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Chapter 7

Discoursing jealousy

[pp. 94-132]

Paul Stenner

[p.stenner@ucl.ac.uk + www.psychol.ucl.ac.uk/people/profiles/stenner_paul.htm]

This chapter attempts a ‘thematic decomposition’ of text taken from taped interviews I have conducted on the topic of jealousy with a soon-to-be-married couple, Jim and May (these are pseudonyms). It is a much condensed version of a wider research project (Stenner, 1992).

A ‘thematic decomposition’ is a close reading which attempts to separate a given text into coherent themes or stories. This approach informed by the idea that discourse does not simply *express* or reflect meanings, rather, meanings are *constructed* through discourse (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). These constructions are useful and have ‘cultural currency’ inasmuch as they are *social* and enable a *share* understanding. They should not, therefore, be considered as the product of any given individual. We use and adapt stories with narrative themes which have already been arranged for us (Sarbin, 1986). Such ‘socially sedimented’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) stories can well thought of as trans-individual, historically localized, culturally specific formations of language-in-use. My approach is also informed by the post-structuralist concept ‘subject position’. A ‘subject position’ is a ‘part’ allocated to a person by the use of a story.² As put by Harré and Davies:

the constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions. A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire ... Among the products of discursive practices are the very persons who engage in them.

(Harré and Davies, 1990: 43)

[115]

This chapter sets out to problematize the idea, endemic in psychology (Harré, 1986), that jealousy is an ‘intrapsychic essence’; a real and unitary psychological property. The *constructionist* stance I am taking views the emotion as inseparable from the social/cultural/ judgemental context of its enactment. In other words, jealousy is conceived – not as *originating* from within the mind of the individual – but as being produced within the ‘interactive space’ (Coulter, 1989); as a complex social production mediated and generated by culturally available knowledge. My focus is on the *storied* nature of jealousy.

Elsewhere in my research I have used other techniques (such as Q-methodology)

to look at how the ‘experience’ of jealousy is accounted (Stenner, 1992). Here, however, attention is directed on to how the ‘attribution’ of jealousy (and its absence) is employed in the context of a relationship. My reading of the interview material, for instance, shows Jim using a story which positions May as jealous, and May resisting this positioning. The employment of a ‘thematic decomposition’ enables us to see that the question of whether or not May is ‘really’ jealous is not the central issue. May’s jealousy is the negotiated product of a series of storied contestations. If Jim’s story gains precedence over May’s and becomes accepted as the ‘true’ definition of the situation, then he will have done something more than simply and neutrally *identifying* and labelling May’s internal emotional state of being. This perspective, therefore, gives rise to a different set of theoretical and methodological questions. We must resist the urge to ask whether or not a given story is ‘true’, and instead look to what may be said to be *achieved* by its use. What are its constructive effects? What is it doing?

In what follows I trace through a number of subject positions set up by competing stories. The ‘thematics’ derived from my reading of the interview with Jim will be considered before turning to the interview with May. Note that I refer to this analysis as a *reading*, and not as my *interpretation* of what Jim and May are *intending* to say. An interpretation can be more or less accurate, - being assessed against the authorial intent of the speaker, or against some outside truth (both criteria are problematized by post-structuralism), - a reading must be judged by how useful it is. [116]

READING OF ‘JIM INTERVIEW’

‘Ideologically informed anti-jealousy’

J: I’ve never been jea ... I’ve never really believed in monogamy.

There are two parts to this first story. First, jealousy is seen as being the emotion of unenlightened, unaware individuals with outmoded beliefs.

J: No, no. Never, no. I can say that about any women ... it would never have worried me if they’d gone off with other men.

Int: So how do you feel about jealousy then, do you see it as a kind of weakness?

J: Uh ... it’s one of the many things I don’t understand about people. Why do they go around chopping each other up with axes and stuff? Why do they go around shooting each other when it’s patently not necessary to do so? How do the very rich people feel about the grinding poverty surrounding them? Why do people get sexually jealous? ... You know, I don’t understand the mass of humanity at all.

Jim (J) is positioned by his story as an ‘outsider’ or ‘non-conformist’. It provides him with a particularly positive identity as a member of an ‘ideologically sound’ vanguard of enlightened individuals. The second part of the story, ‘other people can’t handle my ideas’, concerns Jim’s relations with other people (mainly women) which, within this story, are hindered by the inability of others to accept the hard truth of the unacceptability of monogamy. When asked about these relations, Jim replies:

J: Uh, Well, you know, the girl asks you what you think, you tell her what you think, she disagrees violently with you, and after a while the relationship breaks up!

Other girlfriends have been *ostensibly* like Jim, but have inevitably ‘fallen short’ at some juncture:

J: So it’s been more like that with everybody else. To varying degrees. Subsequent girlfriends have been ... ostensibly like me, they were atheists, you know. Like May ... she’s the girlfriend who’s most like me, that I’ve ever had ... I was very surprised when she announced that we were getting married.

[117]

A contradiction

We can read an illuminating contradiction into Jim’s text regarding this point. This story implies that he discusses his views on monogamy and jealousy in an up-front and open (but inevitably frustrated) manner. However, the only examples Jim gives directly contradict this impression. Did Jim mention his ideas about anti-monogamy during the early stages of his relationship with May?

J: Well, no, umm, it was never like the primary conversation, you don’t meet someone and say ‘oh, who are you? What’s your name? What’s your feelings on sexual monogamy?’

Int: Yeah. But was anything, like, implicit in the relationship? Like that you would be faithful in any kind of way?

J: Yeah, it always has been, with my girlfriends, it’s always been their concept, sort of thing.

Note that Jim finds it necessary to account for the fact that he made no mention to his partner of what he was previously constructing as his deep-rooted ideological commitment to anti-jealousy. He does this by making a joke of the possibility of meeting someone and instantly tackling them on questions of monogamy (Potter and Wetherell (1987: 47), call this device the ‘extreme case formulation’). He uses the same strategy when describing why no mention of monogamy and fidelity was made in the marriage vows which they had jointly rewritten along ‘humanist’ lines:

J: Well, we went through the detail, and, decided we’d cut out anything, like, any reference to God, the state, love, honour, and ~ but actually that [fidelity] never came up. I didn’t say things like, ‘oh sorry, that’s got to go’, we just built up our own thing from scratch.

So, Jim’s ideologically informed stance against monogamy does not stretch to discussing these ideas with his partner. This ‘contradiction’ Jim addresses by use of humour and parody and by denying his own personal involvement in the monogamy. The marriage also is something which is ‘forced’ on him:

J: I was very surprised when she announced that we were getting married ... Well you know, I was ... psychologically twisted into it. Loads of pressure really, you know.

[118]

A necessary compromise

J: Yeah. That's how I see my life, you know, making a lot of compromises.

So, Jim finds that other people fail to live up to his 'anti-jealousy' ideals. The fact that he *does* live a monogamous life and does *not* openly talk about his anti-monogamy to his partners does not prevent this positive positioning. Indeed, he is also able to position himself as a considerate compromise maker. To achieve this, Jim draws upon a multitude of resources, three of which we will briefly examine.

The first involves Jim depicting himself as being pressured on I sides to conform to 'traditional' relationship stereotypes. He can either bend in the direction of the wind of this pressure, or resist id be broken:

J: I've always been very easy going, going along with other people, especially when I'm so heavily outnumbered. Well, when you're outnumbered by your mother and father, and uh, all your relatives, and a fair number of your friends as well, you know, and you think they'd hate it if you went and did something too alternative, and the same thing with one-on-one relationships.

The second theme emphasizes what Jim would lose if he didn't compromise:

J: I could be completely open with everybody. If this wasn't going to work and she was going to throw me out of the flat, and send me back to the student bedsit or whatever, then it would be silly and it would obviously be far more sensible to lie.

The third and most significant theme of 'necessary compromise' involves Jim positioning May as someone who would be hurt and upset if he were to live by his principles of non-monogamous anti-jealousy. The clearest example of this is the following:

J: Obviously you don't want to hurt ... you don't want to say you'll do something that's going to hurt someone you care about. So you try and express what you really think and say, and you get, and then her lower lip starts to go and then I shut up.

[119]

So, Jim would *like* to be up-front and honest with May but finds that she is too emotionally weak to cope with this honesty.

A second contradiction, and May's first subject position: 'jealous'

To maintain the plausibility of this discursive complex, it is clearly necessary for Jim to position May as someone who is jealous: someone who is fragile, unstable, emotional,

and who can't handle the idea of a non-monogamous relationship. However, examples or concrete instances of this jealousy are conspicuously absent. When directly asked to describe an instance of May's jealousy he replies:

J: I mean so far, actually, it's been kind of a game, because she doesn't get genuinely [laughs] angry. Because I'm always, I've been so open about it. The fact is I've never actually been unfaithful to her yet ... she has no problem with me announcing that I'm going out with a girl, spending a lot of time with women, coming back really late at night ~ she'll ask me where I've been and I'll say I've been out with A, B, C or D, or whatever, and she's said 'Oh fine' and rolls over and goes to bed.

Jim laughs when he says that 'she doesn't get genuinely angry', probably because he recognizes that he has been systematically implying the opposite. In the first extract Jim actually goes as far as to claim credit for May's lack of jealousy. He constructs his *not lying* about going out with other women as his open honesty, thus indicating caution on *his* part about this activity. Jim is suspicious that May will be suspicious. The jealousy is always only potentially present:

J: If, for example, I went ahead and had an affair and lied to her about where I'd been at certain times, and whatever, if she found out about this, she'd probably go completely ape-shit.

Apart from this potential jealousy May seems to cope in a perfectly reasonable way with Jim's ideas and, from the examples given by Jim, she seems to be prepared to talk in a direct and honest way about them: [120]

J: So sometimes she says jokingly, 'Oh yes, well you know, I wouldn't mind if you go and have your fling, you know, just to catch up with me', but other times, she does get, you know, really upset if I ever talk about really doing it.

Int: Does she actually get angry, get upset and talk about these feelings?

J: Mmm. no not really ... She'll keep quiet, yeah. And make it clear, let me know, you know, body language.

Jim's first subject position: 'walking on eggshells'

Jim is positioned by his story as someone who has to tread a very careful line between his own desires and the negative effect these will have on other people (particularly May). It is Jim as much as May who is hypersensitive to the ways in which his actions might influence May. He constructs a familiar position for himself where it is as if he is 'walking on eggshells'; he has the power either to hurt or to protect May by his actions. This 'power-positioning' is clearly in evidence when Jim describes feeling 'guilt if not jealousy', indicating that he sees himself as *responsible* for May's feelings:

J: Yeah, she just goes very very quiet, lower lip starts to tremble.

Int: And how does that make you feel then?

J: Well that makes me feel guilty. I do know guilt, if not jealousy.

This is a good example of the way in which emotions can be constructed through the positions made available in discourse. Jim's guilt is part and parcel of the story he is telling which allocates to him responsibility for May's supposedly fragile feelings.

Jim's second subject position: 'selfless person blown about by the winds of everyone else's desires'

The position Jim constructs for himself using 'necessary compromise' that of a selfless individual willing to sacrifice his own desires in favour of those of other people. He constructs an identity which in a state of permanent existential 'drift'. He drifts into monogamy by allowing it to become implicit in the relationship (see p.117), and the marriage also is not *his* idea, in fact it goes against his principles, but still he 'drifts' into it: [121]

J: I'm just going along with it to keep everybody else happy ... I'm prepared to keep my mouth shut and smile happily.

When questioned about this construction of selfless drift, Jim answers:

J: Yeah, I get the distinct impression that's been the story of my life, as it were. I was always a good boy, do what his mummy tells him, even when I was a kid, and I ... went alternative lifestyle, I didn't really go that, you know, I never ran away from home, I always, worked hard and did well at exams, got to university, and yeah, I've always been very easygoing, going along with most other people, especially when I'm so heavily outnumbered.

The joint product of these stories is a state of affairs where Jim constructs himself as effectively paralysed. He cannot move for fear of hurting sensitive others and so his desires become 'frozen' and his will placed into the hands of emotionally and ideologically weak others. An extreme synthesis of this can be seen in an extract where Jim goes so far as to describe himself as a suffering martyr whose selfless altruism will surely one day be repaid. How long will Jim compromise?

J: God knows, umm. I'm optimistic, I mean, May might come round to my way of thinking. If she gets bored of me sexually, can't be long now! It's been three years. Uh, I'll ... I do keep encouraging her. And she does know I'm unhappy quite a lot of the time. Again, maybe she'll start suffering a bit to help me out. It's possible.

Jim's future is in May's hands:

J: The funny thing is me encouraging her to go and have affairs so I won't feel guilty and have all my friends spit on me.

Jim's position of 'paralysis' in these stories prevents him from living by his ideological principles and pursuing his non-monogamous desires. It leaves him two 'passive' alternatives: (i) 'encouraging' May to act as *lie* would like to (as above); and (ii) criticizing and undermining her reasons for not acting as he would like to. He sets about the second by use of what Wendy Hollway (1989) calls 'the permissive discourse', which argues for a sexuality 'freed' from monogamy. This story is seen by Hollway as a reaction to the 'have/hold' construction of relationship which stresses commitment in the form of sexual 'faithfulness'. May is positioned by Jim as a [122] believer in the 'have/hold' story. The 'permissive discourse' can be seen as taking one of the central tenets of the 'have/hold'; discourse; that sex and the emotions should never be separated, and subjecting it to a critical attack. 'Have/hold' subjects are constructed as being *unable* to separate sex and emotions: they have an insecure and disabling *need* to keep them together.

The permissive discourse

J: Having a stable relationship in my eyes, shouldn't have anything to do with sexual faithfulness. It's like, disappearing for three days at a time and not telling her where you're going, that kind of thing ... that's unreasonable, that's unstable ... May doesn't mind how many women I see as long as I don't sleep with them. It's bizarre, because I can tell them everything, exchange the deepest darkest secrets of our soul, but as long as there's no touching involved, it's absolutely fine and dandy which is strange isn't it? . . . I mean I've got these really close friends who happen to be women, and, for example, I see John from time to time ... and the fact that I've gone away with someone, and we ended up sleeping in the same room together ... and like we're really close friends other ... you know she's not jealous about John at all! Presumably because there's no sex involved. It's utterly incomprehensible to me ... I've got some other close friends more recently in London who also happen to be extremely attractive women. So would it matter if in addition to being really close friends I went to bed with them from time to time? Or not? I really can't understand that attitude.

Note that the emphasis is placed on what should *not* be the case, critiquing the 'have/hold' by emphasizing its contradictions. He describes what he thinks really *is* damaging to relationships, and he problematizes the core of the 'have/hold' discourse (which separates sex out as a unique, central and highly significant act) by stating that it is 'bizarre' and 'strange isn't it' that you can have lunch with someone and talk intimately, but not have sex or physical contact with them.

So, in this passage, Jim elaborates upon his ideologically informed anti-jealousy by using the 'permissive discourse' without having to make *his* desires explicit. Again, Jim is being 'blown about by the winds of other people's desires'. He is at the mercy of the traditional, [123] moral and arbitrary rules of other people. Rules from which Jim is careful to distance himself: 'I really can't understand that attitude, it's utterly incomprehensible to me, you know.'

There is something peculiar about this story, however. Implicit within it is a theme which is never directly stated and which does not bring with it the subject position

of moral exemplar. Is there really no difference for Jim between his close male friends and his other friends who ‘happen to be extremely attractive women’? The impression generated is that *primarily* they are ‘really close friends’, and only secondarily ‘extremely attractive’. One is *added* to the other. The following section is also interesting in this respect:

J: I’ve got a lot of female friends, you know, friends who happen to be female, and have lunch with them, and see them after work And like, the job I used to have, there was a big bunch of people I got on well with, some were women, and I’d go out for drinks with the old gang and sometimes there’ll be one woman and lots of men, and stuff like that, and uh, she always makes jokes about the fact that I have lunch with extremely attractive women ... One or two of which I would extremely like to sleep with. They are extremely attractive.

Notice that in the first half of this extract great care is taken to emphasize the gender-neutral ‘friendly’ aspects of his acquaintances: ‘the old gang’, ‘people I got on well with, some were women’. The second half of the passage, by contrast, indicates that the gender of these people is not in fact irrelevant; indeed the word ‘extremely’ is used three times in the last three lines to express the extent to which Jim is physically attracted to these ‘female friends, you know, friends who happen to be female’.

A closer look at the text suggests that we can identify a further story, only ever indirectly stated, which holds that the point of a relationship is primarily sex.

A ‘laddish’ construction of sexuality

Why does Jim involve himself in such relationships?

J: Well. First of all you’re trying to lose your virginity, aren’t you? Yeah! Then you make sure that you kind of keep on getting laid. And if you’re a nice person it’s always nice to have someone to talk to.

[124]

Here the order of priority found in the ‘permissive discourse’ is directly reversed; first there is sex, and second, ‘if you’re a nice person’, friendship. Jim, talking here from a position in the ‘laddish’ story, is nevertheless clearly aware of an available discursive tension between the laddish privileging of sex and an alternative (often female) prioritizing of companionship and friendship. He distances himself from the latter at the same time as subtly mocking its ‘niceness’.

READING OF MAY INTERVIEW

The companionship/friendship construction of relationships

This story, which we have already encountered as the ‘other’ to the ‘laddish’ theme, is summed up by May as follows:

M: I mean, I suppose, for myself, I just don’t think of sex as being the most important

thing in a relationship. I think, um, companionship, trust and all the rest of it is far more important than that for me.

So, from the start sex is constructed as being secondary to companionship. May talks of her 'companionship/friendship' construction of relationships as the product of her own self-development and maturation. She tells a familiar 'maturity story' which charts her development from a person unable to communicate openly (and therefore prey to jealousy) to a person able to communicate openly (and therefore no longer jealous).

From the old May to the new May

'Communication' forms the axis of this transition. May spends some time talking about an earlier, 'immature' relationship where she describes feeling intensely jealous. She refers to this affair as 'a closet relationship' and explains her jealousy as being the product of an extreme lack of communication compounded by lack of self-worth. This lack of communication May describes as a 'gap' which she filled with her own 'self-punishing' jealous thoughts. Did this jealousy stem from a lack of communication?

M: Yes (loudly), oh, I think so, yes ... Because ... it meant that in a way you could ... you could and you did perpetuate both sides of the conversation in your own mind.

[125]

The 'new May' is more able to communicate and thus no longer jealous:

M: It was years ... before I could have, sort of the happy-go-lucky attitude I have now about relationships.

M: I certainly haven't ever felt any jealousy in regard to [Jim], in fact it's been nothing but sort of obnoxious, content sort of feelings really.

So, using this 'maturity story' which culminates in the adoption of the companionship/friendship story of relationships, May is able to position herself as a mature, 'healthy', and above all *experienced* or worldly person.

May's second subject position: 'a person of experience'

M: I suppose I've been a very experiential learner, I've learnt the hard way through everything and I ... I think I was a lot more rebellious ... and the outcome of that was that I did experience ... have sexual experiences much younger than Jim ... and many more, before serious relationships and ... a lot of things have happened to me that he knows about ... well, I suppose it does amount to a lot packed into a few years and now in a way my only desire is to sort of like ... I mean to me it's actually a novelty to not go out and have a wild time.

This subject position could not be in starker contrast to the one constructed for her by Jim. In his story she was positioned as an emotionally weak and jealous individual who cannot handle Jim's ideas or intentions and who (rather like a fragile eggshell) needs to

be protected from knowledge that she is unable to bear. In May's story she comes across as a kind of battle-scarred and unshockable figure who has absorbed every blow that society can deal to her. She makes a point of asserting that, in principle, nobody should be 'protected' by somebody else from life's experiences:

M: I certainly feel that I've burnt my fingers enough times ... I do believe in experiential learning and I don't think that you can prevent people from hurt and pain and ... grief and anguish and ... regrets. I don't think that you can protect them and you shouldn't. But those who have maybe been protected through life longer or had a generally very comfortable existence – there might be something in them that [126] still makes them want to ... you know, something like they're never quite satisfied like ... restless or itchy feet. They want to do something. They don't know the potential in them.

The last few sentences from this extract are an early example of the subject position provided for Jim in this 'experience story'. He is positioned as someone who has 'been protected through life longer or had a generally very comfortable existence', someone with 'restless or itchy feet' who doesn't 'know the potential in them'. His 'inexperienced' position in relation to her 'experienced' one is made clearly manifest in what I will call the 'catching-up' story, where May accounts for Jim's dissatisfaction with monogamy in terms of his limited sexual (and general) history.

'Catching up' - and Jim's third subject position: 'inexperienced'

M: If he had ... a few sexual experiences with other people because there was sort of a burning need in him to fulfil these sort of; you know, experience wider afield, because I think, you know, his experience has been more limited than mine, maybe there's this feeling of catching up or something. Then, um, I don't think, I don't think I'd see that as damning to our relationship.

According to this story, May has been an experiential learner whilst Jim hasn't, and this leaves Jim with a 'burning need' to 'experience wider afield'. Notice that one of the things that this story accomplishes is the construction of Jim's desire for sexual experience outside of their relationship as very much a *phase* or transitory stage in his life, rather than an enduring state of desire or a principle. Recall that one of the effects of the 'permissive discourse' is to construct the person who wants to keep 'sex and emotions together' as someone with an *inability* to make this separation. In May's story, by contrast, the person who *wants* to make this separation is constructed as someone who is inexperienced and not mature enough to recognize the importance of communication. The urge for 'pure sex' or 'pure experience' is simply a stage:

M: I do get a strong sense that there is a sort of a need to mature and go through this stage and that sounds cruel, but there is [127] a need to go through all this, and far be it from me to get in his way.

By using the 'experience' and the 'catching-up' stories, May is able plausibly to maintain

her allegiance to the companionship/friendship construction of relationships whilst at the same time allowing Jim a certain amount of sexual 'flexibility'. May, therefore, constructs herself as very much in control of the situation. She is *not jealous* about Jim's 'urge', rather, she is, as befits the mature and experienced teller of this story, tolerant and understanding. When asked about the possibility of Jim having 'extra-relational sex' she replies:

M: Well I think, urn, it's a genuine possibility ... I think that I would find it very sad if I let that ... come between us, because I ... see this sort of need in everyone to live out their lives and ... he should do that.

A point of tension

The discursive complex so far outlined is clearly at odds with that used by Jim. How is it that people can unknowingly entertain such contrasting constructions of themselves and their relationships? One answer to this is that we falsely assume that we are in agreement if we are not in disagreement. This is compounded by the fact that, despite the importance for May of open communication, Jim does not tend to talk about his feelings and desires:

M: I try to talk to him about everything, I mean I don't think we have great secrets, but, he's not a great talker ... I find the need to talk about things that he would never need to talk about, and so it's a bit one-sided that way, ... it's like trying to get blood from a stone.

It is within this context that May tells a further story which is sometimes at tension with the others, and which brings with it two new subject positions. The story is 'pro-monogamy' and the positions are, for May, one of 'vulnerability', and for Jim, one of 'honesty'.

An initial indication of a 'point of tension' between these stories is provided by a textual contradiction. At one point May denies that there is any 'genuine fear' behind her jokes about Jim's 'other women':

[128]

M: I joke all the time about, you know - the other women, and I think a lot of this joking is sort of; you know, keeping the light-heartedness in things anyway, I don't think it comes from a genuine fear, I have to say that.

Yet earlier she states the exact opposite:

M: But I mean the fact that it's in a jokey way, I think, behind that joke is a sort of slightly genuine fear.

Of course, by itself such a contradiction is scant evidence for the existence of a discursive tension; people can hardly be expected to be non-contradictory. To demonstrate here that May is in 'two stories' rather than in 'two minds' we need to describe more fully the stories involved.

From ‘companionship/ friendship’ to ‘pro-monogamy’

The companionship/friendship story alone does not necessarily involve the enunciation of a theme of ‘pro-monogamy’. In May’s text, however, it is extended to incorporate monogamy:

M: I think the main thing is that your commitment emotionally should always be to one person.

The fact that these stories are separable (you can have a version of each without anything to do with the other) produces the possibility for the discursive tensions and contradictions which are present in May’s text. Let us turn to the new subject position made available to May, that of ‘insecure person’.

May’s third subject position: ‘insecure’

M: We’ve been affected by our inherited backgrounds, so I’m sort of very pro-monogamy, not for the reasons of, um, morality, but simply for reasons of security, I’m a very insecure person, basically. I suppose I see the fact that I’m making a commitment to him and him only as being ... that, it’s like all or nothing.

Note that May stresses that her ‘pro-monogamy’ stems not from ‘morality’ but from what she sees as emotional necessity. The position that May here provides for herself, therefore, alters from the previous positive, mature and sensible identity, to a more negative,[129] immature and ‘insecure’ position within the ‘pro-monogamy’ story. When May constructs herself as insecure this extends to her feelings about herself and her ‘sexuality’, she worries that she is perhaps not exciting enough:

M: I suppose my only fear is, is it going to be a problem in the future? Is Jim going to sort of one day turn around and think ‘Oh God, I wish I had a more exciting wife’ or something, you know?

May’s previous understanding and accepting attitude towards a future Jim sexual liaison is transformed into a self-blaming, negative and emotional reaction reminiscent of the ‘old May’ (p. 124):

M: I don’t think I’d feel jealousy *against* that other person because ... I tend to see ... it more in terms of the act, I see it more in terms of ... well you know he’s turned elsewhere, I’m not good enough, I’m a terrible person and all that ... so I think I’d take it against myself

Jim’s fourth subject position: ‘honest person’

Jim’s positioning as ‘honest’ is complementary to May’s positioning as insecure. May’s

ideal of companionship and friendship rests upon a shared commitment which, ideally, is established and maintained by open communication. Jim's reluctance to communicate disables this way of ensuring commitment, and a 'pro-monogamy' story provides an alternative index: that of sexual faithfulness. May's monogamy story, therefore, constructs a precarious line of 'trust':

M: I'm making a commitment to him and him only ... it's like all or nothing ... I can only feel secure if I know ... that there is commitment on both sides that is equal.

Within this story 'honesty' (by necessity) replaces communication and becomes valorized as the most important aspect of a relationship. It ranks higher even than fidelity:

M: I hope that he'd come out and tell me ... I could even live with certain things so long as there was honesty there.

Against this background Jim is constructed as an 'inherently honest person':

[130]

M: I think he also does know that ... I require honesty. And I think also that he's an inherently honest person, and I know from certain things in the past that he does come out with that um, he can't beat about the bush ... if something's on his mind he will just come out and say it. I couldn't live with somebody if I thought there was going to be suspicion.

As with Jim's proof of May's jealousy, 'body language' is resorted to as the final proof of the construction:

M: I feel that there is enough body language communication between Jim and I that I would know ... I mean I'd know for a start if he was hiding anything from me. Even though he doesn't talk about these things.

DISCUSSION

A point to be re-emphasized regarding 'discoursing jealousy' is that it is a *reading* of an interview. There is great danger of *misinterpretation* if I am taken as saying something like 'this is what is *really* going on between Jim and May'. Two points are worth making regarding this issue. First, it must be acknowledged that my reading could (and should) be re-read and similarly 'thematically decomposed' to show (or make a reading of) my particular concerns in engaging in this work. I am grateful to both Rex Stainton-Rogers and Maria Pini for doing exactly this the moment I began getting 'delusions of reality' on first writing this chapter. Second, the reading of 'discoursing jealousy' as if it were a finished definitive statement must be resisted. Such a decomposition is always *located* - it always comes from some 'position' and is, therefore, always-already incomplete. In this work I was interested only in bringing out relevant *constructionist* points relating to jealousy (although my focus was also influenced by those themes which I recognize from my own experience of relationships).

These issues point also to the key problem of the *place* of such work in social

science. To put it crudely, I feel that work of this kind *cannot be understood* from within the framework of objectivist/essentialist social science. If the reader believes there to be a 'reality' in the situation under study, then an approach such as 'thematic decomposition' can only ever be trivial. If the constructionist stance embraced, on the other hand, then this approach is making a useful contribution to a highly complex subject matter. [131]

There are, finally, the *ethical* problems. In work such as this I am painfully aware of having power and control over other people's words and, what is more, to be doing this without the (misconceived) reassurance of an objectivist methodology to back me up. Like most people, I have experienced the irritation, or even horror, of having someone else take control over the 'meaning' of my words. It is crucial to stress the importance, not only of confidentiality, but of a realization on the part of the researcher of the possible ethical minefield into which they are wandering.

This thematic decomposition, whilst making no claim to be exhaustive, represents a specific example of the enormous complexity of meaning which weaves in and out wherever jealousy is discoursed. We have seen how Jim and May draw upon numerous, often contradictory and competing stories, within which they position themselves and one another. At times their stories meet and are in agreement: May's 'pro-monogamy' and 'insecure' stories, for instance, are complicitous with Jim's 'permissive discourse' in producing the subject position of 'jealous May', and, in contradiction, both Jim and May concur with the 'catching-up' story where Jim is positioned as inexperienced, and May as (conditionally) non-jealous. At other times their stories 'clash' and are antagonistic: May's 'companionship/friendship' story with Jim's 'necessary compromise', to give just one example.

These stories, which are variously resisted, insisted upon, agreed and ignored should not be thought of as being *about* the relationship, *reflective* of emotions or *expressive* of May's or Jim's 'personality', - as if a reality existed independently beneath the discourse - but rather as *constructive* of the relationship, *productive* of contradictory and non-essential identities and *generative* of emotional experience. This realization renders problematic the 'social hygienist' assumption that such non-congruous subject positions are resolvable by, for example 'getting in touch with our feelings' or 'getting it all out into the open'. Such prescriptions can themselves be seen to be constructions located in local and contingent discourse (Foucault, 1981, makes a similar point using the example of the confession). To reduce jealousy down to a timeless emotional essence is not a route to getting beneath 'mere' discourse, but yet another type of jealousy story. Attempts to ground experience in the certainty of feelings and their vicissitudes are therefore strongly challenged. However, to end with a caveat, just as we need not conceive of emotion as lying behind discourse, so, reflexively, we [132] are not obliged to think of the stories or thematics highlighted in this decomposition as lying behind the text itself.

NOTES

1 Thanks to Rex Stainton-Rogers for this concept which avoids the 'structuralist connotations' of the notion of 'discourse analysis'.

2 Here it must be noted that people using the concept of 'subject position' go to great pains to distinguish it from the more static concept of 'role' (see Harré and Davies, 1990).

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