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### **Discursive Social Psychology**

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### **Abstract and Keywords**

This chapter introduces basic features of discursive social psychology using discursive analyses of family mealtime interaction. It puts discursive social psychology in historical context and distinguishes three overlapping, strands of work: (a) the use of open-ended interviews to identify interpretative repertoires, (b) the focus on naturalist data to consider how versions of social life are constructed to support actions, and (c) the use of methods and findings from conversation analysis to reveal the sequential and interactionally embedded organization of social psychological phenomena. It overviews its basic theoretical principles: that discourse is (a) oriented to action; (b) situated sequentially, institutionally and rhetorically; and (c) constructed and constructive. Its systematically noncognitivist approach to human conduct is explained and justified. The chapter overviews research design, data collection and management, transcription, analysis and validation and shows how these work together to build a systematic alternative of social psychology. Future directions for discursive social psychology are also considered.

**Keywords:** Discursive psychology, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, transcription, sequence organization, action formation, qualitative methods, natural data

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The following fragment comes from the very beginning of a UK family breakfast. Mum has started the video and placed Katherine, who is 5, where she will face the camera and be able to see Mum getting breakfast through the kitchen door. Katherine is not happy!

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- 01 Kath: I [↑don't want↑ [ <to wat ]ch #you>
- 02 Mum: [Katherine:, [Katherine:, ]
- 03 Mum: Katherine if you carry o[:n:, ]
- 04 Kath: [(At) w]or:k[:h
- 05 Mum: [Whingeing
- 06 an whining?
- 07 (0.3)
- 08 Mum: Had enough of i:t,
- 09 (0.5)
- 10 Mum: 'S is your warning now.=if you ↑carryon↑
- 11 ↑whingeing and whining,=during breakfas'
- 12 time I'll send you to the bottom step.

(p. 296) Discursive social psychologists work primarily with material of this kind; that is, with interaction between people happening naturally in the settings where they live their lives. It is not staged by the researcher in an experiment or vignette; it is life as it happens. The recording is done on digital video, which allows researchers to capture different features of talk, such as prosody, as well as embodied elements of the interaction, such as who is sitting where. Crucially, the video allows the interaction to be captured not just as a crystalized whole, as it appears in the transcript, but as something unfolding with precise and relevant timing. This unfolding is not just there for the researcher to examine; it is central to the intelligibility of this interaction for the participants themselves.

A recording of this kind and its associated transcript allows the researcher potent access to psychological and social psychological matters. For example, Katherine's complaint about her table position in lines 1 and 4 is delivered using a high-pitched, creaky voice and stretching of the word "work" (more on transcription below). It displays upset and perhaps pleading. In overlap with this, Mum in lines 2 and 3 uses Katherine's name as a "summons." Deliberate overlap of this kind is relatively unusual in interaction. Here Mum displays a specific disattention to the substance of Katherine's complaint.

Mum now issues a threat. As Hepburn and Potter (2011) have noted, threats are profoundly social psychological in nature—they are a form of pumped up social influence—yet they have been little studied. Mostly, they have appeared in research as variables in relation to cognitive dissonance or power. But what makes something a threat and how it

operates has escaped social psychological study. In their study, Hepburn and Potter note that threats are often constructed with an if-then grammar, and this is what we see in lines 10 to 12: =if you ↑ carry on↑ ↑ whingeing and whining, =during breakfas' time I'll send you to the bottom step. This has an "if-then" structure that formulates both the action that is a problem (whinging and whining) and the negative upshot that will follow (being sent to the bottom step). The latter is produced as contingent on the former.

These materials allow us to consider how the interaction unfolds and each element of the interaction is relevant to what came before and what came after. This involves an understanding of the role of different lexical items and grammatical organizations. For example, note Mum's "if you carry on:, whingeing an whining?" on lines 3, 5, and 6. Grammatically, this tells us, and Katherine as an already competent speaker, that more is to come. But rather than immediately delivering what is grammatically due, Mum delays its progress to formulate what her own state now is "had enough of i:t," (not willing to take any more from Katherine) and to gloss what her (still impending) action will be: "S is your warning now." She holds up the action, therefore, to underline the seriousness with which she should be taken and to characterize its nature. Conversation analytic work emphasizes that "progressivity" is generally an important feature of interaction, so we are likely to find something analytically interesting where that progressivity is held up (Schegloff, 2007).

Note also Mum's use of the term "warning." Although what she goes on to issue takes the standard form of a threat, building it as a warning can soften her role in delivering the noxious upshot of having to sit on the bottom step. Threats are rarely issued as explicit speech acts; they tend to appear in the form of attributions: "are you threatening me"? Discursive psychology builds on the basic Wittgenstein (1953) insight that mental and psychological terms have a fundamentally practical role.

Note that by the end of line 12 Mum has fully issued the threat. At this point, Mum's action makes relevant a range of specific next actions from Katherine. Most appropriate, at least from Mum's perspective, will be compliance. And Katherine does cease making complaints about her seating position, at least to start with. However, threats as a pumped up attempt at social influence set up the possibility of a pumped up response, defiance. More precisely, they generate a slot in the interaction in which Katherine can do things that will count as defiant; Hepburn and Potter (2011) identify examples of this kind. This makes the issuing of threats both a powerful and a risky interactional maneuver. However, with actions such as threats and directives, there are further options. For example, Katherine could have shown what Kent has called *incipient compliance* by giving some indication that compliance is forthcoming, and yet it has not actually been offered yet (for more details, see Craven & Potter, 2010; Kent, 2012a; Hepburn & Potter, 2011).

Let us note one final feature of this extract to illustrate another strand of discursive psychological work. Mum glosses Katherine's complaint as "whinging and whining." As Edwards (2005a) has emphasized, complaints are "object-side" descriptions; they focus

on states of affairs that are unsatisfactory—these shoes have come apart, I have been (p. 297) given the wrong chair at breakfast. And they focus on remediation—the shoes should be replaced, the seating plan should be changed. However, they are open to formulation in ways that focus not on the states of affairs but on the complainer. Such formulations are “subject-side” descriptions because they focus on the subjectivity of the complainer rather than the object. This is precisely what Mum does with Katherine’s complaint—she treats it as about Katherine rather than the problem seating and thereby dismisses it.

We can see in these concrete, readily researched materials then some of the big issues of social relations played out. We can see a practical demonstration of how social influence and resistance go together, and we can see how objectivity and subjectivity become live, rhetorically opposed possibilities. These are some of the basic concerns of discursive psychology. Analytically, we see how we need to pay attention to the way actions are built and responded to within particular sequential positions, the role of different lexical items, the inflection and prosody of delivery, and the role of gesture and embodied action. We now develop some of these themes more systematically.

This chapter introduces and overviews a discursive approach to social psychological matters. We refer to this as *discursive social psychology* (DSP). Because discursive psychology is a fundamentally social approach, we occasionally use the terms *discursive psychology* and *discursive social psychology* interchangeably. Discursive social psychology begins with social psychological matters as they arise practically and within the settings in which people are living their lives. Its focus is on how psychological issues and objects are constructed, understood, and displayed as people interact in mundane and institutional situations. Discursive social psychology looks at the ways in which psychology is important in conversations between people. This style of research starts with video or audio recordings of people talking, in either everyday settings (family mealtimes or everyday phone calls) or in professional settings in which the focus is on medical, legal, therapeutic or other matters. It works directly with those materials rather than giving people questionnaires, interviewing them, or putting them through experimental manipulations. Discursive social psychology focuses on how psychological issues such as motivation, intention or distress are revealed by speakers in interaction. For example, in a child protection help line, the call taker may need to identify callers’ distress from what they say and tiny tremors in their voice, and the call taker may need to say just the right thing to be soothing but not encroach on the caller’s experience. Discursive psychology focuses on how people do that and how they use basic resources that all of us use when talking to one another to be successful. This close focus on what goes on in its natural setting makes DSP a particularly powerful approach for having practical impact and helping professionals of all kinds do a better job. It focuses on questions such as:

- How is upset displayed, recognized, and received in mundane and institutional settings (Hepburn & Potter, 2012)?

- How do narratives in sex offender therapy sessions manage issues of blame, and how can this be misidentified as a “cognitive distortion” (Auburn, 2005)?
- How do “why formatted” interrogatives work as elements in complaints (Bolden & Robinson, 2011)?
- How does one of the parties in a relationship counseling session build a description of troubles that indirectly blames the other party and places the onus on him or her to change (Edwards, 1997)?
- How does a speaker show that he or she is not prejudiced while developing a damning version of an entire ethnic group (Wetherell & Potter, 1992)?

Questions of this kind involve a focus on matters that are social and psychological for people as they act and interact in particular settings—in families, in workplaces, in schools and so on. They may not all have appeared as chapter headings in the conventional textbooks of social psychology, but they are about the way people coordinate their activities and modify the behavior of one another. Instead of starting with inner mental or cognitive processes happening below and behind interaction, it starts with the public displays, constructions and orientations that participants use with one another. These, we suggest, are basic topics for a systematic and empirical social psychology to address.

## History and Development of Discursive Social Psychology

Charting the historical development of an intellectual field can be tricky and controversial because, as Potter (2010, p. 659) noted, such histories “tend to mix what philosophers of science distinguish as the ‘context of discovery’ (the contingent, ad hoc ways in which a scientific field developed) from the ‘context of justification’ (the sorts of logically (p. 298) organised arguments that are used to justify the place the scientific field has arrived at).” Edwards (2005*b*), Wetherell (2007), and Wooffitt (2005), for example, have all offered rather different accounts of the development of a broader discursive psychology.

Discursive social psychology has a complex theoretical lineage that has selectively developed strands of thinking from discourse analysis, rhetoric, sociology of science, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and post-structuralism (Potter & Edwards, 2001). It is part of the broad and heterogeneous field of discourse analysis. Work in this area has drawn on post-structuralist ideas, such as those from the Foucaultian tradition of Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine (1984), or on broader post-structuralist thinking from Barthes, Derrida and others (e.g., Potter, Stringer & Wetherell, 1984). Of particular significance has been the work of Wittgenstein and linguistic philosophy (see Potter, 2001), as well as the subsequent philosophical respecification of psychology developed by Harré (Harré & Gillett, 1994). Wetherell (2007) adds that discursive psychology in particular was boosted by the social constructionist movement in social psychology (Gergen, 1985; Shotter, 1993) and feminist psychology (Wilkinson &

Kitzinger, 1995). Finally, the sociology of scientific knowledge and the distinctive program of discourse analytic work on science conducted by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) and the early studies in conversation analysis (e.g., Drew & Atkinson, 1979; Levinson, 1983) all helped to shape the contemporary nature of DSP. What unites all of these disparate strands of research is an emphasis on the (a) careful empirical study of discourse, (b) ways in which discourse is oriented to action, and (c) the way representations are built to support actions.

The present form of DSP emerged most clearly out of the form of discourse analysis outlined in Potter and Wetherell's (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology*. Taking the publication of that influential book as our starting point, we will sketch out the three main strands of work that over the past 20 years have shaped the field of contemporary discursive social psychology. This is not a complete picture of the development of the field but should illuminate some of the key issues that discourse research has engaged with.

### Strand 1: Interviews and Repertoires

Starting in the mid-1980s, the major focus of discourse analytic work in psychology was on identifying the different *interpretative repertoires* that are used to build social action (most notably, Potter & Wetherell, 1987). An interpretative repertoire is a cluster of terms, categories, and idioms that are closely conceptually organized. Repertoires are typically assembled around a metaphor or vivid image. In most cases, interpretative repertoires are identified by analyzing a set of open-ended interviews in which participants address a set of different themes.

The repertoire notion is derived from Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) pioneering study of the different repertoires that scientists use to construct their social world when they are writing research papers and arguing with one another. It was further developed in Wetherell and Potter (1992) in a major study of the way *Pākehā* (white) New Zealanders constructed versions of social conflict and social organizations to legitimate particular versions of relations between groups. Much of the interest was in ideological questions of how the organization of accounts and the resources used in those accounts could be used to understand the reproduction of broad patterns of inequality and privilege. Put simply, how did white Europeans undermine Maori land claims and other grievances without appearing self-interested or racist?

This strand of work was closely allied to and influenced by Billig's (1996) rhetorical psychology and incorporated the central notion of ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988), which itself builds on the notion of interpretative repertoires from Potter and Wetherell (1987). For example, Billig (1992) found in talk about the British royal family a web of arguments and assumptions that work to sustain the familiar social hierarchies and avoid questioning privilege.

The notion of interpretative repertoires has been drawn on by many studies from across the social sciences. It offered a picture of complex, historically developed organizations of ideas that could be identified through research and yet were flexible enough to be

reworked within the contingencies of different concrete settings. This theorizing of the flexible requirements of practice offers some advantages over some neo-Foucaultian notions of discourse that are more brittle and tectonic (Parker, 1992). Nevertheless, Wooffitt (2005) has suggested that the notion still fails to fully accommodate the complexity of human conduct, and there are major questions as to whether the structuring of repertoires is a consequence of preformed conceptual organizations or a by-product of the pragmatic organization of practices (see Potter, 1996). Furthermore, the original repertoire (p. 299) notion required a series of procedures and criteria for the reliable identification of repertoires. Yet, many current studies offer only the vaguest idea of how the repertoires are identified and how they relate to a corpus of data (Potter, 2009). There are important points of principle here, illustrated in the influential exchange between Schegloff (1997) and Wetherell (1998).

This type of work was largely based on the analysis of open-ended interviews, or group discussions, which provided the ideal environment for generating the kinds of ideological themes or interpretative repertoires that were a key topic of study. This has been a continuing and productive theme in discourse research on such topics as gender and nationalism (for many examples from social psychology, see Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Rapley, 1999; Condor, 2006; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). This work has been particularly effective in tackling ideological questions that are not easily addressed by more mainstream social cognition perspectives (Augoustinos, Walker, & Donaghue, 2006).

### **Strand 2: Naturalistic Data and Discursive Constructionism**

A key area of difference between Potter and Wetherell's (1987) conception of discourse analysis and the body of work later to be identified as discursive psychology or DSP concerns the place of open-ended interviews in the generation of analytic materials. Much of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discussion, and the majority of the very large body of subsequent studies using interpretative repertoires that this work spawned, have used open-ended interviews. In contrast, DSP in its modern form has almost completely abandoned open-ended interviews as a technique for generating appropriate analytic materials. This was partly due to profound problems with the production and analysis of open-ended interviews (Potter & Hepburn, 2005, 2012).

In the early 1990s, a new strand of research emerged that worked with records of naturalistic interactions such as conversations, newspaper reports, parliamentary debates, news interviews, radio call-ins, and courtroom arguments. This body of work began to look critically at how speakers could use descriptions of the world and psychological states to perform specific actions within the interaction. One of the central themes developed in discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992) was the close inferential relationship between versions of "reality" (things in "the world," actions, events, history and so on) and "mind" (things "in the head," attitudes, dispositions, feelings, expectations and so on). People construct versions of both in their talk and their texts, and they do so in the service of action. For discursive psychology, this pervasive

practical reasoning is an important topic of study; it offers a new way of doing social psychology—hence DSP.

Whereas the earlier strand of work was, and often still is, referred to as discourse analysis, this strand of work was the first to explicitly call itself discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992, 1993). This type of discursive psychology centered on respecifying traditional psychological notions in relation to the function they perform in discourse (Potter, 2009). Instead of trying to get at the internal states of participants, discursive psychologists look at how participants draw on notions of psychological phenomena such as emotion to accomplish an interactional goal. It engaged with major topics in traditional social psychology but also generated major themes of its own.

Take Edwards's (1995, 1997) analysis of "Connie and Jimmy" as an example. Within their ostensibly factual descriptions of events during a counseling session, Connie and Jimmy depict each other as "endemically jealous" and "flirtatious," respectively (Edwards & Potter, 2005, p. 245). By constructing each other as jealous or flirtatious, the speakers simultaneously both provide conceptual support for their own account and discredit alternative understandings. If Jimmy is always jealous, then he is overreacting to Connie's behavior; or, if Connie is being provocative toward other men, then Jimmy is justified in being unhappy with her behavior (Edwards, 1995). The example allows us to understand how Connie uses a psychological concept like "jealousy" not necessarily because that is how it "really" happened (that is not of relevance here), but because it is *interactionally* useful for her to employ that concept at that time to support her argument.

As it developed, DSP moved to a more explicit style of discursive constructionism focused on texts and talk, with different analytic and epistemic consequences to the cognitive form of constructionism found in Berger and Luckmann (1966) and other forms of social construction (see Potter, 1996; Potter & Hepburn, 2008). The continuing momentum of this work comes from its critical engagement with mainstream cognitive and social cognitive psychological work, shown in particular through studies that respecify core notions such (p. 300) as memory, scripts, emotion, attribution, and perception in interactional terms (Edwards, 1997; Hepburn, 2004; Stokoe & Hepburn, 2005).

### Strand 3: Sequential Analysis

From the mid-1990s onward, discursive psychology began to draw more extensively on the analytic principles of conversation analysis (see Schegloff, 2007; and papers in Sidnell & Stivers, 2012). The sequential focus of conversation analysis provided valuable methodological rigor to discursive psychology and offered a framework for a more nuanced and precise understanding of the situated nature of discursive practices. For example, conversation analysis offers a way of approaching topics that psychologists would typically characterize in terms of a construct such as "attitude" in terms of situated practices of evaluation or assessment. Here, evaluations are structured events in talk; they are sequentially organized within turn-taking and are the products of rather than the precursors to an interaction. The work of Pomerantz (1978, 1984, 1986) has been



particularly insightful in this area. For instance, assessments and subsequent (or second) assessments are structured so as to minimize stated disagreement and maximize stated agreement between speakers (Pomerantz, 1984). When expressing an assessment, one is therefore performing an action, such as praising, insulting, complaining and so on. This action is itself structured through the sequential organization of the talk. Research on evaluations in discursive psychology reflects this emphasis, bringing to the fore the action orientation and sequential organization of evaluative expressions, such as the use of different types of food evaluation to justify or account for particular courses of action (Potter, 1998; Wiggins & Potter, 2003).

Discursive psychology has increasingly exploited the sophisticated understanding of sequence, position, and turn design provided by conversation analysis. Indeed, there has been a convergence of issues in both conversation analysis and DSP because both focus on concerns with how shared knowledge is displayed and how intersubjectivity is established or contested (compare Edwards, 1999; Heritage & Raymond, 2005). This has become the fast developing field of *mundane epistemics* (Potter & Hepburn, 2008).

The convergence between discursive psychology and conversation analysis has been highly productive and, in recent years, has produced a high volume of fine-grained, nuanced work looking at how various psychological topics are produced through discourse. For example, there has been an evolving concern with how categories are conversationally and sequentially occasioned (compare Antaki, 1998; Edwards, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1987, chapter 6; Stokoe, 2009; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). This strand of DSP is still engaged in a debate with cognitivism and its problems in different arenas (e.g., Antaki, 2004; chapters in te Molder & Potter, 2005). However, DSP has started to address new topics. There is a major interest in taking the administration of psychological methods as a topic in its own right, studying how particular interactional practices in experiments, surveys, focus groups, and so on contribute to the methodical production of psychological findings (e.g., Antaki, Houtkoop-Steenstra & Rapley, 2000; Maynard, Houtkoop-Steenstra, Schaeffer & van der Zouwen, 2002; Puchta & Potter, 2002). There is also a growing concern with considering how psychological matters become parts of institutional practices such as therapy (Peräkylä, Antaki, Vehviläinen & Leudar, 2008), counseling (Kurri & Wahlström, 2001), mediation (Stokoe & Edwards, 2009), gender reassignment assessments (Speer & Parsons, 2006), peer evaluation (Cromdal, Tholander, & Aronsson, 2007), and others.

## Theoretical Principles of Discursive Social Psychology

The previous section offered a necessarily selective and brief history of three of the significant branches in the history and development of DSP out of discourse analysis. It is important to stress that discourse research is a broad church and houses numerous different approaches to research (see Tannen, Schiffrin & Hamilton [2001], Wood & Kroger [2000], Edwards [2005b], and Wooffitt [2005], for longer treatments of the field

from various perspectives). It is equally important to acknowledge the conversation between DSP and mainstream psychology. The fundamental project of discursive social psychology involves a radical approach to and reevaluation of traditional topics of psychological enquiry.

Discursive social psychology is the application of ideas from discourse analysis to central topics in social psychology. It is not a social psychology of language. Instead, it is an approach to psychology that takes the action-orientated and reality-constructing features of discourse as fundamental. Whereas the dominant social cognition paradigm gives a story of behavior produced on the basis of information processing done on perceptual input (see Augoustinos (p. 301) et al., 2006; Fiske & Taylor, 2008), DSP's narrative revolves around activities done through discourse as parts of situated practices (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Whereas theory and method in social cognition presume an out-there reality that provides input to cognitive operations, DSP focuses on the way both "reality" and "mind" are constructed by people conceptually, in language, in the course of their execution of various practical tasks (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996; Potter, Edwards, & Wetherell, 1993).

For theoretical, methodological and empirical reasons, discursive psychology takes discourse to be central to social life. For example, most social activity involves or is directly conducted through discourse. Furthermore, even where activity is "nonverbal" (embodiment, physical actions, and their settings, etc.), its sense is often best understood through participants' discourse. Trying to short circuit this way to understanding nonverbal materials is often a recipe for imposing the analysts own categories on what is going on. Discourse is the prime currency of interaction, and if we are studying persons embedded in practices, then discourse will be central to that study. Discursive social psychology builds from three core observations about the nature of discourse (see Potter, 2003; Potter & Edwards, 2001). These form the theoretical principles that underpin its research.

### **Principle 1: Discourse Is Action Oriented**

Talk is action: our words do things. The idea of talk-as-action can be understood in a very literal sense, as with conventional "speech acts." For example, in the sentence "I now pronounce you man and wife," the words themselves perform actual action; in this case, the legal act of marrying two people (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). However, all discourse has functions (e.g., greeting, requesting, explaining, complaining), so talk can be studied in terms of what speakers are doing with their words rather than what their words reveal about putative inner thoughts. Discursive social psychology uses the notion of action-orientation to emphasize that actions are pervasively being done even in ostensibly factual, descriptive discourse, and to distance itself from a "speech act" approach that assumes that some discrete set of words corresponds to a discrete act.

The key point is that discourse is studied for how action is done rather than treated as a medium for access to a speaker's internal mental furniture (e.g., intentions, preferences,

beliefs). This is a very different starting point from that of cognitive (and some social) psychology. Holding discourse as the topic of study rather than just a route into the speaker's mind, the study of social interaction becomes an exploration into how events or ideas come to be; whether that be how a group of friends successfully arrange to meet up, or how the British and American governments worked to present a legitimate case for war in Iraq following the 9/11 attacks.

The corollary of discursive psychology's focus on discourse is its respecification of cognition. Instead of cognitive entities and processes being the principal analytic resource, as they are in social cognition research, they are approached empirically as participants' ways of talking. The focus is on the way cognitions are constructed in talk and how their implications are oriented to. For example, rather than treating attitudes as inner entities that drive behavior, for discursive psychologists, attitudes are evaluations that are studied as part of discourse practices (Potter, 1998). Such an approach might consider the way evaluations are organized interactionally, as in Pomerantz's (1978) study of compliments; it might consider how attitudes are interactionally produced through social psychological methods (Myers, 1998; Puchta & Potter, 2002); or it might consider the way negative evaluations of minority group members are turned from potentially accountable, personally held attitudes into more "safely sayable" factual descriptions (e.g., Edwards, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

### Principle 2: Discourse Is Situated

Central to DSP is the idea that discourse is situated in three different but complementary ways. First, actions are situated *sequentially*. That is, they are situated within the here and now of unfolding conversation. They are located in time, orienting to what has just happened and building an environment for what happens next. For example, when an invitation is issued, this sets up an ordered array of possible next actions, of which accepting or turning down are most relevant. It is not possible to simply ignore the invitation without this being, potentially, hearable as the action of ignoring the invitation. Moreover, when the recipient accepts or rejects an invitation, the recipient is locally displaying an understanding that that is precisely what has been issued, so the turn-by-turn unfolding of talk provides an ongoing check on understanding (Schegloff, 1992). The explication of this order of (p. 302) interaction has been the central project of conversation analysis and has highlighted an extraordinary level of specificity and organization (Schegloff, 2007).

Second, action is situated *institutionally*. Institutions often embody special identities that are pervasively relevant—news interviewer, therapist, patient—such that actions will be understood in relation to those identities. And they often involve collections of local interactional goals that all parties orient to (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Heritage & Clayman, 2010). These institutional goals are often themselves dependent on broader everyday practices that are refined for the institutional setting (compare Edwards [2008] on "intention" with Potter & Hepburn [2003] on "concern"). The specific analytic relevance

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here is how psychological matters are introduced, constructed and made relevant to the setting's business (Edwards & Potter, 2001).

Third, action is situated *rhetorically*. Billig (1996) has emphasized the pervasive relevance of rhetorical relations, even where there is an absence of explicit argument (e.g., he has explicated the rhetorical underpinning of "opinion" discourse—Billig, 1989; see also Myers, 2004). Discursive social psychology highlights, for example, the way descriptions are built to counter actual or potential alternatives and are organized in ways that manage actual or possible attempts to undermine them (Potter, 1996). A major theme in DSP is the way epistemic issues are managed using a wide range of conversational and rhetorical resources (Potter & Hepburn, 2008). This theme cuts right across the conventional social psychological topics of memory, attribution, attitudes and persuasion.

### Principle 3: Discourse Is Constructed and Constructive

Constructionism is a fundamental theme in DSP. There are two senses in which DSP is constructionist. First, it studies the ways discourse itself is constructed. It is assembled from a range of different resources with different degrees of structural organization. Most fundamentally, these are words and grammatical structures, but also broader elements such as categories, metaphors, idioms, rhetorical devices, descriptions, accounts, stories and so on that are drawn on and built, in the course of interaction and in the performance of particular actions. For example, how is a description manufactured in a way that presents something that has been done as orderly and unproblematic? People are extremely well practiced and skilled builders of descriptions; they have spent a lifetime learning how to do it. Part of the analytic work of DSP is to reveal the complex and delicate work that goes into this seemingly effortless building of discourse.

On the other hand, discourse is constructive in the sense that these assemblages of words, repertoires and so on put together and stabilize versions of the world, of actions and events, of mental life and furniture. For example, how does one party in a relationship counseling session construct a version that presents the breakdown of a long-term relationship as primarily the responsibility of the other party, who might be the one most in need of counseling and under most pressure to change (Edwards, 1995)? Similarly, take for example a criminal court case: the defence and the prosecution lawyers work with the same evidence presented to the jury but use it to build two different accounts of events, one that condemns the defendant and one that exonerates him or her. Thus, language is used to build different versions of reality. Through this understanding, we can see that speakers design their talk in order to accomplish specific goals in interaction.

### Defining Features

Discursive social psychology falls within the broad church of discourse analysis. However, unlike much of discourse analysis, which tended to situate itself within sociology or linguistics, DSP is not so much a branch of current social psychology as a discursive

reformulation of the central problematics of social psychology. In this section, we briefly describe two aspects that highlight what is distinctive about DSP.

### Discourse Produced as Psychological

One thing that distinguishes the conversation analytic-influenced strand of DSP from experimental work, on the one hand, and approaches based on qualitative interviews such as the “free association narrative method” or “interpretative phenomenological analysis” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008), on the other hand, is that it puts participants’ own orientations at the heart of its analysis. These are the live orientations that are practical parts of conduct unfolding in real time. This is a different order of phenomena to the post hoc constructions and formulations that appear in qualitative interviews.

The focus on orientations in real time in natural interaction makes “psychological” matters inescapable; such matters are a resource for participants as they coordinate their actions, respond to (p. 303) expressions of liking and dislike, or as they manage incipient actions such as invitations or requests. The world of discourse is psychologically imbued in precisely the way real life is imbued. The organization of discourse with its lexical items, prosody, categories, grammatical organizations, and plethora of different practices is highly normative. Moreover, it unfolds in real time, with an extraordinary granularity in which delays of less than a fifth of a second or minor changes in pitch contour can mark a “psychological state” (Drew, 2005; Heritage, 2005).

As Edwards summarizes it:

One of DP’s tasks is to do something that psychology has not already done in any systematic, empirical, and principled way, which is to examine how psychological concepts (memory, thought, emotion etc.) are shaped for the functions they serve, in and for the nexus of social practices in which we use language. (2012, p. 427)

Discursive social psychologists are focused on the way what counts as psychological is a central concern of participants. People can construct their own and other’s dispositions, assessments, and descriptions as subjective (psychological) or objective. For example, an assessment of a minority group can be couched in the language of attitudes (“I am generally positive about Polynesian Islanders”) or built as an objective feature of this social group using a range of descriptive procedures (Potter & Wetherell, 1988).

As we noted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, Edwards (2007) has distinguished subject-side from object-side descriptions and has highlighted the way producing discourse in either of these ways can be a central element in a range of practices. A person can be described as having a legitimate complaint about something in the world (an object-side description) or as moaning and whining (a subject-side description that highlights things wrong with the speaker rather than the world; Edwards, 2005a). “I love that cake” is subject-side; “that cake is lovely” is object-side (Wiggins & Potter, 2003). This is a member’s distinction that is regularly and methodologically deleted in the methods used by experimental social psychologists. One of the features of the normative

organization of interaction is that it provides a baseline calibration for marking out psychological investment.

Discursive psychology has a longstanding engagement with conversation analysis. One of the novel features of Potter and Wetherell's *Discourse and Social Psychology* more than 25 years ago was its use of the methods and findings of conversation analysis when reworking social psychological notions such as accounts, attitudes and social representations. In recent years, discursive psychological work has been able to draw on the increasing sophistication of work on repair, sequence organization and turn design as it pursues its engagement with social psychology.

Despite the increasing synergy between the two fields, a distinctive characteristic of DSP in its use of conversation analytic methods has been its focus on the role psychological ideas and concepts play in everyday life. For example, Childs (2012) examines how the mental state of "wanting" can be invoked in interaction. Through a fine-grained sequential analysis, guided by the analytic canons of conversation analysis, she demonstrates how formulations with the character "I don't X, I want Y" enable speaker to build "desires" in ways that are appropriate to sequentially unfolding social interaction. Specifically, she shows how they are able to "formulate an alternative sense of agency which undermines the preceding turn and shifts the trajectory of the ongoing sequence" (Childs, 2012, p. 181). Thus, instead of focusing on it as an inner (social) psychological state, wanting is shown to be systematically and practically deployed in a particular interactional sequential context in service to a specific interactional goal.

### Noncognitivist

A growing body of work within discursive psychology has revealed the active, constructive, and rhetorical use to which speakers can (and do) employ psychological concepts and objects. This work has reworked traditional topics such as causal attribution (Antaki, 1994; Edwards & Potter, 1992, 1993), prejudice (Edwards, 2003; Gill, 1993; Speer & Potter, 2000; Wetherell & Potter, 1992), identity (Antaki, 1998; Edwards, 1998; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995), scripts (Edwards, 1994, 1997), violence and aggression (Auburn, Lea & Drake, 1999; Hepburn, 2000; McKinlay & Dunnnett, 1998), social influence (Hepburn & Potter, 2010), and role play (Stokoe, 2011), and it has brought to the fore new topics such as the relation between interaction and institutions (Edwards, 1995; te Molder, 1999) and the construction and establishment of factual accounts (MacMillan & Edwards, 1999; Potter, 1996; Wooffitt, 1992). More recently, classical psychological problems (p. 304) of shared knowledge—who knows what and how is knowledge shared—have been tackled in subtle ways (see papers in Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig, 2011). Discursive psychologists study psychological matters in their home environment of live, unconstrained interaction, in which the parties have a genuine and practical stake in outcomes (Edwards, 2006a).

The majority of contemporary approaches to the study of human conduct treat it as ultimately dependent on putative individual entities such as beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge. Approaches as varied as social cognition (Fiske & Taylor, 2008) and

interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2008) have adopted some version of this cognitivism. Where they work with discourse, they look through it in an attempt to access the cognitive objects being described. Discursive psychologists start with discourse practices—that is, people interacting with one another, in mundane and institutional settings—and they bracket off issues of cognition. It is not that discursive psychologists do not consider thinking, cognition, mind or feelings, but this is not something they start with or see as the causal underpinning of social behavior. Rather these things become a major topic of analysis in terms of the orientations and constructions of participants.

By starting with discourse, discursive psychologists prioritize the epistemic over the ontological. Trying to read through participants' talk to unitary versions of events in the world or to singular mental events, structures, or processes draws analysis away from the business of talk and how the fashioning of versions is bound up with that business. The focus on talk as oriented to action binds discursive psychology with conversation analysis and some post-structuralist approaches (for more on this, see Hepburn [2003], Wetherell & Potter [1992] and Wooffitt [2005]). At the same time, that focus separates discursive psychology from approaches such as interpretative phenomenological analysis, social representations, and much of experimental social cognition. However, it is important to note that discursive psychology is not a program that suggests that social phenomena do not have objective reality (Hammersley, 2003); to deny such things would be as realistic a move as endorsing them (Edwards, Ashmore & Potter, 1995). Rather, discursive psychologists consider the role of "phenomena" in terms of the different descriptions, glosses, categories and orientations offered by social actors (Potter, 2003, 2009).

## Methodological and Analytic Principles

The theoretical principles outlined earlier are central to the project of discursive psychology and they are closely aligned with the methodological practices that have been developed. They support a research style that is a radical departure from the hypothetico-deductive method that dominates mainstream psychological and social psychological enquiry. Crucially, the focus on sequence and context has led to the development of a radically empirical approach to research, which is an alternative to the factors and variables multivariate model underlying much experimental work. In this section, we sketch out the key analytic and methodological principles of discursive psychology and show how they are shaped and governed by the theoretical principles on which this type of research is founded.

Discursive social psychology starts from the view that the careful and detailed analysis of materials is central to making claims and developing theory. An awareness of the philosophy and sociology of scientific knowledge leads discursive psychologists to being cautious about the separation of data, theory, and method (Chalmers, 1992; Woolgar, 1988). For discursive psychologists, data are central. Ironically, given the emphasis on science and empiricism in more orthodox cognitive social psychology, many of the

insights of DSP have come from its willingness to be open to careful records of actual people actually living their lives. Elsewhere we have noted the way the image of qualitative work as a preliminary stage to a full scientific social psychology is both a fiction in practice and way of avoiding taking seriously problems of description and analysis (Potter, 2012). How this engagement with records of interaction is accomplished will become clearer as we outline the methodological steps involved in discursive psychological research.

### Research Design

Discursive social psychology is interested in how people use discourse to do things (e.g., persuade, plan, explain, argue, make decisions, show emotion, display an attitudinal stance toward something, etc.) as well as the various normative resources that enable those things to be done. Therefore the essential ingredient in discursive research is the collection of interactional data. Research begins with some materials to focus on and an interest in what might be happening in the data. Discursive research does not start with hypotheses or use data to test them. Testing and validation is central to its analytic (p. 305) practice but conceived very differently from orthodox experimental or survey approaches.

Discursive social psychology treats social life, organized and produced through discourse, as normative and rhetorical. However, the organization of social discourse is not deterministic in the sense that variables can be manipulated to produce predictable outcomes. Discourse cannot be reduced down to the interplay of specific factors designed to produce a regular pattern of outcomes. The norms of social life do not work as templates that govern interaction. Instead, they are participant's resources for action and understanding, for making life accountable, describable and sanctionable (Garfinkel, 1967).

For example, greetings are typically responded to with a return greeting (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Nonetheless, failure to return a greeting is not an occasion to see the norm as somehow refuted. It is the basis for a potential range of inferences about the person and context; are they rude, hard of hearing, sulking or shy (Heritage, 1988)? Consequently, the factors and outcomes model that underpins much social cognition research is not suitable for this type of enquiry. Discursive social psychology projects are rarely productive if they start from predefined research questions, particularly because those questions are often implicitly formulated using the factors and variables assumptions of more orthodox work. That is not to say that it may not be useful to identify broad areas of interest, such as "how are notions of remembering invoked during arguments?" More often, researchers are interested in a particular interactional setting (e.g., police interviews, family mealtimes, phone calls to emergency response services) and aim to find out how psychological matters are produced and used in these settings.



### Materials

Discourse is situated. It happens in the moment, shaped by what came before it and shaping what comes next (Heritage, 1984). Therefore discursive psychological research needs to capture materials within the context in which they occur. Discursive psychologists prefer to analyze “naturalistic” rather than “got-up” materials. This is not a commitment to an unsustainable philosophy of a natural world free of observer influence. Rather, it is a preference, grounded in DSP’s conception of how discourse works, for examining records of people living their lives, telling what happened, arguing about relationships, answering parliamentary questions, and so on, instead of answering researcher’s questions, cooperating with experimenters’ requirements, and responding to researcher’s textual vignettes.

Data for discursive psychologists tend to include conversations, arguments, talk in work settings, professional client interaction, the various situations where interaction is mediated and supported by technology (phones, visual displays, instruments etc.), and any occasion when people are doing things involving some form of interaction. Occasionally, discursive psychologists will work with open-ended interviews, but these will be treated as interactional events rather than as places where participants’ views can be excavated (e.g., Edwards, 1998; Myers, 2004).

The focus on naturalistic materials starts to become inevitable once the importance is fully recognized of discourse being situated, action-oriented and constructed. It is also a reflection of what has become technically and analytically possible. Given that such rich materials are increasingly tractable and can be successfully recorded, digitized, scanned, transcribed, and rigorously studied in the wake of several decades of research, why do anything else?

### Data Collection

In terms of data collection, the main aim is to develop an archive of records of interaction in the setting under study. There are no hard and fast rules for the size of such a collection. Even small amounts of material can provide the basis for useful research, but the more material there is and the more appropriate the sampling, the more questions will become analytically tractable and more confidence can be placed in the research conclusions. In short, the better your data reflect the environment you want to study, the more scope you will have for coming up with useful and relevant research questions, finding enough material for analysis, checking the analysis thoroughly, and generally doing better discursive research.

The original recordings are an integral part of the research process. They are transcribed to help facilitate analysis, but they are played again and again right through the analytic process. As technology develops, recordings are increasingly being included in online publications and presented at conferences as part of the dissemination of results. It is

worth spending the time and effort required to get the best data possible. There are several aspects to recording that need to be considered in advance:

*Quality.* The quality of recording has a powerful effect on the time taken in transcription and (p. 306) analysis. Time and resources devoted to getting high-quality recordings will pay off handsomely when it comes to transcribing the recordings and working with them in data sessions. Hours are wasted relistening to a key piece of talk against a loud recording hum or using grainy video footage to work out whether a child has taken a mouthful of food or just put the fork near her mouth.

*Audio/video.* If embodied activities are available to participants, then they are certain to be a live part of the interaction. Thus, it is important to have video records of face-to-face interaction (or non-face-to-face interaction that is technologically mediated with a visual modality). High-quality digital video is inexpensive, simple, and relatively easy to manipulate, so this is not an insurmountable problem. A good rule of thumb is that if the participants can see each other, the researcher needs to be able to see them, too.

*Quantity.* Once you've got everything in place to record, the actual recording process is almost always simpler and easier than analyzing and transcribing them. Because the collection process is not overly arduous, it is worth collecting more recordings than planned. Digital recordings can be easily stored, and they provide an important resource for future research. Having an archive of interaction data allows cross-comparisons to be made with similar phenomena in different settings and can greatly enhance your work. As a cautionary note, it is important not to frivolously collect data you have no intention of using. That is not ethical. The point we wish to make about quantity is that you need to make sure you have enough; having more than enough is infinitely preferable to not having enough. As a researcher, you always need to balance your need for data with the level of imposition you place on the participants. Asking families to video tape their normal mealtimes at home is considerably less arduous than asking them to come into a lab to eat their dinner every evening. Therefore, you can reasonably collect data from more meals. But if your research interest is in mealtimes, don't ask them to film the children doing their homework.

*Who collects.* A characteristic feature of contemporary discursive psychology is that participants often collect the data themselves. This is designed to minimize the reactivity generated by extended researcher involvement and allows the participants to manage ethical issues in a way that suits them best. For example, in our recent family mealtimes project, we left the video cameras with the families for as long as it took them to record 10–15 meals. They quickly got used to the small video camera and didn't react much to it at all. If something happened that they didn't want to submit for analysis, they could delete the meal and record a later one.

*Data storage and management.* Although digital data takes up much less physical space than questionnaires or tape recordings, it can consume a large amount of memory (particularly if you use video). Make sure you have enough disc space to both store and work with the data. It is important that your storage of original recordings is secure and protected, particularly if the data need to be anonymized before it is

shared. Having a coherent filing system is also necessary to help you keep track of the data once you start selecting extracts for study, adding transcripts and analytic notations, and sharing extracts with collaborators. Thinking about these issues in advance can help you avoid getting in a catastrophic tangle half way through a project.

### Transcription

Once the data have been collected, they need to be transcribed. Transcription is an important step in the research process. Not only does it convert the data into a format that is easy to search through and present in written documents, it is also the first step in the analysis. The close attention required to produce an accurate transcript serves to familiarize the researcher with the intricacies of the data and begins to reveal features of analytic interest.

Discursive psychologists work continuously with both the original audio or video recordings and the transcript. It is no longer the case that after transcription the recordings are put into storage. Nevertheless, the transcript is an essential element in the research. It is common to use two forms of transcript. A basic first-pass transcript is often generated by a transcription service. This has just the words (not broken up by the colons, arrows, etc., that capture features of delivery) rendered as effectively as the service can hear them. This kind of transcript allows the researcher to quickly go through a stretch of interaction and get an overall feel for what is there. This can be a particularly important shortcut when there are many hours of recordings. It is also searchable, allowing one to sift through an entire set of materials very quickly for particular phenomena that can be identified through individual lexical items or transcriber descriptions; for example, finding all occasions where participants refer to wanting or needing something (Childs, 2012).

**(p. 307)** Discursive psychology requires an attention to the detail of interaction. The principle that discourse is situated means that how something is said is just as important as what is said (or not said). Harvey Sacks (1992) suggested that none of the detail of interaction, whether it is pauses and repairs, the selection of particular words, or the placement of interruption and overlaps, should be assumed a priori to be irrelevant to interaction. For example, sometimes a sniff is just a sniff, the consequence of having a runny nose; yet a sniff, in the right place, with the right kind of in-breath, could also do something else, such as displaying indirect disagreement, or it might be a precursor to a more fully fledged bout of upset (Hepburn, 2004). Therefore, the first-pass transcript is insufficient as an analytic tool.

The second form of transcription is an attempt to capture on the page features of the delivery of talk that participants treat as relevant for understanding the activities that are taking place. The standard system used in discursive psychology was developed by Gail Jefferson within conversation analysis and is specifically designed to support analysis of interaction (Hepburn & Bolden, 2012; Jefferson, 2004). It was designed to be (relatively) easy to learn and simple to produce, using standard character sets. It encodes features

such as overlaps and pauses, volume and emphasis, features of prosody such as rising and falling intonation, and features of the speed of delivery.

Producing a Jefferson transcript is extremely labor-intensive. The ratio of record time to transcription time can be anything above 1:20, with key factors being the quality of the recording, the complexity of the interaction, and whether there are nonvocal elements that need to be represented. It also takes time to learn to do quality transcription. It is necessary to both understand the roles of the different symbols and learn to apply them consistently. Because of the time investment required to produce quality transcripts, there are rarely resources for completely transcribing a full set of recordings. Various criteria can be used to decide what to transcribe and in what order. Transcription is a process that continues throughout the analysis phase of research as research questions are developed and refined with each new discovery.

### Analysis

Analysis starts during transcription as the researcher begins to get to know the data and identify potential phenomena of interest. It is at this stage that research questions begin to emerge. Rather than posing a strict question of the type associated with hypothesis testing and the factor-outcomes model, here the focus is often on attempting to explicate the workings of some kind of social practice that is operating in the setting, perhaps with the ultimate aim of making broader sense of the setting as a whole. This often means that questions are continually refined in the course of a program of work and a study within that program. One of the benefits of working with naturalistic materials is that they present their own challenges that lead to novel questions. They often feature actions or occurrences that are unexpected or not easily understood with the repertoire of explanatory concepts available in contemporary psychology. This can provide an exciting start point for analytic work.

A common practice in the discursive community is to use different levels of engagement with the materials to generate questions. A key part of this method often includes *data sessions* with analytically minded colleagues. Data sessions are a highly collegial activity in which a group of colleagues study a short extract of data and offer analytic observations and suggestions for further enquiry. As a researcher, this can be an extremely useful exercise in helping to refine and develop the analytic focus.

There is no established sequence of actions that will lead to a good analysis using discursive psychology. However, the close methodological ties between discursive psychology and conversation analysis mean that some of the guidelines provided for approaching conversation analytic work are highly relevant and can prove to be a useful entry point for discursive psychology too (see methodological chapters in Sidnell & Stivers, 2012).

Analysis can proceed based on a single case, and a detailed account of a single instance can be worked up and published (e.g., Toerien & Kitzinger, 2007). However, analysis more typically involves building a collection. This is a gradual process, subject to continual



Extract 2: Forbes\_4\_1\_10-30

- 01 Lucy ((puts her fingers in her bowl))  
 02 Dad [((points))]  
 03 Dad Da:ɒn' [pɪk at i'] pleɪ::se. Y' need to eat it  
 04 ni:cely.  
 05 (0.4)  
 06 Lucy ↑I ah(h)[a:(h)m.=  
 07 Lucy [((lets the food fall off her fingers back into  
 08 her bowl))]  
 09 Dad =It's very] cold ou' the:re.  
 10 [(1.2) ]  
 11 Lucy [((picks up her spoon and puts it to her bowl))]  
 12 Dad Vrey they very co:ld. ((in a funny voice))  
 13 Lucy ((lifts spoon out without putting any food on  
 14 it)) I's mo:re [colder than ] the sno:w.  
 15 Daisy [It's very co:ld ]  
 16 Dad No.  
 17 (0.3)  
 18 Dad S'not qui:te that cold (.) cos it wud snow  
 19 otherwi:: cos it's been rai:ning.  
 20 [(2.4) ]  
 21 Lucy [((eats a mouthful))]

(p. 309) Extract 2 is from a different mealtime recording of the same family as Extract 1. Here, Dad also tells Lucy to eat nicely (lines 3-4). Unlike in Extract 1, where compliance happens straight away, here it is only on line 21 that Lucy actually eats something and a lot has happened in between. By line 21, you'd be hard pushed to prove that Lucy was eating because Dad told her to rather than just because she felt like it.

From this subcollection of extracts a practice of incipient compliance (actions that move toward compliance but do not in themselves constitute compliance) was identified. Children recurrently used incipient compliance to stall for time while they worked to regain autonomy over their own behavior. Telling someone to do something is an invasive

social action that threatens the recipient's autonomy and self-control. Refusing to do what your parent has told you is a risky action and typically leads to conflict and arguments (Kent, 2012*b*). Ultimately, parents often end up forcing children to do what they had been told to do (Craven & Potter, 2010). Neither option is entirely satisfactory for children. Incipient compliance was sometimes a useful technique that children could use to take back control over their actions without actually defying their parents or refusing to do what they were told (Kent, 2012*a*). This study is an example of how building and refining collections can help in the early stages of analysis.

### Validation

The notion of validity in DSP is different from that found in much of mainstream psychology. It is built more systematically into basic research design—the choice and presentation of naturalistic materials in something close to their raw form, for instance—rather than arising as a worry about extending claims and findings from a research domain into relevant arenas of everyday life. In DSP, analysis is made accountable to the detail of empirical materials, and these are presented in a form that allows readers to make their own checks and judgments. This form of validation contrasts with much traditional experimental and content analytic work in which it is rare for anything close to “raw data” to be included or for more than one or two illustrative codings to be provided. It also permits an accumulation of empirical data and analytic studies against which new findings can be compared for their coherence. For example, work on fact construction builds on the insights about accountability from earlier studies, and its success provides a further confirmation of the validity of those studies (Edwards & Potter, 1993).

Two specific principles of conversation analysis are useful in validating analytic claims: *deviant case analysis* (checking claims against potential counter cases) and the *proof procedure* (basing the analysis of a turn at talk on how the participants themselves treat it, in next turns; see Heritage, 1995; Schegloff, 1992). Both principles are illustrated in studies of television and radio news interviews, in which participants routinely avoid treating interviewers as accountable for views expressed in questions. That normative pattern is supported rather than refuted by studying deviant cases in which interviewees treat their interviewer as expressing personal views, whereupon considerable interactional trouble ensues in subsequent turns (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991; Potter, 1996).

### Conclusion

For much of the past 100 years, psychology has developed as a hypothetico-deductive science that has conceptualized the world in terms of the effects and interactions of variables on one another that can best be assessed using experiments analyzed using multivariate statistics. This methodological apparatus has been combined with a cognitivist form of explanation for which the causes of human action are seen to lie within individuals. In some ways, this has been a hugely impressive and successful enterprise.

Yet this has had a number of unintended consequences that restrict its approach to human action.

First, the search for general relationships that underlie behavior has the consequence of moving research away from the specifics of human action. Action is typically modeled, restricted, or reported and transformed into the kind of counts that are amenable to multivariate analysis. On the extremely rare occasion that records of actual interaction in natural settings are used, it is quickly transformed into counts (using content analysis, say). Second, this search for general relationships combined with the need for simple controlled designs means that little attention has been paid to the nature and organization of the rich local and institutional settings in which human conduct invariably takes place. Third, the hypothetico-deductive approach has led researchers away from careful descriptive studies in favor of studies that start with some kind of relationship or model to be tested. This combines with the legacy of the distinction drawn between competence and performance that has become (p. 310) foundational in cognitivist psychology and that treats performance data as enormously messy and something to be bypassed by focusing, via hypothetical models, directly on competence.

In contrast to this, discursive psychology starts with the concrete particulars of human action recorded in specific settings with minimal researcher interference. In many ways, it is a classically empiricist enterprise. Its analytic approach is focused on the way practices are built in real time and how their organization and intelligibility depends on the normative organization of talk. Psychological matters come into discursive psychological study through their emergence as issues that are relevant for participants. Instead of attempting to capture underlying competence, it is focused on how psychological matters are public and intelligible.

## Future Directions

- Discursive Social Psychology is a radical, empirical approach to the study of social behavior. It is continuing to develop as a discipline. Looking ahead we can see several emerging areas for research to which DSP is well placed to contribute.
- Discursive social psychology can be applied to any setting in which interaction takes place. This has historically encompassed phone conversations, face-to-face interactions, and broadcast video and radio media, as well as focusing on how written texts are organized to build actions. However, the increasing use of technology to mediate social interaction is opening up new lines of enquiry for researchers (see Meredith & Potter (2013); Lamerichs & te Molder (2003) for full discussions). Internet forums and chat rooms have already produced a significant body of DSP work on a wide range of topics including managing accountability (Antaki, Ardévol, Núñez & Vayreda, 2005; Sneijder & te Molder, 2004), having an “authentic” identity (Horne & Wiggins, 2009; Sneijder & te Molder, 2009), attributing responsibility and blame (Sneijder & te Molder, 2005), and unsolicited advice (Vayreda & Antaki, 2009). An interest in computer-mediated interaction is likely to continue expanding as the use of



technologies for communication becomes more widespread. We expect to see more work looking at electronic communications settings in the future.

- Discursive social psychology will build on advances in the transcription of prosody and developments in the understanding of sequence organization to throw further light on the way social psychological issues are organized interactionally.
- Discursive social psychology has started to reformulate ways in which academic researchers and professionals can work together (Puchta & Potter, 2004; Stokoe, 2011). This focus on successful impact is likely to be an important area of development in the near future.
- Discursive social psychology has been making important contributions in areas of emotion and embodiment that are often seen as particularly difficult for discourse-based approaches (see, e.g., contrasting treatments in Hepburn & Potter [2012] and Wetherell [2012]). Again, the strongly empirical focus has brought dividends in areas that have often become theory heavy.
- There is likely to be a further methodological debate between DSP and approaches that are based largely on the analysis of qualitative interviews such as free associative narrative methods, much neo-Foucaultian work, and a now significant body of work in interpretative phenomenological analysis. Discursive social psychology offers an analytic approach that highlights the way findings in these perspectives depend on largely implicit methodological practices used with open-ended interviews (Potter & Hepburn, 2012).

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