Desert island data: an investigation into researcher positionality

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Desert Island Data: An Investigation into Researcher Positionality

ResearcherJ, ResearcherC, ResearcherP, ResearcherH, ResearcherS, ResearcherD

Abstract

The nature of qualitative research means that the personal values of an individual researcher can and do (unwittingly) shape the way in which they analyse data sets, and the resultant conclusions drawn. However this phenomenon is under-studied in social research: this article seeks to help rectify this. It presents findings from a small research project focused on discourses of class, masculinity, and work among British male comedians from working-class backgrounds, interviewed on the popular BBC Radio 4 radio programme Desert Island Discs. Six different researchers, from varying disciplinary, methodological, and theoretical groundings, as well as from varying personal backgrounds, analysed three interview recordings and transcripts separately. All the researchers wrote up their individual analyses of these interviews and wrote reflexive pieces examining why they thought they approached the data as they did. The researchers then came together as a group to compare and contrast findings and approaches. The results from this study, including the discrepancies and distinctions and final group analysis, are reported alongside a thorough discussion of the project's methodology. We find that the project evidenced how a diverse research team can bring out deeper and richer analyses, and was a refreshing way to try and answer questions of individual and collective positionality

Keywords

collective research, data analysis, interpretivism, positionality, reflexivity, subjectivity, teaching qualitative methods

Introduction

This article reports on a methodological investigation conducted among six researchers from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, who had different research interests, personal experiences and subjectivities. Taking the same three interviews with working-class male comedians, each researcher analysed the audio and transcript data separately. The six researchers then came together to present

their findings and research themes, discuss their response to the interviews, and to reflect on their participation in the task. The researchers used different methodological and theoretical frameworks in their examinations of the data, and different reactions to the data emerged. While some researchers focused on the role of media interview as performance and the celebrity hierarchy that Desert Island Discs may seek to perpetuate, others focused on the role of social class habitus and hysteresis in how interviewees understand the lived experience of their own success.

While the role of subjectivity and positionality in social research has been much discussed (for example May, 1999; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000; Letherby, Scott, Williams, 2014), and despite awareness in social science research that two researchers may interpret the same data in very different ways, the issue has remained relatively underexplored and tested empirically. This paper will situate the findings of this project in the history of such debates alongside examining the role restudies play in social research. It is also posited that such an investigation may form a useful teaching and training tool for social researchers.

The article is organised in the following way. First it will provide an overview of the social science and methodological literature which has focused on the issue of individual researcher interpretation. This will include reference to several examples from recent research where this issue has been central, and also to the issue of restudies in social research and the notion of looking at the same data through different eyes. Second it will present a detailed overview of the methods undertaken in this present research project. This is especially important in this case as original contributions to the practice of methods need to be as explicit and open as possible so that future applications (and interpretations) of the approach are built on a firm and fair base. Third it will provide a detailed exploration of the nature of each researcher's analysis, and it is shown that as a result of working in a somewhat diverse team of researchers, we asked surprising questions of our own practice, and in effect built triangulation into the project. Finally the article will conclude by discussing the implications of the article for conducting qualitative research and how such a task could be a useful tool in the teaching of qualitative research methods, aiding students in understanding the realities of individual data analysis.

The role of the researcher in interpreting data

In recent years there has been a growing expectation that social researchers, particularly those applying qualitative methods, should reflexively acknowledge their personal positioning, because, due to such subjectivity, 'a different researcher, or the same researcher in a different frame of mind, might write a different report from the same data' (Brown, 2010: 238). As Morison (1986: 56) has written:

> Sociological research is a complex enterprise involving a dynamic interplay between personal values, theories and practical data gathering skills. Different sociologists, looking at the same community but not starting from the same theoretical viewpoint, may direct their attention to different aspects of the place they are studying and come up with extremely contrasting results.

Morison goes on to give the example of Tepoztlán, the Mexican village central in studies by both Redfield (1930) and seventeen years later by Lewis (1951): 'To read their accounts it would appear as though they had been looking at totally different villages' (Morison, 1986: 56). However as Crow (2012) writes, while acknowledging the difference between the two studies in terms of sample size and the date they were conducted, technical issues in research process can only account for so much in terms of data interpretation. Crow quotes Brunt (2001: 84) who reminds us of 'the subjectiveness and onesidedness of social perception', going on to argue that 'it is unrealistic to expect different researchers to come up with the same findings because the research methods used in community research are not standardized ones that bracket out the individual researcher's unique creativity and imagination' (Crow, 2012: 410).

Different researchers can look at the same issue or phenomenon, and find value in different artefacts and behaviours, or stress different elements as most important or most interesting; yet despite the acknowledgement of this variety of interpretation, rarely are interview transcripts available for wider analysis from different researchers, unlike large quantitative data-sets. And, as Burnham et al. (2004: 218-9) have written, even 'if they are available, they may not reveal how the nature of the interaction

between the interviewer and the respondent has affected the data. Two researchers might interpret the same data in very different ways.' Each researcher has a repertoire of interpretations (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). These can come from disciplinary structures, or the breadth of professional experience or exploration, but reflection on practice is restricted because 'prestructured understandings dominate seeing' (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000: 250). To produce more accurate accounts of the social world, we need to examine pre-theoretical knowledge (May, 1999).

In one relevant example, after carrying out a multidisciplinary project, Massey et al. (2006) found difficulties in consolidating the diverse ontological and epistemological approaches that they, a team of five researchers, specialised in, noting that little literature exists on this subject. The authors dwell on the sometime 'murky' nature of team research, but emphasise the importance of committing to sharing knowledge and understanding, and talking openly of different methodological approaches and 'worldview'. They express the difficulty of 'talking through' these differences, and note the lack of a 'common vocabulary' hampering communication between the positivists and constructivists on the project. During the course of their research project, Massey et al. were surprised by the strength of individuals' positions and how these impacted their study's design, application, and conclusion. This shows the value in practically exploring and showcasing how individuals' positions can come to impact the process and results of research (key in participant-led action research [Reason and Bradbury, 2006]), and the philosophical underpinnings of data analysis.

Pluralism in research methods

Alverson and Sköldberg (2000) incorporate multiple reflexive analyses of an interview transcript at the end of their book on the theoretical underpinnings of reflexive inquiry, examining an advertising agency founder's discussion of his career and his company. After noting the difference between primary interpretations (those that occur during the interview) and secondary interpretations (those that occur later, of the interview's content and of its authenticity), the authors pull apart the difference between the interviewee's desired representation of himself, and the more critical interpretation of the role of the business executive in general as holder of 'the truth' of an organisation or its dealings.

These specific details are not vital here, but what is interesting is the way these four meticulous and reflexive investigations of the same short transcript are presented, in a linear fashion, 'regarded as moments in the researcher's own thinking' (Alverson and Sköldberg, 2000: 270), and as such the authors argue the need for academic space to conduct such multi-layered inquiry.

Yet perhaps the most enlightening and useful companion piece of research we can use here is that carried out as part of the Pluralism in Qualitative Research project (PQR) by Frost and colleagues (2010). This article, drawing on a single element a wider investigation into pluralist (defined as using more than one qualitative approach) qualitative research, was published in Qualitative Research and serves as a direct corollary to the project outlined in this article. Frost and his team recruited four postgraduate researchers to each analyse one of Frost's interview transcripts from a previous research project into motherhood. Each of these postgraduate researchers was using a different analytic approach in their research (grounded theory, Foucauldian discourse analysis, narrative analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis) and was asked to both analyse the interview through application of 'their' approach, and to keep a field journal of the research process. The principal investigators then conducted a 45 minute interview with each researcher, and these were analysed alongside the initial interview analysis and the research journal.

Among other issues, the research sought to 'interrogate the contributions and impact of researchers and methods on data analysis (Frost et al., 2010: 441), involving the acknowledgement that 'the researcher's interpretation is a privileged one which silences possible others' (Frost et al., 2010: 444), adding weight to the argument that personal reflexive analysis needs to be built into research design, conduct and writing up (ResearcherJ, 2017). This arises in the four accounts, as some of the researchers describe a very personal and attached relationship to the interviewee, whereas others would use much less personalised language. Frustratingly, while the authors felt that those researchers who were not mothers spoke of the narratives as being 'dramatic' or 'emotional' (Frost et al., 2010: 450-1), in comparison they offer no detail of whether any researchers were mothers and whether this experience affected their relationship to the (person behind the) data. Similarly, in their study of attitudes towards women who smoke while pregnant, Wigginton and Lee (2014) reflect on their use of

different research methods - thematic analysis and discourse analysis - and how each approach identified different (but connected) patterns and conclusions. While the former identified a dominant theme of disapproval, the latter offered what the researchers felt was a reflexive space to interrogate both participants and their own positioning in relation to the issue. Yet again, like the Frost et al. study, there was no personal and little disciplinary reflection.

Restudies

The issue of different researchers interpreting data differently arises when we examine the role of restudies in the social sciences. As Wilson (2014) has argued and demonstrated, reanalysing others' data can be a fruitful, if demanding, research journey as it encourages the examination of both others' and one's own research practice. This 'investigative epistemology' (Mason, 2007) encourages researchers to be creative, interpretive, critical and reflexive, and challenges the notions that we should be guarded in our research practice, and the anti-historical idea that interpretation and analysis can only be carried out by the original research team. A willingness to challenge the unique epistemological privilege of original researchers seems to be increasing. Charles and Crow (2012) argue that restudies are (re)emerging due to the increased availability of archives and the comparable richness and breadth of previous studies when compared to the specialised narrowing of modern social enquiry. Restudies also highlight the messy nature of qualitative research and the important role of serendipity in research design.[1]

Platt (1992) explores one such restudy. Reporting on the establishment in the United States of the Social Science Research Council's Committee on the Appraisal of Research in the 1940s, Platt explains how a team of researchers, led by Ernest Burgess and including Robert Merton, would re-examine the data and theoretical insights of Robert Angell's 1931 study The Family Encounters the Depression to examine their validity and reliability. Angell's data, a collection of individual personal documents which accounted for family and personal narratives during the Great Depression, were to be reassessed and classified according to Angell's original schema. Platt's telling demonstrates the messiness and complexity of the process, but recounts how one examination of the data found that in

only 32 percent of cases did Angell's original analysis match his conclusions in the eyes of the Committee's research team. It was concluded that 'a personal equation entered into the classification of the cases…[raising the issue] of the correctness of Angell's theory along with the applicability of his method to other data' (Platt, 1992: 146-7).

One of the key stated objectives of the restudy, Platt (1992: 149) explains, 'included determining whether the same results would be produced by other people using the same method, or by variants of the method.' In his original work Angell made clear that his analysis came from his theoretical positioning as well as the emergent data, not from simple induction. As Platt (1992: 149) goes on to conclude, 'Thus someone with a different theoretical background might have arrived at different concepts, which could have worked equally well. Conversely someone with a similar background might have arrived at similar concepts for reasons other than the nature of the method'.

Careful restudy and analysis can also be seen to be politically and morally imperative. An academic study by two prominent economists (Reinhart and Rogoff, 2010) argued that if a nation's debt level rose to 90 percent of GDP then there would be crippling knock-on effects on that nation's economic growth. This finding was widely reported in early 2010 and was held up as a significant piece of evidence, fiercely promoted by the authors, for the introduction of austerity policies in countries such as the United Kingdom. It was later found by economists at the University of Massachusetts that due to the original study's 'coding errors, selective exclusion of available data, and unconventional weighting of summary statistics' (Herndon, Ash and Pollin, 2013: 1) that reaching the 90 percent debt to GDP ratio threshold had barely any negative effect on growth, therefore undercutting much of the economic rationale for implementing cuts to public services and imposing tax rises.[1]

Methodology

[Insert Table 1 here]

Table 1 provides brief details of the team of six researchers who carried out this project. We have only included in this table a limited set of information about each of us, focused on disciplinary and methodological perspectives as these were, as the discussion below will show, central to our analyses.

There are many other personal characteristics which are rightly identified as sociologically vital to framing researcher positionality (such as race and ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and disabilities), but these are left absent. This decision is due to space constraints, and to avoid unnecessary complexity: these factors did not arise in our discussions as central to our analyses. We want to stress that we understand that this is problematic: for example, all ten of the people in this project (the six researchers, three comedians, one interviewer) are white. The fact that we did not 'see' race in this study perhaps reveals difficult truths about the presumptions of both social science and ourselves, and is something for us to do better in the future. But as the following discussion will show, part of the contribution of this article to the qualitative method canon is the unknown nature of what is revealed in research projects that purposefully explore positional differences within the research process. If race had been central to our data analysis, it would be central to our personal positional analysis. The factors in Table 1 are prioritised because it was our disciplinary position and methodological experiences, alongside personal reflections on age and career stage, which emanated mostly strongly in our analysis of the data.

The data

Desert Island Discs (DID) is a British institution. Since its first broadcast in 1942, it has been a mainstay of radio. Forming part of the bedrock of the programming of BBC Radio Four, the country's premier spoken-word radio station, it has become a cultural totem which continues to make the news. With over 3 million listeners every week (Williams, 2013), the format of the show has barely changed since its inception. A single guest, such as a leading politician, scientist, or cultural figure, is invited by the presenter, currently former news anchor Kirsty Young, to imagine they are to be stranded on a desert island, with only the bible (or other appropriate religious text) and the complete works of William Shakespeare for company. Alongside these, the guest can request eight records (usually music, but occasionally sound recordings or spoken word pieces), a book, and a luxury item to be stranded with. These eight records are played during the show, punctuating a life history interview, which aims to explore deeply and entertainingly the interviewee's professional and personal life.

DID was chosen as a source of data for several reasons. With the programme's 70th anniversary in 2012, a significant proportion of the show's back-catalogue of interviews was placed online. This made finding suitably comparable material for analysis and discussion easier. While, as ResearcherS's insights below demonstrate, DID is a media construct in itself, with a primary aim of creating educational entertainment seeking to bring emotional stories and juicy gossip to light, it does also bear resemblance to a research project in the social sciences. Due to the nature of the programme's format, all the interviews follow very similar structures. The presenter, in this case Kirsty Young, introduces the guest, referring to the themes she seeks to explore in the interview; the first few questions are generally about the most well-known elements of the interviewee's career; the questions then move back in time to explore the interviewee's childhood and upbringing; and then moves, often chronologically, through the interviewee's life, before usually ending on the issue of how the interviewee would cope on a desert island and what third book and luxury item they would like to take with them to the island. The interview follows a relatively rigid pattern, comparable to a semi-structured qualitative interview, and it was felt that this made the data which emanated from these interviews suitable for comparison and analysis in such a setting.

There were other mundane practical issues to consider as well. ResearcherJ, the principal investigator on this project and the person who originated the study, felt that in asking colleagues to devote their research time to a new research project, additional to their own research, teaching and administrative responsibilities, it had to be a project which would appeal as fun and different. Choosing alien interviews and transcripts from a research project separate to the interests of five colleagues would be less likely to garner interest. And given the diversity of interviewees on DID over the years it was difficult to select a sample of interviews. More by chance than by judgement ResearcherJ heard the comedian Frank Skinner talk on his own radio show about his appearance on DID. As a fan of Skinner this episode was listened to and, as a researcher with an interest in class habitus (shown below), ResearcherJ felt that searching for other comedians from a working-class background may prove an enjoyable study. Ultimately, interviews with Ricky Gervais and Johnny Vegas were included alongside the interview with Frank Skinner for analysis. While we recognise a sample size of three as

small, as the central point of the exercise was to investigate our differing interpretations and analyses, this was not a pressing issue. Other studies in a similar reflexive vein, such as those examined above by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) and Frost et al. (2010) only used one interview as a data set.

Each of the six researchers was presented with printed out and digital copies of the three transcripts and access to audio files of the three interviews. After a four month period to complete the task alongside ordinary workloads, the research team met for a discussion of our findings and reflection on the project itself. This discussion lasted 115 minutes and was recorded and transcribed. While all six researchers were aware that the purpose of the research was to explore if and how different interpretations may arise in research, minimal instruction was provided, beyond 'analyse these transcripts'. The brief was purposefully kept as light as possible in order as not to direct anyone's approach or focus. There are obvious limitations to such an approach. Rarely is research not looking for specific issues - research questions are more directed and specific. The fact that we all knew, at least in broad outline, what the research was on may have had some impact on the task: for example, we may not have got the same sort of results if the task had been directed to examine how the comedians defined and possibly reinterpreted the experience of being on DID for themselves, or asked what the relevant characteristics were of the pieces of music they chose and their reasons for the choices, or specifically asked about how they deal with success. The ultimate shape of the project is more free-form and inductive, but aims to show how research specialisms and personal interests inform one's reading of data. It also shows how multi-faceted and layered one account of a few social agents or narratives can be.

'What did you find out?'

With each of the six researchers producing substantial written work, alongside long and varied discussions, space does not allow for a total exploration of the results of this research. The following data section instead presents three areas for discussion. Firstly there is an overview of the approach each researcher took to the data, which documents how working separately on the same pieces of data can produce widely different results at the same time as recognition and familiarity. Secondly, this

section wants to focus on a specific item to come out of ResearcherS's reading of the data, that of DID as a media construct and celebrity ritual, and the group's reaction to such an analysis. And thirdly the section centres on the often overlooked issue of the practical challenges (and mundanity) of doing research and analysis through examples which arose during this task.

Approaches to the data

ResearcherP is a psychologist with interests in social and health psychology, and extensive experience in qualitative methods and a range of approaches to qualitative data collection and analysis. Based on previous experiences and with no defined research question, her analysis on this occasion was most closely allied to interpretive phenomenological analysis on this occasion. This approach involves paying close attention to data but acknowledging one's own part in analysis which is both grounded in data and interpretive. Her aim here was to create themes which reflected important aspects of and similarities in accounts, which were distinct from one another, and whose titles told an interesting 'story' about constituent data. Analysis is generally a much longer process than ResearcherP gave to this project, thus her analysis was early-stage and would, for publication, have involved much more analytical and reflective work. ResearcherP's analysis produced five main themes to discuss in the meeting: 'career success through a working class lens', 'alcohol as muse and monster', 'art and creativity', 'inspiration and grounding', and 'humour in dark places.' In accounting for her analysis, ResearcherP illustrated her themes with data extracts containing stories and anecdotes which had influenced their development. ResearcherD is a psychologist with a particular interest in personality and individual differences who typically uses quantitative methods within empirical studies (ResearcherD, 2012). He followed a similar thematic approach to ResearcherP, but used different headings for these themes, looking at the relationship each comedian identified between lofty art and commercialism, how they are seen by other people, and the role of parents. This focus on their parents fell into two broad categories, with some focus on class and how the role of comedian may not live up to the value standards of a 'working-class job', and all three mentioned the importance of religion at a young age, but with little clarity or pattern as to how this had affected the three subjects through their careers.

ResearcherC's style of analysis was again similar, pulling out common themes and patterns around gender. But her original idea, to explore themes of masculinity, developed into the more specific question of what it means to be a middle-aged man. The answer to this was controlled by two distinguishing features, specifically in relation to class and family. The comedians' success, in ResearcherC's analysis, was moderated by a sense of uneasiness with their success stemming from their working-class origins. This sense of uneasiness was at the heart of ResearcherJ's analysis as well, but situated in a more theoretical frame, that of Bourdieu's (2010[1984]) hysteresis, the discordance between habitus and field. ResearcherJ's discussion picked up on the many instance in the three transcripts in which the interviewees discussed feeling like 'a fish out of water' because of the conflict between their working-class experiences, upbringings and values, and their new position in a wealthier celebrity culture. These included Gervais being unable to tell his friends that he'd met his hero David Bowie the previous night, as he dreaded seeming aloof and out of touch, and Skinner going to the opera and fearing being 'found out' as someone without the requisite cultural knowledge.

ResearcherS has published widely on issues of media representation (ResearcherS, 2011) and teaches across media and cultural studies. His view developed as he thought about the context of the show in greater detail, and was the only one of the six researchers to focus exclusively on the programme as a constructed piece of media. While originally he felt that the speakers were 'genuine' and had 'the sense that the interviewer had enabled a very searching exploration of their personas', this became slightly more sceptical as he struggled to take the interview 'as authentic, because [there] was a permeability between the performative side of this and their lives'. The comedians' styles of comedy, he felt, were wrapped up in this confessional, highly personal interview. This led him to think about the role DID plays in both celebrity culture and British society. ResearcherS was the only one of the six researchers who could be said to have brought a media or cultural studies element to his analysis, focusing on the positioning of the guests and the shows role as a cultural institution. This aspect of the research is discussed later in this article.

Finally, out of the six analyses, ResearcherH's approach to the data was the most singular. Applying a discursive psychological approach, he focused in detail on Kirsty Young's introduction to each of the

comedians. 'I wanted to consider how the interviewer, almost as an invisible presence, pressed the levers, didn't she?' Focusing on three devices he saw in each introduction - situating achievement, flagging culture, and invoking expertise - ResearcherH examined the use of specific words and contrasts Young uses in order to 'set up' each of her interviewees. These contrasts, he argued, serve to intrigue the listener: Vegas as well-honed comedian or potential on-stage breakdown? Skinner as 'King of the Lads' or opera lover? Gervais as world-famous comedian or famously scathing about celebrity culture? These esoteric and oppositional caricatures provide a base for the interview to build on throughout, footing the show's research and narratives on which the interview is built, but obviously shows a connection to ResearcherC and ResearcherJ's foci on uneasiness and hysteresis, using the interviewee's cleft habitus as a framing device. Similarly in his analysis ResearcherD highlighted the importance of 'the fourth person' involved in these interviews, namely Kirsty Young, raising how at one point she says to Skinner 'I don't want to play up to any sort of stereotype at all, God forbid', but then immediately raises the archetypal image of Skinner's father as a working-class English man with a garden shed and a whippet.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Figure 1 (above) is one way of presenting the relationship and differences between our analyses. In this simple quadrant diagram, we can see that our readings can be split along the dichotomies of whether the researcher focused on macro (the extent to which the interviews reveal wider social structures) or micro (the meaning of the words spoken issues), or grounded (focused on codifying and organising all the data to create theory) or theoretical (using existing social theories to explain some emergent themes) readings. It would also be possible to draw these approaches into a disciplinary/methodological typology, where we see ResearcherP and ResearcherD take a broad thematic approach to the data, ResearcherS a cultural studies approach, ResearcherH a discursive psychological approach, ResearcherJ a social theory approach, and ResearcherC an issue-based approach. However, as a team we do feel that these presentations risk simplifying and over-codifying what was seen by us as a more fluid and cross-cutting result. These methodological categories are not necessarily alternatives; for instance, 'grounded theory' as a strategy can be used where the tentative

interpretations it checked were derived by discourse analysis. An anecdote raised as striking by one researcher was often similarly raised by another. The group session was dominated by nods of approval, and comments such as 'Oh yes, I noticed that too'. Those researchers who presented back to the group last often found they had less to say because one of their colleagues had already covered it, except in one key instance, where the usefulness of a research team with different academic groundings was made plain to us.

Analytic differences; Analytic synthesis

As would be expected in a project in which multiple people are looking at the same data there were many shared observations and points of agreement between the six researchers. However, there were also some dramatic differences that emerged due to paradigmatic and methodological preferences. These differences are best exemplified by the quite distinct approach taken by ResearcherS. Unlike any of the other researchers, his analysis focused on a cultural studies reading of DID as a site of power within celebrity culture, referring little to actual quotes or stories emanating from the interviews. He was the most critical of the programme itself, and the role this form of interview serves within the celebrity hierarchy:

> This did make me wonder sometimes given that this is almost a ritual, rites of passage type of thing, the Desert Island Discs, a bit like ‘This is Your Life’ or one of those which shows that you're now a consecrated celebrity, a consecrated person in the Pantheon, and it did make me wonder how much of this was rehearsed and how much of it was [true]...

Originally reading the interviews as quite 'genuine' and offering a 'searching exploration' of the interviewees' personas, as he thought about it more ResearcherS developed a rather critical view of the interview as inauthentic, where the permeability of performance and confessional were made plain:

> [T]he form of these stories seem to suggest to me that this is a ritual confessional, it’s really part of the performances of the players and these

> maybe unfairly called rehearsed sort of thing yet are difficult to assess as strictly biographical, but more of an extended part of a screen narrative to me. I think it's nothing surprising in the stories in that they resonate perfectly with the projected selves which suggest either that they are very consummate performers or that they are entirely unerringly honest in the way they portray themselves.

Ultimately, ResearcherS became annoyed with the material, feeling that rather than a deep sociological interview, he'd been presented with another excuse for 'self-indulgent legitimation,' part of a culture in which lots of celebrities just end up talking to each other.

ResearcherS's analysis was probably the most challenging to the underlying assumptions of what we were doing, and took the widest sociological view of the data. ResearcherD, as a generally quantitative psychologist unused to analysis at this level, was particularly taken with this approach:

> [ResearcherS], you were placing the programme. You were looking at the cultural raison d'être of the programme and where it's situated within a wider culture, what's it doing, what's its function? But those weren't…it didn't even occur to me to look at them, to look at them in that way. Because I'm a psychologist, I was looking at the person.

While ResearcherS apologises throughout the discussion for doing what he thought was a 'lazy' and 'superficial' job of analysis, his contribution on DID as a media construct was not only missing from the other researchers' accounts, but helped the team frame social and personal analyses of the conversations between Young and her interviewees. His more macro-level analysis of where this encounter fits in the celebrity hierarchy and cultural establishment helped the rest of the team understand other micro-level interactions they had noticed.

The research team saw ResearcherS's contribution as vital, even though he himself was unimpressed by it. ResearcherP observed that:

> Because I think if I was putting together an article - because my analysis I think stopped at the descriptive, slightly interpretative element – but if I was putting together an article for people to read and find interesting…and find useful, I would want to have some of what you said in there. So it would be almost like a teamwork approach. You'd get some themes, but then you'd have a look what was underpinning those sorts of things. So I think your analysis was really…I thought it was very rich from that much more contextual, social, contextual…

Pushing back on this, ResearcherS agreed but noted that it was the codifying research done by ResearcherP and ResearcherD, and the granular research done by ResearcherH in particular, that would add data-driven weight to the general theoretical framework he had constructed. While it is not possible to ascertain whether a single person writing up this project would have focused both on the macro issues of celebrity culture and the granular issues of dichotomous discursive techniques, it does not seem likely. This was the clearest example in undertaking this task that different researchers bring different skills and experiences to their reading and analysis, and demonstrates how the combination of such experiences and skills in research teams can bring exponential benefits.

Research as a (mundane) lived experience

As Brown (2010) highlights above, an individual researcher's mood can have an impact on how they analyse data, a more prosaic concern than that of disciplinary training or social positioning. While discussion of which analytic techniques might be used typically entail grand argument about which theorists' work is most suitable for framing a concept, at the other end of the spectrum are the prosaic and mundane realities of research may play just as important a role. In our discussion of why we thought we analysed the three transcripts in the way that we had, it was felt in several cases that practical issues impacted on our attention to the task. Firstly, it was recognised that this was very much a side project for many of the team, sited way down the priority list. ResearcherS's ability to find the time and (physical and mental) space to read and theme the transcripts was hampered by

renovations to his house, limiting access to his computer during the time period involved. ResearcherP, who had, apart from her during her doctoral research, always worked in a research team, felt that the lack of someone to talk her findings over with was an issue:

> I didn't have a team to talk my themes through with, and what I ended up doing was talking through what I saw – before I got to themes, just talking about the interviews with my partner in the garden with a glass of wine. It helped me articulate some of the things that I was seeing as well.

The research process is messy and ideas, for suitable theoretical frameworks for example, can come from random inspirations often in a non-linear way. In his study of homeless men in New York Mitchell Duneier (1999) only thought to use Jane Jacobs' research on cities after it was recommended to him by a research participant; Platt (1992: 144) shows how a researcher only found out they were applying a particular framework to their analysis after the process. The importance of a glass of wine and a pleasant evening conversation with a non-researcher may be incidental and too oblique to be the subject of scientific study, but that does not mean it should be ignored or not recognised as important. These are details which will be left absent from the write-up of most social research (for a discussion of leaving out methodological detail for ethical reasons, see Blackman, 2007). There is mundaneness to research which is often forgotten, as must we remember that research is situated in the practice of everyday life, not operating in a 'bubble' abstract from it. As Hannah Jones (2013: 27) puts it, 'researchers are not that special' (emphasis in original). While we may have received special training, have broader frames of theory, and have more time to think about individual pieces of data like those under study here, taking on the mantel of 'expert' in such a scenario is extremely dubious. We are as open to the warp and weft of (research) life as much as anyone else looking at these transcripts, and so therefore these small but significant moments in our research processes provide more evidence for the necessity of reflexive and collegial practices.

Discussion

This small qualitative project has served to augment Law's (2004: 6, emphasis in original) assertion that events 'necessarily exceed our capacity to known them', and we should seek to unmake any epistemological methodological desire for certainty (see also Brown, 2010). While there may be criticism that this project is rather banal, one of the fascinating elements of doing this work is that when we have discussed it with experienced social scientists of varying disciplines they commonly state how interesting and useful the project will be, and how they would love to get involved in it. The six researchers have decades of experience between them of social research, experience in using various methodological and theoretical tools, have published in a diverse range of areas, and have presented to a diverse range of publics. None of us had come across similar work, or held similar discussions about researcher interpretation until we started studying it. The idea that 'researchers produce different research' is an obvious and well-known sentiment, but it seems to us known without knowing.

Given the wealth of research outputs in the social sciences, it is rare for data from previous studies to be re-examined by independent researchers. There is little tradition of making anonymised interview and focus group transcripts or ethnographic field notes and photographs available for the wider (social science) public to study, raising obvious questions both of ethical practice and authenticity. Where there is critique of others' academic (particularly qualitative) research (for example, Wacquant's [2002] memorably critical review of Duneier's [1999] monograph Sidewalk, and Duneier's [2002] caustic response), it is based on reading the final research report, not the original data itself. Research which occurs in independent silos rather than in teams will always be open to such criticism. Supervisors who do not have time to listen to and personally analyse their PhD students' transcripts or interviews to validate or counter their interpretation (not in the guise of surveillance but in that of academic rigour) would be one such instance of a possible lack of thoroughness in inquiry. The benefit of sharing data in such a way was found in the Angell restudy:

> The draft report by Burgess summarized the data on reliability by suggesting that analysts have personal equations which make group ratings more reliable, that rating scales eliminate much subjective bias, and that the

> highest reliability comes from group ratings using scales and scores. (Platt, 1992: 147)

All six of us have conducted research as part of a team and individually, although we are all at varied career stages, with ResearcherH just starting and ResearcherS approaching retirement. Unfortunately, the necessity of churn in academia will not stop, corners will continue to be cut, and singular rather than multiple interpretations of data will continue to be presented as conclusions. As Dave Beer (2014: 67) writes in his recent call to arms, social science needs to be more responsive to current issues but must protect and revere 'long-term, careful, and meticulous work' citing reflective pieces of synthesis and secondary analysis as two avenues which 'go against the grain of the systems of measurement of academic worth and value.'

Participating in this project has helped us remember the rich potential of collaborative and interdisciplinary qualitative work (see Lingard et al., 2007). This is not to overplay the significance of the small and simple project outlined in this article, but merely to express how refreshing we found it to work across channels, and open our own academic analyses to the critique (not criticism) of colleagues who can be at once so near and yet so distant. Exposing our own ideas to others, and hearing their insights, was an excellent way of challenging and developing our own practices, which can otherwise become repetitive and limiting. As one example, Psychologist ResearcherP was inspired by hearing the more abstract, theoretically-driven, structural perspectives on the DID interviews of her politics and sociology colleagues. Resultantly, she is developing her own analysis to take a broader, more critical and theoretical approach to participant data, where appropriate - which it often is, in both health and social psychology fields - and actively encourages students taking more creative and critical approaches to their own datasets. As Wyatt and Gale (2014: 296) argue, collaboration 'activates a form of radicalism and subversion which can challenge conservative academic practices. Small and enjoyable research projects can do the same.

Teaching and doing interpretivism

We believe that the small research project presented here highlights opportunities for teaching qualitative research methods and doing qualitative work. As a result of this project, ResearcherP has instigated a new research study group at our university, focused on sharing new data and analysis, where a group of colleagues are provided with transcripts and other research material to discuss. This welcoming environment has been hugely welcomed by doctoral students and early career researchers, and lone researchers, who want the opportunity to share their ideas and, importantly, hear others' insights into their data. As Simons and Billig (2004: 1) argue, salaried academics might not be the best placed individuals to critique and make sense of the social world: perhaps we can best combat the undermining of confident criticism by opening up our practice to others, from all spheres.

Following on from this, we believe the project is also highly suitable for undergraduate students across the social sciences to undertake. Those teaching research methods may wish to see how their students' analysis tally with their own and ours here. Allied to this is a commitment to open research practice where other researchers can analyse our analysis if they so wish, especially as space only allows for a partial discussion of our process and findings. Therefore as a resource for anyone who wishes to do either of the above, the materials from this project are freely available online. The internet address is [removed for peer review]. All three of the transcripts from DID are available to read, alongside links to the programme pages for each of the comedians. Also available is the transcript from the focus group held between the six of us, which has received very minimal editing.

Notes

[1] For summaries of the Reinhart-Rogoff controversy see Cassidy (2013) and Alexander (2013).

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