

# DOING EXCELLENT SOCIAL RESEARCH WITH DOCUMENTS

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Practical Examples and Guidance  
for Qualitative Researchers

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## Chapter 8

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### **Participant-created documents as an elicitation tool**

Things we might not have otherwise been told

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# 8

## PARTICIPANT-CREATED DOCUMENTS AS AN ELICITATION TOOL

Things we might not have otherwise been told

### Summary

**Elicitation interviews** are where participants are either shown items or asked to bring items to the interview in order to shape the direction of the conversation. This approach is often referred to as being part of '**visual methods**'. The chapter focuses in particular on when participants are asked to either bring everyday documents, such as photographs, or when they are asked to create a new document, with both sources serving as a 'topic guide' during interviews, which are directed by the participant. The advantage of this method over many documentary analysis methods is the presence of the **author** and the ability for the researcher to ask the author questions. This allows us to more easily establish **meaning** than in participant-absent documentary analysis. A detailed case study is presented of the research that aimed to understand health behaviours, such as smoking and drinking alcohol, during pregnancy. Ten women from deprived areas living on low incomes took part in **elicitation interviews**. Techniques of elicitation included life-history timelining (drawing a timeline of their life), collaging or using a paper template with thought bubbles to describe what it was like being pregnant, and sandboxing (that is, creating an image or scene using sand and a range of everyday items). Data was analysed using a **narrative analysis**, which is used to consider change over time. Guidance is provided on how to undertake **narrative analysis**. The findings highlighted a wide range of barriers and facilitators to abstain from alcohol and smoking during pregnancy, which were related to life circumstances. The key challenges of using such a method, including the ethical implications, are discussed. An exercise with additional data is provided to consolidate learning.

## Key learning points

- How documents can be used as part of **elicitation interviews**, sometimes known as '**visual methods**'
- How the use of document **elicitation interviews** can reduce power imbalance between the researcher and participant, but does not automatically do this
- How to consider if a document **elicitation interview** is appropriate in your research study
- How to undertake **narrative analysis**

## Background: using documents created by individuals during elicitation interviews

As discussed in Chapter 5, individually created documents can shed light on many phenomena within society. However, the most significant weakness in using this method, which we noted in Chapter 5, is the challenge in interpreting **meaning**. One way in which we can obtain the benefits of a participant-generated account, whilst also having a clear understanding of the **meaning**, is a document **elicitation interview**. When using this method, the participant will be provided with a brief by the researcher ahead of the interview to either create a new document or to bring existing documents to the interview. Here the purpose of the document is to help the researcher and participant create a shared understanding and to reduce the researchers' dominant position as an 'interviewer'. Unlike the use of documents in ethnographic settings, considerable attention has been paid to the value of this approach, and this is often linked to the term '**visual methods**' or to terms such as creative and participatory methods.

Prior to the twentieth century, researchers would have been the 'experts' creating documents, such as field notes and photographs, in the research field, when attempting to understand the behaviour of a group of people and bringing their own (often imperialist, white, middle-class) lens to interpret them (Mannay 2016). However, as has been made clear throughout this book, such an approach will not engender an understanding of '**meaning**' from the point of view of the people under study, which is important to truly understand the context behind these 'expert' documents (Scott 1990). For this reason, asking participants to create documents can enable them to define their own reality, albeit shaped by the researcher's brief. In this type of research, the site and context in which a document is produced has an impact on their content (Rose 2016).

A broad range of approaches can be used within document **elicitation interviews**. As with all research projects, the type of documents used in **elicitation interviews** should be carefully considered to ensure they are the most appropriate to fit with the **research question**. The first question to consider is whether you are interested in documents the participants already have, or if they

should create something new for the research project. These two approaches are discussed in more detail next.

### *Use of existing documents in elicitation interviews*

The use of pre-existing documents has been widely, and sometimes creatively, used in qualitative research. This approach has been discussed at length by Gillian Rose (2012) in her work on family photography. Rose conducted **elicitation interviews** with participants, to allow them to tell the story of their family through the images to which they had access. However, Rose noted that the types of events in photographs presented as part of the research project tended to depict leisure time, such as family holidays or festivals, in routinised ways. This excluded much of the everyday, ordinary, social and domestic life, highlighting that taking a photo is itself a social event, disrupting the event immediately preceding it (Banks 2001). That said, participants in photo **elicitation interviews** (using their pre-existing photographs) are able to construct meanings in similar ways, by discussing who took the photo, who was present, and providing lengthy accounts around some images, whilst skipping others (Rose 2012). Accordingly, the use of an **elicitation interview** is important to understanding the **meanings** behind photographs (Banks 2001). Whilst this approach may seem common sense, alternative approaches to understanding society through photography are advocated by Terence Heng (2017), who uses photography within **ethnography** to capture feelings and moods at events, and Marcus Banks (2001) who uses photographs that he has found or taken during interviews as elicitation tools. Thus it is important to note that there are many possible uses of any one type of document within elicitation-based research.

Although photos may easily come to mind as an elicitation document, other everyday objects and artefacts can provoke interesting accounts of society (Mitchell 2011). My own research, to understand intergenerational changes in infant feeding by working with new mothers and their own mothers (the grandmothers), raised the importance of context in designing methods for **elicitation interviews**. The likelihood that participants (who were new mothers) would have limited time to construct a new document was central in forming the research methods; as such, we asked participants to bring “everyday objects that make you think about infant feeding”. Some participants brought traditional documents, such as leaflets given to them by health professionals and baby weight charts, whilst others brought objects used whilst feeding their infants, such as pumps (for expressing breast milk), bottles and shawls. The participant who brought a shawl used it to explain her fear of being thought of as sexual whilst breastfeeding (Grant et al. 2017). This issue may not have been established in a traditional interview, without the ability for participants to bring along objects and tell their own stories (Mannay et al. 2018).

More recently, as individuals document much of their life on social media, social media elicitation has been used as a form of narrative interview whilst

“scrolling back” through Facebook profiles (Robards and Lincoln 2017, p. 1). In this study, the process of examining these participant-created digital documents allowed for participants to be ‘co-analysts’ of the data, reflecting on their mindset at the time of writing and how this varied from their present interpretation of the written account. In undertaking such research, important ethical questions must be answered; participants may not have considered the data in detail prior to the **elicitation interview**, and they may encounter elements that they would rather not discuss with a researcher. They may also have strong emotional reactions to documents that have not previously been considered in detail. Researchers should consider how to reduce the potential of harm to participants as part of their research design. In doing so, you should consult your professional body’s Code of ethics prior to conducting such fieldwork (see, for example, British Sociological Association 2002) and review relevant literature on the use of **visual methods** (see, for example, Lomax 2015; Mannay 2016; Rose 2016). If you are undertaking research using social media as an elicitation tool, you should also refer to Chapter 5.

### ***Creating new documents for research projects: a participatory approach?***

The second approach to document **elicitation interviews** involves asking participants to create a new document which will be explicitly focused on the aims of the research. Participants may be asked to create a document in advance of or during the **elicitation interview**, depending on the research design. Elicitation tools include asking participants to draw, write or create content in some other way. A broad range of techniques have been used, such as diaries (which are discussed in Chapter 5) (Coxon 2006), collages (Mannay 2013), participant-collected photographs (Latham 2004; Rose 2012) and sandboxing (Mannay et al. 2017). The briefing document that participants are provided with will be key to ensuring they are able to help you answer your **research question**, by focusing their efforts on the area of enquiry (Rose 2016). They should also be considered as part of the **social construction** of creating the data and the **meanings** contained within it.

In undertaking an **elicitation interview**, there are a number of key points to remember. In advance of the interview, you should decide whether an interview can go ahead if the participant has not created a document. It may be that this adds extra challenges for a researcher, who might need to play a more active role in shaping the direction of the interview (Mannay et al. 2018). For this reason, it might be beneficial for researchers to have access to a topic guide, which can be used if no documents are provided (Phillips et al. 2018). When participants have created documents, it may be that they do not cover all aspects of interest to the researcher, and therefore it may be necessary to ‘mop up’ any uncovered areas of interest with some questions at the end. It should be decided in advance if this would fit within the ethos of the research, or if additional questions should not be asked.

Participatory approaches develop research agendas *with* the groups in the study, rather than in isolation from them. Within Participatory **Action Research** (PAR), the researcher or a practitioner guides and facilitates whilst aiming to empower the community to solve problems they have identified (Walter 2006). **Elicitation interviews** can be used within studies which are participatory or can be used in a partly participatory way to attempt to provide participants with agency (Lomax 2015; Mannay 2016). However, these documents and their site of production are often strongly shaped by the researcher; such research should not uncritically be classified as participatory, and other approaches may not be participatory at all (Sheridan et al. 2011). This may be, for example, because of the needs of project funders to focus on answering a relatively narrow **research question**, or because of the time constraints of completing a dissertation.

### *Quality and bias in document elicitation interviews*

In considering quality in relation to documents in **elicitation interviews**, it is still relevant to consider criteria that are focused entirely on the quality and **biases** in documents. By using Scott's (1990) criteria (see Table 2.1), we can see that parts of **authenticity** are high, as we know that the document is original, and we usually know who created the document, but we cannot know what elements a participant has chosen to exclude. Likewise, the relationships between the researcher and participant will have a large impact on whether the participant felt comfortable enough or willing to provide a sincere and accurate account. Issues of **representativeness** in terms of the **sample** of participants are likely to be high, and the major way in which elicitation interviews score highly on Scott's criteria as compared to other documentary sources is that we are able to understand **meaning** through a dialogue with the author.

In analysing elicitation documents, areas of contrast between elicitation materials and the participants' spoken words should be given attention, such as the influence of others on the elicitation materials (Mannay 2013). A more thorough analysis of elicitation documents provided may occur in two ways: either alongside interview transcripts or in isolation from interview transcripts. In some studies, elicitation documents may be paid little attention during the analysis phase, as their purpose was viewed entirely as a way to encourage participants to talk about matters which were important to them. Prior to beginning your study, you should decide which approach is most suited to your research.

If you do decide to include the documents in your analysis, you may find it is difficult to decide whether to try to interpret the document yourself, or to provide an extract or the entire document in your output, to allow the **reader** to make their own interpretation. There is no generally accepted standard way of doing so (Banks 2001). One of the most basic ways in which elicitation materials can be analysed is through **content analysis** (Ball and Smith 1992), which is described in more detail in Chapter 6. Should you wish to interpret the **meaning** of the document you may wish to consider: the presence or absence of items (Mitchell 2011), the size of various aspects that are included (perhaps indicating their relative importance) (Banks 2001) and the colours present (Ball and Smith 1992).

Wider interpretation may focus on the portrayal of discourses, such as gender, place and portrayal of bodies (for a collection of examples, see Reavey 2011).

## Health and wellbeing in pregnancy: detailed case study

In the final empirical case study of this book, this chapter moves on to consider the way in which documents can be used as a tool, instead of a topic guide, during an interview. The case study is based on a study in which I focused on health and wellbeing in pregnancy, and the context is briefly provided. Following this, the process of refining the **research question** and sampling participants is described. A detailed account of the four modes of data production – timelines, thought bubbles, collages and sandboxing – is provided. I then consider how to undertake **narrative analysis**, providing a reflective account of the process undertaken. Additional data is provided at the end of the chapter, to give you the chance to practise **narrative analysis** using a timeline and interview data.

### *Context*

Three in four pregnant women in Wales, UK, either smoke, drink alcohol or are obese, and almost one-third of women experience more than one of these risk factors and thus, their babies are at increased risk for low birth weight, birth defects and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (Reilly 2013). Women from poorer social backgrounds are most likely to engage in such behaviours (Health & Social Care Information Centre 2012). Considering this from a health services perspective, this has significant financial implications for the National Health Service, with a cost of up to £246M per year for smoking and obesity-related complications alone (Godfrey and Consortium 2011; Morgan et al. 2014). However, these health behaviours also exacerbate health inequalities throughout the life course, reinforcing social inequality. At the time of the research, it was a priority of the four UK governments to promote healthier pregnancies (see, for example, Welsh Government 2017). As such, considerable investment to encourage healthy behaviours during pregnancy has been evident in the UK. However, these programs often have low uptake and high dropout (Gamble et al. 2015) or do not produce the intended behaviour change (Robling et al. 2016). This is likely to be because such programmes fail to take account of the full, lived reality of people's lives. One approach that aims to consider health behaviour holistically is the socioecological model (Whitehead and Dahlgren 1991).

### *Research design*

#### *Research question*

We aimed to develop an understanding of multiple health behaviours, including smoking, drinking alcohol and infant feeding, among pregnant women from deprived areas who lived on low incomes.

### *Population and defining a sample*

From the very beginning, having reviewed existing qualitative work, it was clear that a single interview would be unlikely to allow the necessary rapport to develop that would uncover new insights. As such, we planned to speak to fewer women, but in a more detailed way. Within the budget available for the study, it was decided that a **sample** of ten women would be feasible within the resources, which was related to researcher time available to co-produce and analyse the data, but also a significant budget in terms of transcription (see Table 2.2).

As noted earlier, women from poorer social backgrounds are more likely to engage in risky health behaviours. Accordingly, we aimed to **purposively sample** women who lived in the most deprived areas of Wales, as measured by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (Stats Wales 2015), and who were in receipt of a means-tested benefit (welfare). We aimed to recruit participants in a way that would make them feel less concerned or stigmatised when disclosing a risky health behaviour, so decided to recruit participants away from the health service. We therefore created an advertisement which was shared through community groups in poorer areas, social media groups targeted at mothers and in local communities. Within the advert, we explicitly noted that participants would be thanked with a £25 shopping voucher for each phase of the research they participated in. The use of incentives is sometimes viewed contentiously; for example, in this study, the ethics committee who reviewed the research were reluctant to allow these incentives. However, the use of incentives is an important tool to reduce the inherent power balance between the researcher and participants, so if a broadly participatory approach is desired, incentives should be provided wherever possible.

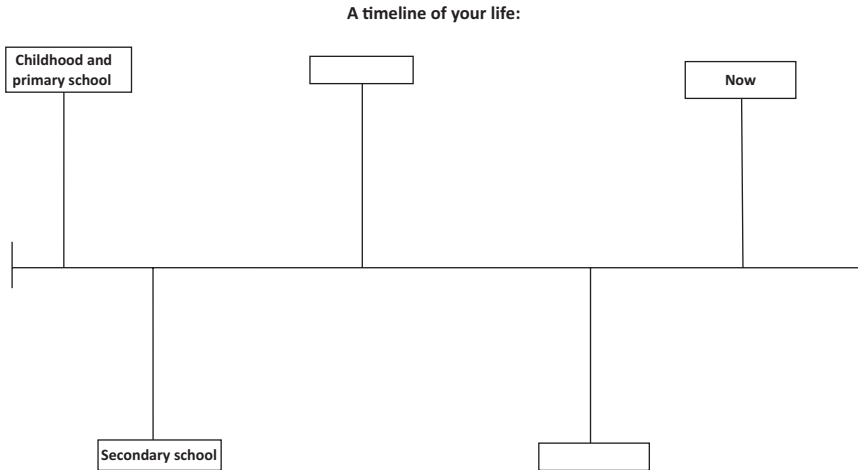
### *Data production*

As we were using an approach that aimed to be women-centred and as egalitarian as possible in terms of data generation, it is not appropriate to think of this data as having been ‘collected’ by the researcher. As such, unlike in other chapters of this book, this section is titled “data production” (Mannay 2016, p. 4). Data production occurred through three **elicitation interviews** per participant, with interviews two and three occurring on the same day following a short break. Nine of the ten participants contributed to all three interviews. One participant was unable to continue following the first interview. In the next section, I outline the four creative approaches utilised to produce data in this study.

### **Timeline elicitation interviews**

Participants were sent a resource pack around a week before the interview. The pack included a simple timeline template (see Figure 8.1), which defined the time period of interest from the participants’ “childhood and primary school”





**FIGURE 8.1** Timeline template.

to “now”. A range of alternative paper, and coloured stickers and pens were provided, which could be used to “represent emotions” (Gabb and Fink 2015). Guidance in the resource pack was reiterated during telephone calls and text message conversations prior to the interview. We asked participants to create a timeline of their life prior to the interview, but, in the spirit of an approach that aimed to reduce power imbalance, provided reassurance that they did not need to use the template and that the interview could go ahead without a timeline if participants did not want to create one. During **elicitation interviews**, the participants were asked to talk through their timeline and thus lead the interview.

### Collage and thought bubble elicitation interviews

During the second data production period, participants were sent a second pre-interview kit that consisted of two activities: collaging and a thought bubble template. Materials for producing a collage included a range of coloured papers, stickers and glue. The thought bubble template featured a picture of a white pregnant woman’s torso (with no head, to allow for ease of participant identification with the image; all participants were white) in the centre and thought bubbles around her. In this task, participants were asked to describe “how being pregnant impacts your everyday life” and were given the option to produce a collage or use the thought bubble template, or both, or neither (see Figure 8.2). Three participants only created a collage, five participants only used the thought bubble template and one participant did both. **Elicitation interviews** were undertaken, with participants using their pre-prepared collage or thought bubbles to direct the interview (Mannay 2013).

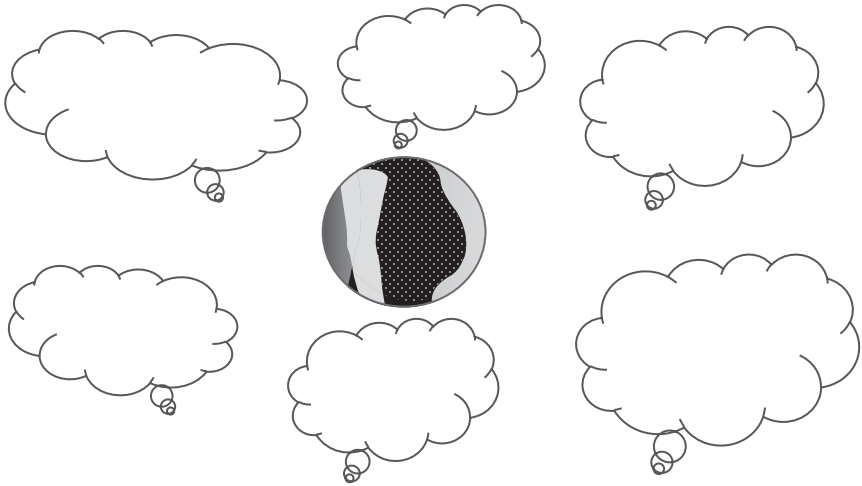


FIGURE 8.2 Thought bubble template.

### Dyad sandbox elicitation interviews

The third interview included a dyad sandbox **elicitation interview**. Sandboxing is a **visual method** where participants select symbolic objects and ascribe **meaning** to them (see Mannay et al. 2017 for details and practical guidance). On the day of the interview, participants were provided with a sand tray and a range of 3D figures and objects<sup>1</sup> and were asked to create a scene, image or abstract design in relation to ‘health and wellbeing in pregnancy’ (see Figure 8.3). At the same time, but separately, the researcher created a ‘sandbox’ of their own experiences of health and wellbeing during pregnancy using a second set of equipment. When the sandboxes were complete, the researcher and



FIGURE 8.3 Sandboxing materials.

participant sat together for a third **elicitation interview**. First, the participant described their experiences of pregnancy through reference to their sandscape, and then the researcher described their own experiences, although there was an overlap in some of the accounts. Areas of similarity and difference were also discussed. Whilst a sandscape may not be considered a document in the traditional sense, the use of creative methods may work well with those who have created documents to inform previous elicitation interviews.

### ***Analysis technique: narrative analysis***

#### *What is narrative analysis?*

Narrative approaches consider change over time as the central element in analysis (Plummer 2001). Narratives may be structured around family, self or events in wider society. As with many approaches to qualitative analysis, there is no one standard definition of **narrative analysis**. For example, Kohler Riessman (2008, p. 539) states that **narrative analysis** is a group of approaches that analyse data presented in “storied form” around individual cases, which may include multiple data sources, such as interviews and documents. As well as considering ‘stories’, Plummer (2001) suggests that we may also pay attention to plots, characters, themes and structures. Broadly, Kohler Riessman (2008) argues that **narrative analysis** can be either thematic, focusing on the themes within the account, or structural, where the composition of the story is considered chronologically with attention paid to meanings ascribed. By contrast, Jane Elliott (2005) provides a comprehensive overview of narrative approaches to research, both within qualitative and quantitative paradigms. She states that “a narrative can be understood to organize a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole. In this way a narrative conveys the meaning of events” (Elliott 2005, p. 3). As such, the significance of events, as described in a chronological fashion, is central to understanding the **meaning** in Elliott’s **narrative analysis**. Moreover, if one is to adopt this position, a narrative approach to data collection should be adopted, with participants encouraged to describe events, rather than themes. Although **narrative analysis** may often be conducted on interview accounts, the method can also be used to make sense of reports (Kohler Riessman 2008) and other written documents (Elliott 2005).

#### *How to do narrative analysis*

As may be imagined, from the lack of shared definition, there is no one single type of **narrative analysis**, and researchers’ particular interests in varying elements may shape the analysis strategy used (Elliott 2005). However, core elements may include empathetic understanding of life circumstances (Elliott 2005) and consideration of the telling of narrative to establish identity (Riessman 1990). It is

relevant to note that the use of **narrative analysis** has come under criticism. It has been argued that in allowing ones analysis to focus on the narrative within data alone, the researcher may miss important details about the social context (Denzin 1997). Thus, researchers should not use narrative analysis within a **positivist** framework, but instead should be critical, seeing the data as a **social construction**. Box 8.1 provides a list of key stages within **narrative analysis**.

**BOX 8.1 PROCEDURE TO UNDERTAKE NARRATIVE ANALYSIS (BASED ON ELLIOTT, 2005; RIESSMAN, 1990; KOHLER RIESSMAN, 2008)**

- 1 Use a narrative data collection method
- 2 Audio-record the interviews and transcribe the recordings **verbatim**
- 3 Use **line-by-line** coding to code data into themes, chronological events or both
- 4 Consider the presentation of self and others in data extracts by creating reflective notes attached to data extracts
- 5 Repeat steps 1–4 for all other cases
- 6 Compare reflective notes to search for trends in the construction of self and others throughout the data set
- 7 Draw conclusions

***Health and wellbeing in pregnancy: data analysis***

Within this project, we wanted to consider both events over time (as in Elliott, 2005), but also themes relating to health risk behaviours, following the Kohler Riessman (2008) approach. As such, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed **verbatim** by a professional transcription company (Stage 1 and 2 in Box 8.1). Following this, as part of Stage 3, we constructed an overview of the events presented during each life history interview. We used participant timelines and **line-by-line** coding to identify central events, with emotional and identity responses to the events written alongside them, in a simple Microsoft Office Word document (see Table 8.1 for an extract from one participant). It should be stated, however, that not all participants completed a timeline with ‘events’: one participant highlighted emotions and feelings at various points throughout her life. In this study, it was relatively simple to consider events over time, as the life history interview approach, facilitated by a timeline, encouraged participants to describe their lives chronologically.

Following the second phase of data production, full thematic coding occurred within **NVivo 11** (the second element of Stage 3), using analytic memos to record researcher reflections alongside data extracts (Stage 4). Here, codes related to health and wellbeing (including smoking, alcohol, exercise, diet and infant feeding choice),

**TABLE 8.1** Extract of narrative events and emotional responses from one participant

<i>Age/time</i>	<i>Experience</i>	<i>Emotion</i>
Primary school	Domestic violence (dad to mum), dad an alcoholic	Angry and upset
8	Parents separate; alongside this, family bereavement	Very upset
8–11	Lived with mum; had to move house a lot and didn't have many close friends	Alone, isolated, upset
[...]		
Late teens	Met partner at work	
Adulthood	Lots of family bereavements over a few years, including grandparents and dad	Very sad
Adulthood	Decided to get married and start a family	Content
First pregnancy	Suffered an accident and needed a lot of treatment for the injuries	Traumatised
	Lots of pregnancy-related sickness. The baby was OK	Happy
[...]		

as well as chronological life events, such as education and employment. Additional detail was added to the narrative accounts that had been created for each participant, based not only on insights from the second and third interviews, but also on the researchers' greater understanding of the participants' presentation of self.

The final stage of the analysis focused on drawing together findings from the ten participants (Stage 5). Due to the project funding, these focused on three core health behaviours (smoking during pregnancy, drinking alcohol during pregnancy and infant feeding) alongside the construction of a positive parenting identity, adopting an approach similar to that used by Riessman (1990). Participants described their own health as part of their life to date, including health behaviours of their family and social networks during the first interview. They reflected further on these during the second and third interviews, and all information was reviewed together. Here, comparisons were made between cases, by comparing quotations in relation to health behaviours between participants. Finally, we pooled all of the coding and analytic memos to draw conclusions (Stage 6), as can be seen in the next section.

## **Findings**

Many of the participants felt very unwell during their pregnancies as a result of nausea, sickness and tiredness. However, these women did not see their pregnancy-related illness as a reason for rest and recuperation, as they had busy family lives and nine of the ten were already primary carers to children. The women avoided certain foods which they knew would increase their nausea symptoms and simply "got on with it". Several participants noted that the

desirability of smoking a cigarette or drinking alcohol was severely reduced by their sickness and nausea.

As has been found in previous studies (see, for example, Grant et al. 2017), women reported that they felt that they were under surveillance when they were pregnant. This surveillance was tied to their (visibly pregnant) body and health behaviours. On one hand, the women said that they felt strongly that they should be able to make their own decisions, for example, regarding whether to smoke or drink alcohol. On the other hand, a high level of awareness of the potential judgements from others, and their own negative judgements regarding smoking outside of the home, meant that smoking and drinking alcohol were generally done in private at home, away from a public gaze. Partners played an interesting role at this time, with strong condemnation of smoking during pregnancy but subtle encouragement of drinking alcohol in the home.

The participants who smoked or drank alcohol during pregnancy performed identity work to maintain a 'good mother' self-identity in their narratives of events. They highlighted confusing and contradictory health advice from professionals, in relation to alcohol use and foods which should be avoided. Alongside this, participants noted examples from their own social network where mothers had smoked or consumed alcohol and their babies had gone on to be apparently healthy. In such an instance, participants were not considering a higher likelihood of symptoms associated with smoking during pregnancy, such as asthma or ear infections, but instead, focused on childhood deaths as the undesirable outcome, using phrases such as "I haven't killed them yet!" Women's strategy to reinforce their own good maternal identity was to follow their instincts, do what their own mothers had done or discuss their concerns with others, either face-to-face with their close social network or online via social media.

Women who did not partake in smoking or drinking alcohol during pregnancy reinforced their status as good mothers by highlighting how irresponsible mothers who smoke or drink alcohol. This practice, known as 'othering' (see Chapter 3), is a divisive strategy that serves to highlight the difference between social groups with which the participants could be associated with and ones which they felt might damage their reputation (Taylor-Gooby 2013).

## ***Discussion***

To conclude, overall women described many life circumstances that impacted their life and health choices. These factors, which the women often could not control, varied between their pregnant and non-pregnant lives. In the context of a society in which motherhood is strongly regulated, the women performed identity work through their narrative accounts in order to build and maintain a good maternal identity. This has impacts for providing care to

pregnant women who smoke or drink alcohol, highlighting the need for non-judgemental care.

## Challenges of undertaking document elicitation interviews

Gillian Rose, a leading methodologist, opens her seminal text by stating, “There’s an awful lot of hype around ‘the visual’ these days” (Rose 2016 p1). Concern has grown regarding appropriate and ethical use of visual approaches to research (Lomax 2015; Mannay 2016), and as such, it is of vital importance to consider the appropriateness of research methods in relation to research questions and participants’ likely engagement prior to study design. In much of my research a quasi-participatory stance is adopted: we aim to answer predefined research questions (often because I have been awarded funds to answer them), but to allow participants to give a reflective account of the issues as they experience them.

Using elicitation techniques in qualitative interviews requires interviewer confidence to allow participants to direct the interview. If you have not used these techniques before, it may be advisable to do a practice interview with a friend or family member about a topic that they would be able to discuss at length. Likewise, when undertaking analysis of **elicitation interview** transcripts, researchers should think with **reflexivity**, considering their role in shaping the data (Rose 2016). This includes through consideration of demographics and their physical and emotional presence in the research field (Coffey 1999). The safe dissemination of visual and documentary outputs, in terms of protecting participant anonymity (if desired), should also be considered (Mannay 2014).

## Exercise: using narrative analysis with document elicitation interview data

The earlier analysis focused on how participants constructed narratives about their lives and health. In the next section, data is presented from a fictionalised 11th participant to allow you to practise **narrative analysis** of a timeline-facilitated interview.

### *Instructions*

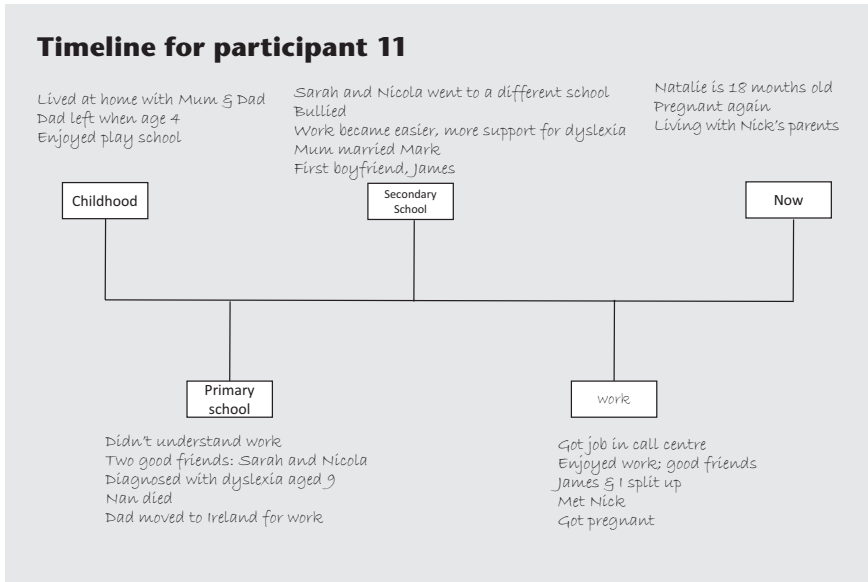
Using the timeline and the interview transcript extract, answer the following question:

**How do events and relationships impact on identity and presentation of self?**

I suggest that you consult Box 8.1 for guidance on how to conduct a **narrative analysis** (excluding Steps 5 and 6, as you only have one participant). You may wish to photocopy the data to facilitate your analysis.

Data

Source 1



Source 2

### Selected extracts from interview with participant 11

I: Do you want to start off talking me through your timeline?  
 R: Okay. So in terms of my childhood, growing up, I lived at home with my mum and dad. It was pretty good, my mum and dad were so in love, always running around and hugging each other and laughing and kissing. There was always lots of fun, Mum didn't mind if I made a mess if I was painting or we were baking. We lived in a really nice place, with a park with a great slide only a few minutes from the house, which I used to go to most days. And my mum's sisters, my aunts, lived just around the corner. I don't have any brothers or sisters, but my cousins Jess, Kate and Jim and I were pretty close.  
 I: It sounds as though you enjoyed that part of your childhood?  
 R: Yes, definitely.  
 I: Did that change when your dad left?  
 R: No, not really. Things were calmer at home, and it was quieter, but it was okay. Dad told me I needed "to be mum's little helper", but looking



back, I was already a really good kid. Mum and I always understood each other really easily: I could tell when she wanted help and when she'd rather be left alone. It did used to upset me when mum was sad, because I knew she missed him, but I think I was too young to properly understand. I was only four, and I still got to see dad in the evenings or the weekend. At about the same time, I started playschool. I really enjoyed having so many friends to play with, and my cousin Jim was in my class, which meant I got to see him every day. We're still good friends now.

I: OK.

R: I found it harder when I moved to primary school. At playschool everything felt really fun and easy; I really didn't understand the work at primary school. When everybody was making sentences and spelling words, I just couldn't do it. It made me really upset because I wanted to get the gold stars that the other children were getting. When I was nine I was diagnosed as being severely dyslexic, and then I got some help at school. Mrs Wiggins came to see me in the library twice a week. I found it really embarrassing at first having to leave lessons, but she understood how my brain worked and helped me to start to read as quickly as the other children in my class.

I: You mentioned some friends on your timeline?

R: Yes, Nicola and Sarah. We had to hang our coats next to each other on the first day of school, and Mrs Clemo, our first schoolteacher, told us that we had to look out for each other and be friends. So we did. Nicola lived close to my house – you just had to walk along the back lane, and there were no cars there – so at some point, I must have been about 8 or 9, my mum said that I could walk to Nicola's house by myself. I felt so grown up. I used to go there all the time – my mum used to joke that her mum would have to start charging me rent! Just before the end of primary school, my dad had to move away for work. It felt kind of weird, because it happened around the same sort of time that Nan died, and Dad had been living with her since he moved out. Thinking about it now, I've never really thought before – those two things are probably related, and maybe he didn't need to move away. He tried to talk to me on the phone, but he never really said very much, so we stopped speaking very often, but that's okay.

R: Things were different in secondary school. Sarah and Nicola had to go to a different school. I didn't get a place to go to their school because we lived just outside the catchment area. There were a few people from my primary school that went, including the school bully, a girl called Fiona, but it wasn't the same as having my friends there. I found it quite lonely and tried to hide away. Fiona joined up with a group of other bullies, and she made my life hell in that first year. I think I became known as

someone you could easily bully – they'd all make fun of me being dyslexic and because I didn't have the most expensive shoes or whatever.

I: Did you tell anyone?

R: I told my mum, and she tried really hard to sort things out. She spoke to the school, and when that didn't work, she went to Fiona's parents' house one evening and banged on the door until they let her in. I was completely mortified, but the bullying eased off after that.

[...]

R: And then (when I was 14) I met James, I had been going to trampolining class on a Friday night at the community centre. It was the time that I always saw Nicola, and I loved trampolining, I was so good: I could do all of the somersaults. One evening there was a party, and Jo, the girl whose house it was, her older brother James was there too. I thought he was so cool, he was a bit older, and the lads my age all seemed so immature, you know – they still all thought girly stuff was stupid. He looked old enough that he was able to buy alcohol, and so we were all drinking cider at the party. We went out for the last two years of school, and then he decided to go into the army. I really didn't want him to do it, and we argued all of the time. I really loved him, but I just couldn't face him being away all of the time, so we split up.

[...]

R: I didn't do very well at school, even though in Year 8 I got some really good help: they gave me a computer, and that made everything so much easier, but I just couldn't think when it came down to my GCSEs [exams]. Everything with James was just going on, and I couldn't think about anything else. Thinking about it now, I don't have a GCSE in English or maths, you know, above the grade C, so it meant that I couldn't go on the college course I wanted to. I think it's all worked out well now, in the end.

I: Do you want to tell me what happened after you left school?

R: I was really panicking, because I had always planned to go on and do hair and beauty college, you know, an NVQ, but they wouldn't take me unless I agreed to redo my GCSE in English. After finding school so hard, I just didn't want to do any more exams, and I didn't want to lie to them about it. My cousin Jim always said he wasn't going to go to college – he wanted to get out and start work, he said. Before he even finished his exams, he had a job lined-up in a call centre where some of his friends worked. He said it would be a real laugh and that he could put in a good word for me. So he got me the job. I had to go for an interview, I felt so nervous, but he told me it would be okay that I had the job.

[...]

R: On a work night out, I met Nick. I hadn't really had another boyfriend since James – they'd all seemed to just be interested in one thing. Nick works on the evening shift, so I hadn't met him before. On our first date, I could tell he was different: he wore a shirt and everything. My mum told me then that she thought he was a keeper. We'd only been together about six months when I fell pregnant. I was absolutely terrified. I didn't know how mum would react, I thought dad would give me a right telling off, and I had no idea how I was going to be a mum to a tiny baby. But Nick was great. He told me we could do whatever I wanted – he made it seem like it would be easy.[...]

R: I had the worst morning sickness – I felt sick literally all of the time. Before I was pregnant, I'd go out drinking every Friday and Saturday with work people. We'd have such a laugh, but once I was pregnant I couldn't even bear the smell, so I had to stop going out. It felt really weird; I felt so different to everybody else. Luckily, I found out that Nicola was also pregnant, and that made it better – to know someone knew what I was going through. We both ended up going to this session run by the midwife where they tell you what you're supposed to do. It was so patronising, it's like, 'I'm young, not stupid'.

[...]

I: How have things been since Natalie was born?

R: It's been hard, people tell you that they don't sleep, and that you won't get to sleep, but you can't really understand it until it's happening. We are lucky that we live with Julie [Nick's mum] and Paul [Nick's stepdad], but... No one else is going to see this, are they?

I: No, nobody will know what you said.

R: It's just sometimes they can be really pushy. Like I wanted to try to breastfeed Natalie, but Julie kept on telling me to go to bed, to get some rest, but I think it was because she wanted to give Natalie a bottle. So she's been really kind, and I don't know what I'd do without her helping, but sometimes it's just difficult. I feel like I can't do what I want with my baby, but there wouldn't be space for us to go and live with mum and Mark (my stepdad).

[...]

R: It's like, now I'm pregnant again, I know I shouldn't be smoking, and I've tried so hard to stop. Nick tells me off for it, but in the evening when he's out at work I sit with Julie [his mum] and she lets me have one of her fags. I only ever have one, one a day, two at most. When I see the midwife, I have to blow into this tube and it says if you smoke, so I make sure I don't smoke the day before, and it says that I'm a non-smoker. I am definitely going to stop, but it's just so hard.

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