The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology

Psychoanalytic Approaches to Qualitative Psychology

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Chapter 7: Psychoanalytic Approaches to Qualitative Psychology

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Introduction: What Has Psychoanalysis to Do with Qualitative Methods?

Psychologists working within academic traditions both in Britain and in the United States have often found themselves both attracted to and repelled by psychoanalytic ideas. It is as if the two disciplines have contested the same ground – how to understand human behaviour, especially apparently disturbing behaviour – and have been caught up in a dispute that is at the same time epistemological, practical and political. How one can know the reality of psychological phenomena has been a key element in this contestation, with this debate being coded (perhaps speciously) as that between an 'objective' (psychological) and a more 'subjective' (psychoanalytic) approach to understanding. This has, historically, been paralleled by differences in the focus of investigation, which for psychologists has been mainly directly observable or at least measurable phenomena (behaviours or reports on subjective states, taken at face value) whilst for psychoanalysts it has been what Freud (1917) calls the 'dream work' – the tricky, hard-to-observe ways in which unconscious material finds its way into consciousness.

As will be seen, this divergence between a 'ground up' model of psychological explanation, in which observable facts are given priority, and a theoretically driven, 'top down' model continues to exercise qualitative psychologists who find themselves

drawn to psychoanalytic ideas as one possible route to moving beyond 'mere' re-description of what their research participants tell them. At the outset, though, it is worth noting how the move produced by the growth of qualitative social psychology towards a new openness to investigations of 'meaning' (for example, through discourse and narrative analysis; Emerson and Frosh, 2004) and to the potential of psychoanalysis as a conceptual and methodological tool (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2003; Kvale, 2003), make it ever easier to envisage collaboratively 'binocular' accounts in which the concepts **[p. 110 ↓]** and procedures of both traditions might be brought to bear on psychological material. The 'new' social psychology, with its roots in social constructionism, Foucauldian critique and methodologically scrupulous qualitative research (Chapter 21; Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine, 1998; Potter and Wetherell, 1987), offers a grounded way in which to articulate the psychosocial bases around which personal and social accounts of experiences and beliefs are constructed. The possible contribution from psychoanalysis derives from the sophistication of its ideas about emotional investment and fantasy, which can offer a 'thickening' or enrichment of interpretive understanding brought to bear on personal narratives, especially those arising out of interview situations. In particular, because of its concern with the 'split' subject (Frosh, 1999), psychoanalysis might supply a framework and methodology through which subject positions can be explored without necessarily having recourse to assumptions concerning the stability of selfhood or the separate sphere of the 'personal'. Instead, the *investment* subjects have in certain discursive positions can be seen to intertwine with the constructive power of discourses to produce the kinds of fluid and complex texts characteristic of in-depth narrative research. Put crudely, psychoanalytic interpretive strategies may be able to throw light on the psychological processes, or perhaps the conscious and unconscious 'reasons', behind a specific individual's investment in any rhetorical or discursive position. This may offer a more complete (because more individualized as well as emotion-inflected) interpretive re-description of interview material with helpful links to clinical perceptions and practices.

The possible syncretism of discursive social psychology and psychoanalysis has a number of facets, but in essence these relate to shared perceptions of the constructive role of language, a concern with language or communication as the medium through which people compose themselves. Thus, both schools of thought assume

constructionist theories of meaning, in which reality is always to some extent 'made up' discursively. Nevertheless, there are important differences in how psychoanalysis and discursive psychology understand personal experience and in each school's approach to language. For the former, talk is primarily mediated by relational dynamics and unconscious processes; while for the latter talk is mediated by the availability of discourses in the social and political realm. Consequently, social psychologists have been critical of psychoanalytic attempts to go 'beyond' language to inner experience. Billig (1997: 139–40) describes the difference thus:
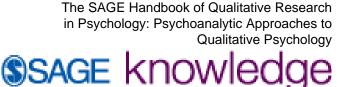
> Discursive psychology … argues that phenomena which traditional psychological theories have treated as 'inner processes' are, in fact, constituted through social, discursive activity. Accordingly, discursive psychologists argue that psychology should be based on the study of this outward activity rather than upon hypothetical, and essentially unobservable, inner states. In this respect, discursive psychology is inimical with psychoanalytic theory, which presumes that hidden unconscious motive-forces lie behind the surface of social life. Psychoanalytic theorists often treat outward social activity as a cipher for unobservable, inner motivational processes.

While discursive psychology explores the cultural resources that people draw on in accounts, psychoanalysis is more interested in talk as suggestive of psychic structures that organize individuals' internal worlds in particular ways. This *psychic* realm is seen as being informed by actual events and therefore social structures but also 'added to' from the unconscious. Thus, psychoanalysis conceptualizes discourse as a site where the internal world of psychic reality is expressed and revealed. Individuals are 'unconsciously impelled' to express themselves in particular ways, resulting in discernable patterns that will differ from individual to individual. A psychoanalytic reading goes 'behind' the text as the positions that individuals construct through their talk are taken to be indicative of anxieties, defences and particular ways of relating that develop in infancy and recur throughout their lives. By contrast, from a discursive perspective, individuals express themselves in ways that are familiar or readily available to them within their **[p. 111 ↓]** social context (Wetherell, 2003). Discursive psychology reads the text for the identity positions that are constructed for the person talking and

the audience listening, and for the broader cultural discourses and subject positions it draws on in these constructions.

In this regard, Wetherell (2003) speaks about psychoanalysis as predicated on a problematic psychological–social dualism. She argues that the deep psychological properties or structures that psychoanalysis is interested in are separated from social relations and therefore represented as static, confined to early development, without any exploration of their possible transformation through subsequent and ongoing social relations and practices. Similarly, Sondergaard (2002: 448) argues that using psychoanalysis reproduces the individual/social dualism because of its strong focus on 'inner-psychological and individually demarcated reality'. This is at the core of the distinction between the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious, with its insistence on the materiality of an underlying domain of expressive meaning, and the kind of 'discursive unconscious' postulated by Billig (1997), which understands the unconscious as a domain of prohibited speech. Billig points out that conversational devices have defensive functions: the centrality of politeness and the accomplishment of morality in and through conversations necessarily implies that the temptation of rudeness or immorality is repressed. For Billig, this repressive aspect of conversation is a point of fruitful contact between psychoanalysis and discursive psychology, although he admits that theoretical adjustments need to be made on both sides. He argues that discursive psychology needs to pay attention to the absences as well as the presences in dialogue. This suggests that there will need to be some willingness to interpret 'past' what can be easily transcribed as text. On the other hand, psychoanalysis, rather than viewing repression as individual in operation, needs to perceive it as socially produced in overt interpersonal activity. Developing a psychosocial account of relationships and subjectivity that can draw on psychoanalysis without dumping the significant advances produced by discursive social psychology thus requires openness to interpretation grounded in an understanding of the social as something that permeates apparently 'individual' phenomena; whether this project can be advanced through a psychoanalytic approach to qualitative methods is the concern of this chapter.

Reflexivity

With the querying of positivism characteristic of the discursive turn in the social sciences has come agreement that the human sciences are characterized by the impossibility of any search for absolute knowledge, precisely because of the meaning-making or 'reflexive' nature of human psychology itself. Instead, what has come to be privileged is the form that experience takes when it is put into narrative (Bruner, 1993). One important implication of this claim about the essential 'narrative-generating' character of human psychology is that influential ideas about such things as 'human nature' have an impact on the construction of their own subject; that is, people consume these explanations as part of the process of constructing stories about their lives. This can be seen particularly clearly in the history of psychological theories on 'race'; the use of psychological 'expertise' to generate social policies is also relevant. More generally, the ways in which people construe themselves owes a lot to influential psychological theories, perhaps particularly psychoanalytic and biomedical ones. People's routine uses of psychoanalytically derived notions such as 'sexual repression' or 'trauma' or 'acting out' as explanations of their own or others' behaviour are examples here. Conversely, psychological theories draw strength from the 'common sense' (that is, ideologically inscribed) assumptions and ways of understanding experience prevalent in the culture. This is linked to a debate in social science on the virtues or otherwise of 'constructivism', understood in regard to human psychology as implying the impossibility **[p. 112 ↓]** of absolute truth: people's understanding of their psychology shifts with the ideas to which they are exposed. Social constructionism, as a variant of constructivism, makes this anti-positivist claim even stronger through arguing that knowledge is negotiated and invented – 'constructed' – out of ideas and assumptions made available by the social and interpersonal context.

The reflexivity argument has a number of implications in relation to the employment of psychoanalysis in qualitative research. For Parker (2005) it focuses and limits the possibilities of psychoanalysis itself, understood as a compelling narrative that is culturally specific and even functional. Research, therefore, is not a process of uncovering (even relative) 'truths' about people, but rather exposes the ways in

which people are positioned by the theoretical structures used (by them as well as by researchers) to understand them.

> What psychoanalytic research can do, then, is to turn psychoanalytic knowledge around against itself so we understand better the way that psychoanalytic ideas have themselves encouraged us to look for things deep inside us as the causes of social problems. Psychoanalytic subjectivity – our sense of ourselves as having hidden childhood desires and destructive wishes – is the perfect complement to economic exploitation in capitalist society, for both succeed in making the victims blame themselves.
>
> Parker (2005: 105)

This takes to its logical extreme the constructivist/constructionist argument that subjects are produced discursively, though exactly how psychoanalysis will reveal the conditions of its own operation as an exploitative system is left open to speculation. More conventionally, Parker draws attention to the impact of psychoanalysis' emphasis on how knowledge (specifically of the patient) is mediated through the person – the subjectivity – of the knower (the analyst): that is, knowing the other requires knowing the impact of the other on (or 'in') the self, and being able to reflect on this in a way that openly recognizes both the pre-existing investment of the knower/researcher in the material, and what is added to this by the specific concerns of the other. Parker (2005: 117) comments on how this produces a reassessment of conventional research ideas on subjectivity as a problem:

> Subjectivity is viewed by psychoanalysis, as with much qualitative research, not as a problem but as a resource (and topic). To draw upon one's own subjectivity in the research process does not mean that one is not being 'objective', but that one actually comes closer to a truer account. In psychoanalytic terms, the 'investment' the researcher has in the material they are studying plays a major role in the interest that will eventually accrue from the research.

This is a conventional point in relation to psychoanalytic infant observation, where it is held that knowledge of the child can *only* be obtained through registering the observer's emotional response to what s/he sees (Waddell, 1988); coded more broadly as 'countertransference' it is also a feature of all contemporary psychoanalytic practice, especially that influenced by Kleinian and British School thinking. Hence Hollway and Jefferson's (2005) assertion that in their psychoanalytically inflected qualitative work they can ground their interpretive claims through what they refer to as an analysis of the 'countertransference'. Referring to their case study of 'Vince', they claim that information is generated through comparing the different responses the two researchers had to the participant himself:

> We used these and the triangulation of them between the two of us. For example, while WH [Wendy Hollway] wanted to describe Vince as quiet-spoken and unassertive, TJ [Tony Jefferson] was more inclined to describe him as timid. We used this information to reflect on how we were differently positioned in relation to Vince through these different countertransference responses. Wendy, who conducted both interviews, found herself feeling suspiciously protective of him, while Tony, having met him briefly, listened to the audiotapes and read the transcripts, felt critical of his timidity. This observation is an example of how to use the psychoanalytic principle of unconscious intersubjectivity to theorize the effect of research relationship(s) on the production and analysis of data.

> Hollway and Jefferson (2005: 151)

[p. 113 ↓] It has to be said that this looks only schematically like the intense exploration of unconscious material characteristic of psychoanalytic reflection on the counter-transference in the clinical situation, but at least it provides a space for checking out the researchers' responses to the research participant and thinking through what these responses might signify. It also draws attention to the position of the researcher in qualitative work, where the end point of research might be various constructed versions of experience rather than full knowledge of an objective and fixed external reality. The task of the interviewer, therefore, shifts from one of eliciting the interviewee's 'real' views to creating the conditions under which a thoughtful conversation can take place

– a 'shared understanding' model (Franklin, 1997). Clearly, in doing work of this kind, the person of the researcher is deeply implicated: if it is the case that psychological knowledge is constructed in the context of an interchange between 'researcher' and 'researched', then understanding the determining characteristics of that interaction – including what the researcher brings to it – is crucial for evaluating the significance of any research 'findings'.

A major difficulty concerns what account can in fact be given of the investments of the researcher in the knowledge-making process. Here, psychoanalysis has considerably more sophisticated concepts available to it than can be found in much social science, but this very sophistication makes the issues more problematic. For example, some social psychologists seem to imply that describing researchers' investments in their work might be a relatively simple, technical matter, perhaps an issue of confession or self-revelation. But what is to be revealed? The researcher's gender, class and 'race' positions may well be relevant and it may be important to declare them as a way to increase the transparency and richness of the data produced. This is, indeed, the strategy employed by some of the best practitioners of the new social science; for instance, Margaret Wetherell acknowledges that her work on racism in New Zealand is influenced by her own history as a white New Zealander (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). However, even where researchers have been scrupulous in laying out the ways in which they might have promoted certain 'responses' or narratives from their research participants, the most they are able to do is declare their conscious intentions and include material such as full transcripts to enable a reader to form an impression of the researcher's own active contribution. Psychoanalysis suggests that this declaration of relatively explicit aspects of the researcher's persona will never be complete enough to understand what her or his contribution to the research might be – let alone, to comprehend the nuances of the interpretive strategy employed in data analysis. There are likely, for example, to be complex unconscious processes interacting with the research work, encouraging some ways of going about things, inhibiting others. Psychoanalysis might even suggest that the only way to fully explore a researcher's investment in a particular piece of research would be through a dialogic encounter involving the possibility of interpretation of the researcher's activity and checking out the impact of this interpretation on her or his understanding and future conduct. This seems rather a tall order, although perhaps not an impossible one. For example, some

very innovative German studies have used a process whereby researchers meet with members of their team in order to explore the thoughts, feelings and associations that have been brought up by the work as an indicator of important issues that may have been communicated indirectly or even unconsciously from the research participant (Marks, 2001). This 'intervision' procedure is combined with one in which small groups of researchers track their responses to the recording of interviews, identifying moments of heightened emotion reflected in contradictions, interruptions or fragmentations of the material, and then discussing the impact and possible meaning of these. Particularly provocative or difficult interviews might be assessed by the whole research team **[p. 114 ↓]** with a view to identifying their underlying dynamics. Sometimes the results from this procedure can be striking, as in the work reported by Marks and Mönich-Marks (2003) into the tolerance of Nazism, in which feelings of shame were identified in the research group and used to probe the manner in which research participants defended themselves against such feelings by projecting them onto others, including the victims of Nazi actions. The point here is not that there is some magical route to identifying the unconscious material (supposedly) present in any discourse, but rather that the process of 'locating' and utilizing the investments of *researchers* is a complex and difficult one, but nevertheless one that has to be engaged with at a more profound level than is conventional in qualitative psychology, if psychoanalytic thinking in this area is to be taken seriously.

As Kvale (1999) argues, the standard psychoanalytic interview is an interesting model for a narrative style conversation in which the research participant is encouraged to talk freely and thoughtfully about her or his experience. For example, qualitative researchers interested in generating 'rich' texts might do well to adopt the analytic stance in which a safe temporal and physical space is offered by a professional whose behaviour is characterized by 'free-floating attention' – a serious, non-intrusive yet ruminative type of activity – and in which the relational characteristics of the interview are acknowledged and considered for their effects. It is unusual, except in some ethnographic work, for researchers to spend enough time with research participants for the kind of deeply emotional relationship found in psychoanalysis to develop, and this places strong constraints on the extent to which, for example, transference material can be fostered and examined as part of the research. Nevertheless, holding attentively to what emerges without irritably seeking to order and understand it, and simply encouraging

participants to speak on or around the topic under study, is itself quite a radical move for researchers and can pay dividends in terms of the quality of narrative data that is produced. Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) adaptation of the biographical-narrative method into the 'Free Association Narrative Interview' is a particularly well known implementation of this idea, but it can be found enacted in several 'life history' type research projects (e.g. Plummer, 1995). Hollway and Jefferson (2000: 152) comment:

> The free association narrative interview method is based on the premise that the meanings underlying interviewees' elicited narratives are best accessed via links based on spontaneous association, rather than whatever consistency can be found in the told narrative. This is a radically different conception of meaning because free associations follow an emotional rather than a cognitively derived logic. Once we follow that logic, the result is a fuller picture than would otherwise have emerged, offering richer and deeper insights into a person's unique meanings.

The link here is explicitly psychoanalytic and in a way antagonistic to conventional notions of narrative as story-telling: what matters is the emotional sense of the story, not its cognitive logic, because this emotional sense is what points to a person's subjective meaning-making.

The problem this produces, however, is of what to do with the richly subjective, suggestive texts that derive from such free and evocative interviewing procedures. Given all these interlacing subjectivities, how can one interpret their meaning in a reasonably convincing way? Different qualitative interpretive approaches have grown up with their own set of answers to this question, largely relating to varying strategies for 'grounding' interpretation in close analysis of the textual material, and presenting this procedurally for scrutiny by readers (Emerson and Frosh, 2004). What is especially problematic, but also interesting, about the use of psychoanalysis in qualitative research is that its interpretive strategies and grounding procedures have arisen most convincingly in one context – that of the clinical situation of the 'consulting room' – but are here being deployed in another context with strikingly different characteristics. Moreover, psychoanalysis is by no means unitary in its understanding of what **[p. 115 ↓]** constitutes a good interpretation; indeed, in recent years it has become very

hesitant about the idea that it can be used to uncover anything 'real' or 'truthful' about a person. What has changed is predominantly an advancing recognition of the way psychoanalytic formulations are worked out in the context of particular individuals struggling to relate to one another. This also means that as this context shifts, as the relationship changes, so psychoanalytic understanding of what is happening might also have to shift dramatically. Spence (1987: 91) comments:

> No interpretation is sacred. If context is boundless and ever-expanding, the grounds for reaching a conclusion about this or that meaning are forever shifting. An archive can be constructed, but its contents will always be open to interpretation and elaboration.

Psychoanalytic understanding depends on the subjective exploration of one person by another; by implication, this means that something different will occur wherever different analysts work, or when different theoretical perspectives dominate, or when social contexts shift. Hence, any psychoanalytic finding can only be provisional, constrained by the conditions under which it has been produced.

Validation

The relativity of the notion of truth here raises the obvious question of validation – of what criteria might be available for enabling distinction between all the possible 'provisional truths' which might arise, including all the provisional or perhaps absolute falsehoods. This is part of a general question arising out of all qualitative analysis of textual material: what are the limits on interpretation? Given, as most qualitative researchers and many (though not all) psychoanalysts would allow, that meaning is not fixed but is constructed in specific situations and usually through particular intersubjective encounters, then alternative interpretations of any text are likely to be viable and may even be equally persuasive. Under such conditions, what are the constraints operating on interpretation, what is allowable and what is not? For Hollway and Jefferson (2005: 150), the warrant for psychoanalytic interpretation in the clinical situation is reasonably clear: it 'emerges in the therapeutic relationship'. The qualitative researcher is in a different position: whereas the psychoanalyst interprets 'into' the session and can observe the patient's response, the researcher saves her
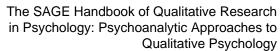
or his interpretation for later (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 77), and so is faced with what might be called 'dead' text. Outside the psychoanalytic situation, therefore, the warrant for interpretation is more flimsy than within it: Hollway and Jefferson (2005: 151) propose that this warrant includes 'the researcher's multiply informed (hermeneutic) interpretations of interview claims in the context of everything that is known about the person' and in particular that it is legitimate to read through the surface of the text to the life that is 'assumed' to be beyond it. In the context of the case study of 'Vince', this is articulated as follows:

> Vince's account is a form of evidence about that life, and our interpretative approach is based on the principle that the ways that Vince constructs his account in the context of the interview relationship can, when interpreted, provide further information about its conflicts… Thus, in addition to typical thematic and narrative analytic procedures, we paid particular attention to the links (free associations) between textual elements and to behaviours that signalled conflicting feelings about the material; for example, changes in emotional tone, long pauses or avoidances. These are some of the symptoms that make visible otherwise invisible internal states.
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> Hollway and Jefferson (2005: 151)

The obvious difficulty with this is that it still leaves the move from the surface to the proposed depth unanchored. How confident can the researchers be in the accuracy of their particular speculations about the significance of the free associations and emotional markers that they observe? Hollway and Jefferson (2000: 80) fall back on some idea of the recognizability of their interpretations: 'Their reliability can be checked (though never **[p. 116 ↓]** guaranteed) if, when our interpretations and analyses are studied by others, they are "recognized": that is, the sense that we made out of them can be shared through the subjectivity of others'. The problem here is that an interpretation may be agreed upon by various people all looking at something from the same perspective (as, for example, psychoanalysts tend to do), but this does not mean that it is right. This is part of Wetherell's (2005: 171) objection to Hollway and Jefferson's procedure, which focuses on the ways in which they 'ignore the discursive context in which they have put Vince; the pressure the interviews place on him to

offer a satisfactory account of who he is and the kind of attributional work Vince's circumstances would demand of anyone placed in them'. The consequence is that a certain kind of story almost has to emerge, as the psychoanalytic frame used by Hollway and Jefferson funnels the research participant's talk, leading rather ineluctably to a reading that revolves around the pre-ordained notion of the defended subject: 'Vince's words become acontextual and psychologized; he becomes a one trick pony, everything he says is leading towards his one true story, and that story is seen as definitive and automatically revealing of his real character' (Wetherell, 2005). This critique is taken further by Parker (2005: 108), who warns against the Free Association Narrative Interview procedure on the grounds that it is individualizing, essentializing, pathologizing and disempowering; the key complaint is that it is organized around a pre-set discourse that imposes an expert account on the research participant in a typical (of psychoanalysis as well as psychology) 'researcher knows best' set of moves.

In response to the problem of validation of truth claims, both psychoanalysis and qualitative psychology have at least partially embraced a hermeneutic position arguing that whilst causal, explanatory truths about people may not be available, meaning-imbued 'narrative truths' are. The model for this in the first instance is the reading of literary texts: the richer the text, the more alternative and even contradictory meanings might be pulled out of it. Narrative truths convince because of their capacity to evoke and structure experiences, to offer coherence where there is fragmentation, to articulate half-understood meanings, to throw light on obscurity. This is not an arbitrary process as it is quite possible to make interpretations of a text which have no coherence at all, and which fail to communicate anything; these would be failed, 'false' interpretations. But while the search for narrative truth is not arbitrary, it is difficult: not only is there a strong element of relativity brought into the situation by the variety of different narratives which might be available at any one time, but also as the context for interpretation shifts – as culture changes, for example – so do the narratives which take hold and which hold conviction. This has led some hermeneuticists, most notably Jürgen Habermas, to suggest that the final arbiter of analytic correctness, at least in the clinical setting, should be the patient. Analytic insights, he argues

> possess validity for the analyst only after they have been accepted
> as knowledge by the analysand himself. For the empirical accuracy
> of general interpretations depends not on controlled observation and

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the subsequent communication among investigators but rather on the accomplishment of self-reflection and subsequent communication between the investigator and his 'object'.

Habermas (1968: 261)

Habermas accepts as psychoanalytic the idea that symbolic structures of intention and meaning are causal in human relations, and from there proposes that psychoanalytic knowledge is validated by its capacity to demonstrate, in practice, the impact of its interventions in these structures. From the point of view of the patient, an interpretation is 'emancipatory' in linking the subject with her or his split-off meanings: 'The interpretation of a case is corroborated only by the successful *continuation of a self-formative process*, that is, by the completion of self-reflection, and not in any unmistakeable way by what the patient says or how he *behaves*' (Habermas, 1968: 266). Emancipation is expressed in a kind of becoming-real **[p. 117 ↓]** in the session, as the patient recognizes the meanings generated dialogically and takes them in so that they have causal impact, promoting an enrichment of felt experience and a process of enhanced self-reflection.

The hermeneutic account of the psychoanalytic process, and Habermas' version of it in particular, is more compelling than can be developed properly here (see Frosh, 2006), but it also shows up starkly the difficulties for the application of psychoanalytic ideas in the non-clinical research setting. It can be argued that the dependence of psychoanalysis on biographical and interpersonal information in order to ground interpretations means that it is not very appropriate for the analysis of interview material which, whilst it may be rich in details concerning attitudes and thoughts, is relatively sparse in relation to background features and fantasies. This suggests that for psychoanalytic procedures to be appropriate, more focused ways of gathering personal biographical material will need to be incorporated into qualitative psychological studies, and that these should not be merely 'factual' but should privilege respondents' in-depth accounts of their own perceptions of their experience. More broadly, the usual methods of 'testing' psychoanalytic interpretations rely on close observation (at various levels) of the analysand's response to the interpretation, evidence unavailable to the researcher after the event. There is, simply, no response from a text to an interpretation in the way

that a person might respond; and unless one is going to incorporate trial interpretations into the research interview itself, it is hard to see a way around this.

Many hermeneuticists have drawn out the parallel between psychoanalysis and textual analysis by focusing on the idea that meaning is the production of effects rather than the naming of truths, and hence that the interpretive process is a matter of 'local' readings of a spoken or authored 'text' (Friedman, 2000). Psychoanalysis, however, is not satisfied with generating particular meanings; it also has an interpretive task that is irreducibly bound up with the unravelling of unconscious conflicts. Here, a distinction worked on by Ricoeur (1974), between a 'hermeneutics of understanding' and a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' is important, the latter being the mode characteristic of psychoanalysis, with its reluctance to accept what the patient has to say at face value. Friedman (2000: 234–5) revives the textual analogy here when he comments that, 'analysis … is primarily intent on reading what the patient does not want read, and also, to some extent, the analyst's profession requires that he or she read against the analyst's own inclination'. Asserting the validity of a psychoanalytic concept thus requires *both* recognition of the way psychological 'reality' is impossible to pin down, because it fluctuates and is reconstructed continually as it is enacted and produced in different contexts; *and* an appreciation that some 'readings' of the unconscious are more forceful than others, and can be observed to be so because of their resonance in the participants, their capacity to communicate experience more richly, and their productivity in relation to further associations and deepening of emotional states. Outside the context of the consulting room, this can be applied in the same way as arguments about literary interpretations are applied: what way of understanding generates most material, what pushes thinking on, what 'thickens' the story that can be told about how psychological phenomena might work? None of this is completely satisfactory: psychoanalytic interpretation is always wavering and uncertain even when it can be tested against the patient's response, and even more so when it cannot; but this can be turned into a strength if one can maintain the stance of uncertainty and tentativeness within a context of cautious checking against the emotional tone of the research participant's talk and of the researcher's reactions.

We have been arguing both for the productivity of the application of psychoanalysis to qualitative material and for its problems, and have asserted that the use of psychoanalytic understanding must be tentative, rooted both in biographical information

and in a dynamic contact with research participants that allows space for emotional connectedness and the **[p. 118 ↓]** observation and thoughtful reflection on the relationship that arises. As with other forms of qualitative research, analysis of textual material must be rigorous and cautious, employing psychoanalytic concepts (that is part of the point) but grounding them in clearly observable textual moves – however open these might be to alternative readings as well. No interpretation is sacred, there is no full and absolute truth; but some are more reasonable and persuasive than others on theoretical grounds but also in terms of their logic and productivity, the implications and conclusions to which they lead.

Narratives of Brotherhood

In what follows, we try to demonstrate some of these tentative possibilities through reference to one specific piece of research into the 'brother' relationships of some adult men. This research involved interviews with eight men in middle adulthood, using an open, 'clinical' style in which the interviewer (LSY) combined paraphrasing and clarification of participants' comments with probes into their motives and interpretations of their experiences. Immediately after each interview, extensive field notes were made detailing observations of the participants' interactions with the interviewer as well as the interviewer's personal feelings about the interview and the participant. Each interview was transcribed as soon after conducting the interview as possible, including in the transcription the interviewer's words and responses, false starts, hesitations, pauses, laughing, crying, whispering and overlapping of responses.

The analytic process involved a discursive reading of the entire interview text exploring how the men's language shores up or tears down certain ways of doing and being (Gee, 1999). Discourses and interpretive repertoires were explored along with how they reinforced or subjugated particular subject positions. Much of the literature on men's same-sex relationships (sibling relationships and friendships) points to a male deficit model of intimacy (e.g. Bank and Hansford, 2000; Wood, 1999), so we were interested in whether the cultural ideal or dominant discourse of men as tough, aggressive and unemotional meant that particular men might find it difficult to construct an intimate relationship with their brothers. However, we also explored how men might resist

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or negate this cultural ideal by constructing a fraternal relationship that undermines hegemonic masculinity.

While paying attention to this 'social' dimension of brothering, we also wanted to focus on the deeply personal nature of 'doing brother'. This involved identifying core narratives in the interview, selected for their emotionality or 'breaches' (Emerson and Frosh, 2004), and applying psychoanalytic interpretive strategies to 'thicken' the discursive reading of the text. These strategies included analysing the men's personal biographies, elicited in the course of the interview, and using psychoanalytic concepts (drawn especially from Mitchell's (2000, 2003) work on siblings) to explore ways in which early sibling and parental relationships might mediate their investments in certain discourses. A second strategy involved using the field notes to understand how the interview context influenced the participants' investments as well as exploring how the texture of the research relationship might increase the resonance of the analytic interpretations.

Throughout, we recognized that employing this psychoanalytic reading in the research required grounding interpretations not only in the research relationship, but also in textual moves. Therefore, the core narratives were retranscribed using Gee's (1991) poetic approach in pursuit of a fine-grained analysis of *how* the narrative is told. Gee argues that analysing the structure of a text is an important part of interpretation in that it points to a set of what he calls 'interpretive questions' while at the same time also constraining the answers that are given. He offers an analysis of the way a text is put together, the use of intonations, stresses and the rhythmic patterning of words, in an attempt to focus on the subjective and personal meaning making **[p. 119 ↓]** of the narrator and to resist ascriptivism, the tendency for interpreters to appropriate the narrator's meaning, making it into their own. Gee's poetic approach 'helps to privilege the teller's experience and assumptions "from the inside" of their own language-use' (Emerson and Frosh, 2004: 46).

Box 7.1 offers a brief outline of the methodological procedures involved in the research on brothers reported in this chapter, as one example of a psychoanalytic approach to qualitative research. The left-hand column outlines the steps that were taken to implement the method and the right hand column lists publications which provide either more detail about the procedure or apply the procedure to research data. It is important

to note, however, that research of this kind is a dynamic process and so, while the procedures are listed in chronological order, they nevertheless took place in a cyclical rather than linear manner. In particular, steps 6 and 7 of the list below overlapped considerably during the research process as we sought to root the psychoanalytic interpretation of narratives in the previous levels of analysis (particularly in the field notes and the 'poetic' reading or linguistic analysis of the text).

Box 7.1 Methodological Procedure

Procedure	References
1. Conduct biographical–narrative interviews.	See Hollway & Jefferson's (2000) free association narrative method and Kvale's (1999, 2003) psychoanalytic interview.
2. Write up field notes detailing observations of the participant's interactions with the interviewer as well as the interviewer's personal feelings about the interview and the participant.	See Riessman's (2003) performative approach to analysis. In addition, Hollway and Jefferson (2000), Stopford (2002) and Emerson and Frosh (2004) all use approaches that emphasize the centrality of the interviewer's/researcher's subjectivity and the co-construction of narrative.
3. Transcribe the interviews.	See Lapadat (2000) for a discussion of the complexities of transcribing interview text.
4. Discursive reading of the entire interview text.	There are many examples of discourse analysis; for this study we drew mainly on Gee's (1999) approach which shares concerns with Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discursive emphasis on different subject positions across different contexts. See also Frosh et al. (2003) for the application of a discursive reading using a psychoanalytic framework.

5. Identify core narratives in the interview selected for their emotionality or 'breaches'.	This is a sampling strategy used by Emerson and Frosh (2004).
6. Retranscribe the core narratives and conduct a fine grained 'poetic' reading of the text.	Gee (1991) describes his 'poetic' approach in detail. Emerson and Frosh (2004) recently applied Gee's linguistic method to narrative data in a study of young sexual offenders.
7. Apply psychoanalytic interpretive strategies to core narratives to 'thicken' the discursive reading of the text. These include analysing participants'personal biographies, applying psychoanalytic concepts to narrative material and analysing the research relationship drawing on the field notes.	See recent examples of the application of such interpretive strategies by Frosh and Emerson (2005), Gough (2004) and Hollway and Jefferson (2005).

[p. 120 ↓] In the next section we present discursive and psychoanalytic readings of one particular case, 'Tom', based on a 'core narrative' from his interview. Because of the focus of the chapter, we emphasize here the interpretive account rather than the linguistic analysis, even though this leaves exposed the difficulties involved in substantiating analytic claims.

Case Study: Tom[1]

Tom is a 40-year-old married man who is employed as a teacher. He is white, British and has one younger half-brother, Gareth, from whom he is estranged. Tom described their relationship as close when they were children, sharing common interests and fantasizing about living together when they grew up. However, throughout the interview Tom was keen to emphasize the differences between him and his brother. According to Tom, Gareth was rebellious as a child and was therefore sent away to boarding school during which time the brothers grew apart. As teenagers sharing a bedroom they would frequently fight, sometimes physically. The brothers currently have no contact and only

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hear about each other's lives through their mother. This has been the case for a number of years although, recently, the enmity between them increased due to a family conflict when Tom and Gareth took different sides and Gareth threatened to never speak to Tom again. Tom describes his brother as a '*big man*' with a '*big appetite*'. In comparison Tom describes himself as '*woolly*' and '*intellectual*' contrasting his occupation as a teacher with his brother's work in the defence force.

The following extract was selected as a core narrative for two main reasons. First, Tom's narrative is particularly hesitant with frequent narrative cues (such as laughter and false starts) that point to both meaning making within the interview and emotionality. Second, the interviewer's subjectivity and the interview context are both explicitly referred to and therefore serve as rich indicators for psychoanalytic interpretation. The narrative begins with the interviewer questioning Tom's thoughts about the possibility of his estranged relationship with his brother changing.

Core Narrative

Discursive Reading of Tom's Core Narrative

In the above extract, Tom constructs his brother as a 'macho male', drawing on notions of hegemonic masculinity such as physical prowess ('sporting' I.14) and a lack of emotionality ('shrug it off and get on with it sort of thing' II. 17–18). In contrast, Tom aligns himself with the intellectual and emotional world. First, Tom describes wanting a better relationship with his brother and clearly identifies talking as a means to repair this relationship. Prioritizing relationships and striving for better communication within relationships are activities associated with the 'new man'. Second, Tom claims that he is able to 'do' emotional talk with other men, such as his friends, reinforcing his 'new man' identity.

Nevertheless, throughout the core narrative Tom's identity position shifts and inconsistencies arise around whether or not he is comfortable doing emotional talk as a 'new man'. Initially, Tom acknowledges his lack of communicativeness and his feeling of embarrassment linked to expectations around 'real men' not being emotional (II. 8–

12), but then he disowns this macho way of 'doing man' suggesting that it is his brother who would find an emotional conversation difficult to cope with (II. 13–14). Further on in the narrative Tom states that he too would find it hard doing emotional talk with his brother (I. 20), although later this difficulty is again associated with his brother rather than himself as Tom suggests that talking to a friend would be easier (II. 42–43). Thus, on the one hand, as a 'new man' he constructs himself as comfortable with 'emotional talk' but on the other hand in his fraternal relationship there are indicators that holding onto this 'new man' position is difficult. How does Tom manage these contradictions in his narrative?

We argue that Tom constructs a coherent sense of self as a 'new man' by suggesting that it is not because he is 'macho' that he feels uncomfortable doing emotional talk with his brother but rather because he is '*over analysing*' and '*more emotional*' than other people and so feels self conscious. From this perspective, it is precisely because Tom is so identified with a 'new man' way of being that doing emotional talk is awkward. Constructing the narrative in this way enables Tom to hold onto a coherent self construction as a 'new man' while at the same time acknowledging his role in a fraternal relationship between 'real men' in which emotional talk is avoided. Tom's narrative is thus an account of the jostling of masculinities: he asserts his 'new man' identity as a way of positioning himself as 'liberated' in the interview context but at the same time acknowledges the vulnerability and ultimately the subjugation of this 'new man' identity in favour **[p. 122 ↓]** of being a 'real man' in the fraternal relationship. In Tom's case, the power of the masculine ideal, as unemotional and 'macho', polices the available subject positions in his fraternal relationship, seemingly diminishing the possibility of renewing the brother bond.

Psychoanalytic Reading of Tom's Core Narrative

As noted earlier, one weakness of much narrative data in the context of psychoanalysis is the relative thinness of biographical information. In Tom's case, however, the interview generated a considerable amount of biographical material that can be brought to bear on developing a plausible psychoanalytic formulation of his investment in the

presentation of his difference from his brother. We claim that applying psychoanalytic interpretation to these biographical details 'thickens' our understanding of Tom's narrative and that it is possible to root this sufficiently strongly in the text to offset the danger of a completely top-down, theoretically driven account in which what is found is already known from the theory itself. Psychoanalytic thinking is being used here as a provocation to explore the possible sources of investment in the discursive positions described.

The psychoanalytic formulation runs as follows. Tom's mother suffered two major losses immediately before and after he was born. Her first child (a daughter) died before Tom was born and her husband (Tom's father) died when Tom was eight months old. These losses in quick succession are likely to have left Tom's mother emotionally fragile. She remarried shortly after her first husband's death; hence the fact that Gareth is Tom's half-brother. However, Gareth's father left their mother when they were young and she remarried another three times. Her inability to have a lasting relationship as well as her inability to be alone point to possible issues of attachment and loss not uncommon in complicated bereavement. It is possible that these relationship difficulties also played themselves out in Tom's early relationship with his mother. In these circumstances of loss, how might the parent–child and sibling relationships have interacted to construct a particular fraternal bond for Tom and Gareth?

For Mitchell (2000), the sibling uniquely represents what is both the same as and different from ourselves. The sameness allows for identification with siblings: the sibling is loved as oneself, as one has been loved and wants to be loved. However, the difference between ourselves and another means an inevitable abandonment of this identification: the sibling is also 'another baby (that) replaces the baby one was until this moment' (Mitchell, 2000: 20). It is precisely the sameness (another baby) that emphasizes the displacement, a loss of position or place. The plaintive cry is, 'where do I stand now that my place has gone?' This displacement is experienced as annihilating, as a danger of non-existence. What Mitchell terms 'the law of the mother' is what emphasizes difference over sameness. The law of the mother refers to the mother's injunction that as children siblings are the same, they cannot have babies like adults can; but as siblings they are also different and there is space for one, two, three or more. One way of negotiating the resultant hatred of sameness is through emphasizing difference – 'I hate you, you are not me' (Mitchell, 2003: 27).
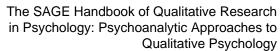
Applying Mitchell's theory, one could posit that Tom's experience of displacement at the arrival of his brother meant that as a way of protecting his place, he constructed himself as different from his brother. This may have been a particularly emotive investment for Tom given the emotional climate of loss, which may have made his fear of losing his mother especially pressing. As the brothers grew older, the need to be different from one another may have been further exacerbated by their mother's romantic relationships and the way the brothers had to compete with each other for their mother's attention (something Tom refers to). Tom's investment in a 'new man' discourse and his construction of his brother as quite the opposite may be interpreted as a means to protect them both from competitiveness as well as to maintain a place of his own in the family. **[p. 123 ↓]** But why then is Tom so ambivalent about this position? Following Mitchell (2003), one could posit that Gareth's birth prompted Tom to regress and return to his mother to seek the symbiotic relationship he always yearned for in infancy. In so doing he confronted an oedipal scenario in which he found not his father, but *another man* in his place, who was continually replaced by one man after another. In the interview, Tom expresses resentment of his mother's multiple marriages, claiming that as a child he never felt that he got much attention from her as she was always preoccupied with her marital relationships. Tom's jealousy of the other men in his mother's life and his wish to have her attention as they did suggests that he may have envied the traditionally masculine positions they represented. However, despite its allure he could also never completely identify with the hegemonic subject position represented by these father-figures. To do so would mean that like his father he is another man and like his brother he is another baby, both likely to be replaced. Hence Tom's investment in difference – he is a different man and another baby – thereby securing his position.

Earlier, we warned against too cavalier uses of psychoanalytic theory offered as a pre-existing grid to force a certain kind of sense into recalcitrant or fragmentary material. This is clearly a risk in the reading we have just given, dependent as it is on a particular theoretical framing of the sibling relationship. For this reason, we seek also a stronger textual grounding for our claims; for the purposes of this account, this is focused particularly on the working out of the research relationship. Our suggestion here is that Tom constructs a special place for himself within the research relationship by populating the narrative space with men against whom he can assert his difference.

First, Tom correctly identifies the interviewer as South African and assumes from this that she is familiar with the 'macho male', the sort of man that his brother is. Evoking the interviewer's background means that Tom is positioned as different from not only his brother but from other men with whom the interviewer has interacted in her past. Tom also frequently asserted his difference from the other participants in the study, displaying great interest in how his story compared to those of other men that had been interviewed and asking twice whether he was 'normal' in the way he had spoken about his brother. Tom's narrative also asserts his difference as a participant in that he imagines other brothers to be '*more matey'*.

One of the interviewer's field notes offers an interesting sidelight on how Tom's sense of being different was felt in the research interchange. LSY wrote, '*Many of the questions were constructed with a positive sibling relationship in mind and were not appropriate for this interview where a negative relationship was being described*'. With hindsight, this observation is strange as there are other interviews that upon analysis we considered to be more difficult and unusual case studies than Tom's. Yet the notes suggest that Tom's interview required special handling, perhaps revealing that his supposed difference and uniqueness, so important to his narrative, were played out in, or projected into, the research relationship. Tom as a participant creates a unique place for himself in the research mirroring his employment of difference in his fraternal relationships as a means of avoiding or denying displacement.

There are other ways in which the interview interaction mirrors the dilemma that Tom may have faced in his childhood. In the beginning of the core narrative Tom is the 'new man' who desires a closer relationship with his brother through a cathartic conversation. Significantly, this narrative echoes the reasons Tom gave for volunteering to be interviewed for this study: he wanted to have the opportunity to express his feelings and thoughts to somebody neutral in the hope that associations and epiphanies might follow. However, as the conversation continues so Tom's 'new man' performance seems to crumble. His narrative becomes more fragmentary, punctuated with long pauses, false starts and with more frequent interruptions by the interviewer. Tom begins to describe difficulties with doing emotional talk as a **[p. 124 ↓]** man, and as he does so he also performs his difficulties with talk in the interview.

Perhaps what happens here is that having identified the interviewer as South African, and therefore familiar with the 'macho male', Tom's expectations of the interview context shift from being one in which 'new men' are valued. Instead, the context is an interview with a female whose national discourse is one of hegemonic masculinity and yet who is requesting him to open up the conversation in an emotional way. It is almost as if Tom begins to experience the interview and interviewer as emasculating. The field notes draw attention to the interviewer's impressions of a certain irritation or hostility from Tom: '*As an interviewer I felt criticized for the type of questions I asked*'. This research interaction could be interpreted as a mirroring of Tom's relational experiences. The interview felt populated not just by Tom's brother Gareth, but also by South African men and previous research participants, all of whom Tom seemed to compete with by asserting himself as different. However, he also positioned the interviewer as aligned with these other men, by assuming that she was familiar with 'macho males'. Significantly, Tom expressed disappointment at the end of the interview, claiming that it had not met up to his expectations of catharsis. Like his mother in the oedipal relationship, the interviewer fails Tom by emasculating him and associating herself with hegemonic masculinity. Importantly though, she also treats Tom as unique and different enabling him to hold onto his place by asserting his difference from other men, by becoming a special case.

Conclusions

In the beginning of this chapter we discussed the possibility of 'binocular' accounts in research, which are both grounded in data and theoretically driven, accounts which are cognisant of systemic processes as well as individual perspectives. The above case study demonstrates both the rewards and challenges of such 'binocularity'. Applying psychoanalytic ideas to Tom's narrative 'thickens' the discursive reading by taking account of his life context and biography and exploring how his unique life trajectory 'hooks into' particular social discourses. Doing so points to the interweaving of the social and psychological in 'doing brother', conceptualizing men as taking up socially available discourses in ways that resonate with the deeply personal. Taking account of biographical material moves the interpretive work forward by making sense, however tentatively, of the ambiguities and contradictions highlighted in the discursive

reading. However, this piece of research is not analogous with 'psychoanalysing' Tom. Rather, it is the research relationship and the narrative produced within this research relationship that is under scrutiny. Therefore, throughout our analysis we attempt to anchor psychoanalytic ideas in the texture of the research relationship and a close reading of the text, processes that require commitment to reflexivity and systematic narrative analysis respectively.

There are limits to accessing relational dynamics and unconscious processes in a research context, however fine-grained the analysis. While the interview can elicit actual events in a participant's past, the research context does not afford the luxury of evoking their unconscious correlates over an extended period of time (as in therapeutic situations). Instead, we have to look for patterns in participants' linguistic repertoires and in their way of relating that resonate with our hypotheses. The use of field notes in analysing the above case study enabled 'counter-transference' feelings to enrich the analytic interpretation by demanding coherence between the analytic account and the experience of the interview that produced the text. Particular aspects of the researcher's experience of the interview moved the analysis forward while others closed it down. Nevertheless, these field notes are prone to all the linguistic manoeuvres of a self-analysis, and thinking about ways in which this material could be more systematically recorded and sensitively utilized is an important task **[p. 125 ↓]** for psychoanalytic approaches to qualitative research.

In summary, using psychoanalysis in qualitative studies involves conceptualizing individuals as embedded in social and cultural contexts with socially acceptable and powerful ways of being, but also as individually orientated to these contexts, uniquely invested in discourses in different ways influenced by conscious and unconscious wishes. Such an approach requires thinking about narratives as dynamic processes mediated by, but not reducible to, personal biographies, relational events, linguistic repertoires and subjective experiences.

Notes

1 Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the anonymity of the participant.

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