Hyperlinked Identity

A Generative Resource in a Divisive World

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Raised in a Muslim household, my identity as a Muslim was organizing but not fundamental to my identity. However, at the time of writing this chapter, the events unfolding across the two lands I call home has centered the relationship I have with what it means to be a Muslim. I am forced to ask, How do I respond? How do I define rather than defend? How do I resist the marginalization that threatens my focus and how do I seek to define myself? Is my identity primarily defined by nationalist movements against Islam in both my home countries, or is my identity a more complex web of stories?

The United States and India, the two countries I'm connected to by birth and residence, as well as many other countries in recent years, have been experiencing populist and nationalist movements that are not only about the politics of nationality but also about the politics of identity and who is allowed to define it. These movements are also collectively shaping when, where, and how these politics are defined.

Typically, I don't lead with my religious identity as a primary way of defining myself. However, these populist and nationalist movements are foregrounding my identity as a Muslim by creating a context in which being a Muslim is questioned, threatened, and vilified. So I feel a call to respond. Such a call-and-response dance between one's context and the performance of one's identity can be understood by the notion of a *hyperlinked identity* (Bava, 2016), as illustrated in this chapter.

Born and raised in Delhi, India, I often say I came of age as a working woman in Bombay (Mumbai now). As a Delhite, I had access to what an urban capital offers its citizens. But the extent of the urban–rural divide was not obvious to me until I started working in the rural and tribal belts of India

after I graduated with my master's degree in social work from Tata Institute of Social Sciences. I knew of the divide, but not experientially. The lived sense of disparity and gap developed as I traveled for over a year through various villages to help youth and women's community groups organize and develop projects that would further their economic development. With the help of mentors from other villages, the local community would determine the kinds of economic projects to design and implement with financial and technical assistance from the international funding group I worked for. Economic development was the pathway to organize for civil rights—rights to land, water, wages, and dignity that we in the urban sector[1] took for granted. I was struck by the disparity and understood the draw to better oneself in order to have a better life for one's family and oneself. But I was equally struck by how generations of oppression can make whole villages appear "complacent" about their living conditions. However, it was not complacency, it was the upper hand of an oppressive system that had won the battle against basic human rights. It was a painful lesson of how as a collective we can deny groups of people their dignity and dehumanize them. It was deeply etched in my soul to fight against an oppressive collective system.

Feeling good by putting others down is not just an individual act or an interpersonal act. Rather, it is a social act that comes dressed up as caste system, classism, colonialism, regionalism, racism, sexism, and fundamentalism and all the other possible oppressive systemic forms it takes. I learned early in my professional life that even though it is hard to fight against such a larger-than-life system or even "convince" people that they deserve more, it is not hard to "awaken" the human spirit when one is treated with dignity.

Even though I had this rude awakening in the early 1990s of how we, as a collective, structure our society to give ourselves advantages, I also learned other powerful messages. The most important of them was how to keep going on in the face of struggles, challenges, and oppression. The Indian spirit, especially in the face of extreme poverty and in the wide chasms of the haves and the have nots, has taught me the art of making it up as you go along: how to improvise with limited resources. How it is not just the resources but the art of making it up that becomes the measure of one's success. As I worked with women and youth from villages that were branded as "untouchable," I learned about the human spirit, which, like water, finds a way to flow. Generations of oppression didn't kill the spirit that seeks connection; these men and women were responsive to their fellow human beings who treated them with dignity. I saw no fear in their eyes during those moments of connections. As humans, we know how to survive. And our job as helpers, activists, therapists, and others is to look, listen, feel, and find that spirit (for the lack of a better word) and walk alongside it. We know how to go on.

On the one hand we, Indians, have structured a society (caste system) that is built on putting others down or "keeping people in their place" (as if there were a predetermined order other than the one we have created). On the other hand, we have also built a society of relationality. Trust and relationships

go hand in hand. For instance, on a recent visit to Delhi, India, I observed that the local TV cable providers packaged competitive wireless Internet deals based on the needs of the local community (neighborhoods and apartment complexes) by being an enterprising intermediary between the larger service providers and customers. Such a business model is very similar to the "mom and pop" stores in the United States—a trade model that is based on the relationships with the customer in which the provider adapts and makes up deals to fit the customer; a model also known as "hyperlocalism." It is a model in which business is about community relationships (which creates its own checks and balances) rather than only about financial profit. This way of organizing and doing business is so common in India, like the air we breathe, that we might fail to conceptualize its inherent strengths. In this way of being, people don't seek to organize to be a community. Rather, the relationships organize themselves to be a community; a classic self-organizing system. That is, it is not a higher power of a community leader that is organizing of the people, but rather the relationship is an organic element by which organizing occurs.

Thus India has taught me that this spontaneous, organic system produces processes that can be dehumanizing as well as socially supportive. It gave me an awareness not only of how power can operate as a "feel-good" system at the expense of other human beings, but also how relationships and creativity are central to making up a meaningful life and finding ways to go on. There is a link here between power and relationship.[2] There is also a link between adversity and creativity. Often Indians conceptualize power inequalities as adversities rather than as oppression and find ways to go on living. This organic process gives rise to what is known in Hindi as "jugaad," or hack. *Jugaad* means an innovative work-around or a fix, based on limited resources, often signifying creativity (Prabhu, 2017). Today the word is used in the English language to signify "a low cost solution to any problem in an intelligent way" ("Definition of Jugaad Innovation," n.d., para. 1). I view it as patching it together, making it up as we go along—improvising—creating a bricolage of relationships, systems, and patterns. And that is my story of identity—both as a concept and my own journey of making up the concept of hyperlinked identity.

ARRIVING IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In 1995, when I arrived in the United States from India, even before I could understand and articulate my experience for myself, I was labeled and categorized based on how I looked and sounded. I was a "minority." I was a "person of color." My skin color was defining.

When it comes to skin color, I'm familiar with it from my experience in India. Having been colonized, Indians are socialized to idolize Whiteness. Everything from a skin care product to a matrimonial ad for brides emphasizes

Whiteness. Similarly, my students from the Caribbean Islands at Mercy College, where I teach, describe how openly the lighter skin tones are privileged over the dark skin tones. I see this not only as a legacy of colonization but also as a form of present-day colonization.

So, though I grew up experiencing my identity being shaped by inequalities based on skin color, I didn't experience the degree of binary making until I got to the United States. Skin color in the United States is reduced to Black and White. So, as an immigrant Brown Muslim woman, married to a White American man who advocates for "remaking manhood" (Greene, 2016, 2018), I have this triple consciousness[3] of not belonging, of being externally labeled as a person of color, and of being invisible, as I reside outside the Black–White binary while also experiencing double silencing. And, mind you, that is just based on my skin color. Yet I refuse to be marginalized, as I elucidate below.

MY SOCIAL LOCATION IS NOT MY IDENTITY

I have spoken about living in between spaces (Bava, 2001) and understanding what it is to be in the margins, even enjoying that liminal positionality. When does living in the margins become marginalized? I wonder, does it become marginalized because of hegemonic practices in the United States against immigrants and people/women of color? Sandoval (1991) states that the "hegemonic feminism of 1980s" marginalized the writings and theoretical activities of "U.S. Third World[4] feminists" (p. 1). Did my arrival in the mid-1990s in the United States drop me right into this divide for which I had no words at that time? I felt cautious of faculty voices that conducted social power analyses in terms of gender relations. Was my resistance because I had been inducted by a patriarchal society, or was it a form of opposition (Sandoval, 1991)? As a person who had not chosen marriage as a route to come to the United States to further my studies, I doubt I was fully under the trance of patriarchy. Rather, I had chosen to position my education ahead of getting married, as I had already been shaking off the social induction of India's patriarchal script of how to perform as a woman for a few years. This was thanks in part to my mother, who ironically was both a conduit for the oppressive system and the liberator from it. Even as she told me that I couldn't wear a sleeveless blouse unless my husband was okay with it, she also ensured that we attained the educational status to be financially independent before seeking marriage. The irony of these juxtapositions was not lost on me.

Back to my story in the United States: Even as I felt drawn toward feminist discourses, I pushed back against them. The gender analysis definitely spoke to my lived experiences in India, but it also felt incomplete. Though I did not lack the lived awareness that a gender-based power analysis did not fit my experience fully, I lacked the language for intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and the interconnectedness of my experiences at that time. However, I had no

way of making meaning then other than, "it doesn't fully fit for me." I was surrounded by White feminists, and none of them looked like me or was an immigrant from a colonized country in which religious fundamentalism was on the rise. I didn't want to choose one of these other categories to make sense of my lived experience. I wanted for all of it to be present as I moved through the activity of sense making. Making meaning as an activity is what drew me toward dialogic practices (Anderson, 1997; Bakhtin, 1981), social constructionism (Gergen, 2009), and communicative approaches (Lemke, 1995; Pearce, 2007). I wanted to be able to step in and out of the different streams (of meaning making), as my contexts and stories moved me (Bava, 2016). This was a beginning of *hyperlinked identity* with no conceptual naming for it, but rather it was an embodied, felt experience that was conceptually emerging as I worked on my dissertation (Bava, 2001, 2005). I locate this mindfulness within Sandoval's (1991) "oppositional consciousness" (p. 11). Such an awareness is "a mapping of consciousness in opposition to the dominant social order which charts the White and hegemonic feminist theories of consciousness . . . while also making visible the different grounds from which specific U. S. third world feminism rises" (Sandoval, 1991, p. 11). I agree with Sandoval that such oppositional consciousness is not necessarily "feminist" in nature; rather, it is a positionality that refuses to be dominated by the current hegemonic order when it does not fit.

Thus my social location is not my identity. My stories define my relationship to my social location. Stories are social activities of making meaning. My identity is fluid, forming and reforming in my stories as they relate to the contexts and relationships I engage in, both constituting them and being reconstituted in turn. My identity is plural and emergent not only from the intersection of these evolving stories but also based on how I perform them against the backdrop of the historical and social narratives. I have come to call this *hyperlinked identity* (Bava, 2016).

HYPERLINKED IDENTITY

Due to the Internet, we can all relate to the concept of *hyperlink,* which means linking from one textual space[5] to another by clicking on the embedded links. Imagine you are surfing the Web in search of understanding of a concept and, as you are reading an article about it, you click on a link within the article that transports you to another textual space. So it is with identities. Each is affected, modified, and constructed in relationship to the larger web of our stories, contexts, and conversations. It is this dynamism and interconnectedness that shapes our identities to be *intertextual, fluid, plural, emergent,* and *constitutive/performative,* as explained below (Bava, 2016; Combs & Freedman, 2016).

Hyperlinked identity is *intertextual,* meaning that every text makes sense within the web of other texts. According to critical social theorist and

social semiotics thinker Lemke (1995), "this implies, of course, that it is very important to understand just *which* other texts a particular community considers relevant to the interpretation of any given text" (p. 23). The notion of intertextuality is more common in the fields of literary studies than in marriage and family therapy (MFT), though I was introduced to it in the mid-1990s during my doctoral program in MFT at Virginia Tech. Intertextuality conceptually expands on the notion of context and multiplicity. It does so by locating texts in relationship to other texts in which each text's meaning is shaped by the other texts—what comes both before and after it. Every social context is a communal space made up of multiple texts that are circulated by the people who occupy/engage that space. Thus, over time, these communal spaces might become prescriptive about how to perform one's identity. For example, social scripts about how to be a man, woman, dad, mother, student, and so forth inform how we perform our identities. Over time, these social scripts take on a life of their own, become shared common values within a community, and travel as shared stories and practices of that particular community. They appear in terms of the words, gestures, actions, and invisible rules of that particular community, that is, community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Such communities are known as discourse communities, and their shared social stories are referred to as dominant or preferred discourses. A community of practice becomes a discourse community. And over time these discourse communities give rise to larger social systems that in turn shape the discourses (see Figure 23.1 on p. 331). Lemke (1995) states that Bakhtin, a philosopher, literary theorist, and critic, developed the view that discourse is

> always implicitly *dialogical,* as always speaking against the background of what others have said or written in other times and places. He describes the struggle to make a word or utterances one's own, to place it in a new context as a new social event, so that its meanings are as much our own as another's. (p. 23)

Thus every text has a social context and provides context to other utterances and texts. We all live within multiple discourse communities. Thus our identities, metaphorically seen as texts, are inherently embedded in discourse communities that are dialogical and interpretive, as illustrated by cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa:

> "Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement," say the members of my race. "Your allegiance is to the third world," say my Black and Asian friends. "Your allegiance is to your gender, to women," say the feminists. Then there's my allegiance to the gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the new Age, to magic and the occult. And there's my affinity to literature, to the world of the artist. What am I? *A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings*. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label. (in Keating, 2009, p. 2)

Hyperlinked identity allows for the *fluidity* and *plurality* of identities, which are centered and decentered, within the shifting relational contexts we engage with, as illustrated by Anzaldúa. It is inclusive of intersectionality, as it speaks to the idea of how intersectionality is intertextual. Moreover, it places interconnectedness or interrelatedness, the original spirit of family therapy, in the foreground. Hyperlinked identity foregrounds relationality.

As a *relational metaphor,* hyperlinked identity refers to our interlinked stories of self (texts) that *emerges* from within a discursive process with very real effects. It is like the sense that emerges when we surf the Web by clicking on one link after another in search of an understanding; where the links are symbolic of the dynamic conversational linkages we make within the dialogic process. And the clicking of a link is equivalent to our curiosity to follow up on these linkages. Curiosity appears as questions and reflections from within the conversation. Such a stance of curiosity elevates the linkages from *within* the relationship and conversations (Anderson, 1997; Shotter, 2004). It throws light on the activities of relating and making within a discursive process (McNamee, 1996). Thus our emergent identities could be viewed as relational performances made up—improvised or hacked—in the process of relating to one another within constantly changing contexts. As McNamee (1996) states:

> The emphasis on performance is in keeping with Wittgenstein's (1963) notion of language games. To Wittgenstein, words do not represent a world "out there" nor do they represent the nature of the speaker's mind. Rather, words gain their significance through their use in social interplay. Consequently, the construction of a world, a reality, an identity is contingent upon how language is used in particular contexts. *How* language is used is dependent, in turn, upon how others respond to (supplement) each action. The forms of action and supplementation in any given context or relationship are themselves contingent upon the discursive traditions (i.e., histories) and discursive communities (i.e., cultures/relationships) with which the participants are engaged. (p. 150)

Hyperlinked identity is *performative,* that is, in interaction and utterances we make up each other (Anderson, 1997; Pearce, 2007). For example, when a therapist issues the utterance "she is depressed," the therapist's utterance gives life to the story that the client is depressed. Unlike a search for understanding of a concept on the Web, the material nature of these emergent texts/stories can range from being harmful to liberating and thus can create a sense that ranges from being unsafe to safe depending on the varied contexts and the responsiveness (Shotter, 2004) of the other. Our *own* responsiveness draws on what Sandoval (1991) refers to as differential consciousness in order to position ourselves within these varying contexts, thus performing a hyperlinked identity that is constitutive. It is a way of shape shifting to be responsive within a context while also shaping the context as we assess the conditions for/of oppression. For instance, in an antiracism context within the United States, to be included, I might deemphasize my gender or immigrant narratives. Or in

a religiously oriented context, I might bracket my racially gendered identity to work across our differences. It is a survival skill, not a skill of assimilation; nor am I a victim of internalized oppression. It is a skillful dance of a "relational being" (Gergen, 2009, p. xv). There is an element of consciously choosing to perform certain stories of my identity to be responsive within a context that demands the performance of a particular identity to participate, be heard, or be seen. That doesn't mean I give up other stories of myself. Rather, when the contexts are limiting, I find an agentic way to participate within it. The difference between internalized oppression and the relational stance of differential consciousness lies in the sense of agency when one is performing his or her identity. Whether such a performance includes one's sense of agency rather than the loss of one's sense of agency depends on the context and one's differential consciousness, among other factors. Thus an agentically performed hyperlinked identity provides the larger web of interconnected stories to move through the various limiting contexts by recognizing these contexts as specific social stories or discourse communities.

In an age in which texts are constantly being recontextualized and reconstituted, it helps us to examine intertextuality in the making of social identities. As family therapists, through our activities of theorizing, researching, and writing, we are active participants in textual constructions that have very real effects on people's lives and relationships. As clinicians and supervisors, when we promote the discourse of socially locating ourselves, how are we participating in the codifying of our identities as text? How do intersectional utterances alter the codification of our identities? Aren't we still categorizing? What is the context created through our theories? How might we explore our intertextual participation in the making of social identities and contexts? How do we participate in the critical conversations of personhood as we invoke the complex network of narratives that make up our intersectional identities?[6] Thus, in practice, I find it useful to remind myself that our MFT theories are metaphorical texts (Rosenblatt, 1994). In fact, family therapy historian Lynn Hoffman's (1998) statement, "models are heuristic fairy tales, holders of complex realities" (p. 98), reminds us that we need to hold our theories lightly as maps or guides (Bava, 2017; Imber-Black, 2014).

SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE

Race is organizing in the United States. Race discourse is divisive not only because it serves the dominant order but also because its binary analysis plays right into the hands of this divisiveness. As stated, the mainstream United States speech of race is in terms of White and Black. As a Brown person, I don't belong in the White or the Black categories. However, I do belong when I'm categorized as a "person of color." And often at that juncture I experience a double silence that I am unable to break even in this writing. And thus, with my words below, I come close to speaking of this experience as:

SILENCED

If I speak, I'm a sell out
If I don't speak, I'm silent
Silenced
Those who I fear hurting,
fear for themselves

How to speak my truth?

Speak not to be universalized
Or silenced
I fear the division
The master's tool
Enslaved by
Our in-fighting
While he wins on

Fear to speak out
Yet fear keeps us in
Fear keeps us fighting each other
And we fear not the
silence that kills us

We fight our own
Fearing the master's hand
We serve
Keeping disorder within
Silently we move

Disconnected
Fearful
Silent
In-fighting
Enslaved

Just as the language of gender analysis didn't fully fit me, the same was true with race analysis. Race was definitely organizing in India, both in terms of its colonizing and its partition. However, we never spoke of it as such. We spoke of it in terms of skin color, the Aryan and Dravidian divide, and the colonization of the East by the West. So I was steeped in dualisms, but not in the same sense as the racialized United States.

HYPERLINKED IDENTITY A GENERATIVE RESOURCE

A Paradoxical Resource to Transcend the Divisive (Dis)Order

Whose voice and whose stories count? And who does the counting, telling, and listening? And more so, how is it (re)told? In a world of colonizing there are only two sides—"ours" and "theirs." It is central for the colonizers to have

their story win; an order built on dominance—who is able to keep an upper hand. And even more important, it doesn't serve the colonizer to have plurality or multiple stories. What's the use of plurality if only one story is allowed to dominate? Why even entertain plurality; let's just stick to the binary. Colonizing creates a call and response for polarization, a binary induction.

And the moment we respond with a dualistic response, we buy into the binary. I'm referring to those that are in binary opposition, that is, an either–or position. Not only are we a slave to the binary, but we are also its tool when we respond from the space of binary opposition. In that moment we are serving the very "master" whose house we want to take down. As Audre Lorde (2015) states, "for the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 94). It is for us to see what processes are set into motion that keep us reaching for the master's tools and thus keeps us prisoners of the very system we are attempting to change.

The ways we make meaning are our tools as therapists; they construct realities and identities (Anderson, 1997; Bava, 2017; Combs & Freedman, 2016; McNamee, 1996, 2009). By the way we use the language, we might be continuing to use the master's tools. Why do we continue to talk about dominance and not liberation? I believe it is because we are afraid of the unknown, when it will turn the world on its head. We will then have to truly give up the privilege of knowing. Our theories and ways of knowing give us, rather grant us, privilege. The ways we track, categorize, and name phenomena not only create our theories but also, more importantly, create the context of people's lives and our practice of therapy. For instance, calling racism a "Black issue" leaves the other people of color and Whites off the hook. Further, the word "issue" is not spoken from a liberating or power-giving perspective but generates a problematic picture affecting Blacks. And in that instance we fail to create a context of interconnectivity. Rather, we continue to play into the field of divisiveness. We are playing right into the hands of colonization. Similarly, the use of the word "dominance" continues to preserve the dominant group as the "one with power" and as the starting point of analysis. Further, when we continue to be spoken of as the oppressed, our power continues not to be seen. However, if we are seen as resisters, liberators, creators of differential consciousness, we start to see the world anew. At the event "Apollo Uptown Hall: 50 Years after MLK: A Dream Deferred," Patrisse Cullors, cofounder of Black Lives Matter, stated, "Black folks are still here. . . . It takes a level of creativity and genius to still be alive when something continues to try to kill you" (Lehrer, 2017). Sandoval (1991) similarly illustrates that there is power in our differential consciousness as it "requires grace, flexibility, and strength" (p. 15). How would we act differently if these were our starting points for engagement? As seductive as it is to choose one or the other utterance, there is power in each utterance, and each of these utterances is located within discourse communities—or, rather, identity (in)forming communities—to which we belong.

By drawing on hyperlinked identity, we can move fluidly among various communities that shape our identities. It allows for polyphony (Anderson,

1997; Bakhtin, 1981). For instance, at the personal level, I choose a liberatory frame, as it is more generative and hope giving for me. At the social level, it is helpful to look at analysis from the perspective of who holds the power institutionally. At the interpersonal level, I draw on the hyperlinked identity frame, as it helps me maintain a differential consciousness (Sandoval, 1991). Although I speak of myself as being at the personal, social, and/or interpersonal levels, each is embedded in my identity-forming discourse communities.

In India, we have our own form of "second-class citizens," based on the caste system[7]—one of the oldest forms of social stratification, designed over 3,000 years ago. The lowermost strata—the "shudras"—and those outside of the caste system—the Dalits—were seen as the untouchables, because they often performed menial labor such as cleaning the bodies of the dead, taking out the trash, cleaning out the sewer system, and so forth. However, as a Muslim, I was personally raised "outside" the caste system but within the social milieu of a community that retained vestiges of the system. On a recent visit to India, I asked a relative of mine why we use separate "water glasses" for people who come to do any repair work at home or for the maid. I sensed the discomfort in our conversation as she spoke about "cleanliness," because the repair person and maid lived in shacks made of corrugated metal sheets and tarps (juggies) and thus were more than likely to have limited access to clean water. She also noted how the man who gave daily massages to her dad was a local sweeper, who most people wouldn't allow into their homes, as he represented the untouchables. The notion of "cleanliness" was not lost on me, as it represents both issues of hygiene and the untouchables. I left the conversation feeling that perhaps she felt judged by me. And yet it is in these uncomfortable conversations that we also experience moments of raising consciousness of how we organize our lives, through rituals and practices that denote who is ingroup and who is outgroup—and, over time, learn how an outgroup gets constructed as "less than" to give members of the ingroup a sense of dominance and privilege.

Thus, irrespective of gender, race, caste or class, and so forth, the binary induction is present. It is a dominant way to make sense of our experiences. It is how dominant order is made. To engage the complexity of our identities we have to resist the making of these oppositional, polarizing binaries. Paradoxically, hyperlinked identity opens up the space for plurality of identities as multiple stories. Rather than choosing between our identity scripts, one can access multiple, contradictory scripts that we creatively link or patch together— as in jugaad—as we navigate the various contexts with which we are engaged.

A Shift toward Intersectional Stories and Our Interconnectedness

The identity categories, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and so forth, constitute one's identities even before we gain consciousness of their existence, thus indicating their social presence. Rather than pitting the social identity against the subjective identity, we need to adopt a relational frame

by holding the tension between them both, as not all dualisms are polarizing. Rather, some are in a dialectical relationship—that is, the presence of each is defined by the other. For example, the concept of "rich" doesn't exist without the concept of "poor."

In attempting to understand our identities as intersectional, we have elevated the social categories of our identities, which is problematic. We have reduced our identities to categories. Labels for social categories are shells without the stories. Without the stories we cannot connect. Social categories keep us in our silos. But stories keep us connecting.

Generating awareness of social categories of identity was a much-needed political action, and yet it also played politically into another aspect of social categorizing, which is to keep people boxed in by being reductionist in identifying who people are. They are thin descriptions, and, without the stories, they distance us from each other. When we assign labels, such as *men, women, liberals, conservatives, Black, Brown, White, lesbian,* and so forth, we adopt a knowing stance about people's stories and/or are resistant to hearing people's stories, as stories are often complex and cannot be neatly categorized. Hyperlinked identities break down these categories and labels and, instead, bring forth the narratives in the interlinked texts.

Thus not only do we need to think of the intersection of social identities to engage one's complexity, but we also need to shift our attention to the *intersection among the stories*. The intersection among our stories often sheds light on our *interconnectedness*. When we shift our focus to the intersection within our stories and between the stories, we breathe more life into the origins of political action of our identities. We rediscover our interconnectedness, our compassion, our care for each other. Whereas labels create abstractions, stories create connection and compassion.

IMPLICATIONS OF OUR POSITIONALITIES AND PRACTICE

How one uses words and utterances locates oneself and others socially. For instance, the statement "I live in Manhattan" locates me differently than does the statement "I'm from India" in terms of access and privileges within a particular social context. So these statements not only locate me geographically but also position me socially, depending on the meaning we give to "Manhattan" and "India." So it is with our questions, such as "Where are you from?" as illustrated by writer Taiye Selasi in her TED talk "Don't Ask Me Where I'm from, Ask Where Am I a Local."[8] Davies and Harré (1990) conclude that "position is what is created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons" (p. 62).

Thus one's stories, formulated in our utterances and our use of words, not only are carriers of our interconnections but also frame our social positionalities. How one reads these stories of positionalities might be reflective of the speaker, but it is more so reflective of the listeners' activity of making meaning and the intersection with their own positionality. As Davies and Harré

(1990) state, positioning is "the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines. There can be interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another. And there can be reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself" (p. 48).

Thus we can pose the question, Whose expertise defines one's positionality? And what are the implications of answering this question within the context of therapy? For instance, in clinical practice, does the therapist define the client's positionality, or is it defined by the client, or jointly? Meaning making is a coordinated activity that lies within the relational and cultural repertoires we have co-created (Gergen, 2009; Lemke, 1995; Pearce, 2007).

Dewery (2005) notes that "different ways of speaking offer different possible effects, and these effects include different possibilities for future actions" (p. 315). So what effect am I producing when I am suggesting the positionality of interconnectedness alongside intersectionality? What effects am I producing when I speak of myself as a Brown woman from Delhi (intersectionality)? And which of my identity narratives resonate for you or touch you, thus highlighting our interconnectedness? How might you as a reader notice both intersectionality and interconnectedness in my stories? I raise these questions as a segue to our clinical practice. As practitioners, if we noticed both the intersectionality of the clients and our own narratives and how we are interconnected, then how might we practice therapy? The clinical implications of hyperlinked identity are as follows:

1. We approach our clinical conversations as meaning-making spaces where both the "therapist's" and the "client's" identities are co-created through dialogue and the context of our relationships.
2. We imagine these identities as interlinked multiple texts and remain curious how they are interlinked by attending not only to the identity narratives but also to the relationships among them.
3. We engage in joint inquiry *with* our "clients'" emerging narratives, actively noticing *with them* how the identity narratives are being made and remade through the conversations. We also attend to our creative process of relating and making meaning to promote collaboration (Anderson, 1997; Bava, 2017; McNamee, 2009).
4. We notice that our understanding of any one of these texts is dependent on our lived experiences, theories, and the stories of larger social systems that we bring to make sense of these texts. Simultaneously, we are coordinating *with* the client's text and context.
5. Consequently, we need to hold our theories of practice lightly, as a map or guide, rather than as a certainty about our clients' lives, because they also have their own maps by which they are making sense of their own lives. Thus the therapists' and the clients' maps are among the many multiple texts from within which to find generative resources to design our lives.

In summary, what I'm offering as a guide for clinical and everyday conversations is a reflexive practice that is built into the notion of hyperlinked identity. We have to stay reflexive about our utterances/interactions, actions/discourses, and the larger social systems/processes as they make up our identities (see Figure 23.1). We need to notice how our interactions and utterances (circle 1) make up our actions and discourses (circle 2), which in turn make up our social systems (circle 3). And over time these larger social systems provide context to the social discourses and actions, which in turn provide the context for the utterances and interactions. Each of these circles consists of multiple interlinked texts. And so the process of making it up goes on. For instance, returning to my question in the opening paragraph about how I respond to increasing nationalist and populist movements in my home countries, I found that the larger discourse of populism and nationalism (circle 3) foregrounded dominant oppressive social stories (circle 2) of "who is a Muslim." The responsiveness I felt (circle 1) took on many forms of activisms. One of these was writings and conversations with colleagues—men and women of different religious faiths and nationalities (Arora & Bava, 2018; Trimble, 2018)—in which we discovered our interconnectedness and intersections. I authored these chapters to add my voice to the growing alternate discourse of what it means to be a Muslim (Bava, 2016) and how do we do "social justice" (Bava, Gutiérrez, & Molina, 2018). By participating with these members of a responsive community, I experienced "reasonable hope" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 6) and found an agentic way to go with my everyday life in the midst of rising nationalism and populism.

The implications of hyperlinked identities exist not only in our practice as therapists but also in living. They help us to accompany clients' story arcs within the various textual spaces they enter and exit, just as we do when we
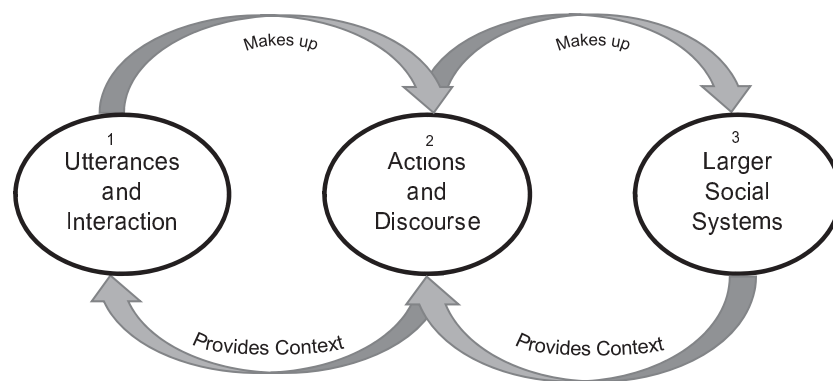
FIGURE 23.1. The interlinks between utterances, actions, discourses, and social systems.

are surfing the Web. Textual space is any one of the identity stories, situated narratives of the person and stories of the larger social system. And by staying "locally" curious about the foreground and the background textual elements and their relationships, we center and decenter other textual spaces. It is through such curious inquiry that we may find ourselves transported to another textual space, seemingly unrelated, but very much internally linked, based on the person's hyperlinks and those created within the conversation. By maintaining a curious and not-knowing stance (Anderson, 1997), we continue the process of inquiry, which helps us to notice and/or develop the linkages and to clarify them. It is through the process of making sense of these linkages that new frames (meanings) for ways to go on in life emerge. Thus conversation or therapy becomes a space to make sense—"a transient order"—in what might feel like random leaps between various hyperlinked spaces of our lives. For instance, by hyperlinking my stories of arriving in the United States with my stories today in the United States, linking back with my life in India 25 years ago and then linking back to the present, giving background on the various discourses of power analysis, differential consciousness, and intertextuality, I can explore and make up (jugaad) threads of identity that I had not constructed 20–25 years back. These threads of identity continue to be fluid, emergent, and constitutive of what comes next, just as they are of what came before.

CONCLUSION

Each of the stories I have shared in this chapter about skin color, religion, gender, class, caste, and so forth are based on my experiences in India and the United States. They may be read as social identity stories across contexts. But I offer them as hyperlinked stories of identity that shift as the foreground and background shift. For instance, any reading of my relationship to gender discourses shifts based on whether you view me as a woman from India, as a Brown woman (intersectional), as a theorist critically reflecting on discourse construction, as a family therapist raising questions of practice, and so forth. Making sense of my stories lies at the intersection of the stories *you* bring to this reading. In that moment we are in an intertextual conversation, creating a hyperlinked identity of you *and* me. Your reading of this text is what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as hetroglossia: the practice of joining (and/or disjoining) different voices within the same text. No readers ever come to an interaction without their own texts and the embedded discourse community they bring to the text at hand. The intersection of these texts is the intersection of our stories. And, if nothing else happens, that intersecting moment gives rise to our interconnectedness. So it is with therapy space, where our conversations (public and private) are stories. The texts we bring to this intertextual space intersect and in the process create our clients' and therapists' hyperlinked identities and meanings.

Hyperlinked thinking grants us the freedom to leap between various stories without a categorical bias about a particular narrative. Our stories and actions make up the collective. They are our collective tools. They are not reactions, but very much in response to the world we want to create; not in defense of our positionality but in definition of our stance of dignity.

NOTES

1. For the purposes of this chapter, I am drawing upon a simplified thread to contrast the urban–rural divide, though the story of civil rights is far more complex both in the urban and rural sectors, respectively.

2. Power grows in relationships. And in relationships there is power, for example, a people's protest march. Exploitation is power _over_ the other. Creative collaboration is power _with_ the other.

3. Triple consciousness also refers to not only how I see my _Brown_ self, but also how the others from outside—_Blacks_ and _Whites_ within the U.S. context—see me (or do not).

4. I use "Third World" as used by Sandoval. But it is not my preferred way to refer to myself or India because of the connotations. To learn more, read _If You Shouldn't Call It the Third World, What Should You Call It?_ Available at _www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/01/04/372684438/if-you-shouldnt-call-it-the-third-world-what-should-you-call-it_.

5. Textual space on the Internet can be a website, Web page, or paragraphs/multimedia within one page that are interlinked. Within the context of hyperlinked identity, _textual space_ refers to lexias or text composed of blocks of text, where texts can be our situated narratives—historical, social, and cultural stories—and/or relational, familial, or personal narratives or fragments.

6. These were some of the questions raised by Jackie Hudak, Eli Nealy, and me in our 2017 American Family Therapy Academy plenary titled "The Politics of Personhood and Clinical Work: Reflecting on Our Fluid, Emergent, and Performative Identities." I thank Jackie and Eli for being my early conversational partners and reflectors about hyperlinked identity.

7. There are many theories about the development of the caste system in India; most date it to pre-Vedic times. There is a linguistic debate over the term "caste" as the Vedic (religious) scriptures of the Hindus used _varna_ and _jati_ to refer to social groupings of people. However, for thousands of years, this social stratification system organized people, by birth, along economic and occupational lines. People born into these groupings were segregated. Over time, the reification of this system kept people from choosing their lives, food, marriages, and work to keep them from moving outside their social status. Thus this hierarchical system limited access to education, equality, and resources for people in the lower levels. Under the British, this dehumanizing system was further exploited based on the divide-and-conquer colonizing practices. Today, though the caste system is illegal in India, it is still socially and politically organizing.

8. Her talk is available at _www.ted.com/talks/taiye_selasi_don_t_ask_where_i_m_from_ask_where_i_m_a_local_.

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