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6 **Crafting stories in hermeneutic phenomenology research: a methodological**
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8 **device**
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Crafting stories in hermeneutic phenomenology research: A methodological device

Abstract

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a methodology, is not fixed. Inherent in its enactment are contested areas of practice such as how interview data is used and reported. Using philosophical notions drawn from hermeneutic phenomenological literature we argue that working with crafted stories is congruent with the philosophical underpinnings of this methodology. We consider how the practical ontic undertaking of story crafting from verbatim transcripts is integral with the interpretive process. We show how verbatim transcripts can be crafted into stories through examples taken from interview data. Our aim is to open dialogue with other hermeneutic phenomenological researchers and offer alternate possibilities to conventional ways of work with qualitative data. We argue that crafted stories can provide glimpses of phenomena that other forms of data analysis and presentation may leave hidden. We contend that crafted stories are an acceptable and trustworthy methodological device.

Key words:

Interpretive methods, phenomenology, hermeneutics, stories, interview data, lived-experiences

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3 “Once upon a time...” is a familiar way of engaging an audience. We wait for the story
4 that will follow. What happened? To whom? How did events unfold? We are drawn into
5 someone else’s life, an experience not our own yet one that we may somehow already
6 know. Malala Yousafzai begins her story:
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14 I come from a country which was created at midnight. When I almost died
15 it was just after midday. One year ago I left my home for school and never
16 returned. I was shot by a Taliban bullet and was flown out of Pakistan
17 unconscious. Some people say I will never return home but I believe firmly
18 in my heart that I will. To be torn from the country that you love is not
19 something you wish on anyone. (Yousafzai and Lamb, 2013, p. 1)
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29 Many of us listened to this unfolding story on TV news and watched in horror.
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31 The story evoked many emotions. Now, several years later, we recognise this story for
32 the courage and leadership Malala has demonstrated in the global arena. Her story
33 reveals humanity at its worst and its best. It speaks loudly and stays with us. It becomes
34 the impetus for ongoing political action. The story is dynamic and alive with so many
35 layers of meaning. Malala’s life is a story. So too are our own lives, and those of our
36 research participants.
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47 Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a methodology, provides glimpses of the
48 meanings that reside within human experience. Malala’s story, woven in context, brings
49 alive the phenomenon of being displaced from one’s beloved home. Her story, crafted
50 from conversations with her co-author (Lamb), speaks to us directly. Gadamer
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3 (1960/1975) suggests that “understanding begins when something addresses us” (p.299);
4
5 Malala’s story addresses us and brings awareness to something previously unknown.
6
7 Similarly, the experiences of research participants address us, and can be captured
8
9 through interpreting contextualized stories (Patton, 2014). In this paper ‘crafting’
10
11 describes the process of “deriving narratives from transcripts” (Caelli, 2001, p. 276).
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13 Examples of how crafting is accomplished and how stories are used are provided as
14
15 illustration.
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20 21 **Theoretical background**

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24 The practice of hermeneutic phenomenology we are referring to is underpinned
25
26 by the philosophies of Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur and Derrida. Concerned with
27
28 phenomena related to being human (Dreyfus, 1991; Gadamer, 1960/1975; Heidegger,
29
30 1927/1962) hermeneutic phenomenology is an ongoing, creative, intuitive, dialectical
31
32 approach that challenges pre-determined rules and research procedures thus freeing us
33
34 from dichotomous ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways of doing things. Hermeneutic researchers
35
36 seek to reveal aspects of phenomena that are rarely noticed, described or accounted for.
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38 The intention of hermeneutic researchers is to illuminate essential, yet often forgotten,
39
40 dimensions of human experience in ways that compel attention and provoke further
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42 thinking.
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49 Hermeneutic phenomenology grants researchers access to rich contextual data
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51 and surfaces meaning from human experiences of health care as lived-in and lived-
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53 through. It is a methodological approach not bound by structured stages of a method; it is
54
55 how one attunes, questions and thinks in and through evolving methods. For this to
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3 occur hermeneutic researchers adopt an attitude or stance that ponders unfolding and
4
5 evolving questions allowing them to be surprised by how their thinking on phenomenon
6
7 transforms over time (Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 2014). Researchers using this approach
8
9 attune in a way that opens and invites them to work with data in emergent ways
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11 (AUTHORS, 2015; Diekelmann & Diekelmann, 2009; AUTHOR, 2005; AUTHOR,
12
13 2011). A phenomenological stance thus seeks ways of working with and reporting data
14
15 that keeps an open questioning stance. In other words, attuning to a phenomenological
16
17 stance allows one to become receptive to nuances and changes in the phenomenon of
18
19 interest as these arise rather than being drawn into prescribed methods and anticipated
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21 meanings.
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28 There is always the tension between the practical methods of gathering and
29
30 reporting data and the ontological orientation in hermeneutic phenomenology. This
31
32 tension is seen in conflicting views on the notion of 'story' in relation to the analysis of
33
34 verbatim data derived from this ontological, rather than epistemological or
35
36 ethnographical orientation. This paper therefore addresses some of these tensions and
37
38 challenges the orthodoxy of the verbatim story.
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43 **Stories in hermeneutic research**

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46 Shared stories give testimony to past events and experiences, whether they are
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48 told for research, teaching or entertainment. In this paper, we are referring to stories as
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50 speech events gathered in interviews, although we acknowledge there are of other forms
51
52 of data. In hermeneutic phenomenological research, stories are commonly excerpts taken
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54 from verbatim data provided by participants during interviews. Hermeneutic analysis
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3 requires that the researcher dwells within the data, awaiting glimpses of the
4
5 phenomenon. The attuned researcher apprehends more than the words in the
6
7 transcriptions. He or she is able to craft rich and meaningful stories that may become
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9 allegorical exemplars, using a mantic quality of language that resonates with the reader
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11 vividly describing and revealing the nuances of contextualised experience (van Manen,
12
13 1990; 1997).
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18 The well-crafted phenomenological story is able to reveal ways of being,
19
20 thinking and acting in the world that shed light on what is known but covered over, or
21
22 forgotten. Stories crafted in hermeneutic phenomenology are thus a provocative and
23
24 powerful means of evoking shared pathic responses (van Manen, 2014). They can
25
26 communicate the way we humans make sense of events and relationships, both with
27
28 ourselves and with others. In a story we encounter ourselves in dialogue and experience
29
30 ourselves in different ways. As Gadamer (1976) explains we are at once interpreting and
31
32 making the story our own; understanding a story is to always and already to understand
33
34 and recognise ourselves within it.
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41 Inherent in hermeneutic phenomenology is the place of the researcher's
42
43 understandings in the interpretive process. The hermeneutic project requires an intimate
44
45 understanding of the participants' experiences and those of researcher so that a fusion of
46
47 horizons and "bridging of personal or historical distance between minds occurs"
48
49 (Gadamer, 1976, p. 95). This movement is acknowledged and made explicit in
50
51 hermeneutic phenomenological accounts so that readers see how investigators' horizons
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53 of understanding are entwined in the project and how these understandings evolve
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3 through the interpretive process. Stories thus act as a medium for researchers to invite
4
5 readers into acquiring deeper insight and awareness about shared phenomena. As
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7 researchers, the way we pose questions and read/hear stories is integral to who we are as
8
9 humans and how we come to understand the world in a dialectic movement.
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14 Given the possibility of endless contextual variations how can one ever judge
15
16 (and on what basis) that a story shared at a particular time and place as “true”, complete,
17
18 or accurate? We ask “true for whom?” Malala’s understanding of her story will always
19
20 be so much deeper and more complex than we who listen can comprehend; yet we take
21
22 from it insights that matter to us. Although we commonly assume that we witness events
23
24 in specific, unique and individual ways, a story always brings a sense of multi-
25
26 perspectival wholeness and possibility that exceeds, yet includes, individualized or
27
28 specific details. In other words, ‘a story’ is always a paradoxical play of the many and
29
30 the individual (Nancy, 1996/2000). Those who came with the guns to shoot Malala
31
32 would have a different story.
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38 Derrida (2004/1972) uses the term ‘dissemination’ to describe how a story is
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40 always larger than the sum of its differing vantage points. A story is living and changing
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42 with an abundance of interpretation that requires openness to possibility. The story has
43
44 interchangeable meanings that speak (and remain silent), that ebb and flow over time,
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46 and in different contexts with different listeners. A shared story, like Malala’s, is neither
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48 the teller’s, nor is it the reader’s; the story is communal and shared through and through.
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50 Malala’s story in a sense “does its work” not merely in the telling but how in the sharing,
51
52 be it reading or listening, reveals more of our shared understanding of being human.
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3 Stories in hermeneutic inquiry acknowledge that human beings are always in
4 relationship to others, that every story involves two or more others (Ricouer, 1984, 2005;
5 Gadamer, 1960/1975). Stories not only involve others, but also places and times
6 providing a sense of continuity and unity in shared human experience (Eberhardt, 1996).
7 We thus become enmeshed within the plot of a story in our listening and reading. No one
8 telling or listening of a story by any one person will ever reveal all there is to know
9 about a phenomenon and claim to provide the whole 'Truth'.
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20 **Truth and stories**

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24 Drawing on the Greek word *alétheia* (ἀλήθεια), Heidegger describes truth as un-
25 concealment. Truth is not concerned with agreement, correspondence or/and correctness
26 but an unconcealment of that which is hidden and covered up (Heidegger, 1927).
27 According to Taylor (1989) how we live our lives unfolds in moral space. In a certain
28 sense there is an ethical responsibility to both participants' telling their story and to the
29 researcher (and others) who listens. Story tellers anticipate that their story is valued, and
30 in sharing their story (in a way that makes sense to them) give it to the researcher to shed
31 light on their experience and reveal the phenomenon of interest.
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45 Derrida (2005) argues that to give an account or to share a story is to testify and
46 testimony is predicated on the telling of truth - or in the phenomenological sense a
47 degree of unconcealment. Thus testimony can never be neutral, correct or complete.
48 What is unconcealed by the teller today, may not be important for the teller to unconceal
49 tomorrow. What the teller speaks of today may be told in quite a different manner
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3 tomorrow. Mood, context and how we are listened to all influence the 'how' and 'what'
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5 of telling (Fiumara, 1990).
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10 As hermeneutic researchers we enter the interview space assuming that the story
11
12 shared by a participant is an account of their understanding of their experience yet
13
14 acknowledging that the whole story will never be told or heard; truth is never fully
15
16 revealed. Cases of exaggerating or minimising therefore speak to what is felt as
17
18 important and understood by the teller to emphasise in any given moment; how they
19
20 choose to 'appear' is integral to the story. The researcher can thus never know the
21
22 thinking of the participant and capture the past exactly as it happened (Koch, 1998). Nor,
23
24 for that matter, can the person themselves.
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30 Hermeneutic phenomenology accepts that phenomena are never fully concealed
31
32 or unconcealed, to anyone. The orientation in hermeneutics is not on determining a
33
34 hierarchy of truths; one version of the truth is not understood as more significant than
35
36 another. Gadamer (1997) speaks of a thematic plurivocity/polygema or multiplicity of
37
38 meanings in a story, text and poem. Each story is thus understood as holding multiple
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40 meanings and further uncovering of phenomena.
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46 So, does this undermine the credibility of data in hermeneutic phenomenology?
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48 A story's truthfulness (or unconcealedness) becomes known to us by how it resonates in
49
50 felt, shared plausible meaning and this resonance cannot be reified into proof. When one
51
52 bears witness to an experience of joy, for example, one can connect with the shared
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3 human experience of joyfulness but never measure the joy, categorise its nature, or bring
4
5 any other sense of 'reliable' transfer of facts.
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9 We contend that the use of crafted stories is supported by the philosophical
10 underpinnings of this methodology and its purpose. We have found that crafting stories
11 is comprised of two overlapping yet distinct undertakings. First is the method or "how
12 to" craft in the practical or ontical sense and the second is the ontological sense of
13 "attunement to" the crafting. Crafting stories from verbatim data is part of the
14 interpretive analysis (Zambas, 2016); they are not separate undertakings.
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24 25 **Different ways of using data** 26

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28 Different research paradigms bring different assumptions and traditions regarding
29 the use of data. Debating what constitutes "good or bad" data worthy of analysis is
30 challenging due to these myriad presuppositions. For instance many qualitative research
31 methods are synonymous with coding verbatim data. The protagonists of coding would
32 be critical of crafted stories. They would see this 'crafting' as 'altering' verbatim
33 transcripts and be unacceptable. For instance, in grounded theory a verbatim transcript is
34 required for the coding of particular processes used by participants (Starks & Trinidad,
35 2007; Walker & Myrick, 2006). Grounded theory's objective is to show ways of
36 behaviour and speech in the construction of social processes. It seeks to reduce and
37 organise, label and categorise the verbatim data, highlight similarities and differences
38 and develop themes leading to models and substantive theories. In contrast hermeneutic
39 phenomenology uses data to draw attention to the multiple meanings within phenomena
40 and draw the reader/listener into new understandings.
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3 Importantly, researchers using hermeneutic phenomenology do not claim that
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5 there is only one way of working with data or one possible (or best) meaning of the data.
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7 They would claim that there is this way *and* this way; that there is always more meaning
8
9 to be surfaced. Gadamer (1960/1975) warns that from a hermeneutical perspective, over
10
11 reliance on method leaves what is meaningful hidden and is antithetical to the pursuit of
12
13 truth (as unconcealedness) (Gadamer, 1960/1975, 1976). We concur with Sandelowski
14
15 (2011) that over adherence and excessive focus on method alone can be unhelpful.
16
17 Indeed, drawing lines between methodological approaches is often unhelpful because
18
19 they may be more yielding than believed. As Sandelowski (2011) warns “... forgetting
20
21 lines are permeable risks reifying them” (p.349). Hermeneutic phenomenology
22
23 recognises that there are myriad ways of working with data. It calls for openness to
24
25 flexible methods and the possibilities of how meaning and understanding evolves as
26
27 stories are heard, read and re-read, shared and explored.
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34 The issue of authority and power in research is a concern to many scholars. For
35
36 example, some scholars would argue that all researchers exert power over participants’
37
38 data regardless of methodology. Thought in this way, the act of crafting stories from
39
40 verbatim transcripts for our projects reinforces our authority over participants’ words.
41
42 Crafting stories and subsequent interpretations could be construed as an abuse of that
43
44 power because researchers’ perspectives are privileged. We acknowledge these
45
46 concerns. Yet no one escapes the effects of power. According to Foucault (1982) power
47
48 is a phenomenon that is everywhere embedded in our everyday activities. Consequently
49
50 all qualitative researchers examine data from their understandings of methodology and
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52 method and are in a position of authority over the analysis (Morse, 2015). The
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3 hermeneutic researcher is charged with articulating the pre-understandings and power
4 relations they bring to the listening and interpretation of stories, always being open to the
5 impact of their already-there prejudices (Gadamer 1960/1975).
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11 Transparency about the researcher's pre-understandings is essential; we always already
12 bring our backgrounds with us into all our activities. Our backgrounds help inform how
13 the project unfolds (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Indeed, it is these pre-understandings that
14 underpin and initiate our inquiry. One doesn't have a method and go in search of a
15 question, but rather we have questions and we use a methodology that helps us
16 investigate that question.
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27 The epistemologies and viewpoints of many qualitative methods demand that the
28 verbatim data/text be employed for analysis with minimal alteration. These concerns
29 should continue to be discussed in the methodological literature. Yet, such concerns
30 assume that the words the participant shares encompass their experience, that their
31 experience is fully revealed in the telling such that the transcribed account (story) is a
32 complete and comprehensive representation of their experience. This position is
33 incongruent with the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology
34 (Gadamer, 1960/1975, 1976) wherein ontological issues, such as temporality, come to
35 the fore. A presupposition of this approach is that there is always already an excess of
36 meaning, more than can ever be captured in a single account (Diekelmann &
37 Diekelmann, 2009). Experiences narrated through stories are not the phenomenon.
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3 In hermeneutic phenomenology, data use is concerned with surfacing meaning
4 and sharing human experiences in ways that resonate with listeners/readers. The purpose
5 is to reveal that which lies in, between and beyond the words whilst staying close to the
6 phenomenon of interest. As researchers, attuning our thinking to this purpose is essential
7 as we begin our interpretive work with verbatim data.
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13 14 15 16 **Collecting and crafting stories** 17

18
19
20 In this section of the paper we examine, with the use of examples, the collecting
21 of data and how and why verbatim data is crafted into stories. This shows the reader the
22 dialectic movement of method and methodology. It reveals how the ontological and
23 ontic nature of data analysis, including the crafting of stories, unfolds within the project.
24 The analysis is not working *on* the data but working *with* data. To begin, the data needs
25 to be gathered from participants. Let us show you an example. Figure one is a portion of
26 a transcript. Figure two is the crafted story that emerged from this transcript. (For the
27 purpose of this paper we have focused on our own experience of learning to craft
28 stories). The process of moving from transcript to story is as follows:
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- 42 • Remove extraneous detail that does not add to the story, for example where the
43 conference was, that the weather was cold, the comments about the conference as a
44 whole,
45
46
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48
- 49 • keep the data as 'story' – this is what happened, this was the experience and
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- 51 • keep the sentences that seem to hold the meaning; remove the sentences that repeat
52 or expand in a manner that is not needed.
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3 Ensure the story flows. This may mean:
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- 7 • Adding words in where there sentences have been removed to make the link from
- 8 one section to the next,
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- 10
- 11 • given details of context,
- 12
- 13
- 14 • polishing grammar,
- 15
- 16
- 17 • reordering sentences to keep the flow,
- 18
- 19 • going back to the original transcript to add in bits that now seem to matter as the
- 20 polished story comes to life and
- 21
- 22
- 23 • reading it aloud to 'hear' how it sounds.
- 24
- 25
- 26

27 This interpretive process involves asking questions:
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- 31
- 32 • Does this story 'show' the experience?
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- 34 • Does it engage?
- 35
- 36 • Are we still holding the meaning as gifted by the participant?
- 37
- 38 • Have we seen 'more' in the process of crafting up this story?
- 39
- 40
- 41 • Does it work?
- 42
- 43 • Does it still need more pruning?
- 44
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47 This may require returning to the story some days later to polish/prune some more and
48 looking for what was left behind; there may be another story that needs to be crafted.
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3 Here is another example of verbatim transcript from AUTHOR's study on the experience
4
5 and meaning of joy at birth:
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9 AUTHOR: Tell me what was it was like when your grandchild was born?
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12 Tui: It was the most incredible experience, cos I caught her - the midwife
13
14 said to me you know you can catch baby as she comes out. So I caught
15
16 Mary and I had this face in front of me that wasn't a face, that just kind of
17
18 morphed through some faces that I recognize so rapidly that it was this kind
19
20 of, like a jelly almost forming into face that I knew – of my grandparents
21
22 and my father and heaps of faces that I didn't know until it came to her
23
24 face. And it eventually settled with her face.
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29 But I was sitting there watching, thinking, Oh! What is this? What's going
30
31 on? It's never ever happened to me again to that extent, but it was the
32
33 most....
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39 AUTHOR: What, that was immediately after?
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43 Tui: Amazing. Yeah, it was at the moment that I looked at her, that started
44
45 happening. I've got no idea how long it took before she settled into who she
46
47 is, but the faces of all the, all her ancestors on both sides were there. And
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49 just for fractions of a second, it was, it was an amazing experience until it
50
51 settled into her face.
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3 As previously stated, stories may be crafted from different parts of the verbatim
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5 transcribed interviews. In this instance the remaining part of the story emerged
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7 several pages later in the transcript:
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11 AUTHOR: How long did the amazing feeling last?
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16 Tui: I was high for maybe a week after that. You know, I was just kind of
17
18 walking around in a cloud, smiling to everyone!
19

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21
22 AUTHOR: Tell me about what lasts?
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26
27 Tui: Loving the world, just, and I think with all the births I've been at it is
28
29 like that. That there's..., you know, it lasts for a long time afterwards. That
30
31 joy, and that feeling of love.
32

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36 Within the verbatim transcripts, hints call from the data that evolve into crafted stories
37
38 used for interpretive analysis. Koch (1998) reminds us hermeneutic phenomenology is
39
40 not about "what to do" in the research process but about asking constantly "what is
41
42 going on" in the account that we want to capture in the research process. AUTHOR
43
44 continually asked questions of the data, taking care to remain close to the phenomenon
45
46 that was being explored. For example, "how else is joy revealed (or not) in Tui's
47
48 transcript?" Through a process of reading, thinking, writing, re-reading re-thinking and
49
50 re-writing Tui's stories revealed qualities of joy at birth. Copious notes, mind maps,
51
52 reconsidering the highlighting of sections in the transcript were used in a seemingly
53
54 'messy' process until the felt meaning of story was crystallised.
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3 Developing crafted stories from transcripts is an art that takes practice and can be
4
5 challenging for the nascent phenomenological researcher. The crafting process takes
6
7 time and openness. It is a way of being in relation to data that honours participant's
8
9 experiences, is congruent with philosophical underpinnings and acknowledges the
10
11 researcher's pre-understandings. In this way the ontological understandings as well as
12
13 the ontic practical aspects work together.
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18 In AUTHOR's research, the actual words of participants were used but the
19
20 grammar and syntax were corrected, 'ahs' and 'ums' etc. were removed. As a
21
22 participant's story becomes polished from the verbatim transcripts, a clearer and more
23
24 focused story emerges that is able to illuminate for readers or hearers the shared
25
26 phenomenon being investigated.
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29 30 31 **Questioning member checking** 32 33

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35 In AUTHOR's research crafted stories were returned to participants, although
36
37 this is not essential. Member checking, which is often used in other research approaches,
38
39 is questionable in hermeneutic phenomenology because human understanding is
40
41 understood as evolving and thus open to ongoing revision and interpretation.
42
43 Sandelowski (1993) challenged the notion of member checking as a method to ensure
44
45 rigor. She argued that stories are temporal in nature and are constantly changing from
46
47 initial telling due to the ongoing flux of personal and social agendas. This position was
48
49 further reiterated by Morse (2015) in relation to qualitative data overall "It is not clear
50
51 why one should provide the participant with such an opportunity to change his or her
52
53 mind; it is not required in other types of research" (p.1216). A story once spoken is open
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3 to multiple interpretations as in Derrida's notion of dissemination discussed previously.
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5 Stories, phrases, words, manners of speech and meanings are not static they all continue
6
7 on their own trajectory. What is shared in a conversational interview style may be
8
9 forgotten or reinterpreted when read later in typed transcripts. Thus member checking to
10
11 ensure rigour is not congruent with hermeneutic phenomenology.
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16 Yet, this is not to say that returning crafted stories to participants is without
17
18 benefit. Support for the finally crafted stories is helpful when there is agreement about
19
20 felt meanings that disclose the phenomenon being studied (Zambas, 2016). Several of
21
22 the participants in AUTHOR's study responded appreciatively to the way the crafting
23
24 process had crystallised their meanings. Tui responded to the following crafted story
25
26 saying: "Yes that is it! – that is the special and lovely feeling I get at birth".
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31 Here is the crafted story from Tui's verbatim transcript:
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36 It was the most incredible experience. The midwife said I could catch my
37
38 grandchild as she came out. So I caught her and I had this face in front of
39
40 me that wasn't a face, that morphed through some faces that I recognize so
41
42 rapidly that it was like jelly almost forming into a face that I knew. The
43
44 faces of all her ancestors on both sides were there, known and unknown to
45
46 me. It was just for fractions of a second that it started happening. I've no
47
48 idea how long it took before she settled into her own face. I was sitting
49
50 there watching, thinking, 'What is this? What's going on?' It was the most
51
52 amazing experience leaving me high walking on a cloud. The feeling of
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3 joy, loving the world and wanting to smile at everyone went on for a long
4
5 time afterwards.
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9
10 Tui's story now becomes a compelling vivid paradigmatic story that in many
11 ways "says it all". Care is required not to turn the story into an allegorical or symbolic
12 exemplar because this would cover up the revelatory and mantic nature of Tui's story
13 that attunes to our (human) shared knowing of birth as joyous. Many qualities of joy at
14 birth are woven succinctly in Tui's story intensifying and invoking an intuitive grasping
15 of the phenomenon while remaining close to the nuanced detail that brings the story
16 alive. The tension of phenomenological writing is to keep projects really close to lived-
17 experience while working with data in a way that vividly brings forth or provides
18 glimpses into the qualities of the phenomenon.
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32 The crafting process brings the phenomenon into sharper relief in a more concise
33 and readable format reducing the need for lengthy verbatim data. The art of crafting is
34 not concerned with summarising and cleaning up verbatim transcripts to emphasise a
35 point important to the researcher. Crafting stories from transcript data is about bringing
36 the story together in a way that 'shows' what the researcher is noticing and interpreting
37 whilst working with the data. Crafting, as it progresses, is thus not focussed on the story
38 but on compelling and salient qualities that illuminate the phenomenon. In Tui's story it
39 is about how Tui understands her experience and how her story helped AUTHOR to
40 illuminate anew the phenomenon of 'Joy at birth'.
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3 Stories may be re-crafted, re-edited in the writing and re-writing processes as
4
5 analysis deepens. Hermeneutic analysis requires reflexive movement between parts and
6
7 the whole (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Tui retold the same stories in different ways as the
8
9 interview progressed revealing more about the phenomenon of joy at birth. Here Tui re-
10
11 tells the story of being at the birth of her grandchild.
12
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15
16 There's this whole kind of feeling of love in the room, where everybody
17
18 has that joy. Everybody has that excitement. I already love the baby before
19
20 it's born. It's almost like this joy is there to support the mother, but at the
21
22 same time it's not about the other.
23
24

25 In this rendition she speaks about the temporo-spatial feeling of love permeating
26
27 the room. Her story exemplifies Gadamer's, Derrida's and Nancy's philosophical
28
29 notions discussed earlier.
30
31

32 33 **Revealing the sense of phenomena** 34 35

36
37 A story calls for us to consider and ponder what the experience of the
38
39 phenomenon "is". Each participant in AUTHOR's study had their own vantage point:
40
41 midwife, mother, obstetrician, and father, yet each gestured beyond these differing
42
43 points of view. The variety of perspectives and experiences of childbirth lead to the
44
45 phenomenon becoming progressively more visible as a richness of previously concealed
46
47 meaning surfaced. Each crafted story provided glimpses of what is unconcealed beyond
48
49 the semantic assemblage of words, enabling insights into the sense of phenomena to
50
51 emerge. van Manen (2014) refers to this as, "inspiriting our understanding" (p. 282).
52
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54
55 Tui's stories reveal how joy at birth is deeply relational with seen and unseen others. As
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3 understanding deepened so did the realisation that joy is a phenomenon that is shared at
4
5 birth. Like poetry, the crafting brought forth ‘felt’ meanings as each story contributed to
6
7 revelation of the phenomenon.
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11 Crafted stories do not pretend to provide empirical, factually accurate accounts.
12
13 They gift a powerful ‘felt’ knowing that is difficult to encapsulate. van Manen (2014)
14
15 claims that “well-written and well-edited anecdotes may create for the writer and reader
16
17 the experience of presence, closeness, propinquity, or proximity in place or time” (p.
18
19 242). The crafted story is a device that can be taken “in a fictional or real sense” (p.250).
20
21 An equally legitimate story can be crafted from the multitude of experiences that
22
23 comprise life. The following story derives from the AUTHOR’s years of experience in
24
25 midwifery practice:
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31 As I entered the birthing room the mother was already pushing, it was tense
32
33 in the room. I just knew the baby was about to be born. Then all of a
34
35 sudden the waters popped and within what seemed seconds I could see the
36
37 head; no time to get my gloves I knelt down and caught the baby as the
38
39 mother attempted to climb back onto the bed. It was all so sudden, baby
40
41 was out! As the hair stood up on my neck I found I couldn’t stop smiling.
42
43
44 Then I noticed everyone else in the room beaming smiles, such a sacred
45
46 moment.
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51 We argue that this story, crafted from several lived experiences, reveals the
52
53 experience of birth as equally significant and joyous as in Tui’s story. This story
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3 challenges us to think more broadly about what is a story. In this example “elements
4
5 from different narrators [or in this case AUTHORS experiences] create a blended
6
7 [crafted] story” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1377) providing further shared sense of the
8
9 phenomenon. It also highlights AUTHOR’s pre-understandings bringing more
10
11 transparency to the project. There are many ways of working with stories and it is not the
12
13 intention of this paper to provide a formulaic process to be followed dogmatically, but
14
15 rather to provoke thinking about how data can be used to illuminate phenomenon. In
16
17 Diekelmann and Deikelman’s (2009) work, for example, crafted conversations taken
18
19 from 15 years of data brought together multiple perspectives/stories that revealed the
20
21 assumptions, oversights, understandings and insights through converging conversations.
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28 Morse (2015) states that data may come from researchers’ own experiences
29
30 because all data (personal and otherwise) always exceeds what can be known. This is
31
32 certainly congruent with hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenologists
33
34 thus find themselves amidst the murky middle of existential experience where the best
35
36 they can do is faithfully use data in a way that shows readers/listeners what has caught
37
38 their attention and provoked further thinking. The intention in hermeneutic
39
40 phenomenology is not to provide the definitive description of experience or the final
41
42 interpretation of being at birth, or being challenged about an approach to research, or
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44 being taken from one’s home. It points to the meaningful possibilities that surface from
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46 stories of those experiences.
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52 The purpose of this methodology is thus not to ‘hammer home’ a point or create
53
54 overly sentimental accounts based on biased perspectives; it is to let texts speak,
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3 revealing meanings beyond those which are taken-for-granted. What beckons us in this
4
5 research approach is an attuned space of wonder and a phenomenological stance.
6

7 Whether or not a story is verbatim or crafted, or whether a story from a participant is
8
9 “what they meant to say or how they meant to say it” the story’s role is to gift insights
10
11 into human experience from which we can all learn. Malala concludes her book by
12
13 reminding us of the way a story becomes something more than (but includes) one’s own
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15 personal experience:
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20 A ‘talib’ fires three shots at point-blank range at three girls in a van and
21
22 doesn’t kill any of them. That seems an unlikely story, and people say I
23
24 have made a miraculous recovery...I know God stopped me going to the
25
26 grave. It feels like this life is a second life. People prayed to God to spare
27
28 me, and I was spared for a reason – to use my life for helping people. When
29
30 people talk about the way I was shot and what happened I think it’s the
31
32 story of Malala, ‘a girl shot by the Taliban’: I don’t feel it’s a story about
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34 me at all (pp.254-5)
35

36 **Conclusion**

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39 There is no doubt that focusing on transcribed verbatim interview data is a common and
40
41 accepted tradition in qualitative research. In this paper we urge further thinking about
42
43 achieving rigor in this contested area of research practice. Solely focusing on transcribed
44
45 verbatim data can leave hermeneutic phenomenologists lost in semantic meanings that
46
47 impoverish the sense of the phenomenon they are seeking to illuminate. Yes, there are
48
49 tensions inherent in hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. Yes, there is a need for
50
51 sustained and rigorous adherence to the philosophical underpinnings of the research. But
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3 stories and their meanings must be recognisable as being within a web of interlocution
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5 that brings forth a sense that speaks the experiences of being human.
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10 Although crafted stories may initially seem to threaten the authenticity of an
11 individual's experiences, such stories can provide purchase even when not universally
12 experienced. The stories do not belong to an individual; once spoken they are shared.
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14 Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the shared common understandings of
15 experiences that are illuminated through crafted stories that resonate with us all. The
16 interplay between parts and whole is as eternal as phenomena. Hermeneutic
17 phenomenology gathers glimpses through the use of stories that coalesce into revealing
18 new possibilities and provoking further thinking and action.
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29 The notion that hermeneutic phenomenology must be rigorous (valid and
30 reliable) in the conventional sense is neither possible nor desirable from a philosophical
31 perspective. Learning the practical skills of crafting stories, whilst essential, needs to
32 remain integral with an ontological orientation. Focusing solely on the veracity and
33 accuracy of words and phrases can miss the phenomenon being sought. The contribution
34 of hermeneutic phenomenology lies in creating study reports that compel thinking and
35 invite reinterpretations of life experiences. Let us not constrain the creativity and
36 openness that hermeneutic phenomenology solicits. This approach emphasises
37 attunement, listening, feeling and pondering deeply the commonalities of our human
38 experiences.
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For Peer Review

Figure One: Example of a transcript

AUTHOR 1: So how did you learn about crafting stories?

AUTHOR 2: Well AUTHOR 3 and I were at a workshop in Melbourne, led by Max Van Manen – our hero! We were spellbound most of the time. It was the first time we have been exposed to such teaching. He would read stories, poetry, bring in philosophy, just make it all come alive. We loved it! Except it was much colder there than we imagined. I had to lend AUTHOR 3 extra clothes from my suitcase. It has become a bit of a standing joke with us; she never takes enough ‘warmth’ and I always take ‘layer upon layer’. Anyway, this one day Max was talking about crafting stories. We had never heard of such a thing before; it almost felt scandalous! How could you fiddle with the data! I even felt naughty taking the mmm’s out.

AUTHOR 1: Yes, I know what you mean. You re-listen to the tape over and over to try to get the transcript ‘perfect’.

AUTHOR 2: We had been asked to take a transcript along with us. I had taken my latest one which had been a disaster. The sound quality was hopeless. There were big gaps in sentences where you simply could not hear what she had said. I was thinking I would need to either re-interview her, or just use that parts that were intact. Max sent us back to our rooms to work with our transcript and craft a story. I remember AUTHOR 3 and I grumbling as we set off to do that task. It just didn’t feel ‘right’. Our prejudices were well established!

AUTHOR 1: So how did it go?

AUTHOR 2: I had an amazing experience. As I lay on my bed turning the pages, reading what I could, a beautiful story emerged. The woman had been talking about taking her new-born baby home. On one page she talked about trying to get him dressed, how fiddly all the buttons and ribbons were. Somewhere else was the challenge of getting him into the car seat. And then on another page was the account of arriving home, of walking in the door. She burst into tears, suddenly overwhelmed by the enormity of the responsibility of mothering this new baby. I remember the anguish in her voice as she said “*what have we done, what on earth have we done and how on earth are we going to be able to do this*”.

I suddenly saw the story as it unfolded over about three pages. There was a gradual build-up of tension, of taking on the responsibility of mothering. The missing sentences were no longer of great importance. The guts of the story was shouting at me. I would have missed that altogether if I had tried to stay with the data in its discreet paragraphs. I needed to stand back and see the bigger picture, and then zoom in to pluck out the bits that revealed the unfolding of this experience.

AUTHOR 1: What was it like when you pulled those bits into a story?

AUTHOR 2: It was such a ‘wow’ moment. I felt like I had glimpsed the vulnerability of becoming a mother in a whole new way. Later, when I read that story to others I could see its impact; that was the story of so many women, yet few had ever told it with such succinctness. I could so easily have missed seeing what was there; I was so distracted by the ‘missing’ words that I wasn’t attuned to the story that was already there.

AUTHOR 1: What happened after that?

AUTHOR 2: AUTHOR 3 and I were hooked. We rushed back home and started crafting all our transcripts into stories. It brought new life to our work. The stories revealed in such an evocative manner. There was nothing to distract, to confuse, to plod through. It was as though with each story we were gifting our readers with an up close view of ‘experience’ in a manner that spoke to their emotions as much as their minds. I am of the opinion that phenomenology is soul food, stories speak to the soul. When you polish a story to reveal its inner glow it is received and absorbed in sacred silence. I really good test of a story is to read it out loud, listening for the flow, the mood, the rhythm. I often tell students to do that. But how we hate pruning! You need courage to push the delete button. It is only when you see how much more powerful the shorter version is that you realise what this is all about.

AUTHOR 1: What about your participants, what did they think of you fiddling with the data?

AUTHOR 2: We discovered they loved being gifted with a beautifully worded account of their experience. It was like packaging their treasured memories in a way that they can keep them safe forever. In contrast, when you send back a transcript, so often they get embarrassed about how messy it all looks. I suspect they throw those away!

AUTHOR 1: So how did your fellow researchers respond?

AUTHOR 2: We were very fortunate that someone else who had been at the same workshop, Kate Caelli, published an article that talked about crafting data so we had someone to reference. When we joined our American colleagues at the Hermeneutic Institute they were a bit bemused. You yourself had that experience of AUTHOR 4 suggesting the need for this paper, to help others understand what we are doing, and how we are doing it.

AUTHOR 1: Yes, I got quite a bit of flak at the Institute about crafting data. Some people were horrified. AUTHOR 4 was great; she helped open a very useful conversation.

Figure two: Crafted story

We are at a conference where Max van Manen was talking about crafting stories. We had never heard of such a thing before; it almost felt scandalous! As requested, I had taken my latest transcript with me which had been a disaster. There were big gaps in sentences where you simply could not hear what she had said. Max had sent us away to craft a story; AUTHOR 3 and I grumbled as we set off to do that task. It just didn't feel 'right'. Our prejudices were well established! Yet, as I turned the pages, reading over the gaps, a beautiful story emerged. The woman had been talking about taking her new-born baby home. On one page she talked about trying to get him dressed, how fiddly all the buttons and ribbons were. Somewhere else was the challenge of getting him into the car seat. And then on another page was the account of arriving home, of walking in the door. She burst into tears, suddenly overwhelmed by the enormity of the responsibility of mothering this new baby. I remember the anguish in her voice as she said *"what have we done, what on earth have we done and how on earth are we going to be able to do this"*.

I suddenly saw the story as it unfolded over about three pages. There was a gradual build-up of tension, of taking on the responsibility of mothering. The missing sentences were no longer of great importance. The guts of the story was shouting at me. I would have missed the story altogether if I had tried to stay with the data in its discreet paragraphs. I needed to stand back and see the bigger picture, and then zoom in to pluck out the bits that revealed the unfolding of this woman's experience. Later, when I read that story to others I could see its impact; this was the story of so many women, yet few had ever told it with such succinctness.

We rushed back home and started crafting all our transcripts into stories. It brought new life to our work. The stories revealed in such an evocative manner. There was nothing to distract, to confuse, to plod through. It was as though with each story we were gifting our readers with an up-close view of 'experience' in a manner that spoke to their emotions as much as their minds. We discovered participants loved being gifted with a beautifully worded account of their experience. It was like packaging their treasured memories in a way that they could keep them safe forever. Our experience is when you polish a story to reveal its inner glow it is received and absorbed in sacred silence. It speaks to the soul.