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If asked to describe the contemporary climate of methodological inquiry and debate in discursive and qualitative social psychology I would say that at its best it is adventurous, challenging, rigorously argued, and yet not hypercritical. A recent article in the in-house journal of the British Psychological Society, *The Psychologist*, sought to create a 'dialogue across divisions' between experimental, discursive and psychoanalytical research traditions (Wetherell and Manstead, 2005). In so doing, it created some unlikely alliances out of some of those divisions; experimental psychology, we are told, shares some common cause with psychoanalytic psychology because of the way both seek to arrive at explanations of social life that do not remain at the surface level of discourse (Speers et al., 2005). At a recent invited address I gave at the launch of the UK's National Centre for Research Methods (Henwood, 2005), I was able to argue for the importance of the methodological priorities associated with the emergence of inquiries into 'the psychosocial'. These priorities are to find ways of considering the role of signification and the imaginary in the ongoing flow and constitution of people's identities and lives, and the more ambiguous, fleeting aspects of culturally inflected human subjectivity (see e.g. Frosh and Emerson, 2005; Wetherell et al., 2005).

Chris Griffin's article 'Being dead and being there: research interviews, sharing hand cream and the preference for analysing "naturally occurring data"' (this issue) is a rigorously argued, but certainly not hypercritical, attempt to clarify and interrupt some parallel, and potentially influential arguments, that have been staked out recently within discourse studies, and specifically within discursive psychology (which is itself a key constituent of qualitative social psychology). There are two main targets of her critique. The first is that naturally occurring conversation should be the primary data that is subject to analysis by discourse analysts and qualitative social psychologists. The second is that such researchers should adopt a stance of detachment and distance

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from their investigations in order to avoid contamination and inappropriately 'getting up' their data to serve the purpose of their own research agendas. Griffin draws on her own experiences of doing engaged interviewing research within a broadly ethnographic research strategy to show why neither of these claims can be supported.

My starting point in commenting on Griffin's article is one of agreement with the points she makes there. For all the valuable insights discursive psychology has generated about the way that truth claims are staked, and psychological meanings and actions are performed in everyday talk and interactions, making claims that are at the same time over-general and over-specific in favour of adopting the kinds of methodological principles and practices that may make these insights possible is not, in my opinion, the way to go. Hence, what I intend to do in my commentary is to reiterate and build on Griffin's arguments and examples, and take up a point made implicitly by her. This is that qualitative social psychology is a methodologically broader church than would be allowed by the strong arguments she considers (and rebuts) for adopting the principles and practices of discursive psychology. I conclude with a postscript to situate the developments I pinpoint (following Griffin) as important within discursive and qualitative social psychology in relation to contemporary efforts that are being made to strengthen and develop social science methodology.

Research interviews as a legitimate source of data and focus for analysis; discourse as topic and *resource*

I start with one of the main points made by Griffin throughout her article, which is about the appropriateness for qualitative social psychology (including discursive psychology) of conducting research interviews tailored for the purposes of specific projects, and of researchers reflexively analysing their own involvement in, and reactions to, the incidents and 'everyday' realities that take place as part of such interviews.

Interestingly, it should be noted that discursive psychology has not always been so inimical to utilizing interviews as part of its chosen research strategy, and that some of the most widely cited of such discourse analytic studies generated their primary research data through conducting interviews (see e.g. Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Where discursive psychology has provided a major point of criticism of interview research is in relation to the apparent lack of theoretical concern shown in many interview studies for the core ontological and epistemological issues at the heart of research. For discourse analysts, there are two fundamentally different approaches that can be taken to interview research: one of which construes interviews as topic and another as a resource (see e.g. Edley, 2001; see also Seale, 1998). Discursive psychologists argue in favour of studying interviews as *topic*, that is as episodes of situated interaction and talk requiring an analytical stance of investigating the 'heacceity – the just thisness' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000: 492) of the meanings and practices constituting the reality of the interview. Juxtaposed against this is the rather

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different (and typically taken for granted) approach of interpreting (or reading) interview data as a *resource* for what it tells (or signifies to) the researcher about processes and realities located beyond the interview as a specific text and context.

Since the introduction of these ideas, it has become clear that there is no need for investigations involving the collection and analysis of interview data to be enmeshed in the restricted perspectives on ontological and epistemological issues that engender suspicion among discursive psychologists. In recent years, interviews have been approached as topic *and* as resource (see e.g. Holstein and Gubrium, 1997, 2004). Griffin's article shows very clearly how this duality is not one she has found to hold firm in her own research. Through careful and painstaking interpretive and reflexive analysis, that is not a matter of 'pick(ing) over the details of recorded interactions in which (analysts) have taken no active part' (p. 254), we can see how Griffin is able to move from analysis of the situated, cultural practices and interactional meanings at play in research interviews to consider their possible implications beyond the interview text and context.

Participants' orientations, emic research, and contextualizing and interpreting data

So how does Griffin manage to conduct an analysis that is focused upon both the interviews themselves as interactional episodes, and on drawing out the wider relevance of these specific encounters for understanding her research topic: the meanings of consumption for young women? The answers lay, first, in Griffin's explicit interrogation of the assumptions informing some discursive psychologists' avowed preference for distancing practices on the part of the interview researcher and data analyst; second, in her own data analytic practices which she illustrates at length through presenting two incidents (about 'sharing hand cream' and 'flag-waving'), and third in the albeit necessarily brief details we are given about the substantive findings of her research.

As discourse analysts have argued, a vital methodological consideration in qualitative research (both in psychology and beyond) is how to ensure that a researcher's own, a priori, research agenda does not obscure other meaning frames and relevancies that are important to understanding people's orientations to, and ways of acting within, specific encounters and local situations. Discourse analysts suggest two appropriate safeguards. One is to maintain a clear separation between the encounter and the materials being studied, and the investigative activities of the researcher. The other is to adopt, as a key principle guiding discourse analytic studies, the tactic of always attending to the ways in which participants' themselves orient to, and invoke contextual frames, in social encounters. Griffin is, likewise, attentive to the orienting concerns of the young women in her interviews, and focuses especially detailed lines of analysis on those occasions when the young women's frames of reference do not seem to coincide with her pre-planned strategy as researcher for asking

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them questions. However, what she also clearly demonstrates is the importance of the researcher's presence in the encounters for implementing this as a key element in her research strategy. Only through her practice of involvement in the encounters with the young women were such frame clashes invoked, was she able to make their introduction a centrepiece to be explicitly commented upon by all interviewees, and was she able to register the incidents as meaningful episodes – both as features of the ongoing course of the interview and from the point of view of her research (e.g. by verbalizing the 'hand cream moment').

The principle of attending to other people's meaning frames also applies when a researcher is interested in understanding how people are culturally and socially positioned at specific moments in history and over their life course. This is a particularly important issue in Griffin's research, since her investigations involve looking in detail at an arena of cultural practice (consumption) that has radically changed in significance and form in recent years. Also, her specific interest is in the meanings of consumption for young people, and it is possible that young people's collective and individual positionings may have become more problematic and intense in modern times in relation to this issue (e.g. as issues of youthful style, identity and social standing have become linked even more firmly to costly consumption practices). In discourse analytic terms, Griffin makes a challenging methodological contribution in this regard by explicitly linking her strategy of attending to participant orientations and contextual framings (which is at one with discourse analysis) with its antithesis: that of introducing researcher frames for understanding the features of social, cultural and historical context she considers to be relevant. Yet it does not seem to be an unhappy confluence of approaches given Griffin's analytic project. Griffin interprets the dispute between Gemma (the young woman who uses non-branded hand cream and speaks of not liking shopping) and the other girls (all of whom approve of buying branded hand cream, and see non-branded bottles as somehow improper) as 'a dispute between the young women about how to "do" contemporary youthful femininity, and as an example of none too subtle peer pressure regarding the appropriate feminine consumption practices'" (p. 261). She is aware that different elements of the interaction might be characterized as etic (worked up by the researchers' interview questions) and others as emic (coming from the young women's perspective). Yet it is the intermingling of the two that enables her to generate her key analytic insights – here about the involvement of gendered peer pressure in generating poignant differences among the interviewees' experiences of the normative force of product branding.

Postscript: discursive psychology, qualitative social psychology and methodological trends in contemporary social science

In a recent 20-page article providing a reflexive commentary on the state of the art in qualitative social science in the UK, I commented on the many 'explicit and implicit agendas that are energising and motivating what may be called the "turn to methodology" in funded UK social science in the early 21st

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century' (Henwood and Lang, 2005: 1). In the space of just one article, Chris Griffin manages to articulate a number of these agendas, drawing mainly upon developments in discourse analysis and qualitative social psychology, while paying some attention to wider currents in relation to the philosophy of social science and practice of ethnography. At the same time, the article focuses with great clarity on methodological issues in researcher instigated interactions and involved interview research. Griffin demonstrates, in some very compelling ways, why the style of interview research she advocates is an important antidote to studies in discursive psychology that are more narrowly focused on naturally occurring data, and which apparently fear any involvement by the researcher for threatening to distort the integrity of interactional data. Griffin's article is unlikely to bring an end to the debate about detached and involved discourse analysis, and it would be good if the debate could be joined by other parties interested in, for example, the analysis of discourse, identity practices, and psychosocial perspectives on culture and subjectivity.

By way of final comment, one of the strengths of Griffin's article is the way it raises questions about the links between qualitative data gathering and analytical methodology. In this regard the examples she gives of her own methodological and analytic practices could be discussed within other domains where such key issues in qualitative social science are considered. One of these is concerned with the challenge of producing thick descriptions of culturally meaningful, textual data: as Kincheloe and McLaran have argued it is important and possible to:

> transcend the inadequacies of thin descriptions ... and produce thick descriptions of social texts characterized by the contexts of their production, the intentions of their producers, and the meanings mobilised in the processes of their constructions (although) the production of such thick descriptions/interpretations follows no step by step blue print or mechanical formula. (Kincheloe and McLaran, 2000: 286)

The research narratives Griffin has produced certainly do not follow any blueprint or mechanical formula, but they do show how ways can be found to transcend the problems of producing thinly described and interpreted data.

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