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Analysing qualitative data in groups: process and practice

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This paper presents a worked example of a group data analysis process, using a narrative approach. We describe our working practices, the analytic resources we drew on and how the insights we generated while working on a short data extract related to, and expanded our analysis of, the whole case. We track how group members were positioned in relation to the data, reflect on the porous boundary between primary and secondary analysis and draw out the implications for secondary analysis of qualitative data. We also discuss issues of matching data across datasets and narrative approaches. More generally, this paper also offers insights into practices of qualitative analysis which can often seem opaque but which are more articulated and therefore more visible when individual researchers come together to conduct analyses in a group.

Developing a dataset for secondary analysis

This work was undertaken as part of the Parenting Identities and Practices (PIP) project within the National Centre for Research Methods Narratives of Everyday Lives and Linked Approaches (NOVELLA) programme.
(http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/3161/7/MethodsNewsSummer2013.pdf) The project brings together two narrative studies concerned with migration, ethnicity, identity and parenting. *Transforming Experiences*, led by Ann Phoenix is a psychosocial study of adults looking back on their 'non-normative' childhoods, the parenting they received from parents who were mostly migrants and its impact on their own parenting. *Fathering over the Generations*, led by Julia Brannen, is a sociological study of fatherhood across three family generations.

We are using these data to examine how family practices over the life course are narrated, how practices which may seem particular to families and individuals are embedded in cultures and history and the extent to which family stories serve to reproduce or transform ideals of family life. As well as our substantive aims, we are interested in developing methodologies for qualitative secondary analyses and for bringing together data from different sources. It is to this process we now turn.

Both the *Transforming Experiences* and *Fathering over the Generations* studies are comprised of subsamples. The former included samples of adults who had been language brokers for their families as children, serial migrants (that is children who had migrated to the UK separately from their parents) and adults who had grown up in households where they were visibly ethnically different. The *Fathering over the Generations* study included intergenerational chains (grandfather, father and son) of Irish and Polish migrants as well as UK born white men and boys. This meant that we had to consider which groups from each dataset to select for secondary analysis. As a first stage, selected transcripts were read from both studies to identify samples and common conceptual and methodological criteria.

We decided to focus on the experience of men, exclusively, as the *Fathering over the Generations* study included only men and masculinities had received little attention in analyses of the *Transforming Experiences* study to date. Our interest in migration led us to focus on the serial migrant sample within the *Transforming Experiences* study and the Irish migrant sample in *Fathering over the Generations*, which comprised men who had migrated to the UK as young adults in the 1950s and 1960s. The men in the *Transforming Experiences* study had migrated as children in the 1960s, and as such were younger than the Irish sample. However, both samples had in common that they had migrated mainly from rural to urban settings, from island nations with complicated and fraught colonial relationships with the UK.

The new dataset comprises 24 cases. Initial analysis involved the researchers reading transcripts individually and as a group. One of the core interests to emerge from this work was a concern with how ideas of success and survival were narrated in migration stories. We looked at data illuminating this issue across cases and selected the extract below for our group analysis with colleagues outside the immediate research team.

'Peter's' migration story

The extract we consider is the opening of an interview with 'Peter' (a pseudonym).   Peter had migrated to the UK from the Caribbean aged ten, to join his mother who had migrated five years previously, and his sisters, who had joined her a year and a half before Peter did.

I: So um, I wonder if we can start um with you telling me about your experience of serial migration.

P: OK.

I: …and I'm interested in anything that comes to your mind?

P: Right. OK. Well as you know my name is Peter ermm. My recollection, recollection of serial migration. My mother left me in the Caribbean erm, with my father and my two sisters. We were living in my grandmother's house er. My grandfather had died some year earlier. I didn't know my grandfather. Er but we had the house in a place called Burnt Hill which is on the outskirts of, of the town .hh. It was a happy home errrm and I think my mother left when I was about five. So her leaving, I haven't got much recollection of that ermm. All I know is I was left in a happy, caring environment. My grandmother looked after .hh myself, my other sisters and my father was there. But erm, it, it, I suppose it was the typical ermm, father relationship – the disciplinarian, made sure I knew how to

use my knife and fork properly – made sure I cleaned my shoes properly every evening .hh ermm, and then made sure that I was well behaved so I wouldn't embarrass either he or any other member of the family should I be taken anywhere err. .hh err. So it was, I had a strict upbringing. He was very mu-, much into education hh and erm, (.) .hh

I came to, my sisters left to come to this country a year before me because my mother wasn't, couldn't afford to send for us all at the same time er. She had been a, erm, I suppose what you could call a fashion designer, or a seamstress as she, erm, referred to herself .hh In this country they would call her a fashion designer. She made dress for people. She designed them errm. Unfortunately when she came to this country she couldn't get anything like that at, in terms of work .hh. She had to work in factories erm as a machinist erm. She lived in er, (noises) in a house. She rented a room in a house. The house belonged to the church .hh. Erm. So I grew up in a religious erm environment erm.

So when I came to, when my sisters came before me, about a year and, maybe eighteen months before I came .hh erm, when I came they greeted me at Heathrow. They recognised me immediately. I was too busy looking around at this big airport. And some, you know, err, I'd never seen anything as grand as that. I was nnnine er. No I'd just turned ten. I came here erm in 1956, 55, April of 66 so I'd just turned ten erm. (noises) They spotted me. We went home and erm my new life .hh erm begun. I've got nothing but admiration for my mother and what she had done for me. She still the biggest influence in my life errrmm. Very close to her, very close to my sisters and for me there's nothing negative about the experience because I understand, I know why. I was always told why. It, err, she had left the Caribbean. And I was always told that I would be joining her erm. So would my sisters. They went before and it was explained to me why .hh they went before and erm, and I was in a loving home when I was left back in the Caribbean so I was in an environment where I was always thriving erm.

Drawing on the work of Martine Burgos (1991) and Paul Ricoeur (2006), our rationale for focussing on the opening passage is that the start of an interview provides insights into the whole narrative that will unfold, as the participant is organising their thoughts and working out the task at hand. Developing the Deleuzian notion of interaction as rhizome (that is 'a dynamic, open, decentralised network that branches out to all sides unpredictably and horizontally') Sermijn et al (2008) suggest there are no fixed starting or endpoints to narratives, only multiple entry points. They argue, with Ricoeur and Burgos, that at the start of any narrative, the narrator is working out what is needed from the encounter and which of the multiple possible ways into a story to take. When a particular dimension (or

discourse) takes over, there is an appearance of coherence but this is largely artificial, as any point within a rhizome can be connected to any other point. Thus each decision to pursue one entry point leads to a closing down of other possibilities.

The courses that narratives take are shaped in part by the audiences they are addressed to and thus in a research interview the interviewer becomes connected into the rhizome. This highlights the importance of paying attention to co-construction in interviews, data collection and analysis, and of keeping interpretations open. The multiple perspectives which a group holds may be particularly valuable in fulfilling these functions.

Secondary and primary analysis

In the process of creating a new dataset drawing on the original studies and bringing a new set of research questions to bear on this, we have found that working in groups (both the project team and with others) is an important way of re-conceptualising the data and providing fresh perspectives on the analysis. (Wengraf, 2001). This has allowed us to place interpretations alongside one another and makes visible how each analyst is positioned in relation to the data. Thus Heather Elliott, as secondary analyst on the PIP project, rooted her analyses in a close reading of selected transcripts from both datasets. Ann and Julia were primary analysts of part of their own datasets as well as secondary analysts on both projects. Elaine Bauer was part of the original *Transforming Experiences* team and conducted the interview with Peter. She was not part of our secondary analysis group but commented on their analyses as part of the writing process for this paper. Only the original researchers on the *Transforming Experiences* and *Fathering over the Generations* studies have access to audio and fieldnote data. They also, of course, have access to what Hammersley (2010) calls 'head-notes': that is the implicit understandings and memories of what they have seen, heard and felt during fieldwork, analysis and project discussions. These are a rich resource and Elaine highlighted how fieldnote data would have supported and developed some of our analyses.

However, this is not necessarily to suggest the primacy of the original researcher's knowledge of, and relationship to, the data. In common with most researchers on large qualitative studies, Ann and Julia did not undertake all the interviews and were not as familiar with data collected by other team members as with their own. Further, the tacit knowledge carried in head-notes fades over time and interpretations are also likely to shift. Andrews suggests that 'new experiences, and new understanding of old experiences, bring with them a new perspective not only on our own lives – our present, as well as our pasts – but on the way in which we make sense of the lives of others.' (Andrews, 2013)

Group processes and affect in data analysis

We have suggested above that groups can enable a research team to notice what they are unable to see alone because the data are over-familiar (Wengraf, 2001). Psychosocial work suggests that another reason for data being hard to notice is because they touch on aspects of our experience about which we are uncomfortable, which we 'defend' against, or protect ourselves from noticing, by splitting them off from ourselves and projecting them onto others. (Walkerdine et al, 2001; Hollway and Jefferson, 2012; Elliott, 2011). However, this kind of work requires sensitivity: unpicking how such data are co-constructed can be exposing (Elliott et al, 2012).

Related to these ideas is the notion that the presence of a group can help process emotional experience, and make it thinkable. This may be particularly helpful when data are difficult or painful. Thomas Ogden sums up this principle of containment as 'it takes two minds to think one's disturbing thoughts' (2009, 97). However, groups are not necessarily able to function in containing ways. Turner found that some members of an analysis group convened for her study of Sudden Infant Death became distressed and exhausted by the material, describing feelings of being chronically 'polluted' by the process of 'picking over' people's words and that there was a general sense of unease (Turner and Webb, 2012; Turner, 2013).

Commentators have theorised how affect within groups works as a resource for understanding data (Thomson et al (2012) and Hollway and Froggett (2012)). Drawing on the ideas of Alfred Lorenzer (Bereswill et al, 2010), this work is premised on the idea that texts contain deeper, affective and unsymbolised meanings, which are both beyond the surface meanings and related to them. Collective work can help to access these meanings, through techniques such as active listening, close reading and paying attention to group dynamics.

Thus, describing a process of working with data as secondary analysts, Thomson et al (2012) highlight how it is possible to notice affect through textual mechanisms; 'in the language that is spoken, in the manner in which it is spoken, in the sounds of the words and sentences, in the feelings elicited in the listener, and (in the analytic setting) in the behaviours and bodily sensations that accompany what is being said' (990).

Moreover, they argue that present in group analysis is not just the affect produced in the secondary analyses but also something of the affect of the original encounter which is textually encoded. 'It is not simply that material is restaged and with it newly situated affects are produced through a new context and audience, but that something of the original, encoded in the text, also travels' (op cit, 991).

As well as affective responses, we were, as narrative analysts, particularly interested in tracking imaginative responses to the data.

Our analysis group and working practices

Working with the PIP team were Anne Barlow, Paulette Morris, Janet Smithson and Cordet Smart. We have found that when working with data in the way we outline below, groups of between five and seven people are most productive and manageable. Prior to the session, the PIP team had led a training event on narrative research, which Janet, Cordet, Paulette and Anne had attended and had undertaken a group analysis session with data from the *Mapping Paths to Family Justice* project, which involves Janet, Anne Barlow and Paulette. Further, Janet and Cordet, and Janet and Julia had also worked together on previous occasions. Thus the group was made up of project teams with their own established working practices and relationships and had had a little experience of working together before the session outlined below.

The methodological resources the group brought to the task included: narrative, attachment, conversational and discourse analysis and interpretative phenomenological approaches. This example indicates how working on the same text was useful in pointing up synergies and differences between approaches and challenging attachments to particular ways of working. Thus though guided by narrative methodologies, our approach was essentially pluralistic.

When Ann Phoenix talked about the *Transforming Experiences* project, informally before the session began, members of the group responded with reflections on their own familiarity with processes of migration to the UK, including from the Caribbean. As the analysis progressed the personal resources we drew on to interpret our data became apparent, including our various intersectional gendered, generational and ethnicised positions in relation to the data.

We began by reading each section line by line and anticipating what we expected to happen next. Making predictions enabled us to identify and explore any pre-judgments we had about how the story would unfold and would also check any impulses to skate over meanings and puzzles. (Wengraf, 2001)

We took turns to read the each sentence aloud in the group, Through voicing the data, we re-established the data as talk as well as text, transforming the group into listeners as well as readers and directing us to think about how speaking words involves interpretation by actors as well as audiences. Slowing down the reading of the text, both by reading it aloud and analysing it line by line, gave us time to consider our own affective and imaginative responses.

Line by line analysis

We now describe how our analysis progressed, line by line, to offer insights into the variety of interpretations generated and importantly the associations made between them.

I: So um, I wonder if we can start um with you telling me about your experience of serial migration.

P: OK.

I: …and I'm interested in anything that comes to your mind?

We reflected on the narrative possibilities that the initial question set up and what subject positions it allowed the respondent. This discussion also raised questions about how the original *Transforming Experiences* project had been conceptualised, and how the data were collected, as well as arrangements for secondary analysis. We also reflected on what the informant already knew about the project and on the various ways in which serial migration might be understood, and how likely it would be to resonate with the informant.

As we read the opening section, our own approaches to starting interviews came to mind. We noted how the interviewer and informant were working to get the interview going, and the small struggle involved in this. We reflected that we, as an analysis group paralleled this process of 'getting going', working our way into the task, establishing what was needed and how this related to our repertoire of research practices. Overall, these discussions also established an ethos of working carefully and empathically with the interviewee's story and with a fellow researcher's fieldwork.

We thought that the second question gave the interviewee permission to talk about what is important for him, what is 'in his mind', but also gives him a challenge in working out where to start and what is needed.

P: Right. OK. Well as you know my name is Peter. My recollection, recollection of serial migration......   My mother left me in the Caribbean erm, with my father and my two sisters.

The group noted that Peter came to the point quickly. We noticed that Peter said my mother 'left me,' rather than left 'us', or the family but we hypothesised that the sense of abandonment which the words 'left me' could connote would not be strong.

One member of the group drew on personal experience of family structures in the Caribbean to suggest that by Peter's father staying in the Caribbean with his family and the

grandmother remaining as 'matriarch', the family was left intact and that had Peter's father migrated with his mother, this would not have been the case.

We were living in my grandmother's house er. My grandfather had died some year earlier. I didn't know my grandfather. Er but we had the house in a place called Burnt Hill which is on the outskirts of, of the city .hh..... It was a happy home errrrm and I think my mother left when I was about five. So her leaving, I haven't got much recollection of that ermm. All I know is I was left in a happy, caring environment. My grandmother looked after .hh myself, my other sisters and my father was there.

In the quotation above, Peter built up a picture of the setting, evoked in part through the specificity of naming places and a cast of characters for Peter's story.

The group was struck by the strength of the assertion that the home was happy. 'All I know' reminds us of the task the interview gave him which was to state 'what comes to your mind' and highlights the primacy of his point of view given from a present time perspective. The 'all' in this statement shuts down the possibility of other versions. We agreed that Peter's account suggests no sense of abandonment in Peter's mother leaving. Rather the group saw Peter's presentation of his mother as agentic and making arrangements for his security and happiness. We noted that Peter's comment that he didn't know his grandfather removed any potential painfulness around his grandfather's death, which might have clouded the picture of the 'happy home' he is creating.

Some of the group were struck by the gendered work implied in creating a 'happy caring environment' and one colleague was surprised by the resentment she felt at how the division of labour was underplayed. The mother organised the household, and the grandmother 'looked after' the household, the father just had to 'be there'. This pointed to the group's gendered and temporal perspective on the data. We were a group of seven women, influenced by feminist approaches, analysing a man's story, which did not question the patriarchal nature of family relationships at the time of the mother's migration. The group also reflected that mentioning something which can *not* be remembered or narrated (his mother leaving) suggests an awareness of other, possibly more dominant narratives, where a mother's departure was likely to be a pivotal point in a story about serial migration.

One of the group members thought that, although no formal attachment interview had been undertaken, Peter's account up until this point could be seen as consistent with an emotionally avoidant attachment style (Dallos et al, 2012) namely, he presents some detail of time and place elsewhere in his account but is vague in his memory of his mother's leaving 'I haven't got much recollection of that ermm'.   His comment 'all I know is I was left in a happy, caring environment' seemed to pre-empt any potential criticism of his mother,

though this is not expressed at this point in the text, as if the reasons for this family scenario need to be accounted for, rather than simply suggested.[i]

We reflected that Peter was defending against the inference that being apart from his mother had been problematic. We thought that he was likely to have encountered such inferences in the UK, where there was at the time of his migration, a strong emphasis on co-presence of mother and child. We noted that the availability of the extended family facilitated certain family practices which would not otherwise be possible: one group member reflected that were she to leave, there would be no-one at all to look after her child.

But erm, it, it, I suppose it was the typical ermm, father relationship – the disciplinarian, made sure I knew how to use my knife and fork properly –

The group focussed on the word 'disciplinarian' and our discussion here shows how an interpretation builds, opens up   and is then refined within a group. Initially, some of the group associated disciplinarian with being punitive. Researchers working with the larger corpus of *Transforming Experiences* data reflected that the word discipline was sometimes used in the study to describe cruel practices, while one group member, drawing on personal experience of growing up in the Caribbean, made a telling slip, saying that discipline could signify 'capital' punishment when she had meant to say 'corporal' punishment. We reflected that there seemed to be a discrepancy between punitive aspects of discipline and the relatively mild example given – expecting children to exercise table manners. Those with conversational analysis experience thought that the comment 'made sure I knew how to use my knife and fork properly' was the start of a rhetorically powerful three part list, that is a persuasive device, which by indicating that there are more than individual instances on their own, they stand for something more general. (Jefferson, 1990; Potter, 1996) and expected more severe examples of discipline to come.

made sure I cleaned my shoes properly every evening .hh ermm, and then made sure that I was well behaved so I wouldn't embarrass either he or any other member of the family should I be taken anywhere err. .hh err So it was, I had a strict upbringing. He was very mu-, much into education hh and erm, (.) .hh

When we read on, the hypothesis of a three part list was confirmed ('made sure I cleaned my shoes properly every evening and then made sure I was well behaved') but not the one related to increasingly severe examples of discipline. We thought on balance that, in the context of Peter's childhood in the Caribbean, discipline around table manners and dress were indeed 'typical' and everyday. We also considered whether 'should' in this extract was a rather correct and well brought up grammatical formulation or whether it reflected that Peter was unlikely to be taken anywhere (with the sense of 'in the highly unlikely event that'). Although Peter was likely to have meant the term 'strict upbringing' positively, for

some the term still implied distance and some difficulty in the father-son relationship remained, particularly since Peter does not tell us anything further about the relationship at this point. This was a point where the group had differing interpretations of the data.

Due to pressures of time, we moved on to consider chunks of data at a time, rather than working line by line.

I came to, my sisters left to come to this country a year before me because my mother wasn't, couldn't afford to send for us all at the same time er. She had been a, erm, I suppose what you could call a fashion designer, or a seamstress as she, erm, referred to herself .hh In this country they would call her a fashion designer. She made dress for people. She designed them errm. Unfortunately when she came to this country she couldn't get anything like that at, in terms of work .hh. She had to work in factories erm as a machinist erm. She lived in er, (noises) in a house. She rented a room in a house. The house belonged to the church .hh. Erm. So I grew up in a religious erm environment erm.

We noted how Peter provided a strong argument as to why mother did not take him with her. He put an emphasis on chronology, being careful to say who in family came first, which suggests that he wants for own reasons to get the story straight. He also needed to account for why his sisters left first, explaining that his mother could not afford to send for all the children at the same time and thus neutralising any potential blame or implication that he wasn't favoured enough to be sent for. We thought that any defensiveness was perhaps due to the fact that a mother leaving her children behind indefinitely on another continent is an anathema to canonical narratives about the way we do family now, although these practices do continue today, invisibly (Lutz,2008; Madianou,2012).

Drawing on data from across the *Transforming Experiences* sample, Ann explained the significance of birth order. His sisters, being older, may have been better able to make the journey. Further it might have been imperative to bring the older children over sooner, because of immigration regulations of the period placing restrictions on settlement for children aged over sixteen.

One member of the group drew parallels with internal migration and mobilities within the UK, locating the story Peter tells about his mother in wider histories of industrialisation and the movement from rural communities to urban ones by garment makers, and from the skilled labour of dressmaking to routinised factory work, as described in the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell.

We reflected on conditions of possibility which made Peter's mother's story tellable now but which, at the time of his migration and hers, probably could not be told. We drew comparisons with contemporary moral panics about the UK being 'swamped' by unskilled European migrants and reflected that the possibilities for narrating their stories in the current climate were likely to be limited.

The slowing down of analysis afforded by reading texts aloud and focussing on short texts at a time enabled us to notice that while Peter starts the paragraph with the story of him

coming to the UK, he skips via a story about his mother to being immediately settled in the UK. This seems to foreshadow the rather unpeopled story of arrival in UK, which follows.

So when I came to, when my sisters came before me, about a year and, maybe eighteen months before I came .hh erm, when I came they greeted me at Heathrow. They recognised me immediately. I was too busy looking around at this big airport. And some, you know, err, I'd never seen anything as grand as that. I was nnnine er. No I'd just turned ten. I came here erm in 1956, 55, April of 66 so I'd just turned ten erm. (noises) They spotted me. We went home and erm my new life .hh erm begun. I've got nothing but admiration for my mother and what she had done for me. She still the biggest influence in my life errrmm. Very close to her, very close to my sisters and for me there's nothing negative about the experience because I understand, I know why. I was always told why. It, err, she had left the Caribbean. And I was always told that I would be joining her erm. So would my sisters. They went before and it was explained to me why .hh they went before and erm, and I was in a loving home when I was left back in the Caribbean so I was in an environment where I was always thriving erm.

Some of the group noted that the emotion of reunion was located outside Peter – in his sisters. They also suggested that there is a good deal of attention paid to external details and dates and that a focus very specific memories tends to occur when someone is not doing emotion and when facts are standing in for emotions.

Again other contributions from the group enabled us to keep this issue open and nuanced. It was suggested that Peter was perhaps 'doing emotion' in a different way – that his narrative here reflects the emotion of a child, projecting the excitement of being in an airport for the first time, a situation which is particularly resonant for a child growing up in the 1960s, the golden era of space travel. Indeed, we noticed that the account of the arrival in London is given in the tone and syntax of a ten year old child, using short, vivid sentences 'They spotted me. We went home and erm my new life .hh erm begun.' We found the concepts of vivid and vague formulations from discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and intentional vagueness from conversation analysis (Jucker et al, 2003) useful in tracking what was vivid in his account and which details were vague: whether he travelled alone, for example, whether his mother was there.

One group member, drawing on her knowledge of the rest of the sample, commented that if the time in the Caribbean was presented as happy, the UK was often presented as place of unhappiness but noted that Peter's story stresses the positive 'an environment where I was always thriving'. We tracked how the strength of the assertion is built up and (over) justified. Again he uses a three part list 'because I understand, I know why. I was always told why.'

We reflected on the work the phrase 'for me' does in the sentence 'and for me there's nothing negative about the experience because I understand, I know why'. It underlines again that this is his story and closes down other interpretations. 'For me' is possibly

intertextual too, suggesting that he is aware that his is a counternarrative to the more difficult experiences of serial migration which his contemporaries faced.

One group member reflected that 'admiration' seemed to be a precisely chosen word to describe Peter's mother's achievement and that again, Peter, is anxious to show that his mother leaving and the way she dealt with it this was a reasonable and proper thing to do having left him in a good environment. The phrase 'I have nothing but admiration for my mother' suggests both a move from narrative to evaluation but also from a perspective located in the past to one in present time.

How group analysis can inform understanding the case

We conclude our paper by indicating how the group analysis has fed into our wider analysis and then by reflecting on the value and limitations of this method.

One consequence of working in this way is that one becomes much less certain about meanings, reminding us of the provisionality of interpretations. Working with others enabled us to see our own understandings of family structures and practices as constructed and situated and to hold back from overlaying our data analysis with these. Thus Peter makes the case that a loving mother can leave her children and that children can thrive in such circumstances.

Wider analysis of the case

The continuing questions around attachment theory led us to reflect that his narrative is peopled by a large cast but they seem positional not personal: his loving grandmother and sisters for example are not enlivened or distinctive. Thus his account has a sense of talking about something not 'remembering in talk'. The point when he does this, when he relates vividly the story of being in the airport as a boy, stands out.

Peter is an obedient interviewee – he does what he is asked. However he has particular stories to tell. He is defending strongly against blaming African Caribbean families. Reading on in his interview, it becomes clear that the story Peter wants to emphasise is about the damage produced by institutional racism and racist societies. Thus any difficulty in his life is located not in serial migration or an individual story but in racism in the country he came to. This becomes even clearer a little later in his interview.

'So that's my, that's my story errrm. It's something I'm proud of. It's an experience that erm .hh (.) (harsh out breath). It's, there are certain parts of the experience I could have done without like being discriminated against when I came to this country. I think I, I wasn't exposed to discrimination in the Caribbean. I was in a very, erm, secure, erm, protected environment. Wasn't discriminated against. I didn't experience discrimination until I came to this country .hh and if anything could be taken out it would be the way black people are discriminate against. If there's anything I could change in my life. But other than that I've had a wonderful life and I've enjoyed it.'

The group's discussions of ambivalences around Peter's relationship with his father opened up reflections on the losses involved in his father not joining the family in the UK, alongside feelings of resentment towards him which emerge later in Peter's interview. This is an example of group analysis where a focus on short sections of the narrative opens connections across the whole. Peter's comments on his father's strictness particularly in relation to education coincide with where the narrative trails off.   He later describes how, in common with many African Caribbean boys in the *Transforming Experiences* study and elsewhere, his abilities were consistently underestimated at school. He had a dream of being a pilot (reminding us his excitement in the airport when he arrived in Britain aged ten) which was not encouraged at school or by his mother (whom he was careful to exonerate again from any potential blame by stressing how hard she worked). While Peter states that he accepts full responsibility for not following through on his ambition, he comments that had his father been there, he would have insisted on him applying himself more at school.

Advantages and limitations of group analysis

The analysis process was stimulating – as evidenced by our motivation to produce this paper - and the insights generated were rich and varied. To capture them, we needed to record the session and to make fieldnotes immediately afterwards. The shift we note above from working through the text line by line to working on chunks of text reflects how labour intensive this work is. We had scheduled two hours for the session and the first six lines took more than half of this time. It can open up a case in many directions for analysis, which may be stimulating and at times daunting for the individual researcher returning to the data.

As we suggested above, one advantage of group work is that it can make our data strange to us and push us to unpick assumptions which over-familiarity might otherwise leave unchallenged. To maximise the fresh perspectives on data, Wengraf (2001) advocates convening heterogeneous panels of analysts which are multi-disciplinary and inclusive of people from outside academia in order to break out of common cultures and hierarchies within research teams. Given the time commitment for an analysis group, this may be difficult to achieve in practice. Further, as we have seen in the analysis above, people come to groups with particular methodological and academic positions but find that that they also draw on experiential resources when responding to the data. Thus our group reflected to some extent on their own families and parenting philosophies as well as their experiences of gendered divisions of domestic labour, of being migrant to the UK and of belonging to a generation in particular cultures where strong discipline was expected. This blurring of professional and personal boundaries can be difficult to negotiate, as one of our group reflected in her notes.

'There was a point where it was thought that I had read on and I hadn't, which made me realise that I was bringing my experience into the analysis. I did find myself suppressing/censoring some of my thoughts; on hindsight I feel it might have been useful to share them. That said, the process was again very powerful and encouraged deeper thinking about data analysis.'

Another group member also mused on the validity of using her own experience to interpret data and on how working in the group pushed her to unpick where her own assumptions came from.

'It was fascinating to reflect on the concept of extended families, which I myself have frequently experienced and associated with Caribbean families in the UK - the proud nature of many of these families, and the particular emphasis on success. At the same time it was interesting to hear the views of other group members who highlighted that this is not necessarily associated with this particular population and that these are also things that are valued more broadly in UK cultures. I struggled a little to think for myself why I had this particular emphasis... This highlighted for me some of the difficulties in trying to draw on personal experience in interpreting texts, which is something I have only more recently started to do to this extent.'

These comments point to how a first encounter with data can be unexpectedly evocative and intense and point to the importance of the group in containing this intensity and by implication, the risks involved if the group is not able to do so.

Further, the second comment highlights how using your own experience to interpret data is more acceptable within some qualitative traditions, like feminist approaches, than in others, such as conversational analysis. Within a group, some perspectives and analytic frameworks may be seen as more acceptable than others and therefore more readily taken up. Further, some group members may feel more confident in sharing their views because of their professional positions (whether they are a professor or a PhD student, for example), or because they are more familiar with qualitative analysis. Tracking how group dynamics shape analyses helps establish how 'shared' assumptions are arrived at.

Thus we need to pay attention to how the group moderates itself, both for ethical reasons and also in order to understand the processes whereby groups generate interpretations.

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i At a later point in the interview, the possible critique or alternative rhetorical position is hinted at in the form of discrimination. Peter does not really open up what his experience of this was, but notes that this was not something he had experienced until he came to this country.

What is Novella?

NOVELLA, Narratives of Varied Everyday Lives and Linked Approaches, is a research programme concerned with the everyday habitual practices of families. It's funded by the ESRC and is a Phase III National Centre for Research Methods Node. The everyday habitual practices of families are frequently taken for granted, but people's habits and their relation to society are often negotiated within families. Novella's research considers what people do and what they say they do, as this can tell us about their identities, values and possible future actions. NOVELLA analyses the ways in which family members understand their practices and develops methodologies for conducting secondary narrative analysis and matching data across a range of datasets.

NOVELLA's six projects are **Parenting Identities and Practices, Families and Food, Family Lives and the Environment, Possibilities for a Narrative Analysis of Paradata, Recipes for Mothering: An Analysis of Food Blogs and Advancing Paradata. We also run a Training and Capacity Building programme.**

Further Information

Novella is based at the Institute of Education, University of London and works with the Centre for Narrative Research, University of East London, Young Lives, Oxford University and the University of Sussex. Please visit www.novella.ac.uk for more information.