

Intersectional and contingent school success: Racialisation, gender and social class

Ann Phoenix

www.ioe.ac.uk





**Leading education
and social research**
Institute of Education
University of London

Many thanks to Hanna Ragnasdóttir and team

Education (and schooling) produces and amplifies social inequalities

- ❑ **Across generations and over the life course (Barone and Schizzerotto, 2011).**
- ❑ **Gender, racialisation, social class & sexuality differentiate educational outcomes & life chances.**

Repeated findings

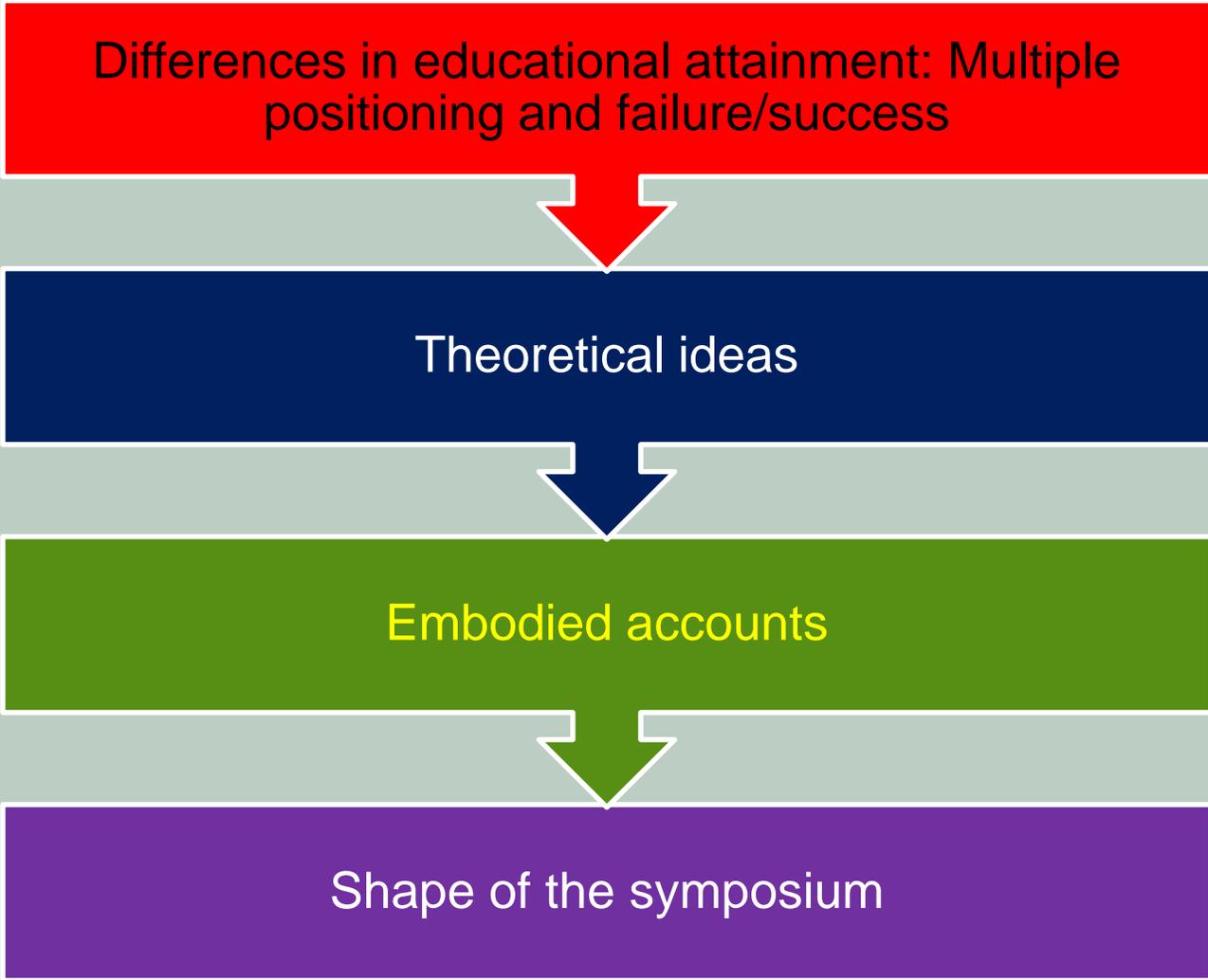
BUT

Dynamic picture

Specificities for particular groups situated in particular local/global contexts

Aims of the talk

Differences in educational attainment: Multiple positioning and failure/success



```
graph TD; A[Differences in educational attainment: Multiple positioning and failure/success] --> B[Theoretical ideas]; B --> C[Embodied accounts]; C --> D[Shape of the symposium];
```

Theoretical ideas

Embodied accounts

Shape of the symposium

Aims of the talk

Differences in educational attainment: Multiple
The necessity for intersectionality



Theoretical ideas

Embodied accounts

Shape of the symposium

At age 16, social class achievement gap is double the biggest ethnic gap and six times as large as the gender gap in the UK (Strand, 2014)

- ❑ Except for black Caribbean origin boys [and Gypsy/Travellers], all **low socioeconomic status (SES)** ethnic minority groups achieve significantly better than White British students.
 - ❑ White British low SES students and Black Caribbean boys ('particularly the more able') make the least progress.
 - ❑ But substantial minority ethnic underachievement at average/ high SES.
 - ❑ For **high SES** students, only Indian students outperform White
- 'Accounts of educational achievement framed exclusively in terms of social class, ethnicity or gender are insufficient, and the results challenge educational researchers to develop more nuanced accounts of educational success or failure.' (Strand 2014)

Differences in attainment on 2011 UK Census: Place of birth, generation, ethnicity

- ❑ Those **born outside the UK** gain more qualifications (35% cf. 26% white British).
 - ❑ Indian, Chinese and black African groups had significantly higher educational achievements than white British groups.
 - ❑ **Younger people** were more qualified than their older counterparts.
- ‘The most educationally disadvantaged groups in 2011 were white Gypsies/Irish Travellers, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis; they were more likely to have no qualifications than white British people.’ Lympelopoulou, K. and Parameshwaran, M. (2014) ‘How are ethnic inequalities in education changing?’ *ESRC Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Dynamics of Diversity: Evidence from the 2011 Census series.*

Differentiated picture of success/failure in attainment by gender, ethnicity, social class and nation

- ❑ Heath and Brinbaum (2007) Turkish origin young people attain poorly in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway
- ❑ Those of North African descent attain poorly in Belgium, France and the Netherlands.
- ❑ Young people with Pakistani parents attain poorly in Norway and the UK,
- ❑ White working class and African Caribbean boys both gain lower qualifications than most other groups in the UK (Strand 2014), as do white working class boys and Moroccan boys in the Netherlands (Dekkers et al. 2000) and African Caribbean and Mexican-descent boys in the USA (Covarrubias (2011).
- ❑ In contrast, young people of Indian descent attain well in Norway and in the UK.
- ❑ Chinese origin young people in the UK and those of Greek origin in Germany attain well.

Differentiated, dynamic and situated success/failure

- ❑ **Social categories such as race, gender, social class and nation always operate simultaneously**
- ❑ **They mutually constitute each other within particular social contexts, including countries, families and schools (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000).**
- ❑ **Concept of intersectionality allows theorisation, and analysis, of the simultaneity of social categories (Crenshaw, 1989; Lutz et al., 2011)**
- ❑ **Enables recognition of students' multiple positioning in stories of school failure and success (Bhopal and Preston, 2014).**

Aims of the talk

Differences in educational attainment: Multiple positioning and failure/success

Theoretical ideas: Intersectionality, racialisation, liveable lives, contact zones

Embodied accounts

Shape of the symposium

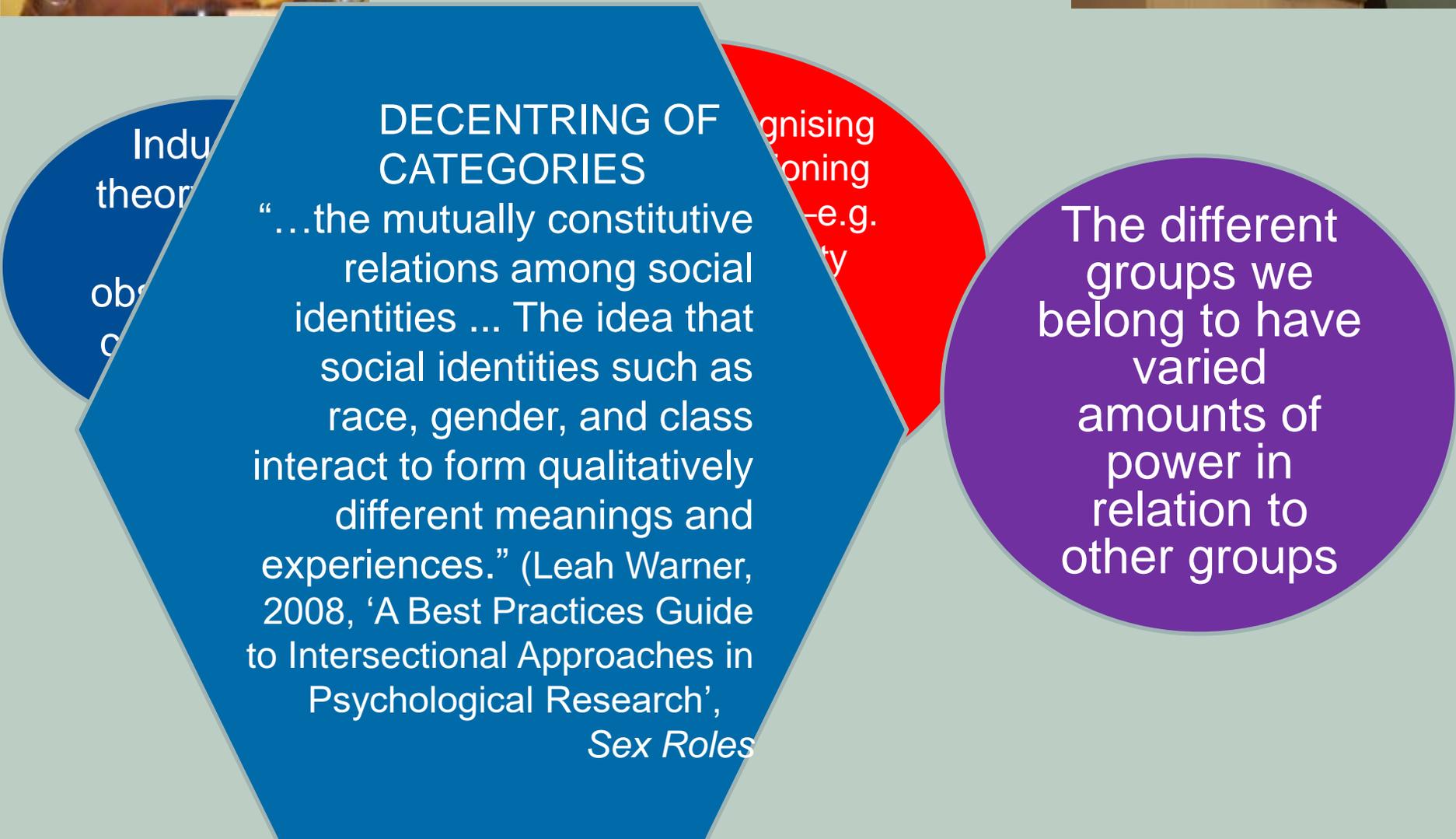


Intersectionality

(Kimberlé Crenshaw 1989, 1994, 2011, 2013)



g education
cial research
e of Education
ty of London



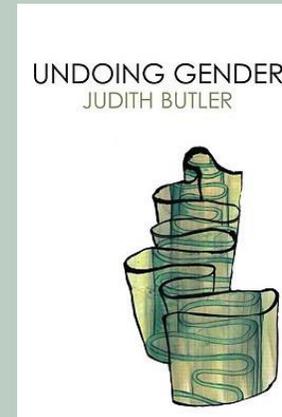
Racialisation (Frantz Fanon)

- ❑ **'Race' changes over time and is different in different situations.**
- ❑ **It is made socially significant, rather than being natural or fixed.**
- ❑ **A relational process—everybody has a racialized/ethnicised position**
- ❑ **Involves exclusions and inclusions.**
- ❑ **Socially constructed process of subjectification.**

□ We 'make' and account for ourselves through autobiographical narratives (Bruner, 1990).

□ Part of identity projects (Connell, 1995, 2000).

'We achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story..' Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988: 150) *Narrative Knowing & the Human Sciences*



Performative (autobiographical) narratives (Bruner, 2002; Schutze, 1981)

Discourses of the normative construct 'liveable' (intelligible) or 'unbearable lives' in canonical narratives of what it is to be a person.

‘Contact zones’ of multicultural classrooms (Mary Louise Pratt, 1991)

‘Social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power...’

- ❑ Classrooms are complex as cultures knock against each other in ways that teachers & schools approve of, and ways that they do not.**
- ❑ Challenging and enabling.**

Aims of the talk

Differences in educational attainment: Multiple positioning and failure/success

Theoretical ideas: Intersectionality, racialisation, liveable lives, contact zones

Embodied accounts: Learning Spaces as relational microcosms

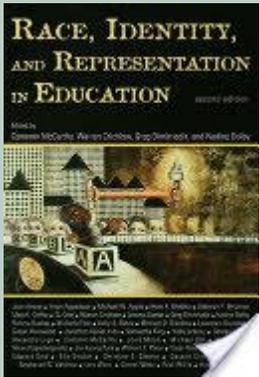
Shape of the symposium

Teachers bring wider social context into the classroom in differential feelings about children

Hayley: So I mean also we both teach in Tower Hamlets, and our schools are about 90 – probably 98/99% from the Bangladeshi community as well. So although it's completely different because my husband and I are both Christians, um they are the Muslim community. For me, a child is a child, whatever religion they are. Whereas my husband still thinks (.) um like with the bombing, for example, because Muslims were obviously involved in all of it, that still sticks in the back of his mind a lot. But (3) I guess a lot of people do it anyway, so you'll label the Muslims as being, for example, this. But because we're working at the schools, and we're working with the children growing up, not everybody's like that... So (.) yeah [faster] ('it affects my husband as well, but it took him longer to come around'). [slower] 'PREVENT STRATEGY' WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Michael Apple (2013) In Warren Crichlow (ed.)

Series Editor's Introduction



I begin a book of mine, *Official Knowledge* (2000), with a story of an African American child who is trying to stop a fight between two of his classmates. He isn't participating in the altercation, but *he* is the one who is literally pulled into the principal's office and suspended for fighting. The child in question in this instance was my son—and the reality of constantly being constructed as the “other” and the extremely powerful effects of this on him are too distressing to retell. Instances such as these are “ordinary” and that is exactly the point. They speak to the ways in which differential power relations are ongoingly built and experienced in our daily lives. They also speak to a powerful politics of whiteness in which even supposedly “liberal” institutions, filled with supposedly “liberal” people, construct identities and relations of dominance and subordination—and the resistances that ensue from these relations—that enable such institutions and people to act on their common sense in ways that are more than a little damaging (Lipman 2004).

I wanted to begin my Series Editor's Introduction to this important book with this example because it points to some of the ways race works, in this case on a school playground. It's a mundane example; but it also can serve as a reminder about the power of race in the ordinary interactions of daily life in all of our institutions.

In their exceptional analysis of the way the discourses of race have operated in the United States, Omi and Winant argue that race is not an “add-on,” but is truly constitutive of many of our most taken for granted daily experiences.

Peer groups central to learning and negotiation of everyday practices and exclusions

- ❑ Kofoed (2008) observation of daily ritual at a Danish school – the selection of players for football games.
- ❑ Ritual indicates and ensures the transition from lesson to playtime
- ❑ How pupils policed each other, negotiated hierarchies and constructed community and otherness.
- ❑ Calling out of the names of the boys chosen reiterated notions of who were the attractive pupils.
- ❑ **Repetition of the ritual reproduced already established differences**
- ❑ ‘The skilled players’ were always male and white, without this having to be made explicit.

Intersecting categories of difference & inequality: How 'agency is built into the concept of Learning Spaces' (Jim Cummins)

- ❑ Haavind et al. (2014) reanalysed a focus group transcript from four Chinese girls at a multicultural school in California from Barrie Thorne.
- ❑ Girls experienced their social identity categories as linked with painful, exclusionary, group divisions and hierarchies
- ❑ In the focus group, however, they created more pleasurable narratives and were supportive of each other.
- ❑ They felt that the category 'Chinese girls' was incommensurate with 'cool', but their ability to speak an additional shared language and achieve well allowed them to categorize others as 'stupid'.
- ❑ Laughed about the racialised teasing they reported,
- ❑ Drew on cultural discourses about fighting racism to turn their hurt into anger.

Informal segregation as performative

A1. Everyone has said everyone has got black friends, they've got Turkish friends, but when it comes down to it, when you are sitting in assembly - when you're sitting in a big room, there's always the people that stick together. There's the black people, there's the white people.

A2. Especially in school.

A3. That is true.

(Everyone speaks at once)

A. Even in that room out there (Girls' sixth form)

Beverly Daniel Tatum (2002) Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?

- ❑ **‘Affinity groups’: separate "spaces" that facilitate positive identity exploration, where people can pose questions and process issues.**
- ❑ For adolescents of color, affinity groups provide support for identity.
- ❑ White young people also benefit from separate spaces for discussing race.
- ❑ **Affinity groups also help individuals participate in larger, blended groups. They are good for overall community-building.**
- ❑ **Zembylas (2010) ‘school practices & discourses are entangled with emotion in relation to perceptions of race and ethnicity’.**

Spatialised exclusions through linguistic difference: 'Othering' through language

Billy That's what most people don't like about (3) the Bengali people cos they speak in their own language and you can't really understand what they are saying but when you are speaking in English you can you can understand what they are saying [RP: Yeah] right and...

RP Is that something you don't like about them?

Billy Yeah cos you don't even have to say anything about you [RP: Right] (2)

(White 14 year old)

Schools need Gail Prasad's plurilingual approach

c.f. language brokering studies (e.g. Orellana, 2009)

'Stereotype threat' (c.f. Jim Cummins)

- ❑ **Traditional explanations for poor exam performance (e.g. structural inequality, or family background) are insufficient.**
- ❑ **Steele (1997) suggests that there is a general 'threat in the air' whenever a negatively stereotyped group member enters a situation where negative stereotypes might apply.**
- ❑ **This threat can lead to underperformance because of concern about confirming a negative stereotype (Steele, 1997)**
- ❑ **Black testers who do not confirm stereotypes can help Black participants to perform well (Marx & Goff, 2005, British Journal of Social Psychology).**

Issues that need to be addressed to normalise school success and produce 'liveable lives'

Critical engagement & holistic, systemic approach (Ragnasdóttir, LS)

- ❑ **Prejudice and stereotype threat;**
- ❑ **Relationality:** 'educators must rethink how they value different forms of families' contributions to their children's education, rather than holding all families to a White, middle-class standard' (**Syed et al., 2011, 461**).
- ❑ **Belonging and identities: 'transclusions' (Gerd Biesta).**
 - ❑ Inclusions always contingent & with unequal power relations
- ❑ **Intersectional differences**
- ❑ **Racism in schools & educational system (Finney and Lymperopoulou, 2014) / 'Concerted practices' (Gillborn, 2008)**

Aims of the talk

Differences in educational attainment: Multiple positioning and failure/success

Theoretical ideas: Intersectionality, racialisation, liveable lives, contact zones

Embodied accounts: Learning Spaces as relational microcosms

Shape of the symposium

Shape of the symposium

1) Narratives of African Caribbean high-attaining boys: Perceived peer and family influences in education'

Dr Tracy Robinson: Educational Psychologist, Barking and Dagenham Community Educational Psychology Service

2) The educational strategies of the black middle classes

Dr Nicola Rollock, Senior Lecturer and Deputy Director, Centre for Research in Race & Education, School of Education, Birmingham University

3) Culturally Responsive Practices and Young Immigrants' Academic success in Iceland

Susan Rafik Hama

4) General discussion