

## Ascribing Identities and Othering: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of a BBC Documentary on YouTube

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**Abstract :** This study looks at identity and othering in discourses around sensitive issues in social media. More specifically, the study explores the multimodal resources and narratives through which the other is formed, and identities are ascribed in online spaces. As an integral part of social life, media spaces have become an important site for negotiating and ascribing identities. In line with recent research, identity is seen here as constructions of belonging which go hand in hand with processes of in- and out-group formations that in some cases may lead to othering. Previous findings underline that identities are neither fixed nor limited but rather contextual, intersectional, and interactively achieved. The goal of this study is to explore and develop an understanding of how people co-construct the 'other' and ascribe certain identities in social media using multiple modes. In the beginning of the year 2018, the British government decided to include relationships, sexual orientation, and sex education into the curriculum of state funded primary schools. However, the addition of information related to LGBTQ+ in the curriculum has been met with resistance, particularly from religious parents. For example, the British Muslim community has voiced their concerns and protested against the actions taken by the British government. YouTube has been used by news companies to air video stories covering the protest and narratives of the protestors along with the position of school officials. The analysis centers on a YouTube video dealing with the protest of a local group of parents against the addition of information about LGBTQ+ in the curriculum in the UK. The video was posted in 2019. By the time of this study, the videos had approximately 169,000 views and around 6000 comments. In deference to multimodal nature of YouTube videos, this study utilizes multimodal discourse analysis as a method of choice. The study is still ongoing and therefore has not yet yielded any final results. However, the initial analysis indicates a hierarchy of ascribing identities in the data. Drawing on multimodal resources, the media works with social categorizations throughout the documentary, presenting and classifying involved conflicting parties in the light of their own visible and audible identifications. The protesters can be seen to construct a strong group identity as Muslim parents (e.g., clothing and reference to shared values). While the video appears to be designed as a documentary that puts forward facts, the media does not seem to succeed in taking a neutral position consistently throughout the video. At times, the use of images, sounds and language contributes to the formation of "us" vs. "them", where the audience is implicitly encouraged to pick a side. Only towards the end of the documentary this problematic opposition is addressed and critically reflected through an expert interview that is - interestingly - visually located outside the previously presented 'battlefield'. This study contributes to the growing understanding of the discursive construction of the 'other' in social media. Videos available online are a rich source for examining how the different social actors ascribe multiple identities and form the other.

**Keywords :** identity, multimodal discourse analysis, othering, youtube

**Conference Title :** ICMI 2022 : International Conference on Multimodal Interaction

**Conference Location :** Barcelona, Spain

**Conference Dates :** June 09-10, 2022