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Texts, Interaction and Communities: Qualitative Approaches to Society and Social Action
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Society and Communities in Social Constructionism and Discourse Analysis

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As a psychologist, I am fortunate to work in a University Psychology Dept that acknowledges the place and value of qualitative research in the discipline, as is the case here in Tampere. It is easy to forget that, within the discipline as a whole, the vision of 'science' that is held up for us to emulate is still one that exhorts us to strive for objectivity and the quantification of psychological phenomena. So presenting at this conference is an opportunity for me to reflect upon what it is that psychologists are aiming for when they make a case for the use of qualitative methods. It is also an opportunity to consider the extent to which specific qualitative methods help us to achieve those aims. In this paper, I want to consider discourse analysis as a qualitative methodology and ask to what extent it is capable of fulfilling at least some of the aims of qualitative research. I will be using 'social constructionism' as an umbrella term to cover the theoretical positions I want to critique. In the USA, SC is equated with the work of Kenneth Gergen, but I will be using the term to also include the work of poststructuralist writers, particularly those adopting a Foucauldian approach. And mirroring this, I will broadly divide DA into two forms, Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, and take each in turn, discussing their relative merits and the problems I think they raise. In particular, I will argue that, because of their theoretical assumptions, both forms of discourse analysis are, for different reasons, problematic in terms of their ability to give 'voice' to individuals and communities whose experiences are often marginalised within society.

Structure here

I'm going to start with a brief reflection on the historical context of our present day situation. We could trace back some of these issues to the very beginnings of psychology

as a discipline, even before the terms 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' came into general use. For instance, Wilhelm Wundt is thought of as the grandfather of experimental psychology, having founded the very first psychology laboratory towards the end of the 19th century. However, Wundt believed that only some aspects of our psychology could be adequately studied in the laboratory, and it can be a surprise to contemporary psychology students to learn that he was also interested in phenomena that have long since been exiled to neighbouring disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, topics such as religion, myth and social customs. He felt that individual behaviour could not be understood without reference to its social context. Wundt's vision of psychology as a science was lost in translation as it crossed the Atlantic and took up residence in the USA, and the split between Mead and Watson at the University of Chicago early in the 20th century was decisive in sending the discipline down its current route, in which it is modelled heavily upon the natural sciences.

But it was in the 1960s and 1970s that concerns among some psychologists, particularly social psychologists, began to be expressed, especially with regard to the kinds of methods that were widely adopted. There was an anxiety about the effects our methods of investigation may have upon not only the quality of our findings but upon the people taking part in our research. The so-called 'crisis' in social psychology articulated a variety of concerns, including a growing unease about the relationship between researchers and their 'subjects' and about the power relations and hidden values operating in the research context. A number of critics, including Rom Harré and Ken Gergen, argued that laboratory methods and hypothesis testing failed to appreciate the significance of the cultural and historical context of human action, and Harré and Secord (1972) further argued that the 'voice' of participants in psychological experiments was systematically ignored. They argued for a turn to the study of people as

“conscious social actors, capable of controlling their performances and commenting intelligently upon them” (preface).

Present day critical psychology has brought these concerns into the 21st century together with an explicit emphasis upon the need for a psychology which is FOR people rather than ON people, a psychology that reflexively recognises the power implications of its practices and that strives toward creating spaces where marginalised voices can be heard. These are concerns also at the heart of the work of feminist psychologists, and so it is no coincidence that researchers striving to provide a more facilitative and liberatory understanding of women's experience have adopted qualitative methods, sometimes within a social constructionist framework.

So the call for qualitative methods in psychology was motivated by a desire to build a discipline which did not use people for its own or others' purposes, which was democratic in its conception of the relationship between researcher and participants, and acknowledged the status of the participant as a skilled social actor alongside the researcher, and which most importantly allowed due attention to be given to the socially contextualised, subjective experience of people, described in their own terms. In various forms, then, we can see these concerns expressed today through the work of critical psychologists, feminist psychologists, narrative psychologists, social constructionists, deconstructionists, and discursive psychologists- I apologise if I've left anyone out!

Qualitative methodology involves a rejection of natural science as a model for the social sciences. According to Hammersley (1992) (cited in Silverman, 2000) it includes a desire to uncover meanings rather than to measure behaviour, to document the world from the point of view of the people studied' (rather than the point of view of the researcher or other privileged person or group, and to attend to the socially and culturally situated nature of human experience and behaviour. The hope is that we will understand people in the context of the relationships, communities and societies in which they live and the everyday social interactions in which they take part. But across the range of methods that have come to be known as 'discourse analysis', these concerns take on different forms and give rise to different tensions in my view. I will look at both Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as two forms of discourse analysis that have increasingly been taken up by social psychologists. I will take each in turn, looking at

their theoretical assumptions and research aims, and identify what I feel are the problematic areas.

Social constructionism, as the theoretical framework broadly underpinning discourse analytic work, attends to the constructed nature of the social world. Discursive psychology focuses on the constructive work taking place in everyday discourse between people in interaction. Here, multiple versions of the world are potentially available through the discursive work that people engage in during social interactions of all kinds. Foucauldian Discourse analysis acknowledges the constructive power of language, but it is the constitutive force of prevailing, hegemonic discourses circulating within a society or community that is the focus here. This is not to say that the two forms of constructionism are incompatible- I don't believe this is the case. But I think they each raise different problems for the discourse analyst as a qualitative researcher.

Discursive psychology: situated accounts.

The focus of discursive psychology is upon the production of situated accounts. Accounts are produced for purposes within specific interactions, and there is no sense in which one account can be said to be more real or true than others; the text of this discourse is the only reality we have access to- we cannot make claims about a real world that exists beyond our descriptions of it, an argument powerfully made in Edwards et al's now classic paper, *Death and Furniture*. Discursive psychology has, then, in recent years, opened up a parallel universe of research, where 'topics' that social scientists might earlier have investigated in terms of their nature or effects are now investigated in terms of their discursive construction. For example, whereas psychologists have studied the nature and functioning of memory, discursive psychologists ask instead how we 'do' remembering or how we 'do' 'being a reliable witness'. 'Doing being' placed before any social science topic transforms it from positivistic science into discursive work.

All topics have a similar status here- they are of interest because of the ways that people are able to use their linguistic skills to construct accounts, to perform identities for themselves and to achieve reasonably good outcomes for themselves in their interactions.

Community and society are topics too in this respect. For example, Potter and Reicher (1987) studied the use of the word 'community' in the wake of the St Paul's riot in Bristol, England in 1980. Using the conceptual tool of the interpretative repertoire, their analysis revealed how 'community' was constructed as cohesive, warm and organic, and how this construction was mobilised by their interviewees to build accounts which legitimated their actions and apportioned blame.

Critics of discursive psychology sometimes argue that it pays too little attention to the relationship between discourse and power, to the political implications of particular ways of talking. In other words, does it sufficiently locate interpersonal interactions within the broader systems of discourse and material inequalities in society that affect people's lives? Although I think it is true that some discursive research does not address such issues, this does not mean that the approach is incapable of doing so. In particular, work around rhetoric, ideological dilemmas and interpretative repertoires has the capacity to demonstrate how social inequalities and prejudice can be maintained through the rhetoric of 'common sense'. But I think that a discourse analysis that does not attempt to properly theorise power relations may have little useful to say about social inequalities.

Structure here

In this respect, within the area of what I would call discursive psychology, Ken Gergen's perspective on discourse and social change is more problematic, I think. Gergen has written at length about society and community, and I would like to spend some time, considering his views. However, this will also be to some extent a reflexive commentary, because it seems to me that the way he presents his arguments may themselves be of particular interest to the discursive psychologist, so to some degree what I will present is something of a 'case study' in discursive psychology.

Gergen's focus is on social construction in interaction, on the dialogue between people in relationship. His concern with what he calls the 'saturated self' (Gergen, 1991) has in some of his more recent writings led to an anxiety about the possibilities for different

communities and societies to live in tolerance of each other. He sees the postmodern condition, globalization and mass communications as producing a shift in the nature of the person such that the self has become fragmented, distributed and thoroughly saturated by culture and social life. In short, as people we are inevitably constituted through the myriad of forms of communication, interaction and relationship open to us in the contemporary world. I'm going to discuss two of Gergen's recent conference papers, which are posted on his website. In these papers, he talks about 'communities' in very different, perhaps contradictory, ways- and this is a feature that would be of interest to discursive psychologists!

In the first paper, entitled "A civil world beyond individual and community" (Gergen, 2001) he does not seem to particularly favour 'communities', either actual communities or the concept. While acknowledging the view that communities can provide individuals with beliefs and values, he also points out that they can be stultifying and oppressive, 'obliterating difference and promoting intolerance'. He then goes on to argue that, in any case, 'community' like anything else is a social construct, that it exists only as a function of linguistic exchanges between people. Putting aside the concept, he favours instead a focus upon 'generative' versus 'degenerative' moments in meaning-making between people, which might roughly be read as co-operative and productive versus hostile and destructive.

He argues that the only hope of an improvement in people's relations with each other, both at a local and at a global level, lies in generative, dialogic relationships. As a constructionist, he takes an anti-essentialist view of persons, communities and societies, arguing that each can only exist and draw its identity from its relations with others. Recognising our interrelatedness is vital to our survival, he says, but beyond this is a need to set up conditions where dialogue and a meaningful exchange of perspectives can take place, what he calls 'transformative dialogue'. He recommends a technique of 'appreciative enquiry' to resolve conflict, which involves the telling and hearing of different narratives within which each protagonist may be positively framed.

But his bracketing of issues of power, economy, government etc as 'terms' which are co-constructed in their meaning is problematic, I think. The example he gives of 'appreciative enquiry' is gender conflict in an organisation, where 'women in the company felt poorly treated by the men, seldom acknowledged, sometimes harassed, underpaid and overworked.' An 'appreciative enquiry' involved a meeting between small groups of men and women, where they were challenged to recall some of the good experiences they had shared in the company. In this process apparently their hostility melted, and they began to feel their way toward a shared vision of a better organisation. However, the struggle towards gender equality that we have seen in western societies throughout the last 100 years or so surely must indicate that such conflicts can be resolved simply by talking to each other. In the mid 20th century, writing about prejudice, Allport's Contact Hypothesis recognised that 'contact' between conflicting groups would not lead to change if it took place in a context where members of the two groups had unequal status.

Gergen's argument appears to be a version of liberal humanism, putting change in the hands and within the scope of individuals without recognising the way that we are all subject to structures and power relations that stretch beyond our immediate social encounters. The intention may be honourable, but it feels a little too close to Margaret Thatcher's (1987) construction of society which makes a sharp distinction between individuals (who have their own problems, probably brought upon themselves) and the society that might be persuaded to help them out:

I think we've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it. 'I have a problem, I'll get a grant.' 'I'm homeless, the government must house me.' They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There's no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation.

Of course, from a discursive position, Thatcher is here rhetorically constructing the

individual as having obligations, as being wrong in expecting the government and society to solve 'their' problems. Gergen, in 'bracketing 'communities' and presumably society also, as a social construct, draws attention away from the structural inequalities in these that may materially affect people's ability to engage in 'transformative dialogue'

In the second paper, entitled *Self and Community in the New Floating Worlds* (Gergen 2002) he continues the dialogic theme, but here his concern with 'community' takes on a more positive tone. Whereas he earlier saw the distributed, fragmented self a cause for celebration, as an opportunity for people to invent and reinvent themselves in facilitative ways, more recently his attention has turned to international relations and to the potential dangers to 'communities' that he sees in the effects of modern technology.

He argues that media such as television have led to people becoming insular because they are 'monologic' (communication goes only one way), and that many 20th century technologies have led to the 'corrosion' of geographical communities, the relational bodies that provided stability, beliefs and values and mutual understanding and support. The nuclear family also goes, replaced by psychological insularity of kids in their private bedrooms with TV and internet access. His concern for a space where meaningful relations can be established and maintained means that he appears nostalgic, bemoaning the loss of his wife's childhood 'community' in Minnesota, and the nuclear family. He argues that 'many of the major technologies of the 20th century functioned 'corrosively' with respect to the traditional, face-to-face community, which was 'placed in jeopardy'.' The words 'corrosive' and 'jeopardy' are emotive and value-laden. Can 'corrosion' and 'jeopardy' ever be positive?

This lengthy quote is very evocative, and would provide much interest for the discursive psychologist:

One of my favorite illustrations is furnished by my wife, who grew up in a small community in Minnesota. The houses on her street typically featured a screened in back porch, and in the summer families would often take their meals in the cool of the porch. As the meal was complete and talk continued, there was frequent "visiting." Neighbors from one household would come over to share the news, laugh and commiserate. As

national radio broadcasts became increasingly effective as vehicles for entertainment, the visiting was reduced. Jack Benny, George and Gracy Burns, and their associates were just a little more entertaining than the neighbors. With the entry of television, air conditioning and the TV tray, back porch dining became a rarity. The neighbors could scarcely compete with this techno-cocktail. When we recently returned to "the old neighborhood," and talked to the residents now living in the family home we found they scarcely knew their next door neighbors.

He goes on to add "Community dissolution is matched as well by the demise of its heart: the nuclear family"- again- heart is an emotive word, and we are invited into the warm, cosy and secure world of the community and the family, its heart. His treatment of 'community' here is evocative of Potter and Reicher's earlier work, with the 'community' constructed as cohesive and warm.

Within a constructionist, discursive framework, it does not make sense to ask 'what does Gergen really think?'. In both of these papers, Gergen is deploying different accounts of 'community' to make an argument. Whether or not we share Gergen's nightmare vision of technological change, what I find problematic is a conception of interaction and dialogue which is disconnected from the material world we inhabit- certainly our lives are as yet not 'virtual' to this extent. Discourse is privileged to such an extent that it overrides all material inequalities and power relations, where the communities or societies which might be implicated in these recede from our view. Compared with the earlier discursive work of Potter and Reicher, its potential to take account of such issues is limited. The conflict manifested in the St Paul's riots, and in more recent years on the streets of Bradford in the UK, took place within the context of a society where ethnicity is in a complex relation with poverty, health, education, unemployment and crime, and it is hard to imagine such conflict being resolved by 'appreciative enquiry'.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis: power and materiality

Of course it is just these issues around social structure, material inequalities and power that are at the heart of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. Drawing on the work of the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault, the focus here is upon the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge and the relationship between such knowledge, the possibilities for social action, and power. It is our socially shared language that are seen

as producing phenomena at both the social and personal levels, and the term 'subjectivity' is preferred to 'self' to signal both the fragmentation and intangibility of selfhood and our 'subjection' to discourse.

FDA acknowledges the constructive power of language but sees this as derived from, or at least related to, material or social structures and institutionalised practices. Within this approach, it is not problematic to talk about communities or societies as real or material social structures which form one corner of a triad, which also includes discourse and social practices. For example, in his chapter 'Tablet talk and depot discourse: discourse analysis and psychiatric medication' David Harper (1999) acknowledges the way that patients are constructed eg as uncooperative in treatment, and argues that these constructions have negative implications for service users. Then he says "the implications focus less on rhetorical strategies and devices and more on the political, interests and effects of those strategies" he follows this with practical suggestions for all those involved, which recognises the power imbalances between users and medics and how discourse serves these, and about regulation of the pharmaceutical industry whose interests 'disease talk' serves, and legislation to extend users' rights. Importantly, he also points out that you don't need to be a discourse analyst to draw some of these conclusions- just politically informed.

The problem of agency

But one of the difficulties that FDA runs into is about the status of the person as moral actor. As Butt (2004) points out, SC represents a pendulum swing in psychology from agentic to structural explanations. Constituted through and 'subject to' discourses over which we have little or no control, of which we are probably unaware, how is it possible to conceptualise human choice and the possibilities for change? In the last few years, some social constructionist writers have begun to explore the concept of 'positioning', which seems to allow us a conception of agency that acknowledges both the constructive force of discourse at a societal level as well the capacity of the person to take up positions for their own purposes. Davies and Harré (1990) claim this duality for positioning. They see the person as simultaneously produced by discourse and manipulators of it.

Discourses provide the possibilities and the limitations on what we may or may not do and claim for ourselves within a particular discourse. We may ourselves adopt a position by drawing upon a particular discourse, or we may assign positions to other speakers through the part that we give them in our account.

I particularly like Wendy Drewery's work here, which she applies to the problems experienced by Maori communities in New Zealand. Drewery (2001) explores the concept of agency that this view of positioning affords. She attends to the material consequences of the 'position calls' (referring back to Althusserian notion of 'hailing') that are issued to others in our talk, the implicit invitations to them to take up certain subject positions. She points out that 'what will happen next is not necessarily the prerogative of the person doing the inviting.' Invitations may be accepted or rejected. However, she is particularly concerned about the kind of position calls that leave the other no way of responding as a full participant in the conversation.

She suggests that such 'exclusionary position calls', which require people to speak in terms provided by others, is a form of colonising and it is probably commonplace, for example, between adults and children, a function of their unequal power relationship. The issue is:

one of how the invitation to engage is offered, whether the other is invited to speak in their own terms, or whether the interrogator is controlling the terms of the conversation/narrative...Such forms of speech reproduce unequal power relations by reproducing the kinds of relationships where one party to a conversation is called into a non-agentive position in respect of the conversation.

She takes up Davis and Harré's (1990) claim that positions are also 'internalised' by us, becoming part of our psychology, and then goes on to apply this to the concern, in New Zealand, that Maori children suffer from low self-esteem, poor motivation, lack of initiative and the apparent inability to alter their own situation. She argues that if people are repeatedly colonised, given exclusionary position calls, they may come to habitually adopt ways of speaking about, and therefore thinking about, themselves that are not agentic. She argues that this 'lack' may be better understood as the outcome of being repeatedly discursively positioned as passive participants in public life, and calls for a 'collaborative conversation' between Pākehā and Māoris where both are given voice. Drewery points out that agency thus conceptualised is not the agency of liberal humanism, since the person cannot be agentic on their own. Agency is only possible in relation with others.

I particularly like Drewery's use of positioning because it retains a notion of agency while reformulating it in a way that is compatible with social constructionism- as something that exists between people rather than within the individual. At the same time she is careful to build into her account the way that talk can both manifest and reproduce material power relations, while also taking a little further our understanding of how positions can become part of our psychology, our subjectivity.

Structure here

Problems in practice: a research example

Experiences of domestic violence

I would like to now go on to show what I think are problematic methodological and theoretical issues for social constructionists doing discourse analysis through the work of

one of my own past PhD students (permission granted), remembering the reasons why we want to use qualitative methods in the first place.

When I visited Tampere University previously, in November 2001, I took part in a research seminar where a number of your postgraduate students talked about their work, which was generally qualitative in its approach. What impressed me most about their research was that they had chosen to work in areas where there was urgent need, where suffering needed to be alleviated. The aim of the research was certainly to hear the voices of individuals and communities who were marginalised and damaged by society and to conduct research that might ultimately be of assistance to them.

Some of my own PhD students have also taken this route. One student is studying the provision of services for women who have experienced 'drug rape', another is investigating the needs of women who have been diagnosed as having 'borderline personality disorder' because they self-harm, and the PhD I am going to use as an illustration (from a research student I will call Lisa) was about the needs of women who have experienced domestic violence. Each began with a concern to allow the experience and the voice of these women to come to the fore, to allow their stories and not just the stories of powerful medical or other institutional voices to inform practice. This led them naturally towards qualitative methods, and depth interviewing was their chosen method. However, as they began to collect their interview material, both from women service users and from the service providers with whom they came into contact for help, they each in their own way became drawn to a social constructionist theoretical framework and to DA as a method. They became aware that the power relations existing between service providers and clients/patients was something that had to be addressed in their research. They became aware that the accounts, narratives or perspectives of service providers were the ones that influenced service provision and that the experiences and views of their clients/patients had to be understood in this context. So they gravitated towards social constructionism and discourse analysis as a way of addressing these concerns.

Extract 1 from Lisa's PhD describes this process. She wanted:

'to explore experiential and subjective meanings of responding to domestic violence'

She therefore initially adopted a phenomenological theoretical framework. However, as interviewing progressed, power differentials emerged between policy-makers, health professions and their female patients. and she felt the need to explore the influences of 'power' and 'knowledge' on action. The research then becomes the study of how people are positioned within discourse and how they negotiate, accept or resist those positions. It is, according to Lisa:

'an exploration of the impact of discourses, constructions, practices and subject positions for the speaker's subjectivity; '

However, one major aspect of Foucauldian discourse analysis that does not sit easily with the aims of these research projects is the way that it positions the subject as a product of discourse. The conception of the subject offered here is of a being constituted through discourse, through whom discourses speak. The 'voice' of these women is then reduced to an effect of discourse, a result of taking up particular positions within the discourses circulating within society- how can this be reconciled with the aims of the research that provided the grounds for a qualitative method? This lack of agency, and the sense that participants in this research cannot fully 'own' their subjective perceptions and accounts sits uneasily with the desire to allow the 'voice' of the marginalised to be heard. What is this worth if the voice is just an echo of discourse? Women's experience here simply signals the operation of discourses.

In an effort to bring back into their analysis some conception of the agency of the subject, their voice, students then became drawn to the more recent developments in discourse analysis that suggest that the two approaches of Foucauldian DA and discursive psychology can be brought together. Wetherell (1998) also calls for a synthesis of the two 'versions' of discourse analysis, arguing that we need to take account of both the situated

nature of accounts as well as the institutional practices and social structures within which they are constructed.

Here, the constructive force and power implications of discourse are analysed while at the same time recognising how individuals deploy discursive constructions to account for themselves and their actions and to represent them in a certain light. However, can even this tell us anything about their experience? Experience remains a problematic concept. DP brackets it. FDA acknowledges it, but only to the extent that experience is constituted through discourse. How can it provide evidence against the view of the world painted by discourse?

In Lisa's research, she adopted what she referred to as a 'feminist Foucauldian discursive approach' research. But immediately she finds a problem in the relativism of the approach:

Extract 2

She is concerned that she may be seen as as claiming to offer a 'truer' version than that which the participants had themselves offered. The participant's story is certainly not privileged here, and there is an added problem of the possibility that the 'reading' produced of their accounts may actually not present them in a good light. She also points out that

Extract 3

'the accounts that women produce within this research are likely to be no less specific or tailored to the interview setting, their trust in me as a researcher and their expectations about what the research requires of them. '

Within a DP analysis, the account tends to undermine itself as a route to outside experience, and also highlights the situated nature of the womens' accounts. In her choice of an interview method she wanted an approach which would allow women to relate their experiences in their own terms. But then later:

Extract 4

[The research] aims to ... consider the ways in which women experiencing domestic violence are located at a discursive level to identify the discourses through which women's knowledge is constructed.

So in what sense can their accounts of their experiences be 'in their own terms'? They appear produced through dominant discourses or accounts built for situated purposes, or both.

Example from research findings- telling as tough and telling as re-telling

I have taken an extract from Lisa's analysis of the interviews with these abused women to illustrate the kinds of problems I have talked about.

Susan talks about her experience of accessing accident and emergency services as a result of her husband's violent assault:

'...but it were that (.) embarrassment of avin' ter, when somebody come to see yer like, a, another understudy or another doctor and you'd to go though it all again...ahh and it were em, it, it made me feel really embarrassed an' (2) as though it were my fault it 'ad 'appened to me, d'you'know?'

Lisa's analysis argues that Susan positions herself as vulnerable to the judgements of health professionals, as somehow deserving the violence she experienced. The trauma of the violence is constructed in this account so that the health professionals appear positioned as potential evaluators or judges. The construction appears to position health professionals as abdicating responsibility for being informed. It implies that they do not need to inform themselves of Susan's situation, because it is easier to ask her.

So we have a picture of the identity Susan constructs within the interview, and of the positions she adopts for herself and for the health professionals. But what conclusions can Lisa draw about Susan's experience? Susan's 'voice' is problematic here, much more so than it would have been had Lisa adopted a phenomenological approach as originally intended. Her participants' subjectivity is constructed through discourse, or else they are producing situated accounts for specific purposes in the interview. In trying to theorise some agency for these women, has Lisa given them 'voice' in the manner envisaged by qualitative researchers?

A big problem is that the research must take the interview as the text for analysis, which cannot be taken to refer to real events. Nothing can be said about the events they describe. So there is a tension here between the interviews as 'revealing' experiences of the women, and as 'constructing situated accounts'. When describing women as 'drawing upon constructions', the talk can ONLY be taken to be oriented towards the interaction in the interview- when women describe to the interviewer the course of a consultation she had with a doctor, what status does this account have? Surely whatever she says can only be located as performing a function in that interview?

Lisa would LIKE to be able to argue that if GPs were better prepared, women could be spared the pain of keep going over the same painful ground. She WANTS to explain why telling is tough for people and say what should be done about this, but can't. She ends up with something potentially more oppressive- women 'construct' telling as 'tough' to the interviewer- it gives them excuses for taking a long time to reveal the truth. Susan's report of her interview with health professionals does not lead us to her experience- how justified can we be in hearing her account as anything more than a situated series of excuses, blamings, justifications and the manipulation of stake and interest?

Further problems arise when constructionist researchers consider their own role in constructing the very groups and communities they wish to study. If there is a concern with, say, 'the mentally ill' or 'immigrants' or 'abused women', are we justified in constituting these people as groups, masking the diversity and difference between them

and their situations? Can social constructionists really step outside of the researcher/researched power relation that always privileges the researcher's account of the world?

Conclusion

I have tried to address how the concerns addressed by qualitative methods 'cash out' in discourse analytic research.

The desire to build a discipline which did not use people for its own or others' purposes, which was democratic in its conception of the relationship between researcher and participants, is fundamental to at least some forms of discourse analysis.

Discursive psychology acknowledges the status of the participant as a skilled social actor alongside the researcher, a member of the speaking community, someone having the same resources as others, giving them back an agency they do not have as a 'subject'.

Most importantly, SC and DA allows due attention to be given to the socially contextualised nature of people's reports of their experience.

But the extent to which this reporting is in their own 'voice' or can be taken as descriptive of the world (other than just an account) is problematic. The society and communities within which we live, in what Danziger terms the 'strong' version of social constructionism, are seen as the discursive context from which we draw our own subjectivity.

There is a danger that discourse analysis may undercut the voices that we want to hear. If we attend to the nature of their accounts of the world, what relationship has this to experience? And if it is their experience we wish to affect, how can we take action on the basis of their accounts? As Butt (2004) points out, discursive psychology shows how people draw on the discursive resources available to them, but does not address the question of why- it ignores our struggle to convey something or four life-worlds to

others. We can't make the leap from 'deployment of discourse' (even though that acknowledges agency) to 'reasons for action'. Foucauldian discourse analysis does allow for subjectivity, but does not give the subject access to the source of this or agency. Even Drewery's more sophisticated account of agency suggests that our voice is inevitably the internalisation of powerful discourses. So the status of society and community are as constructions we deploy for interactional purposes or as sources of subjectivity we can barely escape. The intractable agency/structure debate that has challenged sociologists for so long seems no easier to transcend for social constructionists. Indeed, the value of the work of earlier micro-sociologists in this respect, in particular Berger and Luckmann's classic 'The Social Construction of Reality', seems to have been forgotten. Often cited as one of Social Constructionism's key influences, this work, as well as the even earlier work of Mead, does offer us a conception of the relationship between person and society that is consistent with social constructionism and yet leaves room for a psychology of the person.

I think we need some conception of experience and the self which is not simply subject to discourse, to elaborate on those perspective that suggest that discourse does not simply determine subjectivity. As Willig (2001) asks, with respect to Foucauldian discourse analysis and positioning theory, how we can account for the emotional investments that people make in particular discursive positions? How can we explain individual differences in the subject positions that people habitually adopt, and why people sometimes position themselves in ways that are disadvantageous for them? With regard to discursive psychology, she notes the absence of a concern with subjectivity, our self-awareness, thought, intentions and sense of life history. She asks why particular individuals work hard to claim or resist certain attributions in their accounts, why sometimes people seem to use discursive devices that do not work in their favour, and why they sometimes find it impossible to say things such as 'I love you' or 'I'm sorry' when this would be, strategically, very effective for them. I think that only when we have opened up a space for subjective experience that does not in one way or another simply subordinate it to discourse will we be able to say that discourse analysis fulfills the aims of qualitative methods.

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