SAGE researchmethods cases

Uncovering the Unconscious in Psychosocial Research

Abstract

This case study will demonstrate how psychoanalysis can enable the sociological researcher to reveal another level of understanding of emotional experience that is often missed out in the traditional social science interview. A psychosocial approach takes into account narrative construction but goes beyond this to access to the unconscious thoughts, motivations, feelings, fears, and desires of the participant. The case study will introduce some of the key psychoanalytic tools that can be useful to social scientists, such as transference, counter-transference, and projective identification. I will then demonstrate a practical application of this technique to a particular interview case with a participant called "Adrian," to highlight how psychoanalysis can reveal a new layer of understanding of the unconscious dynamics at work in the interview encounter.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this case, students should be able to

- Understand four key concepts from psychoanalysis—The Unconscious Mind, Transference, Counter-transference, and Projective Identification
- Understand that emotions play an important part in research. They will be able to identify emotional content in future interview encounters and everyday personal interactions
- Recognize that some experiences can be too emotionally difficult to put into words, and can identify techniques for how we might attempt to access this sensitive, unconscious content as social researchers

Project Overview and Context

This case study is based upon my doctoral research on the experiences of ageing which had a particular focus on the midlife period "*Negotiating Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experiences of Ageing.*" I interviewed 22 British born, men and women aged between 39 and 58 years old, and I was interested in understanding not only the social and demographic aspects of life course experiences but also the subjective and emotional responses that individuals have to the ageing process. I wanted to know "how do people feel about getting older?" "How do they feel about life changes in the midlife period of the life course?" and "to what extent do other earlier life experiences impact upon the way in which they feel about ageing?" This case study does not focus on the thematic results of this research but rather illustrates the techniques of data collection, and looks specifically at how, as a psychosocial researcher, I was able to access deep rooted, unconscious material, which is not easily expressed by the participant through language, but can be explored using certain techniques borrowed from

psychoanalysis.

Talking About Difficult Topics and Researching "Defended Subjects"

Talking about ageing can be quite emotionally difficult for some people. Ageing often involves experiences of loss, and my research results showed a focus on a number of particular types of losses; those associated with the ageing body such as the loss of physical abilities and the loss of perceived ideas about beauty, those associated with the loss of "the dream" such as unfulfilled ambition and life reviews, children leaving home, and finally the loss of parents which sadly is a common form of bereavement in this part of the life course. The death of parents in later life has been the focus of my research since completing my doctorate.

When talking about something difficult, painful, taboo, or sensitive people can become what Hollway and Jefferson (2000) call "defended." This means that the unconscious part of their mind does not want to recognize this painful information. I was interested in Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) approach to research published in their book *"Doing Qualitative Research Differently"* and how they developed a way of accessing painful, difficult material, which their participants were "defending" against. In my research, I wanted to question the complex inner psychic conflicts which are evoked by the experience of ageing but which are not necessarily expressed directly through language so I chose to take a "psychosocial approach" to try and understand this deeper level of emotional experience.

What is the Unconscious and How Can We Access it?

I am a psychosocial researcher, which means I am interested in the combination of the disciplines of sociology, psychology, and psychoanalysis. I believe that we cannot understand the social world without also understanding the inner world of the individual or vice versa that the inner and outer worlds need to be considered as inextricably linked. As Woodward (2015) states,

> It is not a matter of adding on the social to a psychological approach or one that explores the social with an added psychological perspective. Psychosocial studies are innovative because both elements are always in play. (Woodward, 2015, p. 5)

As a psychosocial researcher I am interested in what goes on in the unconscious part of the mind and believe that often this material is often overlooked in social research. For this case study, it is important to have some understanding about how the unconscious mind is structured and what emotional content we might find there. So what is it?

The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, developed the first model of the mind, which he envisaged as being formed of three layers of emotional material. He referred to these layers of psychic activity as the *conscious*, *pre-conscious,* and *unconscious*. (He elaborates on these ideas in his seminal book "*The Interpretation of Dreams*" [*1900*]). This "topographical model of the mind"[1] was later commonly likened to a metaphorical iceberg. So, for instance, at the tip of the iceberg you have the *conscious* material, which is accessible to the individual in any given moment. So my *conscious* thoughts are "I am writing this case study for you right now," "I can hear a bird outside," and "my seat is quite comfortable." It is all happening in the here and now. The conscious is concerned with logical thinking, reality, and civilized behavior.

The next level is the preconscious (just below the water line in the iceberg metaphor) and this refers to ordinary memory. So although things stored here aren't in the conscious, they can be readily brought into conscious. These are things you don't think about all the time but you can recall if you need to. Thoughts like, "I remember being really happy at my friend's wedding last year." They are stored memories and stored knowledge. Material or thoughts can pass easily back and forth between the conscious and the preconscious. So you can bring back memories, which have been stored away and bring it into conscious thought.

The third level (deep under the water at the depths of the ocean in the metaphor) is the *unconscious*, and this is the part that a psychosocial researcher is particularly interested in. It is thought that the unconscious makes up around 80% of the psyche (wilderdom.com[2] and Freud, 1933). It is like a treasure chest of information about the individual's psychology, which psychoanalysts and psychosocial researchers think is too significant to ignore. The material held in the unconscious consists of impulsive urges, primitive drives, and deep-rooted anxieties, all of which our psyches would rather keep psychologically contained there. Our minds employ a number of psychological tactics called *ego-defenses* to keep these destructive and demanding impulses under control. These ego-defenses (expanded on later in Anna Freud's work [Sigmund Freud's daughter]) operate at the level of the unconscious, and they prevent us from becoming overwhelmed by denying or distorting the reality of the situation. Some of the ego-defenses include (among others) denial, repression, regression, projection, and sublimation (Freud, 1936/1992).

Sometime unconscious material can slip through the defense barriers (repression) and can be observed through what Freud called *parapraxes* such as jokes (which reveal a hidden meaning), Freudian slips of the tongue (saying something you didn't really mean to say), or through unconscious body language, and also through dreams. Unconscious information can also be sent and received between individuals without them really noticing. This can be done

through processes called transference and counter-transference. As a psychosocial researcher, I am interested in accessing this unconscious material to understand my participants' experiences in a holistic way, taking into account more than just the words that the interviewee expresses in a verbal and conscious way, but also the emotional experience of the encounter.

In my research, I emphasize the importance of psychodynamics (how this unconscious material is expressed) in the interview relationship and use this to access the unconscious level material. Hoggett (2008) argued that "we communicate affectively as well as discursively and we do this precisely because of the inherent limitations of language in expressing experience" (p. 381) taking on Bion's claim that the "I" is a sensuous experience (Bion, 1970; Hoggett, 2008, p. 381). In other words, language is not always sufficient in understanding human emotional experience. Some feelings are beyond words, and it is only through affectively feeling the emotion that some things can be truly understood.

To access the unconscious material in the interview I used psychoanalytical techniques such as observing the *transference*, *counter-transference*, and *projective identification* in the interview encounter (I will come on to explain these terms later). I also took into account the slips in the narrative, the inconsistencies, and the silences. By employing a psychosocial approach, it enabled me to look beyond the words and wider discourse, and to understand unconscious motivations and emotions. I argue that this in turn provided a more illuminated analysis of the emotions, which accompany the ageing process.

The Free Association Narrative Interview Method: The Method in Action

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) in *Doing Qualitative Research Differently*, suggest that the incorporation of psychoanalysis into social research methods requires a very specific interview technique and new ways of analyzing the information gathered. In their own research, they conducted two interviews with each interviewee. To begin they used a free association narrative interview (FANI) technique, keeping the questioning style as open as possible and letting the interviewee's ideas, views, and story to emerge as much as possible in their own words. Free association in psychoanalysis refers to the free flow of the thought process without interruption or guidance from another. This FANI method follows the direction of the interviewee's "ordering and phrasing" of their story (2000, p. 53). It also allowed the interviewer to look critically at any inconsistencies and contradictions, which could then be checked in the second interview through a series of narrative questions based upon the first interview. The second interview was an opportunity to ask some more semi-structured questions in order to make some comparisons between interviewees. It involved asking "tailor made" questions based on issues, which seemed to cause the conflicts in the narrative. The interviewing process was then

followed by a detailed analysis of the experience as a whole including the relationship between the interviewee and interviewer, the emotions involved, examining the words in the transcript, and a careful consideration of the narrative construction.

Like Hollway and Jefferson I also conducted two interviews with each interviewee. This method of double interviewing my participants was a valuable one as it enabled me to explore some of the psychodynamics of the first interview and to take into consideration this in the second interview. I was able to follow up on leads, hunches, and ideas, which arose in the first interview. The first interview was more open-ended than the second. Although I took inspiration from Hollway and Jefferson's method of interviewing I did not follow it rigidly. A free association method requires a certain amount of courage, and it is too easy to revert to the security of the interview schedule and its predefined questions. In the initial stages of interviewing, there was the constant worry and danger that without this safety net the conversation will dry up and I would not know how to develop a certain lead. I think using a schedule gives the interviewer a degree of control over the interview, control over the interviewee, and even control over themselves to ask the right questions in the right way. It took a few attempts with my own interviewees to relinquish some of this control over the interviews, and although I asked some questions, I tried as far as possible in my later interviews to allow the interviewees' narratives to develop according to their own line of thinking.

I also found that a free association method is quite an anxiety provoking experience for both the interviewer and interviewee. Asking someone to tell me his or her life story with little or any interjection can be a difficult and uncomfortable process. I felt that to use a purely free association method would have been counter-productive. I was interested in the anxieties related to the topic of ageing rather than the artificially induced anxieties that were heightened in the interview process. Of course, I recognize that any interview can be anxiety provoking when neither party knows precisely what will happen nor do they know one another. The anxiety that the interview situation necessarily evokes unfortunately cannot be completely controlled for in such a study, but being aware and reflexive about this possibility can go some way to differentiating it from anxieties relating to particular issues related to ageing.

During the interview, I took mental notes about my interviewees' body language, verbal and bodily expression, the use of the physical space, demeanor, and presentation of self, which I then recorded these immediately after the interviews. I also kept a comprehensive record of my own impressions and feelings about each interview. A psychosocial approach requires critical reflection by the interviewer to monitor the process. The psychosocial interviewer needs to be constantly questioning "why has this person said this?" "why at this moment?" and just as importantly "why did I respond in this way and how did it reflect the interview?" (Roper, 2003, p.

27). This is where the issues of transference and counter-transference come into play; the psychosocial interviewer needs to be constantly questioning their reflexivity asking "why did they make me feel like that?" and "how did I deal with it?" and "how did that affect the interview?" Frosh and Baraitser (2008) described reflexivity as requiring the researcher to

> keep an honest gaze on what s/he brings to the research process: how s/he sets it up, what is communicated to the subject, what differences of race, class, gender etc. might prevail and what impact they might have, and how her/his actions might influence the subject's own active meaning-making activities. (p. 359)

Both interviewer and interviewee necessarily bring in their own personal and emotional biographies into the interview encounter, and they will form impressions about each other based upon these backgrounds. However, these positions are not fixed and are constantly adapting throughout the encounter. It is the exploration of these dynamics, which can be a valuable technique for supplementing the analysis.

To bring this discussion back to the start, I would argue, as Hollway and Jefferson have, that a defended subject may not tell you the full story, whether that is a conscious or unconscious effort. There may be emotions, which arise in an interview situation such as anxiety, guilt, triumph, terror, grief, fear, anger, or fantasies of a sadistic or sexual nature. These are not things people will usually want to verbalize in an interview or even consciously recognize for themselves. Some things are too difficult to talk about or to express often because they threaten to break down emotional defenses. In my research, the most painful thing for some participants to admit was that they were struggling with the relationships with their parents, and in some cases unconsciously phantisized that their parents would die. By becoming aware of these powerful emotions and defenses can also result in an enriched understanding of the interviewees' deep rooted feelings and enabled me to recognize the undercurrent of emotions which underpin the socially acceptable front which is performed on a much more conscious level. Every interviewee is necessarily psychically defended—everyone has an unconscious, which contains motivations, instincts, and impulses, which are constrained by the social world in which they live. In different social situations, this struggle between the inner and outer world fluctuates, making the individual more or less defended depending on the circumstances. The interview setting is a unique one. It is not every day that you are sat in front of a stranger as an interviewee and expected to reveal intimate details of your life and feelings. For some people, this creates a deep sense of anxiety.

Using Psychoanalysis in Social Research

Psychoanalysis works on the acknowledgement and awareness of unconscious resistance, repression, and defense mechanisms, which serve to keep painful emotional content securely in the realms of the unconscious. Badcock (1988) described resistance as existing "in order to prevent the conscious mind from becoming painfully aware of some unpleasant mental conflict" (p. 107). Perhaps one of the most important techniques for identifying and interpreting defenses in psycho-biographical interviewing involves analyzing the clinical terms *transference* and *counter-transference*.

There is much debate between the schools of thought about the precise definition of the terms transference and counter-transference. Freud, who discovered and defined transference, first claimed that transference referred to a re-enactment of a significant sexual relationship in the patient's past, he later suggested that it went deeper than that and could be associated with primary love objects (the love for a mother or father) from infancy during the Oedipal period, and it was this love relationship that was being projected onto the analyst (Freud, 1912; Symington, 1986, p. 107). For Freud, the point of analysis was to trace back emotional experiences to early childhood and Freud's early definition of transference was that it referred to these early love relationships, which are then projected and experienced in the present.

For Kleinian psychoanalysts (those who follow and practice Melanie Klein's ideas) everything that is brought to the session is *transference*, that is, dreams, experiences, and everything that is said. Kleinian theorists believe that in the process of transference, internal object relationships are externalized. The analyst temporarily represents the internalized image of the parent in order for the patient to project their unconscious feelings and phantasies onto him. So the analyst unconsciously "becomes" the patient's mother or father and emotional content is put into the analyst. Klein (1986) suggests that "in the transference on the analyst the patient repeats earlier emotions and conflicts" (Klein, 1986, p. 46). However, unlike Freudian analysis, the emphasis for Kleinians may be more on the situation "now" rather than the situation as it was in the past.

Modern definitions of transference, such as those used by Roper (2003) and Craib (2001), generally refer to the projection of past experiences and relationships onto the analyst and their reactions to them as experienced in the here and now, present-day situation. Transference could then refer as Roper (2003) says of the clinical setting, "to the enactment of emotional fragments of past relationships in the present, and the manner in which they re-appear in the immediate situation of the analysis. Counter-transference by contrast is concerned with the analyst's feelings" (p. 21). These transferences are most evident when the emotional content of the particular interaction is significantly high.

Craib defines transference and counter-transference as the "sending and receiving of emotional messages" or processes of "unconscious communication" (Craib, 1998, p. 173). In the context of psychoanalysis, Sandler defines it as "every verbal and non-verbal communication or expression by the patient during the course of his analysis" (Sandler, 1973, p. 45). Another clear example of transference, used by Craib (1998), is between a baby and its parent or guardian. A baby is not able to express its needs linguistically, so it therefore expresses its emotions and desires through these "emotional messages." It is able to transfer its feelings onto its carer. Similarly, the baby is unable to understand the response given by the parent, yet through a similar process the parent is able to communicate with the child. Craib (1998) says that "psychoanalysts would argue that we can see in the relationship between the baby and its carers the earliest and most primitive way in which we communicate our ideas to other people" (Craib, 1998, p. 173).

Craib says that in interaction and the processes of transference and counter-transference, there is a "dynamic process in which external and internal stimuli are in constant interaction with each other" (Craib, 1998, p. 168). For example, when talking to an admirer you may sense that they like you without them having to explicitly say so. Similarly, on occasions you may talk with someone who appears nice to you but you can sense unease and a sense that they perhaps do not really like you. The feelings that they project are called the transference and the feelings that you would experience in return are the counter-transference. One will not be experienced without the presence of the other, and it is in this sense that we can suggest that "transference and counter- transference are inextricably linked" (Bateman & Holmer, 1995, p. 96).

Freud viewed counter-transference as a hindrance to the analytic process. He said that the analyst should be a "blank screen" and refrain from showing the patient his feelings or sharing his experiences with him. Many psychoanalysts would argue that it is virtually impossible for the analyst to remain completely objective as he brings into the analysis his own "active conscious" (Craib, 2001, p. 201) and his own emotional issues and insecurities. However, some would agree that it is necessary to remain as neutral as far as possible in order to recognize the counter transference and to use it as a "therapeutic tool" (Sandler, 1973, p. 69) in the interpretation, as well as allowing the patient's own material to be given priority (Craib, 2001, p. 201).

If we consider how this operates in an interview setting, the emotions that the interviewer experiences become an important element of insight into the relationship and the issues that have become the focus of the encounter. The interviewer is able to question why the interviewee aroused these emotions in him and what it says about the situation. Also if the

interviewer is able to tolerate these feelings, it enables the interviewee in turn to realize that they can be experienced without serious negative consequences (Brenman Pick, 1985). Brenman Pick (1985) said that in the clinical setting "the analyst allows himself to have the experiences, work through and transform them into a useful interpretation" (p. 166). It is important that the analyst or interviewer is comfortable in experiencing strong emotions and is able to use them in a constructive manner for interpretation. One of the roles of the psychosocial researcher (like the analyst) is to recognize the counter-transference and manage it in a controlled way. Just as an analyst does, the psychosocial interviewer "contains" the emotions and creates a safe environment in which the interviewee is able to access and express parts of their subconscious without the risk of being judged, criticized, or mocked.

Adrian's Story: An Example

It is not every day that someone sits down and wants to know the intimate ins and outs of your life story and relationships, and this can be anxiety provoking. Moreover, in the interview situation, the interviewer does not know their interviewee and vice-versa, so in the interview itself the scope for *projective identification* is enormous and the experiences of transference and countertransference can be observed. In *projective identification*, each person in the encounter (interviewer and interviewee) needs to situate the other in relation to a past relationship, as they have no other point of reference. (So think, for example, of when you have met a stranger who has reminded you of your mother, and so you have related to that person in the way that you might with your own mother). So as an interviewer in this state of projective identification, a past relationship is psychically pushed into you by the interviewee, and at the same time you project a past relationship into the interviewee.

This experience of projective identification was highlighted in one particular interview encounter that I had with 43-year-old Adrian. In his interview, I found Adrian's attitude quite childish and at times he came across like an angst-ridden teenager who felt it was so unfair to have parents who held him back from doing what he wanted with his life. He even likened himself to a child at one point saying "I still think of myself as being really quite young. There is still an eighteen-year-old, ten-year-old inside me" (Adrian aged 43). He had described how he felt his parents had held him back and implied that his life would be easier without them around—perhaps even to go so far as unconsciously wishing them dead (this account discussed in more detail in the *Growing Up and Growing Old* chapter). There was also an interesting exchange between us, which I think highlighted some of the unconscious feelings he had about this issue with his parents and my own reactions to this. I felt it highlighted the projected identity of an inadequate mother that I felt was being pushed into my psyche and perhaps I had adopted too readily because of my own emotional state at the time.

To put this example into context, at this point in my own life I had been emergency fostering three children, whose mother had died. One of teenage boys I was looking after had been causing me some problems with regards to authority that particular day. I was contending with feeling the need to be a nurturing and disciplining mother figure to the child, but at the same time not particularly wanting to be a mother to him and also him not wanting me to take the role of his mother either. When I was confronted by a "grown man" (Adrian) who I felt was acting like a spoilt teenager, who wanted his parents out of the way for more selfish reasons, I felt rather aggrieved with him. It felt as if I had to deal with yet another problematic teenager. I also felt that in this interview I seemed to be positioned in the place of a mother figure to Adrian, but this was the position of an unsatisfactory mother as I was to the child I was looking after. The transference and counter transference in the following exchange was interesting to note. He was remarking on how he could not relate to his parents because they had worked in the counseling/self-help field and could never move away from that position to being having just natural conversations with him and having a laugh. This also linked back to his feelings of being oppressed by them and his reasons for wanting to break away from them altogether. He said,

Adrian: … they don't give me the kind of parental support that I want, they kind of do the counselling thing and I'm not sure I want that.

Interviewer (me): Because they have done that sort of counselling work?

Adrian: And I used to do it and I did it to [my ex girlfriend] and people in the past and I'm trying not to do that myself. It's nice to feel that you can help everybody like that, and even friends don't want it, and to be told "why don't you get some help," and "how are you feeling right now?" and I notice it, even with [my daughter], you kind of have a tendency to ask questions that are probing rather than, for the wrong reasons probing, I say, "how you feeling?" you know, "what do you think about this?" rather than just like having a good laugh.

Interviewer: How do you feel about this interview actually, just out of interest because it's not a counselling session but it does some have similarities?

Adrian: … I don't mind about people knowing what I have done, you know, I am not dealing with a crisis … I've been open about who I am, just telling my story really, I haven't really spoken a lot about feelings, I feel quite comfortable, telling the truth. Erm, yeah.

Interviewer: It just struck me that you are uncomfortable with the way that your parents are saying, "oh, how do you feel about that?" and I am asking quite similar questions, like, how do

you feel about that?

Adrian: Well, yeah, but your coming from a completely different point of view, you don't mean to me what they mean to me, yeah, it's different relationships that puts a different colour on what you expect.

[TRANSCRIPTION OVER]

I was surprised by my overwhelming feelings (the counter-transference) when he said "you don't mean to me what they mean to me." I was surprisingly hurt and felt a weird and strong feeling of rejection when he said that, almost like a punch in the stomach! But I was also confused by my reaction—why *would* I be offended? I hardly knew this man and of course I would not mean as much to him as his own parents. I also noticed when transcribing that I then ended the interview immediately afterwards, something which I had not noticed that I had done in the interview. Usually, I would have concluded the interview a bit more carefully and thanked him for his time. This, I suggest is a result of the overwhelming counter-transference experienced in the interview situation. The overwhelming feelings that have been transferred to me had become overbearing, without me even noticing, and I shut the interview down.

Failing to recognize or contain the counter-transference can have disastrous consequences for the analytic session or interview as it did in this instance. When transference and counter-transference were first recognized in an analytic session the psychoanalyst Breuer was analyzing a woman called Anna O and he was so taken aback by the strength of the emotions that were aroused he abandoned the session (Breuer & Freud, 1895/1974). He was shocked by his reaction and questioned why the difficult emotions that had been aroused in him had caused him to call the session to a halt. He failed to recognize the counter-transference at this stage and subsequently failed to contain it. In this interview, I could not hold and contain these feelings so the interview was abandoned abruptly. This is comparable to the way in which Breuer abandoned his analysis of "Anna O." I suggest that the premature closure of the interview is transparently reflective of the workings of counter-transference when I could no longer contain the projections that Adrian was putting into me.

After the interview Adrian commented that next time he would "get himself a cup of coffee" before the next interview. Again I felt bad—like a bad mother I had failed to look after him properly because I forgot to offer him a drink. I also felt that his attitude toward his parents and wanting them to die so he could get on with his own growing up was selfish and childish. However, it could be argued that there was projective-identification from him to me too. In many ways, he had treated me like an incompetent mother, which enforced my own insecurities about

this. Moreover his own deep-seated insecurities about his dependence on his parents could have been projected to me creating this counter transference of inadequacy and failure.

In short, both Adrian's and my own emotional baggage was brought into the interview encounter. Those unconscious past relationships were transferred into the present encounter (the interview). We each projected an identity into each other. I projected a mother figure to him, and he projected a child figure to me. How we then experienced those projections was the counter-transference, which for me became over-whelming and strangely painful so I terminated the interview prematurely. I have presented this in a pictorial form. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Unconscious Dynamics in the Social Research Encounter.
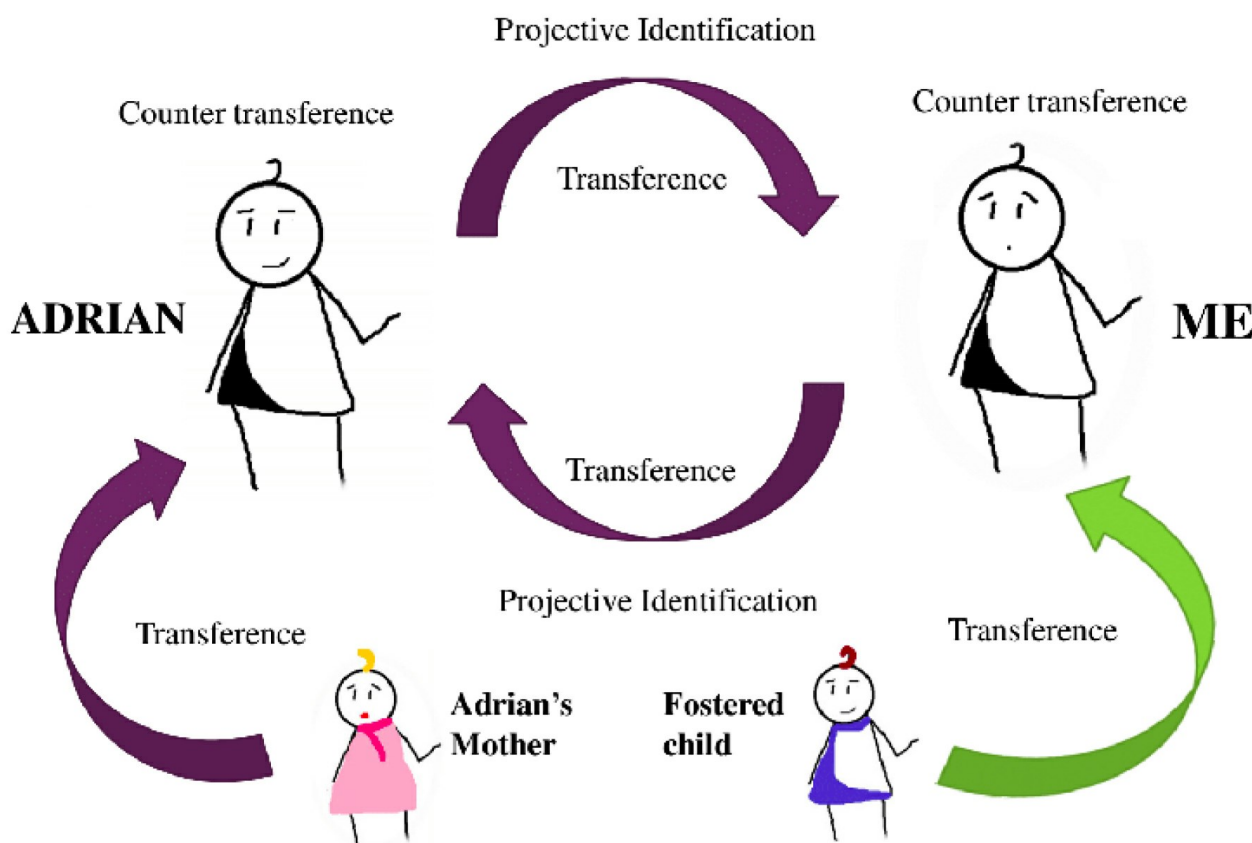
This experience and interpretation of the projective identification helped me to better understand Adrian's relationship with his parents, which is explained in greater detail in the *Growing up and Growing Old* chapter. Moreover, Adrian was someone who became a parent later in life. His relationship broke down once they found out they were expecting a child. His young daughter did not live with him, and I felt he was quite bitter about this. By unconsciously

treating me as an incompetent parent, he may have been projecting his own insecurities about his own sense of inadequacy as a parent. I think this example also highlights the nature of projective identification in an interview and opens an interesting debate as to how far we can take this interpretation, which I do not have space for here but you can read about in my full thesis. I argue that projective identification is inevitable in the interview situation and it is only through reflexive practice and the awareness of the psychodynamic processes at work in the interview that it can be identified. It can offer an added level of interpretation to the narrative of the interview and give a further, more subjective insight into the experience of midlife.

Conclusions

This case study has explored a psychosocial approach to social research (as influenced by Hollway and Jefferson, 2000), highlighting the contrast between the very different teleological concerns of these different disciplines. Psychoanalysts argue that a great deal of our motivations, emotions, and feelings are unconscious and are not always regulated or screened by our conscious self. A traditional social research approach, however, only really takes into account the conscious motivations and emotions. I hope I have inspired you to explore how psychoanalysis can reveal another layer to the study of the individual that sociology sometimes overlooks. In this case study, I introduced some of the key psychoanalytic concepts that I found useful in my research and demonstrated how I practically applied this method. This case study illustrated that valuable information can be gathered through examining the emotions and dynamics of the interview relationship, and has highlighted the way that a psychosocial method can reveal a hidden level of emotions and thoughts, which are often inaccessible in a more traditional sociological interview.

Notes

1. Freud later developed a new structural model of the mind, which he published in "The Ego and the ID" (1923) in which he saw the mind as consisting of new three part system of the Id, Ego and Superego. He mapped these onto the topographical model.

2. http://wilderdom.com/personality/L8-3TopographyMindIceberg.html

Exercises and Discussion Questions

Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of emotional content is contained within the unconscious? Why might it be important or interesting to access this material as a social researcher?

2. What is meant by an experience, which is "beyond words"?

3. What might be some of the ethical challenges of conducting interviews, which aim to access unconscious material?

4. Can you think of an example in your everyday life where you have "felt" someone else's emotions without them verbally expressing them?

5. What is projective identification? Can you identify any encounters from your everyday life (or your research experience) where you have experienced projective identification?

6. List 3 advantages and 3 disadvantages to conducting two interviews with each participant.

7. Think about research that you have conducted. What has been your emotional reaction to the interaction and to the data that you have collected? Have you ever felt uncomfortable? How did you respond to these feelings? What might these feelings say about the unconscious dynamics of the interaction?

Activity

1. Read through one of your own interview transcripts or the attached example transcript (taken from the "The Negotiation of Midlife" collection)

2. Free Associate on the transcripts by writing freely any thoughts, reactions, emotional responses, key words, themes, and so on—anything that comes to mind.

Write down

- Your first impressions of the data, of the interviewee and of his/her narrative.
- Your feelings when reading it. How does the interviewee's story make you feel? How does the way in which the interviewee tell his/her story make you feel?
- Your reflections on any contradictions, false starts and inconsistencies that you might notice.
- What themes can you see in the data?

Further Reading

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Woodward, K. (2015). *Introduction to psychosocial studies*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Web Resources

This is a teaching resource that I wrote for the UK Data Service on Psychosocial Approaches. Psychosocial Approaches, UK Data Service (2017, August 27). Retrieved from https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/teaching-resources/psychosocial

This is the archived data collection from my PhD (2016)

SN 8035—Negotiating Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing, 2006-2008

https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8035

My PhD thesis is published here.

Morgan Brett, B. (2011). *The negotiation of midlife: Exploring the subjective experience of ageing*(PhD Thesis). Retrieved from http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=1&uin=uk.bl.ethos.531545

This is a website on my current research.

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