

Mobilising the Global Significance of Multidisciplinary Discourses of Performativity:
Lessons from an Australian Major League Baseballer in the United States and Australian
Circus Performers

Susan Wilson-Gahan, Robert Mason and P. A. Danaher
Faculty of Business, Education, Law and Arts
University of Southern Queensland
Australia

Abstract

The discursive construction and expression of multiple forms of identities (self and other; individual, group and community; local, national and international) continue to exercise scholars across a wide range of disciplines, who in turn sometimes seek to exercise less constructive and enabling representations of certain kinds of marginalised identities. This multi-valenced character of identity discourses is illustrated starkly in the very different status and forms of capital of two occupationally mobile communities with whom this paper is concerned. One group is the highly successful internationally mobile major league baseball players – specifically in this case an Australian player who spent many years travelling the baseball circuits in the United States. The other group is the circuses who travel from place to place in Australia providing public entertainment based on equally specialised skill sets.

The paper presents a critically engaged and theoretically informed discourse analysis of empirical data collected with the two groups. The analysis is framed by selected aspects of Judith Butler's notion of performativity, augmented with more recent theorisation in the field and taking note of the critiques of the concept. The analysis interrogates the discourses of mobility and performativity across the three disciplines of sports biography, life course studies and the sociology of education, in the process distilling areas of potential convergence while acknowledging the appropriate aspects of disciplinary specificity. The analysis is clustered around the emergent organising themes of constructions of home, selfhood and otherness, and multiple identities created and communicated through repeated performances of evolving skills. The paper concludes by examining possible implications of this analysis for contemporary debates about global discourses related to in/equality, discrimination and marginalisation, with particular reference to current and possible future developments in the European polity and society.