UNDERSTANDING CRITICAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

KEITH TUFFIN

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Psychology**

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Sweetness and light

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Prologue

Audience and aims

This book has been written for students. A key aim, and also a key challenge, in writing this book, has been to write about critical social psychology in a way that is accessible for those who are new to the area. Ideally, students who read this work should have already completed a first course in social psychology. Much of what is said here assumes familiarity with at least an introductory knowledge of the topics and methods of traditional social psychology. This book has been aimed at those students who wish to take their study of human social life beyond the traditional philosophies, methods and topics of the discipline. Initially this project involves critical reflections of these methods which, in turn, lead to a discussion of alternative research approaches. Alternative approaches are increasingly being taken up by critical scholars who have become dissatisfied with the constraints of traditional ways of doing social psychology. In a broad sense, this book aims to provide a bridge between traditional social psychology and the newer critical approaches to the discipline.

In 'bridging' the traditional and the newer approaches I have attempted to remain focused on the title of the book, and particularly the emphasis on 'understanding'. The main aim, therefore, is to explain the work of critical social psychologists for students who come to the area with an understanding of main-stream, traditional approaches. There are, of course, other aims that are best understood by looking at the achievements of contemporary social psychology. The longstanding promise of social psychology has been to unlock the secrets of human social life. This promise will be assessed through an examination of the philosophy, theories and methods of contemporary social psychology. One con-clusion to emerge from this evaluation is that the discipline has, at best, only partly met the promise of revealing the core insights into human social actions. The critique which supports this conclusion is not new within social psychology, with various authors making similar points over the last three decades (see,

for example, Armistead, 1974). What this volume aims to achieve is to refresh and restate the theoretical and methodological concerns that have been gathering momentum as interest in critical alternatives has flourished. Further, this work sets out to move beyond criticism and introduce research alternatives that have developed from these growing dissatisfactions.

What is offered here is a version of critical social psychology, and it is important to be clear that this is but one of a number of possible versions. There are several excellent texts (for example, Gough & McFadden, 2001; Hepburn, 2002; Stainton Rogers, 2003) which offer differing versions of critical social psychology. While these books have similar titles to the present text, they approach critical social psychology from differing perspectives and emphasise different aspects of critical work. The exact shape that a book finally takes reflects many things, and this book has been moulded by my research interests and experience. Inevitably, readers are offered a version that is selective and unique. My hope in writing this particular version is that it does justice to the breadth of interests critical social psychologists have, and that it is able to enhance the understandings students have about critical social psychology.

The orientation of the book is one which aims to tell a simple story that begins with a critique of mainstream social psychology and looks at the limited ways in which the discipline has delivered on its promise to reveal the secrets of social life. This critique seeks to highlight the reasons why social psychology has been constrained in what it has been able to offer. Following this, readers are introduced to a new understanding of the place of language in social psychology. This in turn opens up a series of different orientations that enable social psychology to increase the range of methods it may call on in the pursuit of better understanding the 'social' in our lives. One such method, textual analysis, has become a key marker of critical social psychology. This style of analysis is based on a belief in the profound importance of language for understanding the social world. Critical scholars such as Ibanez (1997) are keenly aware of, and interested in, the importance of language for understanding our social worlds. Indeed, Ibanez suggests our social realities have a character that is uniquely contributed to by the conversations, dialogues and messages we immerse ourselves in. This interest has spawned the development of an impressive array of new research practices (for example, discourse analysis and conversation analysis), which collectively have begun to change the face of contemporary social psychology.

Having studied, researched and taught social psychology for twenty years, I am able to document some changes that have occurred within the discipline over this time. These changes are both challenging and exciting. The challenge comes in the form of critique that has been applied to traditional theories and methods. The challenge also involves writing about this in a way that is constructive and positive, without being threatening and intimidating. The excitement stems from being involved in a 'quiet revolution' (Hayes, 1995) involving the promotion of research alternatives that critical social psychology has made both possible and desirable.

Teaching critical social psychology

As a teacher of social psychology I have increasingly been excited by the critical literature and have sought to introduce this critical edge to students. In attempting to do this I have relied on notes, journal articles and snippets of material from a wide variety of sources. As Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson and Stainton Rogers (1995) comment, the syllabus for critical social psychology has largely been developed without textbooks. This has ultimately been a frustration for both teachers and students, and this book sets out to put some of these ideas into an accessible and coherent framework. The importance of accessibility cannot be overstated as students may have difficulty with the complexity and density of some of the existing writing in the field of critical social psychology. Part of the explanation for this is that new ideas are often difficult because they are new. Another part of the explanation is that critical work requires working with abstractions and symbols and there is a sense in which this can be unusually difficult. A further consideration is that critical scholars sometimes deploy esoteric language that can be inaccessible. The impact of such language is that students are denied ready access to this new and developing field. This outcome is the precise opposite of what I aim for in my teaching. Hence this book has been written in the hope that these abstractions and complexities may be presented in a user-friendly manner, thereby opening the field of critical social psychology to a broader range of students.

Critical psychology

Critical work within social psychology is a relatively recent development and it is important to locate this within the context of wider intellectual forces. It is also important to locate critical social psychology within the wider field of critical psychology. Critical social psychology should be understood as part of the critical movement occurring both within psychology (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997), and also within the human sciences (Rosenau, 1992). The critical impetus within psychology is beginning to touch an ever increasing number of the branches of the parent discipline. In this regard 'critical social' is but one of many areas where critical work is taking hold and shaking the foundations and assumptions that psychology has previously taken as the sole basis for guiding theory, research and practice.

Within psychology, critical work (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002; Sloan, 2000) draws on a wide range of intellectual traditions in its critique of the mainstream. The broadest aims of critical psychology include an overt political agenda, which stands in stark contrast to the political innocence and neutrality that have characterised the discipline until recent times. Bradley and Selby (2001) point out that the fundamental problem with contemporary psychology is that psychologists

are seemingly oblivious to the negative effects of political disadvantage. In contrast, critical psychologists are keen to exchange political innocence for political awareness. For Fox and Prilleltensky (1997: xvi) the aim is 'to expose the unholy alliance between psychology and social norms that benefit the powerful and harm the powerless, and to offer emancipatory alternatives'. This critique of psychology's political innocence is driven by a social justice agenda, and the belief that mainstream practices work to prevent rather than enable this. These claims about psychology and politics highlight a significant irony. As Bradley and Selby note, the original assignment psychology undertook was to describe reality and then to set about improving it. What seems to have happened is that the discipline has stopped short of attempting the second of these broad objectives. Indeed, critical psychologists argue that mainstream psychology works in the interests of the powerful, which would seem contrary to the very reasons people get involved in psychology in the first place!

While an overt political agenda is a feature of critical psychology, another notable feature is the impressive range of areas where critical work is beginning to appear. Indeed, critical work is increasingly apparent across a wide spectrum of psychologies. Fox and Prilleltensky's (1997) edited book, *Critical Psychology*, includes chapters from clinical, community, cross-cultural, ethical, developmental, feminist, forensic, lesbian and gay, personality, political, and of course social psychology. While the pages of this book focus on the area of critical social psychology, it is important to be aware that critical initiatives are occurring in a wide range of sub-disciplines within psychology.

Criticality and negativity

One aspect of critical work that can be initially off-putting is the apparent negativity entailed in doing critical work. There is a certain emptiness associated with criticism that leads nowhere, and which amounts to criticism for the sake of criticism. This failing of critical work at worst resembles critique wrapped in negativity that contributes almost nothing positive or constructive. This is the reason the current text seeks to make sure that critique is not conducted simply for its own sake. Rather, I have regarded it as important to show that good critique should provide a foreground to offering something which is both positive and constructive.

Another important point to state at the outset is that I am also aware of how critical analysis of the traditional ways of thinking about and doing research in social psychology may well be unsettling and confusing. After all, all the things that have previously been taught to constitute 'good' psychology are now implicated as being inappropriate, outdated and the subject of strong criticism. Wexler (1996: 15), for example, accuses traditional social psychology of being common sense, of 'participating only in the discourse of the eighteenth century', and of making a substantial contribution to social ignorance. While this may

initially seem negative and disruptive of previous learning about psychology, I would argue for the importance of understanding the context in which criticism occurs before dismissing it. Further, I would urge that a positive feature of critique is that it can act as a catalyst for change. Out of the challenges articulated by critical scholars comes rethinking and reworking, which leads to new developments. The hope is that such challenges will lead to an invigorated form of social psychology that may ultimately enhance our understanding of the complexities of human social life.

Critique involves many skills, not the least of which is developing a good understanding of what is being criticised. This is why this book is aimed at students who have already completed a first course in social psychology. It makes little sense to criticise the philosophies and methods of a discipline before first coming to understand what is being criticised. Critique also rests on the promise that things might be otherwise, that alternatives are possible and desirable. This requires being prepared to look at social psychology from a broad perspective and stand outside the dogma that surrounds the customs and practices of mainstream social psychology. In this light, criticism should be valued as a precursor to innovation and positive change, rather than regarded as disagreement and negativity. The philosopher Passmore (1967) urges that we go beyond considering criticism as a knee-jerk rejection and see it as a creative activity that has the potential to open up new ideas, new thinking and new approaches. In this regard, criticism is regarded as a positive force that has the creative power to improve our research methods, and ultimately our understandings of social life.

Amateur social psychologists

Social psychology, whether mainstream or critical, offers scientific insights into areas where ordinary people already have an impressive store of knowledge and understanding. This comes as no great surprise since humans have been informally studying themselves and their social actions since the beginning of time. As Billig (1990) explains, social psychology's topics are also areas where people have relevant experience. Not only do people have experience, they have also frequently developed much common sense about these areas. The fascination social psychologists have for the social aspects of human existence is largely shared by the interests ordinary people have about social life. As Myers (2000: 4) puts this, 'Unlike other scientific disciplines, social psychology has nearly 6 billion amateur practitioners.' What this staggering figure highlights is that people have an intense interest in social matters. The kind of questions that professional social psychologists ask are also of great interest to everybody.

In addition to the overlapping interests of both professionals and amateurs, the topics of social psychology are relentlessly pervasive. This means that the opportunities for studying social life are enormous. Such pervasiveness makes it easy to explore what is directly in front of us daily as there is no shortage of

'material' in our lives as we interact with friends, family, colleagues and lovers. Indeed, the interactions that take place in sports teams, at school, at work, in cafés, bars and over the dinner table contribute to the very fabric of social life which social psychologists seek to understand. The pervasiveness of social phenomena is equally available to anybody who seeks to make sense of their social worlds and thereby develop their own theories and understandings of the social dynamics of everyday life. Indeed, we seem to do this frequently as we ask questions about who said what to whom, why this happened this way, what the current state of our relationships are, who may be trusted, and whom one should be wary of.

While these kinds of questions will have a very familiar ring to them, the standard textbook treatment of the work of amateur social psychologists involves firstly, acknowledging it, and secondly, problematising it. It is argued that common sense should not be trusted as it offers contradictory and imprecise guidance. As Stanovich (1992: 27) puts this, amateurs fail to develop coherent theories, relying instead on 'a rag bag of general principles, homilies and clichés about human behavior.' This situation was deplored by the influential social psychologist Homans (1961), who suggested replacing lay common sense with a scientific study of human actions. Homans argued that proverbs are riddled with inconsistency and offer little help with our attempts to make sense of the complexities of social reality. The unsatisfactory aspect of this may be illustrated with two equally plausible folk sayings or proverbs, which seem to be directly contradictory. For example, when someone announces that 'birds of a feather flock together' this seems strongly to support the view that similarities and shared interests are important in understanding the basis of human attraction. However, when we hear that 'opposites attract', this seems highly contradictory in endorsing the general notion of differences providing an important basis for understanding attraction. To take another example, 'too many cooks spoil the broth' and 'many hands make light work' are self evidently contradictory. Following Homans, the message promoted by mainstream social psychology is that common sense is contradictory, unsatisfactory and unhelpful. As Billig (1990) notes, common sense is positioned as being 'inherently suspect' on the grounds that it is unscientific. Mainstream textbook writers believe that scientific experimentation and the use of rigorous laboratory methods will enable us to establish which of these contradictory sayings is the more accurate and correct. In short, experimentation will permit us to establish the 'truth' of each saying. In this regard, Stanovich (1992: 32) refers to the role of psychology as 'the empirical tester of much folk wisdom'.

Truth and knowledge

The way in which common sense, homilies and proverbs are viewed by critical social psychologists differs dramatically from the way in which the mainstream regards these matters. Traditional social psychologists regard the observations

and interpretations of amateur social psychologists with great suspicion as they are seen as unsystematic, inconsistent and unscientific. For the traditional social psychologist experimentalism provides a standard against which such informal methods of accessing social truths may be tested.

In contrast, critical social psychologists are more respectful of the work of amateur social psychologists. Just how such informal observations, proverbs and common sense are talked about is of great interest as this becomes potential data about how people conduct aspects of social life, and specifically how these things are actually dealt with in social situations. Critical social psychologists suspend the question of whether the conclusions of such amateur theorising and interpretation are true or not. In one sense it really does not matter, since the focus of attention becomes how such 'truths' are used, rather than whether they are, in fact, true.

Critical psychology argues against the view that experimentation will assist in divining singular truths. Critical scholars believe that there is reason to become deeply concerned when others hold themselves, or their methods, as being diviners of 'truth', and are deeply sceptical of claims that demand that truth be unitary and universally agreed on. There are serious methodological issues that arise when social psychologists claim to be able to sift social fact from social fiction. The most obvious question to arise concerns the veracity and robustness of the methods used in the process of truth saying. As Stainton Rogers et al. (1995) comment, there are serious problems associated with claiming a 'hotline' to the truth. In particular, critical social psychologists are wary of the view that there are authorised methods for distilling the truth about social life. Returning to the example of contradictory proverbs, critical social psychologists accept that both 'opposites attract' and 'birds of a feather flock together' can be true. In other words, it is possible for both similarities and differences to be important in contributing to understandings of who we are attracted to. Equally, it is possible to have some situations where it is true that 'too many cooks spoil the broth', and others where the truth of 'many hands make light work' is evident.

At this point it might be worth asking about what kind of knowledge and truth critical social psychologists are interested in, if they are disinterested in sorting out 'the truth'. Wood and Kroger (2000) have addressed this very question when they suggest that the kind of knowledge critical social psychologists are interested in might be usefully summarised as looking 'inside the correlation'. This term was coined by Wood and Kroger when contrasting their research aims with those of conventional research, which seeks to establish and measure statistical relationships between variables. They noted, for example, that in studying rape victims, Janoff-Bulman (1979) discussed a relationship between self blame and the future avoidability of rape. In a nutshell, it seemed that those women who were more likely to blame being raped on their own behaviour, were also more likely to believe they could avoid rape in the future. In contrast, the discourse analytic study by Wood and Rennie (1994) offered alternative insights into what notions such as 'self blame' meant for rape victims. Rather than

examining the relationships between self blame and future safety, this study examined the discourses used by rape victims. Notably, it was found that the women used complex strategies involving both blame and the absence of blame as they negotiated victim and non-victim identities. In this regard, Wood and Kroger argue that critical work does not accept that notions such as self blame should be treated as static constructs. Rather, they should be examined for the work they may do as participant resources. Questions of interest would include: How have participants used notions of blame, responsibility, avoidability, and victimhood? When thought about this way, the metaphor of looking 'inside the correlation' is useful for characterising the kind of knowledge critical scholars are looking for. For Wood and Rennie, the constructs of blame, safety, and even the notion of rape itself are not assumed, but are examined for the ways in which they are used by participants. This use is seldom straightforward, but contributes in complex and dynamic ways as participants seek to make sense of their experiences.

Critical social psychology stands apart from attempts to refine universal principles of social life. It regards as naive, attempts to develop universal principles of human social behaviour. While experimentalists seek the refinement of broad themes that will stand the test of time and endure across different cultural and political spectrums, critical social psychologists pursue a more modest research agenda. This agenda respects the importance of multiple truths rather than the blind pursuit of *the* truth; it seeks not merely to establish differences between groups or statistical relationships between variables, but is interested also in examining the social and psychological meaning of events.

Curious questions from the disciplinary margins

The alternatives offered by critical approaches have not been smoothly welcomed into the discipline, nor warmly embraced by most social psychologists. Rather, these alternatives have disrupted traditional thinking about the discipline, which has resulted in some unsettling of the mainstream. The challenges posed by critical social psychologists have produced tensions. At the crudest level, critical work advocates change, a mission rarely met without resistance. For some, the implications of critical work will appear heretical, others will respond with curiosity and still others will be excited and intrigued. These tensions are apparent in the following questions. Some of these questions reflect the concerns with which critical scholars are grappling, others speak to the resistance the mainstream has shown in response to the critical challenge, and still others index deep-seated concerns that drive critical work towards seeking alternatives to mainstream research practice.

The following questions are offered as a way of structuring reading about critical social psychology. The answers to most of these questions will unfold over the course of this book. Additionally, these questions will feature again in the Epilogue where each one is addressed directly.

Why is it that some of the leading British social psychologists do not even attempt to get their work accepted in the leading mainstream American journals?

Billig (1997: 37) asks, 'How is it possible to call oneself a social psychologist, but to read few of the main social-psychological journals, and, indeed, to feel alienated from much of their content?'

Why are some leading social psychologists now proudly stating that they have not conducted a laboratory experiment in decades?

The so-called crisis in social psychology has been in evidence for at least the last three decades. Why do some writers regard the crisis as over, while others believe it has just begun?

While social psychology as a discipline has demonstrable dedication to the experimental method, is it the case that experimental work is completely inappropriate and absurd?

If you wanted to understand ordinary everyday life in the middle classes, why would you spend time studying inmates in a maximum security prison?

Are attempts to establish generalised laws of human social behaviour naive, given the way in which time, place and culture impact on our social relationships and our social realities?

Has the disciplinary rush towards embracing the methods of the hard sciences contributed to social psychology losing sight of alternative opportunities in both method and topic?

Is it fair to say that mainstream and critical social psychologists live in different worlds?

Is reality socially constructed?

Why does critical work not feature more prominently in most social psychology textbooks?

Given that psychology has long been fascinated with the psychological interior, how do critical social psychologists justify their detailed examinations of talk (which is exterior) about private and personal matters?

The mainstream literature suggests racism has become increasingly subtle – why does that make studies that look at language more appropriate for studying racism?

What is so wrong with mainstream psychology's attempt at political neutrality?

Potter (1996b: 135) writes, 'Arguably, one of the most astonishing omissions in psychology for most of the 20th century has been the study of what people do: their interactions in the home and workplace.' Similarly, Reicher (2001) is critical of contemporary social psychology for almost completely failing to examine how people act towards each other. What substance do these claims have?

Why is it that the critical enterprise, which holds language as the key to understanding social life, has failed to articulate its mission successfully to students?

Overview of chapters

Before outlining the flow of topics around which the subsequent chapters are organised, I want to mention the features readers will encounter. These features are simple, and consistent with the accessible style adopted in the writing of the book. Each chapter begins with a short overview and is further supported with a brief summary at the conclusion. At the end of each chapter there is a brief list of further readings. This is an 'entry level' text to an area that is ever changing and complex. Accordingly, what is offered here is a simplified version and for this reason I urge readers to follow up the list of further readings that accompanies the conclusion of each chapter. After the Epilogue there is a Glossary of terms that will assist with the new terms introduced in this book. The terms covered in the Glossary are identified in the text in bold the first time they appear.

Structurally, the book features six substantive chapters. These chapters are framed by a Prologue and an Epilogue, which should be regarded as half chapters. While there are many issues that could have been included within these pages, not all of these are covered. This book is not an encyclopaedic overview of the full complexities of this area, but rather a modest attempt to introduce some new ideas current in critical social psychology. The material covered in this book may be classified into three broad sections. The first section (Chapters One and Two) examines and critiques existing practices within social psychology. The second section (Chapters Three and Four) lays the philosophical groundwork for an alternative way of thinking about social life and sketches an alternative, language-based orientation to research within social psychology. The third and final section of the book (Chapters Five and Six) includes material that offers a contrast between the way selected topics have traditionally been studied and how they have been examined by critical social psychologists. These broad sections fit within the structure of the substantive chapters outlined below.

Chapter One critiques traditional social psychological research methods. These methods are illustrated by taking three well-known studies in experimental social psychology and analysing these in terms of critical concerns about methodology and ethics. I argue that these studies are weakened by their reliance on placing participants in artificial situations and deceiving them about the social reality they find themselves in. The argument is made that this method of gathering data is intellectually misplaced and disrespectful of those who willingly offer their time to participate in social psychological research. Unethical treatment of participants does a disservice to the discipline and those who work within it.

In Chapter Two the orientation moves from methodology to an examination of the theory behind the methods of mainstream social psychology. This chapter is

oriented to the question of why mainstream social psychology has aligned itself so closely with positivism and experimentalism. The critical explanation for this alliance suggests that contemporary social psychology has disengaged from history, and has become narrowly focused on a philosophy of science known as positivism. The argument is made that the limited range of methods traditional social psychologists use stems from their desire to be seen to be conducting research which satisfies narrow, positivist definitions of 'science'. Doubts are raised regarding the appropriateness of positivism as the guiding philosophy for social psychology because of the way it encourages reductionism and individualism.

Chapter Three develops the suggestion that a quiet revolution is taking place within the discipline of social psychology. An alternative paradigm, which rests on the view that we are compulsive users and consumers of language, is introduced. The argument advanced is that language is the central feature of social life and this offers a powerful conceptual tool through which we conduct our social activities, and which enables us to engage in the systematic study of human social life. The social constructionist view is introduced providing an alternative paradigm through which social life may be understood and researched. The constructionist view argues that language is active and constructive, and, most importantly, that our psychological experiences are inseparable from language. The chapter concludes with a number of comparisons between experimental and critical work.

Chapter Four introduces readers to an approach to research that comes out of the work of discursive psychology. The action orientation of talk and text is a basic tenet of discursive research. The main assumptions of discourse analytic work are spelled out through a 'fly-on-the-wall' tutorial in which a series of virtual students ask questions and discuss issues with virtual tutors. A key point to emerge from this tutorial is the reiteration of language as primary in defining our social worlds. Further, readers are introduced to some of the details of conducting analysis. This is achieved by a systematic, step-by-step approach to interpreting and reading text analytically. This example establishes some basic points about doing analysis, while also highlighting the importance of carefully examining the details of text and studying language use as a form of social action in its own right. For critical social psychologists language is the key to understanding social life.

Chapter Five focuses on prejudice and racism, and begins with a historical review of the area. Also reviewed are both traditional and critical approaches. This review includes coverage of traditional approaches to understanding and conducting research in the area of prejudice. The traditional approaches cover social cognition, personality and group membership as orientations to understanding prejudice. Critical work does not assume that prejudice emanates from the psychological interior, but rather is part of the business that occurs *between* people. Critical work in this area is illustrated with discursive studies that look at discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. Racism is also covered in this chapter. Initially this topic is shown to be one that may be increasingly characterised by subtlety and complexity. Racism has been extensively studied

by critical scholars who have examined the details of people's talk about race related issues. Studies conducted in both New Zealand and Australia are reviewed. This work highlights the flexibility, ambivalence and elasticity that exist within the language of racism. These features provide a powerful resource that allows racist talk to appear reasonable and allows the unsayable to be said.

In Chapter Six the topics of emotion, identity and politics are considered from a critical perspective. Emotion from the traditional perspective of social psychology is private, internal and closely linked to physiology. Critical views of emotion place it as public, constructed through the ways in which it is talked about, and working to serve important interpersonal functions. An example of a text dealing with jealousy highlights the importance of socially oriented under-standings of emotion. Within traditional mainstream social psychology identity is assumed to be part of the essential core of the person. The critical view of iden-tity is to argue that it is a changing psychological resource that is sensitive to context. Thus the argument is made that identity is something that people *do*, rather than *have*. Two studies illustrating these points are presented. Finally, the critical work that has begun in the area of politics is briefly reviewed.

The book concludes with an Epilogue that tidies up some loose ends and restates the basic message I have attempted to convey in writing this book. Firstly, the 'shame' of social psychology is revisited, where the discipline's dedi-cation to individualism is reiterated and critiqued. Secondly, the relationship between critical and traditional social psychology is reviewed. This section is organised around brief answers to the questions posed in the Prologue. Thirdly, criticality is revisited with the point being reiterated that different critical authors will emphasise differing aspects of criticality. The importance of accessi-ble language precedes the conclusion which highlights the positive aspects of critical social psychology.

Chapter 1

Experimentation and the Social World

Overview

This chapter sets out to examine and critique the way in which social psychology has sought to understand the social world through research that has employed **experimentation**. It begins with a review of three classical studies that have had an important influence in shaping the direction of contemporary social psychology. These studies might well be regarded as 'standard' studies in that they share a number of similarities consistent with the aspirations of mainstream experimental research. As examples of the experimental tradition they combine both cleverness and conceit, fascination and flaw. These studies are introduced for readers who are unfamiliar with them, and reviewed for those who already know of this work. The first study comes from an area of research that became known as *impression formation*, which is closely connected with the sorts of judgements we make about others. The second study is one of the most famous in social psychology and looks at the question of *obedience* to authority. The third study is taken from the area of *bystander intervention* and considers the question of when people will offer assistance to a stranger in distress. After drawing together shared similarities, these studies are subjected to critique on the basis of **methodology** and ethics. These criticisms lead to a conclusion which argues that experimental studies are not only limited, but are inappropriate for studying social aspects of the human condition.

Classical studies in social psychology

First impressions and the warm–cold experiments

The first of these studies examined what seems to be an everyday situation we often find ourselves in – that of forming initial impressions of other people. We are familiar with the process of forming such impressions and there are, of course,

numerous ways in which this may take place. Sometimes these impressions are formed during the course of a first meeting with someone. In such situations our impressions are based on a range of factors such as interactional style, dress, appearance, how we relate to the person and how we feel the person relates to us. Less directly, initial impressions might be formed on the basis of a third party's comment, or we might glimpse a person from a distance and form an early impression based on 'looks' alone. It is also possible to form impressions based on written comments that may come directly from the person, or perhaps someone we know has passed on a comment about this person in a letter, email or text message.

In 1946 Asch published a study that looked at the issue of how we form first impressions of others, based on indirect, written information. Subjects in Asch's research were undergraduate students who were divided into two groups for the purpose of the experiment. One group was presented with a list of seven personality traits describing a hypothetical person. The actual traits were *intelligent*, *skilful*, *industrious*, *warm*, *determined*, *practical* and *cautious*. The second group of subjects received the same list, with one crucial difference – the word 'warm' had been replaced by the word 'cold'. Next, subjects were asked to write a paragraph about their impressions of this hypothetical person, and to endorse items on a checklist that they felt might be characteristic of the person. The checklist was extensive and included items such as good-natured, important, generous, wise, happy, humorous, sociable, popular, humane and imaginative.

One interesting point about what Asch's (1946) subjects were asked to do, is that they had no difficulty in completing the task. The apparent ease with which this task was completed suggests that we are very familiar with integrating separate pieces of information into a composite whole, and that the business of forming impressions of others (even when never having met the person) is something we routinely do as a usual part of engaging with others. Famously, the results of Asch's study showed that substituting 'warm' for 'cold' produced major changes in the impressions reported. When 'warm' was part of the initial description, subsequent traits that were attributed included positive items such as happy, successful, popular and humorous. However, when 'cold' was substituted for 'warm' this produced negative descriptions of the person as being unsociable, unpopular, irritable, ungenerous, humourless and self-centred.

This simple substitution of one word for another had important consequences. However, this was not the case for all words. For example, when Asch (1946) looked for differences between 'polite' and 'blunt', these descriptors produced little in the way of variation in subsequent traits which subjects used to describe these hypothetical people, suggesting that not all traits are used equally. Asch's explanation of this involved a **Gestalt** perspective, along with the notion of 'trait centrality'. Asch argued that as words on the list were read, subjects attempted to form a unified picture of the person. This attempt to integrate information into a Gestalt (whole) was facilitated when the list included traits that possessed high levels of centrality. Highly centralised traits assisted with the

organisation of the other information and thereby contributed to the task of forming a single impression, whereas peripheral traits contributed minimally (if at all) to this process. Central traits not only add a new quality, but have the power to transform the meaning of the other, less central, characteristics. The operation of central traits becomes clearer when we consider the way in which a peripheral trait (for instance, 'calmness') changes meaning depending on which version of a central trait it is linked with. When the combination of 'warm–calm' was presented, this was interpreted as meaning serenity, however the meaning of calm changed when it was considered as a part of the combination 'cold–calm'. Under these circumstances it took on a more sinister interpretation and was taken to mean ruthless and calculating.

Milgram's shocking revelations

Just as Asch (1946) pioneered research into understanding the processes involved in the formation of initial impressions, Milgram's (1963) work in the area of obedience proved to be groundbreaking, and also ethically contentious (Baumrind, 1964; 1985). These dramatic studies involved soliciting male volunteers through a newspaper advertisement, which asked for volunteers for a study of learning and memory. The advertisement was the first of many deceptions. The study was actually interested in looking at the conditions under which people will continue to obey orders – even when remaining obedient carried with it very serious consequences.

   The experimental procedure involved each subject being introduced to another subject on arrival at the laboratory. However, this second subject was not what he seemed, and was actually a paid confederate who merely acted the part of an innocent research subject. The experimenter announced that the learning and memory task involved the allocation of roles, with the need for both a teacher and a learner. An apparently random draw resulted in the actual subject in the experiment being assigned the role of teacher while the other 'subject' was assigned the role of learner. The apparent randomness of allocating these roles was yet another deception. The draw was rigged such that the experimental subject was always assigned the role of teacher. The experimental task involved the learner memorising a list of word pairs, while the teacher's task was to test the learner on these words. Success on a particular word pair moved the task forward, however failure was met with increasing levels of shock, administered by the teacher.

   Before beginning the learning task, both subjects were shown the 'shock generator', which included a panel with 30 switches. The switches began at 15 volts and each subsequent switch was attached to a voltage level that was a further 15 volts higher than its predecessor. The first switch corresponded to 15 volts, with the last of the switches being 450 volts. These switches also carried written designations indicating the level of shock: 'slight', 'moderate', 'strong',

'very strong', 'intense', 'extremely intense', 'danger: severe', and finally, 'XXX'. The experimental procedure was explained, with the first error requiring a 15-volt shock and all subsequent failures to be punished with an increasingly strong shock, such that the second failure resulted in a 30-volt shock, the third failure a 45-volt shock, and so on. Next, both subjects were shown into another room where the learner was strapped into a chair. This confinement was explained by the experimenter as being to prevent excessive movement during the administration of shocks. Next the electrodes were attached to the 'shock generator', with its realistic panel of 30 switches and the written descriptions as mentioned above. An electrode was attached to the learner's wrist and electrode paste applied to avoid blisters and burns. To add to the credibility of the experimental situation, the teacher received a sample shock (which actually came from a 45-volt battery housed inside the shock generator). It looked real, it felt real, and (as we will shortly discover) it even sounded real.

Before the experiment began and the teacher and experimenter started their respective tasks, the learner mentioned that he had a heart condition. The experimenter responded by saying, 'Although the shocks can be extremely painful, they cause no permanent tissue damage'. Back in the experiment room, the teacher was seated in front of the shock generator and the experiment commenced with the learner successfully completing the early word pairs. However, the learner also made several errors, each of which was punished by an increasingly stronger level of shock, and when a shock of 75 volts was administered, this prompted the learner to grunt audibly. At 150 volts, he complained of heart trouble, and refused to continue. Also at this point he demanded to be released from the experiment. At 180 volts he shouted that he was unable to stand the pain and demanded to be let out. At 270 volts the learner let out an agonised scream accompanied by no fewer than five requests to be let out. At 300 volts another agonised scream was heard along with a declaration that he no longer wished to be part of the experiment. At 315 volts an intense and prolonged agonised scream was heard along with repeated hysterical demands to be released from the experiment. Following this the learner fell completely silent and failed to respond to any further memory test items. When the issue of the learner's silence was raised by the teacher, the experimenter insisted that silence and refusal to answer were to be treated as errors and punished as if an incorrect response had been supplied.

Although the experimental situation looked, felt and sounded real, much of what the teacher was exposed to was fabricated. Outside of the 45-volt sample shock, no other shock was actually administered. The learner's responses to the memory test were predetermined, with his verbal protests being pre-recorded and played back at the appropriate moment. All of these deceptions were designed to put the teacher in a position where there were apparently severe consequences resulting from continued obedience to the experimenter's instructions. On the surface it was made to appear that continued obedience resulted in inflicting unbearable pain on an innocent volunteer who carried a heart

condition and clearly reached a point where he wanted no further part in the procedure.

Those reading about this for the first time will be keen to ask why the teacher continues to participate in something that seems a cruel and inhumane way to treat research participants. This concern gives rise to questions such as, 'Would you knowingly harm an innocent person if ordered to do so by a complete stranger?' When students are asked to nominate the level at which they would disengage from the research procedure they unanimously elect one of the early voltages. The truly surprising aspect of Milgram's studies was the fact that approximately two thirds of all subjects continued administering shocks right up to the maximum 450-volt level!

This astonishing result begins to make more sense when we consider the role of the experimenter in this work. The subject is placed in a highly unenviable situation, and without the intervention of the experimenter would cease participation in the experiment about the time it became evident that the learner was unwilling to continue (Milgram, 1974). However, the experimenter intervened so as to make breaking off from the experimental procedure seem as if it were not really an option. This intervention consisted of a series of verbal 'prods' that were used when a subject expressed reluctance to continue. In order the prods were: 'Please continue' or 'Please go on', 'The experiment requires that you continue', 'It is absolutely essential that you continue', and finally 'You have no other choice, you *must* go on.' These prods were always used in sequence. Only if the first prod was unsuccessful was the second prod used. If the teacher asked questions about physical injury to the learner the following explanation and encouragement to continue was deployed: 'Although the shocks may be painful, there is no permanent tissue damage, so please go on'. If the teacher mentioned the learner's unwillingness to continue, he was told, 'Whether the learner likes it or not, you must go on until he has learned all the word pairs correctly. So please go on.'

It is worth noting that this experiment rests on the authority invested in the experimenter. Indeed, this man appears in film footage of this experiment as white-coated, serious and uncompromising. Further, his instructions are issued with speed, conviction and authority, with little apparent empathy shown for participants' concerns about the severity of what they were about to participate in. The firmness and rigidity with which the experimental procedure was uncompromisingly enforced made it difficult for participants to resist, and was clearly designed with this in mind. The uniqueness of the situation requires that those in the power of the experiment are exposed to forces that are opposing. The idea here is that this is a good way to test the strength and meaning of issuing an order. For those unwittingly involved in these studies it meant being simultaneously confronted by the power of the situation and a test of obedience. It was important that it was made extremely difficult to defy the experimenter's authority, while also making it extremely difficult to ignore the plight of the learner. Indeed, it is through these highly controlled and contrived circumstances

that a powerful experimental simulation has provided us with a window through which we have been able to see obedience at work.

Strangers, husbands and violent attacks in the psychology of bystander non-intervention

The third study comes from the area of bystander intervention that is concerned with questions about when people (bystanders) will intervene in situations where another is distressed and in need of assistance. The social psychological research was stimulated in this area following the famous case of Kitty Genovese. As Cialdini (1993) reports, this young woman was raped and murdered in the suburb of Queens in New York in March, 1964. Significantly, this tragic death was not quick, private or muffled. In fact, her death had been a prolonged, public and loud affair that occurred only a short distance from her home as she returned from work early in the morning. If ever someone needed the assistance of a passerby it was this young woman. And yet, remarkably, the repeated assaults she endured were witnessed by no less than 38 of her neighbours. Her assailant returned to the scene three separate times over a period of 35 minutes, which culminated in Kitty Genovese's fatal stabbing. None of her neighbours provided any direct assistance, although they had unwittingly frightened the attacker away by turning on lights and opening blinds. It was only after Kitty had been murdered that one of the neighbours phoned the police. Arguably, this area could also be referred to as bystander non-intervention as the bulk of the research has sought to explain why people fail to intervene (Cherry, 1995).

The **field experiment** by Shotland and Straw (1976) was similarly inspired by the research tradition of presenting bystanders with a situation in which they observe a situation that invites their intervention in coming to the aid of a woman. This work specifically looked at bystander reactions to a man attacking a woman. The study possessed high ecological validity with the roles acted by drama students in natural circumstances. In this interesting study the authors commendably focused on a gendered particular and the state of relationships between the parties. The gendered particular here is that a woman is (yet again) cast as a victim. The relationship between the pair is a variable within the design of the experiment, and is accordingly manipulated. We pick up the action, as you are invited to imagine that you are a participant in this study.

You arrive at the psychology department and are shown to a room. You are asked to complete an attitude questionnaire and left to complete this. You look around the room which seems unremarkable, although it is noticeable that the door has been left open. This affords a view out into the corridor where you can see the door to the lift across the hallway. There is little foot traffic and you return to answering questions and ticking boxes.

Shortly, you hear voices, which begin to get louder. It becomes clear that there are two voices, a man's and a woman's. They are having what seems like a

heated argument. Next, you hear the voices get louder as the arguing pair, audibly shouting and yelling, are clearly travelling up in the lift. The lift stops at your floor and while the shouting continues the doors open revealing a man and a woman having a serious disagreement. As you watch, the man grabs hold of the woman and begins to shake her violently. The woman attempts to resist, she struggles and screams. This is all rather frightening as the woman responds to the man's violent treatment by shrieking and screaming out a sentence. The words that comprise this sentence are of crucial importance to the experiment and constitute, in effect, the experimental manipulation. What is being manipulated is her relationship with her attacker. This manipulation suggests that the assailant is either a stranger, or a spouse. The relationship is varied by having the woman either shout, 'Get away from me; I don't know you', or 'Get away from me; I don't know why I ever married you.' In the case of stranger abuse, 65% of bystanders intervened, however this figure dropped to 19% when bystanders believed the abuse was being inflicted by a male spouse. If the subject failed to intervene the fight lasted about one minute.

Experimental similarities: philosophy, method and language

The studies above have been chosen for a number of reasons. Importantly, they are illustrative of research practices that have been prevalent in social psychology for many decades now. Not only do they share similarities in the way in which the research has been conducted, but they also share some key ideas about the nature of the social world and the best ways in which to study this. Philosophically, they share some core assumptions about the nature of causality. They rely on a particular model of science and the ensuing understandings about how best to explain the social world. These ideas will be scrutinised more carefully in the next two chapters where the ideas behind this kind of research are subjected to a searching examination, providing a platform for the introduction of some radical new ideas in social psychology.

These three studies are illustrative of the key method and the supportive philosophical assumptions that argue for the use of experiments to increase our understanding of social phenomena. The dominance of experimentalism has been well documented with Hendick (1977) referring to the experiment as the 'queen' of methods and Sears (1986) noting that experiments account for the great majority of published studies in social psychology. The three studies introduced at the beginning of this chapter are all experimentally based studies, and as such involve some features that have become synonymous with social psychological enquiry. In particular these studies all involve experimental manipulation of independent variables and the measurement of the effect of these variables on a limited number of dependent variables. Further, they involve deception of participants and reliance on a specific use of language for their key manipulations.

The way in which language has been conceptualised in these studies might be described as the face value version of language. What this means is that language is heavily involved in the experimental paradigm these studies rely on, but nothing other than the face value of language has been considered by those who use language in this way. The face value of language has been harnessed in a way that makes it possible to create a certain reality, for example, the issuing of orders and making it seem as if there was no alternative other than to obey these, or casting a particular image of a hypothetical person as being cold or warm, or staging an attack whereby the attacker becomes either a husband or a stranger. In this respect, the authors of these studies acknowledge the power of language, and yet fail to engage with any level of theorisation about the role of language, the limits of its powers, or the ways in which it can be made to work.

One of the key aims of this book is to challenge this way of thinking about language and to offer an alternative view. This alternative goes beyond the mere face value of language and argues for a theory of language that carefully considers the dynamic, active and constructive properties of language. This view will also be taken up and delineated more fully in Chapter Three. At this point it is sufficient to note that the commonly held view of language utilised in these three studies (and also in many other experimental works in social psychology) has been increasingly under attack from a new wave of critical psychologists who see language quite differently. Critical social psychologists not only regard language differently, but have major concerns about the use of experimental approaches to the study of social behaviour. The nest of problems associated with experimentalism include the contrived artificial nature of experiments in social psychology and the ethical issues that arise when deception is almost routinely employed by social psychologists. Each of these areas is dealt with in more detail below.

The trouble with experiments

Artificiality and relevance

In simple terms there are at least two grounds on which mainstream research in social psychology may be critiqued and challenged. The first concerns a range of theoretical and philosophical issues that will be the subject of Chapter Two. The second may be seen as a methodological challenge and this material will be covered in the remaining sections of this chapter. When thinking about method-ologically oriented problems, an important consideration is the basic concern with the artificiality that forms part of any experimental design. One of the fun-damental arguments here is that in terms of the social realm, it makes little sense to study cause and effect relationships out of context. The reasoning here is simply that social life (almost by definition) is always contextualised. This context for social life is inevitably provided by the people we engage with and the

unique histories we develop with those people. Critical psychologists are deeply interested in context and it is this interest that encourages the exploration of alternative methodologies – but I am getting ahead of myself, so let us return to the problem of artificiality.

The logic of experimentalism suggests that alterations in one variable may result in subsequent changes in other variables. Indeed, experimental methods in social psychology routinely deploy the strategy of examining the impact of independent variables on dependent variables. This narrow cause and effect rationale may work when studying the way in which billiard balls work on a table; however, this logic becomes strained to the point of ridiculousness when the objects of study are people, and the study is attempting to tell us something meaningful about the operation of the social world for those involved. Human beings do not respond in the manner predicted by the simple physics of billiards on a table and are almost always more difficult to predict due to the inevitable variability that characterises human actions and interactions. Accordingly, critical psychologists are increasingly reluctant to apply the basic methods and logic of physics to the study of human social life.

There is a powerful irony involved here. The variability that experimentalists would regard as contamination, is regarded by critical social psychologists as making an important contribution to the very complexity that makes up the social world. In short, the kind of decontextualisation so sought after by experimental social psychologists is seen as simply a nonsense in terms of providing any meaningful contribution to our understanding of the wider social world. Social life is, simply, never that simple. We are almost never in the position of being able to note the effect of one variable on another. Our social worlds include a vast complexity of variables, and it is the interplay of these that makes the social aspects of our lives so fascinating, unexpected and at times unpredictable. In a sense, it is this complexity that defines social life. So why then has it become so popular for social psychologists to adopt methods that strip social life of much of its meaning in order to study it? The answer is not a simple matter and will be addressed more fully in the next chapter. In the meantime, it is sufficient to make the point that the simplification experimental control necessarily entails comes at a cost. This cost may be documented in terms of concerns about artificiality, relevance and ecological validity.

Three decades ago Argyle (1973) noted that the dominant approach to social psychology was to test abstract hypotheses in artificial laboratory settings. A major problem with such artificial experiments is that they are likely to omit, constrain or control essential ingredients of human social interaction. This is certainly evident in the three studies that began this chapter, where the possible list of serious omissions could include communication (both verbal and non-verbal), a cultural setting with known rules, and the normal motivational bases that operate in natural everyday settings. Argyle highlights the absurdity of this by noting that the study of primates in captivity tells us little about free-ranging animals. Similarly, if we wanted to better understand life in middle-class society,

it would make little sense to study the inmates of a maximum security prison. The point here is that experiments are steeped in artificiality, and those who are 'captured' in these highly controlled, contrived social situations may be able to tell us little about more fully contextualised social situations. The important question that underlies these concerns is: What can controlled laboratory studies actually tell us about spontaneous social actions that occur in natural situations? This is, of course, the external validity question that raises doubts about the validity of experimental methods and results.

Westland (1978) raises other doubts and questions about laboratory-based experimental research. He writes that, 'at best what happens in a lab context could only have a tenuous and problematic relevance for everyday life' (p. 24). In clarifying this damning critique he is especially concerned with experimental simplification, which is typically sought in order to remove the influence of contaminating and confounding variables. However, the cost of a simplified laboratory environment is that natural dynamics normally at play in social situations become obscured due to the unrealistic analogue that has been created. In short, variables simply fail to operate in real life, as they may do in laboratory studies. Furthermore, the attempt to isolate variables in a laboratory may well change the nature of the variables under consideration.

The objects of social psychological study

As well as difficulties with artificiality and the relevance of experimental variables, there is another problem specific to the social sciences generally, and social psychology in particular. Adair (1973) alludes to this problem by noting that human subjects are not passive blobs. Returning to the metaphor of human beings as billiards or pool balls on a table – while it is true that we are subject to physical forces, it is also the case that we respond to forces and events in ways that are uniquely human. We are able to both act and react and we also possess the ability to react reflexively to our initial reactions. Human beings under the scrutiny of experimental situations will react to all aspects of that situation, not simply the aspects the experimenter has focused on. Westland (1978) refers to this as the 'objects as subjects' argument. The objects to be investigated also happen to be the subjects of investigation. When people are involved in a social psychological experiment, they will develop expectations about what this situation might mean and respond accordingly. This response, this reactivity to stimuli, this interactiveness, is a human quality that contributes greatly to the study of what makes people interesting. It also makes the application of simple cause and effect thinking to the study of human social life extremely problematic.

Specific cues that lead research participants to develop inferences about what might be wanted in the experiment have been referred to as **demand characteristics** (Berkowitz & Troccoli, 1986; Orne, 1962; Rosenthal, 1969). The basic point here is that people are likely to become sensitive to such cues when placed in an unusual environment like a social psychology laboratory. As part of the

process of trying to make sense of these situations people will search for any hint of how they are expected to act.

Another important aspect of participation in social psychological research is the very real possibility of evaluation apprehension. The idea here is that participants in psychological research become sensitised to the fact that they are under the scientific microscope and are very aware of the possibility that they may be evaluated negatively as a result. This sensitivity may take the form of fear or at least apprehension with respect to such evaluations. Accordingly, subjects are keen to appear in a favourable light. Indeed when the desire to look good has been contrasted with demand characteristics encouraging cooperation with the experimenter, research tells us that most subjects will prefer to look good (Page, 1971; Rosnow, Goodstadt, Suls & Gitter, 1973).

Experimenter bias and self-fulfilling prophecies

Problems with conducting research with human subjects do not end with the subjects themselves, with many studies highlighting the fact that the role of the experimenter is far from passive. Research by Rosenthal (1980) has provided evidence suggesting that hypotheses tend to be confirmed. Rosenthal (1966) discusses the experimenter expectancy effect, where knowledge of the research hypothesis may subtly and unintentionally influence the way in which participants are treated, thereby increasing the likelihood of confirming the research hypothesis.

Researchers' expectations can also contribute to self-fulfilling prophecies. Merton (1948) was one of the first social scientists to examine this possibility. Merton considered that self-fulfilling prophecies occurred when expectations about a person or group led to the fulfilment of those expectations. This intriguing possibility might be best illustrated with an example. Imagine you are about to meet someone for the first time, and you have been told to expect an outgoing, friendly person with a great sense of humour. Having this expectation will change the way in which you interact with this person. At the heart of the self-fulfilling prophecy is the notion that your treatment of the person (based on your initial expectations) has the power to alter the way in which that person may react. In this case above, your expectations might lead you to say the sorts of things or ask the kind of questions that give the person the opportunity to respond in a friendly and humorous manner. Similarly, you might start a jokey kind of interchange – which the person responds to with an amusing display of humour. In this simplified example it is possible to see how our expectations may well become confirmed. Simply having an expectation may lead to the very fulfilment of that expectation.

The most notable research into the self-fulfilling prophecy has been that conducted by Rosenthal and colleagues. In these studies (Rosenthal & Fode, 1963; Rosenthal & Lawson, 1964) experimenters were given the task of training rats to run through a maze. Half the experimenters were told they were working

with rats that had been bred for cleverness at running through mazes, while the other half were led to believe they were working with rats that had been bred for dullness at the task. Of course, no such breeding programme existed and the rodents were randomly allocated to the two experimental groups. On this basis there should have been no reason to expect differences in the rats' maze learning abilities. Nevertheless, the rats that were expected to be quicker at learning the task proved to be significantly better than the rats that were expected to be slower.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) applied this basic research paradigm to teachers and students. Following extensive IQ testing with children, the experimenters met with teachers and told them they were able to identify certain students as potential bloomers who could be expected to show considerable intellectual gains throughout the remainder of the school year. What the teachers were not told was that the intellectual bloomers were in fact no different from their classmates. Their names had been randomly selected and put forward on that basis alone. In short, there was no actual basis for their identification as bloomers. Eight months later a series of tests were run with all the children, and the results clearly indicated that those whom the teachers expected improvements from showed improved schoolwork and significant gains in IQ. A clear pattern emerged in these studies whereby simply having an expectation had set a process in play whereby the expectation came to be confirmed. In this study the result was positive for the children concerned; however, it is also possible that negative expectations may work to the disadvantage of those concerned.

This work on interpersonal expectancies has generated hundreds of research studies. Rosnow and Rosenthal (1997) report that at the beginning of the 1990s over 450 studies had been published in this area. These studies have added to our understanding of how such expectancies work. In the case of teacher expectancies Raudenbush and Bryk (1985) provide a meta-analysis of this extensive literature that qualified the way in which expectancies may operate. A meta-analysis is essentially a summary of all the research available on a particular topic. The work of Raudenbush and Bryk suggested that prior contact with the students diminished the effect of simple expectancies. This might indicate that once teachers had formed their own impressions of students, these became more powerful in determining the extent to which they believed that students had untapped potential.

The general point about these studies is that they highlight the involvement of both the experimenter and the subject as potential sources that may corrupt the simplicity promised by the logic of experimental cause and effect. Expectations held by subjects and experimenters may affect what is found in experimental situations. The vulnerability of the experimental situation to these potential sources of error argues for extreme caution when evaluating the validity of experimental procedures and the ensuing knowledge claims.

Laboratory settings are susceptible to an assortment of artifacts that reduce the validity of research findings. Rosnow and Rosenthal (1997) review this literature and also explore the politics that have constrained psychologists' reactions.

They suggest, for example, that psychologists are aware that it is not in their professional interests to publicise the broad notion of research artifacts. This idea is widely acknowledged within the human sciences and is one of the key reasons why so few other social scientists embrace experimentalism as passionately as psychologists. Further, it is clearly the case that psychology is dominated by positivist ideals. This particular view of science holds that hypotheses must be tested in order to establish evidence relevant to the evaluation of ideas. This notion of the testing of ideas sees some theories gain support while others fail to attract support and languish as a result. Such evaluations have the potency of truth claims allowing psychologists to establish the facts and dismiss the fictions. Psychological truth is thus arbitrated through science and the experimental method.

In recent decades, psychologists have experienced considerable dissonance when committing to practices which they have good reason to be suspicious of. Professional psychologists like being able to wear the mask of hard science when in competition for research funding. The difficulty is having to act while accepting the flaws in the empirical foundations of one's methods. Psychologists have been unwilling to relinquish their hold on the truth saying power of laboratory methods. Neither have they been especially willing to change their methods. Hence, we have the 'business as usual', unquestioned reliance on laboratory experiments as the method of choice. As Stainton Rogers et al. (1995) note, the 'good ship' experimental social psychology continues to sail on.

Another reason for resistance came from behavioural psychologists who were reluctant to accept any suggestion that consciousness might be operating within research settings. Cognitions that might influence the way research participants responded in experiments were deemed to undermine the notion of objective experimentalism (since cognitions were beyond observation they were regarded as scientifically irrelevant). Also, acknowledging error was regarded in some circles as possibly slowing the growth of psychology. As Rosnow and Rosenthal (1997) put it, 'Critics who voiced concerns about artifacts were seen as undermining the empirical foundations of the scientific facts and theories which were proliferating in behavioral research' (p. 10).

This threat to the integrity of the experimental enterprise, combined with the fact that many aspects of social life are not amenable to laboratory study has meant that some social psychologists have taken their methods into the field. While this move overcomes the artificiality inherent in laboratory experiments, it gives rise to other problems. The next section identifies some of these.

Ethics, fieldwork and deception

Conducting research in the field gives rise to a dilemma regarding the extent to which those who are being studied are informed of the fact. Informing people that they are being studied or observed is likely to change the way in which they act, and may also bring about some of the same problems that beset laboratory

research, such as evaluation apprehension. However, the ethics of involving people in psychological research without their knowledge is a highly questionable practice. When non-reactive methods are used, participants are unaware they are being observed and for this reason have certainly not provided the researchers with their informed consent. It is a moot point as to whether the word *participant* may be used in circumstances where the objects of study have not volunteered for such involvement and are totally ignorant of their participation. The non-interventionist approach to non-reactive research relies on simple observation. Ideally, observers exercise both discretion and distance so that they are able to maintain a watchful eye on events, without actually influencing those events. There is no absolute certainty about the degree to which this procedure is, in fact, non-reactive. The mere presence of an observer may possibly change the events in some subtle way. Interventionist approaches to non-reactive research include contrived contexts, which vary from simple acts like gluing coins to the pavement and watching people's reactions to finding money on the street, through to more elaborate deceptions. Examples of more elaborate hoaxes include the study by Middlemist, Knowles and Matter (1976), which involved varying spatial distance between men in a public urinal, and Humphreys (1970), who observed sexual acts in men's public lavatories. This latter study is discussed in detail below.

Critical social psychologists are critical of almost everything you might read in the typical research methods chapter available in most introductory social psychology texts. From the arsenal of methods and techniques available to social psychologists many choose to misinform those whom they are studying, in order to explain fully the 'true' nature of the social phenomenon under scrutiny. The irony of this has been noted by Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith and Gonzales (1990), who mention the trouble associated with concealing the truth, so as to reveal a truth about social life. Questions of deception, lies and research ethics are considered next.

Deception

Deception has been defined by Franzoi (1996) as a research technique that provides false information to subjects. It may also be more complicated, as in the case when information is purposefully withheld from those participating in the research. Either way the experimenter aims to stage a *version* of social reality in order to systematically study reactions under controlled conditions. To this end, participation in social psychological research may involve procedures that involve various types of deception.

Geller (1982) discusses three forms of deception. *Implicit deception* occurs when the actual situation is radically different from what subjects have been led to expect. In extreme cases subjects are unaware that they are taking part in a research procedure. One notable example of implicit deception was the study by

West, Gunn and Chernicky (1975). In this study undergraduate students were approached by a private investigator who claimed to be acting on behalf of the Internal Revenue Service, and asked if they would assist with the burglary of a local advertising firm. The Watergate style burglary was aimed at photographing records that would indicate that the business had been defrauding the government. In the condition where immunity from prosecution was offered, 45% of subjects indicated a willingness to become involved. Participants in this research had no idea they were subjects in psychological research until after they had indicated whether they would be prepared to assist with the burglary. *Technical deception* involves the misrepresentation of equipment, or experimental procedures. Typically, this occurs when subjects are provided with a deceptive cover story about the purpose of the experiment, thereby masking the actual aim of the study. Milgram's (1963) obedience study provides an example of this. Subjects were told the study was interested in the effects of punishment on learning, when the real focus of the experiment was on levels of obedience. Similarly, there was technical deception involved with the impressive-looking shock generator. This apparatus looked authentic, with incremental levels of shock associated with each of the switches. Of course, these switches were not actually wired to anything and no actual shock was delivered when the switch was depressed. *Role deception* refers to the misrepresentation of other people in the study. Role deception was involved in Milgram's experiment with the subject placed in the role of learner actually being a confederate. Similarly, in the Shotland and Straw (1976) study 'the arguing couple' were in fact paid actors working as confederates.

Social psychological research has relied heavily on the use of deception (Adair, Dushenko & Lindsay, 1985; Gross & Fleming, 1982; Smith & Richardson, 1983). Nicks, Korn and Mainieri (1997) have provided a detailed content analysis of deception in social psychological research from the 1920s through to the mid-1990s. This work highlights several points about deception in social psychological research. Firstly, the use of deception was almost non-existent when social psychology was beginning. In the early years of the discipline there was a period of development in which there was no single method, topic or issue that dominated research interests. Naturalistic observation and field studies were just as likely as laboratory experiments. Secondly, an influential paper by Rosenzweig (1933) argued for the use of experimental deception, and was followed by increased usage. Thirdly, the use of deception increased markedly from the 1950s to the 1970s. Somewhat ironically, this increase occurred during a period when the American Psychological Association (APA, 1953) published its first code of ethics. Christie (1965) reports that social psychology studies also became more manipulative over this period. Experimental manipulation was estimated at around 30% in 1949, but had risen to over 80% a decade later. Correspondingly, the use of deception also increased at this time. Experimental manipulation has become synonymous with deception for social psychologists, and Adair, Dushenko and Lindsay (1985) report that more than half the studies published in 1983 contain deception.

The use of deceptive practices in more recent times has perhaps declined, although the evidence for this is mixed. A survey of four key social psychology journals by Vitalli (1988) suggested a decrease in deception between 1974 and 1985. However, a study by Sieber, Iannuzzo and Rodriguez (1995) showed a decline in the use of deception from the 1960s, with an increase in the early 1990s. Whatever the extent of deception in contemporary work, it seems highly likely that the use of deception has been fostered by a laboratory culture.

This laboratory culture and the associated enthusiasm for experimental methods of studying social behaviour developed strongly in the last half of the last century. Experimentalism and the manipulations this research paradigm afforded became the method of choice for social psychologists. The popularity of deception may be understood better if one considers that without deception the study of some aspects of the social world would not be possible. Deception provides the experimenter with the opportunity to construct a cover story, and thereby weave a more precise and controlled version of the social reality under scrutiny. Variations on and around this theme are then able to be adjusted in accordance with the broad aims of the experiment. Deception is used, and justified, on the grounds that subjects would not act 'naturally' if they knew the true purpose of the study. Again, Milgram's (1963) studies of obedience provide a good example of research that relied on deception, but which would not have been possible to conduct without deception. Similarly, Shotland and Straw (1976) would possibly have obtained quite different outcomes if the participants in the study had been told the arguing couple were only acting.

Having considered types of deception, levels of usage, and reasons for the continued popularity of deceptive research practices, it is now time to look more carefully at some of the more (in)famous cases where deception has been employed in the name of social science. While it would not be overstating things too much to suggest that social psychology has majored in deception, it is also true that other disciplines have some notable examples of the use of deception. The human sciences have seen some morally indefensible practices, some bizarre and exceptional twists, and some clever and insightful research arrangements. The range of studies from which we could have sampled is truly impressive. Consider, for example, the bizarre concealment of social psychologists Henle and Hubble (1938) under students' beds in order to record the conversations of those who were on, or in the beds. Or the pseudo-patient studies (Caudill, 1958; Rosenhan, 1973), where researchers have masqueraded as psychiatric patients, feigning symptoms in order to gain entry to psychiatric hospitals. We will consider only a small sample of the available cases. However, for those interested, other examples may be found in Homan (1991), Korn (1998) and Koocher and Keith-Spiegel (1998).

As you read the following cases think about them critically. Think about the details of how deception has been used, what effects it might have had on those involved in the research, how such practices were justified, and what explanations the researchers would provide if asked to explain why they had duped research subjects.

Mindless tasks

An important focus of Orne's (1962) work was the study of the social psychology experiment itself. Orne maintained that such experiments have their own unique brand of social psychology operating and he set out to document the extent of this. Orne suggested that agreement to participate in a research study made the general requirement to follow instructions more salient. Typically, those volunteering for a psychological experiment have little or no prior experience. It is a new social situation and the participant is offered few clues about what is expected. This lack of experience combined with the ambiguity of what the experiment may be 'about' contributes to participants simply following whatever guidelines are available.

Orne (1962) believed that subjects were likely to become especially compliant when participating in a psychological experiment. He sought to test the limits of this in a study that looked at social control under hypnosis. One of the requirements of the study was an activity that would be tedious and pointless, such that non-hypnotised subjects would refuse to comply, or would stop working at it soon after beginning. Strong support for Orne's view concerning experimental compliance came from the fact that he had great difficulty in finding a task subjects would refuse to do. In one attempt to find such a task, subjects (working alone) were given 2000 sheets of paper, each containing 224 addition problems and asked to complete the first sheet. Subjects were asked to follow the instructions printed on a card, which requested that they destroy the sheet they had just completed and complete a new sheet, then take another card of instructions. All instruction cards were identical, and Orne anticipated subjects would cease this meaningless activity when they realised this fact. However, contrary to expectations, subjects continued with the experimental task for hours. Orne's contention is that explanations of these high levels of cooperation must take into account the experimental setting itself. That is to say, for most people, being in an experiment involves an unfamiliar situation which, in itself, contributes towards the high levels of cooperation, conformity and obedience that have been documented in social psychology experiments.

The dynamics of the social psychology experiment extend beyond the extraordinary control afforded the experimenter. For example, Rosenberg (1965) has suggested that subjects display a marked sensitivity to the opinion of the experimenter. It is not uncommon for subjects to display a degree of evaluation apprehension as the experiment may be regarded as some form of psychological test. Silverman, Shulman and Wiesenthal (1970) suggest this is the reason subjects are keen to conform to an image of what they regard as a psychologically healthy person. These studies highlight the extent to which the experimental situation is unique in being founded on an unusual set of social relationships. At the very least, results that emanate from laboratory experiments should be viewed cautiously. A critical response to these issues is to seek alternatives to conducting experimental work in social psychology.

Experiments in the subway

While the external validity of laboratory experiments may be questioned, experiments conducted in the field have a greater sense of realism. They are typically conducted in natural situations similar to those we might find ourselves in. Of course the trade-off in terms of ecological validity is at the expense of experimental control, as is demonstrated in the following study. Piliavin and Piliavin (1972) were interested in bystander apathy and particularly the costs of helping. They set out to test the idea that as the costs of helping increase, so the likelihood of anyone actually providing help would decrease. Participants in the study were unsuspecting passengers on the Philadelphia subway who witnessed a staged collapse whereby a man appeared to be ill and fell to the floor of the moving train. In one condition he started to bleed from the mouth as he fell, while in the second condition no blood was present. It was assumed that the presence of blood increased the cost of helping, and the results supported this hypothesis.

The study was not without problems (as so often can occur in field studies), which included being discovered by the transit authority police, who would have been decidedly unimpressed with what they found. Other passengers also created problems in the sense that they engaged in potentially dangerous actions (attempting to pull the emergency cord to stop the train), and in some cases panic when they saw blood. Remember also that this work was undertaken at a time that predated public awareness of AIDS. In one trial two passengers were observed witnessing the man collapse, at which point they rose to help; however, one was heard to exclaim, 'Oh, he's bleeding' and they both promptly sat down again.

Other field studies have also had the deceptions involved brought home to the researchers in dramatic fashion. The fieldwork conducted by Harris (1974) illustrates how things could have gone dramatically wrong. In this study, supermarket shoppers and movie goers were exposed to the frustration of having someone (an experimental confederate) push in to the queue ahead of them. Of course, it is possible that a particularly frustrated shopper could have responded violently to such treatment. Although Harris anticipated 'frustration' and was prepared to measure this, what was routinely expected was negative comments – not a full-blown attack on the confederate. Such unexpected and unanticipated outcomes are always possible when innocent people are involved in social psychological research without their knowledge, permission or consent.

Twenty acts of fellatio in an hour

The next case of 'deception in the name of research' involved field research that was unique in the history of the social sciences. The work generated a storm of

controversy and protest, which culminated in demands being made for the rescindment of the degree for which this work was undertaken. Humphreys (1970) was a doctoral student in sociology at the University of Washington. His ethnographic (participant-observation) research aimed to examine the 'truth' behind various myths and stereotypes associated with men who seek and perform sexual acts in public lavatories. In order to study the kind of men who sought instant sex, a level of voyeurism was necessary and Humphreys stationed himself in lavatories and adopted the role of 'watch queen'. This role came about because these sexual acts were outside the law, and the task of the watch queen was to keep a lookout and cough loudly at the approach of either a stranger or the law. In this role Humphreys reported witnessing twenty acts of fellatio in one hour, while sheltering from a thunderstorm one summer's afternoon. After maintaining this role for some time he gained the confidence of some of the men and was able to obtain more detailed information about other aspects of their lives. Those who did not openly trust him were followed and Humphreys recorded details of their car licence plates. A year later these men were approached in their homes by Humphreys who claimed to be a health service interviewer and thereby gained access to information about their family circumstances, employment status and so on.

The results of the study met with mixed reactions. Some professional sociologists were outraged at the lack of ethical standards that guided this research and demanded that Humphreys's doctoral thesis be rescinded. The gay community was more positive in providing an endorsement of the work, which showed that only 14% of those studied were actually gay. The gay community praised the work as it had dispelled some myths that surrounded the notion of instant sex. Indeed, there were a number of suggestions at the time that such activities were exclusively the preserve of gay men – the location (male toilets) making it difficult for heterosexual activity.

Before considering the next case let me make a couple of points regarding why we have gone outside social psychology in dealing with deception and research ethics. Firstly, this work highlights the point that deception is not solely the preserve of social psychologists but has been used in many of the social sciences. Secondly, while this case was chosen because of its notoriety, it would have perhaps been as instructive to examine one of the many examples of social psychological ethnography. The work of Festinger, Riecken and Schachter (1964) is a case in point. In what Homan (1991: 102) describes as 'a remarkable case of deceit and invasion', these social psychologists infiltrated a religious sect whose firm belief was that the world was about to come to an end. Festinger et al. wanted to study what would happen when the predicted end of the world failed to materialise. The common feature of this work and the field work of Humphreys (1970) was the basic deception of failing to inform research participants that they were actually participating. This lack of informed consent also meant that participants were denied the right to withdraw from the study. This was also the case in the following study.

Anticipating a fall from 5000 feet

Berkun, Bialek, Kern and Yagi (1962) had military trainees undergo an extremely stressful procedure in the name of examining the effects of stress on performance. The male trainees were aboard a plane at an altitude of 5000 feet, when a propeller stopped and they were told of emergency conditions. The recruits then overheard a conversation involving the pilot, which indicated the plane was in danger. As they flew over the airfield ambulances and fire engines were seen preparing for a crash landing. The pilot then indicated a malfunction with the landing gear and told the recruits to prepare for a crash landing at sea. At this point two questionnaires were handed out, ostensibly to measure performance under stress. The first document asked about instructions for the disposal of personal possessions in the case of death, while the second was a series of multi-choice questions asking about the emergency procedures that had been read prior to take-off. The accompanying rationale explaining the second questionnaire was a deception indicating that this would satisfy insurance companies that emergency precautions had been followed. These papers were supposedly placed in a waterproof container, to be jettisoned before the aircraft crashed.

Of course most of what the army recruits were told was a fabrication, designed to increase the perceived danger of the situation. The aircraft was never in danger and landed safely. This again raises questions about the ethics of conducting research that places 'volunteers' under considerable stress, as you may well imagine if you put yourself in the boots of one of those recruits for even a short time. In this study the volunteers had not been informed of their status as research subjects, nor had their consent been sought.

Paranoid reactions and hearing loss

Zimbardo, Andersen and Kabat (1981) deceived their subjects with the pretext that they were interested in the effects of hypnosis on problem-solving ability. The early sessions proved to be useful with the young college students claiming improved levels of concentration and reduction in fatigue. Subjects were then given the post-hypnotic suggestion that they would experience hearing trouble. Shortly after subjects were asked to interpret a series of slides, at which point the hypnotically induced hearing loss caused them to become confused, angry and distressed. Their upset was caused by their inability to understand what others were saying, when they were clearly talking to the subjects.

The purpose of this study (of which the subjects were unaware) was to investigate the hypothesis that paranoia in the aged could be caused by hearing loss. The basic idea here was that paranoid reactions following deafness could be contributed to by an initial lack of awareness of the hearing deficit. It was hypothesised that paranoid thinking is a cognitive attempt to explain the perceptual anomaly of not being able to hear what others are saying. So, if the loss of hearing was seen as others

not speaking up, this might result in accusations of whispering. Denial by others would be interpreted as a lie, since it would obviously be at odds with the observed evidence. Following this line of reasoning, it is not hard to see how this could result in frustration, anger and a deterioration in the social relationships which are so necessary to provide corrective social feedback for modifying such false beliefs.

Student reactions to deception in social psychology

Much of the above mentioned work routinely appears in social psychology texts. Deception has become such an integral part of social psychological methodology that students have (alarmingly) come to expect this from researchers. One indication of this is the common reaction from students who have read about the routine use of deception in social psychology and subsequently begin to see the possibility that almost anything could be 'a social psychological experiment'. Strongly implied in this realisation is the very real likelihood that such an experiment would involve deception and that participants could be involved in a research procedure without their knowledge or consent. This view is contributed to by the use of 'Candid Camera' style tactics in conducting research (Maas & Toivanen, 1978; Milgram & Sabini, 1979). Both the producers of such entertainment programmes and experimental social psychologists believe that the importance of capturing spontaneous behaviour is more important than the responsibility to inform people of the procedures they are about to undergo, and obtaining their consent. The rights and wrongs of this have been extensively debated, with deceptive research practice still being the norm for some social psychologists. Kimmel (1988) makes the telling point that the popularity of a practice should not be taken as evidence for its moral acceptability.

Critical social psychologists are in strong disagreement with the practice of deception. However, before a summary of these specific concerns is presented, let me share an interesting and instructive story dealing with an incident that occurred in one of my social psychology classes. This story is illustrative of student expectations about the commonality of cover stories, deception, and expecting the unexpected.

Some years ago I had the good fortune to have a Swedish social psychologist visiting. His research interest was in non-verbal behaviour and he asked to video one of my lectures. The idea was to capture some of the non-verbals that accompanied public speaking and I was happy to assist. At the beginning of the class I explained why we had a video camera at the back of the room and then began. Little did I know that this was to become one of my most memorable lectures. Part way through this class a student interrupted loudly and began asking urgent questions, which I answered. However, the student persisted with questions that became increasingly vague and unrelated to the topic of the class. The questions were also accompanied by increasing fervour and enthusiasm. Eventually I decided the questions were disrupting the class and not contributing much at

all – in fact they were becoming disruptive and so I asked the student to refrain from asking further questions until the conclusion of the class. After class the student approached me and we talked about a number of things related to the material in the lecture. There was nothing odd in this, as students often see me after class for clarification or further questions. However, it soon became clear that this student was entertaining a number of paranoid delusions and was terrified and frightened by this. An immediate referral to student counselling led to a referral to a local mental health centre and subsequent hospitalisation.

You can see now why I regard it as a memorable class. At the time I was very nervous about this as I was not only having to teach a class of 150 students, but deal with a line of questioning which at first seemed legitimate, but increasingly became unconnected with anything that usually went on in such classes. An added factor in all this was my Swedish colleague who now has a very animated record of my lecture that day. I am sure the students had little idea of what was actually happening, and my Swedish colleague was even less certain about what all this meant. The next day some of the students talked to me about their confusion as to what had happened. Some interpreted this as just another student acting strangely. Some had even been in earlier classes where the student had been disruptive and they had simply seen this as odd. However, others saw this as a clever way to involve them in some bizarre social psychological experiment.

What we had witnessed was a public display of a very personal tragedy. At the time the situation was shrouded in ambiguity for all concerned and it only became clear to me after the class that something was profoundly wrong. I was also concerned that students could see this as a form of controlled experiment. At one level this was not an unreasonable interpretation, given that their reading included experiments that were confusing and ambiguous for participants, and which turned out to be social psychology experiments. Further, they had noted the video camera and the student's odd behaviour, and concluded that this might be some form of research unfolding before their very eyes. The fact that students thought this might possibly be something that was planned and executed in the name of research was disturbing, but, given the history of deceptive techniques used in social psychology, not unexpected. The disturbing thing here is that students believe events such as the personal tragedy witnessed in class could be stunts pulled in order to set up some false reality for the purpose of studying it. I regard this as a sad indictment of the discipline that condones such activity. Arguably it is a discipline that has, for various reasons, embraced methods based on deceit, misrepresentation and trickery. This is not an aspect of the discipline critical social psychologists are proud of, or keen to emulate.

Critical concerns about deception

While some researchers (Smith, 1981) have argued that deception is justified as it provides knowledge we would otherwise not have, others (Diener & Crandall, 1978)

have levelled a series of objections to the practice of deceiving research subjects. Four of these issues will be commented on here. Firstly, Ring (1967) has suggested that a general mistrust of cover stories may develop as a norm for students who participate in research studies. This suggestion is of relevance to the story told above, where this mistrust extended to the interpretation of a spontaneous class disruption as being an attempt to stage some form of experimental manipulation. Secondly, there is the point that deception breaches the principle of informed consent. This, in turn, may work to erode the trust that should exist between researcher and researched. Kelman (1968) has developed this argument, through asking what potential subjects might think when dealing with those who routinely engage in double dealing. Thirdly, there is the question of what the general public think. Do they see social psychologists as manipulative, exploitative and mistrustful? If the answer is yes, then we must seriously consider what kind of public image we wish to foster in the future. The final concern rests with those who have willingly offered their time to be involved in psychological research. How do these people feel when they realise they have been duped or fooled by the researcher? More broadly, Brown (1997) has criticised the way in which psychology has seen ethics as an add-on, rather than as something that is carefully integrated into the overall framework of the work completed in psychology. This critique is levelled at teaching, research and practice within the discipline. Brown argues that existing ethical codes typically place the interests of the researcher above those of the research participant. The preceding discussion would tend to support such a concern.

In summary, it seems that experimental research subjects are mistrustful of the instructions with which they are provided. As Aronson et al. (1990) note, the prevailing ethos of suspicion and doubt create problems for the social psychologist. Subjects assume pointless tasks do have a point, that dangerous tasks are really safe, and that immoral acts are ultimately someone else's responsibility. This highlights the degree to which an unusual culture is operating in the social psychological experiment. Given that these situations are synthetic in the first place, these concerns must raise doubt about the validity of the findings that emanate from such contrived situations.

Summary

This chapter has introduced a strand of critical social psychology that criticises the standard research practices of mainstream experimental work in social psychology. Three popular and influential studies were introduced and discussed as examples of a tradition whose time has elapsed. The dominance of experimentalism has been criticised in terms of a series of concerns that operate methodologically and ethically. At the level of method, critical social psychologists have largely denounced the experimental method as being highly contrived and artificial, failing to show relevance and application beyond the

situation in which the data was derived, and being a method that is ultimately inappropriate for the study of human beings. Finally, the chapter has concluded with an examination of ethical problems associated with methods that have failed to respect the welfare of those who have volunteered their time in the name of psychological research. In short, the experimental tradition has been examined and critiqued as part of a wider argument regarding the wisdom of continuing to rely on experimentation as the method of choice. In Chapter Two the concern moves to one of understanding why social psychology has come to rely so heavily on experimentation. The explanation offered draws on an understanding of the history of social psychology and philosophy of science known as positivism.

Further reading

Brown, L. (1997). Ethics in psychology: Cui bono? In D. Fox & I. Prilleltensky (Eds.), *Critical psychology: An introduction* (pp. 51–67). London: Sage.
In this thoughtful chapter Brown poses the question of whose interests are being served by ethical codes. A stinging attack is launched on the way in which 'American psychology' has only belatedly dealt with the ethics of professional practices. The argument is made that the discipline has failed to integrate ethics into the practices that psychologists undertake. Research participants and clients are not, Brown argues, the focus of ethical codes that have largely been written for the benefit of the psychologist.

Gough, B. & McFadden, M. (2001). *Critical social psychology: An introduction.* Basingstoke: Palgrave.
Chapter Two is especially relevant as it provides a critical snapshot of contemporary social psychology. This is examined in terms of history, the 'crisis' within the discipline, the rise of cognitive social psychology, and finally, there is a discussion of some of the 'virtues' of adopting a more critical approach.

Kitzinger, C. (1987). *The social construction of lesbianism.* London: Sage.
Chapter One is especially recommended as it offers a reflexive analysis of the ways in which the social science literature is organised to achieve certain aims, such as being authoritative, truthful and knowledgeable. The way in which psychology studies gay life provides the focus around which Kitzinger offers some interesting and insightful points regarding the pitfalls of simply accepting the standard ways of conducting research and writing about that research. In Chapter Two social science accounts are taken to task, with psychology being targeted for some particularly strong criticisms. The broad ideology that sits behind psychology's adherence to a constrained understanding of science is also discussed in the context of psychological research into the management and control of gayness.

From the Shadows
of the Hard Sciences

Overview

In Chapter One readers were introduced to the experimental tradition in social psychology, and some of the grounds on which this tradition may be critiqued. In particular, the problems of artificiality, relevance, studying ourselves as objects, and a range of ethical issues were highlighted. When considered together these issues raise serious concerns about the wisdom of *continuing* to rely on experimentation as the method of choice for advancing our knowledge and understanding of the social world. In this chapter the crucial question centres around an examination of *why* social psychology has come to rely so heavily on experimentation. In order to do this, the historical and philosophical ideas experimentation is based on are examined. Firstly, this critique is structured around a brief examination of the history of social psychology. This provides a useful background to understanding the basis from which the traditional version of the discipline emerged and is helpful in providing a better understanding of the reasons why experimentalism came to be embraced so wholeheartedly. Secondly, the philosophy of science known as **positivism** is considered, as this entails a version of science that has had a powerful impact on the shape of contemporary social psychology. This philosophical perspective is outlined and interrogated in terms of its limitations as a science for studying the social world. Thirdly, two key problems associated with positivism are discussed: **reductionism** and **individualism**. These twin problems serve to limit severely the horizons and usefulness of social psychology. The conclusion that is reached following the examination of history, philosophy and the twin problems of reductionism and individualism is that social psychology is a discipline fashioned from the elements of the hard sciences, which now finds itself reluctant to step from behind the shadows of that background. In Chapter Three the task is to move beyond criticism and consider one of the possible philosophical paths that might guide the discipline into a more thoroughly *social* version of social psychology.

Social psychological history

Haslam and McGarty (2001) note that a commonly acknowledged starting point for social psychology was the 1898 publication of Triplett's famous experiments in social facilitation. Triplett enjoyed the sport of cycling and was made curious by his observations that under race conditions cyclists could produce better times when other cyclists paced them. Explanations for this difference were predominantly tied up with the idea that there were physical factors involved. The physical account, for example, made reference to 'drafting', which is the effect of reduced wind resistance when a rider sits snugly behind another rider. This is clearly not possible when cycling alone, but becomes a factor when there is another cyclist on the racetrack. Triplett, however, was dissatisfied with the physical explanation and pursued the idea that psychological factors might be involved. Accordingly, he set about to gather supportive evidence by conducting a series of **analogue studies** that tested the same basic principle with tasks such as winding in fishing reels, where the involvement of 'drafting' was not at issue. Under these conditions children were able to wind their reels faster when doing so with other children. The presence of these **coactors** saw improved times when compared with solitary performances. Of course there is much more that could be said about Triplett and also about the beginning of experimental social psychology. While it is important to acknowledge Triplett's early contribution to the discipline, it is also important to recognise the powerful intellectual influences that date back much further than a single century.

It is difficult to imagine a time in our past when people were not, at least in some primitive sense, interested in each other and in the social world more generally. These kinds of interests were evident two and a half thousand years ago when great thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle grappled with the 'nature–nurture' debate. This debate involved questions about whether social actions are determined by genetic or environmental social factors, and whether human actions are determined by genetic inheritance gifted from parents, or are due to the influences of nurturance, upbringing and education. The lengthy history of these kinds of debates highlights the important observation that humans possess an intense and prolonged interest in the causes and explanations for our social actions. Indeed, it is the case that our species is an essentially social one, possessing a keen interest in social matters, in relationships and in each other. Academically these interests and questions came to be formally studied as part of philosophy, and it is only in relatively recent times that social psychology (and psychology more generally) developed out of and separated from the parent discipline of philosophy. As recently as 150 years ago the relationship between social psychology and philosophy was close. However, many common philosophical roots became untied when psychology broke away and established its own identity (Allport, 1968).

Disciplinary detachment from the past

While issues of social concern have attracted the attention of some of the greatest thinkers and cleverest minds, disappointingly, most contemporary social psychologists treat history with disregard and neglect (Samelson, 1986). Sarason (1981: 176) argues that history is treated as an irrelevancy by psychology generally, 'For all practical purposes psychology is ahistorical. It has its subject matter: the individual, and all else is commentary – interesting, but commentary.' This contrasts with the views of critical social psychologists who argue that ignorance of history has impoverished the discipline and contributed to a distorted view of the nature of psychological knowledge (Billig, 1987; Gergen, 1997). More generally, Gergen (1973) is critical of the mission traditional social psychology has set itself and argues that attempts to establish laws of human social behaviour are naive, given the inevitable way in which time, place and culture impact on our social relationships and our social realities. The key argument is one of **epistemological contingency**. This means that psychological knowledge is very much a product of its cultural and historical context – just as psychology's subjects are also produced through time and place. In short, epistemological contingency means that knowledge is inextricably linked to the period in time when it was gathered. This means that attempts at capturing immutable laws of social behaviour without regard to history and culture are not only impossible, but naive. Any such 'law' might apply to the people who contributed to it, but given the vast and powerful influences of culture and socio-political context, such universals would quickly become outdated and hence have limited application.

The detachment from history that characterises contemporary social psychology may be explained in terms of psychology's unquestioning acceptance of what Riggs (1992) calls 'the standard view of science'. Under this view knowledge is regarded as being both progressive and cumulative, with applications of the scientific method providing for successively closer approximations to the truth. Thus, the standard view of science contributes to the notion that fresh research is more highly valued and seen as more relevant. The most recent theory or the latest research promises a more accurate picture of the world than that which preceded it (Gergen, 1997). Most psychologists understand science in this way, and are therefore inclined to disregard, or downgrade, the work of their predecessors.

There is ample textbook evidence of social psychology having detached itself from history (Stringer, 1990). The majority of mainstream introductory social psychology texts acknowledge the youthfulness of the discipline, but provide limited or non-existent historical treatment. There are, however, some notable exceptions with both Franzoi (1996) and Vaughan and Hogg (2002) providing more extended coverage of the question of where the discipline has come from. Critical social psychologists refuse to ignore history and are acutely interested in where the discipline has come from, and how the past has shaped the

discipline. The contemporary form of the discipline may be characterised as an almost slavish devotion to a single version of the philosophy of science (positivism) and a single preferred method (experimentation). A critical perspective on history brings into focus the question of why social psychology has engaged in an intellectual, conceptual and methodological marriage with positivism and experimentalism. This is, of course, the core question this chapter seeks to address.

A history of experiments, subjects and people

Among traditional social psychologists, not only has the experimental method been wholeheartedly embraced, but it has been done so unquestioningly. As Bull and Roger (1989: 9) note, belief in the power of experimentalism 'is in itself the distinctive theoretical perspective of psychology'. Indeed, for the vast majority of social psychologists, experimentalism is *the* method of choice. One attempt (Higbee, Millard & Folkman, 1982) to document the extent to which experimental methods were prevalent in social psychology noted that three quarters of all work in major social psychology journals used experimental designs. Penner (1986) makes this point by referring to the 'tremendous emphasis' placed on using laboratory experiments. Stam, Lubek and Radtke (1998) characterise psychology's relationship with experimentalism as achieving ritualistic proportions. They also bemoan the way traditional social psychology reduces social life to a series of **intrapsychic** individual variables, thereby losing any real notion of the social.

Morawski (2000) has documented some of the formative work in early social psychology, and suggests that a century ago the discipline brimmed with opportunities for understanding social life. However, the development of these opportunities became constrained by 'orthodoxy of method and subject matter' (p. 429). Social psychology through the twentieth century came to be based on a limited model of the relationship between science and social life. Morawski criticises the dominance of this model, which is seen as determinist, atheoretical and excessively individualised. Further, this model assumes social psychology can produce technical knowledge that is able to be applied to the necessary regulation of individuals in the social world. Thus, the last century has witnessed social psychology develop a *single version* of the ways in which knowledge about social life may be obtained. Critically, this version has produced a wealth of knowledge that is severely constrained by being based on such a limited conception of the social.

Critical social psychologists are keen to see the discipline broaden its conception of the social, and in so doing to broaden the range of understandings that we might have as social psychologists. The final chapters of this book are dedicated to showing some of the exciting possibilities here. At this point, however, I will focus on examining the criticism that contemporary social psychology

is narrow, and later move to examining how this might be altered with respect to theory, method and subject matter.

An interesting historical comment on constraints within social psychology is provided by Sherif (1987), whose involvement with the discipline began in the 1940s. At this time there were clear demarcations emerging within the various sub-disciplines of psychology. The differentiations were hierarchically ranked according to methodological values, which were attached to the methods of the hard ('natural') sciences. Within psychology, the experimentalists, mental testers and statisticians ranked well above developmental, clinical and social psychologists. Sherif argues that in the decades following the 1940s the more lowly ranked sought to improve their status by adopting the theories and methods of those further up the hierarchy. Bannister (1970) explains this with the suggestion that psychologists were desperate to join the 'science club'. The particular methods of this club included the importation of statistical methods (Gigerenzer & Murray, 1987), which added a quantitative dimension to the work of social psychologists.

As well as statistical methods being adopted to bolster the status of social psychology, fundamental ways of conceptualising methods underwent substantial change. Danziger (1990) provides a detailed history of experimentation in psychology where two distinct models operated within early European psychology. One model was based on fluid social functions, with the roles of experimenter and subject being highly interchangeable, while the other model kept these roles rigidly separate. The second model grew out of work that was conducted in experimental hypnosis, and it was this model that was subsequently adopted by American psychology. Danziger (1985) advances the idea that these rigidly defined roles and status structures originated from the medical context in which early experiments were conducted. The roles of subject and experimenter mirrored the doctor–patient relationship, with the entire social situation being largely defined in medical terms. Subjects were mostly drawn from clinical populations and the experimenters identified strongly with the medical profession.

The names given to the sources of human data reflect the prevailing conceptions of psychological knowledge that apply at any particular time (Danziger, 1990). The broad aim of experimental psychology was to establish knowledge of human behaviour that would be ahistorical and universal. General laws (or principles) of behaviour were sought. One of the reasons for the popularity of the experiment was that it stood 'apart from the sociohistorical context in which the rest of human life is embedded. It appears to lead straight to human universals, not infrequently identified with biological universals' (p.100). It was this pursuit of universal human truth that saw the experimental identity of subjects played up, while personal, social and identifying details were downplayed and ultimately eliminated. Actions were more easily attributed to generalised incumbents of experimental roles, rather than to specific individuals. This effect may be further strengthened by the almost complete invisibility of individuals, with results being attributed to anonymous groups of 'subjects'.

Building on Billig's (1994) attempt to 'repopulate' social psychology, Stam et al. (1998) advance the criticism that social psychology's blind adherence to experimentalism has resulted in people having been artificially removed from the study of social life altogether. Stam et al. suggest that social psychology has taken individualism to such an extreme that it is now about individuals who do not exist! The non-existence they write about refers to the process of data collection whereby individual identity and experience are completely undermined by methodological practices that extract data from subjects who cease to be persons. In effect, this speaks to the dehumanisation of experimental procedures whereby individuals become completely lost in the process of data collection and extraction.

In recent times the way in which psychologists have referred to those who have been the objects of study has changed. When I first entered psychology 25 years ago I recall being told that 'only kings and psychologists had subjects'. This claim elevated the discipline to a pretentious and grandiose level. Importantly, it also highlighted the unquestioned way in which the discipline uniformly referred to those involved in studies as 'subjects'. In recent times this has changed with the fourth edition of the APA Publication Manual (1994) recommending that the 'impersonal' term *subject* be replaced with more descriptive terms like *participant* or *respondent*. Subject is not merely impersonal, it also refers to the process of people being subjected to various 'treatments' and when considered in this light it is easy to see how the traditional language of the discipline owed much to the medical model it was based on. Further, referring to the people who are involved in social psychological research as participants is more than a descriptive term. It serves as a code for some basic aspects of how such people should be treated when they are participating. I refer here to the importance of issues such as informed consent, the freedom to withdraw from participation at any point, and the expectation that participation be treated with confidentiality and respect.

The history of terms used to describe those who have been involved in psychological research provides an interesting lesson about how words carry with them particular meanings that encourage certain practices, while at the same time constraining others. Danziger (1985) reports that the earliest published reports were marked by a lack of consensus as to how to refer to those who were involved in psychological experimentation. *Observer*, *percipient*, *subject*, *experimentee* and *reagent* are all terms that have been used at one time or another. As Rosnow and Rosenthal (1997) remind us, the term *reagent* is a chemical term that refers to a substance which, when mixed with another, will reliably produce a certain reaction. This kind of reliability and predictability has proven to be mostly absent from studies of human social life, in spite of the aspirations and expectations of mainstream psychologists. By the end of the nineteenth century *subject* was used in about half the published psychological work and *observer* in about a quarter. Fifty years later, *observer* was no longer being used at all. Up to this point the term *observer* appeared most in the *American Journal of Psychology*,

which published the work of experimental introspectionists who were critical of the cult of objectivism. Danziger (1990) criticises the common practice within psychology of adopting terminology that contributes to the illusion of **empiricism**. As already indicated, claims to being scientific were, at least in some measure, dependent on the manipulation of the identity of the data sources.

This brief history provides a picture of the development of increasingly sharper definition as the discipline began to stand outside the methods of traditional philosophy. The way in which social psychology has developed its scientific orientation and methods has become increasingly narrow and constrained. Contemporary social psychologists have displayed a remarkable disregard for the history of the discipline, and a surprising lack of interest in the general question of where the discipline has come from. From the above engagement with the issues, it can be shown that the methods and terminology of social psychology have increasingly attempted to mimic the methods and understandings of the 'hard' sciences. These developments may be traced through such issues as what we call data sources and the increasing reliance on experimental methods. These in turn have been derived from a commitment to the philosophy of science known as positivism. Positivism will be discussed in detail, but first it is important to situate this discussion within the context of the philosophy of science and to introduce some key terms.

Philosophy of science

At a broad level science may be thought of as being about how we make sense of the world. Any particular philosophy of science therefore deals with the underlying ideas of how best to approach the business of making sense of things. These ideas include a range of beliefs and assumptions that strongly guide the practices of all scientists, including social psychologists. Such beliefs are of great importance as they impact on all kinds of issues social psychologists deal with when conducting research. The specific beliefs that guide the practices of social psychologists may be considered to operate at three interrelated levels. Accordingly, it will be useful to make some distinctions by introducing the terms *ontology*, *epistemology* and *methodology*.

The most fundamental of these terms is **ontology**, which is derived from ancient Greek and means reality, being or existence. For Nightingale and Neilands (1997), ontological assumptions refer to those views we have about the nature of the world and the nature of people. As Richardson and Fowers (1997) explain, ontology means a general view of what exists. Putting this bluntly, we can roughly equate questions of ontology with questions about the fundamental nature of our worlds, our realities and about the social face of those realities. The kind of ontological assumptions one adopts have implications for knowledge. In particular questions of ontology have implications for *what* it is that can be known.

This brief discussion about ontology may seem somewhat abstract and removed from the daily reality of our social worlds. However, I would suggest that nothing could be further from the truth. What should be clear from the above is that it is possible for people to hold differing ontological assumptions, and this means quite differing understandings of the nature of reality. This may seem rather frightening – given that you probably feel quite comfortable with your own sense of reality, and may regard such debates as the unique preserve of philosophers or the insane. It is not difficult to think about the ways in which people fundamentally differ in the way in which they 'see' the world. I am not referring to simple acts of perception but wider views on the nature of reality. Consider the different ways in which religion can change one's view of what is real, what is important, and how one should conduct one's interactions with others. Cultural differences provide further evidence that we don't all agree about the exact nature of what exists and how we should conduct ourselves in relation to important aspects of the physical and social world. More locally, you might be able to think of examples of disputes you have been involved with (with parents, siblings, friends, classmates, lovers). Often these arise, not as a mere matter of misunderstanding, but as a result of the other having an entirely different view on the exact nature of 'what happened'. When explored in detail, differences of opinion frequently turn out to be fundamental ontological differences. Sometimes successful negotiation through such arguments, debates and conflicts depends on recognising just how deeply these differences go.

Discussions of philosophy of science should also make a distinction between **epistemology** and methodology. The term epistemology also comes from Greek, and is derived from the word epistēmē, which means knowledge. This is a wide-ranging term that entails a complicated set of issues which relate to the philosophy of knowledge. These issues include questions about how we may come to know, what constitutes knowledge, what relationships exist between the knower and the knowable, and how reality may be known. There is also an important relationship between ontology and epistemology, since alternative realities will necessarily entail knowledge of those realities.

Assumptions at both the ontological and epistemological level have clear implications for the methodology that may be adopted to deal with research questions. Methodological questions are similar to epistemological questions, both being concerned with how we come to know. Methodological questions are, however, more practically oriented and examine specific ways, practices and methods that may be used to try to find out about what is knowable.

As Nightingale and Neilands (1997) explain, ontology, epistemology and methodology are all closely related. Adopting a particular set of ontological assumptions has clear implications for the way in which questions will be addressed at a philosophical (epistemological), and practical (methodological) level. It seems likely that most social psychologists are content to leave these issues for philosophers to engage with. Mainstream social psychology textbooks and journal articles almost entirely disregard these issues, or make unstated assumptions that

then inform their practices. In the case of student textbooks the closest thing to this kind of discussion comes in the *methods* chapter, but even here the unstated assumptions that support particular methods remain firmly unstated. What is clearly stated is that reality takes a particular form (about which there is never any debate), that only certain kinds of knowledge are worth obtaining, and that the standard methods available in social psychology are best suited to furnishing this end. In short, students are introduced to discussions about methods, but are protected from the need to engage with issues of ontology and epistemology. Critically, it would seem important to have an understanding of the basis of one's methods, otherwise choices in approaching research would seem to be fulfilling nothing other than further acts of compliance.

Part of the argument of this book is that these issues are overdue for consideration. Indeed, the critical imperative demands that mainstream assumptions and methods be fully interrogated. Through this process it will become less likely that methods of research will be adopted blindly, without consideration and understanding of underlying assumptions. Further, it is hoped that a consideration of these assumptions will encourage discussion about alternatives that will move social psychology past its reliance on experimentalism.

Positivism

A critical orientation requires an understanding of the underlying philosophical basis on which experimental social psychology rests. The experimental tradition has developed into a forceful methodological dogma, and proceeds, for most contemporary social psychologists, as a matter of disciplinary convention. However, it is important to remember that there is nothing god-given about this. Ultimately such work is based on the justification and rationale provided by the guiding philosophy of science: positivism. In simple terms this means that the choice of questionnaire, survey, experiment or whatever is never conducted independently of a set of ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions about the nature of the social world, the kinds of knowledge we can have about that social world and how best to access this. In other words, social psychologists employ methods because they believe these methods have a justifiable basis. They believe their methods are appropriate and useful in providing insights and knowledge of the social world. Critical psychologists demand an examination of these assumptions *prior to* any methodological commitment.

Enlightenment values (rationality and empiricism) and modernism

In terms of the broad history of ideas, positivism and scientific thinking were the result of the **Enlightenment** project whereby the power and control afforded both

Church and Crown were challenged. Indeed, this project aimed to overthrow the **totalitarianism** that dominated Western society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Further, intellectual egalitarianism and political democracy sought to undermine the traditions that allowed religion and royalty to speak for all, and to rule on matters of truth and morality (Gergen, 1999). In this way it was hoped that the 'dark ages' would yield to the power of the enlightenment age. Key aspects of enlightenment thinking have defined what is currently understood by the notion of **modernism**. The important aspects of this kind of thinking that Gergen (2001) has identified include beliefs concerning rationality, empiricism and language. With respect to rationality, Gergen refers to the Enlightenment as a 'historical watershed primarily owing to the dignity which it granted to individual rationality' (p. 150). Such individually empowering views were promoted in response to the long history of people being ruled by the traditional institutions of the Church and the Crown and being afforded little control over their own lives. Empiricist views were also promoted, with particular emphasis being placed on the power of individual observation. As Gergen argues, it was the combination of reason and observation which provided the basis for claiming that individuals should have no less status than those of the ruling royal and clerical classes. The associated empiricist philosophy placed prime importance on observation as the basis for modern science. Contemporary views of language closely associated with empiricism regard language as having a representational function. This capacity for language to represent uncomplicatedly the true state of affairs is a position that is strongly resisted by critical scholars. This issue is at the forefront of debates that are dealt with in the next chapter when the philosophical orientation of social constructionism will be introduced and discussed in detail.

The growth of the natural sciences in the nineteenth century inspired a number of leading intellectuals to apply these ideas to the study of humanity. Key among such thinkers was Auguste Comte, a French philosopher who had been influenced by the French revolution. Comte rejected philosophical speculation in favour of a scientific approach to the study of human society. Just as religion had replaced the magical thinking that preceded it, science was to replace religion as the basis on which the new society should be organised. Positivism was founded on the ontological assumption that the true nature of the world becomes available to us through observation. Visual perception is the medium through which we are able to determine the basis of reality. In a nutshell, this orientation embraces a visually mediated ontology that applies to the philosophical traditions of empiricism and positivism. Nightingale and Neilands (1997) explain empiricism most simply as the belief that what you see is what there is. Positivism is the associated belief that the nature of the world will simply reveal itself to observers. Furthermore, it is claimed that such observations are able to provide objective and bias-free knowledge.

Problems with positivism

From a critical perspective, claims of objectivity, neutrality and unbiased knowledge are regarded with the same scepticism applied to all beliefs that promote the notion of access to 'true' knowledge. While the questions regarding objectivity and bias-free knowledge have been widely debated within academic circles in recent times, critical scholars regard these notions as being of mythological proportions. In short, these ideals of positivism to which mainstream work aspires are regarded as illusory.

There are also significant problems with adopting positivism as the basis for one's science. Not the least of such problems is what Parker (1999) refers to as the '**interpretive gap**'. Simply, this refers to the requirement for interpretation between representation of the world and the actual things in the world. The 'interpretive gap' highlights the possibility of interpretation being influenced by issues to do with how representative the data is, the degree to which data is context dependent, and the extent to which the researcher has influenced the data.

Epistemologically, this means that for positivist social psychologists, science is organised around the business of collecting evidence that must be observable and measurable. Failure to satisfy these two criteria would mean the 'evidence' would fail to qualify as knowledge. This limited definition of what counts as knowledge has opened the door for critical psychologists to launch full-scale attacks on the epistemological and methodological tenets (principles) of mainstream social psychology. For example, Kitzinger (1987) provides a characterisation of positivist methods as being concerned with experimental control, manipulation of variables, quantification, measurement and statistical analysis. The advantage of quantifying observations is the statistical and mathematical precision that is then afforded numerical indices. Numbers also convert observations into a neutral language (Gergen, 1999), which seems to transcend the awkwardness and difficulty of working with verbal language. And, importantly, numerical precision contributes to a sense of objectivity so prized by positivism.

These notions have been the subject of much criticism, including the idea that numerical precision is achieved at the cost of meaningfulness. Gergen (1999) provides the example of summarising the victim of a rape or robbery as a statistic, which completely strips out the psychological significance and meaningfulness of such an event. Reason and Rowan (1981) have cleverly coined the term '**quantiphrenia**' to refer to the near obsession of psychologists to measure all aspects of social life. Sarason (1981: 183) has been equally damning when he writes, 'Psychology has for too long sought to measure a world of its own contrivance, and this it has done extremely well – so well that for decades it did not have to face the possibility that ingeniously measuring a world of one's own making is a mammoth waste of time.' Sarason's recommendation is that the discipline de-emphasise the role of measurement and attend more to the question of understanding.

Wood and Kroger (2000) are critical of the assumption that quantification is the *only* analytic activity that is meaningful or worthwhile. If, as traditional social psychologists suggest, numbers are the only valid currency with which psychological aspects of social life can be indexed, then other currencies (for example, talk and text) are always going to be seen as inferior. The critical perspective strongly resists such numerical imperatives and argues for talk and text to be recognised as important and valid ways of indexing psychological experience. On the question of importance, critical social psychologists are united in their belief that language is of profound importance. In talking about indices of experience Gergen (1999) refers to numbers and words as merely different translation devices and suggests that numbers provide a translation no more adequate than words. In terms of psychological meaning or psychological understanding, numbers provide a single system of translation, one simple measure, and only one strand of the wider psychology which seeks to understand social life. The critical argument is that numbers do not provide a better, a more accurate or a more correct translation than words. Indeed it is important not to overlook the point that words, not numbers, form the basic currency for the conversations, dialogues and messages we routinely deploy in our daily social interactions. In short language is the primary social currency. Gough and McFadden (2001) write about this from the perspective of the research participant. They make the important point that quantitative methods inevitably constrain individual choice in forcing participants to select from a list of responses, or by limiting their responses to a phenomenon they may never have previously considered by way of a numerical index. It is unusual for us to, for example, attempt numerically to index the strength of our feelings, beliefs or relationships. Critical social psychologists do not assume that people can use numbers to make sense of their social experiences, and are highly critical of the assumption that this is desirable from a research perspective.

It is important to be clear here that such criticisms are not new. Widespread criticism of social psychology's wholesale commitment to positivism has been evident in the literature since the 1970s. Tajfel (1972) warns that traditional social psychology is premised on positivism, which precludes an appreciation of the social basis of social psychological theory. There is a major irony here: of all the branches of psychology, social psychology should have the strongest commitment to providing a social basis for psychological knowledge. Yet, largely due to its commitment to positivism, this has generally not been the case. Shipman (1988) provides two key criticisms of positivism within the social sciences. Firstly, he suggests that positivism has degenerated into scientism, with a resulting methodological constriction whereby only experimental methods have been valued by researchers. This methodological commitment has resulted in a degree of epistemological constraint whereby the pursuit of causal relationships has become prized over alternative forms of enquiry. Secondly, Shipman argues that Comte's mission to develop a natural science of society has failed – applying the methods of the natural sciences to the human sciences has resulted in dogma,

mystification and a set of methods that are inappropriate for studying the social world.

Methodological inappropriateness has also been a popular topic among those critical of the direction traditional social psychology has followed. Harré and Secord (1972) express concern that positivist methodology does not automatically produce reliable scientific knowledge. They further suggest that positivistic social psychology fails on the grounds of its inability to take account of the meaning or context of social life. Frewin and Tuffin (1998) have similarly warned against the futility of attempting to capture decontextualised cause and effect relationships that have been artificially derived from variables defined by social psychologists themselves (rather than by those who participate in experiments). Boulding (1980) has criticised the way in which methods have been uncritically transferred from one 'epistemological field' where they have worked well, into another where they are not appropriate. As Kline (1998) notes, the subject matter of psychology differs markedly from that of the natural sciences and we should not, therefore, expect the methods of the natural sciences to simply slide across and work successfully when we attempt to study ourselves.

In the case of social psychology, the methods of physics have been lifted from that particular epistemological field and applied to the study of human social life. Totman (1985: 28) criticises this move when he writes, 'Importing the method of classical physics makes social psychology look respectably scientific and licences the social investigator to use scientistic rhetoric in commenting on a culture of which he or she is part.' Parker (1988) makes a similar point by suggesting that psychology has mistakenly viewed itself as a natural science, and further compounded this mistake by misunderstanding the methods of the natural sciences. Harré and Gillett (1994) comment that 'old paradigm' psychology (which they equate with traditional, experimental psychology) was unlike a *science*, in the accepted sense of that term. They argue that the popularity of experimental methodology is a result of institutional pressure, rather than scientific merit.

Another concern relates to the positivist assumption that an objective knowable reality exists (Harré and Secord, 1972). The problem here is that when considering the social world, a case could be made for suggesting that such objective reality is mythical – as this world pivots on interpretations and understandings that are continually in the process of negotiation. A fundamental point here is the distinction that can be made between the *physical* and the *cultural* aspects of our being. Wood and Kroger (2000) advance the argument that human relationships with the physical world have been studied by areas of psychology, such as sensation and perception, and brain and behaviour, and that such studies are open to the causal explanations that have been at the forefront of the physical sciences. Wood and Kroger remind us, however, that these methods are much less useful for studying human relationships with the cultural world. Above all, these relationships are concerned with the symbolic world and as such are 'wholly enmeshed with the complexities of language' (p. xi). The territory these relationships deal with includes a vast range

of human activities – all of which are played out, transacted and negotiated through our use of language. This argues strongly for methods that transcend simple causal accountability, and have the ability to acknowledge the complex ways in which these fundamentally important human activities are produced. Attempting to 'capture' this through experimental intervention and control of extraneous variables seems at best contrived, and at worst naive. Finally, the concerns voiced by Harré and Gillett (1994) centre around questions of appropriateness and timeliness, especially given that the physical sciences that have most successfully championed this approach are now themselves in the process of seeking alternatives.

The philosophy of positivism may be characterised by a reliance on science and the scientific method as capable of producing the only kind of worthwhile knowledge. Critical social psychologists (for example, Kroger & Wood, 1998) contend that not only do mainstream social psychologists subscribe to the philosophy of positivism, but that they regard it as *the* philosophy of science. This disciplinary reliance on the single philosophy of positivism has made a very significant contribution to what has been referred to as a 'crisis' in social psychology (Parker, 1989). One aim for those interested in critical work is to broaden the basis on which research may proceed in social psychology. In the next chapter an alternative basis from which other methods for investigating social psychology may be developed is introduced.

What should be clear from the above review of aspects of social psychology's history and philosophical underpinnings is an intellectual inheritance that has become narrow and constrained with respect to both topic and method. Of course, the concerns of those critical of mainstream approaches extend beyond narrowness and restriction. Leavitt (2000), for example, has provided a detailed documentation of the problems associated with experimental psychology, which includes such glaring problems as scientific fraud, publication bias and faulty assumptions on which such work rests. There are also two further issues that should be considered further before moving to a consideration of research alternatives.

Reductionism and individualism

The preferred methods within social psychology rely on a reductionist premise: that the cause of an event can be determined by reducing the event to component parts and studying these and their interrelationships. It is important to point out here that the logic of experimental design is not at issue here. Rather the critical arguments are about the appropriateness of continuing to promote the experiment as the 'method of choice' when attempting to study and understand the social world. There are compelling reasons for exercising caution and also for thinking seriously about alternatives.

Reductionism

Reductionism within social psychology has been criticised by a number of writers (see, for example, Hayes, 1995; Reason, 1994; Westland, 1978). A common form of reductionism is that which accounts for social problems in terms of qualities believed to reside in the psyche of the individual. Hayes calls this social reductionism and notes that this form of explanation has been frequently employed to explain a wide range of social problems. Consider, for example, the reductionistic explanations that have been used in attempts to explain racism, prejudice and discrimination. The thinking involved in these explanations goes something like this: those most racist in the community, having been identified through psychological measurements of such tendencies, are so because they have been judged by psychological research to be high in the personality characteristic of racism. The circularity in this logic is all too apparent.

One example of social reductionism comes from the study by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Sanford (1950), who attempted to explain the strong anti-Semitic feelings that were prevalent in Nazi Germany. The authors of this work suggested that social prejudice could be accounted for in terms of authoritarianism, which came about as a result of having strict parents who were harsh disciplinarians. While it is possible that personality traits such as authoritarianism may explain some part of prejudice, such reductionistic accounts place the final responsibility for such social problems within a narrow and individualistic perspective, while ignoring the impact of wider cultural, social and political forces. Locating responsibility within the individual carries with it political implications that typically underplay the impact of social influences.

Indeed, Hayes (1995) comments that the political dimension of reductionism is problematic as attention is deflected from issues of power and control within society. Milgram's (1974) experimental studies of obedience are similarly open to the charge of reductionism. Milgram attempted to explain the unexpectedly high levels of obedience by reference to individual states of being. In particular he suggested that people can fall into an **agentic state** whereby individual autonomy is suspended while the person acts as the agent for another. Clearly, there are problems with reductionistic explanations, with the particular weakness exposed here being that such explanations ignore the broader social and political influences and (again) position the primary explanation firmly within the individual. More generally, reductionism of this kind shifts attention away from matters of politics, power and control. As Hayes notes, reductionism is 'both negative and misleading in the way that it ignores all the other levels of explanation' (p. 16). A version of reductionism that seemingly lies at the very heart of contemporary social psychology is individualism. It is to this topic we now turn.

Individualism

Reductionism involves the explanation of a phenomenon in terms of its constituent parts and is a powerful and influential form of explanation (Garfinkel, 1981). In the case of social phenomena (for example, unemployment, youth suicide or mob violence), explanations for these may be reduced to explanations which operate at the individual level, in much the same way that the characteristics of a gas may be explained in terms of the properties of its molecules. Social psychology has defined itself with an expressly individualistic orientation towards the study of social actions. Even a cursory examination of textbook definitions will highlight the degree to which individualism forms a core aspect of the way in which the discipline is conceptualised. In fact, these definitions vary little, with Franzoi (1996) providing an almost archetypal definition that charges the discipline with attempting to understand how *individuals* are influenced by others. While it has been acknowledged that individuals exist in social groups, the disciplinary division between psychology and sociology has seen psychology adopt the individual as the standard unit of analysis, while sociology has focused on groups and society at large. One of the problems of this division is that social psychologists also clearly have an interest in collectives and groups and this may give rise to tension, in terms of what should be the appropriate unit of analysis.

Tensions between the social and the individual have been at the heart of social psychology, ever since there has been social psychology. Indeed, Kvale (1992) suggests that the tension between the universal and the individual is one of the key themes of modernity, with individualism becoming one of the cornerstones of modern thought. Historically, the discipline of psychology has also grappled with these tensions between the universal and the individual. Traditionally, both **nomothetic** and **idiographic methods** have been used, with the former most famously represented by the experiment, and the latter being more likely to be represented by the case study. The overarching goal of the experiment is to establish universal laws while the aim of the case study is to understand the detailed workings of the individual.

The way in which modern-day psychology has settled these tensions is to privilege experiments. In so doing a major contradiction has emerged. While psychology promotes itself as an individualised approach, data supplied by any particular individual in an experiment becomes aggregated. This pooling of data is justified on the grounds that it increases the power and generalisability of results, but this is achieved at a cost. Namely, that such data collection and aggregation involves losing sight of the individual contribution. That which is most prized becomes submerged in wider processes of data collection. Mainstream contemporary social psychology provides a fairly standard methodological (and ideological) treatment of these issues. In short, the social becomes regarded as simply nothing more than the sum of the individuals. This approach leaves the individual as the preferred unit through which problems should be studied – and leaves social psychology's rampant individualism unchallenged.

The individualism that has dominated social psychology also carries with it an allegiance to intra-psychic explanations. Not only are the answers to pressing social problems to be found within individuals, but the domain where this operates is at the level of the cognitive. There is a sense about this style of explanation which seems to fit. As Burr (1995) notes, there are many topics (for example, memory and emotion) in psychology which we feel are rightly located within the individual. These things are very personal, intimate and private and there is an almost overwhelming sense that they happen within us, and therefore should be studied at that level, for that very reason. Mainstream psychology operates on this assumption, and privileges the internal workings of the individual as being the prime source of psychological explanation. Critical social psychologists have no wish to deny that we have a profound sense of uniqueness, individuality and physical separateness from others. However, critical social psychologists are acutely aware that such notions of individuality are peculiar in the context of the history of ideas and cultures of the world (Geertz, 1979). There is, of course, nothing natural or god-given about the ideology of self-contained individuality, but there exists considerable difficulty in recognising that this is a decidedly human overlay, which is itself subject to cultural and historical contingencies. Cherry (1995) has identified the workings of culture and history in the way in which psychologists have theorised their topics of study, and discusses this in terms of the 'cultural embeddedness' with which such theory must inevitably operate. Sarason (1981) criticises social psychologists for ignoring 'the fact that psychologists, no less than those they studied and about whom they theorised, were and are products of a socialization process from which they absorbed a particular view of people and society' (p. x). Inevitably, we, and the topics that are the focus of our research efforts, are products of both the times and cultures in which we live.

While it is possible to locate individualism as an approach that matches the individualism of North American culture, there are strong claims from critical social psychologists that individualised accounts which attempt to explain social events are insufficient. Parker (1992a) points out that traditional social psychology is premised on the promise of linking the individual and the social. This promise remains unfulfilled, and there are strong suggestions that while rampant individualism dominates, social psychology will never fully become a social discipline.

Sarason (1981) also writes about the separation of the individual from society, such that most psychologists conceptualise the individual as being outside (rather than an integral part of) society. Similarly, Stainton Rogers et al. (1995) have suggested that mainstream social psychology is based on a very narrow understanding of what social means. They document how a number of key social psychological topics all serve to reinforce the message that our productivity and efficiency are disrupted by the influence of others. In a similar vein, Buys (1978) reviews a lengthy list of social psychological phenomena that are seen to support the general thesis encapsulated in the eye-catching title of his paper, 'Humans would do better without groups'.

A number of critical psychologists (see, for example, Sampson, 1988; Shotter & Gergen, 1989) have attempted to stimulate discussions about alternatives to the dominant individualised self that social psychology has assumed. Gergen (1999) contends that the view that our thoughts, feelings, desires and so on are private (and therefore located within the individual) is not demanded by what there is, but is optional. This claim follows from an argument that individual selves are socially defined by social relationships, and that notions of the self vary across culture and history.

Gergen (1999) lists a number of problems associated with individualism. The first of these stems from Shotter's (1989) idea that individualism contributes to life occurring in psychological isolation. The psychological distance involved fosters a sense of distrust since we can never fully know another, as it is impossible to enter the private world of another individual. Individualism, Gergen suggests, contributes to suspicion, which in turn serves to undermine closeness and cooperation between people and groups. Secondly, the ideology of individualism works to promote further the notion that self-gratification is all-important. Relationships with others become judged on their worth in promoting the interests of the individual, and not valued for their social or collective uses. Thirdly, that individualism promotes the self as the primary reality when relationships with others could equally be seen as binding social institutions together. Fourthly, the 'looking out for number one' that legitimises self gain may be seen as simply another manifestation of the competitive, free-market, Western, capitalist political orientation. The problem here is that this offers a pyramid model of society whereby some reach the top of the economic ladder, but the majority struggle. Importantly, the domination of this model in the education system and in the workplace means there is no space for alternative forms of political ideology. Finally, there is the problem of '**systemic blindness**', which is closely linked to the problems of reductionism. The belief in self-contained individuals offers a limited explanatory frame for considering social problems. Inevitably, individualism encourages an analysis of social problems in terms of individual responsibility. Kitzinger (1987: 35) criticises psychological explanations on the grounds that they 'perpetuate the status quo through an insistent emphasis on individual responsibility, internal causation and individual solutions to problems'. The weakness involved in relying on individualised accounts is that they draw attention away from other, more systemic solutions. Gergen refers to this as 'an obtuse simplification of our ills' (p. 122), which constrains analysis of particular problems to the simple view that problems reside within individuals and solutions should therefore be aimed at the same level.

The politics of attempting to understand social problems in terms of individual responsibilities was pushed into prominence in New Zealand recently when a conservative government promoted the possibility of a formal code of responsible behaviour. An analysis of this proposition (Tuffin, Morgan, Frewin & Jardine, 2000) showed how a range of social problems were examined almost exclusively from an individualistic perspective, which significantly constrained

available understandings. A concrete example might help illustrate this point. The issue of youth suicide was linked to both substance abuse and depression. Both risk factors were individualised. Substance abuse and depression were talked about as being problems that resided within troubled individuals. The problem with such a narrow analysis of youth suicide, and the assumption that it is accountable in terms of drugs and depression, is that alternative analyses are discounted or, worse still, never considered or voiced. This kind of analysis of problems could easily have been extended to consider the possible effects of social, interpersonal, community and environmental factors. There are clearly social elements to these possibilities, and yet there is a strong tendency to embrace individualism. In its worst light, this may lead to victim blaming. The thinking here goes like this: a young man commits suicide, and people are understandably shocked, upset and grieved by this. However, the accounts put forward to explain this rest on understandings of a depressed individual who was increasingly becoming dependent on drugs. Such personal 'weakness' is factored in early in the explanation in such a way that the victim comes to be almost blamed for his situation – his depression, drug taking, and ultimately the suicide itself. Unfortunately, such thinking tends to rest there. It fails to consider a broad range of socially based possibilities that could equally help explain this tragedy.

Young (1980) has similarly provided an argument concerning the notion of 'stress'. The way in which stress is popularly thought about, is as an individualised problem. Responsibility for avoiding stress, becoming stressed and overcoming stress all reside within the power of the individual. Young argues that capitalist exploitation provides a political and ideological background, and the notion of stress acts to deflect responsibility away from the corporate and structural levels thereby maintaining the capitalist enterprise. One of the problems with individualised conceptions of problems is that they mislead one into thinking that this is the *only* way in which such problems may be approached. In short, all other levels of explanation are ignored. Fox and Prilleltensky (1997) address this issue at the level of values with the suggestion that the ideology of individualism results in an overemphasis on self-determination while notions of caring, collaboration and community are played down, or overlooked completely.

The net effect of reductionist, individualised accounts is that more holistic, inclusive, social analyses tend to be ignored once the suggestion has been made that problems reside at the level of the individual. Returning to the above example of understanding youth suicide, more socially oriented approaches could have included details of peer relationships (so vital at this age), educational achievements, future aspirations and links to the world of work, social expectations, family circumstances and dynamics, financial concerns and gender relationships. As Fox and Prilleltensky (1997) observe, an analysis of problems at the individual level ensures that individual solutions are sought. If a particular problem is societal, rather than individual, then urging individuals to change will do almost nothing to alter the basic problem, as the status quo will be unaltered. Hayes (1995) agrees when suggesting that the reason individualistic explanations

are popular with right-wing sectors of society is precisely because they avoid social, economic and political issues. Wilkinson (1991) has applied this critique to psychology and claims that psychology has contributed negatively to the lives of women through locating both responsibility and pathology at the level of the individual. This has been achieved at the expense of neglecting the social and political oppression women suffer.

Summary

Critical arguments with contemporary practices in social psychology stem from both methodological and theoretical sources. This chapter has accentuated theoretical critique, beginning with aspects of social psychology's history, and moving to examine the philosophy of science known as positivism. Critical social psychologists bemoan the way in which the discipline has disengaged from history, a move that restricts full understanding of the origins of particular topics. Further, the impetus of modernity and the standard view of science have contributed to high regard and value being attached to the most recently published work. This set of values reflects the disciplinary attempts to establish laws of human social behaviour, which (critically) ignore any sense of epistemological contingency. From the early beginnings of social psychology, exciting opportunities for understanding social life have been severely constricted by the disciplinary rush towards adopting a philosophy and associated methods that contributed to the 'scientific' status of the discipline. A key concern for critical social psychologists is that this has come at a rather expensive cost, namely, that the fundamental conception of what constitutes the 'social' has become asocial and insensitive to the subtleties and nuances of daily social life.

Three core aspects of the philosophy of science have been introduced: ontology, epistemology and methodology. At the risk of oversimplifying, these notions are concerned with aspects of reality, knowledge and ways of generating knowledge. Further, it has been argued that these three notions are closely linked, with ontological assumptions having a direct impact on fundamental aspects of epistemology, which in turn have important implications for the choice of methods. Positivism is the philosophy of science that has been most influential in the development of mainstream social psychology and for this reason has been provided with an extended coverage here. In particular, the broad history of positivist ideas has been reviewed and placed in the context of a movement that grew out of the Enlightenment project. Historically, positivism provided a basis for challenging the political and ideological dominance of religion and royalty. The impressive gains in knowledge in the natural sciences in the nineteenth century saw positivism applied to the study of humanity. Positivism and empiricism are both views that rely on a visually mediated ontology, and require that phenomena be directly observable and measurable in order to be considered as knowledge. Criticisms of this philosophical position include the idea that positivism

fosters methods that overlook the social nature of knowledge, and that this is an inappropriate guiding philosophy for social psychology as it is unable to take account of the interpretive, meaning-making and contextual aspects of social life. In short, serious doubts have been raised about the appropriateness of applying the philosophy and methods of the physical sciences to the study of cultural and social life.

Finally, the philosophical, conceptual and ideological problems of reductionism and individualism have been discussed. While the reductionist problem is one of circularity, it is argued that individualism contributes to limiting understandings of wider social problems. Individualism encourages a restricted analysis of problems and shifts responsibility from the political, the ideological and the social to the psychological interior. In its simplest and worst light, individualism transforms social problems into individualised, personal problems. Collectively these concerns add up to a powerful argument for encouraging the mainstream discipline of social psychology to emerge from the shadows of the hard sciences. The remaining chapters of this book offer a path that such emergence may follow. It begins in Chapter Three with an alternative way of thinking about human social life.

Further reading

Gergen, K. (1973). Social psychology as history. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 26*(2), 309–320.

Psychological detachment from history is the topic of this paper, which is highly critical of the contemporary aims of mainstream social psychology. Gergen suggests that attempts to establish generalised laws of human social behaviour ignore the fact that any psychology must be contextualised in terms of time, place and culture.

Pancer, S.M. (1997). Social psychology: The crisis continues. In D. Fox & I. Prilleltensky (Eds.), *Critical Psychology: An Introduction* (pp. 151–165). London: Sage.

This chapter is especially well written and offers a good introduction to the kinds of concerns that the 'crisis' in social psychology has been developed around. Pancer makes the important point that while the crisis of confidence began decades ago, the concerns of that time are still relevant, and may even be contemporaneously more pronounced. Pancer paints a picture of a discipline dominated by the concerns of white male practitioners, who study college students using artificial methods and theories that are greatly distanced from the important social issues and social problems that people face daily.

Alternative Social Worlds

Overview

In the previous chapter the philosophy of science known as positivism was explained as providing a core set of guidelines that have shaped the development of traditional experimental social psychology. The overall aim of this chapter is to introduce and argue for a theoretical reorientation involving an alternative way of thinking about social life. This alternative philosophy highlights the importance of language in social life and is known as **social constructionism**. Before examining the philosophical insights of social constructionism, it will be useful to consider the views of one of the most influential philosophers of science in recent times. Kuhn (1962) introduced the basic notion that science is a dynamic and changing enterprise, challenging the suggestion that science is static and unresponsive to the intellectual world of changing ideas. When thought about in this way it is possible to see the emergence of critical social psychology as contributing to a 'scientific revolution' within social psychology. In particular the argument is made that social constructionism represents a challenge to positivism and that social psychology is in the throes of a major upheaval. Critical social psychologists are at the forefront of this challenge to the mainstream and are deeply committed to questioning the old and exploring the new. Alternative ways of thinking about social life are on offer and are fleshed out in this chapter with a discussion of the importance of language in our everyday lives. The chapter concludes by drawing some simple comparisons between social psychology informed by positivism and critical social psychology, which has been informed by social constructionism.

Science, normal science and scientific revolution

While science helps us make sense of the world, there are many scientific debates about the best ways of doing science. A useful framework for such debates comes

from Kuhn (1962), whose book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was a landmark volume in the philosophy of science. This work has been hugely influential and was, according to Gergen (1999), at one point the most widely cited work in the English language. Popularity aside, this work contains some ideas that may usefully be applied to the position critical social psychology occupies with respect to mainstream social psychology. We begin with Kuhn's view of how science works.

Kuhn (1962) regarded science as involving both 'normal science' and 'scientific revolution'. Normal science includes what is commonly meant by 'science' and involves research based on past achievements, which the scientific community acknowledges as acceptable practice. These achievements are presented in textbooks that are used within various scientific disciplines. The linkage with previous work contributes to the sense in which science claims to be built solidly on established foundations, and to be progressive. It is this sense of advancement and progression, whereby scientific knowledge brings us ever closer to the truth, which Kuhn challenged directly. Scientific progress, he suggested, was not marked by small incremental steps towards ever more accuracy and objectivity. Rather, these notions of accuracy, objectivity and truth are only achieved from within the terms of a particular paradigm.

At the heart of this analysis is the notion of a scientific paradigm that is a broad set of assumptions about how a particular science should proceed. Paradigms involve the assumptions, beliefs and philosophies that are shared by those who conduct research within a particular scientific community. The knowledge and practices of a scientific community are linked by a shared commitment to particular ways of doing research that are accepted by those who operate within what Kuhn (1962) referred to as the **disciplinary matrix**. This matrix involves unstated and untested assumptions that define subject matter, guide topic selection, influence theory and determine methodology. The disciplinary matrix also involves a language that is unique to those who subscribe to the paradigm. The language of a paradigm is closely affiliated and integrated into the practices and beliefs of the particular science. Kuhn makes the point that there is no neutral language able to arbitrate between the differences that differing paradigms offer. Thus, there is a very real sense in which paradigms may be said to create their own reality (Collin, 1997). This is precisely what Kuhn refers to when he claims that scientists, before and after a paradigm shift, live in different worlds. This is close to the situation that exists within social psychology at present, with traditional methods being utilised alongside the newer critical approaches to research that are heralding a range of alternative ways of examining social worlds.

In addition to influencing assumptions, theories and methods, paradigms also carry symbolic value (Clegg, 1978). Those wishing to become legitimate members of a particular scientific community must demonstrate their affiliation to the core beliefs of the paradigm. Demonstrating a thorough use of the paradigm shows that one is able to see the world as a legitimate scientist. In summary, a

paradigm provides an intellectual structure of ideas and practices to which members of the scientific community conform. For students, exposure to a scientific community involves initiation into a particular way of seeing things (worldview) and a particular way of doing things (methodology). For social psychologists, this has traditionally meant accepting the tenets of positivism and embracing experimentalism.

All of these matters come to a head in the scientific literature where some topics, theories and methods are legitimately accepted as contributing to the discipline, while others are not. In this regard, new and innovative ideas are often stifled by the conservative practices endorsed by the editorial policies of scientific journals. Thus, it is the authority of established scientists that determines the status of evidence, and it begins to look as if science is organised in such a way as to preserve agreement. The pact is so strong that the scientific community will often ignore material which fails to support established ideas (Shipman, 1988). Critical social psychologists have begun questioning the wisdom of traditional understandings by contending that normal science works to constrain. Further, they are critical of the disciplinary reliance on research methods that have been condoned by members of the scientific community. They are also critical of the topics that may be legitimately studied, the questions that may be raised, the way in which results are discussed, and the importance that may be attached to them. Of course this challenge to mainstream ideas and practices has come at a cost that is both personal and professional. There is the problem of having critical work published. Editors of established journals have regarded this work as sitting outside the strictures of traditional social psychology and have rejected it on those grounds. Further, there is the point about professional alienation, whereby mainstream colleagues regard critical work with sidelong glances and scepticism. And this is merely the superficial aspect of being involved in a paradigm clash. As Haste (2003) indicated at the recent opening of the International Conference on Critical Psychology in Bath, the courage of the pioneers of critical work must be admired as many pressed on with their work under threat of losing their jobs.

While the effects of challenging paradigmatic assumptions and practices can be brutal, often the assumptions that underpin a paradigm are unstated. One of the functions of normal science is to explore and make explicit what was previously implicit. Other functions include extending the range of phenomena to which the paradigm is applicable, and improving the methods through which this applicability may be tested. The functions of normal science are, of course, self-limiting. It would be possible to reach a situation where all implicit assumptions had been made explicit, no more phenomena remained to be examined for applicability, and where methodological and technological limits had been reached. Under these circumstances the paradigm would be complete and the science would effectively come to a halt!

An important part of Kuhn's (1962) argument is that science includes scientific revolutions as well as normal science. The development of new paradigms

is just as important as the exploitation of existing ones. In Kuhn's work the notion of revolution and paradigm clash was illustrated with reference to well-known upheavals within the physical sciences such as the Darwinian revolution in biology and the Newtonian revolution in physics. In applying these ideas to the current situation in social psychology, it might be possible to conclude that a revolution is occurring, although this has, more prudently, been described as a 'theoretical reorientation' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The basic notion here is that the scale of change should be kept in mind. What critical social psychologists argue for ranges from complete and total revolution through to more modest claims about the need to expand our conceptual and methodological orientations to encourage promising, alternative ways of studying social life.

Whether large scale and requiring a radical overhaul of existing practices, or unspectacular and seeking minor changes in existing theoretical conceptions, we should have some understanding of how scientific revolutions occur. For Kuhn (1962) new paradigms are generated by *anomalies*. These include phenomena that do not fit with existing paradigms or theories, inconsistencies among explanatory systems, and conflicts between different explanations and/or descriptions. As new problems emerge they give rise to alternative concepts, new topics and alternative methodologies. Collectively, these changes may give rise to the birth of a new paradigm. The notion of scientific revolution, then, involves a shift from one paradigm to another. At the broadest conceptual level the debates and issues in this book form the background for the paradigm clash that is currently underway within social psychology.

While potentially useful in providing a framework from which to develop the contributions of critical social psychologists, the Kuhnian notion of scientific revolution is itself not without critical evaluation. Perhaps most critically, there are those who argue that the philosophy of science work on paradigms has oversimplified the theoretical level involved in scientific enquiry. Campbell (1978) argues that fields of scientific enquiry are much less integrated and unified than Kuhn suggests. While accepting the extent to which theory and fact are integrally involved in the interpretation of any resultant facts, Campbell is not prepared to accept that all facts may be so open to negotiation and change. Certainly this concern about theoretical and methodological heterogeneity in contemporary social psychology would be grossly misrepresentative. As we have seen already, this particular field is dominated by contradiction and methodological narrowness.

However, as a general appraisal Knorr Cetina (1997) suggests that the Kuhnian legacy has provided an alternative set of terms with which to discuss the notion of scientific progress. Rather than seeing this simply in terms of the 'logic of discovery and the rational reconstruction of scientific progress' (p. 262), it became important to consider a historical examination of how science changed and to study more closely the internal workings of science. Turner (1998) has argued that change to the presuppositions of science should still be regarded as exceptional, with 'normal science' remaining the norm. Revolution, change and

shifts in paradigm may now be seen as a necessary and central part of intellectual life.

The first two chapters of this book argue against the simple acceptance of existing procedures and methods within social psychology. As such, these arguments represent a challenge to the level of agreement about how the discipline should proceed with respect to enquiry and study of the social world. They also may be seen as the basis for a challenge to the basic philosophy of positivism. The alternative that is proposed here is that of social constructionism which is based on a linguistic rather than perceptual ontology. Talk and text are proposed to be as important as the images that dominate positivistic ontologies. Thus, language is proposed as the basis for critical social psychology. Before examining in detail what this proposal means, it is first worthwhile making some general comments about the importance of language for conducting social life.

Language, social life and evolution

A hallmark of postmodern thinking within the social sciences has been the attention accorded the importance of language. Graham, Doherty and Malek (1992) have argued that a dramatic shift is required in the way we think about language, discourse and text. Rosenau (1992) talks about revisions that privilege both the text and the reader, thereby downplaying the standing of the author. Reading of text becomes an interpretive exercise that focuses on the meaning readers might take from text, rather than returning to the question of what the author might have 'really meant'. The impetus towards refocusing attention on language has been referred to as the 'turn to language' or the 'turn to discourse' (Curt, 1994; Kroger & Wood, 1998), and is currently having a major impact on the social sciences. Psychology is one of the disciplines where there is evidence of renewed interest in the importance of language. However, it is also worth making the point that the 'turn to language' has been taking place more slowly in psychology than in many of the other social sciences. Social psychology has been criticised by Parker (1992b: 81) for disciplinary tardiness and for trailing 'miserably behind intellectual trends outside'. Only belatedly, he suggests, has the discipline begun attending to the organisation of language. While social psychology may have been slow to respond to the challenging ideas involved with the 'turn to language', the response has now well and truly begun with a range of critical material being published. For recent examples, see Fox and Prilleltensky,1997; Gough and McFadden, 2001; Sloan, 2000.

Social life as language use

While social psychology may have been tardy in responding to the challenge of recent intellectual movements, critical social psychologists have been at the

forefront of the developments that have taken place. The new initiatives that have emerged stem from an acceptance of two key ideas: firstly, our tendency to engage in social activities, and secondly, our unique ability to manipulate abstract symbols and negotiate meaning through language. The first of these ideas characterises our species as being deeply involved in social activities. This notion is subscribed to by both traditional and critical social psychologists. Indeed, it is often a keen awareness of and interest in social activities that attracts people to the study of social psychology. Aronson's (1995) enduringly popular social psychology textbook in all its revisions has retained the title *The Social Animal*, thereby highlighting the fundamental sociability so characteristic of our species. In this regard we have developed the abilities for cooperation, altruism and collective action rare among the species that inhabit the earth. Of equal interest is, at times, our inability to accomplish successfully worthwhile social goals, and the notions of prejudice, intolerance and aggression have been of appeal to social psychologists for this reason.

The second characteristic (language use) has been less appreciated and generally less well understood by traditional social psychologists. One of the reasons why the importance of language use has been overlooked is to do with its taken-for-granted status. The ordinary, everyday commonality of people talking to each other has meant that social scientists generally, and social psychologists in particular, have been blind to the importance of the topic. This situation is analogous to the goldfish being the last to appreciate not only that it is surrounded by water, but also how crucially important water is. Boyd and Silk (1997) comment that language is so much part of our lives that its very essence *seems* unremarkable. Yet being social creatures inevitably means that almost every aspect of our social existence is infused with language. Wooffitt (1993) talks about this in terms of the centrality of language use working to constrain research interest in the area. Because people talking with each other is so common, this feature of social life has been overlooked as an important topic in social science. The familiarity, commonality and sheer pervasiveness of language has conspired to make it almost invisible. Ironically, the importance of language has been masked by its availability and familiarity.

The importance of language use for human beings is discussed by Dunbar (1996), who concludes that talk is what being human is all about. Our sociability as a species is manifest in our fascination with the details of everyday social life. And, importantly, these details become routine topics of conversation. Dunbar reports that two thirds of the content of conversations are organised around matters concerning other people. Clearly, such matters are of considerable interest to critical social psychologists who share these interests in social matters and the ways in which they surface in everyday life. Dunbar also cites the topics of fiction work (which dominates all book sales) and the generous coverage of 'human interest' stories in the newspapers, to support the thesis that our capacity for language seems to be mainly used for exchanging social information. As a species, we spend a lot of time talking to others, about others.

Our ability to read magazines, newspapers, books, letters and email; listen to television, radio, lectures and conversations; and the fact that much of our negotiation of the social world is conducted through conversation and dialogue leads to two suggestions. Firstly, that language is inextricably involved in our understanding of the social world, and secondly that (possibly because of its pervasiveness) we take the fact of language for granted. One remarkable aspect about the social dimensions of language is that much of this works without the need to think about it. Much of the talk we engage in seems simply to 'fall out', spontaneously, automatically, without premeditation or planning. This is not to deny that some conversations are rehearsed, particularly in situations where we are aware of the importance of what is said and how it is said. For example, requests are especially likely to have been thought out in advance, as saying the right thing can assist in the avoidance of rejection. The point here is that it is not until attention is drawn to the all-pervasiveness of language that we actually begin to appreciate just how powerful and important it is. The goldfish analogy is a simple yet instructive insight that helps open up a whole new way of thinking about the role of language, how it works, and what it achieves.

The evolution of language

Our ability to use language in complex and subtle ways has evolved over the entire course of human history, over millions of years. While other creatures also have the ability to communicate, we alone have the ability to communicate in such an abstract and detailed fashion. It is also worth noting that all human societies have used language, although not all developed written language. The evolutionary importance of language use is difficult to overstate. As Pinker (1994) argues, human language development is one of the keys to understanding human adaptation. Language is part of all human cultures and the ability to use language is just as much part of the human phenotype as large molars and bipedal locomotion (Boyd & Silk, 1997).

Our abilities with symbols, abstraction and manipulation of the very subtleties of meaning have evolved. Exactly when language evolved is open to debate, but the question of *why* language evolved is much clearer. Simply, there was adaptive advantage in language use. Dunbar (1996) refers to the conventional view that the evolution of language assisted in the coordination of group activities such as hunting. Collectively, a group of humans could hunt larger animals than would have been possible alone. Dunbar also advances the view that advantages could have come from the possibilities language provides for servicing relationships, thereby oiling the wheels of social cohesion. It is likely that language offered these and other advantages. Whatever the exact evolutionary history was, it is clear that the complexities of natural selection have resulted in providing us with the gift of language.

Facts about language

There are a number of facts about language that should be kept in mind when thinking about language as an evolved capacity. First, consider the fact that people do not need to be taught how to speak. While learning to read and write require more formal instruction, infants learn to speak without assistance other than being exposed to the articulations of others. Equally impressive is the rapidity with which human infants acquire language. It has been estimated (Dunbar, 1996) that by the age of two most toddlers have mastered about 50 words, and that over the next year of life this vocabulary will increase by another 1000 words. At three, most children have developed a grammatical competence equal to most adults. Vocabulary increases dramatically over the next 15 years, with an adult range of somewhere between 45,000 and 90,000 words. Second, consider the fact that all human societies have language. An important aspect of this is that most people are competent language users. The pervasiveness of language occurs in every aspect of our lives. The biological inevitabilities of life – birth and death, and everything in between – are infused with meaning that comes to us through language. In this regard, language may be thought of as providing the essentials of our meaning-making practices.

It is these meaning-making practices that inform our understandings of the very nature of social reality. At every turn we find ourselves talking, reading, listening, thinking. This engagement with text is such a confrontation of the obvious that few social psychologists would bother considering the issue further. Critical social psychologists have accepted and developed this fundamental insight about the importance of language and have committed themselves to studying the ways in which language works.

The profound importance of language

In providing an analysis of the metaphors that psychology has adopted during its short history as an academic discipline, Soyland (1994: 82) writes, 'Language is the tool of habit, and it is used in a primarily social manner.' An implicit criticism here is that traditional social psychology has failed to appreciate, or even begun to understand, the extent to which this 'tool' forms *the* central feature of social life. In contrast, one of the core beliefs that guide the work of critical social psychologists is the belief in the central importance of language. For anyone interested in social aspects of our existence, it is hard to overstate the importance of language. Language is the very currency through which we transact, negotiate and plan social events. Both traditional and critical social psychologists agree that the 'social' in social psychology is all about others. However, a critical orientation means that language is seen as the important thread that connects us to others. This is why, for critical social psychologists, language is regarded as being so fundamentally important. Potter and Wetherell (1987: 1) regard

language as pivotal when they refer to 'the subtle ways in which language orders our perceptions and makes things happen'. Harré (1983: 58) similarly underscores the importance of linguistic activity when he claims that conversation forms the 'primary human reality'. Finally, the conversation analyst Schegloff (1992) refers to talk as the 'primordial site' of human social life.

The range of social achievements that come about through language is truly impressive. We make plans, provide explanations, state intentions and offer invitations using language. Our questions, debates and discussions all utilise language. We cajole, criticise and counsel through language. Critical social psychologists recognise, appreciate and celebrate the importance and pervasiveness of language. Indeed, the very fabric of social life would be vastly different *without* language. In thinking about a single aspect of a typical day (for example, early morning), imagine what a completely different experience this would be without words. This section of the day may well begin with the sound of someone talking as the clock radio switches on. The announcement that rain can be expected later in the day may be followed by a more seriously toned newsreader who informs us of the dramatic and important political events occurring in the wider world. Perhaps we awake to the morning newspaper where we read of the events of yesterday and the issues of today. Or perhaps watching morning television is the preferred way to start the day – where we get to hear and see the faces of the presenters as they talk us through a similar range of topics. The people we intimately share our lives with are likely to be part of this early morning activity. They are also involved in other fundamental language activities – as we share the stories of yesterday, explain the anticipated events of the day, talk about the troubles, triumphs and trivialities that make up our social lives. This glimpse at the beginning of the day highlights the fact that a huge amount of our waking time is spent using language, sometimes passively, as when we read or listen to another, and sometimes actively, when we are engaged in talk and interaction with others. As Wood and Kroger (2000) characterise it, what most of us are engaged with most of the time is talk and text. It is through the prime medium of language that we achieve almost all of the social achievements that are important to us. These are the kinds of reasons that support critical social psychologists' claims that the undeniable pervasiveness of human language makes it the key to understanding fully the workings of everyday social life.

Critical social psychologists share a foundational belief in the importance of language. For this new breed of social psychologists language is the tool of habit; language is the very currency through which all our other activities and relationships are negotiated; and language provides the medium through which the majority of our important social activities take place. The pervasiveness of language is assumed to have prime importance in explaining the workings of our social worlds. These views of language are further supported and developed through a philosophical paradigm that encourages the detailed examination and further study of language use. It is to this notion that we turn next.

Social constructionism

The philosophical paradigm critical social psychologists subscribe to is that of social constructionism. Methodologically, this involves working with talk and text as data. While there are many possible methods that may be taken up on the basis of a constructionist paradigm, this book will limit itself to the approach that has become known as discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992), which will be introduced fully in Chapter Four. First, it is important to explain the philosophy, ontology and epistemology of social constructionism.

At an ontological level social constructionism demands a radical reconceptualisation of the way in which we have understood language to operate. Epistemologically a social constructionist perspective involves a radical reorientation of what we consider knowledge to be. Social constructionists resist the common view of language as merely descriptive, neutral and reflective, and set out to explore the ways in which language may be seen as constructive, active and dynamic. Most simply, constructionists explore the ways in which language is actively involved in the construction of social reality. The constructionist paradigm contrasts dramatically with positivism, and specific comparisons will be considered in the final section of the chapter. First it is important to introduce the constructionist orientation and offer a broad sense of what this is all about. To do this, the basic scaffolding of ontology and epistemology will be deployed as a way of introducing this radical perspective.

Visual and linguistic realities

Following on from the insights concerning the importance of language with which this chapter began, constructionist philosophy assumes the importance of linguistic ontology. Ontological questions deal with basic matters of reality: *what* it is that can be known about the nature of the world and the nature of people. We have seen how positivism asserts that a visual metaphor will provide the soundest basis for pursuing epistemological questions: observation is regarded as the key to good research as this is believed to provide direct access to the primary social reality. The evidence provided by our own eyes gives us a direct route into the reality that exists outside our bodies (Sampson, 1998).

Constructionism asserts that a linguistic ontology provides an important alternative to the exclusively visual reality in which positivism is so deeply embedded. So, what do constructionists mean when they talk about *linguistic ontology*? Firstly, being prepared to explore the implications of linguistic ontology does not mean the rejection of visual ontology. This is not a situation of either/or, but rather a situation where critical orientations argue for the consideration of another ontological level. What constructionists propose when they talk about linguistic ontology is that reality operates at a linguistic level, as well as at a visual level. In other words, this is an argument which says that what we

say is just as important as what we see. Historically, social psychology has mostly ignored the suggestion of a linguistic ontology. Critical psychologists are setting about to redress this situation.

Traditional social psychology has largely overlooked the possibilities entailed in a linguistic ontology. Rapley (2001) is harshly critical of this neglect when he accuses mainstream psychology of barely theorising language use at all. However, critical scholars are now taking up this suggestion and exploring the implications of understanding the social world this way. At this point it is worth reiterating that this exploration of linguistic ontology does not require the over-throw of visual ontology. Constructionists are not, therefore, proposing that we suddenly begin to ignore the visual and walk about as if in darkness. Accepting a linguistic ontology does not make one blind; on the contrary, critical scholars argue that a linguistic ontology makes available another level of reality that has for too long been overlooked. A linguistic ontology does not require the denial of our observations and visual perceptions. Constructionists do, however, argue for the acceptance of linguistic ontology. In short, this argument is about accept-ing the reality (and social importance) that operates at the level of talk and text. What we say, what we hear, what we read, the conversations we have, the dia-logue we engage in, and the letters, text messages and emails we send and receive are all part of this linguistic ontology that has been seriously under-researched and undertheorised by traditional social psychologists.

Linguistic ontological beliefs require an intense interest in the power of language and the way in which it operates to mediate fundamental social realities. In accepting the validity of a linguistic ontology, critical work is opened to the myriad possibilities that the study of language use affords. In other words, con-structionism argues for accepting that *as well as* vision, there is another level on which social reality operates, namely, the level of language. Shotter (1998: 45) captures this nicely when he explains that we 'see the world just as much through our words as through our eyes'.

In taking issue with the dominance of the perceptual ontology that has been wholeheartedly embraced by traditional social psychology, social construction-ists have argued for the privileging of linguistic and rhetorical metaphors. The constructionist mission is to provide an alternative epistemology and method-ology that may be taken up by critical social psychologists. Billig (1985) provides an analysis of the popularity of perceptual (visual) metaphors and suggests that this can be explained in terms of the widespread adoption of biological models within the social sciences, and psychology in particular. These models empha-sise commonality among organisms and assume the pervasiveness of perceptual abilities to have explanatory power. Billig's argument is that when we examine specific human characteristics (for example, prejudice) we should focus on those processes that are *uniquely* human, rather than those processes that are shared with other species. Thus, explanations for human characteristics should be sought at the linguistic level. This means replacing perceptual models of cogni-tion with linguistic and metaphorical models. Wetherell (1995) extends this line

of argument in suggesting that we begin to examine the social and linguistic aspects of particular phenomena as these may provide advantages over what has previously been considered the psychological.

The belief that human knowledge is analogous to visual perception forms the bedrock of positivism. Philosophically, numerous concerns have been levelled at this belief. Rorty (1980) is one philosopher who has argued that it is both inappropriate and, indeed, arbitrary to have vision as the perceptual metaphor for knowledge. The history of ideas saw the Greeks privileging vision, which contributed to the subordination of the other senses. Levin (1993) refers to this as ocularcentrism, something which Jay (1993) suggests has contributed to the denigration of language. Rorty has proposed an alternative (discursive) basis for knowledge, which comprises propositions about the world, rather than direct, unmediated, accurate representations of the world.

The linguistic ontology promoted by critical social psychologists carries with it strong beliefs about the powerful role language plays in determining social reality. This view carries with it epistemological implications concerning the nature of truth and knowledge. Most simply, this means that accepting the role of language in constructing social reality also means the acceptance of an alternative foundation for developing knowledge of the social realm. One of the earliest overviews of constructionist tenets was presented to psychologists by Gergen (1985). Since that time, the constructionist movement has been subscribed to by increasing numbers of academics who are involved in critical, alternative social psychologies (Billig, 1997).

Theorising language

Social constructionists argue for the importance of language, not just on the grounds of its pervasiveness, but also on the grounds that language has constructive properties. One way of coming to understand what these properties are and how they are thought to work is to examine the way in which language has been theorised by those philosophers of language who have been influential in the constructionist movement. The inspirational work of the linguistic philosophers Wittgenstein (1953) and Austin (1962) are most noteworthy. Wittgenstein's contribution has been enormous, with Potter (2001) crediting him with writing two of the great works of twentieth-century philosophy. Wittgenstein's perspective on language comes from the basic insight that the meaning of an utterance is established by its context and use. Austin's 'speech act theory' heralded the idea of language being functional and useful rather than descriptive. Language is active, dynamic and most importantly, is used to *do* things. One of the key contributions offered by the work of these linguistic philosophers is the proposal that language should be regarded as constitutive. The **constitutive theory of language** is based on a rejection of the idea that language has a representational function, or that language provides a simple mirror of the external world. As Graham et al., put it,

'Language in this sense does not represent but rather *gives* us our world' (1992: 16, italics in original).

The representational view of language has close ties with positivism, and is a view that has been widely accepted within Western thought. Objects are said to exist independently of us and there is a real world out there. It is possible to have knowledge of that world as mediated through our sensory perceptions, with vision being of prime importance. Once an object has been observed, it can then be referred to, or represented in language. The referential or **representational theory of knowledge** holds that perception and observation give rise to knowledge. Abstractions, like intelligence, personality, anxiety and so on, are referred to by psychologists *as if* they exist in the real world. In summary, the world exists, we acquire knowledge of it through observation, and subsequently use language to label aspects of that world.

Constructionists strongly resist the suggestion that objects can have a clear meaning that exists independently of the ways in which they are represented. Marshall and Raabe (1993) are opposed to the idea of language as a colourless, transparent medium capable of describing some foundational reality. Similarly, Hall (1997) argues that this view places language as having only secondary importance. It becomes seen as something that is 'tacked on' after the object has been fully formed and its meaning fully constituted. The constructionist view contrasts with this since meaning is believed to be something that is produced rather than simply found. For constructionists, language is an important part of the constitution of objects and events. The meaning these things have for us is largely shaped by the ways in which they are constructed in language. This important constructive role contrasts strongly with the view that has language merely reflecting the 'true' properties of objects and events.

The view that language plays an active part in the constitution of meaning contrasts strongly with traditional social psychology's understanding of language. While the mainstream has not completely ignored language, it has failed to engage in any significant theorisation of language. Wetherell and Potter (1992) lament the fact that in social psychology language has become the forgotten object. Similarly, Kroger and Wood (1998: 267) comment that experimental social psychologists have refused to engage with the pragmatic functions of language and are accused of 'remaining fixed on the purely referential, descriptive functions of language.' In concentrating on the literal or descriptive functions of language, traditional social psychologists have been happy to employ language in their manipulations and measures, but have avoided critical or theoretical engagement concerning the wider role of language. Parker (1992b: 81) comments on this lack of engagement with everyday talk by suggesting that it has become 'clear to most social psychologists that a key problem with traditional social psychology was that it studied a silent world'. Such restricted conceptualisations of language have suppressed the degree to which the discipline has considered the role of language in everyday social life. In turn, this has contributed to the removal of social psychological

interest in the details of our social lives, with the preference instead, of placing the venue for examination of social concerns in the more rarified and controlled environment of the laboratory.

Referring back to the classical studies introduced in Chapter One, it will be recalled that all three used language to stage experimental realities for participants. This style of language use and theorisation was described at the time as the *face value* version of language. The authors of these studies do not go beyond a superficial consideration of the role of language. Take as an example the Shotland and Straw (1976) study, where an attacker is variously described as either a 'stranger' or a 'husband'. However, this use of language is never acknowledged or theorised in any way, but is simply accepted at face value as being the way in which language can be made to work. Most obviously, this use of language is both powerful and effective in creating entirely different social realities, and yet there is a glaring omission whereby this achievement is not acknowledged or discussed. Rather, language is used and thought of as merely another variable to be manipulated. Significantly, from a critical perspective, there is no attempt by social psychologists to theorise or conceptualise their own manipulation of language. More broadly, Kroger and Wood (1998) lament the restricted sense in which traditional social psychology has engaged with language, having limited it to the outer edges of the discipline and conceptualised it as nothing more than another variable.

The social construction of reality

The suggestion that something as solid, tangible and well grounded as 'reality' may be 'socially constructed' can be a frightening prospect for those new to constructionist ideas. One common, but seriously misguided, understanding of such claims is that they somehow mean that the solid bedrock of all that we accept as real is somehow reduced to the stuff clouds are made of. It is important to be clear about what exactly is meant by claims that things (attitudes, personality, our friendships and our understandings) are socially constructed. Saying that something is socially constructed does not mean that the object or event under consideration ceases to be real. When constructionist critiques and ideas are applied, this does not mean that some confused sense of unreality is invoked. Rather, it highlights the notion of knowledge as a social product (Gough & McFadden, 2001). The very meaning of events comes about through the way in which these events are talked about. Reality inevitably becomes constituted through socially shared resources. Rather than language functioning in a purely referential and descriptive sense, constructionists hold that words are profoundly involved in the constitution of the objects they speak of.

The *constitutive* view of language espoused by constructionists differs radically from the standard positivist inspired view of language as referential. Epistemologically, a key difference is that knowledge is not regarded as

something out there, merely awaiting discovery and labelling. For constructionists, knowledge is constructed whenever topics are discovered, labelled or talked about in everyday interactions between people. A constructionist tenet is that language is involved on all these epistemological levels, and is inevitably and powerfully involved in the creation of versions of reality. As Burr (1995: 7) puts it, 'When people talk to each other, the world gets constructed.' Instead of seeing reality and thought preceding language, constructionists see language preceding and shaping our perceptions, thoughts and realities. Augoustinos and Reynolds (2001) further differentiate the relationship between language and thinking with the claim that language is not simply a product of cognition. Indeed, they suggest that language provides us with the very instrument of thought. Under this view, meaning is always embedded in the context within which it is used.

The constructionist challenge to the standard assumption of linguistic neutrality amounts to an argument that language is active, constructive and inextricably involved in our social achievements. For constructionists (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999) language is actively involved in the construction of our experiences, our subjectivities and our social realities. In other words, constructionist epistemology advances the view that our psychological experience is fundamentally constituted *in* and *through* discourse. The radical aspect of this view is the rejection of the assumption that there is a world that can be known separately from the ways in which that world is talked about. Potter (1996a) talks about language having a reflexive quality, in the sense that language is always about a particular topic and also becomes part of the topic. It is the second of these two aspects that marks out constuctionism from other views of language. For constructionists, language is not regarded as something merely added on to the things that interest us, but should rather be considered as an essential part of the phenomena of interest.

In contrast to the referential view of language as a system of signs with fixed and agreed meanings, constructionists accept that language is a site where variability, negotiation and conflict occur. This is especially pertinent when talking about abstract concepts and ideas. As Parker (1992a) explains, discourses permit us to 'see' things that are not really there. Talking about something brings it to life. Once an idea has been elaborated in discourse, it is difficult *not* to refer to it as if it were real. Harré (1986) refers to this as an ontological illusion. Applying this to some of the standard notions of social psychology, let's say altruism, attraction and attitudes, Parker suggests that such notions have been 'called into being' through discourse. The illusory aspect is that once they have been offered up as explanatory concepts they are then regarded as having a solid, factual reality. The referential view of language would have these notions existing independently of language, whereas the constitutive view of language would hold that these concepts become objects with an epistemological base once they have been created through language. Harré's point is that it is an error to believe that such concepts have an ontological status. Constructionists believe that they have no existence outside of or independent of human language. This view has

been stated *in extremis* by those theorists who hold that nothing exists beyond the text (Derrida, 1976). The radical suggestion here is that it is impossible to have direct knowledge of ontological objects because there are perceptual, linguistic and constructive processes mediating between the object and the knowing. We can, however, call the object into being by talking about it and giving it *epistemological* status. Through discourse, we can talk about ideas and concepts whose status has no basis in perception at all (for example, many philosophical ideas, religious concepts, and so on).

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the idea of language as constitutive. It is of prime importance in understanding the social constructionist perspective. One useful way of coming to grips with this material is to consider the following question: What do we understand language to actually do? Potter (1996a) provides two alternative metaphors (the mirror and the building site), which parallel the two theories of language (representational and constitutive) introduced above. These metaphors are helpful in providing an answer to the question about how language works. When language is regarded as a mirror, it is believed to work as something that simply reflects the reality it is claimed to portray. Language takes a passive, reflective, second-order kind of role. By 'second order' I mean that language is regarded as separate from the actual entity under discussion. However, when the building site metaphor is used, language may be seen as something that affords creative possibilities. The role of language becomes active, constructive, and very much a part of the reality that is created.

Immediate reactions to the claims of constructionists, and to the metaphor of language as a building site, are doubt, disbelief and incredulity. There is an almost overpowering sense of clinging to the metaphor of the mirror as the correct model of language – after all, is there not an important distinction between talk and real things? There is one level of 'real things' with which I would agree wholeheartedly. However, there is another level at which the mirroring qualities of language become inadequate. A couple of examples may clarify things. Firstly, consider a tangible object such as the pen you may now be holding. Constructionist views of language do not require that you start calling this object something other than what it plainly is, although I would hasten to add that it could take on other functions. For example, under certain conditions it could become a weapon, a measuring instrument, a tool for removing wax from your ear, an extension of your hand for scratching an otherwise unreachable itch in an inaccessible part of your back, or whatever. For argument's sake, I will agree that it can remain exactly what we initially referred to it as. A second example requires you to think about some abstract notion such as identity, self or personality. With this example, the simplicity of the mirroring function of language breaks down, because the 'what it is, is what it is' implied by the mirror metaphor no longer works. The reason this fails is because we are now dealing with a different order of phenomena. The notion of identity lacks the simple concreteness of the pen. Identity is an abstract notion. It is intangible, and can be built up in a way we are happy with.

One of the key lessons of the above illustration is that almost all of the ideas psychologists work with are just that, abstract notions about which there is no tangible model on which to rely. Ask yourself: 'What is my identity? How do I define my identity?' The answers will rely on further notions of equal abstraction – character, personality, dispositions, tendencies. All of these things come directly from the metaphor of the building site, and this would become even more so if we were to look at the details of your claim. This assumes that like most people you would want to claim positive characteristics, and probably downplay the less positive features. What is the reality here? The constructionist answer is that this is negotiated, built up and constructed from the basic linguistic resources that are available from the building sites of those who participate. It is important not to forget that different players in this activity would likely provide differing stories about what they considered to be the defining features of your identity. Your version would differ from that offered by your mother, father, sister, best friend, work mates, teachers and so on.

What is the reality of this unsettling plurality? The constructionist perspective would argue that plurality should be expected since not only do different people see different things, but they also draw from the linguistic building site in different ways. In this way, constructionists do not regard accounts, descriptions and stories as working in a disinterested and neutral manner. Rather they provide the opportunity to perform important psychological business as they carry with them evaluative components. Consider some other examples of plurality and the evaluative aspects of the language that is used in different contexts.

> An employer is in pay negotiations with workers and announces that a 'generous' wage increase is being offered. The workers in the same negotiations receive the offer and consider it to be 'insulting'. What is the reality of this offer?
>
> Sardar and Davies (2002) report that Nelson Mandela, who devoted his life to resisting apartheid and who led South Africa through the post-apartheid period of the 1990s, was himself branded a terrorist by none other than former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Should someone fighting for the rights they believe they deserve be called a 'freedom fighter' or a 'terrorist'?
>
> A student receives a poor report and regards this as an indictment of the conservatism of the school and teachers, while the teachers who compiled the report regard this as an accurate and fair reflection of the student's ability and achievements. What is the truth of the situation?

These illustrations highlight the contested and variable nature of social events. Of course not every event is shrouded in such dispute, as there are many things about which we achieve substantial, or at least satisfactory, agreement. This is not a simple matter of people 'seeing' things differently. Rather these differences are created through the ways in which social realities are constructed through language. Further, they serve to highlight the basic constructionist claim that language is far from a neutral, passive medium. The representational view of language (the mirror) assumes such neutrality, and regards language as

working simply to describe the reality it is claimed to portray. Representationalists suggest that language operates in a way that is able to capture the absolute truth and transport this neutrally to an audience (Reddy, 1993). This abstract and rather disconnected view of language overlooks both the power and subtlety of language. A constructionist view would argue that language has been misconceived in terms of its constructive powers, and would have concerns about knowledge of the world being analogous to visual perception.

Comparing experimental and critical approaches

In the final section of this chapter I want to consolidate some of the key ideas presented thus far. Further, this section seeks to put in place some links between the largely theoretical material and the practical work that lies ahead in the coming chapters. Having been working with these ideas for some years now it is easy to reach the point where these alternative views of language and social life can themselves be taken for granted. However, teaching this material serves to remind me that these can be very abstract and difficult ideas to grasp. Further, I see this point as a turning point in the book, where we farewell critique of mainstream practices and strive to accentuate the exciting possibilities that lie ahead for critical social psychologists. For these reasons this final section is organised around a series of comparisons between mainstream and critical versions of social psychology. This comparative structure will hopefully provide some useful points around which the differences between these approaches can be fleshed out in more concrete tangible ways. While some of the comparisons will be restating the ideas that have already been introduced, others will rely on notions that have yet to be fully dealt with. This newer material will be more fully detailed in Chapter Four, where the basic principles and practices of discursive psychology will be outlined. The following comparisons are organised around guiding philosophy, ontological considerations, theories of language, epistemological considerations, methodology and finally some preliminary comments regarding data and analysis. In this way the comparisons presented below rely on both a summary of material already presented in this chapter, and a look forward to some of the material that lies ahead.

Guiding philosophy

The guiding philosophy for each version of social psychology differs considerably. Experimental work has been substantially informed by positivism, which has been borrowed directly from the physical sciences. This philosophical position privileges visual perception as the basis upon which the nature of the world will reveal itself to the keen observer. Critical work is guided by constructionism,

which privileges language as an alternative site through which we may study human social activities.

Ontology

Experimental work is based on the assumption that vision provides the primary ontological basis. Positivism is founded on the ontological assumption that the true nature of the world is accessible to us through observation. Further, positivist ontology holds that 'truth' is singular and may be captured with the application of proper scientific study. Critical work stems from the argument that vision is not the only ontological basis and that for human beings language provides another ontological layer for exploration. 'Truth' is regarded as plural, along with the suggestion that it is too simplistic to attempt to capture single truths that apply to all people for all time.

Theory of language

Mainstream social psychologists hold a 'face value' or referential view of language, which regards language as something that broadly 'works' and may be effectively manipulated. This approach to language recognises the literal and descriptive functions of language but avoids any critical engagement with the wider role of language. With respect to applying this view to social life, it can be criticised as encouraging the study of a silent world (Parker, 1992a). Critical social psychologists largely adopt a **constructionist view of language**, which posits that language is not removed from our experience of social life, but rather forms an inextricable part of that social life. Further, constructionism holds that it is not possible to understand our experiences independently of language. Language has constitutive power and is thereby involved in shaping our perceptions, our thoughts and our social realities. Constructionists encourage the exploration of language use in its own right in order to chart the extent to which language operates.

Epistemology

Mainstream social psychologists attempt to generate knowledge through intervention. Specifically, they routinely develop experimental procedures whereby the impact of one variable on another may be tested. This procedure results in knowledge claims about the causal relationships that exist between variables. Correlational studies attempt similar aims, with causality being replaced by measures of association. The kinds of knowledge claims the mainstream strives towards may be seen as approaching general laws of social behaviour. Critical social psychologists regard knowledge as something that occurs (perhaps less

spectacularly, but more meaningfully) between people. When people talk, they draw on and contribute to knowledge that has an undeniable linguistic basis. As Burr (1995) suggests, the world gets constructed when people talk to each other. The kind of knowledge that is sought by critical psychologists is unashamedly partial and local, relating intimately to those who have contributed to the study.

Methodology

Most social psychologists use experiments as a way of studying topics of interest. These methods have received sustained critique and have been spurned by critical social psychologists who reject the artificiality of the laboratory and the synthetic version of social psychological knowledge that results from such situations. Instead, they have attempted to adopt more naturalistic methods which involve the collection of textual data from a wide range of sources. Often this data already exists and this holds the appeal of non-interventionist study, which may take place without the need to alter the topic of study. In contrast to experiments, critical work attempts to study language use in more natural settings.

Data and analysis

The data coming from most social psychological studies are in an abstract numerical form that have been subjected to statistical analysis in order to establish whether 'significance' may be claimed. Data are typically aggregated, with individual contributions becoming lost in the wider pool of group scores. Variation within the data is limited and subject to strict control. Critical work typically occurs with texts and is fundamentally linguistic in form. This kind of data often comes from interviews, conversations, or sources that offer records of written text, for example, newspapers, letters or magazine articles. Analysis of this data is essentially an interpretive exercise that seeks to highlight patterns of meaning. Variation within the data is both expected and respected. Variability is assumed to be a feature of such data and also may be seen as related to the functions the data may be serving.

Summary

This chapter began with a review of some ideas about how science works. The notion of clashing paradigms suggests that the different ways of doing social psychology might indicate that the discipline is presently undergoing a change. Whether this change proves to be revolutionary or more in the nature of a minor recalibration remains to be seen. What is clear is that there are significant problems with continuing to conduct experimental research and that critical work has sought alternatives. One such alternative stems

from the fact that human beings are compulsive users and consumers of language. Indeed, one argument that arises from the writings of critical theorists is that social life may be reconceptualised as language use. The pervasiveness of human language offers a powerful underlying conceptual tool, which is evident in almost all of our social activities. According to this view, language is held to be the central feature of social life. The broad philosophy of social constructionism has been introduced as the basis for an alternative conception of social psychology. This ontological position challenges the standard view of language as a neutral, passive medium and offers the suggestion that language is both active and constructive. An argument is presented that the study of language in its own right is important for critical social psychology, since language gives us insight into our meaning-making practices and is inevitably involved in our psychological experiences. For these reasons, the study of language use is seen to be important. The chapter concludes with a series of broad comparisons between experimental and critical work. In the next chapter the principles of discursive work in psychology are introduced.

Further reading

Gergen, K. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist*, *40*, 266–275.
This classic paper introduced social constructionism to the psychological literature and has since become greatly cited and immensely influential.

Gergen, K. (1997). Social psychology as social construction: The emerging vision. In C. McGarty & S.A. Haslam (Eds.), *The message of social psychology* (pp. 113–128). Oxford: Blackwell.
In this chapter Gergen documents something of a personal journey that charts the realisation that straight experimentalism relies implicitly on interpretive work for placing research results into perspective. This realisation leads to the position of advocacy for constructionist work and the closely allied position of scepticism regarding the psychological interior. Gergen also writes about the importance of developing political agendas and the creative possibilities in seeking meaningful social change.

Stainton Rogers, W. (2003). *Social psychology: Experimental and critical approaches*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
Chapter Two is especially relevant as it deals with issues of ontology and epistemology in both experimental and critical work. The chapter also contains a useful 'compare and contrast' style table that shows some useful comparisons between experimental and critical research work.

New Social Psychology: Discursive Work

Overview

This chapter builds on the foundation laid down in the previous chapter, which sought to move beyond the failings of old social psychology and to introduce a philosophical basis for new social psychology. While it is always useful to apply critique to our assumptions, beliefs and practices, such criticism is most effective when it leads to constructive suggestions for change. Broadly, such opportunity for change is delineated in the remaining chapters of this book. In this chapter discursive psychology is introduced in terms of basic aims and orientations, while in the final two chapters the applied work of critical social psychologists is examined more closely. In particular, the ways in which discursive work has been undertaken in a variety of selected topics becomes the subject of the final two chapters.

Up to this point I have argued that social psychology is currently being challenged by critical work which posits that language is the defining feature of social life. Social constructionism has been introduced as providing a philosophical basis for developing critical social psychology. Having argued for the importance of studying language in its own right, it is now time to address the question of *how* this might be achieved. If we accept that language is powerfully important within the social sphere, how might we best go about studying this? This chapter answers this question by introducing the key assumptions and practices of discursive psychology.

An important point to bear in mind is that discursive psychology provides one of many possible paths for work in critical social psychology. The version of critical work provided here is, necessarily, focused on this path. While it would be possible to include a wider variety of approaches, this book aims to provide an accessible introduction to one of the ways in which it is possible to work with language. Indeed, it would be possible to sketch a number of other versions of the form that critical social psychology might take, and the recent work of Gough and McFadden (2001), Hepburn (2002), and Stainton Rogers (2003) provide examples of such possibilities.

Discursive psychology

Recently, within the social sciences, there has sprung up an impressive array of methods for dealing with textual analysis. Not all of these approaches are grounded in constructionist philosophy. Content analysis and grounded theory are two examples of **qualitative** approaches, which stand outside constructionism. However, there are numerous approaches to dealing with language that do share a constructionist epistemology. Crossley (2000) lists postmodernism, discourse analysis, **rhetorical** analysis, interpretive phenomenology and critical feminist analysis. Potter (1996b) offers a more extended list, which includes ethnomethodolgy, ethogenics, sociology of scientific knowledge and symbolic interactionism. Of course there are others that could be added to this list – narrative analysis and **conversation analysis** are two that come immediately to mind. While each of these research orientations could be argued as forming a mainstay for critical work, the aim of this book is to provide an introduction to how one constructionist approach (discourse analysis) operates as critical social psychology.

Discursive work has been chosen to spearhead the version of critical social psychology explained in this book for two main reasons. Firstly, the research opportunities that are enabled by discursive psychology are directly related to the core interests of social psychologists. Broadly defining social psychology as being about the things that happen between people, discourse analysis provides exciting opportunities to enlarge this area of study by recording and analysing interpersonal interactions and accounts. The second reason for promoting discourse work as a key method for the critical social psychologist is that this area is gaining increasing recognition within social psychology generally. The evidence for this growing interest comes from a range of different areas, which are detailed below.

Firstly, there is the undeniable growth in research studies that utilise discursive methods. In the last decade an increasing number of academic journals (in social psychology and related areas) have opened themselves to contributions that explore the discursive basis of social and political life (Gergen & Leach, 2001). One of the key journals to have begun this movement was the *British Journal of Social Psychology*, which has been publishing discourse analytic studies for well over a decade now. Secondly, there are growing numbers of students who have adopted discursive methods for their research projects. This popularity is evident in the 'data sessions' that are now appearing at conferences and which are used extensively in graduate training (Hopper, 1999). Conferences where critical and discursive research is the focus have increasingly been held in major cities all around the world (Ussher & Walkerdine, 2001). Thirdly, there is growing acknowledgement of the influence of discourse work in the professional literature. Jahoda (1998: 513) characterises discourse work within social psychology as a radical alternative that has been 'rapidly gaining ground'. Similarly, Banyard and Grayson's 1996 text *60 Studies that Shape Psychology* discusses a broad range

of studies they regard as having been influential in the wider discipline of psychology. Among this select group of articles is a discourse analytic study conducted by Potter and Edwards (1990). Finally, the innovation and freshness of discursive work is increasingly being recognised within the discipline. Psychology methods texts frequently feature chapters on discourse analysis. There are many such texts and the following list provides some illustrative examples: Bannister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall (1994), Breakwell, Hammond and Fife-Schaw (2000), Hayes (1997), Richardson (1996), Silverman (1997), and Willig (2001).

It is this kind of recognition that makes discourse work an ideal candidate around which to base the version of critical social psychology this book seeks to explain. Before looking more closely at the various traditions of discourse analysis, it is worth restating the point made by Gough and McFadden (2001) that while not all discursive work is critical, discursive work has become the 'dominant activity' critical social psychologists are engaged in. Putting this another way, it would seem that discourse work has become the publicly recognisable face commonly associated with the critical movement.

Discourse analytic traditions

In offering a version of critical social psychology based on discursive work I have been necessarily selective. Part of the justification for this is the belief that it is better to develop a good understanding of the workings of one version of critical social psychology than a more superficial familiarity with a range of approaches. There are, not surprisingly, several strands of discourse analysis that are clearly outlined by Wood and Kroger (2000). These traditions operate in parallel, with no one version being accepted within the social sciences as more authoritative. The differences between these traditions are traceable to the academic and theoretical orientations from which they developed. There are three main varieties of discourse analysis, including the linguistically oriented, critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995: Wodak, 1996), and the social psychological orientations commonly attributed to Parker (1992a) and Potter and Wetherell (1987). The social psychological approaches to discourse studies have been the most informative for our purposes, with key features of these two orientations sketched below.

Danziger (1997) refers to two versions of social constructionist psychology: a 'light' and 'dark' version. This distinction is useful for introducing the two versions of discourse analytic work that have been most influential in developing critical social psychology. The dark version, also referred to by Gough and McFadden (2001) as a 'top down' approach, is represented in the discourse analytic work of Parker (1992a), which has been inspired by the post-structural theorists Foucault and Derrida. The 'top down' orientation is aligned with a macro orientation to analysis. It has provided historical reinterpretations of broad topic

areas such as sexuality, medicine, criminology and psychology, and seeks to identify the 'discourses' that shape our views of the world and ourselves. Discourses are the key building blocks through which both political and personal dynamics operate. Discourses are described as coherent systems of meaning and are regarded as being in competition with each other, with discursive ascendency being played out in the corridors of political and institutional power. This 'top down' description comes from the orientation that positions people within the historical and cultural workings of key institutions (for example, the educational, legal and medical institutions). Dominant discourses work to legitimise particular ideologies and power relationships within society. This style of discourse work has analytic concerns that are organised around issues of power and subjectivity. It aims to encourage the possibility of challenge and resistance to the status quo, thereby marking itself as having an explicitly political agenda.

The light version of constructionist social psychology is represented by the work of Potter, Wetherell and Edwards (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Gough and McFadden (2001) refer to this tradition of discourse work as 'bottom up'. It has also become closely aligned with more micro-styled analysis. The micro orientation that distinguishes this approach is strongly interested in the interactive features of talk and text. Possibly for this reason, this analytic style has become the most popular form of discourse work within critical social psychology. Potter and Wetherell (1987) spearheaded this approach with their groundbreaking text, which sought to change the face of social psychology. In drawing on the academic traditions of semiotics, ethnomethodology and linguistic philosophy, Potter and Wetherell argued for an approach to studying social life that privileged everyday talk and text. This is in contrast to the abstractions that social psychologists have previously built into their basic assumptions and methods. Wetherell (1995) suggests that the strength of discourse analysis is that it privileges the social/linguistic over what has previously been considered the psychological. Previously social psychologists have regarded talk and text as simply a road to another level of abstraction, for example, a way of accessing our 'attitudes'. Accordingly, the topic of language use has been largely overlooked as something worthy of study in its own right. For discourse analysts telephone conversations, dinner time discussions, television news reports, magazine articles and the apparently mundane talk that pervades our social lives become important topics of study.

This orientation to the study of language use attends to the rich details that characterise our everyday interactions and engagements with talk and text. In this sense the description 'bottom up' is apt as this approach works with the ordinary details of everyday textual life. Further, a key analytic feature is that of examining the ways in which language is used to achieve particular ends. This aspect of the approach is close to traditional social psychological interests in interpersonal work. Through language we routinely achieve such ends as offering justifications and explanations that take account of how others may judge our actions, motives and intentions. We provide accounts and descriptions that

inevitably attend to questions of responsibility, blame and accountability. We criticise, cajole and counsel through the use of language. It is important to remember that when engaged in these activities we are rarely doing so from the perspective of neutrality or disinterest. It is almost always the case that we are psychologically invested in the matters we provide comment on.

Discursive psychology acknowledges this issue of investment with the suggestion that it gives rise to the **dilemma of stake** (Edwards & Potter, 1993). When offering descriptions about who said what to whom, and what really happened, we often have a vested interest in the kinds of conclusions that may be drawn. Accordingly, we attend to this in the course of providing our explanations, descriptions and versions of what happened. A concrete example might clarify how such matters of stake and investment work in practice. Imagine sitting at a dinner party and one guest asks another, 'Please pass the salt.' This seemingly innocuous request is open to variable readings. It could, for example, mean that the food lacked taste and the request for salt reflected that. Equally, but less benignly, the request could be aimed at showing up the dinner host as a cook who presents bland food. Or the request could work as an opening to initiate conversation with the person sitting between the speaker and the salt. These readings do not exhaust the possibilities and without knowing anything of the context in which the comment was made, it is impossible to decide which way to interpret this request. Such context or background may assist, if for example, we knew the speaker to be sometimes at odds with the cook, we might suspect the request for salt could be a back-handed way of criticising the food as being bland. The wider point is that comments and descriptions are almost never free of such investments and stakes. So, while it is possible to treat things that are said as straightforward, it is also possible to consider questions of interest and stake as being important. The ways in which these interests are managed include hiding such interests, denying them, acknowledging them and then discounting them. Some of the discursive work that will be discussed in the next chapter looks at ways in which people make racist, sexist or otherwise prejudiced comments and manage these in such a way as to downplay implications that they are personally prejudiced or discriminatory.

In promoting the **action orientation of language** use, this approach is saying that we achieve much through the complex ways in which we are able to structure and manage our talk and text. The plural meanings that are conveyed with any comment carry with them implications for both speakers and members of any audience. In brief, much important social business is transacted in and through language. This leads to a consideration of the aims of analysis and the key features that define discursive psychology.

One of the key aims of discourse analysis is to study the dynamics of how such transactions operate. In terms of describing the broad goals of discourse work, Harré and Gillett (1994) suggest two discursive aims for psychological research: identification of resources, and an examination of how these resources are put to work. Similarly, Potter (1996b) comments on two defining characteristics

of discourse analysis. He notes the emphasis placed on both discourse as social practice, and the linguistic resources that facilitate those practices. These aims are better able to be understood once some of the important features of discursive work have been outlined.

The three key features that are important within this tradition are *construction*, *function* and *variability* (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). *Construction* asks the questions: How is a particular account (story or explanation) put together? What are the linguistic resources that are harnessed to make this account work and seem reasonable and plausible? Such resources are often referred to as '**interpretive repertoires**', which Potter (1996a: 116) has defined as 'systematically related sets of terms, often used with stylistic and grammatical coherence, and often organised around one or more central metaphors'. Less formally, Hepburn (2002) refers to these as packages of ideas that are useful for making sense of and evaluating the world. As Reicher (2001) notes, the notion of repertoires has proven to be controversial amongst discourse analysts as they are open to the criticism of being overly cumbersome and insufficiently sensitive. *Function* attends to the active, 'doing' elements of our talk. Functional analysis focuses on the things that are achieved by particular characterisations, evaluations and descriptions. When considering the dynamic and functional aspects of text, versions of events are examined for possible interpersonal and psychological achievements, such as accountability, blame and causality. Such analysis has important implications for how we make attributions and assign responsibility for events. Importantly, these activities all occur within the particular way in which accounts are constructed. Remember that there are always many ways of describing and explaining events. *Variability* is assumed to exist as a natural feature of language use. Further, variability is argued as having a unique relationship with function. Alternative accounts may be seen to be doing different business on particular occasions (rather than, say, indicating contradiction or inconsistency). Variability is important as it highlights the importance of taking context into account when providing an analysis. Further, context is regarded as a crucial issue when studying how people use language to understand and make sense of their social worlds.

Delineating the two main styles of discourse analytic work that have been popularly taken up by social psychologists seeking a fresh approach to research does not mean that in practice the styles always remain distinct. Although there have been frequent disputes between these two discursive camps, there have also been suggestions that it is possible to follow the guidelines of both and produce a more integrated style of analysis. Indeed, there are numerous discussions about amalgamated versions of discourse analysis (Praat, 1998; Praat & Tuffin, 1996; Wetherell, 1998). There are also many research examples that have developed unique hybrids in terms of analytic approach. The consideration of some examples will highlight the theoretical breadth that informs work which goes under the title of discourse analysis.

Abell and Stokoe (2001) blend both social constructionism and conversation analysis into an analytic frame which they apply to the study of identity. Willott

and Griffin (1997) employ a Foucauldian (Parker style) discourse analysis combined with a constructionist version of grounded theory, overlayed by a feminist framework. This complex orientation was applied to the subject of masculinity and unemployment. Also from the broad area of equality and discrimination in the workplace, Riley (2002) has offered a synthesis of three levels of analysis: conversation analysis, interpretive repertoire analysis and Foucauldian analysis. Lynn and Lea (2003) provide an analysis of letters to the editors of newspapers on the topic of asylum-seekers in the United Kingdom. This analysis is informed by both 'bottom up' and 'top down' traditions and also draws on a third school of thought that regards people as being shaped by their discursive practices. Finally, Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1990) blend conversation analysis and discourse analysis in order to study the inferential and constructive nature of language used in establishing subcultural identities.

The blending of analytic orientations is common with critical researchers seeking to harness the potential benefits of various traditions and orientations. In practice, the kind of analysis that is conducted results from the theoretical orientation, the particular data that are available, the research questions under consideration, and the interests of the researcher. Irrespective of theoretical allegiances, analysts share an intense interest in language and are united in their belief that words work in important ways. Such theoretical and analytic amalgams respect a broad discursive imperative. That is to say, they are all involved in tracking down the work achieved by particular constructions. This work highlights the possibility that discourses and repertoires overlap, that analysis can include both the political and the personal, and that micro and macro orientations are not mutually exclusive.

The theoretical orientation that has influenced my own research owes much to the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987), and Edwards and Potter (1992). This bottom-up or micro approach seeks to understand more about the ways in which our social practices are played out in language. This approach is aligned with the interpersonal and interactive agenda of mainstream social psychology and perhaps this is the reason for its popularity. While it is possible to discuss discourse work formally in terms of philosophy, ontological and epistemological assumptions and general research orientation, it has also proved useful to introduce the fundamentals of discursive work in a less formal fashion. One successful technique for introducing some of the key assumptions of discursive research has been to present students with the following tutorial session.

The social psychology students who have previously been exposed to this material have indicated a strong liking for the format as their own concerns and questions are articulated. One problem faced by those new to the area of constructionist and discursive work is the difficult and inaccessible language that often characterises academic material. The following seeks to cut through such impenetrable and theoretically dense language. What the 'fly-on-the-wall' tutorial offers is 'down-to-earth' language that is pitched at a suitable level for those entering this field of study for the first time. The orientation of the tutorial

assumes students have a knowledge of traditional social psychology. Their questions are largely based on this knowledge, and highlight their attempts to integrate discursive work into what they already know about social psychology.

A 'fly-on-the-wall' tutorial

This tutorial is based on a paper by Tuffin, Morgan and Pennington (1996), and seeks to address initial concerns and questions. Readers are invited to eavesdrop on a part of a tutorial session that features students and tutors asking questions and commenting on how discursive work relates to and becomes a part of social psychology. The students are Monica, Whetu, Angela and Dave and they are discussing these issues with two tutors, Scarborough and Zygo.

Dave:	*I looked up 'discourse analysis' in the index of a couple of social psychology textbooks which I found in the library and it doesn't feature. So, why are we studying it as part of social psychology when it's not covered in social psychology textbooks?*
Zygo:	*That's right, discourse analysis is not mentioned in most of the currently available introductory social psychology textbooks. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, it reflects the newness of the discursive material, which really didn't get off the ground until the late 1980s or even the early 1990s. And secondly, discourse work is partly based on criticisms of, and dissatisfactions with, conventional methods in social psychology. While most social psychologists are aware of methodological criticisms, not all are keen to embrace the alternative that discursive psychology provides. For this reason the material is only just beginning to find its way into mainstream textbooks. What we are noticing is that there are an increasing number of textbooks which are dedicated specifically to the concerns of discursive and critical work.*
Scarborough:	*Dave, can I ask if the texts you looked at were from the United States?*
Dave:	*Yes, I think so.*
Scarborough:	*In that case, it comes as no great surprise. Most of the available texts in traditional social psychology are North American in origin and I think it is fair to say that alternative approaches to doing social psychology have developed most strongly outside that country. In particular, this style of work is currently flourishing in Europe, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.*
Monica:	*Okay, so what exactly is discourse analysis? And, also, I really think it would be helpful to have a simple definition of what discourse is.*
Scarborough:	*It's an orientation to understanding people which examines language as the most vital part of our social and personal lives. It can also be described as a research approach which takes seriously our talking, writing and other forms of communicating. While language has always*

been recognised as part of social behaviour, discourse analysis goes beyond 'recognition' by challenging the idea that language is a neutral medium like a 'window' that gives researchers access to 'inner' aspects of personhood like, for example, attitudes, feelings, memories or thoughts. Instead it deals with language as discourse – as a social phenomenon in its own right.

As for 'discourse', this has been variously defined, but for our purposes we will refer to it as all forms of spoken and written text. So, at its simplest the definition deals with the stuff we speak and write: talk and text.

Monica: *I understand that talk and text are important. But I need some clarification about the discursive perspective on those 'inner' things. I have always thought that our attitudes, memories and emotions were the very things that made up the essential topics psychologists studied. If language does not give us access to these things then how are we to study them?*

Scarborough: *This is a good question because it leads directly to one of the key points to understanding discursive psychology. We are not saying that these matters are unimportant – but what we are saying is that it's wrong to think of these things as purely located in the psychological interior. The cognitive influence which has dominated psychology in recent decades has located all the important psychological business as occurring inside our heads. Discursive work has challenged this assumption, maintaining an important epistemological difference with the suggestion that emotion, attitudes and memories (and remember the list does not stop there) should be regarded as being constituted in and through the ways in which they are talked and written about. Discursive work seeks to examine the ways in which language contributes to our shared understandings of how these categories are put together in particular ways. Recognising that talking about emotion (or memory, or attitudes) in one way will have particular effects, while talking about it in another way will have another effect. In other words, things like emotion are not treated as givens, but are regarded as topics in their own right. Psychological knowledge is not something to be extracted from the interior, but something to be studied interactionally, conversationally and relationally. Emotion thus becomes a social practice that is produced interactionally. The emphasis and orientation move from the interior to the exterior. What was previously inferred, now becomes part of what is able to be captured and studied as part of our daily social practice.*

Monica: *So, what was once regarded as happening privately, now becomes public?*

Zygo: *Yes! And one of the exciting things about this is that such public material provides an enormous wealth of potential data. This is exciting because there is an almost overwhelming availability of data. Some of the data sources occur naturally, such as newspaper reports, radio*

interviews, parliamentary debates and transcripts from court cases. Others are less natural but still require minimal intervention on the part of the researcher, such as in the case of recorded interviews. As you will see, much of the published discursive work has been based on interview material. Within the professional literature there has been recent debate about the place and worth of interviews. I think interviews are great in that they mirror conversational exchanges while also permitting the researcher to focus the conversation around topics and questions of interest. I really like the opportunity that interviews provide for the researcher to focus research attention and gather the accounts and explanations that participants offer on the questions of interest. The other point about this wealth of potential data is that it provides exciting research opportunities in areas that social psychologists were previously unable to work in.

Scarborough: *Yes, that's right, but returning to the view of language that discursive psychology has – this challenges the assumption that language is a neutral medium. This assumption sees language as uncomplicatedly describing events 'as they really happened'. Discursive psychologists regard language as more active, constructing rather than reflecting that which it portrays. According to this view language is assumed to be dynamic and active – that is to say, it gets things done, achieves things, and orients to all sorts of interesting social psychological business. This is referred to as the 'action orientation of talk and text' and it suggests that we achieve things through the ways in which we talk about things. This is a crucial point for understanding discursive psychology.*

   We are not just talking about shifting language to the centre of the research stage, but also about a profoundly different view of language. This view challenges the presumed neutrality of language and suggests that language should be seen as a vitally important social practice in its own right. In the past, social psychology has undertheorised the role of language and as a result has studied it in a very limited way. This limitation may be seen in studies where experimenters develop stimulus material which they wish to measure reactions to. The stimulus material would be standardised (for reasons of experimental control), but also artificial and staged.

Angela: *You mean like in those 'classic' studies we looked at earlier?*

Zygo: *Yes, definitely. Think back to the Shotland and Straw study on bystander reactions to attacks on a young woman. As we now know, in this staged attack the relationship between the woman and her attacker was manipulated as she either shouted, 'Get away from me; I don't know you', or 'Get away from me; I don't know why I ever married you.' While demonstrating the power of language to construct (either a 'stranger' or 'spouse'), the study is also very constrained in its examination of language. The use of language to operationalise the*

independent variable provides a 'window' for experimental subjects to 'see' the relationship between the man and the woman. Language is artificially manipulated and controlled by the experimenter, after which it is discarded and apparently ceases to have any further use.

From the perspective of critical social psychology language is used in this experiment after which it becomes obsolete. The experimenters have no interest in the ways in which the participants might have used language to explain aspects of their involvement in this study. It might, for example, have been interesting to have collected participants' stories about what they thought was going on, how they read or interpreted the meaning of the situation they found themselves witnessing. Equally, it might have been interesting to have sought explanations of why some participants offered help and why others failed to do so. While some would argue that the manipulation of language in this way was a clever experimental intervention and was a strength of the study, critical scholars would see this as a weakness, with language being used in a contrived and limited manner.

Scarborough: *In spite of the limitations of the study, it does highlight the powerful effects of language. In this case a relatively minor change in wording dramatically altered the likelihood of receiving assistance from bystanders.*

Whetu: *Are you saying that discourse analysts are interested in the effects of language on subsequent behaviour?*

Zygo: *Partly that is correct, but it also goes beyond that. Shotland and Straw were interested in the effects of varying relationships on subsequent behaviour, and through a manipulation of language they demonstrated the importance of such relationships. Discourse analysts are interested in the functional aspects of language as it occurs more naturally, in conversations, in discussions, on the telephone and on television.*

The kinds of functions that discursive psychologists are interested in include such things as explanations, justifications, blamings, denials, accusations, excuses, and describing events and actions. It's also important to be aware that language always carries with it evaluative implications and when it comes to attributing responsibility, causality and accountability our descriptions and explanations always have the power to highlight some aspects while also underplaying others. These emphases have strong implications for the way our attributions will develop. The main point here is that you can see that language is involved in doing some very important social psychological business and for that reason should be the focus of study in its own right. The 'social' aspect of all this should be obvious as all the actions described above are things that occur between people. When we attribute blame, this involves attributing responsibility to another person. When we offer an excuse, we almost always do so as part of an account of what happened, which we relay to another.

Whetu: *But if we accept that psychology is the science of human behaviour, then surely the study of discourse is only useful in helping us understand more about actual behaviour?*

Scarborough: *That is certainly a perspective which is common, but I think we are talking about a new approach that is in the process of establishing itself as an alternative theoretical orientation within psychology. As such, it has lots to say about 'behaviour', which will aid our understanding. The first point to note here is that any description of 'behaviour' will inevitably involve discursive resources, which will be constitutive of the 'behaviour'. A simple example might help at this point. How might we characterise the actions of a suicide bomber? It is possible to frame this 'behaviour' as terrorism, and also possible to frame it as martyrdom. Equally it would be possible to characterise such actions as either brave or as foolhardy. As you can see, much hinges on the turn of a single word, and this will have significant effects on everything we subsequently say about that person's actions. Through the language we deploy we have the power to construct quite separate psychological realities, which would either encourage condemnation, or aggrandisement. I think this illustrates the point that language is never neutral and bland. Language is never therefore simply telling it like it is. Reality is always socially constructed, in the sense that our knowledge of events comes to us through the words we use when describing 'behaviour'.*

At this stage, discourse analysts are attempting to show that discourse is a social process which is worth examining in more detail. While traditional experimental studies such as Shotland and Straw's have hinted at the importance of language use, discursive work is about demonstrating just how important language use is.

The 'turn to language' advocated by critical social psychology carries with it some fascinating implications, not the least being the idea that psychological 'constructs' are constituted by the way in which we talk and write about them. Let's take the study of emotion as an example. Critical studies of emotions (jealousy, anger, and so on) assume that the nature of emotions is to be found in the way in which these are talked about and written about. This means that, for example, jealousy is not located in a tiny 'bent-out-of-shape' corner of the heart, nor is it located at the level of physiology, or cognition. Jealousy can be thought about and studied as located and constituted discursively. How is jealousy talked about? What entitlements does a jealous person have? What are the dynamics that contribute to someone claiming to be jealous? These are the kinds of questions that critical studies are exploring. What is being suggested by this approach is that talk does more than simply describe the emotion, it contributes to the nature of what we understand the experience of jealousy to be.

Dave: *I think I understand what discourse analysis is trying to achieve, but I have no idea how they do it. My question is about methods. I mean, do discourse people run experiments, or are they into correlational stuff, or what?*

Zygo: *Discursive researchers are interested in detailed examinations of what people say and what they write. Language provides the fundamental currency through which we transact our daily social interactions, and this also provides potential data for discourse work. Data, therefore, typically consist of interview transcripts, newspaper reports, email messages, telephone conversations, and so on. The data are looked at as they occur, which means we do not transform the data into numerical categories for the sake of statistical analysis. In this respect the approach is qualitative rather than* **quantitative**. *Please remember, however, that there are numerous other qualitative approaches also.*

Dave: *So, given that your data might come from something like a transcript of an interview, how would you begin to analyse this kind of data? Would you, for example, be looking for group differences in the way people answered particular questions?*

Scarborough: *To answer the second question first, no. Discourse analysts are both respectful and critical of existing methodologies that examine group differences and we do not wish to get into that type of research. Let me explain. The 'respect' comes from an awareness that if you want to do research that looks at, say, differences between groups then there are established ways of doing this. The 'critical' comes from the problem of lumping people into groups for methodological and analytic reasons. This usually ensures that individual variation gets submerged within the group data. Discourse work is keen to examine this kind of variation, while taking into account the contexts in which it occurs. An important part of the work of discursive psychology involves the examination of variation.*

The question of how do we do the analysis is not an easy one to answer. A starting point is always to develop an intimate and detailed knowledge of the data. This means developing a style of reading that runs contrary to the way in which students have typically been encouraged to read. Rather than reading vast quantities of material and being expected to provide summary-style understanding, discursive work requires reading with a view to examining the fine detail of how the particular account has been put together. The other point about analysis is that it is something that is best learned by doing. This means working with data and trying to work out how the analysis might begin, how it might be structured, what the important aspects of the data are, what functions are being achieved, how things are constructed and what is achieved by those particular constructions. Clearly there are many ways of looking at data – and I want to restate

the importance of, firstly, looking at existing published analyses and, secondly, actually having a careful look at data yourself.

Zygo: *As Scarborough just mentioned, the idea of how things have been 'put together' is an important issue for analysis. It is often referred to as construction and is argued to be one of the core strategies of any analysis. The constructive nature of text comes from the view that language does not simply reflect the state of affairs, but it actively constructs a particular version of those affairs. Remember we said earlier that the assumption about linguistic neutrality was being challenged? Well, this is part of that challenge. What discursive psychologists are claiming is that language is both active (it does things) and constructive (it produces things). It is because of its power to act and construct that it needs to be studied carefully.*

Monica: *I am finding this idea of 'construction' really difficult to grasp.*

Zygo: *You may find it helpful if you can suspend the notion that there might be only one 'true' reality. This notion is commonly tested when competing accounts are presented. Perhaps you can recall an argument you had where you and the other person could not agree on what 'actually' happened. Such disputes support the claim that different accounts of the same event are not uncommon, and when examined in detail provide further support for the suggestion that 'reality' is in some part created by the manner in which an account is put together.*

    Construction is also useful in guiding the analysis. The notion of construction implies that an account has been built up from basic linguistic resources. One of the aims of analysis is to identify what these resources are and how they operate functionally.

Angela: *I think I understand something about the aims of this approach to social psychology and the stuff about how to do it, but this really doesn't seem like science to me. In fact, it seems more like something the English department would be involved with rather than the Psychology department.*

Scarborough: *There are a number of responses that could be made to this. Firstly, think of the extent to which mainstream work relies on and uses statistics. This is an accepted way of doing psychology and is not criticised as being something that should be undertaken within the mathematics department. Secondly, lets consider this question as a discourse analyst might. Disciplines like English, History, Sociology, and Psychology are not 'naturally occurring' entities. They have social histories, but more importantly, various academic activities are 'categorised' according to the ways we have for speaking and writing about different aspects of human life. English and Psychology are not inherently distinct. One of the ways in which they are made distinctive is by using the notion of 'science' to tell them apart. Psychology is a 'social science', English is one of the 'humanities'. As a discourse analyst I'm interested*

in how 'science' and 'humanities' have become different ways of understanding people. When I think about what you have said from this point of view I think that perhaps discourse analysis is a 'multi-disciplinary' methodology – an approach that can be used by both the 'sciences' and the 'humanities'.

Discourse analysts have been interested in the social construction of science for some time now. In fact, some of the earliest discursive work looked at the ways in which talk about 'science' was used by scientists to support their arguments. It is clear from these studies and the literature on scientific practice itself that there are many ways to 'do' science. Perhaps the only characteristic they have in common is that they involve a notion of 'systematic study'. Discourse analysts are certainly 'systematic' in their approach to discourse. I would say that discourse analysis is 'scientific' and a legitimate methodology for social psychologists.

Zygo: *However, answers to questions ultimately depend on the discursive resources we have for understanding the question and constructing an answer. This partly depends on the context of the talk also. Scarborough seems determined to be a teacher at present, so I think her answer functions to show a little of how a discourse analyst might use a variety of perspectives to interpret the question. Scarborough's talk has been 'constructed' to 'perform' that demonstration.*

Angela: *If I understand this it seems that discourse analysis is an appropriate way to study any social situation that involves language, including science. And that doesn't mean that it isn't scientific.*

Scarborough: *I think that is a very fair summary.*

Dave: *I'm not exactly sure where I got this idea from, but some people have the view that discourse analysis is all about finding 'hidden messages' in what people have to say. What is your response to that?*

Zygo: *I have also heard that comment, and I think it is seriously misplaced. While it is true that analysis involves interpretation, I don't think that there is anything 'hidden' about the entire business. In research reports, extensive tracts of data are involved and reproduced along with the researchers' interpretations of the data. One of the tasks here is to make explicit the implicit work that the data are achieving, so in that sense analysts aim to reveal something that may have initially been obscured. Overall, I think it's a very open and transparent process, opening up data and making it explicit.*

Dave: *Thanks, that puts it into a useful perspective for me.*

The previous two sections have introduced discourse work, firstly, through formal identification and discussion, and secondly as the topic of a question-driven tutorial. The ideas discursive psychology utilises are complex and may seem overly abstract and difficult. This argues for attempting to introduce discursive work in differing ways. Hence, the final section of this chapter will deal

with a detailed examination of one piece of analytic work. The aim here is to provide a concrete example of how analysis may be conducted. This demonstration and others like it are able to contribute to understandings of some of the finer theoretical points that guide analysis while also providing worked examples of the methods and practices of discourse work. While not quite 'learning by doing', such illustrative work might usefully be thought of vicariously as 'learning by seeing how others have done'.

It is important to appreciate that one needs to develop a certain analytic orientation that will assist in the interpretive work necessary both to produce and understand good analysis. Wetherell (1996) talks about this broadly as identifying ideological patterns, examining the ways in which interpretations become bound up with actions, and developing an understanding of the social and psychological implications of various ways of talking. Widdicombe (1993) incorporates two key features into her analysis. Firstly, there is an analytic mentality that involves a particular way of looking at material and the application of a range of skills which may be developed through practice (see also Tuffin and Howard, 2001; Wooffitt, 1990). Secondly, Widdicombe talks about the way in which inferential and interactional aspects of talk may be used, such that 'the way things are said' is treated as a speaker's achievement. Most usefully, this achievement may be regarded as a solution to a problem, and the analytic task is then to identify what this problem might be. Of course, the problem is often unstated and if the speaker is successful, the problem can be successfully avoided, sidelined or deflected in some other way. Hopefully, these points will be illustrated in the following analysis.

Beginning analysis

The data presented below come from a social psychological study of youth subcultures, which included an examination of punks, skinheads and goths (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1990, 1995). The extract comes from a recorded interview that took place on a street in London. The speaker is a male punk who talks about the events that led up to a 'riot' which occurred following a concert. This extract has been chosen because it involves rich detail that is useful for introducing the kind of analytic concerns which are of interest to discourse analysts. Not all descriptions are as analytically fruitful as this. One final introductory point is that readers will notice that the data are arranged in specific numbered lines. Of course, the interview did not take place in such an orderly fashion, rather this represents an analytic overlay which allows for easier reference to specific sections of the data.

1   And the police were all outside there at the concert.
2   There wasn't a bit of trouble,
3   apart from say one or two wee scraps, you know.

4   But that happens … every gig there's a scrap –
5   there's always somebody that doesn't like somebody else.
6   It doesn't matter what it is, it's always happening,
7   you know you cannot stop that.
8   And we go outside and there they are –
9   fucking eight hundred Old Bill,
10 just waiting for the chance –
11 riot shields, truncheons, and you're not doing nothing –
12 you're only trying to get down to the tube and go home.
13 So what do they do? You're walking by
14 and they're pushing you with their truncheons
15 and they start hitting the odd punk here and there.
16 And what happens?
17 The punks rebel – they don't like getting hit
18 in the face with a truncheon, nobody does.
19 So what do you do?
20 You push the copper back and what happens?
21 Ten or twelve of them are beating
22 the pure hell out of some poor bastard
23 who's only trying to keep somebody off his back.
24 Now that started a riot.

Prior to an examination of the data some initial points need to be made. Firstly, full acknowledgement should be given to Wooffitt (1993) as many of the analytic points covered here are drawn directly from his analysis. More generally, constructionist epistemology regards knowledge as historically and culturally situated. This idea that all knowledge is inevitably grounded in time and place is closely related to the general discursive maxim that meaning, interpretation and analysis are context-dependent. It is therefore important to keep in mind that the whole notion of 'punk' is, historically, a relatively recent phenomenon. Further, there are a specific cultural context in which the extract is embedded. This context will be comfortably familiar for readers in the United Kingdom where culturally specific words like *gig*, *truncheon* and *copper* need no explanation. Readers from other cultures may not be so familiar with these terms, so for that reason some brief synonyms: gig – concert, wee – small, scrap – fight, Old Bill – police, truncheon – baton, tube – underground passenger railway, copper – police.

When doing analysis the first step is always to become intimately familiar with the data. This requires different reading practices from those required for reading a novel, or reading study material for a university course. Mostly, that kind of reading requires the consumption of vast amounts of material, following which the reader should be able to provide a brief summary of the main points, or in the case of a novel the basic plot. This style of reading is referred to as reading for 'gist'. Such a summary of the above data could be that it is an eyewitness account of what happened prior to a riot between punks and the police.

However, discourse work requires a level of familiarity and intimacy with the data that far exceeds the requirements of gist. Analysis is not about providing a simple overview of the data, but rather about getting inside and examining the dynamics and details of the data in order to understand better how it works as an account, what it achieves and how it does this. The crudeness of summary statements is that they miss much of the interesting stuff that occurs whenever versions of events are put forward. Hopefully, over the next few pages readers will come to appreciate some of the interesting dynamics of language use that occur even in short segments of talk. In this respect analysts have a deep-seated fascination with the detail of language and a sensitivity to the functional and performative aspects of accounts.

Getting to know the data demands repeated readings, with attention being paid to the organisation of textual details. Read, re-read, and then read again is a useful rule of thumb here. Discourse analytic work is an interpretive activity that requires careful attention to the fine details of the text. As you read there are a number of questions that should be to the fore. Analysts are always aware of questions such as: What is said? What effect does the text have? What language resources are used in this particular description or account? What is achieved by this text? How do these achievements come about? How does the account work in terms of plausibility? How does it manage to seem fair, balanced, and reasonable?

On first reading this extract might seem rather unremarkable. The extract deals with a version of 'what happened', and as with most disputes or disagreements we routinely expect to find the picture painted by the description to side with the orientation of the speaker. This is clearly the case above where the speaker makes quite strong claims that the punks were not responsible for the violence. Issues of blame, responsibility and accountability are of special interest to social psychologists since they inevitably carry with them implications that relate to matters of evaluation, judgement and attribution. In this extract, questions of blame and responsibility are key achievements of the text and the discursive task is to look at the details of how these matters are attended to and worked up by the speaker. Putting this another way, one of the claims of discourse work is that language achieves things, so with respect to the current data we could well ask, firstly, what is being achieved? And, secondly, how is this accomplished? Analysis attempts to answer these questions.

Following repeated readings of the data a useful next step is to consider the questions that relate to construction. The data under consideration involve an explanation of 'what happened' at, and immediately following, the concert. The account involves descriptions of both the actions of the police and the punks. One useful analytic strategy is to examine carefully the ways in which the two groups are drawn into the explanation. How have these groups been constructed? What 'work' is accomplished by these descriptions? With these questions in mind let us begin with the police.

The police

Specific references to the police appear on lines 1, 8–11, 13–15, 17–18, 20–22. These lines are repeated below and will be commented on in turn.

1   And the police were all outside there at the concert.

8   And we go outside and there they are –
9   fucking eight hundred Old Bill,
10   just waiting for the chance –
11   riot shields, truncheons, and you're not doing nothing –

These descriptions of the police presence may be read in a number of ways, with one possible reading being as follows. A sense of ominous threat appears in the initial constructions in lines 1 and 8. This sense of threat is honed in line 9 with the size of the police presence being quantified. It is, of course, a moot point as to whether there were actually 800 police, or indeed anything near that number. However, this gives rise to a number of important analytic points. Firstly, while it is possible (and even likely) that this number has been exaggerated, the reported size of the police presence does some important rhetorical work. It increases the magnitude of the police threat posed to those leaving the concert. The second point to make is that discourse work remains, necessarily, agnostic about the actual truth of the matter. As analysts, we are not in a position to actually know how many police were there, and importantly, it is of little significance to the task of the analysis. Remember that we are not working as arbiters of the truth, as positivist traditions would have expected. Rather, our job is to examine the work that is conducted in the text and explore the ways in which this might be read and the psychological consequences of those readings. In this case the work done by the description of 'fucking eight hundred Old Bill' portrays the police presence as excessive, imposing and threatening. The third point concerns the apparent paradox of discourse analysts working with numbers. Although critical social psychologists have highlighted the importance of the linguistic features of social life, this does not mean they eschew numerical considerations. Indeed, there are many important discursive and psychological features which numbers contribute. See, for example, the work of Potter (1996a), where numerical values are regarded as one of the many resources available to be harnessed by participants to shore up their accounts as solid and factual. Also the work by Morgan, Tuffin, Frederikson, Lyons and Stephens (1994), Potter and Wetherell (1994), and Potter, Wetherell and Chitty (1991) all offer useful comments on the discursive analysis of numerical indices.

In line 10 the characterisation of the police does some important attributional work. The description 'just waiting for the chance' captures a sense of eager anticipation, suggesting that the police are far from a passive force. There is an implication that they are hungry for some action and are simply waiting for any opportunity to initiate this. Line 11 further supports the overall formulation

of the police as being overprepared with shields and truncheons for any violence that might erupt. Arguably, the mention of these two items of hardware covers the issues of both defence (shields) and attack (truncheons).

13   So what do they do? You're walking by
14   and they're pushing you with their truncheons
15   and they start hitting the odd punk here and there.

This segment opens with a classic rhetorical question. Having previously portrayed the police as being in great numbers, poised for action, and armed for the eventuality, this question has a 'what next' quality. Asking such a question sets the stage for the speaker to move the narrative forward, and to focus attention on the actions of the police. In line 14 the police are accused of pushing the punks with truncheons. Importantly, this aggressive action ('pushing') is unprovoked. Looking carefully at the structure of lines 13 and 14 it is possible to see how the actions of the punks (which we will consider in more detail next) are contrasted with those of the police. Atkinson (1984) has extensively discussed the way in which rhetorical devices such as contrasts may be seen to achieve certain functions. Specifically, the suggestion has been made that contrasts elicit audience approval and offer a simple yet slick way of summarising quite complicated arguments. In the above extract the punks are performing inoffensive, unprovocative, routine actions. Note how these actions ('walking by') contrast dramatically with the actions of the police, which involve pushing with truncheons. In line 15 the actions of the police escalate. By 'hitting the odd punk here and there' police violence is firstly documented and reported, and secondly, it is contrasted with the harmless and routine actions of the punks. And, thirdly the police violence is depicted as random and haphazard. Glossing the work of this section it would be possible to conclude that not only are the aggressive actions of the police unprovoked, but that they are also random and senseless. Given the actions of the punks, the police response seems inexplicable, except perhaps in terms of the suggestion that they were looking for gratuitous violence.

17   The punks rebel – they don't like getting hit
18   in the face with a truncheon, nobody does.

The work of the above two lines further contributes to the overall construction of the police as violent and aggressive. The generalised pushing and hitting of the previous lines is now more precise. The police are here described as using their batons to hit punks in the face. Notably, the number of punks who are brutalised is not addressed, other than to suggest that there are sufficient in number for this to produce rebellion among their ranks.

20   You push the copper back and what happens?
21   Ten or twelve of them are beating
22   the pure hell out of some poor bastard

In line 20 another question is asked that requires no answer. This time the copper has received a 'push' from a punk and the question introduces the police response to being pushed. This response may be regarded as excessive both numerically and in terms of the force and level of violence described. The numerical characterisation is similar to that used previously. However, this offers a more precise ratio of police to punks (somewhere in the vicinity of ten or 12, to one). The singular punk is portrayed as a victim who has received an unwarranted beating. These actions have further invoked the sympathy of the speaker.

The punks

Specific references to the punks are to be found in the following segments: lines 2–8, 11–15, 17–20, 22–23. Each of these fragments will be reproduced and commented on in turn.

> 2   There wasn't a bit of trouble,
> 3   apart from say one or two wee scraps, you know.
> 4   But that happens … every gig there's a scrap –
> 5   there's always somebody that doesn't like somebody else.
> 6   It doesn't matter what it is, it's always happening,
> 7   you know you cannot stop that
> 8   And we go outside and there they are –

Much is achieved in these lines where the speaker tells of the events that may have resulted in the police presence in the first place. Line 2 indicates a trouble-free evening; however, on the very next line an exception is introduced. This is the kind of variability that excites discourse analysts as it frequently signals that important things are happening in the text. This extract is no exception and Wooffitt's (1993) original analysis features an extended discussion of line 3 for this very reason. Wooffitt highlights the swift move that occurs between line 2, where the speaker indicates a trouble-free evening, and line 3 where there is a concession that there was trouble. Denial of trouble would position the speaker as an untrustworthy reporter of events. So, in line 3 there is an admission that there was trouble; however, this concessionary work is managed very carefully. Firstly, the trouble is talked about in terms of 'scraps', which may be read as minimal versions of the kind of thing that went on. Wooffitt argues that this word (rather than alternatives such as 'fight' or 'punch up') evokes images of play-fights that might occur in a school playground. Accordingly, scraps are not sufficiently serious to cause physical damage or to warrant the police presence. Secondly, the scraps are minimalised by prefacing them with the descriptor 'wee'. This further works to downplay the significance of these events. Thirdly, in quantifying the extent of the trouble, the number of scraps is recounted as 'one or two'. Wooffitt makes the insightful point that this particular characterisation is

the most minimal version of plurality that may be admitted to. The speaker thereby offers an account conceding that there was more than one incident that resulted in the police being called to the concert, but does this in a sophisticated way which downplays the characterisation of the punks as a violent or troublesome group.

In lines 4–7 the occurrence of scraps is talked about in general terms. From the specifics of what happened that evening, the speaker moves to contextualise these events in terms of what generally happens at concerts: 'every gig there's a scrap'. A key point here is the claim that these kinds of outbreaks are routinely associated with 'gigs'. The implication of this point is that the specific context of the *punk* rock concert becomes submerged in this account. Again, considering the broad cultural context it should be remembered that punk culture in the late 1970s and early 1980s came to be stereotyped in the media by characteristics such as uncleanliness, flaunting of conventional mores, rebellion and violence. This background helps with our understanding of why the account we are examining pointedly fails to make the unique cultural features of this concert salient.

In line 4 scraps are regarded as normal; they carry with them implications of events that are both predictable and inevitable. Notably, the reliability with which these events occur all centres around discussion of a single scrap. Possibly this also works to downplay the trouble that precipitated the police presence on that particular evening. Scraps are depicted as very ordinary and usual. Wooffitt's (1993) analysis points out the appearance of words like 'every' and 'always' and argues that these are illustrations of **extreme case formulations** (Pomerantz, 1986). Such formulations may be regarded as persuasive tactical moves that enhance rhetorical effectiveness by emphasising extremes of relevant dimensions of judgement. Pomerantz has suggested that extreme case formulations are likely to be used when the speaker's version of events may receive an unsympathetic hearing. In suggesting that at every concert there is a fight the speaker constructs such events as nothing out of the ordinary. Scraps become part of the routine of attending gigs. These conflicts are marked as an expected part of human likes and dislikes and something that happens as a consequence of that fact. What this achieves is the characterisation of this gig as being unexceptional – the minimal violence at the concert was unremarkable thereby raising suspicions about the police presence.

Finally, in line 8 we have the innocuous 'and we go outside'. Wooffitt (1993) refers to this as a 'very minimal' description of what the punks did following the concert. The principal achievement of such a description is to steep the actions of the punks in neutrality and passivity. The strength of this characterisation becomes apparent when we look at the subsequent contrasting description of the police who, in line 8, are talked about as having a rather ominous presence. This portrayal of punk neutrality and passivity contrasted with police hostility and threat is similar to the descriptions of the punks as simply 'walking by' (line 13), 'not doing nothing' (line 11) and 'only trying to go home' (line 12).

11   riot shields, truncheons, and you're not doing nothing –
12   you're only trying to get down to the tube and go home.
13   So what do they do? You're walking by
14   and they're pushing you with their truncheons
15   and they start hitting the odd punk here and there.

Line 11 follows, and completes the description of the police, and then moves to contrast the actions of the punks who are here seen as models of passivity ('not doing nothing'). Arguably, references to 'you' include the speaker while also broadening the account, such that 'you' may have relevance for anybody engaged in ordinary, everyday activities. Wooffitt (1993) makes the point about pronoun use, whereby the speaker makes reference to both 'we' and 'you'. He suggests that 'we' (line 8) identifies the speaker as one of the punks, whereas references to 'you' (lines 11–14) appeal to the kind of activity that is unexceptional and could be expected from anybody. The deployment of pronouns has previously been shown to be an important feature of discursive analysis (Muhlhausler & Harré, 1990; Praat, Tuffin, Lyons, Morgan & Frederikson, 1996). The broad point here is that pronouns do not form perfectly neat divisions and as such are open to use and manipulation for effect. It is possible to distribute responsibility more widely, or to distinguish the specifics of an individual perspective. The power of identifying the speaker as a member of 'we' is such that it puts him at the concert and reminds the audience that this is a first-hand account. The wider reference implied in the use of 'you' invites audience identification with the unprovocative and unremarkable actions that 'you' (anybody) might be engaged in, and arguably to share the outrage when such actions become the focus of police brutality. It is also notable that the number of references to 'you' far exceeds the number of references to 'we'. This inferential work is further supported by lines 12 and 13. In line 12 the actions of the punks are formulated as being no different from what anyone would do. Reaching the tube and going home are just the kinds of unexceptional actions anybody could identify with, and for that reason seem unlikely to attract the attention of the law. Similarly, line 13 has the punks innocently 'walking by'. Contrastively, these actions attract violent responses from the police who begin pushing and hitting.

17   The punks rebel – they don't like getting hit
18   in the face with a truncheon, nobody does.
19   So what do you do?
20   You push the copper back and what happens?

In line 17 we have a reaction from the punks, which is depicted as rebellion. As Wooffitt (1993) notes, this is the first active involvement the punks have displayed. There are a number of points about this construction that are important to consider. Firstly, the actions of the punks are described as being reactive to considerable police provocation. Secondly, the actions of the punks are cast as being

retaliatory. Thirdly, the actions of the punks are constructed as being the same as could be expected from anyone who was victim of extreme police violence. Finally, describing the actions of the punks as rebellion is, in itself, interesting. Rebelling is always against something, and in this case the punks have been exposed to extreme provocation against which rebellion seems justified. The particular form through which the punks rebel is also interesting: 'you push the copper back'. Pushing is described here as an action that occurs in response to the actions of the police. It is significant that the punks' response to this is reactive and notably similar in kind to the initiating actions of the police. Thus, the punks respond in kind, rather than initiating and escalating the violence. This characterisation is consistent with the overall evaluation of their actions as being harmless, passive and reactionary, rather than dangerous, aggressive and provocative.

General analytic points

In any discourse analysis there are always many points that bear repeating about the analysis. I will resist this temptation and instead make some general points that illustrate key aspects of discursive psychology and more precisely, about doing analysis itself.

Of course, it would have been possible to give the speaker in the above extract a questionnaire, which may have resulted in a score indicating a negative attitude to authority and the police. Such a questionnaire would involve language with questions being phrased and ordered in particular ways. However, the bluntness of such an approach would miss much. Indeed, it could be accused of somehow entirely missing the point, not to mention the finely textured and richly detailed account that has just been unpacked in this analysis. The aim of such questionnaires is to capture some abstract interiorised notion like an 'attitude', while the discursive aim is to examine language use as a form of social action in its own right. For critical social psychologists, demonstrations such as the above prove to be instructive in showing the importance of grounding research practices in participants' accounts. The above analysis argues for adopting a research focus that examines language in its own right, contrasting strongly with views that regard language as simply a route to a cognitively inspired psychological interior. This interior has been filled with abstractions and much of the work of conventional social psychology has involved honing and measuring these concepts. The problem for critical social psychologists is that these abstractions have become increasingly removed from the psychological experience of the participants and from any meaning with which they imbue their experiences. In contrast, we have just spent some time looking at the ways in which meaning-making practices were deployed in a single account. Indeed, critical social psychologists are very much in the business of privileging participants' own accounts as the core data that warrants further scrutiny and examination.

Students often react to such analysis with some surprise – surprise at the richness and complexity of such a small segment of text. There is also the potential

for surprise when they realise that this interview was *spontaneous*. Indeed, it is hard not to be impressed with the skill, dexterity and cleverness with which this account has been put together. However, this illustrates the general point that all our daily talk and interactions are peppered with such rhetorical and discursive features. In this regard the interview with the punk is unremarkable, while appearing to be surprisingly complex and well-designed. The general complexity and sophistication with which language is put together gives rise to one of the very positive advantages of a discursively oriented critical social psychology. Namely, that the shift of emphasis to a more social epistemology that acknowledges the importance of our social practices through language use promotes a more positive view of people (Wood & Kroger, 2000). According to this view, our social practices should be recognised as considerable social and linguistic achievements, highly deserving of research attention.

Mainstream social psychology texts (for example, Myers, 1993) commonly deal with the topic of social thinking as a recent perspective to be added to the old standards of social influence and social relationships. This work draws on research in the area of **social cognition** (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) and catalogues human failings. The extensive list of human failings includes errors in thinking, false beliefs, illusory thinking, the fallibility of self-knowledge, poor performance at predicting our behaviour, preconceptions dominating our interpretations and recall of events, and the intellectual conceit associated with overestimating the accuracy of our beliefs and knowledge. Further, it seems we are also prone to suffer from bias (confirmation, hindsight and self-serving), we are powerfully seduced by information that is available and vivid (but not necessarily relevant), we form illusory correlations, have illusions of control and invulnerability, and hold false beliefs (consensus, uniqueness and perseverance). As Myers (1993) concludes, these errors can 'warp our perceptions of reality and prejudice our judgements of others' (p. 71). In stark contrast to the rather bleak and negative view promoted by social cognition, the discursive perspective regards people more positively as sophisticated and polished users of language. As language users we show remarkable subtlety and finesse in our ability to put forward accounts that attend to significant social psychological business. Such attention has a bearing on the orientation of the speaker, the orientation of the audience and other possible accounts of the same event. These alternative accounts are often implicit, but work is often done that could be seen to bolster the authenticity and plausibility of the story. Such work is arguably done in order to add strength to the account, which is especially important when it may be in competition with other versions.

Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to shift the emphasis from critiquing existing mainstream practices to that of introducing a new research orientation. The discursive approach to doing research in social psychology rests on a

social constructionist perspective and has been introduced in terms of aims and basic procedures. While acknowledging that discourse work offers one of many possible paths towards conducting work in critical social psychology, this orientation has been the focus of this book due to its growing acceptance and popularity within the discipline. Increasingly, discursive work has become recognised as the face of critical social psychology. Two key traditions of discourse analytic work were introduced with the more micro-oriented version being the version that has gained greatest acceptance among social psychologists. It was argued that this was a result of its close alignment with traditional research interests. In practice, the distinctions between these and other approaches tend to break down with much analytic work being informed by theoretical traditions, specific research questions and the nature of the data.

The version of discourse work this book follows most closely aims to reveal how discourse is central to action. The constitution of events, actions, responsibilities, evaluations, identities and cultures occurs through language and a prime analytic task is to show how resources are harnessed and organised to make this work. The action orientation of talk and text is a theme prevalent in the work of discursive researchers. Their key goals are the identification of the language resources that are available and the examination of how these are put to work in practice. The key assumptions of discourse analytic work were discussed less formally in the 'fly-on-the-wall' tutorial, in which questions were raised about how the approach differs from mainstream approaches in terms of fundamental philosophy and basic practices. One of the major points to emerge was the discursive view that core psychological entities are not primarily located in the psychological interior (as cognitive psychology has long maintained), but rather are able to be studied interactionally, conversationally and relationally. The research orientation thus moves from the interior to the exterior, with an inferential epistemology being replaced by a social epistemology. A second key point that characterises discourse work is the reconceptualisation of language as active and functional. Language is seen as the prime medium through which our social worlds are played out. The discursive view of language is to highlight the action orientation of talk and text, and to argue that language use is something that is important to study in its own right.

Readers have also been introduced to some of the finer points of doing analysis with an extended discussion of a segment of an interview and subsequent analysis of this. The analysis was organised around the varying constructions of the police and the punks and the contrastive work that occurs between these two groups. The analysis unpacks this interview and attempts to highlight the way in which analysts' fascination with and sensitivity to language provides a way of interpreting and reading text. These interpretations stem from an intimate familiarity with the detail of the text and seek to examine the functional and performative aspects of talk. The analysis attends to concerns of construction, function and variation through careful readings of the fine texture and rich detail. The analytic example served to highlight

the importance of firstly grounding research practices in participants' accounts, and secondly examining language use as a form of social action in its own right.

For critical social psychologists discourse goes beyond being simply another topic to be studied and is regarded as the key to understanding social life. This position has been introduced in this chapter and will be further developed and applied in the next chapter, where the topics of prejudice, discrimination and racism are considered from a discursive perspective.

Further Reading

Coyle, A. (2000). Discourse analysis. In G. Breakwell, S. Hammond and C. Fife-Shaw (Eds.), *Research methods in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 251–268). London: Sage.
A nicely written chapter dealing briefly with both the theory and practice of conducting discourse analysis.

Edley, N. (2001). Analysing masculinity: Interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor & S.J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as data* (pp. 189–228). London: Sage.
This chapter comes from a book that includes chapters on the practicalities of conducting critical analysis with a range of methods that include conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics and a variety of discursive analyses. Edley's chapter follows the analytic traditions that are detailed in this book and his chapter makes excellent reading for those wishing to explore the process of analysis more closely.

Potter, J. (1996a) *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric and social construction.* London: Sage.
Potter offers a comprehensive background to discursive work which is liberally illustrated with analytic examples.

Wood, L., and Kroger, R. (2000). *Doing discourse analysis: Methods for studying action in talk and text.* London: Sage.
This easy-to-read volume shows how the methods of actually doing discourse analysis are closely linked to a theoretical perspective on social life that highlights the importance of language. The practical orientation of this book explains in detail how to collect data, conduct the analysis and write research reports.

Prejudice, Discrimination and Racism

Overview

Having introduced a social constructionist epistemology and provided readers with a flavour of the interpretive work involved in discursive research, it is the mission of this chapter to apply these understandings to an area that has been of perennial interest to many social psychologists. This chapter will firstly provide a context for considering social psychological approaches to the study of prejudice and racism with a brief history which includes political racism. Mainstream explanations for these topics are reviewed. Social cognition, personality and theories of prejudice based on group membership are considered. Critical social psychologists have also made a major contribution to the study of prejudice, discrimination and racism. In applying the insights of social constructionism to these problems two strands of critical work are presented. Firstly, studies that have looked at discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation are discussed. Secondly, racism is discussed as an area that has changed over recent times with its manifestations becoming more subtle and complex. Discursive studies of racism from both New Zealand and Australia are examined with this work seeking to expose the dynamics of racist talk, thereby demonstrating how it is that the unsayable is made to appear reasonable, fair and sayable.

History

Social psychologists have long been interested in the negative judgements we make about others. Sometimes these judgements rest on what amounts to trivial concerns, while at other times the basis of the prejudice is more deep seated. Common and high profile prejudices occur against people who are a different colour, or of a different culture. This form of prejudice is referred to as racism and will be the subject of the final section of the chapter. The other key areas

that have attracted research attention in recent years include prejudice based on gender (sexism), and age (ageism). Other prejudices exist, although they have been the subject of less concentrated research effort and are frequently organised around a dislike, mistrust or suspicion of trivial characteristics. Take, for example, the stereotypes that are talked about on the basis of hair colour: red heads, reportedly being fiery in temper; blondes being not as smart as others. Of course, hair colour is but one of thousands of dimensions around which such prejudice may operate. Think of the stereotypic judgements that might be made about short people, fat people, people with facial hair, bald people, disabled people, people with tattoos, people who wear glasses, people who are highly educated, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, people who ride motorcycles, people who play golf, people who vote 'green', people who wear leather clothes, nudists, people with heavily pierced bodies, accountants, policemen and women, teachers and the unemployed. There almost seems no limit to the trivial and superficial bases upon which people draw negative conclusions and rigid stereotypes about others.

While the breadth of such judgements is impressive, the history of prejudice and discrimination is even more impressive. Unfortunately, some of our history in these matters extends tragically beyond the level of judgements that are simply offensive. Indeed, human history offers a barbaric picture of racial, ethnic and cultural groups seeking domination and exploitation of other groups. The history of prejudice and racism is closely aligned with the practices of colonisation, domination and subjugation, which have seen indigenous rights and traditions yield to the 'pioneering' spirit of the new settlers. The 'pioneers' or 'settlers' of 'new' lands were charged with a cultural and religious zealousness that resulted in the imposition of new systems of ownership, law, education, language, and technology. Land that had been occupied for many thousands of years by the indigenous people of, for example, North America, New Zealand and Australia, was seized or 'annexed' by the newly established authorities and powers. Native customs and practices that had been honoured across the generations were displaced and marginalised by the machinery of colonisation.

The history of colonisation is not simply a story of the inevitability of progress and of the human race spreading itself over all the available territory the earth has to offer. While land was at the heart of much colonial interest, there is also an interesting history of relationships between colonised and coloniser. In the case of New Zealand's colonial history the building of equitable and harmonious relationships between the colonists and the indigenous Maori people was thwarted by the practices and policies of the British Crown and Settler Governments (Ward, 1973). These policies undermined traditional Maori authority and institutions while denying Maori a significant place in the newly established political and social order. Maori became subject to the indivisible sovereignty of the Crown, and their rights to self-determination were largely ignored. This, in spite of a legal document (the Treaty of Waitangi), which attempted to capture the spirit of 'two peoples and one land'. While the promise

of equal partnership failed, New Zealand is not unique in this respect, with the Native American tribes of North America and the Aboriginal tribes of Australia suffering similar, or worse, fates. Indeed, this pattern of history has been repeated in other colonised countries where, without the protection of a legal treaty, policies of genocide and political decimation resulted in the indigenous peoples being further humbled and marginalised (Power, 2003). This tragic history and the language used to characterise indigenous people has laid the foundations for many contemporary racist practices (McCreanor, 1997).

The displacement of indigenous people by colonial interests is only one of the brutal chapters in the history of racist practice. One of the most inhumane racist activities was the business of trading in human lives and labour. The practice of buying and selling slaves occurred over a lengthy period, which, in the United States, lasted for about 200 years and did not end until the mid-1860s. The documentary film maker and social critic Michael Moore (2002: 69) refers to slavery in the United States as 'the single greatest stain on the soul of our country'. Wetherell (1996) suggests that ideas about black inferiority and savagery were rife amongst the British public during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and these views ultimately supported the trading of slaves. Fredrickson (2002) makes the point that slavery was justified on racial and religious grounds. While it seemed wrong to trade in Christians, the enslavement of 'heathens' was rationalised as a missionary project. Their souls, it was argued, could be saved as a result of contact with true believers. The economics of this trade saw British traders exchange manufactured goods for slaves, who were shipped from West Africa and subsequently exchanged for goods such as sugar, rum, tobacco and spices. These materials were transported back to Britain where they were subsequently sold (Fryer, 1984). One of the most astonishing aspects of this trade in able-bodied human flesh was the numbers of Africans who were transported and sold into slavery. Fryer estimates that between 20 and 60 million people crossed the Atlantic to be sold as human livestock.

Operating powerfully during this time were strong presumptions regarding white supremacy/black inferiority, which legitimised the oppressive conditions under which slavery flourished. Wetherell (1996) points out that the science of 'racial types' was in its heyday at this time. Notions of race were often grounded in a form of crude physical anthropology. They have persisted in spite of subsequent discreditation following the development of modern genetics. In short, it has now been well established that strong similarities exist between humans from all parts of the world. Further, greater genetic variation occurs between individuals within the same population than between populations.

While it is possible to take comfort in the fact that slavery happened a long time ago, there are many recent examples of extreme discriminatory practices. In the 1930s and 1940s the world witnessed the mass extermination of some six million Jews, and five million Poles, communists, homosexuals, Romanies, political opponents and other 'undesirables' in Nazi Germany (Power, 2003). Until the 1960s the southern states of the United States were deeply divided and

brutally segregated along racial lines. As Wetherell (1996) notes, discrimination in employment on the grounds of race was lawful in the United Kingdom until 1968, where the preference of landlords and employers for white applicants was seen as quite natural and legitimate.

In South Africa in 1948 the Nationalist Party took political control, ushering in almost 50 years of overt racism with white rule over the indigenous majority. The political apartheid that dominated social and cultural life during this time saw the enforcement of repressive laws. These laws controlled where people could live, whom they could have sex with and whom they could marry. For example, 70% of the population was forced to live in the rural 'homelands'. This area was equivalent to about 13% of the total land area of South Africa. Those permitted to live in urban areas were treated as resident aliens whose purpose was to serve the economic interests of the ruling white classes (Fredrickson, 2002). This is the system that saw Nelson Mandela jailed for decades until apartheid came to a conclusion in 1994. And while the legal end may be marked with a date, the social practices the system supported did not cease as abruptly. As an interesting aside, is it worth noting that under this deeply divisive system Maori rugby players who were selected to represent New Zealand on tours to South Africa were permitted to enter South Africa by being awarded the status of 'honorary whites'.

Of course prejudice and racism do not require explicit legal or institutional support in order to flourish. While the highly publicised and politicised examples of human slavery, the Nazi extermination of millions of people, and the injustices and hardships imposed by apartheid are all too familiar, it is also important not to forget everyday occurrences of racism. In a world where cyber-racism flourishes, racist comments have moved into the world of sport, racist graffiti are in no short supply on the walls of public buildings, racist jokes are frequent and it would be rare to have not heard racist jibes and taunts thrown at people who come from 'other' groups. The prevalence of such incidents gives rise to questions about how social psychology has traditionally dealt with the study of prejudice and racism. It is to this question that we turn next.

Traditional approaches

The topics of prejudice and racism have been an important part of social psychology for at least the last 100 years. This tradition tells us something about the importance and endurance of the topic, which continues to have great significance today. Reicher (2001) agrees that the topics of prejudice and racism are of unparalleled importance in society. However, he makes the point that the work of psychologists has not always been helpful in the cause of anti-racism. Indeed, a part of the academic history in this area highlights the way in which psychological research has been used to *support* racist agendas. In particular, research in the controversial area of racial differences in intelligence test scores has been a

regrettable feature of twentieth-century psychology. Augoustinos and Reynolds (2001) mark this as beginning in the early 1900s, achieving further notoriety with the publication of Jensen's (1969) influential paper in the *Harvard Educational Review* and continuing with the more recent contributions of Herrnstein and Murray (1994) and Rushton (1994). Richards (1997) comments that this work highlights the difficulty in relinquishing the concept of 'race', long after this basic idea has been discredited. Andersen (1994) points out that biological definitions of race hinge on the notion of differing frequencies of genes within populations. This differs considerably from definitions based on cultural stereotypes and associated characteristics such as skin colour and facial features. Andersen's argument is that 'race' is a socio-political belief that has been transformed into a pseudo-biological concept. These kinds of debates and controversies make the study of psychology important since it points to the fact that our ideas do matter in both theoretical and practical ways. Reicher (2001: 278) stresses psychologists' responsibilities thus: 'If we get it right we may contribute to the fight against racism and if we get it wrong, we may become something to be fought against.'

Undoubtedly this is an important topic, and before looking at the work of critical researchers in the area we will consider traditional studies of racism and prejudice. Gough and McFadden (2001) identify three traditional approaches. Firstly, the *social cognition* approach, which regards prejudice as resulting from errors in thinking that stem, inevitably, from our limited capacity to process vast amounts of perceptual information. Secondly, there is the view that prejudice is a function of *personality*, with some types being more predisposed to prejudice due to their childhood socialisation. Thirdly, there is the view which advocates that prejudice is a function of particular *group membership*. Each of these mainstream perspectives will be briefly reviewed before introducing critical approaches to the study of prejudice and racism.

Social cognition

Wetherell (1996) links this approach to the work of Allport (1954), who defined prejudice as a matter of thinking badly about others when this is not warranted. For Allport, prejudice amounts to a dislike of others based on generalisations that are too rigid, or simply faulty. Errors of thinking where we think too broadly, or we are too rigid in our thinking, or we simply get it wrong, provide the basis of the social cognition approach. This approach to prejudice has been dominant within social psychology since the 1970s. The perspective relies on the notion of information processing which borrows the metaphor of the human mind as a computer. This view holds that we are overwhelmed with a vast amount of perceptual information and in order to both manage and make sense of this we are forced to simplify the perceptual complexity. Simplification

occurs through a process of categorisation, which is believed to contribute to stereotypes. Thus others may be automatically categorised in terms of basic qualities like gender, age, and colour. A study by Duncan (1976) illustrates how prior stereotypes may influence both perception and interpretation. In this experiment, white students saw a video of two men having a brief argument, during which one man was seen to lightly shove the other. When a white man shoved a black man, 13% of students rated this as 'violent', with most simply rating it as 'playing around'. However, when a black man was seen to shove a white man, 73% reported this as 'violent'. Clearly, perception and interpretation of this event were influenced by the colour-related stereotypes held by the students.

One problem with the 'information processing' account is that sometimes our faulty thinking means we form stereotypes that result in the pre-selection of information in ways that confirm our negative biases. According to this view, prejudice is regarded as an error in thinking and an inevitable byproduct of the way we process information about others. Since we are forced to simplify the vast complexity of our social worlds it is inevitable that our striving to prevent cognitive overload will result in stereotypes. These involve overgeneralisations and prejudgements based on generalities. At its most basic level, prejudice is thought to occur as a regrettable byproduct of our cognitive limitations. While the social perceiver might be thought of as a 'cognitive miser' (Fiske & Taylor, 1991), there is recent evidence to suggest that this might overstate the case. As Locke and Johnston (2001) would have it, there is some evidence suggesting that we are strategic and tactical in our cognitive efforts.

There are numerous criticisms of this approach to prejudice. Firstly, there is concern (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) with the image of the person assumed by cognitively oriented theories. The individualistic idea of the person as a simple processor of information fails to explain why only some people become prejudiced. This seems especially curious, given that we all (presumably) possess similar cognitive machinery and similar ways of processing information. Further, this view seems unable to explain why some groups within society have traditionally become the victims of racist thinking. Secondly, there is the critique that suggests cognitive models of prejudice are simplistic and reductionistic (Gough & McFadden, 2001). At the core of this objection is the suggestion that it is far too simple to assume that we all perceive the same stimuli, independently of social, cultural and historical backgrounds. Finally, a major concern is that when prejudice, bigotry and racism are seen as simply natural effects of the way we process information, these actions become unalterable and thereby excused. Reicher (2001: 276) comments on the pessimism of this view, 'If hatred of other races is wired into human nature, then we can hardly be held responsible for it and it makes no sense to charge or punish an individual who expresses such hatred … we should be very wary of claims that there is something about human psychology that makes prejudice and racism inevitable.'

Personality

This approach to the study of prejudice and racism has drawn on the psychodynamically inspired work of Adorno et al. (1950). This orientation has been more recently taken up by Frosh (1997), who has challenged the view that prejudice is a problem located within the mind of the individual, and suggested that the emotional aspects of prejudice are also important. Adorno et al. believed that the appeal of racist views became attractive for certain personality types. In the examination of the authoritarian personality Adorno et al. sought to uncover the causes of anti-Semitism and fascism that became popular in Europe in the last century. This search was based firmly on the assumption that prejudice was a function of deep-seated personality characteristics formed through childhood interactions with parents who were harsh, punitive and demanded obedience from their offspring (Heaven, 2001). Such upbringing, it is argued, is likely to contribute to the authoritarian personality, which is characterised by the attributes of obedience and conformity, intolerance of ambiguity, and respect for authority. In turn, these features are regarded as providing a potential breeding ground for racism and fascism (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Personality-based explanations argue that parental demand for deference produces anger and hostility, which cannot be directed at authority figures and so becomes displaced onto those regarded as politically weaker, such as ethnic minority groups. Wetherell (1996) makes the point that the links established here are not causal. Adorno et al. (1950) are not saying that the child-rearing practices cause authoritarianism and racism. Rather these ideologies simply are more likely to appeal to, and be taken up by, certain people. In other words there is a close alignment, or fit, between the individual and the political ideology.

The theoretical implications of the authoritarian personality are impressive in their breadth. Certainly, this approach provides a far broader attempt to deal with prejudice at a range of levels compared with the narrow focus of the social cognition approach. The theory has received praise for its bold attempt to incorporate ideology, socio-cultural circumstances and individual psychology. Further, it has attempted to consider emotional aspects of prejudice and has attempted to combine individual psychology with social context (Gough & McFadden, 2001).

In criticising this approach, Wetherell (1996) notes that while it offers insight into individual prejudice it is unable to account for large-scale social movements, such as fascism and associated political perspectives that emerged in Europe in the last century. The importance of the socio-cultural context was highlighted in Pettigrew's (1958) study, which looked at prejudice in white university students in both South Africa and the United States. The South African students were more prejudiced than their American counterparts. Within the US sample those living in the southern states were noted to be more prejudiced than those from the northern states. In addition to emphasising the importance of cultural factors, this study was further instructive in showing that although the

South African students were more prejudiced, they did not display correspondingly higher levels of authoritarianism. This finding clearly puts the value of personality factors into perspective by suggesting the greater impact of socio-cultural factors.

Group membership

Mainstream researchers in this area share the fundamental belief that belonging to a group has powerful effects on the individual, and that we must first understand the impact of groups if we hope to understand prejudice fully. In contrast to the social cognition and personality approaches, this orientation holds that prejudice is as much a group phenomenon as an individual phenomenon. The two theories that have spearheaded this approach to the study of prejudice are the *realistic group conflict theory* (Sherif & Sherif, 1969) and *social identity theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

One of the starting assumptions of realistic group conflict theory is that prejudice may be further understood by considering the conflicts that exist between groups. These conflicts arise out of the view that groups are in competition for limited resources. Sherif and Sherif (1969) famously conducted a series of three field experiments at boys' summer camps. These studies grew out of the notion that groups have their own reality, which is based on the prevailing material conditions, group identification, group roles, interactions with other group members and the shared norms and beliefs that guide group actions (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood & Sherif, 1961). Another way of putting this is to suggest that the complexity and power of groups have an enormous impact on the individual and for this reason it makes sense to examine the workings of groups. The camps were run over a two-week period with the boys, selected on the basis of their 'normality', unaware of their involvement as research participants. The boys, aged 11 or 12, were white, middle class and previously unacquainted with each other. The experimenters took on the additional roles of camp counsellors and activity leaders, with the primary investigator becoming the camp handyman and janitor. The experimental procedure involved three stages involving *ingroup formation*, *intergroup competition* and *intergroup cooperation*.

Prior to the first phase of the study, the boys were simply allowed to mix freely and develop spontaneous friendships. In the ingroup formation phase the boys were assigned to one of two groups. The groups were separated and provided with tasks such as pitching tents, carrying canoes and building rope bridges, which necessitated them working collectively as a group. Under these conditions each group developed a cohesive structure along with their own flag, jargon, ways of completing tasks and jokes. Each group chose a group name (for example 'Bull Dogs' and 'Red Devils'), with these names and other symbols being stencilled onto clothing and caps. Other group norms also emerged, with leadership patterns evident and group members forming friendships with other members of their group.

The intergroup competition phase involved groups competing against each other in situations such as baseball games, tug-of-war and skit competitions. As Platow and Hunter (2001) note, even prior to the beginning of these contests intergroup hostilities began to emerge. Ingroup loyalties influenced a range of judgements the boys were asked to make, along with more obvious actions like ignoring members of the outgroup and raiding the outgroup's cabin. The hostilities and strong negative feelings towards the outgroup were matched by a strong identification with the ingroup (Wetherell, 1996).

Having established a competitive and arguably hostile environment for the two groups, the experimenters next sought to reduce antagonism and prejudice. They initially tried having a religious minister preach the values of tolerance and cooperation. Next they brought the groups together to watch a movie, enjoy a fireworks display and have a communal meal together. However, these interventions failed, with the communal meal resulting in both insults and food being thrown between members of the different groups. Finally they tried a manipulation that required intergroup cooperation with the groups working towards mutual goals. These superordinate goals were manufactured and involved things such as the camp truck breaking down and the camp water supply needing attention. These situations demanded cooperation, with which the boys complied. When working towards the achievement of mutual goals intergroup hostility decreased.

One of the strengths of these studies was to emphasise that prejudice is not merely the preserve of the maladjusted or neurotic (Sherif & Sherif, 1969). Remember, these boys were selected for their stability and normality and yet, when they closely identified with one group and were thrust into competition with another group, all the trappings of full-blown prejudice were demonstrated. While these studies were able both to induce and then reduce prejudice, there are several criticisms of the theory of realistic group conflict. Firstly, although intergroup competition may lead to intergroup prejudice, this may not necessarily or inevitably be the case. Relevant to this criticism are studies that show that when group cohesion and identification are weak, competition may fail to increase intergroup prejudice (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Secondly, Wetherell (1996) voices concern over the suggestion that if prejudice is seen as a natural consequence of group conflict, this presents significant political and moral problems. If prejudice follows from competition for scarce resources, this seems to eliminate personal accountability for prejudices like racism and sexism. Thirdly, this approach seems to ignore the importance of history in explaining how certain groups have come to be perceived. Sherif and Sherif acknowledge this point when they note that real conflicts are more complex, involving historical precursors, power differentials and political inequalities. Further, as Gough and McFadden (2001) point out, there is a failure to explain variation in prejudicial actions, that is, why some groups attract high levels of discrimination. Finally, there are methodological concerns about the way in which the boys' summer camps were manipulated by the experimenters (Billig, 1976). The artificial and contrived

nature of this work raises concerns about its relevance for understanding naturally occurring intergroup hostility.

A second key approach to understanding prejudice through involvement in groups comes from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This approach gives prime importance to the social group, arguing that group membership provides another dimension to the psychology of people. Of special interest for Tajfel (1981) was the identification with groups and the psychological consequences of this for the individual. Group identification was examined through a series of studies known as the minimal group experiments. In contrast to the kind of 'bonding' and intense interaction that characterised the boys' summer camps, the formation of groups in this work occurred at the most minimal level. This approach aimed at establishing a baseline where group membership would involve minimal identification and group members would not discriminate between members of their group and others. Tajfel's subjects, who were schoolboys, were randomly assigned to one of two groups on the basis of trivial criteria. In one case they were asked to estimate the number of dots on a screen and were then classified as either overestimators or underestimators. In fact, group assignment was random and the experimental work was conducted individually in cubicles, thus eliminating interaction among group members. The task Tajfel set his subjects involved a matrix that required the division of points between members of the two groups. These groups had no history, no strong sense of identification and were not in competition with each other, in fact they were set up to try to establish a no-discrimination baseline. Surprisingly, there was clear evidence, in the way points were allocated, that participants favoured members of their group and discriminated against members of the outgroup. Part of the surprise was that this occurred in spite of conditions designed to reduce the psychological significance of 'belonging' to a group.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) explain this in terms of changes occurring in personal identity arising from group membership. When people see themselves belonging to particular groups (for example, female, student, Asian, etc.) their social worlds become categorised in terms of the group's characteristics and beliefs. Social identity theory involves three stages (categorisation, identification and comparison) that connect the desire for a positive self image with negative processes such as stereotyping and discrimination. The first stage involves *social categorisation* in which cognitive templates become overlaid on the social world. Categories based on salient features of groups help structure our views of the world, help us make sense of the world and organise perceptions of self and other. Within groups similarities become accentuated, while differences with other groups become highlighted. According to the theory, the categories of everyday life reflect particular social histories and are socially constructed (Wetherell, 1996). The second stage involves *social identification*. Assignment to particular social categories involves knowledge of belonging to the group and the emotional significance attached to membership. One of the central ideas of social identity theory is that we are social beings for whom identity is located in

social groups. Knowledge of group membership increasingly defines self in terms of a range of social identities. These carry with them evaluative criteria that have important implications for self-esteem. The third stage involves *social comparison,* whereby the groups an individual identifies with are compared with other groups. Thus, individual self-esteem is linked closely with group self-esteem. In order to feel good about oneself, it is important first to feel good about the groups one identifies with. The approach assumes that individuals are motivated to seek a positive self-concept, that groups may be evaluated positively or negatively, and group evaluations occur comparatively (Reynolds & Turner, 2001).

In critically evaluating the contribution of social identity theory, it is notable that the theory provides a highly social account of the causes of prejudice. Examining prejudice as a group phenomenon emphasises the social context and acknowledges that prejudice is levelled at others on the basis of their group memberships. Overall, the account is complex and ambitious and as Wetherell (1996) notes, prejudice is seen as involving a range of psychological states that may also be involved in the development of more positive actions such as group loyalty and cohesiveness. There are, however, a number of problems. Firstly, Wetherell and Potter (1992) point to the similarity with the social cognition approach in casting prejudice as a byproduct of the way we process perceptual information. The same criticisms that applied to the social cognition approach are relevant here. Secondly, there have been questions asked about the universality of the stages and processes claimed to operate by this theory. The point here is that different social, cultural and historical backgrounds may alter the proposed workings of this model. For example, cross-cultural research using the minimal group experimental paradigm shows that children from other cultural backgrounds do not automatically discriminate between groups in the same way as their North American and British counterparts (Wetherell, 1982). The key point is that the cultural framework people deploy will have important consequences for the development of social identities.

Critical approaches

Critical approaches to the study of prejudice and discrimination frequently employ a social constructionist epistemology. This orientation to understanding phenomena such as prejudice begins by challenging some of the taken-for-granted aspects of traditional approaches. The common understandings of identity as unitary, stable and fixed are replaced with the view that identity will be occasioned by different contexts and should therefore be thought of as fluid, multiple and, importantly, constructed. For critical theorists language is central in the construction of identity. At its most blunt, the way we talk about self brings this self to life. For critical researchers, prejudice is best studied by looking carefully at the ways in which prejudice appears in talk and text. Remember that for the critical social psychologist, language is not merely a route

to the cognitive interior, but something that provides us with ways of examining the resources that structure our very understandings of topics such as sexism and racism.

The critical insight towards entities that have long been believed to exist within us, is to suggest that the interior and the inferential epistemology it relies on should be replaced by a social epistemology. In short, what is being suggested is that prejudice be examined as something that occurs between people, in talk and interaction. The action-orientation of discursive psychology suggests that the categories, groupings, identities and evaluations involved in prejudice occur in and through language. The task for critical research is to identify the key linguistic resources that enable these practices to occur. If prejudice occurs through language, the task of the critical social psychologist is to show how this happens discursively.

The action-orientation towards language suggests that rather than having levels of prejudice, we *do* prejudice in, and through, the ways in which we talk about people who are different from ourselves. Thus, prejudice is not regarded as something that stems from one's personality, or the way in which we process information at the cognitive level, but as something that is pervasively embedded in language. The next sections examine studies that have shown us how gender-based prejudice is achieved, how gay men are discriminated against, and how the forces of racism are manifest in talk.

Gender and inequality

One of the critical imperatives is to examine the taken-for-granted assumptions that are deeply embedded in people's talk about gender. These assumptions work towards the maintenance of the status quo, in ways that make current practices seem natural and correct. Often this is so convincing that we fail to recognise that these are merely assumptions. This severely limits the extent to which questioning, critique and change occur. Further, these naturalising constraints limit innovation and consideration of how alternatives may make social life more equitable. While feminist theorists have long attempted to apply critical perspectives to gender issues (see, for example, Friedan, 1963), one of the first discursive studies in this area was conducted by Wetherell, Striven and Potter (1987). This study involved interviews with university students who were asked to discuss their views on women's career opportunities. What views did the students articulate? What gender talk was articulated, and how was this achieved? What social and political actions were performed in the talk of these students? These are the kinds of questions addressed by critical research.

Wetherell et al. (1987) use the term 'unequal egalitarianism' in the title of their paper. This provides a strong clue about one of the important ways in which talk about career prospects was organised. Egalitarians believe in equality and so the term (unequal egalitarianism) captures a strong sense of contradiction. Looking

more closely at this apparent incongruity the authors noted, firstly, that there was strong support for the general principle of equal opportunity and negative sentiments about discrimination on the basis of gender. The students drew on a repertoire of 'equality' and were overwhelmingly supportive of gender equality in the workplace. However, they also provided a range of practical reasons that undermined the universality of the principle of egalitarianism. Often, these practical matters centred around issues associated with producing and raising children. In short, they identified practical problems that undercut the principle of egalitarianism.

Tension over matters of practice and principle have been well documented (Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton & Radley, 1988; Tuffin & Danks, 1999; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Wetherell et al. (1987) refer to such dilemmas as practical/principle rhetorical devices. In the case of the unequal egalitarians the two competing themes work to endorse the principle of equal employment opportunities, and also undercut the principle by involving the necessity of practical considerations. As Wetherell et al. point out, the business of practical talk ensures the ideal remains just that, an ideal. Practical considerations render the principle of egalitarianism unworkable. The social and political implications of this were that the status quo was both maintained and legitimated through the talk of these young students.

The second study to be considered here extends critical enquiry into gender inequalities. While Wetherell et al. (1987) looked at talk about 'opportunities', Gill (1993) conducted a simple yet elegant study that looked at gender discrimination grounded in the employment practices in radio broadcasting in Britain. An important context Gill sought to investigate was the lack of female DJs featured on popular radio. Radio controllers and male DJs were interviewed with a view to studying the explanations and accounts these men offered for the undeniable gender inequality. Gill's broad research question was: How do people working within broadcasting account for this inequality?

Explanatory accounts of the small number of female broadcasters drew on resources and arguments that were incongruous and apparently contradictory. The principle of equal employment opportunity was supported, in conjunction with 'practical' reasons for the failure to appoint more women. The practical reasons situated the radio stations as necessarily being required to be responsive to audience opinions. One such opinion was claimed to be a strong preference to hear male voices on the radio. Audience objections were used as a resource to locate responsibility for discriminatory employment practices with either women DJs themselves because they sound 'funny', or with the audience who prefer men's voices. Importantly, the way this reasoning works is to move responsibility for discrimination from radio controllers and the radio stations to the radio audience. Further, it should be noted that the practical reasons offered were drawn on as factual constructions, which, when combined with the weight of public opinion, meant the radio stations were not responsible for discrimination.

As Gill (1993) emphasises, these accounts shift responsibility for the lack of women employed in the industry to external factors. Thus the radio stations and

their management were absolved from responsibility. Station managers had no control over these external factors. Discussions regarding specific employment practices and institutional sexism were notably absent in the accounts. The 'dilemmatic' (Billig, 1997) form of these accounts is again consistent with the principle/practice resource that was apparent in talk of Wetherell et al.'s (1987) university students. The important point here is that the ideological dilemma between principles of equality in employment and practices that defy the principle presents no problem for the men who were interviewed. Rather the dilemma is drawn on as a resource, which is used to sustain the contemporary institutional practice of gender discrimination.

Gill's (1993) study offers an insight into the workings of gender discrimination and shows how injustice is justified, thereby allowing broadcasters to present as non-sexist while supporting sexist practices. Wetherell et al.'s (1987) study highlights the operation of a similar tension between the principle of egalitarianism and the practical reasoning that undermines the principle. The importance of these tensions and contradictions is that they are not problematic for the positions espoused by participants. Indeed, the status quo is maintained by these rhetorical tensions. One of the implications of this style of work is that it forces us to rethink the standard social psychological approach, which suggests that discriminatory attitudes may be changed through interventions that rely on information or education. The force of critical work in gender discrimination and prejudice points strongly to the need to examine carefully the ways in which these social actions are justified in everyday talk.

Sexual orientation and discrimination

The third study in this section also looks at employment-related prejudice (Praat & Tuffin, 1996). There was a reasonably complex socio-cultural background to this study which, broadly, sought to examine 'attitudes' to homosexuality by interviewing police officers. Before considering the cultural/political context and the findings of the study, it is first important to spend a moment outlining the way in which critical social psychologists think about attitudes. In the previous chapter it was noted that one of the legacies of **cognitivism** was the assumption of interiority. Critical social psychologists seek to challenge this by employing a social epistemology. They challenge the idea that 'attitudes' reside within the psychological interior and suggest that they may be studied interactionally, through our talk, and through everyday conversation. Of course, it's not as simple as merely refocusing research attention from the interior to the exterior. Critical scholars have also been involved in respecifying the notion of 'attitude'.

Attitudes have an extensive history within social psychology, and an equally extensive history of disquiet about their usefulness (La Piere, 1934). Following a review of the literature, Wicker (1969) concluded that expressed attitudes have little predictive power. In other words, there is likely to be little correspondence

between what people say and their subsequent actions. Such variability, while consistent with critical expectations, argues against attitudes being enduring entities that are able to be meaningfully measured. Critical social psychologists do not assume attitudes to be unitary, stable, quantifiable entities. Rather, they assume that people will make variable and often conflicting comments. Attitude critiques (Kline, 1988; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) have attempted to explain such variability. It is suggested that evaluative and judgemental statements, which is where we usually derive the notion of attitude from, are contextually sensitive. In this regard, context informs understanding and should therefore be assumed as part of the action-orientation of talk.

Returning to the study by Praat and Tuffin (1996), it is important to note that one of the contextual features was the unique socio-historical background that informed both the rationale for conducting the study and the way in which the results were interpreted. This study took place in New Zealand at a time when the *Homosexual Law Reform Act* (1986) had recently passed into law. This legislation legalised homosexual activity between consenting men, while another piece of legislation (1993 *Human Rights Act*) outlawed discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. This meant that gay applicants for jobs in, for example, the police and the military could no longer be excluded on the grounds of sexual preference. Within the space of eight years the law had changed from outlawing homosexuality to outlawing employment discrimination *against* homosexuals. The combination of these laws created the potentially interesting situation whereby cops could be partnered to work alongside the same people who were formerly regarded as criminals. It was just this mix of social, historical and political context that created the intriguing situation this study sought to examine through interviews with police officers.

All participants spoke of the problems gay cops would have working in the police force. Praat and Tuffin (1996) document the ways in which gay cops were constructed in the talk of the interviewees. These constructions were organised around discourses of effeminacy and deviance. While detailing their reservations about gays working as police, the officers quickly distanced themselves from harbouring any personal dislike or prejudice against homosexuals. The question of why gay men should not become police officers was answered by drawing on two key discourses: *internal pressure* from within the force itself and, secondly, a *society discourse* that assumed negative public reaction would tarnish the reputation of the police.

The internal pressure discourse was talked about quite generally, as something that would be imposed on officers who failed to fit in. The following extract (Praat & Tuffin, 1996) comes from an interview with a female officer, and illustrates the ways in which internal pressure might be applied.

…oh he's just a homosexual he's just gay … *mm* … he's a faggot we don't want anything to do with him and they will they'll just push him straight out and they'll make you know there'll be come to a stage where he will he will leave

> of his own accord … *mm* … only because he he won't get jobs promotion will be turned down because he's got this thing written across his folder saying you know his personal file this guy's he's a you know a homo we don't want that sort of stuff in the job … *mm* … and the taunt – you know the ridicule he would get from other people if he's I think so high up he probably wouldn't he definitely wouldn't get the respect from his juniors if everyone knew you know whereas a cop on the street definitely would not get backup

This extract begins by making the sexual orientation of the officer salient. This is repeated using three different terms (*homosexual*, *gay*, *faggot*), prior to specifying the kinds of pressure that would be applied. Interestingly, there are two constructions that relate to leaving the force; the first places the responsibility for leaving with *others* who 'push him straight out', while the second has the officer taking responsibility and leaving of 'his own accord'. This pressure would come in the form of lack of promotion, taunting and ridicule from peers, lack of respect from junior officers, and a lack of backup for the cop on the street. It is interesting to note that pressure would be applied by 'other people', and the nebulous 'they'.

It is also interesting to note that the speaker presents herself as merely a neutral reporter on the actions of others in the force. This issue was investigated more thoroughly in a re-analysis of this data by Frewin and Tuffin (1998). They looked more directly at the culture of the police and the kinds of pressures that operate to maintain the status quo and suppress challenges to traditions within the force. These pressures towards conformity place those who espouse more liberal views in an unenviable position, especially so when these views conflict with the established culture of the police. The following extract illustrates the harsh reactions that may be provoked when gay cops are supported.

> … people that have got a more liberal attitude to the homosexuality can't stand up for people that come out and say they are just like myself I have made my thoughts known a couple of times I've been shouted down … *mm* … and to be honest I wouldn't be prepared to make a stand ah because of the effect that it might have on my position in the department … I can't afford to be ostracised and forced out of the department.

Verbal opposition, ostracism and threats to career prospects all elevate the cost of liberalism. While these sanctions seem extreme for simply supporting the principle of having gay cops on the force, the price for actually being a gay cop could be much higher. One final feature of the internal pressure that was evident in the data were several references to the prospect of gay cops being unsupported by colleagues in potentially life-threatening situations. Tuffin (2002a) provides a detailed analysis of the internal pressure discourse that deals with the chilling prospect of a gay cop who has been shot and calls for assistance. Alarmingly, his fellow officers fail to treat this as first priority.

The second major linguistic resource (Praat & Tuffin, 1996) featured officers justifying the exclusion of gay men on the basis of a society discourse. Accounts were constructed with reference to external pressures the police face in having to deal with and serve the public. Public trust and respect were matters not to be treated lightly or threatened in any way. The common function of these arguments was to place responsibility for denying gays entry to the police with the public. By casting the police as simply complying with public demand, speakers were absolved of this responsibility. External constraints prevent the police from employing gay cops. Readers will immediately see the close alignment of this rhetorical argument with that employed by Gill's (1993) radio broadcasters. Public prejudice becomes the warrant for institutional discrimination.

In summary it should be noted that both these resources (internal pressure and the external pressures of society's demands on the police) were constructed as significant factors over which participants themselves were powerless. Thus, the source of unfavourable reactions to having gay cops on the force was constructed as being outside the control of individual officers. In this way, officers were not personally responsible for prejudice that originated in the powerful forces of the wider police culture and the society the police serve.

In the next section the focus of attention shifts from studies that have examined prejudice based on gender and sexual orientation to studies based on the highly contested notion of 'race'.

Racism

Definitions: classical and modern racism

Given the central importance of racism in this chapter, it will be useful to discuss the broad parameters that define racism. According to Miles (1989) racism involves categorising people into groups based on their genetic or surface (phenotypical) characteristics, and attributing negative characteristics to members of these groups. Belief in this biological hierarchy between racial and ethnic groups, and the social practices associated with these beliefs forms the basis of racism (Augoustinos, in press). Putting this another way, racism involves the belief that external characteristics (for example, skin colour or particular facial features) mark essential features that are negative characteristics not possessed by members of the dominant group.

The recent social psychological literature suggests that racism has undergone a change in moving from 'old fashioned' to more sophisticated forms (Billig, 1978; Van Dijk, 1992). Akrami, Ekehammer and Araya (2000) have captured this change by identifying two distinguishable styles of racism, 'classical' and 'modern'. The classical version is more overt or direct, while modern racism is thought to be covert and subtle. There are a number of synonymous terms that have emerged from the literature, for example, Pettigrew and Meertens

(1995, 2001) refer to 'blatant' and 'subtle' racism. Regarding the more covert version of racism, McConahay (1986) also refers to this as 'modern', while Kinder and Sears (1981, 1985) use the term 'symbolic'.

Until quite recently social psychological research measured racism with scales that included such crude questions as, 'Do Whites have a right to keep Blacks out of their neighbourhoods?' (Gallup & Hugick, 1990). Such blatant racism was based on ideas of racial superiority and explicit opposition to racial equality. Modern racism has been proposed as being more subtle, complex and socially acceptable. Resentment towards members of other racial and ethnic groups is set against a set of moral values such as the Protestant work ethic, self-reliance, individual achievement and self-discipline. Modern racism thus becomes less about the biological weakness of particular racial and ethnic groups and increasingly about beliefs in the cultural superiority of the values and practices of the majority group. As Augoustinos, Tuffin and Rapley (1999) point out, the discourse of modern racism relies heavily on the liberal notion of individualism. The failure to live up to these values and practices is regarded by majority group members as a direct function of the personal shortcomings of minority group members. Further, such weaknesses and personal failings, while associated with membership of particular racial or ethnic groups, remain the responsibility of the individual. Such individualised conceptions of broad social problems are frequently associated with economic rationalism, which advocates that both problems and their solutions ultimately remain the responsibility of the individual (Tuffin et al., 2000). Thus, the problems indigenous peoples face are regarded by modern racism as being surmountable at the individual level. Modern racism argues against social and economic disadvantage being addressed at structural and political levels. Thus, in spite of its subtlety, modern racism argues strongly against policies of affirmative action and positive discrimination (Augoustinos & Tuffin, 2004).

Closely linked with the complexity and subtlety of modern racism is the claim that racial attitudes are increasingly characterised by ambivalence (Adams, 1997; Katz & Hass, 1988). The multi-dimensional nature of modern racism is such that both positive and negative sentiments may be simultaneously part of race-related views. Devine (1989) suggests that such ambivalence may reflect childhood exposure to negative stereotypes and adult acquisition of racial tolerance. The tendencies towards complexity and ambivalence are consistent with suggestions that modern racism works subtly in a deracialised manner whereby issues of race are referred to indirectly (Obeng, 1997; Reeves, 1983; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Some authors (Lynn & Lea, 2003; Rapley, 1998) even go as far as to suggest that the deracialisation of racism has reached the level of a social taboo, which goes largely unmentioned. This subtlety and complexity were evident in an investigation of the experiences of racism by second-generation Bangladeshis living in Britain (Ahmed, 2000). Participants constructed racism as less conspicuous than previously and also more underground, or hidden, than before. As Ahmed points out, this subtlety is something of a mixed blessing, as

it makes challenges to racism extremely difficult. It remains nearly impossible to challenge the unsaid.

Complexity, ambivalence and variability come as no surprise to discursive psychologists as these are the very features that are expected in people's accounts. Interestingly, it might be argued that the state of knowledge in mainstream social psychology has reached the point where it intersects with one of the basic tenets of critical social psychology. This alignment argues for the increased use of critical methods in order to increase our understanding of the dynamics of racism.

Discourse and racism

Critical approaches to the study of racism contrast with the traditional ways in which social psychologists have studied this topic. Working within the framework of social constructionism, critical work challenges the idea that identity is unitary, stable and fixed. Thus the notion of the racist as a personality is replaced with the notion that identity is fluid, multiple and occasioned by particular contexts. Another way of putting this is to suggest that racist identities come about through talk, rather than necessarily residing within particular people. This provides a compelling argument for studying racism as a feature of everyday conversations, and examining the resources that enable racism. Locating the object of study in text means the research focus moves from cognitive processes to discursive resources. As Marshall and Raabe (1993) note, this signals a move away from the individual as the unit of analysis. When critical scholars examine racism they seek to understand further what these resources are and the dynamics of how they work to legitimate the inequalities and prejudices that are at the heart of racism. For constructionist studies of racism the preferred mode of enquiry is the careful examination and interpretation of everyday talk and text. Thus the practices and ideologies that surround racism are studied, rather than particular features of individuals and the inevitability of cognitive errors. Prejudice and racism are no longer understood as manifestations of the psychological interior, but are understood in public and explicit displays of the language of racism.

Critical social psychologists regard language as central to our social practices and the construction of our identities. In claiming that language underpins the things we do and the people we are, critical theorists have moved the focus of research attention towards discourse. The aims of critical work in this area include describing patterns in contemporary ideology, understanding the social and psychological implications of particular ways of talking and the ways in which interpretations become inextricably linked to patterns of action (Wetherell, 1996). Frosh (2002) similarly regards critical work as having three broad aims: *theoretical*, *empirical* and *practical*. The theoretical aim works towards increased understanding, the empirical locates these understandings in racist activities,

and the practical looks towards offering anti-racist suggestions. For the critical researcher, racism comes about through the deployment of fundamental discursive resources that enable, permit and foster racism. These widely available resources are characterised by variability, contradiction and tension. Indeed it is these very features that give discursive and rhetorical resources much of their power. As was clear in the studies reviewed earlier in this chapter, the radio managers and police deploy contradictory discourses to argue for the continued support of practices that defy principles of equality and fairness they themselves endorse. One lesson to take from this is that we should not expect ideologies and political positions to have conceptual order or internal coherence. Political perspectives and arguments are not weakened by conceptual elasticity, quite the reverse. The rhetorical flexibility available in these resources is the very feature that makes them seem reasonable, fair and, most importantly, sayable.

In the next section of this chapter we will examine some of the work that comes from the increasing body of critical studies examining the talk of contemporary racism. While LeCouteur and Augoustinos (2001) provide an excellent overview of these studies, the current aim is to provide a flavour of work that has studied race talk 'down under', in Australia and New Zealand. The broad picture that emerges from these studies is that the language of racism is not characterised by consistent, blunt negativity directed towards minority groups, but rather is marked by talk that is loaded with ambivalence and contradiction. Indeed, the strength of racism that is marked by such variability is that the prejudicial component is deniable due to the form in which it is presented. As Frosh (2002) puts this, contemporary racism is notable for its remarkable sinuousness. This means that racist talk has the capacity to appear as something else. In the next sections racist talk will be seen to appear as a fundamental expression of the principles of equality, progress and unification.

Race talk in New Zealand

One of the most ambitious and accomplished critical studies of racism is to be found in the work of Wetherell and Potter (1988; 1992), who interviewed white majority-group New Zealanders about a range of race-related questions. This extensive research project showed how participants managed the dilemma of simultaneously supporting existing conditions, with the implication that their own advantages should continue, while also deflecting suggestions of racism. Two primary themes illustrate how participants deploy flexible discursive resources to manage the dilemmatic position that characterised their views on race relations in New Zealand.

Firstly, the way in which social groups and categorisations were constructed is an important theme. The key aim is explained by Wetherell and Potter (1992: 118) as being to show 'how the descriptive methods of race, culture and nation generate their own distinctive ontologies, psychologies and social theory'. These

notions of race, culture and nation are not natural, but constructed categories that are subject to historical contingency. The authors provide the example of how prior to 1840 the British Colonial Office instructed their representative in New Zealand to negotiate a treaty with the independent Maori nation. In the contemporary talk of Pakeha New Zealanders the idea of Maori as a national group is 'unpolitic' and raises issues about notions of Maori sovereignty and questions the status of Pakeha. For these reasons, Maori nationhood remains a largely silent discourse. Also not talked about directly is the old-fashioned racism with reference to traits transmitted through blood, skin colour and racial purity. More common was talk about culture, which took two primary forms: *culture as heritage* and *culture as therapy*. Constructions of culture as heritage emphasise culture as something that is ancient, important to preserve and fixed in the past. The imperative to treasure culture also involves the need to protect it from possible contamination at the hands of the modern world. Wetherell and Potter argue that one of the functions of such constructions is to provide a separation whereby Maori culture and politics should remain distinct from, and irrelevant to, the influences of the modern world. Through the valuing of Maori culture such talk implies much about the political impotence of a culture that derives its significance from the past. Constructing culture as therapy draws on understandings of culture as being closely related to identity, values and tradition. Culture is held up as having therapeutic value for Maori social problems such as unemployment and low educational achievement. The way this construction works against Maori is by suggesting that cultural deficiencies are the basis of present-day problems. The problem of young urban Maori is that they lack sufficient Maori culture to support a robust identity that can succeed in the modern world. The crucial point about these two versions of culture is that they have a positive face and can be spoken publicly. However, it is just this acceptability and apparent concern for the welfare of Maori culture and people that contributes to a racist agenda. This contribution comes by maintaining the idea of group differences (Maori have culture, while Pakeha do not), and emphasising ingroup explanations of inequality while downplaying intergroup explanations.

The second theme from Wetherell and Potter's (1992) analysis was the practical politics that surfaced in discussions about land ownership and past injustices, teaching Maori language in schools, and affirmative action programmes. The practical politics that were evident amounted to a series of phrases that have a familiar, taken-for-granted quality to them. Wetherell and Potter refer to these as 'rhetorically self-sufficient', or 'clinching' arguments, which take on the status of principles or maxims. As such they are difficult, if not almost impossible, to dispute. They include such ideas as: resources should be used efficiently; people should be treated equally; the clock cannot be turned back; current generations cannot be blamed for the mistakes of the past; injustices should be corrected; and it is important to be practical. The potential for dilemma in these ideas is evident. For example, there is a dilemma with support for the idea of correcting past injustices being undermined by the impossibility of turning back the clock,

not to mention the overriding need to be practical. The analysis offered by Wetherell and Potter highlights the ways in which these resources are drawn on by participants to bolster their justifications for contemporary perspectives that maintain existing political hierarchies. The interesting thing about these resources is that they are shrouded in the ideology of concern and common sense, features that make them highly justifiable and sayable in ways that traditional forms of racism were not. Attempts to rebut them appear to be attacks on the rhetorical stronghold of common sense itself. This analysis is similar to the work of Reeves (1983), who referred to 'sanitary coding' as the process of leaving racism visible and hearable, while also rendering it deniable through the deployment of mixed and contradictory discourses that are difficult to challenge. The intriguing and perhaps surprising aspect of this work is that it highlights how principles of freedom, human rights, equality and progress are utilised in arguments for policies that are discriminatory and racist.

Race talk in Australia

This section draws on studies that examined the discussions of university students, who in **focus groups** talked about a range of contemporary race-related issues in Australia (Augoustinos, Tuffin & Rapley, 1999; Augoustinos, Tuffin & Sale, 1999). The data parallelled the data collected in New Zealand by Wetherell and Potter (1992). It captured everyday talk about matters relevant to Australian indigenous people. Through group discussions it was hoped that spontaneous talk would emerge and that this setting would more likely encourage the kind of argument and debate that is common in natural conversations (Roscoe, Marshall & Gleeson, 1995).

Augoustinos, Tuffin and Sale (1999) report that participants drew on four common linguistic resources in their talk. These resources (*history*, *Aboriginal plight*, *racism* and *one Australia*) will be illustrated and explained in terms of their rhetorical features and social implications. Following this brief overview, the historical resource will be illustrated and discussed more fully. Briefly, the *historical resource* was talked about as being important in understanding and explaining contemporary problems faced by Aboriginal people. The culture of the British settlers was routinely characterised as 'advanced', while the culture of the indigenous people was contrastively regarded as 'primitive'. These contrasting cultures were talked about as clashing and the tensions arising out of this conflict led to the suggestion that Aboriginal problems stemmed from *their* failure to adapt to the advances that accompanied the arrival of colonial culture. Another feature of this resource was the paradox of history being regarded as important in explaining the present, but also as unalterable and therefore something that should not constrain movement towards the future. Thus, history was constructed as something that was useful, yet also held the potential to shackle the constructive and positive movement to the future. The second linguistic resource was that of

Aboriginal plight. This served to acknowledge both the seriousness of indigenous problems, and to attribute responsibility for this situation. The pervasiveness and gravity of these problems are reflected in the negative statistics in areas such as health, education, crime and unemployment. The cause of these problems was attributed to Aboriginal people themselves, through constructing them as responsible for exacerbating their own plight.

Further 'victim blaming' was evident in the *racism resource*, through which the students openly disapproved of racism and distanced themselves from this with the claim that racism was mostly the preserve of older generations. At the same time they minimised the extent to which racism was a problem. Specifically, it was suggested that while indigenous peoples may be the victim of racism, they were also the perpetrators of racism. Furthermore, their over-sensitivity combined with media exaggeration made it difficult to assess accurately the extent of race-related problems. The unifying resource of *one Australia* accorded closely with the 'togetherness' resource identified by Wetherell and Potter (1992), as well as McCreanor's (1993) 'one people' theme. In McCreanor's analysis, 'one people' referred to participants' claims that all people in New Zealand should be unified as New Zealanders or Kiwis and should be treated the same. The 'one Australia' discourse achieved similar ends by embracing a common cultural identity. The appeal of a singular identity is that it works to exclude separate cultural identities through the minimisation of group differences and the increased emphasis on similarities.

Having provided an overview of some of the key resources that constitute racist talk, I now want to examine the historical resource in more detail. The aim is to highlight how the analysis proceeds from what participants said to the interpretations that come from this. Such detailed examination provides the chance to see inside the workings of racist talk, showing how resources are marshalled to achieve particular tasks concerning attribution and responsibility. The analysis reveals the dynamics involved in the language of racism in addition to further illustrating the work involved in doing discursive psychology.

An important feature of the historical resource is how it dealt with the arrival of the British settlers and the way this was received by the indigenous Aboriginal people. Participants talked about how a new lifestyle was 'imposed' and how this conflicted with traditional practices of Australian Aboriginals. This conflict was characterised as occurring at the level of culture, involving the advanced culture of the British and the primitive culture of the indigenous peoples. Further, the conflict provided the basis for misunderstandings between these two communities. These accounts leave open the possibility that responsibility for contemporary injustices may rest with either the process of colonisation, or the Aboriginal failure to adapt to a new culture. Some of these features are evident in the following extract.

> I think it's very difficult because I mean there is so much past history and the fact that the British came over and a set up you know this lifestyle and

almost imposed it on the Aboriginals, umm, even though monies been given to the Aboriginals to to build houses and whatever, but that just didn't fit into their lifestyle so there was a real, I think not an understanding of each other's lifestyles. And the way that they differed and it was like the British were trying to impose their type of lifestyle on the Aborigines and that just hasn't gelled, umm so umm it's caused a lot of problems, for like example alcoholism umm with Aboriginals etc.

This speaker develops a very soft version of the early history of the colonisation of Australia. While the British are accorded agency in this account, their involvement is obscured by the use of neutral terms 'came over', 'set up', and 'this lifestyle'. Such inoffensive and innocuous actions obscure the armed occupation of the country and the social and political marginalisation of the indigenous peoples. Sacks (1992) refers to these kinds of softenings as 'pro-terms': terms that are used to avoid conflict between speakers. Such terms are less contentious, and are therefore less likely to be disputed. This would seem to be the case here, where contentious terms such as 'invade' and 'massacre' (which could have also been used to summarise British history in Australia) are avoided. Indeed, the closest the speaker comes to any suggestion of forcefulness is the qualified use of 'imposition'. On each occasion where there is direct reference to the notion of imposition, the speaker qualifies this: 'almost imposed' and later, 'trying to impose'.

The qualified use of 'imposition' alludes to the possibility of coercive practices in forcing a way of life on the indigenous peoples, yet, strikingly, the speaker argues that these practices produced 'mutual misunderstanding' of each other's culture. Looking a little more carefully at the imposition of this 'lifestyle' it becomes evident that this is talked about using both vague and specific terms. The more specific terms relate to the problems, for example alcoholism, which are alluded to here and which form the substance of the discourse of 'Aboriginal plight'. The vague terms relate to the cause of these problems, with the speaker offering the analysis that such problems stem from 'misunderstanding', 'lifestyle' and failure to 'gel'. Discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992) has previously noted the rhetorical accomplishments of such carefully framed combinations of vagueness and detail. Vague formulations are difficult to undermine since they possess sufficient meaning to ground an inference while also commanding the flexibility not to discount alternative interpretations. Applying this to the extract above we have such vague terms as 'it just hasn't gelled' and 'misunderstanding', which achieve much in accounting for the responsibility for contemporary Aboriginal problems. 'Misunderstanding' implies that responsibility may be shared by either or both the British and the Aboriginal people. The possibility for misunderstanding is evident in the next extract, which contrasts the different cultures.

I think too and also when you look at history you look back at the fact that the Aborigines were very very primitive (mmm) and they confronted our

culture that was superiorly more advanced, the wheel had been advanced and whatnot but the Aborigines hadn't seemed to to advance past that very primitive stage and whatnot (mmm). Umm, they had sort of had no modern technologies as such as the British had. Like the British had gun powder and alcohol and these things, ahh, I think that was another big problem.

Aborigine culture is constituted as 'very very primitive' with these comments being closely indexed to failure to develop modern technology. Clearly, the speaker is positioned as claiming an identification with the advanced culture with the use of the pronoun 'our'. The speaker also retains a personal distance from the descriptions of the two cultures, by suggesting that this is simply a matter of factuality ('when you look at history'). Notable also in this extract is the vagueness attached to the use of non-specific list completers such as 'and whatnot', 'and these things'. The idea of conflict between cultures is also apparent in the next extract.

That was partly thing to do with their lifestyle being nomadic because they didn't actually build towns and villas, they didn't build any sort of solid sort of ahh cities or whatever … they moved around they didn't have a lot of claim when we got here there wasn't like a a city which they could say this is *ours* like you're not coming in here or whatever they were a, they didn't have anything to hold onto I guess.

The speaker explains the social dislocation of Aboriginal people in terms of their nomadic lifestyle. Failure to establish permanent architecture is suggested (somewhat eurocentrically) as playing a significant role in the assertion that the indigenous people lacked the basis on which to claim ownership. The absence of architecture in this extract parallels the citing of technological advances (wheel, gunpowder and alcohol) in the previous extract. This works to establish a cultural hierarchy through contrasting technological superiority (highlighting modernity and progress) with the primitive indigenous culture that is characterised as nomadic and unsettled. Such cultural superiority is the basis on which cultural imperialism operates, which in turn works to blame Aboriginal people for their own dispossession.

The historical resource dealing with British settlement backgrounded participants' explanations of existing social problems and inequalities. In focusing on the narrative of British settlement of Australia, participants were able to account for present-day social relations and inequalities. Indeed, the emphasis on the past permits contemporary practices and conventions, which also contribute to contemporary social problems, to go unexamined and unchallenged. An interesting paradox was also evident in the way the resource of history was deployed in these accounts. While 'history' was used to explain contemporary indigenous problems, it was also argued that a focus on the past was not constructive and an orientation to the future was wiser. The past, it was argued, remains unalterable and should therefore be left behind. This point is illustrated in the following extract.

But I think arguing over things that happened in the past is just ridiculous, it doesn't get you anywhere umm they sort of say that umm they keep bringing up the point that umm they were here sort of in Australia before the British and whatnot and that it was the British background that did all this and they seem to be taking it out generation after generation. Until people sort of let go of the past and say, well we can't do anything about that, let's just try and get something done in the future umm it's just always going to be bickering.

In the above the speaker downgrades the historical resource by constructing it as something that anchors the debate and prevents the imperative of forward movement, towards the promise of a more constructive future. Thus the injustices inflicted on indigenous people can be glossed over as being of little practical relevance. This rhetorical move provides a good example of Wetherell and Potter's (1992) self-sufficient argument that the clock is not able to be turned back. Of further interest is the degree of agency attributed to Aboriginal people in revisiting the past ('they keep bringing it up', and 'taking it out generation after generation'). This provides a strong contrast with the great majority of references to Aboriginal people where they are characterised as passive. While the speaker attributes Aboriginal agency here as repetitive, there is much work done to minimise the political significance of the Aboriginal case by describing it as 'ridiculous' arguing and 'bickering'.

In summarising some of the achievements of the historical resource it is important to point to the way in which participants saw colonial history as both useful in contributing to understandings of contemporary social problems, while also constructing history as unalterable and therefore as something that should not be used to prevent movement into the future. Thus, history is a flexible resource that was used to argue both for and against the relevance of past events for understanding contemporary problems. The culture the settlers introduced was cast as superior to indigenous culture. Technologies attributed to colonial culture included weapons, alcohol and architecture, while indigenous culture was regarded as being nomadic and lacking these 'advanced' features. In describing this as a matter of cultural differences, participants were attributionally neutral with respect to allocating responsibility for both historical tragedies and contemporary injustices. This was often glossed over as simply a matter of 'misunderstanding' or a 'failure to gel': the cultures were simply incompatible. In its worst light this suggests that participants regarded Aboriginal problems as resulting from their failure to adapt.

Summary

This chapter began by discussing the broad history of prejudice and discrimination. This rather bleak history included a review of the impacts of colonisation and slavery. On a more contemporary level the overt political racism that

has been evident in countries such as South Africa and the United States has also been discussed. The pervasiveness of prejudice invites a review of the traditional social psychological approaches to the study of these issues. The approach inspired by the tradition of social cognition frames prejudice as errors in thinking. The basis of this approach is that such errors (overgeneralising, thinking too rigidly, or simply getting it wrong) provide the basis of the social cognition approach, which has been dominant within social psychology for at least the last three decades. The personality-oriented accounts focus on child-rearing practices, while the theories that rely on group membership include both social identity theory and the theory of realistic group conflict. The second of these theories suggests that when groups are in competition for scarce resources negative outcomes (such as hostility and prejudice) will be fostered, but also that compatible goals may lead to positive outcomes (such as tolerance and fairness). Social identity theory develops the psychological significance of categorising and identifying with particular social groups.

Critical approaches to prejudice invert standard approaches by suggesting that a more social epistemology is operating. This involves the view that prejudice is not something that stems from the psychological interior, but rather is formulated in the business that occurs between people. The categories, identities and accompanying evaluations occur in and through language. These points are illustrated in a series of discursive studies that examine discrimination in the realms of gender and sexual orientation.

Racism is introduced as having undergone a change from *classical* to *modern*, the last named being characterised by increasing subtlety and complexity. Critical social psychological approaches hold that racism comes about through talk, rather than necessarily residing within people. This view argues for the study of racism by examining the details of talk about race-related issues. Studies of race talk from both Australia and New Zealand are discussed. The view of racism that emerges from these studies is that the language of racism is marked by talk that is ambivalent and contradictory. The argument is made that such variability is an important feature of racism. The elasticity within race talk provides a powerful rhetorical resource that permits racist talk to appear as something else. This ambiguity becomes the feature of racist talk, which makes it appear reasonable and most importantly sayable.

Further reading

Richards, G. (1997). *'Race', racism and psychology: Towards a reflexive history*. London: Routledge.
A carefully written account of race-related issues in psychology.

Wetherell, M. and Potter, J. (1992). *Mapping the language of racism: Discourse and the legitimation of exploitation*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
A comprehensive and detailed study of the language of racism. This book set the standard for contemporary critical studies of racism and remains a classic.

Emotion, Identity and Politics

Overview

In attempting to chart some of the territory in which critical social psychologists have worked, this chapter will change focus to illustrate the breadth, applicability and importance of critical work. In Chapter Five readers were introduced to the way in which critical scholars have studied prejudice and racism. This was structured around a consideration of both the mainstream approaches, followed by the more recent critical work in these areas. The emphasis in this chapter is on simply presenting critical work from selected areas.

The three substantive areas covered in this chapter (emotion, identity and politics) have been chosen for several reasons. Firstly, I am keen to show something of the breadth of topics to which critical social psychology has been applied. Secondly, the review of these areas aims to show that topics that were formerly regarded as internal, private and intimate (for example, emotion) and topics that have previously been regarded as external and public (politics) are equally able to be examined using critical methods. This illustrates the fact that critical work may be usefully applied to the political and cultural as well as to the intimate and private realms of social life. In providing extended coverage of the topics of emotion and identity this chapter offers further illustrations of interpretive data analysis.

Social psychology has adopted a number of theoretical frameworks to study emotion. These orientations include **introspectionism**, **behaviourism**, cognition and social constructionism. The application of constructionist views to emotion challenges the notion that emotion is interior, flowing directly from physiology, and asserts the importance of a social epistemology in which language, conversation and relationships become the focus of research attention. Similarly, with respect to identity, critical moves have seen this idea as less fixed. Thus, identity is regarded as a discursive achievement, which comes about within the specifics of particular contexts. Rather than having particular identities, critical social psychologists see identity as something people do

whenever they talk about aspects of themselves. In reviewing critical work from the area of politics, this chapter makes the point that such work exists outside the apolitical position the discipline has traditionally adopted. Two strands of political work are mentioned, firstly the work that has examined political rhetoric and political speeches, and secondly the work that has an explicit political agenda and has sought to bring about political change.

Emotion

Since psychologists first began asking questions about emotion the subject has generated a substantial amount of interest and enquiry (Strongman, 1978). Psychology has long flourished by responding to the Zeitgeist (the spirit of the times) and the psychological study of emotion is no exception. The ways psychology has attempted to study emotion reflect the broad trends that have swept through the discipline over time. The key theoretical influences include introspectionism, behaviourism, cognitivism and more recently social constructionism. The early work was characterised by introspection, which promoted the study of experiences by attending to what was happening 'under the skull'. The focus of attention for introspectionists was the exploration of one's own mental processes and, in particular, emotion sensations. Introspectionism was subsequently overtaken by the disciplinary dominance that behaviourism exerted on psychology through the middle decades of the twentieth century. The mood of behaviourism saw research attention shift from the internal workings of the mind to the exterior, where overt acts could be measured, controlled and modified. Behavioural approaches to emotion measured the physiological correlates of emotion and examined the ways in which these could be controlled through standard behavioural techniques using reinforcement and punishment.

The later decades of the last century were dominated by the theoretical impact of cognitive psychology. One of the early cognitive theories (Schachter & Singer, 1962) challenged James's (1890) long-accepted belief that separate emotions resulted from a separate pattern of physiological response. Schachter proposed a two-factor theory of emotion that relied on the notion that the same physiological arousal could be interpreted differently depending on the social situation and the meaning people ascribed to those situations. Thus, the difference between, for example, excitement and anxiety would depend not on a specific type of physiological arousal, but on the social situation and the way in which this was interpreted by the person. The two factors proposed by this model were firstly, physiological arousal and secondly, the cognitions involved with the labelling of the emotional experience.

In a famous study supporting the two-factor theory of emotion, Schachter and Singer (1962) injected participants with either epinephrine, which is a synthetic form of adrenaline, or a placebo. All participants were told that the injection was a vitamin supplement, but only some were told of the possibility

of side effects (heart palpitations and hand tremor). Those not told of possible side effects were left in an ambiguous position which the experimenters believed would encourage them to seek cues from the immediate environment. Of course this environment was highly controlled with participants filling out a questionnaire in the company of a confederate who posed as another experimental participant. The questionnaire included offensive questions, for example, asking how many extramarital affairs participants' mothers had. The confederate provided a stylised reaction to the questions by explicitly depicting either anger or euphoria. In the 'angry' condition the confederate complained about the questionnaire and eventually tore it up while stomping around the room. In the 'euphoric' condition the confederate treated the questions in a farcical manner and happily engaged in a 'game' by tossing balls of paper into the rubbish as if they were basketballs, making paper planes and generally acting energetically. The results showed that those in the euphoric condition attributed their arousal to happiness, while those in the anger condition interpreted their arousal as anger.

While cognitivism has had an unquestionably major influence on the development of theories of emotion and orientations towards the study of emotion (Calhoun & Solomon, 1984), the two-factor theory proved to have significant limitations. In particular, Reisenzein (1983) noted small experimental effects, while Maslach (1979) reported that unexplained arousal is mostly unpleasant and people label it accordingly when given the opportunity to do so. Finally, Parkinson (1985) reports that mistakenly attributing the source of emotion (also known as the misattribution effect) has proved to be limited mostly to laboratory studies and is an unreliable and short-lived phenomenon.

In spite of the lengthy history and numerous theoretical influences psychology can boast, there is limited consensus about what exactly constitutes emotion (Gergen, 1995). One point of agreement seems to be that emotions are experienced privately, and they may further be accompanied by physiological change and emotional expression (Parkinson, 1995). The idea of emotions as powerful feelings arising from within our bodies is consistent with theorising within mainstream social psychology. This theorising has internalised emotions and promoted the idea of them as both natural and universal. One of the hallmarks of critical work is a return to basic questions, and in this case the question becomes: What do we mean when we talk about emotion? Critical social psychologists have challenged the internalised, cognitive view of emotions by suggesting that emotions may be considered more in terms of their public and social aspects. While Parkinson has suggested that emotion involves privacy, physiology and expression, critical interests have focused on the *language* of emotion.

Critical scholars are increasingly seeing emotion as an interpersonal achievement facilitated through talk and text occuring in specific contexts. Armon-Jones (1986) comments on the importance of context by suggesting that the social function of emotion is closely aligned with local notions of morality and proper

conduct. Emotional responses thus support and validate the local moral order, in which emotional responses are not only expected, but are required when moral violations occur. Our localised understandings of what is correct and proper come about through emotion talk, which carries with it unique entitlements to act in certain ways and say certain things. In addition to the social entitlements afforded by emotion talk, the constructionist challenge to the psychological interior argues that public, social and cultural aspects of emotion are profoundly important in structuring the nature of emotional experience.

Critiques of mainstream psychological approaches to emotion have cautioned against one-sided individualism. Such individualism offers a singular commitment to the individual as the basic unit of society and also as the primary source of human subjectivity. Harré (1986) has suggested that traditional psychological understandings of emotion amount to an 'ontological illusion'. The argument is that emotions exist as independent and abstract phenomena that are self-referential. That is, traditional approaches assume that because it is possible to talk about being angry, then there must be a corresponding *state* of 'anger' that exists inside the person (Gergen, 1995). Wittgenstein's (1953) linguistic philosophy highlighted the fallacy involved in this kind of thinking by arguing the logical impossibility of mental predicates as representational labels for inner states. O'Connor (1997) refers to this as a 'trick' of Western individualism. Thus, continuing to think of emotions as natural or preverbal individual experiences is simply untenable.

From a constructionist perspective, human emotions are unavoidably social. Rather than entities that are exclusively private and located primarily around bodily physiology, the constructionist formulation situates emotions firmly in the social world (Stainton Rogers et al., 1995). Instead of understanding emotions as locked inside our basic biology and physiology, constructionists highlight the extent to which emotions are social and enabled by culturally available discursive resources. This orientation argues for the investigation of contextual, linguistic and performative dimensions of emotion talk. This approach is likely to prove more useful than attempting to define emotion in the abstract. Social constructionism moves the focus of research attention from the cognitive interiorisation of emotion to aspects of emotion that are overt, sayable and social. Thus a social epistemology replaces a cognitivised inferential epistemology. Critical approaches to the study of emotion have sought to examine how emotions may be studied interactionally, relationally and through everyday conversations. What was once regarded as exclusively the preserve of the psychological interior has become open to examination from the outside, as it is spoken about, written about and talked about.

Within critical social psychology there has been a shift from traditional understandings and methods of studying emotion (Buss, Larsen, Westen & Semmelroth, 1992; Mullen & Martin, 1994). The shift from the purely private, interior and cognitive to the public and social has meant the study of emotion is now a topic that is open to examination as part of our daily social practice. Increasingly, critical

scholars have begun to explore the ways in which emotions are discursively constructed to perform interactional and psychological functions (Abu-Lughod & Lutz, 1990; Harré, 1986; Tuffin, Morgan & Stephens, 2001). Discursive work (Edwards, 1997; Stenner, 1993) has contested the fundamental belief in the interiority of emotion by showing how this may be negotiated in conversational exchange (Parkinson, 1995). Similarly, historical (Harré & Finlay-Jones, 1986; Phillips, 1993) and anthropological studies of emotion (Abu-Lughod & Lutz, 1990; Lutz, 1988; Shweder, 1985) have challenged simplistic views of emotion as being universally and uniformly experienced. These studies highlight considerable social and cultural variation in the way emotions are experienced and interpreted. Further, many emotions do not readily translate across cultures, which regard emotions quite differently. This literature argues for a view of emotions as being unique to their sociocultural context. As Parkinson (1995: 21) explains, 'an individual emotion is not something basic and essential that could sensibly exist apart from its interpersonal manifestations or the cultural categories that allow it to be interpreted'.

Critical social psychologists regard emotions as interpersonal achievements that are facilitated through the talk and text that occur in specific contexts. Through the background meanings provided by local contexts emotion may be seen to support and validate local moral orders. At such times emotions are not only expected, but are required. Thus the constructionist orientation to emotions encourages the examination of the social aspects of emotions. The social and interpersonal work that is achieved by emotion talk has previously been shown (Edwards, 1997; 1999) to have significant application with respect to matters of causality, responsibility and blame. This orientation to the study of emotion is perhaps best illustrated by looking at an example.

Jealousy

The example below comes from a discursive project that sought to examine the socially constructed aspects of jealousy (Morgan, Stephens, Tuffin, Praat & Lyons, 1997; Tuffin et al., 2001). The participants were a relatively homogeneous group of undergraduate psychology students who were invited to write about a time when they had been jealous. In asking for such accounts no formal conceptual distinction was made between jealousy and other emotions (for example, envy or anger), nor was any distinction made between types of jealousy. It was assumed that such distinctions were connected to the local context in which the usage took place and should be derived from, rather than imposed on, the texts. Similarly, such studies of emotion seek not to define and measure the nature of the emotion, but rather aim to examine the way in which emotions are constructed from available cultural resources and to examine the dynamics of how these constructions operate. In simple terms, these studies were interested in

identifying the resources that were drawn on when jealousy was talked about, and sought to understand better the ways in which jealousy works at a discursive level. The following account was selected from the corpus of data collected for the original research, and deals with a situation in which 'Jane' writes about a memorable incident where she experienced jealousy.

1   I have been jealous on numerous occasions however
2   a particular incident that sticks in my mind happened when I was 16.
3   I had just broken up with my first boyfriend which in itself was upsetting enough,
4   but low and behold he turns up to a disco, I was at, with another girl.
5   A lot of emotions were experienced that night none the least was jealousy.
6   I felt physically ill and even had hot and cold sweats.
7   I went round telling everyone that his latest was a bitch, a slag etc etc.
8   I mean this was true love at the tender age of 16!
9   In the end I tried to make him jealous by playing up to another boy
10   that I knew really liked me – it didn't work but it sure made me feel better.
11   I also got quite ill by drinking a bottle of cheap wine ('Brother Dominic' Yuk!)
12   some one had managed to sneak in.
13   All and all it was rather an embarrassing evening
14   and evoked severe feelings of guilt in me the next day.
15   The said boy did ask me to go back out with him a week later
16   but I was well and truly over him by then
17   and concentrating on a member of the first 15.
18   Now I'm a lot older
19   and find it quite odd that I was jealous over a pimply, 16 year old school boy.
20   Now days I'd more jealous of someone who got an A grade on their 309 assignments.
21   I'm sure though I would act with more control and dignity now!

Jane begins her account with a category entitlement (Edwards & Potter, 1992). This entitlement rests on the claim that she has sufficient experience with this emotion to warrant offering this particular account. The 'incident' this account deals with is noted (line 2) as being both memorable, and occurring when she was an adolescent. It becomes clear later in the extract that this event took place while Jane was still attending school.

Line 3 begins the narrative of Jane's jealousy experience and locates this at a point in time when she had just ended her first important heterosexual relationship. The question of who had concluded this relationship remains ambiguous, but Jane makes it very clear that this was a time of considerable upset. Rhetorically, the use of 'enough' at the end of the line may be read as suggesting that worse is yet to come. It establishes a baseline of upset and prepares the

reader for further layers of distress. The strong inference from the text is that the initial upset was significant enough without the further complications that are subsequently detailed.

In line 4 an element of surprise is introduced, which works to establish what happens next as both unexpected and important. The 'disco' was likely a school dance, and most certainly a public venue at which Jane has been quickly and publicly replaced. Part of the significance of this is that the appearance of the other girl strongly suggests that Jane's relationship is unlikely to be resurrected. Jane is positioned as a victim of the circumstances of the breakup, with this position being solidified by the appearance of the ex-boyfriend with another girl.

The second mention of emotion occurs in line 5, where Jane recounts the evening in question as being characterised by high emotionality. Jealousy is but one of a range of unspecified emotions that were experienced that night. The emotion story is gradually unfolding, and may be seen to move from 'upset' to 'lots of emotions' to 'jealousy'. Line 6 constitutes emotion as a series of unpleasant bodily experiences. This embodiment of emotion works to document the strength of Jane's experience of jealousy by offering a list of tangible sensations associated with the experience of a powerful emotion. The strength of the emotion is indexed to a series of symptoms that speak to the intensity of the emotion experienced.

In line 7 Jane explains her actions in publicly defaming the 'other girl'. In referring to her as 'his latest', Jane links the identity of this girl to the ex-boyfriend. The importance of this is that it works implicitly to highlight her as the cause of Jane's jealousy. Jane has been hurt over this unexpected appearance and now seeks some form of revenge. Jealousy is being constituted through the actions of public defamation. While these actions are directed at the 'other girl', it is also possible that these comments may work to undermine the social standing of the ex-boyfriend. In the next line Jane offers a reflection on her own story that carries evaluative force. By deploying ironic rhetoric ('true love') Jane is able to remind readers that this all took place when she was (presumably) much younger, less experienced and more naive. The discursive achievement of this line might be to offer an explanation and an excuse for the actions Jane now judges to be socially unacceptable.

Jane's next actions involve an attempt (lines 9 and 10) to make the ex-boyfriend jealous by overtly flirting. These actions are directed at the ex-boyfriend, rather than the other girl, with the aim of constituting him as jealous. There is a strong sense of reciprocity operating within the text, with Jane seeking to treat the ex-boyfriend similarly to the way she has been treated. While the strategy was unsuccessful in making the ex-boyfriend jealous, Jane claims some success in relieving the upsetting emotion. The act of seeking revenge has occasioned emotional relief. In the original research (Tuffin et al., 2001) the authors comment more generally that such relief was mostly short lived, and in the next two lines we are reminded of the ease with which it is possible to move from feeling better to feeling ill. In short, Jane becomes ill as a result of drinking cheap wine.

In line 13 Jane steps back from the retelling of events and provides an evaluative summary. This summary links another emotion (embarrassment) to the events that took place that evening. In line 14 yet another emotion (guilt) is brought into play. This emotion is characterised as being both extreme ('severe') and also linked to the experience of embarrassment. The evaluative feature of this guilt gains much force from the fact that it occurs the following day. The strong implication here is that when reviewing the events of the previous night Jane offers strong negative judgement of her actions. It is significant that the emotion that is closely linked to this judgement occurs in the cold light of the next day, when Jane is able to comment on her actions free of the effects of alcohol and a little more removed from the emotional intensity of the previous evening.

Lines 15–17 show how the ex-boyfriend seeks to re-establish a relationship a week later. Interestingly, the construction of the ex-boyfriend changes in line 15, after initially being afforded the special status of 'first boyfriend' he is downgraded to the 'said boy'. In distancing herself from the boy and the experience of jealousy Jane is now positioned as outside the events that gave rise to the emotion. An important part of this distancing is that Jane has once again become sought by the ex-boyfriend. However, she makes it clear that within the space of a week he is unambiguously no longer an object of desire for her. As stated in line 16, Jane is 'over' him and has become interested in someone who is a member of the top rugby team in the school.

In lines 18–21 Jane orients to the present by assuring readers that she has aged positively since the time when this incident of jealousy took place. This temporal shift from the past to the present works to maintain the distance between her as the subject of the story, and her as the narrator of the story. Jane admits to some puzzlement about her jealousy (line 19), and especially about the object of her desire, who, at this point is even further downgraded to 'a pimply, 16 year old school boy'. Arguably, Jane injects this puzzlement and curiosity to stress the extent to which she is now a different self from the one who was so affected by jealousy. She is older, has different tastes and, as line 20 suggests, has different interests from those that were salient when she was a teenager. Here Jane explains that she is still capable of jealousy, but the object of jealousy has shifted from a romantic interest to an interest in academic performance. In the final line Jane indicates, with certainty, that any contemporaneous experience of the emotion would be enacted with control and dignity. These two characteristics may be read as suggesting that Jane is aware that this account has her being perhaps undignified and out of control – such was the power of her jealousy experience.

In summary, it is possible to see how jealousy may be constituted through the ways in which it is talked about and written about. Discursively, jealousy comes about as a result of a breach of the local moral order whereby Jane becomes publicly displaced by another. The partner who was formerly hers is now overtly associated with a new romantic interest and this gives rise to Jane's experience of

jealousy. Jane's subsequent actions include defaming the new love interest in her former boyfriend's life, attempted retaliation with a view to making him jealous, and becoming ill after drinking wine. The moral justification for these actions stems from Jane's claim that she experienced a host of emotions, including jealousy, and associated physical symptoms. Interestingly, the way in which jealousy may be seen to 'work' here is as an entitlement to take extreme actions, which themselves may provoke further emotional responses at a later date. In this case the entitlement for jealousy arises from the dispossession Jane is confronted with when her former boyfriend appears publicly with another girl. The following day Jane's actions themselves provide the basis for further emotion (embarrassment and guilt) when Jane assesses and judges her reactions without the complications of alcohol and intense emotional involvement. As Morgan et al., (1997) point out, it is not uncommon for the object of jealousy to become distanced, and to undergo a significant negative reconstruction. In the data above it is possible to see that not only does the former boyfriend receive successful downgrades over the course of the account, but Jane is disinterested in him a week after the event. As readers, it is possible for us to understand how her public replacement as a girlfriend is upsetting and a cause of suffering. In terms of such relationships we find it reasonable that Jane would be upset by the loss of her boyfriend to another and that the passing of time may have made this easier for her. Her suffering and the subsequent actions that were initiated in order to ease this are understandable within the social context offered. However, the actions Jane takes to relieve the suffering are generally not socially sanctioned and she acknowledges this with her self-critique, which takes place the next day, and also from the distance provided by the stance of someone looking back on their actions from a position of greater maturity.

In this example, Jane has discursively constituted jealousy in a range of differing ways and this variability argues against the psychological commonplace of assuming emotions to be singular and essentialised. In particular, Jane constructs jealousy as being merely one of a number of emotions that were experienced at the time. A further construction involves jealousy as closely linked to internal bodily sensations. Yet another construction casts jealousy as something that is potentially able to be manufactured through the manipulation of interpersonal relationships. These differing constructions form part of the richly textured discursive resources that are culturally available for use in explaining and making sense of our emotional experiences. Not only are these resources used to constitute differing versions of jealousy, they are also inextricably involved in the ways in which we account for our actions towards others. As Locke and Edwards (2003: 253) make clear, emotion talk may refer to private mental states but is also powerfully involved in 'how actions and actors are made publically accountable'.

A discursive reconceptualisation of jealousy moves us to another topic that has been close to the heart of traditional social psychology. The topic of identity has also received attention from critical social psychologists as we will see in the next section.

Identity

Who are you? What defines you as an individual? What is the nature of your self? How would you describe your personality? How do you imagine friends would describe your particular character? These questions give rise to a series of overlapping concerns about matters of identity, personality and self. Asking the question of who we are presupposes that the question may be answered and also that it is possible to provide definitive answers to such a question. It will come as no surprise to find that mainstream and critical approaches differ markedly in the way in which they address these questions of identity and the extent to which they believe these questions are answerable. Mainstream researchers have assumed the existence of an essential, inner core that can be identified and measured, while critical researchers are sceptical about the idea of static, enduring aspects of personality. Accordingly, critical social psychologists hold that identity is more plural, shifting and context-dependent. Thus, they have sought to examine the ways in which issues of self and identity arise for participants as a topic in talk.

Mainstream social psychology has offered two key approaches to the study of identity: social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), and the cognitively oriented self-categorisation theory (Turner, 1987). Social identity theorists (as detailed in Chapter Five) hold that social identity comes about following the three interconnected processes of categorisation, identification and comparison. At its simplest, this theory argues that personal identity is produced as a result of our memberships in various groups, coupled with our desire for positive self-image. For self-categorisation theorists, one of the key research questions has been *how* people categorise themselves. Critical approaches share this interest, but resist the practice of making assumptions about the private, cognitivised, mentalistic aspects of processes which, it is inferred, influence both thought and behaviour. Edwards (1998) has criticised these approaches as being simplistic and insensitive to the issue of how such categories are used by people *themselves*. Indeed, he regards it as 'extraordinary' that a science of mental life can ignore the fundamental importance of how discourse and social interaction work. Not surprisingly, critical approaches to the study of identity have been organised around understanding the ways in which identity comes up in conversations, stories and descriptions. This follows from the view that talk about the self is important in actually constructing that self (rather than merely describing it).

The research tradition that most fully acknowledges such 'business of participants' in these matters is ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). Ethnomethodology developed out of sociology and may be regarded most simply as the study of people's (ethno) methods (methodology). Broadly, this research orientation seeks to examine the way in which people make sense of their social lives. The business of making sense of social life is regarded by ethnomethodologists as a joint accomplishment, achieved by members of communities. The ways in which these achievements are jointly negotiated have become a focus for critical social

psychologists, conversation analysts and discourse analysts who have adopted this framework in the study of identity.

In addition to shifting the research emphasis to the way in which people use identity in talk, critical scholars have also argued that anti-essentialist views of identity should prevail. Burr (1995) argues against essentialism being applied to personality on the grounds that such a view encourages the belief in having a particular nature, which in turn limits what people can and cannot do. Further, the essentialist view fosters the belief that we are products of our biology and, as such, remain fixed stable entities for whom change is unlikely. Widdicombe (1998: 201) puts the criticism of essentialism like this: 'Identity is not presumed to be a relatively fixed property of people or societies, nor is it assumed that identity terms are simply reflections of social and psychological reality.' The anti-essentialist stance of critical social psychologists is consistent with the view that not only are matters of identity a concern for participants, but that these things are carefully negotiated through the ways in which we take up various positions and the inferential business that is achieved when we both accept and reject descriptions about our selves. Stainton Rogers et al. (1995: 60) are also concerned about essentialist notions of self: 'This realisation that our identities are not pre-formed essences which exist independently outside of time, of talk and other social activity … has led many contemporary researchers to abandon as misconceived the search for the 'true self'… and to look instead to how, why and under what conditions different selves are constructed in discourse.'

Critical approaches resist the essentialist understanding of identity as something people *have* or *are*, and instead regard identity as something that is achieved, negotiated and contested in and through the ways in which people talk about themselves and others. Thus, critical social psychologists challenge mainstream psychological views that treat identity as a set of fixed attributes residing within the individual's cognitive make up. In contrast, writers such as Antaki (1998) have developed the conversation analytic insight (Sacks, 1992) that social identity may be seen in terms of the social categories that are embedded within the details of everyday talk. Sacks identified the work of membership categorisation devices, such that it is possible to have membership of a vast range of categories, bearing in mind that each category would imply a range of characteristics. Given the almost unlimited range of terms that may be used to describe people, the actual deployment of terms becomes a matter of research interest. Questions regarding the choice of terms, their cultural and situational relevance, and the kinds of moral and psychological work that may be achieved by the use of particular terms (Jayyusi, 1984) all become potential topics for research. Membership categories are typically associated with a number of different features such as values, activities, entitlements and attributes. Identifying someone as a member of a particular category may encourage inferences suggesting that the person may also take on certain features that might routinely be associated with the category. Similarly, descriptions of particular features may occasion inferential work that invokes category membership.

Unlike mainstream approaches, which regard categories as an analyst's resource, critical work takes up the challenge of examining the ways in which people *themselves* use descriptive categories. For critical researchers, categorisations are topics to be studied in their own right, rather than simply regarding them as a resource for researchers to impose when it suits. In this regard, Sacks (1992) studied how categories were deployed, defined and monitored in everyday conversation. According to this view, it is possible to regard identity as membership of a category which, in turn, is rich in inferential possibilities. As Antaki and Widdicombe (1998) point out, analytic interest centres around the question of which particular features are made salient, and to what ends these are deployed. Membership categorisation analysis is gaining increasing acceptance as a useful means of studying identity-related questions as the recent examples of work by Vallis (2001) and Roulston (2001) show. In this way, critical scholars challenge the view of identity as something that people have, and which causes them to act in particular ways. Rather, the suggestion is offered that identity becomes an important part of the business of describing ourselves and others, and that these features may be invoked at certain times for particular effects.

This notion of 'identity terms' being seen as achievements frames identity as something that is much more dynamic and active than has previously been thought to be the case. For Widdicombe (1998) identity is understood as something that people *do*, rather than something they *are*. Invoking aspects of identities enables dynamic features to be employed in the business of, for example, allocating blame and responsibility, developing accusations and defences, and invoking alternative identities. A recent example of 'doing' identity comes from a study of sex offenders' treatment talk (Auburn & Lea, 2003). These authors make the important point that the way in which offenders talk about their version of the offence achieves important psychological business. The version of the offence that is offered orients to the social identities of the offenders and carries with it moral implications about the offences and the identities involved. In these accounts offenders strenuously resisted suggestions of premeditation or the idea that offenders were predatory. These occasioned and dynamic features of identity construction will be further explored in the following two critical studies, which have examined identity talk in quite different arenas.

Critical studies of identity

Critical approaches to the study of identity place a premium on the importance of how people deploy, negotiate, achieve and resist category descriptions. These studies emphasise the fluidity with which identity resources are deployed within interaction and talk. At this point it might be useful to think back to the delicate and subtle ways in which the Punk in Chapter Four put together the description of what happened and how this reflected on the category 'punk'. The following two studies further illustrate this point and provide extended segments of text

that provide further opportunities to see how other analysts have worked with raw data. They have been chosen as they cut across quite different 'terrain' in the sense of offering analytic insights that are derived from data sources that share little common ground. The first study (McKinlay & Dunnett, 1998) examines an interview, broadcast on Scottish radio, conducted with members of a North American gun club. The key identity issue at stake for these participants is the question of how they talk about themselves as gun owners. The second study (Throsby, 2002) presents the accounts of women who have unsuccessfully attempted *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF). These women (and in some cases their partners) were interviewed following IVF failure, and the cessation of subsequent treatment. Thus, there was a degree of finality about their failure to conceive.

Gun owners

How does one 'do' the identity term 'gun owner'? Given the complex and controversial political and social consequences of owning a weapon, this is an interesting question that was taken up by McKinlay and Dunnett (1998). The social relevance of this matter should be all too clear with gun-related incidents regularly featuring in the news media. It seems as if the United States is the country where this happens with great frequency and in recent times there have been dramatic incidents that have included gun-carrying students rampaging through schools and gunmen stalking innocent victims. Within the broad debate, gun owners are positioned as believing that gun ownership contributes towards people's safety, while proponents of gun control believe that gun ownership makes society more dangerous and violent. McKinlay and Dunnett claim that self-descriptions provide the opportunity to tailor accounts towards the solution of possible problems. This analytic orientation is similar to that discussed by Widdicombe (1993: 97), who suggests that it is 'useful to regard the way things are said as a solution to a problem. The analyst's task is therefore to identify the problem and how what is said constitutes a solution.' Of course the challenge is that the 'problem' is almost always unstated, so the business of identifying this must be inferred from what is said. In general terms, such 'problems' may arise from the account that is offered and the specific category descriptions and inferences that are encouraged by those descriptions.

McKinlay and Dunnett (1998) refer to these problems as 'identity related' problems, with gun owners establishing two inconsistent versions of themselves in the interviews. The two conflicting versions of identity that emerge from McKinlay and Dunnett's analysis stem from the casting of gun owners as 'normal' citizens who are both like, and not like, everybody else. The key difference between normal citizens and themselves is that as gun owners they possess the potential to use deadly force. This conflict is just the kind of 'problem' that Widdicombe (1993) suggests accounts are constructed to solve. For gun owners, the question becomes one of how they can position themselves as

being just like everybody else, while also retaining the power to deploy their weapons. The analysis offers some insight into how this problem is smoothed over and negotiated by Carol, who is a member of a gun club, as she is interviewed by Bob.

1	Bob:	Because obviously one of the things about (.) <u>wo</u>men
2		and guns in America now (.)
3	Carol:	Mmm
4	Bob:	is pre<u>cisely</u> to do with the climate of rape of misogyny
5		[of sexual harassment
6	Carol:	[well yeah a lot of women a lot of women are (.) more
7		and more women are finding the <u>need</u> to (.) protect
8		themselves because – (amm) the gun laws being what
9		they are – the <u>criminals</u> are the ones that are going to
10		disregard any kind of licensing laws and the criminals
11		and the gang-bangers are the ones that are gonna be
12		<u>carrying</u> (.) (ahhh) I'll tell you the truth I have a I keep a
13		12-gauge shotgun in my apartment as well ((*laughs*))
14	Bob:	wow
15	Carol:	(ahh) (.) and whoever gets into my apartment into my
16		bedroom who doesn't belong there is gonna be in for a
17		<u>big</u> surprise – because ( ) if someone gets in there to rob
18		I mean if if all they wanted was <u>stuff</u>, my stereo my TV
19		they could have whatever stuff they wanted wouldn't
20		bother me they could have the stuff (.) (hh) but you
21		know and I know what's gonna happen and (.) that is
22		<u>not</u> gonna happen to me it's happened to my friends
23		(amm) happened to a friend of mine (.) she was raped
24		got the guy went to trial they crucified <u>her</u> (.) on the
25		stand (*snaps fingers*) the guy walked that is <u>not</u> going to
26		happen to me there is no way that is going to happen to
27		me and it's as simple as that and I made that decision a
28		long long time ago

This data extract includes some transcription notation that needs to be explained. Brackets containing a full stop '(.)' indicate a short, but hearable pause. Underlining '<u>wo</u>men' indicates emphasis. Square brackets '[' between adjacent lines indicate the start of overlapping talk. Brackets containing nothing '( )' indicate unclear speech or noise.

In this interview, Bob refers to a 'climate' where women are the victims of crime. This works to set the scene for the interview by making gender a relevant issue with respect to gun ownership. Carol responds to this by developing the notion of increasing numbers of women who 'need' to protect themselves. Women who own guns are thus characterised as doing so out of the need for self-protection,

reacting to the potential hostility and danger they face. It is also noteworthy that in lines 8–12 Carol works up a contrast whereby women gun owners are described as having a legitimate reason for owning a gun, while criminal elements defy licensing laws and carry weapons for criminal purposes. The contrast achieves a divide between gun owners in suggesting not all gun owners are alike, and there are those who carry weapons for good reasons and those who do not, those whose guns are legal and those whose are not.

Carol begins what McKinlay and Dunnett (1998) refer to as her 'deadly force narrative' with a prefacing statement, 'I'll tell you the truth' (line 12). This works to stamp the subsequent account as honest, authentic and genuine, and carries the implication that Carol is sharing a confidence with Bob (and the radio audience) that she would otherwise keep to herself. The particular revelation here is that Carol indicates that she possesses a shotgun, as well as (presumably) a handgun. The 'deadly force narrative' involves a situation where an intruder may be in her apartment or in her bedroom. McKinlay and Dunnett make the point that when Carol talks about her response to such an intrusion it is clear that the intruder might be met with deadly force. The precise formulation of the use of deadly force is considerably softened, with no actual mention made of shooting ('is gonna be in for a big surprise'). The potential for using her weapon is qualified by the intentions of the intruder. If the motive for the intrusion was robbery, this would be of little bother to Carol and she would willingly yield possessions such as her stereo and television.

Lines 20–22 signal a shift from considering the intrusion as a robbery to considering a more sinister motive that Carol is determined to prevent. McKinlay and Dunnett (1998) claim that this achieves two identity-related functions for Carol as a gun owner. Firstly, it specifies just how extreme the circumstances must be before she would use her weapon, and secondly, it moves responsibility for the use of a weapon from Carol to the presence and motives of the intruder. The situation Carol is determined to avoid is spelled out in more detail in lines 23–25. This illustrative story is presented as something that happened to one of Carol's friends. The woman was a rape victim who suffered the further injustice of being 'crucified' at a trial that resulted in the rapist going free ('the guy walked'). The implied criticism of legal procedures as failing to deliver justice works to shore up the case for using deadly force and administering immediate justice. In short, it works to further justify Carol's resolve that she would employ deadly force to prevent this from happening to her. Carol's determination to prevent such a situation is apparent from the repetition and strong emphasis in lines 21–22 and 25–26. Her refusal to permit herself to be messed around by an intruder and the possibility of subsequently suffering further humiliation at the hands of the legal authorities, leaves the option of a 'big surprise' as the favoured course of action. Following a brief consideration of these alternatives, the conclusion Carol reaches is marked by both simplicity and long-standing conviction. Under these circumstances Carol's willingness to use deadly force is couched in terms that are free from uncertainty and ambiguity, with the matter being 'as simple as that'.

There are two key points to bear in mind when considering what this kind of analysis has to offer in terms of developing better understandings of how matters of identity are deployed in talk. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the complexity with which people characterise themselves. Carol does not simply present herself as a gun owner, but takes up the interviewer's suggestion that gender is relevant to issues of personal safety. Nor is her delineation of the circumstances under which she would use her weapon a simple matter, on the contrary she details one situation when she would not use a gun, and another when she would. Secondly, as a gun owner Carol sets out to establish some conditions that distinguish her from other gun owners: she makes it very clear that she is in legal possession of her weapon. For McKinlay and Dunnett (1998) the problem Carol must manage in this talk about herself as a gun owner is how to combine her identity as a law-abiding gun owner with her willingness to use deadly force. These two categorisations may been seen to be in conflict, and the way Carol resolves this is by carefully delineating the conditions under which she would use her weapon. Thus the use of deadly force is made to seem reasonable and well considered, under the circumstances she describes.

The preceding account has highlighted the claim that social identities are constructed in language and has illustrated some of the complexity such construction entails. Further, constructing identities in talk is rarely a simple matter of claiming category membership, but involves quite subtle negotiations and qualifications about such membership. In the above, this process of negotiation involves a collaborative effort, with the interviewer's suggestion regarding the relevance of gender for Carol as a gun owner. The usefulness with which we can begin to understand identity construction may be further demonstrated by considering data that comes from the following study where gender is also a highly significant categorisation. This study looked at the accounts of women who had sought assisted fertility and who, following failure to conceive, had concluded their fertility 'treatment'.

Failed fertility

The original research (Throsby, 2002) examined interviews conducted with women (and, in some cases, their male partners) who sought conception by means of *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) but were unsuccessful in achieving this. Not only had the participants failed to conceive, but they were also no longer part of the assisted fertility programme. In this work the label 'infertile' was avoided as it carries a rather blunt rhetorical force. While paralleling the lack of available positive terms for childlessness, this term would have been misleading because more than half the women interviewed already had children. The interviews were conducted at a point when participants would have been sensitive to the frailties of human fertility, and to the failure of their biological reproductivity, which was compounded by the failure of medical interventions that initially offered the promise of assisted fertility.

The broad research question is one of how these women made sense of the IVF failure. Clearly, failure to conceive could have a significant, perhaps even devastating, impact on one's identity. For these women, the analytic question focuses around the issue of how they see themselves. What does IVF failure mean for them as women and as potential mothers? What does this mean for the ways in which they must now regard themselves? Throsby's (2002) analysis suggests the women make sense of this through the deployment of discourses that normalise 'happiness' and 'hopelessness'. Throsby characterised these participants as falling into an 'ambiguous space', which lies between the narratives of happiness and hopelessness.

Throsby (2002) presents the following extract as an illustration of resistance to the construction of parenthood as the only acceptable outcome, through claiming that life without children can be positive. As Throsby explains, such a rhetorical move must be undertaken with care because of the negative association of childlessness with selfishness. Indeed, this association may be one of the problems the accounts of these participants sought to resolve. The prospect of living without children is constructed as a second-choice option, which is taken up only after the initial desire for children has been thwarted by failure to conceive. This is evident in the following extract:

> Melissa: [...] I just thought, 'Sod it!', you know. Life's what you make it. I haven't got what I wanted, so I'm going to find something I do want then go for that.

While it is entirely possible to read the above as a way of managing potential accusations of selfishness, it is also possible to entertain alternative readings of this (Tuffin, 2002b). In particular, this segment may be read as an acknowledgement of disappointment regarding IVF failure but which provides a basis for making assertions about the future. In spite of its size, this is a rather busy piece of text that achieves much in terms of identity work. It is especially notable that Melissa seems keen to regain control of her life, after having been unable to control her fertility in the desired manner. This gives rise to the rhetorical commonplace ('Life's what you make it'), which reasserts the extent to which individuals may control important outcomes in life. This common saying restates the degree to which the speaker believes that control is within the grasp of the individual. Arguably, Melissa is aware that she has failed in one arena and is keen to re-establish control in another. While acknowledging her disappointment, Melissa then quickly moves to restate another unspecified goal that would be achievable. In identity terms, Melissa presents her self as someone who has faced disappointment, but reacts positively by moving forward and setting a new goal. As Throsby (2002) explains, this goal was initially to study horticulture with a view to setting up a plant nursery. In identity terms, Melissa is not someone who will become deflated by disappointment. Rather she adapts by settling on something that is also desirable, but which is within her grasp.

The next extract is also rich in identity inferences, and provides another example of someone who has apparently dealt with the disappointment of unsuccessful IVF treatment and moved on. The progressive aspect of these accounts may be summarised as follows: disappointment is acknowledged, and resolved through an account of moving forward positively. In the extract Sarah acknowledges her infertility before settling on an alternative goal.

> Sarah: So I just thought, this energy, I want to put it somewhere, but I'm not going to have kids. That's when I decided, I mean, it wasn't an overnight decision, but for a while I thought, 'Well, you know, I've got all this energy. I'm going to start a business.'

The notion of maternal energy is talked about as being frustrated by the failure of IVF. This energy is afforded portability with the possibility of moving it from its original purpose to another project. In this case, Sarah wants to put her energy into a business. The disappointment of remaining childless is linked to the decision to settle on an alternative goal. This reading is consistent with the general notion of participants progressing from disappointment to another project. In so doing they show themselves to have resolved the grief of child-lessness (where this is the case), dealt with the disappointment of failed IVF and moved forward positively. Of course this characterisation of having dealt successfully with disappointment is one aspect of identity that marks us as mature, sensible adults who are able to recognise that when our aspirations are frustrated it might be better to move on, rather than continue to try to achieve the impossible, or at least the unlikely. The workings of this aspect of identity have been revealed in the above extracts where frustration and disappointment are acknowledged and then replaced with alternative, achievable goals.

The criticism of people persevering with fertility interventions beyond a certain point is part of the next extract in which Liz concedes that her failure to conceive will not improve the success rate for IVF treatment. Liz had earlier revealed that she had been labelled a 'poor performer' and IVF treatment was ended by medical staff following repeatedly poor results.

> Liz: […] I felt very much like I am not going to make your figures look good at the end of the day, and another part of me thought, well, yeah, … stand aside and let someone else have a go who would have a chance. […] You do sometimes see women who, you know, had ten goes […] so I thought that was a bit unfair. Someone else could have a go.

Liz contextualises her personal disappointment at failing to conceive within the wider aims of the fertility clinic. In conceding that she is not going to make the 'figures look good', Liz interprets her personal failure as adding to the disappointment that the clinic must also have. Arguably, this evaluation may be seen as Liz accepting that her attempts at IVF conception have ended badly. Liz does

not dwell on any sense of disappointment, but moves quickly to say that she is prepared to withdraw from any further cycles, thereby permitting another woman, who has a greater chance of conceiving, this opportunity. Liz contrasts her own benevolence in this matter with women who have had multiple treatments, which she evaluates as 'unfair'. In her own case, there is a strong inference that in the interests of fairness, she is prepared to step aside. This frames her actions as being a matter of personal agency and there is, notably, no mention of her being dropped from the programme. Rather, this is cast as a personal sacrifice that may permit another the opportunity to benefit from assisted fertility. Interestingly, the overt casting of herself as benevolent offers a characterisation that is almost precisely opposite to that of selfishness, which as already mentioned was an association participants sought to resist.

The social categories invoked in this account provide an analytic basis for examining the way in which identity work is achieved. Liz seems selfless when positioning her fertility failure in the broader context of institutional figures. Her personal disappointment becomes embedded within a concern for other women, thereby presenting an unselfish self who is prepared to 'stand aside' so as to permit someone else access to assisted fertility. The category that is strongly resisted by Liz is the one where women are unsuccessful in their attempts to conceive even after multiple treatments. Repeated treatments are judged to be 'unfair', and Liz claims this as a motive for her willingness to give another woman a chance to conceive.

Through an examination of both the radio interview with a gun owner and these extracts from interviews with women for whom IVF had not worked, it is possible to see how identity may be examined as an occasioned and flexible resource. This contrasts with the view of identity as something that is biologically embedded, static and fixed. Here we see the subtle aspects of the ways speakers describe, explain and negotiate aspects of their identities. This process of construction is, of course, ongoing. What we have examined here is simply a snapshot of some of the identity work that was being conducted in response to interviewers' questions. In the next section of this chapter we move to an examination of material that is much less personal and private – the world of politics.

Politics

While the first two sections of this chapter have shown how critical social psychologists have examined intimate (emotion) and personal (identity) topics, the third and final topic goes beyond the bounds of traditional social psychology to illustrate critical work that has occurred in the area of politics. Unlike the first two topics, this brief assay of critical engagement with political topics does not include data, but rather seeks to provide a more expansive view of developments

in this area. The breadth of critical social psychology is one of its defining features, which Hepburn (2002) notes should include criticism of social psychology, and criticism of society. Disciplinary criticism occupied the early chapters of this book while the aspect of critical work that focuses on society will be covered in this section on politics.

Critical social psychologists have reacted strongly to the apolitical stance that has characterised mainstream work within the discipline. Indeed, a defining feature of critical psychology is the deep-seated concern about psychology's failure to study the social, political and cultural aspects of life meaningfully. While the accusation that traditional social psychology is inherently asocial may seem like an oxymoron, this matter has been the subject of much debate within the critical literature. For example, Burr (2002) argues that contemporary social psychology has come increasingly under the influence of cognitively inspired theorising, which reduces the social to merely a set of variables that relate to other people. Such rampant individualism is difficult to defend as having an important social component. Indeed, these concerns have been implicit in many of the newer research orientations that specifically aim to examine the social aspects of human social life.

There are other reasons for the disciplinary failure to become involved in the social, political and cultural aspects of life. Mostly, these areas have been regarded by psychologists as simply too difficult to operationalise. The complex notions associated with the way in which, for example, culture may be thought about, have restricted social psychology's engagement in this area. Further, traditional social psychologists believe that forays into the world of politics would only serve to puncture the illusion of a value-free approach towards research. Such political commitment has previously been regarded as compromising the illusion of scientific neutrality that positivistic science offered. Accordingly, it was seen as safer to work from behind the façade of scientific neutrality and attempt to keep private the values and politics that are inevitably involved in any research endeavour. Critical social psychologists have traded this intellectual and political safety for a more engaged, active and politically meaningful approach to research. Indeed, critical work is value driven, and openly engages with issues of power as it aspires to effect positive social change (Goodley & Parker, 2000; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

The disciplinary failure to engage with the social and political, the problems of operationalising complex aspects of social life, and the tendency to disable the political implications of research by adopting the trappings of a neutral epistemology are well-rehearsed criticisms of mainstream social psychology. In writing about the cultural and psychological uprootedness faced by political refugees, Apfelbaum (2002: 79) takes social psychology to task for adopting a narrow epistemological focus where 'much of its mainstream theorising is based on the fiction of an ahistorical, emotionless, decontextualised, subject/individual governed only by the rationality of "Homo economicus". For a long time, insufficient attention was paid by modern-day (experimental) social psychologists to the fact

that we do not evolve in a sociocultural vacuum, but rather that we are inscribed in family and genealogical filiations as well as in world history, in a larger social environment with its changing representations of social categories over time which filter our life-experiences.' Refugees face a unique set of psychological issues that cut across and include the main topics of this chapter – matters of politics, identity and emotion. As Apfelbaum argues, this cultural and political disconnection makes mainstream approaches seem all the more inadequate.

The apolitical stance that has characterised the discipline of social psychology is evident in almost every available textbook on the subject. This situation of apparent consensus and calm within the social psychological academy stands in defiance of the radical political movements evident in the Western world in the 1960s and 1970s, and the subsequent upheavals brought about by the intellectual changes associated with **postmodernism**. Collier, Minton and Reynolds (1991: 266) question the relevance of the traditional research agenda within social psychology and argue for overhauling 'the political message that traditional social psychology, by its uncritical acceptance of existing social relations, tends to promote and maintain the status quo'. Dissatisfaction with this situation is nothing new for feminist social psychologists (see, for example, Wilkinson, 1996), who long advocated political activism in seeking change on behalf of women. They are critical of mainstream social psychology, which has inadequately theorised women and neglected social and political oppression.

An important part of the critical agenda is to replace neutrality with involvement, and acknowledge that values and political positions play an important part of what 'being critical' means. There are two main ways in which critical research has engaged with this political agenda. Firstly, there is a developing tradition of examining political discourse. The data for this work comes from public speeches by politicians, political documents and advertising, and the records of parliamentary debates. Reicher and Hopkins (1996a; 1996b) have provided analyses of political rhetoric. A number of studies (Dickerson, 1997; LeCouteur, Rapley & Augoustinos, 2001; Rapley, 1998) have stressed how rhetorical devices work to bolster authority, consensus and facticity. Herschell (2001) has provided an analysis showing how particular political positions are made to seem reasonable and commonsensical. Finally, in this tradition there are studies that have examined everyday usage of politically loaded terms. This exploratory work may be illustrated by Marshall and Raabe (1993), who interviewed people about the twin notions of 'nationalisation' and 'privatisation'. The authors note considerable variability in accounts, with much reliance on the discourse of 'efficiency' being used by both liberals and conservatives.

The second way in which critical researchers have engaged with politics has been through that body of work that has adopted an overtly political agenda and has advocated for social and psychological change. This style of work presents a direct challenge to the status quo and is evident in the texts by Sloan (2000), Fox and Prilleltensky (1997), and Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002). The work of Prilleltensky and Nelson provides the most recent example, in which they examine

the political implications of the work of psychologists with a view to introducing new approaches to training, research and psychological practice.

Underlying these approaches to the study of political topics are commitments to, firstly, further exploring the complex and powerful ways in which language shapes the political and psychological landscape and, secondly, an increased awareness of the importance of a more politically engaged discipline. Lynn and Lea (2003) claim an unashamedly political objective in their analysis of constructions of asylum-seekers. Specifically they seek to challenge the dominant oppressive discourses thereby fostering resistance to prejudice and discrimination. No longer is it possible for the discipline to remain detached from the political issues that intersect strongly with a psychological orientation towards social life. This political engagement operates through the topics of study and also through the arguments and thinking that sit behind the approach to research that is adopted. Widdicombe (1998) pulls these twin commitments together in explaining that material power is exercised through discourses, which also have the power to position people differently. To understand how we are positioned in this way, we need to examine the discourses and the positions they both offer and deny. Oppressive practices rely on dominant discourses that ultimately support existing social and power relationships. These relationships may be amenable to change when the dominant discourses have been interrogated, unsettled and ultimately displaced.

A useful illustration in this regard is Gavey's (1989; 1996) work, which examined women's accounts of sexual acts that were unwanted and coercive. Gavey argues that simply restating the inevitability of gendered sexual relationships, with male domination and female submissiveness, reproduces these cultural constructions. Her suggestion for fracturing and disrupting the common constructions of passive female sexuality and aggressive male sexuality is through the promotion of competing discourses that offer positions of resistance. This kind of discursive intervention argues for a vigorous questioning of the taken-for-granted aspects of heterosexual relationships. The aim of such intervention is to provide an analysis that offers women a wider range of positions which, over time, will increasingly become not only more desirable, but also more possible. At its bluntest, this kind of analysis advocates for a detailed examination of current social practices through the identification of the dominant discourses that structure the experience of unwanted sexual relations. Once identified, these discourses are interrogated, with the aim of generating alternatives that might be taken up by women to increase the possibilities of what may be regarded as the 'thing to do' in such situations.

Applying critical work

While such strategies may be regarded as political interventions, they may also be considered as part of an increasing call for discourse and critical work to be

applied. Willig (1999) suggests three key ways in which this style of work has attempted to address social and political practice: as *social critique*, as *empowerment* and as a *guide to reform*. The aim of social critique is to highlight the ways language legitimates, normalises and perpetuates unequal power relations. This involves the identification of current 'ways of talking' such that analysis may show how these ways operate to make the status quo seem like the 'best' way. Willig draws on two research examples of social critique. Wetherell and Potter's (1992) analysis of Pakeha New Zealanders' talk about race issues involves an anti-racist position that rests on the hope that following the identification of the ways in which racist talk works to legitimise and justify discriminatory practices, the opportunity for change will arise. Willig's second example of social critique comes from Wilkinson and Kitzinger's (1995) work examining psychological perspectives on feminism. These researchers sought to apply discourse work in the interests of social and political change in a range of feminist topics. The agenda here is to highlight the way in which language contributes to the oppression and pathologisation of women. In both social critiques the analysis seeks to inform people better about the workings of contemporary constructions, such that these might be resisted, challenged and displaced by more liberatory discourses. While the overall aim of increased understanding is laudable, the precise relationship between social critique and intervention is seldom spelled out. As Willig (1999) notes, the link between the analysis and the development of strategic intervention frequently remains unspecified.

Willig's (1999) second suggested form with which social and political practice may be addressed is empowerment. This activity follows from the identification of discourses, and involves an exploration of alternative discourses. These alternatives offer the promise of subverting and surpassing existing practices that are oppressive and work in the interests of the powerful to the detriment of the powerless in society. The work of Parker, Geogaca, Harper, McLaughlin & Stowell-Smith (1995) provides an example of this approach where the discourses of psychopathology are deconstructed, the implications of these discourses are examined in terms of the effects on patients and treatments, and alternative understandings of pathology are considered as offering the possibility of improved mental health practices. One such alternative comes in the form of the Hearing Voices Network. Traditionally, 'hearing voices' might be regarded as symptomatic of a serious psychological disorder, however the Hearing Voices Network seeks to define such unusual experiences, not as disordered symptoms, but rather as part of a process of development. Thus, the emphasis moves from the simple fact of hearing a voice as being symptomatic, to accepting the psychological reality of that kind of experience for the person hearing the voice. The empowerment for people who hear voices may come from assistance the network provides in offering suggestions about how to live with the voices.

The third way of addressing social and political practice that Willig (1999) identifies is through offering guidance to reform. Here the results of critical studies are applied in the form of specific interventions that seek to introduce positive

change in social and institutional practices. A key forum for this approach is the journal *Discourse and Society*, in which an impressive range of material is analysed with a view to exposing the particular ways in which reality is described. As Willig notes, these constructions are examined to show how they continue to support unequal power relations and thereby continue to serve the interests of the powerful in society. Another version of the 'guiding reform' version of political action is the suggestion (Adams, 2001) that critical work has a natural focal point in the area where policy formation occurs. The basis of this suggestion is that policy is inevitably bound up in language and so it makes sense to have critical scholars working at the edge where policy is being set and written, since their impact is likely to be most effective at this point.

It is important to make the point that this survey of critical work in the political arena provides only a brief snapshot of the research that is taking place here. What remains unmentioned is that a considerable amount of the work already referred to in this book combines a political and a critical edge. Take, as an example, the content of Chapter Five where critical studies examined the language of prejudice, discrimination and racism. These examinations are not neutral scientific attempts merely to document the language in these domains. Rather, these studies seek to study and shape the politics that are evident in the ways in which these matters operate textually. Increasing our understandings of the textual basis of these social practices brings us closer to bringing about meaningful change in these areas.

Summary

This chapter has provided extended coverage of two topics – emotion and identity – and a briefer survey of work being conducted in the area of politics. Within social psychology, work in emotion has moved from the theoretical influences of introspectionism, to behaviourism, to cognition, and more recently to constructionism. The dominant view within psychology has maintained that emotion is internalised, private and linked to bodily physiology. Critical reorientations to emotion hold that language is important in understanding the way in which emotion works interpersonally. These reorientations advance a more social epistemology, which argues for examining emotions as they are talked about in everyday conversations. A detailed example is provided, which takes an account of jealousy and offers an analysis of this that highlights how emotion may be constituted through the way it is talked about and written about. The variability in the way jealousy is constituted in this account highlights the range of discursive resources available for us to make sense of emotional experiences.

The question of identity also has a long history within the discipline, with traditional approaches assuming a core essential that may be identified and measured. Critical social psychologists have been sceptical regarding static enduring aspects of identity. Rather, they hold that identity is plural, flexible

and context-sensitive. Identity is not regarded by critical scholars as something that people have, rather it is seen as something that people do, and as such may be regarded as a discursive achievement that comes about whenever we talk about aspects of the 'self'. Two studies were discussed as illustrations of these points. The first examined a radio interview with a gun owner and the second examined interview comments made by women whose attempts at IVF-assisted conception had failed. This data is rich in inferences about the kinds of selves that are involved.

Finally, the area of politics is considered. While the mainstream discipline has adopted an avowedly apolitical stance, critical work has responded to the impetus of postmodern thinking by becoming increasingly involved with politics. There are two broad forms this involvement has taken – firstly, through the examination of political rhetoric and political speeches. This work sets out to study the dynamics of political rhetoric with a view to revealing the resources and functions such talk aims to fulfil. Secondly, there is the work that more directly seeks to bring about political change through the interrogation and unsettling of discourses that constrain and oppress. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the ways in which critical work has been applied to issues of social, psychological and political importance.

Further reading

Edwards, D. (1997). *Discourse and cognition*. London: Sage.
In this superbly crafted work there are many highlights, but Chapter Seven deals with emotion and is especially worth reading.

Prilleltensky, I., & Nelson, G. (2002). *Doing psychology critically*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
These authors extend critical work within psychology with suggestions for the practical implementation of a critical agenda in the areas of teaching, research and applied work. Following a review of important concepts for critical psychologists, the authors attend to training-related issues before discussing critical possibilities in a broad range of applied work.

Willig, C. (Ed.) (1999). *Applied discourse analysis*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
This edited volume takes up the 'applied' challenge and offers a number of interesting chapters covering a broad range of research areas, including critical readings of the self-help literature, the discursive positions of women smokers, human reproductive technologies, sex education and psychiatric medication.

Epilogue

Critical social psychology and the 'shame' of social psychology

While critical material has been available within social psychology for some time, it was not until the early 1990s that this material gathered momentum and contributed to the establishment of alternative schools of thought. Critical writers opposed the dogma accepted by most experimental social psychologists, namely that controlled laboratory experiments provided the best means of examining human social life. While experimentalists acknowledge weaknesses in this approach, they still largely hold on to the view that studying ourselves in controlled environments is the preferred method to increase our understanding of the social world. The critical literature strongly contests this, arguing the absurdity of such a single-minded approach. Further, this literature argues that there are good reasons for adopting a more expansive approach to the study of human social life.

While the critical literature extends much beyond the boundaries of social psychology, it has also been developing strongly within social psychology. One of the reasons for the strength of critical work within the social domain is that there are unique aspects of social life that make critical work especially relevant. It is also true that traditional social psychology shares many of the wider criticisms that have been levelled at the parent discipline. Within social psychology there are unique arguments and reasons for advancing the critical cause. This book has attempted to explicate these reasons and argue for broadening our approaches to research through the systematic examination of talk and text.

One area that has attracted particular criticism is the radical individualism that has dominated social psychology's thinking about 'social' life. This individualism is at the very heart of definitions of psychology, and yet cuts across the broad interests of the *social* aspects of social psychology. In particular, individualism is promoted as the dominant ideology at the expense of traditional

notions of collective and social responsibility. The widespread acceptance of individualism sits behind the claim that 'social psychology' is an oxymoron. Further, stripping the social out of social psychology has severely constrained approaches to the study of social life. Notably, one area that has suffered as a result of individualistic notions is the area of social interaction. The legacy individualism has left the discipline has been referred to by Folger (1987: 52) as 'the shame of social psychology'. Folger is referring to the basic tension between the individual and the social, with the shame of traditional social psychology being that it has relinquished its hold on the social in order to follow the creeds of individualism and experimentalism.

Curious questions

This book has sought to make sense of the comments and questions that continue to arise within the burgeoning literature of critical social psychology. While this literature initially operated at the edges of the discipline, increasingly these sorts of questions have gained currency with social psychologists and their students. These questions were posed in the Prologue in order to highlight the tensions between mainstream and critical work. Asking such questions early hopefully served to flag some of the thematic concerns the book has subsequently dealt with. While these questions speak to the disciplinary ripples created by critical concerns, not all of these have been directly addressed. Hence the following brief responses to those earlier questions provide the chance to revisit those questions and offer some answers. Some answers reiterate material that was introduced earlier while others draw together the threads that were previously introduced, and still others provide a succinct statement regarding the theme implied by the question.

- Why is it that some of the leading British social psychologists do not even attempt to get their work accepted in the leading mainstream American journals?

   This situation has come about since critical work has attracted greater interest from scholars in countries outside the United States. While there are leaders in the critical field who do work in the United States, the major impetus has come from critical social psychologists working in countries such as Canada, England, New Zealand, South Africa and Australia. From these countries the leading critical social psychologists have long since given up attempts to get their work accepted in the mainstream American journals, which are conservative in holding the view that experimental work sets the epistemic standard for the discipline. Of course, these leading critical social psychologists have moved beyond this and seek outlets for their work in new journals that are emerging to deal specifically with alternative assumptions, theories and methods.

- Billig (1997: 37) asks, 'How is it possible to call oneself a social psychologist, but to read few of the main social-psychological journals, and, indeed, to feel alienated from much of their content?'

This question is related to the previous one in dealing with the constraints and limitations that the mainstream journals impose on those who work in non-traditional ways. Not only are critical social psychologists not submitting their research for publication to the mainstream journals, but they are increasingly finding the content of these journals irrelevant to the research interests they wish to follow. At a broad level the work of critical social psychologists examines data that have a linguistic form, while the mainstream journals remain firmly in the grip of positivism and continue to value research dealing with numerical abstractions. Accordingly, critical social psychologists feel increasingly alienated and uninterested in the content of an apolitical decontextualised literature that continues to reduce social life to narrow quantifiable variables and to ignore wider views of how the discipline might proceed. Of course, there are notable exceptions with some mainstream journals being highly supportive of critical work. Typically these journals (see, for example, the *British Journal of Social Psychology*) publish both mainstream and critical work alongside each other and seek to offer the highest quality research from both traditions.

- Why are some leading social psychologists now proudly stating that they have not conducted a laboratory experiment in decades?

Again, this is a question that is closely related to the previous two. Critical social psychologists mostly agree that laboratory methods fail to do justice to the complexity of social life – hence they are no longer reading about experiments and they have mostly given up conducting experiments. Once the epistemic weaknesses of the experimental method for revealing insights into human social actions have been grasped, it is difficult to develop or sustain much faith in this method for 'finding out about' particular topics. This simply acknowledges that a new breed of social psychologists is looking beyond experimentalism and seeking epistemological alternatives in the search for greater understanding of the human social condition. To be a social psychologist who does not conduct experimental work says something about methodological and epistemological doubt, and suggests that critical alternatives may have been given some consideration.

- The so-called 'crisis' in social psychology has been in evidence for at least the last three decades. Why do some writers regard the crisis as over, while others believe it has just begun?

So, where are we with the disciplinary crisis? The crisis may have been over-stated and could well have been called disciplinary dissatisfaction as growing numbers of social psychologists became disillusioned with the limitations of

attempting to study human social life by employing the basic methods that had worked so well in the hard sciences. Clearly, as the question implies, there is no consensus within the discipline regarding the state of the crisis. While the question may not have been definitively answered, this book has provided a fuller background to understanding the basis of the crisis literature and also the research alternatives available for those who seek to go beyond the narrow strictures of experimentalism.

Linking the crisis literature to the Kuhnian notion of paradigm clashes, it would be possible to conclude that the crisis is far from over. In fact, the recent emergence of books such as this one would suggest that the crisis is ongoing and that we are some way off reaching a disciplinary resolution. For social psychology, 'normal science' seems to mean that theoretical debates will continue and it would be premature to expect any immediate resolution. This conflict and debate within the discipline should be regarded as a healthy sign as it means that social psychologists are not complacently accepting philosophical and methodological tradition without critiquing and debating these important disciplinary matters.

- While social psychology as a discipline has demonstrable dedication to the experimental method, is it the case that experimental work is completely inappropriate and absurd?

A moderate approach to this question would argue that experimental work has a place in offering us knowledge about, for example, differences between groups and the impact of certain interventions. Many of my critical colleagues would disagree, but I believe that experimental work has its place. The debate comes over the issue of where that place is and just how much social psychologists should be open to other methods. The continued reliance on laboratory experiments as *the* best and only method is where the absurdity arises. As has been stated already, critical social psychologists seek to explore alternatives and thereby widen the epistemological horizons of the discipline. Partly, this search has been driven by dissatisfactions with existing methods, but the real question here is whether it is important to continue with such methods and integrate newer approaches, or simply to admit that experimentalism was a mistake and move forward.

- If you wanted to understand ordinary everyday life in the middle classes, why would you spend time studying inmates in a maximum security prison?

This question arose in Chapter One in the context of considering the wisdom of a method that takes people out of their usual familiar surroundings and places them in a highly constrained environment where they lack the usual freedoms, and hope to obtain results that tell us something useful about human social life. Of course this is a powerful analogy whereby the experimental situation

is likened to the confines of a security prison, and asks whether this is where you would choose to study ordinary everyday social life. Clearly, such highly controlled environments are not the place of choice because they are steeped in artificiality and contrivance, and for this reason the answer to the above question must be that you would not.

- Are attempts to establish generalised laws of human social behaviour naive, given the way in which time, place and culture impact on our social relationships and our social realities?

This question touches on the epistemological wisdom of seeking broad patterns that might pass the test of time and stand up as general laws of social behaviour. Of course, the critical answer to this is that such objectives seem naive in ignoring the fact that social life is powerfully governed by context. Critical initiatives are respectful of context and sensitive to the importance of factors such as the period of history in which we live, culture, race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic class and gender. Given the impact of these concerns it soon becomes apparent that such 'laws' are unlikely to hold up over time as they will inevitably be subject to the influence of these factors and many more. This appreciation of context, culture and history argue for taking a more modest approach to what can be revealed by social psychological research. This means accepting that the results of our studies are partial, local and relevant to the circumstances in which they were collected. Critical researchers fully acknowledge the extent to which their research is located in time, place and culture. Gergen (1997) refers to knowledge as having 'historical perishability', meaning that changing social patterns inevitably make our knowledge of social matters subject to continual transformation. According to this view attempts to establish generalised laws of human social life do seem futile.

- Has the disciplinary rush towards embracing the methods of the hard sciences contributed to social psychology losing sight of alternative opportunities in both method and topic?

Critical social psychologists argue that this is very much the case. Part of the reason that critical work has become so strong is due to a reaction to the methodological restrictions the discipline has imposed on practitioners. Of course, it is not simply method that is important here, as the topics critical scholars study also seek to broaden the horizons that have previously defined the discipline. The sustained critical interest in language has opened up the range of options for both method and topic. As should now be very clear the methods available to critical social psychologists include discursive work along with such possibilities as conversation analysis and narrative analysis. The topics that are now available are impressive in breadth as they no longer rely on precise measurements or the need for manipulations. Removing these

restrictions and locating the level of fundamental enquiry within the parameters of language has, arguably, broadened the field to the extent that topics that were formerly inaccessible are now increasingly available. Studying what people have to say about particular topics means that a wide range of topics have been opened up for study and also that the data for critical research is more readily available.

- Is it fair to say that mainstream and critical social psychologists live in different worlds?

On the surface, this looks like a very curious question indeed. However, the question makes reference to the strong likelihood that critical and mainstream social psychologists do occupy very different worlds. Let me explain. The point at which different worlds emerge is the point at which differing ontological and epistemological assumptions come into play. As has been detailed earlier, mainstream views of reality are dominated by positivism whereby the nature of the world simply reveals itself for anyone who cares to observe it carefully. Critical views of reality stem from a commitment to social constructionism which holds that language mediates this reality whereby things, events and accounts are never independent of the way in which we talk about them. A powerful linguistic ontological layer guides the way we interpret events and make meaning. And this is a world positivists fail to acknowledge or inhabit. Ontological assumptions flow into matters of epistemology, which means that the methods for conducting research and ideas about what constitutes knowledge also change depending on the initial assumptions about ontology. In a very real sense then, these two camps of social psychologists occupy different worlds.

- Is reality socially constructed?

Before answering this it is firstly important to be clear about what is meant by 'socially constructed'. Critical scholars hold that reality is socially constructed; however, this should not be taken to mean they believe the world is made entirely of clouds, feathers, or other light fluffy stuff that is difficult to grasp hold of. What a socially constructed reality does imply is that reality is never beyond the field of human interpretive activity, that things may never be simply taken for granted, and that even the most cherished and obvious of assumptions should be interrogated. Most simply, the social construction of reality implies that our meaning making happens through the application of language whereby shared meaning and uncertainty are discussed and debated. Constructionists are keen to explore the ways in which such meaning making occurs and this entails a strong commitment to examining language practices. Thus the linguistic becomes of prime importance for research purposes, rather than simply something that is tacked on to the underlying 'reality' of the situation.

- Why does critical work not feature more prominently in most social psychology textbooks?

There are several things to take into account here. Firstly, there is the relative newness of critical and discourse work. As critical initiatives become more established and have greater impact it seems likely that they will gain greater recognition among mainstream textbooks. Secondly, there is the issue that mainstream textbook writers are reluctant to deal with critical agendas that criticise the very methods promoted as being exemplars of good social psychological research. At a crude level critical work could be seen as undermining the very foundations of experimental work. Imagine the hypocrisy of trying to argue for the use of experimentalism while also offering stinging criticisms of that method. Finally, it should be pointed out that some newer texts are beginning to mention critical work, see, for example, Vaughan and Hogg (2002). Arguably, what is more important than critical work receiving acknowledgement in mainstream texts is the fact that textbooks are now beginning to appear that are devoted entirely to the practice of critical social psychology.

- Given that psychology has long been fascinated with the psychological interior, how do critical social psychologists justify their detailed examinations of talk (which is exterior) about private and personal matters?

Part of the rationale for critical work is the view that for too long social psychology has ignored the obvious external aspects of phenomena in pursuit of the psychological interior. It has long been assumed that the heart of all matters psychological occurred within the interior and the appeal of approaches like cognitive psychology is that they offered the promise of revealing this interior for more detailed study. Critical social psychology turns that assumption on its head by arguing that the linguistic aspects of such psychological experiences are profoundly important in shaping the nature of that experience. This is, of course, the basic constructionist maxim – that through language our experiences are constituted. This view moves much beyond the simple claim that language simply describes our experiences.

- The mainstream literature suggests racism has become increasingly subtle – why does that make studies that look at language more appropriate for studying racism?

The broad argument here is that racism is no longer accessible through the use of crude psychological scales which purport to measure racism. Indeed, recent discursive work from the field of racism demonstrates how racism is intimately involved in the ways in which we talk about issues connected with race. The subtlety and ambivalence that characterise modern racism have rendered crude attempts to measure racism ineffective. Accordingly, the sensitivity interpretive

work offers provides an ideal way of getting inside race talk and showing how it is that the unsayable (racism) becomes said. As previously highlighted, racist sentiments are often found to be delicately wrapped in rhetoric that espouses the very principles that might be thought of as anti-racist. Careful analysis of such statements, however, can reveal the ways in which unjustifiably discriminatory statements are justified and made to seem reasonable and fair.

- What is so wrong with mainstream psychology's attempt at political neutrality?

Two aspects of this question are important to comment on – issues of possibility and desirability. Critical social psychologists hold that it simply is not possible to be politically neutral with respect to philosophy, method or topic. No matter how vigorously the image of the white-coated, neutral scientist is aspired to by mainstream social psychologists, it remains the case that political implications are inevitably intertwined with our methods, our philosophies, the very topics we study, and the ways in which we interpret results. At almost every level of the research process there are key assumptions that are politically important. This makes attempts to stand outside or beyond politics seem rather naive, with the critical position being that such politics are acknowledged reflexively as part of the research process. With respect to desirability, the critical impetus here argues for open declarations of political allegiance and full awareness of the political ramifications of one's research. Those working in critical areas maintain that strong, well-argued political positions are important as they reflect thoughtful research that fully acknowledges the reality of social disadvantage and political aspirations for change.

- Potter (1996b: 135) writes, 'Arguably, one of the most astonishing omissions in psychology for most of the 20th century has been the study of what people do: their interactions in the home and workplace.' Similarly, Reicher (2001) is critical of contemporary social psychology for almost completely failing to examine how people act towards each other. What substance do these claims have?

Both these criticisms suggest that social psychology has neglected important areas of social life. The criticisms further suggest that what has been omitted from the research agenda is the study of important everyday matters around the broad theme of how people get along with one another. This lack of attention to fundamental interactional concerns is evident when examining chapter headings in mainstream textbooks. The topics in these books reflect an overall interest in social matters, for example, whom we might like or dislike (attraction and aggression), but fail to really deal with these social matters from the perspective of how likes and dislikes play themselves out at an interactional level. Of course, this comes as no surprise as traditional methods in social psychology have tended to ignore the textual, conversational and interactional aspects of

social life. Neglect of this important dimension of social life is precisely what the criticisms above refer to.

In supporting the sentiments implied in the above criticisms and readily agreeing that such claims have substance, the next question might be to ask why this situation has come about. The answer is twofold. Firstly, although most social psychologists are practising conversationalists, when it comes to research they seem to believe that such levels of interaction are unimportant. Secondly, even if they believed in the importance of textual matters, until quite recently social psychologists may not have had the methodology available for tackling the difficulties associated with textual analysis. Critical social psychology argues for the importance of interactions and also offers suggestions as to how these might be systematically studied.

- Why is it that the critical enterprise, which holds language as the key to understanding social life, has failed to articulate its mission successfully to students?

This is both curious and puzzling, to the extent that it provided one of the key reasons for wanting to write this book. It always seemed peculiar that theorists who were so skilled in the use of language seemed unable to explain their ideas at a level that was easily understood by those new to the area. My thinking was that there was no point it putting interested students off by making the entry-level material incomprehensible – hence this book.

Revisiting criticality

Critical social psychology is a complex area that almost defies definition. Hepburn (2002) comments on this by noting that if critical social psychology were easily defined, there would be little need for entire books on the subject. A useful comment in this respect comes from Spears (1997), who notes two defining features. Firstly, critical social psychology should be seen in opposition to positivistic traditions. Secondly, a series of recurring themes is involved, which includes commitments to social constructionism, critiques of individualism and universalistic assumptions regarding human nature, and textual analysis. This definition fits with the orientation and organisation of this book, which has documented strong opposition to positivistic methods, offered a critique of psychology's longstanding relationship with individualism, and introduced social constructionism as the basis for a critical social psychology that engages in textual analysis. The first two chapters were devoted to the basic critiques that challenge experimental traditions within social psychology. Subsequent chapters outlined a theory of language on which the constructionist paradigm has been built, following which textual analysis was introduced and applied to a number of selected topics.

While the definition of critical social psychology offered by Spears (1997) accords with this book, it is also important to stress that the field of critical social psychology is a developing one. What some regard as core aspects, others may equally regard as peripheral. This diversity of views is another feature of the critical landscape and reflects the wide range of theoretical influences that have informed the directions critical work has taken. This diversity means, for example, that textbooks dealing with critical social psychology may well cover quite differing aspects of this growing and developing field. A further aspect of this diversity is the difficulty in finding an agreed definition. While there may not be consensus over basic definitions, there is vigorous debate occurring around issues of method, theory, epistemology and ontology. Spears regards these debates as positive indications of energy and vitality. Further, he makes the point that these debates offer a 'refreshing sign of life' when contrasted with mainstream social psychology, where paradigmatic and metatheoretical debates have either been forgotten or repressed.

Ussher and Walkerdine (2001) regard critical work within psychology as representing a diverse range of efforts which have, until recently, existed on the sidelines of psychology departments. Their view of this marginalised work is that we are currently witnessing rapid growth and interest in critical work. The whisperings that were formerly consigned to the disciplinary margins are now becoming clearly articulated voices that enter and impact on the mainstream. Consistent with the notion of the margins becoming amplified, this book has attempted to explain how critical concerns that have been debated extensively over the last thirty years (Armistead, 1974) may be aired constructively and positively. These concerns stem from disciplinary critique at the levels of philosophy, methodology and practice.

The exact form critical social psychology has taken varies with different authors emphasising differing aspects of criticality. Curt (1994), for example, refers to a 'climate of problematisation' whereby a forum of disenchantment becomes one of the inevitable outcomes of engaging in critique. Indeed, one of the aims of critical work is to unsettle mainstream practices and Curt applies such disenchantment across the areas of ontology, epistemology and methodology. Thus questions about the nature of social reality, what we can know about that reality, and the suitability of particular research methods become matters of debate and interrogation rather than blind acceptance. For Hepburn (2002) the emphasis is on breadth of critical concern, which includes criticism of society, and criticism of social psychology. Stainton Rogers (2003) stresses that critical social psychology applies to a range of approaches, all of which contest experimentalism.

Accessible language

As the earlier question about the failure to articulate successfully the critical mission to students implies, there are real concerns about making the language

of critical social psychology accessible. This issue is important in any new area, but especially so in an area that advocates methods that offer textual analysis and where, somewhat ironically, there are frequent comments about the inaccessibility of the language used. One of the reasons why this material may be difficult for novices is that the critical impetus requires working with language that is itself a highly abstract and symbolic system. Critical work largely rests on rethinking the way in which we understand language to work, and again this takes us to new levels of abstraction. It is not always easy to come to understand a new theory of language, especially when the sheer pervasiveness of language has meant that even as social psychologists we may have never previously theorised language. The opportunities for misunderstanding are immense and this volume has attempted to step readers through this material at a pace that is manageable, using language that is accessible, and with writing that is hopefully easily understood.

It is unfortunate, but undeniable, that difficult language has been a feature of some of the writings about critical work (Burr, 1995). Students who are fresh to this area frequently report the language employed as both impenetrable and inaccessible. As Curt (1994: 13) notes, this is contributed to by the use of 'obscure words, awkward and alien juxtaposition of phrases and grammar', and writers who would rather 'face incomphrehension than risk miscomprehension'. The second of these points amounts to the suggestion that intellectual jargon may present a cover for not trying to communicate. Either way, this presents an unsatisfactory situation for beginning students. In my attempts to teach this material over the last decade, students have reported the language to be difficult, bewildering and unhelpful. Indeed, this is a key reason why I have written this book, as I believe it is possible to present complex ideas in ways that are understandable to those who lack experience with this material.

The reasons why some writing in this area has been less than user-friendly include the suggestion that new ideas demand new language. Thus, the unfamiliarity of this language makes for reading difficulties, at least until one gains some familiarity with the language of this new psychology. In short, jargon may be a necessary evil. The necessity arises from engagement with new ideas and thoughts, which require new vocabularies. A second explanation for the denseness of language in this area is hinted at by Gough and McFadden (2001) when they claim that the discipline of critical social psychology is inherently difficult and fails to lend itself to clear and unproblematic writing. The suggestion here is that the writing is difficult because the material and ideas are unfamiliar and complex. I have resisted this suggestion and attempted to write an accessible introduction to critical social psychology. As for the material being inherently difficult, I would again resist this and suggest that there are three key requirements that students need in order to develop a good understanding of this work. The first of these is an understanding of conventional social psychology, the second a willingness to criticise this enterprise, and the final requirement is a willingness to consider language differently. This alternative view of language

invites those who are interested in working with language to be open to methods that enable a new research agenda for social psychology.

Curt (1994) argues that language is difficult in this area because it is intended to be. The suggestion here is that within a climate of problematisation, language that flows easily should be regarded with suspicion. This suspicion will reduce the chance of the reader being lulled into believing the text unproblematically mirrors the world. This is a complex point that amounts to the suggestion that difficult text serves a particular purpose. While I can accept that this is sometimes useful, I don't believe it is sufficiently important to risk placing a barrier to understanding and frustrating students. I have attempted to overcome this problem by the use of simple examples and illustrations, which hopefully have provided points of understanding around which some of the more complex material may be draped.

Positive features of critical social psychology

In conclusion I want to point to some of the positive features critical work involves. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, the kind of critical work outlined in these chapters offers quite a different approach to the study of human social life. It stands aside from the philosophical creed of positivism and the methodological dogma of experimentalism. In rejecting these ideas and methods critical social psychologists are able to avoid the 'business as usual' ethos that characterises much of psychology's approach to the new intellectual forces that have been influential in other disciplines within the social sciences. In adopting language-based approaches to the study of human social life, critical work offers a positive way in which the discipline may move forward with an alternative set of ontological and epistemological assumptions. These assumptions support methods that focus on everyday language use as the key to further understanding the complex dynamics of human social life. Further, these new methods are ethically uncontentious. This means that the ethical requirements of informed consent, confidentiality and respect are easily met. This straightforward approach to data gathering requires that research participants are informed about the topic and the method of the study in an open and honest manner. This would require informing participants of the topic of the interview (for example) and informing them that the method would involve them in a discussion about this topic. The ethical simplicity of such an approach provides a positive contrast with the massive ethical problems that have previously been responsible for giving social psychological research a bad name.

Secondly, critical approaches are based on the view of people as social agents who achieve much through the use of language. Rather than reproducing the philosophy of self-contained individualism, a socially based epistemology is heralded as offering new understandings of what we understand by the term

'social'. In particular, critical scholars adhere to the view that we are intimately linked by the use of shared discursive resources. Of course we may not agree with some of these discourses, but the fact of recognising them says something profoundly important about our shared access and understandings as social beings.

Thirdly, critical social psychologists argue for treating people more positively. An important part of such treatment is the ethical honesty with which research participants are treated, and another aspect of this treatment is the respect which personal accounts are afforded. As Garvey (2001) notes, psychologists are mostly trained to be suspicious of personal accounts on the grounds that they may be inaccurate. Further, part of the legacy of social cognition is the documentation of a series of 'cognitive errors' that highlight human frailty with respect to issues of bias and distortion of the truth. Thus the image of the person cognitive psychology offers is one of mistrust based on human failing. This notion of human fallibility contrasts strongly with critical attempts to develop new appreciation of our remarkable abilities with language. Critical work attempts to overturn this deep-seated mistrust of people's accounts, by regarding people as sophisticated language users who are adept in the subtle and complex use of language. Auburn and Lea (2003) point out that promoting the view of humans as suffering from cognitive distortion rests firmly on the assumption that talk is driven by underlying cognitive entities. This view fails spectacularly to take account of the flexible and constructive features of talk which, when examined in a functional context, demonstrate that talk is a form of social action in its own right. When people offer descriptions and accounts, important psychological business gets done. For these reasons, people's accounts warrant examination rather than dismissal, and respect rather than suspicion. As Wood and Kroger (2000) explain, taking up a social epistemology works to acknowledge the importance of social practices that are achieved through our use of talk and text. These social practices amount to considerable social and linguistic achievements and for that reason are fully deserving of research attention.

Somewhat more critically, there is the fundamental question of whether critical work is actually still about people. Arguably, the individual becomes somewhat lost in the critical rush to study language use rather than the psychology of individuals, as has been the case in the past. I would agree that critical social psychology does not take the individual as the prime locus of study. As Marshall and Raabe (1993) note, this is a purposeful move away from using the individual as the unit of analysis. However, this move does not ignore the person, but reframes them as a user of discourses that are widely shared and understood. Indeed, these linguistic resources connect us uniquely as social beings.

Finally, there is the point that critical work involves not just the rejection of what went before, but also involves participating in the development of a new form of social psychology. The intellectually exciting aspect being that those involved in language-based studies are at the forefront of applying new ideas to the issues and problems that have long fascinated social psychologists. This new form of social psychology offers the promise of a new perspective and the opportunity

to see the social world differently. Alternative social worlds are indeed on offer. One gratifying point that students consistently make when evaluating the worth of such approaches is that they strongly endorse the way in which these approaches have increased their awareness of the workings of language in the social realm. This is not simply an increased sensitivity to language, but suggests that they are in the process of developing an understanding of, and openness to, a new version of social psychology. Being able to see something familiar in a new way is an exciting prospect, but comes with a warning. As pleasing as this insight may seem, it remains important not to forget the lesson about the overwhelming familiarity of language. The sheer pervasiveness of language can mean that we take it for granted and this is something we must remain wary of.

Conclusion

The story that has introduced critical social psychology draws to an end. Reflections on the mainstream practices have concluded with unfavourable assessments. Social psychology has been firmly in the grip of positivism for the last 50 years and this has contributed to both methodological constriction and ethical dubiousness. In reconsidering the philosophical basis on which the discipline might develop new aims and practices, a social constructionist ontology has been introduced. This orientation argues for the adoption of language-based research. It concludes that when language is embraced as the fundamental social reality, critical social psychologists must refocus their attention on the accounts, explanations and interactions that are such a pervasive feature of everyday social life. Discursive methods have been explained and liberally illustrated in a number of areas where they offer an alternative research approach that holds the promise of new ways of understanding the social world. The story that encourages questions and criticisms has ultimately led to the possibility of exciting and innovative change within the discipline. While this sentence marks the end of this book, I trust that for some, this will not mean the end but rather the beginning.

Glossary

Action orientation of language: contrasts strongly with the assumption that language is a neutral medium that simply reflects reality. This view holds that language is active and dynamic and inevitably involved in social outcomes. The action orientation of language forms a key foundation for the work of critical and discursive psychologists who seek to examine the ways in which accounts are put together and what might be achieved by various constructions.

Agentic state: a term used in Milgram's explanation of high levels of obedience to authority. It was proposed that individual autonomy and free will were temporarily suspended while the person acted as the agent of the authority issuing orders.

Analogue studies: studies which share some likeness with the original work, but which usually seek to extend understanding of the object of study by extending the range of variables that are believed to have an important influence.

Behaviourism: a school of thought that dominated psychology in the 1960s and 1970s, and which regarded observation and description of overt behaviour as core to understanding human social actions. Measurement, control and modification became the catch cry of behaviourists, whose exclusive focus on the externally observable gave rise to the popularity of cognitive psychology.

Coactors: research participants who perform identical activities while in the presence of others who are also engaged in these activities.

Cognitivism: a dominant school of thought within psychology over the last 25 years. Cognitivism assumes that the most important aspects of being human occur through cognitive processes such as thinking, reasoning and decision making. It is further believed that these processes occur within an individualised psychological interior, thereby conflicting with more socially oriented

perspectives that highlight the importance of language, conversation and social interaction.

Constitutive theory of language: a rejection of the view that language merely mirrors the external world, arguing instead that language has a constructive and constitutive function. See **Representational theory of knowledge**, **Constructionist view of language**.

Constructionist view of language: this rejects the common view of language as descriptive and neutral, arguing instead for the active and constructive functions of language.

Conversation analysis: this is often referred to as simply CA, and involves the systematic study of talk that occurs in everyday human interaction. CA aims to identify the interactional structures and processes which, as Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) point out, are studied as recorded transcription of naturally occurring social intercourse.

Demand characteristics: cues within the experimental setting which might lead participants to develop ideas about what might be expected of them.

Dilemma of stake: historically, this notion has developed in response to the standard psychological assumption of research participants being uninterested in the subject of the research. Discursive psychology overturns this assumption with the view that participants are interested, invested and involved. Recognising this level of psychological investment and the need to manage it in talk has become incorporated as a feature of discursive research. The dilemma refers broadly to speakers' management of interests and investments in such a way as *not* to appear to be motivated by those interests.

Disciplinary matrix: an idea that comes from Kuhn's philosophy of science. A disciplinary matrix refers to the shared beliefs that doing research in particular ways will enhance the knowledge a discipline may produce. The matrix includes assumptions about the subjects, theories, methods and language that define a scientific discipline.

Empiricism: the view (still held by most contemporary psychologists) that knowledge should be derived from observation and experiment. Empiricists place great store in the power of individual observation as the basis for modern science.

Enlightenment: the period of intellectual history that came about in response to the power of the Church and the monarchy which dominated the Western world throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Enlightenment

period sought to promote the values of rationality and empiricism, which have helped define what is currently understood as modernism.

Epistemological contingency: a term which stands in contrast to the mainstream attempts to establish generalised laws of human behaviour. Epistemological contingency argues that psychological knowledge is inevitably linked into its cultural and historical context. Given the importance of contingency (time and place), this makes attempts to capture 'laws' of human social life both naive and impossible.

Epistemology: the philosophy, theory and study of knowledge. Associated with a complex set of questions about how we come to know something, the constitution of knowledge and the bases on which we can make knowledge claims.

Experimentation: formal, controlled attempts to assess the impact of some variables on others. While mainstream psychologists believe that experimentation provides the method of choice since it conforms closely to the requirements of 'science', critical psychologists hold that there are other important ways in which human social life can be examined.

Extreme case formulation: a technical term used in discourse analysis, which enhances rhetorical effectiveness by emphasising extremity. For example, in suggesting that some action 'always' occurs, the extremity implied by 'always' makes the event seem unexceptional.

Field experiment: experiments that are conducted in natural settings rather than in laboratories. They offer the promise of increased ecological validity at the expense of possible loss of control.

Focus group: a group that comes together for the purposes of discussing particular issues and topics. These interactions are recorded and guided by a facilitator who ensures that the discussion stays focused on the topic in question and that group members are all given the opportunity to have a say.

Gestalt: derived from the Gestalt school of psychology, which emphasises the importance of considering the whole rather than merely the parts that make up the complete pattern.

Idiographic methods: an approach to research that seeks to understand better the workings of the individual. The case study has become the most characteristic idiographic method with its intensive focus on the detailed study of the individual.

Individualism: an orientation to the study of social life that privileges the internal workings of the individual as being the key source of psychological

explanation. Traditionally, social psychology has uncritically adopted this perspective, which has proved to be of limited use in the study of social phenomena.

Interpretive gap: the phrase coined to refer to the necessary interpretation that must occur between representation of objects and the actual objects themselves (between language and things). Mainstream social psychology assumes a simple one–to–one correspondence between these two and fails to acknowledge the importance of such interpretive work. Critical social psychology explores such interpretation and acknowledges the interpretive importance of context, history and reflexivity.

Interpretive repertoire: also referred to as 'interpretative', repertoires are culturally available linguistic resources from which accounts may be put together. They include related sets of terms that are often organised around a central metaphor. Hepburn (2002) refers to them as ideas used in making sense of, and evaluating, the world.

Intrapsychic: that which is thought to occur within the mind of the individual. The notion is heavily individualistic and cognitive and as such is not favoured by critical scholars.

Introspectionism: an early method in psychology involving intensive self-reflection. This exploration of one's own thoughts, emotions, memories and experiences was subsequently overtaken by behaviourism, which shifted the focus of attention from the psychological interior to the observable exterior.

Methodology: refers to the ways in which research is conducted within the discipline. This book has repeatedly argued that the experimental method is inappropriate for the study of human social life.

Modernism: promotes the view that truth is singular and must be accessed through rationality, empiricism and the power of observation. These values underpin modern scientific enquiry. Modernist views of language are representational whereby language simply mirrors the 'true' state of affairs.

Nomothetic methods: an approach to research which seeks to develop generalised laws regarding social behaviour. The experiment has become the emblematic nomothetic method.

Ontology: concerned with the nature of reality, existence and being. In dealing with fundamental questions of existence and reality, ontological questions precede questions of epistemology. Ontological questions have crucial implications for epistemology and what it is that can be known.

Positivism: a philosophy of science that has guided experimentalism within psychology. Positivism is closely related to empiricism and holds that the true nature of the world will reveal itself upon observation, and that such observations provide knowledge that is objective and free from bias.

Postmodernism: an intellectual and cultural response to modernism whereby theoretical 'grand narratives' are replaced by multiple perspectives. Within the social sciences postmodernism has challenged the claim that truth is singular and is accessed through scientific enquiry. One marker of postmodern work has been the focus of attention on language and the way in which we understand language to operate.

Qualitative: a broad term for analysis of data that is language based. Qualitative analysis is often contrasted with quantitative analysis, which relies mostly on transforming data into numerical indices for statistical purposes. With qualitative analyses no attempt is made to measure the data that has been collected.

Quantiphrenia: refers to the obsessive lengths to which psychologists are prepared to go in order to measure all aspects of social life. This measurement imperative is closely associated with the desire to index all such measurements to numbers.

Quantitative: a broad term for analysis that is numerically based. Contrasting with qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis is closely associated with experimentalism and old-style social psychological research. Measurement forms the backbone of quantitative analysis.

Reductionism: the idea that a complex social phenomenon may be better understood by studying the parts that are thought to cause it. In social psychology reductionistic explanations of phenomena such as racism have been criticised as being overly individualistic and employing circular logic.

Representational theory of knowledge: representationalists view language as a system of signs that have fixed and agreed meanings. Further, representationalists hold that language mirrors the reality it portrays. In representing reality, language is thought to name aspects of reality, but remain separate from that reality. These views contrast strongly with the constitutive and constructionist views of language, which hold that meaning is negotiated and that language works actively and powerfully in creating reality.

Rhetoric: a term originally referring to the art of oratory, now more generally used in connection with the way language is oriented towards argument and persuasion.

Social cognition: also known as social thinking this perspective, which has had a major impact on social psychology since the 1970s, applies the principles of cognitive psychology to social phenomena. Social cognition relies on the metaphor of the human mind as a computer with tasks such as remembering, decision making and problem solving all regarded as forms of 'information processing'.

Social constructionism: an alternative philosophical paradigm to positivism, which emphasises the importance of language and argues that language is actively involved in the creation of psychological reality.

Systemic blindness: part of a wider criticism that individualism limits understanding and the study of social problems. These problems are reduced to an analysis of individual responsibility, which limits the extent to which more systemic analyses and solutions might be considered.

Totalitarianism: political control that offers neither recognition nor tolerance of those with differing views.

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