Abstract

Many in the postmodern era recognise the subjectivity of the research process and in doing so seek to dismantle the traditional barrier between the researcher and the researched.

How may the standpoint of these research participants be incorporated? How may this be implemented in practical terms? And how may this be analysed without theoretical recourse to essentialism?

This paper proposes an application of journalling to solve these methodological dilemmas drawing on a wider research project that investigates how teaching practitioners conceptualise and enact curriculum policy reform.

Responses to related postmodern methodological dilemmas and solutions will be encouraged from conference discussants.

Postmodern backgrounds to postmodern research journals

In this paper I follow strategic attempts (St. Pierre 2000: 266) to rework feminist research methodologies amidst the crisis of confidence in the postmodern academy.

This reflects my determination to seek emergent possibilities in research methodology in the postmodern era. This is in preference to joining the repertoire of deconstructive techniques or the ranks of those who catalogue the evident impossibility of such a methodological task.
Given my coterminous refusal to relinquish elements of the modern project of feminism, I am not prepared to abandon such methodological challenges.

At the same time this is tempered with the realisation that this can never pretend to be any kind of ‘final’ methodological solution. Indeed, there is no suggestion that this paper solves the postmodern problematic of speaking positions. Apart from anything else the scope of a conference paper does not allow for lengthy consideration of this topic. This paper is about prompting methodological discussion thereby getting on with the work of empirical research within the context of postmodernity.

To activate this determination I puzzle over a series of questions after St Pierre and Pillow (2000: 1-10). Namely, what counts as postmodern data? How can the notion of data be enlarged accordingly? What methods construct such data? How can writing research itself be analysed as data? And more specifically, how may the personal standpoint of both researcher and the research subject be incorporated? And finally, how can this be done within a feminist imperative but beyond the mere valorising of experience?

A related body of literature is reworking representations of knowledge production for postmodern means and these ideas background this paper. For instance from a narrative perspective Kamler (2001) includes the personal knowledge of the research subject but in a more contextualised manner more akin to the postmodern climate. The goal is to understand the research subject rather than to merely romanticise their experiences. Kamler extends the motif of autoethnography by taking the idea of voice to story in deploying the elements of situation, narrative and interpretation.

Then from a postcolonial perspective Johnson with Huggins and Jacobs (2000: 169) advances the technique of a tandem narrative. This method tries to blur the voices of the researcher and the researched in representing themselves as "writers not trying to settle… trying to demonstrate that there is not one story".

In addition, from a postructural perspective Lather (2000: 286) develops the notion of hypertext by devising a layer of subtext underneath the voice of the research subject. This takes the form of a commentary designed to reveal the researchers’ struggles in coming to grips with the data. Additionally, Lather offers the idea of intertext wherein the researcher inserts sections between data analysis with ostensibly different registers. Similarly St. Pierre (2000: 265) uses the concept of asides in data analysis, with St. Pierre defining these devices as extra- ideological spaces intended for the reader as audience.

Whilst all these techniques are concerned to adopt more dialogic and self-conscious approaches better suited to the postmodern environment, my interest in (re)presenting research in this paper concerns the particular methodological potential of journals- in some ways an extension as well as a blurring of traditional field notes. However, in this instance field notes are formally included as results. They are not buried in the research process or relegated to brief comment in a ‘methodological limitations’ section of a final research report.

To answer my research questions I offer an initial review of the literature to substantiate a rationale for such a methodological reworking of journalling as well as discussing indicative excerpts from such a research journal. This constitutes my attempt to reconstruct journals for the postmodern era- an attempt to work at methodology postdeconstruction.

To some extent, journals are associated with written evidence for the postmodern researcher. Typically this format seeks to include the personal knowledge of the research subject which is then structured by the researcher. Two associated uses dominate whereby
past journals are analysed by the researcher or where researchers specifically ask research subjects to keep journals for later submission to the researcher.

More specifically, a review of recent AARE papers extends these applications of the journal to that of a research tool, following the tradition of the reflective practitioner expounded by Fulwiler (1987), Holly (2000) and Boud and Walker (2000). In these cases the journal embodies the researcher’s personal experience of the research process—although confined to the tertiary teaching context. For example, Angwin (2000) utilises journals for postgraduate students researching their workplace practices within the framing of a professional doctorate and to a lesser extent McGill (2000) incorporates anecdotes as a research tool for postgraduate teachers.

In this paper I think about using journals in a similar way. Here the researcher is also the author of the research journal and the journal is treated as data.

Postmodern perspectives for research journals

As implied, this methodological move is grounded in a feminist perspective to theory. This resonates with McNay’s (1992) twin moments of ‘explanation-diagnosis’ and ‘anticipation- utopian’ as characterising the multiplicity of feminisms in the postmodern era. This is further informed by the now common proposition (Coffey and Delamont 2000) that feminist theorising should be useful for feminist politics. Moreover this shares (Acker 1993: 162) the view that feminist research can theorise in politically useful ways, thereby signifying a political act.

So although I heed postmodernity I admit at times to still sharing Tsolidis’ (1996: 271) nostalgia for the uncomplicated confidence of feminist politics of the 1970’s before the postmodern turn- "a sure-footed sense of having something to say and somewhere to go". In addition, I am aligned in part with elements of the feminist standpoint rebuff of poststructural theoretical critique. As Hartsock (1987: 190) says of poststructural theory- "at best [it] manages to criticise... without putting anything in their place" and in terms of research methodology "it cannot accomplish the tasks we have in front of us" (p.198-199).

Yet I rest for now on an undecided response to postmodernity in terms of my feminist perspective of theory. Like Elam (1999: 81-82) I envisage a politics of the undecided and I argue that this is not the same as being apolitical. For instance, Elam justifies this stance saying such a politics seeks to imagine new political spaces whilst remembering past oppressions. Brown (1991 and 1995) is one such a feminist who has endeavoured to create new spaces within what she describes as the third path between modernity and postmodernity. In my estimation, this is neither relativism nor nihilism.

My way of managing this response is to distinguish poststructural theory from postmodernity as an era, claiming this as a recognised (Rheding Jones 1995:492) methodological move. Thus I see postmodernism as a change in cultural conditions rather than a complete break. I assert that this claim allows me to straddle the modern and postmodern eras whereby I can sustain a modern project of feminism in the postmodern era.

At the same time, I interpret this idea of straddling as an active balancing gesture- neither comfortable nor neat. But this is sufficiently convincing for me for this particular research for this particular time. Moreover this temporary closure has the added advantage of potential mobility to future locations- an asset for these postmodern days.

This theoretical framework points to the feminist perspective of methodology that goes onto implement this work. Again this appreciates the multiple expressions of feminist
methodology in the postmodern era. It also acknowledges that it is the degree of feminist consciousness accompanying the research technique that makes it feminist.

This is further embedded in the position that Skeggs (1997: 17) aptly describes- "methodology is itself a theory. It is a theory of methods which informs a range of issues from who to study, how to study, which institutional practices to adopt... how to write and which knowledge to use... to ignore methodology is to assume that knowledge comes from nowhere... to abdicate responsibility".

As such, this paper is based on two related methodological principles. Together, these uphold the more general (Nixon and Comber 1995) methodological goal of 'lesser falsification'.

Firstly, this research is constructed on a desire to explicitly position the work of research as an inherently subjective dynamic. Here I concur with Lather that feminists need to reveal their commitments (1991a and 1986); expose their voice in the research product (1991b: 83-85); and demonstrate how the data has layers of meaning allowing multiple interpretations to emerge (1989: 7; 1991: 101-106; 1992a: 90; 1993: passim and 2000: 288).

At the same time, I contend that this is no more ideological than usual- just more honest. I contend that I am merely substituting politically overt interests over the more typically covert subjectivities. What is more I agree with Harding (1987: 9) that acknowledging the subjectivity of the research process offers data with stronger validity than so-called objectivity.

In this paper I am interested in specifically investigating this methodological tenet as put by Coffey and Delamont (2000: 137) - "understanding how we compose meaning from our data... The articulation of the self in the products of research has also become a matter of critical reflection. Relationships between the research process, the writing process and the self have been reconceptualising the emotional and personal dimensions of research and drawn attention to issues of authorship and authenticity".

I activate this methodological principle by constituting the research journal that I kept during the data gathering process as research data. I offer my personal experience of the research process in detail through what Lather (1993) calls the discourse of emotions. For example my reservations are deliberately included to make available the various ambiguities and contradictions of the knowledge production process. But like Waldby (1995: 23) I suggest that my journal "counts not as a naive, experiential utterance, an expression of an authentic self, but as a... methodological innovation in the way that academic texts can be written".

Nevertheless I reiterate that I do not set out to claim transparent representation- fidelity is not possible under these conditions. Given these enigmatic methodological tensions then, what results in this postmodern space is the construction of rather messy and conflictual accounts.

Most importantly, I believe comparable to Weiler (1995: 6) that while this like other feminist scholarship "is not 'reality'... it is not a myth or poem either". Yates (1987: 13) summarises this point- "it is an approach that explicitly recognizes that facts do not speak for themselves: it recognizes the impact of the researcher on the interpretations that are made... On the other hand it is an approach which considers that the question of the 'validity' of interpretations is not a meaningless issue". Methodologically speaking I try to do this in my journal by unravelling the problem of my research inquiry at the same time as problematising the inquiry itself- much like what Lather (2000) calls weaving back and forth from realistic text to interrogative text.
Secondly, and building on the notion of research as subjective I also (Alcoff and Potter 1993) seek a non-hierarchical position in the research process. I try to emulate this latter principle by trying to avoid objectifying the researched. I am mindful of my responsibility as a feminist in the academy that ensues from this methodological perspective, accepting Roberts' (1988b: 101) reference to research as typically driven by "academic machismo" and Reinharz' (1983: 150) usage of a rape metaphor with a ‘take-and-hit-and-run’ mentality.

At the same time I am not [and can never be] virtuous in my methodological position. The research product is still seeped in the select perspective of the researcher- no matter how alternative is the form.

In addition, these two methodological principles are employed in the course of this research via a feminist interpretation of standpoint methodology. As a methodological framework I regard standpoint methodology as sufficient for my project at this time. It is compatible with the described methodological principles summarised as lesser falsification, exemplified by rejecting recourse to essentialism.

I take this standpoint lens with the understanding that experience is not the grand unmediated original. As Britzman (2000: 39) says of feminist researchers in the postmodern era- they must "be willing to construct more complicated reading practices that move them beyond the myth of literal representations and the deceptive promise that 'the real' is transparent, stable, and just like the representational".

As well as this, although I claim that standpoint methodology is an appropriate framework to guide the conduct of this study for now, I certainly envisage mobility to other ways of thinking about future projects (Harding 1992: 583). Again I argue that this helps to meet the postmodern challenge of pluralism.

This methodology is further filtered through the subsequent framework of a case study method formed by the data gathering method of interviews. Yet again I also (McLeod and Yates 1997: 32) find myself with the dilemma of admitting the limits of my evidence whilst simultaneously proposing its significance. As noted, I do have a definite theoretical interest in offering generalisations on the basis of these interviews (Bachor 2000).

In reply to this conundrum I argue that recognition of the research process as subjective and willingness to qualify my claims works to minimise these concerns. Indeed I argue my journal acts as somewhat of a defence mechanism. It represents my attempt to remain reflexive during the interview process and activates my broad methodological principle of representing the research process as subjective. Weller’s (1995: 26) objective that others recognise the interview accounts as reflective of their time and circumstance is the test of my validity under these slippery circumstances.

Nevertheless, merely employing the interviewing method does not guarantee that my research project is feminist. However, although interviews are not a method unique to feminists, I argue that the interview technique imbued with a feminist perspective has recognised (Johnson 1995) methodological advantages for this type of research. Indeed I believe that the interview method meets my established methodological principle of lesser falsification.

For instance, Reinharz (1992: 87-92) claims interviews have the particular potential to involve the research subject as they give the audience a more direct sense of the subject’s voice. I agree and believe that the interview method is thus compatible with my methodological principle of dismantling the barriers between the researcher and the research subjects.
My methodological principle of recognising the research process as subjective is also relevant. Spender (1983: 27) for instance argues that a feminist approach to the interview process acknowledges that all researchers (including feminists) select interview data to match their theoretical paradigms. Spender (1988: passim) goes on to say that feminists are therefore more likely to regard interviews as a reconstruction of experience where subjects are recognised as modifying their memories to facilitate comprehension for their own sake as well as for the researcher. Likewise, Oakley (1988: passim) asserts that feminists seek to validate the experiences of the interviewee. This thinking influences this methodological reworking of journals.

The conduct of these interviews is enacted by Reinharz’ (1992: 20) advocacy of non-intrusive questioning and active listening. This interactive style of interviewing for Reinharz contrasts with conventional approaches that seek separation between the research participants. Reinharz contends that the feminist interview format can be more intersubjective (p.130) than usually planned. Thus the goal for Reinharz is for the researcher to assist subjects to record experiences through the asking of questions. For example, the focus here in this research is not on getting subjects to answer a set of predetermined interview questions, but on trying to understand the respondent.

Reinharz concludes (p. 212) that feminist researchers should accept responsibility for the personal issues raised by the interview encounter and this is elaborated in my paper. Reay (1995: 205-212) for instance confesses to the invasive tactics that she uses to gain consent from potential candidates. Indeed she feels she has to abandon her feminist research ethics in order to get her data. Her problems with negotiating consent with potential interview candidates resulting in a select and therefore unrepresentative sample is an issue for my interviews as my journal reveals later in this paper.

Feminists critically reflect on the interview process and my journal tries to apply this principle. Greed (1990: 148-154) for instance argues that feminist researchers must respect the trust that interviewees bring to the research project. Her concern is that interviews may appear routine to the researcher, yet go on to raise traumatic experiences for the subject. Taking a feminist approach to interviewing wasn’t straightforward for me either. Greed argues that interviews can open "a Pandora's box" and my journal deals with this type of ethical problem.

Even on a seemingly minor level, interviews raise methodological issues for the feminist researcher. I do not for instance take for granted the methodological implications of tape recording interviews. In spite of my methodological desire to dismantle the barriers with the research subjects, I acknowledge that the tape recorder is a concrete reminder of the detached relationship between the researcher and the research subject. For instance I am sure it restricts communication during the course of interviews. This is even though I advise interviewees that they can turn off the recorder during the interview. Indeed my journal discusses the problems that ensue from even just the placing of the recording microphones and how this can become embroiled in the politics of research.

How feminists use interview material is also relevant. For example, Reinharz asserts that a feminist approach more fully contextualises the circumstances of each interview event and my journal attempts to detail the particular circumstances as they unfold. I claim that a feminist approach to interviewing must be alert to the specific conditions of each interview, recognising the relationship of the participant to the research process. Certainly, I position the interview as a construction where the interview situation influences the comments of the participants. The relationship between the researcher and the research subject is seen as highly relevant.
In relation to this Lather (1986: 166-271) advises feminist researchers to ‘recycle’ transcripts for consideration by a sub-sample of interviewees, so that interview material is treated as emergent and therefore open to debate. This is preferred to foreclosing on the meaning of the interview event thereby facilitating validity. McDonald (1992) also says that interviewees should be permitted to add subsequent comments to the interview transcripts. I extend this principle by constructing verbatim interview transcripts and inviting all interviewees to comment as they see fit.

Weiler (1995: 15) adds to my thinking here about how feminist researchers read interview transcripts. I share her conviction that feminists need to reflect on how they are implicated in the construction of the interview responses and my journal represents my efforts in this regard. In particular I follow her urge not to judge the research subject.

Finally, like Weiler (1995: 25) I acknowledge that interviews move between the construction of the past by the interviewees and their self-conscious attempts to negotiate present meanings. Interviews are accounts that last for the moment- even in the telling, the stories change. They are better referred to as ‘events’. She (1995: 24) comments how interviewees reshape their memories to give meaning to their current life experiences- "constructing a story for the circumstances of the telling". Similarly Angwin et al (1992: 2) describe their interviews as resembling "projected memory... refracted through time... the continual ‘reanchoring’ of self, and the ‘rewriting’ of self".

This is true for me too. In this paper I am also telling a story through my mediation of the research experience.

**Excerpts from a postmodern research journal**

With this background and perspective in mind, I am arguing that the personal experiences of the research process of both the research subject and the researcher may be incorporated in practical terms through the device of a research journal- explicitly elevating it as data.

In this section I show how the various methodological dilemmas of the research project can be rendered visible through a journal thereby activating my research goal of positioning research as subjective. Secondly, I bring the informal voice of the research subject to the research product beyond formal interview transcripts thereby activating my methodological principle of emulating research as non- hierarchical- again presenting this element as legitimate data in of itself.

Due to the limited space of a conference paper I select a few brief excerpts here which I feel especially exhibit the potential of the journal to engage in research with lesser falsification. Other sections of the research journal are added by way of summary so as to clarify the significance of the data.

I present these excerpts interspersed with the ‘usual’ methodological themes as linking comments for intelligibility. I do so in the ‘traditional’ chronological order of research design to amplify this intelligibility.

The first section of my journal that I present formally as data here illustrates how I rely initially on personal contacts to establish the sample for the wider research project. Although utilised as a feminist method (Taylor 2001: 50) my journal points to the difficulty of constructing a suitable sample by this method.

For example in an excerpt I observe-
"One contact qualifies her comments saying that she can only nominate schools, rather than specific primary teachers. She admits she has not realised that it is me who is asking for nominations, adding that she would not have been prepared to suggest nominations to a stranger who does not have my credibility as a feminist researcher. She also says that she has not had time to contact these potential interviewees. This is clearly with the belief that it will be necessary to check with nominees prior to any contact by me".

Elsewhere in the journal I add to these admissions by acknowledging that some of those nominated did not reply, whilst other contacts proposed candidates whom I knew to be antipathetic to these policies- which I then go on to explicitly reject. Having concluded this nomination phase I set about gaining consent.

The purpose of informed consent was not merely to conform to established ethics procedures (such as outlined in Bibby 1997a and 1997b) but to offer potential interviewees a clear account of the research project. Gaining consent from nominated interviewees involved considerable negotiation, as my credibility as a feminist researcher and a primary teacher was of vital concern to these nominated practitioners. My research interest was important but insufficient grounds to guarantee their consent.

Indeed I was not always successful in obtaining consent and my journal discusses these machinations. Some negotiations were protracted affairs and some wanted assurance that their employer would approve their participation in the research project, whilst others did not reply to my requests. In other cases consent was not a problem. As a result, the participants for this study are drawn from the pool of primary practitioners nominated by the feminist network contacts and who subsequently gave their consent to be interviewed. As implied, the interviews were not structured through the use of closed and fixed questions. Emphasis was given to encouraging interviewees to make their own comments around the broad interests of the wider research project. Additional questions were asked to follow up comments offered during the conduct of the interview. Field notes were kept during the interviews to record non-verbal responses, as well as any anecdotal comments made before or after the taping of the session and these all were included in my research journal.

My notes in the journal include the following observations around the actual interview period-

"Maria- ‘warm and quietly spoken, yet her passion about all this is clear’.

Elizabeth- ‘She is very concerned that she will not be identifiable, but is satisfied with my assurances of anonymity. She plies me with homemade shortbread and freshly brewed coffee and wants to show me her extension’.

Caroline- ‘she sounds very enthusiastic. She says she is very happy to co-operate but notes that she might have to struggle with her memory. I found this interview to be great... She is definite in wanting to get across what she sees as her story. I realise when I interview people they all make me feel welcome, for instance by asking me into their homes. Perhaps a school location does not feel safe to speak. Anyway it makes me feel all the more like a voyeur and I always end up by telling interviewees about my personal life and I always bring the biscuits!’.

Jemmima- ‘she says that times have changed and the gender inclusive policy is no longer promoted in primary schools. She asks me a number of questions about my research and the nature of the interview- much more than anyone else so far. Eventually she indicates that if I knew Anita (another interviewee) then I must be OK. Once I seemed to satisfy her questions she is very interested and supportive. On
meeting her I find an intense woman who is very keen to support the research project. She is keen to see the transcript and before the interview commences she wants to know more about my plans for the data. She asks to see the questions first before the taping commences. Jemmima rings me a few days after the interview. She says that the interview left her feeling depressed. She wants to send me her definitions in writing and she says she feels that I should take editorial rights with her transcript, as she believes that she is too poetic and vague. Here is evidence that the interviews opens up a significant space for deep emotions".

Through the described nomination process only one male was identified. This reflects the gender of most practitioners who work in the relevant field and also the feminisation of the primary sector. The nomination of a male provoked a range of methodological dilemmas for me. These eventuated in me excluding his interview from the final transcripts that form the basis of this wider research project. He was the only interviewee who was excluded. These dilemmas are evident in this excerpt from my journal-

"Gavin- ‘he indicates that he is concerned that he might not have much to offer. It is very different interviewing a male. Eye contact has clearly been an important rapport/interviewing technique for me and today I feel uncomfortable. Also missing is the affection and warmth developed in every other interview which I can only describe as sisterly. Prior to the interview Gavin wants procedural issues explained again which I do. A few days after the interview when I sit down to transcribe this interview I find the quality is impossibly poor! This is incredibly frustrating as I can just hear us murmuring. I spend a lot of time with the audio specialists at a university trying to get this repaired. I also spend a huge amount of time trying to labour through barely audible phrases. What I have left is 2 pages of phrases that almost contain a message. On reflection I am positive that the fact that he is male causes this technical downfall. I sat ridiculously far away from him, yet this seems to have been our mutual comfort zone. As well as this I observed, like some of the other interviewees, that he had the microphone pointing away from him. But unlike my response with the others where I just move over to help pin it on I let him fumble and left it unchecked. How I rue the long trip across the city for this interview"

All interviews were transcribed and verified by all interviewees. In this way, they were given the opportunity to read and comment on the transcripts prior to any form of research analysis. I amended all transcripts exactly as requested. Interviewees could put conditions on the use of their transcript. This included erasing whatever sections they chose. If interviewees did not return amended transcripts according to arrangements made with them, this was taken to mean the transcripts represented an accurate record of the interview and this conveyed their continuing consent to participate in the research project.

I have alluded to how validity of this research is dependent on confirmation of transcripts. Yet assumption of their agreement based on an absence of their deliberate rejection is also problematic. Finally, I decided that I do not feel it can be claimed that the transcripts are necessarily discredited by such non-participation as discussed elsewhere (McTaggart, Henry and Johnson 1997).

My journal reflects this verification process too-

"- ‘Anita writes me a note attached to the amended transcripts-
"Dear Evelyn, What a massive task! But from my end it is quite difficult reading my own words back- especially when I'm confronted by such massive slabs of them. I know I'm not really able to edit in such a way that showed me as a terribly articulate person, but a couple of the changes I have suggested just make better sense. I'd be happy to read it again if need be, kind regards Anita".

Her amendments are semantic ones to clarify her thoughts. Some demonstrate that I 'misheard' the intended words- a point worth keeping in mind for other transcripts too. She also removes repetitions/ unnecessary verbiage and completes incomplete thoughts. At times she adds extra phrases to more fully explain ideas that are not self-evident. Some grammar errors are fixed up and some words are underlined as if for later desired emphasis. Where I indicate sections of the tape as inaudible, she supplies missing footage. She notes where on reflection her ideas don’t make sense in her view and has another go at making these points. I am struck by her willingness to have so many incendiary comments on these transcripts. Of all my interviewees, in some ways, she is the most vulnerable in her current position. She is also probably the most identifiable- the one with the most to lose by participation unless I am very careful to protect her identity. And yet, in spite of being confronted by her 'evidence' she is the first to come back to me with continued consent and she has not deleted anything. This sense of trust and thus responsibility is considerable here and my appreciation of her feminist politics is one of awe and admiration. On top of this she clearly spends an enormous time attending to editing- something I did not request and certainly do not expect. She leaves me with the feeling of considerable support'.

- Elizabeth- ‘She says that she has been putting off the task as she is so horrified by her transcript as evidence of her lack of articulation. She wrote me a note as follows-

"Dear Evelyn, This has been a really humbling experience. Am I really as incoherent as this? It has taken me a long time to have enough courage to read through the whole transcript. I would love to take your questions and totally rewrite my answers in a logical, coherent fashion that would be of more use to you and would convey more of what I was trying to say. I don’t think I’ll ever volunteer to be interviewed again. I just don’t believe how awful I sounded. I hope it was of some use to you- I have my doubts. Best of luck with your research. I hope your other respondents were better than me, best wishes, Elizabeth". I find it bad and sad that she finds the interview process so horrible. This must impact on feminist interviewing techniques, as we have a responsibility to her and others like her who become our ‘data’.

- ‘Jemmima- ‘She leaves me a beautiful bunch of flowers and a completely rewritten transcript. Attached is a note- "Dear Evelyn, My sincere apologies for this- and equally my sincere thanks. If it's too much for you to work out, do please phone me, and if you let me know whether your computer is IBM or MAC I'll put it onto disk and send it. I just read a transcript of incoherent, unconnected, ranting drivel. I hope you extrapolated five meaningful bits of information. Hopefully, you gleaned more of value from all your other interview transcripts. My grey matter sounded impeded enough to require a thorough service, rebore and spray painting job!!! All the best! Let me know how you go! Regards. Jemmima". Yet another example of how this process
challenges these people. Here I am reminded by her language of the extent of feeling this research process evidently stirs up'.

- Maria- ‘Her amended transcript is returned with rejecting comments all over it. I feel dismayed. Such comments include "FINAL SUGGESTION- DUMP IT", "What a terrible interview", "How inarticulate", "Can you cut out the ‘ums’" and "CAN’T READ ANYMORE. IT’S TOO BAD". These comments are as if scribbled all over the first few pages. I wonder how to interpret this. Is Maria trying to indicate that she has withdrawn consent or at least that she wants to withdraw consent? Does she want me to meet her again so I can make any amendments she requires? Does she want to reflect on this process or delay a decision? I want the feminist ethic of creating a space for her voice in a spirit of advocacy, but this has to be in a way she finds fair. Perhaps if I tell her again that her transcript would exist, but safely so. I wonder if I have made it abundantly clear to her how I propose to handle the transcripts. I decide this is needed and to give her again the following reassurances-

  - complete confidentiality of participants
  - anonymity of participants
  - use of a composite biography to facilitate confidentiality
  - use of amalgams to facilitate confidentiality
  - pseudonyms for names of interviewees and school locations
  - no transcripts attached to the research report
  - transcripts never to be published without consent
  - transcripts to be kept in my cupboard at home
  - transcripts to be analysed for common trends for discussion in the research report
  - explicit consent for future use other than this research project

When I actually talk to her I reiterate that many interviewees feel confronted by transcripts. She is abrupt saying that is "the worst interview ever"; "you can use it"; "that’s fine"; "if you can make sense of it" and "good luck". I take this as my exit to this dramatic experience of feminist research ethics”.

Postmodern conclusions

These excerpts have addressed what Lather (2000: 297) refers to as the thematics of feminist research in what she calls the ruins of the postmodern era. In my reading, these thematics are expressed both here and in the work of Lather as productive methodological tensions- clearly exemplifying the potential of journals as a research tool.

For example, the way that my journal reveals how I develop a personal relationship in the context of the research project and how I try to deal with the consequences of this web of
relations reflects two of Lather’s thematics that she specifies as ‘displacement’ and ‘rhizomatics’ respectively.

To explain briefly, Lather defines the thematic of displacement [which she also labels as dispersal/ deferral] as the goal of struggling with the research text yet she sets it up as a tension against the negative weight of excessive deconstruction. Lather uses this thematic to encapsulate her paradoxical will to get closer to the unrepresentability of the data. Lather then delineates her rhizomatics thematic as “an open trajectory of loose resonating aggregates as a way to trace how the space of knowledge has changed its contours. Altering the way we organise and communicate knowledge, rhizomatic practices question taxonomies and construct interconnected networks where readers jump from one assemblage to another… all without underlying structures or deeply rooted conventions… invites multiple entry, multiple readings” (p. 303). At the same time this thematic is set up by Lather as a tension against her on-going will to leave future spaces not yet envisioned.

It seems to me that my journal data can be represented according to these thematics too in terms of the human relationships that permeate the research product. The discourse of emotions that I have included here from my research journal defies fixity and yet I seek to position them as fixable enough to be central to the validity of my findings. How I deal with my interviewees as they at various points simultaneously confirm and reject the research experience is crucial to how I defer judgement and yet decide against staying at the point of deconstruction akin to Lather’s displacement thematic. How I try to blend some kind of structure around the emotions aroused by my research work to make some kind of sense of them and yet leave them readable as enigmatic compares with Lather’s rhizomatic thematic also. In this way I argue that it is the mechanism of a research journal that can provide this kind of unstructured structure to ameliorate the challenge of empirical research in the postmodern era.

Another of Lather’s thematic that she refers to as ‘translation as betrayal’ is pertinent too. In this thematic she mobilises the means to stay alert to the danger of the researcher as so-called neutral witness. Lather again sets up a tension here- this time against the essentialist research product as unmediated experience. She summarises this thematic as the "refusal to situate the researcher as the ‘Great Emancipator… use theory to incite questions and context, rather than to interpret, reduce, fix… a kind of presence, and absence, and presence again. The only way to break free is to invent new channels" (p.302).

I propose that the journal excerpts that discuss the methodological dilemmas revolving around Maria can illustrate this thematic, as well as pointing to the journal as one such new channel. Here for instance my journal reveals how I grapple with the goals of feminist politics- my reflections as both an absence and a presence- as I seek to include her standpoint and yet resist from adopting a modernist feminist zeal.

Finally, I claim that Lather’s thematic of feminist research as ‘ruin/ rune’ is exemplified in my journal in the excerpts associated with Gavin’s inclusion and exclusion- for me a personal ruin and yet clear evidence of how research is a rune! Lather clarifies this thematic as "anticlimatic, down to earth” (p. 307) and as in tension with the ultimate responsibility to the research subject rather than the research product. Here my journal wades through highly personalised dilemmas. This is in opposition to research that sets up the construction of the research sample as evidence of the researcher’s authority- whether feminist or otherwise.

The applicability of this research to Lathers’ thematics points to how through these selections I have tried to raise the attendant methodological possibilities of a research journal. In particular, I have suggested ways that a research journal can offer a vehicle for doing research in the postmodern era. In my opinion, it has potential as a method for
portraying the embarrassments, the unsaid and the uncertainties - rather than the fiction of a unitary account. It allows the researcher to foreground rather than hide what I believe are the usual accommodations and complexities.

Comparable to Britzman (2000: 30) I propose that reconstructing journals as "a form of speculative self-critique… to elaborate the theoretical and narrative decisions I made in producing my text" is a methodological way forward that goes beyond the postmodern want for deconstruction. In my mind, this solution begins by identifying our research writing strategies, our theoretical and political commitments and modes of telling- premised on crafting a research journal.

In sum, the scope of this conference paper permits only initial conclusions to be drawn. The postmodern context will always give rise to tentative conclusions, but I think that there is sufficient rationale offered here to warrant follow up. As Coffey and Delamont (2000:125) argue feminist researchers in the postmodern era should actively consider all possible research methods. For me this includes going beyond the trend to deconstructive space. This paper advocates a more vigorous and rigorous engagement with autobiographical research methods that reflect situated emotional representation more appropriate for postmodernity- such as evident in a research journal. This has to occur even though such research is appreciated (Taylor 2001: 52) as very difficult.

To return to my introduction, I have argued that the category of data can and indeed should be enlarged to include that of research reflections and that a research journal can count as data for feminists in the postmodern era. Through the format of a journal writing research can be analysed- and without necessary recourse to essentialism.
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