Collective Findings, Individual Interpretations: An Illustration of a Pluralistic Approach to Qualitative Data Analysis

NOLLAIG A. FROST,1 AMANDA HOLT,2 PNINA SHINEBOURNE,1 CIGDEM ESIN,3 SEVASTI-MELISSA NOLAS,1 LEILA MEHDIZADEH4 AND BELINDA BROOKS-GORDON5

1Middlesex University, London, UK
2University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, UK
3University of East London, London, UK
4University of Leeds, Leeds, UK
5Birkbeck University of London, London, UK

The establishment of qualitative approaches in the mainstream of psychology research facilitates innovation in their use, both singly and in combination. In this article, we describe a pluralistic qualitative analysis of the transcript of a semi-structured interview on the topic of second-time motherhood using Grounded Theory, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Narrative Analysis, and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. Each approach encapsulates different epistemological assumptions and is employed by a different analyst. We present key collective findings and the different interpretations of these findings by each analyst. We discuss how a pluralistic qualitative approach to data analysis can aid the quest to “know more” about a phenomenon by providing a more holistic, multilayered understanding of data that works across epistemologies.

Keywords: integration; motherhood; pluralism; polyvocal; qualitative analysis

Introduction

As the debates about the place of and competition between different research paradigms recede, researchers are starting to take stock of fundamental issues of mixed method research (Bryman 2006a). These include identifying differences in the meaning of the term “integration” when bringing together different ways of conducting research (e.g., Bryman 2006a; Mason 2006; Moran-Ellis, Alexander, Cronin, Dickinson, Fielding, Stelley & Thomas 2006), gaining multifaceted perspectives of a phenomenon by adopting multimodal approaches (e.g., Dicks, Soyinka & Coffey 2006), and reaching outcomes that are triangulated by combining qualitative methods (e.g., Moran-Ellis et al. 2006).

These issues have led to the recognition of mixed method research as a valuable research strategy with which to examine phenomena from different perspectives. It has
been argued (Kellner 1995, cited in Kincheloe 2001, p. 682) that doing so offers different vantage points with which to view a topic and helps avoid one-sided reductionism. Research approaches are combined for pragmatic as well as eclectic reasons. The pragmatic approach marginalises paradigm differences (e.g., Bryman 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2005), and the eclectic approach (or bricolage) draws on the “best tools available” in the pursuit of the research question (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Kincheloe 2001, 2005). Mixing methods not only refers to the mixing at the level of data (quantitative and qualitative) but also the mixing of realist, interpretative, and constructionist paradigms within qualitative approaches (Moran-Ellis et al. 2006). It is this latter meaning that is implied in our use of the term pluralism.

The use of qualitative approaches to psychological research in the United Kingdom has arguably moved from the margins to the mainstream (Willig & Stainton-Rogers 2008), and there are a number of approaches now available for qualitative research in psychology (Bauer & Gaskell 2000; Denzin & Lincoln 2000, 2005; Smith 2008; Willig 2001). Qualitative researchers work with a range of research methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, visual methods) and data modalities ranging from participant accounts of events and experiences, to visual and audio representations, official documents, and observations of practice (Bauer & Gaskell 2000; Dicks, Soyinka & Coffey 2006). By considering the content and structure of these data modalities, the language used, and the role the researcher plays in the construction of these research artefacts and their interpretation, data are transformed within a theoretical and intersubjective framework that results in the construction of personal and collective perspectives on lived experience and social worlds.

The range of data methods and modalities is now widely accepted, so called “multimethod” or “multimodal” approaches. Less explored is the explicit combination of analytical tools that emerge from different paradigms where ontological and epistemological assumptions often vary. Assumptions about the nature of reality and kind of knowledge being sought influences the type of research questions asked and informs the interrogation of the data. Thus different approaches seek to access different psychosocial artefacts (thoughts, feelings, and actions), for example, and drawing on the analytical approaches used in our project, a description of the event (e.g., Grounded Theory; Glaser & Strauss 1967); the chain of connection between the cognitive, linguistic, affective, and physical states that affects the participant’s perception of the event (e.g., Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; Smith 1996); the way language is used to construct the event (e.g., discourse analysis; Burman & Parker 1993; Potter & Wetherell 1987); or the stories constructed by the participant to give meaning to their experience and construct their identity (e.g., narrative analysis; Riessman 2008). These four approaches can be considered on a continuum from the experiential to the discursive and from the empiricist to the constructionist, with significant partial overlapping (Willig 2008). Overlaps include a shared focus on language (McLeod 2001). More specific common ground can be found across the four approaches. For example, with its focus on content and systematic analysis of a text to identify themes and categories, IPA shares some similarities with grounded theory (Willig 2008). Through its concern with meaning-making IPA also shares strong intellectual links with various approaches to narrative analysis (Crossley 2007; Smith et al. 2009). Although narrative analysis has developed from social constructionism, it has integrated several aspects of phenomenological and discursive psychology (Hiles & Čermák 2008; Smith et al. 2009).

How each approach deals with the role of the research differs. Some approaches to narrative analysis incorporate an explicitly critical approach that regards the researcher
as a co-constructer of the account (e.g., Emerson & Frosh 2004; Mishler 1986); others, such as some approaches to grounded theory, seek to counter subjectivity with the use of a memoing process (e.g., Glaser 1998).

It used to be the case that researchers were advised against pluralism at this level because of issues of incommensurability between different approaches. However, our data will often suggest otherwise. For example, people do not only express themselves through stories or talk in temporal terms about their actions and activities. The variety of human expression cannot always be adequately represented by one method alone, rather it is sometimes better served by different analytical approaches used concurrently. Methodological pluralism can be used to offset the limitations of one method with the strengths of another in analysing complex research problems (Madill & Gough 2008). However, to avoid a tendency toward unreflective eclecticism (i.e., focusing on similarities between methodological approaches rather than differences), Madill and Gough (2008) advise that researchers focus on integration by bringing methods together from at least three different perspectives to explore direct experience, intersubjective understanding, and systems perspectives (Madill & Gough 2008, p. 263).

The pluralistic qualitative approach illustrated in this article emerged in response to discussions about the similarities and differences in different analytical techniques and the possibilities and limitations for analysis each technique offers. In particular, the pluralistic approach was developed as an investigation into the comparative construction of meaning across a range of analytical approaches. We refer to the investigation as the Pluralism in Qualitative Research project (PQR).\(^1\) The PQR project explored whether different analytical approaches would find different meanings in data and whether the application of different techniques would illuminate aspects of the data not available to a single approach used alone (Frost, Nolas, Brooks-Gordon, Esin, Holt, Shinebourne & Mehdizadeh 2010).

Each data analyst was responsible for the employment of one method in the analysis of the same piece of data. The four analyses were then cross-analyzed by three other researchers for common themes and findings. In addition, the data analysts were interviewed individually about their experience of carrying out the analysis. The project gave us the opportunity to explore the analytical process and to gain insight into creative tensions arising from combining epistemologies when analyzing the same piece of data. Whilst there is research that discusses issues of epistemological coherence when working across ontologies and methods (e.g., Edley 2006; Frosh & Emerson 2005), less is said about issues arising from the combining of processes of analysis. The debate is developing through publications such as that of Lyons and Coyle (2006) and this article aims to contribute to that debate by focusing on the ways in which different insights can be brought to pluralistic research.

In this article, we present the process and outcomes of the data analysis. Using the process of analysis carried out by each researcher, we show that several of the findings were separately reached by drawing on the same sections of text to identify the same themes. Different interpretations were made by each analyst according to the data analysis approach they employed. We show the individual interpretations alongside each collective finding. We consider whether this process broadens the usefulness of the research by enabling different audiences to select the meanings and values that are most salient to them.

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Method

Data Collection and Analysis

The data comprised a semi-structured interview transcript taken from a longitudinal study of second-time motherhood. Expectant mothers were interviewed at three monthly intervals over the course of a year to investigate their experiences of becoming a mother to a second child (Frost 2006). The transcript under discussion was gathered from an interview held with a mother we call Karen. The interview had been conducted in a semi-structured “conversation with a purpose” (Kvale 1996) style. Semi-structured interviews are organised around a set of topics the researcher is interested in but are flexible enough to allow participants to develop the conversation in ways that are salient to them. As such, these interviews can result in a range of expressions of accounts of experience (e.g., opinions, emotions, experiences, stories) that are amenable to analysis from a number of different perspectives. We chose to use Karen’s interview for secondary analysis in the PQR project because its content included accounts of past and present experience of first-time motherhood as well as expectations of second-time motherhood. None of the other interviews in the study included the narrator’s reflections and accounts of all three time periods. At the same time, Karen’s eloquence meant that the transcript was rich in coherent and evolving stories, metaphors, and other linguistic features and included thoughtful self-analysis. This made Karen’s interview accessible to different data analysis techniques and so appropriate for use in our aim to explore the pluralistic data analysis process.

The interview was the first to be held with Karen and took place when she was six months pregnant with her second child. It was carried out by the PQR project leader, Nollaig. The Interview Schedule covered aspects of past, present, and anticipated future experiences of motherhood and second-time motherhood. Nollaig aimed to be responsive to the participants in each interview and to develop a rapport that enabled them to speak freely about any aspect of their transition to second-time motherhood.

The interview was audio recorded with the participants’ permission. The recording was transcribed in full by Nollaig to include her words as well as those of the participant. The speech was not “cleaned up” and the insertion of grammar was kept to a minimum in order to minimize the imposition of meaning by the transcriber/interviewer.

Interview Summary

Karen starts her interview by describing the experiences of a friend of hers who had a second child and subsequently developed postnatal depression. Karen does not speak about this for long before starting to describe what it was like to leave her first child at nursery in order to go to work. She describes not wanting to leave her child with people that the child did not know, not believing that anyone else would understand her child or be able to take care of her properly, and tells of her distress when her child develops nappy rash after a day at the nursery.

These accounts are followed by Karen’s description of how she dealt with the nappy rash and the decisions she took about staying at home with her child rather than going to work. She speaks of her belief that she should be the one to get up in the night when her child is crying in pain, rather than expecting her partner to do it.

Karen describes attending a wedding alone and enjoying the opportunity to be without her child. She describes the pressure she feels at being a mother who also works and talks about how pleased she is to have been offered a new job despite having a child and being
pregnant with a second child. She explains that she turned down this job and plans to extend her maternity leave with her second child in order to minimize the anxiety she experienced when she returned to work after having her first child.

Karen describes the trauma of the birth experience with her first child and how she is planning a home birth (instead of a hospital birth) for the birth of her second child. She talks of how she has benefited emotionally, socially, and practically from belonging to a postnatal group and how one group member in particular is supporting her in her second pregnancy.

Throughout her interview Karen refers to differences she experiences between the practical and emotional aspects of motherhood and how she is using her awareness of these to prepare for the experience of second-time motherhood.

To summarise, the experiences that Karen chose to present in this interview centred on events and feelings that she experienced when she became a mother for the first time within the context of taking place when she was six months pregnant with her second child. She described her emotions and attachment to her first baby with descriptions of actual and “metaphorical” events (such as “it was like losing a limb”). She drew comparisons between herself and others throughout the interview.

**Data Analysts**

The data analysts were PhD students from different fields of psychology. Each employed a particular qualitative approach in their doctoral research. Their research topics covered female embodiment, parenting and youth justice, addiction and recovery, and clinical decision making. They had not met each other when they carried out the analyses. The analysts were selected by the lead author who had been acquainted with their research work through their publications and conference presentations. The analysts had already much commercial and academic research experience and had worked with their analytic method on a number of projects prior to their PhD research. They were invited to join the PQR team on the basis of the quality of their research output. Most were at the analytic stage of their PhD work at the time of the PQR analysis.

**Interview Transcript Analysis**

The original transcript was sent to each analyst with instructions to return a written analysis of it by a certain date. Each analyst was responsible for using one method of analysis from grounded theory (GT), interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) and narrative analysis (NA) to interrogate the interview transcript. Beyond this, very little instruction was given and analysts were free to be as flexible in their approach as they chose as long as their analysis remained epistemologically and theoretically anchored to that approach. Analysts were asked to keep a personal reflective journal of the analytic process and to return their completed analysis and journal (if they were happy to do so) by an agreed date.

Researcher impact was examined by conducting individual semi-structured interviews with each analyst after they had submitted the written analysis. The interviews explored the researcher’s experience of carrying out the analysis.

When the completed analyses were received they were cross-analysed by three other members of the PQR team. The analyses were explored for common themes. The impact of the analysts was also investigated by examining language used, relationships with the research artefacts, and structure of the written presentations.
Collective Findings, Individual Interpretations

Initial cross-analysis of the analyses made two contrasting findings. In the main, most of the analysts had separately drawn on the same sections of text to reach several collective findings. We present three of these below (Findings i to iii). As would be expected, interpretations of each finding differed across the techniques and analysts. In contrast to this, however, the analysts drew on different sections of the text to discuss their interpretations of Karen’s accounts of using her experience of becoming a mother to prepare for second-time motherhood (Finding iv). This finding relates to interpretations made about the main topic of the research for which the interview was conducted—the experience of becoming a mother for the second time.

Two techniques (IPA and GT) identified themes as the basis for writing a narrative account of the analysis. The approach to IPA that the analyst in this study used is entirely consistent with that described by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009): “an approach to qualitative, experiential and psychological research which has been informed by concepts and debates from three areas of philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography” (2009, p. 11). The grounded theory analyst adopted an approach that sought overarching themes in the material through processes of reduction and minimisation. The complexity of the material was managed by looking for one overarching, core theme to which the analyst would be able to hang the rest of her findings. Her analysis tends toward summarizing and toward simplification.

The other two techniques were concerned with how language constitutes social and psychological life (Willig 2001) (FDA) and how narratives construct multiple positions of the participant (NA). These were presented as narratives.

Although familiar with both discursive and Foucauldian discourse analysis the analyst chose FDA to analyze this data as she felt that a discourse analysis approach, which pays attention to rather than brackets off wider relations of power such as class and gender, would be a more appropriate analytic framework when analysing talk that concerns particularly gendered and classed experiences such as motherhood. This is not to suggest that applying a more “discursive psychology” method which focuses on the interactional context of the interview would not also yield useful insights.

The narrative analyst adopted an approach that combined analytical models, which focus on content, context, and performance of narratives (Riessman 2008). She used this combined method in a flexible way. There are no strict guidelines for the application of analytical models in narrative analysis. As argued by Riessman (2005), the considerable variation in the definition of narrative analytical methods is often shaped by the discipline of the researcher, research questions, and context. Although it is possible to identify some models, according to Riessman, “in practice, different approaches can be combined; they are not mutually exclusive and, as with all typologies, boundaries are fuzzy” (p. 2).

The narrative analyst worked within a constructivist approach to narratives (Elliott 2005) and made her analytical decisions by following the data closely. Particularly in the analysis of personal stories such as the one analyzed for the PQR project, the analysis must focus on uncovering multiple layers in the construction of meaning in stories. By reading narratives closely, the analyst could find her way toward the multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings in the data. The analyst gave priority to the multiple positions inhabited by Karen in constructing and performing her stories about motherhood. Having considered the specific context of the analytical process, this was the best way to uncover the complex layers in her stories. The analysis also looked that the available discursive, social, and political resources (storylines, grand narratives, discourses) because storytellers
draw on these resources as well as their experiences while constructing and telling their stories (see Riessman 2008; Squire et al. 2008).

The interpretations are presented alongside the collective findings in the analysts’ own words from their written analyses.

We present and label the Findings as:

i. The visceral nature of the mother-child bond for Karen
ii. Karen’s perception of gendered roles of mother and father in caring for the child
iii. Karen’s comparison of herself with others
iv. Karen’s preparations for second-time motherhood

They are represented for ease of reading in Table 1.

The Visceral Nature of the Mother-Child Bond for Karen

All analysts selected the following section of text as an illustration of Karen’s perception of the visceral nature of the bond she had with her first child:

“Well just the initial separation, it’s just weird because you’ve been carrying this child inside you for nine months and then feeding it with your own bodily fluids you know every three or four hours or so, four hours for the last five months. And it’s just like they’re a part of you isn’t it? When you have to try and leave them behind you feel like your arms have been cut off or you’ve got a limb missing.”

Grounded Theory Interpretation

This technique identified a core category of “Emotional Carnage of Becoming a Mother” in the interview transcript, supported by “The Visceral Bond.” The analyst included this section of text as an illustration of Karen’s description of the anxiety provoked by the visceral bond that she feels with her first baby:

“Karen describes the separation from her baby as weird and anxiety provoking and attributes it to the strong attachment resulting from the visceral nature of the bond” (GT analyst).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Interpretation

This technique identified a “Superordinate Theme of Relationships.” The section of text is included as an example of Karen’s relationship with the baby. The analyst describes how Karen uses vivid imagery to convey the intensity of the bond within her relationship with her child:

“Karen describes the bond using vivid bodily images. Following from the intensity of the physical bond between the mother and the child the experience of separation is described as acts of intense violence” (IPA analyst).

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis Interpretation

This technique presented a narrative account of the transformation of the interview transcript data based on the ways in which the analyst perceived that Karen constructed motherhood and fatherhood. Both constructions were part of how she saw herself and her
Table 1
Summary of findings reached by each method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>GT</th>
<th>FDA</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The visceral nature of mother-child bond for Karen</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Emotional carnage of becoming a mother: The Visceral bond</td>
<td>Constructions of motherhood and fatherhood</td>
<td>Layers of Karen’s motherhood narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen’s perception of gendered roles in relation to caring</td>
<td>Making sense/ attempts to explain</td>
<td>Traditional gender roles</td>
<td>Childcare responsibility</td>
<td>Creating positions to balance family life and motherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen’s comparison of herself with others</td>
<td>Comparisons</td>
<td>Emotional carnage of becoming a mother: The invaluable support of pregnant women</td>
<td>Parenting technologies</td>
<td>Constructing her position as a mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen’s preparations for second-time motherhood</td>
<td>Comparisons</td>
<td>Anticipations of second pregnancy: Practical plans &amp; Emotional Anticipations</td>
<td>New spaces for new subjectivity to emerge</td>
<td>Anticipation of and resistance to a depressing second-time motherhood</td>
</tr>
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partner. This section of text was used to illustrate how Karen constructed the special relationship that biological mothers have with their children and how this forms part of her construction of herself as a mother:

“A key aspect of Karen’s construction of herself as a mother was her relationship with her daughter. This is usually constructed as ‘special’ and much is made of the visceral nature of their bond which Karen constructs in terms of it having its origins in their umbilical connection. The construction of a biological link between mother and daughter might explain the anxiety experienced by Karen in terms of her fear of separation from her daughter and her reluctance to leave her with strangers, a fear which Karen refers to frequently in her narrative” (FDA analyst).

**Narrative Analysis Interpretation**

This technique presented a narrative account of the multiple layers constituting the narratives of motherhood in Karen’s interview. The analysis unfolded the multiple positions inhabited by Karen while telling her experiences. This quote was used in the introduction to the notion of Karen’s creation of multiple positions through her recounting of her experiences:

“This is where Karen describes her contradictions as a working mother. What she tells us about is the exhausting and painful experience she had when she left her first baby at the nursery to go back to work. It is one of the typical narratives of motherhood that describe the baby as part of her body” (NA analyst).

**Karen’s Perception of Gendered Roles of Mother and Father**

The following section of text was used by all the analysts to illustrate Karen’s gendered view of the roles of parents:

“Usually if he does know I’ve got a big thing on the next day he will do it but equally more often than not it’s the nature of his job that he has big presentations and meetings and travelling and all that sort of stuff so you know I’m conscious as well you know that he earns much more than I do and so I kind of feel like it’s you know. . . . but yeah having said that he’s very kind, thoughtful and if he knows that I’m exhausted and tired you know then he does do it. He will do it and uncomplainingly really but um I just don’t like asking him all that much.”

**Grounded Theory Interpretation**

This section of text is used as an illustration of a sub-category of “Traditional Gender Roles.”

“When asked how she and her husband go about tending to the baby during the night it becomes apparent that the interviewee is somewhat influenced by traditional gender roles. So she is aware that her husband is the main breadwinner of the family and interestingly she points out twice that he earns more money than her. This seems to be the factor that influences her choice to be main person that looks after the child during the night:

“and then, part of it is I know that Matthew, Matt’s got a job he has to go to the next day and he’s more highly paid than I am so I sort of think I should be the one to get up.” (P18: 100)
This suggests she feels the responsibility lies on her because he works in a more highly paid, demanding job outside the home, therefore he should not be expected to tire himself out during the night.

However, just as she is sensitive to her husband’s needs, the quote below would suggest that he is also considerate of hers:

“he knows that if I’m exhausted and tired you know he does do it. He will do it and uncomplainingly really but um I just don’t like asking him all that much.”

(P35: 182)

Still it seems the interviewee as the mother, who works in a lower paid, less demanding job outside the home, feels a sense of obligation to be the primary caregiver throughout the night” (GT analyst).

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Interpretation**

This section of the text is discussed as an illustration of the superordinate theme of “Making Sense/Attempts to Explain”:

“The mother tries to make sense of her experiences, attempting to explain using common cultural discourses and perhaps re-experiencing and re-interpreting her initial experience in the light of engagement with these discourses. Her gendered explanation is also constructed along biological/social roles, a man can’t be that gentle: He’s a man and he can’t be that gentle with her and that it’s me that I will do it better. That’s what I believe anyway (Laughing) (127–128). It is worth noting that she is laughing as she is speaking, perhaps recognising the social stereotype she is presenting here. However, social stereotyping seems to also be the basis for her other explanatory accounts, for example, explaining why she gets up in the night when the baby is crying: Matt’s got a job he has to go to the next day and he’s more highly paid than I am so I sort of think I should be the one to get up (125–126). The various attempts to explain the situation she is in, using biological/gendered/social stereotypes and through generalisations, locate the experience in social, economic, and cultural circumstances of the mother’s life. At the same time the intensity of the embodied metaphors locate her experience in the personal domain of the physical body and her emotional responses” (IPA analyst).

Here the IPA analyst explores both the experiential dimension and the participant’s attempts to make sense of her experience. The IPA approach acknowledges that the understanding of the event is always mediated by the context of cultural and socio-historical meanings (Eatough & Smith 2008). IPA is also interpretative in recognising the role of the researcher in making sense of the experience of participants. The researcher’s role is inevitably interpretative, as the researcher’s own conceptions are implicated in trying to make sense of the participant’s account. Smith (2008) refers to “double hermeneutics”: the participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world, the researcher is trying to makes sense of the participant making sense of their personal and social world (p. 40).

**Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

This section of text is discussed in relation to Karen’s construction of motherhood (and fatherhood) in relation to childcare responsibility:

“The gendered nature of child-rearing in wider cultural discourses is reflected in Karen’s constructions of motherhood (and fatherhood). It also appears that the gendered
nature of childcare practices is legitimised by Karen by referring to the practice of labour outside the family home. Karen’s partner works full-time and appears to be the ‘main breadwinner’ and, for Karen, this means that it should be her who gets up at night with their daughter:

*Matt’s got a job he has to go to the next day and he’s more highly paid than I am so I sort of think I should be the one to get up.*

Two interesting issues are played out in this extract: first, Karen’s reluctance to ask her partner to provide childcare support may be a product of her position as ‘main child-carer,’ a position which may constrain some practices and open up others. For example, this position means that Karen has to request help from Alice’s father. Similarly, she constructs her partner Matt as:

*quite good if he’s around on a Saturday or a Sunday he’ll take her downstairs and let me have a lie in and do the breakfast and stuff so I can have as long as I can or what have you.*

This suggests that Matt’s ‘thoughtfulness’ is a ‘favour’: relieving her of what should be her duties. However, Karen’s position also means she can perhaps exercise greater agency than Matt in certain arenas, specifically child-care: as the exchange below suggests, Karen has the final say:

*Yes, the buck absolutely stops with me. That’s partly because I’m the one who says what I’m comfortable with.*” (FDA analyst)

**Narrative Analysis Interpretation**

This extract is read as an insight into the ways in which Karen seeks to create positions for herself that enable her to balance family life and motherhood.

“The sections on her family life and her strategies to re-construct a balance in this space is where Karen returns to the ‘good mother and wife’ storyline of modern gender system.

The extract above where she explains their arrangement to get up in the night for the baby is significant in showing her understanding of gendered division of labor at home. Here she moves to another storyline, that is, ‘good wife.’ Her gendered position in her relationship with her partner comes up in various parts of the interview. Her internalization of gender is what constructs her positions and tensions in motherhood. This understanding of gender also shapes her perception of motherhood in which she is the primary carer. Her educational and class background, which was configured by discourses of women’s liberation, does not put her in a position where she can refer directly to gender. Instead she gives excuses, which reveals the gender hierarchies at home. When someone needs a break, it is the man who is the bread winner. Although she has got a well-paid job, she thinks her income is still the supplementary one at home” (NA analyst).

**Karen’s Comparison of Herself with Others**

All the analysts found that Karen valued the support of other people, notably other mothers that she met through a postnatal group, the National Childbirth Trust (NCT). She was able
to turn to the women in the group for advice and support and this was illuminated by all the analysts:

“I have to say it was the best support and I never thought it would be but every expectant mother I’ve met I’ve said PLEASE go to NCT however you find their classes and the breathing it’s not it’s really not the point. The point is you meet people that are going through the same thing as you at the same time and I just thought it was the best support in the world I really did, just to be able to phone somebody up and you know there are people who are far more paranoid even than me and far more relaxed and you can compare experiences and get tips.”

**Grounded Theory Interpretation**

This section of text was used to illustrate the sub-category of “The Invaluable Support of Pregnant Women.” It was used to illustrate the core category of “The Emotional Carnage of Becoming a Mother.”

“For the interviewee the “best support” came from the women’s groups she attended, due to the mutual understanding of what it was like to be pregnant and to have already had children. Even though she did not expand on the words “going through the same thing at the same time” is likely to be the emotional experience of pregnancy as well as the physical.

Karen found that she benefited from the experiences and advice that was shared among the group and even managed to get tips from women that already had children.

It would also seem that the interviewee found it reassuring to know that others existed who were more paranoid and anxious than herself. She found the whole experience of these groups so beneficial that she has made a point of recommending them to every expectant mother she has met” (GT analyst).

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Interpretation**

This section of text was used to illustrate the superordinate theme of “Comparisons.”

“A distinctive feature of the transcript is the extent to which the account is constructed through comparisons. The elaborate network of comparisons constructed in the mother’s narrative points to the contextualised social, economic and cultural circumstances of the mother’s life, perhaps also pointing to a sense of uncertainty about negotiating those circumstances. In comparing her anxious state to other mothers there is the pragmatic side of comparing experiences: There are people who are far more paranoid even than me and far more relaxed and you can compare experiences and get tips (565–566)” (IPA analyst).

**Foucauldian Discourse Analysis Interpretation**

This extract is used to illustrate Karen’s use of parenting technologies to regulate the construction of mothers.

“Karen refers to a number of ‘parenting technologies’ (organizations and practices which serve to regulate parents, especially mothers): books, a Web site, medical technologies, and the NCT. The final parenting technology described by Karen is the NCT, whose classes Karen attended when she was pregnant with her first child and continues to attend during her second pregnancy. Although the NCT has sometimes been accused of performing a particularly elitist (Burtch 1994) and pernicious form of regulation on expectant
mothers, particularly in its promotion of ‘normal’ and ‘natural childbirth’ (Kitzinger 2003), Karen found the NCT very helpful.

Again, one of the things which Karen finds helpful is the access to reassurance provided by the other mothers’ presence to whom she can compare herself, and reassure herself of her own ‘normality,’ since there are some more paranoid, others more relaxed. Karen demonstrates an awareness of the criticisms which have been levelled at NCT in its promotion of natural childbirth, and she appears to negotiate this by emphasising its social aspect and negating the more regulatory aspects, by suggesting that expectant mothers should attend the classes ‘however you find their classes and the breathing it’s not it’s really not the point’ (FDA analyst).

Narrative Analysis Interpretation

This section of text is referred to in order to discuss ways in which Karen might construct her positions as a mother.

“As a well-educated, middle class mother, her analytical lens in telling the stories is informed by various discourses surrounding the modern notion of motherhood. She refers to the scientification of childcare. This discourse creates mothers who read books, and study child care so as to standardise this process. Karen deconstructs the scientification discourse saying that her baby does not fit into the development stages explained in those books, but her development follows another line. Here, her discursive agency speaks. She knows the effects of the discourse on the motherhood, but she does not internalise it fully. I think this an important point in understanding her version of ‘good enough’ motherhood” (NA analyst).

Karen’s Preparations for Second-Time Motherhood

The collective finding that it was important to Karen to share her experiences of motherhood with others became particularly relevant when she was pregnant for the second time, as illustrated in the following section of text which returns us to the topic of second-time motherhood, the interview focus:

“It was in the antenatal class before the arrival of both our first and now we are both pregnant with our second which is quite a relief because none of the others have got pregnant that I know of so I don’t know when I got pregnant she said “Thank goodness I’m not the only one, I feel like I’ve betrayed you all.”

Second-time motherhood was the topic of the research, and Karen and the analysts were aware of this. The cross-analysis found that no one section of text was explicitly referred to by the analysts in discussing and illustrating Karen’s account of preparation for second-time motherhood. Instead it was a finding of all the analysts that she used her experience as a first-time mother to prepare for becoming a mother to a second child by drawing on different sections of the text.

It was notable that IPA and NA gave relatively little attention to this compared to the other techniques. The IPA analyst describes regarding the next stage of the technique in which “the research moves from a close textual reading to a more abstract and critical understanding, examining, and contextualising aspects of the analysis in a social, cultural, and theoretical perspective as evidenced in the existing literature on the topic” as being “beyond the scope of the PQR project.” The NA analyst highlights only one aspect: that Karen is preparing for it to be “depressing.” Both GT and FDA analysts, however, present
their discussion of Karen’s preparations and anticipations of second-time motherhood as summaries of the analysis and the interview transcript.

**Grounded Theory**

The analyst identified a sub-category of “Anticipations for Second Pregnancy” and included dimensions of “Practical Plans” and “Emotional Anticipations” to discuss it.

**Practical Plans.** Obviously the experience of having a child already has allowed the interviewee to start making plans for the second arrival, especially things that she will do differently this time round. Two key points were raised. First, there is the plan to take a longer maternity leave this time “because I only took five and a bit months off with her and it was quite a struggle to get her on a bottle and ready for nursery” (P9: 43). From an emotional point of view the interviewee spoke about it being too early to leave her child with other people; she found it upsetting and anxiety provoking. So the “vague plan” is to “take maternity leave until um next year um and then I’ll sort of reassess” (P9: 41).

The second plan is to have a home birth. It would seem the interviewee was unsatisfied with the hospital care she received.

“The birth the second time around because of . . . . . mainly well partly because of the medical care I received but mainly because of the aftercare which I found horrible.” (P73: 371)

**Emotional Anticipations.** This subcategory relates back to the core category “Emotional Carnage of Becoming a Mother.” The interviewee explained that she feels prepared to some extent on a practical level for the arrival of the second baby. This is in regards to the care routine role as she “knows what to expect”:

so it is possible at least being able to slip into a breast feeding role and nappy changing and all that sort of thing. (P60: 303)

Conversely it is the emotional side to having another child that she clearly focuses on as still a daunting prospect. Interestingly, at one point the interviewee could be heard saying, “I don’t think you can prepare yourself for emotional carnage.” This is probably why she focuses on ‘hope’ and mental expectations as a way of attempting to prepare psychologically for the second baby.

“You know I kind of hope second time around less, somehow less traumatic.” (P26: 138)

Furthermore, it is clear that she is apprehensive about her emotions from the quote “and so I am going on the theory to expect the absolute worst and then I’ll be pleasantly surprised so um . . . .” (P62: 317). This is quite a dramatic anticipation and may have something to do with a book that she had been reading that supposedly presents the worst case scenarios of raising children. She found this book “difficult to stomach” and could not continue reading it as “it made me made me for a while dread the whole second child thing” (P3: 12). Nevertheless, she described herself as under no illusions that raising two children will be more difficult than one.

There is some contradiction in that the couple have a busy schedule before the second arrival, and the interviewee states plainly that “October will be carnage” (P47: 232) in
terms of the emotional and practical impact. Yet when she was asked if she is expecting another “car crash” of emotions she replied “no because I’ve come out the other end so I’m anticipating turbulence, to keep up the transport metaphors” (P67: 341). So it is difficult to determine whether she is expecting the emotional impact of a second child to be just as dramatic, or less so than the first child. It seems that becoming a mother incited mixed emotions in the interviewee and despite speaking at length about the physical, mental, and emotional strains she has not been put off from having another child. In fact, the following quote is a nice summary of these mixed, ambivalent feelings and also the entire interview discussion as a whole:

“I can’t wait well I can well, I’m looking forward to it in the sense that I’m hoping that emotionally speaking it won’t be as traumatic.” (P60: 299)” (GT analyst)

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

This is discussed under the “Comparisons” theme:

“In anticipating the second birth the mother’s reference point is the first time experience: I don’t think you can prepare yourself for emotional carnage. I wasn’t I couldn’t have been first time around and I don’t want to be second time around (439–441). Considering the pragmatic aspect of being prepared, she hopes the second time experience is going to be less traumatic, less like a tidal wave in your life” (IPA analyst).

**Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

This discussion closes the written presentation of the analysis and provides a summary and overview of the interpretation of the interview transcript.

“However, Karen’s expectations of second-time motherhood may have opened up a space for new subjectivities to emerge, ones which may facilitate the exercise of greater agency with which to make more powerful decisions at an institutional level. The knowledge produced by Karen’s first pregnancy and childbirth, particularly from the friend whom she met at the NCT, has enabled her to make significant changes in how her second birth will be performed. Karen has decided to have a home-birth and she has chosen to attend a different hospital (one which is ‘very friendly’ and where the people ‘seem good’), which may be read as Karen’s own act of resistance against the ‘colonisation of medicine.’ Karen’s decision and actions in taking control of the birth of her second child may demonstrate a new degree of personal agency aimed at an institutional level. This may indeed create a disruption of universalised gendered norms of femininity and motherhood and may produce a real shift in inequitable structural practices around work and employment, medicine, and the division of childcare which, up until now, have served only to intensively regulate Karen’s experiences and practices of motherhood. The second time may well be different” (FDA analyst).

**Narrative Analysis**

This analyst briefly discusses the anticipation of a “depressing” second-time motherhood:

“Her narrative about her staying away from the negative/depressing aspects of the motherhood can be read as her response to her emotional ambiguity. In other words, it is
her resistance to prepare herself for a ‘depressing’ second time motherhood, which seems a common storyline” (NA analyst).

Discussion

The findings show the collective nature of many of the key findings reached separately by different analysts using different data analysis techniques. Using different approaches, four analysts identified similar themes and frequently used the same sections of text to draw out these themes. As would be expected, the interpretations differed among techniques and researchers. The findings show that each analyst framed his or her interpretations in a methodologically situated epistemological framework.

By bringing different paradigms that included critical realism, social constructionism, and phenomenology to the study, we sought to find out whether we could come to “know more” about the experiences described in the interview transcript.

The four interpretations of the “Visceral Nature of the Mother-Child Bond” describe the anxiety provoked by Karen’s bond with her child, the descriptions of its intensity using vivid imagery, the way in which the nature of the bond enables Karen to construct herself as a mother, and the contradictions the bond evokes in her as a mother who works. While each one taken alone is useful in providing insight into Karen’s experience of being a mother, taken together allows for a more holistic view of the emotional landscape provoked by the strength of the bond as well as its nature and the purpose it may serve for her.

The gendering of Karen’s experience is identified by each analyst but differently interpreted through the lenses of traditional gendered roles (GT) and making sense/ attempts to explain (IPA), of explaining why Karen feels ultimate responsibility for childcare (FDA) and of describing the positions she perceives as available to her in the modern gender system (NA). This provides a fuller picture that illustrates how different analytical interpretations bring either the structures or agency that Karen perceives as available to her to the fore.

When she compares her self with others the analysts describe how this illustrates the particular support Karen gets from other pregnant women (GT), how she uses others to compare herself to as a mother (IPA), how it provides parenting technologies with which she can regulate herself (FDA), and how she uses the comparisons to identify different ways in which she could construct her self as a mother (NA).

The fourth finding differs to the first three because it uses different sections of text to discuss the collective finding that Karen’s account describes how she uses her experience of first-time motherhood to prepare for second time motherhood. Each interpretation casts a different light. The grounded theory analyst describes how Karen uses her first-time experience to make both practical and emotional plans for the second-time experience. The IPA analyst uses Karen’s anticipations of the birth of the second child as further illustration of ways in which she draws comparisons, this time between the first birth and planned second birth. The Foucauldian discourse analyst draws together several of the themes she has identified to provide an overview and summary of the interpretation she has made of the transcript, so returning to the main topic of the research. The narrative analyst simply refers to Karen’s preparations for second-time motherhood as anticipating it to be depressing.

The notion of using more than one method to find out more about a phenomenon has been used extensively in ethnographic approaches and in disciplines such as anthropology. Researchers use more than one method (often a qualitative one with a quantitative one) to
“triangulate” the outcomes of measurements and observations (Todd, Nerlich, McKeown & Clarke 2004). As qualitative researchers, however, we were not seeking to validate any claim about the experiences but to explore how a pluralistic approach enriched our understanding of it. None of our findings appeared to contradict each other, and so this approach may be understood to have provided us with a way of “generating complementarity” (e.g., Greene, Caracelli & Graham 1989). This has been identified as a form of triangulation that regards different understandings of the phenomenon under study to be reflections of its different aspects (Moran-Ellis et al. 2006). This is an evolution of the traditional approach to triangulation, which uses different methods in order to counter biases and assumptions brought by one method alone and regards differences in findings as examples of flaws or biases in measurement. Qualitative researchers using phenomenological or constructivist paradigms are not in pursuit of a definitive truth about experience and combining the epistemological claims they bring to the analysis instead is regarded as bringing a multidimensional understanding of it.

In addition to epistemological claims made when using more than one method, it is important to distinguish the processes used. The processes are not underpinned by epistemology but are instead a consideration of the practices employed in generating the data outcomes (Moran-Ellis et al. 2006). In our study, methods were used simultaneously and separately by four researchers.

IPA is grounded in the experiential dimension in its concern with a detailed examination of individual lived experience and how people are making sense of that experience. It “endorses social constructionism’s claim that sociocultural and historical processes are central to how we experience and understand our lives, including the stories we tell about these lives” (Eatough & Smith 2008, p. 184). Although recognizing the action-oriented nature of talk, “for IPA the lived life with its many vicissitudes is much more than historically situated linguistic interactions between people” (Eatough & Smith 2008). In this respect IPA can be described as located at the “light end of the social constructionist continuum” (Eatough & Smith 2008) in relation to discourse analysis. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that IPA has a potential for fertile links with “Foucauldian discourse analysis, through shared concerns with how context is implicated in the experiences of the individual. While IPA studies provide a detailed experiential account of the person’s involvement in the context, FDA offers a critical analysis of the structure of the context itself and thus touches on the resources available to the individual in making sense of their experience” (p. 196).

Equal importance is placed on the use and outcomes of each method used and its role in the process. This process is labeled “integration” and contrasts to the process of “combining” methods, for example, by using a qualitative study to identify variables for measurement in a subsequent quantitative study (Moran-Ellis et al. 2006). When combining methods one method is often regarded as an adjunct to the other(s) and commonly it is the qualitative method that is relegated to a secondary position (Moran-Ellis et al. 2006). Moran-Ellis et al. suggest that the placing of equal weighting on each method exemplifies integration but that the highest level of this approach is reached only by adopting it from the inception through to the conclusion of a study.

The process described in this article arose out of the findings and questions raised by an earlier study (Frost 2006), and so the data used for analysis were not originally elicited with the intention of bringing a mixed method approach to it. However, the cross-analysis used to examine the four analyses regarded the contribution of each method as equal. To achieve the level of “integration of methods” a similar project could be carried out that would collect multimodal data to investigate the same phenomenon (e.g., Dicks, Soyinka & Coffey 2006).
The epistemological claims that each analyst brings to the use of her method in this study are transparent throughout the pluralistic process. According to the definitions suggested by Moran-Ellis et al., the next step would be to bring the findings made using these claims together to form an “interpretive integration” of the data (Moran-Ellis et al. 2006, p. 55).

The pluralistic approach enables review, discussion, and consideration of how we reach different understandings as well as what understandings we have formed. On the one hand, it highlights a technical approach to data analysis which puts aside concerns about epistemology and does not treat methods as exclusive to particular perspectives (Bryman 2006). On the other hand, it clarifies the ways in which different readings of data are made and the impact of the researchers and their role on these readings in providing a polyvocal data transformation. We believe that the pluralistic qualitative approach to data analysis will be of use to a wide range of practitioners, policy makers, and academics, each of whom can extract what is of most relevance to them. It makes transparent the pathways data analysis follows and so provides securely robust qualitative findings. As researchers we are keen to examine the extent of this approach and will be investigating the concept and practices of reflexivity and reflexive practice as a next step.

Finally, it seems important not to forget Karen in our evaluation of our approach to trying to find out more about her experiences. We have gained a multilayered understanding of what she told us. It has been reached by careful and detailed examination of her accounts through different frameworks, using different paradigms and from different perspectives. We felt we came to know her better through the process by developing an interpersonal relationship with her in the interview and by exploring her words. Furthermore, we would argue that the resulting construction of “Karen” is perhaps more salient and loyal to her lived identity, as a mother, lover, wife, and professional, than a construction of her derived by using one analytical approach. In tapping into the various dimensions of Karen’s anticipation of second-time motherhood, we do not limit Karen to being a phenomenological, realist, or postmodern subject alone. Instead we offer the possibility of Karen as a phenomenological and realist and postmodern agent depending on her context and situation.

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About the Authors

Nollaig A. Frost is Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Middlesex University. Her research interests centre on pluralism in qualitative research, second-time motherhood, mental health and mental illness, and the student experience.

Amanda Holt is Senior Lecturer in Criminal Psychology at the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth. Her current research projects address child-to-parent abuse, anti-violence strategies in schools and pluralities in qualitative data analysis. She teaches across a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes within criminology, psychology and forensic studies.

Pnina Shinebourne is a senior lecturer at the Department of Psychology, Middlesex University and an honorary research fellow at Birkbeck University of London. Her publications include topics on addiction and recovery, interpretative phenomenological analysis, pluralism in qualitative research, use of visual and poetic methods in qualitative research, applications to clinical practice.
Cigdem Esin is a feminist narrative researcher. She teaches at the University of East London. Her doctoral research at the Centre for Narrative Research was about social construction of sexuality in the narratives of educated young women and their mothers in Turkey. She has been working on research projects on gender, employment, women’s movements and organisations and sexual health of young people in Turkey, Germany and Britain since the mid-1990s. Her research interests focus on the interactions between individual stories and grand socio-cultural narratives, and the interconnections between gender, power and politics within historically specific contexts.

Sevasti-Melissa Nolas is a Lecturer in Psychology at Middlesex University. She studies policy interventions from a social psychological perspective focusing on how psychological and policy knowledge create conditions that enable or inhibit social change, how people make sense of, respond to or initiate change, and the consequences of both top-down and bottom-up approach to social change. She has done research on youth inclusion, early intervention and mental health promotion, psycho-educational and community support groups, and organisational change.

Leila Mehdizadeh is a doctoral research student at the University of Leeds. Her research is focused on the training of doctors to make clinical decisions well. She conducts empirical work using quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate doctors’ perceptions of how they reason about and learn to make clinical decisions, and training interventions that are designed to improve doctors’ clinical decisions.
