

**THERAPEUTIC INTERACTION IN
ANOREXIA
NERVOSA TREATMENT**

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BA (Honours) (Psychology)

This thesis is presented for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Murdoch University

2009

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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ABSTRACT

Anorexia nervosa (AN) is a chronic and complex psychosomatic condition, characterised by a primary drive to be thin and a refusal to maintain normal body weight. Only a minority of people diagnosed with AN ever become asymptomatic and more research has been called for to address high drop-out rates and lack of engagement in AN treatment services, in particular psychotherapeutic treatment. Prior studies have generally examined this problem in terms of patient mediated variables, such as attitudes and behaviours, with little focus on contextual factors. Research that has studied therapeutic engagement in the area of AN has yet to examine psychotherapeutic treatments-in-practice. Guided by this gap in the literature this thesis examines ways in which therapists engage with adolescents diagnosed with AN in naturally occurring psychotherapeutic interactions. A secondary and concurrent focus is to look at how the therapists' underlying theoretical models are reflected in *in situ* practice. The data corpus comprises twenty-four therapy sessions recorded in an eating disorders programme based in a children's hospital. In contrast to eating disorders treatment statistics reported in the literature, the programme has a low drop-out rate, zero mortality rate and good long-term patient outcomes, making it an especially suitable setting to examine engagement.

Drawing on methods from discursive psychology (DP) and conversation analysis (CA), a number of interactional practices are found which show how the key principles of engagement and neutrality are *brought off*, or achieved as such in turn-by-turn interaction. Central to the analysis, is the recurrent production of patients' bodily states and conduct as delicate items. As these topics are also the primary focus of the institutional setting, the analysis shows how practices such as perspective display series

and dispositional management allow delicately marked institutional tasks to be carried out. The analysis also examines how patients' bodies and conduct are embedded in, and constituted as problematic in the interactions. Regularities, such as agentic repositioning in accounts, demonstrate the co-production of patients as *psychologically* compliant with treatment while *physically* non-compliant.

This thesis contributes to work in applied CA concerning links between theoretical models and interactional practices by demonstrating naturally occurring regularities that describe key guiding principles of the eating disorders programme. It also builds on work in DP concerning examinations of the body and embodiment, by showing how patients' physical bodies are an integrated feature of the interactions. Finally, this thesis has implications for a clinical audience in terms of extending therapists' awareness of how engagement with patients is constituted interactionally, which also contributes to wider AN literature on 'resistance' to therapy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	. iii
Acknowledgements .....	. ix
CHAPTER 1	
Overview .....	. 1
Conceptual and Methodological background .....	. 2
Research aims and implications .....	. 5
Thesis structure and chapter summaries .....	. 7
CHAPTER 2	
Literature Review .....	. 10
Introduction .....	. 10
Overview of Anorexia Nervosa .....	. 11
Diagnosis and Presentation of AN .....	. 12
Issues of co-morbidity .....	. 13
Treatment of AN .....	. 14
Motivational treatment approaches .....	. 18
The current project .....	. 22
Discursive psychology and conversation analysis .....	. 24
Embodiment and bodies in discursive psychology .....	. 28
Conversation analytic research in institutional settings .....	. 31
Connecting conversational practices to therapeutic models .....	. 35
Site of data collection .....	. 37
Project aims and summary .....	. 40
CHAPTER 3	
Methods and methodology .....	. 43
Introduction .....	. 43
Institutional background information .....	. 44
EDP admission/assessment process .....	. 45
EDP therapeutic treatment approach .....	. 46
Data collection and transcription .....	. 47
Participating EDP clinicians .....	. 48
Participants .....	. 49

Process of EDP and hospital ethics approval.....	49
Hospital ethics committee provisions	50
Analysis and methods	51
Discursive psychology	52
Conversation analysis	54

CHAPTER 4

“Muscly and tall and normal” versus “Too thin”: Practices in the Management of Delicate Items.....	57
Introduction.....	57
‘Bodily state’ and ‘conduct’ as delicate matters	58
Extract 4.1.	59
.....	
Extract 4.2	60
Extract 4.3	61
Perspective display series.....	64
Perspective display invitations in current setting.....	67
Extract 4.4	70
Extract 4.5	77
Extract 4.6	81
Extract 4.7	88
Conclusion	91

CHAPTER 5

Neutral practices in conduct ‘check-ups’ and ‘safety non-negotiables’	96
Introduction.....	96
Information-eliciting tellings	97
Extract 5.1	100
Extract 5.2	105
Neutrality as an interactional achievement	109
Extract 5.3	111
Extract 5.4	112
Extract 5.5	115
Extract 5.6	119
Conclusion	122

CHAPTER 6	
On requests for accounts and the management of accountability	125
Introduction	125
Marked and unmarked account requests and accounts	128
Extract 6.1	128
Extract 6.2	130
Patient initiated agency repositioning accounts	130
Extract 6.3	131
Extract 6.4	134
Extract 6.5	137
Therapist initiated agency repositioning accounts	139
Extract 6.6	140
Other uses of ‘anorexia’ in agentic repositioning	142
Extract 6.7	143
Extract 6.8	144
Extract 6.9	146
Past-tense ‘bodily state’ accounts	147
Extract 6.10	148
Extract 6.11	150
Extract 6.12	151
Conclusion	152
CHAPTER 7	
Management and orientation to contextual identities	158
Introduction	158
Omni-relevant devices	161
Extract 7.1	164
Extract 7.2	167
Orientation to institutional identities.....	169
Extract 7.3	169
Extract 7.4	171
Extract 7.5	172
Conclusion	174

CHAPTER 8	
Conclusions	177
Chapter structure	177
Thesis summary	177
Clinical implications of analytic findings	179
DP/CA implications of analytic findings	186
Thesis limitations	190
Future research	192
Reference List	195
Appendix A - Transcription Notation Glossary	230
Appendix B - Record of Therapy Sessions, Extracts and Session Times	231
Appendix C - Patient and Parent Consent Forms	232
Appendix D - Patient and Parent Information Sheets	234
Appendix E - EDP - Clinical Practice Guidelines	234

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, my deepest thanks goes to all the adolescents who volunteered for this project from the PMH Eating Disorders Programme. I am also incredibly grateful and indebted to the participating clinicians for your trust and commitment of time.

My thanks to Ngaire Donaghue and Iain Walker for your consistent support throughout my candidature. Ngaire, thank you especially for your insights, reassurances and generosity (and patience with ‘urgent’ thesis related phone calls). I am so grateful for how much care and time you have given me, and your continual belief in my ability to complete this thesis.

Many thanks to my original supervisor Mark Rapley for providing ongoing academic assistance and generous input. I have really appreciated how you have taught me to think more critically about psychology and life if general.

Thanks to David Silverman for taking time to help me with data analysis, and providing comments on portions of this dissertation.

My thanks to Charles Antaki for answering my emails concerning this thesis, regardless of how trivial, so graciously and promptly.

To the Discourse Analysis Group (DAG) at Murdoch University for your input.

To my Club Murdoch writing group for your empathy and encouragement. It has been a rewarding environment to work in, and often the highlight of my working week.

To my friends and family for your understanding of my general absence from birthdays and other significant social events during the past year. Anita, thanks so much for your wonderful laughter, intelligence and encouragement – I will really miss sharing an office with you. Magenta, thank you for taking the time to do corrections, and your continual generosity and love. Rachael, words cannot adequately express how appreciative I am of your friendship and care throughout this year, I would not have got through it without you.

To Marty for your encouragement to continue.

To my parents, Jennifer and Bill Bellair, for your steadfast love, support and enormous amount of babysitting, without which this dissertation would certainly have remained unfinished.

Finally, to my beloved and beautiful children, Ethan, Sophie and Annabelle, for your frequent tolerance of ‘mummy going to uni *again*’.

During its preparation, portions of this dissertation were presented at the following conferences:

8-13 July, 2007 – 10th International Pragmatics Conference, Göteborg, Sweden. *“The anorexia keeps getting stronger” : The management of accountability in therapeutic talk in an eating disorders clinic.*

September, 2006 – Mosaics and Milestones: An Eating Disorders Conference – Western Australia. *Keeping patient-centred in a diagnostic paradigm: Can qualitative research help?*

June, 2005 – Conversation Analysis of Psychotherapy – Manchester University, UK. *Psychotherapy of Anorexia Nervosa.*