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The primary aim of this article is to explore the predicament of one man, Vince, in difficult circumstances, in order to produce a psychosocial analysis that could contribute to the understanding of agency<sup>1</sup>. In the process we note the role of what we prefer to call affect, rather than emotion, in most contexts. If emotions are, as Blackman and Cromby (2007: 6) suggest, 'those patterned brain/body responses that are culturally recognizable and provide some unity, stability and coherence to the felt dimensions of our relational encounters', it is perhaps unsurprising that, because we are focusing on unconscious dynamics in this chapter, the term affect proves more relevant to our analysis than the emotions of anger and shame that are, arguably, the core suppressed emotions in the account. Vince himself never talked in terms of specific emotions, but rather, in line with Blackman and Cromby's definition that 'feelings register intensive experiences as subjective experience' (ibid), of how he was experiencing his painful world. In highlighting his embodied 'sickness', and the accompanying anxiety, we focus on the affective dimension. In this usage, anxiety is an affective state.

A psychosocial analysis is attentive to the co-presence of the psychic and social dimensions of human behaviour, in a non-reductive fashion. This means specifying their joint effectivity on a person's meanings and actions. Vince, the subject of our chosen case study, apparently had a stark choice to make: try to hold onto a job that he dreaded but needed, or return to life on the dole. However, this predicament had turned into a crisis when he became sick and could not go back to work, a situation apparently denying him any choice. His illness, some might say, had caused him to forego the choice, at least temporarily. But what theorization of the individual subject would be entailed in seeing his illness also as a choice, one that solved certain problems, even as it created others? In particular, we are interested in demonstrating an approach to this question that is based on the detailed analysis of empirical data, since so much of the debate remains exclusively theoretical and thus rather abstract.

The difficulty of drawing up models that include both structure and agency, without simply collapsing one into the other has been a perplexing one for social psychology (Harre 1977, Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Gergen 1989) and social theory (Elliott, 2001, Giddens 1979). Both approaches are avowedly interested in the interaction of individuals with the social. The psychosocial approach we explore here does not resort to reductive mentalist accounts in its understanding of the effects of unconscious dynamics. We fully acknowledge the importance of the social in explaining human choices. The idea that social discourses construct an array of subject positions provides a non-individualistic way of linking

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<sup>1</sup> An extended version of this paper was published in 2005 in the *British Journal of Social Psychology* 44, 2 (147-63).

individual subjects and the social world. What seems to be less well understood is what ‘produces the specific “choice” of location a particular individual makes amongst the available identity positions’ (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2003, p. 39). This question pinpoints the issue of choice as unavoidably implicating individuals in a way that is neither separate from the social world they inhabit, nor reducible to it, but rather ‘always already’ psychosocial.

The theoretical problems involved in using the term choice illustrate how delicate the deployment of each relevant concept can be in our efforts to transcend dualism. We have argued elsewhere (Hollway 1984, pp. 237–238, for example) that more attention is needed to the affective investment involved in particular discursive positions, and that individual histories are important to understand these investments. In Hollway’s formulation, the term investment, based on affective processes, replaced choice because the latter implied a rational, decision-making subject that easily reduced to a model of an information-processing, asocial individual (1984, p. 238). As is the case with choice, so it is with agency. According to Bruner (1990, p. 9), the term ‘implies the conduct of action under the sway of intentional states’. However this too depends on an idea of conscious, rational choice. It also sees actions as discrete episodes rather than as a continuous flow of social practices. The latter idea leaves open the question of the rational intentionality of agency and leaves space for the influence of the primary unconscious, which, according to Elliott (1992, p. 4) is ‘the dimension through which human beings create themselves anew’. In this article, we use a psychoanalytically informed idea of investment to emphasize that identity conflicts experienced within the flow of social practices are not necessarily resolvable by conscious intention or will.

In our analysis of Vince’s choices, we take the workings of unconscious conflicts to be of central importance. Unconscious dynamics involve experiences that are not able to be thought (because they are unbearably painful or anxiety-provoking). The implication is that this kind of experience lays down its traces on and in the body; that is through affect. This postulate enables us to notice different dynamics in our empirical data, based on which it is possible to reinterpret choice and action. This idea that meanings are mediated by psychic dynamics entails, first, taking into account how current choices signify through biography (in which social events and discourses were, in their turn, mediated by psychic events) and, second, paying attention to how current social experiences are mediated by defensive psychic organizations (both intra- and inter-psychic).

### **Method and analytic procedure**

The data used in our case study were produced from two interviews with Vince (a pseudonym), conducted by Wendy Hollway (WH), each lasting for approximately

one hour and 30 minutes, one week apart.<sup>2</sup>

Our research methodology, consistent with our theorization of subjectivity, follows psychosocial principles. It involves positing a subject – including a research subject – ‘whose inner world is not simply a reflection of the outer world, nor a cognitively driven rational accommodation to it’. This research subject ‘cannot be known except through another subject; in this case the researcher’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 4). In practice this is achieved by monitoring ones response to the encounter based on the theoretical principle that affect is a dynamic entity that travels across porous individual boundaries (Blackman and Cromby, 2007: 6). The question of researcher reflexivity (as it is now usually posed) is important when psychoanalytic principles are introduced in data interpretation, as we do here. Psychoanalytic interpretation originates in the clinical situation, where the warrant for any interpretation emerges in the therapeutic relationship. What is the warrant in this context? This is an important emergent debate that we can only acknowledge briefly here. For us there are two forms of warrant for psychoanalytically informed data interpretation, forms that are inseparable in practice. First there are the researcher’s multiply informed (hermeneutic) interpretations of interview claims in the context of everything that is known about the person (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, chapter 4). These are informed by many theories, both formal and informal, explicit and implicit. Second there is significance as it is revealed in what clinical psychoanalysis would call the counter-transference responses of the researcher<sup>3</sup>. For example, I (WH) experienced a strong need during the interview of to protect Vince, and after I left the interview felt fury at the boss, experienced as a strange, almost alien, emotion which was presumably an introjection of Vince’s suppressed anger (see below for how this was used in our case analysis). This provides an example of how to use the psychoanalytic principle of affective unconscious intersubjectivity to theorize the effect of research relationship(s) on the production and analysis of data (Hollway, 2004). We have discussed this in the context of other case analyses (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, pp. 47–52 & 65–68).

The research topic, which posed the question about the theoretical relationship between fear and anxiety, required inferences to be drawn about people’s internal states. Drawing as we did on a psychoanalytic theorization of anxiety, it was not appropriate to rely on interviewees’ conscious self-knowledge of such states. This led to the development of the Free Association Narrative Interview

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<sup>2</sup> These were part of a corpus of 37 double interviews conducted within an ESRC-funded project entitled ‘Gender difference, anxiety and the fear of crime’ (Grant number L21025222018). For methodological details see Hollway and Jefferson (2000).

<sup>3</sup> Clinical psychoanalysis uses the terms transference and countertransference precisely to refer to the affective transfer that crosses individual boundaries and provides a form of emotional communication.

method (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), based on the principle that, by enabling free associations to the interview questions, unconscious dynamics could be symptomatically inferred. The first interview consisted of seven questions phrased to elicit specific narratives about experiences of criminal victimization, risk, fear, and anxiety (see Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, pp. 37–38). The second interview questions were constructed after both researchers (WH and TJ) had listened to the audiotape from the first interview and identified what we considered to be significant issues for follow-up. Consistent with our theorization of the psychosocial subject as a defended subject, our data analytic procedures were based on the principle that accounts cannot necessarily be taken at face value. Thus, in addition to typical thematic and narrative analytic procedures, we paid particular attention to the links (free associations) between textual elements and behaviours that signalled conflicting feelings about the material; for example, changes in emotional tone, long pauses or avoidances. These are some of the symptoms that make visible otherwise invisible internal affective states.

### **Going off sick**

Vince was a married man in his 40s who lived with his wife and three children on a council housing estate in the north of England. He was thin, wiry and quiet spoken and unassertive or timid in the interview. He described how, as well as working long hours as a long-distance lorry driver for 12 years, he had been an active man in his spare time, transforming their council house and actively enjoying gardening and his children. Now, 'I've lost interest in virtually everything'. 'Feeling 'ow I am like, I tend to keep meself to meself you know, and for peace and quiet.' He had eaten very little since he had been off work, could not stand watching television, and even ended up turning off his music tapes. 'Little lad, like, er, a few months back,'e says to 'is mum like, he says, you know "what's the matter wi' me Dad like, 'e never speaks" like, you know.' After 5 months, he was still signed off work with depression and was on medication that 'can 'elp me sleep and get over me anxiety'. His state was uncharacteristic, as he used to be 'so outgoing, you know, happy go lucky'. The period of sick leave began when, one morning, Vince was unable to go to work: 'And I got up on Monday morning and er, I was sat over there like, and er . . . I felt absolutely shocking like, you know, just terrible. And er I asked me wife to ring the firm and just to say, well look, you know, I won't be coming in like, I'm feeling ill like.' His wife rang the firm and later also rang the doctor. She 'rang without me knowing like, you know, 'cos I kept saying "no, don't phone the doctor" like, I'll be OK, I'll just she told me like [that she'd phoned the doctor] – I started panicking then you know, because er I'm, what's happening. You know, me 'eart were beating and pounding away.'

Vince's preferred way of dealing with feeling ill was to 'just 'ave a bit of time off' (without involving the doctor) in the expectation that the rest would be sufficient to enable him to return to work. On this occasion he started panicking, not earlier

in the morning when he first realized he could not go to work, but once his wife had involve the doctor. Presumably, he could no longer deny that his ability to carry on with his job was under threat, and with it, as we argue below, a part of his identity.

After five months, Vince's experience was 'I don't feel any better now than when I first came off'. The doctor had found no organic evidence of an illness. Vince had attended some sessions of counselling, which the doctor appeared to think had been no help and he had just started a course of group therapy recommended by his counsellor. He found it 'hard to explain at times . . . how you do feel. I mean that court case now. I mean I think about it every day and every night, you know, it's still with me'. We address the meaning of the juxtaposition of these two sentences through our principle of free association. The fact that Vince's train of thought moves from his attempts to explain feeling ill directly to the court case is, in our view, a clear indication of the emotional connection between the two. He went on to explain that 3 years earlier he had had his lorry stolen from outside the firm's office. As was standard practice he had left the keys in the cab. Although it was normal practice, the insurance company argued that this invalidated the firm's insurance claim. His boss was furious, and decided to take the insurance company to court, at the same time as telling Vince that he would lose his job if he didn't get the money back.

Vince presents his illness as occurring as a result of the 3 years of stress waiting for the court case to resolve itself. However, he is aware himself that perhaps things are more complicated. Despite the court case being won (indeed as we will see his boss had reason to be happy with him and so he was certainly keeping his job) he did not feel better:

And er, it took 3 years to get there like [to court]. So obviously I were worrying for 3 years, at end of it all if he didn't get 'is money, I'd be out of a job like. And 'e did win 'is claim. Er, but I still wasn't too 'appy like. Obviously I'd been worrying all them years like ... ( WH: And then?). Well you know, everything – that were last November – it got to court and then Christmas 'olidays like. It er, you know, we 'ad us 'olidays like. At that particular time I thought well once it's over and done with, that pressure would go like. But it didn't (WH: Oh right.). So I'm off er, now with depression. You know, 'cos obviously it's got me down that much.

The fact that Vince did not begin to feel better once the court case was won, alerts us to the possibility that we need to understand Vince's difficulties in wider context and understand more fully his psychosocial reality. Let us start where Vince did, with the experience of his job.

### **Running on empty**

In assessing the contribution of Vince's job, and the threatened loss of it, to his present predicament, it is important to examine the evidence of what the job meant to him. Its primary, bodily meaning was the relentless experience, year in, year out, of punishingly long hours. At first when the company was new and Vince was the only driver, he did 'all the runs – what three drivers do now', working '14-hour days ... some days 17 hours ... solid driving', undertaking '500-mile, 600-mile runs' daily, '3,000 miles a week', 'hundred thousand miles a year'. Rest stops were few on the longer runs, an infraction assisted by using a lighter 3.5-ton van which did not need a tachograph. The pressure also meant that breaking speed limits became routine. This could be particularly risky in the vans they used at first: 'if it was slippery or wet ... they'd spin and everything'. These rushed, stressful, long daily runs – setting off at 3 o'clock in the morning, arriving home at 9 at night, having spent the evening preparing the next morning's load – were necessary because 'nights out' allowances were not paid.

Unsurprisingly, this gruelling routine took its physical toll. It left him feeling 'really tired', 'flat on me feet', and that was before he started the day's driving: 'every day were er absolutely murder'. On weekends he was 'so tired' that, after the family shopping, he 'just stopped in'. His driver mates told him they would need 2 or 3 days to do what he did in a day; one warned him he was headed for an early grave ('never see 45, way you're going'). He was not unaware of the problem: 'I knew eventually there'd come a day like, you know, when I wouldn't be able to do it, you know, physically.' After a few years, tiredness gave way to exhaustion. He lost the ability to relax ('I 'ad to be doing something all time') and to sleep properly ('I couldn't really keep me eyes open, but I couldn't sleep'), a state exacerbated in the final 3 years by the additional stress of the impending court case. Whenever he expressed concerns to his bosses about the length of the runs, the number of deliveries, the safety of the vans, and the need for more drivers, the answers were dismissive. According to Vince, he was told how they needed 'to build the business up', that the business 'can't afford it', or, more brusquely, 'do it or leave it'. 'They just wasn't bothered. As long as the job got done.' Being paid as 'staff' rather than by the hour meant no overtime payments for the long hours worked – not even for the annual stocktaking weekend. It meant no meal allowances. It meant a Christmas bonus that was dependent entirely on the goodwill of the boss, who cleverly turned it into a form of attendance allowance and halved Vince's for the year he was off sick for three months. This was the only extended time he had had off, the result of needing cortisone injections in both his arms, which had seized up as a result of the long hours spent driving. His latest pay rise was a mere 2–3%, this at a time when, according to his estimates, the firm's turnover had increased by 4,000% since it started out. And while Vince was facing the much-reduced income of statutory sick pay, his boss 'has got to be a millionaire now'.

### **A family man**

Vince stayed in this job when others would have accepted unemployment or taken a casual, ill-paid job instead. To understand Vince's commitment to this

job we need to consider his investment in the idea of the 'family man'. His home and family come across as the most important things in his life. His three children he describes as 'the best thing that ever happened' to him. He supported his wife's ambition to work as a qualified nurse, whatever the financial hardships that might entail. His early married years were spent converting their old council house to its present modernized and immaculate state, so that he could say, with justified pride, 'we've managed to get it as we want it'. Since then (and before he became too tired to do much), weekends would be spent on home-related activities – shopping, decorating, and gardening.

A defining feature of being a good family man in developed, patriarchal societies is being able to protect and provide (Gilmore, 1993). Crucial to this is the ability to be a breadwinner. It can be argued that Vince was identifying here with that influential version of working class masculinity that celebrated the ability to undertake hard, physical graft through long days (and nights), year in year out, with fortitude, humour, and in fraternal solidarity with fellow workers (Dennis, Henriques, & Slaughter, 1956). This industrial, manufacturing-based world of work began to unravel in the mid-1970s and, under Margaret Thatcher's relentless neoliberalism, accelerated during the 1980s. Talk of a 'crisis of masculinity' was usually connected to the decline in manufacturing jobs (cf. Campbell, 1993; Mac an Ghail, 1994) and their replacement by jobs in the service sector, the infamous 'MacJobs' of the post-industrial era. These jobs signify femininity, not masculinity (cf. Bourgois, 1995) and, in any case, are often too casual, temporary or ill-paid to provide the basis for a secure bread-winning identity. Thus, Gorz's (1982, 1989) post-industrial vision and the crisis of masculinity go hand in hand with serious implications for those wanting to be good, family men. From this perspective, Vince's refusal of unemployment or low-paid casual employment makes sense. As he put it:

I could 'ave took er, another job like but er, financially you know, I mean the jobs now like – I mean you're talking £100 a week and there's just no way you could live on it like, you know. I mean there's people say to me like, you know, "well why don't you get another job like?" You know, I say "basically it's down to money like, you know, you just can't live on it".

### **Biographical significations**

When we explore the biographical origins of Vince's identity, the relationship between the present threat to his breadwinner status and his own childhood adds a further dimension to understanding Vince's choice to hang on to his job. His father had been a heavy drinker, who had 'no time for the family', who put them 'through a lot of hardships', especially his hard-working mother, who eventually left him. During his teen years Vince actively disidentified with his wastrel father: 'I used to think to meself, well there's no way I'm gonna be like 'im', a phrase he used more than once. He described his younger brother as 'a bit of a pain in the neck', because, when younger, he would lie in bed all day and

'would never go to work': it was not that he could not get a job, like Vince, but 'would not' – with all its connotations of willful refusal. His elder sister was 'great', 'totally different' from him and his other siblings. She had done 'very well' – by which he meant 'doing a lot of reading and staying in' (as opposed to going out drinking), and really liking home life. So, his hard-working mother and home-loving sister were spoken of in respectful, somewhat idealized terms; his brother's indolence was an irritant; his father's wastrel life roundly condemned. In narrating each of these relationships, the significance to Vince of hard work and family-centredness was repeatedly revealed. It is worth noting that, despite the connections of the provider discourse with masculinity, Vince's identification as a selfless (family first) hard worker derived from his mother and involved a disidentification with his father. The character of his attachment to his job also suggested a strong unconscious identification with his own sons, not via the adult provider part of himself but via Vince as the son who was himself deprived of a father who worked (and whose failure to work he despised).

At this stage, how can we summarize Vince's 'choice' to remain in a job that had all but wrecked his health and that his friends thought he was crazy to be doing? ('It's not a job you've got, it's a sentence', was how one friend memorably put it.) The answer has a social, a discursive, and a psychic dimension. The social dimension emphasizes the restricted employment choices for unqualified working-class men in 1980s Britain, a time of rapid industrial decline and rising unemployment. To see why Vince decided to put up with dreadful employment conditions in return for the relatively high wages, attention needs to be given to his sense of himself as a family man. The discursive dimension points to Vince's positioning in a provider/protector discourse. However, we need also to understand the particular biographical dimension and his unique investments in this position. Using some biographical evidence, we suggested the importance of his disidentification with a failed and rejected father, and his identification with his hard-working and long-suffering mother. However, the exploration of his relation to his boss suggests a further seam of significance in Vince's paralysing inability to work or to give it up at the time of interview.

### **Committing perjury**

In the second interview, Vince adds another layer to his earlier account of the effect of the stolen van on him. In a nutshell: 'apart from worrying about getting sack, I were also worried about committing perjury, 'cos that's actually what I did.' Briefly, the boss asked Vince, via another employee who claimed to be a witness, to alter the evidence that he had initially given to someone from the insurance company about exactly where the van had been parked when it was stolen. This was to make it seem that that the van was parked on private land and not partly outside on the road. Vince felt that he was in an impossible position:

And they're using me as a – well as a pawn type of thing. He'd threatened to sack me, you know, frightened me, so hopefully, you know, I'd go along with them like. Well I did do. And er, like I say it took three years to get to court so obviously I – apart from worrying about getting sack I were also worried about committing perjury, 'cos that's actually what I did.

Vince's revelation here reconfigures the meaning of his prior account regarding the significance of the court case and its effect on his health. In what follows, we will approach the eventual question of whether and how his going off sick from work was a choice of which he was the agent, first by exploring further Vince's relationship with his boss and second by considering his investment in a moral identity.

One important theme of this extract culminates in Vince realizing something about his boss. Prior to this, he implies, he believed that a forklift truck driver was responsible for the plan to lie about the position of the van. Later he comes to accept that his boss was also involved. Not only did the boss exploit Vince's labour and coerce Vince into perjury for the sake of winning an insurance claim, to add insult to injury, the boss paid Vince for his cooperation:

Anyway when we got back to work like [after the court case], I went into canteen to er, get changed and er, he shouted me into his office like, came into canteen, he said 'can I just see you in office like.' So I went to office, and he gave me some money. And then he took it back off me like, and then he said 'oh, I think I've give you (the forklift driver's) as well.' (WH: Mmm.). So I gave it him back, then he gave it – he said 'no you're alright like' and he gave it me back. . . . What it was then he said er, – what did he say now er, he gave me money, he says 'don't let it happen again,' cos we'll not get away wi' it again.' So that more or less convinced me that, you know, he did know. Well to me anyway like.

Vince's conclusion is remarkably uncertain: 'So that more or less convinced me that, you know, he did know. Well to me anyway like.' Surely it would be more accurate to say that the boss 'was responsible'. So why does Vince soften this conclusion? Why is he still invested in the boss' good character, despite what he conveys as a bitter betrayal? As with our enquiry into the meanings that the job holds for Vince, we can sketch a social explanation and also provide evidence for two elements of a psychic explanation. To threaten Vince with the sack if the insurance case was not won was not only unfair (bullying) because Vince was following company practice, but it meant that the future of his job was largely out of Vince's control. The boss's strategy suggests that he knew just how important was Vince's job to him and we know how often the boss had dismissed his complaints about unreasonable conditions of work.

Perhaps Vince's wish to continue to believe in his boss derived from the history of him getting the job. Vince had been unemployed for 3 years at the time and his wife worked behind the bar at a pub and got to know the boss that way, finding out that there would be a driving job in a new business he was setting up. Vince worked in that job for a year but was laid off when the boss closed it down. The full reasons were not clear from Vince's account, but there was a problem with employee theft. This was significant because the boss treated Vince as an exception, as the trustworthy one, and said he would give him the first driver's job when the new business was ready to start up one year later. Vince duly started the job, having remained unemployed in the interim, waiting. The boss's word was reliable and in this respect he already had the power to make or break Vince's fortunes by conferring employment: Vince depended on that promise for a year. At the beginning, the new business felt like a shared venture: working hard in the early stages in exchange for the rewards of a 'good living' later. Vince committed himself to this vision of the future. He said, 'at first, they promised everything and they've just gone back on their word. They've just . . . pushed and pushed and pushed and they don't know when to stop.'

These interpersonal characteristics of the relationship make sense in terms of the power relations given by the hierarchy of the business and mediated by an old-fashioned class discourse. The boss has the power to threaten and bully, to offer and withdraw employment; the employee is scared, dependent, also grateful and admiring of his boss' success ('He's very clever. Very shrewd. . . . He is a good business man you know.') The external, material power relation is clear here, but it does not fully explain the interpersonal dynamics between the two men, which resemble those of a bully and victim (for example, the forklift truck driver is not victimized in a similar way). WH's fury with the boss and her strong feeling of wanting to protect this vulnerable man are further sources of information about Vince's relationship with his boss. The boss has come to know, over many years, that he can get away with exploiting Vince and now he succeeds in coercing him too. Vince has long found the boss frightening ('he's very intimidating') and been compliant and so it is not surprising that at this moment of choice he does not change the well-established dynamic and stand up for what he believes is right.

### **An honest man betrayed by the boss**

However, many employees would not have felt so betrayed (the boss's reprehensible behaviour did not surprise or shock me, TJ, for example). His continuing reluctance to acknowledge the boss's dishonesty suggests an idealization of the boss by Vince that has the flavour of an ideal father figure: a powerful figure that supported Vince in ways his own father had not. Faced with betrayal by this man, his disillusionment would be all the stronger, as it turned out to be. It is possible there was transference from the father figure to the boss

(both of whom he described as frightening) once he felt let down by him, just as his father let him down.

Having admitted perjury to the interviewer, Vince could return to the question of why he went off sick when the court case had been successfully resolved, enabling him to keep his job. This time, the ending is different:

And er, obviously at end of this court thing like I – I thought well, at least it's over and done wi' you know, the pressure will go. But it never did. So I carried on working for a few month and er, like I say, eventually I just cut off.

'Just cut off' suggests that his sickness was a way of severing his painful relations with his work. Given the context of this account, directly following the story in which the boss's role in his perjury is incontrovertibly demonstrated, and given the growing expression of his hurt at the boss's betrayal as the interviews progressed (he 'feels betrayed', the boss 'just ripped me apart' and 'used me as a pawn'), we can conclude that it is not only his job but his boss that Vince is cutting off from.

Vince prefaced the story of the perjury by emphasizing, in the present tense, how terrible he feels about what he did. In the context it is clear that he is no longer referring to how terrible he felt during the 3 years, but to his feelings about committing perjury. There is shame implied in this direct address to the interviewer ('this will surprise you like'); shame being relived as he now comes clean, after avoiding the admission in many places where it would have been relevant during the interview. Paradoxically, Vince seemed to be motivated by his identity as an honest man, even as he was revealing a serious dishonesty. By his revelation, he was being honest in relation to the researcher. In this way he could be said to be repositioning himself, in a new relationship, as honest. He described his response to being paid by the boss for perjury as follows:

So the first thing I did then. I rang me wife and I were really upset like and I said 'you'll never believe what's happened' and I told 'er. . . . So I just came 'ome and er, I gave money to lads. I didn't want anything to do with it. Just split it between three of them (WH: Mmm.). And I was so (WH: Mmm. Mmm) mad and I don't know – I just couldn't believe it.

He conveys his distaste for the money, which, because it was given as a reward for his dishonesty, was dirty money ('I didn't want anything to do with it'). His action in giving it away implied that at least he would not be guilty of the charge of having committed perjury for financial benefit. However, the taint presumably remained, not least because the money did benefit his children (who, we assume, were not told of its provenance). He also, unusually in the interview, conveyed his anger at being put in that position ('I was so mad').

We need to inquire about the sources of Vince's investment in honesty, since we can imagine many justifications that could have been used to mitigate the dishonesty of his perjury. Not being a liar was central to his self-concept:

'I think they 'urt me in the fact that, like I said to [my wife], I'm not a liar (WH: Mm). If anything I'm not a liar and that's what they made me do.' Assuming that 'if anything' means 'if I'm anything at all ...', he is saying that being an honest man is more important than other aspects of his identity.

This remains in the present tense, despite his acknowledged act of dishonesty. His identity goes beyond a single, coerced behaviour: 'I've worked for this company 12 years and, for being honest, hard-working, this is what I end up with.' It is this robbing him, a powerless man, of perhaps the most crucial aspect of his limited power, namely his self-esteem as an honest, hard-working man, which turns the boss's coercion into a betrayal. It silences his (honest) voice, literally, and forces him to adopt their (dishonest) one.

The emotional strength of this experience is illustrated in a thrice-repeated phrase attributed to the forklift truck driver during the story of how Vince was asked to lie about the position of the van, 'I'm not putting words into your mouth', each time conveying more powerfully Vince's indignation that they were doing just that. This demonstrates the importance to Vince of being able to speak honestly. To feel forced to tell a lie robs him of control, entails a painful re-evaluation of his boss's honesty and undermines his ability to trust: 'With the company, like, I've lost a lot of trust in people ... I've really trusted 'em and I think they've let me down in that respect.' This left him with a feeling of betrayal: the boss not only let him down (that was not new) but forced him to let himself down: 'If anything I'm not a liar and that's what they made me do.' The vehemence of 'if anything' is both poignant and revealing: it establishes honesty as bedrock to his sense of self worth, even as it begins to explain why it hurt, and continued to hurt, so much, leaving him with bitter feelings about his work and the company as a whole. This added theme in Vince's relation to work – namely the loss of trust and honesty in his relationship with his boss – provides us with the necessary understanding of what Vince meant by 'cutting off' when he went sick; a profoundly felt meaning, central to his identity, leaving him further bereft of hope and self-worth.

## **Conclusion**

Referring to his act of perjury after its admission, Vince expresses the conflict between determinism and agency in the following words:

He forced me to do it, yeah. I mean and I think to meself now (pause) I'm trying to kid meself saying he did force me, you know, I'm blaming meself

for that. I mean I think I could have said 'no, no way, I'm not doing it'. I 'ad the choice you know. Obviously I was frightened of losing me job and (WH: mm) basically that's why I went along with it.

The determinism in this statement reflects Vince's experience of material power relations, because the boss had the power to sack Vince. However as soon as he has claimed he was 'forced', he changes position: 'I could have said "no, no way, I'm not doing it".' Taken together, these two statements express this aspect of Vince's mental conflict. Although these two positions are in conflict, they are not contradictory. Put simply, Vince is saying that he both had and had not the choice to say no: had not, because the pressures were so great that he felt that he was forced. This is an example of Barnes' (2000, p. 15) argument that choice and causation can be compatible. We do not see this apparent contradiction as a problem in everyday discourse, although the idea of compatibility of the two positions fails to acknowledge the painful mental conflict that Vince is experiencing and how it is central to his agency. While he is forced to choose perjury, this does not resolve his mental conflict, rather it exacerbates it: he feels worse, not better, when the court case is resolved and he can keep his job. He then 'cuts off' by going on what turns out to be long-term sick leave.

We have detailed the meanings of Vince's job using a psychosocial perspective. It made sense to divide the meanings of his job into three for this purpose. First, the experience of his daily job (the exploitation, the danger, the exhaustion, the powerlessness to improve his conditions, the determination to carry on); second, the significance of having a respectable job (being employed, providing for his family, being worthy like his mother not worthless like his father) and third, the relationship with his boss (the gratitude and dependence, the trust, the fear, the idealization, the betrayal, the moral taint).

Once we are aware of all of these sources of significance, we can understand the full extent of Vince's inner conflict about his job. Not only was it exhausting and threatening to his health and he dreaded it, not only had he worried for 3 years about being held unfairly responsible for the van's theft, not only did he discover that his boss was a bully and dishonest, but also he compromised himself in a way that was central to his self respect. Working for his boss came to signify moral corruption. At this point, then, he hated the job even more but he still could not consciously bring himself to give it up. Yet that outcome was about to be achieved by his ill-health. What can this painful case tell us about choice and agency? In what sense can we say that he has been the agent of that outcome?

We have made it clear that Vince's intentions cannot be reduced to his conscious awareness. He had come to dread his job and it must follow that a part of him wished to be rid of it. It is also clear that this part was in fundamental conflict with another part (one shot through with fears of failing as a family man) that dreaded not having this job. A psychoanalytic model of subjectivity defined

by mental conflict and based on affect is much more plausible in Vince's case than one relying on the idea of a unitary rational subject. It therefore needs to inform our idea of agency.

When mental conflict is too painful – and surely Vince's is a poignant example – it cannot be thought (Bion, 1962). By becoming too sick to work, Vince achieves a resolution, not through thought but by the action of his body; action based on affect. This resolution is an elegant one. On the one hand he has not chosen to quit his job. He and others can honestly say that he would be working if he could. His intentions remain unimpeachable. On the other hand, his collapse has achieved that desired-and-feared situation: he does not go to work. The resolution is also impressive in that he can hold on to the possibility of his job in the future (it will be held open for 2 years). Unfortunately since a return to work would – unless things changed considerably - precipitate the conflict that his sickness resolves, we fear that Vince's illness will remain with him as long as there is any risk that, by getting better, he would feel obliged to return to his job. If, as we have argued, his sickness is the resolution, then it will have to continue. Clearly the cost of this resolution is huge.

Can we say that Vince chose this outcome? Yes, if we define the agent of this choice as the subject of unconscious conflict; that is divided, defended, affective and embodied. In this view, Vince chose to leave his job. We are not arguing that all choices are experienced in conditions of such mental conflict as this: each choice must be situated in its psychosocial specificity. On other occasions, Vince or some other agent might face more or less difficult external circumstances and be capable of thought resulting in reasoned action. Our psychosocial theory can understand those cases too. A theory of the subject of choice and agency must be applicable across this whole spectrum.

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