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# Group Analysis in Practice: Narrative Approaches

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## Group Analysis in Practice: Narrative Approaches

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**Abstract:** Working in groups is increasingly regarded as fruitful for the process of analyzing qualitative data. It has been reported to build research skills, make the analytic process visible, reduce inequalities and social distance particularly between researchers and participants, and broaden and intensify engagement with the material. This article contributes to the burgeoning literature on group qualitative data analysis by presenting a worked example of a group data analysis of a short extract from an interview on serial migration from the Caribbean to the UK. It describes the group's working practices and the different analytic resources drawn upon to conduct a narrative analysis. We demonstrate the ways in which an initial line-by-line analysis followed by analysis of larger extracts generated insights that would have been less available to individual researchers. Additionally, we discuss the positioning of group members in relation to the data and reflect on the porous boundary between primary and secondary analysis of qualitative data.

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## 1. Introduction

Within qualitative research, "the art of interpretation" is central to the research endeavor and, as DENZIN (1994, p.500) suggests, "[i]nterpreters as storytellers tell narrative tales ... [that] always embody implicit and explicit theories." As qualitative research has burgeoned, so too has recognition that the analytic stories told partly depend on the experiences and practices of the researchers doing the telling and on their experiences of alternative ways of doing interpretation. Recognizing that meaning is socially produced (FINE, 1994; GUBRIUM & HOLSTEIN, 2009), many qualitative researchers value opportunities for joint analysis of their research material in order to make their interpretations more robust. Joint or group analyses can also help to identify interpretations that are provoked by unacknowledged emotional reactions (HOLLWAY & FROGETT, 2012). [1]

In some qualitative analytic approaches, including the biographic narrative interpretive method (BNIM) (WENGRAF, 2001), participatory research and interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), it is said to be epistemologically desirable to "triangulate" analyses by allowing research participants to comment on the interpretations produced (SMITH, HARRE & VAN LANGENHOVE, 1995). This is sometimes for emancipatory or equity reasons and sometimes on the grounds that analyses are improved and made more transparent and systematic. There is, however, disagreement amongst researchers about the desirability of taking research findings back to participants for two main reasons. First, this can privilege the participant's interpretations when everybody has partial, situated understanding of their motives and behavior (WEITZ et al., 2011). Second, particularly with analyses informed by psychoanalytic theory, researchers suggest that it could be damaging to research participants because they may see themselves in unfamiliar and unwelcome ways (HOLLWAY & JEFFERSON, 2013). Therefore many researchers who do joint analysis do so with other researchers. While opportunities for joint analyses are easily marshaled within large research teams, they have to be more formally organized in smaller teams. Groups that span research projects bring together those who are "primary" analysts and those who are new to the data and so are "secondary analysts." Group data analysis is, therefore, epistemologically and structurally differentiated (e.g., MAUTHNER, 2010; URWIN, HAUGE, HOLLWAY & HAAVIND, 2012; WALKERDINE, OLSVOLD & RUDBERG, 2013). [2]

This article begins by discussing the epistemological and organizational issues involved in analyzing data in groups and the benefits and disadvantages of this way of doing analysis. We then present an example of the issues that can arise in group analysis across research teams. Lastly, we discuss the benefits and limitations of the particular group exercise. The material that we worked with was collected as part of a narrative research project, but the focus of the article is on the group analysis process, not about the particular data or analysis of it. [3]

## **2. Benefits, Disadvantages and Processes in Group Analysis: Epistemological and Organizational Issues**

Language-based methodologies have shown how talk is inextricably linked to social interaction and processes of meaning making (WETHERELL, 2001) and "deployed in situated narrative interaction" (DEPPERMAN, 2013, p.2). The focus on narratives-in-interaction (BAMBERG, 2006) or "narrative practices" (BAMBERG, 2012) highlights processes that have been shown to be as much part of interpretive talk amongst social scientists as spontaneously occurring conversation or research participants' talk. For example, MEYER and MEIER ZU VERL (2013) report an ethnomethodological analysis of the videotaped meaning-making processes employed in data analytic sessions by a team of qualitative social researchers. They argue that the hermeneutic practice of reconstructing meaning in qualitative research is not an individual achievement, but a cooperative, embodied and situated practice that is reflexively intersubjective. They identify the ways in which the research group analytic practices are situated,

distributed, reflexive, and often draw on members' bodily and tacit knowledge as a resource. [4]

One implication of MEYER and MEIER ZU VERL's work is that, from the start of research projects, whether acknowledged or not, research analysis produced from teams is collaborative. An increasing number of research teams are recognizing the importance of analyzing such collaborative processes in the qualitative analysis of their research material. We identify six, overlapping benefits identified in the literature. First, analysis in groups can make analysis more creative since it is informed by a greater range of perspectives (HOLLWAY & FROGETT, 2012; WENGRAF, 2001). From her experience of facilitating postgraduate discussion groups, SALMON (1992, p.26) argued that:

"[i]f research is to move beyond conventional wisdom, it has to engage with what is as yet intuitive, unarticulated, beyond the level of coherent meaning ... the context of a small group which has established a sense of mutual trust potentially offers richer opportunities for the development of this kind of intuitive exploration." [5]

By virtue of having to make analytic decisions transparent to a group and being open to challenge, the process of conducting group analysis offers some protection against unquestioned and idiosyncratic assumptions that may have been made in interpreting the data (SMITHSON, HOLMES & GILLIES, 2015). Second, it can make interpretation more transparent, and possibly more accountable, as discussion makes the analytic process more visible and researcher reflexivity becomes part of the analysis. As RUSSELL and KELLY (2002) suggest, qualitative research is a series of dialogic processes in which the positioning of individual researchers is an inextricable part of the group process and serves to sensitize other members of the group to things they might otherwise not attend to. Third, group analysis may increase the accountability of the research by identifying social difference and political inequalities in discourses and bringing these to light in the research process (KITZINGER, 2000; SPEER & STOKOE, 2011). Researchers further suggest that group analysis can help to reduce political inequalities and social distance between researchers and participants (GILLARD et al., 2012; RODHAM, FOX & DORAN, 2015). Fourth, research teams have reported that the process of group analysis makes the data "strange" to the analysts who are familiar with the material and thereby introduces fresh perspectives and makes alternative discourses more visible. For this reason, WENGRAF (2001) advocates convening heterogeneous panels of analysts that are multi-disciplinary and inclusive of people from outside academia in order to break out of common cultures and hierarchies within research teams. Psychosocial research approaches suggest that working in groups may offer insights into aspects of the data we "defend" against, or protect ourselves from noticing because we are emotionally unable to face them (ELLIOTT, 2011; HOLLWAY & JEFFERSON, 2013; WALKERDINE et al., 2001). Working in a group can help researchers to process an emotional experience, making it "thinkable" (HOLLWAY & FROGETT, 2012). Thomas OGDEN sums up this principle as "containment" that arises because "it takes two minds to think one's disturbing thoughts" (2009, p.97). Fifth, it can help to build research skills

(WEGENER & TANGGAARD, 2013). Finally, group analysis can enable *knowledge sharing not only between team members* (WANG & NOE, 2010) but between different disciplines. For analysis to work in multidisciplinary groups, where researchers take different approaches, mutual trust has to extend to preparedness to engage with these different approaches. This can be difficult since there are often fundamental epistemological differences between qualitative approaches. Conducting successful group analysis requires both foregrounding of the different approaches involved and avoidance of value judgments about other analytic perspectives (SMITHSON et al., 2015). [6]

There are also problems and difficulties in group analysis. For example, there is a danger in making inappropriate compromises in which the synthesis of approaches may gloss over tensions between approaches and members' positioning. CAHILL (2009), for example, acknowledged that the process of doing joint analysis allowed engagement with complexity, but found it emotionally difficult, convoluted and formal. PHILLIPS, KRISTIANSEN, VEHVILÄINEN and GUNNARSSON (2013) identified a number of problems that arose from collaborative analysis and argued that there are no easy solutions given the differences in power relations and experience and the tensions that can arise between participants in efforts at collaboration. [7]

In addition, analysts in groups often respond differently to participant accounts, sometimes being divided in terms of feeling sympathy (e.g., RODHAM et al., 2015) or in the emotions they read into the accounts (RUSSELL & KELLY, 2002). In a group analysis employed in an anthropological study of childlessness amongst Pakistani British women, HAMPSHIRE, IQBAL, BLELL and SIMPSON (2014) found shifting connections and differences between researchers and between researchers and participants on the basis of their experiences and sympathies that sometimes made analysis difficult and divided the team. The HAMPSHIRE et al. (2014) study provides an important corrective to assumptions that qualitative analysis in groups is necessarily productive, egalitarian or pleasurable. Complex practical and ethical issues can arise as researchers engage in such collaborations. TURNER, for example, 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 and some hostility (TURNER, 2013; TURNER & WEBB, 2012). The benefits of group analysis are unlikely to accrue to groups that struggle to work well together (whether established or new groups) or who are conflicted about sharing research material. [8]

In this article we report on the analytic procedure that resulted when two research teams came together to build their research capacity by trying out each other's analytic methods collectively. Those who took part in the group analysis were variously positioned as primary analysts, working with material they had previously encountered or as secondary analysts encountering the material for the first time (THOMSON, MOE, THORNE & NIELSEN, 2012). The discussion was audio recorded in order to capture the nuances of the joint analysis. [9]

The process involved analyzing an extract from an interview transcript that had been informed by a narrative approach. This raised methodological issues that led to a secondary joint analysis of the group processes of the analysts, begun in the group session and continued through e-mail discussions. This process, initially not designed to produce methodological data, makes two potential contributions to the literature. It first shows how consensus was reached about the substance of the analysis in the process of multi-party talk. It then analyses ways in which the decision to write up the process for publication highlighted tensions that had been silent in the face-to-face interaction. These tensions were connected to power relations produced by positioning in connection to the substance of the extract, whether the researchers were early career researchers or senior academics and differences of methodological commitment that challenged the construction of the analysis into particular words and phrases. [10]

### **3. The Group Analysis Data and Team**

The interview extract analyzed by the group was recorded as part of a parenting and identities project (PIP)<sup>1</sup> that brought together two narrative studies concerned with migration, ethnicity, identity and parenting. In what follows, we identify ourselves as individual analysts by numbers reflecting the order of our names on this paper. The study (led by author A1) was the focus for this analysis exercise. It was a psychosocial study of adults looking back on their "non-normative" childhoods, examining how the parenting they received from parents who were mostly migrants had impacted on their own parenting. The PIP researchers [authors A1, A2 and A3] used the data from two studies 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 having substantive aims, the project sought to develop narrative methodologies for qualitative secondary analyses, in particular by bringing data sources together. [11]

The work described in this article arose from an analysis workshop involving the PIP researchers in collaboration with researchers from another university engaged in a separate study [authors A4, A5 and A7]. A6 was from a third university and was involved in other research with A4. Across the teams, A2 and A4 had worked together on previous projects. Thus the group consisted of project teams with different constellations of established working practices and methods of analysis between some of its members as well as different levels of familiarity and trust. Prior to the session, the group had together undertaken an analysis session with data from the project on which A4, A7 and A5 were working and the parenting and identities project team had led a training event on narrative research that the other group members had attended. [12]

Analysts in the parenting and identities project were positioned differently in relation to the research material. A2 and A3 were secondary analysts, while A1

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was a primary analyst in that it was her data set from which the extract came. She was also, however, a secondary analyst since she did not conduct the original interview. A8 was a member of the original project team and conducted the interview with the participant (pseudonymized as Peter). She was not part of the group analysis but commented on the analyses as part of the writing process for this article. Only the original researchers had had access to the audio recording of the interview and fieldnotes. This was in accordance with ethical agreements to avoid the possibility of identifying participants' voices and because the fieldnotes were designed to include highly personal issues about interviewers' feelings, associations and reactions in the interview that were not archived for re-use by other researchers. The team were thus differentiated in the extent to which they had access to what HAMMERSLEY (2010) calls "head-notes;" the implicit, and often taken for granted, unacknowledged understandings and memories of what they have seen, heard and felt during fieldwork, analysis and project discussions. [13]

We were a group of seven women, influenced by current feminist perspectives in the global north, analyzing a man's story that did not question the patriarchal nature of family relationships at the time of his mother's migration. The methodological resources the group brought to the task included: narrative approaches, attachment theory, conversation and discourse analysis and interpretive phenomenological analysis. Working on the same text was useful in illuminating synergies and differences between approaches and challenging particular approaches and ways of working. The extract selected for the analysis was short in order to allow in-depth reflection and discussion among the seven qualitative researchers who came together for the purpose. This runs counter to the view in some qualitative analysis that it is essential to contextualize secondary and group analysis with fieldnotes, information from the fieldworker and sometimes audio recordings (COLTART, HENWOOD & SHIRANI, 2013; HEATON, 2004; IRWIN, 2013; RODHAM et al., 2015). The transcript provided also was not sufficiently detailed to meet the requirements for conversation analysis. It was, however, more detailed than is common in much qualitative analysis, allowing the analysis of pauses and other dynamics. The method adopted was designed to allow engagement with the extract without priming secondary analysts with "insider" knowledge and in order to allow for multiple possible interpretations of the extract. [14]

#### **4. The Importance of the Opening Extract: "Peter's" Migration Story**

The extract considered in the group analysis is the opening turn of an interview with "Peter," who migrated from the Caribbean to the UK in childhood in order to join his mother. The first question was an invitation to Peter to describe his experience and so was designed to elicit talk that was extended and narrative in quality. Our rationale for focusing on the opening passage is that different theoretical and methodological approaches invest the start of an interview with particular importance as a site that provides insights into what will unfold in the interviewee's narrative. Developing the Deleuzian notion of interaction as rhizome (that is "a dynamic, open, decentralized network that branches out to all sides

unpredictably and horizontally'), SERMIJN, DEVLIEGER and LOOTS (2008, p.637) suggest there are no fixed starting or endpoints to narratives, only multiple entry points. They argue 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. Martine BURGOS (1991) emphasizes the fruitfulness of analyzing the initial turns of an interview. She suggests that the narrator of a story has the difficult task of unifying heterogeneous material into a narrative. It is, therefore, a struggle to start telling a story. As a result, conflicts are often evident at the start of stories, as are the key issues that animate the life story. While it is possible to analyze any extract of material, analysis of the beginning of an interview is particularly fruitful. According to BURGOS, since narrators have to take up a subjective position in relation to their stories, it would be wasteful to pay attention only to explicit content, rather than also attending to how stories are told. [15]

The sequential organization of an account and close attention to opening talk are also important in conversation analysis (SCHEGLOFF, 2007), so the focus on the opening extract was a shared emphasis in narrative and conversation analysis work and was familiar to group members from both these traditions. This was an example of a shared agreement in how to approach a text from different methodological traditions, which made working together seem appropriate and non-conflictual. [16]

A1 described the study before the analytic session began, and members of the group responded with reflections about their own familiarity with processes of migration to the UK, including from the Caribbean. Below, we present our analysis of the first eighteen lines of an interview with "Peter," who had migrated to the UK from the Caribbean aged ten years 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. (For a fuller analysis of the initial turn in this interview, see ELLIOTT et al., 2013.) We began the analysis by reading the extract line by line and using the analysis of one line to anticipate what we expected to happen next in the transcript. Making predictions enabled us to identify and explore the pre-judgments that we made about how the story would unfold and to foreground any impulses to skate over meanings and puzzles (WENGRAF, 2001).



1	I	So um, I wonder if we can start um with you telling me about your experience of
2		migration.
3	P	Okay
4	I	...and I'm interested in anything that comes to your mind?
5	P	Right. OK. Well as you know my name is Peter ermm. My recollection, recollection of
6		serial migration. My mother left me in the Caribbean erm, with my father and my two
7		sisters. We were living in my grandmother's house er. My grandfather had died some
8		year earlier. I didn't know my grandfather. Er but we had the house in a place called
9		Burnt Hill which is on the outskirts of, of the town .hh. It was a happy home errrm and
10		I think my mother left when I was about five. So her leaving, I haven't got much
11		recollection of that ermm. All I know is I was left in a happy, caring environment. My
12		grandmother looked after .hh myself, my other sisters and my father was there. But
13		erm, it, it, I suppose it was the typical ermm, father relationship—the disciplinarian
14		made sure I knew how to use my knife and fork properly—made sure I cleaned my
15		shoes properly every evening .hh ermm, and then made sure that I was well behaved
16		so I wouldn't embarrass either he or any other member of the family should I be taken
17		anywhere err. .hh err. So it was, I had a strict upbringing. He was very mu-, much into
18		education hh and erm,

Table 1: Extract from the beginning of Peter's (P) interview [17]

## 5. Achieving Face-to-Face Consensus in Group Analysis

We took turns to read each sentence aloud in the group. Through (re)voicing the data, we re-established the data as talk as well as text, transforming the group into listeners as well as readers (HOLLWAY, 2015; THOMSON et al., 2012). This fits with MEYER and MEIER ZU VERL's (2013) suggestion that re-enactment is an important part of the process of joint analysis. Re-voicing directed us to think about how speaking words involves interpretation by actors as well as audiences. We considered each progressive line as building the story, rather than in isolation. Accordingly, when we discussed a subsequent line, we would sometimes refer to previous lines and discussion. A major part of the method was to consider what we expected to be said following what had been said in the previous line. [18]

We started by reflecting on the narrative possibilities that the initial interview question set up and what subject positions it allowed Peter as the participant. This discussion raised questions about how the original study had been conceptualized, and how the data were collected, as well as arrangements for secondary analysis. We reflected on what Peter already knew about the project and on the various ways in which he might have understood the term "serial migration." The discussion of the interviewer question produced cohesion by bringing the group together in discussing their own experiences of starting interviews and how it might set up possible and preferred responses. [19]

As we read the opening section, our own approaches to starting interviews came to mind. In the opening discussion on the start of Peter's interview, A2 considered that the analytic frame researchers employ "depends [on] what you've been trained in" and the interviewer's own style. We noted how the interviewer and participant were working to get the interview going, and the slight struggle involved for the interviewer in "mobilizing a response" [A4 and A7]. A6 began her analysis by saying that the interviewer and participant were positioning and repositioning themselves as they co-constructed the interview. By relating the beginning of the interview to our own experiences, we picked up on issues that we had faced; of anxiety to get interviews flowing and power relations in the dynamics of the interview. A1 followed this by pointing out that, as BURGOS (1991) suggests, the beginning of the interview does show a struggle to get going. While this is a minor struggle, it signals that Peter has a story to tell that is not entirely straightforward. Equally, as a group, our analytic process paralleled this process of struggling to work our way into the analysis, drawing on our repertoire of research practices in order to do so. These initial discussions established an ethos of working carefully and empathically with the interviewee's story and with a fellow researcher's fieldwork. As the analysis progressed the personal resources we drew on to interpret our data became apparent, as did our various intersectional, gendered, generational and ethicized positions in relation to the data, as will be demonstrated below. [20]

We concluded that the second question (line 4) gave the interviewee permission to talk about what was important for him, what was "in his mind," but also gave

him a challenge in working out where to start and what to include. It was striking that our discussion of Peter's response (lines 5-7) started with the process of the interview, focusing on his "recollection" and memory before substantive issues. Each of the group members made the material personally meaningful by bringing it into their own experience, theoretical commitments and the ways in which they were interpellated by the account (c.f. ALTHUSSER, 1977). These different threads highlight the plurality of the group's entry points into the analysis and, as shown below, recurrent themes partly occurred because researchers' analyses are necessarily filtered through their preoccupations and positioning (RIESSMAN, 2008). [21]

In lines 7-12, Peter built up a picture of the setting, evoked in part through the specificity of naming places and a cast of characters for his story as well as a strong assertion that the home was happy. A4 (and A7) considered the ways in which discursive constructions of "happy home" are gendered, so that women's labor in creating homes emerges strongly around talk of "happy caring environment" but is not acknowledged [also A7]. This was a point of agreement that, in itself, pointed to the group's gendered and temporal positioning and perspective on the data. [22]

Analysis of the recording of the group work showed three major themes. First, the process of conducting the analysis was as much a process of group building as of engagement with the substantive content of the extract. To some extent, this happened because everybody spoke and everybody listened to the points made, so that the process was one of adding to what had already been said. Laughter has been found to serve multiple functions in interviews and in group discussions (BONAIUTO, CASTELLANA & PIERRO, 2003; WETHERELL, 1998). In the group analysis described here it served to help create a consensus by keeping the discussion light, "doing" shared enjoyment and validating ourselves as researchers experienced in qualitative research. For example, there was general laughter about the difficulties of starting off interviews. Later, after A5 commented that Peter followed the instruction to talk about his experience of serial migration, there was laughter when A7 cut through the general murmurs of agreement that participants do try to follow researcher instructions, by saying that you also get disobedience. This led on to discussion, following comments from A4 that participants have their own agenda, of previous interviews where interviewee agendas took precedence over the researcher agenda [A1 & A2]. There was also laughter when members of the group made slips in reading, as for example, in reading "toes," instead of "shoes" (line 15). The one time where the laughter was not about the researchers' experiences or mistakes came when we were grappling with the symbolic importance of Peter's father, signaled in his phrase, "father was there." The laughter at that point was about the intersections of gender and generation and the group's views and personal experiences of the role of fathers more generally. The point here was that laughter may be important in building group cohesion by suggesting that we shared understandings and perspectives. In this case, it required the invoking of other interviews members of the group had done and social trends so that it was clear to all of us that we were not laughing at Peter or what he said in order to maintain respectful engagement

with the extract. Apparent digressions were thus important to the dynamics of establishing group solidarity. [23]

The second main theme was insider/outsider positionality in the negotiation of authoritative interpretation. One of the group was born in the Caribbean and another had a husband and parents who were born there. This both interpellated them into Peter's account and was a position from which they claimed authority to interpret his account at a number of points in the group discussion. When, for example, the line "My mother left me in the Caribbean erm, with my father and my two sisters" (lines 6-7) was read, A5 explained that

"[i]t's interesting actually. Being of [Caribbean] heritage, the men do tend to say—the boys say mum left me about serial migration and then afterwards—dads usually come before—and then afterwards the girls would say 'our parents left us'." [24]

Her claim to insider expertise recurred at other points as, for example, following the reading of lines 7-8 ("We were living in my grandmother's house er. My grandfather had died some year earlier"). A5 introduced a new angle on gender and generation in Caribbean families that shifted the discussion into understanding patterns of serial migration as complex. A5 suggested that Peter's experience was "typical" and one with which her family is familiar. This led on to a discussion of how Peter's family was "preserved as an appropriate family unit through migration" [A7] and allowed the co-construction of analysis of Peter's construction of his "happy home" as gendered [A2, A4 & A6]. It also alerted us to how Peter's narrative demonstrates the rhetorical work of "doing family" in a way that closed down possibilities that it would be viewed pejoratively or as dysfunctional [A1, A5, A6]. This discussion opened the way for A5 to augment the construction of Peter's family as a "typical" Caribbean family in various turns. A5 herself recognized her interpellation into Peter's narrative in a later e-mail:

"Peter' came from an area in [the Caribbean] and my husband was born in an area [in the Caribbean]. To this end I found myself closely associated to Peter by virtue of what I perceived to be his location.

There was a point where it was thought that I had read on and I hadn't, which made me realize that I was bringing my husband's experience of serial migration 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." [25]

A5's recontextualization seemed to open possibilities for other members of the group to position themselves as experts on families that allowed them to draw parallels between Caribbean families and white British families. A7, for example, suggested that this reminded her of 1950s conversations with her father, who would say things like "sit up straight," so that Peter's report that his father was a disciplinarian and strict was, at least partly, generational [A4]. [26]

A third theme, generating difference within the group was to do with the methodological and theoretical commitments brought by members of the group. In particular, in lines 14 and 15, the group focused on the word "disciplinarian" used by Peter to refer to his father. 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. 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. From her experience of conversation analysis, A4 thought that the comment "made sure I knew how to use my knife and fork properly" was likely to lead to a "three-part list," which is, a rhetorically powerful, persuasive discursive device (JEFFERSON, 1990; POTTER, 1996) and was likely to indicate that more severe examples of discipline would follow. 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 that there would be increasingly severe examples of discipline. [27]

For lines 15-18 the group agreed that, in the context of Peter's childhood in the Caribbean, discipline around table manners and dress was indeed "typical" and everyday so that disciplinarian here meant order, not punishment [A5]. Although Peter was likely to have meant the term "strict upbringing" positively [A2], for some the term also implied distance and some difficulty in the father-son relationship particularly because Peter did not tell us anything further about the relationship at this point. In particular, A6 who is trained in analyzing adult attachment interviews, suggested that, although no formal attachment interview had been undertaken, Peter's account up until this point could tentatively be seen as consistent with an emotionally avoidant attachment style (DALLOS, DENMAN, STEDMON & SMART, 2012). She pointed out that Peter was precise about time and place elsewhere in his account but vague in his memory of his mother's leaving, "I haven't got much recollection of that ermm." He also seemed to trail off in his account, something that she explained is common in avoidant attachment patterns. For example, she considered that the disjunction between the strong word "disciplinarian" and the examples in lines 15-17 and then the use of the less strong "strict," indicated this. [28]

Peter's assertion that "I haven't got much recollection of that ..." (lines 10-11) was a point that generated discussion. A1 reflected that mentioning in an absolute way that he *cannot* recollect or narrate his mother's leaving may indicate that he was aware of other, more common, narratives where a mother's departure is a pivotal point in a story about serial migration and pre-empting questions expecting him to comment on this. There was general agreement that Peter's account suggested that he had experienced no sense of abandonment in his mother leaving—something that we had surmised from the tone of the first few lines. We reflected that Peter appeared to be defending against the inference that being apart from his mother had been problematic. We thought that he was likely to have encountered such assumptions in the UK, where, from the time of his migration to the present time, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of the

co-residence of mother and child. We noted that his extended family is likely to have decentered the importance of his mother's absence. [29]

In terms of how the group analysis has fed into the wider analysis of the interview, one advantage of working in the way described above is that it reminded us of the provisionality of interpretations and made us less inclined to make interpretations without spelling out their epistemological foundations. Group working 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. The case that Peter makes, that a loving mother can leave her children and that children can thrive in such circumstances, is particularly illuminating for considering how group analysis can help researchers nuance their interpretations and not foreclose possibilities.

"I think it really shows the danger of putting your own preconceptions on somebody else's narrative actually and why a group narrative is *really* the thing to do because it takes you out of your own position. It challenges your position" (A5). [30]

The group analysis proved to be very labor intensive work. We had scheduled two hours for the session and, in keeping with work that focuses on openings and first lines, it took longer to do the analysis than we had expected; the first six lines took more than an hour. Nonetheless, A6 felt that the process of doing the group analysis had allowed her to see how she might be able to benefit from doing narrative analysis. "I understand it much better. It's something I dismissed because it takes too long ... but now I can see ways I can use it." [31]

## **6. Contingent Consensus: Differences of Positioning, Interpretation and Methodological Commitment in E-Mailed Exchanges**

ANDREWS (2013, p.205) 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." [32]

We found that an advantage of group work is that it pushed us to unpick assumptions which over-familiarity might otherwise leave unchallenged. Further, group analysis facilitated the unraveling of the complex interaction between researchers' methodological approaches, academic positions and experiential resources. A benefit of analysis across research groups was that it made those experiential resources explicit in ways that are not always apparent when researchers work alone or in familiar teams. In DENZIN's (1994) terms, it made the "art of interpretation" more explicit than is generally the case. [33]

The fruitfulness of the joint analysis led us to interrogate the process and to decide to write an article on the process. In its turn, this second process that was conducted by e-mail, illuminated the ways in which face-to-face consensus-building silences some views and positioning and so is emotionally marked for

some participants in different ways. It helps to add substance to understandings of the dynamics at play when participants in a face-to-face interaction do not verbally orient to particular issues and so do not make them open to scrutiny and analysis. It also helps to clarify the ways in which research issues continue to be considered by researchers after their first analyses of them so that they make new sense of their first analyses (CAHILL, 2009). [34]

The multiple e-mailed exchanges in the process of writing up the article for publication unsettled notions of easy consensus and illuminated the ways in which such settlements are contingent and the process more emotionally difficult than was immediately apparent, partly because group analysis is likely to result in a hybrid of theoretically-informed interpretations (SMITHSON et al., 2015). Once members of the group were on their own and away from the laughter and easy camaraderie established in the group, they returned to their own ways of working within their research commitments as well as their epistemological and disciplinary positions. They may also have reflected on their own families, parenting philosophies and gendered divisions of domestic labor, experiences of being migrant to the UK and of belonging to a generation in particular cultures where strong discipline was expected. A4, for example, mused on the validity of using her own experience to interpret data and on how working in the group encouraged her to reflect on the bases of her assumptions.

"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... At the same time it was interesting to hear the views of other group members who highlighted that ... these are also things that are valued more broadly in UK cultures. ... 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." [35]

This comment arose because A4's background in conversation analysis eschews the focus on personal experiences in analysis, while reflexivity is more acceptable within some qualitative traditions, like feminist approaches and narrative analysis which were invoked in the group. Since each person brings their background of analysis and engagement with the substantive issues, it is unsurprising that they find different issues salient and challenging, taking away different new ideas in the process. A4 has developed the notion of "border crossing" to describe how researchers doing joint work retain distinct traditions and rules of textual interpretation. She considered that there are epistemological incompatibilities between narrative research and conversation analysis that cannot be overridden because they draw on different understandings of the nature of text, interaction, knowledge and subjectivity. In particular, she suggested that the group analysis showed that there "were more attributions of the participants' emotions and inner states than I would be used to in a DA [discourse analysis] or CA [conversation analysis], that's a big difference." [36]

Power dynamics, often unacknowledged, inevitably enter into the analytic/epistemological approaches that are brought to bear on group analysis (e.g.,

TURNER & WEBB, 2012). Group analysis has contrary potentialities (FINE, 1994; HAMPSHIRE et al., 2014). Some group members may feel more confident in sharing their views because of their professional or academic positions (whether they are a professor or a PhD student, for example), or because they are more experienced in doing analysis. Tracking how group dynamics shape analyses helps establish how "shared" assumptions are arrived at and how differential positioning affects analytic insights (FROGETT & WENGRAF, 2004). The process of conducting the above analyses showed that some interpretations were suppressed during the workshop in favor of working toward consensus and that power relations are inextricably linked to whether or not researchers voiced particular viewpoints. It is important therefore to attend to how the group moderates itself, both for ethical reasons and also to understand the processes whereby groups generate interpretations. Thus, the ways in which group analysis enables knowledge sharing (WANG & NOE, 2010) can be beneficial to qualitative analysis. However, the notion that group analysis per se reduces inequalities within research teams is overly simplistic. It became clear in the writing of the article that members of the group sometimes disagreed with particular comments and had not said so at the time, with the result that the analysis was based on less of a consensus than initially appeared. [37]

In keeping with the literature on group analysis we found the group narrative analysis fruitful in building research skills and deepening creative analysis, including of social differences. It increased the transparency and scrutiny of the work. However, the analysis was contingent on the prior analytic perspectives that researchers brought to the analysis and on unacknowledged power relations. The outcomes of the analysis were inextricably linked with the people who constitute the group. [38]

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