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I. Feminist Research Practice: Using Conversation Analysis to Explore the Researcher's Interaction with Participants

Estefania GUIMARAES

This article focuses on the ethics of my own conduct during the course of recording interactions between women and the police to whom they were reporting abuse in a women's police station in Brazil. Using conversation analysis I explore how my own research practice changed over the course of the data collection phase. I began with a commitment to 'objectivity' and abandoned that as I increasingly felt a debt to women who let me record their interactions, learnt progressively more about police work, and felt a moral responsibility as a feminist to intervene if I thought I could help women. I present one data extract from my first day in the police station and show how I try to disengage from a woman's attempts to elicit my involvement in her case. Then I show one data extract from my last day in the police station, in which I actively intervene in the situation, giving advice to a woman about what should be included in the police report. My research contributes to other work on the ethics of feminist research method in being based on fine-grained analysis of actually recorded (rather than remembered) interactions.

Key Words: *abuse, Brazil, ethics, feminism, method, objectivity, police, reflexivity, women's police stations*

Feminist researchers generally agree that there is not a singular feminist research method (Kelly et al., 1994; Kirsh, 1999; Kitzinger, 2003; Maynard and Purvis, 1994), but many propose that – whatever the method employed – what makes research 'feminist' is, in part, an underlying research ethic (Kirsh, 1999) of 'integrity' and 'responsibility' in the research process (Maynard and Purvis, 1994). Particularly since Oakley's (1981)¹ influential work arguing that the traditional, detached, protocol of conducting research/interviews was 'morally

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indefensible' (p. 41) and that researchers should engage with their participants and be responsive to (rather than seek to avoid) respondents' reactions to the interview, as a way to promote a 'sociology for women' (p. 48), research has been understood as 'relational practice' and a form of 'connecting with others' (Gergen and Davis, 1997: 97). In the field of violence against women, for example, Hydén (2005: 174), who interviewed women in a shelter for battered women in Sweden, reports having a 'basic commitment . . . to emphasiz[ing] the importance of knowledge gathering as a personal activity, in which the researcher and the researched are recognized as in relation to one another'. It is fairly common for feminist researchers (at least *qualitative* researchers) not only to report their findings, but also to reflect upon their own research conduct and to consider their own role in the research process (see Maynard and Purvis, 1994). This article contributes to the debate on the ethics of carrying out feminist research, based on the analysis of my personal involvement during the data collection phase of the research.

My ongoing doctoral research at the University of York (supervised by Celia Kitzinger) is on women's reports of violence as given in interviews with the police, counsellors and social workers. It is motivated by the hope that by understanding better what happens in these interactions I can offer feedback to the professionals that can assist them in improving their practice. I have audio-recorded 36 interactions in which women report abuse in a women's police station (WPS) in the north-east of Brazil and 20 interactions between abused women and their counsellors or social workers in a Care Centre for Abused Women in the south-east of Brazil. Using conversation analysis (CA) within a feminist framework (as proposed by Kitzinger, 2000 and developed in Kitzinger, 2003, 2005a, 2005b; Land and Kitzinger, 2005; Shaw and Kitzinger, 2007; Toerien and Kitzinger, in press), I am analysing these interactions to understand the problems that arise in them, especially those that may lead to under-reporting of violence, to lack of help for abused women, or to complaints being dismissed. In this article, however, I will focus instead on the ethics of my own conduct during the course of recording interactions between women and the police.

This article contributes in three key ways to the field of feminist research ethics. First, it is based on analyses of *recorded* interaction, rather than on field notes or on recollections of incidents after the event, whereas most feminist researchers reflect on their research practice without having (or making reference to) recordings of what they actually did or didn't do in the course of their interactions with their research participants (for some exceptions see Franklin, 1997; Grønnerød, 2004). Second, it is based on a rigorous analysis of these interactions using the tools of CA (see Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973) to understand small but significant features of my interaction with research participants (such as a few seconds of silence and/or actual talk) which could not possibly have been remembered or analysed without their having been recorded. Third, unlike most feminist research, which is based on interviews or focus groups, my research uses naturally occurring data, i.e. the talk between the

women and the professionals helping them was not set up for research purpose. In most research using naturally occurring data, the researcher is removed from the research scene,² which sidesteps a lot of ethical concerns raised in the feminist literature: researchers who never meet their research participants tend not to worry about their relationship with them. By contrast, the gatekeepers in both my research environments requested my presence throughout the data collection process in order to seek ethical clearance from each of the women recorded, to operate the recording equipment, and to witness the interactions at first hand. Although my participation was supposed to be restricted to getting the participants' consents to record their interaction, it turned out that I became increasingly involved in the interactions I was recording, so that my recordings of women reporting abuse have turned out to be also recordings of my research practice. This means that they offer an opportunity for a self-reflective study of my own research practice during data collection although I was not aware, when recording those interactions, that my practice would become a matter of interest. Hence my own study is unusual in contributing to the study of feminist research practice an analysis of recorded interactions between a researcher and her participants in a naturally occurring environment.

I began the data collection process with two competing models of research practice. One was my feminist commitment to research that engaged with the realities of women's lives and would be helpful in challenging violence against women. The other – taken from discursive psychology and notions of objective science – dictated that I should try not to influence the data or to engage with my research participants as human beings, since this would 'contaminate' the data. One value of collecting and analysing naturally occurring data is that (usually) the researcher is not there directing the interaction in any way. When this is the case researchers pass the 'dead social scientist test' (Potter, 2003): that is, they have no impact on the interaction they are studying, which would happen even if the researcher were dead. Even though I was recording interactions that would happen even if I were not collecting them as data, I worried that I would fail the dead scientist test because I had to be present during the recording. This meant that, although I had every intention of being as 'imperceptible' as possible to my participants once they had agreed to have their interactions recorded, I could not physically remove myself from the scene. In fact, my research participants saw no reason to ignore my presence. Both the abused women and the professionals involved with them engaged me in conversation, and the issue of how to engage with participants became crucial for me.

I will show two extracts from my recordings: an early interaction between myself and a complainant that reflects my hope for 'uncontaminated' and objective data, and a later one that reflects my abandonment of that as a priority, and an attempt to do what I could for the complainant right there and then. The names shown in the extracts are pseudonyms and the data were transcribed using Jefferson's (1983, 2004) transcription system. I will show here both the Brazilian Portuguese original and my English translation of it (for a discussion

of issues involved in transcription and translation see Guimaraes, in preparation).

Extract 1, recorded on my first day in the WPS, shows my uneasiness with the fact that complainants sometimes interacted with me despite my desire for their interactions with the police to be as little 'contaminated' by my presence as possible. My fear of contaminating my research made me not very responsive to a woman's sharing of her pain with me. Bianca had brought her 12-year-old daughter (allegedly a victim of sexual abuse) to the police station and the police officer had asked the girl to sit next to her and tell her the details of the story. While the officer was talking (in the same room) to the daughter, Bianca began to talk to me. She told me, with some anxiety, that the alleged abuser had been pursuing the girl (in her grandmother's house) with the intention of running away with her. Bianca's dramatic telling is not, however, met with more than minimal responses by me, as shown in Extract 1.

Extract 1 – WPS 11

- 08 Bia: Ele >f:oi na casa de minha mãe<=que eu estava
He >w:ent to my mother's house<=cuz I was
- 09 aqui: né? Ontem. Aí ele chegou lá atrás dela
he:re right? Yesterday. Then he went there after her
- 10 >né=querendo iludi ela- pra levá ela.
>right=wanting to delude her- to take her.
- 11 → (1.0)
- 12 Bia: Né? Agora (ele assi:m) chegou na casa da
Right? Now (he like) he got to
- 13 minha mãe=num pediu ela prá namorá, (.)
my mother's house=didn't ask to date her, (.)
- 14 s:ó falou assim dá roupa (.) dá sa-
j:ust said like he'll give her clothes (.) give r-
- 15 som dá televisão.=Isso é o que:?=
a radio give a television.=What does it me_a:n?=
16 =Ele tá querendo seduzi ela.
=He wants to seduce her.
- 17 → (0.8)
- 18 Bia: Né?
Right?
- 19 → (3.0)
- 20 Ele num tá sabendo nã:o.=Que=eu vim pra cá: não.
He doesn't kno:w.=That=I came he:re no:.

I was aware of the importance of validating women's experiences of abuse in their reports, but although I did my best not to disregard the complainant and made sure I paid attention to what she said, looking at her and nodding in

response to her telling, that was all I did. The fact that my responses may not have been 'good enough' is not only my post hoc analysis of the interaction, but is also analysably available from the data. Note the relevance of my silences for Bianca, who tries repeatedly to get more than non-minimal responses from me. The arrows on lines 11, 17 and 19 show those places in which a response to Bianca's telling was made relevant but where I remained silent. Line 11 is placed after Bianca tells me with some moral indignation that her child's alleged abuser had pursued her daughter and wanted to take her with him. Line 17 is after the man's actions are presented and rounded up with the story's punch line: he wanted to seduce her daughter. My minimal nods were clearly not taken as an appropriate response: Bianca pursues a more adequate response from me ('right?', line 19) – something like 'How terrible' perhaps. What can be seen, then, is Bianca's orientation to my lack of engagement (beyond minimal non-verbal responses like nodding or smiling) when I could have responded more empathetically.

It was difficult, at the time, to know how to respond in this institutional context. To Bianca, who met me in the police room as a researcher sitting through the report making and asking for permission to record the interaction, my 'incapacity' to respond was probably not evident: she met me 'with' the police when searching for help and she did not know that day was also a first for me in the WPS and that I did not know how or if I could help. I did not know much about the police work or how to help her and I did not feel I had any capacity to respond to her report. As a friend I could have empathized with her or expressed outrage; as a psychologist I could have helped her explore her feelings about what had happened; as a police officer I could have used her story as a reportable matter. But I was not there in any of those capacities. As a researcher collecting naturalistic interactions I wanted to have no impact on the interactions and definitely not to encourage people to talk to me. Moreover, while Bianca was speaking I felt frustrated at not being able to hear the interaction between Bianca's daughter and the officer, who were talking at the same time, and I was aware that Bianca's talk to me would be picked up by my microphone and obscure the girl's disclosure of the abuse.

As a researcher concerned about violence against women and women reporting violence, I felt a debt to the women who let me record their interactions with the police. Listening to their stories of abuse often left me feeling powerless and disturbed, although I hoped my research could give something back to women (and help the WPS) in the future. Over the course of data collection, I progressively learned more about the police work and the police interactions with abused women, and I also became more comfortable in that environment. In this context, the debt I felt towards the complainants who had trusted me and took part in my research became more important than passing the dead scientist test when I was clearly not dead, but there and listening.

The second extract I will show was the 33rd case in my corpus, recorded on my last day at the WPS and after accompanying lots of cases. Having accompanied many reportings, I had a lot more to work on, not only in terms of the

number of cases I had already recorded, but also because I learned what to expect from the police and the interactions. I knew, then, who did what in the police station. I knew they performed tasks I was previously unaware of, and I had established some rapport with some officers who were getting used to my presence and with whom I was feeling more comfortable. So, contrary to my first example in which I do not really respond to a complainant's effort to involve me, in this second example I actively interfere and step in to help a woman, Rosa, when I didn't think her complaints were being depicted in the report in accordance with her best interests.

Rosa reported multiple forms of violence that culminated in a serious incident of battery in which her partner had attempted to strangle her with a belt. She had managed to escape and run away from their house when the belt broke and slipped from her abuser's hand while he tightened it around her neck, but after a period away – in which she took care of her mother who was in hospital – she found most of her belongings thrown out of her house and the lock to her house changed, so that she no longer had access to it. After about 35 minutes of interaction, the police officer (Po6) read to Rosa the statement, which dealt only with the physical abuse Rosa had suffered and did not mention the fact that she had no access to her house, and asked her if that was 'all'. Although Rosa's first response agrees with it being 'just that', she later raises 'other things', i.e. things not included in the report such as not being able to get into the house she had with her partner and her rights to the property. Those complaints, which had already been 'dismissed' by Po6 as not 'policeable'⁴ matters, are blocked again as she says they should be discussed with the chief commissioner in a meeting they would schedule for almost a month later. What follows is depicted in Extract 2. In line 1, the police officer is reading to herself part of the statement as she continues finishing the report. Again, Rosa tries to re-open the sequence checking if she really couldn't talk to the 'doctor', i.e. 'the chief commissioner', on that very day (line 3). Rosa's request (her fourth attempt to talk to the 'doctor') gets at most a head shake (line 4), so she quits pursuing the matter and asks when her abuser will be summoned by the police. After responding (line 7) and closing the sequence, Po6 resumes working on the report for approximately 18 seconds. It is then that I, the researcher ('Est'), intervene into the situation – not by directly interfering with the officer's work, but by informing Rosa about what to do (lines 9–10).

My advice to Rosa quickly prompts her to address the officer, raising her inability to enter her house. This is taken up by Po6 and, after a small debate regarding what Rosa needs to get in her house, Po6 says (lines 33–4) that they can talk to the chief commissioner about Rosa's problem. Rosa continues talking about her situation and Po6 says again they will bring Rosa's concerns to the chief commissioner and asks to finish the report (line 38). While Po6 finishes the report I intervene again, giving some advice to Rosa regarding what she could get from the police in order to take the next step and get legal help. In my talk (starting at line 41) I engage in multiple self-repair instances as I try to explain to

her what the legal procedure would entail. I later remark on the relevance of her mentioning that she had not abandoned her house in terms of protecting her rights to her property (lines 56–8), which again prompts Rosa to address Po6 to make sure that it is made clear in the report that she had not abandoned her house. Po6 asks, then, if Rosa wants it to be stated, which she confirms. At this point (lines 65–6), I address Po6 for the first time regarding the importance of registering the fact that Rosa could not get into her house. Po6 agrees to state it (line 68) and I present the reason for it as being to avoid the legal representation of her situation as being one of home abandonment (line 69). Later, Rosa talks about her situation while Po6 keeps working on the report and, on line 78, addresses me by making reference to my research and ‘lots of things’ I could get for it in the WPS, with which I agree.

Extract 2 – WPS 33

- 01 Po6: °o citado cidadão°
°the mentioned citizen°
- 02 (1.2)
- 03 Wom: >>Por hoje eu num posso falá com a do:ra né:.<<
>>Today I can't talk to the do:ctor ri:ght.<<
- 04 (2.2)
- 05 Wom: >>Esse=-essa intimação vai pra ele qua:ndo.<<
>>This=- when does this notification go to hi:m.<<
- 06 (1.8)
- 07 Po6: Eu acho que pra sema:na.
I think in a wee:k.
- 08 (18 sec)
- 09 Est: °°A senhora (pode/deve explicá-) seria ú:tchil assim
°°You ma'am (can/should explain-) it would be u:seful like
- 10 que ele (num deu/ mu:dou) (a)casa=°°
that he (hasn't given/ cha:nged) (the)house=°°
- 11 Wom: =Olhe! Mas ele não deixa eu entrá dentro de ca:sa.
=Look! But he doesn't let me get into the ho:use.
- 12 (1.0)
- 13 Po6: Si::::m. Você qué- você qué i:=em ca:sa- a
Ri::::ght. You wa- You want to ge:t=into the ho:use- the
- 14 casa é su:a,=
the house is yo:urs,=
- 15 Wom: =E [de:le.=E]
=And [hi:s.=And]
- 16 Po6: [E de:le.=A]í tuas coisas tão tuda-
[And hi:s.=t]hen your things are all-

- 17 Wom: Umas coisas minha ele jogô: mas (viu)
Some of my things he threw awa:y but (see)
- 15 lines omitted: 'Wom' and 'Po6' discuss what is in the house and what the woman wants to get there in order to establish the next action --
- 33 Po6: [Pro:n]to. Aí a gente falá com a delega:da.=
[Ri:g]th. Then we talk to the chief commi:ssioner.=
- 34 =Tá ce:rrt[u.]
= Alri:gh [t.]
- 35 Wom: [Po]rrque=eu fa:çoç=Né:.=Bijuteria
[Be]cause=I ma:keç=Ri:ght.=Costume jewellery
- 36 pra vendê.=Que eu tenho tudo dentro de ca:sa
to sell.=Which I have all seized up inside the
- 37 pr[e:so.]
ho[:use.]
- 38 Po6: [A gente] fa:la viu. T- terminá aqui: tá:.
[We'll] te:ll her right. O- I'll finish he:re oka:y.
- 39 Wom: Tá:.
Oka:y.
- 40 (0.5)
- 41 Est: °°(Name) Depois cê pedje uma indicação pra eles
°°(Name) Later you ask for a referral for them
- 42 encaminharem você pra defensori:aç°°
to direct you to the legal a:idç°°
- 43 Wom: °°Uhum. (S:i::m).°°
°°Mm hm. (R:i:ght).°°
- 44 Est: °°Que é pra justi::çaç°°
°°That is to ju::sticeç°°
- 45 (0.2)
- 46 Est: °°Pra você podê pedi a separação de be[:n]s=
°°To enable you to ask for the separation of prof[:p]erty=
- 47 Wom: [mm]
- 48 Est: =e a separação (judicial).°°
=and the (judicial) separation.°°
- 49 (.)
- 50 Est: °°Esse j:- esse:- fazê- (pra você/sabe assim)
°°This j:- thi:s- to do- (for you to/you know like)
- 51 (uma) separação no pape:l, () é um
(a) separation on pa:per, () is a
- 52 negocinho do Esta:do:, (.) cês vão-(tiveram) os
Sta:te ma:tter, (.) you will-(had) the

- 53 bens (então) vai ter que pedi a separaçã:o,
property (so) you'll have to ask for the separa:tion,
- 54 (.) e a divisão dos be:ns, (.) pra:=num-
(.) and the division of pro:perty, (.) fo:r=not-
- 55 pra você:: podê regularizá a situaçã:o.=Pra ele
for yo::u to be able to regularize the situa:tion.=For him
- 56 não ficá com a ca:sa. É bom que cê colocô: (.)
not to keep the ho:use. It's good that you sta:ted (.)
- 57 (essa aqui de) que você não
(this here of) that you didn't
- 58 (abandonou- falá) que cê não abandonou a ca:sa.°°
(abandon- say) that you didn't abandon the ho:use.°°
- 59 Wom: Senhora, eu- só deixa claro aí que eu não
Ma'am, I- just make it clear there that I didn't
- 60 abandonei a casa vi:u.
abandon the house ri:ght.
- 61 Po6: Cê qué que eu colo:que.
Do you want it sta:ted.
- 62 Wom: Que eu não abandonei a ca:sa.=Porque eu não
That I didn't abandon the ho:use.=Because I didn't
- 63 abandone:i. Foi ele que jogô as minhas #(coisa)
aba:ndon it. It was him who threw my #(things)
- 64 pra fo:ra:#
awa:y:#
- 65 Est: É bom colocá que ela num pode entrá em- na
It's good to state that she cannot get into- into the
- 66 casa.
house.
- 67 Wom: É:. Ele não deixa entrá, trocô o cadea:do,
Ye:h. He doesn't let me in, changed the lo:ck,
- 68 Po6: Tá cerrto. Eu vou colocá.
That's right. I'll state it.
- 69 Est: Porque senão configura abando:no.=Num é i:sso.
Because otherwise it consitutes aba:ndonment.=Doesn't i:t.
- 70 (.)
- 71 Wom: É:. Porque ele jogô minhas coisa fo:ra. E
Ye:h. Because he threw my things awa:y. And
- 72 porque trocô o cadea:doç=Porque eu tou
because he changed the lo:ckç=Because I am
- 73 aqui com a chave: da po:rta e o cadea:do mas
here with the ke:y to the do:or and padlo:ck but

- 74 só que ele trocô.
he changed it.
- 75 (±10)
- 76 Wom: Ele é muito estúpido. Desafora:do.
He is very rude. Insolent.
- 77 (.)
- 78 Po6: Tem muita coisa pra você né doto:ra.
There are lots of things for you right do:ctor.
- 79 Est: Tem.
Yes.

My agreement with the police officer's observation (line 78) about there being lots of things for me to research in the police unit certainly did not include, back then, my own participation in the interactions. I look at this interaction now as an important and interesting one for my analysis, but I thought of it then as a 'lost case'. In my concern for uncontaminated data I assumed I would 'ruin' (for research purposes) any case I decided to actively take part in. In this instance, however, I had simply felt that I could not remain silent in the name of generating 'uncontaminated' data and in the hope of producing some future knowledge that could help women in similar situations. I could only hope that whatever action derived from my research results could help other women in the future, but I knew that my research itself would not be able to retrospectively help that specific complainant, at that very moment. Also, during most of the time I was recording their statements I felt so powerless and so sad about their problems that the thought of doing something that could help and/or be empowering was too attractive to be disregarded. Apart from all the hopelessness I had felt, that was a moment in which I could at least do something that would definitely help someone and have an impact on her life. So, I was happy to lose a research case to try to help this particular woman's case. As other feminist researchers have reported (Oakley, 1981; Kirsch, 1999), I felt I had a moral obligation to interact with officers and complainants if I thought I could help: remaining silent in the name of conducting 'uncontaminated' research would have felt like 'holidaying' on someone's misery (to use McRobbie's comparison presented by Ganguly, 1992). In speaking, I betrayed the principle that guided my behaviour towards passing 'the dead scientist test'. But it was a different principle that made me step in: my commitment to my research was not only *about* women reporting abuse, but also *for* women reporting abuse.

The fact that the research process itself was being recorded together with the police interactions was crucial for this self-reflection. Without the data I would probably remember that I interfered with case WPS 33, but it would be hard for me to question what I did (and didn't) do in interactions such as WPS 11. Though my behaviour in WPS 11 as a researcher and someone new to the police station is absolutely understandable, it is hard to listen – and to present – this data

without feeling that what I did back then was not good enough. Although my intervention in this interaction cannot show what women generally experience when reporting abuse to the police (because generally I am not there to interfere), its recording is well suited for a reflection on the ethics of data collection, changes in research practices, the research role in interactions and the issue of involvement with the researched.

In sum, I propose that there is a lot to be gained by close analysis of one's own recorded interactions with participants that goes beyond impressions, memories and field notes. Detailed analysis of the data collection process can provide insights into research practice by revealing some of its blind spots and helping to raise questions (and perhaps solutions) for some issues about *doing* research that are not covered by abstract debates about research ethics and researcher involvement. CA of my recorded interactions made that possible.

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NOTES

1. See Finch (1984), Kirsh (1999) and Letherby (2004) for diverging feminist views on researchers' interactions with participants.
2. Conversation analysts frequently provide recording devices for participants, leaving them to do their own recordings (e.g. Shaw and Kitzinger, this issue; Land and Kitzinger, this issue; Kitzinger and Rickford, this issue) and/or use data collected by other researchers (e.g. Kitzinger, 2005b).
3. For a transcription key and for an introductory overview to the feminist CA special feature of which this article is a part, see Kitzinger, this issue.
4. 'Policeable' means worthy of police attention and is used here in a similar sense to that of 'doctorable' in CA research – that is, in analyses of how patients demonstrate their concern with presenting their condition as worthy of medical attention and, perhaps, treatment. According to Heritage and Robinson (2006) the issue of 'doctorability' centres on patients' concerns to show that they have good reasons for seeking the physician's assistance. While complainants in a WPS may have similar concerns about showing 'good reasons' to present themselves to the police, their understanding about what actually falls under the police remit is very limited. Research on Brazilian WPSs proposes that complainants frequently want justice (of a moral order) and to 'assert their rights' (Brandão, 1998; Silva, 2001). Complainants' perspectives regarding what constitutes a 'good reason' to go to the police and what they expect from the police frequently conflict with the police job of making a report about one specific incident of a predefined 'reportable' abuse. My data also support the observation that complainants reporting abuse to the WPS present their concerns regarding legal separation and division of property, which are not police duties but matters that have to be dealt with

separately within the Brazilian legal system. Police officers clearly orient their actions to this discrepancy between what is policeable and what complainants think is policeable by blocking complainants' attempts to bring property and separation issues into their reports and asking them to limit their statements to the last incident of battery/threat and to leave other concerns out.

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