. Research reports that came out of a longitudinal project from the mid-nineties probably demonstrate best how positioning analysis with visual data also feeds deeper reflections of participants' positioning of their subjectivities as contradictory and multi-layered—opening our susceptibility to the complexities for interventive and educational strategies. Watching for instance ten-year-olds' interactions (as published in Bamberg 2012; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008), my students' first reactions range between legitimizations and critique, such as "boys-will-be-boys" versus "toxic masculinity"—though largely insensitive to the complexities of what actually is going on underneath the surface of these interactions. However, after a close inspection of the participants' navigations between dominant and counter backgrounds and the ways their positions are displayed in micro-genetic detail, especially when it comes to their role as accountable subjects, a fuller understanding can emerge for the complexity and struggle for recognition in the formation processes of gendered subjectivities. As such, these documentations of positioning analysis are well suited to uncovering the contextually sensitive navigation of agency, resistance, performance but also ambivalence, dilemmas and contradictions for them as subjects. Employing positioning analysis facilitates a deeper inquiry into the delicate positioning work between master and counter positioning as well as how speakers position themselves as subjects—and simultaneously are being subjected—between the two directions of agency-fit.

5 Concluding remarks

5.1 Comparing theories + their potential for empirical inquiry

As may have become apparent, positioning theory attempts to avoid the psychological trap of having to invent interview techniques that arguably are equipped

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to penetrate individuals' interiorities, make them reflectively introspect, and thereupon engage in self-disclosure that then is assumed to unveil an authentic self. Instead, positioning theory avoids the exterior/interior distinction in its entirety, and approaches the subject as positioned and simultaneously positioning themselves—by way of navigating the two directions of agency-fit on one hand and in this process maneuvering between master- and counter-positions vis-à-vis ideological and hegemonic positions on the other. As such, the subject is approached as agentively engaged in the creation of ideological positions, though with the potential to critique and undermine these positions as well. Positioning analysis then is the methodology to (ethnographically) follow participants in their construal processes of such positions as process in which their subjectivities come to existence and are performed. These processes are described in terms of practices, i. e., as bodily (and as such also as verbally) performed and over time refined and changed enactments. Thus, what is being analyzed as the unit of analysis is not the person, and as such also not "the subject." Rather the unit of analysis has shifted to the context—the time and place in which positioning is performed.

As a way of concluding, it should be noted that there is a range of competing theories and methodologies with their corresponding methods that compare and contrast with positioning in illuminating ways. To end our discussion, I briefly want to touch on two such competing approaches, "claims making," and "stance taking." Positioning, in contrast to 'claims making,' 'stance' or 'perspective,' refers to an act or activity that, if applied to subjectivity, can be performed self-reflective and transitive—as in speakers can position themselves as they can position others. In addition, position also can characterize a state or result of agentive positioning activities of self or others—as in speakers or others being positioned as lawyers, females, young, Latinx, and the like. Claims making, a sociological concept for theorizing and analyzing social problems developed by Spector und Kitsuse (1977), and expanded by Ibarra und Kitsuse (2003; Koopmans & Statham 1999) to include political analyses of movements and protest, captures the agentive component of positioning, but remains disinterested in an analysis of the person who is making claims. Stance taking (Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007) and 'perspectivation' (Graumann und Kallmeyer 2002)—two related theoretical frameworks grounded in linguistic theorizing and applied to discourse analytic investigations—similarly are well situated to capture the agentive engagement of speakers in their choice of linguistic markers, but also seem to be relatively uninterested including into their analytic endeavors the stance or positionality as attributed to speaking subjects in terms of a world-to-person direction of fit. Interestingly, representatives of both claims making and

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stance taking allude to the notion of position and positioning, without exploring them for their full potential.[3] Thus, and to sum up, positioning as theory and as analytic procedure is optimally "positioned" to capture the dynamic between a person-to-world direction of fit and being positioned as a result of a world-to-person direction of fit when discussing the relation between master and counter narratives and the role of background assumptions that ultimately enable communication and understanding (intersubjectivity) as well as enable critique and change.

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[3] Graumann and Kallmeier argue: **"With 'perspective' and 'viewpoint' we refer to a position [sic] from which a person or a group view something (things, persons or events) and communicate their views" (2002, p. 1); while** Downing und Perucha (2014) explicitly qualify their notion of stancetaking as "intersubjective positioning."

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