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Discursive Psychology and the Study of Gender: A Contested Space

Nigel Edley and Margaret Wetherell

INTRODUCTION

In the social sciences many fields of enquiry with apparently clear and defined boundaries begin over time to fragment and sub-divide. This is sometimes seen as a disruptive process, due to the ‘narcissism of minor differences’, yet it can also be viewed as a sign of health and growth. As people reflect on the original paradigm, exploring its strengths and weaknesses, new ideas and amalgams emerge and new conceptual frameworks begin to solidify around parts of original models. The aim of this chapter is to describe and review discursive psychological approaches to the study of gender, charting a process of division and creation of just this kind.

Early work on discourse and gender in social psychology took a broadly constructionist line – looking at gender as not ‘always/already’ in place, fixed as an essence, but as emergent from discourses which formulated and made available identity positions marked as masculine or feminine. This early work was also interested in the performance of gender in talk and texts, through interaction, as a local accomplishment. Much of this work developed as a

contrast to the traditional work on sex differences in psychology. In more recent times discursive work in psychology has taken several different paths. Some practitioners have become much more focused on the fine-grain, following the prescriptions of conversation analysis, while others (including ourselves) have tried to build a path between post-structuralist discourse analysis and conversation analysis, extending the more integrative and synthetic starting points for discourse analysis in social psychology. The empirical consequences and the investigations of gender which result are nicely illustrated in the chapters of this volume with Kamada taking the integrative view and Stokoe and Kitzinger illustrating the conversation analytic path.

This chapter will review these developments and will argue for a discursive psychology of gender performances which continues to work across both the micro and the macro. We will recommend an analysis of what participants do in their talk which is informed by readings of the cultural and political contexts surrounding that talk and which is attentive also to the emergence of gendered subjectivities.

PSYCHOLOGY, GENDER AND DISCOURSE

The 'turn to discourse' felt across the social sciences in the 1980s had a radical effect on psychological research on gender. It reinforced the burgeoning interest in the social and cultural foundations of gender identities and the impression that the study of fixed, biologically driven, sex differences could only provide a partial account. Evidence of historical and cultural variation in forms of

masculinity and femininity showed that gender was relative, performative and negotiated. Crucially, the discursive turn opened up new ways for psychologists and other social scientists to conduct research on gender. For most of the 20th century it would be fair to say academic psychologists studied a world of apparently silent individuals. Quantitative surveys measured (through paper and pencil) people's attitudes (understood as internal mental states) while psychological experiments focused on behaviour. The study of discourse expanded the concept of social action to include talk and texts of all kinds and it began to offer ways to work with people's words and communicative activities. It offered ways of moving past the increasingly sterile debates about what in sex/gender was biological and what was due to nurture and the environment.

Early work on discourse in psychology (Middleton and Edwards, 1990; Billig et al., 1988; Condor, 1988; Billig, 1987; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Henriques et al., 1984) established a number of principles bringing together themes from Austin and Searle's speech act theory, Foucauldian post-structuralism, ethnomethodology and Rom Harre's (1979) work on ethogenics among other sources. A core claim was that language was *constructive* or *constitutive*, rather than simply reflective (or referential). In other words, it was argued that language worked to *build* the world in addition to being a medium for talking *about* it. Potter and Wetherell (1987), for example, tried to show how various identities are 'worked up' from a stock of common resources, according to the demands of different interactional settings. What this meant for the analysis of gender was that, instead of seeing masculinity and femininity as something that both preceded and ushered from 'always/already' gendered subjects, it became understood as something that was produced and maintained

in and through discourse (Wetherell, 1986; 1984a). Echoing the ethnomethodological analyses of Garfinkel (1967), Kessler and McKenna (1978) and, later on, West and Zimmerman (1991), gender became understood as a social and discursive *accomplishment*; a performance rather than an essence - ideas which, famously, became extensively developed by Judith Butler (1990) as an elaborated and elegantly justified philosophy.

Throughout the 1990s a number of socio-psychological investigations appeared which applied broadly constructionist and discursive premises to look at gender in practice (e.g. Edley & Wetherell, 1999; Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Coyle & Morgan-Sykes, 1998; Gough, 1998; Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Willott & Griffin, 1997; Gill, 1993). One example, from our own research, looked at how, within a boys' independent school, inter-group relations were organised around and conducted through different constructions of masculinity (see Edley & Wetherell, 1997). What we found here was, in effect, a clash of multiple masculinities. Of particular interest were the attempts by one group of young men to construct alternative identities to what was, in that context, a dominant ideal of macho masculinity. Our analysis charted the struggles inherent to such a project. As such, it offered an illustration of hegemony in action. A second study (Edley & Wetherell, 1999) explored the 'ideological dilemmas' (Billig *et al*, 1988) embodied within men's talk around fatherhood and domestic life. What this analysis showed was that, whilst the notion of the father-as-breadwinner was still a potent cultural common-place, so too was the ideal of the fully involved, active or participant father. In other words, within the (then) contemporary ideological landscape, cultural common sense seemed to demand not only that the (post)modern father provided for his family, but also that he

was physically there for them too. The young men we studied puzzled over this apparently impossible dilemma: either they went out to work and so failed as fathers or became stay-at-home dads and failed as men.

What was common to most of these studies was an attempt to situate the local production of gender identities within a broader ideological or cultural context – for it was assumed that these two levels (the micro and the macro) were closely intertwined. As Laurel Kamada (this volume) shows, for example, the creation of a positive new identity (*'daburu'*) for Japanese multi-ethnics only makes sense in the light of the already prevalent patterns of cultural denigration (*'haafu'*). This new discursive construct is a response to what was there before. Likewise, as we found, when the young men of the 1990s talked about their future as fathers, they were negotiating both older notions of masculinity and newer cultural versions. Negotiation of the new takes place in dialogue with already existing cultural contexts and social practices.

DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY & CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

The phrase 'discursive psychology' first made its appearance in a book of the same name by Derek Edwards and Jonathan Potter in 1992. This book set out to provide 'a thorough reworking of Psychology's subject matter' (Wooffitt, 2005: 113), or, as Potter & Hepburn (forthcoming) put it, to 'look for psychology in a completely different place' (pg?). In contrast to traditional or mainstream psychology, which saw the mind and/ or the brain as the site of its main interest, Edwards and Potter focused their attention on a much more social domain:

[r]ather than seeing discourse as a pathway to individuals' inner life, whether it be cognitive processes, motivation or some other mental stuff, we see psychological issues as constructed and deployed in discourse itself' (p.127).

Edwards and Potter didn't pick up on gender (indeed, the topic doesn't feature at all in the index), but their work acted as a catalyst, providing the impetus for a range of gender-specific studies, most notably in the writings of Susan Speer and Elizabeth Stokoe (see Speer and Stokoe, forthcoming; Speer, 2005; Stokoe, 2005; Stokoe, 2003; Stokoe and Smithson, 2002, Speer, 2001; Stokoe and Smithson, 2001; Stokoe, 2000; see also Kitzinger, this volume). Unlike most of the work done during the 1990s, this body of research displayed a much closer alliance to the meta-theory and analytical foci of conversation analysis - indeed, to the point where, as Speer (2005) notes, the two disciplines have become quite hard to distinguish. As with conversation analysis, the contemporary discursive psychologist pays close attention to the action orientation (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984) and sequential organization of talk. As with CA, they discourage 'ventur[ing] further than the limits of the text to explain *why* participants say what they do' (Speer, 2001: 107 – emphasis in original). So, instead of going to the data to reveal the workings of patriarchy, hegemony or sexism, the post-millennial discursive psychologist is much more likely to restrict herself to the orientations, meanings and understandings of the participants themselves. In other words, gender is studied as a *participants' concern*; this work looks at how participants 'orient to' or make relevant matters of sex or gender (see Edwards, 1998 for an early example).

According to the main proponents of this new approach, there remains one significant point of difference between CA and DP – a point of distinction that centres upon the ideas of social constructionism (see Speer and Potter, 2002; Potter, 1996). As Speer (2005) points out, many conversation analysts reject the basic tenets of social constructionism, operating, instead, within a firmly realist paradigm. Discursive psychology, on the other hand, is said to:

retain[s] a solid constructionist edge, treating discourse as the site in which the relevance and properties of what are traditionally taken to be mental phenomena are constituted and negotiated (Wooffitt, 2005: 129).

It is important to take a moment to look at what is actually meant by constructionism here – especially in view of the fact that, in recent years, various commentators have claimed that it is not a unitary paradigm (see, for instance, Burkitt, 1999; 1998; Hacking, 1998 and Danziger, 1997). In particular we are drawn to the distinction made by Edwards (1997) between what he calls the ‘ontological’ and ‘epistemic’ senses of construction.

Epistemic constructionism focuses analysis upon ‘the constructive nature of *descriptions*, rather than of the entities that (according to descriptions) exist beyond them’ (pg. 48 – emphasis in original). Ontologic constructionism goes further and opens up a wider range of scholarly activities. Ontologic constructionists do not just analyse patterns in people’s descriptions but are interested in making claims about the patterning of the culturally constructed entities such as minds, worlds, selves, identities and sexualities which discourses bring into being. The new discursive psychology attempts to rigorously stick with epistemic construction while ontologic constructionism is more

characteristic of cultural studies, cultural psychology, cultural anthropology and some work on social cognition. Ontological constructionists do not necessarily claim that their accounts of patterns in constructed social worlds are objective or true descriptions of the real nature of minds and worlds or indeed that these accounts are statements outside or immune from the constitutive nature of any discourse (including social scientists' discourse). But there is an attempt to apply scholarship to discuss the possible social consequences of the descriptions.

Edwards (1997) seeks to align discursive psychology much more with epistemic construction. The alternative, ontological, sense of social construction is cast out into the shady realms of cultural psychology. So, for example, when Speer (2005) subsequently writes of discursive psychology as embracing two senses of constructionism (within her book on gender), we find no trace of the ontological interpretation. The first sense, she says, considers the way that discourse 'is constructed from a range of conversational resources'. As for the second:

it studies the way that these resources are built and used in the course of performing specific social action – for example in asking questions, providing accounts, or managing blame and responsibility (p. 91).

What this means is that, within these more recent discourse studies, there is no longer any sense of discourse as 'world building'; the whole notion of discourse 'constructing the object of which it speaks' (Foucault, 1972) is lost. Rather than retaining the post-structuralist elements of the original mix (found, for instance in Potter and Wetherell, 1987), discursive psychology now confines itself to talk

about talk – or the analysis of ‘talk-in-interaction’ (see Coulter, 1999 and Hibberd, 2005).

The implications of this strategy for the discipline of discursive psychology become clear when we focus on the topic of gender, for what ends up getting studied is, not how discourse produces subjects who think, act and feel in ways socially recognised as gendered, but the ways in which speakers use the vocabulary or discourse of gender (or ‘gender talk’) in the pursuit of everyday social actions (such as providing accounts, managing blame and so on and so forth). The point is that for us, as well as for a number of other critics (e.g. Coulter, 1999), such analyses appear as something of a ‘side-show’ to our principal concerns. It seems as if psychology has been abandoned rather than merely ‘re-specified’ (Potter and Hepburn, forthcoming). As a consequence, what we are looking for is a broader understanding of constructionism, combining both its epistemic and ontologic senses. Indeed, it seems to us that any anti-essentialist understanding of gender both implies and *requires* an ontological ‘take’; after all, from what other position can one investigate gender as a discursive accomplishment and not as some kind of mental or physiological substrate? A discursive psychology that embraces a post-structuralist as well as an ethnomethodological (or ‘endogenous’ – see Speer & Potter, 2002) sense of social construction is one that can not only appreciate gender as a discursive resource, but one that can also understand how discourse shapes people’s sense of themselves (and others) as gendered beings. It is an approach that is capable, in other words, of showing how gender is brought into being – or realised as an efficacious social phenomenon – through a range of discursive practices.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: TOWARDS AN OLDER DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY OF GENDER

At the heart of this chapter, then, is an argument about the constitution of discursive psychology in terms of how it approaches a topic like gender. As should now be clear, what we are advocating is an expanded version of discursive psychology; one that opens out from an exclusive focus on ‘talk-in-interaction’ so as to include a broader understanding of the *onto-formative* capacities of language. What we are arguing for is an approach that holds together a sense of how people both *do* and are *done by* gender talk; an approach that can illuminate how speakers construct (and use) gender categories and how they are constructed – as gendered beings – by those very categories. Commentators such as Wooffitt (2005) seem to feel that it is impossible to keep these two ‘balls’ in the air. In looking at the broader patterns of discourse, he says, the analyst is constantly drawn into underestimating or forgetting the interactional (i.e. ‘local’) context in and for which the talk was designed (p. 173). Maybe this is a danger, but, even so, as far as we are concerned, it is better to attempt this juggling act rather than to drop one ball, under the (mis)apprehension of methodological rigor.

Having laid out these (largely) theoretical arguments, the time has come to try to substantiate our claims through the analysis of some empirical data. What we intend to do is to present a piece of data that comes from our own research on men and masculinity. This piece of data was first discussed in Wetherell (1998 see also Edley, 2001). Our aim is to reiterate the argument presented then and respond to a recent CA re-working of our analytic claims (Wooffitt, 2005). We hope to demonstrate that whilst the more conversation

analytic influenced style of discursive psychology provides some account of what is going on in the data, a fuller account can be found in a more synthetic approach which combines the micro-analyses of CA with a broader understanding of the rhetorical and ideological contexts that surround and lend substance to such conversational exchanges.

The data that we have chosen comes from some fieldwork conducted amongst the sixth form of a U.K. based single sex boys' school during the early 1990s (see Wetherell, 1994b). Over the course of several months, interviews were held with three groups of white 17-18 year old student – each lasting for about one hour – with the aim of revealing the construction of masculine identities in a particular institutional site. The interviews covered various aspects of the young men's lives, including relations within the school, families and friends and their expectations for their future. The data that constitutes Extract One comes from one such interview and concerns the putative sexual activities of one of the participants. Just prior to the start of this extract the interviewer (Nigel Edley) had interrupted the interview in order to put new batteries in the tape recorder and, during the hiatus, the young men had made several references to a weekend in which Aaron had supposedly 'struck it lucky' with a number of young women. Indeed, it was claimed that he had 'got off' with four in one night. With the machinery now restored to working order, line 1 sees Nigel asking for an account of those events.

EXTRACT ONE¹

- 1 Nigel: Okay yeah tell me about going with four people in one
2 night=
3 Phil: [=All::right ((bangs table))]

4 Aaron: [hhhhhhh hhhhhh hhhhhh h] hh no::=
5 Phil: =Go on=
6 Paul: On the record=
7 Phil: =Was it was it this f .hh
8 (.)
9 Aaron: I don't know I was a bit drunk=
10 Phil: =I I'll tell he was drunk I'll tell you what I know
11 [because] I am never drunk
12 Nigel: [Hm mm]
13 Phil: Because I'm dead smug [erm:::]
14 Aaron: [He's never] drunk it's true=
15 Phil: =Friday you went with Janesy on Friday?
16 Aaron: I did yes::
17 Phil: Out down the pub I I missed this completely a
18 complete shock to me=
19 Aaron: =.hhhh

20-66 ((lines omitted - concerned with listing the names of the young women involved))

67 Aaron: =We were very lucky that day
68 Phil: We were erm and we were walking back and he says
69 oh I went with Janesy on Friday and I went yeah you
70 went with three birds last night you went with one on
71 Friday this was in his good month
72 Nigel: Hm mm
73 Phil: So that like took me aback somewhat (0.3) so that was
74 a good weekend for you
75 (.)
76 Nigel: Is that good?
77 Phil: Well in his books yes you know=
78 Aaron: =hhhh.h [yeah]
79 Phil: [The thing] is you got so much stick for it
80 Aaron: Well yeah I could take the stick because it was
81 almost like (0.2) a good ego trip when everyone was
82 taking the stick oh you got off with her ah ha ha
83 yep I did so what's your problem? [Oh, er..errr]
84 Nigel: [Hm mm]
85 Aaron: [Errr]
86 Phil: [None of them] were particularly pikey so you were
87 alright really
88 Aaron: No (.) they weren't .hh none of them were like majorly
89 pikey .hh (.) one or two perhaps could have like
90 (.)
91 Phil: I don't know I don't know I think I know this Cathy
92 bird I know Jenny I know Cathy thing I don't know who
93 the other one was and neither do you so can't tell=
94 Nigel: =Yeah I mean I wasn't sort of saying is four in two
95 days good I mean it's impressive [you know]

96 Aaron: [hh [hhh] hh
 97 Phil: [hhhhh] hhhh
 98 Nigel: But I me::an like (.) it presumes that erm that's:: a
 99 creditable thing (.) yeah? Is it?
 100 (0.2)
 101 Phil: No because you're on the moral low ground
 102 Aaron: But I don't mind being on the moral [low ground]
 103 Phil: [Oh no you don't]
 104 mind I I it didn't fuss me at all you know and I wasn't I
 105 thought it was quite (.) it was quite impressive you
 106 know you're sort of thinking that's shocking because it
 107 never happens to me um:: .h hhh
 108 Aaron: Hhhh
 109 (0.3)
 110 Phil: But he was (.) by some people in the group he was li
 111 (.) they were just taking the piss it wasn't serious no-
 112 one it didn't really bother anyone at [all]
 113 Nigel: [Hm mm]
 114 Phil: It was like Aaron was on the moral low ground because
 115 he was like (.) gigolo Casanova whatever
 116 Nigel: Right (.) okay (0.2) what do you think Paul?
 117 (0.3)
 118 Paul: Did you=
 119 Phil: =Are you ap[palled?]
 120 Paul: [When you] .hh no just a sec (.)
 121 [when you went out]
 122 Nigel [are you appalled?]
 123 Paul: I jus I'll tell you in a minute when you went out
 124 ????: hh[hhh]
 125 Nigel: [hhhh]
 126 Paul: When you went out on that Friday (.) evening you were
 127 out on the pull yeah?=
 128 Aaron: =No
 129 Paul: This (.) you were not?=
 130 Aaron: =Just out [as a group]
 131 Phil: [Just out] as a group of friends
 132 Paul: On the Saturday you were out on the pull?
 133 Phil: No
 134 Aaron: .hh [not really]
 135 Phil: [He was] drunk=
 136 Aaron: =I wasn't drunk [unconscious] (.) I was very merry I
 137 Phil: [(inaudible)]
 138 Aaron: was like (.) all erm (.) all like social guards were down
 139 Paul: Yeah (0.2) and (0.3) whe::n (.) so and (0.4) when you
 140 got off with the first one [did you]
 141 Aaron: [hhhhhhh hhh]
 142 Phil: Who was first? Can you remember?
 143 Paul: On the Friday
 144 Aaron: Er:::m on the Friday that that was Janesy

145 Paul: Did you have any sort of like intonation (sic) of
 146 carrying the relationship further?
 147 Aaron: No
 148 Phil: ((inaudible undertone/one nighter))
 149 Paul: So so you basically went for as many pullings off as
 150 you could get in a weekend?
 151 Phil: No
 152 Aaron: I didn't go for it it just
 153 (.)
 154 Paul: It just happened?
 155 Aaron: Well yeah (.) it's not so much I thought right ((hits
 156 the desk)) this weekend (.) keep your pecker up lad
 157 you're away [it's] not like that it's just that I
 158 Phil: [hhh]
 158 (.)
 160 Paul: With any of them [did you feel]
 161 Aaron: [I get lucky very (inaudible)]
 162 Paul: that they'd be like a follow on?
 163 Phil: He didn't know who half of them were do you .hh hh
 164 Aaron: Ah er I didn't (.) I mean it wasn't (.) I mean it wasn't
 165 like a right gitty thing to do it was like the other
 166 half knew as well that it wasn't gonna be
 167 (0.4)
 168 Phil: Mm
 169 Aaron: Erm (0.2) no it's it's you're getting it all wrong it's
 170 it's (0.2) it wasn't (0.4) errr Aaron come up with the
 171 phrase you want to say (.) it wasn't alright this kid's
 172 gonna get off with me then we're gonna go out oh no
 173 we're not gonna go out what a git it was (0.2) I'm
 174 gonna get off with this lad and that's alright
 175 Phil: Fancied a bit of rough you know
 176 Aaron: Fancied a bit of rough
 177 Phil: As and it was mutual I imagine

In the original analysis of this extract (Wetherell, 1998), it was suggested that what we have here is a populated ideological struggle between, what Wendy Hollway (1984) described as, three different discourses (or interpretative repertoires) of male sexuality: the 'male sex drive' discourse, the 'have and hold' discourse and the 'permissive' discourse. It was suggested that the different speakers are positioned – by themselves and by each other – within these various discourses. To begin with, the notion of promiscuity as an

achievement is clearly evident in Phil's summary statement, on lines 73 and 74, that it had been 'a good weekend' for Aaron. Moreover, it is also implied insofar as Aaron's account of having been too drunk (to remember the details of the weekend in question) can be seen as a form of 'modesty device', whereby somebody else is compelled or invited to 'blow his trumpet' for him. The 'have and hold' discourse is most evident in Paul's contribution to the dialogue (particularly around lines 145-6 and 160-62, where he quizzes Aaron about whether or not he had any intentions of engaging the girls in question in longer term relationships), whilst the 'permissive' discourse figures mainly at the end (i.e. lines 164-77 - where Aaron and Phil jointly construct the encounters as entirely mutual or reciprocal affairs). As feminist social psychologists we were interested in the fact that this group of middle-class white young men had reached a discursive settlement around a particular kind of permissive discourse. In response to Paul's invocation of 'have and hold' relational sexual morals, it was interesting that Aaron spent so much discursive energy in establishing that the young women had wanted it too and he had thus not acted in a 'right gitty' way. The data suggested that for these young men the subject positions associated with male sex drive discourse could constitute a troubled identity. More generally, the original analysis suggested that such patterns of 'trouble' (and examples of lack of trouble) were potentially very informative about the macro discursive environment and social change.

In his critical reinterpretation of this original analysis Wooffitt (2005) argued that it is both unnecessary and unhelpful to look for the interplay of discourses or interpretative repertoires in data such as these. Part of his objection is that such practices direct attention away from the local business of

talk-in-interaction. However, he also suggests that there is often no empirical evidence for the existence of these discourses; that they are, in effect, an analysts' fabrication. To illustrate his point, Wooffitt looks, in the extract above, at the notion of being 'out on the pull' (Lines 173-8). He claims that the phrase doesn't belong to any particular discursive register (such as the 'have and hold' discourse) and neither, he insists, does it carry an inherent accusatory force. Rather, he says, the phrase is made to function as an accusation by virtue of its sequential location within, what he describes as, an 'inauspicious' environment or situation (whereby Paul – who uses the phrase – has been put on the defensive).

Perhaps the first thing to say, by way of a response, is that we don't disagree with a good deal of Wooffitt's analysis. In his close treatment of things like 'insertion sequences' and 'interjacent overlaps' he provides a persuasive account of how the talk unfolds. Neither do we disagree with his assertion that, whilst the phrase 'out on the pull' can carry an accusatory force, it can also be used in different ways (including, as Wooffitt notes, as a simple description of one's intentions for a night out). Like Hollway, we understand that promiscuity isn't inherently right or wrong / good or bad, it depends upon how it is framed. In this extract, it may well be that an upcoming accusation is signalled, as Wooffitt suggests, by the detailed organisation of Paul's talk at that very particular moment and the surrounding interactional inauspicious environment rather than as we would suggest by both the organisation of the talk and the available cultural meanings and connotations of 'being out on the pull'. Wooffitt, however, misses the point. What is so interesting in cultural and broader discursive terms (and for the study of gender) is that Aaron treats being

‘on the pull’ as a serious accusation which has to be countered, which is troubling and difficult for his identity. He need not have responded in this way – he need not have produced an elaborate defence. Unlike the conversation analyst we think that to explain why he did so and why the accusation did seem to be so troubling we need to go beyond the patterns in this immediate interaction to reflect on broader culturally available discourses and changes in these over time.

What we are maintaining is that phrases like ‘being out on the pull’ often ‘reference’ or invoke sets of shared understandings (about, in this case, premeditation, agency and an overall sense of ‘light-heartedness’ – such that going ‘out on the pull’ is like some sort of sport or pastime), but also that these framings are themselves shared resources. People are familiar with the ‘voice’ or discourse of disapproval when it comes to promiscuity. The idea of sexual relations as the preserve of loving, monogamous relationships – rather than as the expression of some natural urge or the itch of lust – is clearly part of our own cultural (Christian) heritage. As Billig (1992; 1987) has ably demonstrated, it is not just the design of talk that relies on a certain cultural competence, the same is also true for the substance of conversation. In our view, taking such discourses or interpretative repertoires into account serves to improve, rather than diminish, the quality of our analyses.

Let us take another example. Consider the interviewer’s question on line 76. Clearly, ‘Is that good?’ stands as an utterance that works to problematise or unsettle the valorisation of male promiscuity evident in Phil’s prior turn. However, what is interesting about the seventeen lines that follow (i.e. 77 to 93) is the way that this ‘troubling’ is resisted: the (de)merits of Aaron’s actions do get discussed, but only in terms of the attractiveness of the young women

involved (note that ‘pikey’ here can be read as ‘ugly’). In other words, the discussion remains firmly within the parameters of the same, celebratory, discourse. Then, in lines 94-99, Nigel Edley, as interviewer, has another go at formulating the question posed, initially, on line 76. But look at how this is done.

In the original analysis of this extract (Wetherell, 1998) this was described this as ‘a complex discursive act’. Indeed, it does seem complex. On the face of it, the interviewer *first* glosses Aaron’s actions as ‘impressive’ but then goes on to question the ‘credibility’ of those same actions. So how are we to understand this bit of talk? The way that we believe it is best accounted for it is in terms of *subject positions* found in different discourses or interpretative repertoires of male sexuality. What the interviewer is doing, in effect, is *skipping* between positions. The point is that ‘four in two days’ *is* impressive from within the register and logic of the male sex-drive discourse, just as it is reprehensible from without. Moreover, we would argue that this momentary identification with the male-sex drive discourse might help to explain the ripples of laughter that immediately ensue – on lines 96 and 97. It is possible that Aaron and Phil are laughing at the irony of the interviewer’s positioning, or maybe it marks the pleasure of a moment of ‘male-bonding’ (which sees the interviewer talking ‘their language’ – as opposed, perhaps, to the more ‘responsible’ or ‘politically correct’ line expected of someone in role as an adult social scientist). In the end, of course, it is difficult to say. Yet what does seem obvious, from the two analyses presented above, is that by drawing upon the concepts of subject position, interpretative repertoires and ideological dilemmas, discursive psychology is much better placed to provide us with a productive way

of studying the construction of gender, both as talk-in-interaction and also as a lived or subjective reality.

NOTES

1. NB the transcript of this data has been slightly revised from how it appears in Wetherell (1998) – having returned once again to the original recordings.

TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION

The form of transcription notation used above was modified from the system developed by Gail Jefferson (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984).

One or more colons indicate the extension of the previous sound, e.g.:

Tha::t

Laughter is marked by hh the number of hh is a rough marker of duration of laughter

.hh indicates an audible intake of breath.

A ? is used to mark upward intonation characteristic of a question.

Underlining indicates stress placed on a word or part of a word.

Extended square brackets mark overlap between speakers. The left bracket indicates the beginning of the overlap while the right bracket indicates the end, e.g.:

hh[hhh]

[hhhh]

Double parantheses indicate transcriber's descriptions.

Numbers in parantheses e.g. (0.2) indicate pauses in tenths of a second while (.) indicates a micropause.

An equals sign = indicates the absence of a discernable gap between the end of one speaker's utterance and the beginning of another speaker's utterance.

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