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**“You couldn’t ask for more really”: A
relational perspective of doing and
un-doing jointness using individual
alongside couple interviews of home
birth**

Nicole Miriam Daniels

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About the author:

Nicole Miriam Daniels is a Masters student at the University of Cape Town.

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“You couldn’t ask for more really”: A relational perspective of doing and un-doing jointness using individual alongside couple interviews of home birth

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to discuss the methodological advantage of a dyadic approach to researching home birth. It is based on a study in which a combination of pre and post, conjoint and individual interviews generated men, women and couple narratives of decision making and experiences of home birth. The study sought to address a gap in the literature on home birth by adopting a relational perspective of jointly doing home birth that resulted in additional knowledge on the doing of jointness in couples’ everyday lives. This unique aspect of how couples do and un-do jointness resulted from a dyadic approach that included the neglected perspectives of men’s experience of home birth. Knowledge produced through a combined research design strengthened the ‘common reflective space’ constructed in joint interview contexts in ways that were instructive for understanding the research and the researched. Overall a dyadic approach was found to balance divergences and convergences across shared and individual accounts by allowing experiences to be rectified, remembered and re-adjusted in light of new, emerging information in the construction of a jointly told, dyadic narrative of home birth.

1. Introduction

Dyadic interviewing has emerged “as a methodology for research on couplehood relationships” which positions interdependence between individuals “as a source of information rather than attempting to control for it” (Caldwell, 2013: 488). Differing from the couple interviews, dyadic interviews are used together or separately (it does not infer both), with two individuals who have a pre-standing relationship (not necessarily a couple). The multiple perspectives gained by such an approach assumes an interdependent relationship between individuals, thus making it particularly suited for research on couples.

Given that home births are undertaken as collaborative projects with romantic partners (Edwards, 2005; Cheyney, 2008; Carter, 2009; 2010; Lindgren and Erlandsson, 2011;), a combined approach to studying couple experiences would unpack the multiple, overlapping social realities embedded in the home birth setting. Five studies of home birth have been conducted with couple's (Morison *et al.*, 1998; 1999; Viisainen, 2000; 2001; Lindgren *et al.*, 2006). While these studies provide ample discussion of the beliefs and attitudes shaping the choices and approach to birth particular to these couples, they examine 'the relationship' in much less detail. As a result, this study sought to examine couples joint engagement in home birth from a relational perspective.

A combination of individual and couple interviews was able to strengthen the 'common reflective space', said to be a product of the dyadic interview context (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014: 6-7). This mutually constructed space was integral to an understanding of the shifting meanings of home birth and couplehood represented in the individual and couple accounts. Through the active presence of the researcher, a striving to jointly remember, relive, and reflect on what happened, both complicated and contextualised the stories told (Heaphy and Einarsdottir, 2013; Torgé, 2013).

Guided by the research question: 'What are the relational negotiations that take place when couples plan home births, have home births, and narrate their experiences', a framework was provided for the relational aspects of home birth to be brought to the fore. Dyadic interviewing is recognised as an inherently relational research method (Eisikovits and Koren, 2010), thus representing a congruence of theory with method (Chadwick, 2012). Studying couples' experiences of home birth using a dyadic approach allowed for multi-dimensional, multi-focal interpretations of relationships (Heaphy and Einarsdottir, 2013). This combination of couple and individual interviews, thought to retain as many perspectives on the phenomenon of home birth as possible, generated both contestation and agreement across accounts. While this showed up the negotiated character of couplehood, getting to grips with such depths was facilitated by the 'common reflective space' that helped both the researcher and the researched make sense of home birth experiences.

An additional benefit to adopting a dyadic approach relates to the nature of the subject matter where literature on the experience of home birth is dominated by women's accounts. By focussing on couple's and men's experiences, an inherent bias on the study of home birth is being addressed. Men's understanding and experience of home birth is sorely lacking and has rarely been investigated, albeit two exceptions (Sweeney and O'Connell, in press; Lindgren and Erlandsson, 2011). By including men and couple perspectives in a study of home birth, this paper shows how the methodological approach generated

knowledge of the research as well as the researched. In so doing, the rich detail of individual experiences of home birth was not sacrificed for the sake of presenting a shared account, but neither was the interdependence of this social activity taken for granted. Rather, home birth as a life event of significance on individual, communal and societal levels could be observed side by side.

The paper will proceed by briefly outlining the dyadic research context in which this study is situated. It goes on to engage with existing literature in the field of childbirth to determine the particular fit of a study on home births with a dyadic conceptualisation. A description of the broader study from which this paper is drawn leads onto findings that illustrate the additional benefit of researching home births from multiple perspectives. The findings begin with a vignette of observational data that showcases ‘jointness’. Discussions of a ‘common reflective space’ include dimensions of disclosure and coercion that have ethical consequences in shared narrative contexts. Accordingly, conclusions are drawn by reflecting on the process in which the methodological promise of dyadic research into home births is determined.

2. Context of the study: Combining the best of both

Dyadic interviewing is recognised as a way of simultaneously understanding shared endeavours while generating insights into the relational components of lived experiences (Eisikovits and Koren, 2010; Torgé, 2013; Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014). Dyads can be interviewed in multiple ways including together as a pair, separately but simultaneously when you have two interviewers (Hertz, 1995), or separately but on different occasions (Boeije, 2004; Mellor *et al.*, 2013). Some authors define the term dyadic interview as referring to interviews involving any two individuals with or without a prior relationship. However, the suggestion that a focus on “pair relatedness” should be built into the design and conceptualisation of a dyadic study (Thompson and Walker, 1982: 890) means that an established relationship between the dyad is preferable. Thus, dyadic approaches adopt a two-person perspective which is favoured in studies of heterosexual couple relationships (Eisikovits and Koren, 2010; Taylor, 2013), homosexual couple relationships (Wagner *et al.*, 2000; Adam, 2006), as well as carer and cared-for relationships (Morris, 2011; Caldwell, 2013). Conjoint, joint, or couple interviewing¹ is the better known term used when dyads are interviewed simultaneously in the same interview.

¹ This article uses the term couple and joint interviewing interchangeably.

While debate in the social sciences has raged since the 1970's of whether to interview couples separately or apart (see Arksey, 1996; McKay and Doucet, 2010), there seems to be consensus that a combination of both separate and joint interviews offers a bridge over the divide (Taylor and de Vocht, 2011; Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014). Previous authors have suggested that it affords additional benefits (Pahl, 1989 quoted in Arksey, 1996), even going so far as to suggest it is the "best of both worlds" (Stamp, 1994 quoted in Eisikovits and Koren, 2010). That being the case, relatively few studies have adopted a research design that comprises both joint and separate interviews with the exception of studies where joint interviews were conducted with all household members, including children (Valentine, 1999; Harden *et al.*, 2010). Otherwise, different research projects are combined to assess the merits of both separate or joint interviewing (Taylor & de Vocht, 2011; Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014).

Only four studies have been identified where all the couples involved were interviewed on their own and in a pair (Morris, 2001; Butt & Chesla, 2007; Heaphy and Einarsdottir, 2013; Taylor, 2013). This method thus seems gravely overlooked, particularly in the context of longstanding debate on the merits and pitfalls of interviewing couples together or apart. This article thus seeks to address this gap by contributing to an understanding of the knowledge produced by adopting joint and separate interviews when examining the relational aspects of home births.

3. Literature Review: Couple's doing of jointness in home birth

Several studies (too many to mention here) have utilised dyadic approaches without specific mention of dyads. Such research is divided according to two main research areas: Family studies or mental and physical health studies, both posing the question, what about research on childbirth? Falling neatly under either family or health studies, childbirth research is well suited to couple and dyadic approaches to data collection and analysis. The birthing mothers' experience has been recognised for its importance both in the marital relationship (Entwisle and Doering, 1981) and as an important life event for men (Dellmann, 2004; Erlandsson and Lindgren, 2009; Longworth and Kingdon, 2011), with positive health benefits (Bartlett, 2004; Johansson *et al.*, 2012) and social meaning (Barclay and Lupton, 1999; Draper, 2003a; 2003b; Hildingsson *et al.*, 2011) that has been known to impact on men's identity (Dolan and Coe, 2011). Childbirth research has thus been conducted on men and women's experience of the birth separately, largely ignoring their shared experiences.

Large scale studies of home births show that the active involvement of partners and the ability to maintain autonomy in the birth process are strong motivating factors (Johnson and Daviss, 2005; Janssen, *et al.*, 2009; Boucher, *et al.*, 2009; Murray-Davis *et al.*, 2012; 2014). As a result, the relationality of dyadic accounts, which recognises mutuality (Torgé, 2013) and accounts for multiplicity (Taylor, 2013), can address the interrelatedness of couple's active engagement in the home birth process. A mutual, relational perspective of couples' experiences was deemed fitting for this research context based on pre-existing knowledge that women in a partnership will not choose home birth without their partners support (Viisainen, 2001; Edwards, 2005; Lindgren and Erlandsson, 2011). Even though Morison *et al.* (1998; 1999) found home birth couples to be involved in a collaborative project of prescribing family values and strengthening moral beliefs, previous studies of home birth from a couple perspective (Morison, *et al.*, 1998; 1999; Viisainen, 2000; 2001; Lindgren *et al.*, 2006) have not examined 'the couple' in any detail. Yet such knowledge implicitly suggests that the couple relationship itself may be worthy of analysis in addition to how home birth as a couple undertaking is jointly negotiated and experienced.

The process of doing couple interviews in addition to individual interviews offers both interpersonal and intrapersonal perspectives (Heaphy and Einarsdottir, 2013) of home birth as a joint undertaking. Joint interviewing was not only conducive to an analysis focussed on couples' constructions of a unified couple-hood or "we-ness", in Torgé's words (2013: 103), but was actually an outcome in its own right (Eisikovits and Koren, 2010; Taylor and de Vocht, 2011). In other words, couple interviews pre-suppose exiting relational selves which allows the researcher to not only observe (Allan, 1980), but also unpack the construction of social identities as they are constituted in relationships to existing cultural frameworks (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014). The interview context made it feasible to learn about the phenomena in question (home births), and in addition, the couple relationship more generally (Hetherington, 2013; Taylor, 2013; Torgé, 2013; Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014). Where the aim had been to elicit co-constructed narratives of home birth, the interactions and performances of the couple was understood to produce knowledge on home births, informed by the perspective of how couples engage in couplehood.

This paper argues that the relational aspects of jointly carrying out a home birth can be seen concurrently alongside couples' doing of jointness in their everyday lives. Similar to the concept of "family display" (Finch, 2007 cited in Bjornholdt and Farstad, 2014), doing jointness is here conceptualised as constituting conventional notions of couplehood, by emphasising the process through which social meaning is conveyed. As Heaphy and Einarsdottir have detailed, the

interactions and performances of the couple can be read as part of the negotiating strategies that take place in the doing and scripting of relationships (2013: 54-64). In this way, the relational aspects of doing couplehood in home birth allows the analyst to gain insight into the doing of jointness in everyday couple lives.

4. Research Methodology: Description of the study

This section details both the methods used for sampling and the data collection tools that supplemented the key strategy of dyadic interviews. Justification of the research method was gaged from the research question: ‘What are the relational negotiations that take place when couples plan home births, have home births, and narrate their experiences?’ This study traced longitudinal changes in the realities couples face, from the decision-making stage through to the sense-making stage. Through their co-constructed narrations of deciding on and having home births, couple’s negotiate numerous social realities to construct meanings that describe themselves within relationships.

Five couples who were planning midwife-led home births were purposely sampled during the pregnancy phase: Two from home birth gatherings, two on the basis that they had previously experienced home births, and one who contacted me directly. All the couples were informally invited to participate and briefly told about the research. In two of the five cases this informal conversation included both partners. In all cases the individuals received a formal email inviting them to participate, explaining the study, the nature of their participation, the contract of confidentiality, and assurance of their right to withdraw at any point. Only when interested parties confirmed their participation by replying to this email was further telephonic contact made to set up a convenient time and place for the interviews to happen, which in all cases was in the homes of the participants.

A range of data collection methods were used. Ethnographic fieldwork at home birth gatherings in Cape Town’s Southern Suburbs was a naturally occurring data source that served both as a site for sampling and a means of collecting data through participant observation. The important role of childbirth literature in feminist studies has discerned the socio-cultural contexts generating adherence to, or divergence from various ‘models’ of childbirth (Oakley, 1980; Rothman, 1982; Jordan, 1983; Martin, 1987; Davis-Floyd, 2003). Occurring over a two year period, this data collection and sampling strategy provided me with an opportunity to participate in the culturally rich form of home birth practiced in a

South African setting thereby enabling identification of some of the characteristics shaping home birth as a 'model' of alternative birthing practice in the South African context (Viisainen, 2001).

Generated data was gathered from two sets of open-ended, narrative style interviews taking place with each couple, before and after the birth. Each individual participated in four interviews, producing a total of ten couple and twenty individual interviews. While it has been claimed that one of the challenges of interviewing couples together is that individual meanings are harder to decipher from the concurrently presented account; conducting separate as well as joint interviews aided in reducing this limitation. Additionally, the shared narrative was conceptualised as under-told and less well-rehearsed in relation to the individual narratives and thus, couple interviews were arranged (as far as possible) to take place first.

An interview schedule comprising in-depth, open-ended questions focussed on three aspects of couple and individual experiences pre-birth: Pregnancy, the process of choosing a home birth, planning, and expectations. These interviews were conducted between six and two weeks before due date. After the birth, a single open-ended invitation question to illicit personal narratives was presented in the same way to both individuals and couples:

'So as you know, I'm interested in the experiences of couples who have had home births. Please take as much time as you need and tell me in as much detail as possible what you both experienced during your child's birth. This is your story so tell it to me the way you are most comfortable. Start wherever you like, end wherever feels right. I'll listen and I'll try not to interrupt and at the end I may have a few questions. When you are ready, please feel free to tell me all about your home birth experience.'

In some but not all of these cases, follow up questions further probed the told story or went on to pose questions from an interview schedule I relied upon in case the narrative invitation failed. These were conducted anywhere between six and thirteen weeks after birth. This allowed the post-birth narratives to not only reflect on the home birth, but address issues specific to the adjustment period after home birth when negotiation between the couple may be most intense.

5. Findings: The doing and un-doing of jointness

A short vignette of observational data presents an incident that shaped and informed the analysis in useful ways. The findings to follow illustrate how the individual alongside couple interviews revealed more about home birth and the couples who choose it. The active creation of a common space for reflection, convergences, and divergences across and within cases was instructive in the interpretation of multiple perspectives. A mental snapshot I took away from my final set of interviews with Mark and Alessandra, was of him with his arm around Alessandra, who stood with baby in arms, waving to me from the balcony of an old Victorian home. Presenting themselves as the quintessential heterosexual, middle class family unit, had the appearance of a satirical bid to override the strain evident in their ‘off the record’ discussion of negotiating family life.

Previous authors have suggested that a shortcoming of joint interviews is that couples may feel compelled to present a unified, idealised image (Valentine, 1999; Arksey, 1996). My experience of interviewing couples in their own homes meant that the public presentation of a unified couple was all the starker. As the vignette of doing jointness exemplifies, Alessandra and Mark’s ‘display’ on the veranda suggested that whilst a united couple front was actively sought after, in practice, this was often difficult to maintain. In their case, a caricature of harmony served to illustrate the extent to which divergences from the ideal could provide particularly insightful occasions. As Morris (2001) and Gerhardt (1991) have noted, the likelihood of the social context of the interviews providing a platform for a public display of conventional couplehood means that the extent to which this is actually achieved can enrich analysis.

The following accounts are taken directly from the interview transcripts². All identifiable features have been anonymised and pseudonyms are in use. Ethics approval was obtained from the Sociology Department at the University of Cape Town on the basis that standard ethical procedures were adhered to.

² All interviews were transcribed by the author. Transcription code used: *Short pause, **Medium pause, ***Long pause, #Interrupted speech,Elapsed talk, ^Laughter in voice^, *Emphasised speech*, Slowly spoken.

5.1. Doing Jointness

In Amina's individual post-birth interview she says that during the home birth her husband (Zachary) was "secondary.... a little bit other", even "a tiny, little bit separate". Questioning the nature of their joint experience in the couple interview, she begins with "it's hard like for me to say *what* we shared as a couple" and turns the conversation over to Zachary to get her cues for how to narrate their joint experience. What transpires is a discursive position in which her adoption of "we" rather than 'me' offers a perspective that is more than the sum of the two individual parts combined (Taylor and de Vocht, 2011: 1584). Left untouched in their couple interview is the sense of separation from her husband during the section of her birth she experiences at home. In having to endure an emergency caesarean, Amina is already encumbered with "a profound sense of **disappointment". By focussing on 'we' she allows Zachary to foot some of the blame positioned on her shoulders by the medical prognosis of "failure to progress". The couple interview offers them an opportunity to discover the very thing she, herself is unsure of – *what* they experienced as a couple (see later discussion).

Jointness was not only displayed through adopting "we" or "us", but was sometimes done by super-imposing an individual's perspective over another. For example, Mark mentions in the couple interview that: "It was weird, I could kind of almost tell when she was about to have a contraction (Interviewer: Hmmm) There was a kind of, I could almost breathe with her". In the individual interviews Alessandra is able to explain "As the contraction would start I would kind of squeeze his hands so I think he kind of could feel that it was coming". While these accounts clearly diverge, what is of particular interest, is Alessandra's refrain from offering this explanation in the context of their shared account. Instead, Mark's agency in relation to the productive work of labour is afforded equal standing in the home birth. Jointness as a relational achievement elevates their status as a home birthing couple, without detracting from Alessandra's performance in home birth, as the follow example testifies.

Alessandra: '[Midwife] said to me afterwards, something about, uh, um, she was bragging about our birth to somebody or other because she, she said that was an example of the midwife not being needed actually. She said 'the two of you as a couple worked really well together and uh, you just did what you needed to do. You didn't actually need me.'

In the final analysis I argue that divergence across their individual accounts is not resolved specifically because the imperative to do jointness has greater returns both within the context of their relationship and in their doing of home

birth. Comparing points of divergence and convergence across accounts meant that multiple viewpoints afforded insights that deepened and clarified the dyadic perspective. A dyadic perspective was able to balance both the advantage and disadvantage stacked in favour of the individual, the couple, the relationship, and the meanings made of home birth. In the following segment, doing jointness is achieved through collaborative narration where the repetition of key words and phrases has the effect of validating and affirming what is being said. Laura and Xavier repeat one another's words, and in classic story-telling sense, build on and add to what the other has said, and adjust their narrative in conversation with one another to provide a deeper, richer description of their combined experience.

- Laura: It was just too exciting. It felt like, as you said, it felt like Christmas.
- Xavier: Yeah, trying to wake up in the middle of the night and um, I woke up and I looked at Laura and she sort of, I dunno, did you elbow me or something? But yeah, I can't remember?
- Laura: I was breathing, I was doing my breathing#
- Xavier: Oh yeah#
- Laura: And so I was#
- Xavier: And she said, this is the real deal, and I was like, really? "Yup!" And okay, that's quite exciting..... (Laura: laughs) Well, the first thing that went through my head was extreme excitement..... mainly because it was just - I felt like, it really did feel like Christmas, it felt like Christmas#
- Laura: Today it's going to happen! It's gonna happen, today! It was like, it's gonna happen today, it's gonna happen, we're gonna meet him today.

Jointness is strengthened in this account firstly because Laura uses Xavier's phrase that "it felt like Christmas". He goes on to provide a fuller description of his experience to contextualise the expression used, and in the process repeats Laura's description of feelings of 'excitement'. Ending this section, Laura expands on the phrase even further by explaining that going into labour felt like waking up on Christmas morning and knowing this is the day: "We're gonna meet him today". Not only does their elaboration offer a view of the individual's perspective, by weaving each other's ideas and descriptions into their own, they make more convincing the idea of themselves as a pair that results in a strong presentation of jointness.

5.2. Un-doing Jointness

As Allan, (1980: 208) makes known, “how couples perform together, how they attempt to show support and influence one another and how they cope with disagreement” offers insights into the process of negotiation and how this is weighed within the context of the relationship and the research. While jointness is strived for to both to reaffirm the identity of a couple and present an authentic version of home birth, un-doing jointness is neither strived for nor strategic; it is a consequence of negotiating different relational selves and multiple view-points. When questioned on the importance of home birth for the child, an unresolved tension between Isabella and Joseph’s individual versions of their joint approach to home birth undoes a public presentation of jointness.

- Nicole [interviewer]: Do you think it matters where your baby is born?
Joseph: For the baby or for us or for?
Isabella: Yes! I believe it matters.
Joseph: Hmm
Isabella: I believe that the place that I feel safe will make the baby feel safe..... so yah, I think it does.
Joseph: Hmm. Yah, I think it can, I dunno if there’s any sort of necessarily, any - there may be long term impacts but I think..... um *** Yah, it’s a, it’s a tricky one to answer completely. Hmm.
Isabella: You don’t think it matters?
Joseph: Um, I mean it probably, it, it, it does have, it will have an impact on the experience, but I, I don’t think it necessarily has..... I don’t think that it necessarily ** has to be at home.....
Isabella: Do you think it matters where the baby is born??
Joseph: ** Urgh, no. I don’t actually. No. Not, not for the baby’s sake.....
Nicole: Hmm
Isabella: Heheerhugh.

Immediately discernable are two different positions on the importance of home birth. Isabella states “I *believe* it matters” and in four words claims a position on home birth that is sure, certain, and resolute; she believes. Joseph’s reluctance to claim a position displays an uncertainty and tentativeness which Isabella pounces on immediately. Directed towards Joseph, she rephrases the question again, and again, not asking it for the interviewer’s sake, but for her own. In light of Isabella’s conviction, Joseph’s scepticism de-stabilises a public persona of themselves as repeat home birthers that undoes jointness.

The way different concerns are prioritised across individual and joint accounts is capably dealt with by a dyadic perspective which can accommodate divergences in co-constructed accounts. At three distinct points in Xavier and Laura's couple narrative Xavier specifies that the baby's vital indications showed he was never in distress: "Amazingly for such a long labour, but * his heartbeat never changed". Xavier exhibits technical, learned knowledge of birth, such as "no meconium" confirming the baby's safety was never compromised. Such assurances from Xavier suggest he played a role not only as birth support, but as over-seer of the birth process that is developed further in his individual account.

Somewhat concerning in the context of their shared narrative, is Laura's response to Xavier's stated priority, which is: "If the baby's safe at the end and the mum is safe, if that happens, it's great." The following example can be interpreted as a disregard for Xavier's role in monitoring the well-being of those he loves, which Laura does not recognise.

- Laura: I can't imagine doing that in a situation with a partner that was worried for my safety and worried - I think it would've, that would've put a real dampener on the situation ***
- Xavier: Yup.
- Laura: And you didn't give a crap (laughs). No, in, in the best way possible! You just trusted the people we were with really **

Xavier's concerns are dismissed because Laura places her trust in her midwife to ensure the safety of the home birth. While Xavier does not dispute the competence of their caregivers, his subtle, yet persistent assertions of their continuous well-being, suggest he was paying close attention. His awareness of their child's safety and her welfare throughout a long labour seems to have been dismissed by Laura. As a result, she belittles and undermines the care he exhibits. Thus illustrating how the un-doing of jointness is often surreptitious; occurring in spite of conscious efforts to do jointness and present a joint account.

6. The production of a common reflective space

Borrowing the term 'common reflective space' from Bjørnholt and Farstad (2014) allows for discussion of a constructed space, made possible by the research, which facilitated meaning making on the part of the participants and on the part of the researcher. Deeper, more in-depth accounts are possible when one person's narrative prompts a further narrative from their partner (Allan,

1980). A beneficial aspect of such instances arose when my attempts to probe were strengthened by further probing questions generated from within the couple pair themselves.

Alessandra adequately answered my question “and then your fears around the process of birth, or concerns?” However, the intimate knowledge of each other’s ‘fears and concerns’ meant that Mark followed up with an additional probing question that generated a more nuanced picture of the perspective already presented. Mark: “And what about surrendering and letting go?” At which point she was able to divulge more deeply the concerns relating to her “control freak nature”, and how this would impact on the birth. In such occasions, the result for me as the interviewer and researcher was double-barrelled. Not only was I able to observe the couple’s relationships and the roles adopted by each partner, I learnt about characteristics of the birth itself and how these were experienced by the individuals and couples concerned.

The ‘common reflective space’ is a forum created by the researcher that allows additional information and discrepancies to be introduced, shared, and negotiated during the interview. Sometimes this space is as useful to the researched (in the above example), as it is for the researcher (see example below) because it puts on ‘display’ how the relationship functions. For example, Isabella begins the couple interview by saying “Will you start? (little giggle)” but promptly goes on to say “Well, I’ll start (Joseph: laughs)” even after Joseph accepted the invitation to start. This interaction is informative for the researcher, as it informs how to read this couple’s relational life. Later in the same interview, the following arises:

Isabella:	But, shall we start from the beginning?
Joseph:	<u>Yah.</u>
Isabella:	Or no, you don’t wanna start from the beginning? Well I’ll, I’ll #
Joseph:	I was gonna share a little bit from the night before.
Isabella:	<u>Okay.</u>

Isabella interrupts their shared narrative to direct how the telling should take place. She recommends they “start from the beginning”, although Joseph is reluctant. Very nearly bypassing him, she begins to say “well I’ll (start)”, at which point he proposes a point in time that he recognises as “the beginning”. As this example shows, within the shared narrative space, couples have to negotiate persistent patterns in their relational lives as part of the telling of their stories. Observing the “speaking positions” participants adopt reveals how couples compete for narrative agency (Valentine, 1999: 69).

In this ‘common reflective space’ it is the presence of the researcher that forces couples to publically negotiate their relational life. While this space can be used to their advantage, at other times it betrays persistent patterns in their joint lives that allow the negotiated character of couplehood to come to the fore. For example, Alessandra and Mark’s work at constructing an ideal, equal partnership was noticeable in their turn-taking where they would both signal the end of what they were saying and their body language would motion their desire to start speaking. In a section where they are speaking about difficulties in their relationship, this relational characteristic is evident.

Alessandra: Now it’s like, well, we can’t actually just *not* say anything like, it has to come out. And that’s quite a big shift sometimes, hmmm. (Turning to Mark) Have I got it right huh?

Mark: Aah! (Laughs under his breath) I love the way we take turns, it’s great. (Everyone laughs) ^^Um^^ the difficulties have been uh, yeah, it’s been a lot of what Alessandra’s covered.

As this example shows, the joint interview creates this ‘common reflective space’ in which couples become attuned to how they present themselves. Of their own accord couples brought to the surface aspects of their relational interaction (such as “the way we take turns”), which otherwise would not have warranted comment.

Nicole: Sorry, I just realised I need to look at you both.

Laura: We’re being analysed, our body language is being analysed.
(Nicole: Bursts out laughing, Laura joins in.)

Laura: Sit close.

Xavier: Yeah I actually crossed my legs to face you because of that exact reason.

Laura: Clever, yeah.

Nicole: Aah, nice. (All laugh).

Although Laura and Xavier are speaking in jest, they indicate awareness of this ‘common reflective space’. With comic relief they mimic being watched and adjust their “body language” to be read as “close”. Participants’ heightened sensitivity to their joint performance is an aspect of couple interviewing which other authors have said make it too contrived. Although I am not in agreement, it is pertinent to note that none of the ‘contrived’ interactional features were present in the second round of joint interviews, or amongst couples in long-

standing relationships. More longitudinal research with couples would shed light on why this was so. It may have been due to rapport, or because the subject matter in the post-birth interviews was less interviewer driven (they were invited to tell their story in which ever way they felt most comfortable). In addition, the disclosure of deeply meaningful, intimate stories about a life-changing event may have had an impact on reducing false or forced presentations of jointness.

6.1. Emerging Accounts

Similarly to Bjørnholt and Farstad (2014: 9), I found that nearly all the couples produced emerging narratives where one partner revealed information that was new, forgotten, or previously unheard of, bringing with it “new knowledge of each partner’s view point”. These are consequences of creating a ‘common reflective space’ where the presence of an enquiring listener encourages couples to introduce, share, and discuss reflections on their experience that may otherwise not have surfaced. Emerging in the context of this ‘common reflective space’ with Amina and Zachary, is a recognition that the personal, private sense of loss Amina has carried on her own, is shared.

Zachary: Yah, the hospital was unpleasant, especially in the surgery - which was horrific!

Amina: Interesting, I didn’t – I haven’t ever actually heard you ever say that.

Zachary: Yah, we did we had the whole #

Amina: Post-mortem.

Zachary: It was right after your child was born so #

Amina: Oh, I don’t remember, I really don’t remember that!

Zachary: ^There was a lot going on.^

Emerging accounts can be considered a form of triangulation (Morris, 2001), plus they offer couples the chance to modify their accounts. This was clearly the case for Amina and Zachary. The idea that Amina has only become aware of the empathy from her husband through jointly telling me their story of home birth, suggests that the couple interview offered them an opportunity to understand their common experience in greater depth. Once Amina is certain the horror of the hospital is shared, she is less tentative in claiming her disconnect from the birth.

As Taylor and de Vocht remark, where joint discussions illuminate different understandings of the phenomena in question, both for the participants themselves and the researcher, a certain level of authenticity is gained that is

unmatched in individual interviews (2011: 1581). However, there are ethical consequences of previously unheard or unvoiced accounts being aired in the couple interviews as will be discussed later. What made the impact on the research so informative is the opportunity it gave participants to negotiate their shared telling; their joint narrative could encompass multiple, diverging, and converging perspectives of home birth. Emerging most often was a case where revealed information was not detrimental to either partner's memory, but brought with it a new and different interpretation of events. As the next section shows, the idea that Joseph was still grappling with whether or not to go to his race surprises Isabella. Her perception that he had relinquished this idea much earlier on has to shift in light of his revealing after the fact, what he had been thinking at the time.

Joseph: I didn't know what was, whether [the birth] was gonna be like an all-day thing or if this was, pre - you know, the baby was still gonna come in a few days, or #

Isabella: Oh! Is that what you were thinking?

Joseph: Yah,

Isabella: You could still go to your race and come back?

Joseph: Yah! Yah, I did – but, uh #

Isabella: Oooh.

The internal validity of accounts is negotiated in this way in the interview by participants themselves. Allan (1980: 207) specifies that joint interviews give couples the chance to correct one another, spark each other's memory, modify, and correct their accounts, thereby reducing "unacknowledged biases". For another couple presented below, Mark's mistaken perception of the leakages from Alessandra's body needs to be corrected.

Alessandra: So I went to the kitchen for a while and sat on the ball for a while#

Mark: Oooh

Alessandra: And kind of then managed to eat a half a provita.

Mark: Did you get sick?

Alessandra: No! I managed to eat like a half a provita (laughs) #

Mark: You got sick! #

Alessandra: No, I didn't. #

Mark: Didn't you get sick? #

Alessandra: No.

Mark: Oh, okay.

Alessandra: No, as I stood up, more, more waters came out #

These couples were willing to accept the new information presented by their partner and were able to accommodate it, therefore facilitating disclosure. Interactive discussions such as these allow for a fuller picture of the couple relationship to emerge based on how and what couples reveal about themselves, each other, and their relationship. The forum created by these interviews has both positive and potentially harmful consequences. While most of these disclosures were unlikely to pose any harm, they could become so if there was heated disagreement or conflict that arose from such admissions. Such a situation did occur during one of the couple interviews and quickly escalated into a full-blown argument where neither partner could continue the joint interview.

6.2. Ethical Consequences

A potentially harmful consequence of creating this ‘common reflective space’ was encountered when Naledi and Rayne’s couple interview exposed massive tensions in their relationship and their individual views of the home birth. The problem that arose was due to their two completely divergent accounts of the birth. Rayne felt the home birth was pleasant, but was upset by a transfer to hospital for “low blood pressure” that he felt was “unnecessary”. Naledi felt the home birth was a disappointment and was relieved by the transfer to hospital, which she claims was due to massive blood loss and fainting that was a threat to her safety. These two divergent positions are clearly unable to be reconciled within the context of their shared narrative.

Naledi begins the joint interview offering Rayne the chance to present his version, because she has already had her individual interview. Not soon after however, she follows up with a probing question using an accusatory tone. Naledi: “And what happened? ** That’s was who was here, she [interviewer] wants to know what happened?” What unfolds is a passive aggressive situation where Naledi fishes for details that Rayne can’t deliver. He shoves the microphone across towards her saying “Here, you tell the story then”. As the following example from their couple interview illustrates, lacking a more appropriate therapeutic space, Naledi resorts to the couple interview to air her grievances on an experience of home birth she was terribly disappointed by. In their everyday life however, this conversation had not arisen (“we haven’t gotten around to talking about this”). Rayne thus feels under attack when she reveals her pent-up emotions and adopts the role of interrogator in the shared narrative context. Rayne: “this is not working for me. At all!” This particular incident showcases a breakdown of relationality in the ‘common reflective space’ that mirrors a similar such breakdown in their lived experience of home birth.

Naledi: I didn't feel as though - that you were making an effort to connect with me. I was managing to ask you for things but I didn't feel that you were doing anything in order to connect with me because

Rayne: Mmhmm

Naledi: I'm the one dealing with the labour. You're the one who has to do the, make an effort to make the connection. I didn't feel that there was anything I could say that you did to do that. *** Which is a reflection of, of the pregnancy. And I feel that the whole birth was very much a reflection of the pregnancy. ** The pregnancy was happening on the side, while life was going on.

Rayne: Yup.

Naledi: And you didn't connect with me during the pregnancy #

Rayne: That #

Naledi: I felt very alone and unacknowledged #

Rayne: Wheergh

Naledi: By you, during the pregnancy #

Rayne: You've got a four year old that's taking up all the extra time.

Naledi: Yes! But you were also, you had quite #

Rayne: It's normal #

Naledi: A long, quiet period in the winter when you were home a lot, and you - at least a month or more where things were quiet for you for work

Rayne: Well they were quiet on site #

Naledi: Where I felt like you weren't celebrating this moment..... I've felt completely unacknowledged, completely uncelebrated by you, during the pregnancy. And that, I guess, that's a reflection of the birth. That you didn't connect with me, you didn't make an effort to connect with me in the birth.

Rayne: Okay

Naledi: And I didn't feel like you **

Rayne: That's how you felt.

Naledi: Yah. But what did you do then if you feel that you did?

Rayne: I'm gonna leave this now. Because this is not an interview, this is something completely different. This is #

Naledi: No, well home birthing #

Rayne: No! (Gets up off his seat) #

Naledi: Is about #

Interviewer: I've got some questions #

Rayne: Um, that's #

Interviewer: Shall I just read them? #

Rayne: Sorry, I, sorry, I don't like the (pushes seat back to walk off) way it's going. I don't like the tone, I don't like the #

Naledi: You know why? Only because we haven't gotten around to talking about this

Rayne: Okay, but this is not the forum #

Naledi: This is the reality #

Rayne: If you and me, we can talk about it. This is not what this is about.

Interviewer: Yeah cause I've got some other questions about, that you know –

Rayne: Great, cause otherwise I'm not interested. This is not a counselling session, it's an interview about the home birth

Interviewer: Yeah, I've got a list.

Rayne: You keep interrupting me on when I want to expand on how I felt about the thing, so either we do the interview separately but were not gonna have that – a counselling session now.

Naledi: It's not a counselling session. Home births are very much about having birth partners #

Rayne: Do you wanna continue the interview or not? Cause otherwise I'll go and do something else #

Naledi: Fine.

Rayne: Cause I - this is not working for me. At all!

Naledi: Fine Rayne.

Rayne: Okay.

Naledi's decision to sabotage the post-birth interview is due in part, to the situated context constructed by the researcher for the purposes of the research. The active presence of the interviewer brought into their home the sympathetic ear of someone already familiar with Naledi's account, who is an experienced home birther, known to provide support for birthing women. The space thus constructed provides Naledi with 'a leg to stand on', she otherwise may not have

had. Naledi challenges Rayne to answer to her overriding experience of feeling “completely unacknowledged, completely uncelebrated”, an experience she links to the pregnancy in addition to the home birth. The extent to which she has suppressed and concealed this information is clear from Rayne’s reaction who is hearing it all for the first time.

Some of the concerns raised in this situation are the extent to which participants are able to utilise the interview context for their own means. Unbeknownst to me was the extent to which I would unwittingly be called on to mediate their experience, calling into question the ethical repercussions of sharing in the construction of a ‘common reflective space’ where the rapport developed can easily be read as camaraderie. This raises concerns of coercion, both inside and outside of the interview context, which can cause harm to participants. Although the researcher’s more powerful position in interactions with participants is undisputable, the current case is an example of reversed power relations. Naledi hijacked the opportunity afforded by the joint interview to express and display discontent. By un-doing jointness, Naledi presents a particular picture of her side of the relationship, which insinuates that more bottled up discontent may be sitting just below the surface of their joint couplehood. Rayne, hearing this for the first time wants to exit the interview which has constructed this situation “you and me, we can talk about it”, but the interview “is not the forum”. For him, airing previously undisclosed grievances “is not what [the interview] is about..... [the interview] is not a counselling session.” His discomfort is a direct result of what was brought up in the ‘common reflective space’, which revealed private information about his relationship and his role in it that he had not known previously, nor been privy to discussing, nor had wanted made public.

Unintentionally “caught in the cross fire” (Valentine, 1999: 70), I came across as siding with Naledi, making Rayne feel as though he were part of a “counselling session”. Rayne acts out his feeling of being trapped by abruptly pushing his chair away and getting up from the table where we are speaking. By threatening to leave the interview, he places the research under threat as a means of retaliation. The fore-closure of this interview necessitated that I re-negotiate voluntary participation and consent to continue Rayne’s individual interview. While this felt ethically responsible given the circumstances, I was petrified he would decline and I would risk having to forfeit them as a couple in the study. He agrees to continue, but only with his individual interview. He proceeds to explain how the demands of being a provider (necessitated by their relationship and society at large), impose structural constraints beyond his means to rectify, which he argues, affects how he interacts in their relationship and in the home birth.

7. Conclusion

Facilitated by theoretical framing of the relational aspects of home birth, a dyadic methodology produced knowledge of home births, evident as a component of the approach itself, offering a fresh and original take on couple displays of jointness in home births. As a methodological tool, knowledge generated from couple interviews is produced in ways that separate it from either individual or focus group interviews (Morgan *et al.*, 2013). The couple interviews complicated and contradicted the individual interviews but had the effect of bringing to the fore the negotiated nature of shared experiences and shared narration. This was the particular promise of a dyadic approach, which generated narratives of how couples do and un-do jointness within a ‘common reflective space’.

The task set by a combined dyadic approach entailed that couples negotiate how they forge a joint display from their individual perspectives. Interactive discussions allowed for a fuller picture of the couple relationship and home birth to emerge based on what couples chose to reveal about themselves, each other, their relationship, and their experiences. While this offers a place for staged performances of couple relationships to become contrived, these aspects of the joint accounts were found to be more useful than unhelpful. They indicated important relational characteristics that were helpful in finding the balance between individual and joint accounts that didn’t always match. In this way, detailed observations of the research setting and the interactions that take place therein are important.

Still considered a “developing” methodology (Eisikovits and Koren, 2010; Caldwell, 2013), this paper is a response to a call to researchers some thirty years ago (Allan, 1980) to strengthen understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of various interview methods. By offering an account of data collection and analysis in a project on home birth, various challenges were identified. From a practical point of view these include the cost and time needed to implement the combined data collection and analytic strategy. Certain topics are not appropriate for joint contexts, for example long-standing, undisclosed grievances that require mediation. Fear of intruding into the relationship may prevent the researcher from asking questions that make couples feel uncomfortable or inhibit their ability to speak freely. On the other hand, the claim that couple’s conceal separateness in joint interviews is refuted by the present study. I did not get the impression that conflicting views were hidden in the couple interviews. Rather, points of disagreement became rich, valuable sources of information when the ethical elements remained uncontroversial.

A dyadic approach seeks to make sense of both-sides of the story, as well as to provide a third dyadic story that is more than the sum of the parts (Eisikovits and Koren, 2010). While concerns about the complications evoked by such data have raised questions of validity (Hertz, 1995; Boeije, 2004), this article sides with others who consider the validity equal, if not surpassing that of individual interviews (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014; Mellor *et al.*, 2013), specifically because internal validity is negotiated in real time together with the participants. Participants modified their accounts and reflected on their position in negotiating their personal life publically, thereby generating rich insights for themselves and the researcher. New information and discrepancies were brought into the open by participants who found that the common space created opportunities for discussion, negotiation, and sharing that was otherwise lacking.

The co-existence of multiple viewpoints in collaborative events like home births are fruitful opportunities where a dyadic perspective may be called for. I have sided with Bjørnholt and Farstad (2014) in the recognition that a ‘common reflective space’ allows for meaning to be co-created from the dynamic interplay between the individuals present, in which the role of the researcher gets accounted for. As an active presence shaping what is told and how it is told, my identity as home birther and doula³ was instrumental in shaping the shared reflective space. To establish or maintain the ‘common reflective space’ I made suppers, rocked babies to sleep, washed dishes, and changed nappies, as much an interactive participant in the creation of these accounts. While these identities were uncomfortable bedfellows when I was asked for advice or asked about my home birth stories, it made approaching participants easier and increased empathy which allowed for open dialogue around difference and encouraged sharing.

The joint interview, in addition to the individual interviews, enabled more to be revealed about the research, specifically, how couples did and undid jointness. The context within which agreement or disagreement was reached indicated how presentations of (dis)joint accounts could be read and interpreted. Jointness in home births was actively strived for, making analytically interesting the question of whether or not jointness was achieved and how un-done jointness was resolved.

³ Defined as woman being with woman: A birth assistant focused on the needs of the birthing woman.

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