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Discursive and psychosocial? Theorising a complex contemporary subject

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Abstract

This article outlines one tradition of qualitative research in social psychology, that of discourse analysis and discursive research. It proposes that the tradition offers an alternative conceptualisation of a psychosocial subject to accounts which draw on psychoanalytic theorising. The article reviews some of the problems around conceptualising a subject in discursive terms, then sets out some resolutions. It outlines a narrative-discursive approach to subjectivity and proposes that this is consistent with a psychosocial project to explore the person as inseparable from their social contexts. The narrative-discursive conceptualisation admits of agency and change, avoiding over-complete accounts of subjectification, while retaining the critical and political focus of the discursive tradition. It is also consistent with sociological theorisations of the subjects of late capitalism and neo-liberalism. The article discusses an example of narrative-discursive analysis from research on identities of residence and relationships to place.

Keywords: narrative-discursive, subjectivity, emergence, neo-liberalism, psychosocial, relationships to place

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1 Introduction

The common practice of presenting developments in sociological and psychological theory as a succession of ' turns'[1] might suggest that discursive research has been rendered irrelevant by subsequent changes of foci, including approaches which explore phenomena supposedly neglected in discursive work, such as embodiment and affect. There is also division within the specific tradition of discursive work in social psychology associated with social constructionism, discourse analysis and discursive psychology, including about the definition of terms. For example, one point of issue concerns whether discourse analysis and discursive psychology are separate fields. Another point of long-standing debate is their relation to conversation analysis (e.g. Wooffitt 2005) and yet another whether, again, they have been superseded by more recent developments. For example, one of the key names associated with the establishing of the discursive tradition in psychology, Michael Billig, has recently claimed that discursive psychology is now established as a sub-discipline with its own orthodoxy (Billig, 2012) whereas another, Margaret Wetherell, has written: 'I propose we can incorporate the insights of conversation analysis and discursive psychology, but we can also now confidently *move on'* (Wetherell, 2012, p.101: emphasis added). Nevertheless, recent publications within and outside the discipline (e.g. Morison and Macleod 2013a, 2013b; Scharff 2011), including special issues in two key psychology journals (*British Journal of Social Psychology*, volume 51 in 2012; *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, volume 10, issue 3 in 2013), suggest that discursive work in psychology, with all its variations, continues to be an active and growing area.

In this article I will argue for the continuing relevance and utility of discursive approaches for psychosocial research as described in the introduction to this special issue, that is, as the exploration of connections or interfaces between the person and the larger realm of the social, variously defined. After outlining key points in the development of a discursive tradition in psychology, I discuss some of its contributions. I set out the problems of conceptualising a discursive subject, including the criticism that such a subject is vacated or 'blank' (Stanley 2013). I then present some resolutions to these problems which have been developed in the discursive tradition. An account of subjectivity has been noted as a priority for 'innovative discourse research' (Parker 2013, p.223) and I argue that the breadth and potential of discursive approaches for a psychosocial project are not sufficiently acknowledged. I present an example of an analysis in which I explore a discursive conceptualisation, linked to narrative, to investigate a subject who is produced by but not wholly subject to contemporary sociocultural locations. I discuss the contribution of this approach to the exploration of people as inseparable from their social contexts, including the contemporary contexts of neo-liberalism.

2 The discursive tradition in psychology

In a parallel reference to the contrast case outlined in the introduction to this special issue (i.e. that of the social as separate to the person and reducible to discrete and measurable influences), Ian Parker (2012) notes that

> 'It is important to remember that discourse analysis was forged during the attempts in the 1970s and 1980s to bring about a 'paradigm revolution', to shift the terms of debate in psychology from an old positivist paradigm characterized by an abstracted

and alienating specialist language to describe behaviour to a new paradigm that would

entail what was then called a 'turn to language'' (p.472).

One significant challenge to the 'old' paradigm was presented in an article by Kenneth

Gergen which criticized cognitive psychological approaches for claiming 'objective

knowledge of the world' (Gergen, 1985, p.269). He proposed, instead, that we understand

the world and ourselves in terms which are 'social artifacts, products of historically situated

interchanges among people' (p.267). (This is, of course, a definition which could refer to

'cultural' as well as 'social' artifacts.) Gergen suggested that the attention of psychologists

should therefore shift to language itself, as part of 'human meaning systems' (p.270), rather

than the world or the mental events which the language might purport to represent. This

social constructionist focus on meaning systems was one driver for the interest in language

data, especially talk, which is central to discursive work (see also the account in Stanley,

2013).

A second important challenge to positivist psychology came from Jonathan Potter and

Margaret Wetherell's book *Discourse and Social Psychology; Beyond Attitudes and*

Behaviour (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Although often treated as a 'methods' text,

especially outside psychology, it has been a major theoretical influence within the discipline.

The work of Potter and Wetherell subsequently diverged as they became associated with

different discursive approaches, but in a 1998 article, Wetherell proposed a 'synthetic'

approach which brings together the study of different contexts (Wetherell 1998). One is the

'discursive backcloth' of the wider society, associated with Foucauldian analyses (this has

since been described as 'the cultural and ideological context', Edley, 2001, p.137), and the

other the context of the immediate turn-by-turn interaction which is the focus of

conversation analysis. Wetherell's approach is known as critical discursive psychology (Wetherell 1998; Edley 2001) and is the basis of the narrative-discursive approach set out in this article.

Critical discursive psychology explores the psychological within its social contexts through the analysis of cultural and discursive resources. Such resources have been described in various terms, including 'discourses', 'interpretative repertoires' and 'narratives'. As one writer explains: 'descriptions are built variably of a finite set of interpretative resources… and …everyday understandings are rhetorical and ideological' (p.465, Weatherall, 2012). The resources amount to a historically accrued but ever changing pool of meanings, associations and even patterns of words which pre-exist talk on a topic or issue and shape what is (and is not) sayable and said about it. They constitute the shared knowledge and 'common sense' of society as a whole (Edley & Wetherell, 1995). The analytic focus is therefore on language but not as a universal system or as words reduced to their narrowest dictionary meanings. Rather, an analysis aims to explore the accrued associations which are carried through the use and re-use of language into new situations and encounters in which multiple meanings are played out and negotiated, including for the constitution of subjectivity.

3 Discursive contributions

Insights from discursive approaches continue to be generally relevant for almost any qualitative researcher working with language data (Taylor 2012). This point is particularly pertinent because attempts to develop alternative approaches often return to the analysis of language data. For example, Brown et al (2011) in a project to go beyond 'discourse alone' (p.493) in order to explore another 'modality', embodied experience, found

themselves following 'the basic analytic pathway of most forms of discourse analysis' (p.500) as they began looking for 'themes' in transcribed texts and 'common threads' in their own descriptions of their memories. Similarly, Sorensen (2013), rejecting discursive research and attempting a 'posthumanist' study of experience, calls for the analysis of '*accounts* of the situated, distributed configurations of human and nonhuman participants' (p.123: emphasis added). As Wetherell (2012, p.20) notes, research which attempts to explore another phenomenon or modality supposedly neglected by discursive research, affect, often reverts to the analysis of text.

Discursive research highlights the constructed and situated nature of language, its multiple functions, and therefore the need to avoid over-simple readings. It challenges research which interprets talk as representing a stable view or position, as if it were not situated, or as directly channelling the participant's experiences and feelings, like a kind of 'window on the soul' of the participant. (Brown et al, 2011, similarly criticise some interpretive phenomenological analyses which 'treat participants' accounts as more-or-less naively true, such that analysis can read like a more or less sophisticated re-statement of the data', p.498.) It is a premise of discursive research that meanings are unfixed, situated and flexible, and whatever is said by a participant is a version shaped to the current context of telling, including by 'common sense' or received wisdom and by ongoing debates. It is also necessary to distinguish between the meanings within participants' talk and those imposed by the researcher or analyst, for example, through the use of categories.

Some potential contributions of discursive approaches are often not recognised, or have perhaps been forgotten. For example, the criticism that they do not take account of

supposedly extra-discursive phenomena, like bodies, disregards Gergen's point that language is part of the meaning systems through which matter or the material world is encountered and experienced. A discursive focus does not discount the material world, including bodies, but investigates its meanings, generally but not exclusively as these are carried and negotiated in language. Of course language use is not the only 'semiotically structured phenomenon' (Parker p.230); others might include movements, visual images and sound. However, any attempt to discuss communication and interaction involving other phenomena as entirely and permanently *separate* to language use is likely to become caricatured, as indeed would any attempt to consider language use which denied its contexts and references to a material world.

The ways in which language use is both burdened with old meanings and sufficiently fluid to establish new ones has notably been the focus of discursive studies of racism and prejudice. For example, Jovan Byford (2006) has explored how the seemingly benign commemoration of a historical and religious figure in Serbia functions to perpetuate one set of political interests over another, and to revive old social divisions and foster discrimination against a particular group. This kind of discursive analysis shifts an account or explanation of racism from the pathologised individual to the larger social context (e.g. Wetherell & Potter 1992). The problem is no longer one of individual intention or volition but the exclusionary potential of social and cultural values which are carried in language and can be seen to be mobilised in its situated use. Of course there is a possibility that these values are mobilised with awareness; for example, Byford's participants included political and media figures who were almost certainly monitoring their own language use carefully and calculating its effects. Nonetheless, discursive research looks away from the intentional activity of an

individual speaker, exploring collective language use and the meanings carried and constituted in the language of multiple speakers.

Another, sometimes forgotten premise of discursive research on racism can be explained through a comparison to a different approach. In an elegant account of racism which draws on the work of Levi-Strauss and Slavoj Zizek, Derek Hook (2013) discusses a 'symbolic register' (p.251) which supersedes or takes the place of an individual's belief and actions. He argues that the implication of the register is that 'I need not be "psychologically" racist, that is, in any way personally invested in or consciously identified with racist values, *for there to be racism of which I am a part*' (p.251, emphasis in original). Hook argues that, although there can be a (comforting) separation between the self and 'ostensibly external agents of belief' or 'material processes' ('a series of structures, institutional operations, symbolic actions, mechanisms, and Others'), 'subjectivity is by no means exempt of racism simply because there is an absence of an overtly racist identity or psychology'. This argument is of interest because the point Hook is making is also a premise of discursive research, even though Hook is of course working from very different sources and advocating 'developments in theory' which he suggests might extend 'the purview of discourse analysis' (p.249). In discursive research on racism, as already noted, the talk of individuals, whether justifying or resisting racism, is interpreted as part of the social context in which certain values and processes dominate. As members of society, individual speakers are understood to be positioned within the prevailing relations of power. Consequently, as Hook argues from his different premises, the assumption is that an instance of contest or resistance cannot 'exempt' an individual, in Hook's own term, from the advantage of certain social positions or from the racism of the society. The analogy with Hook's work is set out in some

detail here because of the similar conclusions and also because this is an example of an implication of discursive research apparently not being fully recognised.

Another point of interest is that the discursive tradition considers 'personness' as process and practice, that is, what is ongoing, becoming, in the making and performed. Although such assumptions have more recently been linked to 'process' theory (Brown & Stenner, 2009), they already had a significant standing within psychology through the discursive tradition. As Parker (2013) has noted:

> 'The first principle for innovative discursive research is that in place of fixed method abstracted from context, we are concerned from the beginning of our work with the phenomena we study as historically constituted. This means that even before the analysis begins we are oriented to noticing how the phenomenon has come into being and how it changes.' (p.22: emphasis added)

Part of this focus, the historical constitution and coming into being, is implicitly retrospective. It is often associated with genealogical research into the accumulation of discursive resources which shape and constrain contemporary accounts and understandings. Another part of the focus, on change, implicitly concerns the emergent meanings of social events and phenomena. The term 'emergent' is used here with G.H. Mead's definition: 'The emergent when it appears is always found to follow from the past, but before it appears, it does not, by definition, follow from the past' (Mead, 1932, p.2 quoted in Sawyer, 2003, p.12). In other words, it is possible to trace back from the present moment to originating circumstances and influences, but not to anticipate what will follow forward from here and now.

The corollaries of the concept of emergence are subtle but significant. The concept indicates a linear rather than a cyclical pathway of change. However, this is not a linearity which admits of prediction (for example, through cause-effect laws or relationships). Nor is it the linearity of the 'grand narratives' rejected by poststructuralism, most of which locate the present moment securely within a sequence of epochal stages extending into a future which is therefore at least partly predicted. Instead, emergence implies an unknown future of perpetually unfolding novel outcomes. Correspondingly, it draws attention to the present as a unique, never-before-experienced conjunction of circumstances. The notion of emergence therefore re-establishes the social as contingent and situated. Research, including psychosocial research will be concerned not with universals but the sociohistorically and politically specific moment of investigation. This emphasis on contemporaneity is consistent with the concerns of social theorists outside psychology who have variously discussed the distinctive features of late modernity (Anthony Giddens, e.g. Giddens 1991), liquid modernity (Ulrich Beck, e.g. Beck 2002), liberal democracy (Nikolas Rose e.g. Rose 1996) and neo-liberalism. It establishes the discursive subject as contemporary. However, a discursive approach to the subject has also raised certain problems. These are explored in the next section.

4 The discursive subject: problems and resolutions

An essential premise of the discursive tradition is that language, usually talk, is not to be approached as 'epi-phenomenal' (Edwards 1997), as if it were merely an outer layer or secondary manifestation of some other, primary phenomenon. Extended to research on the person, this challenges an assumption that talk can be read or decoded to provide information about an internal state which is separate to what is said and pre-exists it, as if

the talk were the direct expression or external manifestation of some inner personness. (I will return to this temporal point.) For example, spoken references to mental processes or states ('I think', 'I believe', 'I feel') are not to be understood as descriptions of an individual psychology located elsewhere, inside the speaker ('terms such as *view* or *understanding* allude to cognition, but in their normal use are not equivalent to the sorts of mental processes and representations that are the currency of cognitive psychology' p.101, Potter and Edwards, 2003). Rather, the utterances are functional in the here and now of the actions and interactions of talk, as part of ongoing discursive processes.

One consequence of the shift of analytic focus which this requires, from the 'there' of an imagined mental event preceding the talk to the 'here' of the talk itself, is that problems conventionally viewed in individual terms are re-framed as social issues. The speaker is no longer regarded as the bounded container of some kind of mental or psychic entity or machinery. For instance, as discussed above, racist talk is examined not as an expression or manifestation of (mental or emotional) processes which are internal to the individual, but as an element of a spoken interaction, shaped to be functional within that context (for example, as a rationalisation) and also given its form by words, logics and lines of argument which are part of shared social knowledge. The corollary of these assumptions is that the conventionally psychological aspects of the actor have seemingly been vacated. In Steven Stanley's description, subjectivity is understood to be 'blank or empty' because of the lack of 'an "ontology" of interiority' (Stanley, 2013, p.63). How then is the discursive account to be reconciled with people's common experience of themselves as contained individuals who act in response to their innermost thoughts and feelings?

A 'soft' reconciliation of this problem of the subject might be that the interactive context and the individual actor are distinguished in terms of levels. For example, particular functions of talk such as remembering or apologising have been shown to occur at points made appropriate by an interactive sequence (Edwards & Middleton 1986). The function is therefore explainable in social terms, as prompted by the occasion and previous talk, rather than, in Harré and Gillett's term, by 'hidden subjective, psychological phenomena' (Harré & Gillett 1994, p.27). The explanation for the mechanism could be that the individual actor has learned to participate in interactions and respond appropriately to social prompts; this is broadly equivalent to the notion that people are socialised. As one writer outside psychology has explained it:

> 'Individuals are unique and variable, but selfhood is thoroughly socially constructed: in the processes of primary and subsequent socialisation, and in the ongoing processes of social interactions within which individuals define and redefine themselves and others throughout their lives' (Jenkins, 1996, p. 20).

By extension, this socialisation could include taking up the assumption that everyone possesses an agentic and interior individuality, and hence the tendency, noted above, for people to understand themselves in this way. However, an explanation in terms of the social and psychological as discrete levels is inconsistent with the roots of discourse analysis and discursive work in poststructuralist theories which depict influences and processes as multiple, complex and intertwined. Such theories would suggest that the social and the psychological are interpenetrated and inextricable, rather than neatly separable one from the other or reducible to a neat cause-and-effect sequence. In poststructural terms, the methodological focus therefore becomes a social being or person-in-context, equivalent to a psychosocial subject.

A more radical interpretation is that that the discursive subject is dispersed across wider situations and interactions. For example, David Herman (2007) has suggested that cognitive processes are 'immanent in discourse practices' (p.308); in other words, the mind is not to be understood as contained and interior to the person but as part of a range of people's practices in the different contexts of their lives. In Herman's words, it is 'spread out as a distributional flow in what participants say and do' (p.312), located in 'socio-communicative activities unfolding within richly material settings' (p.308). Herman's depiction is derived from that of Harré and Gillett (1994) and is consistent with Jerome Bruner's earlier notion of the self as distributed across different contexts and interactions (e.g. Bruner, 1987, 1990), so that it is inseparable from a "web of others" (p.114). It is also consistent with work, within and outside psychology, which explores a web of people and objects together, as already noted (e.g. Sorensen, 2013). However, this notion of a dispersed or distributed person-in-context is again, of course, considerably at odds with common sense notions of the person as contained and agentic.

A very different conceptualisation of the subject, and possibly the one to which the designation 'psychosocial' has most often been applied, appears in the influential work of Wendy Hollway, including with Tony Jefferson (e.g. Hollway 1998, Hollway & Jefferson 2000). This work arose out of the discursive tradition in psychology already outlined but incorporates psychoanalytic theory, particularly the work of Melanie Klein. Hollway and Jefferson criticise discourse analytic or discursive approaches for the problem of the vacated subject which has already been discussed, that is, for failing to account for some kind of continuity of personness which persists between or across particular moments of social

instantiation or constitution. This perhaps amounts to an argument that discourse analytic or discursive psychological research is overly social and insufficiently psychological. The resolution proposed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) is that continuity is given by 'a biographically unique 'reality'' (p.38), contained in the psyche. They suggest that this 'reality' is researchable through a methodological approach which employs techniques developed in psychoanalysis. In their approach, the researcher investigates 'unconscious dynamics … crucial in determining a person's relation to external reality' (p.104), and also the 'investment' of a speaker in particular discursive positionings (p.24).

There are a number of arguments against this kind of merging of the discursive and the psychoanalytic, sometimes referred to as social psychoanalytic research (e.g. Wetherell, 2012, p.150). One is that it returns to a treatment of language as epiphenomenal, since much of the empirical research in this area tends to use talk data, together with observations. A somewhat different objection is that to import psychoanalytic concepts and techniques into research is inappropriate (Frosh & Emerson 2005) because the relationship between researcher and participant is so different to that between therapist/analyst and client. Wetherell (2012) makes the point that 'ideological critique or discursive deconstruction focuses on conflicts in the *cultural* resources available to people … and the play of power' whereas 'social psychoanalysts' like Hollway and Jefferson interpret 'the very personal substance and most intimate self-understandings of their research participants' (p.134). A further, related issue is that the purpose of research is different to that of therapy: as Frosh and Baraitser (2008) note, in research the initiating purpose belongs to the researcher who seeks out the participant, in contrast to a therapy situation in which a client approaches an analyst for help (p.362). The main concerns relevant to this article,

however, are that a social psychoanalytic focus is overly focussed on the individual and tends to neglect the more traditional concerns of social researchers, including contemporary social and political issues, in part because the psychoanalytic subject is 'transhistorical' (Blackman et al, 2008, p.7).

Discursive researchers have responded to the work of Hollway and Jefferson, in particular, with arguments that the problem of continuity can be addressed entirely in discursive terms[2]. Wetherell (2003) has proposed the notion of 'personal order' as a pattern or patterns of interactional responses ('discursive styles or routines') which are specific to one person, having been established within the contexts of childhood ('the growing child's various discursive apprenticeships'). In this argument, the relevant context for the formation of a social and psychological subject becomes the family as a site of interactions which is itself located within the more general context of society. In this respect, there are similarities to the focus of developmental and psychoanalytic psychologists. The distinctive point of Wetherell's argument is that it does not postulate some kind of psychic entity or structure of which personal order is an epiphenomenon. Her focus remains at the level of continuity of order in the (observable) interactional behaviour, explainable in terms of acquired methods and norms similar to those referred to by ethnomethodologists. Wetherell's notion of personal order can also be extended beyond references to childhood to encompass the local interactive norms taken up as part of adult experience and learning, for example, in specific occupational contexts (Taylor and Littleton 2012).

In a somewhat different conceptualisation, Taylor (2005) and Taylor and Littleton (2006) offer a narrative-discursive account of continuity which refers to resources, arguing that

these acquire additional affect-laden associations through the personal contexts in which they have been encountered (for example, as advice from parents and teachers: Taylor and Littleton, 2012, p.63). The resources therefore form a personal or 'local' pool which is further supplemented by a speaker's own previous talk, including prior versions of 'who I am' and tellings of important experiences and favourite anecdotes. Such rehearsed talk is likely to be re-versioned for the purposes of a particular occasion of talk, for example, to be functional within that specific context. Nonetheless, it establishes continuity for a speaker, through the repetition and re-cycling of previous versions and also through compliance with a social expectation of consistency, so that a version of 'who I am' conforms, at least in part, to versions offered on previous occasions. In this account, therefore, continuity is conceptualised in terms not of some enduring inner essence but of re-used resources and the (partial) repetition of performance on successive occasions. The local resources proposed by Taylor and Littleton are part of the 'cumulative fragments of a lived autobiography' (Davies & Harré, 1990, p.49).

In a further development of this approach, Tracy Morison and Catriona Macleod (2013a, 2013b) relate it to Judith Butler's theory of gender and performativity. Rather than confronting the issue of continuity which concerns Taylor and Littleton, Morison and Macleod's account would suggest that the problem of the vacated subject is illusory. They focus on talk as a form of action, taking from Butler the notion that the actions and deeds of everyday life produce the <u>illusion</u> of a separate and pre-existing (gendered) actor or subject: "'the doer' is merely a fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything". In other words, the performance constitutes the subject. Morison and Macleod therefore avoid postulating a pre-discursive subject or an actor 'behind' the performance. They also

reject an assumption of either voluntarism, which would imply that gender can be performed without constraint, or determinism, which would imply that gendered performances are inevitably repetitive and unchanging. Instead, citing Butler, they suggest that the same performances which constitute a gendered subject amount to "a relation that can be turned against itself, reworked and resisted" (Butler, 1995, pp.45-46 cited in Morison & Macleod 2013b p.4). This reworking occurs through the imperfections or small changes in repeated performances. These inevitable breaks ('or *momentary* discontinuities in *specific* performances of gender') are 'troubling moments' which can have the effect of challenging and slightly shifting established gender performances instead of citing them exactly. An analysis of multiple instances across large datasets can therefore be used to explore social change, for example, in norms around gendered relationship roles.

Taylor and Littleton's account re-establishes the concept of a situated social subject while admitting a degree of uniqueness and personal history in terms of, respectively, a particular conjunction of current situations, and the accumulated discursive resources given by situations and encounters over time. This is an always incomplete subject-in-the-making. It does not, therefore, present the problem of the subject in 'Foucauldian work on governmentality' (Clarke, 2005, p. 454) which has been noted by John Clarke, that is, 'a tendency to assume that such subjects are *successfully* produced by the discourses, apparatuses and practices that seek to construct them' (emphasis added). The narrative-discursive theorisation of the person instead emphasises the complex, divided and incomplete nature of subjectification which follows from the multiple situations of any subject, including, for example, the simultaneous situations established by multiple address in different life roles and categorisations, and also the multiple possibilities given by accrued

local resources. A further aspect of this conceptualisation can be indicated with reference to an argument of Ian Burkitt (2008). Although his account of the incomplete subject-in-the-making is rather different (he relates incompleteness to supposedly separate relationships of work/institutional life and home/personal life), Burkitt proposes that incomplete subjectification admits the possibility of agency and a capacity for resistance. A similar argument can be made for this narrative-discursive subject as, again, not wholly subject or integrated.

The various conceptualisations of a discursive subject presented in this section can be considered psychosocial, I suggest, first because they dissolve social-personal and collective-individual binaries and second, because they encompass aspects, such as materiality and affect, which have been claimed as the particular territory of the psychosocial. However, this is not to say that there are not also differences between discursive research and other developments which might more usually be labelled psychosocial. One concerns the extent to which the research is concerned with the general or the specific. Social psychoanalytic research, like the work of Hollway and Jefferson discussed earlier, tends to follow therapeutic traditions in focussing on a particular individual. Brown et al (2011) similarly aimed to explore specific experiences of relations and an occasion or event rather than attempting some reduction to the generic or general (p.512). In contrast, discursive research in the tradition I have outlined aims to go beyond particular individuals and instances, looking across a larger dataset. Discourse analysis has been described as the search for patterns in language in use (Taylor, 2001, p.6) and such patterns can be discussed in terms of resources such as discourses, repertoires and narratives, for example, of autobiography, which are held to pre-exist particular instances of talk or other interaction. Some discursive

studies *also* embrace the specific by returning to consider the use of resources within a particular context, but ultimately this focus on patterns might appear to contrast with an interest in specificities. The next section presents an illustrative example of narrative-discursive research.

5 An analysis of home and personal achievement

To illustrate the narrative-discursive approach set out in the previous section, and indicate some of its implications, I will refer back to an analysis of interview material presented in an earlier publication (Taylor 2010), from a project on identities of residence and relationships to place. I will focus this discussion on the meanings of 'home'. This is, of course, a concept which is well-recognised to be rich and complex or, in discursive terms, to be part of a wide range of social resources, including in relation to intimacy, safety, life course and nationality. A focus on the resources in play in the talk of all the participants in the project revealed, unsurprisingly, many references to it. The analysis below is inescapably informed by the patterns in these multiple references detected across the larger dataset of interviews, although I will refer mostly to a single participant. This illustrates a feature of discursive work which is sometimes disregarded, that its aim is to explore commonalities, the implications of which may then be considered further with reference to a single case. The underlying assumptions are that the person and the aspects of subjectivity being investigated are 'thoroughly socially constructed', to return to Jenkins' phrase, but that this construction can produce a distinctive subject through a uniquely specific social location and conjunction of circumstances.

The participant I will refer to was a woman who had migrated twice, from the UK to New Zealand as a child, with her family, then to a different part of the UK as an adult, alone. Her account of her life was, of course, a retrospectively constructed narrative shaped to the purposes of the interview interaction, for example, in her responses to questions, and to the stated focus of the research project, but it could also be presumed to draw on previously rehearsed accounts of who she was, where she came from and so on. In this participant's talk, 'home' was notably part of a pattern or repertoire in which it was linked to 'a house' and 'a nice house'. (The latter expression is particularly common in New Zealand English.) The analysis indicated that an aggregation of associations around owning your own home as a marker of upward mobility was linked for this speaker to her family's migration to New Zealand from a working class inner city area in the UK, with the aspirations attached to that move. She described how in New Zealand her parents had been able to buy a house for the first time, having previously lived in rented social housing. Subsequently the woman herself, as an adult, had bought a house with her husband, then, after the marriage ended, a house of her own. On moving back to the UK (though not to the city in which she had grown up), she had bought a 'really nice' flat in an area which was 'not fantastic' but the best she could afford.

These purchases were constructed in her talk as marker points in a narrative of upward mobility and self-improvement in which her two migrations, first to New Zealand and later back to the UK, were also steps. She presented herself as a person of working class background who had moved towards a middle class identity. Like home ownership, this kind of biography of self-improvement can be linked back to features of contemporary Western society, such as the values attached to individualisation (e.g. Giddens 1991; Beck 2002), and

monetary worth as part of neo-liberalism (e.g. Mudge 2008)**.** In the terms of the narrative-discursive approach, the aggregated meanings of home and house, including the classed meanings of home ownership, were social resources which were also part of this speaker's personal or local resources, with additional meanings attached to them. Thus, the meanings of home became inseparable for her from personal achievement and success and an achieved social position. They were freighted with the unique associations of her family and life experiences, and these emotional or affective associations, equivalent to the 'investment' discussed by Hollway, were carried forward into new situations. For example, her claims to middle classness were both confirmed and contested by her accounts of criticisms and some mockery of her lifestyle (such as her visits to art galleries) from family members who visited from New Zealand or other relatives who she encountered in their original UK city.

Home in the form of a purchased house or flat can also provide a possible substitute for the security of the idealised traditional relationships to a place given by nativeness and being 'born and bred' (Taylor, 2010, pp.12-14), thereby alleviating some of the problems of contemporary mobility and migration but creating new vulnerabilities. At the time this woman took part in the research she was distressed because there had been a daytime mugging near her current place of residence, the 'really nice' flat. Although the incident obviously raised issues for her personal safety and her home as a place of refuge and security, her concerns focussed on the mugging as a marker of the bad neighbourhood around the flat. The mugging challenged the meanings of this place of residence for her, threatening her claims, first, to belong there (that is, for it to be 'home') and second, to its quality and therefore, by extension, her positioning within a narrative of self-improvement

and personal progress. Potentially at least, the mugging implied loss of status, failure and humiliation, especially since family members were somewhat critical of her aspirations to social mobility, as already noted.

This is an example of the need for research to go beyond an assessment of 'real' hazards or statistical probabilities to explore the meanings attached 'within the situations, places and spaces where people encounter risk in their daily lives' (Henwood et al 2010). Mugging is a form of crime which potentially reduces the market values of property by marking an area as bad. In addition, it carries strong images which may be separate to the details of recorded crime (e.g. Minton 2008). Mugging has an image as a crime of territorial claim and is associated with people who are 'out of place', such as tourists and richer visitors in poor areas, and people who on the streets late at night. It is an attack on the body (in contrast, say, to burglary) which therefore renders particular categories of people as likely victims, that is, women and the elderly, who are understood to be more bodily frail (even though statistically, they may not be the most probable victims of mugging). These meanings which are attached to mugging constituted it as a particular form of threat to this participant, to her claim on this place as home.

The example of this participant demonstrates how the social and the psychological, including the emotional, are inextricably intertwined in ways which can be explored through a discursive analysis. For any speaker, social resources such as the generally available and overlapping resources of home and home ownership will carry additional and personally specific associations; for this woman, they were linked to a narrative of migration as a change of class as well as country. The conflict between the various meanings attached to

her place of residence, that is, as a safe home and a dangerous area, a desirable 'really nice' flat and a place where no one else would want to live, is an example of 'trouble' in discursive terms (Taylor 2010, p.98) which is laden with personal emotions while also exemplifying wider issues.

The analysis also illustrates the inseparability of language use and aspects of the material world, that is, places of residence, nice houses and flats in bad neighbourhoods, and physical threat. It encompasses embodiment in several ways. One is that the body marks the position from which perception and experience are constructed as perceived and experienced, for example, as safe or vulnerable (for instance, to mugging), and also in relation to the 'there' and 'here' of former and current places of residence. Another is that the body is the carrier of both the accrued meanings of a specific personal identity ('who I am') and the ascribed recognisable markers of intersecting social identities such as gender, age and class, although its meanings are always negotiated and re-negotiated in relationships with others so that the experience of self is also always in negotiation. The analysis illustrates an alternative way of approaching the kinds of personal associations explored by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) but without inevitably invoking the 'transhistorical' psychoanalytic account. However, the analysis goes beyond a simple account of discursive research as concerned with 'speaking subjects' and 'reading and interpreting' (Sorensen, 2013, p.122). Its ultimate point is as evidence for the interrelationship of the social context and aspects of this person, that is, as research which can be described as psychosocial.

6 Conclusion

This article has argued for the continuing relevance of developments in the discursive tradition in psychology. It has re-stated some of the contributions of discursive approaches, including methodologically, to a psychosocial project which challenges the binaries of personal and social, individual and collective, in order to explore a complex contemporary embodied subject. The article has focussed on one development, a narrative-discursive approach which addresses the problem of the vacated or blank discursive subject without returning to the universal or transhistorical premises of social psychoanalysis. This approach also avoids methodological and ethical issues raised by borrowing interpretative approaches from therapeutic contexts. As the analysis in the previous section indicates, the approach goes beyond the linguistic meanings which have been depicted as the contrast to the domains of emotion and affect. The narrative-discursive theorisation avoids the oversubjectification which has been noted as a weakness of Foucauldian theories of governmentality. Although a narrative-discursive subject is inevitably located within social relations of power, by emphasising process, incompleteness and emergence the approach admits some possibility of agency and a capacity for resistance (cf. Burkitt 2008, Hook 2013), including through the troubling of norms which contributes to 'slowly bending citations' (van Lenning, 2004 cited in Morison & Macleod 2013a, p.5). The premises of process and emergence are also fundamental to the emphasis on contemporaneity which a discursive approach contributes to critical and political social research.

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Notes

[1] For instance, to note just one example of many, 'the turn to embodiment', Brown et al, 2011, p.493.
[2] Somewhat differently, Michael Billig, 1999, has discussed a key psychoanalytic concept, repression, as a discursive phenomenon**.**