Interpreting 'resistance' sociologically: a reflection on the recontextualisation of psychoanalytic concepts into sociological analysis

Abstract

This paper explores the contextual, methodological and theoretical implications of using psychoanalytic concepts within sociological analysis. Through the interpretation of an interaction between myself and a research participant as an instance of 'resistance', I will argue that it is possible to recontextualise psychoanalytic concepts, but that this recontextualisation involves an inevitable transformation in meaning. In addition, I will suggest that an analysis incorporating psychoanalytically derived interpretations, combined with more traditional approaches to discursive social analysis, can enhance our understanding of social phenomena.

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Key words: recontextualisation, resistance, discursive regulations, methodology

Introduction: context, methodology and theory
My aim in this article is to trace the transformation of the concept of 'resistance', taken from an origin within psychoanalysis and deployed within a sociological study of student positioning within contrasting disciplines and institutions in higher education. Through the narration of an interpretation of resistance within a small extract of interview data, I hope, firstly, to justify the recontextualisation of some psychoanalytic ideas into sociological analysis, secondly, to identify how this recontextualisation might transform the original concepts, and finally to demonstrate how such redeployments can enhance our understanding of social phenomena more generally. In presenting this argument, I will explore some of the contextual, methodological and theoretical implications of the recontextualisation of psychoanalytic concepts into sociological analysis. In this introductory section I am going to sketch out, in turn, some features of these three aspects of psychoanalytic and sociological practice: context, methodology and theory.

Sociology and psychoanalysis are activities carried out in distinct professional contexts deploying methods specialised to those contexts. Psychoanalytic practice constitutes a very particular contract between analyst and analysand, one that permits the analyst to ask probing personal questions and to offer interpretations of the very intimate material that may emerge. It is a series of conversations between analyst and analysand, in a clinical setting, that constitutes a therapy from which the analysand is thought to benefit in some way. Within the context of sociological research, in contrast, any understanding with regard to an intended therapeutic outcome for participants will normally be subordinated to the wider aims of the research. This difference does not only affect the outcome of the relationship, but also the nature of the material derived from the encounter between practitioner and participant/analysand. For example, as I have mentioned, the psychoanalytic contract permits the practitioner to pursue very intimate lines of questioning, and, more specifically, to present interpretations to their subject in a way that would be highly unusual even in sociological inquiry into the most intimate aspects of people's lives. Indeed, the complexities involved in using such approaches outside of a therapeutic context can raise serious ethical dilemmas.

In addition, I would argue, the intersubjective context constituted in the relationship between practitioner and participant/analysand is less well defined within sociology than within psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic practice does not only specify an intended therapeutic outcome, but also, in the concepts of transference and counter transference, provides a complex theorisation of the intersubjective relationship between participants. This contrasts with the relative under-theorisation of the complexities of gaining informed consent and 'establishing rapport' within the research setting, and the resulting lack of clarity about professional boundaries within the research relationship. The presentation of these aspects of research as unproblematic has been brought into question in recent writing on research ethics

(Hey, 2000, Mauthner et al, 2002, Duncombe and Jessop, 2002, Lapping, 2004). Hey has argued that existing conceptualisations of the research relationship ignore the constitutive excess of emotion, experience and psychic identifications that makes up the relationship between researcher and researched (Hey, 2000). There are clear connections between this work and the conceptualisation of the unconscious communications between analyst and analysand developed within psychoanalysis (Bollas, 1999). Thus, as Clarke has argued, the incorporation of psychoanalytic ideas within sociology may help us to develop 'clearer insight into the emotional construction of the research environment and the reflexivity of the researcher' (2006, p. ???).

Psychoanalysis is methodologically diverse in its practice and also in the conceptual frameworks used to construct interpretations. Sociological uses of psychoanalytic methodology have been similarly diverse. Moore (2006) has used psychoanalytic conceptions of desire and repetition to analyse teachers' responses to new policy initiatives. Froggett (2002) and Sherwood (1980) have used Kleinian theory and object relations in their analyses of, respectively, changing ideologies in welfare provision and 'the psychodynamics of race'. Walkerdine (1982) and Hollway (1989) have both drawn on Lacan's more linguistically based conceptual vocabulary in their analyses of, in Walkerdine's case, the discursive context of learning, and in Hollway's work, adults' accounts of sexual relationships. While each of these studies has drawn on psychoanalytic concepts in their analysis, only Sherwood's deployment of a series of six to eight unstructured interviews with each of her participants explicitly mirrored aspects of the psychoanalytic approach of free association. She describes the interviews as 'a projective measure' intended to reveal both 'conscious attitudes', and also 're-occurring patterns which threw light on unconscious processes and defences', (1980, p. 25). Based on these rich data, Sherwood's analysis of her participants' accounts reveals unconscious associations that can explain the ways in which they tended either to value others as individuals, or to objectify them as representative of racial stereotypes. This deployment of an explicitly psychoanalytic methodology makes the connection between Sherwood's psychoanalytic vocabulary and her data analysis far easier to trace than is the case in studies using more traditional sociological approaches to data collection. One question I am interested to explore here is the way in which the methodological and semantic specificity of a concept may be transformed when used to analyse data produced in distinctly un-psychoanalytic contexts.

Psychoanalytic theory, in contrast to its therapeutic methodology, constitutes a theory of mind based on systematic analysis of empirical observations made within clinical practice. The use of this theory to enhance descriptions of social phenomena is well established (Elliott 2004, Rustin, 2001, Zizek, 1989, 1994, Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, Butler, 1993). This makes sense: the development of a theoretical language involves identifying implications within an empirical data set that go beyond the specific context of origin of the data. As Elliott has suggested, the intense focus on the workings of the mind provided within psychoanalytic practice has produced an understanding of human subjectivity that can contribute to a 'dismantling' of traditional conceptual divisions between self and society (2002, pp. 16 – 17). This 'dismantling' has produced some complex and precise descriptions of the ways in which psychic levels of subjectivity contribute to social phenomena.

One significant insight that attention to psychic levels of subjectivity can bring to the description of social phenomena is the way affect and emotion contribute to the structuring of the social (see Laclau, 2004, Zizek, 1989, Rustin, 2001, Froggett, 2002, Moore, 2006). Laclau and Zizek both distinguish between general descriptions of the form of social/discursive structures and descriptions of the affective or psychic 'force' (Laclau) or 'kernel of enjoyment' (Zizek) that drives and sustains otherwise inexplicable ideological or discursive phenomena. Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras (2006) have used this distinction between 'form' and 'force' to explain the entrenchment of nationalism and the 'pervasive nature of national identification' (p. 148). Feminist theorists have used a similar distinction to demonstrate limitations of recodifications of gender in contemporary capitalist societies (see McNay, 2000, also Lapping, 2006). It is argued that the psychic structuring of masculine and feminine identities persists despite relatively significant changes in the political, cultural and economic organisation of gender relations. The interpretation of a small extract of data from my study, developed within this article, supports this position, and thus also supports the more general argument that psychoanalytic insights can enhance descriptions of social phenomena.

Here, then, I am going to trace the concept of 'resistance' from an origin within psychoanalytic theory through its deployment within my analysis of observation and interview data relating to one student on an undergradute American Literature module. In the first section of the article I will outline a general account of 'resistance' within psychoanalysis, identifying some contextual, methodological, and theoretical, aspects of the concept. These will then be used to trace the transformation in meaning of 'resistance' in the following interpretation of interview data. In the final section I will contrast this psychoanalytically informed interpretation with a more traditional discursive analysis of the student's positioning in relation to the discipline of American Literature. The juxtaposition of these two analyses, I will argue, provides a richer and more precise account of student positioning within higher education than could be produced with the use of a single interpretive approach.

A psychoanalytic conception of 'resistance'
Psychoanalytic work, as I have suggested, involves a very specific contract between analyst and analysand. This is an agreement not only about the intended therapeutic outcome of the relationship, but also, implicitly at least, about the theoretical framework defining the interventions of the analyst. Bollas has noted:

> … although patients will often complain about the slowness of analytical work, or protest about interpretations that feel persecutory, they authorise this search.
> (Bollas, 1999, p. 27).

It is within this context that any language or behaviour produced by the patient that impedes the progress of the therapeutic work can be interpreted as resistance. Lacan reiterates this understanding of resistance as an impediment to psychoanalytic interpretation:

> We classify everything which stands in the way of interpretation as a resistance – it is a matter of definition.
> (Lacan, 1992, p. 127)

The premise on which this conception of resistance is based is that a patient in psychoanalysis has agreed to take part in the process of exploration of their psyche with the aim of developing a therapeutic understanding, and so, when they appear at some points, despite this initial agreement, to block or refuse the professional wisdom and methodology of the analyst, this refusal itself requires interpretation. The contradiction between the willingness to enter into the psychoanalytic contract and the refusal to cooperate with the investigation is what makes resistance, in this context, a puzzling and significant phenomenon.

Within analysis, resistance can be recognised in various forms, or, as Schafer describes it, 'retold in more than one way' (Schafer, 1981, p. 40). Resistance can be retold, for example, in terms of the transference of previous relationships into the interaction with the analyst, or as the adoption of a vocabulary of inability that disavows responsibility and externalises agency ('I can't talk about it', 'something is stopping me from doing it'), and in the many other ways the analysand may find to protect themselves from a confrontation with difficult material. As Smith has pointed out (2004, p. 351), Schafer's account foregrounds the way each instance of resistance is interpreted, or retold through 'thick description', and how each of these retellings refines and adds depth to the abstracted theoretical concept. Nevertheless, these retellings are unified in an understanding of resistance as a tendency to repeat, a certain unconscious pattern manifested in language or behaviour, and repeated in a way that disrupts the possibility of interpretation:

> It is the insistence of an unconscious discourse, which prefers to repeat itself in language and behaviour (rather than to know itself), that must be called resistance.
> (Ragland Sullivan, 1986, p. 121)

This dialogue between different levels of abstraction is also important in considering the way the concept will be retold in the setting of a sociological analysis. The concepts and theoretical principles by which it is possible to identify individual instances of resistance constitute the methodological tools that may enable us to recognise similarities between interactions in psychoanalytic and non-psychoanalytic settings. Just as the meanings of transference, or the language of inability, or self-preservation, need to be reworked in each psychoanalytic interpretation, so they will also be transformed within an instance of sociological analysis.

There is another aspect of the conceptualisation of resistance that is particularly relevant to its use within sociological research. This is the link between resistance and the discursive codes regulating social relations that is, perhaps, most fully articulated within a Lacanian theoretical framework. According to Verhaeghe (1999), the Lacanian conceptualisation of resistance can be explained in relation to Freud's development of the concept in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Here, Freud reflects on the way the effects of interpretation within his practice failed to conform to his initial expectations. He explains how the therapeutic objectives of psychoanalysis required not only that the analyst interpret the patient's unconscious, but that the patient accept and confirm that interpretation:

> the chief emphasis lay upon the patient's resistances: the art consisted now in uncovering these as quickly as possible, in pointing them out to the patient and in inducing him by human influence … to abandon his resistances. (Freud, 1987, p. 288)

Yet, he goes on, that confirmation was not as easy to obtain as he had initially expected:

> … it became ever clearer that the aim which had been set up – the aim that what was unconscious should become conscious – is not completely attainable by that method. (ibid, p. 288)

The reason that this is significant, Verhaeghe suggests, is that it led first Freud, and then Lacan, to reconceptualise resistance as intricately connected to the maintenance of a coherent subjectivity. Freud's earlier theory had suggested that these elements functioned relatively independently, and so overcoming resistance could be seen as a release of the repressed and a fulfilment of the desire of the subject. His later findings suggested that the resistance could not be separated from other aspects of subjectivity, and that overcoming resistance could not be associated with an uncomplicated release of repressed desire. Lacan's conceptual framework offers a precise account of the interconnections between these various elements.

For Lacan, subjectivity is produced within the pre-existing linguistic and social codes of the Symbolic Order: a coherent subjective identity, then, must conform to these discursive regulations. The effect of symbolisation, however, is to produce a gap between the symbol and that which it represents, or, more precisely perhaps, articulates[1]. This means that the language the subject uses to articulate an identity is always inadequate, and thus there is always a remnant leftover in the act of symbolisation. For Lacan, this remnant is desire: that which would bring subjective fulfilment, but which is always beyond our reach (Lacan, 2001). Thus the subject is always divided between the possibility of an identity that conforms to the powerful codes of the Symbolic Order and the possibility of articulating desire. What is key here is the link between the divided subject, desire and the Symbolic Order. The remnant that is excluded from symbolic representation is not random, but is precisely that element of the subject that does not conform to existing social codes. It is therefore not surprising that Freud encountered such difficulty when he asked his patients to confront their desire, since the articulation of desire involves a dangerous readjustment of position in relation to accepted social practice. Resistance, then, is positioned between desire and the symbolic order. It works to keep knowledge of the subject within the existing language of the symbolic order, by blocking the articulation of desire.

The other significant aspect of Lacan's conceptual language is the association between desire, that which is excluded from language, and the feminine position (Lacan, 1998, also Lapping, 2006). At one level this association within Lacan's language merely repeats the familiar argument that within the patriarchal order women have not been able to name their own experience, and so have either been written into a subordinate position or not written in at all. Thus the codes regulating femininity conflict with codes regulating powerful discursive positions. However, Lacan's theory has more complex implications than this familiar argument: it suggests that the requirement to conform to regulations of gender is deeply embedded in the relationship between resistance, desire, subjectivity, and the

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[1] Ernesto Lacalu and Chantal Mouffe distinguish between mediation and articulation. Mediation, as they define it, suggests an essentialised connection between an object and its representation. Articulation, in contrast, suggests the contingency of the organisation of social relations as produced within symbolic representation (1985, p. 96)

Symbolic Order, and thus that transgressing these regulations brings significant psychic and symbolic dangers. This refinement of more general accounts of patriarchal structures is based on observations within clinical practice, which suggest that questions of sexual identity often emerge as the key to understanding the analysand's resistance (Verhaeghe, 1999). This is the basis for the identification of the phallus as the first signifier of subjectivity within the Symbolic Order and of an understanding of sexual difference as a primary organising principle of social relations.

There are, then, three aspects of resistance that I will be considering in my interpretation of interview data in the next part of this article: firstly, the nature of the context and the relationship between participants; secondly, the abstracted principles that enable us to recognise an instance of resistance; and finally, the relationship between resistance, the Symbolic Order, desire and gendered subjectivity.

Introduction to the empirical example
I am drawing on a piece of empirical research comparing literature and politics modules in contrasting institutions within the UK higher education system. Both disciplines and institutions were selected to represent contrasting positions in relation to social hierarchies. The aim of the study was to explore how and whether academic disciplines and institutions that might be said to have an explicitly politicised or inclusive agenda were indeed more inclusive, and, if there were differences between the disciplines and institutions in relation to educational inclusion, how these differences affected the positioning of students within the classroom.

Here I am going to explore my interpretation of resistance in two extracts from one of the student interviews in the study. I participated in a series of at least six classes on each of the four modules. I videoed the sessions and interviewed students and tutors about the discussions that I had observed. The interviews included some general questions about the classes, some specific discussion of concepts from the previous sessions, and then discussion of a series of extracts from the transcript of the previous week's class. Each interview was tailored to the specific interviewee: where possible the extracts would include their own interventions in the class discussion and my questioning would often pick up on specific observations I had made about their participation in the classes.

Monica was a third year student in the East University American Literature class[2]. It was a small group and of the nine students who attended regularly, five were mature, part time students and two were non-native speakers of English now living in the UK. Monica was a full time UK student, living at home with her mother who had recently started a first degree at East University. Monica had just transferred from another university and had missed the first session of the module. However, in the following sessions she was one of the most participative students in the group. She didn't talk at length, but she frequently offered comments, questions and clarifications. She also appeared friendly and supportive of the other students in the group. In the first session the students had sat spread out across the classroom, and had not interacted much. When Monica joined the class in the second session of the

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[2] All names of institutions and individuals have been changed.

module, she chatted to several students, and suggested they get a coffee together in the break.

In the next section I explore Monica's responses during her interview, looking specifically at two extracts where we discussed her participation in the classes.

Interpreting resistance
The first extract followed a brief discussion of the previous week's session. I then seemed to change the topic slightly with a question about her participation:

> CL: So what about when you're asking a question in class, how do you feel?

> Monica: You mean confidence? No, I'm fine with asking a question, I'll ask questions till the cows come home. Sometimes I feel like, because some people, if there's a query, they're not going to be the first people to put their hands up and say 'I don't understand this', but I will. If I don't understand it, I have to ask, because I know nobody will, and the silence will kill everybody and when it comes to the essays it'll be like 'did you know what that meant in class?' So I'm fine asking questions, I've had to ask questions in huge auditorium, lectures, fifty, sixty people.

The first words of Monica's response re-interpret my question with the suggestion, 'You mean confidence?' The following account produces an initial picture of Monica as unambiguously at ease in the classroom, beginning 'I'll ask questions till the cows come home' and ending 'I've had to ask questions in huge auditorium, lectures, fifty, sixty people'. However, Monica's positioning within the account is more complex than this would suggest. While her initial explanation of her willingness to ask questions – 'If I don't understand I have to ask' – suggests a serious and responsible approach to learning, the meaning of this explanation is transformed in the second half of the sentence, when she adds '… because I know nobody will, and the silence will kill everybody'. This refines or shifts her position as serious student into one that is opposed to other students in her classes, who are objectified as less confident or less effective students than Monica. Her suggestion that other students are frequently unwilling to ask questions also implies, perhaps, that she feels some responsibility on behalf of the class: 'I have to' connotes some sense of obligation, though whether this is for her own learning, or for her fellow students is unclear. She also, perhaps, appears slightly frustrated with the reticence of her peers, parodying their too late questions when she says, 'It'll be like "did you know what that meant in class?"'

My next intervention appears to be looking for some kind of clarification, or summary, of what Monica has just said. It includes three questions, and although my first question is fairly open, my third question, which seems intended to clarify my meaning, presents an interpretation that objectifies Monica's role as 'responsible':

> CL: So, what do you feel your role is in class? Do you see what I mean? When you're in class you, like, you feel responsible for asking questions?

It does not seem clear, though, whether 'responsible' in this third question means 'responsible for other students' or 'responsible for her own learning'. So, the phraseology of my objectification does not seem, initially at least, to over-interpret or impose a new significance on the account she had just given. Her response, which seemed quite emphatic, disconcerted me:

Monica: Oh no. I don't know if I feel responsible for asking questions, but I don't have any problem with asking questions if there's a query in my mind. I won't ask questions for someone else, they can ask their own bloody questions, do you know what I mean?

It would seem from Monica's emphatic 'Oh no' that there is something in the way that I reformulated her words that she feels uncomfortable with. My objectification of her participation in class as something she may feel 'responsible' for was not accepted. The second half of Monica's response suggests that she had interpreted my question as implying that she was responsible not only for herself, but also for her fellow students, a suggestion that she again emphatically rejects, 'I won't ask questions for someone else, they can ask their own bloody questions'.

While the contextual features of the interview are clearly quite different to the psychoanalytic setting, there are elements that suggest that the methodological principles for identifying resistance within analysis may be applicable here also. Monica's response can certainly be seen as repeating her complicated feelings about her peers, rather than accepting an interpretation that may offer knowledge about herself. While Monica's account of her participation clearly implies a sense of responsibility for classroom interaction, there is something in the naming of it that she does not accept, and this is consistent with the conceptualisation of resistance as a subject's refusal to accept knowledge that describes her/himself. Her earlier use of the language of obligation is also consistent with the principle identifying resistance in a language that externalises agency: 'I have to ask', rather than 'I ask', or 'I like to ask'.

I am suggesting, here, that there are some elements of the interaction that can be interpreted in a way that is consistent with the methodological principles describing instances of resistance in psychoanalysis. The nature of the interview conversation, though, is less well defined than the therapeutic one, and the expectations of the relationship cannot be directly translated from one setting to another. We can begin to clarify some aspects of the interview context, however, through reflection on my own responses during the interview. I remember this section of the interview quite clearly, or, more specifically, I remember the moment when Monica refuted my suggestion about her participation. I felt disconcerted and also slightly embarrassed that I had, it seemed from her response, misinterpreted what she had just told me. In my initial analysis of the interview, partly as a result of this embarrassment, I didn't explore this extract in any detail. I did remember it, however, and Monica's vehemence, which prompted me, much later, to come back to look at it again. When I did, I found a '…' in my intervention that indicated that I hadn't transcribed the whole of my question. I was quite nervous listening to the tape to check what I had left out. In fact, the missing words were simply the second question, 'do you see what I mean?' and not an embarrassingly inappropriate misinterpretation. The reason this is significant, and not just self-indulgent revelation, is because it can help us to understand the nature of the relationship between interviewer and participant. The strength of my response to Monica's refutation offers a glimpse at the complexity of this engagement, at, perhaps, the nature of the conversation between us, and at the emotions I was transferring into the setting. This, perhaps, is an area in which psychoanalytic approaches, which provide a more precise language to describe the effects of such emotions on the interpretive process, may enhance sociological analysis.

The interventions that followed Monica's refusal of my interpretation also give some hint at the nature of our conversation. After her rebuttal, I reformulated my question, and Monica reverted to emphatic agreement with my suggestions:

> CL: But you feel that it's for you to get as much as possible out of?
>
> Monica: Definitely, the teachers are there to teach us, and we're there not merely to absorb the information but to criticise, and the best way that we can understand it, if we come out of that class and we understand exactly what she said then she's done her job and so have we.
>
> CL: Right, so it's part of your job to understand.
>
> Monica: Yes, definitely…

Monica's repeated affirmation of my suggestions, 'Definitely … Yes, definitely', can be seen as repair to the disruption brought about by her previous refutation. Indeed, it is possible to suggest that she had begun this repair even earlier, when she qualified her rebuttal with 'do you know what I mean?' which, perhaps, echoed my use of 'do you see what I mean?' in my formulation of my intervention. These ongoing strategies of care and repair within the conversation are difficult to interpret precisely, but nevertheless demonstrate that there is a relationship to be maintained between interviewer and participant and that there are implicitly understood boundaries to this relationship, even though these are not specified as explicitly as in other professional contexts.

My interest in the interchange I have just narrated is based on the way it connects to an exchange that took place slightly later in the interview. In this later exchange, I had just shown Monica an extract from the class transcript. In the extract, Edward, another student in the class, had been speaking for some time. The point he was making was rather obscure and difficult to follow and Hannah, the tutor, had already attempted to intervene. Here she attempts to intervene for a second time and Monica follows up Hannah's intervention by offering a suggestion that attempts to make sense of what Edward has been saying:

> 228. Edward: I mean, at the end of the day, here we have a situation where we've historically got this communication system, we know where we are, in America they don't have that, and somebody like Melville is trying to identify with their new concept of who they are…
> 229. Hannah (tutor): I think this is really, I don't know, you're bringing in too many different things that I can't keep a lid on.
> 230. Monica: (to Edward) Are you saying to look at things in their historical context, look at what was going on at the time?
> (East University, Moby Dick 2)

In her interview, Monica explained her intervention:

> Monica: I didn't understand anything he said, but I just thought, because he was talking about the communication system, I just thought he was trying to put everything into a historical context that I don't really think he knew enough about (…) I was trying to save him. I felt really bad, you know, he said it and everyone was like. I thought, okay, you're putting it in historical context, yes, of course you are. Because Hannah, she makes me laugh, she was totally like 'you've just lost me'. He's really good though, he doesn't take offence.

CL: Yes, he keeps trying. Could you make any sense of what he was saying or were you really just lost?

Monica: I understood perfectly what we were talking about, that's why I couldn't understand him. Because I didn't think he was relating it really at all. I mean, she's talking about a sense of identity and a sense of white identity really, so the idea of how white supremacy, white superiority was constructed…

Monica's first intervention here suggests that the purpose of her question to Edward was to support a fellow student in an awkward moment in the classroom, rather than to clarify or further her own understanding or academic expression. Although her suggestion that Edward may be attempting to 'look at things in their historical context' sounded reasonable, she suggests that it was not in fact an attempt to reconstruct what he was saying, since, she 'didn't understand anything he said.' The more convincing explanation of her intervention is, as she says, that she was 'trying to save him.' This attempt to support another student can be interpreted as highly feminised, or perhaps as a maternal position. Monica's comment, 'I thought, okay, you're putting it in historical context, yes, of course you are', expressly ignores Edward's real meaning and offers a solution, in a way that infantilises Edward and puts Monica into a protective, mothering position. Her final observation that 'He's really good though, he doesn't take offence' implies that he might have been justified in precisely this response, and perhaps signifies Monica's own feelings about the (female) tutor's lack of care for her student.

Her response to my next question, though, was very different. Although the first part of my question is clearly about her understanding of what Edward was saying, the second part of my question, asking if she was 'lost', perhaps distracted her, and may explain her response, which refers to the class discussion more generally. Her words, 'I understood perfectly what we were talking about', reassert her position as a successful, confident student. This repeats Monica's earlier foregrounding of herself as a serious student concerned to understand the subject matter of the classes.[3]

What I have been exploring is the contrasts and contradictions within and between the two fragments of my interview with Monica. There seems to be a contradiction, or at least a difference, between Monica's account of her intervention to 'save' Edward and her earlier assertion that 'I won't ask questions for someone else'. There seems to be a tension between Monica's presentation of herself as serious and knowledgeable about her studies, and a demand – within my use of the term 'responsible' and also within her own response to a fellow student having difficulties in the class – a demand to be concerned with the well being of her peers. This demand is consistent with the symbolic regulation of femininity, which requires female students to perform a caring, feminine role within the classroom at the same time as meeting academic criteria for success that conflict with this gendered

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[3] It also, perhaps, represents something about the interview context. I initially met student participants in their university classroom and I asked probing questions in the interview about the subject matter of their studies and the nature of their discipline. Thus, although it was made clear that our discussion was for the purposes of research, the students did sometimes articulate concerns about their academic performance within the interviews. While Monica did not explicitly articulate this kind of concern, it is possible that her representation of herself as engaged and serious about her work may be partially explained by the context of the interview and its close association with the classroom.

performance. It often seems to be in some way difficult or uncomfortable for girls and women in educational settings to maintain these two positions at the same time (see, for example, Thomas, 1990, Walkerdine, 1990, 1998, Hey, 2003, Preece, 2006, Lapping, 2004, 2006).

Finally, I want to see what happens when we translate my interpretation of Monica's responses into a Lacanian framework. Monica's talk within the interview can be interpreted as her presentation of herself within the codes of the Symbolic Order. Her talk presents three different positions: "I am a serious and successful student", "I am responsible for other students", "I am not responsible for other students". Her desire is the remnant of her subjectivity that cannot be represented within the Symbolic Order. My interpretation suggests that the unified ideal of Monica's inarticulable desire is the possibility of maintaining her gendered and academic identities within one moment of articulation. The resistance protects her from knowing her own desire, since such knowledge would force her to confront the contradictions of the Symbolic Order, and the impossibility of her own position. This interpretation of Monica's interventions within the interview can be summarised as follows:

> *Symbolic articulation*
> "I am a serious and successful student"
> "I am responsible for other students"
> "I am not responsible for other students"
>
> *Desire*
> The possibility of maintaining conflicting Symbolic identities within one moment of articulation
>
> *Resistance*
> Protection against knowledge of the impossibility of producing a unified identity within the Symbolic Order

This leaves us with a picture of a divided and unstable subjectivity and of the difficulty involved in maintaining gendered and academic identities within one moment of articulation. It might also be possible to interpret my embarrassment, covered up within the interview setting, as evidence of similar divisions within my presentation of myself as an academic researcher. Both these interpretations foreground the constant tension between embodied, unspeakable desire and codified symbolic articulation.

The implications of this analysis for the description of social phenomena
The interpretation I have presented provides an account of Monica's participation in the classroom that looks very closely at the emotional or psychic implications of nuances of conflict and connection within language and behaviour. The examination of social practice using alternative interpretive approaches can provide alternative accounts. A sociological analysis drawing on psychoanalytically derived interpretations needs to be situated within a framework that incorporates these other modes of analysis, in order to provide a more precise and complex understanding of social phenomena. An understanding of social phenomena needs to distinguish different modes of discursive analysis, and to consider the implications of the

interrelationships between the contrasting interpretations that they produce (see Lapping, 2006).

The analysis of resistance within the interview has produced an account of contradictions between regulations of gendered and academic practices that produce conflicts in Monica's position in relation to her studies. Looked at through a different analytic lens, one that identifies the inclusionary/exclusionary effects of the disciplinary codes of Literary Studies, we get an alternative picture of Monica's position in her university classroom.

Contemporary literary studies is a multi-methodological discipline that incorporates historicist, Marxist and feminist readings and readings that prioritise issues of ethnicity and racism as well as the more traditional approaches of New Criticism and close textual analysis. Thus, at least as it was taught in the American Literature modules observed in the study, the discipline can be said to have an explicitly politicised agenda. When I asked her what she liked about the American Literature module, Monica referred to her longstanding interest in studying issues related to 'race':

> Monica: I've always had an interest in race, racial issues, I mean, I did my A-level sociology project on inter-racial relationships and society's view, and black and white. I've always had an interest in it, so looking at slavery and stuff like that is interesting, I find it quite fascinating.

She had done English, Sociology and Media Studies at A level, which, because of the multi-methodological approach of contemporary literary studies, meant that she felt 'the difference between A level and degree isn't as wide or abstract as the gap between GCSE and A level'. She appeared enthusiastic about the engagement with issues of equity within literary studies, as well as about more textual aspects of her studies:

> Monica: I think now it's not how it used to be understood, as studying dead white poets and playwrights. It's much bigger than that now, which is brilliant. It's just looking at other people's work. You've got creative writing modules, which is cool, because you get to develop your own writing skills and have other people look at your work for a change, and criticise or whatever. I just think it means taking a whole range of books of people from totally diverse backgrounds, from different periods of time, and just looking at them and enjoying them. You've got to enjoy the texts or else they won't mean anything to you…

Monica's identification with the discipline she is studying, then, is based on her political interests in issues of equity, as well as an understanding of the field developed through her experience of similar approaches in her A level subjects, also combined with her appreciation of the distinctive language and value of literary texts.

The juxtaposition of an interpretation of resistance with the analysis of the codes of the academic discipline reveals the complexity of social relations. If we looked only at the practices of the discipline, we could argue that the politicised, multi methodological, contemporary English Literature curriculum provides a liberating site within which Monica, the first generation of her family to go to university, can identify with academic practice. This interpretation might contribute to a picture of changes in the representation of gender, class and ethnicity in higher education institutions and curricula (Middleton, 1892, Robbins, 1988, Lea and Stierer, 2000, Preece, 2006, Coate, 1999, Cotterill et al., 2006). This body of work describes actual and potential

changes in HE curricula, and also suggests the difficulties of implementing and sustaining such changes. However, psychoanalytically informed interpretations of deeply embedded conflicts within feminine subjectivities can help us to distinguish psychic impediments to such changes from institutional, political and economic impediments. What this analysis suggests is that changes in social practice that represent a reconfiguration of gender relations may not also bring about change in the regulation of sexual division at a psychic level: changing the curriculum to reflect the experiences and interests of diverse groups of students is easier than changing the primacy of gender as a mark of subjectivity within the Symbolic order. In addition, the regulation of gender at a psychic level may have significant connotations for the embodied relations between individual subjects and the varied and changing social practices in which they engage. This argument, as I suggested earlier, is consistent with other work identifying the contribution psychoanalytic approaches can make to our understanding of the way psychic identifications constitute and sustain entrenched social formations (Laclau, 2004, Zizek, 1989, Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras, 2006).

Brief conclusion: a sociological understanding of resistance
The interpretation of resistance presented here suggests that in some instances the nature of an interaction within a research interview can be understood in ways that are not dissimilar to interactions within the psychoanalytic setting. It also suggests that to produce such an interpretation care needs to be taken to understand the different contexts within which an instance of resistance is produced: both the interpersonal relationships and the discursive practices to which an instance of resistance refers. The significance of Monica's rebuttal of my interpretation can be understood by unpicking the evidence of repair to the relationship between us that immediately followed the rupture. The meaning of her rebuttal can be understood by tracing pathways from the talk to the gendered and academic practices of the classroom.

Resistance, within this interpretation, is positioned between the discursive regulations of the Symbolic Order and the unarticulated desire of the subject. This, perhaps, shifts the understanding of resistance from a location within the most intimate realms of the ego towards a location within the sociologically more accessible realms of discursive regulation. Had I been using psychoanalytic methods, I might have looked for an explanation of Monica's resistance to the notion of 'responsibility' in her personal history, in, for example, her position in her family, and her relationship to her mother, father, step-father and half-sisters. Instead I have interpreted her responses within the interview in relation to a highly generalised description of the discursive regulation of gender. Perhaps this move from an exploration of the individual psyche to a focus on hegemonic discursive regulations is what distinguishes a sociologised conceptualisation of resistance from its psychoanalytic origin. The effect of this reconceptualisation, I have argued, is to enhance our understanding of the role of emotion and affect in the constitution and maintenance of social formations.

It is worth noting that some authors working in the field of psychoanalytic sociology advocate the use of biographical research methodologies in order to generate 'the kind of empirical data that can benefit from psychoanalytically informed analysis' (Froggett and Wengraf, cited in Clarke, 2006, p. ??, see also Hollway and Jefferson,

2002). Such approaches, when they incorporate appropriate procedures to support complex emotional responses, can undoubtedly produce significant insights (e.g. Sherwood, 1980). However, the analysis presented here suggests ways in which psychoanalytic approaches might contribute to sociological research more generally: in its theorisation of the emotional dimensions of the research context; through the careful deployment of psychoanalytic concepts within interpretations of empirical data; and as an additional interpretive approach that can add precision and complexity to both theoretical and empirical descriptions of social phenomena.

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