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Mind, mousse and moderation

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MIND, MOUSSE, AND MODERATION

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MIND, MOUSSE, AND MODERATION

This chapter is about the ways that psychology appears in, and is used in, the process of research. More particularly we will be considering the way psychological terms, orientations, constructions, and displays are manifest, and practically drawn on, in market research focus groups. This study reflects a broader concern with what psychology is *for* in the different practices, everyday and institutional, intimate and public, that it appears. The interest here is to contribute to the literature on method as an interactional and discursive accomplishment and at the same time to contribute to the broader literature of discursive psychology. We will start with some comments on the general approach of discursive psychology and then consider research on the interactional accomplishment of research methods.

Discursive psychology

Discursive psychology (henceforth DP) has been developed in a series of studies, demonstrations and overviews, and been refined through debates with a varied range of cognitive and social psychologists, critical discourse analysts, ethnomethodologists, sociolinguists and ethnographers. Edwards (1997) and Edwards & Potter (1992) are foundational texts; Edwards (2005) and Potter (2003) review and summarize DP; Wiggins & Hepburn (2005) and the current volume collect together recent DP inspired studies. DP has a rather different object than most of the different traditions that have characterised psychology. It focuses on psychology as embedded in interaction, and as something that gives interaction

sense and coherence. Ultimately the topic of DP is psychology from the participants' perspective.

DP is distinct from superficially similar perspectives on topics such as folk psychologies, mental models, person schemata, social knowledge, social representations or theories of mind (Gergen & Semin, 1990; Heider, 1958; Hewstone, 1989; Leslie, 1987; Moscovici, 1984). As Edwards and Potter (1992) have shown, this way of thinking about psychology starts with a perceptual cognitive picture that has person understanding as a form of individual perception and processing. A mental model or theory processes information delivered via perception of other people. Rather than trying to get inside the person as these perspectives do, DP is addressing the psychology that is there for participants as they talk to one another, coordinate their actions, argue and complain, flirt and reassure. It asks questions such as the following. How are dispositions and intentions made hearable in interaction? How is familiarity and emotion shown? How are 'attitudes' involved with actions such as criticisms and compliments? Rather than seeing the task as that of attempting to open up the mythic black box where psychology has been thought to be hiding since Descartes and Locke developed their arguments, it is focused on what Edwards (2006) calls the 'rich surface' of language and social interaction.

The focus on interaction has led discursive psychologists to draw on the findings, methods and insights of conversation analysis, which provides the most sophisticated available approach for the study of talk-in-interaction. DP also draws on constructionism derived from sociology of scientific knowledge. This highlights the epistemic and reality productive elements of discourse, and the way these epistemic and psychological issues intertwine. For example, a description of an event can be constructed in such a way that it produces the speaker's own stance as,

say, appropriately neutral. Indeed, DP has shown the way that descriptions of ‘mind’ and ‘reality’ are pervasively mutually implicative.

Up to now DP studies, and closely related work at the boundaries of CA and ethnomethodology, has concentrated on one of the following six interrelated and overlapping themes.

1. They have studied the procedures through which the psychological implications of talk are managed. For example, they have investigated the way different motives are established and how memories are discounted as flawed (e.g. Edwards & Potter, 1992; Lynch & Bogen, 2005; Watson, 1983).
2. They have researched the way the thesaurus of psychological words is used to do different things in different settings. For example, it has considered the use of terms such as ‘anger’, ‘opinion’ and ‘noise’ (e.g. Edwards, 1999; Myers, 2004; Stokoe & Hepburn, 2005).
3. They have done studies that respecify topics that are central to cognitive research perspectives such as social cognition, cognitive psychology and cognitive science (including scripts and schemata, categories, attitudes and beliefs, perception, theory of mind, the unconscious, emotions – e.g. Auburn, 2005; Billig, 1999; Edwards, 2006).
4. They have considered psychological ‘displays’ of various kinds, where psychological states are ‘embodied’ (Kitzinger, 2006) in the manner of delivery of talk or associated items such as ‘gosh’, ‘uum’ (in the context of food) or sobs and sniffs (Hepburn, 2004; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2005; Wiggins, 2002).
5. They have examined the way psychological methods operate in practice and in particular the way they constitute their objects and produce them as the

property of individuals (e.g. Antaki, 2005; Puchta & Potter, 2002; Schegloff, 1999). More on this theme below.

6. They have started to consider the relation of psychology to institutions, exploring the way activities in therapy, education, courts and so on are constituted by specifically psychological business, and how institutional objects are constituted as psychological or not (e.g. Edwards & Potter, 1991; Potter, 2005; Potter & Hepburn, 2003).

These themes are not intended to be definitive and completely comprehensive; rather they highlight some of the developments that have been most central. The focus of this current chapter will be mix of theme 1, 2, 4 and 5. It will consider some of the ways that psychological terms and orientations are used in market research focus groups, and the way they are part of constituting the structured organization of those focus groups. Before that it is helpful to survey some of the recent work that studies social research as interactionally accomplished.

Studies of the accomplishment of research techniques

As our sophistication in studying interaction has increased, so it is possible to develop a richer understanding of the interaction that goes on in social research instruments such as surveys, assessments, interviews and focus groups. In one of the first pieces of its kind Suchman and Jordan (1990) studied interaction in survey interviews. One finding was that questions asked often departed from standardized question formats as interviewers worked to manage local pragmatic issues. And they argued that question delivery will always require ad hoc and local negotiation, subverting the ideal of standardization. This work on surveys has been considerably extended by Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000) and contributions to Maynard et al., (2002).

Some of this work has focused specifically on issues of psychological relevance. Schaeffer & Maynard (2005), for example, consider interactive aspects of question delivery in standardized surveys, highlighting a range of shortcomings with the idea that pauses are indicators of the time respondents need for ‘cognitive processing’. A further group of studies has highlighted the way that interaction in assessment interviews, qualitative interviews, questionnaires or focus groups is consequential for the psychological objects that are produced by the methods (Antaki, 1999; Antaki & Rapley, 1996; Koole, 2003; Lee & Roth, 2004; Maynard & Marlaire, 1992; Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Puchta & Potter, 2002; Schegloff, 1999).

The contribution here will be particularly focused on the role of psychological notions, orientations and constructions in market research focus groups.

Market research focus groups as topic

The materials and some of the background analysis to this chapter come from a project considering interaction in market research focus groups in the UK and Germany. In a series of papers we have studied a range of moderator actions including question design (Puchta & Potter, 1999), constructing opinions as objects contained within individuals (Puchta & Potter, 2002) and receipting participant’s contributions (Puchta, Potter & Wolf, 2004). These actions along with broader issues about the way moderators shape the talk of participants are discussed in Puchta & Potter (2004), which also introduces some of the issues developed in this chapter. This work was influenced by, and partly builds on, studies by Myers and Macnaghten (Myers, 1998; Myers & Macnaghten, 1999).

This chapter will take as its topic materials from a focus group run in the UK on hair products. As is common for groups of this kind, the participants sit on low comfortable chairs around a table which has some snack food, coffee cups and

ashtrays on it. The session as a whole lasts about an hour and a half. The moderator sits with her back to the video camera that records the whole group for the clients. See Photograph 1. The moderator informs the group members that there are further researchers behind a one-way mirror also behind the moderator. Groups of this kind are video recorded as standard – such records are part of what is purchased by the company or organization that commissions the group. Part of the skill of moderating is to produce interaction that focuses on the commissioning bodies interests.

Picture 1: Introducing the group

Moderators characteristically start groups of this kind with a general introduction covering what the participants should expect and what the topic of group is. The introduction here is typical in the themes it covers. The extract below is from about half a minute into the introduction. The moderator (henceforth FGM) has said she will ‘explain what we are doing’ emphasising that it will be ‘straightforward’ and noting that ‘companies before they do anything’:

Extract 1: Hair Products

1 **FGM:** Want te (0.2) .hh make su:re that they're doin
2 the right thing before they spend lots of money
3 on it, (0.2) .hh er:m an so they research m:ore
4 or less anything.
5 (0.2)
6 **FGM:** That they're thinking of doing. Er:m: (0.8)
7 tk.hh A:Nd the way they >do that< is te (0.2)
8 hi:re som'dy like me an give me all 'o their
9 ideas.=To °kin've (.) trot round the country an (.)
10 show people like you an see what you think o' them.°
11 .hhh I'VE GOT idea:s for: new products and new
12 packaging (0.3) u:m to show you, this morning,
13 .hh u:m (0.4) I work for an independent company,
14 (0.3) I do:n't work for:: erm (0.2) ((swallows))
15 >the people that came up with all this stuff an I
16 didn't come up with any of it.< I didn't do any
17 of the packaging and I didn't think of the products.
18 .hhh an BASically what that means is >I don't care
19 what you're saying.<
20 (0.3)
21 **FGM:** U:m so you can be: very rude about things, (.) if
22 you want to be, (0.2) um an you can be very (0.5)
23 complimentary about things if you want to be an
24 it doesn't make .hh any difference to me at all.
25 Um the important things from my point of view
26 is that you tell me what you think. .hhh We've
27 got nine of you here, (0.2) °um° hh wh(hh)ich is
28 .hhh record.
29 (0.2)

30 **FGM:** Um tur:nout. .hhh AN:d >that's basically (cuz)
 31 hopefully you all have different opinions about
 32 things so (0.2) again don't be poli:te. Um if
 33 you disagree with what someone's saying then
 34 (.) argue °with them.°
 35 (0.6)
 36 **FGM:** KAY?
 37 (0.4)
 38 **FGM:** Should be straightforward,

We will address a number of themes that arise in this introduction, focussing on elements that are relevant to our issue of different ways that psychology becomes involved in interaction.

1. Moderator stance and interest

A basic theme in DP has been the pervasive attention paid by people to issues of *stake* and *interest* (Edwards & Potter, 1992). This is closely related to the issue of the *stance* that they have to a particular claim or object (Potter & Hepburn, 2003). Moderators attend to these matters because of their potential for effecting the contributions of the participants.

This is a major theme in the extract above, where the moderator is introducing what will go on in the group. Note the emphatic and contrastive organization of lines 13-19. One the one hand:

I work for an independent company,

And on the other:

I do:n't work for:: erm (0.2) ((swallows))
 >the people that came up with all this stuff
 an
 I didn't come up with any of it.<
 I didn't do any of the packaging

and

I didn't think of the products.

.hhh an

Note the emphasis on 'independent' (not the same company who makes the hair products), and note the repetition in the description of what the moderator did not do. All of this is cashed out with the following upshot:

BASically what that means is >I don't care
what you're saying.<

This might seem overdone and redundant. But this is an unfamiliar environment for the participants, who might well be confused about the relation of the moderator to the product ideas. We can hypothesise that experienced moderators who run groups week in and week out have a strong sense of what confusions can arise and how they can be reduced.

The management of stance and interest is not only addressed with this rhetorically formatted contrast, it is also handled in the detail of the descriptive language. Part of this is the use of pro-terms. The 'company' whose 'ideas' are to be discussed is 'they' (lines 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7); that is, not 'we', 'our' or similar pro-terms that would link the moderator and the products. One of the role of pro-terms is the delineation of stake and stance. Another aspect is FGM's descriptive categories for the products – 'all this stuff' (line 15), for example, can be heard as somewhat distancing and dismissive, particularly in the context of the series of denials of involvement. The 'all this' displays a lack of care of discrimination and 'stuff' is a category that displays a lack of concern or precision or knowledge and projects the more explicit psychological disclaimer that follows.

In terms of DP, and particularly theme 1, what we are seeing here is the moderator managing her displayed stance on what will be talked about: she is

indifferent to whether it seen as positive or negative. This is stated explicitly, and in extrematized form on 24:

it doesn't make .hh any difference to me at all.

By using the extreme formulation the moderator displays her investment in the claim (cf. Edwards, 2000). This builds on the earlier formulation (18-19) 'I don't care what you're saying.' That is, she does not have a stake in it, and will not have an adverse reaction to criticism of the products.

In terms of a broader DP of institutions (theme 6) the moderator is constructing her role as indifferent to participant assessments of products, packaging and so on. In interaction terms, participants will not need to be cautious about assessments (they can be 'rude' or 'complimentary' – lines 21-3) and they should not expect moderator turns such as affiliations or accounts, or displays of upset in relation to these assessments. The moderator is thus working to deactivate the pervasive stake and interest orientation of the participants and constructing her relation to the product as formal and organizational rather than personal and invested.

2. Moderator knowledge

One of the basic features of human life is that people are treated as knowing things. People show what they know in what they say in a range of more or less explicit and inexplicit ways. Constructionist and discourse researchers have highlighted the different ways in which descriptions are accomplished as literal and credible (Potter, 1996); conversation analysts have been more focused on rights and responsibilities of epistemics and the way they are bound up with the interaction order (Heritage & Raymond, 2005). These two themes have a range of overlaps (see Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, ch. 8).

Epistemics are involved in market research focus groups in a wide range of different ways. One feature we highlighted in our previous work is the importance of the participants' understanding of moderator's knowledge for the trajectory of the group. In particular, we noted that asking the moderator questions about the product can cause problems. Apart from generating a possible problem for any participants who might disagree with moderator claims, this unhelpfully moves the focus away from participant to moderator views. We suggested that moderators tend to construct themselves as experts on market research but somewhat naïve or at least disinterested in the product itself.

We are not going to devote much space to it here. However, note that the various components of the introduction that manage stance and stake do a double duty in also showing an appropriate lack of knowledge of the product. Not working with the company, or coming up with ideas, suggests an apt lack of knowledge of their nature and detail. Likewise descriptive formulations such as 'all this stuff' (line 15) are outsiders descriptions, avoiding any strong familiarity or concern. And the moderator's characterization of being given all her ideas to 'trot around the country' with avoids presupposing familiarity or understanding.

In general, then, the moderator is managing her knowledgeability (theme 1) and in doing so contributing to an interactional organization in which she is unlikely to be asked about the nature of the product (theme 6).

3. Displaying Informality

So far we have focused on the management of psychological implications and the way in which the institutional organization of focus groups is produced. We can also consider the role of the moderator's psychological display in generating

appropriate interaction in the group. Before there are some things it will be helpful to clarify.

In Puchta & Potter (2004) we distinguish between two broad kinds of accounts. On the one hand, there are accounts that offer descriptions – ‘this mousse works well *as it is not sticky*’; on the other, there are accounts that focus on epistemic issues and particularly limitations of claims – ‘I find it hard to judge this mousse as *I have not used it much*’. Descriptions are often what moderators are after, and may be encouraged using a range of practices. In contrast, epistemic accounts are typically unhelpful and unwanted – we found that they are treated as ‘account clutter’ to be headed off if at all possible.

How can the moderator generate an environment that encourages descriptions but discourages epistemic account clutter? Part of what the moderator does is offer a formulation of how the interaction should unfold ‘don’t be polite’ (32) and ‘argue’ (34). However, she also works to generate an environment that discourages account clutter through her style of speech and lexical choices. Although we know that this moderator starts her other groups in a very similar way the opening sounds spontaneous as if she is making it up as she goes along (certainly not learned or recited). Note also the use of idiomatic and slang terms (‘trot round the country’, ‘all this stuff’), and informal enunciation (‘kin’ve’, ‘o’ them’, ‘cuz’, ‘kay’).

Our general point is that the moderator encourages informality not only by telling the participants that they need not act formally (they don’t need to be polite, they can argue) but by *displaying* her own stance to the interaction as informal and not rule bound. Such a display is not dramatic like the shouting of anger or the sobbing of extreme upset. However, it is perfectly suited to the practical task of generating what we might colloquially call a relaxed atmosphere and what we might more technically describe in terms lexical choice, delivery and accountability.

4. POBAs and the mental lexicon

The American market researcher Naomi Henderson coined the acronym POBA for the Perceptions, Opinions, Beliefs and Attitudes that focus groups are intended to study (Henderson, 1991). On the face of it this is a rather odd collection of psychological objects. Opinions, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs are all terms that have a somewhat uneasy dual life in everyday in technical social science settings. Moreover, if we consider the literature on focus group moderation and analysis it is not hard to make the list longer – thoughts, feelings, instincts, views, and more. Maybe POBATFIV is a less snappy acronym.

A more traditional psychological perspective would treat these terms as objects of study that are mentally encoded, or at least psychologically bounded in some way. The DP approach here is to bracket off any putative referential specificity of these terms – they may or may not refer to mental objects of some kind, in more or less technical or everyday practices. Instead it is concerned with the practical use of terms from the mental lexicon.

If we examine Extract 1 we can see a range of terms that might conventionally be treated as psychological in the sense that they are words for desires, mental objects or actions. As a first analytic move we can loosely categorize them:

Desires	Actions	Mental objects
want (lines 1, 23, 26)	complimentary (line 23) rude (line 21) polite (line 32) argue (line 34)	thinking (line 6) ideas (line 9, 11) think (line 10, 17, 26) opinions (line 31)

However, this exercise suggests a neatness of the separation of these categories and of psychological and non-psychological words that is becomes hard to justify when we consider the specifics of this talk. For instance, given much of lines 1-10 is describing what the commissioning company does, and much of 11-17 is describing what the moderator does, and much of 18-38 is describing what the participants should do not is not clear that the specific words should be treated as psychological. It would be possible to consider in detail the literary construction of the commissioning company, and the role of this construction in the practice of moderation. A central element in the DP project is considering how descriptions are organized to perform practices. However, given the space let us just concentrate on the terms for mental objects.

Thinking. The term thinking here could not easily be taken as a simple cognitive referent given its application to a rather loosely specified commissioning company. The term works well in this context to specify something like a loose plan or objective that may not come to fruition. Also, thinking suggests something conceptual and creative, thought up. Crucially, it presents the work that has gone into the materials that the focus group participants will discuss as being provisional. It therefore presents the participants' task as appropriately important – thinking is something that can be changed.

Ideas. The word 'ideas' complements 'thinking', of course. Again, it would be hard to take 'ideas' here as having a simple cognitive referent. They are treated as objects that can be given to the moderator and shown to group members. This notion too suggests conceptual content. It too suggests something that is provisional and can be changed. This again constructs the role of the participants as practical and appropriate – they are involved in a process that can influence something.

Think. The word ‘think’ is used in two different ways here. The use on line 17 (‘I didn’t think of the products’) is similar to ‘thinking’ above. The point here is the moderator stressing her non-involvement, particular her non-involvement with the creation of the products. The occurrences on lines 10 and 26 are classic POBA uses. That is, the moderator is after ‘what you think’ of the products. ‘Think’ is nicely open – it can involve evaluations, but is not restricted to that. Moreover, it is not necessarily something that has to be worked at or calculated or assessed (although it does not exclude that). Although ‘what you think’ appears a very open request it is interesting to consider what it nevertheless discourages. One of the features of POBA questions that we identified in our broader analysis was that they are not easy to respond to in two ways that are very troublesome in focus groups, namely with ‘don’t knows’ or with questions for the moderator. It seems to be hard not to have any thought about something, and thoughts are personal in a way that means the moderator should not be expected to improve on them. So if we think about ‘think’ in terms of a relatively open generation of responses, that nevertheless heads off some problem responses, we can see its practical value in the setting.

Opinions. This is another classic POBA term. The term ‘opinion’ perhaps suggests a more developed or more publicly stated position than ‘think’, although the OED defines the former in terms of the latter: ‘what one thinks or how one thinks about something’ (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). The definition highlights an aspect of ‘opinion’ that is particularly relevant here: ‘resting on grounds insufficient for complete demonstration’. That suggests something that by definition is not fully accountable. It is talk that participants can offer with less threat of being asked to provide a full justification (see Myers, 2004, for an extended and highly pertinent discussion of opinion talk in the context of focus groups). Put another way, opinions provide a sympathetic frame for participants to offer a range of their own ‘views’

(thoughts, perceptions, etc.). Characterising participants' talk in this way encourages its production. There is a further element to this. POBA talk, including opinion talk, is typically presented by moderators as something straightforward. POBAs are items that can be delivered immediately – they do not have to be worked out. We will develop this below. However, even in this extract we can see the moderator working up the task as easy and uncomplicated. Note the way the moderator ends this package of instructions with this emphasis on the task for the participants being straightforward (line 38).

What we have tried to do in this discussion is highlight four different ways in which psychology plays a practical and interactional role in the work of focus group moderation. While these have picked up themes 1 (the psychological implications of talk), theme 2 (the psychological thesaurus) and theme 4 (the display or embodiment of psychology), taken together they contribute to the emerging interest in the way psychological practices are partly constitutive of institutional practices. In the next section we will develop this analysis

Thought in practice

The following extract comes from about 14 minutes in the group, after the moderator has spent a bit of time with an exercise learning the participants' names (P2 etc. mark the position of screen grabs).

Hair products: First thoughts

1	FGM:	The <u>re</u> sult is ast <u>on</u> ishing.=with <u>n</u> ew organics	←P2
2		<u>s</u> tyling elixir, .hh you'll have <u>p</u> erfect control	
3		with only a few drops, but <u>n</u> o-one will know you've	

4 used a °↓styling produ:ct.°

5 (1.4)

6 **FGM:** So. ((FGM scans group))

7 (2.2) ((FGM scans group))

8 **FGM:** ↑First thou:ghts on that.

9 **Ann:** What- what is it.

10 (0.2)

11 **Ann:** Is it a gel, (0.2) or a (.) mou:sse, or a

12 (1.0)

13 **Liz:** `Tsa [new prod]uct.=

14 **Ann:** [Jsst a-]

15 **Ann:** =New:- [a new hair] right.=A new product.

16 **Liz:** [huh huh huh]

17 **Peg:** T'jsst like a spray is it.

18 **40 seconds omitted**

19 **FGM:** Others' ther- ↑first ↑thoughts?=Ella ↑first

20 ↑thoughts ↑on ↑this?

21 (0.2)

22 **Ella:** Mghm* (0.4) w'll my fir:st thou:ght when it ←P3

23 said you could use a few drops is (0.3) yeah.

24 ri:ght.

25 (0.2)

26 **Ella:** Ahh↑[uhh! (0.3)]

27 **Various:** [((quiet laughter))]

28 (0.3)

29 **Ella:** Cos when- ye know when you get- read the back of

30 the mousse thing and it says do a little golf ←P4

31 ball. An you get this (a[mazing] (3.0)] ←P5

32 **Various:** [((Loud laughter))]

33 **FGM:** >H↑uh h↑uh< using a nhetball's whorth.

34 **Ella:** Yheah [exhactlyh. H↑ah.h]

35 **FGM:** [>h↑uh h↑uh h↑uh h↑uh<]

36 **Ella:** .hh I'm like ↑mm. .hh er:m (0.3) so a few

37 drops: [was my] fir:st thought. and the

38 **FGM:** [((coughs))]

39 **Ella:** second one w's .hh (0.4) if it's soft to the

40 touch an doesn't look like you've °used a styling

41 product,° (0.5) °then how° (0.2) °can it work.°

42 **FGM:** Mh[m:~]

43 **Ella:** [(°Ma]ke) se:nse.° [(I m'n)]

44 **FGM:** [Yeh?]

45 (0.4)

*throat clear

There is a lot going on in this sequence. What we will do is take up DP themes 2 and 4 and develop them further with material that offer more participant uptake, and therefore a possibly more nuanced analytic purchase. Let us start with some brief further comments on theme 4, psychological display, and move onto a more detailed consideration of theme 2, the psychological thesaurus.

Reading as Psychological Display

We have already noted something that might be glossed as ‘informality’ as one kind of ‘psychological display’. Another sort of display comes in the first 4 lines of Extract 2. The moderator is doing reading. That is, she is using a recognizable reading inflection. This goes along with her holding up a board on which the product description is written (Picture 2 suggests that at least some of the participants can read the description that FGM is reading out). The combination of board and inflection makes it very clear that the moderator is reporting something rather than offering her own opinions of the product. As we have noted above,

showing that they are naïve and with respect to, and independent from, the product is something that helps establish the characteristic organizational pattern of a market research focus group.

Picture 2: Moderator reads ‘astonishing’ (line 1)

Up to now this phenomenon has been understood using Goffman’s different footing categories (Goffman, 1981 – for interactional approaches to reported speech see Holt, 1996; Wooffitt, 1992). One thing that this very emphatic display of reading does is present the words uttered as not those of the speaker, who acts as relayer of views rather than origin. The management of footing, then, is inter alia the management of the speaker’s own involvement and accountability. By using the reading voice and the board the moderator makes it clear that she is not responsible for the words. This heads off problem actions such as asking her about their meaning or quality. More broadly it reproduces the important moderator distinction between marketing expertise and product naiveté.

First thoughts, gestures, and the psychological thesaurus

We have noted above that ‘think’ is one of the typical POBA terms that are used in focus groups. The term ‘thoughts’ is closely related to this (the OED has an

item of mental activity, a thing that is in mind, an idea or notion). Let us make a few observations about the moderator's use of 'thoughts' and the participants' uptake.

First, note what happens before the first use in the extract (and the group) in line 8. The moderator ends the reading from the card by putting the card down, pausing and then saying 'so' with terminal intonation. At the same time she scans the group. All of this seems to suggest that some contribution on the part of the group members is being encouraged – although none is forthcoming. It is after further delay that the moderator asks for 'first thoughts on that', which generates an immediate response.

We have already suggested that moderators treat POBA items as things that can be delivered immediately. In this case, the construction '*first* thoughts' highlights this immediacy – what is wanted is not 'thought through', calculated, or refined. Furthermore, the emphasis on *first* thoughts may generate a particularly safe environment for responding as any item offered need be defended as only a first thought.

If we consider what the participants' offer there are a number of interesting features of lines 8-17. Ann starts with something that has the grammatical form of a question, although it is not delivered with questioning intonation, nor is it answered (directly). Liz's contribution on line 13 superficially seems like an answer – however, the emphasis on 'new' suggests more a collaborative 'reasoning' about the product from the description. The request for 'first thoughts', then, generates questions and observations about the product's nature. The moderator lets this run for some time, thereby treating it as appropriate for the research task.

After this interaction appears to run down and become repetitive the moderator repeats the first thoughts request, this time specifying first 'others' in

general (that is, members who have not contributed), and then selecting a particular group member, Ella, who has not yet contributed to this particular discussion.

Others' ther- ↑first ↑thoughts?=Ella ↑first
↑thoughts ↑on ↑this?

It is not clear from the video if Ella has shown signs of wishing to contribute that the FGM has picked up. Whatever the case, having been specifically selected by the moderator she works up to an elaborate response. This is beautifully complex and prefaced with a clear orientation to the 'first thought' construction of the question:

w'll my fir:st thou:ght when it said
you could use a few drops is (0.3)
yeah. ri:ght.

Ella specifies the particular element of the description (note 'when it said' not 'when you said', showing the success of the moderator's footing management) and characterises her first thought as an ironic agreement (i.e. a disagreement). The irony is delivered hearably through the intonational contour. Note that Ella follows it on line 26 with an extended and inflected laughter particle which sets off quiet laughter across the group. It may be that although the irony was clear the action Ella was doing with it was not yet so – it might have been complaining, for example, for which laughter would have been inappropriate. Ella's own laughter, therefore, acted as a guide.

Ella then explicates her ironic response to the 'few drops' description by reporting what happens with mousse. This is presented in scripted terms as something that happens in a standard way. The description starts verbally with 'it says do a little golf ball' and is followed through with an expansive circular gesture. This occasions loud laughter from the group members and the moderator follows the laughter with a formulation of the sense of the gesture as 'using a netball's worth'.

(We can speculate that the moderator may formulate the sense of non-verbal elements of the interaction such as this to clarify them to the research users whose video record provides only a restricted view). Ella agrees with the FGM's formulation and both laugh. Pictures 3-5 illustrate this. Picture three is where Ella is saying 'first thought'. Picture 4 is from where she is saying little 'golf ball' – she is making a small shape in her palm with the fingers of her other hand. Then in picture 5 is part of the expansive circular gesture as if she has a very large ball on her lap, this still accompanies the word 'amazing'.

We have spent a bit of time on Ella's contribution here as it shows the value and flexibility of asking for 'thoughts' in this setting. Ella offers a precisely constructed description of a problem with mousse specifically raised by part of the blurb read by the moderator. She characterises this as her first thought, developing it with a non-vocal, but highly intelligible enactment, receipted by the moderator who both shows her shared understanding of what Ella is saying and showing, and makes the sequence more clearly intelligible to the production workers who are watching behind the one-way mirror and who will watch the video of the interaction.

Some social psychologists have suggested that gesture is a form of 'visible thought' (Beattie, 2004). What we see here is a combination of talk and gesture being used to satisfy the request for a 'first thought'. Whether any of this was or even could be 'going on in Ella's mind' at the moment of hearing the product blurb, it is deftly appropriate to the work of the focus group when it is delivered. The gesture, the words and the 'first thought' are all part of a public and intelligible piece of interaction. Although psychologists and market researchers might treat POBAs as mental entities of one kind or another, and although it may be a practical shorthand to do so for some purposes, perhaps the design of new forms of hair mousse, the POBA language is working here *precisely* because of its public and visible nature.

Pictures 3-5: 'First thought'; 'little golf ball'; 'amazing...'

Practices of Moderation and Psychology

In this chapter we have documented a number of ways in which psychology and discourse are inextricably bound together. It has attempted to explicate psychology from an interactional perspective. This has involved remained agnostic with respect to the nature, status or absence of psychological states and entities enclosed within any of the participants. Instead the focus has been on how 'psychological' phenomena are live in the practices we see here.

Theme 1 – psychological implications

We have shown how the moderator manages the psychological implications of her talk, in particular she constructs a disinterested stance on the product, stressing her lack of stake in its origins, quality or success. At the same time she constructs her knowledgeable ability carefully, emphasising her knowledge of market research procedures but her lack of knowledge of the product itself.

Theme 2 – the psychological thesaurus

We explored the way the moderator uses a range of items from the psychological thesaurus, in particular the way she uses POBA terms in questions for the participants. Our analysis focused on think, opinions, and first thoughts. These items can be parts of questions that are hard not to not respond to – they are items that participants should be their own expert on, and they are less susceptible to discounting as flawed than factual or knowledge items. They are also relatively open items – although they tend not to occasion ‘account clutter’, they occasion a range of descriptions including, loosely speaking, features such as questions, observations, and non-vocal displays.

Theme 4 – psychological display and embodiment

We considered the way the moderator displayed her psychological state. We illustrated this both with the moderator’s construction of informality and with her footing as the relayer of others’ views. Both of these displays have practical consequences for conduct within the group – the displayed informality encourages participation but discourages account clutter; the footing as relayer sustains the separation of moderator from company, making it clear that personal views are not being delivered. Note that this psychological display is in the service of producing the normative organization of the market research focus group; we are not suggesting that there is some specific feature of this moderator. Rather, the psychological displays are generic features of producing the organization.

Theme 5 –research methods in practice

The analysis of this chapter has further specified the specific procedures through which different elements of focus groups are produced. In particular has considered the way psychological terms, orientations and constructions are drawn on

in the practices of the group. As we noted above, we have developed this interest with these materials much more elsewhere. This blurs into theme 6.

Theme 6 – discursive psychology and institutional organization

One of the things we have tried to do here is show the way that psychological terms and orientations are drawn on to produce the distinctive business of the setting. In this case, the management of stance, interest, and knowledgeability, the displays of informality and ‘just reading’, and the use of POBA language (opinions, thoughts) are all coordinated together to generate the distinctive structural organization of the focus group.

Let us end this chapter with some general observations about the nature of psychology and the applied potential of work of this kind. First, psychology. What we have tried to do here is highlight how psychology and interaction may come together. That is, we have tried to explicate the way phenomena that are traditionally thought of as psychological – motive, knowledge, ideas and so on – are parts of interaction. This is what is distinctive in discursive psychology – it focuses on the way these things are part of discourse practices rather than how they are individual or mental objects. What we have done here is just the briefest sketch of the range of range of discursive psychology themes and how they might come together in one setting. Each would be the stimulus to a full study.

With respect to application, we have written extensively on this topic elsewhere (Puchta & Potter, 2004). One of the things we noted in previous work was that the stipulations in how-to-do-it manuals for focus group moderators were sometimes out of line with the practices of highly skilled moderators. For example, although manuals may emphasise that moderator questions ought to be simple and one-dimensional in practice a range of elaborations were used, particularly in topic initial questions (Puchta & Potter, 1999). For reasons of this kind, we suggested that

application might be more effective if it took examples of good practice and attempted to explicate their operation. This might allow moderators to take a more strategic approach to their actions. In effect, we were hoping that moderators could turn practices into strategies. Note that in this case, focus group researchers might offer a more depth or psychodynamic approach to ‘first thoughts’ that would emphasise irrational dynamics or subjective meanings. First thoughts might be treated as relatively uncontaminated by rationalization or social processes, for example. Our analysis does not show such classically psychological interpretations to be wrong – it is precisely and systematically agnostic to such things as its starting position (Potter & Edwards, 2003). However, it does offer a more interactionally guided account of what POBA constructions of this kind may be doing and ultimately studies that highlight conversational pragmatics in this way may raise challenging questions for cognitive or psychodynamic accounts (Edwards, 1997).

Our interest here has been rather different. If there is an applied focus to this chapter it is a critical one. We have highlighted the limitations of individual and cognitive understandings of psychology in favour of understandings that are interactional and jointly constructed. Its use is a positive and negative one, cautioning against particular kinds of psychological picture and offering an image of psychology in practice that is dynamic and collaborative.

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