Professor Jonathan Potter

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Shaming – Using contemporary discursive psychology to capture a practice

This talk will start with some observations about the different national and international traditions of contemporary social psychology, with emphasis on the place of discursive psychology. It then will pick up from Potter (2010, 2012, Potter & Shaw, in press) to highlight the virtues of working with detailed records of naturalistic data which, in contrast to some traditional methodological injunctions (Manstead, 2008), allow for a rigorous study of contingently unfolding practices. It will then build on a series of studies of requests, directives and threats in a corpus of family mealtimes to consider the interactional production of shame in the context of admonishments (Craven & Potter, 2010; Hepburn & Potter, 2011).

Unlike directives, admonishments are not focused on immediate behavior modification. Admonishments, like requests, orient to the agency of the recipient; however, in admonishments it is orienting to the recipient as actively doing wrong. The talk will focus on the exploitation of interrogative grammar to interactionally deliver shaming. Constructions such as 'what are you doing' and 'what did I say' place the recipient in the position where they are treated as able to understand and formulate their own wrongdoing; although that option is not necessarily the one recipients will opt for. In epistemic terms the question is one where both speaker and recipient are treated as K+ with respect to the answer, and the business of shaming is precisely dependent on the recipient's publically shown K+ position. The talk will end by considering how this topic could provide insights into broader questions about the nature of morality and children's social development.

Biography

Jonathan Potter is Distinguished Professor, and Dean of the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University, New Jersey. Before that he was lecturer, reader, professor, chair and then dean at Loughborough University.

He has worked on basic theoretical and analytic issues in social psychology for more than 30 years. This is seen in his engagement with and development of post-structuralism (in Social Texts and Contexts, with Margaret Wetherell and Peter Stringer), discourse analysis (in Discourse and Social Psychology, with Margaret Wetherell), discursive psychology (in Discursive Psychology, with Derek Edwards) and constructionism (in Representing Reality).

Jonathan is currently interested in the way basic psychological notions such as 'socialization' can be reconfigured as an object in and for interaction. Working with naturalistic materials has provided a way of unlocking fundamental and subtle issues about the nature of 'cognition' (in Conversation and Cognition, with Hedwig te Molder). This sits alongside a long-term critical and applied interest in topics such as racism (in Mapping the Language of Racism, with Margaret Wetherell) and, more

recently, morality, asymmetry, and emotion in family-mealtime and child-protection settings (with Alexa Hepburn).