

Mauthner, N.S. and Doucet, A. (1998) Reflections on a Voice-Centred Relational Method of Data Analysis: Analysing Maternal and Domestic Voices, in Jane Ribbens and Rosalind Edwards (eds.), *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Private Lives and Public Texts*. London: Sage; pp. 119-144.

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we discuss the issue of qualitative data analysis by drawing and reflecting upon our respective doctoral research projects: a study of women's experiences of motherhood and postnatal depression (Mauthner, 1994) and a study of heterosexual couples attempting to share housework and child care (Doucet, 1995a). The question of data analysis has been of great interest to us because it is a relatively neglected area of the literature on qualitative research both in terms of general research texts and also within research accounts of specific studies. Yet the processes through which we transform respondents' private lives into public theories are clearly critical to assessing the validity and status of these theories. The particular issue which strikes us as central, yet overlooked, in qualitative data analysis processes and accounts is that of how to keep respondents' voices and perspectives alive, while at the same time recognising the researcher's role in shaping the research process and product. In this chapter, we discuss our own attempts to tackle this issue and the questions and dilemmas we have faced in doing so. We detail the 'nitty-gritty' of how we analysed the interview transcripts gathered in the course of our doctoral work; and four years on, we also reflect back on our data analysis processes casting a more critical gaze on some of the beliefs and assumptions underlying the methods we used at that time. Thus, the chapter traces, but is also part of, an ongoing research journey as we continue to reflect on the ways in which we conduct qualitative research. We are writing this chapter together because we worked closely at the time of our doctoral studies, and have continued to do so despite now being separated by the Atlantic Ocean.

TRANSFORMING PRIVATE STORIES INTO PUBLIC THEORIES: THINKING ABOUT QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis: a neglected issue?

While the question of qualitative data analysis has received increasing attention over recent years (see, for example, Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Delamont, 1992; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Dey, 1993; Hammersley, 1992; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990; Riessman, 1987, 1993; Silverman, 1993; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Wolcott, 1994) we would nevertheless maintain that, compared to other stages of the research process, such as entering the field or data collection methods, data analysis is still largely neglected. Of particular concern is the relative paucity of guidance in the literature, the lack of training on data analysis, the difficulties of finding appropriate support, mentoring and supervision from other researchers, and the increasing move to equate computer 'coding' with qualitative data 'analysis'. These neglects are particularly surprising given that the robustness and validity of our claims largely lie in the precise methods through which we transform people's private lives and stories into public categories, theories and texts. Miles and Huberman (1994: 10) similarly note that 'The strengths of qualitative data rest very centrally on the competence with which their analysis is carried out' (see also Bryman and Burgess, 1994; Glucksmann, 1994).

We first became aware of this neglected area in 1992 when we faced the task of having to make sense of the enormous amounts of data we gathered for our PhDs. We searched the literature for guidance on data analysis and while we found several important texts (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Miles and Huberman, 1984; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) it was unclear to us how to translate these ideas into practice without the advice and guidance of a researcher familiar with one of these particular methods. We also searched for discussions of data analysis in the context of specific research studies but found few detailed presentations of the step-by-step processes of how transcripts are analysed. Indeed restrictions on length of publications, particularly in journals, often preclude lengthy discussions of such methods. As we now reflect back to this period, we also realize that the social context, and the constraints and resources available at the academic institution within which we were conducting our research, had an impact on this stage of our projects. We were working within a faculty where quantitative, positivistic approaches dominated. In addition, there was pressure to get our theses completed and submitted within a three year period, so that any inclinations to spend a great deal of time in data analysis tended to be discouraged. There was tremendous enthusiasm over computer software packages for analysing data. The debates about qualitative analysis in our department revolved very much around which software

package to employ, and issues of 'coding' the data. Broader and more holistic questions about how to do 'analysis', and the links between data analysis and the research project as a whole, were not addressed.

In reading the literature on qualitative research we also paid particular attention to that written by feminist scholars, an impressive body of work which has influenced and helped us over the years (for example, DeVault, 1990; Harding, 1987; Roberts, 1981; Smith, 1987). However, two aspects of this literature have puzzled us. Firstly, the issue of listening to women, and understanding their lives, 'in and on their own terms' has been a long standing and pivotal concern amongst feminist researchers (Finch, 1984; Gilligan, 1982; Graham, 1983; Oakley, 1981); yet there are very few examples of how this general methodological principle can be practically operationalized within the actual research process and, in particular, in terms of data analysis.

A second theme which lies at the heart of feminist research is that of reflexivity. Reflexivity means reflecting upon and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual autobiographies as researchers and making explicit where we are located in relation to our research respondents. Reflexivity also means acknowledging the critical role we play in creating, interpreting and theorising research data (Du Bois, 1983; Harding, 1992; Maynard, 1994; Stanley and Wise, 1983, 1993). Feminist discussions of reflexivity have largely addressed two aspects of the research process; first, the nature of the research relationship, and the extent to which similarities or differences between researcher and researched in characteristics such as gender, race, class, age, sexuality, or able-bodiedness influence this relationship (Olesen, 1994). Second, reflexivity has been widely debated in relation to issues of theory construction and epistemology (Braidotti et al., 1994; Harding, 1987, 1992). Feminist scholars point out that the production of theory is a social activity which is culturally, socially and historically embedded, thus resulting in 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1988). Nevertheless, while much has been written by feminists about reflexivity in methodology and epistemology, it remains surprising to us how little attention has been given to issues of reflexivity and power, voice and authority specifically in the data analysis stage of the research.

As it happened, we spent an intensive period of about 17 months analysing our data. Clearly, we had the time and access to financial resources to allow us to do this. More importantly, perhaps, we had the opportunity to learn a particular method of data analysis with the

help of a committed and enthusiastic facilitator and the support of a research group. Without these resources, we are doubtful whether we would have given data analysis the time, energy, and detailed and thorough attention it deserves. This experience, which we relate in this chapter, has focused our minds on the difficulties, dilemmas, importance, but also relative neglect, of data analysis.

The difficulties of articulating what we do when we analyse qualitative data

Over the years, and more recently in the context of struggling to write this chapter, we have pondered why writing about data analysis, in both theoretical and practical terms, is such an elusive task. The latter stages of data analysis, which tend to be structured, methodical, rigorous and systematic, are often easily described. For example, once a critical set of issues has been identified, the data are systematically scanned for examples of particular themes. However, the initial stages of actually getting to know the data and identifying what are the key issues feel more intuitive than anything else. As Bryman and Burgess (1994: 12) have noted: 'much of the work in which investigators engage in this phase of the research process is as much implicit as explicit'. Thus, as qualitative researchers, we engage in a somewhat random process of following up certain leads and seeing where they take us. In deciding which ideas to follow up we are undoubtedly influenced, whether consciously or not, by our own personal, political and theoretical biographies. But the reasons why we choose some ideas rather than others are not always immediately obvious to us; nor are there necessarily logical reasons for our choices and decisions. The early phases of data analysis can therefore feel messy, confusing and uncertain because we are at a stage where we simply do not know what to think yet. Indeed, this is the whole point of data analysis - to learn from and about the data; to learn something new about a question by listening to other people. But while this sense of not knowing and of openness is exciting, it is also deeply uncomfortable. These kinds of processes are very difficult to articulate, especially in the logical, sequential, linear fashion that tends to be required in a research text.

Perhaps data analysis is also difficult to articulate because in doing so we are directly confronted with the subjective, interpretive nature of what we do - having to interpret respondents' words in some way, while realising that these words could be interpreted in a multitude of ways. It is now well recognized in many feminist critiques¹, as well as within work associated with postmodernism and with the longer-

standing hermeneutic (Dilthey, 1900/1976; Gadamer, 1975; Ricoeur, 1979) or interpretive traditions (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), that all research contains biases and values, and that knowledge and understanding are contextually and historically grounded, as well as linguistically constituted. These critiques, while distinct in many ways, share a common emphasis on deconstructing Enlightenment and modernist ideals of objectivity, scientific thought, dualisms and rationality (see Du Bois, 1983; Harding, 1992; Heckmann, 1990; Mies, 1983; Stanley and Wise, 1983, 1993). Feminists, for example, have argued for over two decades that understanding and knowledge come from being involved in a relationship with our subject matter and respondents, and not through adopting a detached and objective stance; indeed the production of knowledge must contain a systematic examination and explication of our beliefs, biases and social location (Harding, 1992). This reflexivity ensures that the politics underlying the methods, topics, and governing assumptions of our scholarship are analyzed directly and self-consciously, rather than remaining unacknowledged (Crawford and Marecek, 1989). While these are laudable intentions, these biases and beliefs may be extremely difficult to uncover or even to notice: we may not have the practical means to do so in the busy process of analysing interview transcripts; it may be quite uncomfortable to do so; a profound level of self-awareness is required to begin to capture the perspectives through which we view the world; and the 'unconscious' filters through which we experience the world cannot be easily grasped.

In other words, in analysing data we are confronted with ourselves, and with our own central role in shaping the outcome. Indeed, perhaps this is part of the reason why computer programmes have been so popular: the use of technology confers an air of scientific objectivity onto what remains a fundamentally subjective, interpretative process. This is not to deny the obvious practical benefits to be gained from computer programmes (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Weitzman and Miles, 1995). Indeed, one of us used such a programme as part of the analysis process. The point we wish to make is that we need to think critically about how and why we use these programmes.

A further reason why we might be tempted to gloss over the question of how we analyse our data stems from our anxiety about whether we have analysed the data in 'the right way'. When researchers draw on specific methods of data analysis they use and interpret these methods in their own individual ways. Indeed, even researchers who jointly develop a particular method can actually use the same method

differently. The case of Glaser and Strauss (1967), and of the difference of opinion or 'head on clash' (Melia, 1996: 368) that developed between them as to what exactly 'grounded theory' is, provides a particularly good example of this (see Glaser, 1992; Melia, 1996). We might follow the general principles of a method but not go through all the steps that are specified. Or we might go through all the steps for a select number of cases, and analyse the remainder of the data set in a more speedy fashion particularly when resources of time, energy and money are running out. This can engender a sense of anxiety that we have not proceeded correctly; and rather than be open about exactly what we did and did not do, we might be tempted to simply gloss over the details of data analysis. But this issue has raised a number of unanswered questions for us. Are research texts on data analysis intended to be literally followed step by step? How many researchers who describe using particular methods actually follow all the steps as specified within the original texts? To what extent is it necessary to go through all the steps with each one of the transcripts? Do the researchers writing these texts actually go through all these steps themselves? Is there one right way to use a particular method? And to what extent do methods evolve as different researchers use and adapt them (see also Strauss and Corbin, 1990)?

Data analysis is our most vulnerable spot. It is the area of our research where we are most open to criticism. Writing about data analysis is exposing ourselves for scrutiny. Perhaps it is for these reasons that data analysis fails to receive the attention and detail it deserves.

ANALYSING MATERNAL AND DOMESTIC VOICES: HOW WE DID IT

In this section we discuss the detailed processes of how we analysed verbatim transcripts of depth interviews gathered in the course of our doctoral research projects. Throughout the discussion we draw on examples from our research which employed individual, joint and repeat, semi-structured, open-ended interviewing. Natasha Mauthner's research explored women's experiences of motherhood and postnatal depression through interviews with 40 mothers of young children living in England, 18 of whom experienced postnatal depression (see Mauthner, 1993, 1994, 1995, forthcoming). Andrea Doucet's research investigated the experiences of 23 British dual earner couples with dependent children who identified themselves as 'consciously attempting to share the work and responsibility for housework and child care' (see Doucet 1995a, 1995b, 1996).

In focusing specifically on the analysis of interview transcripts in this chapter we are inevitably obscuring other aspects of data analysis and presenting a somewhat static and simplified picture of what is in fact a complex, dynamic process. Two particular issues are worth highlighting here, issues which are critical to how we analyse our data but which we do not discuss due to lack of space.

First, we recognize that 'data analysis' is not a discrete phase of the research process confined to the moments when we analyse interview transcripts. Rather, it is an ongoing process which takes place throughout, and often extends beyond, the life of a research project. For example, our interpretive work started when we first accessed the sample of people we wished to include in our studies. During the interviews, we were actively listening to participants' stories, asking questions and leading respondents down certain paths and not others, making decisions about which issues to follow up, and which to ignore, and choosing where to probe. We were guided by our initial research agenda and questions, what each respondent said to us, and our interpretations and understandings of their words. The interview content was therefore a joint production (see Mishler, 1986) and part of what we were doing in shaping the interview was following our own analytical thinking. Moreover, with each interview, and with the analytical work we did during and after each interview, we formulated new ideas or approaches, and modified our interview questions so as to 'check these out'. The process of analysis continued in a more explicit way as we transcribed the interviews and began to immerse ourselves in the data through full transcript readings. We began to interpret the meaning of each respondent's stories, and noted areas of difference and overlap with other participants' accounts. Finally, data analysis overlapped with and was ongoing during the writing up the research.

Second, in discussing the analysis of narrative accounts told within an interview we are paying less attention to less formal types of information such as fieldnotes; information gleaned during the setting up of interviews; incidental meetings or conversations with respondents; observational data during the interview; and non-linguistic 'data' such as bodily and facial expressions, and non-verbal interactions between the couple in the case of joint interviews.

While we recognize the critical importance of these various processes, for the purposes of this chapter we wish to place the spotlight specifically on data analysis as a discrete stage, and on the interview transcript as the source of data, because these aspects of the research

process have been particularly neglected.

We were able to devote a full 17 months specifically to analysing interview transcripts and our chapter focuses on the analytical procedures which we conducted during this concentrated period. We describe these in two distinct phases of data analysis: (1) the 'voice-centred relational method' of data analysis involving four readings, case studies and group work; and (2) summaries and thematic 'breaking down' of the data.²

Stage One - The voice-centred relational method of data analysis: Four readings, Case Studies and Group Work

In the autumn of 1992 we had the opportunity to join a small graduate research group set up by Carol Gilligan on her arrival as visiting professor at the University of Cambridge. The aim of the group was specifically to learn how to use a particular method of data analysis, the voice-centred relational method, as well to explore the theoretical and methodological ideas which underpin it. This method of data analysis was developed over several years by Lyn Brown, Carol Gilligan and their colleagues at the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (see Brown and Gilligan, 1992, 1993; Brown et al., 1988; Gilligan et al., 1990).³ The method has its roots in clinical and literary approaches (Brown and Gilligan, 1992) interpretive and hermeneutic traditions (Brown et al., 1989, 1991; Gilligan et al., 1990) and relational theory (Belenky et al., 1986; Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1988; Gilligan et al., 1990; Miller, 1976/1986).

While using the method under the guidance of Gilligan, we were also simultaneously developing our own version of it. Thus we drew on the excellent work which had begun at Harvard University but we adapted it so as to reflect our interdisciplinary backgrounds and our specific research interests. In particular, we were both interested in emphasising and refining its application for projects that include a sociological focus. While the method holds at its core the idea of a relational ontology that arose out of the extensive research on girls and women conducted within the

fields of developmental psychology and education, it is important to highlight that this relational ontology has been uncovered and theorized in other disciplines, particularly in political theory, feminist philosophy, and feminist legal theory (see Baier, 1993; Benhabib, 1987, 1992; Gilligan, 1988; Held, 1984, 1996; Minow and Shanley, 1996; Ruddick, 1989; Tronto, 1989, 1993, 1995). The ontological image which has predominated in liberal political thought and the western philosophical tradition is that of a separate, self-sufficient, independent, rational 'self' or 'individual'. In contrast, the 'relational' ontology posits the notion of 'selves-in-relation' (Ruddick, 1989: 211), or 'relational being' (Jordan, 1993:141), a view of human beings as imbedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations (Gilligan, 1982); and a 'different understanding of human nature and human interaction so that people are viewed as interdependent rather than independent' (Tronto, 1995: 142).⁴

The voice-centred relational method, and our version of it presented here, represents an attempt to translate this relational ontology into methodology and into concrete methods of data analysis by exploring individuals' narrative accounts in terms of their relationships to themselves, their relationships to the people around them, and their relationships to the broader social, structural and cultural contexts within which they live. Our version of the method is also deeply rooted within the broader tradition of feminist research practice and the increasingly rich

and wide field of qualitative research.

Since using this method, we have come to realize that it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to carry out this form of analysis without the guidance of an instructor and facilitator who was well versed and immersed in the development and use of the method. In addition, having since read the work of other researchers who have also used this method at Harvard University (Geismar, 1996; Macuika, 1992; Rogers, 1994; Tolman, 1992; Way, 1994), we realize that, as we pointed out above, individual researchers use and adapt particular methods in their own individual ways. Researchers' individuality, their particular topics, their samples, the theoretical and academic environments and social and cultural contexts in which they work all influence the ways in which these methods are used. Although we both used this method, we picked up on and emphasized different elements of it. The method worked differently for us because of our different topics but also because of differences in our own intellectual, personal, political and theoretical biographies. In discussing how we used the voice-centred relational method we are therefore not discussing 'the' method but rather our own individual interpretations, understandings and versions of it.

Our research group in Cambridge met for 3 hours, every 2-3 weeks, over a period of 17 months, and evolved over this time in terms of its membership from an initial group of seven PhD students and one post doctoral researcher to a core of three graduate students (ourselves and Jane Ireland, 1994).⁵ We alternately brought transcripts, ongoing

analyses, and/or written up case studies to the group for comments, suggestions, criticisms and support.

The method revolves around a set of three or more readings of the interview text, and the original tapes can be listened to as these readings are carried out. We conducted four readings of selected interview transcripts.

Reading 1: Reading for the plot and for our responses to the narrative

The first reading comprises two elements. First, the text is read for the overall plot and story that is being told by the respondent - what are the main events, the protagonists, and the subplots. We listened for recurrent images, words, metaphors and contradictions in the narrative. This element is one which is common to many methods of qualitative data analysis (see Riessman, 1993; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

In the second 'reader-response' element of this first reading, the researcher reads for herself in the text in the sense that she places herself, with her own particular background, history and experiences, in relation to the person she has interviewed. The researcher essentially reads the narrative on her own terms - how she is responding emotionally and intellectually to this person. Lyn Mikel Brown describes this process:

the first listening or reading requires the listener/interpreter to consider her relationship to the speaker or text and to document, as best she can, her interests, biases and limitations that arise from such critical dimensions of social location as race, class, gender and sexual orientation, as well as to track her own feelings in response to what she hears - particularly those feelings that do not resonate with the speaker's experience. (1994: 392)

This allows the researcher to examine how and where some of her own assumptions and views - whether personal, political or theoretical - might affect her interpretation of the respondent's words, or how she later writes about the person:

Writing out our responses to what we are hearing, we then consider how our thoughts and feelings may affect our understanding, our interpretation, and the way we write about that person. (Brown and Gilligan, 1992: 27)

Brown (1994) and Brown and Gilligan (1992) therefore highlight the

issue of reflexivity in terms of the researcher's social location and emotional responses to the respondents. What we would wish to give greater emphasis to and make more explicit is the role of the researcher's theoretical location and ideas in this process and how these influence the interpretations and conclusions which are made. Thus being reflexive about our data analysis processes involves for us: (1) locating ourselves socially in relation to our respondent; (2) attending to our emotional responses to this person (see also Song, in this volume); (3) but also examining how we make theoretical interpretations of the respondent's narrative; and (4) documenting these processes for ourselves and others.

An example from Andrea's research:

I became aware that in analysing a joint interview and two individual interviews from one of my couples, Mandy and Christian, I had listened more closely to Mandy than to Christian and I therefore had to examine my own beliefs and prejudices on men's roles in household life. The research group pointed out that I was more critical of Christian and more sympathetic to Mandy and this reflected, in part, the fact that I had been immersed in a literature which clearly sees women as disadvantaged within household life. In addition, my own emotions were brought into play as I realized that I had difficulty hearing Christian's anger, and when I heard it, I shut it off.

The first reading of the interview text thus represents an attempt to come to know our response to the respondent and her/his story. The underlying assumption here is that by trying to name how we are socially, emotionally and intellectually located in relation to our respondents we can retain some grasp over the blurred boundary between their narrative and our interpretation of that narrative. If we fail to name these emotions and responses, they will express themselves in other ways such as in our tone of voice or the way in which we write about that person. The aim of this reading is also to lay down the evidence of our responses for others to see. A further assumption underlying this 'reader response' reading is that our intellectual and emotional reactions to other people constitute sources of knowledge; it is through these processes that we come to know other people (see also Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Reading 2: Reading for the voice of the 'I' The second reading we conducted was similar to that described by Brown and Gilligan (1992) and focused on how the respondent experiences, feels and speaks about herself. In an attempt to get some sense of this through the empirical data, we followed the method of using a coloured pencil to physically trace and underline certain of the respondent's statements in the interview transcript - namely where the respondent uses

personal pronouns such as 'I', 'we' or 'you' in talking about themselves. This process centres our attention on the active 'I' which is telling the story; amplifies the terms in which the respondent sees and presents herself; highlights where the respondent might be emotionally or intellectually struggling to say something; and identifies those places where the respondent shifts between 'I', 'we' and 'you' signalling changes in how the respondent perceives and experiences herself. Spending this time carefully listening to the respondent creates a space between her way of speaking and seeing and our own, so we can discover 'how she speaks of herself before we speak of her' (Brown and Gilligan, 1992: 27-28).

An example from Natasha's research:

Reading for the 'I' was particularly valuable in pulling out what became a central issue in my understanding of postnatal depression, namely that the women seemed caught between two 'voices' which articulated opposing positions, different viewpoints or ways of assessing their situation. One voice, or set of voices, reflected the mothers' expectations of themselves, and their interpretations of cultural norms and values surrounding motherhood. These expectations and interpretations were in turn related to the personal, social, and structural contexts in which mothering occurred, in that certain conditions (e.g. degree of social support; mother's and father's employment situation; employment policies) impeded or facilitated certain options. The other perspective, voice, or set of voices, seemed to be informed by the women's actual, concrete and day-to-day experiences of mothering their particular child, in the particular circumstances in which they found themselves. During the depression, the mothers explained that the latter voice was drowned out by the former. The mothers found it difficult to accept their feelings and experiences; they tried to change themselves, and suppress their needs and feelings, in order to live up to their ideals of 'the good mother'. Sonya's accounts tells of how she attempted to fit herself into a mould which violated her needs and desires:

... sometimes I think if I hadn't been ill, would I have gone to work quicker possibly and maybe felt happier? Because it's more my natural personality to have part work, part Suzie [her daughter] but I kept thinking 'No, if I'm going to do this mother thing properly, I'm going to be at home, I'm going to watch Neighbours, I'm going to make jam and I'm going to go to the local play-groups'. What I did was almost again sort of sweep the business woman under the carpet and say 'Ah, but I'm this now' but by denying the skills there, right, I was harming myself.... I think I damage myself by trying to shut that off.... I was intent on 'This is my big sacrifice, this is me changing my life style for the good of Suzie' and pushing my own needs completely down to the bottom of the bag ... which is a stupid thing to do but that's what I did because I thought ... 'I will be the best mother of all time', you know, like people do and then they start putting pressure on themselves because of unrealistic expectations.

An example from Andrea's research:

Sean who begins his individual interview with the words 'I dropped out'. He says it three more times, followed by a long chain or recurring words like 'I left', 'I fell

into that', 'I gave up', 'I was bored', 'I didn't like', 'I hated', and 'I quit'. He tells the story of a 41 year old man who has moved from job to job all his life, never settling into 'a straight career path'. He reiterates at least seven times the fact that 'I've never been career minded', and that 'a career path never existed for me'. Tracing the 'I' in his interview transcript, how he spoke about himself and the matrices of his life, brought me to an interpretation of Sean's account which I feel I would have missed had I not paid close attention to the way he spoke about himself and the constant contradictions that emerged around this 'I'. For example, I soon noticed a recurring discrepancy between the 'I' who emphatically states that he has never been 'a career minded person' and a looming sense of regret and subtle admission that indeed, a career is actually tremendously important to him. This is evident in Sean's back-to-back contradiction where he states one feeling and then immediately states another which is at odds with the first: 'I wouldn't have wanted a sort of straight career pattern. I mean it would have been quite useful to have some sort of career behind me'. These mixed sentiments became important to me in attempting to sort out whether Sean's decision to stay at home as a full time carer was a 'choice' or a 'forced' option; a decision which, in turn, relates to his experience of caring for his children which he actually finds quite difficult because he finds it socially isolating as a lone man within large networks of mothers. At times, he feels: 'embarrassed'; 'smug'; 'patronized'; like 'a bit of a lemon'; and that he is in a 'female agenda' where 'some people don't want to talk to me - I'm not always sure what I should be saying to them'.

This second reading represents, in a sense, the first step of a phased process of listening to this person as she/he speaks about herself/himself and the life which she/he lives and the world she/he inhabits. From the point of view of psychology which is interested in the 'psyche', and in how individuals experience themselves and the broader social contexts within which they live, this attention to the 'I' is a welcome and valuable empirical technique. From the point of view of sociology, this second reading represents an attempt to hear the person, agent or actor voice their sense of agency, while also recognizing the social location of this person who is speaking. This stage of the data analysis represents an attempt to stay, as far as it is possible, with the respondents' multi-layered voices, views and perspectives rather than simply and quickly slotting their words into either our own ways of understanding the world or into the categories of the literature in our area.

In our view, this detailed and focused attention on the voice of the 'I' can work to increase the volume of the respondents' voice and amplify the terms in which they speak, in the same way that a hearing aid functions. In this sense, we would suggest that it is possible to create more or less space within which to hear our respondents' voices; and to take more or less time doing so.

This reading for the personal pronoun statements strikes us as being

one of the key features which distinguishes the voice-centred relational method of data analysis from grounded theory, a method which is used widely by sociologists conducting qualitative data analysis. According to Strauss and Corbin, grounded theory is less interested in 'persons per se' and more interested in action/interaction:

The aim of theoretical sampling is to sample events, incidents, and so forth, that are indicative of categories, their properties and dimensions, ... we sample incidents and not persons per se! Our interest is in gathering data about what persons do or don't do in terms of action/interaction; the range of conditions that give rise to that action/interaction and its variations; how conditions change or stay the same over time and with what impact; also the consequences of either actual or failed action/interaction or of strategies never acted on. (1990: 177)

With regard to changes in action/interaction, grounded theory is more concerned with the action taken which seems to stand for the decision making process, whereas the voice-centred relational method is also interested in the reflection processes which go into decision making; that is the actual process of making choices, whether large choices over moral conflicts or smaller daily decisions. In this sense, a fundamental distinction between grounded theory and the voice-centred relational method may be that grounded theory assumes the 'act' represents the 'decision' which represents 'consciousness'; therefore, there is little need to explore the decision further to understand consciousness. Contrasted to this, we are in agreement with Marcia Weskott who writes:

Conventional social science research continues to assume a fit between consciousness and activity, despite the recognition of the possibility of a discontinuity between consciousness and activity. The assumption reflects the condition of being a male in a patriarchal society, a condition of freedom, which admittedly varies greatly by race and class, to implement consciousness through activity. Because this freedom has been historically denied to women, the assumption of a convenient parallel between consciousness and activity does not hold. (1990: 64)

Thus, it may be that in researching areas of 'private' life where process-oriented values and ways of being are emphasized rather than the more 'public' goal-oriented values and ways of being (Edwards and Ribbens, in this volume), the voice-centred relational method was quite instrumental in helping to shed light on the meanings, processes,

relationships and dilemmas which are central to domestic life.

The first two readings are the 'staples' of the method in that researchers using this method of data analysis would always undertake these. Generally speaking, researchers have conducted two further readings of their own choice depending on their research topic. The third and fourth readings we carried out are a version of the third and fourth readings conducted by Brown and Gilligan (1992).

Reading 3: Reading for relationships In the third reading we listened for how the respondents spoke about their interpersonal relationships, with their partners, their relatives, their children, and the broader social networks within which they lived, parented, and worked. Again using a pencil, this time of a different colour, we physically traced their words as they spoke about these relationships. Consciously reading for relationships was particularly valuable in revealing the theoretical framework which quietly and pervasively underlines the bulk of research carried out on gender divisions of household labour, as well as on mothers' experiences of postnatal depression.

An example from Andrea's research:

I charted how women and men described their relationships and the differences which occurred across gender, class, and the children's ages. Looking at how other studies did or did not concentrate on issues of relationships revealed that the informing framework of much of the literature on gender divisions of household labour is that of an 'equality' or 'equal rights' framework (see Doucet, 1995a, 1995b) rooted, in turn, in larger sets of ontological assumptions which have predominated in liberal political thought and the western philosophical tradition of a separate, self-sufficient, independent, rational 'self' or 'individual'. Reading for relationships enabled me to achieve a sense of balance between justice, equal rights, individual autonomy for women on the one hand, and on the other, care, responsibilities, and connections between partners and children.

An example from Natasha's research:

Drawing on Andrea's work, I found that an equal-rights perspective has similarly prevailed in feminist research on postnatal depression where the latter is explained in terms of the transition to motherhood and the 'public world' losses this incurs for women, including loss of identity, autonomy, independence and paid employment (Mauthner, 1994). Influenced by the work of relational psychologists (Jack, 1991) and clinicians (Miller, 1976/1986; Stiver and Miller, 1992) which indicates that women's psychological and emotional difficulties are linked to impasses within their relationships, I highlighted the relational difficulties the mothers in my study were experiencing by reading for relationships which the women regarded as positive ones in their lives (for example, relationships in which they felt able and willing to confide their thoughts and feelings, and felt listened to, heard and supported) and tracing the relationships which the women described as difficult and constraining (for example, relationships in which they felt constrained, silenced or rejected).

Reading 4 - Placing people within cultural contexts and social structures In the fourth reading, we placed our respondents' accounts and experiences within broader social, political, cultural and structural contexts.

An example from Andrea's research:

I emphasized the wide array of social structures (gender, class, nation, region, race/ethnicity, age, sexuality) and social institutions (state, work, family) that form the social worlds my respondents experienced. I was interested in whether and how my respondents recognized or alluded to these social factors and thus began to link the person into their social context in a more significant way. I listened for how they described the structural and ideological forces as constraining and/or enabling. Did they recognize them as such or accept them as 'personal' and 'private' troubles rather than as more 'public' and socially located ills? For example, Eve spoke about what she saw as a personal 'battle' at work where in spite of her efforts to demonstrate that 'everything's carrying on really smoothly and that the children haven't affected the way I feel about work or the way I carry out my job' she nevertheless conceded that 'I know that the way my colleagues look on me has changed'. Eve's analysis of this 'battle' keeps coming back to how she is the 'only woman consultant' in her firm of tax consultants and she feels that she was 'pre-judged' with regard to the ability to combine parenting with full-time employment. However, I could also root what Eve perceives as a personal 'battle' into a larger social issue relating to how the social institution of work is still very much a 'male' institution within which many women, and an increasing number of men, feel that they cannot bring family related issues. This final reading or listening to the interview transcript thus focuses on how individuals experience the particular social context from within which they are speaking.

An example from Natasha's research:

In this fourth reading, I paid particular attention to the ideological context of motherhood as well as structural and political issues. I looked for the ways in which the women's accounts voiced and/or reflected dominant and normative conceptions of motherhood. For example, the use of moral terms such as 'should', 'ought', 'right', 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad' indicated places in their narratives where the women were speaking in terms of, or through, the cultural norms and values of society. These 'moral voices' often conflicted with, and constrained, the mothers' concrete day-to-day mothering experiences.

For example, Sandra's difficulties stemmed from the pressure she felt to work full-time and look after her children as full-time mothers do: 'I've found that the hardest, having to assume as well as working that I should do everything else that mums at home do, you know, I should bake and clean and whatever'. Another part of Sandra, or another 'voice', expressed a different view-point, grounded in her actual experiences of mothering. On this basis, Sandra felt that 'to a degree, it's impossible practically to do that', 'I'd set myself these goals which were impossible' because 'I couldn't work out how you were supposed to deal with the baby and do everything else as well, which you can't'. She explained:

It tends to be mothers who are at home that seem to go everywhere with the kids, go swimming, go to ballet classes, do this, do that ... and that's what I feel I should be doing. I should be sewing and baking and cooking and going swimming with her and I mean ... that's cloud cuckoo land. I'm not very good at sewing anyway. I don't particularly like baking.

While Sandra and the other mothers in the study clearly questioned these 'moral voices' and the values embodied within them, during the depression it seemed that the moral voices were 'louder' and 'drowned out' their questioning voice.

Case Studies and Group work The work in our research group involved us writing up our ongoing thoughts and analyses about a particular respondent in the form of case studies. This detailed and time-consuming work was valuable for understanding the depth and complexity of individuals' experiences, as well as the very significant differences between our respondents' narratives. Working within the context of a group was useful because, having read extracts from our transcripts, others were able to point out where we might have missed or glossed over what they regarded as key aspects of the interview narrative. This made us acutely aware of our own role and power in choosing the particular issues we emphasize and pick up on, and which we ignore or minimize. Working with other colleagues highlighted the fact 'that people have more than one way to tell a story and see a situation through different lenses and in different lights' (Gilligan et. al., 1990: 95).

One of the drawbacks of how we used the voice-centred method is that ideally it requires a great deal of time. As a result we found it impossible to systematically conduct all four readings with each and every one of our respondents; we were only able to focus such detailed attention on a select number of cases.⁶ Nevertheless, the energy and time we put into these few cases served the function of 'tuning our ear'. We read the remaining narratives listening for the issues or voices we had by then identified as both critical in terms of understanding the experiences of our respondents, and also 'new' or challenging within our particular disciplinary areas. What is clear to us, however, is that in moving from the slow and careful work with individual cases to the more speedy process of reading through the other transcripts, we begin to selectively focus in on certain issues while shutting out others. This seems inevitable to us. In part, we reach a 'saturation point' where we have enough and even too many 'new' issues we wish to write about and contribute to our areas of work. But shortages of time and resources are obviously a further constraint on the extent to which we analyse the data. It is important to recognize and acknowledge that these processes are taking place.

Overall the four readings of the interview transcripts emphasise the multi-layered nature of narratives and trace voices across and within a particular transcript. This approach is fundamentally different to the thematic organisation characteristic of most methods of data analysis, including those assisted by computer programmes. It delays the reductionistic stage of data analysis when transcripts are cut up into themes and aggregated. This process shifts data analysis away from traditional 'coding', which implies fitting a person into a pre-existing set of categories, whether those of the researcher or those of established theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, tracing voices through individual interview transcripts, as opposed to linking themes across interviews, helps maintain differences between the respondents.

An example from Natasha's research:

I found this approach particularly valuable because it highlighted underlying processes of the depression - such as the discrepancy between women's expectations and experiences of motherhood, and their sense of individual failure in the face of this conflict - which all the women experienced despite the numerous and important differences between them in terms of their age, class, parity, quality of the marital relationship, social support, birth experience, method of feeding the baby, employment situation and so on. This dual emphasis on similarities and differences between the women might have eluded me had I adopted a more thematic approach focusing on 'factors' or 'variables' such as 'the marital relationship', 'social support', or the birth experience.

The detailed and lengthy focus on individual interviews embodies respect for individual respondents within the research context. If we do not take the time and trouble to listen to our respondents, data analysis risks simply confirming what we already know. If this is the case, in no way has the respondent changed our view or understanding, thus defeating the point of doing the study in the first place. At the same time, this approach respects the role of the researcher and indeed the necessity of the researcher having their own voice and perspective in this process. By providing a way of reading and listening to an interview text 'that takes into account both our stance as researchers and the stance of the person speaking within the text' (Gilligan et al., 1990: 96), this approach respects and to some extent exposes the relationship between researcher and researched. As Gilligan notes, 'the relationship has to be maintained throughout the writing, and you don't write over, or voice over, other people's voices.... It's an attempt to try to work as a writer would work, by giving people their voice, by giving ourselves a voice in our work, and then thinking very consciously about the orchestration of the pieces we write' (Kitzinger with Gilligan, 1994: 411). It is in bringing the listener into responsive relationship with the person speaking that this

approach or method is characterized as a relational one.

Stage Two - Summaries and Thematic 'Breaking Down' of the Data:

In addition to the detailed case studies, which we did for 10 individuals (or five couples), we wrote up summaries for the remaining individuals which represented short portraits of each respondent of one to two pages. We also both felt it was necessary and important to try to move from the holistic understandings of individual respondents described above to tackling the data set as a whole. This decision to 'cut up' the transcripts was a difficult moment in our research. Having spent so many months on a relatively small number of respondents, we felt anxious to make the huge volume of data more manageable. At the same time, we were frustrated not to be able to devote the same amount of time and energy to each one of our respondents. We felt we were short-changing many of them; we missed the process of getting to know and understand another story; and above all we feared that in 'cutting up' the data we would lose much of its complexity. Despite this apprehension, we proceeded to break up each transcript into a number of overlapping themes and sub-themes. Natasha did this manually on the computer (through cut and paste) while Andrea conducted a two staged process of working manually and then using a computer based programme (text-base alpha). Many of these themes, and sub-themes in particular, emerged as a direct result of the intensive case study work and provided a way of linking the details of individual respondents with the stories told by the datasets as wholes.

The analysis of the data therefore involved organising the data in different ways (tapes; verbatim transcripts; 4 readings; case studies; summaries; themes) in order to tap into different dimensions of the data sets. It also involved a dialectical process of moving between different ways of organising or representing the data, and between the details and particularity of each one of the individual respondent's experiences, and the overall picture of the samples as wholes.

REFLECTING ON OUR DATA ANALYSIS PROCESSES

Reflecting on 'Stories', 'Voices' and 'Self'

This method of data analysis was enormously valuable to us but more recently it has presented us with a number of difficult questions. There are now a number of discussions around this method (Beiser, 1993; Charmaz, 1993; Gold, 1993; Wilkinson, 1994) which we cannot fully

address here due to lack of space. However, the issue of 'self' or 'voice' is probably the most contentious one within this method of reading or listening, particularly in the midst of postmodern discussions of discursively constructed or fragmented selves (Butler, 1990, 1994; Davies, 1989a, 1989b; Weedon, 1987). One of the difficulties is that terms such as 'self' and 'voice' are used without adequately defining them. Clearly, for many researchers, 'voice' has become a shorthand way of referring to the person speaking or even to the account or story spoken. We struggled around these terms while we were in the processes of analysing our data and writing up our theses, and we have since come to believe that when we analyse interview transcripts we hear stories/accounts/narratives spoken by a person in a voice/voices. With regard to the story, it occurs within a social context and we hear and read the story from within a(nother) social context and in a particular research relationship (see Mishler, 1986, Riessman, 1993).⁷ Rather than wrestling with these age old theoretically contentious issues such as 'self' and 'voice', we wish to highlight, as Ken Plummer so eloquently does, that we 'coax' stories and listen with an open mind and an open heart to this person and her/his story, both of which are ever-changing and continually constituted in relationships. As Plummer points out:

I have slowly come to believe that no stories are true for all time and space: we invent our stories with a passion, they are momentarily true, we may cling to them, they may become our lives, and then we may move on. Clinging to the story, changing the story, reworking it, denying it. But somewhere behind all this story telling there are real active, embodied, impassioned lives. Is this a process of peeling back stories to reveal better and better ones? And if so, when do we know a story is better? Or is it a process of constant readjustment of stories to be aligned with the time and the place of their telling? I am suggesting here that multiple stories engulf us, and we need tools for distinguishing between layers of stories or even layers of truth. (1995: 170)

While emphasising the dynamic and fluid quality of these stories, we believe there is a person within and telling this story, who - in those minutes and hours that we came to speak with them - makes choices about what to emphasize and what to hold back from us. We pay attention to what we think this person is trying to tell us within the context of this relationship, this research setting, and a particular location in the social world, rather than making grand statements about just who this person or 'voice' is. We are drawn to the words of Lorraine Code who writes against the idea of the totally fragmented

'self' and for the importance of being able to refer to 'this person' with whom we have had a fleeting research relationship and from whom we hear many stories which 'engulf us':

The contention that people are knowable may sit uneasily with psychoanalytic decenterings of conscious subjectivity and postmodern critiques of the unified subject of Enlightenment humanism. But I think this is a tension that has to be acknowledged and maintained. In practice, people often know one another well enough to make good decisions about who can be counted on and who cannot, who makes a good ally and who does not. Yet precisely because of the fluctuations and contradictions of subjectivity, this process is ongoing, communicative and interpretive. It is never fixed or complete; any fixity claimed for 'the self' will be a fixity in flux. Nonetheless, I argue that something must be fixed to 'contain' the flux even enough to permit references to and ongoing relationships with 'this person'. Knowing people always occur within the terms of this tension. (1993: 34)

Reflexivity in data analysis

It is only recently that we have come to fully appreciate the meaning of reflexivity in the context of our own research. We have come to understand the extent to which our own theoretical stances have influenced the theoretical accounts we have given concerning our respondents' lives. For example, in analysing our data, we were to some extent reacting against the work which had come before us and which we regarded as telling only one story about our respondents' lives. In contrast to the feminist 'equal rights' framework which had prevailed in our respective research areas where the focus was on issues of identity, autonomy, independence and paid employment, we found ourselves drawing on different feminist theories, including discussions around justice and care, relational theory and feminist ethics as well as methodological and theoretical works on symbolic interactionism, feminist methodologies, phenomenology and hermeneutics. Feminist qualitative researchers have highlighted the difficulties involved in hearing and theorizing the 'muted voices' of women's lives in 'private' domains when the facilities for hearing are predominantly male-stream public language, concepts, and theories (DeVault, 1990; Edwards and Ribbens, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Graham, 1983; Smith, 1987; Stacey, 1981; Westkott, 1979). However, it can also be difficult to hear stories which might contradict dominant feminist understandings such as those within an equal-rights framework; and it is here that locating ourselves within a different

relational, but still feminist, vantage point was particularly valuable.

At the end of the day, whether consciously/explicitly or not, we are in effect choosing a particular theoretical and ontological framework within which to locate ourselves, and through which to hear and analyse our respondents' lives. The difficulty is not so much the choice of paradigm, but rather having to accept that this is the case and that as a result we will focus our attention on certain issues and perhaps ignore others (see also Anderson and Jack, 1991: 12; Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 75; Riessman, 1993). The best we can do then is to trace and document our data analysis processes, and the choices and decisions we make, so that other researchers and interested parties can see for themselves some of what has been lost and some of what has been gained (see also Aldred, in this volume). We need to document these reflexive processes, not just in general terms such as our class, gender and ethnic background; but in a more concrete and nitty-gritty way in terms of where, how and why particular decisions are made at particular stages. Holland and Ramazanoglu make a similar point when they note that:

Feminists have had to accept that there is no technique of analysis or methodological logic that can neutralize the social nature of interpretation.... Feminist researchers can only try to explain the grounds on which selective interpretations have been made by making explicit the process of decision-making which produces the interpretation, and the logic of method on which these decisions are made. (1994: 133)

We wish to highlight data analysis as a particularly critical site for issues of reflexivity because, in our view, this is a point where the voices and perspectives of the research respondents are especially vulnerable. They might be lost and subsumed to the views of the researcher, or to the theoretical frameworks and categories that s/he brings to the research. Furthermore, we believe that if researchers are to implement their theoretical and methodological commitments to being reflexive about the research process, both in the data analysis stage and throughout the entire research endeavour, a practical method of doing this is vital.

The power of the researcher and the vulnerability of the researched

Acknowledging the central role of the researcher in shaping the research process and product means recognizing the power relations

between researcher and researched. In particular, the data analysis stage can be viewed as a deeply disempowering one in which our respondents have little or no control. Far removed from our respondents, we make choices and decisions about their lives: which particular issues to focus on in the analysis; how to interpret their words; and which extracts to select for quotation. We dissect, cut up, distil and reduce their accounts thereby losing much of the complexity, subtleties and depth of their narratives (see also Standing, in this volume). We categorize their words into over-arching themes, and as we do so, the discrete, separate and different individuals we interviewed are gradually lost. Unlike in the interview, we can simply stop reading (or listening) whenever we choose, and thus cut off the conversation at any point without concern that we will offend the respondent. We replace respondents' names and identities with pseudonyms and disguise their distinguishing features for the purposes of anonymity. We extract and quote their words, often out of context of the overall story they have told us. Though we might adopt a bottom-up approach in that the starting point for our research is the perspectives and words of the individuals we study, we are nonetheless the ones who will be speaking for them. We are in the privileged position of naming and representing other people's realities. Thus, in turning private issues into public concerns, and in giving our respondents a voice in public arenas, we have to ask ourselves whether we are in fact appropriating their voices and experiences, and further disempowering them by taking away their voice, agency and ownership.

Despite the attempts we might make to ensure that the voices of our respondents are heard and represented, and in the process trace our research journeys and make our own thinking and reasoning explicit, we must also recognize the impossibility of creating a research process in which the contradictions in power and consciousness are eliminated (see also Acker et al., 1991; Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994). We have to accept that the entire research process is most often one of unequals and that, as researchers, we retain power and control over conceiving, designing, administering, and reporting the research. Researcher and researched have a 'different and unequal relation to knowledge' (Glucksmann, 1994: 150) and within most research projects, 'the final shift of power between the researcher and the respondent is balanced in favor of the researcher, for it is she who eventually walks away' (Coterill, 1992: 604).⁸

CONCLUSIONS

We believe that data analysis is a critical stage in the research process for it carries the potential to decrease or amplify the volume of our respondents' voices. As the site where their stories and 'voices' become 'transformed' into theory, what goes on during data analysis strikes us as being central to the fundamental concern of feminists: 'the intertwined problem of realizing as fully as possible women's voices in data gathering and preparing an account that transmits those voices' (Olesen, 1994: 167). We cannot emphasize enough how these processes between 'data gathering' and transmitting 'those voices' has received only sparse attention in feminist research and in the more general field of qualitative research. Indeed in place of a move towards greater links between empirical research practice and epistemological discussions, we would concur with Maynard (1994: 22) who has noted that 'arguments about what constitutes knowledge and discussions about methods of research are moving in opposite directions'. Our purpose in writing this chapter is to join those authors who are concerned about this increasing gap between abstract philosophical discussions about epistemology and research revealing the daily lives of women and men in domestic and private settings.

As we have gradually come to appreciate our omnipresence throughout all the stages of the research, we now feel that the feminist aim of listening to women 'in and on their own terms' is to some extent impossible. We are thus critical of the tendency by some feminist researchers to simplify the complex processes of representing the 'voices' of research respondents as though these voices speak on their own (see, for example, Reinharz, 1992: 267), rather than through the researcher who has already made choices about how to interpret and which quotes and interpretations to present as evidence. There is therefore a contradiction, as we see it, between two of the principles which are fundamental to feminist research: the commitment to listen to women on their own terms and the recognition that it is the researcher who ultimately shapes the entire research process and product. Instead, we have found it helpful to think of the research process as involving a balancing act between three different and sometimes conflicting standpoints: (i) the multiple and varying voices and stories of each of the individuals we interview; (ii) the voice(s) of the researcher(s); (iii) and the voices and perspectives represented within existing theories or frameworks in our research areas and which researchers bring to their studies. We view research both in terms of process (how we do research) and product (the production/social construction of knowledge) as a journey in

which these three 'voices' or perspectives must be listened to, maintained and respected, and the processes whereby we make critical shifts between these three 'voices' be charted for other researchers to build on or to critique (see also Edwards and Ribbens, in this volume).

We also find it useful to think of the research process and product in terms of degrees rather than absolutes. We can never claim to have captured the 'pure', 'real', 'raw' or 'authentic' experiences or voices of our respondents because of the complex set of relationships between the respondents' experiences, voices and narratives, and the researcher's interpretation and representation of these experiences/voices/narratives. However, there are ways in which we can attempt to hear more of their voices, and understand more of their perspective through the ways in which we conduct our data analysis. Our chapter has highlighted one of the key dilemmas we face as researchers: on the one hand, we play a critical role in transforming private lives and concerns into public theories and debates and in voicing what might otherwise remain invisible and/or devalued issues pertaining to domestic life. On the other hand, in the process of transformation, the private account is changed by and infused with our identity - and thereby becomes a different story to that originally told by the respondent(s). We cannot be sure we have faithfully reported our respondents' concerns. At the same time, as academic researchers, our role involves more than this for we are also required to theorize our respondents' accounts and lives, and locate them within wider academic and theoretical debates. We have to accept the losses and gains involved in this process, and hope that a version of our respondents' concerns is made public, even if it is not their exact version nor necessarily all of the issues they regard as paramount. Moreover, whatever the losses and gains involved in moving from talk, to text, to theory, we must document the paths, detours, and shortcuts we have chosen at each stage of the research journey.

NOTES

We thank the mothers and fathers who agreed to participate in our studies and share their experiences with us. We are extremely grateful to Jane Ribbens and Rosalind Edwards for their comments and advice on earlier drafts of this chapter, and for pushing us in our thinking. Several other colleagues gave extensive and invaluable comments for which we are grateful: Claudia Downing, Kathryn Geismar, Lorna McKee, Kathryn Milburn, Steve Pavis, Stephen Platt and Danny Wight. We also thank Carol Gilligan for giving generously of her time, insights and support in our work. This chapter draws on our doctoral research

which was funded by the British Medical Research Council, in Natasha Mauthner's case, and by the Commonwealth Association of Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), in Andrea Doucet's case. The chapter is also based on research and teaching Natasha Mauthner carried out at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education in 1994-95, made possible by an International Fellowship from the American Association of University Women, a Wingate Scholarship, and a Fulbright Scholarship.

10 Feminist critiques are not uniform but vary, for example, in approaches to the links between methodology and epistemology. Here we can refer to Harding's (1987) now classic distinction between three kinds of approaches: feminist empiricist; feminist standpoint and feminist postmodernist.

20 The first stage took about 15 months and the second one about two months.

30 The method is detailed in Brown and Gilligan (1992, Chapter Two).

40 A relational ontology is not contradictory to the sociological aim of locating and understanding individuals within their social context. Indeed, we would argue that it is firmly rooted in the interpretive or symbolic interactionism tradition within sociology (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). In our view, this relational ontology draws attention to socially located individuals and to the link between, or the 'duality' of, social structures and human agency (see Giddens, 1984). However, rather than working with an image of an individual who stands alone in a composite web of the social structures of class, gender, race/ethnicity, nation, sexuality and age, and who moves in a solitary manner within the social institutions which compose his/her social world, we bring relationships to the centre of this so that human interdependence, rather than simply human independence, are seen and valued.

50 The membership of the group decreased as colleagues either left Cambridge, took up positions elsewhere, or changed the focus of their research.

60 We selected these case studies in different ways: interview(ee)s which we found exciting or moving; interview(ee)s which we found difficult, challenging or perplexing; interview(ee)s which seemed particularly illuminating in terms of our research questions; and interview(ee) which provided a different, contrasting or conflicting story to a previously analysed interview(ee).

70 The ability to 'coax' stories (Plummer, 1995), however, is critically linked with the aims and goals of the particular research project as well as the format and structure that the interview

relationship takes. In the words of Elliott Mishler: 'We are more likely to find stories reported in studies using relatively unstructured interviews where respondents are invited to speak in their own voices, allowed to control the introduction and flow of topics, and encouraged to extend their responses' (1986: 69).

80 This power differential between researcher and researched is likely to be particularly pronounced when doing research both on and in the private, rather than the public, sphere. For example, powerful professionals, public bodies and institutions are in a (better) position to 'police' research output. Furthermore, participatory research, action research or experiential research projects might not face the same kinds of difficulties with power imbalances we are describing here (see Birch, in this volume; Hall, 1992; Olesen, 1994; Reason and Rowan, 1981; Reinharz, 1983, 1992). Feminist scholars have suggested that one strategy for keeping participants' voices alive is to involve participants in the data analysis, either during the interview or with the transcript of the interview, so that the analysis is more collaborative and meaning is negotiated (Crawford and Marecek, 1989; Lather, 1991; Reinharz, 1992). Such research is not without its difficulties and dilemmas. For example, participants might not all wish to become involved in such a way; the goals and aims and time-frame of the research project may not accommodate such an interactive phase of data analysis; and there is a risk that the researcher and the respondent might disagree in their interpretation (Acker et al., 1991; Borland, 1991; Thompson 1992), thus raising the issue of whose, if any, perspectives will take precedence.

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