

Dialoguing across divisions

UK social psychology is highly distinctive – nowhere else in the world is the field of academic social psychology so clearly divided into different camps. Major differences in approach and perspective have been a source of division and strife. The most obvious one is between those who advocate a broadly positivist and quantitative approach and those who adopt a broadly qualitative approach. Like any crude classification, this does not do justice to the varieties of social psychology that are practised either side of (and in some rare cases across) this division. But it does capture the primary dividing line.



TONY MANSTEAD and MARGIE WETHERELL introduce a special issue on the state of UK social psychology, with lessons for all.

Mostly, these days, it is no longer a case of actively warring factions. This peaceful coexistence is welcome and has many advantages, but it has some problems too. We believe that more can be done to create a working environment based on understanding, mutual respect and some common goals. There is a new dialogue emerging, which works across these old divisions, and this special issue describes such a dialogue. We are all social psychologists working in British universities who have come together to talk to each other about the state of UK social psychology. Here we explore new and constructive forms of engagements and set out our conclusions.

Then and now

But first, what do we mean when we talk about warring factions ‘then’ and peaceful

coexistence ‘now’ in social psychology. To make sense of this we need to sketch the recent history.

As any social psychologist will tell you, where there are two or more groups there is potential for conflict. This conflict is greater when one group begins in a position of dominance and defines the playing field in terms of access to journals, acceptance for conference papers and jobs. It is probably true to say that at the beginning of the 1980s quantitative social psychology was in that position. This position was challenged, however, by an initially small but rapidly growing group of social psychologists who were developing new qualitative approaches. These approaches have led to the variety of cultural, critical, psychosocial, narrative and discursive psychologies evident today.

The conflict was fierce at times as the

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universes of quantitative and qualitative social psychology will be sustained in future generations.

This special issue is about how to move on from this impasse. It is about recognising and naming the current state of affairs, working towards a rapprochement and formulating a more secure and healthy UK social psychology.

The articles that follow are one outcome of a series of seminars titled 'Dialoguing Across Divisions in UK Social Psychology', organised by Wendy Hollway and Tony Manstead with funding from the BPS. Selection of a small group of participants from different corners of social psychology combined with careful attention to group process (facilitated by the group analyst Sheila Ernst) and multiple meetings within a short space of time led to a very exciting set of exchanges. These exchanges clarified similarities and differences, and the first two substantive articles in this special issue pick up that theme.

In the opening article three strong programmatic statements illustrate some of the divisions in social psychology. Next, Stephen Reicher and Stephanie Taylor put these similarities and differences in a broader context, and discuss what is behind them. Then Alex Haslam and Brian Parkinson develop one analysis of how we, as social psychologists, might understand our own situation and deal with these divisions. Our seminar series led to greatly increased mutual respect and understanding among the participants and produced a set of suggestions for 'where next' – the special issue ends with this manifesto. We hope that much more will flow from these beginnings.

Lessons for all

If you are not a social psychologist, please don't stop reading now. The main issue – divisions within psychology and how to understand and work with them – is relevant to all. As psychology grows in popularity in all arenas it is vital that our diversity is seen as a strength, not something pulling us apart from within.

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'upstarts' (as seen from a quantitative viewpoint) struggled with 'the establishment' (as seen from a qualitative viewpoint). Voices were raised, conferences were full of challenging but fascinating methodological and theoretical disputes, and there was competition for power and influence. This phase of conflict was followed by a period of stand-off, starting in the mid-1990s and lasting until now. Quantitative and qualitative social psychologists largely went their own ways. They have their own journals, books and academic networks, and more often than not they work in different institutions. Although they may be physically present at the same conferences, in reality there are often two mini-conferences operating in parallel, each appealing to its own constituency.

What, one might be forgiven for asking, is the problem with this state of affairs? A state of benign indifference between disputing groups sounds acceptable, if not particularly fruitful. Why does it matter? Why should we try to do better? There are several answers to these questions:

- The division between the quantitative and qualitative approaches has become

so ingrained that there are many social psychologists in the UK who are simply unaware of what is happening in the other camp. Far from there being any creative complementarity between the two approaches, there are in effect two parallel social psychologies.

- Then there are practical issues to do with the evaluation of research quality. If researchers in each camp lack understanding of the other camp's research methods, how can they arrive at informed assessments of the quality of that research? This is an issue that arises in reviewing papers, research grants and RAE submissions.
- Being viewed by the world outside as internally divided is unhelpful to the identity of social psychology and is probably damaging in terms of academic reputation and influence.
- There are also consequences for undergraduate and postgraduate training. How desirable is it that students are being trained in one set of methods without being trained in the other? Whichever side one is trained in, the result is 'partial' in both senses of the word. The danger is that the parallel

Three views on hate



RUSSELL SPEARS, WENDY HOLLWAY and DEREK EDWARDS tackle one topic from several angles to identify core differences between camps.

ON 24 May 2004 *The Guardian* published a story about an Iraqi family, a mother and her children. The woman's husband, and children's father, had died mysteriously in detention during the American/British invasion. The newspaper headline quoted the woman's response – 'I will always hate you people'.

Mrs Izmerly's response, extreme emotions, unequal power and national, global and group conflict are part of the territory social psychology covers. We want to use the story as a way of exploring what social psychology offers and to probe the differences between three core approaches – the experimental, the psychoanalytic and the discursive. Each author speaks from their particular perspectives within each of these broad approaches.

Experimental social psychology (RUSSELL SPEARS)

Where do you begin to devise an experiment to gain insight into this headline? This reminded me of a conference I recently attended called 'Why neighbours kill', an interdisciplinary meeting of political scientists, sociologists and social psychologists. After diverse talks on genocide in Rwanda, the Balkans, and

Cambodia, by people who had actually been there and talked to the survivors, I was starting to feel a bit uneasy that my little package of 2 x 2 designs (with no killing in sight) might come over as ever-so-slightly trite. This was not helped by a well-known 'experimental' social psychologist (who shall remain nameless) who boldly announced before my talk that he would not insult the audience by presenting experiments on such a grave topic.

So what is the use of experiments on such extreme emotions? First, however real and high-impact these examples are, they remain what psychologists often disparagingly call 'anecdotal'. There is a serious point here: empirical evidence is the lifeblood of psychology, and experiments provide the control to assess causal relations and patterns among variables that may not be apparent to the naked eye. Although few would doubt the evidence of exclaimed hatred from the headline, this is only the first step to understanding it.

I will try to explain why I think an experimental approach can be useful, and perhaps even necessary, to answer key questions about feelings of hatred. Let's take the research I talked about at the

conference, conducted with Colin Leach, on the topic of *Schadenfreude*: pleasure felt at another's failure or downfall. Although not the same as hate, *Schadenfreude* is closely related and can be fuelled by hatred. It can explain pleasure in an enemy's demise, and the failure to stop, or even the tendency to participate in, some of the extreme acts associated with conflict.

However, *Schadenfreude* is rarely openly expressed like hatred. Nietzsche noted that *Schadenfreude* is an opportunistic emotion that relies on a third party for the rival's demise, and this can make it less legitimate, for example, than direct victory over the rival. Open gloating in such circumstances can also be dangerous if the rival retains power (hence Arafat's concern at the open gloating of some Palestinians about 9/11). So how do we detect *Schadenfreude* if it is not legitimate to express it? Experimental techniques can help us.

In our research we have employed a 'bogus pipeline' technique in which we attach a sensor to participants and tell them that this can detect their true emotions (rather like a polygraph). Although this is not actually connected to anything, we find that people are more honest and show more *Schadenfreude* towards a hated rival as

a result. More generally, experiments allow us to detect causal relations (e.g. that threats to identity can incite *Schadenfreude*) and meaningful patterns among variables (e.g. that the pain caused by threats to identity predicts *Schadenfreude*).

Of course we cannot reproduce in the lab the conditions that foster the kind of hatred that motivates some people to become suicide bombers (nor would we want to for obvious ethical reasons!). However, we can model some of the proposed processes and test implications of theories. In other research we have tried to show that the disempowering conditions of stable low status can be associated with more aggressive forms of discrimination. This reflects a 'nothing to lose' strategy of the hopeless and helpless, epitomised by our headline.

The point about experiments is that they offer depth of explanation, enabling us to dig beneath the surface, and to investigate the psychological processes that are not always visible or accessible in direct accounts. Experiments are particularly good at getting at the parts that other methods cannot reach: they are useful in telling us things that people either don't want to reveal, or can't. This may be because they are ashamed to admit to them (e.g. malicious emotions like *Schadenfreude*) or are not even aware of them (e.g. unconscious thoughts and desires, or patterns of behaviour that are only apparent at the group level, through the lens of the experimental panopticon). As with all methods, these need to be treated with interpretative care, but they provide explanation that goes beyond conscious accounts and surface appearances.

The claim that experimentalism is the only show in town is a dangerous one, however. While some advocates of the experimental approach are wont to claim scientific superiority, this is not inherent in the method itself, and experiments (or quantitative psychology more generally) can be seen as complementary to other approaches. To confine oneself to experiments is surely partial and unhealthy (a bit like a dietary fad). Returning to the conference example, it would have been foolish to see myself in a contest with political scientists about the causes of genocide in Rwanda. To admit only experimental evidence here would be absurd. But to deny their utility when they

can sometimes 'tell us more than we know' is equally ludicrous. Rather, we had different parts of the jigsaw, relating to different levels of explanation, and the choice of methods was contingent on this analysis. In the spirit of methodological pluralism (or unholy alliances), experiments could complement discursive approaches (by digging beneath the discourse) and supplement psychodynamic approaches (by uncovering unconscious processes).

Psychoanalysis (WENDY HOLLWAY)

I stare at a headline: 'I will always hate you people' and monitor my feelings, grabbed by the picture of Mrs Izmerly and her three children. It conjures in me a knot of knowledge, belief and feelings about the Iraq war. I am furious with Bush (and Blair) and regularly have a tussle between my hate and my better judgement when it comes to how I feel about American people in general. I feel guilty when I read in the main text that the daughter accuses all British citizens, as well as American citizens, of being complicit in this war because we live in a democracy. There are some powerful group constructions going on even in the six words of the headline and I do not – cannot – stand outside of them. I am British, in this instance to my shame. I start here because I believe that social psychologists should reflect on their own subjective responses to any issue on which they conduct an inquiry in order to clarify where their commitments might lie.

It is not only my meaning frames that will shape the analysis of this headline however. If the journalist did not choose the words, he certainly framed the story,

and it is always within a frame that meaning is achieved. I know immediately that this family of an Iraqi man were expressing their hatred of what the coalition was doing in Iraq. After reading the article, I could see that this case was framed in terms of the terrible effects that such treatment has on the reputation, acceptance and, ultimately, purpose of the coalition's presence in Iraq. The theme of hatred in the main heading was mirrored in the final sentence quoting one daughter: 'I won't allow myself to rest until I have got revenge for him.' Meaning and interpretation are co-productions; in this case the interviewees, the journalist (perhaps editors) and me.

Psychoanalysis is one of the few theoretical perspectives in social psychology that does not shy away from hate, understands it and takes it seriously. There is no established psychoanalytic method in social psychology because psychoanalysis is a clinical method not a research method. I have used psychoanalytic principles to inform my understanding of individuals (ontology) and of how research can come to know them (epistemology). There is no single accepted way of doing this, but it informs my mode of interviewing (see box).

If I wanted to do research on this topic, how would I go about it? What research question would I choose of the many possibilities? Each is made possible by the salient ideas in a given approach. Social identity theory, for example, will be interested in the construction of group identity in the 'we', or 'I' and 'you people'. A social psychoanalytic approach takes account of the feelings and investments that

A PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

The free association narrative interview method reaches beyond structured interviewing, which is dominant in qualitative research and runs the risk of constraining interviewees within the assumptions provided by the questions. This method can elicit deeply felt and difficult emotions, possibly conflictual, as well as taken-for-granted issues like identity and identifications, so it fits well with this subject.

To guard against eliciting generalisations (like the headline) or common discourses, questions are open but specific, eliciting a narrative grounded in actual events. Main questions could include 'Can you tell me about your life under Saddam's regime?' and 'Can you tell me about your husband's life?' The simplicity of these questions belies the complexity and richness they give rise to in the context of an attentive and respectful relationship with the participants.

The resulting narratives are developed by follow-up questions following the ordering and wording of the interviewee, based on the principle that the researcher should elicit participants' experiences, meanings and free associations, imposing as little as is possible of their own. Because meaning is achieved in the context of the wider whole (the gestalt principle), the material is not broken up (as is common) for analysis. Analysis of data involves, among many other things, noticing signs of the affect and potential conflict interviewees show in their narratives.

are involved in such constructions – the inner psychic contributions to meaning – and recognises that these are negotiated in relational, discursive and wider social contexts. So here, hate is a dynamic kindled in Iraqi-Anglo-American relations in the current context of the actions of coalition forces in Iraq. Of course this is a gloss on a situation with a very complex history in respect of relations between Islam and Judaeo-Christianity, but it informs understanding of the affective loading on a category like ‘you people’. In summary, the research question is not an innocent, neutral tool but an intervention that already carries a payload of meaning that will shape the knowledge produced from the research.

Until the research question is clarified, decisions about design are premature. It affects what we take as the unit of analysis. It could be the headline, the whole media text, the existing interviews from which the story was constructed, or new interviews with this family or other families specifically set up for research purposes.

Should it be based on a single-case interview? This question raises the issue of how extrapolation (‘generalisability’) can proceed from one or few cases. On the other hand, how many interviews is enough? What is the justification for needing a number that is amenable to statistical analysis? Is it that one case does not provide ‘proof’? In the case of this extract, the phenomenon of Iraqi hate comes as no surprise. If the question is how widespread it is, the design goes in

a survey-based, quantitative direction. If it is what makes some Iraqis hate and not others, the design must be comparative.

My purpose is to understand more deeply what it means to ‘hate you people’, how it has come about and its likely effects. Such questions require qualitative methods because only these can understand experience and meaning. One case will provide the depth and can be extrapolated using theoretical understandings of hate and group relations as long as this is restrained by careful contextualisation. This makes it appropriate, in principle, to conduct one or more in-depth interviews to establish the specificity and detail of this woman’s hate in the context of her life history and especially of the treatment of her husband. In practice, there might be

political and cultural barriers. The analysis would then take what I call a psychosocial direction, which means I would look at how Mrs Izmerly’s account of her experience (never separable from emotions) draws on actual events and makes something unique of them in her inner world. In terms of generalising from single-case data, the approach is one of theoretical extrapolation.

This method provides data concerning the complexity of a person’s meanings and their relation to specific experiences. Like experimental social psychology, it goes beyond ‘conscious appearances and surface accounts’, although incorporating a complexity and attention to particularity which that cannot achieve. Unlike the discursive approach, its focus is the person who speaks, rather than the text, which in my view is a central location for emotion.

Discursive social psychology (DEREK EDWARDS)

My first reaction to the headline, and the story beneath it, is that of an ordinary reader. It is a powerfully evocative report. But rather than exploring my emotions, or developing my stance on Iraq, finding people to interview, or devising experiments on how emotions are caused, I start to get interested in the report itself. This is not a pursuit of deep, underlying significances, but rather, of how specific words, descriptions and accounts are assembled and put to work.

A common objection to discursive psychology (DP) is that it only analyses discourse, when there are other, more important things to do. We are turning away from the events themselves, whether in the world or in the psyche – in this case death, politics and hatred. Yet to take an immediate interest in those matters is also to turn away from the actual object presented for analysis, the newspaper report, which is also real. Discourse is both real and important. If it were not for discourse there would be no politics, no war in Iraq, no understanding of what is happening there, nobody to quote, nothing to say. So there is no immediate requirement to use the report as a point of *departure* and do some other study instead. Our immediate focus is on reports themselves, how they formulate the nature of events, how they provide for causal explanations, invoke psychological states (see box), and build implications for politics and policy.

EXAMINING EVERYDAY EMOTION

Discursive psychology (DP) examines, among other things, how people deploy commonsense psychological ideas. Rather than taking those ideas out of context and finding that they amount to a messy, contradictory and inaccurate theory of mind, we explore how people actually put them to use in their everyday lives, when accounting for actions and events.

In a relevant study of emotion discourse (Edwards, 1999), talk from relationship counselling was analysed along with newspaper reports in the aftermath of Princess Diana’s death. A *Sun* editorial said: ‘In the depths of his grief, Diana’s brother is entitled to be bitter about her death.’ Analysis focuses on how this formulation selects emotion rather than, say, judgement as his reaction (her brother, Earl Spencer, had produced a heavy rebuke of the role of the press in her death), and names that emotion *grief* rather than, say, *anger*. Conceptually, grief’s object would be Diana’s death, whereas the object of anger would be (in this context) the activity of the press. Similarly, *bitter* evokes a disposition within Spencer, and perhaps a motive for producing emotive criticisms, whereas *anger* directs attention to its object and cause – the press and their paparazzi. Very briefly, these kinds of observations reveal a range of functional uses of emotion terms including, in the case of the *Sun*’s editorial, how to deflect attention from a criticism of their own journalistic practices onto the psychological state of the critic. Everyday emotion talk turns out to be very precise when examined inside the real-life practices where it is used, and for which it is surely designed.

Edwards, D. (1999). Emotion discourse. *Culture and Psychology*, 5(3), 271–291.

Out of such an analysis may come further questions, and the need for more materials. But those materials will probably be more discourse rather than an experiment, survey, or even a depth interview designed to probe the psyches of the participants. In DP there is a preference for collecting discourse as we find it, rather than doing research interviews. The reason is a basic conception (and observation) of how discourse works. Everyday discourse deals not only with its obvious topics, but also with the conditions of its production. It is always situated, indexical, sequentially relevant, always of and for its context, and always doing something. Research interviews are the basis of a great deal of qualitative research, especially where the aim is to discover how people think on some chosen topic. But interviews inevitably usurp the circumstances in which people ordinarily say things in and for living their lives.

Apart from uses of emotion words, and other items from the commonsense psychological thesaurus, DP examines how psychological business is generally handled and managed when people talk together. One specific topic, again starting with our newspaper headline, might be how direct quotation works ('I will always hate you people'). What are the general characteristics and uses of direct quotation? What does it do? In what discourse contexts, at what junctures, and in the performance of what kinds of activities, do people actually produce quotes of what other people say? Does it have regular characteristics, types, functions and occasions? In fact there is already plenty of work on this (by writers ranging from Goffman and Bakhtin, to the detailed conversation analyses of Elizabeth Holt and Robin Wooffitt), and it turns out to be more interesting and systematic than we might imagine. Rather than formulating, as independent variables, a range of theoretically generated types of quotations and measuring their effects, we find order in the ways that quotations are actually used.

From DP's perspective the tendency of psychologists to turn the world into causal factors and variables, and get them under laboratory control, often seems inappropriate. Experimentation conforms to (some) canons of scientific research but it also, especially in social psychology, seems based on an assumption that the everyday world of social activities is actually a

complex mix of causal factors and variables, rather like the relationship between a physics experiment and the world outside the laboratory. In DP the social world is already orderly and intelligible precisely because people make it so – that's how it works. Experimental social psychology is also grounded in an understanding of how social life works, but not in systematic observation and analysis of it. Further, DP is not a preliminary, 'natural history' phase of research that will eventually generate experiments. Rather, our methods are adequate and appropriate to the phenomena. The orderliness we find

is that of actions oriented to norms, rather than effects stemming from causes. It seems weird to treat discourse and social interaction in the same way as one would a chemical reaction.

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DISCUSS AND DEBATE

Are the three methods described here complementary or incompatible? How should researchers define the limits of applicability of each method?

Where does emotion reside – in individual persons and their experiences, or in the cultural practices of language and social interaction?

Do these approaches encourage or rule out certain kinds of question as relevant, legitimate, interesting?

Which (if any) of these methods would provide most solace or utility to Mrs Izmerly? And is that an appropriate criterion for choosing one approach rather than another?

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Similarities and differences between traditions



**STEPHEN REICHER and
STEPHANIE TAYLOR** go back to the root of the debate and reflect on conceptual differences.

WE all know the tired old joke about a man who asks for directions to some destination. 'If I were you,' replies the other, 'I wouldn't start from here.' It's a suitable way to describe many of the current debates in social psychology. Time and again, the issues are presented as if there is a division between 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' social psychologists, or else between

'experimentalists' and 'text analysts'. It isn't that such differences are unimportant. Indeed it is quite clear from the pieces by Russell Spears, Wendy Hollway and Derek Edwards that some traditions do take a predominantly quantitative approach and are centred on experimentation while others focus on qualitative analysis of textual material. However, it should be equally clear that, if our desired destination is an understanding of

the differences between traditions, a dialogue between them, and perhaps even the prospect of learning from each other, then issues of quantity vs. quality or experiment vs. text are the wrong place to start.

There is a simple reason for this. Method, as many have pointed out, is the practice of theory. Those who start from different theoretical and meta-theoretical standpoints – that is, those who have different conceptions of the subject matter they are exploring – are therefore likely to differ in their methods – the way they go about the process of exploration. Conversely, then, to understand why they are using these different methods, it is necessary to start by examining conceptual differences. So what are the differences between the various traditions in social psychology and how do conceptual issues relate to matters of method?

Conceptual disputes

The differences can be described at three levels. The first is a difference in how one conceptualises the very basis of human social behaviour and how it comes to have systematic patterns. Experimentalists tend to adopt a causal approach, in which certain factors and variables (the independent variables of experiments) produce determinate outcomes (dependent variables). The aim of research is therefore to investigate what the crucial factors are and what the impact of any given factor might be. In order to do that, control is needed so as to isolate particular factors, and the experiment is the privileged way of achieving such control and isolation.

As Derek Edwards explains, discourse analysts take a very different perspective. They challenge the notion that human social behaviour is best understood by a ‘factors and variables’ approach. Rather, they see the social world as organised by shared rules and understandings. Relationships tend to be a matter of *entailment* rather than *causality*. To take an example, they would challenge the notion that a salient identity *causes* one to show more solidarity to ingroup members. Rather, part of the meaning of making statements about common identity with others is that one will express solidarity towards them (and vice versa). Hence, if we want to understand phenomena such as solidarity (or rejection), we shouldn’t manipulate identity but rather examine how people negotiate, dispute and achieve a sense of identity and what flows from

that. We should look at social practice itself.

For social psychoanalytic researchers, the self is also crucial to the nature of human social action. In part this is a socially constructed self, but it is also a self which is divided, some of whose reasons may be unknown to us (unconscious) and actively defended against insight. An understanding of this lies partly in the present and partly in the past, and entirely in the relationship between the two. Hence, it becomes important to understand what people think and feel about the present, but one must also investigate individual biographies and key relationships and always be sensitive to what isn’t revealed as well as to what is. Part of getting at this is to examine the way subjects relate to the researcher (transference) but also to be sensitive to the way the researcher relates to and feels about the researched. Meaning is always a joint production, and social psychoanalytic researchers are particularly attuned to issues of reflexivity and highlighting their own feelings in the research situation. This is very clear in the way Wendy Hollway starts her piece. To some, such expressions of feeling might seem rather unscientific, but in fact they are an essential component of a scientific stance that renders feeling a part of the analytic process.

At a second level, these different ways of conceptualising the subject of social psychology (in both senses of the term) lead to different types of question and different issues coming to the fore. Perhaps that is what comes over most clearly from the contributions of Russell Spears, Derek Edwards and Wendy Hollway. The experimentalist asks about the factors which underlie what people are doing. The social psychoanalytic researcher is also engaged in such a search. However, where experimenters may look for general factors which are relevant for everybody, from a social psychoanalytic perspective one starts from the premise that everybody has a divided and defended self and looks for the specific form this takes in given individuals as a function of their biographies. By contrast, the discursive researcher is not interested in looking behind or beyond the patterning of social action, but looks at the patterning itself: what forms does it take, and how are these forms achieved?

The first two levels together lead on to the third: how does one actually go about investigating what is of interest? By now it will be clear why the factors and variables approach to human social behaviour is associated with experimentalism. However, there is an extra point that needs stressing. Because any given behaviour is caused by

multiple factors, one would never expect any single factor to determine outcomes on its own. It is only that this factor makes a difference, all other things being equal. It is because of the probabilistic rather than deterministic consequences of manipulating any given factor that experimentation tends to be associated with statistical analysis. However, the experiments–statistics link is not inherent – indeed in many branches of science statistics are redundant: if you drop a stone, it will always fall down.

This distinction is important when we turn to discourse analysis. If experimentalists focus on the messy effects of any single variable, discursive psychologists focus on the ordered nature of social practice. The phenomena that interest them are a bit like a stick of rock: wherever you slice through the social world you will discover a pattern. Therefore we best understand this pattern by an intensive examination of specific situations. Rather than describing its approach as non-experimental or as qualitative, it may be better to describe it as non-statistical – and that isn't because discourse analysts find multivariate statistics too much like hard work but rather because their conceptual framework is at odds with the assumptions underlying statistical analysis. Finally, then, a social psychoanalytic approach requires a method that is able to address present understandings and past biographies, while at the same time being sensitive to the dynamics and feelings engendered in the research process itself. Wendy Hollway provides a detailed account of just such a method.

Dialogue from difference

So now we are in a position to understand why our different traditions adopt the different methodological stances they do and how all three approaches can be described as methodologically rigorous despite (or rather because of) these differences. To be rather less cryptic, rigour lies in devising a systematic method whose assumptions are congruent with the way one conceptualises the subject matter. To describe an approach as more or less rigorous simply by reference to the method is necessarily unhelpful, because it tries to determine the best way of finding things out without thinking about what we are trying to find out. More usually, it takes for granted the broader philosophical stance of

one position and seeks to judge the methods of others without attending to (or understanding) the stance of others.

It should be clear by now why we argue that the lines of difference between the traditions of social psychology are not as crude as they are often thought to be. But does this make them more or less intractable? Does it increase or decrease the prospect of dialogue, and perhaps even of complementarity? To put it slightly differently, to what extent are the different approaches competing for the same ground and thereby involved in a zero-sum game, and to what extent are they addressing different – and possibly even complementary – levels of analysis?

The one thing we can say with certainty is that, hitherto, the 'zero-sum approach' has predominated and led to conflictual relations. We would argue that such pessimism is, at the very least, open to question. This might seem slightly paradoxical since, in one sense, we have argued that the issues are more profound and more elaborate than commonly supposed. They are matters of meta-theory and theory as well as method. Yet, if differences are abstracted from the context in which they occur, they are turned into irreconcilable principles, and debate begins to take on the characteristics of a Punch and Judy show. Once the context is reintroduced, we can debate how the underpinnings of different traditions relate to each other. At the most optimistic, it is arguable that we need to look both at how we achieve order in the social world and what are the underlying processes that allow us to achieve such ordering, including an attention to unconscious processes and defences. To put it slightly differently, it may be that we are entirely cultural beings who produce our worlds through discursive practices, but to say that is to say something about human nature (since, after all, other species don't do this) and to demand inquiry about what that something is.

Equally, when seen in terms of context rather than in absolute terms, methodological divides may begin to lose some of their sharpness. We can already see from Russell Spears's contribution that experimentalists are not rigid in insisting on only experiments and only numbers. Similarly, it is arguable that discursive approaches are not incompatible with either quantitative analyses or experimentation – at least in the general

sense of looking for consequences of purposefully making interventions in the social world. This is not to suggest that individual discursive psychologists would want to ask questions that require such methods. But it is to allow a debate over whether they would rule them out in principle from their (meta) theoretical perspectives.

Most probably, we will discover some intermediate position whereby there is some level of disagreement and some level of complementarity. The jury remains out and we would certainly not claim to have resolved these issues. What we would claim, however, is to have put these conceptual and methodological debates on the agenda. It is important both for the sake of the individual traditions and for the discipline as a whole. It depends upon, firstly, listening to and respecting different traditions; secondly, understanding the coherence and rigour of each tradition within its own terms (although we need not necessarily agree with those terms); and therefore, thirdly, respecting others not in order to agree but as a condition for clarifying differences constructively. If one thing did come out of our meetings, it was a mutual sense of respect and a realisation that the biggest threat to intellectual progress is not arguing with each other (that way lies progress), but ignoring and being in ignorance of each other.

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DISCUSS AND DEBATE

Does the nature of the object we are investigating – human social behaviour – require different methods to the study of the physical world?

What is the relationship between our models of the human subject and the ways we study it?

Is the 'qualitative/quantitative' division a red herring?

Could discourse analysts ever use experiments?

Have your say on these or other issues this article raises. Write to our Letters page on psychologist@bps.org.uk or at the Leicester address – 500 words or less, please. Or you can contribute to our online forum on this or any other topic – go to www.thepsychologist.org.uk and follow the links.

Pulling together or pulling apart?

Towards organic pluralism in social psychology

HOW should the various individuals and factions within contemporary British social psychology deal with their disagreements? What kind of coexistence do we want? Indeed, what is the best way to manage any form of intellectual and intra-organisational conflict? A common response to these questions is to strive for some kind of pluralism. Such a goal seems appealing to many, even uncontroversial, not least because it plays to our liberal live-and-let-live instincts. And since it paints such a cosy picture of academics as open-minded, tolerant, and forgiving, we may be tempted to leave things at that.

However, nagging questions remain. What does pluralism mean? What are its consequences? And how exactly is it accomplished? These are questions that social psychologists ought to be eminently qualified to answer. In this article, we apply existing expertise in inter- and intragroup conflict to the state and trajectory of social psychology. First, we review influential approaches to conflict and diversity management. Second, we consider their relevance to the specific divisions and disagreements in the academic discipline of social psychology. Finally, we bring these elements together to identify constructive paths for progress. Our aim, like that of our DaD (Dialoguing



S. ALEXANDER HASLAM and BRIAN PARKINSON present a social psychological analysis of the dialogues and divisions.

across Divisions) Group more broadly, is to understand how we currently stand in relation to one another, and how we might change our respective positions to common advantage.

Four approaches to conflict and diversity management

Even groups that are in conflict with one another usually share commitments or characteristics that are a potential basis for unification under some superordinate identification. For example, discursive and experimental social psychologists may be at odds when identifying with these specific social identities, but, under certain circumstances, they may also unite under the banner of social psychology. Within cultural, organisational and social psychology (e.g. see Berry, 1984; Haslam, 2004; Hewstone & Brown, 1986, respectively), approaches to conflict management are often presented in a 2 x 2 matrix specifying two independent factors (see Figure 1).

The first factor reflects concern for the interests of one's own subgroup (high vs. low). The second factor reflects concern for the interests of a superordinate group that contains one's own subgroup as well as other relevant subgroups (high vs. low). Each cell in the resultant grid is characterised by a distinct approach to conflict management – a style, practice or mind-set adopted when conflict arises.

Individualism (low concern for both subordinate and superordinate group) means looking out for yourself rather than the group to which you belong. *Assimilationism* means that the interests of the superordinate group override those of the subgroup. *Simple pluralism* means that subgroup interests are prioritised over superordinate group interests. *Organic pluralism* means that both subgroup and superordinate group interests are highly valued.

A strategy of individualism promotes the vision of a world where all forms of alliance and shared interest are

downplayed. Such an approach typically fails because it is incapable in principle of addressing the group-based conflicts that make conflict management necessary in the first place. Moreover, members of disadvantaged groups have no collective voice and therefore generally lose out to those with higher status.

The same is broadly true of assimilationism. This too tends to advance the interests of dominant groups as they are the ones who have the power to define the inclusive superordinate identity (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). The result is that low-status groups are denied a distinct identity, and are instead inducted into ‘one happy family’ that is unlikely to reflect their particular interests and concerns.

The most obvious alternative to assimilationism is simple pluralism (a.k.a. separatism, segregationism), in which subgroups are encouraged to promote their own identity without heed to any overarching superordinate framework. This gives low-status subgroups the space to grow and develop (and to formulate strategies of resistance and change) without interference from the high-status group. However, material realities – in particular, associated with unequal division of resources – typically serve to marginalise low-status groups and can easily contribute to an apartheid-like state of oppression.

In contrast, a strategy of organic pluralism (a.k.a. multiculturalism or integrationism) encourages a sense of subgroup identity (and the activities that promote it) alongside an overarching identity that attempts to reconcile and make sense of subgroup differences.

Significantly, previous researchers have almost unanimously implied that the organic variety of pluralism is preferable to its more simple form (for a recent review, see Haslam, 2004). In particular, studies suggest that where organisations, institutions and societies aim to promote the interests of meaningfully distinct, self-identified subgroups they tend to be harmonious, productive, creative and stable if they do so within the framework of a shared understanding that accommodates and celebrates those subgroups and the differences between them (e.g. González & Brown, 2003).

Four consequences of organic pluralist systems support this conclusion. First, more powerful subgroups (e.g. those that have access to superior resources) do not

inevitably ‘win out’ at the expense of the less powerful. Second, less powerful subgroups are more likely to remain committed to managing conflict and diversity because they feel collectively valued and enfranchised. Third, members of more powerful subgroups are not required to waste valuable energy maintaining their power and suppressing the less powerful. Fourth and finally, the superordinate unit does not need to expend energy on internal struggle, but instead can use its diversity as a valuable resource to exploit opportunities for engaging constructively with external agencies and powers.

Conflict and diversity in social psychology

You don’t need to be a historian to see how this matrix of possible approaches to conflict can be used to understand divisions in UK social psychology. Indeed, to a greater or lesser extent, each distinct strategy can be mapped on to models informing (albeit implicitly) social psychological practice for the last 100 years.

In particular, ideas of individualism and assimilationism have characterised mainstream experimental social psychology since the 1960s. Over this period, a number of commentators have argued that there is no useful or valid alternative to the models of research activity presented in outlets such as the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, or the *Journal of Experimental*

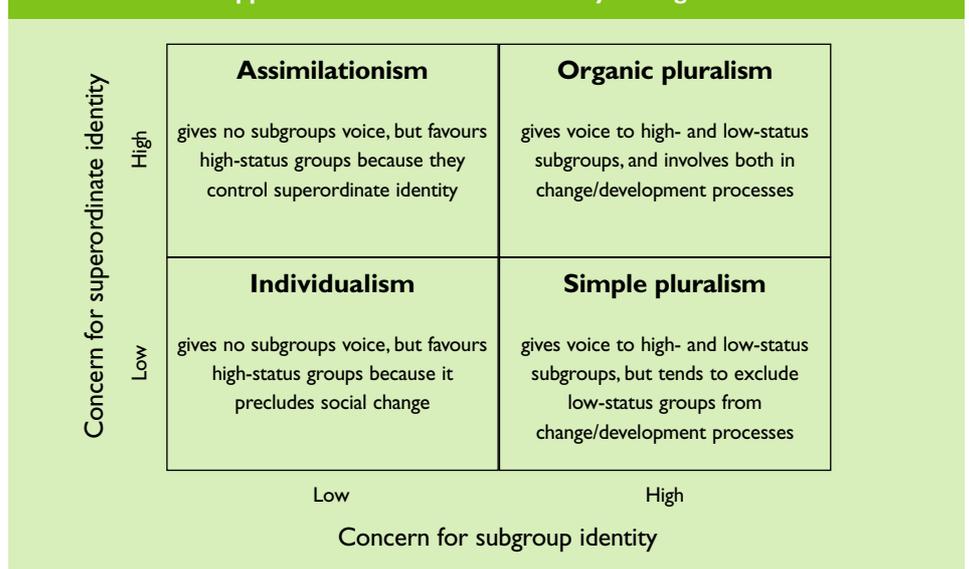
Social Psychology, and that it is pointless to speak of (much less promote) alternatives. To do so, they imply, would compromise the status and prestige of the discipline. Indeed, the very existence of disagreement (particularly about method and metatheory) is believed to send signals that undermine social psychology’s claims to scientific status.

Set against this, since the 1960s ‘crisis’, advocates of alternative perspectives have increasingly had to choose between simple pluralism (‘let them be’) and assimilationism (‘if you can’t beat them join them’). This can be seen most clearly in the trajectory of ideas associated with Tajfel and Moscovici’s vision of a European social psychology. Tajfel’s social identity approach has increasingly become part of the social psychological mainstream, while Moscovici’s work on social representations has remained a much more ‘fringe’ activity.

The relative costs and benefits of these strategies are plain to see. While social identity work now finds its way into the high-impact journals, its founders complain about the dilution of its core ideas and purpose (e.g. Turner, 1999). On the other hand, advocates of social representations and critical (e.g. discursive, psychoanalytic) approaches complain that access to these outlets is barred. Indeed, in many cases they have had to develop their own journals, societies and interest groups in order to promote their distinct research agendas.

Many people are perfectly happy with

FIGURE 1 Four approaches to conflict and diversity management



this state of affairs. Recently, however, a growing number of commentators have begun to sense that, as a discipline, social psychology is losing out because the choice between assimilationism and separatism is too limiting and too costly. On the one hand, pressures towards 'normalisation' have led the discipline to become increasingly monolithic and bland – with conformity (e.g. to methodological and statistical mores) more highly prized than creativity or originality (see Haslam & McGarty, 2001). On the other hand, the discipline has failed to capitalise on its uniquely diverse intellectual and practical traditions. There is no clear consensus on this point, but many – from the president of the US-based Society of Experimental Social Psychology down – have observed that the discipline and its official outlets are not as vibrant or as relevant as they once were. And they have publicly mused on the question of how this state of affairs might be improved.

A way forward

How, then, might social psychology move forward? One answer may come from the research on conflict and diversity management considered above. Here, one of the key questions posed by advocates of organic pluralism is how exactly this state can be achieved. Most researchers acknowledge that this is 'easier said than done'. In the present context, the main problem may lie in articulating the precise nature of the required overarching identity that helps us all to make sense of the differences between us and to reconcile them. Indeed, if no articulated common identity is specified, external observers as well as insiders may conclude that there is no coherent message worth holding on to.

It also needs to be emphasised that, whatever the abstract merits of organic pluralism, it is not an inevitable consequence of intergroup evolution. In the power struggles between groups at

different levels of inclusiveness, some may win out at the expense of others. Some may die out while others gain in strength, for ideological, material or capricious reasons. At some level we are all psychologists as well as social, cognitive, clinical or developmental psychologists, and uniting these camps under the banner of 'psychology' may be neither easy nor desirable under all conceivable circumstances. Furthermore, seeing the

'Social engineering has its practical as well as theoretical limits'

social world as a hierarchy of groups at increasing levels of inclusiveness is at best a useful simplification. In reality, identifications and allegiances cross-cut one another, are repeatedly reformulated and reworked, and continually shift in salience. For this reason, social engineering has its practical as well as theoretical limits.

Nonetheless, there is a general agreement that respect for both subgroup and superordinate identities is best promoted if organic pluralism is preceded by separatism rather than assimilationism or individualism. Rather than emerging from a state in which difference and dissent have been purged, organic pluralism develops more easily in an environment where subgroups have been allowed to foster a sense of their own distinct identity and to collectively discuss issues and interests that are important to them (see O'Brien *et al.*, 2004). This process helps to sound out a range of fully fledged, diverse positions that lend vitality to the superordinate identity and ultimately serve as sources of strength and creativity for the organisation or society as a whole.

Happily for social psychology – and for British and European social psychology in

particular – this analysis suggests that the prospects for development are very encouraging. In large part this is because there have always been strong ideological and intellectual forces working against assimilationism in these research communities, and these have served to ensure a multiplicity of perspectives on the discipline's defining issues and practices.

To those outside our communities, this has often been seen as a weakness rather than a strength. It is clear, though, that journals like the *British Journal of Social Psychology* and the *European Journal of Social Psychology* have survived (and indeed gone from strength to strength) precisely because they provide a single home for multiple voices. Grounded in our appreciation of the empirical literature, it is our contention that this is a model that we need to encourage rather than relinquish.

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DISCUSS AND DEBATE

Do you agree with our analysis of the state of social psychology in Britain? Is it true of the discipline in other parts of the globe?

Do you think that the models that we discuss are relevant to the management of other forms of conflict?

It is widely accepted that social psychology in Britain has experienced a resurgence in recent years. Have the processes we outlined had a role to play in this?

Is organic pluralism a sensible philosophy for science and society?

Have your say on these or other issues this article raises. Write to our Letters page on psychologist@bps.org.uk or contribute to our online forum via www.thepsychologist.org.uk.



In time-honoured tradition, the point of our meetings was not simply to interpret the world (of psychology) but to change it. So, given our analysis of how things stand, where should we go next and how can we get there? The answer, we believe, has several components.

The first is a matter of attitude – or, to be more specific, a matter of respect. It is difficult, if not impossible, to engender a constructive dialogue between parties when some view others with contempt or else perceive themselves to be viewed with contempt. Yet there are times when other traditions are viewed as less scientific, less valid or less coherent than our own, principally because they fail to observe our own methodological strictures. This is often because we take the assumptions underlying our traditions for granted and hence fail to see how procedures flow from them rather than being inherently right or inherently flawed. It is a little as if fish looked down on birds for lacking gills. We need to recognise that different problems, or different ways of understanding the same problems, can require different methods.

It is important to stress here, as we have stressed above, that the point of such recognition is not to try to make everybody agree on everything – as if there were no significant disagreements between us. However, mutual respect makes it easier to appreciate why others are different and may help us better understand our own approaches, the premises on which they are based and the conditions of their applicability and of their inapplicability. This could make us change our minds and adopt other positions, it could allow us to explore how we might work with those we previously shunned, or it could make us yet more committed to what we do. However,

STEPHEN REICHER, on behalf of the *Dialoguing Across Divisions Group*, suggests an agenda for change.

a respectful debate will lead to intellectual clarity and progress even if the net effect is to sharpen rather than dissolve difference.

Of course, such respect involves a certain cost. It requires time and energy to find out about the positions of others at a time when changes in academia make these

'We are in danger of creating a view of the human subject that reflects the limits of our method'

increasingly precious commodities. Nonetheless, a second component of change is knowledge about the diversity of traditions in our discipline. Of course, the willingness to find out is strongly related to our first component – a positive attitude. For instance, there is evidence that second language learning in divided societies has much more to do with attitudes to the outgroup than with cognitive abilities. Indeed there are times when we even celebrate our ignorance of the other as a badge of belonging and a sign of outgroup rejection. However understandable such a reaction might be, it is particularly destructive to the progress of knowledge and to scientific advance. Perhaps it is too optimistic to envisage, for example, discourse analysts poring over the latest journals in social cognitive neuroscience, but we should read enough to understand the arguments of the other in their own terms before we judge them and

pronounce on their relationship to what we ourselves do.

It may be too late to change some of our old lags entirely, but that is no reason to visit our sins on successive generations. This leads us to probably the third and most important of all our components: education. We believe that the syllabus needs to be re-envisaged so that the psychologists of the future are aware of and understand our multiple traditions. This is not simply a matter of having a lecture or two on discursive psychology and psychosocial approaches next to lectures on social cognition and social identity. It means a more radical revision of the way we structure the subject and, of most relevance, how we introduce students to methods.

If one thing emerged from our discussions, it was the need to understand method in context and the dangers of abstracting method from the broader assumptions and issues from which they derive. Such abstraction is the first and greatest step towards 'methodolatry' – the tendency to grant absolute value to a method rather than viewing it as a tool that is useful for addressing certain types of question. Moreover, once we put method first, then we either limit the questions we ask to those with which the method can easily cope or we provide inadequate answers to other questions. In either case we stifle ideas and we are in danger of creating a view of the human subject that reflects the limits of our method. As Moscovici recognised long ago, this is not a recipe for a healthy discipline.

Yet the way methods are generally taught makes it hard to avoid abstraction. On the one hand, students have content courses in which they learn about social psychology and cognitive psychology and developmental psychology. On the other hand they have methods courses in which we teach experimental design and then a range of statistics from a Fischer exact test through ANOVA to structural equation modelling. In response to internal objections and external pressures (notably BPS moves to insist on a broadening of the syllabus) a session or two is provided which lumps a wide variety of approaches under the title 'qualitative methods'. But this doesn't really address the underlying problem.

If we want psychologists to understand how method relates to research perspectives and research questions then all must be taught together. To put it slightly differently, we should teach the research process as a whole, and method must be seen as a part of that process with its links to other parts made fully explicit. Indeed, that was the reasoning with which we structured this special issue. Rather than asking contributors to talk about their traditions in abstract terms, we started from a concrete phenomenon ('I will always hate you people') from which we could see the types of assumption with which different people approached the phenomenon and the types of question they asked about it. From there the logic of different methods was easy to see.

We suggest that a similar reasoning should be applied to the design of

psychology courses. We should start with relevant phenomena and then explore how different assumptions about the human subject lead us to ask different types of question about it. In that way, we can approach possibly the most tricky (and the most ignored) aspect of research: how to pose a good research question. We can look at these different questions and then ask what sort of data we need to answer them, how we collect such data and how we analyse such data. Methods are part of the process – they are not the first link in the chain. In this way seemingly irreconcilable differences which plague all of us simply dissolve. Should we apply qualitative or quantitative approaches? It depends whether our questions are quantitative (Is there more of this than that?) or qualitative (How do we do that?), and that in turn depends on how we view human sociality and what interests us about it. However, only those who are literate in both traditions will we be able to follow such prescriptions. When we only know one approach, we are inevitably forced to squeeze everything into its terms, however inappropriate that might be. If you only have a hammer, everything becomes a nail. In our more optimistic moments we believe that such an approach would overcome the characteristic dread of methods classes which afflicts most students on most psychology courses. Once students are given questions they want to answer and once they are given methods as sensible means of arriving at an answer, then they are likely to be more motivated and to feel more motivated to learn about methods.

The sceptic might retort that all this is easier said than done – and that is a fair comment. It is one thing to sketch out a general framework: it is quite another to show what such a syllabus might look like in detail. That was an ambition with which we concluded our final session. As with many such good intentions expressed in the warm glow of collective agreement, such an ambition may be delayed by grinding everyday realities. However, we see such a task as both valuable and exciting. We have no proprietary claim on the matter. We would be very happy if someone else got to do it first. However, if our meetings and this special issue were to help to establish a dialogue across divisions that, in time, will engage our peers and successors, and that may ultimately transform the divisions themselves, then our ambitions will have been fully satisfied.

DISCUSS AND DEBATE

Are those in different areas of psychology and using different methods addressing different problems or addressing the same problems in different ways?

What can we learn about our own positions by better understanding rival positions?

Should we shift from teaching research methods to teaching the research process?

Are our differences a source of weakness or a sign of strength – and how should go forward from here?

Have your say on these or other issues this article raises. Write to our Letters page on psychologist@bps.org.uk or at the Leicester address – 500 words or less, please. Or you can contribute to our online forum on this or any other topic – go to www.thepsychologist.org.uk and follow the links.