WHEN VEILED SILENCES SPEAK: REFLEXIVITY, TROUBLE AND REPAIR AS METHODOLOGICAL TOOLS FOR INTERPRETING THE UNSPOKEN IN DISCOURSE-BASED DATA

Abstract

Researchers who have attempted to make sense of silence in data have generally considered literal silences or such things as laughter. We consider the analysis of veiled silences where participants speak, but their speaking serves as 'noise' that 'veils', or masks, their inability or unwillingness to talk about a (potentially sensitive) topic. Extending Lisa Mazzei's 'problematic of silence' by using our performativity-performance analytical method, we propose the purposeful use of 'unusual conversational moves', the deployment of researcher reflexivity, and the analysis of trouble and repair as methods to expose taken-for-granted normative frameworks in veiled silences. We illustrate the potential of these research practices through reference to our study on men's involvement in reproductive decision-making, in which participants demonstrated an inability to engage with the topic. The veiled silence that this produced, together with what was said, pointed to the operation of procreative heteronormativity.

Key Words

veiled silence; *performativity-performance; narrative-discursive method; researcher reflexivity; reproductive decision-making; male involvement; procreative heteronormativity*

Introduction

Qualitative research is most often language-based and typically deals with voices. As a consequence, researchers attach value and privilege to *what* is said and *how* it is said; in other words, that which is articulated as verbalised speech rather than what is not (Nairn, Munro, & Smith, 2005; Poland & Pederson, 1998). '[W]hat is not said,' however, 'may be as revealing as what is said, particularly since what is left out ordinarily far exceeds what is put in' (Poland & Pederson, 1998: 293). Yet, analysing silence/s or that which is unspoken or unsayable in our interview data presents a particular challenge. As Mazzei (2007a: 632) asks, 'How … do we take seriously this silence or recognize its effects if it is marked only by an absence of voice?'

Researchers who have attempted to make meaning of the silences in their data generally deal with the absence of spoken text (i.e. literal silence) and other non-verbal 'out of category data' (St Pierre, 1997: 175) such as laughter (Nairn et al., 2005). Researchers have considered how: silences may act as a form of resistance on the part of the participants, especially when dealing with topics that are difficult or sensitive; particular people's voices may be silenced; and silence may represent the taken-for-

granted, the unspeakable or the unthinkable (Callon & Rabeharisoa, 2004; Maclure, Holmes, & Macrae, 2007; Mazzei, 2007b; Nairn et al., 2005; Poland & Pederson, 1998).

In this article, we view silence as more than merely the lack of the spoken word. We expand on post-structuralist scholar Mazzei's (2003; 2004; 2007a & b) 'problematic of silence' in qualitative research. In this paper we address what she calls 'veiled silences'. This term refers not to actual silence—as in the failure to speak—but to metaphorical silence, in which participants speak, but the speaking responds to a different question than the one posed by the researcher. Veiled silences may be generated in relation to the demands of the interview context or social desirability and appear as 'empty talk' (Poland & Pederson, 1998: 299) or 'noise' (Mazzei, 2004). We maintain that such silences may speak to unstated taken-for-granted norms, and may, firstly, be generated by the use of unconventional conversational moves and, secondly, be analysed through reflexivity and attention to trouble and repair.

We illustrate our argument with data from our study on men's involvement in heterosexual couples' pathways to parenthood. The original impetus for this research was the recognition that little is known about heterosexual men's involvement in the process of reproductive decision-making. Despite the increased focus on men in reproductive research, heterosexual male involvement in the initial decision/s regarding parenthood (i.e., to become a parent or not) and the subsequent decision-making that may ensue (e.g. choices about timing or spacing of births, and use of contraceptives) has received scant attention. Our aim in the study was to explore how constructions of gender inform male involvement in decision-making, using a narrative-discursive approach infused with Butlerian theory (what we term a performative-performance analytical approach – see Morison and Macleod (2013)). In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with heterosexual, middle class Afrikaans-speaking women (11) and men (12) from two cohorts: younger unmarried 'non-parents' who were asked about their future plans in relation to parenthood and their understanding of male involvement in this process; and older married, divorced or widowed parents who were asked to reflect back on their parenthood decision-making experiences and male involvement therein[1].

What struck us most as we went through the process of collecting and analysing the data was how participants experienced difficulty talking about male involvement in parenthood decision-making, which, for them, was essentially a 'non-topic'. Although we acknowledged the narrative injunction to 'follow participants down their trails' (Riessman, 2008: 24), we felt that it was equally important to pursue that which 'goes without saying' and is therefore taken for granted and remains unvoiced and hidden, as was the case in our own research. We, like Poland and Pederson (1998), believed that 'what goes without saying can be of the greatest interest to [those] who seek to better understand that which is taken for granted and its impact on social relations' (306), in our case, the gender power relations in reproductive decision-making. It was thus valuable to question the unquestioned, indeed even the unquestionable, and to analyse the unspoken.

In the following we speak in more depth to the 'problematic of silence' and 'veiled silences'. We outline our performative-performance method of analysis. This forms the platform from which we discuss the research practices that we argue are useful in highlighting the normative underpinning of veiled silences: the use of unusual conversational moves, researcher reflexivity and the analysis of trouble and repair.

A problematic of silence and veiled silences

Silence has traditionally been overlooked in qualitative research and is 'seldom considered in its own right as an area of reflection and inquiry' (Poland & Pederson, 1998: 295). However, some qualitative researchers have considered silence as an enduring and integral feature of communication and thus a legitimate focus of investigation. Mazzei (2003, 2004, 2007a & b) is one such scholar who proposes that silence can be considered as data. She draws on Derridean theory to contest the privileging of speech in our research and the binary view of speech and silence (i.e., speech as the opposite of silence). Instead, she sees 'speech on a continuum between that which is voiced literally, and that which is voiced silently or metaphorically' (Mazzei, 2007a: 634).

Mazzei (2003) outlines multiple silences: polite silence (related to fear of offending); privileged silence in which awareness of privilege is precluded; intentional silence; and unintelligible silences in which the purpose is not readily discernible. We concentrate on 'veiled silences', which occurred when her participants 'did speak, but their speaking was an attentiveness to a different question, not the specific one offered by [her] to generate discussion [so that] the answers that were given were silences' (365). Talk about unrelated or peripheral topics can be theorised as 'noise' that serves to 'veil' silence on a topic. Veiled silences may occur when a narrator does not know how else to respond, answering instead with 'avoidance, denial, deflection, reframing, and intellectualizing' (Mazzei 2003: 363). 'Answering a question other than the one posed, […] results in a deflection that, although often not intentional, is purposeful nonetheless' (Mazzei, 2004: 30). Thus, veiled silences discursively mask the narrator's silence on a particular issue. This was evident in our research when participants side-lined issues of 'deciding' and 'planning' in the interviews and instead discussed parenting and children's value. Participants' construal of childbearing as a non-choice disguised their inability to discuss the issue at hand and, significantly, supported procreative heteronormativity (which we discuss in more detail below).

Such side-lining creates lapses or 'blind spots' that 'serve as hints toward concerns and activities that are generally unacknowledged (that are taken for granted), which require a different kind of listening on the part of the researcher' (Poland & Pederson, 1998: 306). Mazzei's (2007b) methodologies for rendering audible 'muffled subtext' (357), include: a poetic understanding of silence in which we are 'attentive to what is not spoken, not discussed, not answered, for in those absences is where the very fat and rich information is yet to be known and understood' (358); deconstructive practices, strategies and rationales that draw on Derridean theory and that 'work *the against* with more vigor than *the within*' (Mazzei, 2004: 27); a 'problematic of silence' which entails 'listening to ourselves listening' (Mazzei, 2007: 634), through engaging in a repeated *process* of listening so that silence may be 'revealed in its incipient importance, both as purposeful and meaningful' (Mazzei, 2004: 31), and through tracking cues (researcher questions inserted in the text) that helps highlight the 'silences that we fail to challenge on the part of our participants' (Mazzei, 2007a: 636). We outline the methodological strategies that we used and that could assist in analysing veiled silences.

A performativity-performance analysis of male involvement in parenthood decision-making

Our performative-performance analytical approach consisted of a dual analytical framework that allows for analysis of relational specificities as well as the broader mechanisms through which

gendering (and gender trouble) occurs. This lens was fashioned by supplementing Butler's (1990, 1993) notion of gender as performative with that of narrative performance. Performativity theory is based upon the anti-essentialist premise that gender is a discursive effect, rather than inherent or rooted in biology. Gendered subjects come into being through the process of recurring and compulsory imitation and repetition—or recitation—of pre-existing gender norms. The continual and *correct* recitation of the appropriate feminine *or* masculine behaviours, styles and so forth causes gender to appear fixed, but the necessity of constant repetition and maintenance shows gender norms to be unoriginal and potentially changeable. It is impossible, of course, to perfectly replicate the ideal, and troubling moments inevitably occur in slippages, omissions, or 'errors' that trouble the supposed naturalness of gender.

These troubling moments (whether unintentional or deliberate) allow for the possibility of subversion—escaping or exceeding the norm. The implication is that the subject who imitates, recites, styles and enacts is active rather than a cultural dope, a less developed aspect of performativity theory that can be usefully fore-grounded by the concept of narrative performance (see Morison & Macleod, 2013). This concept has been increasingly utilised by discursive psychologists in order to move beyond 'totalising' constructions of subjectivity and to acknowledge the subject's reflexivity and agency. This shift in critical scholarship is characterised by an attendance to narrative performances or narratives-in-interaction (Bamberg, 2004b). The notion of veiled silences fits well within such an approach as it highlights a particular discursive action undertaken by narrators as a result of their awareness of the interview dynamics including—as we shall show—both the researcher's and broader societal expectations.

We turned to feminist discursive psychology in order to supplement performativity with performance, infusing Butlerian performativity theory into Taylor and Littleton's (2006) narrative-discursive approach. Building on Wetherell's (1998) 'synthetic approach', the narrative-discursive approach is strongly influenced by conversation analysis and aims to synthesise micro- and macro-level analyses. Wetherell (1998) argues for a 'technical' analysis of the negotiation of positioning by speakers that shows the active nature of identity work within interactions. Accordingly, the narrative-discursive method shows how the wider discursive environment is implicated in speakers' biographical talk while at the same time exploring the ways that 'available meanings are taken up or resisted and (re)negotiated' (Taylor & Littleton, 2006: 23) by means of positioning analysis. We developed the two main analytical tasks of the narrative-discursive approach using performativity theory.

The first step is to look for common elements across a series of interviews and across different points in a particular interview; these elements are termed discursive resources. A discursive resource is defined as 'a set of meanings that exist prior to an instance of talk and [are] detectable within it' (Reynolds et al., 2007: 335). It coincides with the notions of discourse and discursive regime (Taylor, 2006) and is common to a number of critical discursive psychological narrative methods (Bamberg, 2004). We considered two distinct types of discursive resources: (i) canonical narratives which provide specific culturally familiar patterns of temporal ordering with distinctive socio-culturally established endpoints (Taylor & Littleton, 2006); and (ii) scripts (or interpretative repertoires as they are conventionally referred to in the narrative-discursive method), which can be thought of as a socially-established way of speaking that determines what can be said about various topics (Edley, 2001). The second step entails the consideration of how resources are drawn on in particular

interviews, that is, the rhetorical work, especially positioning, accomplished by drawing on certain resources. This includes attention to interactional 'trouble', which may arise due contradictions or inconsistency within a particular narrative account, or in relation to negatively valued social identities (Wetherell, 1998). In most cases, 'trouble' necessitates 'repair', which encompasses various narrative strategies or discursive tactics like the use of rhetoric, argumentation, or 'saving face' (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). We connected interactional trouble and Butler's notion of gender trouble in order to take cognisance of how troubling moments (the momentary discontinuities of specific performances) relate to the troubling of gender norms (i.e. the failure to do gender properly) as well as the various rhetorical strategies used to manage or repair gender trouble. These strategies then point to the larger cultural survival strategy of maintaining the illusion of one's own gender and the gender system as a whole (Morison & Macleod, 2013).

In Morison and Macleod (2013) we argued that by infusing a Butlerian framework into the analysis these tasks could be extended to analyse how the common elements may take surprising turns: how shifts in discursive resources and norms may be evident over a data set to allow for an exploration of the slow bending of citations in which norms or regulatory frames are troubled. Butler (1990) maintains that the discontinuities or anomalies that disrupt the gender binary must be explained away and regulated (through repair) or ignored in order to maintain the illusion of gender as anchored to the sexed body. We therefore also need to consider how instances of interactional trouble are explained away or talked down so that narrators avoid gender trouble and 'do' gender in an acceptable way, conforming to what may be more generally expected of them. It is on this aspect of the analysis in relation to veiled silences that we wish to expand upon in this paper.

Unmasking the silence generated by a troublesome topic
Before data analysis even began, it was obvious to us that our participants were withholding on the topic of male involvement in reproductive decision-making. This awareness was facilitated by careful reflection after each interview and the writing of field notes. This, as Poland and Pederson (1998: 308) confirm, 'can assist in capturing some of the silences'. The first author's notes below show the growing awareness (and frustration) of the research topic as a non-subject.

> "There's nothing to talk about really" seems to be the general feeling [...] Interviewed SN this morning… once again, the "nothing to talk about" conversation. [...] It's difficult to ask questions when there's just nothing to talk about. How do I follow up on that? [...]it's a non-topic, something *'van selfsprekend'* [self-explanatory], nothing to discuss! (Field notes, 2008)

There were also instances in which some participants expressed bewilderment, asked for clarification, or explicitly stated that planning was not how things happened in reality and/or not the ideal. Reflecting on these moments alerted us to both the presence of veiled silence and to its possible origins. We began to see them as instances when the veiled silences were ruptured. We were then able to see the apparently unrelated answers that we were given as 'noise'. Two such instances appear below.

Ilze[2]:   Ja[3], but what STORY, what do you mean by "STORY"?

AuthorA: Well, I suppose like, um, kind of the story of how you came to be a parent (.) [...] So maybe you could tell me a bit more about [...] you not wanting kids in the first place and then how it came to be that you decided=

Ilze: =no, we didn't decide to have [a child]; it just happened [laughter]. [...] It comes from generation to generation. We do it the same way. We don't even think about it. That's why I said, I don't know what you really want, we don't talk about these things, it just happens. [Laugh]

TM: That's interesting. Then, here comes this person and says, "Let's talk about this." What did you think?

Ilze: [Laugh] Ja, there's nothing to talk about [laugh]. It just happens.

Elias: Jis[4], that's a difficult one. Why did I want to have children? I think [pause] jislaaik[3]! [Laughs] Ja, this is a difficult one, huh? […] I think (.) it's not because it's the right thing to do. That's not the right answer. [...] I think both of us had the desire to have kids. Why? That's a difficult question. It's too hard! [Laugh] I never thought of it. Why, why? But I think I answered you there, there was the need, ja, the want for children. We really wanted children.

The first exchange occurred at the beginning of the interview in response to the request to tell the 'story' of becoming a parent. Ilze directly exposes the veiled silence by interrupting Tracy to contradict her suggestion of a decision-making process and by stating that there is 'nothing to talk about'. There is no *story*, at least not about decision-making. Rather, childbearing is something that "just happens" and is generationally perpetuated. Elias's difficulty in answering the direct question of why he wanted to have children is also related to the taken-for-granted nature of the desire to have children. He explains his initial literal silence (indicated by the long pause) as he eventually states that he had 'never thought of it'.

These instances, along with our general reflections on the interviews, made us aware that the participants did not necessarily understand the topic in the same way that we as researchers did. As we continued to critically consider and contemplate this trend, like Mazzei (2003; 2004), we eventually saw that the veiled silences in our data were not coincidental. The participants were unable to engage in the topic of male involvement in parenthood *decisions* on our terms and were most often 'storying' their experiences according to the discursive resources available to them. During the data analysis, we came to understand the general tendency of our interviewees to meander into various other loosely related topics as noise that masked a silence underpinned by procreative heteronormativity.

'Procreative heteronormativity' refers to the normalisation of parenthood as a natural consequence of being a heterosexual woman or man through the regulative discourses around gender (Meyers, 2001). These discourses comprise the heterosexual matrix—that is, the 'grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, gender, and desires are naturalized' (Butler 1990: 151). Within the heterosexual matrix gender is defined oppositionally: 'a man will 'desire-to-be' a male and will "desire-for" a female, while a woman will "desire-to-be" a female and will "desire-for" a male' (Prassad, 2012: 580). This definition promotes compulsory heterosexuality, normalizing and naturalizing everything associated heterosexuality and rendering other sexualities invisible, exotic or

deviant. The culmination of the heterosexual matrix is procreation, which represents adherence to the expected heteronormative life-course and gendered scripts.

In our research, the construal of childbearing as a non-choice was effected through, *inter alia*, the deployment of what we called the automatic childbearing script, in which parenthood is viewed as an expected part of the heterosexual life-course. This script is central to the maintenance of procreative heterosexuality, because, as we later demonstrate, childbearing can only occur spontaneously within a heterosexual couple context as a result of passive decision-making (Fennell, 2006). It is not surprising therefore that it was underpinned by three scripts that centre on the heterosexual couple and that perpetuate heteronormativity, namely: (1) a romance/love script, which emphasises spontaneity, passion, romance, and children as an expression of a married heterosexual couple's love; (2) the canonical couple narrative, in which a normative and naturalised sequence of heterosexual life events (courtship, marriage, newlyweds, parenthood) are highlighted; and (3) the sacralised child script, in which children are seen as emotionally priceless and invested with religious/ sentimental value. Deployed alongside the automatic childbearing script were the procreative imperative script in which heterosexual reproduction is glorified and non-reproduction denigrated, and the heterosexualised conjugalisation of reproduction script, in which marriage is construed as a transitional point in the heteronormative storyline and the natural antecedent to having children.

The insidious nature of procreative heteronormativity (and how it operated) was highlighted by our 'unusual conversational move' (Reynolds & Taylor, 2004: 203), namely, asking people to account for and give reasons for the desires, preferences and/or behaviour of married heterosexual people in relation to parenthood[5]. Although we had not initially set out to ask difficult questions that potentially produced veiled silence, in time we recognised the usefulness of our unusual conversational move in highlighting the exact issue we sought to investigate (*viz.* gender in relation to male involvement in reproductive decision-making). The veiled silences that our interviews produced, spoke—we felt— more loudly to procreative heteronormativity than any direct questioning about the heterosexual reproductive life-course (pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting) may have. Thus, we came to understand an unusual conversational move, as not only a source of trouble for narrators, but also one that highlights that which is taken-for-granted (in this case procreative heteronormativity).

Unusual conversational moves may occur inadvertently owing to the researcher's lack of awareness that a certain topic is 'unspeakable', as in our research, at least initially. However, it may also be used deliberately as a researcher perceives the unspoken nature of a particular topic (Randall & Koppenhaver, 2004), though this 'might be risky in certain circumstances, given that the silence itself may be an indication of where boundaries lie' (76). Given the usefulness of the unusual conversational move to highlight the unspoken norm, the question of ethical respect for boundaries and the analytical purpose of understanding how normative discursive practices underpin particular patterns of interaction needs to be asked. We pick this up in the following section in which we discuss how reflexivity may be used in relation to the analysis of veiled silences.

Researcher reflexivity as a methodological tool for understanding veiled silences
Mazzei (2007a) argues that an understanding of silence implies not only attending to what participants say or do not say, but also 'what is not said and how it is not said by me as a

researcher/participant both in terms of my contributions to the conversations with the research participants and, as important, in my analysis and interpretation of the empirical materials' (359). She urges researchers to create a 'space for the silence to breathe and inform' (Mazzei, 2007a: 636) as they re/listen to interview recordings and re/read transcripts and journal reflections. This reflexivity allows us to listen to our own listening, not only around what is spoken and how it is spoken, but also around silence.

The notion of researcher reflexivity in qualitative research is much debated. Our approach was to infuse reflexivity into our research practice from the project's inception to its conclusion, viewing it as an essential and on-going activity, rather than an isolated methodological exercise aimed either at confession[6] or at validating our work upon completion (Pillow, 2003). Accordingly, we endeavoured to critically reflect upon the part that the researcher/s played in creating silences in the data. In order to facilitate such reflection Mazzei (2007a & b) suggests that researchers regard the texts that are generated in the researcher settings as scripts that are co-produced by the researcher and participants, in which there are silences present in the lines. This coheres with the narrative-discursive view of the co-construction of narrative in which the researcher is a collaborator in data generation, not least of which includes silences. This view necessitates attention to both the researcher and the participant and the contextual consideration of talk and silence (Poland & Pederson, 1998). We therefore reflected on two (inter-related) aspects of our participation in the generation of the veiled silences that highlighted the operation of procreative heteronormativity: (i) the implicit assumptions contained in the (inadvertent) setting up of the unusual conversational move; (ii) the narrative-in-interaction that is co-produced within the interview context (Bamberg, 2004b), and that pointed to sources of trouble and particular power relations.

(i) Implicit assumptions leading to an unusual conversation move

In terms of our implicit assumptions, we ventured that our unusual conversational move proved to be a source of trouble for the participants for a number of reasons. One source of trouble was the impression that we expected the participants to have meaningfully reflected upon their pathway to parenthood (which was clearly not the case). This impression was created by asking them to tell us their *story* about their pathway to parenthood. Such overt enquiries about 'normal' taken-for-granted behaviour like procreation by people in married heterosexual relationships may be confusing or even intrusive. In general, it is those who deviate from procreative heteronormativity (e.g. child-free heterosexual married women) who forfeit their right to privacy and are expected to account for their situation, not usually those who adhere to the norm (Reynolds & Taylor, 2007).

A second source of trouble was that our questioning about male involvement created the perception that men should, or were expected to, be active in reproductive matters. This perception is potentially reinforced by a 'new father' discourse which has gained popularity of late and which promotes male participation in family, domestic, and reproductive issues (Henwood & Proctor, 2003; Terry & Braun, 2011).

A third source of trouble was that we had (inadvertently) framed our research within the language of choice. For instance, the information letter and consent documents described the study as related to 'family planning' and 'reproductive decision-making' clearly drawing off a family

planning discourse that foregrounds rational choice. This discourse holds high currency in official health rhetoric in certain settings, and bears connotations of responsible citizenship and parenthood.

The language of choice thus placed a constraint upon how the participants were able to narrate their stories. The veiled silence around the main problematic seems to suggest that it was difficult for participants to tell their stories about their transition to parenthood using the language of choice, and especially one in which men were involved in 'decision-making'. This was troublesome for older participants, in particular, who had to try to reconcile their own passive decision-making with the construction of parenthood as an active choice.

(ii) Narrative-in-interaction

Our reflection revealed that interactional dynamics affected the micro-politics of the interviews, in turn shaping the accounts by enabling veiled silence. These dynamics include, firstly, the possible complicity on the interviewer's part in terms of producing these silences and, secondly, gendered and age-related power relations that produced defensive strategies in response to the unusual conversational move. Each of these dynamics, sometimes separately and other times jointly, shifted the balance of power in favour of participants and their agendas. In exploring these, it was possible to see the ebb and flow of the interactional power relations in the interviews.

Emphasis has been placed on researchers' power relative to their participants owing to the institutional privilege that allows them to define how the research is conducted, including the terms of the interaction between researcher and participant (Swartz, 2011). Though this was certainly evident in our study (e.g. participants' expressions of awareness of performing their narratives for a psychologist or jokes about being 'psychoanalysed'), it was also apparent that power is not permanently skewed in the researcher's favour (Etherington, 2007). In retrospect, as much as the participants may have saved face by discussing matters that were not (directly) related to the questions posed, the concern of keeping the interviewee talking may have meant that the interviewer permitted, or even encouraged, such talk, failed to probe further, or 'rescued' participants by filling silences—thereby helping to keep these veiled.

Our reliance on our participants to generate data may therefore have resulted in various forms of complicity with our participants' agendas or opinions. For instance, in the following exchange, which occurred toward the end of the interview, Maria and Tracy co-construct an account in which Tracy colludes with a particular story-line that serves to reinforce procreative heteronormativity. The researcher's notes are in italics and indicate her response upon re-reading the interview after it was transcribed.

TM:	Thank you, it was very interesting [speaking to you].
Maria:	Ja, I hope some of it will stick in your mind for your life. Listen, how old are you now?
TM:	28.
Maria:	Oh ja that's perfect. That's why you must quickly… When are you getting married?
	I had mentioned my upcoming commitment ceremony. I don't correct the word "married"; in fact I think I might have used it! I do remember avoiding the word "fiancée".
TM:	The 21st of Feb.
Maria:	Okay, March, April, May ((counts nine months)) NOVEMBER [Laughter]

> *November is the month that I would give birth should I conceive immediately!! This is unstated, we both understand her meaning.*
>
> **TM**:   I have to finish this PhD, that's like my child, my number one child!
> *I don't want to have children (or at least biological offspring) but instead of stating this I talk around the issue.*
>
> **Maria**:   No, that's wonderful that you're able to do that first.
>
> **TM**:   Mm, career-wise, get it out [of] the way.
> *This is blatant complicity with her assumption that I will become a mother/have biological offspring! Why did I say this?*

In this exchange Maria negotiates the powerful position of experienced mother and advice-giver in relation to Tracy, a younger, heterosexual 'non-parent' and thus concludes the interview on her own terms, terms which repair the partial disruption of procreative heteronormativity that occurred during the interview. This goes unchallenged by Tracy. Rather than make Maria aware of her desire to avoid parenthood or to pursue alternatives to biological motherhood, she side-steps the trouble created by Maria's injunction to have a child immediately by claiming that she is postponing motherhood, rather than avoiding it. She therefore does not reject the position of inductee as she fails to correct the assumption that she, as a 'soon-to-be-married' heterosexual woman, will inevitably become a parent and thus reach the next milestone of heterosexual adulthood.

Tracy's resulting complicity is indicative of the power that participants also possess in the research setting (Etherington, 2007). Additionally, it points to a range of interactional norms that operate in interview situations, including politeness and social solidarity (Poland & Pederson, 1998). For example, we were aware that our participants were volunteers who had gone out of their way to assist us, accruing no tangible reward or benefit. We were grateful that they were willing to share their personal stories and took care to ensure that they were not inconvenienced or uncomfortable. In the extract above, Tracy politely laughs along with Maria, and enters a social compact in which they agree that it is acceptable to complete a PhD or advance a career before embarking on having children. The failure to challenge this positioning allowed a veiled heteronormative silence into the data.

The interviewer's reflections on her politeness and complicity after re-listening to the interview with Maria are an example of the use of reflexivity in highlighting veiled silences. They represent that which we do not voice to our participants, but consider in the silent safety of [the] analysis' (Mazzei, 2007b, p. 637). Mazzei (2007b: 636) describes this as an 'interior monologue' that expemplifies

> …what we fail to voice in the form of our silent questions or assumptions, the silences that we fail to challenge on the part of our participants, or an absence of the probing of their silent questions. Such a monologue also points toward what we fail to voice in our encounters with others in our research settings, especially when the research context can serve to determine what is acceptable to voice and what is not.

These silences can be thought of as insider silences (or silences of familiarity) that arise out of the researcher's familiarity with the participant's frame or a sense of empathy (Poland & Pederson,

1998). Engaging in 'a problematic of silence' enables us to examine how that which goes unvoiced by the researcher perpetuates 'sameness, hegemony, or privilege' (Mazzei, 2007: 636).

Researchers also occupy dual positions of power and subjugation owing to their multiple outsider/insider positionings (Macleod & Bhatia, 2008; Etherington, 2007; Pillow, 2003). The criss-crossing of insider/outsider boundaries that impacts on the micro-politics of narration in complex and dynamic ways (Macleod & Bhatia, 2008) meant that the interviewer's subjectivity as a young woman—assumed to be unmarried and heterosexual— also created silences in interviews with the older male participants where age and gender intersected with professional positioning and produced paradoxical effects (Macleod, 2002). Arendell (1997) discusses certain gendered behaviours that function as defensive strategies, for instance, men's tendency to challenge a female interviewer in various ways like asking her personal questions, questioning her interviewing techniques, 'hijacking' the interview with their own agenda or giving 'speechifying' responses that fail to answer the researcher's questions (often because they did not know the answer). These strategies served to shift the balance of power toward the male participant and, frequently, to mask his uncertainty or inability to answer particular questions. In our own study, older men were inclined to take charge of the interview from the outset and launch into their stories, talking 'at' the interviewer with little concern for her agenda. One example occurred during an interview with André who, at the outset of the interview, criticised the topic as shown in the following extract.

TM: I've supposed you gathered that my research is about=
André: =boring subject!
TM: ((surprised)) HEY?
André: It's a boring subject [laughs]. Obviously you must do something, but couldn't you have chosen something more=
TM: [Laughs] I don't think it's boring! I suppose "different strokes", hey? (.) Well, I'll tell you why I decided on the particular topic. [Tell background of what interested me in the study.]
André: ((interrupting)) =okay maybe (good point?) but [if] I understand the motivation for choosing [the] subject it will make it more clear, but if you look at it like (.) objectively=
TM: [Laughing] Well, I suppose if *Nguni* cows are your thing=

The interviewer's similarly blunt response to André indicates her surprise to be thus challenged. Although this declaration invoked an explanation of the motivation for the study at the commencement of the interview, André embarked upon a monologue about peripheral topics, which highlighted his expertise as a professional and family man, making it literally impossible to find an opportunity to interject and re-direct the conversation. He persistently took control of the interaction and, like other participants, re-directed the conversation to related topics such as child-bearing and rearing.

We surmise that such defensive strategies relied upon gendered conversation dynamics and were particularly salient in male participants's interviews because they were under pressure to talk about a topic they were unsure, perhaps even confused, about. These strategies functioned as a way of masking uncertain silences. It was not only men, however, who engaged in defensive strategies but also older women, although their strategies differed. Older women tended to be less talkative than men, even withholding and evasive, and waited to be directed by the interviewer. For instance, after

the interview with Susanna, which was one of the last with the older cohort, the interviewer noted the following in her field notes:

> Very focused on own role, not too keen to chat about partner. A lot taken for granted. Absence of partner in interview may point to 'real' absence—he simply does not feature! She seemed a bit nervous and at a loss of what I actually wanted to talk about. It's like a non-subject!! So frustrating not to be able to bring to light all the 'taken-for-granteds' and I'm so conscious of not offending because she's doing me a favour and is an *acquaintance* (possibly why she was reluctant to speak about her partner?) (Field notes, 2008).

Reflecting on the transcripts indicated that the problem was not talking about reproduction, since many of older women, like the men, recounted detailed stories of pregnancies and birthing experiences. Rather, older women were inclined to redirect the topic in order to avoid questioning the automatic childbearing script, as we shall discuss in the following section.

Veiled silences as a strategy for repairing trouble

Reflecting on her own interviews, Mazzei (2007b: 363) indicates that 'the acts of avoidance, denial, deflection, reframing and intellectualizing that were prevalent in [participants'] interactions and in their responses to my questions was indeed neither inaction nor passivity but rather a silence that was speaking without speaking'. In the act of listening to silence it is important, she argues, to make space for 'the returns, the interruptions, the resistances, the denials, the subtle eliding of text' (363). We argue that these avoidances, interruptions and the like may usefully be analysed through attention to the notions of 'trouble', 'repair', and 'discursive tactics'. The two discursive tactics that were used for repair and drew our attention to the veiled silences operating in our data were: (i) redirection and (ii) reframing.

(i) Redirection

Redirection occurred when participants meandered into various other topics, such as accounts of the conception of their first child, detailed tales of pregnancy and labour and especially parenting, as illustrated by the extract below.

TM: Did you talk about whether you wanted to have children before you got married?

Susanna: There was never, it was never an issue that we weren't going to have children. I'm one of three sisters ... [Discusses composition of their birth families] I don't think we ever said that, it was just assumed that we would have children. [Discusses how she met her partner.] I don't think we ever even thought that we wouldn't be able to have children. It never crossed our minds that we wouldn't have children or whatever and then it was just as to when we would have a child, I think. It was just not straight away. [Discusses ideal timing] So, I was just on 27 when I had Isak and it was quite a difficult labour [laugh] [Discusses details of labour at length, even time of birth.] Once he saw what went on there—he was with me there—he was like, "Never again! [Laughter]

Susanna indirectly answers the question without stating that no active planning or discussion had taken place with her partner. She relies on recognisable tropes (romantic coupledom) and topics (childbirth) that act as familiar reference points for her story. In this way, she negotiates to the difficulty of constructing a story about her pathway to parenthood in terms of choice, and especially one in which her partner was involved in discussion and decision-making.

We felt that redirection, as illustrated above, occurred in response to the trouble introduced by our unusual conversational move. In particular, male involvement in *parenting*, rather than reproductive decision-making, was brought to the fore. Many older participants discussed how they or their partners had been involved in raising their children, while younger participants recited the construction of the 'hands-on dad' as their ideal. People's stories about parenthood can be understood as a familiar reference point, in an otherwise strange topic. Notably, in such stories men's involvement could be foregrounded. This foregrounding might have served the discursive purpose of redeeming uninvolved men somewhat—and to some extent circumventing the issue of male involvement in parenthood decision-making.

(ii) Reframing
Participants also used a discursive tactic of reframing to veil their silences. This occurred when participants minimised or spoke against the notion of choice implied by notions of reproductive decision-making or family planning, as illustrated below.

> **Koos**: I think for me it was (.) it's like (.) it's a natural thing. If you get married then you have kids. It's not that you decide "I want to be a dad." You accept that that is the life. You grow up, do whatever studies you want to do, then you get a partner somehow and get married eventually and then you start with the family. That is natural, so there's no decision.

Here Koos responds to the question 'When did you decide that you wanted to be a dad?' by explicitly rejecting the notion of 'deciding' and invoking the naturalness of parenthood as part of the logical unfolding of the usual heterosexual life trajectory. This construction of automatic childbearing in which childbearing features as a natural and inevitable part of heterosexual life, ideally after marriage, essentially renders childbearing a non-choice.

Like Koos, other participants also drew on a canonical couple narrative and spoke about having children with little or no overt discussion or premeditation, drawing upon a complex array of socio-cultural norms about passion, romantic love, and gender roles that discourage rational or calculated action with regard to procreation, including couple-level communication and collaboration (Fennell, 2006). Hence, participants recited notions of spontaneity and romance and as a spontaneous overflow or sign of a married couple's love. This romantic scenario reframes parenthood as a matter of chance in such a way that mitigated the potentially troubled positions of irresponsibility, impulsivity, negligence or recklessness in relation to procreation. In contrast, active planning was disparaged as 'scientific', calculating, and emotionless. In this manner, participants could reframe passive or non-planning as positive and desirable and to negotiate alternative socially desirable positions, in this way saving face. Furthermore, male involvement, as well as decision-making itself, was cast as non-issues in the scenario of automatic childbearing. The issue of men's roles in the process of becoming a parent became redundant and was thereby side-stepped. Importantly, the construction of automatic

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childbearing as tied to biological reproduction that is allowed to occur spontaneously within the context of marriage bolsters procreative heteronormativity since it is only within the heterosexual couple context where reproduction can be entirely left to chance.

Conclusion

Our focus in this article has been on how to approach silence in discourse-based data. Most researchers who attempt to tackle this issue have dealt with the absence of spoken text and other non-verbal data (e.g. laughter) (St Pierre, 1997). In this article, we have attempted to go beyond the understanding of silence as merely the lack of the spoken word. Using a performativity-performance method, we have extended Lisa Mazzei's 'problematic of silence', placing particular emphasis on 'veiled silences'. These occur when participants responses function as 'noise' that 'veils', or masks, their inability or unwillingness to talk about a potentially sensitive and confidential topic and thus fail to address questions in a way that substantively answered the research questions.

The significance of veiled silences is their discursive function of masking, and thus perpetuating, unspoken—indeed, even unspeakable—normative frameworks. We showed how, for instance, the notion of procreative heteronormativity lay beneath participants' veiled silences in data from our study of male involvement in parenthood decisions. Discursive tactics that masked their silence—though not necessarily entirely intentional—disguised their inability to discuss the issue at hand and, importantly, reinforced procreative heteronormativity. The normative underpinning of veiled silences was highlighted by the research practices that we have discussed in this article, namely: the use of unusual conversational moves, researcher reflexivity and the analysis of trouble and repair. These methodological tools provide a concrete means of dealing with and understanding the effects of veiled silences.

Firstly, veiled silences were ruptured by direct questions that created unusual conversational moves through overtly questioning the accepted and taken-for-granted norm. Secondly, the deployment of researcher reflexivity showed how discursive silences can be linked to the negotiation of power in the research relationship, the researcher's failure to question silences, and ultimately, the maintenance of these veiled silences. Finally, the analysis of trouble and repair showed how the discursive actions of redirecting and reframing the issue of 'male involvement', as well as decision-making itself, allowed respondents to side-step the issue of men's roles in the process of becoming a parent and to re/claim power by introducing topics that they deemed relevant and offered positive positions. Using these tools to listen to the veiled silences in our data we are able to pursue that which is taken for granted and goes unspoken, such as the normative idealisation of procreative heterosexuality.

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Notes:

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[1] The first author conducted and transcribed the interviews. Transcripts retain the level of detail associated with conversation analysis and therefore reflect some of the irregularities of spoken language. Relevant transcription features (which appear in this article) are:

end of line =	the next person started talking over the first speaker/or interjected a comment
[laugh]	a short burst of laughter from the speaker
[laughter]	general laughter
[ ]	editing for clarification (what the speaker probably meant)
((text))	additional comments from transcriber, e.g., context or intonation.
CAPITALS	mark speech that is obviously louder than surrounding speech (contrastive emphasis)

[2] All names are pseudonyms

[3] 'yes' (Afrikaans) equivalent of 'yeah', used as slang by other language groups

[4] 'Jis'/'jissie'/'jislaaik' (Afrikaans): 'gee' or 'gosh', used ubiquitously by South Africans

[5] There are some interesting resonances between unusual conversational moves and Garfinkel's (1967) breaching demonstrations. These demonstrations are intended to highlight the unspoken social rules and norms that structure interactions. Purposeful violations (or breaching) of these rules and norms—as with an unusual conversational move—illustrates how they are created and maintained by examining to people's reactions to these breaches. Garfinkel (1967) shows how people attempted to repair the breach by rendering the situation understandable in familiar terms and thus demonstrates the resilience of social norms. This resonates with the narrative-discursive notion of repairing interactional trouble and in so doing maintaining certain norms, in our case procreative heteronormativity.

[6] We are both in long term heterosexual relationships; Tracy is childfree and Catriona has two children. Within these relationships we are committed to de-gendering heterosexuality and parenting.