

A photograph of four young women sitting together and laughing heartily. They are in a casual setting, possibly a meeting or a social gathering. The woman on the far left is wearing a black hijab and sunglasses on her head. The woman next to her is wearing a red top. The woman in the center has blonde hair and is wearing glasses on her head. The woman on the far right is wearing a white fuzzy jacket and glasses. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

The Roles of Laughter in Qualitative Research Interviews

“Get it done’ is one of the most used sentences by my Dad (*laughs*)

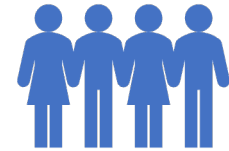
‘Get it done, get it done babes, just got to get it done’. (*both laugh*)’

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Reason, Reflection and Affect: A narrative inquiry into Undergraduate Students' Experience of Learning Law at a Post 1992 University (*the working title*)

- **9 participants** who graduated from the UWE LLB programme in 2018 or will graduate in 2019.
- **'purposeful' sampling** to reflect variation in the LLB cohort (gender/age/race/international-home/ disability/ private-state educated at school/ caring responsibilities/career plans following LLB).
- **Methodology** – narrative inquiry
- **Method** – two 'lightly' structured interviews across the academic year, varying in length from 1 – 2 hours, recorded and transcribed by hand. Transcripts provided to participants for comment. Final work will be made available to participants (if they wish).



Participant	Gender	Race (as identified by participant)	UK/ International	Age	Disability
A	Male	Black British	UK- London	Early 20s	N/A
B	Female	White British	UK- London	Early 20s	Depression
C	Female	Malaysian, Chinese	International, Malaysia	Early 20s	N/A
D	Female	Mixed race	UK - Bristol	Mid 20s	Post-natal depression and subsequent anxiety
E	Female	White British	UK – Cornwall (but US until age of 16)	Early 20s	Dyspraxia/ Anxiety
F	Female	Black – originally Angola, now British	UK – Somerset/Dorset	Early 20s	N/A
G	Male	Mixed race (English/Pakistani)	UK - Essex	Early 20s	N/A
H	Male	White British	UK - Leicester	Early 20s	Epilepsy
I	Female	Black	International – British Virgin Islands	40s	Anxiety

Interviewing in narrative inquiry

‘narrative research requires interview techniques that will enable the disclosure of multi-layered individual meanings....[it] aims for a rich, nuanced, *storied*, sample of subjectivity that details how it has felt to the participant to be living the life he or she has lived in relation to the phenomena of the research question’

(Josselson, 2013:pg ix)

Laughter - an aspect of dialogue/performance in research interviews

'[Dialogic/performance analysis] interrogates how talk among speakers is interactively (dialogically) produced and performed as narrative....this one requires close reading of contexts, including the influence of investigator, setting, and social circumstances on the production and interpretation of narrative' (Reissman, 2008:105)

'Stories don't fall from the sky (or emerge from the innermost "self"); they are composed and received in contexts – interactional, historical, institutional and discursive – to name a few' (Reiissman, 2008:105)

Reflexivity of researcher

‘to be reflective does not demand an ‘other,’ while to be reflexive demands both an other and some self-conscious awareness of the process of self-scrutiny’
(Chisieri-Strater, 1996:130, in Pillow, 2003:177)

Researcher laughing

‘the most obvious function of laughter is that it is a form of active listening, a way of showing interest and establishing connection’ (Carlsen, 2005:248)

‘Some people have asked me whether it is okay to laugh with participants if they tell funny stories that they laugh at themselves. Of course it is fine to do this. The principle is to match the participants’ feeling – and try not to inject your own’ (Josselson, 2013:86)

Power imbalance – laughter as aspect of role reversal?

‘Laughing in general...can be seen as a positioning of oneself as naïve (Gleshne & Peshkin, 1992) where the researcher is signifying that he/she is the learner and the informant the teacher’ (Carlsen, 2005:249)

Participant A – humour in performance of identity

Everyone knows law is hard.

That's why I said people's eyes pop out when I say that I do law.

That's why a taxi driver said to me recently

'Do you feel powerful?'

And I was like 'Whoah!' (*Rachel laughs*)

And he was like 'Knowledge is power'

And I was like 'Yeah, I know that'

But he was like 'You know the law, it's prestigious'

And it was really nice.

And he was like, 'Do you feel powerful?? I want this for my children.'

And I was like, 'Oh, this is great.'

Participant E – entering into the participant's world/playing with language

- E: I became friends with all of these new friends and go to their homes and see what their lives were like. And I remember my friend Lizzie and going to her house and she had this amazing five bedroom house, a big garden, she had a foyer ...
- Rachel: (*laughs*) Not a foyer!
- E: She had a foyer...

Participant D - empathy/ researcher responding to something offered up...

D: I am becoming more reflective in how I can move forward and doing the things, and how to do that more effectively or appropriately, which are more like appropriate steps of taking things.

Yeah. I think, yeah. Actually. Yeah. That's great.... Nice to reflect on that.

(Rachel laughs)

Participant laughing – positioning the self in the narrative dialogue

‘Positioning laughter addresses the research interview as an interactional event, an event where selves are also discursively produced (Davies & Harré, 1990)’ (Carlsen, 2005:248)

Participant E – identity construction/thinking in the moment

when you tell people you're a law student they're like 'Oh my God, you must be so clever' and 'That's such a hard subject' and 'dah, dah, dah, dah, dah' and I'm like they're only basing that on society and the traditionalness of studying law,

which is fine, but I think studying law is so much more than that.

It's so much more like creative thought for me, I find it like weirdly creative.
(laughs)

I don't know why, I think it's because you can take something that's been put in the box and apply it to other scenarios,

and I'm not talking about land law because that is just boxes. *(laughs)*

Participant C – irony/cultural awareness pf stereotypes

So I was very lucky because my parents were, they allowed me to do whatever I wanted for post GCSEs.

They were like ‘OK you can do A Levels if you want, you can do the IB system if you want, you can do whatever and you can choose your subjects’.

But, I have been very lucky in that sense and I explored the arts, humanities subjects and I enjoyed it.

But some of my friends do end up doing the science stream all the way and they do not enjoy it. It’s a very Asian thing I would say (*laughs*)

Rachel: So you’re gesticulating quotation marks.... So explain a bit more about what that means...

Participant I – Reflection in performance/affection for /relationship with others

...and he also said ‘You’ve changed’ (*laughs*) I was like ‘That’s a good thing or a bad thing?’

He was ‘No, it’s a good thing, cause you would have been on me’ (*laughs*)

Yeah, so, law really has changed me, for the better I would say.

I see things differently, I just don’t jump at everything you know. I see everything legally.

Sometimes my nieces and nephews say ‘Auntie take off that law hat, please take it off, I can’t deal with it, I really can’t deal with it today’ (*Rachel laughs*)

Participant laughing – about serious things

‘humour, and laughter were used as part of a complex system of `emotion work' which enabled them to distance themselves from certain emotions, cope with the demands of their trade, protect their private life, and translate feelings of distress into laughter.’ (Macpherson, 2008:1082)

Participant D – serious/self-awareness/mini-catharsis/expression of trust?

Rachel:....where I want to start today was really just asking how things have been since we met. So I met with you in October, it's quite a long time back, isn't it? So how has your year been...?

D: Oh, it's been so much stress (*laughing*).

And again....

Rachel: OK. So my first question is how have things been going since I saw you last in November? (*F laughs ironically*) so that might take a while then....?(*both laughing*)

F: Yeah, I had a sort of mental breakdown in January and I was suffering really badly from my anxiety and my depression. And it got to the point where I had a massive anxiety attack in my EU law exam....

Laughing together...

‘Being an insider means being embedded in a shared setting (Smyth and Holian 2008), emotionally connected to the research participants (Sikes 2008), with a ‘feel for the game and the hidden rules’ (Bourdieu 1988, 27)’ (Floyd and Arthur, 2012:173)

‘It has also been noted that sharing humour tends to require participation in a “shared form of life”’ (Davidson, 2001:174 in Macpherson, 2015:1083).

‘I suggest investigating it by invoking another Bakhtinian (1981) concept: *addressivity*, that utterances in a living dialogue are always formed in the ‘atmosphere of the already spoken’ (p. 280) and in anticipation of an answering word. Laughter is thus placed as an utterance in the event of understanding.’ (Carlsen, 2005:248)

Participant A

Narrative performance/physical comedy/awareness of transcription as 'silhouette'

I think that if there were girls in the classroom I would have been way more nervous to get involved in drama and do dance and, er, which gave me loads of confidence, because no-one was embarrassed.

There was a real camaraderie amongst all the boys who just got on with it, um, so I've got, had friends at other schools who thought it was really weird that you were in all these shows and things like that, because they would never do anything like that,

whereas I played girls in plays (*both laugh*)

Participant E – seriousness of topic/ironic performance/signalling of empathy by researcher

...so for instance whenever we were sat in a religious studies class and we were talking about ethnicities or whatever, the topic of different races came up I'd always go quiet because I didn't want to highlight the fact that I was the only black person there.

I never wanted to put myself as the spokesperson for a whole race, and that's also funny because they always looked at me to be the spokesperson, because I'm definitely qualified to speak on behalf of an entire race.

(both laugh)

Participant A – narrative performance/inner and outer perspectives

I was explaining to someone, who was one of my friends at Uni who went to private school, who had a lot of mis... she's not seen much of the world and hasn't seen London and I think she, because I'm black and told her I'm from an area of London, she said 'Oh, do you live on a council estate then?' and I'm like 'No',
(laughs slightly and Rachel laughs too)

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