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The Interactional Construction of Social Authenticity: “Real” Identities and Intergroup Relations in a Transylvania Internet Forum

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Authenticity has become an increasingly salient topic within various interactional traditions, including conversational and discourse analysis, discursive psychology, interactional sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and symbolic interactionism. However, there has been remarkably little cross-fertilization of ideas and concepts. In this study, we consider the relevance of the interactional sociolinguistic concept of relationality for symbolic interactionist theories of authenticity. We first disambiguate two forms of authenticity that are commonly studied but not clearly differentiated in symbolic interactionist research – self-authenticity, which emphasizes selves, and social authenticity, which emphasizes social identities. We then argue that relationality and its three pairs of interactional tactics – verification and denaturalization, adequation and distinction, and authorization and illegitimation – are particularly useful in conceptualizing social authenticity. We draw on data from an interethnic internet forum to show how members of two ethnic groups, Hungarian and Romanian, employ these relational tactics to authenticate their own ethnicity as the rightful inheritors of a place-based Transylvanian identity, and to limit the other ethnicity’s similar identity work. We then clarify the significance of social authenticity for the interactional study of category-based identities by widening our discussion to other contestations over social identities in everyday life.

Authenticity, which has a long tradition in philosophy (Trilling 1971; Weigert 1988), has in the past few decades received serious empirical focus in the social sciences.

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Yet scholars across social science disciplines have tended to use the concept in non-complementary or incompatible ways, depending on how they theorize authenticity's source. Rational approaches, which prevail in psychology, assume an inherent internal source of authenticity and thus often operationalize authenticity in terms of trait and psychoanalytic theories, where authenticity is measured by the degree to which an individual's self-concept remains consistent (English and Chen 2011), or through the enactment of a "true self" (Scharf and Maysel 2010) through which a person maintains "full power over his or her own domain" (Kernis and Goldman 2006:293). Interpretive approaches, however, do not assume authenticity to be a natural quality of individuals, and therefore they typically frame authenticity not as something that is ontologically fixed, but rather as something that is culturally defined and/or situationally negotiated (Bucholtz 2003; Leppänen et al. 2015; Van Leeuwen 2001; Williams and Copes 2005).

The distinction in approaches is not so simple, however. When comparing to rationalist psychology and its focus on the *intrapersonal*, it is easy to lump a number of interpretivist perspectives together as collectively *interpersonal*. However, a review of the literature reveals multiple ways in which interactionists conceive authenticity (see Vannini and Williams 2009). Symbolic interactionists appear to increasingly lean toward a phenomenological emphasis on *narratives* and/or *experiences* of authenticity, while interactional sociolinguists and conversation analysts have maintained an emphasis on social action by studying the *interactional achievement* of authenticity in naturally occurring talk. Representing the more phenomenological orientation, Vannini and Franzese (2008:1621) focus exclusively on authenticity "as a social-psychological phenomenon in relation to the self and personal identity." Drawing from Turner's (1976) work on "real selves," interactionists in this vein recognize the social basis of the self, but ultimately use language that construes authenticity as an intrapersonal concern. Erickson (1995:124), for example, describes authenticity in terms of "one's relationship to oneself" and as "a **self-referential** concept [that] does not explicitly include any reference to "others." Vannini (2008:231) describes authenticity as "an agent of structural and cultural resistance" set against social expectations, or as something that can be lost, found, or strengthened (see also March 2000; Weigert 1988). Similarly, Smirnova (2016:29) frames authenticity as "a process of self-actualization" and Hutson (2010:217) writes of "authenticity as a motivation..." These examples highlight an inward gaze on personal experiences via narratives that appear to reify both self and authenticity.

Fewer symbolic interactionists have theorized authenticity explicitly in terms of its interactional achievement in talk. In studies of subcultures, Williams (2006; Williams and Copes (2005) investigated how straightedge youths negotiated their own and others' authenticity as subcultural adherents through exchanges on an internet bulletin board, while Force (2009) analyzed data from multiple dyadic exchanges among punks as they worked to achieve an authentic situational or categorical identity (see also Williams 2013). Interactionists working in other disciplines have put more effort into studying the achievement of authentic identities. In her review of authenticity in

sociolinguistics, Bucholtz (2003:408) argued that earlier assumptions (e.g., the acceptance of the idea of “authentic speech communities”) were being replaced with examinations of “authentication practices” as key intersubjective tactics in the production of identity. Meanwhile, conversation analysts have long theorized authenticity discourses as aspects of interpersonal communication rather than as something that is primarily self-referential and experiential (Widdicombe 1998; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995). In these and other studies, the focus is on authenticity as an achievement of social identity instead of as a phenomenological experience of self. This conception, which we call *social authenticity* to differentiate it from the more phenomenologically oriented *self-authenticity*, offers an analytic framework that brackets the assumed intrapersonal ontology of authenticity and facilitates explicit focus on the situational and behavioral elements and processes through which authenticity is or is not achieved. Authenticity thus becomes “an evaluative concept” (Van Leeuwen 2001:392) more concerned with how people use social identities than with how they experience selves.

What can symbolic interactionists learn from work being done by interactionist scholars in other disciplines on social identity and social authenticity? In this study, we use the interactional sociolinguistic concept of relationality (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 2005) to analyze a sample of naturally occurring interactional data on an internet forum. Our primary aim is to illustrate how social authentication is bound up in processes through which members of groups construct coherent social identities for themselves and others. Our analytic focus is on how members of two ethnic groups regularly seek to authenticate their claims to a geographical territory while contesting others’ attempts to authenticate their own claims. While our data relate to ethnicity, the relational processes we discuss are relevant to the authentication of social identities more generally. This takes us toward a larger theoretical goal of delineating authentication as a member of a group or category (social authenticity) from authenticity as an experience unique to oneself (self-authenticity).

THE RELATIONALITY OF SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION

Relationality, that is, the notion that “identities always acquire social meaning in relation to other available identity positions” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005:598), provides a useful analytic tool for linking identity processes in everyday talk to authentication. Research has considered the relationality of identity by focusing on how individuals who self-identify as members of social categories will see themselves as relatively similar to others in the same category, while seeing themselves as relatively different from members of other categories. While the sameness versus difference axis of relationality is a key to understanding the boundaries between groups, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) have argued that focusing on similarity and difference oversimplifies and even ignores some of the intricate interactional processes that make up identities. They complexify the relational aspects of identification by arguing that similarity and difference be reframed as adequation and distinction in order to highlight how

speakers selectively emphasize or downplay both similarities and differences in support of their efforts to position themselves and others. In addition, Bucholtz and Hall add two further sets of tactics that people selectively use in interaction to identify themselves and others as particular types of people: verification¹/denaturalization and authorization/illegitimation. We argue that all three sets of tactics work together to authenticate people as members of social groups or categories.

Studying acts of verification can be particularly useful in examining how members of groups establish the “realness” of their identities, often in relation to tradition, shared history, and place. Denaturalization however highlights “the ways in which identity is crafted, fragmented, problematic or false” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005:602). It is the interactional process through which speakers draw attention to or subvert the claimed “realness” of identities, often through parody or ridicule. People rarely denaturalize their own identity claims, but regularly denaturalize the claims of others (e.g., Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1990). Alongside adequation/distinction and verification/denaturalization is Bucholtz and Hall’s third pair of relational tactics, authorization and illegitimation. Authorization refers to the process of affirming or imposing identities through ideological structures, while illegitimation has to do with the dismissal or marginalization of identities through the same structures (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). These concepts highlight on the one hand how authorities may discursively position identities as legitimate or not (Hochstetler, Copes, and Williams 2010), and on the other hand how people invoke ideological structures in everyday talk in order to authorize or sanction identifications of self and other (Williams and Ho 2016).

INTERACTIONAL AND SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES OF ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION

Similar to studies on authenticity, research on ethnic identities has increasingly framed interpersonal interaction as a key process through which ethnicities become “real.” Social-psychological and discursive studies have investigated talk about ethnic selves and others (Byrne 2008; van Dijk 1984; Verkuyten 2003) and focused on how ethnic identities are made contextually relevant in interaction (Lo 1999; Pietikainen and Dufva 2006; Williams 2008). Ethnomethodological and conversation analytic studies have treated ethnic identity as a resource for the legitimation or accomplishment of social actions (Grancea 2010; Hansen 2005; Tileagă 2006), while symbolic interactionists and social psychologists have focused on the links between interaction and larger cultural meaning structures (Evergeti 2011; Field 1994). Underlying all these studies is a theoretical view of ethnicity and identity as nonessential, interactionally emergent phenomena that are constructed through processes.

When scholars study ethnic identification, they often do so with either an implicit or explicit focus on social categorizations. The process of seeing oneself as similar to other in-group members and different from outsiders was developed in social

identity theory (Tajfel 1978), where members of ethnic groups were seen to internalize commonsensical characterizations of ethnic identities that separated their ethnicity from others. Varjonen, Arnold, and Jasinskaja-Lahti (2013) explored the complex dynamics of identification among ethnic Finns who emigrated from Russia to Finland in the late 2000s. Analyzing focus group data among ethnically homogeneous participants, the authors identified the repertoire of “intergroup relations” as a prevalent interpretive frame through which participants construct the authenticity of Finnish identification. Italian-born Australians similarly construct their “Italian-ness” through relational comparisons with various ethno-national out-groups (Sala, Dandy, and Rapley 2010), while on the island of Thrace “trustworthy” ethnic Greeks distinguish themselves discursively from “shifty” and ethnically dissimilar Muslims living on the island (Evergeti 2011). One of the ways in which people essentialize ethnic identity is through a reliance on ethnic genealogies and the belief in common origin and descent (Roosens 1994), which often entails the metaphor of kinship. As Horowitz (2000:57) notes,

To view ethnicity as a form of greatly extended kinship is to recognize, as ethnic groups do, the role of putative descent. There are fictive elements here, but the idea, if not always the fact, of common ancestry makes it possible for ethnic groups to think in terms of family resemblances — traits held in common, on a supposedly genetic basis, or cultural features acquired in early childhood — and to bring into play for a much wider circle those concepts of mutual obligation and antipathy to outsiders

Ethnic affiliation can generate powerful feelings of belonging among individuals. At the same time, it provides group members with a sense of historical continuity (Verkuyten 2005), collective memory, and elements of a common culture that facilitate the sense of a coherent social identity, despite its “fictive elements.”

Studies on ethnic groups tend to focus either on social comparisons between in-groups and out-groups, or on the authentication of ethnicity within a particular group. What has not been adequately addressed is how social authenticity is achieved through social comparisons. Furthermore, social comparison research relies on notions of similarity and difference which, as interactional sociolinguistics have noted, overlook other nuanced interactional practices involved in social authentication. In the remainder of this article, we utilize Bucholtz and Hall’s (2004, 2005) three sets of relational concepts — adequation/distinction, verification/denaturalization, and authorization/illegitimation — to highlight processes of ethnic authentication as they exist in naturally occurring interactions. Analytically, we anchor our discussion in the relationality of identity work, that is, how individuals position themselves and others in terms of social categories. Interestingly, our work also deals with two ethnic groups that compete to authenticate the same place-based identity, while denying the other’s access to it. While the data below comprise interactions about ethnicity, place, and identity, we want to reemphasize that our focus is not on ethnicity per se, but rather on how an interactional sociolinguistic

view of relationality may improve a symbolic interactionist conceptualization of social authenticity.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Like interactional sociolinguists and conversational analysts, who have focused on moments of authenticity in discourse (Lacoste, Leimgruber, and Breyer 2014; Widdicombe 1998), we wanted to study the practical accomplishment of authentication and therefore sought out naturally occurring interactions through which the authenticity of social identity was negotiated, rather than rely on interview data within which people report on their experiences. Ethnographers typically promote a “wait and listen” approach to learn when and how social identities are articulated in everyday interactions (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008:556), yet we found such data readily available in an ethnically charged online internet forum created by a self-identifying Romanian nationalist with the expressed purpose of providing a space for dialogue on Transylvania.

Transylvania has been populated by ethnic Germans, Hungarians, Romanians, Roma (Gypsies), and other smaller ethnic groups for many centuries. Controlled primarily by the Kingdom of Hungary from the eleventh century, the territory was ceded to Romania in the Treaty of Trianon following World War I, leading to the emergence of Hungarian irredentist movements in Transylvania and the geographically reduced Hungarian republic. The period 1920s to 1930s was marked by the Romanization of the region, including the (re)establishment of Romanian place names, the expungence of the Hungarian language from public institutions, and the (re)distribution of land to Romanian peasants. During World War II, Germany and Italy returned Transylvania to Hungary, but Russian intervention in 1945 restored Romania’s control. With the collapse of Soviet Union in 1989, Hungarians renewed calls for reunification of the region with Hungary and the 1990s were marked by a resurgence of irredentist and pro-nationalist movements. Ethnic tensions have repeatedly played themselves out in the spheres of politics, education, labor, and leisure, as well as in scholarly and popular literature throughout the region’s history (Brubaker et al. 2006).

As internet access spread across central Europe in the mid- to late 1990s, ideological polemics about the “rightful heirs” of Transylvania emerged online, just as in other ethnically contested regions in Europe (e.g., Linstroth 2002). It was within this milieu that the forum we studied was created. Much of the forum activity was in English, a common trend in transnational internet communications (Warschauer 2002), though Hungarian, Romanian, and German were occasionally used.² The forum was most active between March 2001 and September 2003 and we retrieved all posts ($N = 1091$) from that time period and saved them as text documents, eliminating any html mark-up since the study also included corpus analysis (Williams and Weninger 2012).

As a first step in the analysis, we took a random sample of 10% of the posts ($n = 109$) and searched for identity-laden talk. Recognizing a variety of ways in

which forum users were invoking identity, we then expanded to surrounding posts to capture the interactional context within which such talk was occurring. Since one author is trained as an interactional sociolinguist and the other as a symbolic interactionist, we constantly discussed how scholarship on identity from each discipline could inform an analysis of the data and eventually we decided to narrow our analytic focus to explore the tactics forum participants were using to authenticate place-based ethnic identities. We subsequently engaged in purposive sampling, reading through more than 600 additional posts to further identity appropriate data. In the analysis below, we illustrate how forum participants negotiated ethnic identification through the interrelated tactics of verification/denaturalization, adequation/distinction, and authorization/illegitimation. Our findings and discussion frame the region's history of interethnic strife, rekindled by the political-economic uncertainty of the 1990s and early 2000s within our analytic interest in social authenticity practices.

In interactional studies of social identity, especially those involving naturally occurring talk, speakers are often identifiable by researchers, though their identities are made anonymous to the reader in rather routine ways. Unlike with face-to-face interactions, however, it can be relatively difficult to protect the identities of users in internet-based research, especially given that anyone with internet access can search online for strings of text and may find the original record from which study data derived. Our unit of analysis was forum posts rather than the individual users who posted messages. As such, we made no effort to collect any identifying information about users. We removed usernames and IP address information from the data, but have presented the excerpts unedited, with typographic choices (e.g., capitalization and bolding) and mistakes retained. The website from which the data came was deleted prior to 2010. A few of the posts we present here — such as the long diatribe in post (1) — have been published on other websites, but not necessarily by the original forum users. In fact, it is not possible to verify whether any particular post was original, versus taken from somewhere else and copied there in the first place. As such, we believe the identity of both the internet forum and its users are protected as far as is possible.³

VERIFICATION AND DENATURALIZATION

From the perspective of social authenticity, group identities are not ontologically real; they require verification through interpersonal communication. In everyday life, the verification of identity is constantly sought, whether for something as simple as logging in to a computer to more complex processes such as establishing ethnicity. In intragroup interactions, notions such as purity of bloodline and national heritage function as ideological constructs and are invoked by interlocutors in a bid to verify cultural authenticity (Shenk 2007). Shared beliefs about common descent are a key aspect of intragroup ethnic affiliation generally and historical narratives are a significant means through which the authenticity of ethnicity and nationhood are achieved

(Gellner 1983; Liu et al. 1999; Wicker 1997). In this section, we look at how forum members used historical narratives either to verify or to denaturalize ethnic claims to Transylvania.

Given the historical back-and-forth of political power between Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania, it was not surprising to find members of both groups attempting to assert coherent and essentialist images of their own ethnicity's rights within the Transylvanian context. Here we would like to detail how forum members accomplished the discursive verification of Transylvanian identity as authentically Hungarian or Romanian through repeated constructions of historical and territorial precedence.

Proving who had settled Transylvania first was an important strategy for defining the authenticity of each group's collective Transylvanian identity, and thus legitimating the group's natural rights to the territory (see Eriksen 1993). Both Hungarian and Romanian participants sought to verify their ethnicity's historical precedence in a number of ways. As post (1) exemplifies, we found several instances of lengthy treatises through which participants attempted to rhetorically "prove" the primacy of their ethnic group.

- (1) Transylvania was part and parcel of the Hungarian Kingdom, or an independent Hungarian Principality for over a thousand years. [...] Besides a few scattered ruins of Roman fortifications, destroyed by the retreating Roman legions in 271 AD, no sign of any kind would indicate a trace of an older established culture preceding the arrival of the Hungarians. Not even the legends, folk tales, ballads or folk songs of any one of the cohabiting ethnic groups suggest anything of this kind, except the oldest Hungarian (Székely) legends which date back to the time of Attila and the empire of the Huns.

This excerpt comes from a post that is over 2700 words in length, one of the longest in the forum. Here the commenter, in factual tone, claimed that Hungarians were the first "established culture" in the region, citing lack of archeological or folkloristic evidence to the contrary. The post continued (not part of the excerpt) with a cultural-historical overview that elaborated Hungarian cultural influence in Transylvania as evidence for claims for Transylvania's Hungarian roots. In support, another Hungarian participant constructed a similar argument to verify Transylvania's ethnic character by using etymological proof of Hungarian precedence; namely that the word "Erdély" (the Hungarian term for Transylvania) meant "wooded area" and that the Romanian name for Transylvania, "Ardeal," was simply a transliteration from Hungarian rather than a Romance-language word.

In response, a Romanian forum member argued that Transylvania was a Romanian land by similarly historicizing their argument, taking pains to establish genealogical links among Dacians (occupants of the ancient territory Dacia that covered present-day Romania), Romans (who conquered the territory in the last century BC and first century AD) and present-day Romanians.

(2) What you people don't get is that the Romanian people emerged from the mixture of Romans, (which didn't entirely retreat after Aurelianus 274, only the army did, there were numerous mixt families, don't you find it logical?) and the Dacians. The Romans never in their history exterminated any population; whom to take the tribute from then? So the Romanians, whose language is the closest to ancient Latin, emerged as a Christian people AT THE END OF THE FIFTH CENTURY, after Andrew, you know, a friend of Jesus, came to Dobrogea and bring Christianity with him around year 60 AD.

The link to Dacia suggests a relationship to the land that is more than two millennia old; alongside the link to the Roman language, it worked to verify present-day Romanians' historical continuity. Aiding this process was a reference to Christianity, which serves a slightly different purpose (see next section). In short, members of both groups used history as a key authenticating resource, and there was a clear pattern in which posts communicated the idea that present-day inhabitants of Transylvania were self-evidently rooted to the region through their ethnic group's history there. Romanian's claims were historically far older than those made by Hungarians, who entered the region in the late ninth century AD. As "proof" of their rights to the region, Hungarians instead commented on Hungary's political and cultural control of the region for more than 900 years (post 1), or highlighted the dominance of the Hungarian language in the region.

Posts that emphasized historical precedence did not remain uncontested. As evident at in the beginning of post (2), forum members not only sought to verify their ethnicity's ancestral rights, they simultaneously attempted to denaturalize out-group claims. Whereas verification serves to naturalize identity claims, "denaturalization foregrounds ... pretense ... in identity positioning" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004:498). In post (2) above, "What you people don't get" and "don't you find it logical" are constructions that questioned the cognitive abilities of Hungarian forum members, undermining the veracity of their claims by turning them into problematic participants. The denaturalization of Hungarian forum members' normality — as people who are ignorant, irrational, or illogical (see also post [7b] below) — alongside the verification of an older cultural and linguistic tradition that tied Romanians to the region, worked hand-in-hand to support a Romanian definition of the situation. Overall, we found relatively few instances of denaturalization. However, the following two posts, which comprise a dyadic exchange, show evidence of attempts to refute portrayals of the ethnic other's history as constructed for purposes of nationalism or the building of national identity.

(3a) YOU ARE REALLY IGNORANT!! But it's not your fault. You are not to be blamed. It's your country's education system that is to be blamed. Ever since Ceausescu came into power your people were taught lies. He wanted to give confidence to the Romanian people, which I admit was oppressed during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The problem is that more than 10 years after his

death, your people are still living in his lies. I understand that it's not easy to change the way you think when several generations grew up with the same lies. But you have to do it for your own sake!

- (3b) Before 1928, nobody ever doubted Daco-Romanian continuity!!! Yes, at that time no Hungarian historian could ever picture a Romanian state incorporating Transylvania, therefore there was no need to lie about the daco-romanian origin of the Romanians.

In these posts, participants articulated the influence of history and politics on issues of ethnic identification, therefore momentarily disrupting the notion of ethnicity as an ahistorical property of groups. In posts (1) and (2), we saw how individuals used historical claims to authenticate a genealogy that linked ethnicity to place. In posts (3a) and (3b), however, we see attempts to denaturalize such claims when made by the Other. Post (3a) alluded to how Ceausescu's nation-building efforts shaped the Romanian national narrative through the teaching of history in schools and even suggested that Romanians "liberate" themselves from the effects of their political past. Similarly, post (3b) argued that Hungarians' challenges to Romanians' ethnic origin claims ("the daco-romanian origin") were simply a product of historical circumstances; namely that the need to disrupt the Daco-Roman continuity narrative arose as a political and ideological necessity after Transylvania became part of Romania following WWI. What is analytically significant here is that, while such forum posts pinpointed the craftedness of the other's ethnic genealogy in the region, each represented an inability or unwillingness to see one's own efforts at crafting ethnic narratives with similar intent. Posts (3a) and (3b), while highlighting the influence of ideology on history, failed to account for the various political influences upon which their own historical and ethnic narratives were predicated.

Individuals often seek to authenticate themselves through narratives that establish "personal legitimacy" (Fine 2003:155) while creating boundaries between themselves and others. Scaling this upward, we see how the authentication of social identity relies on verifying the social group. In the forum, the boundary-laden process of verification entailed "a claimed historical tie to a venerated past" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005:602) that tied one's ethnic group to place while denaturalizing the claims of ethnic others. More than just about narrative content, authentication involved group members establishing themselves as legitimate and qualified participants in the conversation about Transylvanian history and by maneuvering linguistic and other semiotic resources (Leppänen et al. 2015), including outmaneuvering others' claims. Social authenticity emphasizes the interactional moments within which verification and denaturalization take place.

ADEQUATION AND DISTINCTION

Adequation and distinction are extensions of the traditional terms similarity and difference, found in social identity theory. Adequation suggests that the similarity among group members "is not complete, but sufficient" (Bucholtz and Hall

2004:494), and the same idea applies to distinction and difference. Both concepts are significant in the sense that members of groups construct definitions or criteria that mark the boundaries of an authentic social identity. The most common example we found of these concepts revolved around attempts to link Transylvanian-ness to (Western) European-ness. Forum members from both groups regularly articulated “Europe” in terms of civility and enlightenment (Wolff 1994) and each group attempted to adequate themselves with European-ness in those terms, while distinguishing the Other from them.

In the forum, we found recurrent narratives about the relative authenticity of Hungarians and Romanians as Transylvanians and Europeans. Separated from a civil and enlightened Europe through the cold-war rhetoric of Churchill’s “iron curtain,” participants repeatedly articulated the belief that their own ethnic group was adequately Western/European, while simultaneously distinguishing the other ethnic group from European-ness and thus from authentic Transylvanian-ness. In one example, a participant described Transylvania’s Romanian ancestors as the “local, hospitable Geta-Dacian population” that aided the “Huns, the new barbarian settlers,” only to become “oppressed, tyrannized, and periodically butchered” by them. Such posts not only functioned to verify Romanian precedence in the region (“local” Dacians versus “new” Huns), but distinguished civil (“hospitable”) Romanians from uncivil (“barbarian”) Hungarians.

We can see this in post (2), above, where the author discursively aligned current Romanians with Romans and Christians. As we argued in the previous section, such posts verified the historical continuity of the Romanian ethnic group and thus served to authenticate a coherent Transylvanian identity. Post (2) represents adequation through associating Romania with the cultural and political accomplishments of ancient Rome that, through genealogical and linguistic affiliation, implicitly extends to present-day Romanians. A second source of adequation was Christianity; post (2) emphasized that Romanians had since the fifth century been Christians. Christianity, which is seen as a pillar of European civilization (Guibernau 2011), is also important in light of Hungarians’ self-positioning as “European.”

Adequation was also used to establish similarly negative attributes among multiple out-groups. There were many instances in the forum of ethnic denigration, with Hungarians describing Romanians as “backward” or “uncivilized” and Romanians positioning Hungarians as “cruel” and “ruthless.” Often such labels linked the Other to specific out-groups. Hungarians often referred to Romanians directly as “Gypsies” or “Roma-nians.” The hyphen in “Roma-nian” ascribes a double identification; through the linguistic parsing of the word, the poster implies adequation between Romanians and Roma (i.e., Gypsies), an historically itinerate ethnic group from South Asia much despised across Central and Eastern Europe (Csepeli and Simon 2004; O’Higgins 2010). Romanian posts often characterized Hungarians as “Mongols” and mockingly alluded to Hungarians’ origins in and migration from North Asia.

- (4) Let my refresh your memory. You are the ones coming from fuc*king Ulan Bator, man, not us. We were a Daco-Roman people already formed when you stinkers dismounted.
- (5) Hungarians are descendants of Huns an Asiatic tribe and [still] they are only a tribe not more ... “Transylvania will always be a Romanian land.”

Such examples demonstrate how members of each ethnic group used tactics of adequation to spoil the identity of the ethnic other. Posts (4) and (5), authored by different forum participants, both used genealogical and spatial analogies to adequate Hungarians with an essentialized Asian Other. Not only was the capital city of Mongolia claimed as the ancient home of modern Hungarians, but wording such as “when you stinkers dismounted” (post 4) and “the Huns” (post 5) further constructed an image of Hungarians as descendants of less developed, nomadic, societies. Both groups made use of non-European ethnicities (Romani and Mongolian) to further distinguish the Other from the spatial European-ness of Transylvania.

Adequation and distinction tended to comingle within forum discussions. Post (6) demonstrates how both adequation and distinction were not only tied to genealogical and spatial analogies, but were achieved through language use and wordplay as well.

- (6) Let the healing begin!!! **MAGAR**, there are people, you know, who don't have your disgusting habits of fuc*king goats from behind. Now, please, don't get me wrong, I can't blame you, you must have felt terribly lonely coming here all the way from Mongolia, so don't worry, I won't change my opinion about you. Anyway, **MAGYAR** (magar in Romanian means “jack ass,” no kidding) if a guy comes to you and says that “the old chronicles say that Hungarians descended from Mars,” would you believe him, you imbecile jack ass moron you? Of course you would, you are a narrow-minded zöld, fehér, piros crazy sh*thead, but if you were a reasonable man, which, I repeat, is not the case, you would have asked the motherfuc*ker: “Hey, moron, what fuc*king chronicles?” And then, if he could show you the stuff, you only then could say “OK, you are right, we Hungarians come from Mars”. Man, what do you learn in those iskola of yours?

In this case, a Romanian poster started out with ethnic stereotypes adequating Hungarians with nomadic barbarian tribes. He then used his knowledge of the Hungarian language to create a pun using “magar” (derogatory Romanian term) in place of “Magyar” (the Hungarian word for “Hungarian”). Additionally, he skillfully and strategically integrated Hungarian words with his primarily English prose in order to emphasize his points; the expression “narrow-minded zöld, fehér, piros [green, white, red – the colors of the Hungarian flag; often chanted at Hungarian minority rallies in Romania] shi*thead” quite vividly conjures up images of flag-waving ethnic fanatics for Transylvanians, while “that iskola [school] of yours” manages to convey a powerfully belittling critique of misplaced Hungarian ethnic pride.

While ethnic “identity definitions are unavoidably divisive,” the discursive construction of such divisions “take[s] different forms and therefore should not be seen as unproblematically given” (Verkuyten 2005:91). Here we have identified some of the tactics used by forum participants to construct Hungarian and Romanian identities by adequating themselves with groups thought to possess desirable cultural traits, such as ancient Romans, Christians, and more implicitly contemporary Western Europe (see next section). Furthermore, each group invoked macro-level social categories such as Roma or Asian and then adequated the Other with negative or undesirable qualities attached to those categories. In short, the authentication of each group as European involved adequating their social identity with civility and enlightenment, while distinguishing the Other from those characteristics. The emphasis on adequation and distinction differs from much of symbolic interactionists’ interest in self-authenticity, yet is an important component of understanding identity in everyday interactions. As we will go on to further highlight in the next section, group members’ talk, while dramatic in its overt animosity, formed the basis for arguments about who was more deserving of the status of authentically Transylvanian.

AUTHORIZATION AND ILLEGITIMATION

The third pair of relational concepts proposed by interactional sociolinguistics for theorizing identity — authorization and illegitimation — considers how individuals invoke power in the discursive construction of identity. In its original formulation, authorization involved “the affirmation or imposition of an identity through structures of institutionalized power and ideology” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005:603), while illegitimation “is the revoking or withholding of ... validation from particular identities (Bucholtz and Hall 2004:503). However, in our analysis we found that individuals invoked both formal and informal formations of power in their posts. For example, participants clearly oriented to history as an authoritative source of factual knowledge to support or refute identity claims, though the histories relied upon were not necessarily canonized or official.

Like Bucholtz and Hall, we see authorization and illegitimation as tactics that support efforts at verification/denaturalization and adequation/distinction. In the first analytic section, we showed how verification and denaturalization were significant first in terms of the interactional purpose to which history was put and second on the refutation of historical narratives as authentic or true. In the case of authorizing ethnic identities via history, forum participants treated history itself as a source of authority, though in relatively uncritical ways. The following dyadic exchange illustrates this as one participant constructed a Hungarian view of Transylvanian history and then a Romanian called those claims into question.

- (7a) Some facts: Romania as a state exists from AD 1859. Romania’s first king was “imported” from Germany, called Charles. (King of Romania from 1881 until 1914.) Hungary as a state exists from AD 1000. Some questions: It can be read,

that the Dacians were the ancestors of Romanians. What documents proves it? What is the connection between Romania and the Dacian state? Where were the Romanians/Dacians from the disappearance of the Dacian state until the appearance of the two Romanian states? Did they fly away? Yes, of course. Romanians flew away to a Romanian planet, then came back. No? So, what happened then? And was there a state in Erdély (Transylvania) when we Hungarians came in? (In the ninth century.) A Romanian state or another state? Who was the ruler of it?

- (7b) You want the world to believe you, then come with evidence and discuss in a civilized way, not by cursing everything and everybody because you don't have Transylvania. You came here on the ninth century and ... ?????? The land was deserted, waiting for the barbarians to come and occupy it????????????? Who would believe this nonsense?!??? Maybe only people like you. Just because you occupied that land by force, this doesn't mean that that land is yours. In this case, the Italians have more rights there than you, since there was a Roman occupation here before your coming from Asia. Spain was occupied by Arabs for a very long period but this doesn't mean that Spain is an Arab territory.

Post (7a) began by stating “facts” that traced Hungarian roots in Transylvania to the year 1000. There was little historical detail in the post, yet the poster clearly assumed that the history as stated held authoritative value. In addition, post (7a) referred to a more formal source of power/authority, namely the State, to compare the longevity of official Hungarian control of Transylvania, versus Romania's shorter lived nation. In post (7b), we see a Romanian response illegitimate the claims made in post (7a). Post (7b) achieves illegitimation first by foregrounding the factual inaccuracies of the claim that there was no group living in the territory when Hungarians occupied it, and second by challenging the authority of the person who posted (7a), both in terms of that person's logical and civil abilities (“Who would believe this nonsense?!???,” “come with evidence and discuss in a civilized way, not by cursing”).

Forum posters frequently evoked other supranational institutions as powerful authorities in a quest to authenticate Transylvania as either Hungarian or Romanian. This was particularly noticeable in Hungarian contributors' efforts to assert their ties to Western Europe as part of their adequation tactics. They did this through portraying the Hungarian economy and infrastructure as superior to Romania's and through emphasizing their then-recent NATO and then-imminent EU memberships, which at that time Romania did not have.

- (8) Hungary doesn't want to veto Romania's accession to anything! Not because it wouldn't be taken seriously. But because there are two million Hungarians living in today's Romania remember. Trust me on that. Even though Hungary is a new member of NATO and will be in the EU, if there would be some kind of serious problem between Hungary and Romania, they would listen to Hungary.

- (9) I mean, these are facts and not bull-shit talk that Hungary is now a much richer and more developed country with better infrastructure and about at least a 3-times higher GDP than that of Romania.
- (10) By the way, I forgot to write that Hungary will soon become a member of the European Union. Guess when will Rumania be a member? Man! I am laughing so hard!!!

Similar to the role of history's authoritative role in authentication, alignment to powerful institutions and the authority they bestow served here to aid Hungarian efforts of adequating themselves to Western European-ness via NATO and EU membership and economic health. The comments also contained overt comparisons with Romanians, who were thus distinguished as inferior economically and politically.

On the one hand, these posts represent struggles to salvage positive social identities among citizens of two ex-communist countries in the context of Central Europe's millennial political geography. Yet such data also highlight the significance of both informal and formal sources of authority that members of each group used to authenticate their social group as the natural proprietor of Transylvania. The concepts of authorization and illegitimation thus enable new politicized interpretations in studies of authenticity, particularly those involving identity, space, and conflict. Noy's (2009:220) study of the visitor book in the Ammunition Hill National Memorial Site in West Jerusalem, for example, dealt with social identity politics involved in constructing "an authentic, historic narrative, on which collective identities and political claims can be validly asserted in the present." Similarly, Hochstetler, Copes, and Williams (2010) interviewed violent criminals who struggled to define themselves within a justice system that regularly denied their self-definitions and instead demanded the acceptance of stigmatized personal and social identities. Missing, but quite interesting for each of these studies, would be an analysis of how language use in interactions between members of different groups utilize relational tactics that authorize and/or illegitimate the authenticity of certain kinds of identities within such spaces.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we looked at naturally occurring interactions in an internet forum where Hungarians and Romanians each attempted to talk their own ethnic identities into being more authentically Transylvanian. We found that forum members engaged in social authentication in several ways. First, they developed canons of authenticity by verifying their ethnic genealogies in the region and denaturalizing the historical narratives of the other. Second, they segmented the population of Transylvania into more and less authentic groups, adequating themselves with positively valued social groups and distinguishing the other from them. Third, they articulated power by invoking the authority of transnational European institutions as well as cultural ideals of civilized society, and used their relations with that authority to illegitimate

the other's identity in the region. The exchanges analyzed took place at a very particular historical time. When the forum was most active (2001 to 2003), Romania and Hungary had been democracies for just over 10 years, with the hopeful and enthusiastic postcommunist 1990s turning into an early millennium of economic and social instability, stoked by nationalist political agendas in both countries (Țurcanu 2010; Weiner 2004). Times like these are characterized as "unsettled" (Swidler 1986) and cultural struggles over the meaning of things, including identities, are often played out through discourses of social authenticity in politics, the media, and in everyday interactions. As such, we believe the tactics we have discussed are highly relevant to other contexts in which people struggle to construct, control or eliminate identities.

Today, much of the world appears embroiled in struggles over social authenticity, undoubtedly as a cultural corollary of the massive economic and racial polarization global capitalism has brought about. The current crisis within the European Union over migration from largely Muslim countries is often discussed in terms of national security, but is as much about challenges to what it means to be European or British as it is about making Europe or Britain secure. In the United States, the fiercely contested 2016 presidential elections revealed media and campaign rhetoric that clearly demonstrate the everyday use of relational tactics. This is visible in public statements of then-presidential candidate Donald Trump over definitions of who counts as "real Americans." In reference to children born in the United States to undocumented immigrants, his words embody issues of verification as well as authorization and illegitimation:

I don't think they have American citizenship, and if you speak to some very, very good lawyers — and I know some will disagree — but many of them agree with me and you're going to find they do not have American citizenship. We have to start a process where we take back our country. Our country is going to hell. (Diamond 2015)

And in contestations over the meaning of climate change, Ted Cruz's claim that "the global warming alarmists are the equivalent of the flat-Earthers" (Bump 2015) adequates people concerned about global warming with people who are ignorant of modern scientific knowledge.

These examples highlight that social authentication processes are fundamentally interwoven with language and power. Because symbolic interaction focuses on interactional moments as the substance of social relations, it is well-positioned to offer insights into how people use language in the maintenance of social identities.

here are analytic questions about who decides ... which members are more authentic and via what social mechanisms? Who has the "power" to authenticate? and how? and why? Power features need to be spelled out but presumably include the allocating, assigning, and depriving of resources. Basic processes like segmenting cut across authenticating ... The development of new styles and canons of authenticity can be noted. Nonauthenticating processes (like excommunication) and strategies evolve ... Some activities and products of activities can be discounted as nonauthentic. (Strauss 1978:123–124)

Following Strauss, we see that contestations over the authentication of identities have real material consequences for various social groups. When Muslim or non-White immigrants cannot claim to be “real Americans” or “real Europeans” and when environmentally concerned citizens are marginalized as ignorant, the issue becomes clearly about human and political rights.

Bourdieu (1991:221) argued that “struggles over ... identity ... are a particular case of different struggles over classifications, struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognize, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world ... to make and unmake groups.” In an immediate sense, we have explored empirically how Hungarians and Romanians used authentication as a central tactic to “make and unmake” their own ethnic groups through linguistic practices. Theoretically, we have opened up space to talk about the significance of social authenticity in the making and unmaking of social identities more broadly.

CONCLUSION

Gilmore (2007:97) puts things quite succinctly when he writes:

[W]hat it means to be authentic has become increasingly sophisticated and complex over the years and now embraces research from a wide variety of fields including discourse and conversational analysis, pragmatics, [...] sociolinguistics, ethnology, [...] cognitive and social psychology, [...] information and communication technology (ICT) Unfortunately, many researchers limit their reading to their own particular area of specialization and, although this is understandable given the sheer volume of publications within each field, it can mean that insights from one area don't necessarily receive attention from others. With a concept such as authenticity, which touches on so many areas, it is important to attempt to bridge these divides....

We have done this by developing the interactional sociolinguistic concept of relationality for a symbolic interactionist understanding of social authenticity. Unlike self-authenticity, social authenticity focuses explicit attention on identities rather than selves and more broadly on the social processes through which the authenticity of social objects is negotiated in situations (Lu and Fine 1995). This is not to deny the significance of self-authenticity in the study of lived reality, but rather to highlight that members of social worlds do not see themselves in equal terms. Rather, “some are thought to be (or think of themselves as being) more authentically of that world, more representative of it” (Strauss 1978:123).

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NOTES

1. Bucholtz and Hall named these tactics “authentication” and “denaturalization.” For them, authentication refers to the discursive verification of identities (in fact, authentication appears to be synonymous with verification in their work). Therefore, because we are using authentication at a broader theoretical level, we rename authentication within their conceptual frame as verification to avoid analytic confusion.
2. The present study is focused on English posts, though we recognize that language-choice itself may be part of the authentication process. However, the scope of the article prevents us from elaborating further on language choice here.
3. In considering the ethics of internet research, we have oriented toward contemporary best practices established by the Association of Internet Researchers and other social science organizations. See Kennedy (2006); Markham (2012); Leppänen et al. (2015).

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