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Through discursive psychology to a psycho-social approach

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Through discursive psychology to a psycho-social approach).

Abstract

I begin this chapter by tracing the discursive turn's emergence in social psychology with reference to my personal trajectory. I identify two characteristic themes: critique of the unitary rational subject of traditional (cognitive) psychology with its sealed off view of mind, and the enduring question about the relative effectivity of inner and outer influences in forming subjectivity. I then focus on the widespread criticism of discursive psychology for failing to theorise subjectivity, therefore falling into a reductionist external account. I keep a dual perspective on theory of subjectivity and empirical methodology, aiming to show how these are inextricable and how methods can hide (and reveal) important facets of subjectivity. This leads to an account of how some discursive psychologists have used psychoanalysis to make good their 'empty subject' and I give a brief account of the rationale for my development of psychoanalytically informed interviewing and observation methods. This is illustrated by detailing the principles underpinning the design of an empirical research project on identity change, after which I return to the key notion of positioning as a lens through which to discuss some differences between a discursive and psycho-social approach.

Introduction

Psychology as a discipline is definitionally about the person, but what makes people what we are? An argument about the relative strength of 'inner' and 'outer' factors informing identity goes back a long way and takes many forms. Social psychology is the sub discipline that should keep in mind both of these (the psychological and the social) and find a way of explaining the person that does not reduce to one or the other. I now label this focus of my work a 'psycho-social' approach to identity (or subjectivity). I want to take up that story in the 1970's (which is about as far as my personal memory and experience stretch back) with the 'turn to language' in social sciences and the 'discursive turn' (a version of the same trend) in social psychology. These 'turns' involved a new emphasis on language as a leading force in the construction of subjectivity (also referred to as identity or self). They drew on intellectual developments from other European and Western countries, but I shall be focusing on the British situation. Poststructuralism was the intellectual fashion, which for my purposes meant taking in the structuralist influence on linguistics of Ferdinand Saussure and then the critique of this, broadening out from linguistics to social theory. Michel Foucault was the towering influence. The word discourse came into common use and the idea of power-knowledge-practice relations was important in linking discourse to wider social forces. Another significant label for this emerging tradition was social constructionism, which referred to approaches that placed their primary emphasis on how external, social forces 'constructed' the person through systems of meaning.

How was a psychologist to use these developments? I was formed in a psychological tradition that took method very seriously but I was already critical of the deadening effects of experimentation and quantification on psychology's understanding of the person. I had an abiding interest in people – in their specificity – that was not served by the abstract macro-social themes that seemed to me to characterise poststructuralist theory. More generally, feminism was a dominant influence in my early adult formation, a feminism that included practices like consciousness raising which encouraged insight about personal change and its vicissitudes. Feminism's influence on social science also involved trying to do away with disciplinary boundaries that obstructed our understanding of real lives and giving a voice to women through qualitative research methods.

Out of this creative ferment came my PhD thesis about gender differences and power relations¹. In it, I analysed text derived from interviews, group discussions and notebooks. I identified what I called three 'discourses' concerning heterosexual couple relations (male sexual drive, have and hold, permissive) and showed how men and women were positioned in these discourses in gendered ways that had implications for the power relations in couples. This approach is exemplified in chapter 6 of *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*, co-authored with Julian Henriques, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn and Valerie Walkerdine (1984). This book and Potter and Wetherell's classic *Social Psychology and Discourse* (1987) are regarded as influential early examples of critical psychology. Both provide illustrations of a discursive approach, although *Changing the Subject* drew more from critical social theory and *Social Psychology and Discourse* more from linguistics and micro-sociology. Parker (1997c) describes these rather different discursive traditions under the headings 'Foucauldian approach to discourse' and 'interpretative repertoires' (286-288).

Two key themes characterised this early critical social psychology. First, it provided a serious critique of the dominant traditions of psychology. Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell's book, for example, took attitude research as its object for critique and questioned the way that attitudes were located 'inside the mind' in cognitive psychology. Informed by the 'turn to language', they located attitudes outside the person – in discourses. In the case of *Changing the Subject*, we wanted to spell out the implications for psychology of Michel Foucault's poststructuralist theory, with its emphasis on the regulation of subjects. Primarily this involved being alert to the power relations that are inextricable from positions in discourses. The notion of 'the psy-complex' was particularly useful for turning this analysis onto psychology itself. It is 'the network of theories and practices that comprise academic, professional and popular psychology, and it covers the different ways in which people in modern western culture are categorised, observed and regulated by psychology, as well as the ways in which they live out psychological models in their own talk' (Parker 1997c: 287). In *Changing the Subject* we also criticised the dualism in social sciences which meant that psychology was reduced to

¹ This evolved into a book: 'Subjectivity and Method in Psychology: Gender, Meaning and Science'. 1989. London: Sage.

what went on inside the person, as if this was sealed off from the social world. Correlatively, sociology treated the social world in such a way that people were reduced to mere ciphers, and therefore had great difficulty explaining agency. This is known variously as individual-society and agency-structure dualism.

The second key theme of early critical psychology is an expression of individual-society dualism: what forces – inner and outer – are mainly responsible for forming the person. Should our social psychological explanations emphasise inner or outer factors? Can we and should we find a conceptual language that dissolves this dualistic distinction altogether? For example, Stephen Frosh and Lisa Baraitser suggest Lacan's image of the moebius strip for this dissolution: 'underside and topside, inside and outside flow together as one, and the choice of how to see them is purely tactical, just like the decision as to whether to look at the subject from a "social" or a "psychological" perspective' (Frosh and Baraitser 2008: 349).

Social constructionism – as its name suggests – emphasises outer forces. Discursive psychology did so too, specifically following the idea that people's identities were formed through their positioning in discourses. The founders of discursive psychology, Potter and Wetherell, and those who followed their lead, established the inadequacy of cognitive accounts of mental life, making a convincing case for the importance of language and discourse in forming identity. Discourses positioned subjects and provided the meanings that people used to make sense of their experience and inform action. What account of the inner workings of the person would be acceptable in this new paradigm?

Theoretical and methodological challenges for discursive psychology

Discourse analysis² had effects on how the person was theorised and also on research method. Regarding theory, once a cognitive account of mental life was rejected, what, if any, account of inner life could furnish an understanding of how the external world gets transformed into identity. How should we theorise subjectivity? What forms a person's identity? In particular, what understanding of the subject positioned in discourse (the person) would also recognise a person's agency? Regarding method, what should researchers look at? Discourse analysis, in many of its forms explicitly rejected taking the person as the object of inquiry. Derek Edwards, for example, states of discursive psychology: 'This is not a pursuit of deep underlying significances, but rather, of how specific words, descriptions and accounts are assembled and put to work' (Edwards 2005: 546, Edwards and Potter, this volume [p2]). Texts (either created or found) were analysed and the author of the text was seen to be largely irrelevant. Ian Parker summed up the problem: 'but

² Discourse analysis refers to a wider approach than discursive psychology, being used across the social sciences (also beyond) and tending to draw primarily on poststructuralism, whereas the term discursive psychology referred more narrowly to a form of textual analysis whose rules were closely allied to conversation analysis. Margaret Wetherell straddles these approaches. Discourse analysis tends to connote a method rather than a theoretical approach, although there are no hard and fast distinctions, nor should there be.

discourse analysis surely does need some account of how it is that a speaker or writer, or a listener or reader, is moved by language' (1997a: 484).

The emphasis on text was consistent with development of qualitative methodologies in social science where the semi-structured interview became a dominant method (quick and easy) and transcribed data thus derived became the main source of information in qualitative empirical research. Ethnographic methods were time consuming and difficult and observation gave way to interviewing. The methodological and theoretical developments were, of course, strongly interlinked, with discourse analytic methods being informed by, and also (re)producing, theoretical accounts in which discourses determined subjectivity.

An example of this circular effect can be seen in the way that the idea of positioning emerged as central in the discursive turn (see also Edley's account of 'subject positions' and the origin of this concept in Althusser's Marxist theorisation of ideology, in this volume). There is no a priori reason for positioning to refer to positions in discourses (why not people or objects?). Foucauldian discourse analysis placed central emphasis on the power relations involved in the psy-complex, for example educational psychology (Walkerdine 1991) and developmental psychology (Burman 2008). The tendency to limit the idea of positioning can be seen in Davies and Harre's classic statement of positioning as 'the discursive production of selves'. Positioning was useful in moving from the idea of role, enabling 'attention on dynamic aspects of encounters' (1990: 43). The idea of positioning in discourse opened up the possibility of a multiple, fluid, shifting subjectivity. However Davies and Harre demonstrate the commonly shared tendency to reduce the complexity of experience to discourse in their claim that 'once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position' (op cit: 46). This ignores not only the complexity and agency of subjectivity but also the contradictions involved. They also claim that '“positioning” is largely a conversational phenomenon' (op cit: 45), which legitimates a methodological focus on the (transcribed) texts of conversation. In practice most analyses in discursive psychology have been derived from small extracts of samples of text, with little consideration for who was the speaker. Wetherell points out that 'discourse analysts rarely sample the discourse of one individual', with the consequence that 'we need to do more to examine the person as yet a further site where meaning gets organized, displaying specific and recurring devices, procedures, and modes of practice' (2003:114). The production of data that refers to life history would enable looking at the formation of subjectivity across time³. While Davies and Harre make reference to how past experience would affect current meaning, the account is strikingly cognitive, with no reference to the part played by affect and the way experience can be embodied, thus contributing to the formation of selves, without being rendered into language. These are newer developments to which I return below.

³ The Biographical Narrative Interview Method (Wengraf 2001) produces such data, as its name suggests.

Debating the use of psychoanalysis for discursive psychology

What could replace the discredited cognitive account of mental life as a way of theorising inner life? The question, from a discursive perspective, had to be about how people arrive at the positions they take up. In the narrower phraseology of conversation analysis, the question was 'why this utterance here?' (Wetherell 1998: 388), the answer to which divided 'technical' conversation analysts like Schlegoff and those like Wetherell with a broader interest in 'interrogating particular sense making in more depth' (Wetherell 1998: 404). For me the answer was already featuring in my PhD thesis work in the 1970's: psychoanalysis.

There is a profound tension, however, between two ways of bringing together discourse analysis and psychoanalysis. Foucauldian discourse analysis invites us to step back and look at the way that power relations are implicated in psychoanalysis as a discourse and set of discursive practices. By using psychoanalysis, are we, as academics, in danger of reproducing forms of social regulation by the way 'we tell stories about people and so participate in certain discourses' (Parker 1997c: 287)? In the other discourse analysis, closer to conversation analysis, often discourse analysis and psychoanalysis are regarded as diametrically opposed. As Michael Billig put it, 'Discursive psychologists turn the person inside out, converting inner mental life into outward social activity, while psychoanalysts move in the opposite theoretical direction by turning social life outside in' (1997: 140).

Investment and other motivational processes

I regarded discourse analysis and psychoanalysis as being complementary and still do. From a critical realist perspective, I have argued that, just because psychoanalysis – like any other influential discourse and set of practices – is implicated in power relations does not mean that its view of the world is 'wrong' as opposed to 'right', or damaging as opposed to helpful. Power relations are always entailed in meaning making and practices and they are not negative by definition (for Foucault, they were productive). I have looked at the emergence of objects relations psychoanalysis in post-war Britain through the lens of the psy-complex and argued that the radical conceptualisation of intersubjectivity initiated there was not only productive in going beyond assumptions of the autonomous individual and the related dualism of social constructionism but worked better to explain the realities of hospitalised and otherwise distressed children at the time (Hollway 2006b&c).

In the context of interpreting empirical research data, I argued that people are not just positioned in discourses as a result of social forces (for example the ideological pressure to be a man and take up certain 'masculine' positions afforded in discourses, see Edley, this volume). Rather, they are 'invested' in certain positions and these investments inform their provisional, fluid and potentially conflicting positional take up: 'by claiming that people have investments ... in taking up certain positions in discourses, and consequently in relation to each other, I mean that there will be some satisfaction or pay-off

or reward ... for that person' (Hollway 1984: 238)⁴. In other words, discursive psychology, to be a psychology, rather than a linguistics, needed an account of the motivational processes involved in speaking and conversation. These, I argued, were emphatically relational, not simply internal, as I illustrated through the idea of unconscious splitting of characteristics that reproduced (and could creatively change) gender differences in discourses and identities (ibid: 252-4). My approach to discourse analysis used interpretation to detect the vulnerability inherent in the desire for things one could not control, the consequent anxiety and the use of unconscious defences against anxiety such as splitting off anxiety-provoking parts, imaginatively lodging these in others through projection. These processes leave a mark on the subjects involved. They become patterned and to some extent predictable (as is recognised, albeit inadequately, in the old concepts of personality or character). I summed up the implications for discursive social psychology of what was my first use of a psychoanalytic perspective⁵ as follows:

What makes this analysis different from one that sees a mechanical circulation of discourses through practices is that there is an investment which, for reasons of an individual's history of positioning in discourses and consequent production of subjectivity, is relatively independent of contemporary positions available. (Hollway 1984: 251).

The place of psychoanalysis in helping discursive social psychology to theorise the person has been a lively thread running through debates since the 1980's right up to the present⁶. Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman used data from interviews with schoolboys and set themselves the task of explaining boys' homophobia psychosocially. They use the psychoanalytic concept of unconscious conflict to help explain the 'inscription' of individual subjects through subjects' positioning in discourses while yet remaining consistent with a line that 'the arena of personal subjectivity ... does not exist other than as already inscribed in the socio-cultural domain' (2003: 39). Their 'additional move ... goes "beyond" or "beneath" discourse to explore the needs which are being met, the "enjoyment" created, by the position which is taken up' (2003: 52). In this analysis they do refer to psychological processes (although largely stripped of specifically psychoanalytic concepts like desire and anxiety), emphasising their dynamic and motivational quality, while insisting that the resultant subjectivity is always formed socially. Margaret Wetherell (1998: 392-3) cites the influential poststructuralists Laclau and Mouffe who understand 'the social agent as constituted by an ensemble of "subject positions" – never fixed'. Their concession to a psychological element is the

⁴ Freud used the term *Besetzung* (investment in English) to refer to what in English has been translated as *cathexis*, so it is a central idea in psychoanalysis, one that fundamentally accounts for the motivational processes driving action.

⁵ Note how the 'social' side of the equation is reduced to discourse – something else that I seek to complexify in later work.

⁶ More recently these debates have been conducted under the aegis of a new non-disciplinary label, namely psychosocial studies⁶. The term psychosocial represents our attempt to study phenomena without reducing them to either social or psychological causes (Frosh 2003, Hollway 2004). According to Ian Parker: 'the "model" of the "person" for which social psychology has been searching – but has so far been unable to find – is one which conceives of subjectivity as the point of contact between the individual and the social (rather than opting for one or the other)' (1997?: 540).

“interests” (perhaps similar to my notion of investments) are a social product and do not exist independently of the consciousness of the agents who are their bearers’ (op cit: 394). There is a broad arena of agreement about such a claim, but my own account of investments included negative motivational forces too, namely anxiety.

Relational repression

Michael Billig argues that the psychoanalytic concept of repression and the unconscious more generally can be explained by examining the way they are produced dialogically, in interaction and talk (1997, 1999, this volume). In psychoanalysis, repression is one of several defence mechanisms that protect against anxiety. Whereas splitting (see below) is an intersubjective defence, repression works intrapsychically. The idea of dialogic repression is therefore a radical reformulation of a key aspect of the inner world (according to psychoanalysis) to show how it is a product of a social world from which a person learns through relationships with others. Billig used Freud’s case example of Little Hans to illustrate his argument that children learn from their parents ‘to dismiss topics rhetorically’, parents who are ‘thus providing the means of repression’ (1998: 41). Billig’s contribution to the discursive turn is summed up in his claim that ‘probably the biggest difference between the present notion of dialogic repression and Freud’s original concept concerns the relations between psychology and biology’ (1999:253). In other words, he sees (Freudian) psychoanalysis as too biological and therefore asocial. He makes no use of post-Freudian developments in psychoanalysis which, from the 1940s on, are not biologically reductionist but increasingly relational in their central paradigm. His claim that the unconscious should be ‘reconceptualised in terms of discursive activity’ (this volume, [p2]) contradicts the definitional feature of the unconscious conceptualised by psychoanalysis, namely as a non-discursive experience of significance.

Stephen Frosh and Lisa Baraitser (2008), citing Billig on the differences between psychoanalysis and discursive analysis, do focus their critique on object relations psychoanalysis, an approach inspired by Melanie Klein’s departures from Freud that I regard as fundamentally relational. Their critique concerns its focus on ‘viewing adult relationships as structured by (...) developmental processes’ (2008:354) tending towards a deterministic viewpoint. They too are rigorously suspicious of distinctions between inner and outer, but – unlike discourse analysts – find the notion of psychic reality useful because it is ‘never totally internal’ (ibid). They prefer a Lacanian to a relational psychoanalysis.

Relational perspectives need not be deterministically focussed on the structures laid down in childhood (while still acknowledging these). For example, Nancy Chodorow, a feminist, relational psychoanalyst, sees her perspective as characterised by:

The radically uncommonsensual and anxiety-provoking understandings underpinning psychoanalysis – that projective and introjective fantasies are ever-changing, that motives are unconscious, that humans interpret and construct the world and our lives in terms of

unconscious, emotionally-laden wishes, fears and fantasies, that anxiety generates major aspects of human functioning (including the analyst's). (Chodorow 1999 p103)

This perspective is psychoanalytic but it is not the one that Billig and Frosh and Baraitser variously reject. For my purposes, Billig is also too limited in his focus on conversation. In my attempts to use a psychoanalysis that goes beyond the drive-based version, I include unconscious intersubjectivity, dynamic conflict, embodiment and habitual practices; all features of subjectivity that exceed what discursive psychology pays attention to. It is often argued that discursive psychology can embrace phenomena that are not articulated in talk and text. Ian Parker, for example, states that 'the term "discourse" comprises the many ways that meaning is conveyed through culture, and so it includes speech and writing, nonverbal and pictorial communication, and artistic and poetic imagery' (Parker 1997c:285-6).

It has been left largely to psychologists to work out how discourse analysis can be used in empirical research. This is where the focus on language as text (including transcribed speech) has been so convenient and yet so restrictive, led by a refusal to posit internal states that have any life of their own separate from socio-cultural communication. Billig adopts an important aspect of psychoanalytic method, however, when he focuses on the absences in Freud's text of Little Hans. He contrasts this to conversation analysis (which as he points out has informed discursive psychology) whose rules 'militate against psychoanalytic concerns with absences' by privileging what participants say and the normative organisation of conversation. 'By assuming knowledgeable at the outset, the analyst cannot easily investigate how the repression of knowledgeable might be accomplished' (1997:145). This observation has important consequences for discursive psychology's working assumptions about the subjects who engage in conversation; assumptions that not only ignore the core features of a psychoanalytic paradigm – the centrality of unconscious conflictual dynamics in forming subjectivity – but will tend to reproduce that image of the person by virtue of its methodology. I have made central to my method an interest in the significance of absences in participants' accounts. The psychoanalytically-informed concept of the 'defended (research) subject' led to the development of a narrative-style interview method based on the aim of eliciting free associations (Hollway and Jefferson 2000, Hollway and Jefferson 2008). It is my view that any approach that assumes knowledgeable agents will reproduce this image of subjectivity in its findings, analyses and theory building. While there is of course some truth in this assumption, both psychoanalytic theory and forms of data that do not force participants' accounts into researchers' structures reveal areas where participants are not transparent to themselves, notably areas where they have an investment in not knowing and not telling (for example Hollway and Jefferson 2005).

Reflexivity

Ian Parker, recognising discursive psychology's limitations in theorising subjectivity, itemises 'eight points of transformation' that would rework psychoanalysis 'to make it sensitive to social constructionist accounts of the

subject' (1997a:493) which can be used to 'elaborate an alternative to "blank" and "uncomplicated" subjectivity'. Again we see here the advocacy of psychoanalysis to help address an absence or inadequacy in theorising subjectivity that plagues the conversation analytic and discourse analytic traditions that dominate discursive psychology. With Parker too we see an emphasis on what psychoanalysis can offer methodologically. He argues that the utility of psychoanalysis in discourse analysis centres on what it can contribute to 'the vexed question of when and where a reflexive analysis is appropriate or useful' (1994:533). He cites Potter and Wetherell to point out the necessity of reflexivity because "talk has the property of being both *about* actions, events and situation, and at the same time *part* of those things" (Parker 1994: 539). This reminds us about academic participation in the psychocomplex and the need to stand back from psychoanalytic discourse in order to be reflexive about our effects on a regime of truth. Reflexivity has also been taken up in a very different way within discourse analytic method. Qualitative social science has gone a long way in making a case for the necessity of researcher reflexivity, but the usual practice has been to reflect on the social positions that researchers occupy vis-à-vis participants (positions relating to class, ethnicity, gender and so on) with their consequences for power relations and the production of knowledge.

Parker discusses the long tradition of reflexivity in clinical psychoanalytic practice that requires the analyst to observe their own emotional responses to the patient, based on the idea that affect-laden meanings are being communicated between analyst and patient and can be used in the service of understanding. In psychoanalysis, this is referred to as countertransference and Parker suggests that 'an exploration of countertransference would provide some of the elements of what social psychologists attempt to understand when they are reflexive about their research' (1994: 545). My exploration of countertransference in research interview relationships (Hollway and Jefferson 2000: 44-52; Hollway 2008; Hollway 2010) has proved contentious, raising as it does broad questions about the wider use of concepts that have developed within clinical psychoanalysis (Frosh and Baraitser 2008). There is nonetheless agreement that psychoanalysis needs to be used critically and warily when transferred from the clinical to the research situation (Parker 1997b, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman 2003). There are many sound reasons for not adopting psychoanalysis as it is practised in the consulting room as a research tool and so it is a matter of adapting this paradigm for research, finding a 'psychoanalytic "sensibility", a way of working with human participants that instigates a constant reworking of the knowledge bases that we come with' (Baraitser 2008:426). This is why I refer to 'psychoanalytically informed' rather than psychoanalytic methods.

Building bridges

Margaret Wetherell's discursive psychology spans an impressive theoretical range, using and critiquing linguistics, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, poststructuralist theory and psychoanalysis. She systematically tests the utility of these approaches on empirical data (usually derived from research interviews), while not confining herself to conversation analysis with its microscopic focus on textual analysis, but blending this with a broad

reaching poststructuralist treatment of discursive phenomena⁷ (Wetherell and Potter 1992, Edley and Wetherell 1995) and placing these traditions in dialogue, preferring an eclectic approach. While she retains a primary focus on the study of discursive practices, in the 'situated flow of discourses' (1998: 405), she considers it important to look at 'the formation and negotiation of psychological states, identities and interactional and intersubjective events' (ibid). She introduces the notions of 'psychodiscursive practices' and 'imaginary positioning'⁸ and uses the concept of investment to provide more analytical space for these states and events (Wetherell and Edley 1999). A space is opened for a psychology and suggestions are made for the processes through which this might be accomplished (identification, investment)⁹.

Wetherell (2003) went on to examine one school of psychoanalytic thought more thoroughly at the same time as expanding the possibilities of the concept of positioning which, as we have seen, has been discursive psychology's primary way of theorising subjects. She brings this discursive concept into play alongside Melanie Klein's use of 'position' in psychoanalytic theory using some empirically derived discursive data to show the utility of both these. In this way Wetherell shows how discursive psychology can expand the notion of positioning to apply to other modes of relationship than talk and makes it clear that a psychology (a theory of subjectivity) is required for this. She is still sceptical about psychoanalysis' potential for this purpose, however, based on the suspicion of any notion of an 'inner' world, or psyche that is somehow not a reflection of 'outer' (discursive) events. Underlying this suspicion lurks the ghost of the cognitive 'processes' that early discursive psychology killed off, based on an idea of minds that were sealed off from the external world. The question is posed, is it possible to theorise inner psychic processes through a psychoanalytic lens and still retain the benefits that discursive psychology provides, namely a view of subjectivity irreducible to individualist, asocial, unitary assumptions about the person?

While recognising the need to go beyond the 'empty' subject of discourse analysis, Wetherell holds on to the discursive caveat, wanting 'to question just how "personal" or "purely psychological" this ordering of meaning making is' and also question 'the apparatus psychoanalysis provides for making sense of personal meaning making' (2003:114). For me these inner processes are not 'purely psychological', if that means sealed off from the external world. I want to emphasise the *movement* – the constant flow – between outer and inner

⁷ See Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards (1990) and Parker (1997?) for clarifying accounts of these two traditions in discursive psychology and their differences.

⁸ 'Psycho-discursive practices occur in talk and also implicate a psychology ... in the sense that through the momentary and more sustained use of these procedures men acquire a vocabulary of motives and a character with particular emotions, desires, goals and ambitions' (Wetherell and Edley 1999: 353). Imaginary positioning is seen as: 'one way in which identification with the masculine is achieved' (Wetherell and Edley 1999: 343).

⁹ Wetherell (2007) continues opening up this space for a psychology and a related methodological critique when she addresses the need for a dialogue between discursive psychology and linguistic ethnography.

(and also within)¹⁰ and take the processes through which this is accomplished as a prime focus of my analysis. In contrast, Wetherell dislikes the content-process distinction because she sees it as reproducing the old dualism of social and psychological (the outer world providing the content and the inner world the processes). Then she equates it with a content-form distinction, thereby rendering internal dynamics static again. Concerning the Kleinian concept of positioning, Wetherell concludes – inaccurately in my view - that ‘we are left with autonomous and deep psychological properties [... such as repression and splitting] posited as properties of human minds and used as explanatory principles. These processes stand outside social relations and social action and in some unspecified way act on social and cultural material to add a psychological twist to our utterances and accounts’. (2003:115).

Klein’s introduction of paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions helped to initiate a revolution in psychoanalytic theory away from drive theory and towards an emphasis on intersubjective dynamics. The idea of relatively static ‘positions’, laid down by developmental processes, soon shifted to an emphasis on positions as dynamic modes of organisation (a concept quite compatible with Wetherell’s preference for thinking in terms of ‘personal order’). The Kleinian concept of position has been taken up by object relations and relational theorists to a point where oscillation between positions is seen as continual and part of the flux of experience. The analytic emphasis can be on the movement (and therefore also the partial freezing of movement), that is a patterned response to the kaleidoscopic realities of the external world, while nonetheless drawing on life historical patterns of defence and meaning making to make sense of the ‘pattern and order’ (Wetherell 2003) involved in a person’s organisation of experience. In this perspective, the boundaries between inner and outer are as ‘porous’ as Wetherell would like (ibid 115) neither autonomous nor static. Psychoanalytic theory specifies the way processes like splitting and identification act on social and cultural material (through meaning making and the expression of agency in practices). It does provide accounts of ‘how internal mental contents might be transformed’ (ibid:115).

Discursive psychology’s best hope of finding aspects of personal experience that require some notion of an inner world (albeit in constant exchange with an outer one) and thus of ‘filling’ an empty subjectivity is to transform its methods, so that they no longer render individuality and change over time invisible. Wetherell points out that discursive method requires adaptation and analyses biographically relevant data in order to discuss order and pattern. She points to a new terrain for discursive psychology in her conclusion that calls for attention to the ‘earlier positioning work’ of individuals and to ‘settlement processes’. These imply to me an inner (psycho-social) world:

¹⁰ Ultimately, inner and outer are defined by the skin as a (porous) boundary. Bruno Latour’s treatment of bodies provokes a radical shift away from body-mind dualism with his proposition that ‘to have a body *is to learn to be affected*, meaning ‘effectuated’, move, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans’ (2004: 205). I find this usefully complementary with a psycho-social use of relational/object relational psychoanalysis.

Personality, in my view, represents an ongoing process of discursive settlement, ossification, and transformation in relation to the provisional and ever-changing settlements of culture and the linked settlements of those influential “voices” with whom we are engaged in earlier positioning work. And this is where I hope the engagement between psychoanalytic and discursive approaches to positioning, which I have tried to foster in this chapter, might prove most stimulating and thought-provoking for future work. In the end the goal is the same, to try and study further this “settlement process” and to become more sophisticated in the concepts we mobilize as social psychologists for explaining pattern and order (Wetherell 2003:117).

Psychoanalytically informed methods in psycho-social research

Psychoanalytic methods historically are based on working through the subjective, affective experience of the psychoanalyst in order to understand the patient and this approach is based on an understanding of subjectivity that sees people as engaged continuously in dynamic exchange of parts (feelings, ideas) of which we are not necessarily aware. It thus provides an epistemology that is outside the objectivism of positivist science. In two ways I have sought to apply this paradigm to qualitative empirical psychosocial research. The first, with Tony Jefferson (Hollway and Jefferson 2000), was the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) method, based on Freud’s idea of free association as a means of tapping into unconscious wishes. Our method aimed to access latent meaning through eliciting and focusing on the associations between ideas, as opposed to exclusively on words and word clusters. This was based on the psychoanalytic premise of defended research subjects, ‘defended’ in the sense that, following psychoanalytic principles, it is assumed that research subjects are not necessarily transparent to themselves. The same is true in principle of researchers, but there is an asymmetry, based on the fact that the research relation is focused on the participant and it is their investment in that topic (their own life, identity and relations) that may well occasion defensive self accounting. For the researcher, defensiveness will be related to the extent and type of their identifications with the participant.

However, I began to feel that interviewing was insufficient, even though the FANI method is capable of eliciting accounts that remain close to experience and embedded in their settings, because this method depends on narratives based in language. Despite its capacity to elicit free associations, the method must share some of the weaknesses of any talk-based method: by eliciting a mode of communication that is to a great extent under conscious control, perhaps there is a tendency to rationalise, smooth out inconsistency and conflict, thus reproducing images of a rational, unitary, discursive subject. The second method, psychoanalytically informed observation, therefore aimed to go beyond an exclusive methodological focus on text towards a focus on practices and embodied, affective expressions of states of mind and relationship as they are enacted and change through time. I thought that

together the two methods had the potential to complement each other with their different perspectives on subjectivity.

In summary, there are two grounds for believing that a psychoanalytically informed paradigm can enrich research methods; epistemological and ontological. Epistemologically the paradigm can help the use of researcher subjectivity as an instrument of knowing. Ontologically it can inform an understanding of participant (and researcher) subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Of course these two reasons are intimately linked because a psychoanalytic emphasis on unconscious dynamic intersubjectivity ensures that the focus of both epistemology and ontology is on the affective traffic within relationships, be it the relationship between researcher and researched or those of participants in their life world, past, present and anticipated future. As with any approach, and as I have argued for discursive psychology, methods and theory are inextricable in producing empirically-based knowledge.

Designing a psycho-social research project

In what follows, I shall give the example of a recent empirical research project to show how I used and developed these principles. The project was based within the 'Identities and Social Action' ESRC-funded programme¹¹. The transition to motherhood was chosen as a prime site for studying identity change. Our overarching research question was *'how do women make the (first-time) transition into their identities as mothers, embedded as they are, both biographically and in their current lives and relationships, in a series of other identities, such as ethnic group membership, 'race', age, daughter, sister and wife, and class location?'*. It is a psycho-social, not a psychological, question, as is clear from the way we grounded the idea of identities firmly in the women's multiple locatedness. Our focus on experience opened up a psycho-social terrain for identity research. Informed by phenomenological, relational psycho-analytic, and Bourdieusian paradigms, we operationalised the concept of identity to include embodied and taken-for granted, identificatory and biographical, relational and practical dynamic processes. Clearly the approach and design extends beyond a discursive approach, but it does not abandon the idea of discursive positioning (see Elliott, Gunaratnam, Hollway and Phoenix 2009).

Nineteen first-time mothers were recruited in Tower Hamlets, a Borough in the East End of London containing a high level of deprivation and disadvantage, a history of accommodating waves of immigrants and a recent surge of policy initiatives concerning children and families. A new population of young professionals, many working in the rapidly expanding financial sector also situated within the borough, has increased the Borough's diversity. Our

¹¹ Our three-year project "Identities in Process: Becoming African, Caribbean, Bangladeshi and white mothers in Tower Hamlets" was funded by The Economic and Social Research Council (grant number 148-25-0058), the government funder of social science research in the UK. The research team consisted of Wendy Hollway, Ann Phoenix, Heather Elliott, Cathy Urwin and Yasmin Gunaratnam. Dr Cathy Urwin led the observation side of the project and conducted the weekly observation seminars attended by members of the research team. She edited a special journal issue on the observations cases (Urwin 2007).

sample reflected these ethnic and class diversities and also differences in partner, employment and accommodation status, as well as relation to family of origin.

Three interviews based on the principles of the FANI method (Hollway and Jefferson 2000) were conducted over the course of a year: in the last trimester of pregnancy (or early weeks of motherhood if we missed), at four months and at 12 months after the birth. For me one new challenge of this study was to develop experience-near field notes; notes that were capable of conveying the alive quality of the event even long after it had happened and of taking the researchers imaginatively into the scene whether they had been there or not (Hollway 2009). We adopted a version of 'reflexive field notes', 'in which researchers are encouraged to document the emotional dynamics of research encounters and their personal reactions to fieldwork situations' (Thomson 2009: 8). For example, we included in the field note after each interview answers to the question 'What are my hopes and fears for this mother'? Our field notes were also influenced by the psychoanalytically informed observation, which was proceeding alongside, drawing on six of the same mothers.

Psychoanalytically informed observation derives from the infant observation tradition developed at the Tavistock clinic (Bick 1964, Miller et al 1989). Six trained 'infant observers' (not members of the research team) each observed one of the larger sample of mothers, once per week over the course of the first year of her baby's life. For six of the mothers in our sample (two Bangladeshi, one white English, one African-Caribbean, one West African and one white South African) we therefore have all types of data: three interviews (recordings and transcripts¹²), field notes, observation notes and seminar notes.

Observers make notes only after the session has ended, at the time paying detailed attention to the baby and mother. The principle behind the note-writing style of representing the observer's experience is that 'knowledge, theory etc are set aside during the acts of observing and recording in favour of allowing the experience to make its impact ... a new concept of the observer is being employed ... here the truths which interest us are emotional truths. The observer cannot register them without being stirred ... correctly grasped, the emotional factor is an indispensable tool to be used in the service of greater understanding' (Miller et al 1989 p2).

Because this method evolved as a training in infant and young child development, observers become very good at noticing non-verbal, embodied aspects of communication and mental states. It was therefore consistent with our aim to go beyond the consciously aware, talk-based methods of finding out about identity, wishing to pick up a range of other levels, from the unsaid

¹² Transcribing need not always follow conversation analytic conventions. Ours tried to preserve the flow and rhythm of everyday talk while noting obvious changes in emotional tone, gesture and expression, such as long pauses, changes in pitch, laughter and hesitation and changes in the pace of speech.

to the unsayable; that is those that reside in and are expressed through the body (often theorised as the psychoanalytic unconscious). Two practitioners who have applied psychoanalytic observation in organisations characterise the following five characteristics as defining the method:

- Evenly hovering attention without premature judgement
- Use of subjective experience
- Capacity to think and reflect about the experience as a whole
- Recognition of the unconscious dimension
- Informed interpretation (Hinshelwood and Skogstad 2000 p17).

In the psychoanalytic training tradition, the observation method is combined with a weekly observation seminar, in which the group of observers meets throughout the observation period, led by an experienced psychoanalytically-trained observer, to process together the impact of the developing observation. Likewise, ours were not seminars in the sense of being convened for the purposes of applying theory to the data: 'The weekly observation seminars were deliberately devoid of theoretical discussion, both to avoid the tendency for theory to lead or blind observation and because of the assumption that new theory may be required' (Urwin 2007 p249).

The group's task is to use members' subjective responses to the case, which the group can then reflect upon together. This helps observers process their experiences. Identifications with any or all of the participants who have been observed will be present in this material and the different identifications in the group provide different perspectives to think about and contribute to the analysis of the material. An example of group reflection is when one observer was wondering what the significance of the mother's home culture in West Africa was for Martina when her mother visited and wanted to take the baby back with her (while Martina and her husband remained working in London). In this case group members could contribute their varying knowledges of that culture and together think about what the maternal grandmother's offer might signify in that context. We could reflect on our varying feelings of shock at this proposal and explore the extent to which they also belonged to Martina and her husband. This example highlights the desirability of not being a mono-cultural group. An example of the group's help in metabolising a difficult experience is when one observer, who was treated in inconsistent and careless ways by the mother she was observing, 'through the support of the group ... was able to process my hurt and angry feelings and to think about them as belonging to Azra and as reflecting her way of communicating them' (Layton, 2007: 260).

When applied to the observations in our research project, the principle of using observers', group's and researchers' subjectivities as instruments of knowing has radical implications for the ways that researchers arrive at understanding participants, especially because the principle goes against centuries of scientific modernist tradition about methods of knowing that are based on 'objectivity'. At an epistemological level, this involves re-theorising terms like subjectivity and objectivity, reliability and validity as part of a debate that is new to many social scientists and contentious. We need to ensure that

this use of subjectivity safeguards both research ethics and what conventionally was called 'objectivity', which I prefer to characterise as treatment that is accurate, fair, disinterested and impartial, but needs also to preserve meaningfulness (Hollway 2008). For example, it is recognised that identifications with family members can act as powerful vehicles for transferring an observer's feelings and ideas on to a participant in ways that could compromise objectivity. At an epistemological level, the idea of objectivity requires retheorising, outside of the tradition of positivist science. Psychoanalysis has had a largely independent tradition of theorising objective knowing which is useful here. For example Donald Winnicott's developmental psychoanalysis traced the baby's crucial move from creating 'subjective objects' dictated by the desire for omnipotent control, to an ability to acknowledge 'objects, objectively perceived' (Hollway 2006a p37).

In our research design, three mechanisms of support were drawn upon to help the objective thinking of those involved. I have described the observation seminar above. We also used a plethora of group configurations for data analytic purposes (the research team, joint meetings with the team from our sister project, special workshops drawing in others), 'privileging collective forms of working in recognition that collectively we are more than the sum of our parts' (Thomson 2009: 9). Thirdly, we had budgeted for a consultant whom the researcher could contact when she felt in danger of being besieged by experiences that touched too closely on her own situation, which was similar to the women she was interviewing in some respects (location, being a mother of young children) (Elliott, in preparation). A psychotherapeutically trained person can help provide perspective that enables complex difficult emotions connected to research material to be contained and thought about, so that the impact can be productive rather than unhelpful. This support had an ethical dimension (in relation to a duty of care for the researcher) in that it involved processing and separating the mothers' experiences from those of the researcher to prevent these interfering unduly with her life.¹³

Positioning in data analysis

I still find it useful to deploy the idea of people being positioned and taking up positions in discourses, relations and practices. It works, in my view, to conceptualise how meaningful features of the external world impinge on people in ways that, over time, form and reform who they are. We operationalised the more Foucauldian idea of the social regulatory functions of expert discourses by paying attention to first-time mothers' accounts of how they prepared themselves for their new situation. In pregnancy many turned to TV, internet, books and classes, while others preferred to follow their mothers' advice and their own previous experience as older children growing up amongst new babies in their families. When their babies were young, they turned to health visitors and GP's and followed popular baby books to get advice on sleeping, feeding regimes and weaning. Some felt pressures for their babies to be gaining weight fast and reach their developmental

¹³ This is parallel to clinical supervision, which is securely established in psychoanalytic practice. A variant of it used to be a common feature of social work practice.

milestones early. The advice available to them was diverse and often contradictory, for example, in relation to weight gain and bottle or breast feeding (bottle-fed babies gain weight faster, but this does not equate with better health or faster development). Because their stories of this advice-seeking were contextualised, situated in accounts of their particular dilemmas and prior life experiences, along with the anxieties, support (and lack of it), it was clear to us that they were exercising choice and discrimination in the resources they drew upon and that such choices were replete with desires and anxieties, entrenched, inconsistent and fluid positions, all of which fed into the learning and change that a new mother requires to keep up with her baby's rapid transformations. In summary, positioning in expert discourses is a rich and complex topic that requires a complex account of subjectivity, which in its turn is made possible by a methodology that permits changing, emotional, conflicted and complex subjectivities to be expressed and noted.

Experts and positioning: three examples

The following examples are used to point out how particular, varied and unique each mother's relationship to a specific expert discourse is and how this can be understood in a more complex way if our methods afford us access to emotional experience and the way a person's history informs current meaning-making. The effects of a person's prior history is often evident - method and design permitting. Sylvia, for example, had set her heart on breast feeding her baby, in the context of a many health problems which made her worried that she had not been able to nurture her baby properly while still in the womb. Despite her definite preference for breastfeeding, it 'didn't - just didn't work at all' and at first, the baby didn't even have the energy to suck on the bottle so was fed through a tube down her nose for the first thirty six hours. Then Sylvia bottle fed her every three hours, whether she woke or not. The initial worry over whether she was getting enough meant that 'every little feed, John [the baby's father] and I used to write down exactly what she took and end up doing a running total (...) for the day'. In hospital for ten days, she was visited by a 'nightmare' breast feeding counsellor who she experienced as putting pressure on her. The counsellor's claim that breast feeding would give her a strong bond with her daughter upset her and she was 'so close to snapping'. In the interview she elaborated at length what she felt like replying, which was about how a strong bond was not exclusively dependent on breastfeeding. Later on she commented: 'I beat myself up about that [not breastfeeding] for a long time' and cites John as telling her 'you really did try to do it and it just didn't work'.

Other mothers in our sample, similarly visited by breast feeding counsellors in the same hospital, either welcomed the help or, having decided to bottle feed, rejected the advice, but with neutral feelings about it, for example in one case because her mother had bottle fed all her four children and she was happy to do likewise.

We also were presented with data that showed new mothers learning from experience (Bion 1962) in a way that went beyond expert discourse. Becky is describing to the interviewer how she gets her baby to sleep for the night.

So at the night time he'll fall asleep on the sofa, and I'll leave him there for a little while, just so as I know he's settled, 'cos (.) sometimes he'll go down quite early, like he'll go down at half eight or something, and stay asleep. So I'll leave him there for an hour or so, and then I'll take him to bed, 'cos I know that's him sleeping now, and he doesn't wake up. (Int: Yeah.) So sometimes he goes to sleep and wakes up. (Int: Hmm.) But it's hard, because obviously if he goes to sleep in your arms like this, you've gotta turn him to lay him on his belly. (Int: Yeah because that's the way he wants to sleep.) He doesn't go down on his back. I mean he'll sleep like this fine on his back. (Int: Uhuh.) I mean I've gonna try him soon on his back again, 'cos in the daytime he's starting to sleep a bit longer on his back. (Int: Right.) But when he was younger, and we used to lay him on his back, he would throw his arms out and jump. (Int: Yeah.) I dunno, like as if he was falling or something. (Int: Right.) So I thought – then the *only* way he'd get to sleep is if he's on his belly, 'cos he'll settle on his belly. (Int: Yeah.) 'Cos in the daytime, if he was laying on the settee or sitting on the settee, he would lay – lay on his belly on our chest. So I thought – he sleeps like that for hours – let me lie him on his belly, see how he is. And he was fine that way. The first time I done it, the first few times I laid him on his belly, he didn't sleep very well anyway. So I was a bit (.) scared, 'cos they say, "Don't lie them on their belly 'cos they can suffocate themselves." But he's – he's fine, he turned his head about and everything. And a few times he's put his face flat down, and he's left it there for a little while, but then he moves it. (Int: Yeah.) So I mean all these doctors, and all these people, say all these different things about what you should and shouldn't do, but personally, at the end of the day (.) it's your kid, you know what they're gonna like. (Int: Yeah, yeah.) So I don't listen to what they say. They always think they know best, but they don't really.

Becky is positioning herself in relation to (though not 'in') expert discourses here, but the extract demonstrates an agency that draws on a complex mix of experience and insight as she learns from experience and along the way considers, but rejects an expert view that it is unsafe to lay an infant on its front.

A further example derives from observation data on an occasion when the observer accompanied a mother, Zelda, and her baby to a swimming class. From the notes I got a striking picture of a mother who is experiencing painful conflict because on the one hand, her baby is hating every minute in the water and on the other, the swimming teacher is telling her to stick with it and he will overcome his dislike. Much of the meaning that I summarise here was conveyed in the observer's description of bodily expressions, in a situation where not many words were exchanged. The descriptive data are so evocative that, reading the notes, I could feel the baby's and mother's distress, experienced in me as a dislike of the teacher and a wish that Zelda would stand up to her and get out of the water with her suffering child. Noticing such reactions are a useful way to understand the emotional aspects of the scene. My puzzlement at why this sensitive, tolerant, caring mother

continued to put her baby through such discomfort led me to notice, elsewhere in the text, a reference to the fact that Zelda had been good at swimming, and briefly a swimming teacher herself. She commented frequently on her husband's wish, as a keen sportsman, for their baby to become good at sport. Perhaps this was her attempt to introduce her son to her sport; one that she was loath to give up. We see Zelda positioned through an expert discourse, subjected to a power relation that imposed upon her from outside. But we also see how it connected to an aspect of her past history that was infused with meanings that informed her current situation and relationships. Taking a case study approach to data analysis encourages the researcher to make links between bits of information gathered in different situations, at different times and about different events and relationships. It is through holding together the whole ('gestalt') of the case that a richer and more complex picture of subjectivity is garnered, in its situated, practical, life historical, relational, and dynamic as well as its discursive/conversational aspects.

Concluding comment

It is outside the scope of this chapter to evaluate fully how well these methods fulfilled their potential in moving beyond a discursive approach to subjectivity towards a psycho-social one. However, I can summarise by saying that they have transformed my research practice and my way of understanding what research into subjectivity can encompass. Briefly, the use of such methods has made me aware of the many dimensions of time that need to feature in understanding and researching identities and how my own pace of work was shaping and constraining my methods; of how changes in location and the use of different spaces affect identity and how different methods render these more or less visible; of how talk-based methods can conceal what bodies reveal of a person's affective, lived experience. And finally I have learned how useful my own subjective responses (and those of others in a group) are in telling me about the experiences of participants, if I can learn how to pay attention to their nuances.

A psycho-social approach to empirical research is not psychoanalysis, rather it means, in my practice, critically using psychoanalytic ideas, both ontologically and epistemologically to 'fill' the empty subject of discursive psychology in productive, if inevitably provisional, ways.

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