Theory and Practice: Psychoanalytic Sociology as Psycho-Social Studies

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ABSTRACT
Over the past few years there has been an increasing interest in the use of psychoanalytic ideas within a sociological framework. These ideas have been largely developed within sociological theory rather than practice. There does, however, seem to be a new frame of thought and practice emerging which we could term psycho-social studies, perhaps even a new discipline in its own right. In this article I will discuss the development of the use of psychoanalytic ideas around sociological issues, explore some of the tensions that have arisen and evaluate the implications for methodological practice.

KEY WORDS
emotion / method / psychoanalytic sociology / psycho-social

Introduction

In this article I want to discuss the nature of psychoanalytic sociology and the implication theory has for a psycho-social method. I will argue that a psycho-social method in qualitative research enhances both the experience of the research environment by researcher and researched and the quality of the information or data collected. It is not my intention here to discuss theory in depth, this has been done elsewhere (see Clarke, 2003a; Craib, 1989; Elliott, 1999). I feel that the main problematic in this area of study is how we actually ‘do it’ and argue that there is an emerging discipline based in sociological and psychoanalytic ideas that bridges this gap and points to a way forward in qualitative data analysis, that is, psycho-social studies. A psychoanalytic sociology
is a synthesis of both worlds, rather than an opportunity to stake a position and stick to it in an inflexible way. We all know that there is a social construction of our realities as much as we know that we are emotional people who construct our ‘selves’ in imagination and affect. Neither sociology nor psychoanalysis provides a better explanation of the world than the other, but together they provide a deeper understanding of the social world.

I start by outlining some of the problems around the use of psychoanalysis and the often uneasy relationship the discipline has had with sociology and vice-versa. I think this is important because often disagreements occur over deeply epistemological ideas, such as the nature of science and positivism, as much as they do from a general hostility to psychoanalysis. I then examine the historical development of psychoanalytic sociology, couched in terms of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and specifically the ideas of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Jürgen Habermas. I then turn to a more contemporary debate around the sociology of the emotions to stress the importance of the role of emotion not in theory but in practice. This acts as a precursor to the second half of this article which addresses method and practice. In other words, how we ‘do it’.

It is in methodological practice, not theory, that I think a psycho-social approach has its strongest claim to innovation in the social sciences. I conclude by arguing that a psycho-social approach to research methodology informed by psychoanalytic sociology can give us clearer insight into the emotional construction of the research environment and the reflexivity of the researcher; the ability of research to give voice to the research subject rather than a dominant theoretical paradigm; and the role of the unconscious in transmitting our ethnic, gendered, and class identities.

Sociology and Psychoanalysis: Psychoanalytic Sociology?

Psychoanalysis has always enjoyed an uneasy partnership with sociology. There are various reasons for this, based mainly in epistemology, the nature of the unconscious mind and doubts around Freud’s ideas that misleadingly couch psychoanalysis as a science. Another tension has been the nature of psychoanalysis and the tension between biology and constructivism in which the idea of innate or inherited biological drives is simply unpalatable to the sociological establishment. Indeed it is symptomatic of this tension that I feel compelled to discuss it at the start of this article.

As Ian Craib (1998) notes, the dismissal of psychoanalysis as a science ‘is the usual ground for the philosophical dismissal of Freud’, and this dismissal is based in positivistic notions of science. Freud proposed a new theory and practice; the practice – ‘the talking cure’ – is very much based in an interpretive and hermeneutic understanding of the human psyche. Freud, however, claimed throughout his life that psychoanalysis was very much a science and, in doing so, left himself open to constant criticism from medical, philosophical and
sociological traditions. The debate around whether psychoanalysis is a science, that we find expressed in the views of Popper (1983), Gellner (1985) and particularly Grunbaum (1984), exploded in 1993 when The New York Review of Books published Frederick Crew's (1993) essay 'The Unknown Freud'. This damning report on psychoanalysis and Freud's theory describes psychoanalysis as an explanatory worthless hobbyhorse. The problem with taking this as definitive is that it detracts from what Freud does give us in terms of interpretation, and what it might offer sociology in terms of its hermeneutic and philosophical quality.

Craib (1998) argues that a hermeneutic reading of Freud opens up many new possibilities. Using the work of Paul Ricoeur (1970) and Jürgen Habermas (1968), Craib argues that philosophers can learn from Freud rather than trying to teach him – 'they do not destroy psychoanalysis but take it beyond itself' (Craib, 1998: 133). Habermas uses psychoanalysis as a way of maintaining a hermeneutic approach to his philosophical sociology and pointing to forms of ideological domination. Ricoeur uses Freud's ideas to point to the unconscious distortion of meanings in tandem with a more traditional hermeneutic approach to conscious interpretations and meaning. It is Freud the sociologist and philosopher that are often forgotten in lieu of Freud the biologist, but there are many more interpretations of Freud's work than mere biology. These range from the philosophical discussions mentioned above to Lacan's reconstruction of Freud with his emphasis on language, to the writings of 'third wave' feminists, for example Juliet Mitchell's (1974) book Psychoanalysis and Feminism and in the work of Julia Kristeva (1989, 1991) and Luce Irigaray (1985).

As Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) note, after Ricoeur (1970), the entities that Freud discovered in the psyche, the id, ego and super ego, are not entities at all, but interpretations – 'the unconscious becomes something that does not really exist, but is an ascribed meaning' (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 94). They argue that the concept of hermeneutics has undergone a fundamental change:

Psychoanalysis can be seen as belonging to the hermeneutics of suspicion which, apart from Freud, is also represented by Marx and Nietzsche. All three have probed behind what they conceived as an illusory self consciousness to a deeper-lying, more unpleasant or 'shameful' one. In Freud the latter appears as the libido, in Marx as the economic interest, and in Nietzsche the will to power. (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 95)

Alvesson and Skoldberg argue that the history of hermeneutics has been a history which has been devoid of such suspicion; psychoanalysis adds another dimension on the periphery of the hermeneutic tradition seeking the irrational elements behind societal phenomena. So, we have in some sense the notion that psychoanalytic ideas can be employed in a hermeneutic interpretive method. This is a far cry from the biological nature of Freud's early work and I would suggest far more palatable for sociologists. If we look back historically then it is the early work of members of the Frankfurt School that
produced a real synthesis between sociological and psychoanalytic thinking, both in theory and practice.

Horkheimer and Adorno's (1994 [1947]) *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and in particular the chapter 'Elements of Anti-Semitism' is a raging and polemic rant whose object is National Socialism, Nazism, fascism. It is a considered and critical attack on racial ideology, hate crimes and German fascism. It pulls no punches and is arguably borne on the shockwaves of Auschwitz and the programme of human destruction in Nazi Germany. Horkheimer and Adorno describe the elements of anti-Semitism in terms of its blindness and murderous ethos: ‘attacking or defending blindly, the persecutor and his victim belong to the same sphere of evil. Anti-Semitic behaviour is generated in situations where blinded men robbed of their subjectivity are set loose as subjects’ (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1994: 171). For Horkheimer and Adorno anti-Semitism is a deeply imprinted schema; it is a ritual of civilization, indeed the very act of killing simply conforms to the way of life of the anti-Semite. There is, for Horkheimer and Adorno, a measure of truth in the idea that it is an outlet – anger is discharged on defenceless victims. Interestingly, they make the point that both the victims and persecutors in this type of dynamic are interchangeable. There is no such thing as a born anti-Semite, so gypsies, Jews, Protestants, Catholics may all take the place of the murderer as the norm. Horkheimer and Adorno use psychoanalytic ideas – projection, sublimation, mimesis – to explain the plight of the Jew in Nazi Germany.

Horkheimer and Adorno's work on anti-Semitism contains a critique of capitalism, positivism and scientific rationality on the one hand; on the other, it gives us a basis for the explanation of how we form our idea of self in relation to others, and our changing relationship to nature. It provides one of the first psycho-social accounts of racism by addressing both social structure and affect and notably, if you take *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al., 1950) together, then they provide both a theoretical and philosophical account of social conflict in tandem with empirical social research. This is one of the major threads we see developing in contemporary critical theory although the emphasis for many theorists have moved away from psychoanalysis to more eclectic psychological ideas – for example Bauman's (1989) ‘stranger’. Other members of the school are also well known for their psychoanalytic contributions to sociology: Eric Fromm's (1941) *Escape from Freedom* and Herbert Marcuse's (1956) *Eros and Civilization* are among the classic texts of critical theory. It was perhaps Jürgen Habermas more than any other social thinker who revitalized the idea of using psychoanalysis as a form of social philosophy.

Habermas's (1968) seminal book *Knowledge and Human Interests* is an attempt to analyse the connections between knowledge itself and the interests of the human species. It is also a critique of science as the dominant and only form of knowledge. It is Habermas's contention that systematic self reflection is the path to self-knowledge; self-knowledge helps us free ourselves from ideological domination. Self-reflection therefore leads to emancipation. The key to
this is to think about a hermeneutic method in terms of reflection, which is why
Habermas turns to psychoanalysis. Habermas's notions of the cognitive inter-
ests are well discussed elsewhere (see Held, 1980; Outhwaite, 1994; How,
2003) but briefly: all knowledge for Habermas is founded in cognitive interests.
These interests are the basic interests of the human species and are the under-
lying modes through which reality is disclosed and acted upon. They delineate
a general orientation which yields a viewpoint – from which reality is con-
structed. Cognitive strategies are determined by the conditions and problems
governing the reproduction of the human species. So we have the technical
interest with the according social sphere, the world of work; a practical inter-
est embedded in the social domain of interaction and communication; and
finally, the emancipatory interest and the world of power relations. The corre-
sponding types of knowledge are empirico analytic, historico hermeneutic and
critical theory.

For Habermas, it is very much the idea of psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic
interpretative science based in self-reflection that lends itself as model for the
mapping of the cognitive interests. Freud provided a model that reflected on its
presuppositions and, after all, that is what critical theory is all about – critical
sustained self-reflection on our methods and practices. Habermas argues that
initially psychoanalysis appears only as a special form of interpretation, but on
closer inspection we can see that psychoanalysis involves a much deeper form
of hermeneutics, in other words a depth hermeneutics that addresses both con-
scious forces (as Dilthey's hermeneutics did) and unconscious or unknown
memories that make up historical life.

Habermas points to the method and role that psychoanalysis can play in
uncovering distortions and meanings in everyday language, in linguistic expres-
sions and text. Of course for Freud the royal road to the unconscious was
through dream analysis and, as Habermas notes, for Freud the dream was the
'normal' model of pathological conditions. The dreamer awakes, but does not
understand his or her own creation – the dream. Psychoanalysis goes beyond
the hermeneutic because not only does it try to grasp the meaning of distorted
text, but also the meaning of the text distortion itself. Transposing this to soci-
ety, we can start to see a method for uncovering distorted communication and
ideology. The emancipatory cognitive interest aims at the pursuit of reflection –
'in the power of self-reflection, knowledge and interest are one' (Habermas,

Therefore, for Habermas freedom equals knowledge of the real processes
underlying human consciousness and motivation. What makes us 'unfree' is
that we are driven by both internal and external forces that we are not aware
of. Internal forces are covered by repression; external forces are masked by
ideology. Self-reflection can free us from both these internal and external con-
straints. In doing this, Habermas is trying to introduce us to a way in which a
substantive rationality unclouded by ideology can be introduced back into the
project of modernity. There have of course been some major criticisms of
Habermas's work, many of which he addresses in an additional postscript to
Knowledge and Human Interests. As David Held (1980) notes, Habermas’s formulation of the emancipatory interest can be ambiguous. So, the basic conditions of human existence are defined as work, language and domination, which are the basis for the cognitive orientations and are given equal standing. Yet in other places Habermas views work and language as the fundamental conditions of human existence which are distorted by domination. The emancipatory interest develops to transcend these distortions (Held, 1980: 319). Outhwaite also outlines a further point of criticism that he argues Habermas has systematically addressed. That is his notion of the technical-instrumental interest attached to empirical science. Outhwaite argues that Habermas’s view of the sciences is very much based in a Comtean model of positivism – of prediction and control, and therefore power. There has, however, been a change in the way that science is viewed, particularly after, and influenced by the publication of, Kuhn’s The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1970 [1962]).

Despite these criticisms, Outhwaite reminds us that even if Habermas had stopped writing in the 1960s he would have provided us with a huge contribution to philosophy, social theory and sociology. Knowledge and Human Interests itself and its ‘positive implications amount to an enormous promissory note to fill out, some time, just what a critical social science would look like (Outhwaite, 1994: 37). So, it is in these classic studies that we first see a marriage between sociological and psychoanalytic ideas, couched as either critical theory or critical sociological theory.

Sociology, Emotions and Psychoanalysis

More recently the interdisciplinary approach outlined above has tended to find a home in literary and cultural studies in the United States, while in the UK the late Ian Craib made an enormous contribution to psychoanalytic sociology and social theory. Craib’s work centred on developing a psychoanalytic sociology of the emotions and emanated in an exchange with Simon Williams and Gillian Bendelow (which I have outlined elsewhere; Clarke, 2003b) which appeared as an exchange of articles in Sociology. All three authors were in some sense coming from the same place in that they were trying to highlight Sociology’s sometimes neglectful engagement with the emotions. Williams and Bendelow (1996) argue that emotion has been seen as something that either needs to be tamed, or harnessed, often by the hand of reason, and that hand is nearly always male. The emotional is often seen as the antithesis of all that is calm, controlled, detached and scientific. Simon Williams (1998) argues that this is not so. We have to rid ourselves of the idea that the emotions are the poor relation to reason, indeed for Williams: ‘Without emotions, social life, including our decision making capacities and our ability to make informed choices amongst a plurality of options, would be impossible’ (Williams, 1998: 761). The debate centred not so much on the emotions per se but on the old chestnut – social constructionism versus biology.
Ian Craib (1997) published an article in Sociology in which he argued that social constructionism can be seen as a manic psychosis, a defence against entering the Kleinian depressive position. Constructionist sociology is unable to recognize the limits of its own discipline, unable to take on the ideas of other disciplines, for example the sciences, and rejects or ejects threatening knowledge. The upshot of this is that we are unable to discover anything new: ‘we already know what is happening’ (Craib, 1997: 14). Craib admits that there is much irony in his article, and I think what he is arguing is that we should take on a range of ideas, from biological to social construct. Again Craib (1995) lends his psychoanalytic vision to a critique of a series of articles published in Sociology in the early 1990s. Referring to Duncombe and Marsden’s article ‘Love and Intimacy: The Gender Division of Emotion and “Emotion Work”’ (1993) and Jackson’s ‘Even Sociologists Fall in Love: An Exploration in the Sociology of the Emotions’ (1993), Craib argues that a sociology of the emotions may restrict rather than extend our understanding of emotional life (Craib, 1995: 151). Craib’s basic criticism is that Duncombe and Marsden’s article simply adopts the current ideology of the time in relation to the emotions, a stereotype, Craib argues, which is mistaken for reality – that of women being responsible for emotional work in relationships and being more aware of emotional connectedness, and the concomitant idea that men cannot deal with emotions. Craib counters this with a number of points informed by Kleinian psychoanalysis. First he argues that men and women are engaged in interlocking forms of emotional work. Second, there is no simple relationship between the experience and expression of emotion. Third, for Craib, relationships are always more complex than the individuals who make them up. Finally, Duncombe and Marsden’s article seems to represent some form of ideal relationship, which they find does not match reality – a stereotype. Turning to Jackson’s article, Craib is worried that all emotion is reduced to a social construction. Again, Craib’s concern and argument is clear: ‘Since human beings are emotional beings, sociology clearly has something to say about emotions – but so does biology, psychology, social psychology and other disciplines’ (Craib, 1995: 152).

Craib’s article was challenged the following year in a piece by Simon Williams and Gillian Bendelow (1996) in which they make some salient points about Craib’s argument and also, I believe, show us a way forward in this debate. They point out first that while British sociology has neglected the emotions, this is not a new field – it has been big business in American sociology for a long time. Second, they note that Craib charges sociological commentaries on emotions as crass and insensitive as psychoanalytic discussions of society. This, they believe, is an overstatement which neglects much of the good work done in sociology, and this position seems to be some form of ‘border skirmish’ between sociology and psychoanalysis (Williams and Bendelow, 1996: 145). Craib himself is using polarities to make a point, even bringing together different disciplines, but I think Craib goes too far. Those familiar with Craib’s work (1989, 1992, 2001) will know that he draws on a huge variety of social and psychoanalytic theory in his writings on the social and psychological aspects of
the individual and society. But also there are clear arguments to support Duncombe and Marsden’s argument (see Duncombe and Marsden, 1996; Marshall and Witz, 2004), and indeed authors such as Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson (2000) and Valerie Walkerdine et al. (2001) have successfully challenged dominant ideas around theory, method and masculinity in their work (see also Frosh et al., 2002). It is a combination of these views that give a psychoanalytic sociology its explanatory power, in other words a truly interdisciplinary perspective.

I have argued (Clarke, 2003b) that Craib and Williams and Bendelow are all following a similar theoretical trajectory. All three authors map out an interdisciplinary perspective in the study of emotions which has elements of sociology, social constructionism, interactionism and psychoanalysis and address issues such as social action, agency, gender and the embodiment of the emotions. Neither of these approaches wholly discounts elements of biology or the social. In The Managed Heart, Arlie Hochschild (1983) gives a wonderful account of a model of emotion in which she oscillates between biological organismic and interactionist approaches in a new social theory of emotion. Hochschild joins three theoretical traditions, interactionism in the work of Goffman, Dewey and Gerth and Mills in which she explores what gets ‘done to’ emotion. From the organismic tradition through Darwin ‘I posit a sense of what is there, impermeable, to be “done to”, namely, a biological given sense related to an orientation to action. Finally, through Freud, I circle back from the organismic to the interactional tradition, tracing through an analysis of the signal function of feeling how social factors influence what we expect and thus what feelings signal’ (Hochschild, 1983: 222).

In other words, Hochschild is positing an interactional view of biologically derived emotion which we could view as a potentiality which is shaped by the social. This is a position often adopted by psychoanalytic sociologists who argue that there is always a tension between outer and inner worlds, between social structure and society. I am particularly thinking of the work of Ian Craib (1989), Barry Richards (1989), Michael Rustin (1991) and, more recently Elliott (1999) and my own work on the social psychodynamics of racism (Clarke, 2003a). Interestingly, psychotherapists such Farhad Dalal (2002) have started incorporating sociological ideas into their analysis of ‘race’ and racialization.

For me, psychoanalytic sociology is a synthesis of the best of both worlds. It is not an opportunity to stake a position and stick to it inflexibly. Unfortunately, as sociologists this is often what we are taught to do, whether this is in defending our theoretical position or defending our thesis (literally). The reality is, however (or should I say I suspect it is), that we simply have a passion for our subject area and a very real concern for the serious social issues that we are addressing. To these ends I argue that a psychoanalytic sociology can only add to sociological analysis. I think we can make psychoanalytic thinking more palatable by positing it as a hermeneutic method, a way of thinking which helps us think in terms of a sociology of the imagination, and of
human emotion. Neither discipline provides a better explanation, but together they provide a deeper understanding or, as Max Weber would say, Verstehen.

In restating this argument around the sociology of the emotions, what I want to draw our attention to, and indeed I will expand on this in the following section of this article, is the importance of the acknowledgement of emotion, not in theory, but in our method and fieldwork practices. While our sociological training can give us very real insights into the structures of modern (or post modern) life that facilitate, for example, racism, sexism, inequality and social exclusion, a psychoanalytic sociology or psycho-social studies can help us understand the powerful affective forces and embodied, visceral nature of these phenomena – the mad, often crazy side of our lives if you like. There are therefore, I would argue, three clear areas in which psychoanalysis can complement sociological analysis. First, a psychoanalytic sociology addresses the affective component of human social relations. That is, we are not just rational social creatures but live in a world of social relations that are tempered by feelings and emotive dynamics that are often not obvious, or to use psychoanalytic language, motivation in action is often unconscious. Second, there is an emphasis on the psychological relatedness of the individual, society and social phenomena so, for example, in previous articles I have tried to understand the rapidity, and often eruptive nature, of ethnic hatred and its visceral content (see Clarke, 2003a). Again, I would argue that the way in which we relate to Others as both individuals and groups is driven both by conscious (some might say rational) perceptions and ideas, but also by unconscious perceptions, desires and wishes. Finally, and I think most importantly, a psychoanalytic sociology addresses in parallel the complex interrelationship between socio-structural and psychological factors. In other words, social structures impact on the psychological as much as the psychological can play a part in structuring the social. There is, if you like, after Fanon (1968) both a political economy and psychodynamic of social phenomena. Fanon has shown us how black identity has been forged out of a complex amalgam of colonial ideas about how black people are, or should be, that fit the political economy of the colonial and post-colonial situation.

I have used the terms psychoanalytic sociology and psycho-social studies interchangeably throughout this article thus far, and I’m wondering how we might delineate some difference between the two labels. I think in practice there is little difference; psychoanalytic sociology has tended to be based in social theory whereas the emerging discipline of psycho-social studies has had more of a focus on practice. Certainly in the handful of universities in the UK where there is a research cluster in this area, or where psycho-social studies is offered as a degree pathway, there is more of an emphasis on interdisciplinary work based loosely in the social sciences. I’m also wondering if the uneasy relationship between sociology and psychoanalysis has prompted a guarded name change. For me, though, the most important thing about psycho-social studies (informed by psychoanalytic sociology) is the emphasis on empirical research in which the emotional life of both researcher and respondent are explored. This enables, after Habermas, a critical and sustained self-reflection on our methods.
and practice. So, for example, how are we to understand identity if we do not look at both the socio-structural determinants of a person's life and the way in which they impinge on the inner world of emotion and vice versa? After all, we live in a world where one person's fiction is another's fact; one person's rationality is another's irrationality.

There is a growing interest in mainstream research in the social sciences in work that has a psycho-social dimension; indeed this is evident in the latest ESRC Identities and Social Action Programme where a number of projects use psycho-social methods. This next section introduces the reader to some of the basic methodological practices of psycho-social research and some of the challenges it issues to mainstream sociological thinking.

**Method and Practice**

In the same way that I started the first section of this article with a discussion of the uneasy relationship between psychoanalysis and sociology, I want to reiterate Froggett and Wengraf's recent sentiments in relation to the development of method:

> The development of psycho-social and psycho-societal approaches within contemporary social sciences has been hampered in recent years by a widespread ignorance of, or hostility to, psychoanalysis, usually both. (Froggett and Wengraf, 2004: 95)

This may be the case, but it is also the case that wide ranging inroads have made into social science disciplines by the psycho-social perspective, particularly with reference to methodology. These inroads in some sense challenge masculinist notions of rationality not only structured in positivism but in the social sciences in general. For example, this is implicit in Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) work which I discuss later in this section, in Stephen Frosh et al.'s (2002, 2003) work on young masculinities and Valerie Walkerdine et al.'s (2001) *Growing up Girl* (see also Lucey et al., 2003). Although these approaches emanate from what we could term a critical psychology approach to the study of the human subject, they share common concerns and new ideas around research methodology with psychoanalytic sociology. Indeed Frosh (2003) notes that psychosocial research should not decouple itself from mainstream psychology (or in this case sociology) because 'a critical approach of the kind psychosocial studies might offer is important for engaging with, and shifting, some of the more fixed and limited assumptions of the traditional psychological knowledge-enterprise' (Frosh, 2003: 1550).

In a recent article in *Qualitative Research* (Clarke, 2002) I suggested what a psycho-social research method for the social sciences would look like using a small qualitative study of black students in higher education as an example (see also Clarke, 2000). The method was largely built on Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson's (2000) psycho-social model in *Doing Qualitative Research Differently*. Hollway and Jefferson argue that using a psycho-social perspective
in research practice necessarily involves conceptualizing both researcher and respondent as co-producers of meanings. There is an emphasis in their work on the unconscious dynamics between researcher and researched and the use of free association through narrative interviews. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) use the ‘biographical interpretative method’, which ‘can be summarized in terms of four principles, each designed to facilitate the production of the interviewee’s meaning frame’ (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 34). The first principle is to use open ended questions. So, for example, in my current research project on notions of home, identity and the construction of ‘whiteness’ in contemporary Britain (see Clarke and Garner, forthcoming), I would simply ask the respondent what the notion of ‘home’ meant to them. Rather than attempting to use a fairly closed and leading question which may have evoked either a yes or no answer, or made the respondent feel that they had to think of a particular incident, this question was designed to get the respondent to talk about the meaning and quality of experience of notions of home, identity and community – in other words, how it related to their life.

The second principle of the biographical interpretative method is that of eliciting a story. Again, a statement such as ‘tell me something about your background’ is more likely to elicit a story, a narrative, than, for example, ‘where were you born?’. As Hollway and Jefferson note, story telling shares many things in common with the psychoanalytic method of free association:

The particular story told, the manner and detail of its telling, the points emphasised, the morals drawn, all represent choices made by the story-teller. Such choices are revealing, often more so than the teller suspects. (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 35)

This principle also allows the researcher to look at various forms of unconscious communication, of transference, counter-transference and projective identifications that are present in the interview relationship. Why do people tell certain parts of certain stories? Why are they telling them? What form of response are they trying to elicit from the interviewer? It’s often the case that the respondent will say at the end of an interview, ‘Did I give you the “right” answers?’

The third principle is to try to avoid using ‘why’ questions. Hollway and Jefferson note that this may seem counter-intuitive as people’s own explanations of their actions are useful in understanding them. The problem with a ‘why’ question, however, is that you often get a sociological or clichéd answer. This is a more difficult area in fieldwork because the ‘why’ question tempts an explanation, something we are all looking for. If we ask why someone moved to a particular community, then a respondent will often couch answers in terms of school availability, transport links or proximity to shops and services. These are all very important, but go no way in explaining what community means to the respondent. If instead we couch the question in terms of ‘how do you feel about living in this particular area?’, then the response is more likely to be in the form of a story or narrative, where the respondent attaches meaning to experience.
The final principle is that of using respondents' ordering and phrasing. This involves careful listening in order to be able to ask follow-up questions using the respondents' own words and phrases without offering our own interpretations. As Hollway and Jefferson note, although it appears a relatively simple task, 'it required discipline and practice to transform ourselves from a highly visible asker of questions, to the almost invisible, facilitating catalyst to their stories' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 36). This does not imply the stance of an objective observer; rather it means not imposing a structure on the narrative.

So, if again I use the example of the current research project that I am working on, then we could summarize the psycho-social method in this way: This method uses biography and life history interviews (Chamberlayne et al., 2000; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) to situate processes of identification within the subject's life history. These identifications include affective attachments to notions of community, nation and belonging. This will uncover the more subtle psychological dynamics behind identity formation within the context of the in-depth interview. This method is both biographical and systematic, and crucially addresses the construction of the research environment and data by both researcher and respondent. The guiding principles of the method are thus:

- The use of two unstructured interviews with each respondent. The first will be an unstructured life history interview. The second, a semi-structured interview which focuses on substantive areas of perceptions of access to welfare, housing and education and the relationship these perceptions have to the subject's sense of community, belonging and the 'other'.
- The use of open-ended questions which allow us to explore meaning with reference to the respondent's life experience.
- Eliciting a life history or biography tells us a great deal about the respondent's identity and identification with, for example, authority figures. Biography will enable us to investigate whether there is some form of correlation between early childhood experience and later perceptions and experiences of 'others'.
- Central to this method is the notion of 'free association'. By allowing the respondent to structure and guide the interview, we are able to gain insight into the unconscious motivations, forces and anxieties behind the construction of social identity.

The interviews will seek to uncover several ideas and themes around the construction of identity in relation to 'otherness'. These include the meaning of 'home', entitlement and belonging and how these ideas relate to the idea of strangeness, nation and class. In examining the individual's life history, the research team hopes to provide systematic empirical evidence about contemporary identity practices and develop an understanding of the processes of social identification, conflict and cohesion. The interviews will aim to discover the social and dynamic processes that may link identity construction to privilege and hierarchy.
Although this research is only partially completed (approximately 30 interviews have taken place), it is already becoming apparent that the centrality of the role of the researcher in the production of the data is an important issue. It is important to note that analysis does not occur during the interview, but is of the data collected (see Clarke (2002) for an extended discussion). The interview should be separated from the stage of analysis. The interview is a time of listening to the subject, the analysis is where we can identify and monitor our own biases, prejudices and affective responses. How reflexive do we need to be to understand the way in which we as researchers have influenced someone else’s biographical narrative? This is a central question in the psycho-social method. There is no doubt that we bring our own baggage and agenda to the research interview, not least because we have outlined a fairly detailed account of how we will conduct the research and the questions we intend to address to a government funded research council and feel obliged in many respects to stick to our promises. As Walkerdine et al. (2001) argue, ‘no matter how many methodological guarantees we try to put in place, the subjective always intrudes’ (p. 84). But as in all social research, it is unlikely that if we really listen to the respondent, indeed give the respondent a voice, we are likely to hear what we expected. Annie Stopford (2004) argues that it is important that researchers include or give the chance to a respondent to be part of the interpretive process: ‘Whether or not they are cognisant of psychoanalysis, our participants may offer important challenges or additions to our interpretation and analysis. They may also concur with our analysis’ (Stopford, 2004: 18). Stopford argues that whenever a respondent is excluded from the interpretive process for whatever reason, they will always be ‘other’ and their narrative will be appropriated for some purpose in which they have no say – no voice.

As Lynn Froggett and Tom Wengraf (2004) note, the strength of psychoanalysis is that it enables us to conceptualize the dynamic interplay between the psyche of the respondent and the social world in a way that helps us understand the processes by which the external world is internalized and represented. Indeed for Froggett and Wengraf:

Narrative and biographical research methodologies are generating the kind of empirical data that can benefit from psychoanalytically informed analysis and provide fruitful sites of enquiry for those authors who are now posing the conceptual problem of linking the subjective, the social and the societal. (Froggett and Wengraf, 2004: 95)

There is also some important research being conducted in clinical psychoanalytic practice in the United States by Lynne Layton (2004), who talks of ‘normative unconscious processes’ that capture our prejudices, ethnocentric blind spots and cultural hierarchies. Indeed for Layton the unconscious is as permeated by cultural norms as is the conscious mind. The unconscious is not a space that is free of norms; nor is it a space that can solely be conceptualized as resistant to norms (Layton, 2004). Layton argues that the task for a psychoanalytic social theory is to:
Uncover the mediating links between social norms, family dynamics, and psychic life. Understanding more about normative unconscious processes that are repeatedly enacted in everyday social situations, processes that derive from social inequities and the ideologies that sustain them, might provide one such link. (Layton, 2004: 48)

As researchers, we bring to the research encounter, as the clinician does to the consulting room, these unconscious normative processes. Our thoughts, actions and our understanding and interpretations of the subject are all based in our conscious and unconscious ethnic, class and gender identities. I feel that a psycho-social method informed by a psychoanalytic sociology or social theory is important because it recognizes the role of the human imagination in the construction of identity in those notions that are so important to us, notions of home and community. It recognizes that it matters little if these things are more often imagined than real because people attach meaning to what they believe to make sense of their lives. Indeed, central to a critical sociological theory is a recognition of the power of the human imagination and of emotion. In particular, the way in which one person's fiction is another's fact, one person's rationality is another's irrationality and vice-versa. A psycho-social methodology builds on good ethnographic practice by listening for and analysing unconscious mechanisms such as projective identification both in the subject's response to the interviewer and vice-versa. The method cannot claim to have the same far-reaching analysis of the unconscious that a therapy provides, but it provides glimpses and insights into our internal world which adds a further layer of understanding to sociological analysis.

Conclusion

In this article I've addressed a number of ideas. First, the idea of a psychoanalytic sociology that is informed by the early writings of the Frankfurt School and has been developed more recently in methodological practice. Second, that there is a need for a psychoanalytic sociology that addresses the unconscious processes that underlie motivation, perception and the human imagination. This is not contra to sociology but complements more traditional theory and practice in an interdisciplinary way. Finally, I've provided a brief sketch of a psycho-social method and have discussed the implications for empirical research in the social sciences, in other words how do we 'do it'. And I have argued that a psycho-social approach is important because at its heart is a recognition of the unconscious processes that we bring to our own research, whether theory or practice. In other words, it recognizes that our thoughts, actions, understanding and interpretations of the subject are all based in our conscious and unconscious ethnic, class and gender identities. I've used the debate around the sociology of emotions to argue for the importance and acknowledgement of emotion not just in theory, but in practice; in the way that
we approach our research and method. In other words, our theory, method and practice are loaded with emotion.

I feel that psychoanalytic sociology becomes psycho-social when we do empirical qualitative research where the emotional life of researcher and respondent, interviewer and interviewed, are explored and analysed. This is in some sense a practical application of Habermas’s advocacy of sustained and critical self-reflection. I have argued that despite a certain uneasy relationship, wide-ranging inroads have been made into the social sciences by the development of a psycho-social perspective on qualitative research methodology. I’ve primarily used the work of Wendy Hollway, Tony Jefferson, Lynn Froggett, Tom Wengraf and my own research to outline a method and practice for social sciences researchers. As Wendy Hollway has put it: ‘The hyphen in psycho-social is important: it means that wherever you encounter the social, you encounter it multiply mediated by the psychodynamic and vice versa’ (Hollway, 2004: 7). The main themes that stand out therefore in psycho-social research are the reflexivity of the researcher; the ability of research to give voice to the research subject rather than a dominant theoretical paradigm; the role of the unconscious in transmitting our ethnic, gendered, and class identities (to name but a few) into the research environment; and finally, again a recognition of the role of the imagination in the research encounter and the way it is used to construct identity and make meaning in people’s lives.

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References


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