

Challenges in choosing research methodologies as a novice researcher

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Abstract

Evidence of successful parenting by teenagers, which challenges dominant narratives of social exclusion and pathology, inspired me to explore influences on pregnancy choices for young women who had an abortion and then became a parent in their teenage years. Exploring methodological challenges provided an insightful approach to finding my methodology. My 'challenges' were fivefold: articulating my motivations, locating these in a research paradigm, identifying epistemological and ontological ideologies, finding a methodological framework and accepting the chosen methodology as credible. I have a feminist aim, wishing to amplify young mother's voices in the debate. Critical theory articulates my approach: exposing assumptions and exploring how young women grapple with societal constraints; and the work of Foucault explores influence and power in relationships. Drawing on ideas from social constructionism and hermeneutics I feel knowledge is co-created, and historically and culturally located. I have decided on narrative inquiry as my framework, using it in tandem with the Listening Guide as analysis tool. From a feminist standpoint, the researcher traces voice across the story reading for plot; reader response; the voice of 'I' and relationships and networks. Being happy with the methodology is the hardest challenge, it may evolve. However the Listening Guide is a 'guide' only and can be adapted to researcher's need.

Introduction

Identifying and constructing my methodology for a PhD research project has been a long and continuing journey as my knowledge expands, reading broadens, and thinking evolves. There have been four main challenges in uncovering a credible methodology for this research: exploring what has brought me to this particular piece of research, locating these motivations in a research paradigm, identifying my ontological and epistemological ideologies, and identifying an appropriate framework for the research.

Over the past 13 years I have been closely involved in the teenage pregnancy prevention agenda as a nurse practitioner in an adolescent health service in Hackney, East London. Hackney historically has had higher than average teenage pregnancy rates, yet through partnership-working across agencies, a focus on sex and relationship education in schools, and supporting creative interventions such as outreach work with youth organisations, the number of teenage pregnancies in Hackney has dramatically declined during this time. The under-18 conception rate for

2011 in Hackney and the City was 30.7 per thousand females aged 15-17 years. A reduction of 60.2% was observed compared with the 1998 baseline (preceding the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). One hundred and twenty eight conceptions were recorded during 2011, compared with two hundred and seventy three in 1998 (Kelly, 2013).

Contrary to prevailing thought and theory however, I have met many successful and happy teenage parents and have become increasingly uncomfortable with the risk discourse surrounding young parenthood. These young parents had struggled against the expectations and judgments of organisations and professionals who had normalised teenage pregnancy and parenting as negative and irresponsible. I observed how dominant discourses of the family were utilised to produce pathologised readings of how young people start families; with the expectation that a two-parent family is created after completing education and both parents being established in work. These readings lead to a risk discourse over which the collective exercise vigilance and management (Macleod and Durrheim, 2002). In addition, descriptions of constantly attentive and protective mothers who provide nurturance and unconditional love to their infants have traditionally dominated discourses of motherhood and have a powerful influence on professional practice. Generally there is a lack of critical exploration of these dominant motherhood discourses (Fowler and Lee, 2004). Development of maternal competence models frequently presents the process of becoming a mother in ways that suggest a consistent generalised outcome for all women. Such discourses can potentially silence and pathologise some women who may not fulfil this 'ideal'.

My tentative research question came out of an audit to examine the effectiveness of an assertive outreach model to reduce repeat teenage pregnancies. From this audit I became intrigued by a small group of young women who had an abortion yet became a parent within two years. According to the teenage pregnancy strategy these were the 'hard to reach' young women who despite assertive outreach became pregnant again. In addition they confounded general research that shows young women who have education and career aspirations tend to have an abortion when unexpectedly pregnant in their teenage years whereas those who may not have the same aspirations choose parenthood (Arai, 2003; Aldred and David, 2010).

Knowing yourself: Critical theory, Foucault and Feminism

The first major challenge in establishing a methodology for this research was to explore my own motivations to do this particular piece of research and to locate these motivations in a research paradigm. In the light of a decade of overt strategy, seeking in essence to control teenage motherhood, I planned to explore how popular narratives might influence pregnancy decisions as revealed in young women's stories of power relations. After much reading

and reflection fixing a methodological approach proved difficult. Philosophical theories are constantly changing and build on (whether critical or in agreement) what has gone before, yet we are required to name the tradition in which we place our research in an ever-changing landscape. Having said this, after time and reflection, some consistencies appeared in methodological approaches that articulated my research aims. Drawing them together, overlap and complementary variance is apparent.

I was concerned with issues of power and injustice and exploring the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, gender, ideologies, discourse, education, religion, and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to create a social 'norm'. Motherhood appears not to be considered as a valued contribution to society, as mothers are encouraged back into work or to have a non-governmental source of income; teenagers are charged with being troublesome and unfocused. To be a young mother brings judgment in the form of accusations of being welfare dependent, perpetuating a poverty cycle and poor parents. This context appeared particularly relevant to critical theory, feminism and Foucault's exploration of power and these perspectives are resonant in explaining the choices of individuals in the context of young motherhood. It calls into question the status quo and advocates for the marginalised in the context of poor social opportunities and role models, a lack of education and career pathways, poor health, and risk through gang involvement and crime. Parenting in the teenage years may be a reasonable choice in the absence of other pathways available, and to avoid morbidity and mortality incurred by involvement in risky lifestyles.

Often linked to feminist theory, critical theory is concerned with empowering human beings to grapple with the constraints placed on them by ethnicity, class and gender, and exposing the assumptions of existing research orientation (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). Critical theory highlights ways in which participants come to terms with, and/or struggle against, cultural norms that dominate them. They have a dynamic view of reality: people's actions are shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values, and encourage questioning of accepted norms.

Critical theorists seek new ways of researching and analysing the construction of individuals. A critical theory approach to my work would highlight how young women interact with, assimilate and/or contest the constraints on their lives. The discourses in current western society regarding teenage pregnancy and parenthood tend to follow the 'social exclusion' or the 'drain on public resources' agenda. The social exclusion definition sees the teenage pregnancy pathway as placing teenage mothers outside of society's norms, at a social disadvantage and prevented from fully participating in the economic, social and political life of society. The 'drain on public resources' view claims that most of the costs of teen childbearing are associated with negative consequences for the children of teen mothers, including increased costs for health care, foster care, incarceration, and lost

tax revenue. Both these accounts of teenage parenthood have been convincingly challenged (SmithBattle, 2000; Arai, 2003; Duncan et al., 2010).

Foucault's work exploring power in society is also pertinent for the purposes of my research. I planned to explore the power dynamics in young women's pregnancy decisions. Foucault was interested in power in every day interactions 'at its extremities': observing how power is devolved from government, to local authorities, to professionals, to social networks, and finally to self - how we articulate, discipline and judge ourselves. He saw power as not necessarily repressive, but that the 'gaze' and 'surveillance' of authorities can be turned on the self (Foucault, 1980; Henderson et al., 2010). This line of power can create biased categories of what is 'normal'. Although some criticise Foucault's theories for lack of optimism and for offering little viable discourse or practical guidance in terms of achieving a counter discourse (Cheek and Porter, 1997), his approach does reflect how popular narratives, which can permeate attitudes at all levels, might influence personal decisions. Do young women's narratives internalise and reflect dominant discourses? Do the opinions and influence of professionals, family and friends impinge on decision-making, and do the young women judge themselves by society's dominant narratives? Do the young women show an awareness of these possibilities and do they offer any resistance narrative?

The Foucauldian approach is also pertinent to an exploration of the power dynamics between participant and researcher. The participant is in a powerful position in that they can choose how much and what to reveal to the researcher. The researcher also has power as it is usually the researcher that draws together and sets out the 'findings'. Both the researcher and the young woman telling her story are involved in 'an ethical relationship of mutuality in the social construction of meaning' (Shields, 1996). However the final shift of power between the researcher and the respondent tends to be balanced in favour of the researcher, as the participant usually has little or no control over representation, interpretation, and dissemination (Spivak, 1988; Edwards and Ribbens, 1998).

Where Foucault remains silent on the exploration of gender-based domination and racial elements of power, both crucial elements for research into teenage motherhood in a geographical area with a high black and minority ethnic population, feminism is eloquent. There is plurality in a feminist approach, however there are four main tenets to feminist research that reflect my research aims: a focus on gender relations, the validity of personal experience, rejecting the hierarchy in research method, and emancipation of women as its goal (Hussain and Asad, 2012). Feminism 'challenges' power differentials (and refuses to pathologise the 'other'), where Foucauldian theory suggests 'resistance', and critical theory suggests 'freeing' (Weiler, 1988). The strengths of a feminist approach also present challenges. With feminism it is impossible to create a research process that completely erases the power imbalance in the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Moreover, there is an ongoing tension

between avoiding reductionism and offering a true representation of women's lives. This is due to the research process's need for organising the data and producing an analysis, which is a reductionist process (Acker et al., 1983).

Following feminist aims I was keen to hear the young women's stories: restoring women's voices to the conversation, inspired by the work of Lee SmithBattle (2000, 2008, 2009), Lisa Arai (2003), Ann Phoenix (1996), Arlene Geronimus (1992, 1996) amongst others. Feminist qualitative researchers have highlighted the difficulties involved in hearing and theorising the 'muted voices' of women's lives. This occurs particularly in more private domains such as childbearing and child rearing.

In summary, my motivations are broadly feminist and emancipatory. This chimes historically with a critical theorist perspective where norms and assumptions are questioned, and leads to an exploration of how these norms can affect how people articulate their story. My approach also takes a Foucauldian perspective: examining how the risk discourse of teenage pregnancy has been taken up by government and devolved to professionals, lay people and even self, and how the resulting gaze and surveillance might be reflected in young women's stories.

Exploring ontological and epistemological ideologies: Social constructionism and hermeneutics

The aim of research is to contribute to knowledge so it is vital to achieve clarity on my perception of what knowledge is and how it is created, as it is on these foundations that I build my theory. I feel that knowledge is co-created and that there are no essential truths but multiple truths depending on many factors such as location, relationship between researcher and participant, and time of data gathering. I take a social constructionist approach in that reality is seen as socially defined and refers to the subjective experience of everyday life; how the world is understood rather than to the objective reality of the natural world (Hammersley, 1992). Social constructionists focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. The findings from this type of research will not necessarily put forth universal truths, but give insights and aspects that can add to and inform thinking on a certain topic.

People are not entirely free to construct their own narratives; they can only use the narratives that are available to them within popular understanding. It is through narratives that we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world. It is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities, by being located or locating ourselves (usually subconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making (Somers, 1994). Consequently, in some cases, we can expect to find that confusion, powerlessness, despair, and victimisation are some of the

outcomes of an inability to accommodate certain happenings within a range of available cultural, public and institutional narratives. At the extreme there can be a narrative silence towards experiences. If a young mother does not see examples of her story how then can she know herself? It is through positioning in narratives that women learn to construct who they might be and sometimes also the impossibility of that being (Fowler and Lee, 2004). Criticism of social constructionism has centred on its focus on language as the only raw material for analysis; this ignores 'embodiment' (something that gives concrete form to an abstract idea) which interacts with social discourse; materiality ('things' or sensations) in discourse but not reducible to it, and power, inherent but not always acknowledged in discourse (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999). However there is broad agreement in the primacy of social processes and that language provides much, but not all, raw material. Having a social constructionist approach to knowledge creation and how one can know oneself, and recognising that the participant's ability to narrate their story is dependent on the social narratives that are available, led me to a hermeneutic approach to my data. Hermeneutics purports that the text should be understood within its cultural, historical, and literary context as well as the context of the whole narrative – and that neither the whole text nor any individual part can be understood without reference to each other (SmithBattle, 2009).

Hermeneutics, and more latterly feminist research, also recognises the role of the researcher in the creative process bringing together broad and local context, the participant's direct experience as well as the motivations and experience of the researcher. The participant makes choices, sometimes subconscious, about what to emphasise and what to hold back from us depending on a myriad of influences. The researcher is a part of the data collected, consequently there is a need to account for the researcher's role in the work, and to consider the impact on the story told and the interpretation in the light of our own positioning. The researcher's role is to pay attention to what we think this person is trying to tell us within the context of the relationship, the research setting, and a particular location in the social world, rather than making statements about just who this person or voice is (Mauthner and Doucet, 1999; Parry and Mauthner, 2004). These approaches highlight the difference between simply giving someone voice or placing that voice in a framework that points out additional unseen understandings through social, historical and political context.

For this research in particular, teenage pregnancy, or more specifically popular opinion about teenage pregnancy, is rooted in various narratives that have a historical perspective and any research with this group needs to acknowledge, situate and examine these narratives before theorising on findings. For example it is only in recent decades that teenage pregnancy has been perceived as a problem. In fact, rates are at an all-time low - the highest levels were in the 1950s yet did not receive such attention (Luker, 1997). This was probably because most were in the context of

marriage. The decreasing popularity of marriage, and increasing visibility of single parent households, alongside concerns over limited public monies and fear over (mythical) benefit dependency has seen the concern around teenage pregnancy shift from a moral one to a moral-economic one (Duncan et al., 2010). The most recent approach has been a social exclusion argument, suggesting that young parents put themselves at risk of being socially excluded through poorer education and work uptake. Without locating young parenthood in an historical and political context, theorising on current teenage parents' narratives would be poorly grounded.

It seemed that I had quite an eclectic yet complementary selection of ontological and epistemological approaches. Nursing academic, Sally Thorne bemoans an unwarranted attachment to theorising (Thorne, 2011) and suggests that, as a nurse, the motivation to a piece of research will be in the nursing paradigm (the relationship between client, health, environment, and nursing) which uses information from a range of sources and disciplines to inform nursing practice. Perhaps this is why several approaches had resonance for my research, the motivation for which came from a nursing viewpoint. She states that the skilled practice of nursing never locates itself within one domain of explanation, but keeps all options in play. However philosophical tradition is important to nursing research as it helps to deconstruct initial assumptions and scaffold inquiries.

It is viable not to be committed to any one system of philosophy or research yet still to use the broad philosophical tradition to inform our research approach. Whilst there is a long history of philosophy and research, individual researchers have a freedom to choose the methods, techniques and procedures that best meet their needs and purposes. The method ends up being something, which has to be 'painstakingly custom built from other cast offs'; no method was made for this particular job (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012). Consequently the task of the methodology is to explain this fit, and to give a justification for the decisions made.

Finding a framework

Having tentatively established the broad paradigms under which I was approaching my research I had to establish a methodological framework; a framework that reflected my ontological and epistemological approaches. As I was reluctant to fragment immediately and generalise the women's voices I needed to find a methodology that aggregated knowledge without rendering individual cases invisible. This is an approach that Thorne et al (1997) described as reflecting a nursing philosophy where there is a balance between knowledge that is shared by persons in similar situations and knowledge that is particular to the lived experience of an individual person.

The three main methodologies in qualitative research did not seem to be the right fit. They sought to reduce the subject to a cross sectional set of themes or essential truths and, as such, did not suit my feminist hermeneutic

direction of holism and recognising individual stories. Phenomenology has a general philosophical stance that there is essential structure to human experience, grounded social theory assumes there are human social processes beyond individual consciousness which constrain and explain human behaviour, and even ethnography seeks human universals (Thorne et al., 1997).

I wanted an approach that would keep the young women's voices at the fore thus it was evident to me that I would be reporting data in a literary style that would be rich in participant commentary 'restoring women's voices to the conversation' (Dreyfus, 1991; Benner, 1994) and as such I have been led to narrative inquiry or story-telling. According to Frank (2010) people tell stories and narratives are drawn out from analysis. Feminist research has shown that stories recover the 'missing text' of women's lives (Gilligan, 1982) in ways that do justice to women's perspectives and social contexts (Oakley, 1992). Furthermore self-narration offers what Isabel Hofmeyr (1988) calls transitory forms of power; it allows the narrator to relive, control, transform, reimagine events, to reclaim and construct chosen identities, social interactions and communities.

Narrative inquiry - a broad tool

However despite having identified narrative inquiry as the best methodology for my research it was difficult to pin down exactly what it is and how it is used in research. Narrative inquiry is clearly an emerging, evolving and broad tool. Even leading philosophers in narrative inquiry state that it is 'strikingly diverse in the way it's understood' (Squire et al., 2008). There are a range of approaches, emanating from diverse disciplines such as psychology, sociology, medicine, literature and cultural studies. There is no, one, unifying method (Riley and Hawe, 2005). One difficulty seems to be that narrative data can seem to be susceptible to endless interpretation, 'by turns inconsequential and yet deeply meaningful' (Squire et al., 2008). How the narrative is analysed enables different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning to be suggested. Whilst perturbing on the surface this need not necessarily discredit findings and sits well with a social constructionist stance. A social constructionist view does not expect a single interpretation to emerge, it is argued that there are multiple valid interpretations (Freeman, 2003). The hermeneutic circle never closes and the researcher's work is to bring these layers into useful dialogue with each other and consequently to understand more about individual and social change, and to build a credible case for a particular interpretation (Squire et al., 2008).

In fact, social constructionism suggests that the process of composition and configuration is not even completed in the write up but in the reading thereof. For the purpose of this research I am hoping to hear and present personal stories as, in part, bids for representation and power from

the disenfranchised. However, it is vital that there is an audience prepared to hear them if the stories are to achieve currency – and therein is one of the tensions between researchers and policy-makers, where the latter may not wish to hear stories that challenge accepted discourses. Yet as researchers we can hope to build collective identities that may lead, albeit slowly and discontinuously, to cultural shifts and political change (Squire et al., 2008).

How then to use narrative inquiry for my research, exploring influences on pregnancy decision-making for teenage mothers? The researcher could undertake a thematic analysis – what is said rather than how it is said; a structural analysis – examining the way a story is told through the narrative devices that make a story persuasive; an interactional analysis – emphasising the dialogic process between the teller and listener; or a performative analysis – how the narrator engages with the listener through language and gesture. A combination of approaches may be used (Riessman, 2003).

Narrative inquiry encourages the researcher to consider what is in the data and also what is not there, such as missing characters or alternative viewpoints. This makes the systematic coding of data extremely difficult and highlights the importance of a guiding set of analytical principles with which to interrogate the data, ones that reflect the researcher's broader approaches (Rice and Ezzy, 1999). Methods are not neutral – we choose certain methods as they 'fit' our philosophical stance; one cannot separate philosophy from technique.

I have chosen to use the Listening Guide, also called the Voice Centred Relational Method (VCRM) to explore my participants' stories. The Listening Guide was founded by feminist philosophers Gilligan et al (2003) in the psychological tradition and developed by Mauthner and Doucet (2003) from a sociological standpoint. In this approach the researcher hears the woman's story and conducts several readings of her story: for plot and reader response, the voice of I, relationships, cultural and social structures. In this way the listener tunes into the multilayered nature of a narrative rather than fragmenting it, as one might through a coding process. The Listening Guide is not a prescriptive approach to data analysis. The authors advocate for a creative approach with the layered readings as the main approach. It can be used alongside other data analysis methods. Researchers have used the Listening Guide in various ways – some using 'I poems' alone (an element of the reading for the voice of 'I') (Edwards and Weller, 2012), some combining with other methods such as thematic analysis (Balan, 2005).

Firstly the narrative is read for plot - what is this woman choosing to tell me? A focus on the story as a whole reflects a feminist paradigm. Secondly it is read for reader-response. As such I systematically place myself, the researcher, in the research and acknowledge how my interpretation flows from my own personal, cultural and historical experiences. This formally locates the researcher in the process, reflecting a social constructionist, hermeneutic and feminist approach. Throughout the

process the researcher continuously checks and records her own thoughts, emotional and embodied feelings and reactions as part of the data analysis. Grounded in a feminist standpoint this relational practice increases the listener's ability to avoid bias or voicing over the story told with her own reactions (Tolman, 1992).

A reading is then conducted for the voice of 'I'. This gives the opportunity to dwell with the narrator's sense of self, and self in relation to others. It also brings the woman's voice to the fore, again reflecting a feminist approach. 'I' poems can be drawn out by highlighting all 'I' statements, and is a helpful way of distilling the narrator's sense of self. For example a segment of Sandra's (aged 17) 'I' poem expresses her decision to stop contraception:

I came off it
I didn't want to do it no
more
I came off it
I didn't go back
I thought what the point
I've done my GCSEs
I'm a big girl now

I also decided to draw out poems for other protagonists in the young women's stories such as partners, parents, friends, school and social care. I feel it added insight into the perceived importance of a person or institution in a young woman's life – for example all partners had extensive poems. It could also highlight important elements that may get lost in the general narrative. For example Andie (aged 18), originally from the Gambia, loses her sister to circumcision – her sister's poem is only 8 lines long, however this event has had a huge impact on Andie:

My sister passed away
She done her one
She passed away straight away
She died straight away
She was 8
She was like a year older than me
We were meant to do it together
She got her one
She died straight away
She was really young

These poems became an element of the next reading: for relationships or networks of relations. We listen for when, why and how the respondents speak about their interpersonal relationships with partners, relatives, friends and children and the broad social networks in which they live, parent and

attend school/college/work. Are relationships enabling or constraining? This reading reflects Foucault's explorations of power and the relational aspects of feminism. Through the recounting of stories, people reveal what they perceive as the dominant influences that have shaped the course of their lives (Andrews et al., 2004).

For example with first pregnancies parental reactions are very important to the young women:

I crushed certain people's hearts...my mum's thoughts, my mum and dad's thoughts were like, Sandra you need to finish school...I was agreeing with them... (Sandra, aged 17).

and,

She was actually broken hearted because I lied to her that I wasn't having sex and stuff...she took the umbrella and she beat me with the umbrella... (Gloriana, aged 18).

However with time, their boyfriend's opinion becomes more influential, Sandra says to her mum, with the second pregnancy:

me and my baby father we've already spoken about it, I'm going to keep it.

and, the parent-child relationship evolves. Gloriana's parents' reaction is very different the second time:

I don't know if they're going to beat me again...you're a big girl, you don't live here no more, you're a big girl, you do your own decision...

A fourth reading places people within cultural contexts and social structures. How does the narrator position themselves within larger social structures and cultural discourses? How do they speak about themselves in relation to cultural and material structures? For example Sandra articulates the lack of opportunities for young people in her area, reflecting the poor job prospects for young people currently:

I think they (the government) should focus on other things, like opening doors for people to have jobs....opening doors to new things to make younger people, younger baby mothers, teenagers to get involved in. There's nothing for us to be involved in, apart from youth centres, and who wants to really go youth centre?

The dominant discourse of nuclear family is also prevalent in the dreams and aspirations of several of the young mothers interviewed:

Hopefully my future will be the same...keep having kids...hopefully he puts the ring on it... (Sandra)

I keep on saying I want to get engaged, get a ring. But he keeps on saying, yeah, maybe. (Danielle, aged 19)

Mauthner and Doucet (2003) also suggest that other readings can be done according to the research aims. Inspired by the dramatic content of some of my interviews, and being told stories that, although very interesting, appeared to have little to do with the research question, I did a further two readings – for how a story is told and why a particular story is told. I drew on Riessman's (2003) (as described above) and Frank's (2010) typologies for insight into these readings. Arthur Frank explored illness stories and suggested three typologies: chaos: no particular aim to story; restitution: 'I've come through this and I'm ok now'; or quest: 'this is what can be learned from my experience'. For each storyteller there is a specific reason for the telling of their illness story.

Examples of where dramatic tension is created can be found in Andie's description of how her uncle, of whom she's terrified as he's the driving force behind the circumcisions, tracks her down via texts from Africa, at the moment she's sitting down to do a secondary school state examination:

...texting me to say "I know where you are"... "I'm sending someone to get you now".

and in Gloriana's 80 line detailed description of a domestic violence attack by her ex-partner, where she nearly died;

So he strangled me, waited til I turned red yeah, waited til I turned red and then he took his hands off and then he done it again, telling me that I had to say I loved him, if I don't then "I'm going to do it".

Reflecting on why a particular story is told is also insightful. Gloriana's story seemed to be a vehicle for convincing me (and perhaps herself) that she has made the right choice in her baby's father:

He's alright
He's not violent
We have our ups and
downs
He's not violent

For Susannah (aged 17), whose second planned pregnancy has just ended in miscarriage, the telling of her story was a therapeutic opportunity to explore why this had happened:

I noticed I was bleeding again
I got admitted
I got admitted

I was awake
I was just passing clots
I hadn't spoken about it til today

Thus how I approach the analysis of the young mothers' stories will reflect my aim and approach and this is where methodology overlaps with method. Through the Listening Guide layered readings take place and the polyphony within the texts is amplified. It is in this method that my paradigms and approaches become intertwined with method: reflecting feminism, power relations, social constructionism and hermeneutics.

Whilst I have been resistant to reducing the participants' narratives to themes, essential truths or structures – I have struggled with how then to analyse across the narratives. I have come to accept that I will be looking for 'themes' or 'meanings' – not as they emerge independently from the text – but according to the readings of the Listening Guide, exploring difference as well as similarity, and what is not said as well as what is. These readings will enable me to focus on answering my research question: what have been the influencing factors on pregnancy choices as a teenager, through examining what they feel are the important story-lines in their lives, where and how they place themselves in the story, and their stories of resistance and relationship.

Conclusion

I have found the journey in discovering the methodology for this research challenging. However, it is important to note that this journey has not been made alone. The PhD student's supervisors are essential for guidance and support. There are several aspects to a supervisor's role which grow an effective independent researcher: a functional 'project management' role – leading and encouraging the student through the stages of the research project; an 'enculturation' role, where the supervisor(s) suggest avenues for becoming a member of the disciplinary community; a role in encouraging critical thinking through questioning and analysing the student's work; an emancipatory role which encourages the student to question and develop the self; and, finally, there is a development of a quality relationship where the student feels enthused, inspired and cared for (Lee, 2008). My supervisors have fulfilled these roles and have led me to instigate further expert and peer mentorship. Mentoring builds the researcher's competence through sustained support (Byrne and Keefe, 2002). Attendance at specific conferences has been recommended where I have had the opportunity to learn from experts in the field, to develop ideas, and establish networks. I have joined a Study Group on the Listening Guide, which I attend monthly. This group has been invaluable. It was set up in order to explore and develop the Listening Guide and the group engages in debate, gains practical experience of group data analysis and offers ongoing peer support. I have also been working with a Professor in a US University with whom I

made contact via email after reading her work. For the past three years we have been building a table of articles pertaining to teenage parenthood for metasyntesis. As well as exposing me to an unprecedented volume of literature there is scope for joint publication and support to independent publication. Networking is essential to research success. A systematic review of business networking showed that companies who network share risk, obtain access to new markets and technologies, bring products to market more quickly, and pool complementary skills. Those that do not engage in networking limit their knowledge base and reduce their ability to enter into exchange relationships (Pittaway et al., 2004). Whilst describing the business world these outcomes could similarly be applied to the research arena.

I have identified my own motivations to the research, formed an understanding of knowledge and knowledge creation, located this in the research domain, found a framework and a narrative analysis guide. Whilst the journey is summarised here, it has been long and laced with frustration; there is a wealth of philosophical history to explore, and it seems as soon as I identified something that resonated with my standpoint a paper or talk would challenge my thinking. Philosophy of ontology and epistemology can initially seem distanced from, and irrelevant to, the work you wish to undertake, yet exploration of knowledge and knowledge creation forms the foundation on which we build our work. For my research, established frameworks felt ill-fitting for the approach and aim of my work, however narrative inquiry, once found, gave little specific guidance on how to use it for my purpose. The Listening Guide reflects my approaches and gives me a flexible 'how to' I need to apply to the narrative framework. I am encouraged by the authors themselves who stress that the Listening Guide is a 'guide' and can be adapted according to the researcher's need. How we justify this is the key, and this will ultimately be critiqued by the research community, or in the PhD candidate's case, the examiners.

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