CHRISTINE VALENTINE

BEREAVEMENT NARRATIVES

Continuing bonds in the twenty-first century

Bereavement Narratives

Bereavement is often treated as a psychological condition of the individual with both healthy and pathological forms. However, this empirically grounded study argues that this is not always the best or only way to help bereaved people. In a radical departure, it emphasises normality and social and cultural diversity in grieving.

Illustrated by recent research, *Bereavement Narratives* explores the extent to which dead loved ones may retain a social presence in the lives of survivors and how bereavement interacts with other agendas to shape peoples day-to-day experience and sense of identity. As such, it presents a perspective that does justice to the complexity of each, while contributing to a broader picture of bereavement that reflects the increasing fragmentation and multiculturalism of British society.

By focusing on the way people make sense of their worlds, this book expands current thinking on the nature of the continuing bonds people forge with dead loved ones to reveal a discourse of care and reciprocity, the role of deathbed accounts in people's ongoing relationships and the way the dead may gain a presence in the interview situation. Drawing attention to the profoundly social nature of grief, it considers the practical implications this has for supporting bereaved people.

This book is an innovative and invaluable read for all students and researchers of death, dying and bereavement.

Christine Valentine is a researcher and teacher at the Centre for Death and Society, University of Bath. She is currently based at the University of Tokyo comparing bereavement in the UK and Japan.

Bereavement Narratives

Continuing bonds in the twenty-first century

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To the continuing bond with my father

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Introduction

This book takes a social look at the experience of bereavement as it reflects the norms, values and beliefs of contemporary British Society. Illustrated by recent research, it explores the extent to which and the variety of ways in which dead loved ones may retain a significant social presence in the life of survivors and how bereavement interacts with other personal agendas to shape people's day-to-day social experience and sense of identity. By focusing on the way people make sense of their experience, as revealed by the interview narratives of 25 bereaved people, this book expands current thinking on the nature and role of the continuing bonds people forge with their dead. It highlights how the continuing significance of the dead in the lives of the living revises what most people understand as the boundaries between the living and the dead. Drawing attention to the profoundly social nature of grief, it considers the practical implications this has for supporting bereaved people.

In order to appreciate the implications of the experiences my interviewees shared with me, my research and the approach I took must first be placed in context. This introductory chapter therefore provides a brief overview of the ways in which the academic study of bereavement has so far been tackled. First it traces a significant shift in perspective from an individualised, to a more social understanding of grief, highlighting the implications of taking a more social approach. Then, it considers the way such an approach has informed the theoretical and practical investigation on which this book is based. It concludes with a brief outline and rationale of the way the book is structured.

The academic study of bereavement

During the twentieth century, Western approaches to the study of bereavement have been shaped by the scientific rationality associated with modernity to represent grief as a condition of the individual psyche (Stroebe *et al*., 1992; Hockey, 1996a; Valentine, 2006). Reflecting a social and cultural context of liberal democracy or secular society of private individuals, psychological studies of bereavement have focused on defining the symptoms of grief and identifying its 'healthy' and 'pathological' forms (Lindemann, 1944; Parkes, 1972; Parkes and Weiss, 1983; Stroebe and Stroebe, 1987). Such observations of the individual 'grief reactions'

of Westerners, mainly widows, have formed the basis of universal theories, which take little account of ethnic, cultural and individual diversity.

Though originally intended as descriptive, these theories have provided the substance of the prescriptive stage models of bereavement used by many bereavement counselling services (Small, 2001). Such models have obscured the more reflective, tentative and nuanced approach of theorists in attempting to convey grief's inner turmoil, to represent grief as a measurable, predictable, controllable condition. For example, Worden's 'tasks of mourning' (1991), a popular basis for bereavement counselling, include: accepting the reality of the loss; working through its pain; adjusting to life without the deceased; emotionally relocating the deceased and moving on with life. Rather than 'the discovery of the meaning of what has been lost in all its ambiguity, ambivalence and complexity' (Craib, 1998: 166), such an approach neglects the extent to which grief is socially shaped and inhibits any real understanding of the individual, social and cultural complexity and diversity of the way people grieve.

Demonstrating the diversity of responses to death around the world, anthropologists have highlighted the profound social shaping of bereavement (Goody, 1962; Boas, 1911/1965; Evans-Pritchard, 1972/1937). Yet a preoccupation with the 'exotic' aspects of pre-modern societies and a cultural determinism has failed to capture the complexity of the way people actually experience bereavement in their lives. Rather, observations of mourning behaviour have been interpreted as evidence to support universal theories of the function of death ritual, such as promoting social solidarity or representing the dominant values of society (Durkheim, 1915; Radcliffe-Brown, 1964; Huntington and Metcalf, 1979).

However, more recent anthropological and sociological perspectives have drawn attention to the increasingly diverse and fragmented nature of contemporary Western societies. Studies are adopting a more interactional view of society in which individuals make sense of their world through negotiation with each other (Hockey, 1990; Bradbury, 1999; Riches and Dawson, 2000; Francis *et al.*, 2005). As noted by Hockey (1996b), the complexity and diversity of contemporary British society poses a challenge to any attempt to represent the way the social reality of bereavement comes to be experienced and lived out on a day-to-day basis. We can no longer approach people's experience and understandings in terms of generalities and overarching explanations, either those that take the 'individual' and a 'common humanity' as a starting point or those that prioritise 'society' and its structures. As indicated, in the former case the experience of bereavement is understood in terms of what is normal and pathological and in the latter, a collective framework of meanings.

This book seeks to demonstrate how the social reality of death and bereavement within contemporary Britain is both characterised and constructed by a diversity of meanings and world views (Hockey, 1996b: 47). It draws attention to the way people use available cultural scripts to construct and express meanings that are particular and personal to them. Such discursive activity reflects a meeting of people's different agendas, both internally as well as externally, to create a tension through which social reality is generated. This process calls into question any

straightforward relationship between society's structures and individual agency. Rather it reveals the complex and creative interplay between individual and cultural resources, the human capacity for agency in difficult situations and the way people act on the basis of meaning.

By taking a discursive perspective it becomes possible to gain access to the interface between internal and external realities through the medium of conversation (Small, 2001: 41–42). This approach represents a significant challenge to the way the scientific paradigm has drawn a distinction between private, inner experience and outer observable behaviour. Rather, in focusing on the way people talk about their experience, it reveals the separation of the inner world of consciousness from the outer world of what is said and seen as a social artefact. It highlights the way the human encounter with death and loss, and indeed any aspect of the social world, is constructed in the present, through social interaction to allow a very different picture from that presented by models and prescriptions of grief to emerge. This perspective is raising questions about the nature of reality and the production of knowledge, as well as how society supports bereaved people and treats its dead members.

An increasing use of qualitative, interactive methods in relation to small-scale, exploratory studies has allowed researchers to enter the social world of participants to reveal the experience of death and bereavement as integral to life rather than a condition to be treated. This is not to minimise the extreme pain, suffering and disruption the loss of a loved one may generate. Rather, following the current trend in the field of health and illness, it is to focus on the way and the extent to which such suffering 'becomes embodied in a particular life trajectory' (Kleinman, 1988: 31). Thus there can be no 'formula' for grief since how people grieve cannot be separated from the way they live the particularity of their individual lives.

The focus of study has thus shifted from the 'symptomology' of the 'grief reaction' to the utterances of self-reflecting individuals to capture the overlapping aspects of the experience of death and bereavement (Hockey, 1990; Bradbury, 1999; Hallam *et al*., 1999; Hallam and Hockey, 2001). In contrast to traditional methods in which the researcher remains separated from the field of study, a more inclusive focus and engaged stance is revealing the way bereavement experiences may incorporate dying, death, mourning, memorialisation, religion, spirituality, ethics, practical and legal issues. It has revealed the limitations of the dominant psychological model in which 'healthy' grieving entailed severing ties with deceased loved ones in order to move on in life. A more socially sensitive perspective has drawn attention to the variety of ways in which people may maintain their relationship with dead loved ones and the dead continue to influence the lives of the living. Such a perspective has raised questions about the nature of social identity, and of society itself (Hallam *et al*., 1999).

Far from conceptualising grief as a task of internal adjustment to the 'reality of death' in order to return to normal functioning, such an approach calls into question the strict separation between life and death. Instead it recognises how people's relationships with their loved ones may survive the life–death boundary, the focus being placed on how bereaved people make sense of, and manage, the changed

nature of their relationship with deceased loved ones. Bereavement is thus conceptualised as an ongoing process of negotiation and meaning-making (Neimeyer, 2001) to offer a focus of study that allows us to ask questions about the nature of human attachment and sociality (Klass, 2006).

The concept of 'continuing bonds' was originally coined and presented by Klass, Silverman and Nickman as a new model of grief (1996). It has now replaced 'severing ties' as the dominant academic discourse, to beg two important questions. First, how can we avoid the danger of creating a new orthodoxy, thus marginalising those who do not wish to retain ties with their dead (Small, 2001: 35; Klass, 2006)? Second, to what extent does this academic shift reflect the experience of lay people for whom continuing bonds may be far from a new discourse? Indeed continuing bonds are well represented in popular culture, through music, in memoriam notices, on gravestones and in letters of condolence. The interview narratives on which this book is based reveal how contemporary continuing bonds are flourishing, taking highly idiosyncratic forms rather than being grounded in traditional or religious structures. Of course, these recent interviews cannot reveal the extent to which the 'severing ties' discourse may have served to discourage such bonds in the past, or whether it was purely the academics and professionals whose vision was obscured by the dominant model. However, they do reveal a certain amount of negotiation between the two discourses with some bereaved people seeking to justify the fact that they were 'keeping hold' rather than 'letting go'. In some cases people expressed surprise at discovering the extent to which their deceased loved ones continued to influence and form part of their ongoing lives.

As with severing ties, continuing bonds have been represented as purely intrapsychic, in a way which continues to separate the social and psychological (Klass *et al*., 1996). As noted by Howarth (2007a: 211), this perspective relies on the psychological concept of an inner representation of the deceased loved one with whom the bereaved person interacts. It locates the experience in the mind of the bereaved person, implying that it is 'imaginary' rather than 'real'. However by adopting a sociological perspective that emphasises the way people make sense of and engage with their world, then it is no longer a question of what is 'real', but how people act in relation to what they take to be 'real' and meaningful for them. This emphasis is less likely to run the risk of imposing a new orthodoxy that marginalises those who chose not to or may be were unable to find a place in their lives for their dead. It can encompass both 'letting go' and 'keeping hold' of the dead and how people try to manage this paradox (Klass, 2006).

Recent sociological studies have revealed how the dead may retain a social presence and significance in the lives of the living that may be experienced as sensory and material (Hallam *et al.,* 1999; Bennett and Bennett, 2000). Hallam *et al.,* have explored how the dead may continue to live on in a social, as well as 'inner' sense, in terms of exercising agency in the lives of the living (Hallam *et al.,*1999: 155). They link this to the concept of 'social death' where a person ceases to be treated 'as an active agent in the ongoing social world of some other party' (Mulkay, 1993: 33). In contrast a person who is biologically dead may continue to have an active social presence and influence in the lives of the living. Studies of

elderly widows have revealed the way dead husbands may continue to play an active role in their wives' lives, providing comfort, companionship, support, advice, direction and meaning. Their presence may be experienced not just in the mind but via the senses, such as hearing the sound of a dead husband's footsteps (Hallam *et al*., 1999: 150). However, for some widows, such presence may not be comfortable or welcome and they may not always wish to maintain their relationships with their dead husbands (1999: 155–156).

Attention has been drawn to the memory-making activities in which bereaved people engage in order to create a space for deceased loved ones that is comfortable to live with. Francis *et al.* (2001; 2005) have drawn attention to visits to the cemetery as one of the key sites within which such memory-making may occur. Kellaher *et al*. (2005; Hockey and Kellaher, 2005) have explored how memories are forged and sustained in relation to cremation and the disposal of ashes. In particular, the practice of removing cremated remains from crematoria has been found to offer bereaved people more scope to create highly personalised spaces for their deceased loved ones. Davies (1996) has highlighted how obituaries in the newspaper are often full of 'conversations with the dead' that demonstrate the variety of ways in which they continue to occupy the lives of the living. Walter (1996) has drawn attention to the way memory-making may take the form of engaging in conversation with others to construct a biographical narrative that locates the dead in the life of the living and restores a sense of meaning and continuity.

Such studies have challenged both individual and cultural determinism to highlight the importance of individual agency and lay practice. In focusing on the meanings people give to their experience, they engage with both the personal and individual as well as the broader cultural and social dimension. In culturally diverse Western societies this focus has drawn attention to the way bereaved people may pick and mix images and ritual forms to craft memory-making activities and spaces that reflect the unique character of deceased loved ones and their relationship with them (Hallam and Hockey 2001). This approach represents a profound shift away from modernist universalism and its model-building to a postmodern celebration of difference (Walter, 1999).

A sociology of bereavement

In order to discover what the experience of death and bereavement means to people in contemporary British society I have drawn upon the crucial anthropological insight that it is the encounter between self and other that is the source of knowledge (Hockey, 1990). It has been argued that we make sense of and respond to our world through an inherited system of culturally specific constructs rather than on the basis of individual 'subjectivities' (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Hockey, 1990; Bradbury, 1999). This process of meaning-making occurs within the everyday flow of events, speech and behaviour or discursive activity through which we define and structure our social reality. Social discourse then becomes the primary field of study and the research endeavour an interactive,

intersubjective process, rather than the researcher being separate from the field of study.

Indeed, such involvement is crucial if one is to appreciate the nature of a particular experience. For 'personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives' (Oakley, 1981: 58). This means that the researcher is effectively using the 'self as instrument' in the service of his or her research project (Rowling, 1999: 168). Far from being a hindrance, one's 'subjectivity' becomes a vehicle for engaging with and understanding other people's experiences (Howarth, 1998). This includes one's own knowledge, beliefs and experiences and how these inform and shape one's project. Such an approach requires an active, empathic and reflexive engagement with participants, a far cry from the model of scientific detachment promoted by a positivist paradigm.

Thus the findings on which this book is based have emerged from a two-way process in which the human encounter with death and loss not only found expression but actually came into being (Hockey, 1990). What distinguished me from participants was my additional commitment to recording, exploring and explaining what was being constructed between us. This approach requires what has been conceptualised as 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) in the form of an ongoing self-reflexive engagement with one's project. To this end keeping a research journal proved an invaluable tool for fostering an observer position from which to be able to reflect and comment on the 'realities' in which I was at the same time immersing myself (Valentine, 2007). Alongside the more systematic process of analysing my participants' narratives, recording my initial responses to interviews, recurring thoughts and feelings about them formed an integral stage in coming to appreciate the implications of what people were saying.

In setting out to discover the meanings that bereaved people were giving to their experiences of losing a loved one and illuminate the cultural connections between individual narratives of grief, I was guided by the following questions: how do bereaved individuals make sense of the experience of losing a significant other through available cultural discourses? What do these discourses reveal about the way we treat our dead in contemporary British society? To what extent is bereavement a private or shared experience? Do people separate it from the ordinary business of living? Do they try to forget their dead and move on? Or do they include them in some way and if so how and to what extent? To what extent do people's responses depend on social factors such as age, gender and ethnicity? I wanted to capture something of the way bereavement comes to be lived out in people's day-to-day lives. In focusing on an experience that can profoundly disrupt our personal and social worlds to the extent of threatening our very continuity of being, I hoped to learn more about what it means to be both individual and social beings. For the impact of losing a loved one brings issues of identity and sociality and the relationship between the two into sharp focus.

To this end I interviewed 25 bereaved people, 15 women and 10 men, between December 2003 and May 2005, about their experience of losing a loved one (see appendix). Their ages ranged from 17 to 63, and there was a limited representation

of ethnic diversity. Out of 10 male participants, one was Indian, one Spanish, one Irish, one Scottish and the rest were English; out of 15 female participants one was German, one American, 2 Irish with the rest being English. Deceased loved ones included six mothers, seven fathers, two partners, three grandmothers, two grandfathers, two great-grandmothers, one great aunt, one aunt, one godson, and two best friends. There were four sudden and unexpected deaths, one of these being accidental, the other three being illness related. The rest included dying trajectories of varying lengths, three being experienced as prolonged. There were four strokes, two cardiac arrests, one spontaneous brain haemorrhage, 11 deaths from cancer, two from diabetes, three from dementia, one from Parkinson's, one aneurysm and one cot death.

My aim was to focus on bereavement as integral to social life and on those aspects that mattered most to the individuals concerned. So rather than setting out with specific themes chosen in advance, I adopted an open-ended, informal, conversational approach in which I encouraged participants to set the agenda. Riches and Dawson (1996a) have drawn attention to the way that pre-structured interviews only allow participants to pick out isolated items from their own story. This means that they are in effect filling in the pre-existing narrative of the researcher. However, it was my *participants*' version of events that I wanted to hear, *their* world into which I wanted to gain entry, something I could only achieve by putting aside my own agenda. My findings are therefore based on the central concerns conveyed by the responses they gave to my invitation to share their experiences of bereavement.

Interviewing as participation

To claim that an interview-based study can allow entry into local worlds (Geertz, 1983) is controversial in relation to the traditional anthropological approach that promotes the participation of the researcher in a bounded social group (Hockey, 2002). From this perspective interview data is not the real thing, but merely a limited commentary on lived experience. Taking place at a distance from remembered events, interviews represent a snapshot abstracted from the present. Moreover they are restricted to an interaction between two people abstracted from their everyday worlds. Yet, this is to limit the study of socio-cultural categories to spacialised locations, something which is becoming more questionable in our technological society in which social interaction transcends spacial boundaries. It is also to lose sight of how social reality resides in people's thoughts, reflections and communications with each other (Hockey, 2002; Rapport, 2002), the very substance of such interview snapshots.

Indeed it has been argued that the distinction between interview data and 'real life' is questionable in relation to contemporary British society (Hockey, 2002). Rather the research interview is a culturally appropriate form of participation, in keeping with the current nature of everyday patterns of social interaction, which are 'often spacially dislocated, time-bounded and characterised by intimacy at a distance' (Hockey, 2002: 211). As such, the research interview may provide a

space for people to engage with and reflect on particular aspects of their lives for which they have little opportunity elsewhere. Such a space can allow the past to be recovered and the future to be contemplated via the present (Giddens, 1991). Such reflections may have an impact on the future, suggesting that the research interview may be transformative. In interviewing people about their experiences of losing a loved one, then the extent to which the interview may change the bereavement experience needs to be considered.

Furthermore, recounting one's experiences to another will inevitably bring into the picture other people who form part of one's life. In the context of a bereavement study, this is likely to include those who have died. Indeed my conversations with bereaved individuals were far from being second-hand commentaries, but rather first-hand experiences in which I was privileged to play an integral part. I was introduced to a host of significant others, both living and dead, the impact of which, as will be conveyed, was a profound sense of having entered a very particular social space. Far from being an issue of how to gain access to 'real life' it was more one of how to negotiate the necessary balance between insider and outsider perspectives. This is especially challenging when studying one's own culture and a social group with which one is identified.

Ethical considerations

Encouraging people to share such intimate and sensitive aspects of their lives demands an ongoing reflexive approach to ethical issues (Rowling, 1999). Such reflexivity has highlighted how the requirements found in most ethical guidelines, such as guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality, avoidance of harm and gaining free and informed consent are more complex than can be satisfied by, for example, obtaining signed consent forms from participants. Indeed this may do no more than cover one's own back at the expense of addressing the more ongoing everyday ethical concerns (Mason, 2002; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). These concerns include situations that arise unexpectedly out of the interactive nature of qualitative research and for which there may be no obvious solution. Rather, such situations call for a process of negotiation, compromise and adjustment on the basis of experience. Though standardised ethical guidelines provide a useful starting point and checklist, they can reinforce a tendency to separate ethics from the everyday business of research.

Ethics are integral to the interactive nature of qualitative approaches (Batchelor and Briggs, 1994), requiring the ongoing cultivation of one's own ethical stance in order to achieve an ethical research practice. This has been usefully conceptualised as 'microethics', taken from biomedical practice, as differentiated from more general ethical principles, though the two are related (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). Yet this relationship is not always obvious without a commitment to self-reflexivity, a willingness to acknowledge the ethical dimension when it arises and to take the time to think things through and respond accordingly. A reflexive approach to one's research fosters a recognition and appreciation of our own as well as our participants' subjectivities. This allows us to build a bridge between what

we would ideally like to achieve and what is practically possible given the limitations and contingencies of ordinary life. As already indicated, such ongoing reflexivity can be developed through keeping a research journal (Valentine, 2007).

In taking a reflexive approach to one's research, one becomes more aware of how gaining access to the private worlds of others for purposes that may not be primarily for their direct benefit poses a fundamental ethical tension at the heart of the research process (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). In order to take this into account I adopted the principles of a collaborative paradigm in which participants are viewed as active contributors to the research (Reason, 1988). Though this does not alter the fact that they have not initiated the project and may not want to participate any further than they have to, it does offer a model that is more empowering. Encouraging participants to set the interview agenda and to tell their story emphasised the value of their perspective (Riches and Dawson, 1996a).

However, asking people to share their bereavement experiences includes asking them to recall and recount painful experiences that could generate distress both during and after the interview. Bereavement has been identified as being particularly sensitive due to its emotionally charged nature and the way that interviewing may threaten the bereaved individual through the emotional stress that may be produced (Lee and Renzetti, 1993). This has implications in relation to avoidance of harm and what actually constitutes 'harm'. Is it harmful to encourage someone to talk about their experiences of losing a loved one? It raises the issue of how far drawing attention to possible negative effects should form part of the process of gaining informed consent. It demonstrates how any rigid adherence to standardised ethical guidelines would preclude much research with vulnerable groups whose voices would not then be heard or needs understood (Kellehear, 1989).

My own personal and professional experience, supported by the bereavement literature, suggests that far from being harmful, talking about bereavement can provide relief and reinforcement. The process of 'telling it like it is' has been found to enable people to explore painful experiences whilst retaining a sense of control (Riches and Dawson, 1996a). Using an open-ended narrative approach allowed interviewees to disclose only as much as they could manage. The frustration and sense of exclusion that many bereaved people report as a result of the lack of opportunity to do so has been well documented (Riches and Dawson, 1996b, 2000; Walter, 1996, 2001). It has been argued that such interviews can have a therapeutic function by acting as a cathartic mechanism, which may assist the healing process (Rowling, 1999). Participants have reported how telling their stories helped to ease part of their burden (Handsley, 2001: 15). This was confirmed by the majority, though not all of those I interviewed, both at the time and in correspondence with me afterwards. This included the perception that bereavement was still considered a taboo subject in wider society.

However it is important not to generalise about this, but rather to allow for the individual variation that makes it impossible to predict in advance how someone will react. The ethical implications of intruding into the lives of bereaved people can be both positive and negative. The onus is therefore on the researcher to give special consideration to the possible implications of such intimate and often painful

disclosure for bereaved people. Such consideration can be fostered through inviting feedback from participants and being prepared to learn from this. It can be facilitated by enabling interviewees to reconsider their consent away from the heat of the moment and with the benefit of hindsight. In relation to my own study I made interview transcripts available to participants so that they could further reflect upon the implications of their consent. They were advised that if there are any part of the transcript about which they felt unsure, we could discuss this and if necessary exclude it from the study. This also provided an initial validity check by allowing any areas of possible misrepresentation to be addressed.

Interviews lasted between one and two hours with individuals being invited to 'tell me about their bereavement' and encouraged to find their own starting point. Where an individual expressed uncertainty as to where to start or what to say I was prepared to offer some prompting. This took the form of suggesting that they tell me who it was who had died, how, when and where it happened and then gently probing them for more personal details about the impact it had on them. Usually very little prompting was needed to engage the person and explore the meanings of the topics they introduced. The narratives that emerged from this process revealed how, in making sense of experience, people draw upon available cultural scripts, negotiating these according to individual circumstances, purposes and idiosyncrasies. In encouraging participants to tell their stories I was able to capture this process of negotiation to convey the complex, dynamic and reciprocal relationship between individual and social.

Engaging with the data

The process of analysing participants' narratives has raised important questions about what constitutes a legitimate source of 'data'. This is especially relevant to an interactive approach in which exchanges between researcher and participants are likely to occur 'outside' as well as 'inside' the 'field of study' or interview. Moreover, as I was to discover, such 'outside' material, assuming it is recorded and treated as 'data', may have the potential to considerably enhance understanding of one's topic. Thus to what extent should research be limited by the designated field of study? However, if one considers venturing beyond the boundary, then how does one deal with the ethical issues raised by using material that may not strictly be covered by the participant's initial consent? This suggests that the giving of consent should not only be confined to a formal, once-and-for-all procedure but remain open to informal and periodic renegotiation. Where this is not possible, as already discussed, then the researcher must make a sensitive judgement, which takes into account the interests both of the participants and the project.

By approaching the field of study as a discrete entity without recognising its socially constructed nature, one may legitimately limit one's study to 'inside'. Thus the 'real' data can only be found within the confines of the interview and anything occurring outside this should be ignored. One advantage of constructing such a firm boundary is that one may retain a sense of having control of one's study rather than risking exposure to the unexpected nature of 'outside' influences. Yet