Doing Qualitative Research Differently: free association, narrative and the interview method.
ISBN 0 7619 6425 8 (Hardback)
ISBN 0 7619 6426 6 (Paperback)

Hollway and Jefferson draw examples from their Economic and Social Research Council project on ‘Gender difference, anxiety and the fear of crime.’ The authors aim is to recognise and question generalisations of fear and crime from the British Crime Survey (BSC) e.g. Are women afraid of the dark? They set out to question BSC methodology and the book explores how their research project evolved. The book is a changeling, interactive, personal account and journey when using the interview method within the research process. However, the book is so much more than the use of qualitative method. Psychoanalytic theory, (Klein and Werheimer) data production and analysis are all comprehensively examined. The book skilfully draws on its subjects experiences and a strength is its difference when attempting to produce a psychosocial profile of the interviewee. The psychosocial profile consists of: ‘... personal biography, discourse or meanings of the social world; defences or the intersubjective connections of how people are affected by others; and, events or how discourses and defences are suitable in a particular social context’(23-24). The data is hard-hitting and no punches are pulled. I found the narratives of the Walters family (Ivy, Tommy and Kelly) throughout the book fascinating, the psychology behind the methodological development concerning Hollway and Jefferson’s interviews informative and their data examination procedures educational. I took the authors up on their offer of questioning their data. The majority of the time I agreed with their methods, ethics (chapter 5) and data analysis. Interestingly, the very few disagreements I had with their observations got me thinking about my own biographical experiences.

In a book full of biographies, I will focus on one, that of Ron’s, which is the psychosocial case study in the final chapter of the book. Ron’s narrative highlights the concept of risk, or the distance between safety and danger or security and threats. Ron’s journey from one side of this equation to the other is highlighted through increased trust of his safer environment. Ron also identifies the fear and threat of perceived and actual burglary of his victims (130-144).
Hollway and Jefferson draw three conclusions: ‘... the need to recognise the role of peoples defence mechanisms against anxiety; the importance of unconscious intersubjectivity with regard to the psychosocial profile; and, a free association method which widens access to a subjects experiences and meanings’ (155). The authors present a very real, disturbing picture of society which the authors hope will become more visible to researchers and policy-makers. This is quite a poignant wish, especially in a general election year. Will social issues like crime, poverty, (Bradshaw and Sainsbury, 2000) family and employment that the authors address be visible election issues? The BSC should also consider some of the authors methodological approaches after reading this important book.

Richard W. Race, Keele University, UK

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