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Claims and contests: On the epistemic negotiation of place identity

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates knowledge management in interaction and the role of epistemic stance in place identity construction. We examine how a US expat in Toronto negotiates her New Yorker identity in conversation with two Canadians by demonstrating how authoritative epistemic stances are employed to produce relations of distinction, adequation, and authentication in service of place identity construction. We also discuss 'epistemic disputes', wherein epistemic stances and claims to place identity are challenged through the notion of epistemic rights. In doing so, we argue for the fundamental connection between information state, management of knowledge in interaction, and processes of identity construction.

1. Introduction

Place identity is a key factor influencing how people use language. Variationist work has documented how speakers come to associate specific linguistic variants with a place, and then use those variants to affirm their own identity as authentic residents of that place whether in naturalistic speech (Becker, 2009; Grieser 2015, 2022; Johnstone et al., 2002; Johnstone and Kiesling, 2008; Labov, 1963; Nycz, 2018; Zhang, 2008) or in dialect performances (Schilling-Estes, 1998). Place identity becomes particularly salient in contexts where identity is contested—for example, when in-migration and/or economic factors threaten long-standing residents' claim to place (e.g. Becker, 2009; Grieser, 2015; Labov, 1963), those residents will increase their use of place-linked variants to assert their authentic place identities, especially when the contrast between insider and outsider is highlighted.

Of course, speakers may also draw on linguistic resources *above* the level of the dialect variants typically examined in variationist work, constructing place identities in their discourse. While this sometimes involves explicit declarations of identity ('I think of myself as a New Yorker'), speakers often deploy more subtle strategies to signal group affiliations and evaluations. For example, Johnstone (1990) shows how residents of Fort Wayne, Indiana use a particular form of storytelling to highlight their own localness and Basso (1996) discusses how speakers of Western Apache encode ancestral ties in place names to communicate the intrinsic link between person and place. Thus, speakers can use language to not only index where they are from, but also the cultural values associated with that place (Agha, 2003; Remlinger, 2009). Again, such strategies are

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particularly salient in contexts of contrast: for example, when a speaker discursively emphasizes difference with an out-group member (Goodwin and Alim, 2010).

In this paper we examine some of these strategies in the context of a sociolinguistic interview, focusing specifically on how a native of New York City living in Toronto, together with her Canadian interlocutors, negotiates epistemic stances to construct authentic place identities through tactics of intersubjectivity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004, 2005). We show how the native New Yorker expresses authoritative epistemic stances in service of tactics of adequation and distinction, which further authenticate her as a New Yorker. We also discuss how challenges to practices of distinction and adequation through epistemic stancetaking authenticate one's identity as well as denaturalize the interlocutor's claims to identity. Finally, we discuss the implications of our analysis for quantitative studies of place-linked sociophonetic variation.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Identity construction in interaction

In this article, we adopt the view of identity associated with 'third-wave' sociolinguistics and social constructivism: that identity is not static or defined solely by an individual, but fluid and mutually constructed in interaction (Eckert, 2012). A person may convey a stance in relation to some speaker, abstract idea, or other *stance object* (Du Bois, 2007) or *discursive figure* (Goffman, 1981; Kiesling, 2018, 2019); these stances, alongside other linguistic resources, help constitute some relevant social identity, such as gender (Ochs, 1993), in the context of a particular interaction. The role of the 'receiver' in this process is just as important as that of the 'sender': identity moves may succeed or fail depending on the knowledge that the interlocutor holds, and whether the interlocutor ratifies the stance, claim, or action.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) emphasize how identities emerge from the relation between *self* and *other,* defining several relational *tactics of intersubjectivity* used for identity construction in interaction. For example, individuals may discursively construct sameness between themselves and others ('*adequation*') or they may emphasize difference ('*distinction*'). The relational nature of identity construction is also evident in tactics of *authentication* and *denaturalization*: claims to an authentic identity must be recognized by others as legitimate, but claims may also be denaturalized if an interactant draws attention to how those claims are perceived to be false or otherwise problematic.

One facet of identity that can particularly benefit from a relational approach is that of place identity. *Place* is space imbued with social meaning (Johnstone, 2004; Tuan, 1974): physical location may be fixed, but a person's sense of place and orientation towards that place may vary over time and across contexts (Eckert, 2004; Johnstone, 2004). The importance of place identity and its relational nature can be observed in the earliest sociolinguistic studies of language variation. For example, Labov (1963) examined the use of raised diphthongs in Martha's Vineyard, ultimately accounting for the patterns he observed in terms of different social groups' orientation to place and relationship to a canonical island persona (i.e., older fisherman with a strong work ethic). Indeed, the very first interview excerpt Labov provides (from Daniel Poole, a lifelong Vineyarder and exemplar Old Fisherman) includes an instance of denaturalization which serves to distinguish Island folk from the mainlanders who encroach on their space ('you people who come down here to Martha's Vineyard don't understand the background of the old families of the island […]', Labov, 1963, p. 29). Of course, identification with a place (and the linguistic evidence of that identification) does not require lifelong residency. New Orleans residents forced to leave the city in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, for example, continue to use NOLA dialect features to show connection with their home city (Carmichael, 2017), while expat New Yorkers living in Toronto variably maintain New York City English features to construct a tough and city-wise identity (Dearstyne and Nycz, 2023). Similarly, relative newcomers to a place may make claims to that new place identity (Sierra, 2022).

Regardless of one's residential history or status as a newcomer, place identity is co-constructed in interaction, and claims to place must be accepted to some extent by one's interlocutors. It is not enough to *state* that one is a true Vineyarder, say, or a New Yorker; one must convincingly *show* this to be the case—perhaps, by showing what one *knows* about 'their' place.

2.2. Information state and epistemic management in identity construction

Conversationalists are constantly attuned to what their interlocutors know (Labov and Fanshel, 1977; Schiffrin, 1987), potentially know (Raymond and Heritage, 2006), and have rights and obligations to know (Stivers et al., 2011), as well as whose claim to knowledge has more primacy over others' (Goffman, 1971; Pomerantz, 1980; Raymond and Heritage, 2006; Stivers et al., 2011). Such attention to the management of knowledge in interaction is necessary for successful communication (see e.g. Sacks [1972; 1992] on the importance of knowledge-tracking in the sequentiality of interaction, particularly with respect to adjacency pairs) and overall discourse coherence. Indeed, Schiffrin (1987) proposes a model for discourse coherence wherein attunement to what participants know, may know, claim to know, and/or should know figures prominently (Fig. 1).

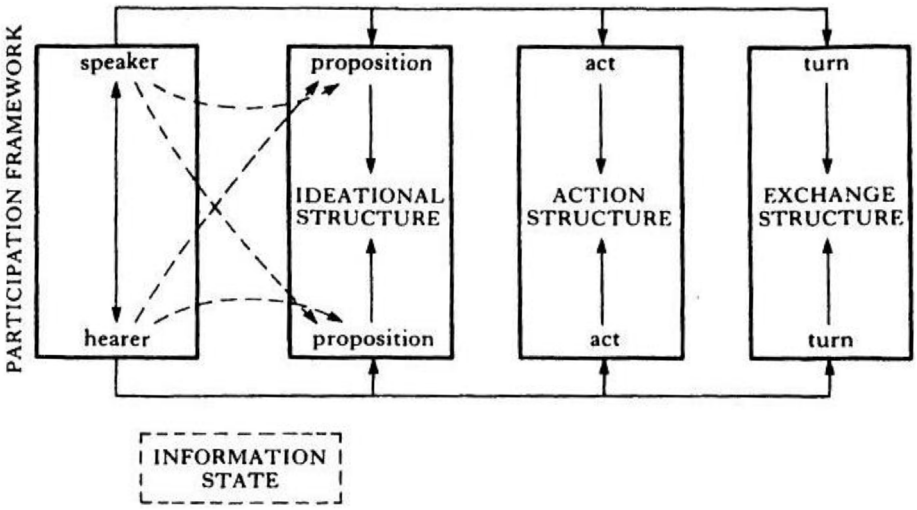

Fig. 1. Schiffrin's (1987, p. 25) model of discourse.

In this model, the *information state* represents a ubiquitous part of the system that influences and shapes every other plane of discourse. How the information state is expressed through propositions and stances influences how interactants are positioned in certain roles, both temporary and longer-term (e.g., identity categories). In turn, these roles influence the exchange structure and constrain turn allocation, design and the sequentiality of interaction. Finally, information states also influence how speech acts are employed in interaction.

In this paper we extend the reach of this model, arguing that information state management constitutes a primary resource for how people claim and perform identities for themselves and produce identities for others.

If we conceptualize tactics of intersubjectivity as performative acts, we are able to build a link between attunement to information states, how such attunement shapes interaction, and how it becomes an actionable structure for the display of identities. In this view, stances taken towards some *discursive figure* (Goffman, 1981)—that is, some *entity* in discourse, be it an object, a proposition, a place, or a person—serve to produce relations of alignment between self and other (Kiesling, 2018, 2019), whether this 'other' is a person in the here and now of interaction, a constructed figure within a proposition, or a characterological figure ideologically associated with a place, object and/or activity. Thus, the manner through which one takes epistemic stances in interaction results in the employment of tactics of intersubjectivity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004, 2005) that have direct consequences for the relational construction and display of identity.

In sum, information state management is done via the expression of epistemic stances, which conveys one's knowledge about a relevant identity category. Knowledge about an identity includes knowledge about what such an identity entails, which in interactional practice comes down to what it is *like* and what it is *not like*–that is, adequation and distinction, respectively, in Bucholtz and Hall's (2004, 2005) model of identity construction in interaction, which simultaneously serve to authenticate and/or denaturalize certain identities and identity acts.

This link between epistemics and identity is most apparent in recent studies that focus on the role of epistemic management in interaction, especially within the field of Conversation Analysis (see Bolden, 2013; Heritage 2012a, 2012b; Raymond and Heritage 2006; among others). For example, Raymond and Heritage (2006) show how a grandmother identity is constructed in a telephone conversation through an analysis that employs the concepts of *epistemic status* (relative states of knowledge, which places interactants on a continuum of more knowledgeable or less knowledgeable), *epistemic stance* (the local display of epistemic status), and *epistemic domains* or *territories* (domains of knowledge to which participants have access, thus constituting an epistemic community).

Linked to these concepts, and especially relevant for identity construction, is the notion of *epistemic rights and responsibilities*. As Raymond and Heritage put it,

> the conduct of participants reflexively constitutes a link between the identities of the speakers (conceived in various terms) relative to one another, and the local distribution of rights and responsibilities regarding what each party can accountably know, how they know it, whether they have rights to articulate it, and in what terms (Raymond and Heritage 2006, p. 681).

Stivers et al. (2011) further claim that the management of knowledge in interaction is morally ordered. In other words, we can and do hold one another accountable for justifiably asserting our rights and fulfilling our obligations with respect to knowledge. The authors propose three concepts to understand how we monitor the moral order of epistemic domains in both the production and reception of utterances. *Epistemic access* concerns what one knows and does not know, the degree of certainty to which they can justifiably assert something, and the source of knowledge. *Epistemic primacy* refers to relative

rights to know, relative rights to claim knowledge and the relative authority of knowledge. *Epistemic responsibility* relates to the type of knowable being expressed, what one should know, and the recipient design of actions and turns-at-talk. These concepts not only structure the information exchange of an interaction, but can also account for disruptions in conversational flow when they are not upheld as expected. Bellavance (2022) demonstrates how epistemic responsibility plays a major role in a young child's understanding of a new type of interaction with her mother. In an interaction that models a mock-interview, the mother asks her child for information about the child's life that she already knows. Aware of this fact, the child refuses her mother's questions on the grounds that her mother is epistemically responsible for knowing this information. This, in turn, leads to several disruptions in the information exchange between the pair.

Outside the realm of Conversation Analysis, Sierra (2016, 2021) demonstrates how analyses of epistemics can be productively tied to intertextuality and framing to understand various aspects of interactions, such as solving interactional dilemmas through rekeying, ensuring the participation of all present in the interaction, and constructing a shared group identity. Finally, Sierra (2022; Sierra and Botti, 2016) combines epistemics and the tactics of authentication and denaturalization (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005) to investigate the interactional construction of place identity. In her study, she explores how a group of friends employs place-specific information in their conversations to construct and authenticate their identities as New Yorkers in unstructured conversation, analyzing how participants contest others' claims to knowledge to denaturalize their interlocutors' identities and further authenticate their own identities as a form of one-upmanship. Sierra also points out the need for further research on other identity relations and their intersection with epistemics.

In line with these recent studies that focus on the connection between identity display and the negotiation of knowledge, and with an aim to fill the gap articulated by Sierra (2022), we examine here the interactional construction of place identity during the course of a sociolinguistic interview, with a particular focus on how participants use the tactics of adequation and distinction to display their place knowledge. In doing so, we affirm the fundamental interconnectedness of knowledge management/display and tactics of intersubjectivity that construct one as a certain 'type' of person. More specifically, we argue that displays of epistemic stance show attunement to and monitoring of information states, thus contributing to processes of identity construction.

3. Data, participants and context of investigation

The excerpts examined here are drawn from a sociolinguistic interview collected as part of a larger study of native New Yorkers living in Toronto, Canada.[1] New York City is a major cultural and financial center and, with about 8.5 million residents, the most populous city in the U.S. Unsurprisingly, New York City residents have been the subject of numerous variationist studies (e.g. Becker, 2009; Labov, 1966; Newman, 2014; Wong, 2015). New York City English (NYCE) is also an enregistered variety (Becker, 2009; Silverstein, 2003) which elicits clear metalinguistic commentary: Americans tend to judge it (along with Southern American English) as being the worst kind of English (Niedzielski and Preston, 2003). New Yorkers themselves have mixed feelings about their own way of speaking, recognizing the stigma of the salient local accent yet also expressing appreciation for what makes their local dialect unique (Silverstein, 2014). These complex attitudes are, like all language attitudes, a proxy for social evaluation: New Yorkers may criticize their city and fellow residents in various ways, but also express pride in being an 'authentic' New Yorker who has earned the local knowledge and developed the toughness needed to live there (Sierra, 2022; Silverstein, 2014).

Toronto is the provincial capital of Ontario, located in the southeast of the province and of Canada as a whole. It is the most populous city in Canada, with over 2.7 million residents; it is also very diverse, with 47 % of its population (over 1.2 million) consisting of immigrants according to the 2016 census (Statistics Canada, 2022). 24,530 of these immigrants (just under 2 % of all immigrants to Toronto, and under 1 % of the total city population) come from the United States. Toronto is also a linguistically well-documented city, represented by several dialect studies taking place in the last decade (e.g. Boberg, 2010; Hoffman and Walker, 2010). As with New York (and any global city), its residents hold complex attitudes towards Toronto; the Canadians who had left Toronto to live in New York interviewed in Nycz (2011) variably described the city in positive terms like 'cosmopolitan' yet also pointed out its weaknesses, particularly in comparisons with their new city.

The main participant we analyze in this article, Gwen,[2] was 60 years old when her interview was recorded. She was born in Brooklyn, New York, where she lived the majority of her first 26 years before moving to Toronto; she has spent the last 34 years living in that city. In her interview Gwen identified as a woman and as 'Norwegian American Canadian' when asked to give her ethnicity; she holds a Masters degree and owns a business. Gwen was accompanied by a female friend, Fiona, who was born and raised in Canada, but who also lived in New York for a period of time. Nicole, a white Canadian female graduate student, conducted the interview.[3]

The interview began with basic questions about Gwen's background and where she grew up, moving to her reasons for coming to Canada and her experience doing so. Gwen was asked for her opinions of the places where she has lived, and was encouraged to compare her new and old homes at both a local and national level (Toronto vs. New York City, Canada vs. the US). While Gwen was the focus of the interview, Fiona was encouraged to chime in with comments. After about an hour of

[1] Supported by National Science Foundation Award [NSF award BCS-1651108, "Second Dialect Acquisition and Stylistic Variation in Mobile Speakers"].
[2] Pseudonyms are given for each participant.
[3] Nicole did not participate in any analysis of the data.

conversation, the participant completed a word list reading and a minimal pair task; only the conversational data is examined in this analysis. The interview was recorded to 44.1 kHz, 16-bit wav files using Audio-Technica (AT831R) lavalier condenser mics and a Zoom H4N Pro solid state recorder, and took place in Gwen's living room.

An orthographic transcription of the conversational portion of the interview was created in ELAN (2018). Excerpts chosen for further analysis were then retranscribed using discourse analytic conventions adapted from Tannen et al. (2007).

4. Analysis

In this analysis, we investigate how interactants constantly attune to shifts in information state (Schiffrin, 1987) and police expressions of epistemic stance as a means of doing identity work. We argue that practices of *adequation* and *distinction* operate simultaneously with tactics of *authentication* (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004, 2005) via instances of epistemic stancetaking, particularly through stances of high certainty. We further show how claims to knowledge are managed in terms of epistemic status and stance (Raymond and Heritage, 2006) and the morality of knowledge (Stivers et al., 2011), how participants position themselves and others as the same as or different from certain groups of people (in this case, New Yorkers), and how such practices consequently frame one's identity as 'authentic'. In our discussion, we draw on two typologies of epistemic territories. Specifically, we employ Labov and Fanshel's (1977) notion of *event type*, which distinguishes between events known to just one party in an interaction, events known to multiple parties, and those events known to be disputable. We also use Pomerantz' (1980) notion of *knowables,* which distinguishes between Type 1 knowables (knowledge to which one has direct access and an obligation to know), and Type 2 knowables (knowledge based on hearsay and/or indirect experience).

To address our analytical goals, our argument is divided into two sections. We first demonstrate how the authentication of identity surfaces alongside practices of adequation and distinction, particularly when these tactics result from epistemic claims. In the second section, we argue that negotiations of epistemic primacy, especially what we call epistemic disputes—i.e., those interactions where the validity of one's epistemic primacy and right to knowledge are at stake—not only lead to authentication for the challenger (the one who calls into question the validity of their interlocutor's epistemic claim) but also to denaturalization for the defender (the one whose epistemic claim was challenged).

4.1. Epistemics in the production of adequation, distinction, and authentication

Sierra (2022; Sierra and Botti, 2014) argues that claims to knowledge and claims of access to certain epistemic domains produce the effect of authentication (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004, 2005), which positions one's identity as genuine, authentic, and valid. Following similar analytical paths, we demonstrate here how epistemic stancetaking is a key strategy in adequation and distinction for the construction of a New Yorker identity. We further argue that, as the speaker produces adequation and distinction through epistemic claims, these claims necessarily produce authentication for the speaker as well.

Excerpt (1) illustrates these points. Prior to this excerpt, Gwen had been discussing diversity in Brooklyn, where she was born and raised. The excerpt picks up at a point where Nicole, the interviewer, has just asked Gwen whether she had noticed any changes over the years in the neighborhood in which she grew up.

Excerpt (1)

1	Nicole	so quite a few neighborhoods,
2		like especially in Brooklyn,
3		have changed quite a bit over the years.
4		do you find that was the same for your neighborhood?
5	Gwen	oh for sure, like when
6		when I grew up it was a lot of Norwegian Americans
7		and Greek
8		and now, uh
9		there's a lot more Greek, Italian, um
10		uh, Muslim
11		uh, population
12	Nicole	okay, ooh
13		um, do you get the sense that they still retain a
14		sense of
15		like, the small neighborhood you grew up in or
16		the small neighborhood you grew up in
17		is there still that same sense of identity in that
18		neighborhood?
19	Gwen	oh, yeah, definitely
20		I mean people who are in Bay Ridge
21	Nicole	Yeah
22	Gwen	uh, identify with Bay Ridge, y'know
23	Nicole	Okay

In this excerpt, Gwen presents an assertive and authoritative epistemic stance about people from her neighborhood. In doing so, she produces adequation as a means of creating a monolithic neighborhood identity. In other words, inhabitants of

Bay Ridge—which includes Gwen—are represented as a coherent entity that shares the same level of emotional attachment to the neighborhood, in that possible differences are erased for the sake of emphasizing sameness.

The interviewer's question (line 4, *Do you find that was the same for your neighborhood?*) serves as a contextualization cue (Gumperz, 1982; Tannen, 2005[1984]) that updates Gwen's information state. Gwen responds to Nicole's question about changes in the neighborhood not only with a highly certain epistemic stance (line 5, *for sure*) but with the discourse marker 'oh' (Schiffrin, 1987). As argued by Heritage (1984) and Schiffrin (1987), 'oh' functions as a change-of-state token that displays shifts in the management of knowledge in interaction. The use of 'oh' suggests that Gwen previously treated the changing demographics of Bay Ridge as knowledge shared by both her and Nicole (an AB-event in Labov and Fanshel's [1977] typology; i.e., knowledge shared by all in the interaction), but Nicole's question cued Gwen to the fact that Nicole did not in fact share this knowledge (it was an A-event, or asymmetrical knowledge possessed by only one party in the conversation) and triggered a revision in her knowledge schema (Tannen and Wallat, 1993).

As a result of this update, Gwen employs several strategies to present information about Bay Ridge through a highly certain epistemic stance. First, there is her second use of 'oh' in line 19 in response to Nicole's question, which further emphasizes asymmetry in terms of information state. Then, she directly responds to the question through an epistemic adverb of high certainty (line 19, *definitely*), followed by a bare assertion (lines 20–22, *I mean, people who are in Bay Ridge identify with Bay Ridge, y'know*) surrounded by two discourse markers: 'I mean' and 'y'know', both of which place an interactive focus on speaker-provided information but to different effects. Schiffrin (1987) argues that, although 'I mean' primarily concerns participation frameworks since it marks the speaker's orientation to their own talk, it also has relevance for information states: one of its functions is to show commitment to a position, and one primary source of commitment is certainty of knowledge. 'Y'know', on the other hand, serves as a marker of shared knowledge, be it specific knowledge shared by speaker and hearer, or knowledge that is generally available. Thus, one of the many functions of 'y'know' is to mark a proposition—typically a bare assertion, as we see here—as a consensual truth and, in doing so, to enlist the hearer's endorsement of such a proposition.

Gwen's construction of a highly assertive epistemic stance is multifaceted. Despite not having lived in Bay Ridge for decades when the interview was conducted, Gwen displays knowledge about the current state of the neighborhood via hyper specific demographic information in her construction of a comparison between the Bay Ridge of today and the Bay Ridge of her childhood (lines 8–11, *and now, uh, there's a lot more Greek, Italian, um, uh Muslim, uh population*). In displaying an authoritative epistemic stance about the current social configuration of Bay Ridge, she is able to claim a *sustained* place identity. The idea of a 'sustained' place identity corroborates the findings in Sierra (2022), whose focal participant takes epistemic stances about places he no longer physically inhabits.

Gwen's use of a bare assertion in talking about Bay Ridge (lines 20–22, *people who are in Bay Ridge identify with Bay Ridge*) adds to the expression of a highly certain epistemic stance. Bare assertions, also referred to as categorical statements (Martin and White, 2005), are those that do not entertain other possible voices through hedges, conditionals, attributions of voice, and other strategies. They present information as if it were an indisputable truth about the world. In lines 20–22, Gwen presents a homogenous picture of Bay Ridge as fact, thus *adequating* all Bay Ridge residents, including herself. In doing so, Gwen stakes her claim to a high level of epistemic authority. Further, the usage of adequation works in tandem with an authentication of her New Yorker identity. Such adequation is achieved via the expression of a highly authoritative stance that shows her access to hyper specific epistemic domains of place identity.

In summary, Gwen employs a number of interactional strategies—the use of a bare assertion, an epistemic adverb with a high degree of force, and discourse markers that have direct relevance for information states and participation frameworks—to present herself as someone who is highly knowledgeable of New York City via her adequation (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004, 2005) of residents of Bay Ridge. This epistemically authoritative adequation contributes to the authentication of her identity as a (former) resident.

In Excerpt 2, Gwen presents claims about New York City using tactics of both adequation and distinction, consequently authenticating her place identity. Where the transcript picks up, the participant had been describing other characteristics of Brooklyn.

Excerpt (2)

1	Gwen	uh, well
2		it's actually very diverse
3		it's very urban
4		no matter where you live
5		uh, but we lived
6		y'know, further away from Manhattan
7		uh, so it was a bit
8		um, suburban
9		um
10		for New York standards
11		but uh, still
12		Kinda
13		mostly concrete

In terms of distinction, we see in this segment a clear separation between Manhattan and the other boroughs of New York City. Gwen describes where she resided as a child using Manhattan as the point of reference (lines 5–6, *but we lived, y'know, further away from Manhattan*). Through the connective of consequentiality 'so', Gwen then builds a link between locations in New York City outside Manhattan and the notion of surburbanness (lines 7–10, *so it was a bit suburban, um, for New York standards*). She further claims that her childhood neighborhood was an exception to the standards of New York City, with Manhattan also defined as the center of reference that sets these standards.

Although Gwen emphasizes the differences between her childhood residence and a prototypical New York City neighborhood, she also engages in interactional work to present her neighborhood as 'truly' part of New York City. Immediately after her assertion that Bay Ridge is a suburban neighborhood for New York standards, Gwen employs the discourse marker of opposition 'but' and the adverb of continuity 'still' in lines 11–13 (*but uh, still kinda mostly concrete*) to counter any possible inferences that Bay Ridge could not be considered authentically New York. By following her distinction between Bay Ridge and other parts of New York with the connective 'but' and arguing that Bay Ridge is 'still kinda mostly concrete', Gwen produces adequation in describing her neighborhood as sufficiently similar to other parts of New York City in order to be able to claim a New Yorker identity.

In this excerpt, Gwen presents herself as having access to specific epistemic domains that relate to New York City: she knows what constitutes NYC standards; she knows the key characteristics of NYC; she knows what Bay Ridge is like; she knows what Manhattan is like. Most importantly, she demonstrates that she knows how Manhattan and Bay Ridge differ, and how Manhattan needs to be used as a point of reference when explaining non-Manhattan places in NYC to non-New Yorkers via the use of the discourse marker 'y'know' in line 6 (*y'know, further away from Manhattan*) to mark the proposition as shared knowledge. In presenting these stances, Gwen employs tactics of both adequation and distinction. In displaying her ability to employ such tactics via expressions of knowledge, she is simultaneously able to authenticate her identity as a true New Yorker.

In Excerpt 3, Gwen compares New York City and Toronto in terms of their population density. This segment is a direct continuation of Excerpt 2 where the participant was describing Brooklyn.

Excerpt (3)

1	Gwen	um, pretty dense
2		um
3		population compared to, say, Toronto, I'd say
4	Nicole	as densely populated as Toronto?
5	Gwen	pretty dense, compared to
6	Nicole	Or
7	Gwen	Toronto, like
8		I fin- neighbors here –
9		neighborhoods here are more spacious
10		and everything's very congested

In discussing the population density of Brooklyn and Toronto, Gwen produces a comparison between the two places that positions herself as having epistemic access to information about the demographics of each place and how they relate to one another. Although the use of the modal verb 'would' in lines 3–7 (*I'd say pretty dense, compared to Toronto*) adds a degree of uncertainty to her epistemic stance and marks it as a personal evaluation, it also marks her source of knowledge regarding population density as deriving from personal experience—what Pomerantz (1980) calls a Type 1 knowable. A similar effect comes about through the use of 'I find' in line 8 (*I fin-neighbors here*) although it is important to point out that the locution is not fully realized and interrupted mid-sentence, which raises questions about whether her proposition in lines 9–10 (*neighborhoods here are more spacious and everything's very congested*) is to be interpreted as an assessment or as a bare assertion. Through the employment of tactics of distinction via an epistemic stance that is marked by its origin in personal experience, Gwen is able to present herself as a person who is connected to both places. This excerpt illustrates yet again how epistemic stances are presented to create relations of distinction and authentication of identities.

In this section, we have focused on what seems to be a fundamental connection between the expression of (assertive) epistemic stances and tactics of adequation/distinction. We have also corroborated Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) suggestion that the tactics of adequation/distinction and authentication typically overlap.

Thus far, we have discussed excerpts in which claims to knowledge have gone uncontested. We might ask, then, what happens when epistemic stances are challenged?

4.2. Authentication and denaturalization via claims to epistemic primacy

In this section, we demonstrate how successful contestations of epistemic stances and claims to epistemic *primacy* (Stivers et al., 2011) lead to authentication for the challenger (the one who contests their interlocutor's epistemic claim). This practice is necessarily accompanied by denaturalization for the defender (the one whose epistemic claim was contested), in which attention is drawn to the ways in which their claimed identity is 'crafted, fragmented, problematic, or false' (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 602). By producing this dichotomy, the challenger then assumes the role of the authentic claimant. In sum,

we argue in this subsection that claims to epistemic primacy—particularly when contested, as seen in Excerpts 4 and 5—produce a paired effect of authentication and denaturalization.

This argument builds on Sierra's (2022) discussion of place names as a resource for authentication and denaturalization, specifically of a New Yorker identity. In Excerpt 4, Gwen and her friend, Fiona, discuss the areas of New York City in which they previously lived. Similar to the analysis presented in Sierra and Botti (2014) and further developed in Sierra (2022), Gwen makes a point to distinguish her and her friend's experiences with the urban setting of New York City. Gwen then denaturalizes her friend's assertions about NYC by claiming that differences across places within NYC undermine broad statements about experiences living in NYC, particularly Fiona's.

Excerpt (4)

1	Fiona	um what I found when I lived in Tor- in New York
2		is a lot of people came from somewhere else
3		they were drawn to New York
4		some of them grew up but maybe out on Long Island
5		or Westchester or something
6		and they moved into the city from the suburbs
7		and in New York
8		because it's such a huge city
9		that could be quite a distance
10		like it would be much further than growing up→
11		in Scarborough
12		and moving downtown
13		you would move, y'know
14		two hours f- away
15	Gwen	you probably lived in a much more cosmopolitan→
16		environment
17		both in Brooklyn and New York
18		than I did, y'know
19	Fiona	okay, that's probably true
20	Gwen	my my experience was like totally different
21		it was everybody was born and bred in Bay Ridge and
22	Fiona	okay
23		but I'm talking about as a adult
24		cuz I didn't grow up as a child in New York
25		so when I moved to New York in my mid-twenties
26		the people that I met working in Manhattan
27		living in Manhattan
28	Gwen	yeah
29	Gwen	yeah
30	Fiona	fell into two camps
31		they were either the ones who grew up in the suburbs
32		from New Jersey or Long Island, wherever
33		who are now living in the city
34		or they had come from who knows where
35		because they were drawn to New York.

In this segment, Gwen distinguishes Fiona's experience in NYC from her own, stating that Fiona 'probably lived in a much more cosmopolitan environment… than [Gwen] did' and that Gwen's 'experience was like totally different' (lines 15–21). In this way, Gwen claims epistemic primacy not only over her own experience in New York, but over Fiona's as well (at least enough to claim a difference), drawing on an ideology in which working class (or at least, less well-to-do) people are more authentic residents of a place, with more authentic experiences of that place (see e.g. Ilbury, 2021; Johnstone, 2010; Snell, 2017). Further, this practice contributes to Gwen's attempt to problematize Fiona's claim to the epistemic ground, thus denaturalizing Fiona's claim to a New York place identity. Gwen's use of the discourse marker 'y'know' in line 18 further reveals the organization and shifts of knowledge states within the interaction. Considering that Fiona presented information about NYC that differs from Gwen's experience in lines 1–14, Gwen's use of 'y'know' clearly does not seek to establish solidarity and display shared knowledge between herself and Fiona, but rather to present as a consensual truth or common knowledge the fact that the places in which Fiona resided are much more cosmopolitan and not representative of NYC as a whole. Thus, her use of 'y'know' serves as a strategy to downplay and expose Fiona's epistemic stance as being at odds with reality. In other words, Gwen's assertion about New York City and Fiona's experience—with support from her employment of 'y'know'—expose an incongruence between Fiona's epistemic stance and actual epistemic status, and the limits of Fiona's epistemic domains.

In demonstrating this incongruence between epistemic status and stance, and the knowledge necessary to do so, Gwen is able to claim epistemic primacy over the topic, denaturalize Fiona's possible claims to NYC-ness, and authenticate herself as a knowledgeable New Yorker. It is important to point out, however, that Fiona clearly recognizes this shift, using the discourse connective 'but' in line 23 to present contrastive information, followed by justifications to establish her claim to this epistemic ground (*I'm talking about as a adult cuz I didn't grow up as a child in New York*), thus contesting the claim that Gwen has put forth. In a way, Fiona performs what we could call an 'epistemic retreat' in which she claims a smaller epistemic territory

rather than ceding the ground entirely, thus clarifying that she is speaking about her limited experience as an adult and not making claims as a lifelong New Yorker. Gwen appears to agree to Fiona's updated epistemic claim, or at least to sharing the epistemic ground, offering only 'yeah' (lines 28–29) in response to Fiona.

Of course, not all challenges to epistemic primacy are successful. In Excerpt 5, it is Fiona who contests Gwen's claims to a New York identity. This particular example stands out in its overt and unprompted contestation of Gwen's knowledge about New York. Just prior to this excerpt, the interviewer asks Gwen what she likes about Toronto.

Excerpt (5)

1	Gwen	I guess what I love about Toronto is the water
2		the um, more proximity to [nature within the city]
3	Fiona	[New York has water]
4	Gwen	[I mean that's what I know ((XXXXXXX))]
5	Fiona	[and you would've been very close to water]
6		growing up in Bay Ridge
7	Gwen	yeah, except that like here
8		I walk on the boardwalk every morning
9		and it gives me a lift
10		um
11		in Bay Ridge
12		I was about a fifteen minute walk down to the water
13		and not something I did very often as a kid

Unlike in the previous excerpt, Fiona takes aim at Gwen's New York identity without the need for her own recovery of an epistemic claim. By identifying access to water as a desirable quality of Toronto, Gwen implies—possibly unwittingly—that New York does not have the same proximity to water as Toronto. Fiona's bare assertion in line 3 (*New York has water*) directly contests Gwen's statement, which undermines Gwen's claim to epistemic primacy of a New York identity (at least as compared to Fiona). This contestation is further strengthened by its overlap with Gwen's speech in line 2; it readily targets Gwen's contribution as epistemically problematic before Gwen is able to even finish her utterance. Recognizing this threat to her place identity, Gwen quickly responds with the discourse marker 'I mean' in line 6 (*I mean, that's what I know*), which places a focus on speaker-provided information (Schiffrin, 1987) and removes the focus from her interlocutor—also note the overlap with Fiona's continued epistemic contestation in line 5 (*and you would have been very close to the water*). In bringing interactive focus to the information she provides, which concerns her source of knowledge, Gwen firmly grounds her epistemic claims on personal experience, thus protecting herself from her friend's challenges. Here, Gwen supports the legitimacy of her claim with an explicit presentation of such as a Type 1 knowable (Pomerantz, 1980), thereby giving Fiona less grounds to contest her statement given that it is not a knowable to which Fiona has access. Gwen then briefly aligns with Fiona in line 7 with 'yeah', creating just enough alignment to then counter Fiona. She continues her explication of her own experiences in lines 7–13, which is again guarded against rebuttal from Fiona given its knowable type. Gwen juxtaposes access to water in Toronto and in New York, thus legitimizing her earlier stance of water access in Toronto and re-authenticating her claim to a New York identity.

In Excerpt 6 below, Nicole references prior conversations with other New Yorkers she has interviewed for the same research project, stating that New Yorkers 'don't tend to leave New York' (line 3).

Excerpt (6)

1	Nicole	so I've been told by other New Yorkers that
2		w- like people in New York don't
3		tend to leave New York
4		at least that's what some of the people I've→
5		interviewed have told me
6		so d- do you find that
7		or like is that something that you also experienced?
8	Gwen	well, uh
9		it varies
10		I know lots of people who left
11		and lots of people di-
12		I still have family back there, um
13		my parents were an example of people who→
14		did not leave
15		but they –-
16		some of my aunts and uncles left
17		and some people –-
18		lotta people left, uh
19		in the Norwegian community
20		left to go to the suburbs
21		so they went to Long Island
22		or New Jersey
23		or Staten Island

In this excerpt, we see that Gwen stakes her claim to a more legitimate New York identity not only in contrast to Fiona, but to interviewer-provided information as well. Nicole limits her claim to the epistemic territory by qualifying her reported knowledge with 'at least' and restricting this claim to some, but not all, participants (line 4, *at least that's what some of the people I've interviewed have told me*). This qualification then sequentially leaves room for Gwen's input. Through one-upmanship (and thus, epistemic primacy), Gwen problematizes any potential claim that Nicole might make to 'real' New York knowledge by questioning whether the information other interviewees have provided Nicole is truly representative of New York, thus denaturalizing those other interviewees' claim to a New York identity. Crucially, Gwen must undermine this claim to avoid denaturalization of her own New York identity as someone who moved away from New York. Gwen achieves this by first rejecting alignment with Nicole in lines 9 (*well, it varies*) through the use of the discourse marker 'well', which affects the participation framework of the interaction and the management of local coherence (Schiffrin, 1987), prefacing a dispreferred move that signals disagreement. 'Well' is also a conversational move that indicates some insufficiency in the question asked (Lakoff, 1973), which is corroborated by Gwen's use of an existential 'it' construction to add nuance to Nicole's question in line 9 (*it varies*). Gwen then elaborates on her disagreement by distinguishing her personal experience of New Yorkers she 'know[s]' (line 10) from those of the New Yorkers that Nicole has only 'interviewed' (line 5). Gwen immediately claims epistemic primacy over Nicole, stating that she knows 'lots of people' (line 10) and that she 'still [has] family back there' (line 12). Crucially, her use of 'still' in line 12 signals the temporal continuity of her epistemic claim to a New York identity, and thus authenticates it. In this excerpt, Gwen uses her knowledge of *others'* experiences, which constitutes a Type 2 knowable (Pomerantz, 1980) to support her claims of 'typical' New Yorkers. This tactic becomes especially transparent in her self-initiated repair of 'some people' (line 17) to a 'lotta people' (line 18) to describe those she knows in the Norwegian community in New York; this change in the choice of quantifier adds to the strength of her epistemic claims, especially considering that it's a Type 2 knowable. Additionally, the group specificity of the New Yorkers she knows adds legitimacy to her claim to epistemic primacy.

Corroborating Sierra (2022), we have seen so far how successful challenges to epistemic stances produce denaturalization and, in turn, further authenticate the challenger's identity. In contrast to the other excerpts analyzed in this section, Excerpt 7 does not present challenges to claims to knowledge and consequent denaturalization of *individuals*' identity claims, but rather focuses on the negotiation of boundaries and requirements for categorization into a given group identity. In this segment, Gwen's construction of access to certain epistemic domains denaturalizes Canadians' own Canadianness by claiming epistemic primacy to a current Canadian issue. Prior to the point where the transcript picks up, the participant had been discussing New Yorkers' decision to leave or not to leave New York City.

Excerpt (7)

1	Gwen	um, so I've been here
2		thirty-four years, did we—
3		we were trying to do the math before, um
4		and, I don't think I can ever
5		uh get
6		y'know, the American out of me
7		or the New York out of me
8		but I certainly
9		identify much more now with Canada
10		and Canadian issues and
11		y'know, ask me about fee-
12		free trade
13		and I can tell you more than the average Canadian
14		I'm sure

In this final excerpt, Gwen authenticates her (right to a) Canadian identity through claims to epistemic primacy and comparisons with where she stands in relation to other Canadians. In lines 1–7, she argues that despite her identifying more with Canada, it would be impossible to rid herself of her American and New Yorker identities. In doing so, the participant postulates a notion of identity that greatly privileges one's place of origin. This move presents an interactional and inter-subjective dilemma for Gwen as it apparently blocks her from being able to claim a Canadian identity on the same grounds.

Gwen escapes this dilemma by presenting a second notion of identity that prioritizes epistemic primacy and access to certain epistemic domains that she constructs as relevant for the claiming of place identity. Immediately after presenting an essentializing notion that equates identity with place of origin, she makes use of the contrastive marker 'but' to begin a segment that separates identity from place of origin and presents alternative views on identification, alignment and belonging (lines 8–10, *but I certainly identify much more now with Canada and Canadian issues*). These alternative views focus heavily on one's access to and depth of knowledge about Canada-specific issues (lines 11–14, *y'know, ask me about free trade and I can tell you more than the average Canadian, I'm sure*). In employing the membership categorization device (Sacks, 1992; Stokoe, 2012) 'average Canadian', Gwen invokes normative practices and domains of knowledge that could be linked to such a category of people (e.g., the country's economy and associated practices). In claiming that she is distinct from this group of people in having more access to specific topics that pertain to Canada (and consequently primacy over being *able* to speak about it), she is further able to authenticate her Canadian identity on grounds that do not relate to place of origin, thus

escaping the intersubjective dilemma that she herself posed to her own identity claims. In doing so, Gwen also partially denaturalizes—or at the very least questions—Canadians' claims to Canadianness through a revised and actualized notion of identity that is more nuanced, complex, and fragmented. It is also relevant to note that, once again, the use of discourse markers—'y'know' as an invitation for alignment from the interlocutors and 'I'm sure' as a marker of certainty—immediately surrounding her claims *about* epistemic access in lines 11-14 add to the strength of how she expresses her epistemic stance.

5. Discussion

In this analysis we observed how a native New Yorker living in Toronto deploys assertive epistemic stances in a discussion of place with two Canadians. These stances produce relations of adequation and distinction, and serve to authenticate her identity as a New Yorker and, in one instance, as a Canadian. In some cases, the main speaker's epistemic status and stances go unquestioned by her interlocutors, but in other instances a challenge is issued, in the form of a competing epistemic stance and claim to status. When such challenges occur, the 'defender' can uphold their status by denaturalizing the claims of the challenger and simultaneously authenticating their own identity.

We examined seven distinct excerpts to illustrate how one interlocutor monitors information states to construct and maintain her identity as a New Yorker. Through our first set of excerpts, we demonstrated how assertive epistemic claims are used in service of adequation and distinction to create an unquestionable member of an identity group. We have also provided further evidence that adequation/distinction and authentication overlap (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). In our second set of excerpts, we introduced epistemic disputes as those interactions where the validity of one's epistemic primacy and right to knowledge are at stake. The epistemic disputes analyzed here lead to processes of authentication and denaturalization, thus allowing the challenger to position herself as the 'true' member of the identity group in question (here, a New Yorker).

In addition to variationist work demonstrating a connection between language and place identity (e.g., Becker, 2009; Grieser 2015, 2022; Johnstone et al., 2002; Johnstone and Kiesling, 2008; Labov, 1963; Nycz, 2018; Zhang, 2008), a growing body of work demonstrates this same connection at the discursive level (e.g., Sierra, 2022; Sierra and Botti, 2016). The analysis presented here contributes to the latter. It is through epistemic management and interactional identity construction that we see the emergence and maintenance of place identity most clearly, and particularly when that place identity is contested. Further, epistemic stance contributes to our broader understanding of how speakers orient to places and who has the right to claim those places through the relative positioning of themselves to that place and to other interlocutors, whether inside or outside of that place.

Our results raise further empirical questions for future research in the domain of discourse. For example, we have observed speakers using several linguistic tools to convey strong epistemic stances, such as bare assertions, epistemic adverbs, and various discourse markers; we might ask whether certain types of linguistic resources are more favored when expressing specific types of stances, or are subject to other types of contextual conditioning. Our discussion here also suggests that epistemic status, at least under conditions of challenge, is a zero-sum game: a defender must denaturalize the claims of their challenger to maintain their own authentication, or lose their own status. More data collected under different circumstances will show whether this observation generalizes, or whether participants may draw on other strategies to ensure that everyone comes out with epistemic status undiminished.

6. Conclusion

The observations made in this paper contribute to our understanding of information state management (Schiffrin, 1987) in interaction – that is, the dynamics of epistemic status and stancetaking, and how stance is used by speakers to construct their own place identities as well as defend these identities against challenges. Our findings echo those in Sierra (2022) that demonstrate how place-specific information serves the production of authentication/denaturalization, and argue for a fundamental connection between assertions of epistemic stance and relational processes of identity construction. In doing so, we heed the call from some researchers for a greater focus on the role of epistemic management in interaction (e.g., van Dijk, 2013) and, with the incorporation of processes of distinction/adequation, we also heed the call for further exploration of different tactics of intersubjectivity and how they relate to one another through epistemic lenses (Sierra, 2022). Our analysis thus adds to the growing body of studies that focus on how knowledge management plays a pivotal role in how we do 'being' certain types of persons in interaction. In agreement with Raymond and Heritage's work on the epistemics of social relations,

> by looking at how persons manage the rights and responsibilities of identities – the territories of ownership and accountability that are partly constitutive of how identities are sustained AS IDENTITIES – we are witnessing a set of resources through which identities get made relevant and consequential in particular episodes of interaction. (Raymond and Heritage, 2006, p. 700, p. 700)

Our discussion also raises important methodological implications for collection of sociolinguistic data. The sociolinguistic interview as typically used in variationist research presents specific configurations in terms of participation framework (Schiffrin, 1987) such that interviewees' claims to knowledge and their employment of tactics of intersubjectivity typically go unquestioned. The data analyzed in this paper are drawn from a small 'group' interview, in which the main participant of interest is accompanied by a local friend who is also ratified as a participant in the conversation. It so happened that this other participant presented epistemic challenges to our main participant, which led her to deploy specific relational tactics in

specific ways. While our analysis did not examine the sociophonetic consequences of these discursive choices, previous literature gives us every reason to believe that the types of stances being expressed would influence the pronunciation of specific words and sounds (e.g. Kiesling, 2005; Nycz, 2018). As such, variationists designing their data collection with an eye towards discerning the extent to which their speakers use certain variants over others might attempt to control more for the content of these interactions in terms of stances conveyed, or at least take into account this variation in analyzing the data.

Outside of a strictly linguistic application, the current analysis has implications for what it means to 'be from' somewhere. For example, insights can be extended to constructing and interpreting the challenging question of "who lives here" in survey design (Martin, 1999; Tourangeau, 1997). Additionally, our analysis of epistemic disputes can illuminate identity-based challenges involved in gentrification practices. Finally, longitudinal studies examining practices of authentication and denaturalization may provide an understanding as to how identity lines are developing cross-culturally in an increasingly globalized world.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no competing or non-financial interests to declare.

Credit authorship contribution statement

Felipe Leandro de Jesus: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft. **Sarah Rose Bellavance:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Jennifer Nycz:** Data curation, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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