

# Microanalysis

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Microanalysis involves repeated close review of small segments of social interaction, to identify the interplay of vocal and non-vocal actions that are used to create meaning and achieve the interaction.

In part the utility of microanalysis is that by examining actual social interactions in fine detail, it is possible to form an inductive, "from the ground up" understanding. The goal at the beginning of any analysis is to set aside theory, knowing that is never fully possible, and examine the data-the interaction-as much as possible on its own terms. This often reveals relationships between actions that were previously unseen, for instance, the close coordination of eye gaze, vocal intonation and interactive gestures when one person invites another to take a turn at talk.

This method differs from traditional social science, which works deductively by applying theoretical constructs to the data, in this case specific actions in the context of interactions. With the deductive approach, actual interaction is treated as an instance of a theory or already devised hypothesis. Interaction is not of interest on its own terms, as a unique focus of enquiry, but as a specific case of presumed larger patterns, or effect of inner forces, that conforms to, or can be made to conform to, a particular theory.

The experience of microanalysis quickly teaches the observer that actual social interaction rarely conforms to theories of social interaction, including theories of personality that predict individual behaviour. From this perspective, microanalysis is deceptively radical: It provides a systematic method that calls accepted constructs into question by testing them against actual behaviour in context.

This is intuitively appealing and useful for therapists, who also engage with clients in reviewing existing constructs or ideas or meanings, and developing others in the service of positive change and, in cases of violence, social justice.

Microanalysis is also a useful tool for examining and improving the practice of therapy. With this kind of analysis, a therapist or other professional can see that a client's response is not a function of imputed unobservable psychological traits, or other theoretical constructs, but a response to the questions that were asked, the information that was taken up, and the ideas that were acknowledged and, perhaps most important, the interpersonal tone or definition of relationships developed in the conversation.

Analysis of specific interactions without consideration of the social settings and larger social contexts in which they occur, including but not limited to diverse power relations, can become mired in endless particularism or reductionism. This is like playing with the pieces of a train set, each whole and fascinating in its own right, without ever putting them together to get the larger form.

Above all, in our view, microanalysis reveals forms of pre-existing ability that are generally ignored. In this way, it acts as a counterweight to deficit-based approaches in the mental health field. A close look at social interaction reveals that problems in living rarely arise from problems in communication: we are simply too good at communication for this to be the great problem it is presumed to be. The same logic applies to professionals, including therapists, who may see through moment-by-moment analysis of their own work a host of pre-existing abilities they have always relied on and never really noticed. We took this orientation into the practice of therapy in cases of violence and eventually, with the help of determined clients, began to see the profound importance of small responses to violence, as acts of resistance