Positioning Theory as a Tool for Analysing Working Class Identities: Angela Rayner in Interview

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Abstract. In recent years, narrative has emerged as a 'prime vehicle' through which speakers are able to construct identities (de Fina, 2015a, p. 351). This research utilises positioning theory (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 48) in its three-tiered adaption to the field of narrative (Bamberg, 1997, 2004) to explore how one speaker in particular, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Angela Rayner, negotiates a sense of self in situated narrative interaction. Previous research has extensively explored each 'level' of positioning in depth (see de Fina's, 2013, investigation of conflict narratives told by Latin American immigrant women, for example). This research instead focuses on how the interplay at different levels assists the speaker in arriving at a reflexive, locally contingent and evolving working class identity. Positioning framework facilitates sophisticated, connected exploration that allows for researchers to elegantly bridge the gap between micro- and macro-level phenomena, imposing neither a top-down nor a bottom-up imposition as the speaker orients to master discourses when and only when relevant. The stories told by Rayner and the ensuing analyses therefore work as a model for future research aiming to describe the relationship individuals have with Discourse and ideology, and the construction of identity within these forces.

Plain English Abstract. In recent years, the field of narrative has emerged as a way in which speakers are able to construct their identities (de Fina, 2015a, p. 351). This research explores identity through the lens of positioning theory (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 48), a three-tiered framework which has later been adapted to apply more readily to the field of narrative (Bamberg, 1997, 2004). The paper focuses on how one speaker in particular, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party Angela Rayner, negotiates a sense of self in an interview context. Previous research has extensively explored each 'level' of positioning in depth (see de Fina's, 2013, investigation of conflict narratives told by Latin American immigrant women, for example). This research instead focuses on the relationships between the levels and explores how the speaker establishes her reflective, context-dependent, and evolving working class identity. Positioning theory facilitates sophisticated connections that allow for researchers to elegantly bridge the gap between micro- and macro-level phenomena, imposing neither a top-down nor a bottom-up imposition as the speaker draws upon master discourses when and only when relevant. The stories told by Rayner and the ensuing analyses therefore work as a model for future research aiming to describe the relationship individuals have with discourse and ideology, and the construction of identity within these forces.

1 Introduction

Narratives function as important sites for studying how individuals construct identities. Positioning theory provides one such avenue through which to explore said identities and posits that the narrator takes part in positioning activities 'whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines' (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 48). In the years following Davies and Harré's early work, positioning theory has been adapted by various researchers to apply more readily to the study of narrative (Bamberg, 1997, 2004; Wortham, 2000; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

Bamberg (1997) proposes that when telling a story, the narrator constructs her identity by positioning herself on three levels: 'vis-à-vis other characters in the world of the story, vis-à-vis interlocutors in the storytelling world, and vis-à-vis herself' (de Fina, 2013, p. 43). This article explores how one individual in particular, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Angela Rayner, navigates multiple aspects and formations of her identity across these three levels in an interview for the daytime television programme, *This Morning*.

Stories told by working class people have long been neglected and undervalued in academic research and wider society alike (Strangleman, 2018). By exploring the autobiographical outputs of Rayner, an individual with a working class background, this research aims to address this fact and redirect academic efforts (much like the work done by Freeman, 2010; Reay, 2002; and Hey, 2003). As Rayner is a politician, she is no longer considered working class in the economic sense. However, the speaker indicates that she still identifies with working class culture and identity (she implies that it hasn't been 'taken out' of her, line 60). This endurance of working class identity is present in other individuals who operate in traditionally middle or upper class contexts (such as politics or academia) with similar roots (Lucey et al., 2003; Reay, 2004). Furthermore, some of these individuals also experience feelings of conflict, in that at times, they can feel detached from their past selves and do not identify with the characteristics of their new surroundings (Hey, 2003; Mahony & Zmroczek, 2005). By analysing Rayner's past and present stories, we are able to explore how those from minorities navigate (accept or reject) the positions afforded to them by existing dominant narratives and assess how their identities evolve (Saini, 2022).

2   Literature Review

As established, Bamberg proposes that the narrator positions herself at three levels. At the first level, the narrator constructs an image of herself in the storyworld (elsewhere 'taleworld'– Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 9), assigning 'protagonists and antagonists', proposing 'evaluations of such characters' actions', and 'distributing responsibilities' (de Fina, 2015b, p. 360). Further positioning techniques at level one include describing attributes (Kitzinger & Wikinson, 2003), labelling emotions (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008), and assigning degrees of agency (Bamberg, 2011). The second level explores the interactional influences on storytelling and the actions taken in conversation, simultaneously examining how stories are told and what motivates their inclusion in a given scenario. Actions at this level can include justifying (Stokoe & Edwards, 2006), seeking advice (Bamberg, 2004; Korobov & Bamberg, 2004), defending, and flirting (Stokoe & Edwards, 2006) – to name a few. Lastly, level three responds to the question, 'who am I?' (Bamberg, 1997, p. 337). This level transcends the moment-by-moment, local interaction and extends to 'how the narrator positions a sense of self/identity with regards to dominant discourses or master narratives' (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 385). Accordingly, identity is conceptualised as a process taking place in specific concrete interactions, as a 'constellation' of selves as opposed to an essentialist, unwavering singularity, and as a negotiation with wider social and discursive phenomena (de Fina, 2013, p. 42).

The stratification of positioning across three levels prompted de Fina (2013) to describe positioning theory as a 'middle ground' between conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis, analysing stories in a clause by clause fashion and relating these findings to broader, pre-existing Discourses and ideologies. Whilst levels are distinct and have the potential to contradict one another (ibid), Bamberg (2004, p. 336) describes how they interact as follows: 'By talking about others and arranging them in narrative space and time (level one), and by talking to others in the here and now (level two), narrators engage in the creation of a sense of (them as) selves (level three)'. Despite these assertions, Bamberg admits that making the

practical distinction between levels one and two is not straightforward (Bamberg, 2004), with McQuillan (2000, p. 12) arguing that the symbiotic relationship between the telling and the tale renders any attempted separation or distinction inappropriate. Others praise this distinction, arguing that the double temporal indexicality of telling vs tale allows for the analyst to explore notions such as constancy and/or change (Bamberg, 2011). This is especially poignant given that other identity related narrative frameworks (Membership Categorisation; for example, Sacks, 1972; Schegloff, 2007) may miss a level of nuance that accompanies temporal or attitudinal changes. Positioning theory has thus been praised for its ability to analyse identity as it is constructed by the individual, identifying enduring properties without an essentialist or top-down imposition (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

Further criticisms include the exact mechanisms by which level three phenomena, that is, 'big D' Discourses or 'master narratives' (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; Mishler, 1995) are oriented to, given the long standing difficulty in describing the relationship between micro- and macro-level structures (de Fina, 2008). Indeed, the question remains: how exactly can one illuminate the other? Researchers have proposed various answers to this question. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008, p. 391), for example, suggest that speakers include these dominant discourses in narration by 'making them relevant' to the interaction. However, as de Fina (2013) highlights, this is difficult to identify and difficult to measure empirically. Heritage and Clayman (2010, p. 20) suggest that these discourses are 'talked into being' during local action. In this way, discourses factor in the creation of positions in an inductive/abductive manner, following the theoretical tenets of Conversation Analysis (CA) and rejecting any top-down impositions that assume discourses and social structures to be automatically present and relevant (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006), as is the case in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA; Wodak, 2013).

The types of study that utilise positioning theory when studying narrative vary in a number of areas. For example, some studies focus solely on positioning at one level, such as de Fina's 2013 investigation of conflict narratives told by Latin American immigrant women. Other studies focus on the interaction between levels (Zimmerman, 1998; see Depperman's (2015) investigation of the turn-by-turn relationship between levels one and two, for example). Different still are the kinds of narratives studied, with some researchers working within a small stories paradigm (Clifton, 2014) and others conceiving of narrative in a Labovian, grand sense (Sargeant et al., 2016). We thus arrive at a varied and vast field of study. For instance, Wortham and Gadsden (2006) have examined how working class, African American fathers navigate masculinity through a series of semi-structured interviews; Saini (2022) utilises the episodic narrative interview to explore one woman's experience with care work in the Global South; and Bamberg (2004) investigates how adolescent males collaborate in 'slut shaming' their female peers during a group discussion. This research follows previous research in varying the level of focus, characteristics of the speaker(s), and types of narrative studied, ultimately centring on the prominent political figure, Angela Rayner.

As mentioned, the types of stories elicited in naturalistic interviews can vary greatly. Defining and classifying stories is a hotly and extensively debated topic, the likes of which fall outside the remit of this research (Ryan, 2007). For the purposes of this article, narratives are conceptualised, more as a tool of interpretation (de Fina et al., 2006) than as a phenomenon abiding by formal criteria, though many stories identified can be classified as either Labovian (Labov & Waletzky, 1967) or 'small' (Georgakopoulou, 2007). At times, Rayner displays narratives that can be identified as Labovian in that they feature 'a coherent temporal progression of events… A plotline that encompasses a beginning, a middle, and an end, conveys a particular perspective, and is designed for a particular audience who apprehend and shape its meaning' (Ochs & Capps, 2001). In other instances, Rayner's narratives are markedly non-canonical,

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narratives which have largely been neglected in the wake of the narrative turn (Georgakopoulou, 2006). These are classified as 'small stories' and have been defined as 'an umbrella-term that captures a gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to (previous) tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell' (ibid, p. 123). Accordingly, working within a small stories paradigm (Georgakopoulou, 2007) is also suited to this research.

3   Method

Titled 'From Working Class Carer to Deputy Leader: Angela Rayner on Her Rise Into Politics', this dataset is a thirteen minute long interview (13:36) in which presenters Holly Willoughby and Phillip Schofield probe Rayner about her past experiences and political life in the present. This example can best be described as a blend between an autobiographical narrative interview (Svašek & Domecka, 2020) and an informal conversation, providing the researcher with the opportunity to analyse situated narrative interaction.

      Bamberg (2004) proposes, when analysing stories using the positioning framework, working through the different levels chronologically, starting at level one. This progression is loosely followed here, whilst also exploring how the levels interact with each other simultaneously. As positioning theory acts as a middle ground between conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis, the methodological process requires analysing the narrative output in a sequential, clause by clause manner (Sacks et al., 1974), whilst also drawing on cultural and social knowledge (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

      The interview was transcribed using the notations outlined in Davidson (2010, pp. 120-121), whilst also utilising Gardner's (2001) suggestion to create specific symbols for the data when necessary. Where new symbols are created, their inclusion is justified in Table 3. The full transcript of the video features in Appendix 7.2.

4   Analysis

4.1   Level One

Bamberg (2004, p. 336) describes Level One positioning as 'talking about others and arranging them in narrative space and time'. Table 1 identifies the narratives Rayner tells, and Table 2 describes the characters present across the various storyworlds.

Table 1: *Narratives identified*

Story type	Story structure	Presence in data	Line number(s)
Anecdote 1	An anecdote is a story aiming to invoke an emotional response from the audience (Martin and	**Orientation**: 'mixing with people who went to private education who have got (.) loads of wealth' - The listener infers that proceeding	24-33

	Plum, 1997). The structure is as follows: Orientation// Remarkable Event// Reaction// Coda.	information is likely to be related to wealth disparities, given that Raynor mentioned growing up on a council estate seconds prior. **Remarkable Event**: "I remember having a joke once with one of the MPs talking about the (.) issues on our estate because there was um (.) ca – um horses churning up the grass on the estate and he went 'oh we have llamas on our estate' I'm like no I'm talking about the <u>council</u> estate" **Reaction**: '[((laughing)) oh my god]=' **Coda**: '=in the wild so it was ya know those moments where two worlds [collide]'	
Labovian Narrative 1	Abstract Orientation Complicating Action Resolution Evaluation Coda	**Abstract**: 'but I just learned in a different way' **Orientation**: 'when I was early (.) erm in my I – when I was younger' **Complicating Action:** 'I wasn't on education my mum had bipolar and was very depressed so I was looking after ma mum and things like that' **Resolution**: 'so education wasn't (.) drilled into me as important' **Evaluation**: 'but (.) that doesn't mean to say that I was (.) less intelligent and I think (.) a lot of people think that you have to speak a certain way (.) or you don't talk about those things cause you're ashamed or you're embarrassed by it whereas I think we should talk about it [more]' **Coda**: –	71-75
Labovian Narrative 2	Abstract Orientation Complicating Action Resolution Evaluation Coda	**Abstract**: 'one of the biggest challenges that I found' **Orientation**: 'when I had Ryan' **Complicating Action**: 'I ended up on income support' **Resolution**: 'now obviously I – I pay my taxes I'm a a ya know high income earner… I managed to you know get on and achieve' **Evaluation**: 'I felt humiliated and ashamed	90-102

		to ask for help and people that use foodbanks now (.) it's that humiliation it's not a lifestyle choice but some people think (.) oh it's a lifestyle choice to do that you know you're responsible and (.) the the difficulties and the challenges I had (.)' **Coda**: 'I just wanted to be a good mum'	
Hypothetical Small story	N/A – whilst Georgakopoulou (2007) outlines that hypothetical stories are a type of small story, they do not describe a structure.	'if – **if y**ou've got no money at the end of the month and then your fridge breaks down your fridge freezer (.) you can't get credit (.) to get a fridge freezer (.) it's impossible and you don't (.) have (.) a couple of hundred quid in the bank= and that pit (.) in your stomach that (.) feelin of absolute dread (.) what am I gonna do (.) the panic (.) and I think sometimes people in positions of (.) influence like um (.) politicians they've never felt that'	106-118
Shared ('known') Stories – Small story	Temporal adverbial indicates speaker is starting a narrative	'I mean **there are times when** you (.) haven't held back (.) I mean you uh (.) said **in October 2020** you used the word scum (.) in reference to the Tory MP Chris Clarkson in the midst of a commons debate (.) **late night event in September '21 at the Labour Party conference** you described the Conservative government as homophobic (.) racist (.) misogynistic and vile (.) a bunch of scum (.) now they are big they're big words (.)'	122-128
Labovian Narrative 3	Abstract Orientation Complicating Action Resolution Evaluation Coda	**Abstract**: 'well it goes back to what I said before about bein' (.)' **Orientation**: 'growin up on the council estate (.) bein a ginger kid (.) who was poor (.) and then havin' a child when I was a child myself at [sixteen (.)] um (.)' **Complicating Action:** 'I already had that level of abuse and that stigma (.) and I always I I felt that there was (.) um (.) y'know I was bullied and everythin' else so (.)'	181-191

		Resolution: 'what I get now doesn't (.) doesn't impact on me because I think (.) I'm (.) I'm worth it (.) and' **Evaluation**: 'that's why I say what I say in the way I do because I want the young people of today (.) and the young (.) single mums like me (.) to know that they are absolutely worth it (.) don't let anyone make you feel like you're not valid because you absolutely are' **Coda: –**	
Anecdote 2 /Projection	Orientation// Remarkable Event// Reaction// Coda.	**Orientation**: 'I was a home help (.)' **Remarkable Event:** 'I saw people in big huge houses (.) who'd live in the kitchen (.) with a little stove on for an hour (.) in the cold (.)' **Coda**: 'I don't want any older person in our country thinkin' they have to do that and they will do that' **Reaction**: 'yeah'	254-257

Table 2: *Characters present in the storyworld(s)*

Narrative	Characters present
Anecdote 1	1. Rayner when she first entered parliament 2. A privately educated colleague that she met in her first week there
Labovian Narrative 1	1. Rayner's 'younger' self, aged sixteen (inferring from instances elsewhere in the interview) 2. Rayner's mother
Labovian Narrative 2	1. Sixteen year old Rayner 2. Rayner's son, Ryan 3. Plural 'you' – those in a position of financial insecurity
Hypothetical Story	1. Plural 'you' – those in a position of financial insecurity
Shared World (known) Stories	1. Rayner in 2020 2. MP Chris Clarkson 3. Rayner in 2021 4. The Conservative Government

Labovian Narrative 3	1. Sixteen year old Rayner
Anecdote 2/Projection	1. Rayner prior to being a politician

4.1.1   Responsibility, Agency, and Emotion

Rayner attributes various qualities to the characters in her stories, one of which being responsibility. At sixteen, she cares for both her mother and her son. In Labovian Narrative 2, she absolves working class members of responsibility for their financial insecurity, stating 'it's not a lifestyle choice but some people think (.) oh it's a lifestyle choice… you're responsible' (lines 96-97). Rayner is therefore seen to be personally responsible for the wellbeing of others, but rejects that working class people should be held responsible for their hardship(s).

In this same Labovian Narrative, Rayner describes agency in two ways – firstly, she describes being agentic in that she managed to overcome hardship and 'get on and achieve' (line 102). She also cites an initial lack of agency in that she relied on the welfare system, something which she was uncomfortable with ('I wanted to go to work… I wanted to help …and I wanted to do the right thing' – line 100). In Labovian Narrative 1, her agency is curtailed by her responsibilities, in that caring for her mother impacted her ability to achieve in educational settings. Agency is further featured in the Hypothetical Small Story, where Rayner describes working class people experiencing food insecurity as unagentic, in that they are unable to carry out the actions that would better their situation (in this instance, buying a new fridge freezer). In the Shared Story, she is described by Phillip as agentic, in that she uses strong language at her will.

In the narrative output, Rayner states that she felt humiliated and ashamed. She also describes characters in Labovian Narrative 2, those relying on foodbanks, as feeling humiliated. Within her evaluations of her stories, Rayner describes her opinion that 'people', i.e., wider society, perceive of class struggle (such as relying on foodbanks and the welfare state; Wunderlich & Norwood, 2006) as something to be embarrassed of. Rayner also describes the feelings of fear and dread that arise from not being able to feed your family (felt by many working class people, as demonstrated by her use of the plural 'your') that is present in the Hypothetical Small Story, and points out that many wealthy MPs in parliament have not felt those same feelings. In sum, Rayner positions characters in her grand, personal narratives as well as characters in her small stories by describing their agency, responsibility, and the range of emotions felt.

4.2   Level Two

Narratives have the potential to be shaped by their interactional contexts. Schofield tells two Shared Stories (stories known to all interlocutors prior to the telling) in which Rayner is accused of using 'big' language (line 127). During this interaction, Rayner mentions Boris Johnson's lack of apology for his comments about racial minorities, homosexual men, and women. Schofield responds to this by stating that Rayner has not apologised for her language, either, implying that he feels that she should. This in turn implies a level of wrongdoing, a moral evaluation, which Rayner rejects. This is demonstrated at level two through the conversational actions taken by both parties in their speech. Phillip presents a statement, which Rayner then defends ('the language that Boris Johnson used… <u>has</u> been racist it <u>has</u> been homophobic it <u>has</u> been misogynistic', lines 150-151). This interaction underscores how positioning amongst interlocutors is a negotiation.

In her first narrative, Anecdote 1, Rayner describes a humorous situation whereby herself and a wealthier colleague have different understandings of the word 'estate' (lines 27-28). This positions her wealthy colleague as out of touch with the general public and Rayner as in touch, by contrast. Telling a humorous anecdote constructs Rayner as a politician that employs informal and relaxed conversation styles, further positioning her as a woman of the people. She also describes, as detailed at level one, how politicians in the telling world have not experienced financial insecurity and its effects – a contrast to her own experience. It could subsequently be the case that Rayner utilises the affordances of the interactional setting, a wider audience of *This Morning* watchers and potential voters, in positioning herself as an in touch, approachable, and electable politician. Indeed, Gee (1999, p. 13) argues that this kind of level two positioning – describing a past version of oneself within the here and now, allows the speaker to construct the 'kind of person' one wishes to convey to the audience. This is one example of how the types of stories and characters within those stories are adapted to the situated interaction.

Rayner carries out many communicative actions in this interview. As mentioned, she defends her lack of apology for her strong language during her interaction with Phillip. At other times, she defends working class people and justifies their actions by saying that using foodbanks is 'not a lifestyle choice'. Rayner uses further defensive positioning when discussing reliance on the welfare state, saying that she 'just wanted to be a good mum', and that she 'wanted to go to work… wanted to help and… wanted to do the right thing' (line 100). Rayner justifies her lack of formal academic education by outlining that she helped look after her mother who has mental illnesses. She then defends the conditions that her caring responsibilities left her with, saying 'that doesn't mean to say that I was less intelligent' (line 75). The communicative action(s) taken in these narratives are primarily those of defence and justification.

Rayner frequently tells stories of a similar structure. She tells a Hypothetical Story, in which she puts herself in the shoes of somebody on the breadline, describing how many people cannot afford for incidents such as your fridge freezer breaking to happen. In the Projection, she again looks to the future, describing how she has seen elderly people heat one room of their house with a stove, and how 'they will do that [again]' (line 257). These particular types of stories demonstrate a consideration for the future well-being of working class people. This, accompanied by the fact that she often plays the role of advocate (by telling stories of struggle that are not her own), positions Rayner as a politician aligned with the needs and struggles of the working class. Indeed, one of the strengths of positioning theory is its ability to convey characteristics over time (Bamberg, 2011). The double temporal indexicality of telling vs tale has allowed for Rayner to convey a sense of constancy – whilst she is no longer working class in the economic sense, her interests remain aligned with working class needs and identity. This has been demonstrated here through the types of stories she tells as well as the communicative functions employed.

4.3   Level 3

The positions Rayner assigns to characters in her storyworlds and the range of actions taken in conversation frequently demonstrate an interplay between positioning at the first two levels and positioning at level 3, that is, an orientation to master narratives. Starting at level one, Rayner discusses responsibility – how she performed her caring duties and the level of responsibility she assigned to food bank users. By arguing that working class people are not responsible for their own poverty, Rayner orients to and subsequently rejects the positions afforded to working class people in neoliberalist discourse (Wilson, 2007). Neoliberalism is defined as an ideology in which 'human beings are made accountable for their predicaments or circumstances… as opposed to finding faults in larger structural and institutional forces like economic

inequality' (ibid, p. 97). These ascriptions of responsibility, taken together with the interactionally defensive positioning at level two, demonstrates how Rayner rejects neoliberally constructed perceptions of working class identity. Positioning theory thus presents the researcher with the opportunity to investigate how speakers orient to master discourses when and only when they become relevant in a given scenario (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008), as opposed to a framework that might hastily assume them to be relevant at all times (such as CDA).

Further instances of Rayner orientating to master narratives are displayed in her descriptions of agency and emotion. In the Labovian Narrative 2, Rayner attests that, despite being on Income Support (a means-tested legacy benefit)**,** 'I wanted to go to work… I wanted to help… and I wanted to do the right thing' (line 100). She describes other working class actors, both in the storyworld and storytelling world (people she grew up with and those on the breadline today) as motivated and possessing the desire to achieve. Rayner also mentions elsewhere in the interview, 'I don't want people to feel that pit in their stomach if they're working' (line 227-228), omitting unemployed working class members from these considerations in turn. Here, she constructs herself, and a particular subsection of working class people (those that are working, wanting to do the 'right thing', and those who are motivated – and only this subsection), as agentic. This orients to what Levitas (1998), Morris (1994) and Fairclough (2000) describe as the 'division of respectable and abject within the working class' (Skeggs, 2005, p. 972). That is, 'abject' working class individuals are branded 'skivers' (Valentine & Harris, 2014) and 'lazy' (Haylet, 2003) if they claim benefits, use food banks, or are unemployed, with 'respectable' working class members avoiding such labels by demonstrating a so-called desire to work and achieve. Through descriptions of certain working class characters in the storyworld as agentic and not others, Rayner is seen to orient to the master narrative that there is such a thing as a 'good' and 'bad' way to be working class, firmly positioning herself as the former. This could therefore be characterised as an acceptance of this abject/respectable division, as opposed to her previous rejection of the positions afforded to working class people by master narratives. As Saini (2022) notes, positioning theory is a particularly useful framework to apply to stories told by minorities, in that it offers up an opportunity to investigate how the individual navigates (accepts, rejects, subverts) existing dominant discourses.

Rayner frequently describes the emotions she and other working class individuals felt as a response to negative public sentiments around stigmatised activities such as having children at a young age. These emotions were also featured in the narratives told about financial insecurity (such as needing food banks and relying on benefits), and included shame, humiliation, and embarrassment. By assigning these emotions, Rayner orients to the master narrative of 'moral disgust' towards working class people (Skeggs, 2005, 2006; Tyler, 2008). As Skeggs (1997) highlights, this perception of working class individuals is so pervasive that many internalise this negativity, feeling emotions of shame in accordance with their perceived lack of 'moral value' (Skeggs, 2005, p. 48). Society treats working class white women in particular, especially those relying on the welfare state who have had children at a young age, as aimless, promiscuous, and uncouth (Tyler, 2008). Here, the distinction between the telling and the tale, in contrast to a sense of constancy as established prior, instead conveys a sense of change. Whilst Rayner internalised moral disgust in the storyworld, she rejects those feelings at the time of the interview and instead advocates speaking out about stigma, saying 'a lot of people think… you don't talk about those things cause you're ashamed or you're embarrassed by it whereas I think we should talk about it [more]' (line 78), and 'I want the young people of today (.) and the young (.) single mums like me (.) to know that they are absolutely worth it (.)' (lines 188-191). Positioning theory has proven itself to be a sophisticated framework in

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conveying consistency and change over time, in turn underscoring the unstable and evolving nature of identity.

5   Conclusion

This research has demonstrated how narratives, both grand and small, function as rich data sites through which to investigate adaptable, contestable, and locally situated identities. Abstract qualities such as responsibility, expressed in real time through actions such as defending and justifying, have together demonstrated orientation to and rejection of overarching neoliberalist ideology, for example. Thus, as exemplified by the interplay at different levels, positioning theory is particularly apt at describing the relationship between micro- and macro-phenomena, exploring how master discourses are orientated to in local interaction and negotiated amongst speakers. This in turn strengthens the case for inductively/abductively grounded frameworks by challenging the need for wholly top-down or bottom-up starting points, the critiques of which are extensively documented (de Fina, 2008). This research has demonstrated how by placing characters in a story world, relaying those stories in context, and employing wider discursive information, a working class speaker can navigate their past, present and future in displaying a layered self.

Questions remain, however, regarding the distinction between the told (level one), and the telling (level two). A post-structuralist stance might postulate, for instance, that both are 'contextually and reflexively dependent on one another' (Watson, 2007, p. 384). Speakers may describe, place, and evaluate (position) characters in storyworlds differently, depending on the interlocutors present and the specificities of any given environment. Schofield's insinuation that Rayner should apologise for her language and the inclusion of that narrative on a national stage could be interpreted as Schofield demonstrating a political commitment, in that some left leaning journalists may not have framed the situation in a negative way. Indeed, Bamberg (1997) describes how characters' actions may be described differently depending on the desire of the speaker and the interlocutors to evaluate themselves with particular moral weight. Future research could therefore explore the tellings of the same story to different audiences in order to examine the effects of level one on level two, and vice versa. This in particular may be fruitfully applied to stories told by working class actors, given that some working class professionals like Rayner have claimed to have changed their behaviour and linguistic output when around individuals whose class is different to their own (Verdi & Ebsworth, 2009).

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1: Transcription Notations

Table 1: *Transcription Notations*

Symbol	Meaning
:::	Elongation of the sound prior
[ ]	Overlap in talk
=	Speech that directly follows prior speech without pause
(.)	A very short pause
(( ))	Descriptions of behaviour

test	Word underlined demonstrates emphasis
TEST	Upper case demonstrates volume
test	Bold indicates the presence of a narrative

7.2 Appendix 2: Transcript

Line no.	Sp.	Dialogue
1	H:	good afternoon joining us is one of the most powerful women in westminster
2		with a reputation for being fiery and outspoken
3	P:	but getting to her senior political position hasn't been easy not just because of
4		her gender but because (.) also of her working class background
5	H:	well (.) to tell us about life as deputy leader of the labour party we're joined
6		now by (.) Angela Rayner good [morning and]
7	A:	[good morning]
8	H:	Welcome
9	A:	[thank you]
10	H:	[it's lovely to have] you here (.) um (.) it's funny because you see you (.) in
11		Westminster (.) doing your job pro- uh (.) carrying out your role (.) I didn't
12		actually know too much about your background until I read this and I'm not
13		sure I mean a lot of people will do but a lot of people won't (.) but it was that
14		background and your upbringing that really shaped you (.) who you are as you sit
15		here on the sofa today
16	A:	yeah (.) and it was crazy when I first went into parliament because (.) yaknow
17		the whole building is like goin' to hogwarts it's a bit (.) surreal you know (.) I still

18

think that yaknow when I stand at the dispatch box and you think of the people

19

[that have stood there and been there]

20 H: [who have been there before you]

21 A: before me it's a bit like wow (.) I'm here and I'm doin' this (.) you know so it

22   does feel a bit surreal from (.) growing up on a council estate and (.) ya know

23   having my son at sixteen and (.) and basically you know um (.) being very poor

24   and (.) having very big challenges and then all of a sudden being in (.) **mixing**

25   **with people who went to private education who have got (.) loads of**

26   **wealth and (.) I remember having a joke once with one of the MPs talking**

27   **about the (.) issues on our estate because there was um (.) ca- um horses**

28   **churning up the grass on the estate and he went oh we have llamas on**

29   **our estate I'm like no I'm talking about the <u>council</u>**

30   **[estate and the horses that were just left]**

31 H: [((laughing)) oh my god]=

32 A: **=in the wild so it was ya know those**

33   **moments where two worlds [collide]**

34 P: [when] you left school at sixteen (.) um (.) you were

35

told that you wouldn't amount to anything

36 A: yeah (.)

37 P: what was life like (.) for you then (.) la- and life at home=

38 A: =you see this is the thing cause (.) in parliament people do see me as quite

39   (.) brash and quite (.) confident but (.) part of the reason I'm like that is

40		because when I was sixteen and I was (.) I was pregnant (.) the shame and the
41		humiliation that people made me feel like (.) you know (.) institutions of
42		government (.) ya know doctors (.) police (.) they were there (.) above you (.) and
43		they were there to do things and you had to keep order they weren't (.) people
44		<u>like</u> you
45	H:	Yeah
46	A:	so (.) I always felt know your place (.) so (.) I felt that humiliation and shame
47		then so now (.) I'm like (.) no I'm proud of who I am and I'm proud of the people
48		that I represent (.) and the people that I grew up with so (.) now I don't have any
49		(.) cares about speakin' (.) ma mind and bein 'cause everyone's got unique
50		talents it doesn't matter where they're from whether (.) they're from an affluent
51		background or not but (.) there's people from working class backgrounds that
52		are (.) from a very young age (.) taught to know your place [y'know]
53	H:	[yes yeah]
54	A:	and and I- I -learnt that and then I unlearned it (.) and realised that actually (.) its
55		important that people do speak out=
56	H:	=a-and do you think that therefore actually (.) um um (.) within parliament there
57		needs to be a bit more broader representation of people from all sorts of
58		walks of life then because obviously clearly its so important
59	A:	yeah and y'know (.) there's so many (.) colleagues from different parties that
60		have got working class backgrounds but it almost gets (.) taken out of them (.)
61		and its a frustration for me cause when I speak to them [an-

62 H: [who's] taking it out of

63   them?

64 A: The <u>SYSTEM</u> (.) they just they grow up thinking that in order to be somethin' (.)

65   ya have to:: speak a certain way (.) or ya have to hide that you didn't like I

66   talk about not having a formal academic education

67 P: ((murmuring))

68 A: and (.) then people say oh you're thick (.) i I'm I'm clearly not because i

69   wouldn't be in the job I'm doin now if I was stupid

70 H: yeah

71 A: **but I just learned in a different way and I had challenges in ma life when I**

72   **was early (.) erm in my I- when I was younger so I wasn't on education my**

73   **mum had bipolar and was very depressed so I was looking after ma mum**

74   **and things like that so education wasn't (.) drilled into me as important but**

        (.) that doesn't mean to say that I was (.) less intelligent and I think (.) a lot of

75   people think that you have to speak a certain way (.) or you don't talk about

76   those things cause you're ashamed or you're embarrassed by it whereas I think

77   we should talk about it [more]

78

79 H: [I agree]

80 P: you spend some time uh- uh working as a carer

81   [working within the social services]

82 A: [I did yeah (.) I loved it] (.) yeah

83 P: so (.) when you have that sort of background (.) um (.) the background with your

84		mum (.) looking after her (.) the background of having um uh a child when you
85		were very young (.) um the background of of that (.) uh (.) growing up uh in in the
86		sort of social area that you grew up in
87	A:	mmm
88	P:	um (.) when you get into westminster (.) do you look at it and think (1) you have
89		no clue what's going on in the outside world
90	A:	yeah sometimes it's really frustrating because (.) **one of the biggest challenges**
91		**that I found so when I had Ryan I ended up on income support and (.) I**
92		**needed that support at the beginning now obviously I- I pay my taxes I'm a**
93		**a ya know high income earner (.) and at that time I needed that little bit of**
94		**help and I felt humiliated and ashamed to ask for help and people that use**
		foodbanks now (.) it's that humiliation it's not a lifestyle choice but some
95		**people think (.) oh it's a lifestyle choice to do that you know you're**
96		**responsible and (.) the the difficulties and the challenges I had (.) I just**
97		**wanted to be a good mum**
98		
99	H:	mmm
100	A:	**I wanted to go to work I wanted to help and I wanted to do the right thing**
101		**but (.) the system at the time was a struggle for me (.) but I managed to you**
102		**know get on and achieve and (.)** and I think the misconception a lot of time is
103		people think (.) oh well they're on benefits so they don't really want any- they

104		don't aspire to anything in life and the challenges that (.) you know some of the
		people I grew up with ma friends (.) they've got like (.) children they're on the
105		breadline they're struggling and and you know I've helped them out in the past **if**
106		**if you've got no money at the end of the month and then your fridge breaks**
107		**down your fridge freezer (.) you can't get credit (.) to get a fridge freezer (.)**
108		**it's impossible and you don't (.) have (.) a couple of hundred quid in the**
109		**bank=**
110		
111	H:	=no
112	A:	to just go and buy one
113	P:	yeah
114	A:	**and that pit (.) in your stomach that (.) feelin of absolute dread (.) what am I**
115		**gonna do (.) the panic (.) and I think sometimes people in positions of (.)**
116		**influence like um (.) politicians they've never felt that**
117	H:	[no no no]
118	A:	**[they've never felt] that fear of not being able to [look after ya family]**
119	P:	[and has this made you]
120		quite obviously you know you have uh you've got a lot to look back on you have
121		an immense amount of experiences it made you (1) angry i mean you are (.) you
122		are (.) uh- uh-outspoken (.) **I mean there are times when you (.) haven't held**
123		**back (.) I mean you uh (.) said in October 2020 you used the word scum (.)**
		in reference to the Tory MP Chris Clarkson in the midst of a commons

124   **debate (.) late night event in September '21 at the Labour Party conference**

125   **you described the Conservative government as homophobic (.) racist (.)**

126   **misogynistic and vile (.) a bunch of scum (.) now they are big they're big**

127   **words (.)** uh Keir Starmer I think said they're not quite the words I wouldn't use=

128

129   A: =sure

130   P: have you (.) be-cuh is that because (.) you are angry and frustrated or is that just

131   the person that you are (.) speakin' your mind

132   A: no it's because I get <u>really</u> (.) frustrated and you know you do have to watch ya

133   tone because obviously people have (.) have got abuse and I I don't condone

134   abuse what I want (.) and what I aspire is that people get involved in politics

135   because it matters (.) and the reason why I get so angry about that is (.) because

136   (.) if you're in (.) Boris Johnson has said some pretty awful things (.) very very

137   bad things that actually (.) even if you were in a a job workin' in a supermarket

138   you'd have been sacked (.) for the things that he's said (.) so I think (.) why do

     you treat a supermarket worker to a standard that you say (.) if you said that

139   comment (.) that you wouldn't be in the job (.) but the prime minister of the

140   country has never apologised for those comments it's the <u>HYPOCRISY</u> of it (.)

141   because they're posh and they've gone to a posh school (.) [they can say those

142   things but]

143

144   P: [but you didn't

145   apologise for saying] (.) uh homophobic (.) racist (.) misogynistic and <u>vile</u>

146   A: no I've I've I've asked (.) Boris Johnson to actually have a debate with me on this

147   because I really want to say to him because (.) this is the problem that I have (.) if

148

149   you if you put working class people (.) ordinary people doing their day to day job

150   your lorry driver whatever (.) to a standard that says if you use language like (.)

151   you know (.) um (.) the language that Boris Johnson used (.) which <u>has</u> been

152   racist it <u>has</u> been homophobic it <u>has</u> been misogynistic (.) they wouldn't last five

153   minutes in their job (.) yet you've got the prime minister (.) who thinks he doesn't

154   have to apologise for those comments and he can say it (.) so it's the hypocrisy

155   for me (.) I accept that some of the language was (.) y'know (.) it was it was not

156   the language that they would u:se (.) but for me it's the frustration of (.) you (.)

157   you treat people to a different standard (.) so if I walk into a room for example

158   'cause I- I've got a Manchester accent (.) I have to prove and because I'm a

159   woman (.) I have to prove why I've got the (.) skills to do my job (.) if (.) Boris

160   Johnson walks into a room because he's from Eton (.) private educated from a

161   certain class (.) and he's a man in a suit (.) he's automatically oh well he must

             know what he's [talkin' about]

162   P: [well you walk] up to the dispatch box and you get that as a

163   woman at the dispatch box because (.) you will be (.) a- a- abused online (.) and

164   trolled online because of what you're wearing (.) [whereas that would never

165   happen to a guy]

166	A:	[well it's funny because I keep
167		sayin' y'know (.)] I'm gonna turn up to PMQs one day I'm gonna ruffle ma hair (.)
168		so it looks really scraggy like I've not got up and (.) done anything with it I'm
169		gonna wear a bland suit with a pair of (.) male shoes on and put (.) no makeup on
170		(.) and then when I get like the <u>tsunami</u> of abuse sayin' look at the <u>state</u> of her (.)
171		how can she turn up like that I'll say well I'm just (.) dressed (.) exactly the same
172		way as the person opposite me (.) because you do get (.) unfortunately=
173	H:	=yeah
174	A:	you do get ya know (.) a different standard and ya do get (.)uh criticised for
175		whatever I wear (.) whatever I say (.)[however I speak]
176	H:	[and you do get a lot of abuse] online as well
177		(.) and you've spoken about this before actually women (.) women within politics
		(.) they do receive a lot of abuse online and (.) how do you shut off to that (.) do
178		you read it do you look at it (.) does it stop you from being able to do your job as
179		well as before
180		
181	A:	**well it goes back to what I said before about bein' (.) growin up on the**
182		**council estate (.) bein a ginger kid (.) who was poor (.) and then havin' a**
		child when I was a child myself at [sixteen (.)]
183		
184	H:	[yeah]
185	A:	**um (.) I already had that level of abuse and that stigma (.) and I always I I felt**
186		

		that there was (.) um (.) y'know I was bullied and everythin' else so (.) what I
187		**get now doesn't (.) doesn't impact on me because I think (.) I'm (.) I'm worth**
188		**it (.) and that's why I say what I say in the way I do because I want the**
189		**young people of today (.) and the young (.) single mums like me (.) to know**
190		**that they are absolutely worth it (.) don't let anyone make you feel like**
191		**you're not valid because you absolutely are** and (.) you know you can speak
192		like ya mates do (.) you you might not have all the big fluffy language but you
193		[articulate yourself and that's completely fine]
194	H:	[do you think
195		traditional politicians are] (.) nervous of you (.) like do you that think you sort of
196		hold a mirror up to something that's quite (.) o-old fashioned in some ways
197	A:	yeah some of them are (.) they don't quite know how to take me (.) they're a bit
198		like woah (.) and I think that's the other thing as well cause (.) Mancunians we're
199		a bit in ya face (.) ya know and and where i grew up it's like y'kno we <u>are</u> a
200		bit (.) boisterous and (.) loud and (.) and they they see it as woah you're a
201		bit full on and actually that's quite normal ya know in fact i'm quite tame
202		compared to [how I am when I'm with my mates in Manchester]
203	H:	((laughing))
204	P:	[well you (.) you've said] you've said of (.) of Keir Starmer it's fair to
205		say me and Keir are completely different in the way that we do things it's like

206		putting two dogs together in a room they'll fight for a bit then they'll find a way (.)
207		
		and then they become best of mates we haven't quite got to be best of mates yet
208		
		(.) um (.) do you want to be leader
209	A:	I want Keir to be Prime Minister so that I can rock it at the other side then I can
210		go in number 10 and he has all the responsibility of being Prime Minister and I
		can (.) get all of the stuff that I think will help [working class people from my
211		
		background]
212		
213	P:	[so you don't (.) you don't (.)] you
214		have no ambitions of being Prime Minister
215	A:	I want to get into number ten with Keir (.) I just want to get into government (.)
		dya know what (.) seriously (.) seven years (.) nearly (.) i've been on frontline
216		
		politics(.) I've I've sacrificed (.) seein' ma kids as much as I'd want (.) I'm a
217		
		grandmother now
218		
219	H:	mmm
220	A:	I haven't seen my grandkids as much as I'd like to (.) and (.) for me (.)
221		opposition is not a place to be cause ya can't change people's lives
222	H:	mmm
223	A:	I want to be able to do all the things that I know will make the difference that
224		helped me (.) when I was growin' up (.) and that's my number one target is to get
		into government (.) so that we can actually implement policies that will change
225		
		people's lives so (.) y'know the cost of livin' now and (.) I talked about worryin'
226		
		about if ya fridge freezer breaks (.) I don't want people to feel that pit in their

227
stomach (.) if they're workin' I want them to feel (.) [confident that they can live

228
their lives]

229

230   P: [where would you] where

231
would you find uh w- the money (.) the UK prices rose by six point two percent in

232
the twelve months to february (.) fastest rate for thirty years (.) [fuel]

234   A: [yep]

235   P: energy (.) food costs (.) absolutely soaring you've got Rishi Sunak today

236
delivering his mini budget (.) um (.) there is only like any household in any

237
country there is only a limited pot (.) of money that you can (.) you can dish out (.)

238
where would you guys find the money (.) to pay for what you're asking

239   A: and and ya know the most important thing about what ya sayin as well is those

240
costs (.) those day to day costs people who are on low incomes and ordinary

241
people workin' families (.) they spend majority of their wages on those costs its a

242
bigger pot of what they spend on (.) and we've said that the -the oil and energy

243
companies have made massive profits over 40 billion (.) they've made (.) they

244
didn't expect to make that level of profit (.) we said the government should do a

245
windfall tax (.) we've done it before (.) and they should help with the households

246
bills now because people cannot find that money (.) it's not just a case of oh well

247
it's just gonna tighten your belt (.) people cannot find that money (.) it is (.)

		yaknow energy bills are going up fifty-fifty six <u>PERCENT</u> (.) how can people find
248		
		that <u>MONEY</u>(.) its- its people are literally petrified about it so (.) we have to do
249		
		something (.) the energy companies made huge money(.) that they didn't expect
250		
		to make (.) so now times are difficult (.) put that money back into helping those
251		
		families cause they really desperately need it (.) it's not just a case of politics here
252		
		(.) this about people feelin' like they can live and they can look after their kids (.)
253		
		and many older people as well (.) **I was a home help (.) I saw people in big**
		huge houses (.) who'd live in the kitchen (.) with a little stove on for an hour
254		
		(.) in the cold (.) I don't want any older person in our country thinkin' they
255		
		have to do that and they will do that
256		
257		
258	H:	yeah
259	A:	And they will do that (.) even if they've got big huge houses you'll see them in the
260		
		kitchen with a little stove on (.) for an hour (.) because they'll be worried about
261		
		spending so much money energy o-o-on their energy bills (.) we've got to do
262		
		somethin' to help
263	H:	[thank you thank you] thank you
264	P:	[we have to leave it there] (.) uh but thank you (.) very much
265	H:	yeah (.) it's great to talk to you (.) [thank you thank you]
266	A:	[thank you thank you]

About the author

Georgia Juckes graduated from the University of Birmingham in July 2022 with a first-class degree in English Language and Linguistics. With a particular interest in the relationship between language and society, she conducted a corpus assisted critical discourse analysis of the representations of Ghislaine Maxwell in the British Press for her undergraduate dissertation. This research suggested that Maxwell was treated preferentially on account of her class and race.

Through her role as a researcher with Journey to Justice, a charity aiming to shed light on injustice and barriers to education in the UK, Georgia continues to contribute to literature on class, gender, and race inequalities. Georgia is particularly committed to feminism and advancing gender equality through her role as Outreach Officer for the Young Fabian Women's Network, where she helps to create spaces for young women to engage in politics and policy.

Having just started her career in policy, Georgia works as an adviser for Citizens Advice Bureau, assisting the public with topics ranging from welfare to immigration. This position equips her with coalface insights which will guide her Master's degree in Social Policy, which she intends to undertake in 2024.

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