

# SECTION III

## Applications

# Social Psychology

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## INTRODUCTION

Social Psychology remains a diverse sub-discipline of psychology. One that in its broadest conceptualisation contains feminist approaches, gender, community and political psychology, and critical approaches to the discipline, alongside more traditional social psychological approaches to group dynamics and attitude theory. The diversity of method and topic has characterised social psychology since its inception. 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, and point to recent developments since the first edition of this handbook was published. 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).

Whilst many of the core principles underpinning the ethogenic approach have been taken up across a variety of approaches – not least in discursive psychology – the term itself was not broadly adopted, and Harré replaced it with the alternative general formulation 'the second cognitive revolution' in the early 1990s (Van Langenhove, 2010; see also Harré & Gillett, 1994). The historical importance of ethogenics for social psychology is that its clear formulation of the methodological importance of concepts from ordinary language philosophy and microsociology, and in no small measure through the association with formidable intellectual and professional standing of Harré himself, enabled it to serve as a 'latch lifter' into the discipline for many of the qualitative approaches that would follow.

## 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.

Much as with the ethogenic approach, the term hermeneutics did not given rise to a specific methodological toolkit. However Shotter's strong body of conceptual work demonstrating the importance of philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Bakhtin, Vico and many others (see Shotter, 1984; 1993a; 1993b) has a continuing relevance and influence (e.g. Corcoran & Cromby, 2016). Equally important is the ongoing recognition that the central hermeneutic practice of 'intepretation' is shared across all qualitative methods, despite the tendency to overlook some of the thorny philosophical difficulties that arise from taking interpretation seriously (see Willig, 2012). Some researchers, such as Langdridge (2007), have argued that the best means of rigorously approaching issues around interpretation in qualitative data is to return to the phenomenological methods and strategies proposed by Husserl and Heidegger.

## 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'.

One of the obstacles to the broader adoption of Q-methodology was the widespread suspicion aroused by its quantitative aspects. To some extent, the development of mixed-methods research and growing recognition of the qualitative/interpretative uses that can be made of quantitative data (as with so-called 'big data') has allowed Q-methodology to thrive (see Watts & Stenner, 2012). Although it remains a relatively under-represented approach within social psychology, it is one of the few qualitative methodologies developed with the discipline to have been adopted without substantive modification in other areas of social science (see for example Baker et al 2014).

## 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 Mulkey'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.

As we will go on to describe, the majority of researchers within this tradition moved away from the version of Discourse Analysis articulated by Potter & Wetherell (1987). But the core methodological ideas continue to be in current use in other disciplines. For example, within management and organization studies, the 'discursive approach' is constituted almost entirely by the use of interviews which are analysed in terms of rhetoric, metaphor and interpretative repertoires (see Steyaert et al 2016; Grant et al, 2004; Watson, 1994).

## 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 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) continues on (see Wooffitt, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Kitzinger, 2006; Potter, 2006, 2012). ).

### 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)..

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 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 undergraduate and postgraduate students. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) 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. In the last half decade, IPA has found its home as a popular qualitative analysis in mainstream health psychology work,,

## **CONTEMPORARY WORK: 2005 onwards**

In this third wave of qualitative research in social psychology, the dominant approaches in social psychology are versions of ‘discourse analysis’ and versions of ‘grounded theory’. Discursive psychology, Critical Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis remain the best examples of the former, whilst Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Psychosocial Research and the newly emerging Thematic Analysis remain as the most common instances of the latter, linking to the strength of grounded theory methodology across the rest of the Social Sciences (e.g. Charmaz, 2013). However, there is a further division between a concern with ‘interaction’ and that with ‘experience’ that transcends the two approaches and connects to a broader renewed agenda around process, affect and materialism across the social sciences (see Wetherell, 2012).

In general, qualitative work in social psychology seems, with some notable exceptions such as Conversation Analysis and some Discursive Psychology, to be becoming more heterogeneous and diversified rather than homogeneous and methodologically ‘purist’. Researchers have continued to adapt and modify many of the qualitative methodologies outlined in the first and second wave as they grappled with both their strengths and limitations. In this section we will point to some the defining features of contemporary qualitative research in social psychology.

### **Thematic analyses**

Thematic analyses have been around for a long time in a variety of forms, particularly, for example, in health psychology. Traditionally thematic analysis shared close links with content analysis in that both were concerned purely with topic rather than social action (see Miles & Huberman, 1994; Boyatzis (1998). More recently work by Braun & Clarke (2013) and Joffe & Yardley (2004) has revived work using a thematic

analytic approach by highlighting its links to the kind of constructionism found in early Discourse Analysis. 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 Braun & Clarke (2006) note, the themes that are produced can be either inductive or deductive and can be taken to reflect broader discursive structures. 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 came back into vogue is arguably that they are able to sidestep tricky epistemological concerns. 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 an attempt to deliver straightforward answers to complex social psychological questions. 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. That said, the detailed outlining of thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2013) suggested that thematic analysis was a method of data coding that could be taken into a variety of theoretical perspectives, meaning that in terms of the interactionist/experiential divide, papers writing from both perspectives could use thematic analysis as the starting point for this enterprise..

## 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. The psychosocial approach developed by Stephen Frosh (Chapter 7), along with other researchers such as Anne Phoenix and Wendy Hollway 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 the most coherent methodological example of the approach, drawing 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).

An alternative dialect of psychosocial research has been proposed by discursive researchers such as Mick Billig (1999), who have proposed alternative ways that Freudian concepts might be used to enrich conversation and discourse analysis. Margie Wetherell (2012) has also outlined how ideas around interaction and practice, associated with the discourse approach, can be mobilised to study emotional investments as 'affective practices'. Paul Stenner's work draws upon process philosophy, notably the work of A.N. Whitehead, to similarly sketch out a non-psychoanalytic approach to researching experience (Stenner, 2014; Stenner & Moreno, 2013). To date, neither dialect of psychosocial research has arguably really delivered on its initial promise. As with other movements in social psychology, such as ethogenics, it may be that the concepts developed here become more important in the longer term than the consolidation of the approach itself.

## Conversation analysis

Conversation analysis (CA) 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 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.

Current work in social psychology engages with a range of themes from CA, including the use of conversational markers in managing 'psychological business' (Wiggins, 2012), the concern with the interactional organisation of everyday practices (Speer, 2012) and the situated epistemics which constitute social psychological phenomenon (Potter, 2012). Perhaps the most interesting development has been Elizabeth Stokoe's applied work (Stokoe & Stikveland, 2016) which has developed an intervention and training package for improving professional and workplace communication, based on CA/Discursive Psychology principles, which dispels the argument that qualitative social psychological research lacks 'real world' applications.

CA research within social psychology remains a relatively small field, albeit highly vibrant, populated mainly by current members and alumni of the Loughborough Discourse & Rhetoric Group. Despite the occasional heated exchange as to methodological and philosophical ambitions of CA-influenced Discursive Psychology (see Potter, 2012), the approach has carved out its own distinctive niche within social psychology seems likely to continue to develop its highly particular research programme for some time.

### Critical Discursive analyses

Discursive methodologies in a variety of guises have been part of the qualitative movement in psychology from the start. As we noted earlier, this began with Potter & Wetherell's (1987) discourse analysis, which, in some quarters, was developed into discursive psychology (e.g. Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wiggins & Potter, 2008). However, whilst some went down a discursive psychology route, others developed discursive approaches that were able to answer the questions that they wanted to ask from the data. It is becomingly increasingly 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. One such way in the continual developing of critical discursive psychology (e.g. Wetherell & Edley, 2014). This is a form of discursive analysis that provides a synthesis of other approaches and is one that utilises principles from both wider (conversation analytically inspired) discursive psychology (e.g. Wiggins & Potter, 2008) and post-structuralist Foucauldian-inspired Discourse Analysis (e.g. Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008), as such framing discourse, language and action as being socially situated (Burr, 2015). A critical discursive analysis enables a typically wider examination of the data looking at what is being constructed by the participants, how is this being done in the interaction, and what this tells us about wider societal ideologies. This work has been applied to topics such as masculinity and identity (e.g. Wetherell & Edley, 2014) and parenting cultures (Locke, 2015). Another way in which discursive methodologies have been broadened includes the use of Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis (Machin, 2013) where the focus becomes on analysing different forms of communication and not just language (e.g. Moran & Lee, 2013). These newer forms of discursive methodologies operate alongside the traditional discursive psychology, discourse analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis outlined earlier in this chapter.

Another stream of broadly Post-Foucauldian analysis has continued to develop alongside this wider discursive analysis. Post-Foucauldian analysis is 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. This work emerged due to social psychologist's delicate placing within both the discipline of psychology and the wider social sciences.

## **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, and if so, what are the implications of this exceptionality? There continue to be occasional sharp exchanges between the 'qualitative' and 'experimental' camps within the discipline, particularly around issues such as what should be the priorities for national research funding (e.g. by the Economic and Social Research Council) during the times of ongoing economic and political austerity. But at the same time, there have been an equal number of initiatives aimed at building dialogue across methodological divisions, such as the working group set up by the British Psychological Society (BPS) in 2004 (see the special issue of *The Psychologist* of 2005 on 'Dialoguing Across Divisions').

For the most part the situation now seems to be that of the parallel existence of two ways of doing social psychology which pursue their own distinct research agendas, topics, methods and audiences. Occasionally these two worlds intersect, such as at the BPS Social Psychology Section Annual Conference, or within the pages of the *British Journal of Social Psychology*. Yet within both camps, there is a similar sense that in comparison with significant debates and transformation of the field during the first and, to a lesser extent, the second waves, contemporary work has settled into the comfortable patterns of research and moderate innovation that the philosopher Thomas Kuhn (1962) once described as 'normal science'. This is by no means a bad thing for a discipline that had previously been absorbed in seeming 'perpetual crisis'. Business as usual can be a more productive in research terms than ongoing epistemic and methodological

disagreement. Yet at a conference held at the London School of Economics in 2015 on ‘The Vision of Social Psychology’ it was striking how many of the senior figures within the field who spoke had been in place since the first wave. The voices of the next generations of researchers were confined to the audience. The mirroring of the circumstances that led to that first crisis are clear. Whether this will result in new, revolutionary methodological developments is rather less so.

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