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Recent Advances in Positioning Theory

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ABSTRACT. Positioning theory opens up a new dimension in the psychology of interpersonal encounters, through explicit attention to the role of rights and duties in the management of action. People are positioned or position themselves with respect to rights and duties to act within evolving story-lines, and on the basis of claims about relevant personal attributes, the discursive process of prepositioning. Some recent applications of positioning theory are presented, ranging from simple interpersonal encounters, through positioning in a complex public but limited legal struggle, to the positioning techniques used to justify civilian causalities in warfare, to the analysis of examples of the discourses by which large-scale social entities position themselves in relation to others.

KEY WORDS: conflict, discourse, moral orders, position, prepositioning

Any scientific treatment of a range of psychological phenomena should ultimately be aimed at answering such questions as "Why did they do that?," "Why did he think that?," "Why did she feel so and so?," each qualified by "in the circumstances." Positioning theory is a contribution to the cognitive psychology of social action. It is concerned with revealing the explicit and implicit patterns of reasoning that are realized in the ways that people act towards others. It is in sharp contrast to the persisting idea that social behavior is a response to a

social stimulus. Positioning theory studies refer to cognitive processes that are instrumental in supporting the actions people undertake particularly by fixing for this moment and this situation what these actions mean. These processes serve to explain the actions to which we are attending. Cognitive psychology involves explanations which draw not only on hypotheses about formal rules of reasoning, but also on the meanings that people discern in the actions of others and that they give to what they do themselves. Positioning theory adds a previously neglected dimension to the processes of cognition—namely concepts and principles from the local moral domain, usually appearing as beliefs and practices involving rights and duties.

There are many semi-independent moral domains in the human world, including moral beliefs, overtly expressed or immanent in the practices of the culture. Including them in the content of cognitive social psychology forces the social psychologist to attend to the historical/social situations of what people are saying and doing.

Positioning theory can also be seen in relation to several strands of recent attempts to by-pass the stagnation of mainstream academic psychology. For example, in one of its aspects it is an important development of discursive psychology. Another aspect fits with attempts to remedy the "unrealism" of premature cross-world generalization in social, cognitive, personality, and emotion psychology. By attending to features of the local context, in particular normative constraints and opportunities for action within an unfolding story-line, it becomes clear that access to and availability of certain practices, both conversational and practical, are determined not by individual levels of competence alone, but by having rights and duties in relation to items in the *local* corpus of sayings and doings. These acts are constitutive of unfolding story-lines which are often realized in conversations, but not necessarily exclusively so. In conversational form they are more readily available for analysis. For this reason alone narratology is a close ally of positioning theory. Narratological analysis reveals the normative constraints on the unfolding of a story-line, constraints which are expressible in the alternative language of locally valid patterns of rights and duties.

Positioning theory also allows for a very natural expansion of scale, from the analysis of the dynamics of person-to-person encounters to the unfolding of interactions between nation states. In both cases the primary medium of interactions is discursive. The scale ranges from intimate conversations through to the discursive institutions by means of which even acts of war are given meaning in a framework of rights and duties by the public media.

Methods of research in positioning theory and the kind of theoretical models offered in explanations of recorded phenomena are specifically designed to conform to the nature of the phenomena that are constitutive of most psychological processes, namely encounters through *meanings*. In carrying through this program, one of the first and most prominent casualties of mainstream concepts is "causation." The explanation of the pattern of succession

between two social acts, a1 and a2, is not to be looked for in causal law linking acts of type A1 as causes with acts of type A2 as effects. Rather it is to be found in the meaning relations between the acts. If a1 is thought to be offensive by someone, then his or her subsequent performance of the act a2 needs to be seen as conforming to some canon of norms of manners and the respondent's right to make use of it. So the response makes sense as a reprimand. If someone is confronted with a popular view on some matter that he or she believes to be mistaken, then that person's agreement with the majority is not caused by "peer pressure," but is an act conforming to a local norm of agreeable behavior. It is the meaning of the agreement that explains how it comes to be expressed, and that agreement is not "caused" in any mindless, robotic way but is, rather, an option that may or may not be exercised by the person in question.

The fundamental insight on which positioning theory and other alternative psychologies are based is the principle that psychology must be primarily the study of meanings. This principle can be taken further. The relations between material bearers of meanings are determined by those meanings, not by any material properties of the bearers as such. It should scarcely need saying that the same physical object can carry different meanings and that the same meaning can be carried by different physical objects. Physical objects are recruited to the role of meaning bearers in the course of entering into a culture—first of all one's own. The practices of a religion, in contrast to but not independent of its dogma and theology, illustrate the meaning-modulation of material things into symbols. Most startling are the meanings given to the materials of the mass or communion, the bread and wine, in traditional Catholic dogma and in Protestant thinking. A trivial but striking example of the way that local meanings become embedded in practices can be seen in the following: accustomed to driving on the right in countries where distances are expressed on road signs in kilometers translated almost automatically by one accustomed to miles, one of the authors found himself multiplying American road distances by 5/8 to find the distance from one place to another.

The emphasis on meaning and its management covers the whole of the traditional fields of psychology, laid out under those useful categories: cognition, emotion, action, and perception.

Main Psychological Theses of Positioning Theory as Social Psychology

Positioning theory is concerned with three fundamental interconnected aspects of interpersonal encounters.

1. Rights and duties are distributed among people in changing patterns as they engage in performing particular kinds of actions.

2. These patterns are themselves the product of higher-order acts of positioning through which rights and duties to ascribe or resist positioning are distributed.
3. Such actions are the meaningful components of story-lines. Any encounter might develop along more than one story-line, and support more than one story-line evolving simultaneously.
4. The meanings of people's actions are social acts. The illocutionary force of any human action, if it has one as interpreted by the local community, determines its place in a story-line and is mutually thereby determined. Any action might carry one or more such meaning.

If we take the view that life unfolds as a narrative, with multiple, contemporaneous interlinking story-lines, the significance of the actions that people carry out, including speech acts, is partly determined by the then-and-there positions of the actors. To have a footing in a social episode, one must at least have some recognized rights. What story-line is unfolding is mutually determined, *pro tem* unless challenged, by the speech acts people are heard to produce, and that in turn is mutually determined by the positions that they are taken to be occupying in the episode. Such positions are constituted by their assigned, ascribed, claimed, or assumed rights and duties to make use of the available and relevant discursive tools.

Positioning Theory and Conflict

Positioning theory has been recruited into the study of the psychological conditions for the emergence and the maintenance of conflicts and alliances, from internal personal relations and crises (Sabat, 2001, 2008) to national and cultural tension and agreements. Recent work in this field has been more or less focused on only one side of the range of possibilities, namely conflict resolution at all levels of scale—while much interesting work remains to be done on how conflicts are exacerbated, how alliances are formed, and what it takes to strengthen or to disrupt them (Moghaddam, Harré, & Lee, 2008).

The thrust of a great many studies of the psychology and sociology of conflicts is towards their resolution. By some procedure the conflict will cease as the psychological and sociological conditions for its emergence and sustenance dissolve. However, the concentration of resources on this side of the topic is hardly scientifically or even practically defensible. It is just as important to be able to create and sustain conflicts as it is to resolve them. It is simply not true that the moral high ground belongs exclusively to those who seek peace, by whatever means. Sometimes it belongs to those who wish to foment and prolong conflicts.

Let us begin with some examples of this which it would be hard to resist. Preparing to go out onto the field, the football team is subjected to a pep talk designed to work them up and to stir up antipathy towards the other team. Positive

team spirit is not enough. It must be supported by the negative positioning of the opposition. Just imagine the locker-room reception for this remark from the home-team coach: "Gee, they look like nice guys. Maybe they *deserve* to win!"

Consider going about setting a "just war" in motion. A conflict situation must be created and the conflict once entered into must be sustained. The moral high ground must be seized and the enemy positioned as morally base. The narrative is always "Good eventually triumphs over Evil." Of course, this is a necessary truth in the political arena since victory is the acid test of moral superiority and goodness. Since the losers might have been winners, they have to find reasons outside their moral standing to account for the loss. One popular story-line, among others, might be treachery within.

Positioning theorists ought not to neglect this aspect of their domain of interest. In a perfect case there would be symmetry between the stories told by the protagonists of each side, as they define and allocate positions for their rivals. In the recent version of the age-long conflict between Islam and Christianity, President George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden offered almost perfectly symmetrical accounts of the positions of al-Qaeda and the United States' Administration (Harré, 2000).

Cognitive psychology studies what a person "can do"—the upshot of laboratory experiments in which context is standardized. Behaviorists collected data on what a person "does" under various conditions of stimulation. Positioning theory focuses on bringing to light the normative frames within which people actually carry on their lives, thinking, feeling, acting, and perceiving—against standards of correctness. In short, Positioning theory looks at what a person "may do and may not do." "Rights" and "duties" are shorthand terms for clusters of moral (normative) presuppositions which people believe or are told or slip into and to which they are momentarily bound in what they say and do.

Positions are clusters of beliefs about how rights and duties are distributed in the course of an episode of personal interaction and the taken-for-granted practices in which most of these beliefs are concretely realized. Positions are more often than not simply immanent in everyday practices of some group of people. The positioning analyst displays the positions that seem to have been immanent in an interaction in a description of the norms.

"Positions" are features of the local moral landscape. People are assigned positions or acquire or even seize positions via a variety of prior implicit and explicit acts which, in the most overtly "rational" positioning acts, are based on personal characteristics, real or imaginary. The upshot could be positive or negative, supporting or denying a claim to a right, demanding or refusing the assignment of a duty.

This "moral landscape" consists of practices: for example, taking notice of someone or ignoring them, giving them tasks, praising them, and so on. We, as analysts, extract from these practices something we call a "position'" which someone seems to "'occupy."

The realization that the content of positions is local and may even be momentary and ephemeral is the deep insight of positioning theory. As such, any positioning act can be challenged. Challenges to positions, implicit or explicit, are possible only within an established context of meta-positionings, which may in turn be challenged. Change in positionings can change the meanings of the actions people are performing, since beliefs about positions partly determine the illocutionary force of members' actions. Changes in the meanings of actions can consequently modify, sometimes drastically, the story-lines that are taken to be unfolding in an encounter. Generally things do not fall apart, so members must have to hand a *repertoire* of narrative conventions.

Positioning is something which happens in the course of an interaction; as such it is a discursive process. It can be deliberate, inadvertent, presumptive, taken for granted, and so on. It can be ceremonial, such as electing the Pope; characterological, such as appointing a CEO or assigning tasks at a picnic; biographical, such as choosing a presidential candidate by reference to voting records; or the result of family recriminations over who let the cat out. People undertake positioning acts, and as such they are or claim to be positioned in certain ways, which endows them with the right and/or the duty to assign or ascribe positions. It follows that there are higher and higher order positionings.

Prepositioning: The Positioning Process as a Discursive Practice

Prepositioning discourse involves listing and sometimes justifying attributions of skills, character traits, biographical "facts," deemed relevant to whatever positioning is going forward. Prepositioning might be positive or might be negative—it is just as much a positioning act to delete someone's rights and duties as to assign them: "You don't have the right to …" or "It is not your duty to …," and so on.

The most powerful attributive schemata are based on a range of presuppositions usually embedded in implicit/explicit practices. There are local and even idiographic implicit/explicit practices implying powers, abilities, or status levels which support ascriptions of duties; and vulnerabilities, incapacitations, social deficits, which, in turn, support rights-ascriptions and claims.

Well-being is a catch-all default consideration parallel to duties. While vulnerabilities call forth specific duties of care, remedy, and so on, "lack of well-being" can be imported to support a rather vaguely specified atmosphere of duties of charity.

The link with social psychology appears in the recent emphasis among the leaders of the "counter-mainstream" such as Jerome Bruner on psychology as the study of the management of meanings, their sequential flow in complex braided patterns of lived stories. Positioning is accomplished as a feature of discursive fluxes of various sorts and is implicit in various modes of presentation—words, signs, gestures, architectural conventions, and so on.

Positioning Positionings

Actual positions include groups of rights and duties. Sometimes there is internal conflict in a position; this can bring on a phase of second-order positioning: "You do not have the right to claim that right," and so on, in "duty" talk. Cultural differences may emerge between rights and duties: for example, among fundamentalists in a secular society. We will follow Austin's example (and Thomas Hobbes') in eschewing any attempt to give a positive account of the authenticity of a position. Rather, we will catalogue some ways a position might be thought to be inauthentic.

A position might be declared "inauthentic" in so far as it taken to be fabricated or fraudulent or even imaginary.

In terms of duties, for example, someone might say that a person had made up the duty, just invented it then and there. This implies that some endurance and trans-situational demand must be met by the content of an ascribed duty. A duty might fall on someone as an ephemeral demand. Positions are ephemeral but the duties they invoke must have some trans-situational standing.

Another case might be where someone claimed that a certain duty exists, but this claim was dishonest—the claimant knowingly insisting on the existence of the duty when it was not recognized by anyone else, even the claimant.

A duty might be declared to be imaginary if there were no general recognition, even a dishonest or self-serving one, anywhere to be found. Nor had there ever been such a duty. One cannot position someone as having the duty to gnaw off their own flesh. However, someone might position him- or herself as having that right—"They are my nails! I can bite them if I want!" Considerations germane to the social psychology of health might include a conflict between good advice offered by some well-meaning institution or person, and the actual practices of a person who ignores it. Prepositioning myself as an autonomous actor, I claim the right to treat my body just how I like, for good or ill.

It would hardly be disputed that some positions have disappeared from the social world, while new ones have appeared. We do not mean duties and rights as declared in laws and constitutions. These are excluded from the domain of positioning theory since they are set up by decree and are intended to last. Accepting a *fatwah* as authenticating a duty to kill an infidel is not a positioning act. Nor would the acceptance of the duty to kill himself by Brutus, or any other disgraced Roman, be rightly taken to be an act of self-positioning. However, when Caesar said "Et tu, Brute," he was positioning Brutus, just as in the famous speech Marc Antony begins with a powerful positioning act: "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him …," and continues by ironically positioning the chief assassin as he declares, "Brutus is an honourable man."

Outdated positions would be another category of the inauthentic: "No one any longer is expected to ..." By the same token, positions that have yet to appear are not yet authentic, even if we have some inkling as to what they might be.

Positioning Theory and Narratology

What the dominant story-line of a narrative is can be determined by the local assignment of rights and duties. As positioned, the act-forces of a person's speakings and acting are given this or that meaning, and consequently play this or that role in a story—perhaps even disambiguating a fuzzy story-line.

What you *are* is partly constituted by what roles you have—in conversations, both personal (ruminating) and social. And that depends in part on how one is positioned—that is, what rights and duties you are effectively able to exploit, and so on.

The useful concept of "footing" sits well with positioning theory. However, in the terms of the analysis above it is a third-order status which a person can occupy. The first-order status, as one might say, the candidate status for a position, is what prepositioning is germane to. The second-order status is to have an acknowledged position, implicit or explicit. Finally, the third-order status of "having a footing" is immanent in the way one can enter into a conversation, a game, a trial, someone' else's private affairs, unchallenged, as of right. Someone with "footing" is listened to. The illocutionary force of their speech acts is taken notice of, and, even when unintended, "taken up" by the members. "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?" asked Henry II, positioning four of his henchmen with what they took to be their duty to murder Thomas à Becket.

Narrotologists make use of a powerful concept drawn from Erving Goffman's writings (1986), the concept of "frame." "Frame" is used to refer to story-line genera—for example, the medical frame, which can be realized in a wide variety of specific story-lines. Frame is important because it allows one to consider the coherence or incoherence of contemporaneous story-lines and the kind of challenges that can emerge. For example, one might challenge a story-line in the medical frame by shifting to a legal frame, that is, breaking frame; or one may shift from one medical story-line to another, without breaking frame.

Scale

In the most recent collection of positioning theory research reports (Moghaddam et al., 2008), the scale of encounters that have been topics of positioning analysis has been extended in two directions. Nations can and do position one another through TV and radio, newspaper articles, and so on—so do religious groups, corporations, and even universities. Turning to the opposite end of the spectrum, it also makes sense to approach the study of the flux of thoughts and self-directed actions of a single individual in positioning theory terms. For example, a devout person may take on the duty of a careful examination of conscience reflecting on his or her own actions, a self-positioning act—though in the frame within which this person lived his or her life, the meaning might be of a positioning with respect not to self but to God.

We now turn to illustrate the efficacy of positioning theory as a tool for understanding the psychological processes that underlie complex social events.

Applications of Positioning Theory

Using Positioning Analysis to Open Up and Transform a Close Human Relationship

Initially, since her husband's diagnosis of dementia, Mrs. V experienced a great deal of difficulty coping with aspects of her husband's behavior and felt that she could do nothing to make life easier for him or for herself. She had positioned herself not only as having domestic duties, but more fundamentally as having a duty to tackle, somehow, the condition itself, or at least the most distressing personal consequences of it. Since his diagnosis, she had taken over most of what her husband customarily did at home, thought that he "had no memory," that he was no longer the man she knew, that she had almost forgotten the man he was. She indicated she knew little about helping him and was saddened as a result. Thus, Mrs. V had positioned herself in a consummately negative way. Prepositioning herself as being ignorant and helpless, she was unable to fulfill the duties of the position the situation had created. She felt unable to cope with her day-to-day life. She felt she was married to a man she didn't see as being the man she married. In this way the positioning assumptions of being a partner in a conventional marriage were dissolving. No wonder she had diminished feelings of self-esteem.

This longitudinal case study examines how Mrs. V repositioned herself and her husband through a number of prepositioning acts—emphasizing the grounds for a new moral order in the practices of her home life. These acts included learning about her husband's subjective experience, learning some effective ways of interacting with him by taking advantage of his remaining intact cognitive and social skills, and taking into account his long-stablished attributes. Despite placing her husband in a nursing home, Mrs. V was able to reposition herself in positive ways. Her interactions with her husband improved and she was able to reach out, engage, and add positively to the lives of other nursing home residents who had been diagnosed with dementia, thereby enhancing her self-worth. Repositioned, duties that were once onerous became rewarding for her, and rights that seemed demanding were once again seen as appropriate.

One example of the repositioning that developed from Mrs. V's learning about her husband's subjective experience is related to his insecurity regarding his own diminished ability to do things that he always did at home. His insecurity was appropriate, a feeling to which he had a right. At first, Mrs. V did not understand the basis of her husband's concerns because she was not seeing their relationship from his point of view. To her, there was "no logical reason" for him to be feeling as he was, so it was important to bring her attention

round to his vantage point. The following exchanges between Mrs. V and one of us (Steven R. Sabat/SRS) exemplify the beginning of that process and demonstrate the prepositioning needed to reposition him.

> **Mrs. V**: Last night I supervised my husband's getting ready for bed and when I left him felt he would go to sleep for the night. So I came down to check the computer. A short time later I heard a noise and "there he was" walking own two flights of stairs. Upon questioning him, he said he was checking to see if I was entertaining a man. In fact, he said he heard noises and was checking on what was going on. This is the second or third time this has happened, but not for months. He also said that he knew I was tired and wondered why I wasn't in bed and he felt for sure I had a man here.
>
> I explained why I didn't go to bed at 8 p.m. and also told him I was very disappointed that he would think I was having an affair. I understand why he is feeling less of a man and insecure. But he shouldn't be feeling insecure in our marriage. I guess I expect more from his reasoning power. I did talk to him tonight about it and he apologized, but that doesn't mean it won't happen again.
>
> When I said goodnight he said, "I know you never thought our life together would come to this." Steve, I never could have imagined this, as my husband was a very strong man who never gave in to pain, being tired and etc. But we never know what life will deal us.
>
> I just wonder how long I can be a caregiver.

Notice how this conversation tracks the ephemeral shifts of positions the husband takes up—first the right to check on his wife's fidelity and then the duty to apologize, that is, to abandon the right he had taken on.

> **SRS:** Your comment about being disappointed that he would think that you were having an affair was genuine and honest. What he is going through right now is not to be understood solely in logical terms. He's clearly aware that he's having a difficult time. He also thinks the world of you, loves you dearly, and believes (as would any man that much in love with his wife) that you are the most wonderful, beautiful, woman in the world. And he believes, just as clearly, that any man would find you to be exactly as he sees you.

Here SRS *offers* a psychological hypothesis that, if true, would provide a grounding for the way that the husband had quasi-legitimately taken on the position of Othello.

> **SRS:** On the other side of the picture, he may be, to some degree, upset, afraid, and insecure as a result of his not feeling that he is the man he's always been. You are a bundle of energy; he tires quickly. Your mind goes at 75 miles per hour, his is going at 40—all this from

his point of view. When people feel insecure about themselves, they do not think logically. When we are in an emotional state, we do not think logically. Logical thinking is, from your point of view: "No matter what, he shouldn't be insecure in our marriage." Logically, you are correct. But logic is taking a back seat to emotion here, as it usually does. So that means that you may not be as happy with him as you have been in the past.

That he apologized tonight about what happened last night means:

1. He has an intact memory of what happened last night (so much for him "forgetting everything").

2. He has the ability to evaluate what happened and clearly reason that it was not a good thing on his part, and

3. He has the ability to express appropriate sorrow for what he did. He had a moment of grave anxiety that blinded him to all the logic that argued against the anxiety.

1–3 require very complicated brain functioning and would that we all could accomplish #2 and #3. How many people do you know and have you known who could never admit to being wrong and apologize?

Here SRS once again offers a cluster of observations that allow Mrs. V space to reposition her husband as having the *urge without the right* to snoop and the duty to apologize.

SRS: When he said, "I know you never thought our life together would come to this," he was telling you exactly what I was saying above. What's the "this" that your life together has come to? Think about it from his point of view. People don't say things like that when they're deliriously happy. He may be seeing himself as being a disappointment to you. In his mind, he's been your hero all through your married life, and he was your hero because of what he did and who he was. Now, he may be seeing himself as a burden to you, and heroes are never burdens on anyone, right? He may be needing all kinds of reassurance and often. It won't hurt to provide it, really. You can honestly say that 58 years ago you said that you didn't want to go through life with anyone else but him, and that you still feel that way.

SRS now moves the focus of repositioning back on to Mrs. V. In the last exchange he provides semi-factual material as prepositioning for his repositioning of Mrs. V with respect to the cluster of duties that constitute her new position. This is not just a diagnosis but an act of positioning because what is at issue is the scope of rights and duties in the situation and how they are to be distributed.

Mrs. V: *You are really smart!* You are absolutely right. He feels that I am very desirable and that any man would want me, but that is so unrealistic. I have tried to make him understand reality. He doesn't. So based on that I can understand his jealousy [that is, he has a kind of right to feel that way, given his illusions]. However, I have never shown any interest in another man. I can be warm and affectionate with other men, but it's all in fun and he seems to know it. I tell him at least three times a day how much I love him and I couldn't picture life without him. I also remind him that he is a very handsome man. He still feels he is lacking and that I should be having more.

Yes, he does see himself as a burden to me. He has mentioned it many times. I don't think that I have told him that he was a burden. He just realizes all that I do. There is nothing I can do about that though I try and give him tasks that will help me.

SRS: When you say that it is "unrealistic" about him feeling that any man would want you, and that you have tried to make him understand "reality," we need to step back from this and explore it a bit. That he feels that any man would want you is real to him. That is what he believes/feels to be true. Whether or not there are men out there who see you at Trader Joe's and drool, wishing they could have a liaison with you, is not the issue. To you, "reality" is whatever you deem it to be, based on your own logical thinking. To Mr. V, "reality" is whatever he deems it to be, based on his love for you.

Feeling that he's a burden doesn't require that you tell him he's a burden. All that's required is for you to have to do things for him that he always did himself. He's annoyed' [and he has a right to be—if only with himself]

In this example, the shift of focus from Mrs. V to Mr. V and back again is brought about by the prepositioning acts of the interlocutor SRS. However, the upshot is not so much a change of beliefs and opinions on the part of Mrs. V, though that has occurred. The significance of the conversation between Mrs. V and SRS is only revealed when it is seen in positioning theory terms: that is, as a redistribution of the scope and content of the rights and duties that have come to be the working frame for the unsatisfactiory life of the couple. Repositioning changes that. How this will turn out we do not yet know fully.

Positioning Analysis of a Small-Scale Political Encounter

The act of positioning is a two-phase procedure. In the first phase the character and/or competence of the one who is being positioned or is positioning him- or herself is established. This can conveniently be distinguished as an act of prepositioning. On this basis, rights and duties are assigned, deleted or

withdrawn, taken up, and so on. Sometimes the first phase is taken for granted, the relevant character attributes known or presumed. Sometimes the "character work" is explicit. In the study to follow, the issue of character is explicit and much of the dialogue is concerned with establishing and resisting character attributions. This study focuses on the *dramatis personae* in terms of the prominent positions, speech acts, and story-lines of some of the hearings conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee between the mid-1940s and late 1950s.

In initial preliminary "positioning moves," prominent playwright Arthur Miller was prepositioned as an "Unfriendly Witness" by the Committee. This character attribution was based upon his refusal to provide names of people participating in activities deemed subversive. Edward Dmytryk, stage and motion picture director, and Elia Kazan, motion picture director, were originally prepositioned as "Unfriendly Witnesses" by the Committee for the same reason. When they decided to provide names of others, they were re-prepositioned as "Friendly Witnesses" by the Committee but as "Betrayers" by other "Unfriendly Witnesses." Whatever assignments of rights and duties these people had as witnesses depended on these acts of prepositioning.

The Committee hearings can be described as a "strip" of life from a stream of ongoing activity that was unfolding within a larger interactive episode (Goffman, 1986). The larger episode, the "Red Scare" (the fear of the Soviet Union), created a frame within which a number of other activities would be interpreted. At the center of this episode was the changing relationship between the United States and its former ally, the Soviet Union. To contain the spread of Communism and the expansion of the Soviets, the Administration began to exaggerate the story-line of a Communist takeover. President Truman called for the American people to "support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures" (Schrecker, 1998, p. 158).

Also unfolding within this frame was the right-wing conservatives' struggle to wrest political control from the left-wing liberals. This political struggle, led by Senator Eugene McCarthy, involved intimidation and threats of prosecution for a range of activities collectively defined as "Un-American." This new American rhetoric, combined with the shift in domestic and foreign policies, fanned the fear of a Soviet invasion and created the cultural conditions for the rise of McCarthyism. The cultural story-line of a possible invasion by the Soviets set the stage for the Committee hearings, loosely defining the set of rights, duties, and obligations permitted by the various actants within the unfolding episode, in short the available positions.

In Figure 1, the Committee positioned Americans as having a right to protection from the evil encroachment of Communism. The Committee positioned itself as the country's principal guardian whose duty was to protect Americans from this evil encroachment, which threatened to tear apart the fabric of America. This duty led to the corresponding right of the Committee

Speech Act –
Ceremonial hearings

Position's Self as Guardian – Duty to protect American's from evil encroachment of Communism.
Position's Citizens – Right to protection from Communism.
Expands Position of Self – Right to call its citizens to account.
Expands Position of Citizens – Duty to be accountable.

Story-line – Villain/Evil-Doer
Communism is evil. Communists are criminals, whose goal is to tear apart the fabric of American society through subversive means, i.e. propaganda and unions.

Unfriendly Witnesses are not meeting their **duty** to expose subversive activities.
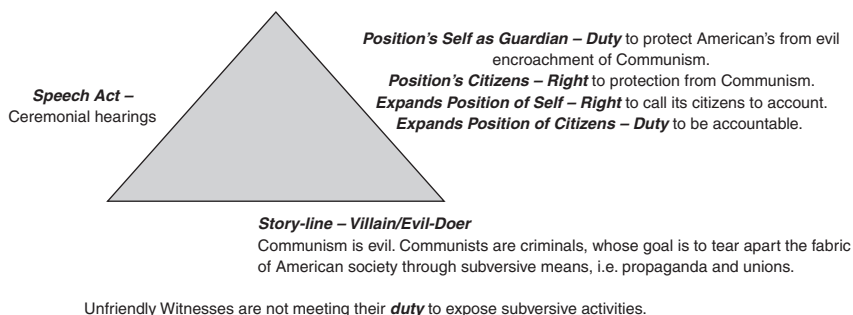
FIGURE 1. Committee's position.

to call citizens to account for their activities. The citizens are further positioned as having the duty to respond to the Committee request to account for their activities.

> **Stripling:**   Mr. Dmytryk, are you a member of the Screen Directors Guild?
>
> **Dmytryk:**   Mr. Stripling, I feel that these kinds of questions are designed to –
>
> **Chairman:**   Just a minute. It is not up to you to "feel" what the design is. It is up to you to answer the questions and be responsive to questions. (Bentley, 2002, p. 166)

In Figure 2, citizens who refused the positioning of duties by the Committee were known as "Unfriendly Witnesses." Unfriendly Witnesses engaged in second-order positioning, whereby they declared that citizens had a duty to say "No!" when called by the Committee to report on the activities of others. These witnesses further positioned citizens as having the right to maintain their personal conscience. By occupying a second-order position, the citizen was refusing the legitimacy of the Committee's first-order position. Unfriendly Witnesses not only refused the positioning by the Committee, they counter-positioned the Committee as the one engaging in Un-American activities.

> **Stripling:**   Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Community Party …?
>
> **Dmytryk:**   I think that there is a question of constitutional rights involved here. The Constitution does not ask that such a question be answered in the way that Mr. Stripling wants it answered. I think that what organizations I belong to, what I think, and what I say cannot be questioned by this Committee. (Bentley, 2002, p. 168)
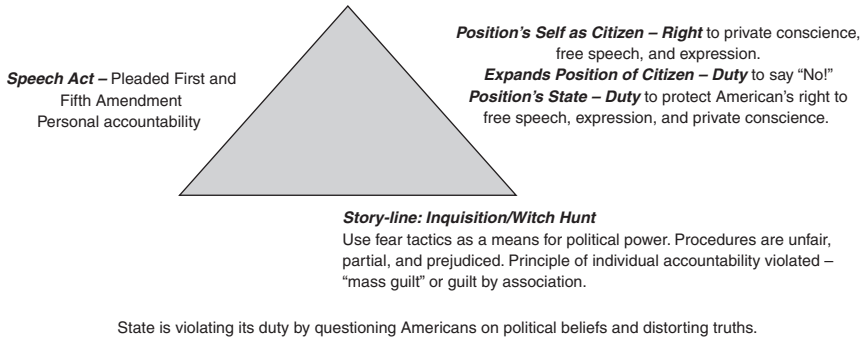
FIGURE 2. Unfriendly Witnesses' position.

According to Harré and Davies (1990), subject positions may be thought of as also operating at a more interpersonal level, so that although in the course of social interaction we may be implicitly positioned as a particular kind of person, we are also able to resist the identities we are being cast into by our own skillful use of language (Burr, 2002). Dmytryk, however, was unsuccessful in his attempt to challenge the Committee's positioning of him as "Communist."

> **Stripling**: You haven't answered whether or not you are a member of the Communist Party.
>
> **Dmytryk:** I answered by saying I do not think you have the right to ask –
>
> **Stripling:** Mr. Chairman, it is apparent that the witness is pursuing the same line as the other witnesses.
>
> **Chairman:** The witness is excused. (Bentley, 2002, p. 168)

Miller was more successful in refusing the presumptive category of "Communist" based on self's prior activities. He accepted the duty of a citizen to be accountable for his personal activities but did not accept the duty to account for the activities of others. Miller focuses his language on the distinction between assertions (facts) and assumptions (opinions); a language understood by Committee members trained in law.

> **Miller:** Mr. Chairman, I understand the philosophy behind this question and I want you to understand mine. When I say this, I want you to understand that *I am not protecting the Communists or the Communist Party* [italics added]. I am trying to, and *I will, protect my sense of myself. I could not use the name of another person* [italics added] and bring trouble on him. These were writers, poets, as far as I could see, and the life of a writer, despite what

> it sometimes seems, is pretty tough. I wouldn't make it any
> tougher for anybody. *I ask you not to ask me that question. I will
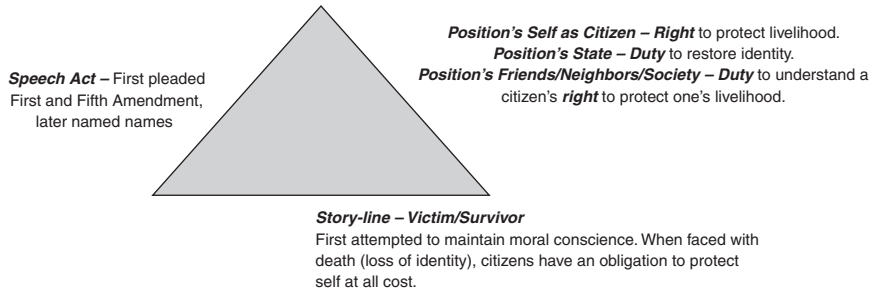> tell you anything about myself* [italics added], as I have.
>
> …
>
> **Arens:** Mr. Chairman, I respectfully suggest that the *witness be
> ordered and directed to answer* [italics added] the question as
> to *who it was that he saw* [italics added] at these meetings.
>
> **Chairman:** He has been directed to answer the question, and *he gave us
> an answer that we just do not accept* [italics added]. (Bentley,
> 2002, pp. 820–822)

Miller's use of language creates a shift in the building and sustaining of the
relationships with others as the actants engaged in ongoing interaction. Some
members of the Committee were not reflecting a preexisting world, as was
evident in their sustaining discourse with Dmytryk; rather, they were actively
constructing it with Miller (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). As the shift in rela-
tionships occurred, the story-line broadened and Miller experienced less con-
straint on his thoughts, speech acts, duties, and rights. He expanded the
story-line to accuse the state of engaging in Un-American Activities.

> **Miller:** *The Smith Act* [italics added], as I understood it … does *lay
> penalties upon advocacy … advocacy of beliefs or opinions
> …if advocacy of itself becomes a crime* [italics added] or can
> be penalized *without overt action, we are smack in the middle
> of literature* [italics added … The Smith Act] is applicable to
> literature…that *cannot be equated with the freedom of litera-
> ture* [italics added], without which *we will be back in a situa-
> tion where people, as in the Soviet Union and as in Nazi
> Germany, have not got the right to advocate* [italics added].
> (Bentley, 2002, pp. 806–807)

In Figure 3, **"Betrayers"** are those citizens who initially refused the first-
order positioning by the Committee but later accepted the Committee's posi-
tioning by providing names and accounts of the activities of others. To
Unfriendly Witnesses, these citizens betrayed their duty to say "No!" and stand
united against the acts of the Committee declared illegitimate. Betrayers
engaged in second-order positioning of self as having a duty to protect their
livelihood. These same citizens would be repositioned as "Friendly Witnesses"
by the Committee once they confessed and fulfilled their duties as positioned
by the Committee. Betrayer/Friendly Witnesses counter-positioned family and
others with the duty to support their action of protecting self and repositioned
the state with the duty to restore their identity once they fulfilled their moral
obligations.

Speech Act – First pleaded First and Fifth Amendment, later named names

***Position's Self as Citizen – Right** to protect livelihood.*
***Position's State – Duty** to restore identity.*
***Position's Friends/Neighbors/Society – Duty** to understand a citizen's **right** to protect one's livelihood.*

Story-line – Victim/Survivor
First attempted to maintain moral conscience. When faced with death (loss of identity), citizens have an obligation to protect self at all cost.

Others are not fulfilling their **duty** by understanding the higher principle of protecting one's identity and livelihood.

FIGURE 3. Betrayer/Friendly Witnesses' position.

Kazan:	To the horror of a few of my best friends, I testified friendly to the House Committee on Un-American Activities. … *I'd hardened myself* [italics added] against the *disapproval* [italics added] some old friends were giving me … whereas *that act, unhappy as it was, gave me an identity I could carry* [italics added]. (Kazan, 1988, pp. 382–383, 134)

In order for the Betrayers/Friendly Witnesses to regain their respective identities, the Committee imposed an expanded duty on the witnesses. This duty not only included giving the names and accounts of the activities of others, but also included a public statement denouncing both Communism and those witnesses who refused to provide accounts of others. This public ritual concluded with a public statement that served to restore the "good" name of the Betrayer/Friendly Witness. To Christians this procedure has a familiar ring—it is the age-old pattern of confession and absolution—the soul is restored to its initial purity.

Motion Picture Industry Council's Response to Dmytryk:	It takes *courage and desire and time* [italics added] for an American *to work free of the tentacles* [italics added] of the Communist Party. And it *takes help. But there is a way out* [italics added]. To any Communist Party members who may be seeking that way, we say: "*You too can be free men again!*" [italics added] (Bentley, 2002, p. 406)

The Committee hearings invoked a repertoire of formal speech acts and were conducted in a ceremonial fashion. Any citizens receiving a call to appear before the Committee understood the meaning of this summons. The action of calling a citizen to appear before the Committee was clearly understood by the larger community. The social meaning of this action was so powerful, in fact, that a

number of citizens lost their jobs based on a whisper of the mere possibility of being called to testify.

> **Jackson:**   *What is your opinion* [italics added] of the *sincerity or devotion to American ideals of those* [italics added] witnesses who *refuse to answer* [italics added] any *questions posted by the Committee* [italics added]…?

> **Dmytryk:**   I knew the minute I *refused to testify* [italics added] everyone in the United States who heard about it *assumed I was a Communist* [italics added].

> **Jackson:**   Do you think that is an *unreasonable assumption* [italics added]?

> **Dmytryk:**   *I make the same* [italics added] assumption myself.

> **Jackson:**   So do I. (Bentley, 2002, p. 400)

As McCarthyism became simpler and more concrete, people could communicate with each other about it. This proliferation in talk further contributed to its solidity and reality. People who participated in certain activities were often categorized as a "Communist" during the Red Scare episode.

Edwards and Potter (2000) stressed the importance of looking at how an account is constructed to seem factual and external to the author and of finding what the particular account is designed to accomplish. The Red Scare was exaggerated in an attempt by the Administration to contain the spread of Soviet influence and gain support for providing much-needed economic assistance to Western Europe. McCarthyism was designed to put the right-wing conservatives back in office. These two combined were part of the unfolding interactive episode through which the actants engaged in their positioning triads during the Committee hearings.

Episodes such as the Committee hearings are an essential part of the political process. Along with the bureaucracy, they are points at which the larger political processes of government touch the lives of citizens. The House Un-American Activities Committee's hearings displayed the role of positioning acts in a particularly striking way, clearly revealing the social psychological dynamics.

Positioning Analysis of Narratives of Civilian Casualties in Large-Scale Conflicts

In wars between nation-states, the 20th century saw a remarkable increase in the number of civilian fatalities. Of course, military officials routinely justify this as collateral to "war's realities," readily presented in positioning theory terms as a duties and rights of "engagement." Because of war's realities, civilian deaths are explained as unintended "byproducts" of military operations–unavoidable,

inevitable, and to some degree acceptable. And over time, civilian suffering is forever situated in war—past, present, and future. No amount of professional training, noble intention, or humanitarian dreams can change the "realities" of combat. Some generals liken warfare to a natural disaster: no one can stop its effects on the Innocent. General William Sherman appealed to war's realities to justify the harsh actions of Union troops against the Georgian population—the burning of Atlanta, and the forced evacuation of its inhabitants. Resurrecting the "war is hell" theme, he declared, "you might as well appeal against the thunderstorm as against these terrible hardships of war" (as cited in Carr, 2002, p. 153).

The presuppositions (grammar) underpinning the discourse of military officials regarding "the realities" of war are examined in what follows. These presuppositions center on the critical relationship between combatants and noncombatants, the moral/political obligations from international law that military forces have in the treatment of noncombatants, and the radical repositioning that they experience in times of war. The following conclusions emerge.

First, for military commanders a combat zone represents a landscape of threats, and such a landscape is part of war's reality. A landscape is not exactly a material surface of dirt, roads, and buildings. Nor is it a piece of real estate. It is more akin to the site for social engagement. Rather than residing *on* a land's surface, the bodies of a landscape are embedded *in* it, in-filling it with a totality of relations among its inhabitants. It is a place in which humans interact, dwell, engage each other, and are separated from each other. And every landscape has a form that represents patterns of movements of natural and artificial bodies that reside within it. The patterns of dwelling (both for natural bodies and for artificial ones) give the landscape its form (Ingold, 2002, pp. 190–193).

A threat landscape is dissected into units of forces that impede, hinder, or obstruct the machines of war. A threat landscape is composed of three kinds of elements: a terrain of bodies (material and immaterial), sites of danger, and instruments of transformation. Consider how civilians are repositioned by a threat landscape during combat. As a soldier in combat becomes an instrument of controlled killing, so too a civilian is recast as an element in a threat landscape. The "civilian objects" are seen as frictions to the engines of war. Individual idiosyncrasies, i.e., for civilians to function in any other way than as objects to be manipulated, are considered dangerous to the efficiency of military machinery. In a war zone, every microbe of civilian behavior is assessed as a potential impediment to the machine's operation. Each speck of human existence is characterized for its instrumental (dis)value, guided by the pragmatics of mechanist efficiency. Civilians can be pushed, pulled, moved, collected, relocated, and, possibly, destroyed. Also, civilian objects are cast as passive, fragile, self-contained, and irrational. They lack the ability to determine their own fate, engage in rational decision-making, or establish plans based on expected costs and benefits. Civilian objects are atomized into self-contained walls of feelings, psychological states, and predictable behaviors. Here we see a massive

and complex pattern of positioning, since every one of these attributions is a prepositioning for repositioning both civilians and combatants with respect to their mutual rights and duties. Second, in their reliance on "realities of war" explanations, military leaders tend to suppress the importance of the military rules of engagement in explaining civilian fatalities. These rules include tactics for controlling civilians, regulating their movements, and anticipating their actions. Of course, in seeking to protect civilians, these rules prohibit the willful killing, torture, or inhumane treatment of noncombatants.

According to the Operational Law Handbook from the Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School,

> ROE [rules of engagement] are directives issued by competent military authority to delineate the circumstances and limitations under which its own naval, ground, and air forces will initiate and/or continue combat engagement with other forces encountered. They are the means by which the National Command Authority (NCA) and operational commanders regulate the use of armed force in the context of applicable political and military policy and domestic and international law. (Berger, Grimes, & Jensen, 2004, p. 24)

The positioning system underpinning such rules is grounded on a triad—enemy combatant, allied combatant, and civilian noncombatant. Consider, for example, the ROE operative by the US military forces in the Vietnam War. With these rules, soldiers routinely directed civilians to stop and go, speak or be silent, and congregate or separate. Such actions became a prelude to civilian vulnerabilities. This is illustrated in riveting form in letters written by US soldiers. One letter begins with the soldier's analysis of the My Lai massacre, contrasting his views with those of others. Without justifying the slaughter of civilians in My Lai, the letter writer explains the atrocities through his knowledge of military training, the combat environment in Vietnam, and his rationale for the "better safe than dead" rule (Helmer, 1974, pp. 422–423).

Third, the centrality of ROE to civilian fatalities is evident in the current war in Iraq. In a disturbing echo of past practices, the frequent killing of unarmed Iraqis by US forces in recent years is often rationalized unofficially by the "better safe than dead" policy. Many encounters with civilians are *perceived* as threats to soldiers. In a combat zone, allied soldiers routinely recast the acts of running, walking, and even sitting as possibly fatal. "Basically it always came down to self-defense and better them than you," said Sgt. Bobby Yen who served one year beginning in November 2003 (Hedges & Al-Arian, 2007, p. 24). "Cover your own butt was the first rule of engagement," according to Lt. Van Engelend. "Someone could look at me the wrong way and I could claim my safety was in threat" (Hedges & Al-Arian, 2007, p. 24). Particularly disturbing was the practice of recasting civilians as the enemy *after* their deaths. A horrific irony of combat in civilian areas is that *after* the actions against the civilians are taken, their status is "confirmed" as harmful/suspicious/dangerous.

Fourth, from the cases examined of combat in Vietnam and recently in Iraq, we see how, in a threat landscape, civilian noncombatants become *de facto*

stateless, recast as political anomalies. Like the refugee, they are repositioned as having minimal rights and no duties, and as such are undifferentiated and objectified. Their political status is radically nebulous. They are neither enemy nor ally, neither friend nor foe. They are stripped of their right to have rights, both political and moral. Civilians living in a threat landscape are annulled of their political agency on issues of life and death. Their fate rests often with the militarists of an invading force, and with decisions based on the militarists' tactics, strategies, and objectives. Even for the most humanitarian soldier who confronts the suffering of women and children, the civilians are stripped of their political status and reduced to their naked biological humanity. The prolongation of their life, the freedom of their movement, and their rights of speech depend upon judgments of military necessity by the occupying force. The categorization of an urban area as a threat landscape automatically insinuates the annulment of their autonomy and political agency. They experience the effects of political conquest; they are treated like racial inferiors to the colonialist "saviors" of a bygone era. Their rights—civil, national, and human—are cast aside in deference to the conquerors' strategies. The Innocents may need to beg the superiors for their jobs, food, clothing, and, in some cases, their lives; they are required to beg for their humanity. And the humanitarian demands to protect them are cast as antiquated, quaint, or dangerous. The rationalization for large-scale slaughter follows in lock-step order from the civilian dis-empowerment.

This process is made intelligible by the use of positioning theory to bridge the gap between positions as implicit soldierly beliefs and practices and the positions implicit in the Rules of Engagement. "How could they do this?" They had positioned themselves as having both rights and duties towards the civilian population, positions which minimized the rights and duties of the noncombatants.

Extending Positioning Analysis to Intra-Personal and Inter-Group Levels

Positioning theory was initially developed as a tool for research on the dynamic inter-personal relations in which selves were given content (Hollway, 1984). Since then there have been a number of projects that extend the theory to intra-personal and inter-group levels of analysis.

Intrapersonal Positioning

An exploratory foray by Tan and Moghaddam (1995) was designed to: "1. Extend the positioning concept to the intrapersonal level ... [and] 2. broaden the scope of positioning discussion by considering how positioning practices are culturally imbedded" (p. 388). The focus of the analysis was on how one intentionally or unintentionally positions oneself in unfolding personal stories

told to oneself. Private discourse can be formal, as in the case of a person keeping a diary, but intended only for review by the author, or it can be more informal and spontaneous, as in the case of a person who says to himself, "This is a stupid situation you've got yourself into!," or "You can win this, you can do it!"

Following a Vygotskian framework, private discourse should be viewed as being shaped by, and stemming from, public discourse. Consequently, the meaning and structure of private discourse has to be looked at within a cultural context, and in relation to the larger normative system in which a person lives. For example, the monopoly of religious discourse in the everyday public lives of people in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the relative paucity of religious discourse in everyday conversations of people in English society means that private discourse in Iran contains more religious references ("God willing, I can succeed") than found among the English ("If I work hard enough, I can succeed"). At the same time, there are certain similarities in the discourse of groups living in different societies. Tan and Moghaddam (1995) discussed the case of Islamic Sufism and American transcendentalism as an example. In the private discourse of both groups is found a concern with "stripping away" from the self, in order to discover an authentic, simplified, ideal self.

Harré and Moghaddam (2008) expanded on reflexive positioning by focusing on intra-personal conflict. The struggle between conscience and temptation can be illuminated in terms of the duties that self-positioning can impose on the person.

Inter-Group Positioning

Positioning includes the discursive production of both selves and groups, and some efforts have been made to explore positioning at the inter-group level. Tan and Moghaddam (1999) re-analyzed Sherif's classic Robbers' Cave Experiment, which involved 12-year-old boys at a summer campsite in Oklahoma. They replaced the traditional causal account of the main stages of the experiment with a narrative analysis, demonstrating how the move from group formation, to inter-group conflict, to inter-group harmony through the introduction of superordinate goals was achieved by changing story-lines adopted by the boys. From a conflict situation in which the boys classified the social world as "we ... brave ... honest ... good ... we beat them" and "They ... cowards ... cheats ... stinkers ... they are losers," they moved to a situation where they shouted "we beat the truck!" when all of them had to cooperate to move a truck that was bringing food to their camp. This merger, from "us against you" to "all of us against X" involved the re-framing of who is "with us" and who is "the enemy."

But in some cases the narratives of the conflicting groups do not merge, as shown by Moghaddam and Ginsburg (2003) in a study of conflicts over patent rights. The story-line from a "Western explorer" perspective might be that a

courageous American scientist discovered a "new variety of a plant" with healing powers in Ecuador, and brought the plant back to the United States for research and development. The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) granted a patent to the American "discoverer," and thus the stage was set for the commercial exploitation of the plant. However, there is also a competing story-line, one from the perspective of native people in South America. This alternative story-line proclaims that a plant that native people have traditionally used for medicinal and religious purposes, the *Ayahuasca*, has been stolen and "claimed" by an outsider. Indeed, the awarded patent meant that South American natives would be charged fees to use a plant that their ancestors had always used freely. Fortunately, in this case the native narrative eventually won out and the patent awarded to the "courageous" American discoverer was cancelled. But this victory was won through international consciousness raising and conflict in the US courts. Here the court was itself a positioning agent, redistributing the commercial rights and duties among the participants.

In some conflict situations the main challenge is to keep the dialogue going, because as long as people are talking there are opportunities to avoid military conflict. Just such a situation was the focus of a study by Moghaddam, Hanley, and Harré (2003), involving an analysis of conversations that took place between 1971 and 1976 between Dr. Henry Kissinger (Assistant to the United States President for National Security Affairs and later Secretary of State) and Mao Zedong (Chairman of the Communist Part of the People's Republic of China), and between Dr. Kissinger and Leonid I. Brezhnev (General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union). The historical background to the conversations studied was the cold war and the Vietnam War. By positioning, in separate meetings, Mao and Brezhnev as "friends" and presenting himself as "honest" and "frank," Kissinger attempted to keep the flow of conversation going "among good chums." By going along with the story-line that these conversations were between "honest friends," Mao and Brezhnev helped to oil the wheels and continue the dialogue.

An alternative way to maintain inter-group harmony is to position oneself and/or one's group as not being in competition with other groups. In two studies, Lee, Lessem, and Moghaddam (2008) demonstrated the same strategy of "differentiation" and the search for vacant spaces in two very different contexts. In the first study, carried out in Washington, DC, United States, participants competed with higher- and lower-status competitors for prestigious summer internships. In competition with higher-status rivals, participants avoided direct comparison, but rather emphasized their "differentness" and their special qualities. In competition with lower-status rivals, participants made direct comparisons and emphasized being "better" rather than being "different." A second study explored how poorer women talk about beauty and beautification in Caracas, Venezuela, where there is a strong tradition of

celebrating female beauty pageants and the cosmetics and plastic surgery industries are enormous. These women could not "compete with" affluent women in how much they invested in beautifying themselves, but in their everyday conversations they differentiated and found vacant spaces by focusing on "inner beauty," "goodness," and the like.

Supererogatory Duties and Rights in Positioning

Positioning research has from the start been concerned with rights and duties, but in two recent studies (Moghaddam & Kavulich, 2007, 2008) the focus has shifted to a more specific type of moral imperative. The first of these is *supererogatory duties*, duties that individuals and groups are not obligated to carry out but get credit for when they do perform them. For example, Joe sees a woman fall into a fast-flowing river, but is not obligated by law to dive into the river to try to save the drowning woman. However, he is given a medal for bravery when he dives in and saves her. The second is *supererogatory rights*, rights that a person or group is agreed to have but will be rewarded for not exercising. For example, a newspaper editor has the right to publish a "scoop" about the mistresses and illegitimate children of a dying politician, but decides to forgo that right because it would cause pain to the politician's family.

By examining narratives in the Farsi- and English-language press between September 1, 2004 and November 29, 2004, and again between January 1, 2006 and May 9, 2006, Moghaddam and Kavulich (2007, 2008) explored how supererogatory duties and rights are at the heart of positioning by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the European Union, and the United States over the "nuclear issue." At the same time, this research highlights how in situations of change and instability, minority groups (those who have less power and fewer resources) emphasize rights, and majority groups (who enjoy greater power and resources) give priority to duties. While Iran has highlighted its rights, and the rights of all nations, to develop nuclear power, the United States has re-interpreted "Iran's right to develop nuclear power" as a supererogatory right, and one that it has a duty to abandon. The United States' narrative is that because Iran cannot be trusted and is now "outside the family of nations," it has lost some of the rights that other family members enjoy. Iran's narrative positions the United States as "outside international law," and claims that Iran is in compliance with the wishes of the international community.

Summary

Recent work in positioning theory has moved out from the very close and dynamic encounters of the earliest studies. This has meant that political activity has been a common topic for positioning analyses. At the same time, the

grounds for positioning acts have become a research focus. What attributes and what historical backgrounds are germane to the ascription, refusal, assumptions, and so on, of positions in the psychological processes in which people become involved? Political campaigns for office are an important social phenomenon, and the way that candidates preposition themselves preparing the ground for claims to the moral high ground will be research domains of future concern. In the examples we have offered as illustrations of recent trends in research guided by positioning theory, the attention to prepositionings is an important refinement, enriching the material that opens up as the scale of social psychological research both expands and diminishes.

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