SECTION III

Applications

Social Psychology

Steven D. Brown and Abigail Locke

INTRODUCTION

Most traditional histories of social psychology single out two key works in the late nineteenth century as the founding moments for the discipline – Le Bon's study of crowd behaviour and Triplett's experimental research on social facilitation. Le Bon's (1895) *The Crowd* is a dense 'philosophical' treatise on the 'minds' and 'opinions' of crowds. This is illustrated by observations the author makes on the events around the fall of the Paris Commune. In stark contrast, Triplett's (1898) work is a more modest attempt to understand 'competitiveness' – how the presence of others seems to encourage individuals to apply greater efforts in the accomplishment of some task. Whilst reference is made to bicycle racing competitions, Triplett's work uses an experimental design where two children are engaged in a somewhat bizarrely staged task involving fishing reels.

What is interesting about these two works is how very different they seem. Le Bon uses 'real world' examples, but only as a way of illustrating a theory of crowd behaviour he has already worked out in advance (i.e. a 'deductive' procedure). Triplett uses experimental data, but treats this data as a window onto 'natural laws' which he does not know in advance (i.e. an 'inductive procedure'). On another level, whilst Le Bon has a clear political position – 'mobs' are dangerous and need to be controlled by the state – Triplett seems to have very little sense of there being any link between the behaviour of individuals and the social and cultural milieu they live within.

The point we want to make is that from its very inception social psychology has been a wildly diverse field. In *formal terms* it has veered between a taste for grand theorizing (e.g. Self-Categorization Theory) and a preference for pointing out small regularities in human behaviour (e.g. Fritz Heider's work on errors and biases). In *methodological terms* it has embraced both large scale observational work (e.g. Festinger's

classic study *When Prophecy Fails*) and the design of highly intricate and at times controversial experimental settings (e.g. Zimbardo's notorious Stanford Prison Experiment). And in *political terms*, social psychologists appear torn between making explicit statements (e.g. Tajfel's work on categorization and prejudice) and denying that the political has any relevance to their individual research programmes (see Frances Cherry's marvellous 1995 analysis of this tendency).

In this chapter we want to show how qualitative methods fit into this very confusing and contradictory field. We will evaluate the place of qualitative methods according to the three criteria used above – formal, methodological, political. Or put slightly differently: what do qualitative researchers claim they are doing, how do they go about doing it and what do they see as the relevancy of their work? What we hope to show is that whilst qualitative methods do in many ways differ from the quantitative and experimental techniques which have dominated social psychology (notably US social psychology) over the past 60 years, these differences also mark some points of deep similarity.

In the first part of the chapter we will put these differences and similarities in context by showing how two rival versions of 'social psychology' grew up in psychology and sociology. We will then describe how the so-called 'crisis' in European social psychology brought the two 'social psychologies' back into contact. In the main part of the chapter we then outline the different qualitative methods which were developed in (psychological) social psychology as a consequence of this renewed contact. By way of conclusion, we will assess the future prospects for qualitative methods in social psychology. At the end of the chapter we have included a worked example where we contrast the various approaches.

THE TWO 'SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIES'

In his historical work, Robert Farr (1995) points out that there are two distinct traditions of work which call themselves 'social psychology'. One is the well-known branch of psychology which we have been describing. But there is a second and wholly separate branch of sociology also called 'social psychology'. We will offer a brief characterization of each in turn.

The first social psychology (or 'psychological social psychology') has its origins in European psychology. Historically, psychology in Europe has experienced considerable difficulty in establishing its

place in the broader divisions of knowledge and academic life. The subject matter of psychology – human activity and mental life – suggests that psychology has its place amongst the humanities as a form '*Geisteswissenschaft*' (the study of culture). But European psychologists at the turn of the nineteenth century sought to align the fledgling discipline with the more powerful disciplines and faculties of medicine and exact science as a form of '*Naturwissenschaft*' (the natural sciences).

By and large, social psychology has followed the path of its parent discipline. Whilst early European work in social psychology (e.g. McDougall, 1925; Bartlett, 1932) explicitly drew upon work in other humanities such as anthropology, by the 1950s psychological social psychology was dominated by a natural science orientation towards experimentation and quantification. At the same time, the research agenda for the discipline was set by social psychologists based in the USA (such as Allport, Asch and Festinger). This dominance of North American research was further extended in the period immediately after the end of the second world war, when US finance and expertise was brought into Europe in an attempt to unify the research community split asunder by the turmoil of war years and the flight into exile of many former leading lights (such as Kurt Lewin and Fritz Heider). It was also hoped that this would serve as part of the intellectual buttress against communism that the USA was then desperate to enable in Western Europe. Between 1950 and 1975 it is fair to say that psychological social psychology was an experimental science dominated by the overarching model and ideology of North American psychology.

In the case of the other social psychology (or 'psychological sociology'), the situation is curiously reversed. This tradition emerged in US sociology, mostly around the 'Chicago School' which flourished around George Herbert Mead and his successors. Working within a discipline which is central to the study of culture, sociologists have traditionally not suffered from the same 'identity problems' which beset psychologists. They have instead been concerned with the best means to study 'social forces'. Classically large samples of statistical data on, for example, suicide rates, household consumption patterns, voting preferences, have been the mainstay. These samples are used as the basis to impute regularities in social structure which are then 'reproduced' or 'lived out' by individuals who take on certain characteristics and viewpoints as a consequence (as in Max Weber's 'ideal-typical' forms). This kind of approach reached its height in the functionalist system theory of Talcott Parsons in the 1950s.

But a counter-trend in sociology has emphasized the importance of approaching social forces in a different direction, by looking at how individuals make meaning and sense out of the social structures they inhabit. The generic term for this approach is 'micro-sociology'. Mead's work, for example, emphasized that an individual's personal understandings emerged through a kind of dialogue with the people and broader world around them or 'symbolic interactionism'. Studying such understanding required the use of different methodologies, such as indepth interviewing, observation and ethnography. In the post-war period, this kind work was given additional impetus by the rediscovery of a branch of European philosophy called 'phenomenology'. Sociologists such as Alfred Schutz developed phenomenological terms such as 'lifeworld' to show that whilst there may be general laws of society, at a micro level what matters is how persons interpret their world by drawing on local rules and rationalities. This insight was developed further in the ethnomethodology of Harold Garfinkel (1967). Between 1950 and 1975 it is then more or less accurate to describe psychological sociology as a minority voice arguing against the overarching model of a quantitative structural-functionalism derived from classical European sociology.

THE 'CRISIS IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY'

During the 1970s these two versions of social psychology unexpectedly came back into dialogue with one another. The period is usually referred to as 'the crisis in social psychology'. It was sparked by the near simultaneous publication of three texts.

In the USA, Kenneth Gergen's article 'Social Psychology as History' (1973) presented a blistering attack on the dominant experimental model in social psychology. He noted that the reliance on supposedly value neutral 'objective' methods led social psychologists to be blind to the cultural and historical factors that shape social behaviour. He argued that to understand social processes we need to study how they have operated and changed over history – how social actions are fluid and dynamic – and how in particular the practices of social psychology have changed and adapted over time. Gergen's attack was particularly powerful since the author had been trained in precisely those methods he attacked so virulently.

Rom Harré and Paul Secord's (1972) *The Explanation of Social Behaviour* argued against the 'mechanism' of much contemporary psychology. The authors – both philosophers – took issue with the

default model of the person used in psychology (notably behaviourism). This model suggested that individual behaviour was the product of generic features of human nature which were essentially beyond the control of the person. The task of the social psychologist was then to uncover these generic features through experimental investigation (i.e. through 'positivism'). Harré and Secord argued instead for a model of persons as wholly rational, complex agents whose behaviour was a product of their own contemplation and attempts to understand their world. They pointed to the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the symbolic interactionism of Mead and Erving Goffman as good examples. The task of the social psychologist would then be akin to that of an anthropologist, who would seek to discover the local rules in play in a given community and how these rules were interpreted by community members.

In Europe, Israel and Tajfel (1972) edited a series of essays on *The Context of Social Psychology*, which similarly echoed the call to engage with wider social and cultural forces and to look beyond the narrow confines of experimentalism. Tajfel's own contribution ('Experiments in a vacuum') neatly summarized the dangers that resulted from treating social psychological experiments as ends in themselves rather than as the starting point for developing propositions about social behaviour which would then have to be refined in dialogue with other social sciences. More seriously, this edited book reflected a sense on the part of many European social psychologists that US research had achieved such a level of dominance that it was able to erroneously assume that it provided universal insights into general human nature, rather than very specific insights about North American culture. The formation of a distinctive European Association for Experimental Social Psychology (EAESP) was then an attempt to 'reclaim' a form of social psychology uniquely suited to European cultures and societies. The EAESP also opened up dialogue with social psychologists in the USSR and Eastern Bloc states, where very different kinds of psychology were being pursued, which emphasized collectivity and materialism over individualism and cognitivism.

All three texts then echoed one another's call for a change in the formal, methodological and political basis on which social psychology was to be conducted. The 'crisis' which subsequently followed involved a great deal of public debate about the strength and weaknesses of these arguments and about what the implications might be of putting these changes into practice. It was within this context that a number of qualitative approaches became adopted. We will refer to these as the 'first wave' of qualitative methods.

THE 'FIRST WAVE': 1975–1990

The key texts of the crisis literature had all called for change in social psychology. To some extent 'experiments' became seen as emblematic of all that was wrong with the discipline. The search for new methods then became at the same time shorthand for doing social psychology differently. However, the majority of the crisis literature proved to be very thin in terms of specific recommendations for appropriate methodologies. This left a generation of researchers in the unfortunate position of being 'against' experiments but with little sense of the alternatives (i.e. what they were actually 'for'). In the late 1970s the 'ethogenic' and 'hermeneutic' approaches came to fill this void, followed in the mid-1980s by Q-methodology and discourse analysis.

Ethogenics

The 'crisis' created a schism in the UK social psychology community. This was demonstrated most starkly at Oxford University in the early 1970s where two versions of social psychology were pursued in parallel. Based in the Department of Experimental Psychology, Michael Argyle worked out a programme of research in interpersonal behaviour using classic experimental paradigms. Literally up the road, at Lineacre College, Rom Harré worked out an alternative version of social psychology based around what he termed 'ethogenics'. In formal terms, ethogenics is an attempt to develop an empirical programme for social psychology along the lines of the 'philosophical anthropology' promoted by Wittgenstein. Crudely this means uncovering the local, culturally specific 'rules of production' which persons draw upon to render their world meaningful. As Parker (1989: 21) and others have noted, ethogenics has three main principles: 'the idea of an expressive order; a description of that order as drama; an understanding of social rules'.

According to Harré, social life can be divided into two very different realms – a 'practical order' which covers physical needs and the actions which are required to satisfy them, and an 'expressive order' which covers social needs such as self-esteem. It is this latter realm which is the proper subject matter for social psychology. Harré argues that the expressive order is best approached through the 'dramaturgical model' of social life developed by Goffman, amongst others. This model sees social behaviour as akin to a 'performance' which social actors must learn to acquire in order to successfully accomplish various activities. These performances are in turn governed by local rules which establish what can be counted as

'proper' and 'improper' acts. For example, in Marsh, Rosser and Harré's (1978) study of football hooliganism, the focus is on the 'moral careers' of football fans. Here becoming a football fan is seen as a complex dramaturgical performance, where individuals have to learn the 'social rules' which govern fan behaviour (e.g. showing the 'right' amount of aggression, but also knowing the limits). The data for the study were drawn from participant observation along with interviews with fans. As a consequence the researchers faced the immediate problem that there appeared to be a gap between how fans described their behaviour at football matches, emphasizing their own violent conduct, and the actual behaviour typically seen at such events. Marsh et al. resolved this by claiming that fans improve their own standing as 'hooligans' by colluding in the pretence that football violence is disorderly when they are aware, in some sense, that actually their behaviour follows social rules. The broader and somewhat conservative political point that Marsh et al. make is that ultimately social life consists of rule-following, although it is often useful for individuals to deny this to themselves, in order to feel like free, creative agents (see Parker, 1989).

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a philosophical tradition concerned with the reading and interpretation of texts, typically sacred works such as the Jewish Talmud or the Christian Bible. The fundamental principle of hermeneutics is that the meaning of a text is interrelated with the historical conditions and local practices in which the text is constituted. Since these conditions and practices are not available in the same way to readers as time passes, they must be 'reconstructed' in order to uncover the layers of meaning which the text acquires (i.e. the Talmud as it is read by contemporary readers is the product of centuries of interpretative traditions which are 'layered' on top of one another). In the late 1970s, John Shotter, working as a developmental psychologist in the experimental psychology department at the University of Nottingham, saw a new way of applying hermeneutics to psychological data. Shotter worked with video recordings of mother–infant interactions. Traditionally, developmental psychologists would 'read' the behaviour of infants and mothers by drawing on existing theories, such as Piagetian structuraldevelopment theory. For Shotter, this was rather like the situation where a reader interprets a novel or a scripture in their own terms without paying any attention to the context in which the text was itself written. The hermeneutic approach would then reconstruct the context in which the behaviour of mother and infant makes sense to one another, rather than

'reading' their behaviour through an external theory. Shotter's work attempted to develop theories of 'play' and 'maternal interaction' from the bottom up by reconstructing the context of behaviour in this hermeneutic fashion (Shotter and Gregory, 1976).

Gergen, Fisher and Hepburn (1986) extended this work by observing that social psychologists fail to appreciate how their own methods and measures may themselves be interpreted. Gergen et al. asked student participants to look at items drawn from the Rotter locus of control scale which had been randomly assigned to a variety of personality traits. Participants were able to make highly articulate claims about why each item might plausibly be seen as evidence of a particular personality, despite the fact that the associations were entirely random. Gergen et al. claimed that this demonstrated the sophisticated ways in which persons could reconstruct contexts to make these links meaningful. The political point here is that academic psychology is just one hermeneutic practice amongst others. It is a way of 'reading' behaviour, but one which fails to recognize that the particular interpretations it makes are just that – rather partial and limited readings based upon a reconstruction of context.

Q-methodology

As we have seen in the case of hermeneutics, many social psychologists who looked towards qualitative methods in the late 1970s and early 1980s were working in traditional departments of psychology where experimental methods were dominant. At the University of Reading, Rex Stainton Rogers had also developed a hermeneutic approach to personality testing (Semin and Rogers, 1973). Stainton Rogers was similarly concerned with showing that the interpretative powers of ordinary persons far exceeded the rather limited models used by social psychologists, but was also concerned with the means by which this could be systematically demonstrated through a method capable of representing the complex structure of lay or everyday interpretations. In order to capture this, Stainton Rogers drew on the notion of 'operant subjectivity' (see Brown, 1980) originally devised by William Stephenson (Chapter 13). Stephenson had treated 'personality' as a constellation of possible opinions and responses which a person might make, whose precise form shifted according to the context in which the person found themselves. Hence at any given moment someone's expressed (or 'operant') position on a topic represents a conscious choice (hence 'subjectivity') out of a range of possible positions. The task of the social psychologist is then to map the

contours of this constellation, in relation to specific issues and concerns, and to demonstrate how persons shift between positions.

Stephenson had developed an unusual written statement sorting task called a 'Q-sort' as a device for capturing operant subjectivity. In collaboration with Wendy Stainton Rogers, Q-methodology was developed into a social psychological technique. Studies were conducted ranging from expressed subjectivity in relation to politics (R. Stainton Rogers and Kitzinger, 1985), health (W. Stainton Rogers, 1991) and emotions (Stenner and R. Stainton Rogers, 1998). Some of the best known work in this tradition is Celia Kitzinger's (1987) studies of lesbian identities. Kitzinger used Q-methodology as a way of sampling the diversity of possible ways in which lesbianism might be 'constructed' (that is, described and understood) ranging from sexual identity as personal preference to radical lesbianism as a strategic political choice. Q-methodology, as developed by the Stainton Rogers, was a curious mix of the old and the very new. Q-sorts themselves resemble traditional personality techniques, and indeed are in part quantitatively analysed. But since they allow for a vast number of possible connections to be made between statements, Q-sorts are able to reveal extremely complex interpretative structures and define the differences between distinct structures. Moreover these structures are themselves interpreted as cultural and historical artefacts (see Curt, 1994). To this extent Q-methodology is seen as compatible with 'social constructionism'.

Discourse analysis

The seminal text that brought discourse analysis into social psychology was Potter and Wetherell's (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*, coming near the end of the first wave of qualitative methods. Discourse analysis as both a theoretical stance and a methodological perspective had a basis in sociology, in particular Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) work in the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK), which had originally formulated the idea of interpretative repertoires (discrete sets of rhetorical formulations and concepts organized around a core metaphor) which Potter and Wetherell put at the heart of their version of discourse analysis. The method was promoted as a way of re-interpreting the subject matter of psychology itself, beginning in this instance with attitudes, but extended in later years to topics such as motives and intentions, emotions and cognition and memory. Formally, discourse analysis shared with all the other first wave methods the ambition of treating psychological processes as flexible, sophisticated

everyday practices through which persons made sense of their social worlds. Methodologically, the approach insisted (as sociologists like Garfinkel had done) that rather than search for the supposed 'causes' of behaviour, social scientists ought to look at the rational 'accounts' persons give of their own conduct.

Potter and Wetherell claimed that since discourse analysis involved the close scrutiny of language, then any 'text' was potentially analysable in this way. However in practice much of their data was derived from interviews (notably a study of racism in New Zealand, published as Wetherell and Potter, 1992) or from easily transcribed sources such as television programmes or newspaper articles. Discourse analysis differed from the other first wave approaches by taking a 'hard-line' approach to language. Whilst the other approaches had prioritized language use as the public means through which meaning and understanding is organized, they had nevertheless retained a role for traditional concepts such as historical and social forces, and even for cognition itself. Potter and Wetherell claimed that it was possible to 'bracket out' all such factors – in particular mental phenomena – since they could demonstrate that social life could be analysed as it is organized through language and conversational interaction entirely without reference to any other process. This resulted in an almost immediate backlash against the approach from both psychologists and sociologists who saw discourse analysis as offering little to their respective projects. More importantly it resulted in the charge that discourse analysis was politically impotent, since it could not offer analyses of large scale social and historical processes.

THE 'SECOND WAVE': 1990–2005

By the late 1980s, a range of qualitative techniques had begun to appear in social psychology. The common thread shared by all techniques was a commitment to a model of persons as sophisticated language users able to flexibly interpret and understand their social worlds. At the same time, the researchers using these techniques were engaged in a wholesale rejection of experimental methods and indeed, to some extent, the discipline that went with it. By the early 1990s, however, the range of qualitative techniques in use and the growing tradition of studies made it a very real prospect to talk of a 'qualitative social psychology'. One crucial marker was the decision by the British Psychological Society to include the teaching of qualitative methods as a compulsory requirement in all UK psychology undergraduate degree programmes which it accredited. By the turn of the millennium, qualitative social psychological studies routinely featured in

mainstream journals such as *British Journal of Social Psychology* and *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* as well as specialist journals such *Discourse & Society*. Whilst techniques such as Q methodology remained vibrant, the 'second wave' of methods mostly focused on the technical analysis of discourse, but with very different aims.

Discursive psychology

The application of discourse analysis to the study of psychological phenomena picked up speed in the early 1990s. Much of the work in this area came from a group of researchers in and around Loughborough University in the UK including Michael Billig, Derek Edwards, Jonathan Potter, Margaret Wetherell and Charles Antaki, who collaborated as the Discourse & Rhetoric Group (DARG). The term 'discursive psychology' was coined in a 1992 book by Edwards and Potter, who extended the hardline stance of Potter and Wetherell. Whereas *Discourse and Social Psychology* had merely suggested the bracketing of mental process, Edwards and Potter aimed to show how the entirety of social psychology (and much of psychology to boot) could be reconstructed as the study of talk-in-interaction. In doing so, Edwards and Potter were effectively repeating the similar provocation which Harvey Sacks made to sociologists by claiming that the social order could only be empirically recovered through the analysis of ordinary, mundane conversational interactions. Psychological strongholds such as memory and cognition (Middleton and Edwards, 1990; Lynch and Bogen, 1996), emotions (Edwards, 1997, 1999; Locke and Edwards, 2003), attributions (Edwards and Potter, 1992) and identity (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995; Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998) were subject to a thorough reworking from a discursive point of view, with the result that ascriptions of mental states were considered for their role as interactional currency.

The focus of discursive psychology (Chapter 5) changed over the period from 1990 to 2005. In 1992, the focus was on fact construction, stake management and accountability (see also Potter (1996) for work along these lines) encompassed in the (decidedly ironic) construction of the Discourse Action Model (DAM), published in the heartland of mainstream psychology, *Psychological Review*. A more comprehensive account of discursive psychology was provided in Edwards (1997), where the influence of conversation analysis is more firmly felt, and more recently in Edwards and Potter (2005) whereby three overlapping strands of discursive psychology are outlined. These ranged from a discursive reworking of traditional

psychological models, to looking at the interactional uses of psychological terms, and finally studying where psychological states are implied in discourse. Here the study of talk-in-interaction in its own right is seen to not merely revolutionize social psychology, but to potentially do away with the need for the discipline at all. Indeed by 2005, Wooffitt (2005: 129) was given to note that 'on occasions it would seem that the methodology of discursive psychology is hard to distinguish from that of CA' (see also Silverman (2006) for similar sentiments). In other words, discursive psychology had become, for many, a branch of conversation analysis (Chapter 4). This is reflected in the increasing 'ratcheting up' of the methodological standards of discursive psychology, such that by the mid-1990s, interviews and focus group material were of interest merely as peculiar interactional settings with the use of naturally occurring data considered as the gold standard (see Puchta and Potter, 2004; Potter and Hepburn, 2005). For critics of the approach, the political questions of what exactly a fine-grained attention to transcripts of conversation adds to analysis of pressing social and political questions remains ever more pertinent. The debate as to the *actual* differences between much of the work coming under the labels of discursive psychology or conversation analysis (aside from one method being mainly used by psychologists and the other by mainly sociologists) still continues (see Wooffitt, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Kitzinger, 2006; Potter, 2006 for recent work linking to this debate).

Foucauldian discourse analysis

In the late 1970s a group of psychologists and sociologists began publishing a journal *Ideology & Consciousness* which explicitly aimed to develop the ideas of the French philosopher Michel Foucault in relation to psychology. In a series of articles (e.g. Adlam, Henriques, Rose, Salfield, Venn and Walkerdine, 1977) they argued that since our thinking is intertwined with the historical development of social practice and state power, it follows that our self-reflections on what we ourselves are (or 'subjectivity') is similarly structured. Hence the entirety of psychology must be considered from the perspective of the power mechanisms and structured modes of thinking with which they are associated (or 'discourses' for shorthand) that have made us what we are. Nikolas Rose developed this approach most extensively (see Rose, 1985, 1989). The critical question then is – how does power produce subjectivity and how might we develop new forms of subjectivity that resist power (see Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine, 1984). In a piece of subsequent work, Wendy Hollway (1989) proposed an approach to the analysis of interview texts

which would focus on the 'subject positions' that discourses allowed persons to adopt. This approach gave rise, in part, to what is sometimes called 'Foucauldian discourse analysis' (FDA) (Chapter 6).

In truth there is no clear set of methodological principles which unites work in the FDA tradition, beyond the common use of the term 'discourse' to refer to those understanding which are made available by a particular social practice existing within a given field of power. The work of Ian Parker and Erica Burman (collaborating as the Discourse Unit at Manchester Metropolitan University) has contributed most to the development of this approach (see Parker and Burman, 1994; Parker and the Bolton Discourse Network, 1999). Parker and Burman insist that since power subsumes the entirety of any social world one can analyse practically any material, from government reports to interviews with professionals through even (notoriously!) to the instructions on a tube of children's toothpaste (see Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall, 1989), for evidence of the 'subject positions' we are forced to adopt to understand ourselves. However, for the most part, FDA work tends to be interview based, and broadly resembles the approach taken in early discursive psychological work. But it differs through its commitment to locating the analysis within a broader social theoretical framework derived from Foucault's work. During the 1990s there was a series of fiercely argued exchanges between the Discourse Unit and DARG members, with the former arguing that the latter had reneged on any sense of the political, which was met with the counter-charge that FDA was methodologically unsophisticated and unable to provide the empirical evidence for the political claims its authors wished to make (Parker, 1990, 1999; Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards, 1990; Potter, Edwards and Ashmore, 1999).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis

One way of considering all of the qualitative work in the 'second wave' is to see it as the renewal of social psychology by sociological thinking. Thus discursive psychology took inspiration from the sociology of accounts (e.g. Garfinkel) and conversation analysis (e.g. Sacks) and FDA drew heavily on then previous sociological interpretation of Foucault's work (e.g. Turner, 1996; Rose, 1989). There was one other major sociological tradition which influenced social psychologists – the 'grounded theory' approach developed by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser. Grounded theory (Chapter 14) is a method which aims to provide a systematic process for inductively deriving 'categories' which can be developed into coherent theories. It

demands that researchers minutely break down the transcript of an interview into tiny fragments of meaning (or 'codes') which are then assembled into broader 'themes'. This process is repeated for every interview, with themes being continually revised, until the researcher feels that the themes properly capture the substance of what participants are describing.

Despite its widespread use in sociology, few psychologists have attempted to adopt grounded theory in its entirety (see Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992; Pidgeon, 1996; Chamberlain, 1999 for exceptions). However Jonathan A. Smith did develop, along with collaborators, an approach which was broadly in line with the spirit and general approach of grounded theory, but which placed far less constraints on the researcher, and which as a consequence could be readily taught to underand postgraduate students. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Chapter 11) works with texts, usually transcripts of interviews with carefully selected participants. It requires researchers to make notes on the transcript, then to systematize these notes into 'themes' which are then clustered together and subsequently compared across interviews to form 'master themes'. IPA work grew rapidly in the late 1990s, dealing mostly with health related themes (e.g. sexual health, chronic pain, maternity). One impetus for its growth was the promise that it was possible to treat the texts that it studies as 'windows' onto participants' cognitions. In this sense it is 'phenomenological'. However such cognitions are inevitably mediated by both language and by the interpretive role of the analyst. In this sense the approach is 'hermeneutic'. But as critics (e.g. Willig, 2001) came to note, this view of language is not especially phenomenological, since phenomenologists have a radically different view of thinking from cognitive psychologists. Moreover, the hermeneutic aspect of the approach rather pales in comparison with the wholesale attempt to reconstruct context in first wave hermeneutics and second wave FDA.

~~FUTURE PROSPECTS~~ THIRD WAVE: 2005~~-2015+~~

In this third wave of qualitative research in social psychology, ~~T~~the dominant ~~contemporary~~ qualitative approaches in social psychology were ~~are~~ versions of 'discourse analysis' and versions of 'grounded theory'. Discursive psychology and Foucauldian discourse analysis were ~~remain~~ the best examples of the former, whilst interpretative phenomenological analysis and the newly emerging thematic analysis remained ~~as~~ the most common instances of the latter. In the last half decade though, IPA has found its home as a more

generic qualitative analysis in mainstream health psychology work, whereas the discursive approaches continue to be widely used within the subdiscipline of critical health psychology. However, iIt is fair to say that in the past few years there has been an increasing diversity in how approaches are actually implemented. For example, it is common to see work using ideas derived from Potter and Wetherell's version of discourse analysis married with a concern with power that is close to Parker and Burman's notion of discourse. This critical discursive psychology has been adopted in various quarters (e.g……) as a methodology that is able to end to both micro and macro concerns. In general, qualitative work in social psychology seems, with some notable exceptions such as discursive psychology, to be becoming more heterogeneous and diversified rather than homogeneous and methodologically 'purist', as one might typically expect as a research tradition grows. In this section we will point to some of what we think are the most significant emerging trends.

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What also emerged most clearly from this third wave was the 'splitting' of research methodologies into interaction and experience, again moving along discursive and phenomenological lines respectively. Whist the lines were being drawn between topics and methodologies, a 'third way' emerged out of tensions. One of these ways was the focus on methodological pluralism (refs)

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Thematic analyses

Thematic analyses have been around for a long time in a variety of forms, particularly, for example, in health psychology. Thematic analysis shares close links with content analysis in that both are concerned purely with topic. However, thematic analysis is less concerned with representing frequency of participant themes. Classic texts around such analyses are by Miles and Huberman (1994), Boyatzis (1998), and more recently work by Joffe and Yardley (2004). In such methods, topics of concern are noted by going through the data, typically line by line, such that these topics can then be placed into larger categories or themes and sub-themes. As Joffe and Yardley (2004) note, the themes that are produced can be either inductive or deductive. Deductive coding would be where the researcher codes the data in the light of a previous theoretical model. Once the theming of data has occurred, it is typical to compare coding with others in order to obtain inter-rater reliability.

One reason why thematic analyses have come back into vogue is arguably that they are able to sidestep tricky epistemological concerns regarding constructionism or interactionism. Such thematic analyses are

particularly useful for those qualitative researchers who operate within an applied and practical domain and want to analyse their qualitative data for topic content without considering any methodological horrors (Woolgar, 1988). Their continued existence, and now resurgence, is arguably a product of a desire by researchers not to become enmeshed in the formal epistemological concerns which have marked much of the debate around first wave and second wave methods, and also part of a political ambition to deliver straightforward answers to complex social psychological questions. It is not then surprising that thematic analyses are current taking off in the health-related end of social psychology. Thematic methodologies also enable researchers to combine qualitative and quantitative research – often seemingly without question. However, as some researchers have noted (e.g. Wood and Kroger, 2000) such analyses can be considered as being more quantitative than qualitative in nature and spirit, and adopt what Kidder and Fine (1987) have called a 'little q' perspective on research.

Psychosocial research

The hope of a dialogue between the two forms of social psychology is that it will be possible for to create a genuinely 'social' version of psychology. However, for some researchers this is a forlorn hope. Frosh (2003) doubts whether any amount of 'social analysis' will transform how psychology thinks about 'individuals', and equally worries that a turn towards 'sociological reductionism' is scarcely an improvement on the 'psychological reductionism' of traditional social psychology. For Frosh the problem is how to see 'the individual' and 'society' as genuinely intertwined. The psychosocial approach developed by Frosh (Chapter 7), along with other researchers such as Anne Phoenix, Margie Wetherell, Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson starts from the same assumption as practically all qualitative methods in social psychology, that thinking and action are shaped by society and culture. But it grafts onto this the notion from psychodynamic theory that unconscious dynamics are a key motivational factor, albeit one that is in continuous dialogue with social forces. In practice what this means is viewing persons as shifting between different 'subject positions' in 'discourse', rather in the same way that Foucauldian discourse analysis proposes, in which they 'invest' unconsciously.

Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) Free Association Interview technique is currently gaining some ground. The method draws upon psychodynamic theory by making the relationship between the interviewer and

interviewee central. The feelings and associations produced by the interviewer (what psychoanalysts usually call 'countertransference') are seen to be analytically significant. Methodologically this is problematic, not least because all of the first and second wave approaches were united in their rejection of any form of 'depth psychology' (i.e. claims to read unconscious processes in empirical material). However not all psychosocial research is so deeply influenced by psychodynamic theory (see Wetherell, 1998, 2005). Indeed some discursive researchers such as Mick Billig (1999) have proposed alternative ways that Freudian concepts might be used to enrich conversation and discourse analysis. Nevertheless, all psychosocial research is committed to the notion that social psychology, as it stands, has failed to provide a means of genuinely engaging with the social basis of individuality.

> **Comment [U2]:** Cut?

Post-Foucauldian analysis

> **Comment [U3]:** From here on goes for future directions? It all needs a rework too.

During the 'crisis', many social psychologists were forced to clarify how they thought the discipline ought to fit with both general psychology and with the social sciences in general. A common view, following Tajfel (1980) was that social psychology was a set of 'mid-range' theories, covering the area somewhere between the individual and society. But this view suggests that we already understand both 'individuals' and 'society', and simply need to join the two pieces of the puzzle together. Contemporary social theory (e.g. Hardt and Negri, 2000) suggests the reverse is true, that working out what kind of 'societies' we live in and what 'individuals' can be is the most pressing political set of questions. Few social psychologists have responded to this view, since it requires, at the very least, seeing the discipline as in perpetual dialogue with other approaches.

One exception is the work of Valerie Walkerdine, who has shifted through a series of collaborations with educational researchers ('Counting Girls Out' and 'Democracy in the Kitchen'), media theorists ('Mass Hysteria') and with culture studies ('Growing up Girl'). A key thread in Walkerdine's research is that the basic categories of social psychology – identity, emotion, development – are all mediated by the cultural 'technologies' which our contemporary societies provide. Thus gender, for instance, is not a neutral peg around which it is possible to develop some social psychological approach, but rather a contested political site which is being continually redefined with reference to the cultural dynamics in which women participate. Social psychologists then need to understand the changes which are being enacted around gender

rather than come up with their own clear 'concept'. Similarly, Middleton and Brown (2005) explore remembering as a set of changing processes rather than a clear cut field of enquiry. Post-Foucauldian analysis is then not so much an approach as a body of research united in the ambition to study what it means to be a person and how this is rapidly changing in the complex geopolitics of the early twenty-first century. Methodologically, most work in this area is highly varied (and thus not systematic or refined with respect to common criteria) drawing equally on interviews, naturalistic data, and increasingly internet based data. However, politically the work shares the common perspective that it is the duty of the social researcher to invent concepts which not only capture the vicissitudes of contemporary life but also create new possibilities for thinking that life.

Conversation analysis

Conversation analysis (CA) (Chapter 4) is certainly not a new methodology, nor is it a new discovery for social psychologists (Edwards published a comprehensive introduction in 1994!). As we have described, conversation analysis has been critical to the development of discourse analysis and discursive psychology. However, as we have also noted, some social psychologists now regard themselves as having become conversation analysts, and correspondingly see social psychology itself as having its legitimate destination in this approach. The initial ideas of CA were of course developed by Harvey Sacks up until his death in 1975 (see Sacks, 1992) and have since been developed into a more concrete methodology by names such as Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. Sacks' original work proposed a conversation analysis that looked at both the sequential components of talk and the categories that were utilized in talk (membership category devices). Interestingly in the years since his death, this second focus has developed into what some would regard as a separate methodology of membership category analysis (MCA) one which is sometimes, though not always, tied to (sequential) CA. Mostly when people talk about using CA, they are referring to the sequential analysis of typically naturally occurring conversation.

The idea that social psychology ought to end up as a branch of CA is obviously problematic. If we consider that social psychology still needs to consider something 'mental' within it, what can a specific CA analysis offer that a DP analysis cannot? Social psychology by its very nature focuses on people, mental states (including discourses of) and social issues surrounding identity. CA in its purest form, cannot add

anything to this argument and to social psychology as a specific discipline in as much as psychology is by definition interested in mental states. However, there is ongoing debate as to the political potential of CA. This emerged in feminist psychology from the work of Kitzinger, Speer and Stokoe who have all demonstrated that issues around sexuality and gender can be studied at a micro-level of negotiation (and coercement) through CA (see Speer, 1999; Kitzinger, 2000; Stokoe, 2000).

SUMMARY

From a perspective of over 30 years onwards, we may now see that what the 'crisis' achieved for social psychology was twofold. Firstly, it enabled social psychologists to consider the cultural and historical constraints and influences on its ideas and theories. Secondly, it enabled a more ecologically valid study of people in their natural environments, explaining and accounting for their actions and decisions. This was accomplished through introduction and flourishing of a range of qualitative methods, over three successive waves. However, it is important to note that this only one half of the story. Experimental social psychology not only survived the crisis more or less intact, but is currently 'in a state of rude health' (Brown, 2002: 70). Indeed journals such as the *European Journal of Social Psychology* publish experimental work almost exclusively, reflecting a broader picture in northern Europe (with the exception of the UK), where social psychology is formally defined as much the same quantitative study of 'social cognition' that it has been since the 1950s.

Should we then conclude that the situation in the UK is a special case? Some commentators, not least the powerful panel of eminent psychologists charged with overseeing the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (an audit of UK higher education research) certainly thought so. Their report concluded that social psychology was now split entirely between qualitative and experimental work, to the detriment of all. A working group set up by the British Psychological Society in 2004 to encourage dialogue across the rival camps was more optimistic, although many participants commented on the yawning chasm between their basic concepts and ideas of how to approach social phenomena (see the special issue of *The Psychologist* of 2005 on 'Dialoguing Across Divisions').

We want to conclude our survey of qualitative methods in social psychology on a different note. We have

used three criteria to discuss approaches: *formal* (i.e. epistemology), *methodological* (i.e. technical) and *political* (i.e. relationship to broader social world). Seen in these terms, it is clear that qualitative methods do not form a homogenous whole (see Box 21.1 for an illustration of how different qualitative research methods may approach a social psychological research topic in rather different ways). For example, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) makes completely different assumptions about mental life and its relationship to language to both discourse analysis and discursive psychology, yet many aspects of its technical procedures are striking similar to the initial stages of an early (i.e. Potter and Wetherell, 1987) form of discursive analysis. Moreover, in terms of its political ambitions to deliver specific policy oriented findings to a selected audience, the applied aspects of IPA share much with some versions of Foucauldian discourse analysis, even though their formal theoretical basis could not be more different (Foucault famously rejected any form of phenomenology)!

We suggest that if these same three criteria are applied across the supposed qualitative/ quantitative divide then a better rounded picture of social psychology emerges. Rather than see work as split across a single division, in which all sorts of immensely varied issues are subsumed, we can see contemporary social psychology as a mosaic of approaches, with some far closer than is usually suspected. For example, conversation analysis seemingly stands in stark opposition to social cognition, with the former in the main virulently against any reference to 'mental states' other than as rhetorical formulations (see the special issue of *Discourse Studies* on 'Discourse, Interaction and Cognition' (2006) for a larger debate on the role of cognition in conversation analysis), and the latter insisting that the broader social world only comes to exist for the individual in terms of cognitive representations. But methodologically the two approaches are strikingly similar – both involve the close analysis of complex datasets which can only be assembled from particular authorized sources purged of outside influence. The 'naturalistic data' on which the conversation analyst insists is the inverted mirror image of the 'experimental data' that the social cognition researcher demands. Politically the two approaches are also bedfellows, in that they place priority on progress being made in the research programme itself above a concern with connecting findings to social policy. Indeed, one could argue, that to read a piece of conversation analytic social psychology, replete with technical details and typically culminating in highly specific points which are only explicable with reference to a very

narrow tradition, is to be immediately reminded of the kind of classic experimental social psychology which provoked the crisis in the first place.

BOX 21.1 Researching Social Psychologies: Identity Transitions in a Memory Museum

(The following example is a composite that draws upon themes from ongoing research by Brown in collaboration with the Universiteit voor Humanistiek and Humanitas, Rotterdam)

Karin is a Dutch woman in her late forties. Her mother, Maria, is approaching 80 and is now living in an elderly care home facility – Humanitas – in Rotterdam. Over the past two years Maria has been displaying symptoms of dementia including memory loss and confusion. In recent months Maria's memory lapses have been particularly acute and she sometimes confuses Karin with other people from her past or fails to recognize her altogether. Karin finds these occasions difficult to manage, in part because she does not know how to relate to her mother when she is not recognized as her daughter, and more importantly because these lapses make the ultimate loss of her mother seem closer. Karin also worries about how her children – Annemarie and Maarten – will cope with seeing their grandmother decline. Annemarie is now pregnant (her first child) and Karin wonders whether her own mother will see the baby, and if she does how she will respond. Humanitas has recently opened a 'memory museum' on site. This is a series of rooms which have been designed to resemble traditional Dutch homes and shops from the 1940s and 1950s. The 'living room' for example, is filled with ornaments, pictures and fittings all designed to evoke memories of the time. The 'shop' is filled with goods – tins, adverts, jars of sweets – which have long since disappeared from everyday Dutch life. The elderly people at Humanitas and their families visit the museum together. Karin has visited the museum with Maria along with Annemarie and Marteen. She finds the visits enjoyable, since Maria is particularly animated and reminisces about times from her youth, but also deeply troubling because Maria makes little reference to their common family history, which she feels is gradually slipping away.

Ethogenics. From an ethogenic perspective, what is of interest are the systems of rules that underpin social behaviour. A family has its own rules governing morally appropriate behaviour, for instance. Here interviews might be used to elicit from Karin why she is troubled by Maria not remembering the family past,

and how this is related to the expansion of the extended family with the birth of her grandchild. Do families have a 'duty to remember'? When are there exceptions?

Hermeneutics. There are clearly multiple layers of meaning at stake in the relationships within the extended family. Some of these are determined 'officially' – such as by Maria's medically authorized status as 'suffering from dementia'. Video recordings of interactions between the family members both inside and outside the museum might help peel apart some of these layers. For example, do the family members switch between treating Maria as a 'patient' who needs help and as a senior member of the family whose reminiscences should be valued and listened to uninterrupted?

Q methodology. Q-sorts are best suited to exploring the ecology of cultural understandings that are brought to bear to understand a social phenomenon. Here a Q-study might reveal the various ways in which 'dementia' is constructed. We would expect there to be a 'medical' construction, but are there other more personal constructions such as 'dementia as loss of family' or 'dementia as moral passage'? The approach here would be to ask Karin and her family to complete the sort, along with other families.

Discourse analysis. Interviews with Karin and family members – perhaps even with Maria herself – would be transcribed and then analysed to recover the 'interpretative repertoires' which are culturally available to make sense of dementia and ageing. These are likely to be clustered around a core metaphor – such as 'ageing as increasing medicalization' or 'ageing as natural deterioration'. It would be of particular interest to identify at what points in interviews family member switch between various repertoires and what social acts they may be thereby accomplishing (e.g. excusing guilt, justifying ill-feeling, etc.).

Discursive psychology. From this perspective the relevant questions would be around the talk-in-interaction which occurs within the memory museum. High quality recordings transcribed to a very detailed (Jeffersonian level) would be required. The precise questions to be asked would be determined inductively as the analysis proceeded, and guided by traditional themes such as 'stake inoculation', 'categorization' and 'making mental ascriptions'. However the discursive psychologist would be immediately drawn to any sign of 'trouble' in the interaction – that is moments where there are pauses, interruptions, or speakers repairing their own talk. What kind of social 'business' occurs in the memory museum? How is identity discursively

managed and accomplished in the local interaction?

Foucauldian discourse analysis. Power and subjectivity are the key concerns here. Maria is clearly embedded in some complex sets of power relations with the care home, including the 'pastoral power' of medicine and social welfare. What forms of subjectivity are granted to Maria as a 'dementia patient'? Does she manage to resist or subvert this classification in any way? Identifying the relevant discourses in play could be done either through interviews or through recordings of interaction (including interactions with care staff), but this would need to be supplemented with a broader historical and cultural analysis of Humanitas as a social institution.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis. IPA would approach the study of identity with regard to looking at how it is personally negotiated for those involved and would typically use semi-structured interviews as the preferred method of data collection. For example, repeated interviews with Karin over time might recover some key themes which indicate the changing ways she comes to think about Maria and what is happening to her. Does she feel a conflict between her 'responsibility as a daughter' and her 'becoming the senior member of the extended family'? IPA would assume that the interviewers' own understandings inevitably inform the analysis.

Thematic analysis. The approach here would be to recover broad themes that encompass the experience of ageing. This could be accomplished by assembling a broad corpus of interviews with people like Maria and their respective families. These would be loosely transcribed and analysed for key terms. For example, is there a sense of 'guilt' at having an elderly family member transferred to a care home? How is this then managed? The assumption would be that there are a limited set of key issues which it is possible for the analyst to recover from interviews which then account for the greater majority of the experience.

Psychosocial research. Psychosocial approaches combine the social with the psyche and personal, although as we noted earlier some researchers operating from this perspective embrace psychodymanic sympathies more than others. The types of data used could vary from free association interviews to other sources of data including media data (see Wetherell, 2006). The questions would be determined by an initial inductive search through the data, guided partly by looking for occasions where the interviewee displays 'conflict' of

some sort. Does Karin's conduct on her visits to Maria actually cover up a range of unconscious conflicts around her mother and indeed her own role as a mother (and soon to be grandmother)? In what discourses of ageing does Karin invest?

Post-Foucauldian analysis. Although there is no unified methodological approach here, the basis would begin by identifying the sort of 'problem' which ageing and dementia constitute. How is dementia configured socially? How does Humanitas as a social body facilitate the 'performance' of particular versions of ageing? Interviews, transcriptions of interactions and quasi-ethnographic notes taken by observers could all be used as the empirical base here. However one substantial part of the analysis would be trying to connect what is observed at Humanitas to broader theoretical debates across the social sciences.

Conversation analysis. Based on ethnomethodological principles, the conversation analyst would regard Karin and Maria's identities as accomplished in interaction and hence to be fluid and indexical (that is, not separable from their context of utterance), rather than being fixed. In this way, conversation analysts would use 'real' or natural data of actual conversations in the memory museum and ask questions such as 'how is Maria's identity being negotiated, constructed, and at times, resisted, across the turn-taking of this conversation'? Ideally video recordings of the interaction would be used to pick up on how gestures and movement contribute to the interaction.

We end, then, with a plea. Whilst qualitative methods clearly have the potential to deliver detailed, contextually grounded, socially oriented and politically informed analyses, the mere choice of a method does not guarantee this. Methods alone determine neither the type of approach nor the political ambitions. By the same token, merely saying that a method is able to indicate underlying cognitions or reveal the social order in the form of talk-in-interaction does not guarantee that it will ultimately provide the evidence to demonstrate such claims. Ultimately technical choices around methodology are only a small part of the broad range of choices which confront us as social psychologists. Qualitative methodology does not guarantee the quality of research. That, as ever, is determined by a far wider set of concerns.

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