

Exercise: Reusing qualitative data: the value of context

Read through the two following interview extracts. A data user would usually have accompanying context or biographical information for the interviewees. For this exercise, all context has been removed for you to reflect on its role and value.

After reading the extracts:

1. Identify one or two analytical points or research questions that these data might address.
2. Consider which contextual information would help you to better understand the extracts.
3. Explain why each item of context would be useful.

Extract 1: Interview extract from Blaxter's Mothers and Daughters study, interview with G19

G19: An' a bottle o' Dettol wis aye... an' TCP.. that wis her. She niver gaed to the doctor. She wis a walkin' doctor. She didnae need a doctor... we wis never nae weel. Ken. We hidnae much clathes, it wis a gym costume an' a white blouse an' that woman brushed it doon every night wi' Dettol an' water... it wis brushed, this wis to keep the germs aff ye. It must have worked, cos we wis niver nae weel, but we wis brought up on, fit, soup, tatties... butter, eggs.. fit else? Veggies. A real... a substantial meal. I mean, we niver got steak an' things like that.. I mean there wis meatless days, some days you couldnae get meat. I believe we wis healthier than what my kids were. They got a' this... a' the goodness has gone oot o' the grub, I think.

LP: Uh-huh... you think that food's got quite a lot to do with it [staying healthy]?

G19: Well, my bringin' up made us healthier than the brinin' up I've gien them... comin'... wi' the things we ate. Wi' the things that we was forced to eat or do withoot. But nowadays... baked rice... now, you got baked rice. It wis made wi' eggs an' there wis currants in it, an' this wis a luxury, mind?

Husb: Nowadays, they'd sooner buy a tin.

G19: Nowadays they get a tin an' there's nae eggs in it an' the goodness is oot o' it. Like... have you ever had frozen stuff an' you've cooked it an' you feel as though it didnae taste right... efter ha'in a fresh bit o' steak an' onion. Ken fit I mean? The juice... there's nae the juice in it. Well, that's whit we find wi' the things nowadays an' a, the richt good is out o' them... the body-buildin' material.. afore you eat it.

I mean, tinned soup, I would niver hae it in the hoose unless it wis maybe Karen [daughter] comin' in an' I wis gaun away in a hurry an' gettin' a tin o' soup... I wouldnae gie it to him [husband]... we were nae brought up like that, we wis brought up to get a' thing oot o' the groun' and intae a pot... My father grew a' thing. As I say we niver had the money that they've nowadays. My mother could have niver bought four tins, five tins of soup to pit in a pot. It would have cost her very little to put on a pot o' soup an' gettin' the full body o' that pot o' soup, ken?

Makin' toast at the fire wis a great thing... you niver tasted toast at the fire that you will in a grill, it's nae the same taste. An' baked tatties in a fire. Used to sit aoun' an' bake tatties, or bake



chestnuts... it wis somethin'... we wis happy sittin' singin'... even when the kids were little we used to say 'Come on, kids, come on an' we'll hae a little concert'. We used to dress them up an' they used to sing an' dance. It wis great, ken... nowadays they'd think we was feel! And now, you see, when they're up we could sit an' speak about this an' laugh about it. what we used to dee, an' this an' that, an' dress them up an' mak' them sing an'... Isabel wis that fat, but she wis goin' to be a ballet dancer an' she wis gaun about Like an elephant! Ken. We all laugh about this nowadays. They were happy, days.

Kids are nae happy nowadays. They're gettin' too much. They're never deprived of onythin', they get it eventually. Even wi' the school... they're nae feart at their teachers the wey we were. The wey they were, we used to come home... 'I got the strap' an' then get a punch up for gettin' the strap. Karen comes home an' says to me 'I got the strap today'. I says 'Oh well, ging back an' get another een'.. she thinks I should ging up an' say to the teacher 'Dinna strap my daughter'. Ken fit I mean? It's a difference... they're defiant wi' the strap they were feart at the strap. They come home an' telt us they got the strap.. we wanted to know what for... an' then we got a punch up for... gettin' it.

Source: Blaxter, M. (2008) [Mothers and Daughters: Accounts of Health in the Grandmother Generation, 1945–1978](#) [data collection], UK Data Service. SN: 4943. DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-4943-1.

Extract 2: Interview extract from Short's Domestic Cooking and Cooking Skills in Late Twentieth Century England, interview with LA (Short, 2007)

FS: ...can you think of any techniques you use when you're trying to eat a healthy diet?

LA: ...um...{thinks}...for a healthy diet well we don't...fry much...we...but then I've always grilled rather than fried stuff...for example sausages...it's the one sort of meat thing that we all quite like...and {L's older daughter} likes...we do have sausages...usually once a week...a nice quick meal...my liver and bacon equivalent...a kind of warm...easy to make meal and you've got nice gravy that goes into mashed potato...um so I would grill but I've always grilled...I don't think there's anything that I particularly change but then...

FS: ...um...

LA: ...I think also my mum was quite conscious of health even...twenty years...thirty years ago...she was quite advanced with that as a cook...to not fry...to grill most things...so it's more up-bringing I'd say then conscious healthy living...that has um...yeah I mean...you know with potatoes we're much more likely to have them mashed or boiled...we'll have the odd sort of...chips out of the freezer...but I'd never have a deep fat fryer and I'd never make chips...um I might do sliced fried potatoes with an omelette...I think that's a really nice combination...um...so...yeah...there's...the only concession is very little frying of food...

FS: ...um...

LA: ...we don't have lots of meat but again that's...I mean that is healthy {?}...we don't particularly like a lot of meat...um...not much fat...semi-skimmed milk...can't think of anything else...

FS: ...the last section...in Britain today...etc?

LA: I think it's brilliant...I think um...my grandmother who I was talking about earlier and who's had a lifetime of preparing food and sick of it...she's also nearly blind...and she came to stay with me when {L's younger daughter} was first born so that was about eight months ago...and she's never been round a big supermarket...she lives in Shropshire...um...and they've got quite a good shop that sells quite a variety of foods for where it is...



FS: ...um...

LA: ...but I took her over to the Sainsbury's in Haringey...and we walked up and down the aisle...and I had to tell her what was on the shelves because her eyesight isn't good enough...and we spent half an hour just in the fruit and veg section...pointing out all the different pears and all the different...all the exotic...star fruit and...and it was all too much for her in a way because you know she's eighty five or something and she's had meat and two veg all her life and yet she's still sort of young enough at heart to want to try these different things...so she had pasta for the first time...the first time she'd ever had pasta was here...and I was just thinking we take it so much for granted now...but things are so different now...I think it's brilliant...I wonder where we can go from here...I suppose there'll just be more and more influx of foreign foods and foreign recipes and I'm all in favour of it all...I think it's a good thing...

FS: What about prepared and semi-prepared foods?

LAit's funny because this same Grandmother...if she knew the extent to which we buy ready prepared foods...she'd be absolutely horrified because of the war-time mentality...of everything must be...cooked...[edits] ...and I...there's part of my background that tell me I shouldn't do it...

FS: ...um...

LA: ...but I also know that for today's living...it's impossible...[edits] I cannot think how they [mother and mother-in-law] managed it...but then I think our lives are different because we have a much bigger social like and...we're more house proud...we want to get our houses looking nice and...I always remember our house being the same for years and years...but my Mum was always cooking our food...plus obviously most women I know work...with kids, so... you know you're both out of the house...[edits] so all in all...I think it's...it's...there's so much a place for it and I wish in a way it wasn't because it's cheating...I still feel it's cheating...I think I said earlier...

FS: ...um...

LA: [edits]...in fact my sister makes me laugh 'cos her and George are the epitomy [sic] of the kind of nineties...could both working really long hours in trendy jobs...and she said cooking for her now is heating up some pasta...some sauce...she says they've 'cooked' if they've done that...most of the time they're either eating out or getting a takeaway...so it's like 'oh should we cook tonight' and then they get ready prepared food and yet deep down...she's got the same sort of thing as me...she comes from a background where cooking food was important...um...and you feel you're cheating...[edits] ...whereas because of the life I'm leading...you know at home with children...I've got more time here...more time to think about food and whatever...and more time to shop for it...but um..

FS: ...um...

LA: there's still a huge part of our lives with ready prepared food...and I can't see that going to change for a while...I just can't see...because as the kids get older and get more time for me I'll probably end up working more...I can't see that suddenly I'm going to have two hours every day...to create wonderful food...and I just think back and wonder how my Mum did it...I don't think she went out much...she didn't go out much...she didn't watch telly much...she didn't have hour long conversations on the phone with friends which I frequently have...I just think our lives are very different...I'm in favour of it I think.

Source: Short, F. (2007) [Domestic Cooking and Cooking Skills in Late Twentieth Century England, 1996–1997](#) [data collection], UK Data Service. SN: 5663. DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-5663-1.

