

## CONSIDERING THE METHODOLOGICAL COMPLEXITIES OF THE INTERVIEW APPROACH WHEN EXPLORING THE WORK OF MOTHERING AND DISABILITY

## DES COMPLEXITÉS METHODOLOGIQUES PROVENANT DES INTERVIEWS EN ABORDANT LE MATERNAGE ET L'HANDICAP

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The experience of disabled or ill mothers is a topic of interest that has been explored in a number of ways and within various research areas, including sociology, education, women/feminist studies, critical disability studies, and science-related fields (e.g., Davidson & Letherby, 2010; Dossa, 2009; Lewiecki-Wilson & Cellio, 2010; Malacrida, 2009; Vannatta, Grollman, Noll, & Gerhardt, 2008). Despite the common themes of *mothering* and *disability*, studies in this area can differ in their methodological approach. Drawing on the methodological inquiries and discussions of researchers such as, Devault (1990), Fontana and Frey (2005), Lincoln (1993), and Roulston, deMarrais, and Lewis (2003), I investigate how and why the interview approach operates well as a method of data collection when exploring the work of mothering and disability through a socio-feminist perspective. During this investigation, I briefly identify the analytical and theoretical issues associated with this topic, and how the interview can mitigate these limitations.

*Keywords: interview, methodology, mothering, disability, illness, work*

Les expériences vécues par les mères malades ou handicapées sont des sujets de recherche investigués dans plusieurs manières, et dans nombreux champs d'études tels que la sociologie, la pédagogie, les études des femmes et les études féministes, les études critiques de l'handicap, et d'autres champs scientifiques (e.g. Davidson & Letherby, 2010 ; Dossa, 2009 ; Lewiecki-Wilson & Cellio, 2010 ; Malacrida, 2009 ; Vannatta, Grollman, Nott & Gerhardt, 2008). Malgré les thèmes récurrents du *maternage* et de l'*handicap*, les études dans ce domaine utilisent diverses approches méthodologiques. À la lumière des enquêtes et discussions méthodologiques d'auteurs tels que Devault (1990), Fontana & Frey (2005), Lincoln (1993) et Roulston, deMarrais & Lewis (2003), j'investiguerai comment, et pourquoi, l'interview lui-même fonctionne bien en tant qu'une méthode de collecte de renseignements quand ceci est utilisé afin d'explorer le travail du maternage et l'handicap d'une perspective socio-féministe. Durant l'enquête de ce thème, j'identifierai les problèmes analytiques et théoriques, et aussi comment le processus de l'interview peut diminuer les fardeaux de ces limitations.

*Mots clés : interview, méthodologie, maternage, handicap, maladie, travail*

The experience of disabled or ill mothers is a topic of interest that has been explored in a number of ways and within various research areas, including sociology, education, women/feminist studies, critical disability studies, and science-related fields (e.g., Davidson & Letherby, 2010; Dossa, 2009; Lewiecki-Wilson & Cellio, 2010; Malacrida, 2009; Vannatta, Grollman, Noll, & Gerhardt, 2008). Through a feminist perspective, Malacrida (2009) investigates the tensions disabled mothers experience when attempting to perform or meet the expectations of ideal motherhood. Similarly, Davison and Letherby (2010) argue that motherhood is often assumed to be a natural and logical role or identity that women acquire at some point during their lives. This assumption stigmatizes and marginalizes women (such those with a disability or illness) who do not aspire to have, or cannot have, children (Davison & Letherby, 2010).

Assuming a more psycho-scientific approach, Vannatta, Grollman, Noll, and Gerhardt's (2008) study evaluates the friendships, social interactions, and peer acceptance in children and adolescents (aged 8 to 16 years) of mothers recently diagnosed with breast cancer. In this case, the experiences of a mother's disability are conceptualized at the individual and interpersonal level (Vannatta et al., 2008). As a critical disability researcher, Dossa (2009) describes the struggles and resistant efforts of racialized disabled women in Canada, with a particular emphasis on the marginalization that they face as mothers. She presents her arguments through "Fahimeh's story", or more specifically, autobiographical accounts of a Muslim woman (Dossa, 2009).

Despite the common themes of "mothering" and "disability", studies can differ in their methodological approach. In studies that assume a medical lens or theoretical framework when exploring disabled mothers, data is usually gathered through quantitative processes, such as in Vannatta et al. (2008), where 75 mothers with breast cancer completed questionnaires, which included questions with research scales of measurement. Conversely, researchers interested in understanding particular phenomena, assessing different language patterns, or exploring subjective experiences (i.e., ethnographies) commonly use qualitative means to gather data, such as in Malacrida (2009), where she conducted interviews with 43 disabled mothers in order to understand how disabled women experience motherhood. The determination of an appropriate method is not an easy task, especially for novice researchers, or when considering the topic of mothers and disability as one that has been, or can be, effectively researched through more than one methodological approach. Interestingly, the researcher is often required to engage in the process of data collection in order to learn about methods of data collection, and to eventually determine the most suitable method. Whether qualitative or quantitative in nature, in order to elicit useful, meaningful, or quality information, the researcher must ensure that the method of data collection is one that compliments study objectives, including the theoretical/conceptual frameworks from which the data is assessed.

Rather than an evaluation of the various methodological approaches that can be assumed when exploring the topic of mothering and disability, I focus on ethnographies, and more specifically, on the interview as a method of data collection. Other than the discernible understanding that interviews usually satisfy ethnographic research, it is important for the researcher to investigate *how* and *why* an interview approach works for a particular research topic, which is the subject of interest in this paper. Drawing on

the methodological inquiries and discussions of researchers such as, Devault (1990), Fontana and Frey (2005), Lincoln (1993), Limerick, Burgess-Limerick, and Grace (1996), and Roulston, deMarras, and Lewis (2003), I investigate how and why the interview approach operates well as a method of data collection when exploring the work of mothering and disability through a socio-feminist perspective (i.e., what is it about the interview that makes this approach of gathering data a suitable choice?). During this investigation, I briefly identify the analytical and theoretical issues associated with this topic, and how the interview can mitigate these limitations. Furthermore, I address some implications of the interview process, or in other words, I question what needs to be considered when a culture of disabled mothers intersects the research process. To illustrate or support my points on the challenges that can surface, I draw on examples from an interview I conducted with a woman (Jane) about her everyday experiences as a disabled mother. The overall objective is to illuminate the methodological complexities (and sometimes subtleties) of the interview approach when used in examining the work of mothering and disability.

### The Research Context: Objectives and Framework

Although this paper does not intend to provide an in-depth exploration of the work of mothering and disability, it seems necessary to present a brief description of the research context nonetheless. The topic is concerned with what happens when the work of mothering and the work of disability intersect, which includes an exploration of the kinds of work disabled mothers complete, as well as how they manage when the two strands of work meet. “Work”, here, can be characterized as the daily routines and responsibilities undertaken for a particular purpose or role (Griffith & Smith, 2005). For mothering, work involves the routines and responsibilities mothers complete for their children, such as helping with homework, making lunches, or volunteering at school. While work for disability includes the activities and practices assumed that promote well-being and functioning, such as attending physician visits or dealing with medicine side-effects. As outlined in the introduction, a number of perspectives (e.g., medical and sociological) can be taken up when addressing the topic of mothering and disability. For example, Malacrida’s (2009) conceptualization of “performing motherhood” outlines the social, physical, emotional, and economic barriers that disabled mothers face in meeting the expectations and responsibilities of mothering and disability. Like Malacrida (2009), I consider theoretical/conceptual frameworks that draw from sociological and feminist perspectives (to satisfy an ethnographic methodology) in my investigation of the interview approach.

### A Description of the Interview Approach

Interviews are commonly known, used, and appreciated for their ability to encourage narratives or story-telling. Through narration, individuals become agents of knowing, or knowledge creators (Lincoln, 1993), and they supplant the production of knowledge that is often textually- and discursively- mediated through those in power, or as Griffith and Smith (2005) would refer to “those” as, “the ruling relations”. Story-telling offers the opportunity to construct ethnographic texts that are distinct from dominant

research paradigms. New modes of narratives and texts can “offer worthwhile and interesting critiques of our own society [and] enlighten us about other human possibilities” (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. ix). Through the interview, an individual can share their personal opinions and viewpoints from which meaning can be drawn, without the intent of representing other individuals.

Of the many types of interviews (see Fontana & Frey, 2005, for a description on types and purposes), those that are semi-structured in nature appear as most suitable for research on mothering and disability, and thus, are the primary focus in this paper. Semi-structured interviews establish a one-to-one (interviewer-interviewee) interaction, where the majority of the narrative or “talk” is expressed by the interviewee. Furthermore, this approach allows for the researcher to prepare a list of themes/topics to consider and sample questions to ask, without restricting researchers to a firm order of questions or direction of discussions (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006; Fontana & Frey, 2005). A semi-structured interview was the approach I assumed for my interview with Jane (a mother with Crohns and Colitis and of four children). Our interview conversations primarily focused on the work she completes for her children as a disabled mother, which included an exploration of how she managed between her responsibilities as a mother and the responsibilities that apply to her illness.

### How and Why the Interview Approach Works

An examination of the everyday experiences of disabled mothers can offer new or diverse insights toward the understanding of mothering and disability. Moreover, an analysis and critique of this topic through various approaches can potentially work to reduce the limitations (or “fill in the gaps”) associated with this research. The interview can provide such opportunities. In this section, along with an identification of some issues that surround this topic, I uncover how and why the interview approach works as a method of data collection when exploring the work of mothering and disability through an ethnographic research approach and socio-feminist framework.

#### *A Voice for Disabled Women*

The interview approach works to create a space for disabled women to express their unique experiences. Devault (1990) argues that language is limited in reflecting the experiences of women: “linguistic forms (the generic “he”, for example) exclude women, and vocabulary and syntax make women deviant” (p. 97). She offers the example of “work”, and how its definition does not consider the unpaid labour women complete in the home (Devault, 1990). Consequently, women do not have access to the “appropriate” words in describing some of their experiences, such as those related to household activities. When provided with limited avenues for expression, women’s voices remain silent. Lincoln (1993) notes that despite an increase in studies on nonmainstream topics and issues, there is still a dearth of research on silenced voices. The excluded voices include those from women, Indigenous peoples, lower class groups, racial and ethnic minorities, and disabled persons. She argues that research continues to represent a discrete ontology, or one way of knowing, which “presumes a singularity of values, views, historicity, and accounts” (Lincoln, 1993, p. 30-31). As such,

those whose voices have been silent continue to be silent, as they are offered limited opportunity and space for expression and empowerment.

Morris (1995) applies this notion of absent voices directly to the experiences of disabled women, including mothers. She criticizes feminist research for the exclusionary practices when it comes to representing disabled women: “Feminist researchers on ‘informal care’ concentrated almost solely on the experience of those women they called ‘carers’, constructing an analysis which allowed no room for the subjective reality of those who are ‘cared for’” (p. 71). In other words, Morris illustrates that the voices of disabled women or mothers are commonly absent, or inferior to those of able-bodied mothers, which is notable not only within feminist research, but also in the everyday practices of women in private and public spaces.

Despite the restrictions of language, Devault (1990) suggests that research grounded in talk offers the opportunity for women to share their speech, and for researchers to examine how women reclaim and redefine language. Lincoln (1993) outlines the responsibility of the researcher: “It will be the inquirer’s role to seek out stories, and to engage in listening both active and patient [as] it sometimes takes an extended amount of time for the silenced to seek and find their voices, and to frame their stories” (p. 34). Similar to Devault (1990) and Lincoln (1993), Morris (1995) suggests that in order to give voice to (silenced) disabled mothers, they must be given the opportunity to participate in conversations, particularly through in-depth interviews.

The interview (specifically those that are semi- and un- structured in nature) is one of the few methods of data collection that allows for disabled women’s talk to flourish. An encouragement of uninterrupted, in-depth conversation is possible through the interview, which allows disabled mothers (rather than submitting to dominant or standard descriptors) the time and space to manipulate, or strategize in their use of language, in order to express everyday experiences. The interview establishes the opportunity for disabled mothers to frame or construct their own stories, to take ownership of their narratives. Through the interview, the researcher is able to acquire an understanding of mothering and disability from the voices that are commonly hidden. The acquisition of absent voices, or the examination of limitations within language, is usually difficult to accomplish with other forms of data collection. For example, Fontana and Frey (2005) allude to the idea that an analysis of gender relations is not entirely possible through structured or formal interviews, as these approaches maintain the researcher/interviewer in complete control of conversations, and thus, keep interviewee voices silenced and language standardized. In addition to other types of interviews, this may also be the case with other methods of data collection, such as observation or surveys.

### *An Encouragement of Non-Medicalized Accounts of Disability*

In creating a space for the voices of disabled women, the interview approach works to allow for the production of non-medicalized narratives. Put differently, another justification for why and how the interview approach works when exploring mothering and disability is that it provides an opportunity for disabled mothers (or disabled persons in general) to transgress or resist the medicalized and quantified accounts of their bodies and minds. According to Sakalys (2000), an individual’s experiences with illness

or disability are often medicalized, and as such, are commonly expressed through scientific and quantified accounts. The identity of *patient* usually dominates, and consequently, a disabled person's experiences are communicated through medical "experts" who usually promote a biomedical understanding of disability.

Similarly, Fitzmaurice (2002) presents her story as a physically disabled mother of a son with an intellectual disability. She identifies that living with a disability is usually represented as a negative life experience. The conceptualizations of disability outlined and critiqued by both Fitzmaurice (2002) and Sakalys (2000) speak to Oliver's (2009) comprehension of the Individual Model of Disability, which represents the common understanding toward disability that critical disability theorists and activists attempt to dismantle. He demonstrates that through this model, disability is situated as a problem within the individual, and as a result, this individual is perceived as tragic, lacking, and in need of treatment or medical care (Oliver, 2009).

In response to the conventional accounts of disability, Sakalys (2000) demonstrates the value of illness narratives through her investigation of "pathographies", which are descriptions of illness through, or as experienced by, ill persons. She illustrates that these autobiographically-based narratives can expose the cultural and social ideologies associated with illness, including the conflicts that exist between patients and practitioners, as well as the political injustices embedded in health care systems (Sakalys, 2000). Fitzmaurice (2002) also speaks about the beneficial role of illness narratives. In her story, Fitzmaurice (2002) situates her disability as a life-enhancing experience, suggesting that being a disabled mother allowed for her intellectually disabled son to gain considerable independence in his life.

An understanding of the cultural and social ideologies that surround disabled mothers is possible through the interview approach, or more specifically, through in-depth, semi- or un- structured interviews with disabled mothers. Kirby et al. (2006) identify semi- and un- structured interviews as less ritualized and interviewer-directed, which can encourage fewer non-medicalized and quantifiable accounts. A mother's personal experiences with disability shared through the interview can shed light on the alternative ways of viewing disability--ways that correspond to the Social Model of Disability, where disabled persons are understood as proud of their identity and as having the right to disclose their subjective experiences (Oliver, 2009). These insights can be difficult to apprehend when the experiences of disabled persons are expressed solely through external persons, or specifically, through healthcare professionals. Moreover, other methods of data collection, such as questionnaires or surveys, are also limited in their ability to acquire autobiographical accounts, and subsequently, to analyze any embedded principles, as these types of data collection are commonly structured in a scientific or quantified manner.

Although the interview provides disabled mothers with an opportunity to talk about their experiences, it is possible that their accounts are as medicalized and quantified as those coming from healthcare professionals, which limits the production of non-medicalized perspectives toward disability. In this case, even though the disabled mother's voice is the one being heard, it is the words or language of healthcare professionals that are being voiced. Through an institutional ethnographic approach, McCoy (2005) reveals the institutional practices that are reflected in the discourses of people living with HIV. In other words, she attempts "to make visible the ways the

institutional order creates the conditions of individual experience” (p. 109). For example, she uncovers that the everyday work individuals complete with respect to treatment for their HIV illness often reflects the professional expertise and organizational features of healthcare settings. Personal dialogues are needed in order to dissect the institutional traces embedded in people’s experiences. Through McCoy’s research, it is notable that interviews can capture personal dialogues. Although a disabled person’s personal narrative may represent a medicalized perspective, the interview presents as an opportunity for researchers “to seek the institutional organization that provides for the sense of the stories being told; that shapes the activities and situations described” (p. 115). Therefore, even though interviewing disabled mothers may not limit the production and sharing of medicalized accounts, it does provide the researcher with an understanding of the practices that can influence personal narratives.

### *The Revelation of Work*

The ability to reveal the everyday work practices of individuals is another reason why and how the interview approach is a suitable method of data collection when exploring mothering and disability. The identification of everyday work processes is a common practice for institutional ethnographers in particular:

The notion of ‘work’ serves as an orienting concept in institutional ethnography, and it is particularly useful both in conducting and analyzing interviews about everyday experience. It directs the researcher’s attention toward precisely that interface between embodied individuals and institutional relations, which is the object of interest in institutional ethnography (McCoy, 2005, p.111).

Devault and McCoy (2005) argue that researchers of institutional ethnography acquaint themselves with the stories of particular individuals in order to identify the institutional conventions that shape the everyday work of these individuals. However, the notion of work is not always explicitly visible in the research on disability, nor in that which examines mothering and disability.

A discussion about everyday work practices seems warranted when exploring the subjective experiences of disabled mothers. In Malacrida’s (2009) research, although she does not explicitly refer to the term “work”, she describes the practices of disabled mothers through her investigation of how they manage and/or overcome barriers to performing motherhood:

Cathy Martin, who has developmental disabilities, described how she deals with her daughter’s schools and homework. ‘I feel the guilt because I can’t do everything other mothers can do, so I have to make up for it by doing other things...[such as] helping out with photocopying’ (p. 109).

This woman’s actions (e.g., photocopying) can be characterized as work that a disabled mother completes for her child, as she feels guilt for not being able to complete intellectually-related types of work (e.g., helping with homework).

To reiterate, the interview encourages extensive talking, reflecting, and listening. As such, it serves as an appropriate method of data collection that can shed light on the everyday work practices of disabled mothers--a seemingly difficult objective to attain through other forms of data collection. As Devault and McCoy (2005) argue, interviews “serve to generate descriptions of what people do in their everyday lives” (p. 21), and the work of mothering and disability is part of the everyday life experiences for disabled mothers. The interview offers a space for disabled women to discuss the work they complete, and through their descriptions of work, women have the opportunity to reclaim and redefine the dominant notion of work, as identified in an earlier discussion on Devault (1990) and her identification of language as limited for women.

### *A Respect for Sensitivity and Emotion*

In addition to the provision of space to uncover silenced voices, reveal non-medicalized accounts, and outline everyday work practices, the ability to address sensitive and emotional subjects is another rationale for the interview as an appropriate method of data collection when exploring mothering and disability. Mothering and disability are both topics that can evoke a variety and fluctuation of emotions, and thus, researchers must address these subjects in a sensitive manner. For example, (disabled and non-disabled) women often feel guilty or self-blame when they cannot meet the expectations of mothering (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Malacrida, 2009).

The interview presents as an approach that can sensitively address mothering and disability. However, Fontana and Frey (2005) argue that not every interview approach can sensitively address certain subjects. They demonstrate that structured and group interviews do not respect the emotionality embedded in some research topics (Fontana & Frey, 2005). For example, in group interviews, there may be one individual who dominates the conversation, or there may not be sufficient opportunity for individual expression (Fontana & Frey, 2005). In support of email interviewing, Meho (2006) suggests that this type of interview approach is considerate of sensitive research topics, illustrating that computer texts and caricatures can be used to share emotions between interviewer and interviewee. However, the emoticons Meho (2006) advocates using also seem insufficient when addressing sensitive issues. According to Fontana and Frey (2005), semi- and un- structured interviews are considered as most effective.

Fontana and Frey (2005) demonstrate that semi- and un- structured interviews work to build a rapport and gain a sense of trust between interviewer and interviewee, which is important to establish when addressing a sensitive research topic. Moreover, as a communicative space, this interview approach allows both interviewer and interviewee to be expressive through multiple means (e.g., verbal and physical). Therefore, the interviewee has the opportunity to communicate in a manner most suitable and sensitive to their needs, which can be considerably helpful for some disabled mothers. For example, an interviewee with a speech impediment due to a stroke paralysis may benefit from using non-verbal gestures (Meho, 2006). According to Devault and McCoy (2005), “[p]eople’s descriptions of their work activities and lived experiences are often produced gesturally as well as verbally, and our understanding of that work and that experience arises for us, in part, through our bodily response to their gestures” (p. 24). In other words, the apprehension of an in-depth understanding toward

disability and mothering is partly dependent on the physicality features of both interviewee and interviewer. Therefore, the (semi- and un- structured) interview creates the opportunity to employ multiple forms of communication, build a positive rapport between interviewer and interviewee, and establish a trusting atmosphere, which help to address mothering and disability in a sensitive manner.

### Considerations when Employing the Interview Approach

Although in the previous section I described how and why the interview approach works when exploring mothering and disability, this does not entail that the researcher will experience a trouble-free interview. A seamless, data-rich interview is often difficult to attain, especially for novice researchers. It is important for the interviewer to anticipate the many directions an interview can assume, as well as the obstacles that can surface along the way. Without such anticipation, interviewers and interviewees can be left vulnerable, unprepared, and apprehensive. This is often the case for interviewers when considering that most researchers do not receive any or adequate formal training in interviewing (Roulston et al., 2003). In this section, I address the challenges that can potentially surface while engaging in the interview process, or in other words, I question what needs to be considered when (or before) a culture of disabled mothers intersects the research process. To illustrate or support my points on the implications to consider, I draw on examples from the interview I conducted with Jane.

#### *Probing*

Probing offers the interviewer an opportunity to discuss a particular topic in greater depth, or to stimulate the interviewee in addressing another or similar subject of interest. The ability to probe appears as a simple technique to employ during the interview, especially when considering that individuals consistently (and unconsciously) probe during most of their daily conversations with others. However, it is possible that these opportunities are missed or ineffectively executed during an interview. In my interview with Jane, there were several occasions where I missed probing opportunities, or asked irrelevant probing questions. For example, I missed the opportunity to probe further into Jane's responsibilities within the family when she discussed her doctor visits:

Jane: It is a big ordeal for me to go there [the doctor]. Sometimes-- because I don't like to go during work, I go on the Saturday...and so I lose out on maybe doing other things that I usually do that week.

Interviewer: What is...what does the treatment involve?

The example above illustrates that I did not choose a probing question relevant to the study objectives. More specifically, rather than asking what her treatment involves (a seemingly medical-based inquiry), a more effective probing question (that compliments a socio-feminist perspective) would have been to inquire about how she manages between the doctor visits and the mothering work she completes on Saturdays. Similarly, in their exploration of students learning how to interview in the

social sciences, Roulston et al. (2003) also recognize the challenges interviewers experience with questioning. They demonstrate that it is often difficult to maintain “the interview flow focused on the research topic and questioning, [for example] phrasing open-ended questions, providing appropriate probes for follow-up on respondents’ accounts, [and] question clarification” (p. 653). Roulston et al. suggest that to help limit the number of missed or ineffective probing situations, interviewers should reflect on their own customs and contributions during everyday conversations and while they practice the interview.

### *The Interview Schedule*

Similar to the majority of researchers, I prepared a schedule before conducting the interview with Jane. The schedule outlined a number of topics or themes that I intended to introduce, as well as a list of sample questions that would stimulate the initiation of particular discussions. However, my conversations with Jane did not always follow the order of the interview schedule. For example, according to the interview schedule, a discussion about helping children with homework was reserved for after a discussion on household duties. However, when asked about dinner routines, Jane incorporated “homework talk” during her discussion on washing the dishes. Consequently, at this time, I found myself flipping back and forth between the pages of the interview schedule, which not only posed as a disruption to the flow of conversation, but also increased my performance anxiety as an interviewer.

In their research on the “good guest” versus the “good interviewer”, Yee and Andrews (2006) experience similar issues. For example, they did not expect that some of their interviewees limited their discussions when a male and female conducted the interviews, compared to only a female interviewer (Yee & Andrews, 2006). Not expecting the unexpected is one of the primary concerns outlined in Roulston et al.’s (2003) observations of amateur student interviewers. In several of their interviews, the type of responses, behaviours, and interruptions often differed from the student interviewers’ prior expectations or plans (Roulston et al., 2006). Therefore, it is essential for interviewers to remain open-minded. To accompany the notion of open-mindedness, the researcher should not confine the possibilities of an interview to the antecedent ideals outlined in a schedule. The schedule should offer considerable flexibility, where it can be revisited or revised after each interview in order to identify what worked well or what failed miserably.

### *The Interviewer-Interviewee Relationship*

The relationship between interviewer and interviewee is an important dynamic to consider when engaging in the interview process. The atmosphere and outcomes of an interview are partly dependent on certain characteristics that are shared (or not shared) between interviewer and interviewee. More specifically, the dynamics between interviewer and interviewee will vary depending on particular factors, such as race, ability, gender, class, and whether or not a relationship between interviewer and interviewee was established prior to the interview (Limerick et al., 1996). In relation to my interview experience, I have known Jane for approximately ten years, as a co-

worker and friend. Furthermore, despite the 20-year age gap, we are both white, middle-class women.

Limerick et al. (1996) highlight the influence of power within the interviewer-interviewee relationship. They suggest that power is often negotiated between interviewee and interviewer throughout the entire interview process (Limerick et al., 1996). For example, although the researcher has “the power to choose who to invite to participate and how to approach the potential participants...the balance in the contact phase of the interview appear[s] to lie with the interviewee” (Limerick et al., 1996, p. 453). Therefore, in accordance with Limerick et al.’s (1996) suggestions, Jane and I negotiated power throughout the interview, and our limited struggles likely stemmed from our commonalities and history.

Despite the familiarities between interviewer and interviewee, moments of disconnect are still possible. A disconnection between interviewer and interviewee can occur when the language and culture of respondents are not understood (Fontana & Frey, 2005). According to Fontana and Frey (2005), “[a]lthough respondents may be fluent in the language of the interviewer, there are different ways of saying things and, indeed, certain things that should not be said at all, linking language and cultural manifestations” (p. 654). In other words, although language of expression is comprehensible, there can be times when jargon or unfamiliar cultural/social references are made. I experienced a kind of temporary disconnection with Jane, as I was unable to relate to the conversations on mothering, or mothering with a disability. Furthermore, although I was able to relate with Jane on the discussions of disability and womanhood (i.e., able to understand the jargon and references part of the culture of disability and womanhood), I could have experienced a disconnection with other interviewees based on the language used to describe disability and/or illness.

Yeatman recommends that in order to address the issue of power within the interview, researchers should recognize that “the relationship between researcher and researched is a political and social relationship” (as cited in Limerick et al., 1996, p. 450). This recognition may help researchers to avoid or limit their discomforts with moments of disconnection, including those based on language. Similarly, Fontana and Frey (2005) remind researchers of the many roles they may assume the interviewer (e.g., academic, teacher, and learner). Interviewees also fluctuate between roles, and therefore, disconnections between interviewer and interviewee are often inevitable. Moments of disconnections should not lead to discouragement, but rather should be viewed as instances that present an opportunity to learn new insights.

### *Censoring: Social Desirability and Emotions*

Responses elicited by interviewees may not always correspond with the opinions of interviewers, and at times, may not even reflect the true beliefs of interviewees. There can be times when the interviewee filters or censors her words. Censoring usually stems from the interviewee’s desire to accommodate certain expectations. The term “social desirability” is used to refer to the disposition of some individuals to bias or distort their responses in an attempt to produce socially desirable traits in hopes of making an admirable effect or reaction (Singleton & Straits, 1999). In relation to my

interview experience, social desirability may have been a potential factor that influenced some of Jane's responses:

Jane: I wanted to give my kids what a mother should be doing, her responsibilities as a mother. I didn't want them to miss out in anyway...Wanting to do things. I just felt that this was my role as a mother, and they deserve to have what most children need. I felt that that was a big part of it, doing the cleaning, the cooking, and so forth.

It is possible that Jane consistently reiterated the work she completes as a mother and downplayed the work she completes toward her disability in order to meet the social conventions of motherhood. She ensured not to present herself as a woman who "struggled" with mothering due to disability, but rather as one who actively participates within, and represents the "mothering discourse" (Griffith & Smith, 2005).

In addition to conforming to mainstream ideals, Miltiades (1998) suggests that social desirability also includes when interviewees "do not report facts or events accurately due to the sensitive or unpleasant nature of the topic" (p. 283). Even though the interview is a method of data collection that respects the sensitivity of research topics (as outlined earlier), some interviewees may still identify a topic as unpleasant or too emotional to discuss. Miltiades provides the example of an Indian family avoiding the subject of madness during an interview, as according to their cultural norms, this topic is not supposed to be discussed with individuals outside the family. Similarly, although Jane did not appear uncomfortable or too emotional during the interview, she still related to disabled mothering as a potentially unpleasant experience, which was particularly notable when she stated that she "tries to keep her health problems as a secret from her children". It is fundamental for the interviewer to recognize this understanding, and thus, to prepare for the expression of diverse belief systems and the censoring of words or ideas.

### *The Transcription Process*

Although a seemingly simple process, transcription is an important and often complex aspect of the interview process. Following the interview with Jane, my first intention was to transcribe the words exactly as they were heard through the recording/playback device. However, when listening to the interview for a second time, I realized that I unconsciously eliminated some words (e.g., "um", "oh", and "you know"). The example below demonstrates the elimination of words (eliminated words italicized):

Jane: Like in the morning, spending more time as to what I want to wear, *you know*, fiddling more with my make-up, my hair, things like that.

The elimination of words can play an important role when exploring mothering and disability through a feminist perspective. Through her quest to preserve women's speech, Devault (1990) suggests transcribing talks with women without smoothing out the sentences that do not make sense, or removing the "ums" and "you knows" that

were recorded. She believes that these words can be telling of how a woman perceives or connects to her experiences:

In many instances, “you know” seems to mean something like, “OK, this next bit is going to be a little tricky. I can’t say it quite right, but help me out a little; meet me halfway and you’ll understand what I mean”...If this is so, it provides a new way to think about these data. “You know” no longer seems like stumbling inarticulateness, but appears to signal a request for understanding (p. 103).

In relation to the interview with Jane, “you know” seems to represent a connection between Jane and I as women. In the transcription example above, Jane’s use of “you know” draws attention to our shared experiences of femininity, or specifically, to our understanding of the work involved to meet the expectations of a celebrated female appearance; to meet the societal conceptions of women’s beauty.

Poland (1995) also takes up the problems associated with transcription, or more specifically, he encourages “[t]he importance of ensuring that interview and focus group transcripts are “verbatim” accounts [or a faithful reproduction] of what transpired” (p. 290). Similarly, Roulston et al. (2003) refer to the term “formulations” to describe the occurrences when interviewers construct or transform interviewee speech during transcription. They suggest that depending on the mode of transcription used, theoretical and empirical implications can thereafter surface, particularly during the analysis process (Roulston et al., 2003). If I had not revisited the recording and transcription following the interview with Jane, the “you knows” would have remained missing, and consequently, I would have been unable to pursue a feminist critique through Devault’s (1990) conceptualization of women and language. Therefore, it is imperative that interviewers review their audio recordings and transcriptions. As Devault (1990) suggests, the messiness of everyday language should be reproduced in order to generate a better understanding of the experiences of individuals through language.

### Conclusions

With a focus on the articulation of personal stories, the interview approach serves as an admirable method of data collection when investigating the work of mothering and disability. It provides disabled mothers with a sensitive and safe space to express (in their own words) their everyday experiences. At the same time, the interview approach allows the researcher to examine the work that disabled mothers complete, as well as the ways in which discourse can be institutionally-mediated. Although a suitable approach, the researcher should not overlook the methodological implications of the interview. Through the interview with Jane, I noted the following challenges: missing the opportunities to probe, or probing ineffectively; limitations of the interview schedule design; a desire to explain versus understand the everyday experiences; disconnections within the interviewer-interviewee relationship; and the censoring of some words or ideas for social desirability.

There are a number of techniques to help the researcher combat the above challenges, or to prepare the researcher for the methodological complexities she will

face and need to consider during the collection and analysis of interview data. For example, practicing the interview with fellow colleagues, family members, or friends can help the researcher comprehend elements of the interview from a diversity of perspectives or angles; recognize opportunities to probe; and interpret whether or not the interview schedule is well-structured. An understanding of the interview as an unpredictable process suggests that preparation strategies can be useless, endless, or inapplicable for some interviewers. However, this does not entail that an interviewer should “just wing it”. A consideration of the methodological complexities associated with the interview approach situates the interviewer in a position to create a strong research design, meet and overcome potential challenges, and encourage the conduct of data-rich, ethical interviews; an advantageous position specifically when exploring mothering and disability.

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