Qualitative Approaches to Research Using Identity Process Theory

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Introduction

Qualitative research in psychology has had an interesting history over the last couple of decades in terms of its development, standing and popularity (see Howitt, 2010) but its story varies across domains of the discipline and across geographical locations. Social, health and counselling psychology in Europe (particularly in Britain) have been notably open to qualitative work whereas, with some exceptions, qualitative approaches to psychological research have struggled to make a major impression in North American psychology generally. In places where it has become relatively established, the story of qualitative approaches to psychological research has not been marked by a cumulative upward trajectory of popularity. Even in the UK, for example, where qualitative methods became an increasingly standard presence in psychology degree programmes in the 1990s, there may have been a flattening in popularity in recent years associated with a changing research culture and the ascendancy of cognitive neuroscience as a powerful domain within psychology. In the time since its original, most complete presentation within British social psychology (Breakwell, 1986), Identity Process Theory (IPT) has been employed in both quantitative and qualitative research. In this chapter, we examine the contributions that qualitative research located within an IPT framework can make to the understanding of

identity and of the theory itself, while also noting some of the challenges associated with using qualitative approaches within IPT research.

In parallel with Vivian L. Vignoles in his chapter on quantitative approaches to IPT research in this volume, we want to make it clear that our chapter should not be seen as suggesting that qualitative research methods are inherently superior to quantitative approaches for studying identity from an IPT perspective. Mindful of critical questions that have been raised about the role and value of qualitative research in the social sciences (for example, Hammersley, 2008), we advocate a pragmatic approach to methodology. The question is always which research approach – singly or in combination with others – is most useful for achieving the aims and answering the research question of any given study and for maximising the value of the research, however 'research value' might be defined. We agree that some research aims are best suited to quantitative approaches, such as testing theoretical predictions, and other research aims are best achieved through qualitative approaches, such as developing rich, contextualised understandings of phenomena.

To contextualise our discussion of qualitative approaches to research using IPT, it will be useful first to explain what we mean by 'qualitative psychological research' and to examine some relevant features and considerations.

Context, Epistemology and Theory in Qualitative Psychological Research

At its most basic, qualitative psychological research may be regarded as involving 'the collection and analysis of non-numerical data through a psychological lens (however we define that) in order to provide rich descriptions and possible explanations of people's meaning-making – how they make sense of the world and how they experience particular

events' (Coyle, 2007, p.11). Willig (2008, p.8) has observed that qualitative researchers 'aim to understand "what it is like" to experience particular conditions (e.g. what it means and how it feels to live with chronic illness or to be unemployed) and how people manage certain situations (e.g. how people negotiate family life or relations with work colleagues)'. Such approaches can help researchers to produce thoroughly contextualised understandings of their research topics, with 'context' understood not as mere 'background' but as constituent of the phenomena being researched. Context can refer to a person's partnerships, family relationships, occupational networks and friendship networks in the present and the past, for example, and their location within social systems of gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality. In the hands of skilful researchers, many qualitative methods allow the operation of contextual considerations to be traced through the subjectivities of research participants.

This is an important consideration in research with IPT. Whether it is qualitative or quantitative (or adopts a mixed methods approach), research that uses or that seeks to test IPT needs to be able to identify and distinguish key aspects of the theory with credibility. This may not be feasible without sufficient contextual data. For example, if a researcher were to place someone's diverse statements about their self-worth into the category of 'self-esteem' in an undifferentiated way, this could be misleading. It may be important to identify self-esteem that represents a sense of confidence based on a considered assessment of strengths and weaknesses and to distinguish this from a defensive attempt to 'talk up' the self to maintain a positive identity in the face of threat to self-esteem. Both dimensions are of interest to IPT researchers but they may carry different meanings and implications for identity and well-being over time. Within a qualitative interview context, a skilful researcher can encourage participants to elaborate thoroughly contextualised accounts of self-esteem that permit data-grounded interpretations of its nature and identity implications to be offered with confidence. This is not to suggest that an 'objective' picture of a person's self-esteem

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can be obtained: by its very nature, a person's self-esteem is their subjective self-evaluation. What a skilful qualitative researcher can elicit through a focus on context is a detailed sense of the nature of a person's self-esteem, the resources upon which they draw in their self-evaluation and the identity functions that this evaluation performs for them.

The broad definitions of qualitative research presented above capture the purposes of much qualitative research in psychology, particularly research from a phenomenological perspective, which uses methods such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore in detail how people make sense of aspects of their personal and social worlds (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). However, other qualitative methods used in psychology have a different focus. The most notable examples are the various forms of discourse analysis which are more commonly encountered in European than in North American psychology. These critically interrogate dimensions of social life, examining how social categories are worked up, how social situations are linguistically managed and the implications of this for social life, with a particular focus on power relations (Coyle, 2012).

The differences between various qualitative approaches (and the differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches) tend to be concerned with epistemology. This refers to assumptions about what knowledge is, how we generate knowledge, what we know, and how we know what we know. Epistemology is often discussed alongside 'ontology', which refers to the assumptions we make about the nature of being, existence or reality. It is important to bear this in mind and not to assume that qualitative research in psychology is a homogeneous category except at the most general level. When we consider qualitative identity research in this chapter, we shall do so from the vantage point of different qualitative methods based on different epistemological assumptions, including assumptions about the nature and scope of identity.

IPT itself is based on particular epistemological assumptions. In its original exposition in 1986, the theory is located largely within a realist perspective. With some caveats, data generated by identity-relevant research are held to provide insights into the psychological realities of identity and to offer the possibility of advancing evidence of cross-contextual, universal identity processes. This positivist-empiricist, realist epistemology accorded with the cognitive, information-processing framework to which the original presentation of the theory is indebted. The subsequent allying of IPT with social representations theory (see Breakwell, 2001) broadened IPT's epistemological scope, largely because social representations are seen as functioning on different levels and in different forms. Social representations theory is best seen as embodying an epistemology of dialogicality. The individual is regarded as living in a world of others' words and the limits of the self are crafted by the individual in inter-dependent, communicative relationships with others (Marková, 2003); social representations are filtered through other people, groups and communities. By invoking social representations to develop an understanding of how 'the social' frames and shapes identity content, value and processes, IPT could be seen as having been opened up in principle to forms of social constructionism. This epistemological stance, which characterises discourse analysis, conceives of the ways in which we understand the world and ourselves as having been built up through social processes, particularly through language (see Burr, 2003). It can be seen as a more radically social extension of dialogicality, although the relationship between the two can be contested (Marková, 2003).

Elaborations of IPT have not oriented towards accommodating a social constructionist stance explicitly. This may be because the theory needs to retain ideas of psychological processes that (largely) transcend the (local) social context – appropriately so because such psychological processes are necessarily involved in managing the social constructionist processes that produce contextualised realities. The use of social constructionist analyses in

research framed within IPT would not be an entirely epistemologically alien importation. It could usefully extend the ways in which the theory engages with macro-social considerations, such as the social construction of desirable functions or principles for identity. Questions arise, though, about what sorts of social constructionist analyses might contribute usefully to the theory's resources and how exactly such analyses would fit with the theory's cognitive commitments.

Within social constructionism, identity can be understood in terms of taking up, according, resisting and otherwise negotiating subject positions within discourses (Davies & Harré, 1990). Subject positions are understood as sets of images, metaphors and obligations about the sort of responses people can make in interactions that are informed by associated discourses. For example, within a biomedical discourse, people who are ill are placed in the subject position of 'the patient', with its obligation to act as a passive recipient of care from those who are placed in the subject position of 'medical experts'. This gives rise to a more fluid, context-specific conceptualisation of identity than is found in IPT. Hence qualitative researchers who use IPT, who are interested in exploring the potential value of social constructionist analysis in their work and who want to produce coherent analytic accounts might regard analyses in terms of subject positions as too fundamentally problematic in epistemological terms to be useful. Additionally there is the problem that an analysis in terms of subject positions is most readily undertaken with interactive data involving more natural conversational turns than those afforded by research interviews, which have been the usual form of data in qualitative IPT research. However, if we accept that identities are not just located within individual psyches but are negotiated in social relationships, a case could be made for studying identity negotiation through naturally-occurring data generated in identity-relevant settings.

We shall return to the question of social constructionist analyses in qualitative research with IPT later but it is worth noting that research on identity from a social constructionist perspective does not necessarily involve an analysis exclusively in terms of subject positions. Narrative analysis is a qualitative research method routinely concerned with self and identity that is often thought of as embodying social constructionist commitments (see Crossley, 2000). It conceptualises identity in terms of narratives that people craft and enact about themselves to achieve coherence over time, social relevance and comprehensibility; identity change is seen as occurring through the renegotiation or restructuring of narratives (Breakwell, 2012; for more on narrative analysis, see Howitt, 2010). The overlaps with IPT are evident in terms of the emphasis on coherence, which can be seen as related to (but not isomorphic with) continuity, and on the restructuring of narratives, which can be posited to occur through identity processes. Yet narrative analytic studies have tended not to use IPT as their theoretical framework, sometimes because researchers frame their work primarily within theories of narrative. There are a few exceptions, though. In her narrative analytic study of non-resident mothers in the UK, Kielty (2008) invoked IPT as one resource in interpreting data relating to identity threat. Brygola (2011) made greater use of IPT in studying narrative sequences on threatened identity but the research used a mixed methods rather than an exclusively narrative analytic approach and questions could be raised about the emphases within her use of IPT.

This raises a final important introductory consideration in this chapter concerning the role played by theory in qualitative psychological research. Some qualitative methods seek to avoid having pre-existent theory shape the research in an explicit way. For example, research employing a grounded theory approach usually addresses topics on which existing theory is judged to be incomplete or inadequate and, in its comprehensive form, seeks to create new theory through the systematic generation and analysis of qualitative data (see Charmaz, 2006,

for a popular contemporary account of the approach). Thus it would not be appropriate to frame an identity-relevant research question in terms of IPT at the outset of a grounded theory study. Interpretative phenomenological analysis would also avoid such early theoretical framing because of the method's concern with exploring the meaning-making of participants as far as possible on their own terms. Some researchers have used IPT in interpretative phenomenological analytic studies in quite an active, explicit way (see Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000); others have claimed that the theory was used to inform rather than drive their analyses (see Coyle & Rafalin, 2000, for example). As practitioners of this method have sharpened their phenomenological focus over the course of its short history, such work might not be regarded as sufficiently phenomenological to qualify as IPA today (another example of such a study is provided later when we consider the research of Turner & Coyle, 2000). Pre-existing theory can be used to interpret findings in a *post hoc* way in research involving this class of inductive qualitative methods, usually in a discussion section.

Other qualitative methods with greater flexibility can readily accommodate the use of theory in an explicit, *a priori* way to shape research. For example, Braun and Clarke (2006) have advanced a version of thematic analysis oriented towards discerning, analysing and reporting patterns within qualitative data that does not require researchers to use theory (or not) in a particular way or to adopt a specific epistemological stance. Instead it is up to the researcher to decide whether and how they will use theory (in an inductive or deductive way or in some 'both/and' fashion) in their research and how their research will be framed epistemologically: these decisions will be shaped by the research aims and questions. For examples of research in which IPT has been used in explicitly deductive and quasi-deductive ways to inform thematic analyses of data, see Twigger-Ross and Uzzell's (1996) study of place identity with residents of an area of London that had undergone major change and Jaspal and Cinnirella's (2010) study with British Muslim gay men. (The analytic method used

in the former study pre-dated Braun and Clarke's exposition of thematic analysis but overlaps with it.) The version of thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) has proven very popular within psychology in the UK and beyond. Given its flexibility and the possibility it affords for making active use of theory, it can now be considered the preferred qualitative method for research using IPT.

Having outlined some considerations relevant to the use of qualitative approaches within IPT research, our attention now turns to what can be gained through these approaches, as well as some further challenges that may be presented by the use of qualitative methods in IPT work. We shall begin by considering one challenge relevant to any consideration of what might usefully be gained from using qualitative research.

Value and Challenges of Using Qualitative Approaches within Identity Process Theory Research

Telling what we cannot consciously know?

A challenge faced by any research that invites people to think about and provide accounts of identity motivations and processes is that it requires them to verbalise psychological features that may have originally unfolded outside conscious awareness. This applies to quantitative research that involves retrospective self-report in the form of numerical responses to questionnaire items on identity as much as to qualitative research that involves retrospective verbal self-reports of identity. While a qualitative researcher can obtain a person's *understandings* of their identity motivations and processes from retrospective self-report data, it is open to debate whether they can obtain valid insights into the *actuality* of the person's identity motivations and processes. If we accept that this is possible in principle – and counselling and psychotherapeutic practitioners have long assumed it possible to gain

meaningful insights into unconscious motivations and processes relevant to past events from people's verbal accounts – a researcher's success in obtaining such insights will depend on the questions they ask and the exploratory skill with which they pose those questions. There is much to be said for adopting some modes of inquiry and questioning from counselling and using modified versions of these in research contexts to elicit rich data, although for ethical reasons it is vital that the interviewer and especially the participant should not become confused about the roles of researcher and counsellor (see Coyle, 1998).

To take a simple example, when exploring the relevance of potential motivators of identity change in a given situation, it may sometimes be best not to ask interview questions directly about how that situation affected someone's self-esteem, sense of distinctiveness, etc. We do not rule out the potential value of direct questions *per se*: people will vary in their awareness of their own psychological processes and some contexts may render identity processes more visible than others. Researchers could opt for a fairly direct approach to questioning at first and monitor the effectiveness of this. An alternative data generation strategy would be to ask more general questions about whether the person thinks that a particular identity-relevant situation had any effect on how they thought and felt about themselves. If the person indicates a belief that there *was* some effect, this can then be explored, for example, by inviting them to consider their thoughts and feelings at the time in a quasi-'free association' way before tracing their implications for identity-relevant action. It may also be useful to invite the person to reflect on how other people might have regarded their actions and motivations at the time when they negotiated situations of identity threat and identity change. These strategies are oriented towards opening up positions from which the interviewee might offer an account other than the position of a consciously-aware agent of their identity.

Having said this, it must be conceded that, even with creative approaches to data generation, some aspects of identity processes that may occur largely outside conscious awareness will remain beyond the reach of qualitative self-report data, such as changes in pre-existing identity structure that occur to accommodate new identity content. Such phenomena may need to be accessed through other forms of data or inferred from qualitative self-report data. Inferential readings could be located at least partly within a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. This involves not taking self-reports at face value but seeing data as pointing to (unconscious, ideological and/or institutional) phenomena that may be constitutive of the data but are not usually (explicitly) oriented to by participants. Within psychology, such 'suspicious' readings of identity-relevant self-reports are usually associated with discourse analysis, with its focus on how versions of events are crafted, the functions these versions perform and the power relations they facilitate or query (for example, see Merino & Tileagă, 2011, on interviews on ethnic identity). Yet the application of a hermeneutic of suspicion to identity-relevant texts is standard in other disciplines. To take an example, at the end of the fourth century, when he was in his forties, Saint Augustine of Hippo wrote his *Confessions* in which he recounted his sinful early life and conversion to Christianity in a vivid, compelling and psychologically sophisticated way. Within philosophy, writers have applied a hermeneutic of suspicion to the text and have considered how it operates as a purposeful self-presentation of Augustine (for example, as a man of interiority, driven by philosophy) that frames his life in particular ways for particular ends (see O'Donnell, 2001). We cannot know whether Augustine would have recognised these as motives for his self-presentation. In this case the hermeneutic of suspicion can operate with the hindsight of centuries of analysis and so, with a richness of contextualising considerations, can tell *more* than Augustine could have known in his self story.

Examples of the '(added) value' of qualitative analyses

Having briefly considered some of the challenges of using qualitative approaches in research with IPT, we turn now to look at how such approaches can offer insights over and above what can be yielded by quantitative perspectives. To illustrate this, we shall first examine two studies that used quantitative approaches to explore aspects of identity that are recognisable as identity principles. We shall consider how qualitative approaches might have made additional valuable contributions to the exploration of similar questions. The two studies have not been chosen due to any weakness or omission in their approach but because of their potential for readily illustrating what might be gained through qualitative analyses. Both are examples of high-quality, topical identity research that is theoretically grounded, well-designed and well-executed and makes novel contributions to the literature.

In the first study, Morrison and Wheeler (2010) investigated self-concept clarity in minority-opinion groups. Drawing on the distinctiveness principle from IPT and on social identity theory, they postulated that holding a minority opinion may help to distinguish oneself from others and that non-conformity may help to define the self. In three elegantly designed experiments, the researchers showed that a manipulation to ensure that one group of participants believed they held a minority opinion was related to increases in self-concept clarity. Furthermore, they showed that the extent to which the opinion reflected participants' personal values and the extent to which participants identified with their group moderated the effect of minority opinion on self-concept clarity. The findings were said to show that holding a non-conforming opinion may function to increase certainty in 'who one is'. The results may be interpreted as evidence that different principles of identity may influence behaviour beyond the well-researched effects of self-esteem and affiliation. They also suggest a mechanism of identity construction and maintenance: distinctiveness may be enhanced through particular forms of non-conformity.

If a qualitative methodology were used to explore the distinctiveness principle, how would such research be approached? A semi-structured interview could explore general questions such as 'What makes you *you*?', 'Tell me about a time when you have felt particularly strongly "you"', or it could adopt a more direct questioning approach such as 'Have you ever been in a situation where you were proud that your views differed from most other people?' Allowing the participant to select their personal circumstances of distinctiveness obviates the need to pre-select scenarios in which people may (or may not) feel a sense of positive distinctiveness. In addition, the participants' description of events or situations of salience may reveal how processes of identity maintenance proceed. Does an unsolicited event which activates a sense of distinctiveness also engender insight into identity content with a possibly lasting effect on the self-concept? Or do people seek out circumstances in which their distinctiveness is made salient? IPT proposes that 'identity directs action' (Breakwell, 1986, p. 43) but much remains to be explored about how identity motivations guide behaviour. A thematic analysis of responses to the sample questions could show the operation of other identity principles as well as pertinent contextual factors: both are central in IPT's exposition of the mechanisms of identity. Patterns in context could be studied across a sample of participants to explore whether there are types of situation in which people commonly experience a threat to or a reinforcement of their sense of distinctiveness. Analyses informed by critical psychology may draw out issues of power which may be crucial to individuals' responses to a majority or minority position (Fox, Prilleltensky & Austin, 2009). Power wielded by others or power sought by the individual may influence or even determine conformity or non-conformity. IPT proposes identity as a dynamic social construct and, mindful of the epistemological challenges mentioned earlier, a discourse analytic analysis could explore interaction and transaction within a discussion or account of distinctiveness-salient situations. Questions could be asked such as how the participant's

position shifts over time within the interview transcript (or within an account generated through other means) in discussion with the interviewer or, in the case of focus groups, with other participants. Is there initially a strong opposition which activates the distinctiveness principle or does the difference between self and others appear to strengthen or weaken over time in the qualitative account?

Many methodologies could be applied to research on distinctiveness and other identity principles and not all can be explored in the current discussion. Sample approaches have been used here to demonstrate that qualitative research could usefully be employed to explore dimensions proposed by IPT as salient in identity construction and maintenance, including context, identity motivations and time. A question arises about how our suggested approaches might fit together in epistemological and other terms. An emerging development within qualitative psychology in the UK offers a potentially fruitful response. Frost (2011) has explored the value of applying different qualitative methods with different ontologies and epistemologies to the same data set in what she has termed a 'pluralist' approach to qualitative research. The aim is to produce rich, multi-layered, multi-perspective readings of any qualitative data set, with the depth and scope of the analysis taking precedence in a pragmatic way over concerns about epistemological coherence. This can be seen as a (restrained) version of what has been termed 'bricolage' in other social sciences (Levi-Strauss, 1966), a stance focused on 'learning from the juxtaposition of divergent ideas and ways of seeing' (Kincheloe, 2005, p.344). In the suggestions that we offered above for extending Morrison and Wheeler's (2010) analysis, the resultant qualitative analyses could be juxtaposed with the quantitative analysis to provide diverse insights into the operation of distinctiveness in this identity context. What comes to mind here is a comment on methodology in relation to IPT that Breakwell (1986, p.44) made in the original, elaborated exposition of the theory: 'Methodological liberation [lies] in the acceptance that it is legitimate to use different

approaches in unison'. We should point out, though, that undertaking a pluralist analysis is a demanding endeavour. The quality of the analytic outcome has as much to do with the creativity of the analyst(s) as with the range of methods involved.

In the second study under consideration, Phinney, Cantu and Kurtz (1997) conducted a large-scale survey to investigate the relationship between ethnic and national (American) identity components and self-esteem among African American, Latino/a and White teenagers. Using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) as a theoretical framework, they argued that the proposition that an individual's self-esteem may be enhanced through group membership holds ambiguous implications for members of ethnic minority groups which may be generally regarded as being of lower social status to ethnic majority groups. The study found ethnic identity to be a small but significant predictor of self-esteem in each group but an American identity contributed to the measured self-esteem of White participants only. The authors recognised that the relationship between ethnic identity and self-esteem may be made more salient in a minority setting, citing Breakwell (1986). The acknowledgement of the contextual nature of identity components and of self-esteem carries the implication that the findings may not generalise. The critical role of contextual data in understanding the nature of self-esteem for the individual and the identity functions it performs have been discussed earlier. As the authors linked their findings to IPT and identity threat in their discussion and the study explored theoretically important questions on the relative salience of ethnic and national identities and their relationship with self-esteem, the study offered a fertile example to explore how similar research questions could be studied qualitatively, informed by IPT. Focus groups of participants with shared ethnic backgrounds could provide data, and ethnic and national identity aspects could be examined. Open questions could include: 'What does it mean to be Latina/American?', 'How do you feel about being a Latino/an American?', 'What makes you feel proud/ashamed of being a

Latina/American?', 'What role, if any, does wealth play?', 'What about where you live?' Responses to these questions would provide data on the content and value dimensions of identity. A particular strength of pursuing a qualitative approach would be the potential to highlight individuals' perceptions of their national identity. As a multi-faceted construct, participants' descriptions are likely to be nuanced and may elucidate more complex national identity elements, such as Irish-American, Italian-American or African American, and interactions with other salient identity commitments. A temporal dimension may also emerge: is an American national identity more salient for individuals at particular times, such as on the American national holiday of July 4th?

Additional data generation strategies could be used to supplement interview data and perhaps to generate different insights. For example, participants who are recruited to focus groups could be invited to take photographs of contexts in which they are most aware of their ethnic identity and contexts in which they are most aware of their national identity and to email these to the researchers in advance of the interviews. It would be interesting to see how White participants respond to this when 'Whiteness' is rendered salient as an identity dimension by the research (see Frankenberg's, 1993, classic work on this). The researchers could print out the photographs which could subsequently be analysed in light of identity-focused research questions using visual methodologies (Roose, 2012), although their primary purpose would be to act as a catalyst for interview discussions about place, identity and identity salience, with the participants presenting rationales for their selection of the photographed contexts and discussing these contexts with other participants.

The significance of place to national identity has been studied through the medium of IPT (Devine-Wright & Lyons, 1997) and raises critical theoretical questions about the interaction between ethnic and national identity components and identity principles including self-esteem. In many countries, immigrant communities have formed in particular geographic

locations. The east end of London, for example, is home to a Bangladeshi community, and Nepalese Gurkha settlement in England has centred on Hampshire. Within such immigrant communities, in what ways do individuals perceive themselves to be part of an ethnic minority? How is this related, if at all, to their sense of self-esteem and distinctiveness? Do identity processes and threats to identities differ for immigrants living in an extensive and cohesive immigrant community, immigrants living amongst other ethnic groups such as a person of Hispanic identity living amongst African Americans, and immigrants living in communities with the majority ethnic population? History too will have bearing on the experience of ethnic and national identity aspects – personal history of family experience and culturally-shared histories (see Jaspal & Yampolsky, 2011), together with experiential histories of social representations or constructions of their ethnic communities. These considerations will have provided content and value for ethnic and national identity components, shaping self-esteem possibilities.

This treatment of qualitative research questions and themes around the relative salience of ethnic and national identity elements illustrates the potential for a qualitative approach to incorporate a multiplicity of identity aspects and meanings, individual circumstances and the geographic, social, cultural and historic contexts of identity aspects based on ethnicity and nationality.

Further insights into the possible contribution of qualitative approaches to exploring identity-related research questions can be gained by taking an example of qualitative IPT work and considering what other qualitative analyses might impart to the picture of identity phenomena yielded by that research. The qualitative study that we have selected was conducted by Turner and Coyle (2000): it examined identity among 16 people who learned in adulthood that they had been conceived by donor insemination and that the man who had raised them was not their biological father. Participants were recruited through donor

insemination support networks in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia and were mailed or emailed a questionnaire with mostly open questions, which they completed and returned by email or post. Today 'face-to-face' interviews with geographically distant participants have been rendered feasible through Skype but this had not been developed when the study was conducted. The data were analysed using IPA, with the analysis informed by IPT. Participants consistently reported experiencing mistrust towards their family after the revelation, a sense of negatively-evaluated distinctiveness, a perceived lack of genetic continuity, frustration at being thwarted in their search for their biological fathers, and a need to talk to someone who would understand. This study has been selected because the data reported in the paper readily lend themselves to social constructionist analysis that could have extended the analysis reported by the researchers. As it stands, though, the study provides an example of impactful qualitative identity research using IPT. It has been cited much more frequently than any other qualitative identity research that either of us has undertaken to date, including in a 2003 report from a statutory body which advised on the provision of counselling to people conceived through donor insemination who might apply for information about their donor fathers in the UK (HFEA Register Counselling Project Steering Group, 2003): in 2004, legislation was enacted which permitted this from 2005 onwards.

In the data presented in the paper, participants can be seen to draw upon culturally available tropes related to need and entitlement within social constructions of the self and self-knowledge. Participants referred to the 'need to know who I was and how I came to be' (p.2046) and the need to 'feel complete' (p.2047), thereby working up a sense of a fractured identity with important elements missing. These are standard cultural tropes that are often used, for example, by people seeking long-lost relatives in television programmes that aim to reunite them. They constitute a recognisable and powerful resource for working up a problem in relation to self and, within the psychologically literate accounts that participants offered,

for justifying actions (or, in IPT terms, coping responses) that are presented as addressing this unfulfilled perceived need. Within the analysis, Turner and Coyle interpreted this expressed need in terms of implications for self-esteem and negative distinctiveness but it can also be seen as mobilising a sense of discontinuity in and a crisis of meaning for identity. The rationales that participants offered for the most obvious coping response (of seeking to find out who their biological father was) also drew upon discourses of entitlement, responsibility and justice as well as psychological need. For example, 'Peter' crafted an analogy between sperm donors and '"deadbeat dads" and promiscuous men who father children through random sex' and who are 'held responsible to their offspring' (p.2047). The invocation of what might be considered extreme cases of fathering children where the fathers are 'held responsible' by the state makes Peter's claim on identifying his biological father seem reasonable and makes it rhetorically difficult to justify maintaining sperm donors as an exception to claims about responsibility. In social representational terms, Peter could also be seen here as anchoring the unfamiliar category of 'sperm donor fathers' in more culturally familiar categories, imparting negative valence to the former category, as part of a meaning-making process for himself and his audience. A broader anchoring process can be seen where participants locate their speculation about their biological fathers within a recognisable narrative motif from fairytales in which a character feels out of place in their parental home and their true parentage is revealed to be of high social standing. For example, Michael said, 'Maybe it [the donor] was a duke or something. Or Dirk Bogarde. Or Alan Turing' (p.2046).

We also see a 'social representation' being constructed by Phoebe when she talked about how and why '"society" views the whole search idea [for her biological father] as pathetic' (p.2047). In elaborating the content of this oppositional account held by the 'Other' (loosely specified as 'friends, neighbours, etc.') and then providing a rationale for her search in terms of need and entitlement, she positioned herself as acting against local mainstream

opinion in an almost heroic way. In terms of IPT, she could be seen as adopting a position within her account that might have been esteem-enhancing and characterised by agency/self-efficacy. Across accounts, the generalised 'Other' was invoked in largely negative ways (for example, as not understanding 'the complexity of the issues' – p.2048), thereby constructing a need for social support by ingroup members and informed, empathic others as a coping resource.

These supplementary analytic observations do not exhaust analytic possibilities, not least because we have restricted ourselves to the data presented in the published paper. Nonetheless, they provide an indication of the potential 'added value' of incorporating largely social constructionist analyses, in this case examining the constructive function of language, within qualitative IPT research (although we also invoked social representations in our analyses because the study pre-dated the elaborated linking of IPT to that theory). We have connected our largely social constructionist analyses to the more phenomenological, IPT-focused analyses offered by Turner and Coyle, setting these side by side in a form of pluralist analysis as advocated by Frost (2011).

Using Qualitative Research to Develop Identity Process Theory

The discussion thus far has reviewed how qualitative research can usefully explore questions on identity raised by IPT and can complement or extend existing research analyses. The potential for novel findings grounded in participants' experience and accounts has been considered. The discussion has also addressed the scope for disparate aspects of context to be foregrounded in qualitative analyses. Continuing our exploration of qualitative approaches and IPT, we now consider the potential of qualitative research to contribute to the

development of IPT as a theory. Quantitative research can, of course, perform this function through the testing of theoretical predictions. It has also been used to extend the theory through the identification of potential additional identity principles (for example, Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge & Scabini, 2006). When presenting the original principles, Breakwell (1986) acknowledged that these were unlikely to be exhaustive but advised that any additional principles identified in future work would have to function in the manner predicted for the original principles. Here we shall consider how qualitative work has identified additional principles through research with samples drawn from specific populations and has contributed to furthering the under-developed, emotion-oriented aspect of the theory.

Discerning additional identity principles

We would argue that exploratory forms of qualitative research are ideal for discerning additional identity principles that are important in the identity processes of specific groups and that might have at least some transferability across groups. Research in which identity-relevant data are generated through loosely structured or (for the experienced and confident qualitative researcher) unstructured individual or focus group interviews can yield insights that were unanticipated by the researcher, were not indicated by existing literature and may point to principles that inform identity change, identity maintenance and responses to identity threat for that group. Exploratory analysis of quantitative data can do the same but the researcher must work with data that have been framed by the researcher's expectations. In contrast, the qualitative research process can be exploratory at the stages of both data generation and data analysis.

The earliest identification of possible additional identity principles was by Markowe (1996) in her largely qualitative, content analytic study of 'coming out' as lesbian, conducted

with lesbian and heterosexual women. She harnessed a range of theoretical perspectives to make a convincing case that coming out should be examined from cultural, historical, social, intergroup, interpersonal and individual perspectives. Whether participants had developed a lesbian identity in their early years or later in life, two salient motivations were evident in the data: the desire for authenticity or integrity and for affiliation. The desire for authenticity or integrity, 'being yourself', predominated in participants' reasons for coming out. It focused on a perceived 'need' not to be assumed to be heterosexual, not to have to hide what was represented as an important part of the self and a desire to be open with others. This reflects a similar emphasis on a desire for authenticity discerned by other writers on identity such as Giddens (1991). The related desire for affiliation concerned a perceived 'need' to belong with family, friends or a new community. This presaged the proposal of a desire for closeness to others as an additional identity principle by Vignoles (2000), based on interview data with Anglican clergy. In this study, Vignoles also identified a desire for purpose as another identity principle, which overlaps with the meaning principle that he and colleagues identified in a later quantitative study (Vignoles et al., 2006).

In her study of women who had voluntarily changed careers, Murtagh (2009) used IPT as an integrative framework to draw together aspects of identity which appeared salient in phenomenological accounts of career change. She found evidence for threats to self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy and meaning in the participants' stories of the early stages in the process of change and she argued that identity threat may be a determinant of voluntary career change. However, further identity-related threats were noted that were not part of the IPT framework. In particular, the analysis of the interview transcripts discerned a thwarted desire for growth to be salient in the preliminary stages of change. A number of theorists have posited a desire or need for growth as a general motivation (Dweck & Molden, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Summers-Effler, 2004), supporting the argument for a

threat to growth as a motivator in change. Murtagh suggested that a threatened desire to grow may constitute an additional type of identity threat and that the findings provided initial evidence for a desire for growth as an additional guiding principle of identity. Further, she noted that IPT, as a theory of identity processes, is highly developed with regard to threat but less so with regard to positive motivations. There remains scope, therefore, to extend IPT to account for positive, constructive and purposeful motivations.

Such purposeful motivations may be examples of what Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012) have termed 'identity enhancing strategies', which refer to 'active attempts on the part of individuals to enhance the principled operation of identity processes even in the absence of subjectively perceived threat' (p. 236). In our earlier discussion of Turner and Coyle's (2000) data, Phoebe's use of the oppositional 'Other' which served as a rationale for her actions could be considered, at some levels, a constructed experience of subjective threat. Drawing together the notion of identity enhancement in the absence of threat, the construction of subjective threat in justifying behaviour and Breakwell's (1986) original formulation of coping strategies in response to experiences of threat, a full spectrum emerges of ways in which identity principles may be deployed to serve identity needs. IPT then may be argued to have developed beyond its early focus on protective and defensive processes to encompass pro-active and constructive identity motivations.

A third example of potential additional identity principles discerned through qualitative research is provided by Jaspal and Cinnirella's (2010) exploration of the experiences of British Pakistani men who identified as Muslim and gay. Qualitative thematic analysis of interviews showed profound conflict between religious and sexual aspects of identity for some participants. Applying IPT to the accounts provided insight into ways in which participants managed threats to identity at intrapsychic, interpersonal and intergroup levels. The analysis also noted the salience of strategies for maintaining coherence between

conflicting elements of identity. As the authors noted, religious and sexual aspects of identity or behaviour were experienced as fundamental to the self-concept of most participants, meaning that identity coherence was paramount for their maintenance psychological well-being. On the basis of this, Jaspal and Cinnirella suggested that a desire for psychological coherence, different from continuity, might be added to IPT's identity principles (see also Amiot & Jaspal, this volume). This is supported by other work, particularly on multiple, salient identity components and commitments, the maintenance of which can carry potential for identity conflict and incoherence (Amiot, de la Sablonniere, Terry & Smith, 2007; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Some identity aspects may be perceived as unrelated and therefore unproblematic but some may be experienced as linked and conflicting. Identifying as both Muslim and gay can engender especially fundamental conflict and incoherence but conflict between identity components that are accepted and lived by the individual may be a widespread and commonplace challenge in identity construction, such as between the identity elements of priest and person (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006) or parent and worker (Pleck, 1985; Thoits, 1992). Psychological coherence speaks to the need to manage compatibility between conflicting identity elements successfully. In proposing psychological coherence between multiple identity components as an additional principle for IPT, Jaspal and Cinnirella have begun to bridge the gap between IPT and sociological and social psychological identity theories which focus on social roles (for example, Stryker, 1980) and social identities (for example, Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Qualitative research with lesbian women, with Anglican clergy, with career changers and with British Asian Muslim gay men has thus yielded proposed developments of IPT. Such studies in themselves do not lead directly to theory extension. Vignoles et al. (2006) have proposed rigorous criteria by which new identity principles should be evaluated, including conceptual and functional distinctiveness from existing principles, applicability

cross-culturally and a strong theoretical and empirical case. The studies above begin to establish arguments for theoretical justification and conceptual distinctiveness and provide initial empirical evidence which should be extended across diverse samples, cultures and methods, although the proposed additional principles do resonate with other identity research. Alongside theoretical extension through deductive reasoning based on existing knowledge, qualitative research offers the potential for inductive extension based on participants' accounts of lived experiences and sense-making.

Emotion in Identity Process Theory

A detailed consideration of the role of emotion in identity remains an obvious gap in IPT. In keeping with the prevailing cognitive and information-processing paradigms when it was originally developed, IPT only really considers emotions as components of identity content and, to a lesser extent, in possible responses to identity threat. However, other theoretical perspectives posit emotions as intrinsic to psychological processes and place emotion centrally in models of identity construction and maintenance. For example, Stryker (2004, p. 8) argued that 'emotions have signal functions, not only to others but to self; they are messages not only *from* the self but also *to* the self, informing persons...about who they really are.' Haviland-Jones and Kahlbaugh (2000, p. 294) argued that 'the emotional system is the value-making system in identity', which suggests that the evaluation process of IPT may be constituted by emotion processes. However, recent theories of emotion postulate dual dimensions of valence and arousal (see Russell, 2003): IPT's value dimension may map neatly onto emotional valence but the role of level of arousal remains unacknowledged. Burke's (1991) Identity Control Theory proposes emotions as signals for the extent to which an identity is confirmed or disconfirmed within its context. Affect Control Theory (Heise, 1979; Smith-Lovin, 1990) defines emotion as the mechanism by which the alignment of

identity and environment is monitored and reported. From such perspectives, emotion is intrinsic to the interplay between identity and context. Current theoretical understanding of emotion proposes that the experience of an emotion requires situated conceptualisation that is social and shared (see Feldman Barrett, 2012), interestingly mirroring theoretical understandings of identities as subjectively constructed within social contexts (such as Stryker's). We can suggest that identity processes may form part of the 'psychological construction' (ibid., pp. 419-420) of emotion, as well as emotion processes signalling to identity processes, as proposed by Smith-Lovin (1990), Burke (1991) and others. The reciprocal, complex interplay between identity processes, emotion processes and context must be accounted for in future developments of IPT. To borrow from Russell (2003, p.145), 'without considering emotion, [theoretical progress will be] about as fast as someone running on one leg'.

Many attempts have been made to operationalise and measure emotions, but challenges remain. The definition of emotion remains contested in quantitative research, with mood and emotion often difficult to tease apart as facets of affect. Perhaps the greatest difficulty in measuring emotion in quantitative research is the unavoidable mediating role of cognitive processes: measures of emotion require participants to think about their feelings and to map them to a pre-defined instrument. Although qualitative research does not escape all of the challenges of exploring emotion, it offers some approaches to affect which depend less on cognition and language than do measures of emotion in the form of quantitative scales. Returning to our earlier point about creative means of data generation, qualitative methods can facilitate indirect approaches to emotion, such as drawing, playing and free association tasks (see, for example, Davis, 2010). Where language is the basis for analysis, attention can be paid to *how* people tell their stories – to pace, tone, emphasis, fluency, pitch

and body language as indicators of emotion. Future theoretical breakthroughs on emotion in identity processes may well come from qualitative studies.

Conclusion

In considering what can be gained and what has been gained from the exploration of identity using qualitative research approaches within an IPT framework, this chapter has demonstrated the capacity of qualitative research to enrich and extend understandings of identity. It is hoped that future qualitative research will continue to make fruitful use of IPT to further this aim and, in particular, will develop our understanding of existing and emergent guiding principles and the role of emotion in identity processes. Advances in qualitative research methodology may assist these endeavours, particularly the refinement of qualitative methods for longitudinal research (see Holland, 2011, for example), which will to some extent address concerns about a reliance upon retrospective accounts, and the adoption of a pluralist approach to qualitative psychology and to psychological research generally which can enable researchers to do ever-greater justice to a topic as complex and multi-faceted as identity.

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