Bodies, Representations, Situations, Practices: qualitative research on affect, emotion and feeling

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Guest Editorial for *Qualitative Research in Psychology* on Special Issue: Feelings, Affect and Emotions in Qualitative Psychology

The papers in this special issue demonstrate how qualitative psychological research on affect, emotion and feeling has come of age. In their collective vibrancy, their diversity, the variety of methods and analyses, the range of ways and circumstances in which data was collected, and in the impressive spread of conceptual and theoretical resources mobilised, the papers testify to the establishment of a novel, significant and rigorous strand of qualitative psychological research. Whilst maintaining and indeed reinforcing important continuities with existing styles of qualitative analysis, not least with respect to the pervasive use of linguistic data, these papers also exemplify the potentials of work on affect, emotion and feeling to deliver new insights into the ways that psychological phenomena are necessarily embodied, the ways that they are situated and emplaced socially, materially and corporeally, and, consequently, the ways in which they are pre-reflectively constituted by history, culture and social relations.

Qualitative psychological research on affect, emotion and feeling is often associated with the 'turn to affect' across the humanities and social sciences, and at least initially was particularly indebted to the cultural studies tradition. However, it is clear from the contributions to this special issue that qualitative psychology has now forged its own distinctive contribution and trajectory. While some overlap with other work within the 'affective turn' remains, qualitative psychology has developed its own theories and concepts; it utilizes very different data – i.e., interview, focus group, ethnographic, etc. – to that typically used by cultural studies scholars; and it has developed distinct methods, with often more formalized analyses. As qualitative psychological research on affect, emotion and feeling develops, then, it contributes both conceptually and methodologically.

Whilst the papers in this special issue can be very usefully read singly, our reading of them as a corpus identified four themes which, in our view, characterise their collective significance. These themes are bodies; situations (with respect to both time and space); representations (particularly in language); and (affective) practices. We will now discuss each theme in turn.

Bodies

Despite differences in the conceptualisation of affect, emotion and feelings across the contributions to this special issue, several authors share a concern for bodies. This reflects psychologists' attempt to 'take the body seriously', which began in the late 1990s (e.g., Harré, 1999; Stam, 1998). In their contribution, Wetherell et al. view emotions as "embodied habits", drawing attention to "the shifting, dynamic and flexible formation of emoting bodies and brains" (p. 5). Similarly, McGrath et al. suggest viewing "emotion as it is embodied, felt and lived" (p. 2) and Boden and Eatough recommend "paying particular attention to the embodied, relational and idiosyncratic ways that [particular emotions] may be lived" (p. 4). There at least two important issues here. First, there is a move to understand concrete instances of affective phenomena, as opposed to viewing emotion in generalised or abstract terms. Second, conceptualisation of the relationship between felt and represented aspects of affect and emotion becomes necessary. As Wetherell (2012) puts it, emotions and affect involve "a figuration where body possibilities and routines become recruited or entangled together with meaning making and with other social and material figurations" (p.19; and see the discussion below).

As the Boden and Eatough quote above indicates, for some, bodies in qualitative research on emotions, affect, and feelings highlights their relational aspects. Appuhamilage's paper also draws attention to the relationality of affect, noting the plural, qualified and relational bodies in affect experiences. Bodily encounters with other bodies, with things and with places, he argues, shape an individual's socio-political and psychological boundaries. For Appuhamilage, drawing on Deleuze-inspired affect theory, affective encounters are, then, central to who we are and who we may become both for ourselves and for others. From a phenomenological perspective, Boden and Eatough similarly pay attention to the role of emotion in one's sense of self, both in terms of bodily memories and embodied reflective practices. Significant emotional experiences, they suggest, may disrupt one's sense of self as a feeling of stability and predictability in the world is altered.

At least implicitly there are different kinds of body invoked here. There is the relatively bounded, phenomenological body (Boden); the body as a modifiable vehicle and/or target of practice (Walkerdine; Wetherell et al.); and the body as a locus of potentiality and becoming, an element of assemblage

(Appuhamilage). We can, then, point to a tension between the body as constructed by affect or feeling versus the body as provider/generator of these. Arguably, this maps onto an underexplored distinction between the body as ground of experience and the body as merely the enabler of experience. From one view, the body is produced by affects, feelings, and other experiences; from another, it precedes and produces its emotions, feelings, and other experiences.

In all this, the biological body is almost entirely absent. Very few authors mention biology at all, and those who do distance themselves from "essentialist notions of emotion as located solely in individual biology" (McGrath et al., p. 1), but do not consider the biological body beyond this. The exceptions are Appuhamilage and Wetherell et al. Citing Thrift (2004) and Damasio (1999), Appuhamilage notes that it should be recognised that language is not the only meaningful mode of communication and the body is also a site of knowing. Wetherell et al. argue that social constructionist and practice approaches to emotion, affect and feelings are supported by recent psychobiological research such as core affect theory (Barrett & Russell, 2015; Russell, 2009), which advocates psychological constructionism entailing "an activation of multiple resources, registerings of core affect and the simultaneous making of meaning" (p. 5). Core affect theory posits textured and valenced biological impulses toward feeling that get taken up within differing cultural frames and thus constituted as the emotions of that culture, so might lend itself well to qualitative investigation. Nonetheless both analyses here are almost entirely concerned with the social body. The biological body is never made foundational, suggesting the persistence of difficult tensions between psychobiology and other areas of psychology.

Representations (particularly in language)

Issues related to language and the (methodological and analytic) representation of affect, emotion and feeling recur throughout this special issue. At root this is because, like all embodied experiences, emotions and feelings are ineffable: not capable of being wholly represented using words. This is why films, music and images can be so effective at communicating feeling, and why talk of feeling makes extensive use of simile and metaphor. Ineffability gives rise to a second issue: the work that naming feeling does. For example, what precisely are the felt differences between rage, fury, anger, irritation and mild disagreement? The linguistic ordering in this list indexes a sequence of declining intensity which will feel recognisable to many. But when, precisely, does anger become mere irritation? Part of the answer is that it does so when named as such, when the feeling gets 'completed' (as (Vygotsky might have said) by a word or phrase that both accords with what is felt *and* is appropriately enactive within its interactional circumstances. This, in turn, leads to a third issue: how to methodologically and

analytically account for differences – cultural, historical and biographical, embedded in parenting, educational and relational practices, and thus engrained individually through repetition and habit – in the ways that feelings are talked about and named.

The relevance of these issues runs through the papers. For example, both Moreno-Gabriel and Johnson and Cresswell and Sullivan carefully mark some distance from discursive analyses, but in different ways. For Cresswell and Sullivan, discourse has to be analysed within the analytical frame of its chronotope – that is, with regard to the "corporeal placement of a body in situated times and space" (p.3) – for an appropriately rich analysis to be achieved. Here, the difference between anger and irritation, for example, would only become meaningful with respect to an entire cultural-historical ensemble. For Moreno-Gabriel and Johnson, by contrast, discourse analysis enacts a paranoid sensibility whereby analysts strike solely critical attitudes towards texts. This sensibility precludes *reparative readings* "that are profoundly ambivalent" (p.8), and its attendant suspicion of the representational function of language may make it difficult to "sufficiently attend to feelings, senses, being and belonging" (p.32). So Cresswell and Sullivan are concerned that discourse analysis brackets off cultural and historical constituents of feeling, whereas Moreno-Gabriel and Johnson are concerned that it glosses both constructive potentialities and the occurrence and import of the ineffable.

Boden and Eatough's hermeneutic-phenomenological analysis of guilt proposes a generative model of its temporal movements, ordered around two modes of return: a felt or bodily mode, and a narrative mode. In this model the relation between linguistic representation and feeling is therefore central and is characterised as a "tentative 'groping' towards the most adequate narrative form ... a *feeling* for a narrative that *feels right*" (p.13). Here, the capacity of language to 'complete' feeling is considered over a more extended temporal scale and characterised by iterative attempts to organise feeling in adaptive ways.

Appuhamilage also addresses issues of language and representation. The paper develops a conceptual framework indebted to a Deleuze-inspired notion of affect as the motive force of bodily becomings, thereby emphasising "what cannot be socio-linguistically categorized and named, rather than what can be cognized" (p.4). Notwithstanding this commitment, Appuhamilage also argues that when affects are transmitted between bodies, they are not "outside of social meaning" (p.10). The paper presents evocative narratives of trauma, framed as affective becomings produced within socio-material-technical and pre-personal assemblages, whilst simultaneously positioning readers of these narratives as cognising human subjects capable of affective interpellation by them. This seeming paradox might be

partially dissolved by considering language itself as an element within the emergent assemblage journal-paper-words-print-reader, and by recognising how – in the research situation – “affect and resulting bodily dispositions are effected through intimate spatial and bodily engagements” (p.49) which the narratives at least partially convey.

Situations (time and space)

Another recurring theme involves the ways in which affective phenomena are situated in space and time. It is argued that we need to consider the temporal and spatial dimensions of emotion, affect and feelings if we are to fully understand them. Some authors are concerned with both space and time (Appuhamilage; Cresswell & Sullivan; Walkerdine). However, some authors focus only on space (McGrath et al.) or solely on time (Boden & Eatough). These analytical choices frame and reveal different aspects of affective phenomena. But they also, presumably, obscure others.

Boden and Eatough, for example, are concerned with the biographical and relational development of men’s guilt experiences within the context of heterosexual romantic relationships. Their focus is on the individual unfolding of particular emotional experiences and how painful experiences may disrupt the unfolding nature of lived time. McGrath et al. state they are concerned with the ‘who, what, when, where why and how’ of located affective phenomena and propose that map-making is a useful research technique to help facilitate their exploration. However, in so doing their attention becomes almost entirely on *where* affective phenomena are located. Whereas Wetherell et al. see time and space as a contextual frame for affective practices. By contrast, Appuhamilage proposes that we need to think about "how affect is shared and distributed in time and space, specifically the particular conjunctions of bodies, spaces and things that transmit affect” and “how affective intensities … can be read through the way these conjunctions are *sensed*" (p. 6; his italics). Key here is the notion that affective phenomena are never merely an individual matter; rather, affects are assemblages of bodies, things, and the space-times in which they are located. For both Appuhamilage and McGrath et al., then affective phenomena are never merely an individual matter; rather, affects simultaneously involve bodies, things, and the space-times in which they are situated.

Cresswell and Sullivan suggest the utility of Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope for qualitative research on affect and emotion: "Chronotope entails the notion of … the corporeal placement of a body in situated times and space" (p. 3). They argue that this concept allows discursively oriented researchers to better focus on connotation in participants’ talk, which allows for a fuller understanding of the layering of space and time in utterances. "Connotations involve the layering of chronotopes simultaneously as

one expresses them, and so different times and spaces can be simultaneously expressed in an utterance. …. The ’experiences, beliefs, and prejudices about’ contexts are the differing chronotopes entailed in an utterance" (p. 9) In other words, any utterance is simultaneously expressing a variety of connotations, judgements and feelings of other people in different places and times. Such a focus, according to Cresswell and Sullivan, allows us to understand what makes rule-breaking pleasure-full along with the subversive nature of laughter (i.e., because it moves us forward in novel ways).

In her paper on post-truth, affect and Brexit, Walkerdine is concerned with historical time; more specifically, with what she calls ‘affective histories’ and how these play out in particular places. This concept captures “the ways in which embodied responses to historical events are transmitted to the bodies of descendants and … the ways in which this might relate to the embodied responses to classed inequalities over generations” (Walkerdine, 2016, p. 700). In her contribution to this special issue, Walkerdine argues that we cannot understand the affective issues in Brexit separate from the complex history and embodied practices of the communities in which people live. She traces the history of relationships between working and middle class communities in two Welsh towns, demonstrating “the affective aspects of the different positions [with respect to Brexit] of [working] and middle class residents via a complex history that has already produced the entanglements of economy, governance and affect, and, in this case, stark class difference” (p. 18).

So, we see differences between the papers in how affective phenomena are understood as situated in time and space. Some see time as dialectically associated with emotion and feeling (Boden & Eatough); some see space as a site of feeling and resource for data gathering (McGrath et al.); some see time and space as a frame for everyday activities (Wetherell et al.); whereas others see time and space as intimate, inextricable constituents of affective phenomena (Appuhamilage; Cresswell & Sullivan; Walkerdine).

(Affective) practices

Concepts of affective practice are central to the papers by Walkerdine and Wetherell. Whilst both have written extensively elsewhere on this subject (writings referenced within their respective papers) here we will consider only the two papers in this special issue. As will become clear, despite the shared terminology what each author means by ‘affective practice’ is quite different.

For Walkerdine, affective practices are produced through a history where factors such as the movements of capital, the relocation of industry, the training and honing of worker’s bodies, and

traditions of solidarity, community and mutual aid are all so densely entangled that “to understand them fully, we would need to explore them together, not isolating any one of them” (p.15). The origins of these practices are thoroughly emplaced, rooted in material arrangements such as the character of housing and the architecture of gardens. Their roots also lie in shared sensations, bound up with collective spatiotemporal rhythms of home and work life: hanging out washing “on the same day each week, the bells and whistles of work time, the joint movement of bodies ... the sounds of the works themselves” (p.16). Consequently, “the affective encounter cannot be understood outside of its specific locational and historical formation” (p.22).

For Wetherell, “affective practice is a figuration where body possibilities and routines become recruited or entangled together with meaning making ... and other social and material figurations” (p.2). Wetherell relates her concept of affective practice to Burkitt’s (2014) notion of emotion as relational complex, although other influences are also noted. Here, “most affective practices display a ‘could be otherwise’ quality” whilst nevertheless being “bound up with established power regimes and ... social relations more broadly” (p.3). Whilst emphasising that her approach undercuts humanism by recognising the contingent relationship actors have to norms (such that they are neither wholly autonomous nor wholly determined) Wetherell rejects the Massumian notion of affect as a realm of influence that bypasses language and sense-making. Instead, her approach “prioritises the rhythms, patterns and unfolding orders of social life” (p.4) within which “The making of meaning and the embodied cascade of emotion are inextricably linked” (p.8).

A prominent difference between the two approaches is the methodological relationship with participants. Walkerdine emphasises co-production, and her data depends upon enduring connections fostered over many years. Wetherell utilises a more typical, less resource-intensive methodology (albeit one in which the researcher travelled to spend time with different participants). The analytic focus of each paper is also different. Wetherell foregrounds small acts of individual resistance to banal nationalism on a day commemorating a military defeat; Walkerdine foregrounds collective resistance to years of political neglect, as manifest in the 2016 referendum vote endorsing Britain’s exit from the European Union. Power relations are thus central to both, but for Walkerdine these power relations are shared and affect often operates as a kind of ‘haunting’ (cf. Fisher, 2009). For Wetherell, whilst the power relations are also shared (on a national day of commemoration) individuals have more freedom with regard to them, and affect is more of the present moment.

Consequently, Walkerdine's participants appear as the subjects of specific, localised histories that powerfully shape their felt experience; Wetherell's participants (whilst reacting to a historical commemoration) seemingly have a more contingent relation to history. For Walkerdine, history is non-optionally embodied through repetitive practices with notably corporeal dimensions. For Wetherell, history is more abstract, more loosely embodied, its import primarily a matter of affect-arranging discourse, symbol and ceremony where there is more choice over the style of engagement. In each analysis, then, the tensions between agency and structure, between performance and enactment, between notions of choice and autonomy versus notions of determination and codification, play out differently. Consequently, each differs in the way it speaks to debates about the rationality or otherwise of affect, although both refuse any straightforward identification of affect with irrationality.

It follows, too, that each analysis has different political affordances: Walkerdine illuminates the force of shared organisations of feeling bound up with enduring social, material and economic arrangements; Wetherell identifies individual, everyday, and perhaps otherwise-unnoticed, affective capacities for resistance and subversion. Each also emphasises different aspects of subjectivity: capacities for individual choice in Wetherell, and for collective determination in Walkerdine. There are distant echoes here of debates about styles of discourse analysis, and their associated ontological and epistemological commitments, that occurred within social psychology during the 1990's. At the same time, both authors emphasise entanglements of affect and discourse; both relate affects to social and material circumstances; both implicate notions of emplaced, embodied subjects with historical and cultural ties; and neither treats those subjects as either wholly autonomous or wholly determined.

In short, these two concepts of affective practice share certain features, whilst also differing in important respects. The presence of these important differences (and their implications for research questions, participant recruitment and selection, data collection and methodological procedures) obliges researchers who claim to be taking an 'affective practice' approach to specify what this means. This would not mean treating these different approaches as opposed to or exclusionary of each other, but rather treating them as representative of a palette of options from which researchers can make informed choices, according to the needs and resources of specific questions and projects.

Conclusion

We have discussed four themes which, in our view, characterise the collective significance of the papers in this special issue. Even in highlighting these thematic similarities, however, we pointed to important differences in their manifestation across different papers. In discussing bodies, we highlighted an

underexplored distinction between the body as ground of experience and the body as the enabler of experience. We also drew attention to three issues relating to (linguistic) representations of feelings, emotions and affect: the problem of ineffability; the role of naming feeling; and how to methodologically and analytically account for differences in the ways that feelings are talked about and named. Regarding situatedness in space and time, we noted at least four analytical positions, which frame and reveal different aspects of affective phenomena. Finally, with respect to affective practices we identified two quite different approaches that, whilst sharing some characteristics, are different enough to warrant further specification when researchers deploy this term.

Relatedly, it is important to acknowledge the implied challenge to cognitivism that comes with prioritising affect or feeling. A privileging of feeling, emotions, and affect further emphasises that everyday psychology cannot be reduced to the kind of information processing associated with the cognitive revolution in psychology (e.g., Simon, 1979), thus building on the earlier critiques developed during the turns to language (Edwards, 1997; e.g., Edwards & Potter, 1992) and experience (e.g., Middleton & Brown, 2005; Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2006). An important consequence of this implied challenge to cognitivism is the positioning of linguistic representation largely (but not entirely) as after-the-fact interpretations – affective phenomena are first of all experienced and are only interpreted and linguistically labelled later. Leys (2011) has critiqued the turn to affect for precisely this kind of separation of felt experience and meaning-making. We urge qualitative psychologists to heed her warning (although we do not endorse her solution; see Cromby & Willis, 2016).

We would also like to applaud an apparent trend away from purely language-based/interview methods. For example, McGrath et al's use of map making as a useful way of visualising experience in space, Appuhamilage's ethnographical observations, Wetherell et al's haerenga kitea/go-along interviewing, and Walkerdine's call for more participatory methods ("research 'with' and not on participants" (pp. 18-19)) seem to us fruitful developments in qualitative methods for psychological research. However, we would also like to suggest qualitative psychologists be yet bolder still in adding non-linguistic techniques –analyses that transcend the exclusively linguistic – to their methodological toolkits, and now offer some examples that researchers might consider using in their research on feelings, emotions and affect.

First, visual (e.g., Reavey, 2011) and object/artefact (e.g., Brown & Reavey, 2015; Sheridan & Chamberlain, 2011) methods offer ways of exploring those aspects of lived experience that are not always available to verbal description. As Sheridan and Chamberlain (2011, p. 315) argue, "material objects, such as photographs, items of clothing, and personal journals, have power to simultaneously

provide proof of the past, produce increased narrative depth, force change in narratives, and change the interview process and the relationships caught up within it". Thus, this kind of data offers more agency to participants, giving them greater freedom from researcher-designed prompts, and images are described as facilitating the 'feeling again' of the experiences to which they relate (Radley & Taylor, 2003). Bates (2013) offers a related and compelling alternative by way of audio-visual methods. She proposes the use of video diaries "can help to develop a sensorially attentive research practice that takes the body seriously" (p. 29). Video methods make embodiment central rather than peripheral by making the body audibly, visibly and viscerally present, giving researchers richer data than audio recordings can provide.

Second, some studies have deployed physiological measures such as galvanic skin response (GSR) and cardio-vascular activity alongside qualitative analyses of textual data. For example, Ellis (2007) measured GSR in participants disclosing emotional experiences, and analysed the extent to which their talk explicitly connected their experience with their emotions, rather than glossing, disconnecting or repressing it. He found that increased GSR was associated with failures to discursively recognise emotional impacts, and with ostensibly emotionally neutral narratives that nevertheless challenged gender stereotypes. Similarly, Lyons, Spicer, Tuffin, and Chamberlain (2000) showed that blood pressure fluctuates alongside self-construction processes in conversation, and Lyons & Cromby (2010) show how four different qualitative analytic techniques can each be used to investigate the relations between blood-pressure changes and conversation.. More recently, Kykyri et al. (2019) conducted a multimodal and multimethod study of alliance formations in couple therapy. The interaction between a couple and two male co-therapists was analysed at the levels of the conversational exchange, bodily postures, and movements, and autonomic nervous system responses. Thus, their analysis encompasses biological, psychological and social aspects of interactions. Kykyri et al. found that when there were clear markers of alliance in a dyad's conversation, markers of nonverbal synchrony were also observed in one or several modalities (such as posture or movement mirroring, or sympathetic nervous system synchrony). They also observed markers of nonverbal synchrony between listeners as well as those who were active participants in conversation. According to the authors, these markers of nonverbal alliance served important balancing functions by providing support and maintaining the connection to a client by way of implicit nonverbal attunement between clients and therapists. In these studies, physiological measures are not deployed as foundational 'proofs' of the truth of bodily influence, nor as crude, reductive indices of 'stress': they are interrogated alongside qualitative analyses to explore how biological bodies are already bound up with the flow of social interaction.

In conclusion, then, the articles in this special issue reflect a diversity of approaches to feeling, affect and emotion in relation to qualitative research methods and qualitative data. In discussing this diversity, we have generated comparisons and contrasts to draw out more clearly some of the conceptual and methodological presumptions that shape the field. Whilst welcoming the apparent trend away from purely language-based methods, we have offered some suggestions for how researchers can move further down this path. Nonetheless qualitative research on feeling, affect and emotion is in fine fettle. As the contributions attest, the time is ripe for this special issue of *Qualitative Research in Psychology*.

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