
The Reproduction of Othering

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Social science is usually about someone else or something out there. A good deal of the work we do, both in the traditional 'hard' methodologies which predominate in psychology and in the 'softer' more innovative fields like discourse analysis and ethnography is about anchoring what we say to the object of our enquiry. Science has a considerable stake in constructing 'out there-ness'. Certainly, there have been attempts to substitute a more participative model of enquiry (see *inter alia* Currie and Kazi, 1987; Oakley, 1979) or to style the people in whom one is interested as 'co-researchers' (Moustakas, 1994). However, there are usually limits to this apparently democratic process: the 'co-researchers' being researched do not suddenly appear on the university payroll, for example. The creation of others in the social sciences, as Fine (1994) reminds us, disproportionately involves the privileged researching and representing 'ethnic minorities', the poor, the 'mentally ill' or even ordinary women. Moreover, according to Fine (1994: 79) an 'even more terrifying' prospect emerges if the research is intended to 'help' the others thus created. Even ethnographically documenting strategies of liberation and resistance is accomplished in and through the structure of academic privilege. So even when we take others seriously there will be 'residues of domination' (1994: 81) haunting the warp and weft of our descriptive fabrics.

Given the ethical and political concerns about doing this kind of thing to others, is there any justification for producing descriptions of people who differ from ourselves in terms of their experience of gender, disability, sexuality, madness or any other distinction which confers privilege on us as describers?

Perhaps we *should* represent 'others'. On an ethical level, it's probably more justifiable than ignoring them. On an academic level, it is because the 'others' are difficult to ignore. Whoever the 'others' might be, they are not solely located in their bodies. The discourse and activity of 'others' spreads out over a variety of surfaces. 'Others' are writing, talking, painting, photographing, acting, filming, singing as well as participating in everyday life. 'Others' are industriously raising scholarly imaginations on their own situation and how it has been represented in mainstream social science. The intense interest in critically re-reading the classic texts of psychology and identifying the racism, heterosexism and masculine basis of the discipline has been propelled by the efforts of scholars who are black, lesbian and/or feminist. While we can't afford to be complacent about the technologies of oppression embedded in the social sciences, it does suggest that others are not just people out there somewhere else. Othering, and being an other, is an intensely public activity. Moreover, it is activity

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which in our academic and private lives we struggle to make intelligible. It becomes so through an ongoing choreography of argument whereby the otherness itself is created and transformed.

CONJECTURES AND REFUTATIONS: INTELLIGIBLE ORGASMS?

As an example of this, consider the recent altercations in these pages between myself and Wendy Hollway (Hollway, 1993; 1995; Brown 1994; Gilfoyle et al., 1992). This debate, while it involves a number of contributors, has increasingly developed along lines that are concerned with the agency of others. My recent suggestions (Brown, 1994) that heterosexual practice, pleasure and desire for women and men are informed by politics and processes of domination are taken by Hollway (1995) to mean that I am denying her 'sexual agency', though this was not what I wrote. Moreover, Hollway takes issue with our earlier article (Gilfoyle et al., 1992) where we described a set of interviews with men and women about sex and relationships. Here we identified the 'pseudo-reciprocal gift discourse', where women were described as somehow giving themselves to men and men were somehow giving them orgasms. Hollway infers that by identifying inequalities in this form of talk we have ridden roughshod over the participants. True, the participants did not launch into diatribes about how unequal it was. However, they didn't say it was equitable either. The lens of feminism, with its especial concern with gender inequality, assists us in understanding how such conversation links in with grander systems and structures. Presuming that fragments of sexuality are equal is just as tendentious.

The whole process gets even more controversial when it is read as 'denying agency'. I have no personal doubt of Hollway's strong subjective sense of herself as an agent, both in her role as an author and as a participant in heterosexuality. However, I am not in the privileged position of knowing Hollway's mind. What interests me is how that agency becomes part of an intelligible public performance. Agency, to my mind, is as much a topic to be explained as it is a resource for substantiating claims to self-determination. The other, in the form of this mysterious agency of heterosexual desire apparently resident in heterosexual women, doesn't just stay inside. It leaks out over other ideologically contoured surfaces, such as the literary surface of *Feminism & Psychology*. Hollway's expressions of pleasure and desire are immediately intelligible in terms of the public ways in which desire and pleasure are 'accountable' in Shotter's (1993) terms. Hollway's (1993) references to being wrapped in strong tanned arms, to be adored and to being given something, which are foregrounded in her account, are understandable by anyone who has grown up watching movies or television, reading novels, magazines or comics in Europe and North America. Consider also how the terms used connote and consolidate agency. What different imaginations do we raise on the situation of women in heterosexuality if different terminology is used — like being imprisoned or restrained, being despised, having their honour or their maidenheads 'taken'? What if, instead of wrapping her in his arms, a woman were to describe her lover wrapping her in his tentacles or in cling film? Trivial, perhaps, but that's why we understand Hollway as describing something fundamentally accountable as part of her experience, rather than writing science fiction for example. The creation of desiring, heterosexual

selves, and consequently desiring, heterosexual others does not rely on internal personal psychological processes, but is accomplished through language.

RELATIONS IN PUBLIC: AUTHORIZING HETEROSEXUAL PLEASURES

A further reason why we need to take the process of people describing others very seriously is that it goes on in everyday life. Getting to grips with this is not entirely coterminous with turning an imperializing ethnographic gaze on people, but looking at how public expressions of activity make sense in their social context. Going back to the example of heterosexual desire, it is immediately apparent that this is a highly contested field where the contributions in *Feminism & Psychology* are but a drop in a very large and unruly ocean. The literate heterosexual is hailed on every side by a huge number of regulatory discourses, such as popular magazines and books on how to have a better relationship, all of which are actively channelling desire. Heterosexual pleasure doesn't get left to chance. In many ways it is authored. That is, pleasure is a kind of argument which enfolds emotions, bodily sensations and orientations to social relationships. It makes possible particular experiences. In order to do this it has to be scrupulously organized.

As people talk about their relationships they participate in much larger, complex systems of meaning where creating and representing others goes on. Everyday talk and popular literature are replete with accounts of the mindedness of other people or their readers. If the people who write for *Feminism & Psychology* don't represent others, we are avoiding a social process which already describes, fixes and enlists them. A process which creates others, their desires and pleasures as entities to be worked on, transformed and managed.

Perhaps we should carry on representing others. Constructing the mindedness and 'agency' of others is so pervasive and so much a part of communication that it is difficult to imagine proceeding without it. In particular, it is important to engage with these patterns of representation because even if we achieve an 'otherless' academic discourse, many people and institutions have a great deal at stake in creating and managing others. Representing others, whether we do it ourselves as an heuristic device to make sense of what we call our data, or whether we detect it going on elsewhere, is an important topic of study in its own right. At the same time, the work of people attempting to break out of the 'otherness' we have constructed them into has a vital role to play in achieving a *reflexive* knowledge which is sufficiently fluid to admit of being 'ruptured' with 'uppity voices' (Fine, 1994: 75).

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