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# How Do We Belong? Researcher Positionality Within Qualitative Inquiry

An Edited Volume of the Proceedings of the 4th Annual Qualitative Research Symposium at the University of Bath

Edited by:
Bryan C. Clift, Jenny Hatchard and Julie Gore

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

# How Do We Belong?

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# Notes on Contributors

**Angela Blanchard** came to Keele University in September 2012 with the single goal of completing the one-year MSc in Counselling Psychology, in order to qualify as a counsellor, and got bitten by the research bug. She is now full-time PhD candidate in the School of Psychology, having completed her first year over 2 calendar years as a part-time student. She qualified as a counsellor in 2014, and combined her full-time studies with a small private practice and some voluntary counselling for a local bereavement and loss charity. Previous work for a national pregnancy, childbirth and parenting charity has given her a long-standing interest in child development, with a special emphasis on the emotional lives of children and parents. Her PhD research is an autoethnography of childhood emotional neglect, which incorporates elements of her own story as well as the stories of her participants.

**Bryan C. Clift** is a Lecturer (Assistant Professor) at the University of Bath in the Department for Health and associated with the Centre for Development Studies and the Physical Culture, Sport and Health Research Group. His work is oriented around three foci: Sport and physical activity in relation to issues of contemporary urbanism, popular cultural practices and representations, and qualitative inquiry. These are inspired by the notable ways in which cultural practices contribute to the structure and experience of contemporary urban social formations.

**Sara Delamont** is Reader Emerita in the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff. She has been given both the BSA's Lifetime Service Award and BERA's John Nisbet Award and has a DSc Econ from Cardiff University. Involved with the Academy of Social Sciences since its beginnings in 1980, she was elected a Fellow in 2002, and is also a Fellow of the newer Learned Society of Wales. Her most recent book (written with Neil Stephens and Claudio Campos) is *Embodying Brazil: An Ethnography of Diasporic Capoeira*, Routledge 2017, based on fieldwork beginning in 2003, and still going on. Her favourite of her own books is *Feminist Sociology*, Sage 2003. She has been doing ethnographic research since 1969, and was one of the founding editors of the Sage journal Qualitative Research.

**Louise Folkes** is in the final year of her PhD in Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences. Her thesis is exploring social (im)mobility narratives in a working-class community in south Wales with a particular interest in the intersection of place-based, classed and gendered narratives. Her supervisory team are Dr Eva Elliott and Dr Dawn Mannay. Louise's research interests include: social mobility, social class inequalities, community and place studies, ethnographic methods, and creative research approaches.

**Julie Gore** is a Reader in Organizational Psychology at the University of Bath's School of Management. Julie is a Chartered Psychologist, Fellow of the British Psychological Society (CPsychol, FBPsS) and is an Associate Editor for the Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology. With over two decades of experience in HE she has an international reputation for her qualitative research in cognition and naturalistic decision making (NDM); eliciting and documenting expertise in ill-defined organisational contexts via cognitive task analysis.

**Jenny Hatchard** is Research Fellow in Public Health Policy at the University of Bath. A political scientist, Jenny's research examines how private interests seeks to influence public policy, particularly in relation to alcohol, tobacco and soft drinks. Her work has contributed to the introduction of plain packaging for tobacco and is now focused on tobacco, alcohol and soft drinks tax. Jenny is particularly interested in corporate networks, evidential transparency and political access of corporate actors to health decision-making and regulation.

**Jennifer Heath**, a Clinical Psychologist and PhD Researcher at the Centre for Appearance Research (UWE Bristol), has clinical experience working within burns services. Her desire to become more involved in applied research and interest in peer support led to a PhD that hopes to develop online peer-informed support for parents of burn-injured children. In 2017, Jennifer received two awards from the British Burn Association; the Laing Essay Prize for her paper considering new technologies in burn care from a clinical psychologist's perspective, and an oral presentation prize for her presentation of novel ideas in the development of support for parents. Her PhD supervisors are Prof Diana Harcourt at the University of the West of England, Dr Heidi Williamson at the University of the West of England, and Dr Lisa Williams at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital.

**Sundeep Sunny Mangat** is a PhD candidate at the University of Roehampton. She is Canadian and moved from Canada to the United Kingdom to further pursue her education. Her research examines how the experiences of Dalit women, who have been raped, are shaped by the sexual violence discourse in India, within the context of the family, community and the State. She is supervised by Professor Aisha K. Gill and Dr. Amanda Holt.

**Sergio A. Silverio**, a University of Liverpool alumnus, is an academic Psychologist who has achieved critical acclaim from The British Psychological Society. Maintaining a primary research interest in 'Female Psychology' he utilises qualitative methodologies, whilst adopting a lifecourse analysis approach to examine women's mental health and

social wellbeing outcomes in relation to changes in gender identity across the lifespan. Now working as a Research Assistant in Qualitative Methods at the University College London's Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Institute for Women's Health, he continues to redouble his efforts to bring women's health to the forefront of academic debate.

**Alexandra Vickery** first became interested in men's mental health when she was working for one of the leading mental health charities, Rethink Mental Illness. During this time she obtained a 1+3 PhD studentship from the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at Cardiff University, co-supervised by Professor Jonathan Scourfield and Dr Katy Greenland. During 2014-2015 she completed a Masters in social science research methods and is now in her final year as a PhD student. Her thesis is titled Men and Distress: Help-Seeking, Coping and Daily Management.

**Ken Yan Wong** has completed his PhD at Cardiff University and has a degree in occupational therapy. His research theorises dialogic reflection as a philosophical concept and explores its suitability in occupational therapy education and practice. He is also involved in research about the reflective nature of patients' stories in nursing education. His research interests include reflective practice, reflection, co-operative and participatory research methodologies, professional development, and healthcare education. He runs TheLittlePhilosopherBlog.com, a website about reflection for professional and personal development. Through reflective coaching, he also helps researchers to understand their personal worldviews and research paradigms. His PhD supervisors are Prof. Ben Hannigan and Dr. Steve Whitcombe.

**Jenny Young** is Research Fellow and part-time PhD student in the School of Health & Social Care at Edinburgh Napier University. Her research interests include gender, informal caring, communication dynamics in cancer care and a general interest in qualitative research. Jenny is currently working on two projects funded by the charity Macmillan Cancer Support. Both explore the impact of holistic needs assessment for people affected by cancer in a community and outpatient setting. Jenny's PhD using narrative interviews explores the experience of caring for a spouse with cancer from the perspective of men

# Introduction

## Bryan C. Clift, Jenny Hatchard, and Julie Gore

The theme of the 4th Annual Qualitative Research Symposium at the University of Bath shared the same title as this text, *How do we belong? Researcher positionality within qualitative inquiry*. The event opened for discussion amongst colleagues and peers across a range of disciplines—such as Cultural Studies, Education, Health, Management, Policy, Psychology, Sociology—the various ways in which authors are embedded in the research process and research texts. In this introduction we echo that discussion and outline the selected contributors' work.

Like the Symposium, we hope this edited volume of the proceedings of the event contributes to fostering a common ground for qualitative researchers to speak about positionality within qualitative research. A central aim of the Symposium is to facilitate an interdisciplinary discussion of common features, challenges, and changes in qualitative research – such as methodological approaches, innovative methods, sampling techniques, theoretical integration, or enhancing quality. Receiving a positive response from the event each of the last three years, we hope that an edited volume based on the event expands these fruitful discussions beyond the boundaries of the event itself.

The inspiration for the Symposium grew out of the Qualitative Methods Forum (QMF) at the University of Bath. The QMF meets monthly to discuss methodological and theoretical issues arising from qualitative research for all interested staff and doctoral students across campus. In 2014, the group's organizers proposed and developed the initial QRS, which was hosted at Bath in 2015 in order to connect and collaborate with our colleagues and peers across the South West of England. Each successive Symposium has carried an explicit theme meant to speak across disciplines and traditions in qualitative research. The themes from the previous three years were:

2015: Quality in qualitative research and enduring problematics

2016: Two faces of qualitative inquiry: Theoretical and applied approaches

2017: From the established to the novel: The possibilities of qualitative research

This edited volume grows out of the continued interest and success of previous Symposia.

**Setting the scene of the conference**

Acknowledging that any form of qualitative inquiry is a social construction, the claims authors make within their work are always negotiated through the voice of the author(s). Importantly, the role that the author/researcher plays in a research project requires some form of acknowledgement of awareness of that position. Denzin (1997) made clear more than 20 years ago that writers can no longer presume to present objective, uncontested accounts of another's experience. Any author, then, should heed this acknowledgement and demonstrate an awareness of their position, which can be taken up in numerous ways.

Some authors choose to 'reflect' on their position within their description of their methods. Others write themselves directly into the work in order to 'reveal' their position, often more implicitly than explicitly. Some forms of writing engage positionality directly, as a form of inquiry itself (e.g. autoethnography). Readers of qualitative research must be able to recognize, discern and value these various ways of positioning positionality. The quality of how this is accomplished is specific to the research approach. An ethnographic text, for example, would expect to see authors more implicitly building themselves into their writing in order to give the reader some sense of how the authors positioned themselves in the field, in relation to participants, or into their writing. In contrast, a text wherein reflection on positionality and the research process is located primarily within the methods section, rather than implicitly/explicitly embedded throughout a text, makes for very different reading and evaluation of researcher presence. Regardless of the form chosen to demonstrate positional awareness, qualitative researchers must necessarily engage in the 'I-thou' relationship of the work (Fine, 1994).

Despite the importance of positionality, scholars often do not have, are not given, or do not make the time and space to explore positionality with much depth. Peer-reviewers, editors, and funders tend to privilege the knowledge generated through the work over its multiple methodological nuances. In response to this, we aimed for the Symposium and this edited volume to be a space in which that exploration can be placed front and center. To prompt this, the Symposium outlined three ways of thinking about positionality within qualitative inquiry in order to prompt interdisciplinary and inter-paradigmatic conversations:

> *Engaging Positionality* invited authors to explore, better understand, and articulate their relationship to their work (e.g., area of inquiry, participants, context, etc.). Questions associated with this kind of framing include, for example: How does an author's identity/subjectivity inform the kinds of

questions asked, or how data is 'read'? How might this be accounted for in the work? How is the author present within the text? In what ways is this evident? How does positionality shape the conception and enactment of the research? How does positionality differ from quantitative notions of bias?

*Inquiring Into Positionality* takes up those practices of writing that directly examine positionality as part of the inquiry itself. These kinds of writing include, for example, the auto-ethnographic, reflexive, or performative pieces of writing that focus at least in part on the author's experience of the research process. Questions associated with this kind of framing include, for example: In what ways does the inquiry contribute to understanding positionality for others? How is positionality *worked* within the work? What is the relevance of being present in our texts? For what purpose? To what end?

*Considering Methodological Relations* considered the relationship between positionality and other methodological features. Questions associated with this kind of framing include, for example: how does positionality feature in relation to aspects of qualitative methodologies and methods (e.g. notions of rigor, ethics, validity, trustworthiness, issues of power, etc.)? How do different epistemological and ontological orientations reconfigure positionality? In what ways might theory inform a methodology and by implication an author's position? How do different disciplines incorporate positionality into their standards or expectations?

These three ways of thinking about positionality are framing devices. They are by no means absolute, definitive, or discrete ways of thinking about positionality. Rather, they are temporary and intended to encourage discussion across disciplinary lines. Several of the presentations at the Symposium and the essays herein demonstrate the overlapping construction of these porous and temporary categories.

This edited volume, like the Symposium, includes established scholars in qualitative research and their respective fields, and those just arriving and getting started. The **first chapter** is from **Sara Delamont** who takes up a central debate about positionality emanating from the work of Edward Said and critics of his work. Principally, Ernest Gellner's response to Said's writing on the Middle East in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* complicated Said's now widespread and significant contributions. Delamont points to two key aspects raised by Gellner, disciplinary differences and Said's own position. Through this debate, and comments on her own position in her work, she highlights the relationships amongst positionality, reflexivity, truth claims, authenticity, morality, and the politics of a text. In the **second chapter**, **Sundeep Mangat** examines her transnational research practices across Canada, the United Kingdom, and India. Turning to post-colonial feminism, she recognizes critiques of Western academics and the injustices of an imperial gaze. Turning this inward, she aims through reflective practice to develop a non-imperialistic approach, work toward decolonizing her own inquiry, and explore how the Western researcher is constructed by the 'Other.'

Gendered relations within qualitative inquiry are the central preoccupation of the next three chapters. **Chapter three** written by **Jenny Young** examines gendered dynamics between her and the men she interviews in a study on male informal carers. Taking a reflective approach, she focuses on how the interview becomes a space for the construction of gendered subjectivity. In her work, she suggests that the gendered dynamic between female interviewer and male interviewee enabled men to negotiate idealized constructions of masculinity. In **chapter four, Alexandra Vickery**, too, focuses on the gendered dynamic between her and her male interviewees. Complimenting the previous chapter, Vickery examines a gendered power dynamic in the interview process, which informs every aspect of her interaction with male participants. Issues of access, recruitment, interviews, and analysis all are shaped by this gendered dynamic. Compellingly, at the same time she experienced issues of trust, vulnerability, sexism, and even inappropriate behaviour, she was also positioned by men in the project as understanding and empathetic. In this way, she attends to the care researchers must work to develop both for their participants in order to generate useful data but also care for themselves. A reversal of the gendered discussion in the previous two chapters occurs in **chapter five** from **Sergio A. Silverio**. As a man researching woman's experiences, Silverio grapples with his own positionality. In doing so, he shares a shifting understanding of himself through his research with women at the intersection of femininity, non-marriage, ageing, and identity. Having adopted a Grounded Theory methodology—wherein the *intention* to enter into the study with no a-priori assumptions shapes the research process—he concludes that the difficulties of silencing his own voice, prior knowledge, and understanding obscure interpretations and decisions in the research process. Rather than adopt the pretence of excluding his position, he instead learns from that position to make productive use of it.

Chapters six and seven explore in detail the relationships researchers form with participants. As an English researcher in Wales, **Louise Folkes** in **chapter six** discusses how her positionality influences data collection, participant interaction, and identification/creation of findings. She understands her position as a "double-outsider," wherein she is an outsider of Welsh culture and the local context. Using reflection based on fieldnotes in her ethnographic work, she troubles the insider/outsider dichotomy by exploring a "third space" that is characterized by a temporary insider-ness developed through understanding of local knowledge. This approach to positionality, she suggests, aids in better understanding the communities in which researchers work and navigating differences in the researcher-participant relationship. **Ken Yan Wong** in **chapter seven** shifts from an ethnographic methodology to a participatory based methodology with co-operative inquiry. Explicit in participatory methodologies is the foregrounding of reflexivity as part of the research process at every stage. He assesses how the intellectual, emotional, and value-driven dimensions cannot be extricated from the research process. Further, he suggests that they are vital in participatory approaches as researchers, co-researchers, and participants interact with one another and together take up the axioms of the research process and the social context in which it takes shape.

The final two chapters examine positionality in different ways in relation to sensitive subject matter. **Jennifer Heath** in **chapter eight** draws from a reflective diary to investigate how different interview techniques impact the research process. Across participant-selected face-to-face, audio-video, audio-only, and e-mail interviews, she discusses how each is both helpful and a hindrance. The choice of format offers flexibility and convenience for participants, sets up different degrees of distance between interviewer and interviewee, and may contribute to improving response rate. Yet, the 'feel' created in the different interview techniques carries different implications for the emotional labour of the research process on the researcher when discussing sensitive topics, and how participants relate to and interact with the researcher. The **final chapter** from **Angela Blanchard** takes an auto-ethnographic approach in her work on childhood emotional neglect. To be responsive to her position in the process and with participants she tells the story of her participants together with her own story (the 'auto' part of autoethnography). Shifting from the reflective to the performative, she eschews the certainty of singular truth and opts in its place to communicate the uncertainties of perceived experience. Importantly, rather than invalidate or undermine her work, she argues that the autoethnographic performance better enables evaluation of the research on account of its transparency.

Notable in all of these contributions are their specificity to a discipline while aiming to incorporate language and representational choices that do not exclude those outside of a specific discipline. It is clear that each discipline within which an author writes carries certain traits. Rather than aim to redirect each contributor into a uniform tone of voice or convention, we hope that authors' representations of their work illustrate the conventions of those disciplines. The common ground in each is their engagement with positionality. Yet, even within their discussions, tensions and challenges are evident within the voices of authors themselves and between them. Each essay contains differences in how positionality is conceived, approached, and represented. Readers of this work should assess for themselves how well this is accomplished both in terms of each contribution and a coherent whole.

We, the Editors of this volume, hope that reading and appraising the work herein can assist in critically engaging those attentive to positionality within their own work. To that end, we hope others value, appreciate, and enjoy this text.

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# One

# Truth is not Linked to Political Virtue: Problems with Positionality

## Sara Delamont

The title of this chapter comes from Ernest Gellner (1993) who used it to conclude a very hostile review of Edward Said's (1993) book *Culture and Imperialism*. Gellner wrote:

> Truth is not linked to political virtue (either directly or inversely). To insinuate the opposite is to be guilty of that sin which Said wishes to denounce. Like the rain, truth falls on both the just and the unjust. The problems of power and culture, and their turbulent relations during the great metamorphosis of our social world is too important to be left to lit crit.

The correspondence in the *Times Literary Supplement* which followed Gellner's review was heated and full of invective. The scholar Robert Irwin (2006, p. 304) called it "one of the finest intellectual dogfights of recent decades." Both Gellner and Said are dead, but the issues of positionality and belonging they disputed are relevant in 2018. Truth, positionality and reflexivity are always important for qualitative researchers and are the three core themes of this chapter. It explains who Said was and the impact of his most famous book *Orientalism* (Said, 1978), relates positionality and ethnography, and then queries what 'truth' might be for a reflexive ethnographer.

Said's *Orientalism* has been a best seller for forty years. As Marcus (2001) summarises it, drawing on

> novels, travellers' tales, music, political tracts and bureaucratic documents, Said delineates a discursive formation which he calls "orientalism", a discourse

> which he shows to be the vehicle for representations of identity which are seriously deformed. (p. 109)

Said claimed that thinkers in the West always 'othered' the East and the Orient, so the two were inextricably linked in an hierarchy. Westerners were accused of preferring their essentialised dream because it enabled them to maintain their sense of superiority. For Said, this polarity could not be easily escaped and had considerable force. Said's work drew on poststructuralism and critical textual analysis, to be part of an intellectual post colonialism.

Gellner's core point – that Said was prone to favour authors whose positionality he shared – is an important one. Good people can do bad research, and 'bad' people can produce good research. Gellner criticised, as bad scholarship both Said's (1978) *Orientalism* and the 1993 text, partly because he had decided Said's self-righteous positionality as a Palestinian was a fashionable mirage covering up sloppy research. There was also a clash of disciplines: Said was an expert in literary criticism, not anthropology, theology or oriental studies. In one way that 'dogfight' in the *TLS* from the early 1990s is very old news, a battle that took place in another country and both men who 'fought' it are dead: Gellner in 1995 and Said in 2003. However I return to it because it reveals the dangers of adopting a positionality that is not reflexive, which Said's certainly was not. My argument is that good ethnography is produced by investigators who suffuse their work with reflexive positionality. Hence *reflexive* positionality should be central at all stages of any ethnography – research design, access, ethical approval, data collection, data analysis, writing and dissemination. Positionality without the reflexivity is a barrier to good research. This is the central theme of Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) advanced textbook on ethnography, and is explained at length there. I too endorse that position, and elaborate it below, after pointing out two caveats. The most reflexive positionality adopted by an ethnographer will improve the project but does not protect against two dangers, which are briefly outlined next.

1) The researcher cannot control how she is seen and positioned by the actors in the fieldsite.
2) The author cannot control how publications are read.

Consequently researchers need to proceed with caution during and after any particular project. How fieldworkers can be mis-perceived is explained next, the 'perils' of positionality at publication stage are presented after the section on doing fieldwork.

We all have to recognise that positionality is a strength, but can also be a disadvantage. An African-American scholar, such as Mason (2002) can use his racial heritage to do fieldwork among African – Cubans believers in Santeria (the African-Cuban religion) in ways no white American could, but the fieldwork is still only as good as the ways his reflexive positionality operates all the time. If the acute self-consciousness of being a researcher slips away, and for a dark skinned descendent of slaves it could have done in ways that for a European it *never* would, the investigation is damaged. Precisely because that is an example of an exotic fieldsite thinking about Mason's positionality in

it helps us all focus on ours in our more mundane settings. We have to knife-edge all the time. Qualitative research without reflexive positionality will not be very good, as Coffey (1999) argued so eloquently. As ethnographers we may think we can choose to declare and display some aspects of our positionality and remain silent about or conceal others. The informants or actors in the fieldsite will draw their own conclusions, interpret what the researcher says and does, and make their own sense of the researcher's presentation of self. The investigator may, or may not, discover how she was socially constructed. Sometimes informants reveal their perceptions while the study is still in progress. Sue Lees (1986) was doing an ethnography of young women in an English secondary school in the 1970s. One day she mentioned her husband and baby, and the girls were so amazed they revealed that they had been certain she was a lesbian because she wore dungarees. Parallel misconceptions may only be revealed many years after the fieldwork. Margaret Kenna (1992) for example did her initial fieldwork on a remote Greek island she called Nisos in the late 1960s. Her presence there as a single woman mystified the islanders, who decided that she must come from a poor family and so had to earn her own dowry. Kenna has returned to Nisos several times since the initial research, but it was only when she was not only married but the mother of a son that Nisiot women told her how her original body postures had baffled them in the 1960s. She sat the way she had been taught in the USA that modest women sat, with her legs crossed above the knee. On Nisos twenty years later, she was told that was the way Greek prostitutes sat, so her body language conveyed a very different message from her story about doing research in order to get a degree and write a book.

Positionality is a vital part of ethnography (and indeed all qualitative research). Good ethnography depends on saturating all the stages with reflexive positionality – not just a bold statement of it but also the hard work of thinking it through at every stage. That is essential. Hard thinking about the positionality of the fieldworker is important when reading about the research topic before the research design is done, when designing the project, when seeking ethical approval, when negotiating access, actually in the fieldsite, as the analysis is conducted and when writing up and disseminating. Ward (2016) is a collection on gender reflexivity, in which the ten chapters all demonstrate how that positionality was important at all the stages, rather than being only relevant when in the fieldsite among the informants. Good ethnographers think about their positionality, and their self-presentation all the time, but they need to have a healthy scepticism about how what they do not know and cannot control may be more dominant for the key actors than anything they say. Positionality is to be used as a *research tool*, and born in mind at all stages of the project up to producing all types of publication. It is a research tool because the researcher's positionality is a one way to frame questions, choose where to observe, decide who to spend time with, while always focusing on the reasons for the choices. For example, if a male researcher 'cannot' go into the female lavatories or changing rooms in a school, or sit in the nurse's office, or go to a baby shower with the women clerical staff, what does that reveal about gender roles in that school? Such features can too easily be taken for granted.

These uses of reflexive positionality are equally important as a way to frame decisions about publications. 'Going public,' whether it is Twitter or a Blog or more conventional articles and books, can be problematic. Autoethnography, as I have written before (Delamont, 2009), can be a perilous genre for the scholar because of the way(s) it may be read. Autobiographical or as they are sometimes called 'confessional' pieces can be a form of self-harm too in ways that impersonal reports of research findings are (usually) not. One autobiographical piece I published (Delamont, 2012) was initially rejected by an academic editor who judged it was too academic and not an authentic revelation about my real self. That judgement was an odd one to receive. It is not clear what kind of social scientist believes there is a *real* self, rather than the rhetorical performance of an autobiography, carefully crafted for the imagined audience. In that case, American symbolic interactionists were the designated readers. Anyone unaware of the dangers of autobiographical or confessional publications would do well to read the online attacks on Alice Goffman (2014) or Sudhir Venkatesh (2008) for revealing some of their own mistakes, and pre-conceptions, rather than pretending they had been wise before the events they recount.

It is also dangerous to step outside the area(s) of one's own areas of expertise, and make claims in other fields based on one's positionality. Gellner's attack on Said was provoked because Said had burst out of his own academic field (literary criticism) to become a public intellectual, a global public intellectual, when he published *Orientalism*. The bitter row in the *TLS* turned on three things.

1) The 'quality' of Said's research
2) The political position he took up in 1967 after the Six Day war
3) Said's claim to have a privileged position from which to write about the Middle East *as a Palestinian*.

Irwin's (2006) demolition of Said, and Gellner's long article about Said's work, which was being developed into a book when Gellner died, turned on two arguments. One is scholarly, the other about positionality. Both men argue that Said was not qualified to write about the subject matter of *Orientalism*, nor was he a Palestinian in any genuine or authentic sense. Hence Gellner's damning comment at the beginning of the paper. Irwin and Gellner are both clear that, by claiming the moral high ground that he was Palestinian and then laying down the law about other people's areas of scholarly expertise, Said had put his self-asserted positionality into the public domain in an unscholarly, non-reflexive way.

I am not competent to judge Said's work, as I do not read Arabic or Turkish or Hebrew or German, and have not done fieldwork in Morocco or Anatolia or Iran or done archival work in Berlin on nineteenth century orientalists. But equally I can see that just claiming the moral high ground that *he* was Palestinian and that *none* of the scholars whose work he attacks in *Orientalism* were, meant the *ad hominem* analyses and attacks were inevitable. Of course Said had every right to articulate pro-Palestinian views against the dominant discourse in the USA, but not to claim authenticity or expertise.

Said was born in Jerusalem in 1935 but grew up in a wealthy household in Cairo and went to a boys' school where Omar Sharif was head boy. His family spoke Arabic only to the servants, and it was forbidden in his school. He went to Princeton, Harvard and lectured at Cornell and wrote a PhD thesis on Conrad. He was politicised by the Six Day war, and learnt Arabic in the USA, but he certainly did not have the skills to read the scholarship (on Oriental Studies) he savaged, and he had never done the first hand fieldwork that, for example, Abu Lughod (1986) did in Egypt.

Gellner and Said are both dead, and their arcane disputes about Middle Eastern studies, such as how nineteenth century German scholars understood the history of Persia, are apparently a long way from the dilemmas of contemporary ethnographers.My contention is, of course, that they are not that far away. If I take Gellner's original argument that truth is not limited to political virtue, and focus on my own research and the 2017 March for Science the immediacy of the *TLS* dispute will be clearer.

I do ethnographic research on the African-Brazilian dance-fight-game, *capoeira* as it is taught and learnt in the UK: diasporic *capoeira*. It would be entirely unacceptable if I failed to be reflexive about many aspects of myself every time I open my notebook, or start to write a paper. My gender, my race, my linguistic abilities, my embodiment, my age are all important, all the time. The embodiment problem - deciding not to learn capoeira myself and therefore not to change my embodied habitus - was 'solved' by doing the research with Neil Stephens, who learnt capoeira seriously for six years as well as bringing his sociological insights to the gym and the office (Delamont, Stephens and Campos, 2017). Every other aspect of the research has to be knife-edged every day. To take a couple of concrete examples, there is hugging and there are parties.

Brazilian society, and capoeira culture, is more tactile than most British people of my generation are used to. It is normal to hug everyone who attends regularly at the capoeira class before it begins, across race, gender, and age lines. I do that cheerfully, but am careful about when it seems appropriate to start hugging new students: that is, when does a learner move from being a newcomer to a regular, and I am very careful to be sensitive about British adolescent boys who might find it embarrassing. When to hug is also complicated by the very sweaty state of everyone who has exercised energetically: two sweaty people will hug each other, but a sweaty person is reluctant to embrace someone who is not equally 'wet', including me. Learning those 'rules of contact' is a very good way of finding out what they are by practice and not just observation. Capoeira groups in the UK have a lot of parties. While I do not go to them, I hear a lot about them and I know there is a lot I do not hear about too. Focusing on how what I am told is 'filtered' by all my positionalities is a revealing research strategy. There are more reflections on the fieldwork in Delamont (2016).

Being an ethnographer, and in my case a symbolic interactionist, also force tough self-examination when not doing 'fieldwork.' The same reflexive positionality may often be necessary in our everyday lives, too. A good example of a dilemma about positionality ends the paper. In April 2017 there was an enormous March for Science in Washington DC, a large one in London, other large marches across the world, and many more local

ones in, for example, Cardiff and Bristol. This was an unprecedented political activity by scientists, including Nobel Prize Winners. The slogan of the march was 'The Good Thing about Science is that it's True, whether or not you believe it'. That is a powerful slogan – aimed at Trump, Creationists, people misled by Andrew Wakefield about vaccination, and climate change deniers in a forceful, self-confident and proud tone. It captures the world-view of the majority of scientists and engineers. When scientific research is under attack, and the expert conclusions about matters of life, death and global survival are being trivialised and derided, many non-scientists will be happy to march under that banner too.

However, no interactionist social scientist can believe it. Gary Alan Fine, arguably the greatest living symbolic interactionist, agues that he would find it impossible to march under such a banner because science is *not* 'true' in the sense that most scientists believe it to be. Of course he is correct, and there is all of Science and Technology Studies to show that. As a sociologist I know that scientific truth is much more complex, and more socially constructed and validated by core sets (Collins, 1986) than any slogan can capture. But faced with Trump, Creationists, Wakefield and Climate Change Deniers it seems more important to march for science than stay home. Commitment to positionality is always posing such challenges to us.

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# Two

# Othering the Other: Explorations in Identity and Positionality of the Transnational Researcher

## Sundeep Sunny Mangat

This article explores how the construction of the transnational researcher's identity, ethics and positionality is shaped by imperialist discourse and research practice. Transnational researchers may struggle with how their intersecting identities such as nationality, age, race, religion, culture and beliefs have been used to construct them as either/or insider-outsider (Subreenduth & Rhee, 2009). This article begins with making explicit the similarities and differences between the transnational researcher and the participants' positionality and identity. It then moves on to explore how the transnational researcher may be constructed by their participants by drawing from post-colonial feminist theory and the concept of intersectionality. The following section explores the importance of reflecting on how subjective knowledge and the experiences of the researcher shape the construction of the participant and in turn how that shapes the research process and analysis. The final section will examine how Western ethical research practices may shape the research process and the construction of the transnational researcher.

### Researcher identity and positionality

I begin with a discussion of my own transnational self, as a South Asian woman, who moved from Canada to study in the United Kingdom to research Dalit[1] women in India

[1] Dalits: Is a specific caste of people that are considered to belong to the lowest rung of the Hindu caste hierarchy and have often been referred to as the 'untouchables' (Thiara, 2016).

who have been raped. My positionality and identity are made explicit to enable an examination of how the construction of the transnational researcher can shape the research process. Previous research has highlighted how researcher identity and positionality can shape theoretical frameworks, methodological processes, research ethical practices and representation of identity politics in research projects (Manalansan, 2000; Bhattacharya, 2007).

My middle-class parents emigrated from Punjab, India to Canada in the early seventies. I was born in a small town called Nanaimo and raised in Surrey, B.C. I am of Sikh faith and I speak both English and Punjabi. At the time I was in the field I was not married and I have no children. I am a feminist researcher and I am in the process of completing my PhD, and my research examines how the experiences of Dalit women are shaped by India's sexual violence discourses, within the context of their family, community and state. My research methods included participant observation, three focus groups and 28 semi-structured interviews all of which were produced with women. I am the founder of a non-profit organization called SAWAVAW an organization that provides support services and information to South Asian women in Vancouver, Canada who have experienced violence in their life. I have been travelling to India since I was child. I moved to London, U.K. in 2013 to complete my Master's degree in International politics and human rights and after went on to pursue my PhD. In 2016 I travelled from London, U.K. to Delhi, India to produce research data from the period of November 2016 to March 2017.

The 28 women interview participants were primarily of the Hindu faith with the exception of one Christian and one Muslim woman. All of the participants were women and all spoke Hindi, which I am able to understand but not speak fluently. All of the women were of the Dalit community, with the exception of one. All of the women had been raped by men. All of the women lived in poverty across various slums in Delhi, India. Their education levels varied, ranging from class five to eleven, while two had a bachelor's degree. The majority of the women had completed seventh class. This was because majority of the women were forced to drop out of school and go to work to help their families. While some of the women stated they were required to watch over younger siblings while their parents were at work. All of the women had migrated from villages across India to Delhi, with the exception of one, and the majority of the women were married with children. None of the women had ever travelled outside of India.

**The construction of the transnational researcher**

When I was in the field I often found I was simultaneously positioned as insider and/or outsider. I was at times seen as an insider because I could understand the language, the culture and had an understanding of Indian history and because I was a woman. Moreover my diasporic experience of travelling to India since I was a child allowed me to not be phased by the pollution, the poverty, the culture and the food as it may for someone who has never travelled to India before. However, I was also seen as an outsider because of my nationality, my accent, my skin color, my hair, my age, marital

status, religion, education, and class status as each of these identities highlighted my privilege and differentiated me as a "Firangi" (foreigner).

While we share some commonalities such as gender and ethnicity, on every other spectrum we were different. Often feminist researchers focus on their commonalities, in particular ethnicity and gender, when it comes to studying sensitive subjects, such as rape, to justify their subject of research. There are some researchers who have argued for 'ethnic matching' between researcher and participant. Bhopal (2010) argued that sharing similar identities such as ethnicity can encourage participants to share more information and allow for a richer understanding of the data produced. However, by simply focusing on one's ethnicity is not enough and may mislead the researcher into thinking that they can relate and understand their participants, when in reality they do not because their lived experiences are so different.

This was similar to my experience, prior to entering the field I was under the assumption that my ethnicity, gender and my education in the U.K. and previous work experience in Canada with South Asian women, would allow me to identify and relate with my participants while in India. However, while in the field I observed that the participants had constructed me as an outsider, and at times even the relatability of ethnicity and gender was not enough. The participants did not just see me as a South Asian woman, but also with the accompanying intersecting identities of Western, upper class, educated and not married. While, they understood that I had Indian origins, they did not see me as an "Indian." For example, while I was in the field I was often referred to as an "Angrazee" (English) or "Ghoree" (White woman) or "Firangi" (Foreigner) by many of the local people within the various Dalit communities I visited. Thus, the concept of intersectionality is important when understanding the insider-outsider positionality because it captures the complexity and the relationality of the various identities researchers hold.

Moreover, for the feminist transnational researcher there is also a focus on how the West has previously constructed the 'Other' and we often attempt to apply various remedies for past injustices. But we fail to recognize how we are constructed by those in the East, and we are often faced with that once we enter the field. As we attempt to re-balance the imbalance of power, at times we may find ourselves looked upon as wealthy, a source of information from law, mediation, counselling, health and everything in between. And as much as we may communicate to the participants that we are unable to help them in these areas, as we are not lawyers, doctors or counsellors, for them that is what they see when they see transnational researchers. This can be illustrated with my experience in the field. I spent approximately three months 'getting to know' the participants prior to producing any interview data with the participants, as I wanted to ensure that we had established a comfortable relationship. I began with participant observation, volunteering, teaching English classes and assisting the NGO staff with their field visits. During this process, I attempted to convey to the participants that the data that was being produced was a shared reflection and that I was looking to them as the experts in the field. I did this to recognize that what they have to say and share is of high value and importance to this research. Although it was well received and many of the women thanked me for

acknowledging that they were agents of knowledge and power. Yet, they still continued to turn to me for advice from education to finances to health on the basis of my education, but most importantly on my nationality. Being born abroad in the West, for them automatically provided me with a higher sense of beauty, authoritativeness and power. From my nationality, my accent, the lighter shade of brown skin, to the texture of my hair I had embodied imperialism. For example, one of the participant's young boy came and sat on my lap and he began touching my cheek and said "You are so pretty, your skin is so white." I was confused when he had called me "white" as I most certainly was not and more so why he had equated white with pretty? Being curious I wanted to understand if he was actually calling me white, or just a lighter shade of brown skin. I took out a box of crayons and asked him if he could draw me a picture of us, which he did and he had colored me in using the white crayon. I asked him why he did not use the brown crayon and he stared up at me confused and said because I was white not brown. Thus, I was constructed as an outsider on the basis of my skin color, accent and nationality and my ethnicity and gender had less of significance.

Prior to my experience in the field, I had not recognised how the concept of colorism was rooted in imperialism, in which it is understood that fair skin is more beautiful (Goon & Craven, 2003), and how that would impact the research process. I observed that all of the women who I had interviewed were a darker shade of brown than me, and it was not until I began observing the comments made about my skin color that I considered the power it may have had on the research. I often had the women touching my hair and telling me how pretty I was or commenting on my skin tone. I also observed, within the first few weeks, while working at the 'CC[2]' NGO that some of the women began changing the way they did their hair and/or that they had begun putting on make-up when they arrived at the NGO. I was told by one of the NGO employee's that this change in style was because the women looked up to me and that they saw me as a role model. But I question how I could be a role model in such a short period of time? And why they looked up to me, as I had not done anything to change their lives? Furthermore, how would this impact the research? Moreover, was this why they had reluctantly signed the consent forms and stated they trusted me? I began to question whether I was seen as a role model simply because I was a Western woman.

**Reflecting on the construction of the transnational 'self'**

While I was examining how I as a transnational researcher, was being constructed and how my bodied self was being represented; I also began reflecting on my own construction of the participants. In particular, through reflexivity, I was able to recognize that identity politics was a complex issue for myself whilst in the field. As a researcher who identifies herself as an Indo-Canadian, whose skin color and hair is the embodiment of the essentialized Indian (while in Canada and the U.K.), and the same

[2] The 'CC' NGO is an organization that has office located in East Delhi and offers scheduled caste and Dalit women job development and training skills. Given the nature and the sensitivity of the subject, all NGO's, participants and persons involved have been anonymized and given pseudonyms.

skin color and hair is the embodiment of a Firangi (while in India). I began to question how do we belong? Drawing from Mercer's (2007) argument that the insider-outsider position is multidimensional and we must account for context and the relational power between the participant and the researcher. This can explain my experience of 'changing' skin color from one country to another, suggesting that our intersecting identities are context specific and relational where my skin color can "change" from brown to white depending on which country I am in and who I am speaking with.

It is important to understand the complexity behind being a South Asian feminist woman, who was born and raised and educated in the West, and travelling to and producing research in the East. There is an understanding and recognition of the process of 'Othering,' yet it is difficult to identify one's own complicity. Spivak (1985) argues the concept of 'Othering' draws on the relationship of the self in relation to the 'Other'; by defining one's own identity through the stigmatization of others. This imperialist gaze of 'Othering' has challenged Western academics' construction of those in the East (Said, 1978). As a South Asian woman growing up in the West I can understand and relate to what it feels like to be the 'Other,' yet my knowledge and education is also engrossed in my Eurocentric education, and until I was in the field I was unaware of how much of an influence this would have on my interpretation and analysis of the data and my construction of my participants and vice versa. I began to question whether it is possible to 'Other' the 'Other'? I began examining my positionality as a Western educated feminist researcher producing data in the East, which allowed me to understand my own complicity of imperialism while producing research with marginalized communities of the East. Post-colonial feminist Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the subaltern speak?" resonated with my experiences in the field and inspired me to further reflect on whether my positionality, subjective knowledge and experiences could minimise the participants experiences. It has been argued that transnational feminist researchers should pay attention, in the global context, to the power relations between the researcher and participant (Hesse-Biber, 2012). This is important because it questions whether a researcher has the right to speak for or give voice to the 'Other.' Thus, without appropriate reflexivity this can result in the universalizing of all women's experiences to be the same and moreover promoting a Eurocentric point of view (Kandiyoti, 1999). For example, while I was in the field I was asked by the CC[3] NGO to conduct a class that they called 'Good touch-Bad touch.' This was essentially a sex education class for Dalit women and their right to say no to unwanted sexual harassment. The coordinator of the NGO stated, "You are an empowered woman because you are from the West, you should lead the class." I was confused by her statement, on many levels. I questioned why does being from the West assume that I am empowered? How had my bodied 'self' been constructed and represented for them to make an assumption that I was empowered? Moreover, I reflected on whether I had become implicated in imperialism, by teaching women of the East about their rights to sex and sexuality? When I raised these concerns to the coordinator she responded "It is easier for Western women, like you, to discuss such things because that is normal practice over there." Yet, this was not normal practice, as I grew up in a Sikh family and we did not openly discuss sex and sexuality. Moreover, I

[3] I have utilized pseudonyms for all NGO's, individuals and localities to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

did not identify completely as a Westerner - over there I was the 'Other.' I felt compelled to take on this role, yet I do not think it was meant for me to do so. To reinforce or to educate a false sense of Western women's 'empowerment' or 'feminism' on these women did not seem right.

There were also times, I felt I had a strong 'connection' with the participants and I could relate with the women on many different levels such as understanding their commitments to their family and community. However, there were also many times when I did not relate to the women at all. For example, while in the field, I observed during the interviews that many of the women actively engaged in victim blaming discourses. For example, I had asked all of the 28 women I interviewed, what they had thought about the Nirbhaya[4] rape case? I found that the majority of the women responded with similar comments as participant Jeeya does below:

> She should have been more careful to go on that kind of bus so late. Even she was with another boy. So that gave them a reason to behave that way with her. They thought since she is with him then they can do anything with her body also.

I often found myself frustrated and disappointed when the women shared these types of conflicting viewpoints to my own. Through careful reflection and examination of my own subject position(s) as both insider and outsider, I was able to recognize that this frustration was under a guise of my own imagined community (Anderson, 2006).

**The construction of the 'Other'**

It was not until after I left the field and began data analysis that I was able to identify my construction of the participants. After careful reflection and several re-readings of the data, I began to take notice that I had constructed the participants as survivors; even though the participants did not see themselves as survivors. It was through reflexivity and re-examining my own various intersecting identities (nationality, age, class and education) and positionality that I was able to recognize that this construction was formed on the basis of my subjective knowledge and experience. It has been argued that the researcher's subjective knowledge, experiences and intersecting identities cannot be isolated from how we do research (Subreenduth & Rhee, 2009; Charmaz, 2006). Prior to entering the field and data production I had the spent the last three years researching sexual violence and rape literature in the U.K. I also worked with South Asian women in Canada who have been abused by men. Their abuse ranged from sexual, domestic, physical and/or verbal abuse. Thus, from my experience and knowledge at that time, I was particularly conscious of constructing all women of abuse as 'survivors' opposed to 'victims' because I thought that they may cope better when being referred to as 'survivors.'

[4] In December 2012 a young woman named Nirbhaya was fatally gang raped in Delhi, India. The young woman was referred to as Nirbhaya (fearless) by the media, because Indian law does not all rape victim's names to be published (Thiara, 2016).

However, through reflection and reflexivity, I was able to recognize how western feminism and academia influenced my construction of rape victims as survivors. The term 'survivor' has become popular in the West since the late eighties. Sociologist Liz Kelly (1988) attempted to change the discourse surrounding sexual violence by having women, who have been subject to sexual violence, view themselves and others as 'survivors' instead of 'victims.' This was an attempt to redress the negative connotations of powerlessness, passivity and impurity that is often attached with the term 'victim.' Thus, as a transnational researcher I had to critically reflect on my analysis of the data and how my construction of the participants as survivors may have shaped data production? I had to question whether the participants adjusted their narratives to fit my construction. Moreover, what were the implications of applying Western constructions onto women in the East?

**Applying Western research ethical practices in the East**

Colonizing research practices are those in which impose imperialistic practices and their way of knowing and understanding the world onto other people (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Bhattacharya (2007) argues that imperialistic discourses often produce narratives that either exoticize or further marginalize the 'Other.' Thus, the research and the data production I designed kept in mind post-colonial critique. The consent forms were made available in multiple languages, moreover the participants were given ample time to read the documents and in addition I read through the consent forms and asked them to summarize what signing the consent form meant for them.

Upon arrival into the field and the beginning of data, it was observed that although well-intended, the ethical requirements highlighted imperialistic ways of knowing, understanding and representing the 'Other.' It was observed that the majority of the participants were reluctant in signing the consent form and furthermore all of the participants rejected the counselling referral. It has been argued that many Dalits have a general distrust of people in positions of authority (Shinde, 2005). I was told by the NGO staff and two Dalit activists that the participants may not have wanted to sign the consent forms because of their past experiences with people in positions of authority altering and doctoring paperwork. Drawing from post-colonial critique, I questioned and reflected on whether my research was undermined from the outset, due to the obligation set by my university to apply western ethical practices that were not applicable to women in the East. As a feminist researcher, I was imposing my ethical practices and obligating participants to agree in order to participate. There were a few women who refused to sign the consent form and thus were unable to participate. The majority of the participants did hesitate, but signed the consent forms on the basis of our relationship and trust that we had formed and their relationship with the NGO I was working with. This raises questions about the ethics of consent and how it was obtained. Moreover, where does this ethically leave the transnational feminist researcher? On the one hand claiming to address post-colonial feminist critique and attempting to overcome previous polarized relations between the people of the East and the West. Yet data production starts with an imperialistic practice. How does this

shape the production of data? Moreover, how do Western ethical practices shape the construction of the transnational researcher?

The questions I have raised are not new, and it has been argued previously that the research practices conducted by those who research the 'Other,' can produce forms of oppression due to Eurocentric research epistemology and practice (Smith, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2000). When obligated to use formal western practices in the East, it is akin to a double-edged sword. On the one hand the researcher is being considerate and protecting their participants, themselves and their university, based on their subjective experiences and knowledge. Yet, the researcher who imposes Western ethical requirements onto participants can be interpreted as a form of imperialism. This is implied on the notion that the Western researcher 'knows' best for the 'ill-informed' Eastern research participant. The assumption that is made is that Eastern women might be too naive to understand what they are signing up for, which is problematic in itself. The NGO's that I was working with did not use any type of contract or consent forms for the women who enrolled into their programs. I was advised that they had obtained verbal consent and commitment by obtaining consent from their family members, such as parents, husbands and/or in-laws. This ensured commitment as the entire family was aware and on board. However, this was not applicable in the present study due to the sensitivity of the research and confidentiality nature of the subject.

**Summary**

Drawing on my own experiences as a South Asian woman from Canada who has studied in the U.K., I attempted to approach my research using non-imperialistic ethics and methods; only to find that as a Western researcher the application western epistemology and institutional ethical requirements was challenging. Although, well-intended, it was found that the ethical requirements in effect produced an imperialist gaze which cannot and should not be ignored. Moreover, it was found that the application of Western ethical practices, imposed by transnational researchers, on participants in the East, such as consent forms and counselling referrals, can further enhance colonizing constructions of transnational researcher. Thus, the ethical requirements imposed on by the researcher onto the participant should be reflective of the participants existing practices and beliefs. The ethical requirements must be made more adaptable and flexible in order to decolonize existing western ethical research practices. This can be achieved through the practices of reflection and reflexivity, which can allow researchers to review and make changes while in the field and for future research. Moreover, it was found that as a female researcher with Indian ethnicity I assumed that this would allow me to identify with the participants, however because our other identities were so different I was not always able identify with them. Drawing on the concept of intersectionality, this article serves to highlight that there are a number of intersecting identities that will shape our experiences and understanding of the world and that identity is multidimensional. Furthermore, it was found that as a transnational researcher is challenging because of the lack of shared identity that can be drawn upon. However, by locating the intersections of differences between myself and the participants and reflecting on my own subjective experiences and knowledge allowed me to reconstruct the 'Other' and to address how our

subjective experiences may unintentionally essentialize all women by applying Western feminist constructs onto the East, such as when I had  I referred to all the participants as survivors. This is not to suggest that all Indian women may not want to be seen as survivors, as many may, however the women I had interviewed suggested that neither survivor nor victim were appropriate words to describe them. Feminist research addresses the importance of ethics, power, positionality and reflexivity within the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Thus, by reflecting on and examining how our own positionality such as nationality, education, gender, class, and religion may affect data production, interpretation and analysis can re-shape the entire research experience and the construction of the transnational researcher.

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# Three

# Moving Masculinities: Exploring Gender Identity Through a Female Interviewer/Male Interviewee Dynamic

## Jenny Young

Conversations between an interviewer and interviewee are at the heart of qualitative research. These verbal and non-verbal interactions have been described by scholars adopting a social constructionist approach as a co-constructed speech event (Talmy, 2011). This frames the research interview as a collaborative experience involving both the interviewer and the interviewee (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2003). Consequently, when we ask participants to 'tell their story' in an interview we need to be aware that we are facilitating a story that is context dependent and is partially constructed by the interviewer. Interviewers and interviewees each bring their own identities, experiences, assumptions and expectations to the interview encounter. Reflexivity encourages us to explore the ways in which these identities and assumptions may influence and inform the research process (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999).

Finding a single definition of reflexivity is difficult as it has various meanings and uses. Common to all is an element of personal reflection on action. What tends to differ is the method and focus. For example, reflexivity may focus on assumptions about knowledge that are made during the course of research, critical self-evaluation, or an examination of the political and social constructions that inform the research process (Dowling, 2006). The purpose of reflexivity is to increase transparency, which is an important benchmark for establishing quality in qualitative research (Finlay, 2002). Because the researcher is part of the construction of the interview, a transparent analysis needs to explain who the researcher is and explore their 'position' to understand their potential influence.

A researcher's position can include characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age, personal experiences, biases and theoretical stances. In this paper the focus is gender although it is acknowledged that gender intersects with other factors such as class, culture and age to shape identity and interactions within the research interview (Manderson & Andajani-Sutjahjo, 2006). Nevertheless, I have chosen gender as my main reflexive lens as it is a phenomenon that, as eloquently described by Broom Hand, and Tovey (2009), "permeates all aspects of social life" (p. 52). That is: gender is a concept that is embedded within the interactions of everyday life making it an essential part of our language, identity and culture.

This paper explores the role of gender in a female interviewer/ male interviewee dynamic[1]. The first section introduces the background to the research topic including the theoretical underpinnings and method. The next section presents a summary of the literature on gendered interview dynamics in order to situate my experience within current academic debates. Finally, using excerpts from my interviews, I will explore how culturally gendered ideas appeared to frame and constrain the interview encounter. The conclusions highlight how the interview is a space which constructs and shapes gender identity and furthermore how being reflexive provides insight into how identity is constructed in multiple and contradictory ways.

**Background to study**

The study from which this discussion is drawn is a longitudinal investigation into the experience of caring for a spouse with cancer from the perspective of males. Recruitment began in March 2017 and is still ongoing. Caring is defined here as unpaid assistance and support. This may be emotional and/or practical support (Scottish Government, 2015). Caring as a research topic began to develop in the 1980s making it a relatively new area of inquiry. It is recognised within policy that carers make a valuable contribution to our society, however more needs to be done to identify them and support their needs (Department of Health and Social Care, 2015).

The literature focuses on the burden associated with caring (Girgis, Lambert, Johnson, Waller, & Currow, 2013). Gender as a mediating factor for distress has predominantly been explored through quantitative approaches (Hagedoorn, Sanderman, Bolks, Tuinstra, & Coyne, 2008). While valuable, this form of research does not always shed light on the experience of caring. Furthermore, there is usually a higher number of females in carer research samples, which means less is known about the male carer experience. Consequently, this study was designed to address this gap.

Participants are eligible for inclusion in the study if they are male, over 18 years old and supporting their spouse/partner through a cancer diagnosis. Participants are recruited from a community based cancer support service in the West of Scotland and interviewed three times over a year. To date, four participants aged between 50- 70 years old have been interviewed (three of them twice). The interviews are unstructured,

[1] We use the gender binary of male/female throughout this paper but it is acknowledged that gender is a spectrum

adopting a narrative approach. The primary aim of the study is to understand the relationship between masculinity and caring. Hence, there is a significant focus on gender. A discussion on the various empirical and theoretical insights that underpin this gender focus will now be presented.

**Theoretical framework: A focus on gender.** This research is guided by a social constructionist framework. Gender, therefore, is approached as a phenomenon that is not biologically driven but something that is constructed through sets of beliefs, statements, actions and discourses (Lorber, 1994). In essence, gender refers to our masculinity and femininity (Chapple & Ziebland, 2002). Within this constructionist framework gender is said to be 'done' or 'performed' (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Conceptualising gender as a 'performance' or an 'enactment' implies that men and women are actively engaged in a process of doing, creating and recreating gender identities as they take up different discourses of masculinity and/or femininity.

The idea of discourses as a mechanism for identity construction emerged from linguists engaged with social theory. Such a linguistic was Kress who stated that discourses 'organise and give structure to the manner in which a particular topic is talked about' (Kress, 1985, p. 7). *Gendered* discourses therefore refer to the ways that men and women are presumed and expected to act, talk, and feel. These discourses make particular subject positions available that, when taken up, have implications for identity and experience (Willig, 2001). They shape the way people behave which is important as some discourses dominate others. For example, dominant discourses of masculinity in Western culture include stoicism, heterosexism, control and authority. Within these discourses, to be a man is to be strong and invulnerable (Kiesling, 2005). These traits are features of 'hegemonic masculinity', a dominant form of masculinity that subordinates femininities and other masculinities, and shapes relationships between men and men, and men and women (Courtenay, 2000).

**Masculinity.** The term hegemonic masculinity was first proposed by the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell. It refers to a socially dominant ideal of manhood. The characteristics of this dominant ideal of masculinity differ over time and in cultures (Beasley, 2008). The concept has been applied across many academic fields such as work, criminology and health (Connell, 2005). For example, Brien, Hunt, and Hart, (2005) described connections between hegemonic masculinity and men's reluctance to seek help. For many participants in their study, being 'strong and silent' about mental health issues in particular was a key part of their masculinity. Gregory (2009), exploring masculinity in the British advertising industry, described a prevalence of hegemonic masculinity to explain the discrimination of female workers within the industry and a 'locker room' atmosphere characterised by male solidarity and conversations predominately relating to sports, drinking and the sexualisation of women.

However, while there are dominant discourses operating within our society there are also competing discourses that individuals can be shaped by (Lee, 1992). Connell's work has been significant in theorising the notion of multiple masculinities, particularly differences within and between men on the basis of class, ethnicity, and sexual

orientation (Connell, 2005). Accordingly, after reviewing 32 qualitative articles on the experience of living with prostate cancer, Wall and Kristjanson (2005) call for a 'reframing' of masculinity. They found that the literature is disproportionately concerned with the concept of hegemonic masculinity. The authors argue that this is detrimental as it prevents other perspectives on masculinity entering into our understanding of the study of men. Subsequently, a growing number of writers argue that masculinity should be conceptualised as something that is adopted *dynamically* depending on socio-cultural context (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Sallee & Harris, 2011). Their point being that masculinity is not something that is fixed and rigid – it is fluid and susceptible to change. Certainly, not all men fit the dominant discourse all the time, and so the idea that different discourses of masculinity are adopted dynamically seems intuitive. If gender is socially constructed then individuals adopt gender performances based on what they feel others expect of them. In this way, constructions of society and discourses on masculinity are co-constitutive: as one shifts and changes so too does the other, reworking each in a dynamic process.

Hence, discourses on masculinity are becoming more nuanced. By using language such as 'navigate' and 'transition' authors such as McQueen (2017) and Schwab, et al (2015) propose that men may move or 'flow' from hegemonic performances of masculinity to contrasting forms of masculinity characterised by traits such as emotional openness and expressivity. However, this negotiation between different forms of masculinity can be complex, particularly within the context of a major life disruption such as illness that can radically alter one's sense of self (Bury, 1982; Frank, 1995). For example, research with men caring for someone due to illness has found that their position as a carer involves a struggle around the negotiation of masculinities (Gilbert, Ussher, & Perz, 2014; Kluczyńska, 2015). The authors suggest that this is compounded by the fact that our society frames caring as a feminine practice. As a result, a male taking on a caring role may feel that caring threatens his sense of masculinity so will act in ways to counter this (Gilbert et al, 2014). This is likely to be the case even with a more nuanced and dynamic discourse of masculinity.

**Gender and the research interview.** There are a number of implications within these theoretical and empirical insights for the exploration of gender and the interviewer/interviewee dynamic. Starting with self-reflection, it is conceivable – indeed likely – that dominant views of masculinity have shaped my own views and expectations before and during research interviews. Considering my preparation for my first interview I felt some anxiety that the men may not 'open up' and talk at length about their experiences. Psychological and sociological thought has stated that the gap between feeling emotion and displaying it is a defining feature of masculine gender performance (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). However, as I was not yet familiar with this literature this was not the source of my anxious thoughts and feelings. Rather, it was likely my perception of how my participants were going to behave – filtered through a 'gendered lens' (Stubbe et al 2000) – that lay at the root of my concern. Put another way, this means that I was influenced by dominant discourses about masculinity and subsequently formed an expectation for how the men may interact with me.

Before focusing on these interviews I briefly discuss how other researchers have written about interview dynamics. There is a small literature base considering the interview dynamics when women interview men. Lohan (2000) undertook interviews with men about their use of domestic technologies and reflected on how she consciously thought about her gender when positioning herself in the interview. She noted how she positioned herself as sexual being, friend, feminist and respectful listener. Furthermore, Lohan (2000) proposed that this positioning helped the men to discuss personal and emotional matters. Lee (1997) reflecting on her experiences of discussing workplace harassment with men described consciously choosing not to perform 'traditional' femininity, in terms of dress and make-up to avoid any likelihood of sexual advances (Lee, 1997). This perhaps seemed rather presumptuous on first reading, but became more understandable after reading about other female researchers experiences.

For example, Arendell (1997), in a study on divorced fathers described instances where the men she was interviewing made sexual advances including making compliments about her physical appearance and asking her on a date. Pini (2005), reflecting on her study of male agricultural leaders, stated that her participants asserted their male heterosexual status through the use of inappropriate comments such as 'I've always got time for a pretty woman', particularly within the presence of their male colleagues. Harries (2016), drawing on her experiences of interviewing men about changes in policy, practice and activism describes a number of instances where she found that the men in her study behaved provocatively by flirting, making comments about her presumed sexuality, propositioning, touching, using terms of endearment and behaving with over-familiarity.

This raises some pertinent issues with regards to interviewer/interviewee positioning and interview interactions. Seemingly, there is a focus in the literature on problematic gender dynamics in a female interviewer/ male interviewee dynamic. However, there is very little said about the dynamics of men interviewing women. These experiences highlighted by female researchers reflect the power dynamics that may operate within interviews where men exert a dominant status. However, the dynamics between female researchers and male participants are complex and multifaceted. Gender interacts with factors such as class, age, the psychological state of the participant, the research environment and the socio-cultural context of the interview topic (Broom et al., 2009). Therefore, while male and female experiences can be 'gendered' no two individual experiences will be the same (Reinharz et al., 2002), and none will simply be the product of a single discourse. Hence, 'problematizing' the dyadic female interviewer/ male interviewee dynamic through the lens of gender becomes vital to our understanding of both research encounters and interpretation of the data as co-created.

Pini (2005) in her interviews with male agricultural leaders emphasised that the gendered context of the interview was critical when interpreting the dynamic between the researcher and the participant. Her study was conducted in the Australian sugar industry where women are not represented in any of the cane growers' elected leadership positions. Displays of masculinity were interpreted within this rural context where, according to Pini, women's invisibility has been constructed as appropriate and natural. Hence, having this understanding of context provided some insight into her

interpretation of the interviewer/interviewee dynamic. The point being that these men were performing their masculinity against a backdrop where 'traditional' gender roles prevailed. However, this raises important questions around whether such behaviours were 'staged' through an active and assertive *performance* of a dominant masculinity or, rather, were a reflection of a 'normalised' hegemonic discourse within this socio-cultural context. Moreover, holding a mirror up to such behaviours through the research process raises issues for the researchers around the extent to which socially inappropriate behaviours should be challenged, either during the research encounter, or through critical scholarship after the event, and whether not doing so serves to excuse – or indeed perpetuate – such behaviour.

Considering another example, researchers have discussed how gender may shape the collection and interpretation of qualitative data within the context of cancer care. Here gender is variously interwoven through discussions about clinical factors, psychological issues and mortality to produce a particular interpersonal dynamic (Broom et al., 2009). Yet, there has not been the same scholarly focus on the problematic influence of gender within this research area. Equally, from a personal standpoint I have never personally encountered an occasion during my four years working in cancer care when the men I have interviewed have acted provocatively or tried to exert a dominant status. This may be related to the fact that when the research topic is deemed to be sensitive female gender has been framed as a beneficial resource as it can encourage openness from male participants (Lohan, 2000). For example, Chapple and Ziebland (2002), exploring how prostate cancer affected men's sense of masculinity, asked their male participants (n=52) if they would like to be interviewed by a man or a woman. All but one asked for a woman. It is likely that the men opted for a female researcher as they anticipated feeling more comfortable talking to a woman. Thus, before the interview has even begun gender has already started to shape the participants' expectations of the interview encounter. Presumably, femininity and its assumed characteristics were more important than 'researcher' when these men opted to be interviewed by a female.

Turning back to my study, this final section draws on the theoretical approaches outlined above to consider how gender was 'performed' within two of my interviews. Specifically, by adopting a metaphor of movement it examines how there were instances where these two men navigated between hegemonic masculinity and moments of emotional vulnerability and how this particular research context (i.e. a discussion about caring for a spouse living with cancer with a female researcher) contributed to this movement. Cognisant of the literature on gendered interview dynamics, the aim is not to present gender as either a resource or a problem but to show how gender, context and interpersonal processes dynamically interact with one another and why considering this interplay is important to the interpretation of qualitative research.

**The interview: Facilitating context dependent stories**

Peter and Robert (both pseudonyms) began their interviews by describing what happened on the day their wife was diagnosed with cancer. They were angry, shocked and upset but did not want to show this emotion:

> Now she's obviously broke down at the fact she's been told she has cancer. I've just had a bomb going off in my head but trying to be strong and not break down and I thought why. And I'm trying to justify why, why is this happening? (Peter)

> Helen's like that's ok, well her first reaction was I can't have cancer I'm not allowed time off work. I broke but I kinda sucked it in. (Robert)

Notably, both men describe this moment with the feeling of 'breaking.' Peter states that his wife 'broke down' but he tried not to. Through describing his behaviour in contrast to his wife's it frames his masculinity in opposition to femininity. That is, the female is associated with emotion and the male with strength. However, as will be discussed later in this section it may be contested how comfortable he is with this binary of difference as his use of the word 'trying' (*trying* to be strong) may suggest a sense of struggle.

In comparison, Robert states that his wife seems to be unfazed or perhaps in denial while he 'broke.' However, he immediately tries to internalise and hide this distress. Thus, while their reactions are quite different they are underpinned by discourses of masculinity that affect the way they construct and project their sense of self. In this example, the masculine self was characterized by emotional control. They were both upset but felt that they should hide or suppress their feelings. This expectation was returned to again as the men appeared to be shaped by the belief that 'men don't cry.' For example:

> I was really, really struggling something dare wants to take her away from me [shaky voice] and I was trying to be strong and not cry for her sake. (Peter)

> Yeah. And I try not to cry a lot, it's the macho man in me don't cry in front of people type of thing. But that's the thing when I'm hurt to hide the hurt it comes out as anger, fright, don't show pain type thing. (Robert)

Once again, they describe being stoic and strong. Two traits that are associated with hegemonic masculinity. A further discourse used by Robert is 'macho man'. This is more than just male it is a 'macho' male suggesting a form of hyper-masculinity. He implies that this discourse dictates how he should behave declaring it is the macho man in him that prevents him from crying. Stating it is the 'macho man *in* me' suggests he feels it is an ingrained and internalised part of his identity. It also suggests accountability. Thus, through aligning himself to the characteristics associated with a macho male he is able to justify his behaviour. Yet, he recognises that the negative consequences of not being able to cry is the expression of anger and fright. Therefore,

it would appear that he is aware that certain discourses shape expectations around the 'right' way to act and feel but that these expectations can be troublesome.

Peter also used the term 'macho' to describe a struggle between feeling and displaying emotion. In a broader discussion about how he feels he is handling the caring experience he spoke about how some things can 'get to him.' Referring to a television programme he stated:

> Children's Hospital or anything like that I turn it over. It's not macho to admit that it's getting to me. These things get to me. And that's, I can't help that, that's just the way I am. (Peter)

He states that his 'macho man' persona prevents him from admitting that he finds the television programme upsetting. However, he then instantly admits to me that it does upset him. Like Robert, it seems Peter is aware that this discourse acts to dictate how he *should* think and feel, when it is in opposition to how he actually wants to react. Therefore, the interview reveals a duality in their identity. One version is constructed by what he considers to be the appropriate 'macho' performance of manliness and another reflects a more sensitive, emotionally open – but private – self. There was, I felt, an underlying tone of defeat to his phrase 'I can't help that, that's just the way I am.' This suggests an internal conflict between the different versions of identity he is trying to hold and perform. In this moment, then, he shows that he cannot mask the emotional part of his identity as this is actually who he is, rather than the 'macho' male. Yet, he feels unable to grasp onto this emotional self, creating an inner tension that is negotiated in relation to hegemonic discursive constructions of who he ought to be as a man.

Reflecting on this, I wondered whether it had been difficult for Peter to open up about these different 'sides' to his identity and if he would have made the same disclosure to a male researcher. Although this cannot be answered definitively, factors that may have influenced our discussion and the co-construction of identity through this research encounter can be considered. From my point of view, I set out to conduct interviews that felt therapeutic. My aim was not to *be* a therapist but to provide the time and space for participants to talk at length about their experiences with the hope that they may find therapeutic benefit from the encounter. For example, I directed general statements about caring to personal reactions using questions including 'How did that make you feel?' In my study journal I noted how at times, the men spoke about how their partner was coping but that I hoped through such questions they would feel, without guilt that they could focus on themselves. It is common for carers to put the needs of their loved one before their own which was a further motivation for this research and my approach to the interview style. In terms of non-verbal cues the participants looked comfortable and relaxed. Despite the sensitive nature of the topic in every interview there were moments of laughter – this reassured me that there was a positive component to their interview experience. The following quote from Peter suggests this was achieved:

> Well can I just say it's been really good and interesting to talk to you. And it's actually been good to get it off my chest.
>
> Researcher: Uh-huh, yeah.
>
> For somebody to actually sit there and listen. And, as I say, even if it helps one person, if something along the way is changed to make it easier, for another person, you know. (Peter)

The interview was regarded as a chance to 'offload' and it is within that context that gendered identity was constructed. While discussing caring issues the men constructed and performed their masculine identities in their interactions with me. I listened carefully, conveyed understanding and encouraged the expression of their feelings through minimal verbal prompts (uh-huh, yeah) and visual cues, such as nods. This, I believe, opened up space for men to challenge their own masculine identities because it contrasted sharply with 'traditional' settings for supportive conversations. For example, in a discussion about support groups there is a shift as Robert compares the behaviour of males and females:

> Women will go into a group and just rabble and guys don't. I did a stress management class and there were 5 of us, 2 women and 3 men and I'm quite open and chatty in the group type thing. There was an older man there and he would say bits and pieces but there was a young guy and he was trying to deal with his brother, help his brother out and he hardly said a word the whole time but he looked as though he needed it the most but trying to draw information out of him was very, very hard. And I think this is the problem with most men you'll get this whole trying to draw information out of them. (Robert)

Describing himself as being 'open and chatty' he aligns himself with the women in the group rather than the quiet man who does not speak. This is because he believes that the quietness is a problem. Moreover, it is a problem that extends to 'most men.' Therefore, we see a shift in Robert from earlier in his interview where he spoke about emotional suppression to someone who sees value in emotional openness through talking.

There was a similar shift in Peter's narrative. His story began with him talking about how he tries to conceal his distress to be 'strong.' Then later in the interview, possibly as he became more comfortable, he stated that he copes by talking about his experiences with others:

> My escape route was telling people about it. That was my escape route telling people that were close to us, telling them about it.
>
> Researcher: why did that help?
>
> I can deal with most things as long as I can get to explain it or pour my feelings out. If I've got to bottle it up I'm a walking time bomb. (Peter)

For both of these men talking is their coping mechanism. This is perhaps not too surprising given they chose to participate in this study. Nevertheless, it was recognised that remaining silent like the man in the support group or 'bottling it up' can be damaging. Yet, this did not seem to apply when they spoke about trying not to cry. It would seem that talking is an accepted outlet for emotion but crying is not. This illustrates again how discourses can shape, influence and constrain behaviour and identity; something the men seemed aware of as they conformed to and rejected certain standards of masculine identity.

**Conclusion**

In this paper I explored how telling a story in a research interview is one way through which interviewees can perform and challenge gendered discourses of masculinity. Focusing on a female interviewer/male interviewee dynamic highlighted how my presence as a female researcher and the process of a research interview that provides time and space to talk may have enabled different versions of interviewee's masculine self to be revealed and brought into tension. Hence, the analysis revealed moments of conflict as the men expressed a desire to perform idealised constructions of masculinity while recognising that supressing emotions can be damaging. This was interpreted within theories of gender performance and discourse. Accordingly, focusing on discourses associated with emotional control, such as 'men don't cry' and 'macho man,' provided insight into the socio-cultural norms and expectations that underpinned the participants' narratives.

Extending this discussion by embracing reflexivity encouraged the exploration of the ways in which these norms and assumptions both trouble, and are troubled through, the research process. In so doing, adopting a reflexive approach offers new insight into the resultant co-created narratives. Here, the passage of time through the interview facilitated the men's movement between discourses of masculinity and their negotiation of their gendered selves. Both Robert and Peter used 'traditional' masculine discourses at the beginning of their stories, situating their self in this version of masculinity to create an initial impression, perhaps based on what they felt was expected of them by a female interviewer. Then, as their narratives progressed, and they presumably became more comfortable, they felt they could move away from these constructions of masculinity, revealing a tension at the heart of their gendered self that provides new insight into the male caring experience. The female interviewer, topic under discussion and the purposefully created therapeutic space to talk intersected to produce a dynamic encounter that enabled men to negotiate different forms of their masculinity. Yet, it was only by considering this nexus through the lens of reflexivity that new insights are revealed about both the interview process itself and the interpretation of the narratives that result. Hence, in closing, I encourage qualitative researchers to embrace reflexivity to gain greater insight into the importance of gender dynamics at each stage in the research process.

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# Four

# "Is this a chat-up line?": A Young Female Researching Men's Mental Health

## Alexandra Vickery

In this paper I reflect on and examine aspects of my researcher positionality and how it shaped the current doctoral work. As an integral part of the research process, researchers are now required to reflect on their role and positon in the research process. This is becoming imperative as a means to increase the integrity and trustworthiness of the research (Finlay, 2002). Being a young female researcher interested in the lives of men, I was conscious of my positionality and it's potential to create challenges from the beginning of the recruitment process, right through to the analysis and writing up of the data. The gendered power dynamic present in the male-female, researcher-researched relationship (Arendel, 1997) influenced various aspects of the research process. I therefore ensured that I engaged in reflexivity and ongoing self-awareness (Finlay & Gough, 2003) throughout by taking stock of my actions and my role in the research process (Mason, 1996). In this reflection I considered how I belonged in relation to my male participants and the topic of their mental health.

This paper provides methodological reflection on issues I faced regarding my relationship to the work as a young female researcher, particularly focusing on the challenges that arose during the recruitment of men from 'male spaces' and how this further influenced the interactions that took place during the one-to-one interviews. Previously, many female academics have written about their experiences of interviewing men in general (McKee & O'Brien, 1983; Smart, 1984; Gurney, 1985; Williams & Heikes, 1993; Arendel, 1997; Horn, 1997; Campbell, 2003; Pini, 2005; Gailey & Prohaska, 2011) but not specifically about mental health and distress.

Throughout the paper, I will discuss my own experiences of researching men about their mental health, including consideration of how the way I recruited my participants from male spaces, the gendered performances that took place and the vulnerability which I experienced as a young female. Firstly I will provide an overview of the research project, discussing the sample and methods.

**Context and overview of the research**

This paper draws on doctoral research that explores men's mental health, particularly focusing on their experiences of help-seeking, coping and management of distress in their daily lives. Men have often been characterised as unwilling to ask for help when they experience problems in living (Addis & Mahalik, 2003, p.5). The dominant narrative throughout previous studies suggest that men are more reluctant to seek help for health concerns and distress than women (Courtenay, 2000; Moller-Leimkuhler, 2002; Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Galdas, Cheater & Marshall, 2005; O'Brien, Hunt, & Hart, 2005) on account of a perceived threat to performing "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1995; 2005) that limits emotional expression and vulnerability. They also put forward that men use fewer, and more ineffective coping strategies than women to manage their own health (Forgarty et al., 2015). In this context, there is a need to explore men's positive experiences of help-seeking and coping with emotional difficulties in everyday life. For this research, I conducted semi-structured, qualitative interviews with men to discuss the topics of distress, help-seeking, coping and daily management of emotional difficulties. Two different sample groups of men were recruited including men who attend or have accessed a support group for mental health issues, and men from the general population. Reasons for the two sample groups was that an overall aim of the research was to explore a diverse range of men's experiences from various ages and social backgrounds. This is because much previous research has tended to involve white, well-educated men of a certain age demographic. In addition, I wanted a group of men who had definitely had experience of distress and seeking help from healthcare professionals as well as every day experiences from ordinary men from the general population, to explore coping with distress in daily life. This paper will primarily focus on the recruitment and interviews with men from the general population sample, as this is where my gendered position was of particular influence. The data from both sample groups of men have been analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Interview settings require a degree of rapport and trust from both the interviewee and the interviewer, however in the case of women interviewing men the interview becomes burdened with gender performances and power struggles (McKee & O'Brien, 1983; Smart, 1984; Gurney, 1985; Williams & Heikes, 1993; Arednell, 1997; Horn, 1997; Lee, 1997; Campbell, 2003; Pini, 2005; Gailey & Prohaska, 2011). As a researcher, I was conscious of my position as a young female researcher interested in the lives of men and their feelings, and that it turn affected decisions that I made throughout the research process. I awaited questions such as 'why are you interested in men, what about women?' and also worried that some men, particularly from certain social backgrounds may not want to talk to me about their personal experiences of being a man because 'how could I as a young, educated woman understand?' I often

worried about how the men I were attempting to recruit and interview would perceive me and whether I would be able to gain their trust. This, I acknowledged, was an assumption that might not necessarily be true. In fact, the majority of men in my research did not question my position in the field or my interest in the area in this way, and if they did, it appeared to be out of interest for the topic rather than suspicion of my reasons for doing the research. I did however face challenges with being a young woman in general. Arendell (1997) questions whether a woman studying men is a "low status stranger" and positioned by participants into a subordinated position? (p. 343). Throughout this paper, I will consider such questions and present issues regarding my relationship to the work and the influence it had on the collection of data. The paper will now turn to discuss some of the problematic situations that I encountered that were specifically gendered during the recruitment of men from the general population from local, 'typically' male environments. I then consider how this subsequently went on to influence the interactions that took place during the one-to-one interviews.

**A young female gaining access and recruiting male participants**

The recruitment procedure was one aspect of the research process that was particularly challenging because of issues to do with my position as a young female researcher. As mentioned in the introduction, the focus of the paper is mainly on the recruitment and interviews with men from the general population sample. This is because in accessing male participants from support groups, my gendered position was generally not a problem in influencing the interactions that took place between myself and potential participant volunteers. This I believe was due to gatekeepers through which I accessed and recruited these participants. I contacted and met with facilitators of the support groups first before speaking to men alone and they often introduced my research beforehand or asked me to give a short presentation to the group in more of a professional capacity. The presence of a group facilitator acting as a gatekeeper seemed to mediate any potential power imbalances that may have been created through the gendered researcher dynamic and the men recruited this way were always respectful of my position. As well as this, I felt that I was perceived as more of a professional researcher, than a young doctoral student, which influenced the way the male participants from the support groups interacted with me.

My gendered position produced more challenges when it came to recruiting men from the general public. When trying to locate and recruit men for interviews, being a woman I was aware of my position as an outsider because I was not enclosed in a world of common understanding (Mannay, 2010) of being a man. I chose to recruit the general population sample men from what I perceived as 'typically' male environments and institutions. These sites included pubs, football and rugby clubs, gyms, cafes, barbers, betting shops, golf clubs, working men's clubs and also workplaces. Through participants snowballing also took place. The sample included men who had responded to adverts and flyers that I had distributed at these locations. During this process I was met with a mixed reaction from the men within the general public. In some instances I was met with no response, with the men blanking or ignoring me, whilst other times I was pleasantly surprised with the positive interest in the research. A lot of men who I approached made jokes about themselves, men or mental health after

reading the flyer. For example, when in a traditional city centre pub "oh you'll find lots of men with problems in this place," or, "Oh you don't want to talk to me I'm bloody nuts." My approach to recruitment was also noted by men, for example, "This is a bit strange picking up men in pub,s" or, "You're brave, fair play to you". I did feel at times and in certain locations that it was 'brave' of me to attempt to recruit men in a way that could potentially place me in a vulnerable position. Before the recruitment had begun I had not comprehended exactly how emotionally draining it might have been.

I found the recruitment of men from the general population challenging as it involved adopting an element of false confidence in approaching complete strangers, the majority of which were in places of leisure, so there was also a sense of being an intruder to their leisure space. In addition, in some of these spaces, such as pubs, it did feel strange being a young women essentially trying to get men's contact details in these locations. This was resonated in some of the strange looks I received, particularly when asking if they would be interested and could I take their contact details. I wanted to get the right balance of being friendly and approachable enough for them to consider a potential interview but also remain professionalism as a researcher as well as dissuade any unwanted attention in these particular settings.

However, given the typically masculine environments I chose to recruit from, unwanted sexual innuendos, jokes and attention was somewhat unavoidable and there were notable times where I had to negotiate such situations carefully. For example, when recruiting from a local pub I approached a mixed group of both men and women of different ages. One of the men asked questions about it and read the recruitment flyer so seemed interested, but often turned to others in the group to make jokes about himself and his mental health during the discussion with me about the research. When asked for a time suitable for an interview he replied in a joke-like manner, "Uh you can come over about eleven pm tonight" and turned to his friends to laugh. I chose to laugh this off, deciding that ignoring the comments was the best way to deal with this situation during the recruitment process, despite it making me feel somewhat vulnerable and uncomfortable. Sharp and Kremer (2006) highlight how difficult it can be for female researchers to deal with such sexual advances because researchers feel that the subject is doing them a favour by participating. On reflection, if I were faced with a similar comment outside of the research process then I may have acted differently towards such remarks. The aim was to recruit participants and I was aware of the potential challenges of recruiting male volunteers and so I struggled with the dilemma of the best way to respond to such inappropriate comments. Other examples include an older man asking "Are you going to ask me about sex?" and another, "Is this a chat up line?" Someone in a smoking area overheard a man saying, "Does she want a shag" whilst holding the recruitment flyer. Another situation involved a man texting (via a research phone) inappropriately a number of times not long after I had handed him a leaflet in a local pub.

Such experiences are not uncommon when women research men and many female researchers have written about similar experiences to this (Green, Gill, Barbour, Barnard & Kitzinger 1993; Arendell, 1997; Lee, 1997; Gailey & Prohaska, 2011). Gurney (1985) calls this "sexual hustling," which involves male participants making

sexual advances and displaying suggestive behaviours. Many of the men engaged in this behaviour did this in front of other men, portraying 'male bravado' in such masculine environments as the pub or football club. Following such situations, I became quite exasperated with the recruitment process and also with men in general. I felt frustrated that men made me feel uncomfortable in this way even though my research was interested in men's mental health experiences and was attempting to give them a voice. This brings attention to how gender performances and norms are very much still active within male sites and cultures.

I persevered with the recruitment of men from the general population despite my reservations of the kinds of behaviours that I anticipated from men. Not all the men I approached made sexual jokes or behaved inappropriately towards me. The challenging situations described however created anxieties about future potential participants. For example, I recruited a man from a local pub and when we arranged the interview via text message I felt uncertain and uneasy about his replies. When I took a while to reply back for example he sent another message asking if I had received his message and then when a time and date was arranged he replied with "look forward to seeing you." I felt that such messages appeared too eager and had the potential to put me in a vulnerable situation. As it turned out, this man was currently unemployed and having experienced depression saw the interview as an opportunity to discuss his experiences and it gave him a purpose to his day. He was in no way inappropriate towards me, highlighting the influence of my position on future recruitment of participants and the vulnerabilities and uncertainties that female researchers may face in particular research settings. As Poulton (2012) argues, a female researcher in the hyper-masculine subculture of football hooliganism, qualitative research is messy and researchers are required to dig themselves out of a hole or deal with awkward and challenging situations (p.2). I had to do this a number of times and so it was important throughout the recruitment stage that I was constantly reflecting upon the impact of these experiences and emotions as a female researcher and how they may influence future aspects of the research process. Throughout the recruitment process I always ensured someone accompanied me to these male sites to provide a safety net should I find myself in any particularly vulnerable situations. Female researchers like Arendel (1997), Green et al. (1993) and Sharp and Kremer (2006) suggest the need for researchers to trust their instincts in the field and so where I did not feel comfortable pursuing a man's interest in the research then I did not follow it up to arrange an interview. Although this therefore influenced the sample, which was based on who I approached and chose to interview, researcher safety was the fundamental goal.

**Gendered interactions during the interview setting**

The paper will now consider my positionality during the interview setting. The interview can act as a site for men to perform gender (Salle & Harris III, 2001; Robertson, 2006) particularly as the interview situation itself can be seen as a threat to control and autonomy (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). Schwalbe & Wolkomir (2001) argue that the interview process puts a man's masculinity at risk as he opens himself up to interrogation potentially placing him in a vulnerable position. In addition, the

research topic of mental distress may have caused men to feel even more vulnerable in an interview situation. Due to the semi-structured interview being flexible in nature, some of the men took charge (Arendell, 1997) of the conversation often going off topic and taking the conversation in a different direction. However unlike other researchers' experiences, (Green et al., 1993; Arendell, 1997; Gailey & Prohaska, 2011) this was not a problem in my research and the men never tried to control the actual interview situation itself. Given my interest in their experiences of distress, I wanted to them to talk in depth about their experiences or a particular life event that they deemed important and as per the nature of semi-structured interviewing, flexibility was warranted. Where this happened, men often paused and asked, "Is this okay? Is this where you want to go?" and so they negotiated the interview interaction with myself.

Doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) noticeably occurred on both the part of myself and the interviewees. When I prepared for each interview I found myself consciously considering how I portrayed my femininity, and carefully chose how I dressed and how much facial make up I wore. Other female researchers have described doing this to avoid the likelihood of sexual advances (Pini, 2005; Sharp & Kremer, 2006; Gailey & Prohaska, 2011) and this too was a reason to dress more conservatively. Regardless of whether it was a man or woman I would still want to have looked professional, but on reflection would I have put so much consideration into the amount of facial makeup I wore had I been interviewing women? Gill & Maclean (2002) claim that female researchers cannot simply "hide" their sexuality from public view. When I spoke to colleagues, someone suggested I could put a ring on my wedding finger to avoid any sexual advances during the interviews. I felt this was not needed and similar to Lee (1997) who also considered doing this in her study of lone fathers, I felt that it would be deception as well as further creating a gendered construction.

In some instances where the participants recruited from the general population had been snowballed, I had had no prior contact with them except for a few text messages. These can be seen as "cold call" interviews that have the highest level of risk (Sharp & Kremer, 2006) and so where the interview took place was an important factor to minimise any risk. Patterson, Greggory & Thorne (1999) suggest that whenever possible, researchers should meet subjects in public places and during the day. I followed this and only met participants for interviews in public places such as coffee shops or local pubs during the daytime, and always informed someone of where I was. I considered potential issues with meeting men in public spaces, as the interview would involve disclosing potential vulnerabilities and emotions. However, this was never an issue with the participants and I gave them the choice of a public space that they would feel comfortable with, often finding a quieter area of the location.

There were numerous occasions during the interviews with the men from the general population, where men offered to buy me a drink and I was faced with the dilemma of whether to except a drink off my interviewees. In these cases I usually replied that I would get one for myself or offered to buy them one as gratitude for taking part in the research. Often the men insisted and so I felt rude not to accept this as well as wanting to build and maintain rapport and make them feel comfortable within the interview

setting. This sometimes made me feel awkward as a researcher because I felt that they were the ones doing me a favour by participating in the research. It could be argued that this situation highlighted that male respondents are conscious about fulfilling masculine expectations (Salle & Harris III, 2001, p.425) such as offering a beverage. This again this exposes power struggles that play out during the interview situation, particularly with a young woman interviewing men.

It has been suggested that rapport and reciprocity is often more easily achieved through "same-sex" interviews (Williams & Heikes, 1993; Broom, Hand & Tovey 2009). Resisman (1987) found that her interviews were "hindered by a lack of shared cultural and class assumptions" (p.190). Bearing this in mind, my interviews too could have potentially been hindered by lack of the same assumptions. Some might argue then, that there should always be race, gender and class matching between respondents and researchers (Byrne, 2004, p. 213). This may have granted a better insight and understanding into the participant's lived world. However, the subject of the research must also be taken into consideration. Winchester (1996) suggests that during the interview men may use opportunities to exert power over the female researcher. As a result, stereotypical gender discourses that suggest that women's role in conversation is to be an empathetic listener are often reinforced. As discussed above, this was not a problem within my research and despite challenges during the recruitment process due to my position as a young women, I actually found that being female and being located in the traditional femininity discourse by male participants was instead advantageous for the research. I believe this was because of the subject of mental and emotional health. Horn (1997) found that being assigned a 'traditional' female role, which is often perceived as harmless and unthreatening, may allow women to access research areas which may be barred to male researchers. When women interview men there has been the general view that men may actually feel more comfortable talking about intimate topics with women than with other men (Williams & Heikes, 1993; Arendell, 1997; Lohan, 2000). I found this to be true throughout the fieldwork as the men opened up to me in detail regarding their personal stories and experiences of distress. As McDowell (1998) claims, it is the subject of the research not just the identities of the researcher and researched that shape the interview. The men in Lohan's (2000) research perceived women to be 'naturally' more interested in the personal and emotional and so found it easier to discuss personal matters with a female interviewer. One of my participants explained that he had never spoken about his experience or feelings to anybody else before the interview. Many of the male participants in this study, from both sample groups, reiterated this point and a key finding that has emerged from the research, is that men explicitly talked about feeling more able to discuss emotions and difficulties with women rather than men. Some of the men from the general population sample said after the interview that it felt cathartic to open up about previous experiences, for example one man said after the recorder had stopped, "wow didn't know all that was there." Such examples show that although my gender proved to be a challenge in the recruitment stages, during the actual interviews being a young woman instead placed me in a position of advantage, to which the men felt they could share things they might not have shared with others, due of the nature of the topic.

Referring back to Arendell's question mentioned earlier, during the interviews I had not felt that I was being positioned as subordinate or a low status stranger, but positioned instead within the traditional feminine discourse of empathetic listener. During some of the interviews, both with men from support groups and men from the general population, the men would sometimes apologise to me if they had said something that they thought might be sexist for example, or inappropriate. Again it could be that their apologies were because I was positioned as a young, empathetic woman in addition to the male participant's renegotiation of their masculinity within the interview setting. This also highlighted pressure to enact masculinity amongst other men and within masculine environments that was displayed throughout the recruitment procedure. Despite the sometimes challenging recruitment of men from the general population, I contemplate how different the interviews and the data collected would have been if I were a male researcher and whether I would have even obtained as many male participants through such male sites.

**Concluding thoughts**

This paper has explored my experiences as a young female researcher researching men about their mental health. Being a young woman recruiting, interviewing and writing about men's distress had the potential to create problematic and challenging situations throughout the research process. During the recruitment of participants, I experienced feelings of vulnerability, had to endure sexist remarks and inappropriate behaviours from men. Following this, I then had to negotiate the interview setting carefully in order to facilitate the interviews and ensure researcher safety. Despite issues I faced at times, being a young woman actually benefited the research and the male participants in that they positioned me as understanding and empathetic. As a result they were able to discuss at length their mental health and experiences of distress. Had I been a male researcher, I may not have obtained as many participants or as rich data as I did. Throughout the research process, gender performances were not unique to the male participants, and as I have discussed in the paper, I also notably performed gender during both the recruitment and interview process.

It is essential to reflect on the ways in which both my participants and I constructed and performed gender during the research process and how this influenced the data collected. It is also important to note that my position to the research is multi-dimensional. Both the interviewees and I in the research occupy several different social locations, including gender, race, age, and social class. Researchers of different gender, age, social class, ethnicity and sexuality studying those of different positions to them face issues similar to what I have outlined in this paper. However here I have only focused on gender and so it is important to further consider how these other social positions influence our actions throughout the research process. In order to do so, researchers, particularly those in contrasting positions, need to consider the varying ways in which their position can create challenges and influence the data that is collected. Researchers should therefore ensure they are reflexive throughout and engage with their positionality within the research process, from the onset and throughout.

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# Five

# A Man in Women's Studies Research: Privileged in More Than One Sense

## Sergio A. Silverio

As part of a new Integrated Master of Psychological Sciences degree, specialising in Clinical and Health Psychology at the University of Liverpool, I was able to design the very first qualitative study I could call my own. Advertised as a study investigating "Femininity in Never Married Older Women" and recruiting from across the United Kingdom, I had twelve participants who self-identified as never married women. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were designed to be open to anyone who identified as a woman (thus including trans-women as well as cis-women, and women of all sexualities, thus not just heterosexual women – though participants were not asked to divulge either their sex or sexuality). All participants, however, had to have been born in-or-before 1966 (therefore being in their fiftieth year of age or more at the time of being interviewed), and must not have ever been legally married. Participants were however recruited if they had had children (six participants did have children), if they were cohabiting at the time of being interviewed (one participant was cohabiting with a long-term [male] partner), or if they deemed themselves to have lived *as a married couple*, despite never having legally married (approximately half of the participants deemed that they had at some point over their lifecourse).

Participants had a median age of fifty-eight years (with an age range of twenty-eight years between the eldest and youngest participants), and interviews lasted between just over twenty-five minutes and just under seventy minutes (two were by telephone, the rest were conducted face-to-face). After transcribing the semi-structured interviews verbatim, the study itself and the subsequent transcripts of the data collected has led to multiple analyses (see Silverio, Bennett, & Soulsby, 2017; Silverio & Soulsby, 2016; Silverio, Soulsby, & Bennett, 2017; 2018 – all of which are due as forthcoming papers).

Furthermore, regarding this particular (under-researched) group of participants, and the findings of these analyses, a number of commentaries on the matter were released (see Bell, 2017; James, 2017; Sore, 2017; Wood, 2017) after a series of invited talks given by the author (Silverio, 2017a; 2017b; see also Faulkner, 2017). The outcome of this attention to the research subsequently led to multiple reflections on researcher position and privilege by the author (see Silverio, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c), however, the first and second empirical analyses – both of which used a Grounded Theory approach albeit on different aspects of the data – are the focus of this paper.

The Grounded Theory approach used was a hybridisation of Glaserian and Straussian Grounded Theory, based on the original methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, whereby transcripts were coded to develop initial categories, and super-categories which are then collapsed, merged, and re-worked leading to theme development, and a final theory. In line with Glaser (1992), I planned to have no *a priori* assumptions of the data or of the population, instead developing robust, layered, thematic concepts through iterative coding and constant comparison, which could then be framed within existing literature (as in Strauss, 1987). The first analysis focussed on gender identity resulting in the development of a theory looking at how this populations' gender identity differed from that of married women, whilst the second Grounded Theory was established to explain ageing social networks in this demographic.

**The dilemma**

The field dedicated to the Psychology of Women was, and remains, long-established with two firm branches of research and teachings. Eminent cross-disciplinary researchers and thinkers such as Judith Butler, Mary Crawford, and Rhoda Unger (see Butler, 1990; Crawford & Unger, 2004) dominate the first arm: 'Feminist Psychology' which I describe as: Exploring the relationship of women's gender identity to, and the interaction of women within, religio-politico-social settings, education & employment, and familial & other social hierarchies. And likewise, equally recognisable academics such as Nancy Chodorow, Karen Horney, and Eleanor Maccoby (see Chodorow, 1994; Horney, 1967; Maccoby, 1966) have published the cornerstones of 'Feminine Psychology' which I define as: Investigating the psychosocial and psychosexual challenges and issues which arise due to an adoption of a feminine gender identity in relation to the intimate & public self, and to society.

Through my initial analyses I began to call my own position as a (male) researcher into question, especially given that I had specifically chosen to align my work with the lesser recognised branch of Women's Psychology: 'Female Psychology', for which I proffer the definition: Examining the lived experience of women's life-courses, through narrative, in order to explore patterns and trends in mental health and social wellbeing, whilst noting adaptations to gender identity challenges over all life-transitions and across cultures. To my knowledge only two texts had ever specifically addressed and asserted themselves as works of 'Female Psychology' – Helene Deutsch's collection of psychoanalytic papers (reprinted as Deutsch, 1991) and an annotated bibliography by Eleanor Schuker and Nadine Levinson (2017). Both being from a psychoanalytic

perspective, there was not much published by way of guidance as to whether I was doing the data, and therefore my participants, justice or whether I was simply the straight, white, educated, male, researching 'Female Psychology'. In reflecting on my position I noticed what was influencing my analysis when I had in fact attempted to use an analytical approach and methodology (Grounded Theory), which prevented me from holding any preconceived ideas about my participants, or of my data.

## Engaging positionality

**My analytical position.** I had commenced this piece of research wanting to explore the relationship (if indeed, one existed) between later-life gender identity and marital status. My approach was to be data driven and to theorise on any relationships using the data itself, rather than from a preconceived, imposed, or forced analytical paradigm. To achieve this, I set out to use an inductive qualitative research approach (Howard-Payne, 2016) using a classical Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser, 1992; Holton, 2008). This research would be a novel foray into the lived experiences and emotional narratives of a population, which has been relatively neglected by the social sciences: The never married older woman. Through conducting the interviews and analysing the data I noted there did appear to be a psychological intersection of gender identity and marital status and aside from an interesting portion of the data being dedicated to later-life femininity, there was a separate analysis to be highlighted focussing on ageing social networks in this population. From one empirical study, I had two separate Grounded Theory analyses to conduct, and so I continued, re-reading the data, re-familiarising myself with the nuances of each interview, and constantly comparing each interview I read and analysed to the last. I was immersed in my data and I knew every interview in excruciating detail. Throughout the data collection process, the time taken to transcribe each interview, and through the lengthy analytical process, there was one comment, however, which brought some doubt to my mind as to whether I was indeed doing the 'right thing.' One of the interviewees towards the end of my data collection had responded to one of my questions with: "I find it a bit irking actually that there's somebody who sounds awfully like a young, white male is interviewing me about femininity!" It became a sticking point. I questioned my position as a male researcher in women's studies research. I questioned my position as a researcher full-stop. I started to evaluate my *actual* knowledge-base of 'Female Psychology', and then as I appraised my theoretical viewpoint, I could not help but dispute my methodological standpoint. If I had a theoretical background – even if acquired subconsciously – how could I be a true Grounded Theorist?

Re-reading the data, I became increasingly aware of *how* I was reading the data, and in what ways it *could* be read. I was reading the data I had collected under the notable influence of de Beauvoir's (1949/2011) suggestion that "women *become*" and of Bem's (1974) work on "Psychological Androgyny." I then contemplated the possibility that if two key readings through my degree training had made such a profound effect on my thinking, it was more than possible that the hegemonic, heteronormative, patriarchal lens of our society had been so ingrained over my lifetime, that when I came to analyse the data, it had simply remained unseen. It was therefore possible that these interpretations and lenses through which I was making assumptions of women's gender

identity and social networks may have gilded (or perhaps had even tarnished) my questioning and subsequent analyses.

I had to admit to myself that Simone de Beauvoir's work had made me think that women (or more generally, people) *become,* rather than being born into a society, performing and constructing their gender within given contexts and therefore not internalising their biological sex as an innate and congruent manifestation of gender. Ultimately, the Beauvoirian influence could have sub-consciously lensed my analysis, causing me to view my participants as products of society rather than individuals with agency. Additionally, adopting a belief system centred around gender which included a Psychological Androgyny (as in Bem, 1974) meant I was analysing my participants' data within the confines of a gender spectrum with masculinity and femininity at either side, and with dedicated space for an androgynous person adopting and constructing their identity using aspects of both flanking identities. In doing so I had once again sub-consciously assumed my participants had the same, or a similar view of gender identity as me, which included the separation of masculinity and femininity by androgyny (for which I could have been accused of looking) when they may have had in fact no opinion on gender identity at all.

I asked whether these influential readings had made my research less valid – because if I could interrogate my work in such a manner, I was sure that others who had been working in the field for longer, and those with a pedigree of influential research would be sure to pick holes in my assertions. My answer to whether my ideologies had compromised the validity of my research was: "No," but I felt my analytical position must be clarified within subsequent discussions or conclusions. By documenting my theoretical and philosophical standpoints, it would then allow me to set them aside whilst I analysed, and draw upon them after the analytical process was complete in order to frame my Grounded Theories within the current empirical and social settings.

**Being a (feminist) grounded theorist.** The awakening, which came whilst analysing my data for both the later-life femininity and gender identity, and the ageing social networks Grounded Theory analyses, meant I had to also address my methodological position. Classical Grounded Theory meant I was to have no *a priori* assumptions of my data, and as established above I could have been challenged on actually holding some quite distinct and prescribed notions of both my cohort of participants and their data, of which I felt I was merely custodian. I somehow had to reconcile a feminist *theoretical* character, and an atheoretical *methodological* approach. Immediately I began to ask myself questions of each interview. Whether participants had been guarded in the interviews because I was opposite sex and the opposite gender asking them about how they perceive and regard *their* gender. This led to thinking about whether it had been me who had been (mis)interpreting parts of my participants' dialogue.

This in turn forced me to take some time out from the analytical process to thoroughly interrogate my work, and my processes up to and including the analytical process thus far. This was followed by taking some time away from the data all together. I had drilled so deeply down into my data, it had become difficult to see where my

participants' data began and where my interpretations ended. It was the most excruciating part of the analytical process. To step away from data you think may well be challenged and give yourself time to reflect on your own positionality as a researcher rather than the results of your participants' data is incomprehensibly difficult, but I would suggest a vitally important, and necessary step. I began to view myself (or perhaps more specifically, my *analytical*-self and my mind) as a vessel for my participants' data. Engulfing twelve transcripts and allowing them to merge into one dataset did not necessarily mean that they had been *gilded* or *tainted* by any other information which was also contained within said vessel.

I had set about analysing my data using a hybridised, but heavily Classical Grounded Theory approach (as in Glaser, 1992), which once a theory had been developed, could be framed within the wider existing empirical literature and social context (as in Strauss, 1987). I had an ontological position of critical realism whereby I dealt with the reality of my participants' experiences and what could be understood about said reality, using solely the information from the data collected to answer those questions by developing a Grounded Theory (in my case – two Grounded Theories, one on gender identity and later-life femininity; the other on ageing social networks). I opposed adopting an ontological approach of social constructivism or pragmatic relativism which would have meant I, as a researcher would have been responsible for co-constructing my participants' data with them through the interview process to formulate a Grounded Theory of a 'truth' created between the researcher and the participant at that point in time and history (see Howard-Payne, 2016).

Furthermore, when exploring my own epistemological approach to this piece of research I was comfortable in that I had adopted a realist epistemological stance (Howard-Payne, 2016), based on objectivist principles (or postpositivist emergence as proposed by Levers, 2013), where in fact, I as a researcher, attempted to approach the participants and their data with no preconceived notions of what the characteristics of the participants are and nor of what the properties of the data may well be. Rather a process of constant comparison of each interview in the dataset allowed me to navigate and negotiate erratic aspects of the interviews, and sort and organise the data into robust, layered, and meaningful thematic concepts, which were then used to theorise about the sample population. This allowed me as a researcher to be *guided by* and *work within* the data objectively being open to new concepts, which emerged through the analytical process, rather than the data being forced into a particular thematic paradigm. In sum, each part of each interview (and the selected quotations) became a constituent part of the now emergent property – which is the theory developed, rather than each constituent part (the data) being made to fit a pre-existing and imposed theoretical, or empirical ideology, or social context (Levers, 2013).

**Accepting my position as a researcher**

**Hearing participants' voices, whilst silencing my own.** I had aimed to use my position as a researcher to offer a platform on which participants could voice their experiences and this is an approach to research which I fervently defend. Allowing for a data collection method whereby: 'We, the researchers are naïve to the lived experiences of

them, the participants, who are the experts'*;* permits us to learn from our participants about their identity, psyche, and socio-emotional experiences with regard to our line of enquiry. In this respect, our participants become the oracle from which we draw our knowledge – thus staying true to an objectivist methodological approach.

I had indeed agonised over the conclusions drawn from both analyses, and worried that there was the possibility for potentially every one of the claims I made to have been lensed by my own position as a researcher – a researcher who through living and learning had been inadvertently – and also *advertently* – influenced by the Psychology, Feminism, & Philosophy which had been so crucial to my development as an early career academic up to and including the time of collecting this data and subsequently analysing it in the ways I have. I ensured I re-read the data, each time attempting to consciously exclude any further evidence of my own perceptions and assumptions occasionally enacting some minor re-analysis to ensure each Grounded Theory had been data-driven, and *not* researcher-led. In doing so I also spoke with supervisors and mentors who had more experience with qualitative research and also discussed approaches and findings with fellow students and colleagues who at the time were using a variety of qualitative analyses. In doing this I was able to critically discuss my approaches, my conclusions, and my subsequent theories developed and defend them out-loud rather than simply battling with them in an ongoing commentary limited to the confines of my own head.

It is my sincere belief that this process enabled me to grow as a novice researcher. I realised how silencing one's own voice is quite probably the most difficult part of the analytical process for any qualitative researcher – and I especially found this problematic at first. Furthermore, attempting to unpick my interpretive voice from my participants' voices whilst reading and re-reading the transcripts during analysis felt for a while like a "muffled clamour" (Carter, 2017) as qualitative research so often is. However, the process has enabled me to confidently assert that I learnt how to control my own voice (if not somewhat rather slowly), setting it to one side for periods of study design, data collection, and analysis; whilst allowing it to 'speak' when framing my data-driven analysis within the wider theoretical context, thereafter lensing my arguments derived from a theory developed directly from a dataset, against the existing literature and social contexts.

In accepting my position as a researcher, I no longer see my reading and training as weaknesses to my analytical process or the outcomes of my analytical endeavours, but rather resources from which I can draw to provide strength to my prevailing assertions and data-driven arguments. I am more accepting of the researcher role having its own interpretive voice and how important that in fact is, when new research is completed. In allowing one's own interpretive voice to come forward at the appropriate time, you can bolster your strength as a researcher to be heard in order to add new perspectives and approaches to the research fields with which we engage and read. Immersing myself in the data will always be one of the most important factors associated with the analytical process, especially for projects where I elect to use a Grounded Theory approach and methodology from my growing qualitative methodology arsenal. In doing so I have also come to appreciate what a great privilege it is to do so, and how

respectful one must be of the participants' data to ensure it is *their voices*, and not our own, which directs any analysis.

**Privileged in more than one sense.** The current paper has been written to explain how I have and continue to engage with positionality as a male academic Psychologist, researching and teaching in the fields of Women's Health, Female Psychology, and Gender Studies. As researchers we can often be greedy for 'good' data, 'lots' of data, and 'varied' data, but actually each individual piece of data is just as valuable as the next and should not be discredited because it might seem at first to be ill-fitting with the rest of the theory or argument which appears to have emerged through the analytical process. Grounded Theory is in essence built on principles that require a researcher to sensitively and repeatedly navigate difficult data and negotiate its space within the rest of the dataset (Levers, 2013). Particularly in qualitative research, each interview acts as a proxy for the voice of the person who may have never divulged this information before – and therefore we have a duty as researchers to be respectful of the content of each interview and value the narratives of all our participants.

The weight of responsibility of privilege had sat very heavily on my shoulders whilst collecting and analysing this data because each interview had become a monograph of each participants' lived experiences, and each participant had entrusted me to be the guardian of those scripts. I believe it is only too easy to forget that the data, which you may have worked very hard to collect, may have been equally as hard for the participant to recount and share. Being a man who engages in this genre of qualitative research may act to only amplify my researcher privilege given that we inhabit a patriarchal society. It is also therefore understandable that women may not want to speak to male researchers or would prefer female-led research and data collection, as may be the case *vice versa*.

I feel hugely privileged to be able to conduct research, especially of a qualitative nature, because it enables me to interpret a variety of peoples' experiences over their lifecourse and interweave different peoples' stories together in a narrative patchwork of psychosocial and emotive experiences. Moreover, I say privilege is only ever amplified once more when I think of the time and emotional energy the women in this study gave when they came forward to be interviewed for my degree project. And when there were times, are still times, and I am sure in the future where there will be times where I question my position as a psychological researcher and as a male researcher of qualitative women's studies, I shall be forever grateful for the following statement from another of my participants (the eldest participant) in this study:

> I think it's good that you were doing it as an opposite sex person because you're free of a lot of the emotional bias. If I were interviewing another woman about this I'd start thinking you know 'doesn't she realise, can't she see the way these things work out?' If it's an opposite sex person you assume there's things they don't understand about the way they feel and think. I think somebody, a woman at some stage ought to do this for older men.

What this participant may never realise is that in one single quotation, she managed to validate my work and the reasoning behind my work, whilst simultaneously banishing any concerns I had had about my positionality as a researcher in this study.

## Concluding comment

Having spent much time designing this study, collecting and analysing the data, and writing subsequent papers, commentaries, and conference presentations to disseminate the messages of this research and my approach to research I now feel confident in my elaborations of how exactly I positioned myself and my interpretive voice amongst my participants' voices. I learnt it was by far the most difficult aspect of research to silence my own voice, but that I could and now can assuredly set it aside and utilise it as an analytical lens when required to introduce my findings and developed theories into the existing empirical and social contexts. In doing so I believe my analytic voice has become stronger in my defence of my methodological, analytical, and interpretive approaches. It was and shall continue to be important for me to be entrenched in the qualitative data I collect, and it would have been wrong of me not to give space to my own interpretations, which have the potential to later be both contested or supported. Overall, I have accepted my certain *privileges*, and as a researcher, those are only too often amplified, but I was also incredibly *privileged* to be so openly accepted by my participants and by the audiences to whom I have presented and who have read these works. Engaging positionality is not an easy endeavour, but one of the most valuable from which I believe any researcher can benefit.

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# Six

# Being the Intrusive 'Double Outsider' Inside Welsh Family Homes: Insights from Researcher Positionality

## Louise Folkes

Exploration of researcher positionality is often reserved to a small section of a methodology section of an academic paper, if explored at all. Recognising the limited scope that qualitative researchers have to expand on their notions of researcher positionality, the theme of the University of Bath Qualitative Symposium was 'How do we belong?'. This enabled a much-needed space for researcher positionality to be explored. In response, this paper aims to interrogate aspects of my researcher positionality, namely how my positionality led me to my research topic; how constructions of insider/outsider boundaries were influenced by my positioning as a 'double outsider'; and how my position as the 'intrusive outsider' entering the family home shaped my understanding of women's domestic responsibilities.

Being both an English researcher in a Welsh suburb and not being a resident of the community being studied has provided many opportunities to explore how researcher positionality impacts upon data creation. I suggest that the insights drawn from researcher positionality can provide additions to the findings of the research, especially when developed from fieldnote reflections (Mannay & Morgan, 2015). The paper works through examples from both my interview data and my fieldnotes to provide a deliberately candid account of research in action, and the salience of reflexive practice. It concludes with final thoughts around the usefulness of the insider/outsider dichotomy, suggesting that researchers may find it useful to consider the extent to which they may be occupying a "third space" (Ingram & Abrahams, 2016), particularly at times when boundaries are blurred.

**Setting the scene: Research motivations and context**

As the focus of this collection is researcher positionality, it seems reasonable to begin not only with an outline of the broader details of my research methodology, but also an insight into how my positionality has impacted upon the choice of topic studied and the methodological decisions undertaken. All researchers have stories to tell about why they chose to research particular topics and they are often invested in their research areas because of a personal connection. Yet this acknowledgement is often lacking in academic work. As Delamont (2009) warns, there is a fine line between personal reflections that are beneficial to and develop the research, and those which delve too far into the researcher's personal life. However, it is important to move beyond conceptualisations of academic study where the researcher is situated as "an unfortunate necessity for the production of research, rather than its beating heart" (Loughran & Mannay, 2018). Consequently, I outline my personal motivations behind the research, sharing this with the reader, before providing a description of the study's methodology and data creation techniques.

Higher education was not something that was on my radar as young adult finishing compulsory education. As a working-class pupil in a middle-class grammar school, the prospect of going to university was one that was actively encouraged by the school but not really something I had personally considered. My experiences both as a working-class pupil in a grammar school and as an undergraduate struggling with a disrupted habitus or habitus clivé (Bourdieu, 1990) got me to reflect on my journey through education as a working-class student, as has previously been explored by other female, working-class academics (see for example Reay, 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001). Having been a so-called 'good example' of working-class social mobility, I had a desire to explore others' narratives, and how they construct their trajectories to appease (or not) the wider normative social mobility discourse. As my experience was (and still is) an unsettling, difficult emotional dislocation (see also Loughran, 2018) as I left my family home in pursuit of mobility, I was intrigued to talk to people who had done the same and those who had not. Experiencing the beginning of my mobility narrative in England, this research was also an opportunity to learn more about mobility in the context of another country, Wales. When thinking about positionality, it is essential to have outlined how my personal story led me to my research topic - exploring social mobility narratives in working class families.

My doctoral fieldwork was a small-scale, in-depth, multi-modal, qualitative study of one Welsh community influenced by various ethnographic approaches and work (see Skeggs, 1997; Williamson, 2004; Evans, 2006; McKenzie, 2015; Ward, 2016). Participant observation, interviews, and visual methods were incorporated and fieldnotes were recorded after each encounter in the field. Not only was I interested in narratives of social mobility within working-class families, but also the intersection of narratives of social class, place attachment, and gender. The community of Hiraeth[1] was chosen due to its overlooked and under-researched status both within academia and community development work within Wales. Hiraeth is a forgotten, disadvantaged

[1] All place names and participants' names have been anonymised in this account

suburb which has complexity, history, and spatial, classed, and economic divides. Therefore, I considered it fitting for my exploration of mobility narratives in working-class families.

This paper will explore reflections on the family interviews that were undertaken in this research. In total, I spoke to nine families. This accounted for thirteen interviews overall with twenty-five participants, five one-to-one interviews and eight group interviews, spanning over twenty hours-worth of audio-recorded material, and 204,398 transcribed words of data. All interviews, except two, took place inside the family home, and it is this which forms the crux of my reflections on researcher positionality, and how I not only position myself personally, but also spatially within this private sphere. Subscribing to a social constructionist, discursive approach, this research comes from the premise that there are no 'truths' or reality, and that narratives produced within the interview setting are essentially intersubjective performances of identity-work influenced by the social and cultural context (Edley, 2001; Atkinson & Coffey, 2002; Nightingale & Cromby, 2002; Burr, 2003; Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Taylor, 2006). Consequently, these accounts provide interesting analytical insights not only into my participants' subjectivities, but also my own, in response to the discursive positioning and the larger social meanings that are drawn upon (Taylor, 2006). It is, therefore, important to reflect upon my positionality as a researcher as it has a direct impact upon the data that has been produced.

**The 'double outsider': Being an English researcher situated outside of the community**

In this section, I will highlight how my positionality as being both English and an 'outsider' to the community impacted upon my data creation in a Welsh suburb. The first and most obvious marker of my positionality was that as soon as I speak I am clearly demarcated as not Welsh. My accent is from South-West England and this automatically places me as an 'outsider' with limited understandings of what it is to be Welsh. As Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford and Davies (2006) highlight, the significant 'other' in terms of Welsh identity is the construction of the English. My 'outsider' status became apparent through conversations I have had with families in subtle ways such as talking about devolved policies and legislation or talking about their children's Eisteddfod and St David's Day celebrations (Geraint, 2016). These are all things which are not necessarily familiar to me as somebody who is not from Wales and it has been difficult for me to identify with some participants' stories. Not only am I not Welsh, but I also do not live in Hiraeth. This makes me, what I term, the 'double outsider', as somebody who is twice removed from the insider identity - I do not have that shared experience of being brought up into a Welsh family and I also have no experience of what it is like to live in Hiraeth on a daily basis.

The term 'double outsider' is not widely used in reflexive literature (with the notable exception of Coombs & Osborne, 2018) yet is a concept, which aptly represents my 'distance' from the local and national identities of my participants. As Scourfield et al., (2006) argue, it is important to theorise local and national identities relationally, and so for this research the 'double outsider' concept encompasses both of these aspects. The

concept may therefore be beneficial to other researchers who experience a dual distancing from their participants simultaneously.

Often there were attempts by participants at 'figuring me out' as they were curious to know more about me and how to position me. This can be demonstrated here in my interview with Michael and his adult daughter Lucy:

> Michael: Yeah he's Welsh though, Louise is Wenglish and Tony is Welsh
>
> Lucy: How long have you been in Wales now?
>
> LF: Six years
>
> Lucy: *intake of breath* you've gotta pass that decade, decade mark, decade mark *laughs*
>
> Michael: *laughs*
>
> LF: Four years to go yet then *laughs*
>
> Lucy: No only because I've got friends who are English think that they're, no, no, the decade, the decade, that's the uh, you've gotta pass the decade now
>
> Michael: Yeah you're almost local if you've been here ten years
>
> Lucy: Yeah
>
> LF: Yeah, well, I've gotta hold out a few more years yet then *laughs*

Michael refers to me in this extract as "Wenglish," a term often used to describe English people who have resided in Wales for a certain amount of time, yet for obvious reasons cannot identify as Welsh. As Lucy explains to me I need to have lived in Wales for ten years before I can position myself as a 'Welsh local,' Michael appears to suggest that even this would not suffice as you would only be "almost local" if you had lived in Wales for ten years. Between them, Lucy and Michael are actively constructing and negotiating the boundaries of the identity category of 'Welsh local' which, as lifelong Welsh residents, is easily accessible to them via established discursive resources (Edley, 2001; Taylor, 2010). As a consequence of their construction, I am positioned confidently as an outsider, which in turn has an impact on the rest of the interaction and how Lucy and Michael position and present themselves to me as the researcher. It subsequently involves identity-work on my behalf as I agree with and take-up the outsider positioning that Lucy and Michael negotiate for me, reflecting on my English-outsider status.

Having provided an example of how I was positioned by 'legitimate' insiders, I will now discuss the example of Roger, who was one of my only English participants (the other being his wife, Maureen). Despite living in Wales for the majority of his working

life, and living in Hiraeth for over ten years, Roger used our mutual English identity as an outlet for his experiences of 'not being Welsh', looking to me to reaffirm his experiences:

> Roger: The other thing that's a bit strange, for us, for me, I've been thinking a lot about this recently, funnily enough, is do I feel Welsh? [LF: mm], and I do sometimes, there are sometimes when I feel very, very Welsh, um, usually when I'm at a football match *laughs* [LF: *laughs*] you know and the, the anthem's coming on or something like that and uh, there are, there's elements of that that I, that I really, admire and want to be a part of [LF: mm] uh, and it's not just football, you know, you get in other things… and you, and you feel, you feel, I feel, well I'd like to be a part of that [LF: mm] and, I appreciate having that opportunity, but then there are other times when I feel almost as soon as I've opened my mouth, and exposed the fact that I'm not Welsh, that I'm actually English, um, where I feel, hurt [LF: mm] really hurt, uh, by and um, it's, and uh, that's a bit uh, that's a little tricky sometimes, and, and again I think that's, there's some insularity about that…
>
> LF: Yeah, I get that about that the Welsh thing, as soon as I speak anywhere, especially when I've been helping out around here, it's kind of like the first thing people notice is you don't have the slight accent
>
> Roger: No, and in a way, uh again I'd be very careful who I said this to, but in a way that's not far short of racism [LF: mm] really, when people make you feel um, that you don't belong because of where you are born really is what it boils down to and um, yeah it's very close to racism that.

This extract shows the effect that not being 'Welsh' can have upon outsiders within a Welsh community. Roger describes his precarious Welsh identity, and instances where he does "feel very, very Welsh" although is cautious in his commitment to this by describing it as something he admires and wants "to be a part of," therefore indicating that he is an outsider. His reference to sport as an example of a time he feels 'Welsh' shows how sport in Wales acts as a symbolic and unifying expression of 'Welshness' (Clarke, 2009; Mackay, 2010). He goes on to discuss how he feels "exposed" as not being Welsh, presumably by his accent ("as soon as I've opened my mouth"), which prompts my response and the sharing of my experience. As we share similar experiences and draw upon the same discursive resources to discuss our outsider status, the extract exemplifies how simultaneous mutual identity-work can have direct influence on the interview context and the researcher-participant relationship (Lawler, 1999). I am contributing to Roger's identity construction as he positions himself as an outsider, whilst simultaneously situating myself as and being situated as an outsider. This mutual identity helps to build rapport and trust in the research relationship, which is demonstrated by Roger's phrasing "I'd be very careful who I said this to," implying that he feels safe sharing his outsider experiences with me.

Being the 'double outsider' then has helped to illuminate various identity construction practices across participants, through how they position me and position themselves in

relation to me. In turn, identity-work is accomplished through the construction and negotiation of the boundaries of 'insider' and 'outsider,' both by the participants and by myself.

**The intrusive outsider inside the family home: Gendered insights**

When entering family homes to conduct interviews, you are positioned both spatially and physically as you navigate a private realm which is usually off-limits to researchers. As Lincoln (2012) argues, the home is often seen as a type of 'sanctuary' which is resistant to the researcher's gaze. In this section, I will focus on how I managed my positioning in this private space by drawing upon my observations of the homes I went into and how these observations provided additional insights into family life outside of the 'formal' interview setting (Mannay & Morgan, 2015). The family interviews undertaken were unstructured and ethnographic. I felt unstructured interviews were most appropriate as they allowed participants space and freedom to determine interview topics. This, in some ways, was a method used to ameliorate the unusual power dynamics of being allowed into somebody's home. It seemed inappropriate for me to be in complete control of the encounter having been allowed into *their* personal space. Throughout the interview process I was aware of my positioning as an intrusive outsider, ensuring that at all times I acted with courtesy and respect, acknowledging my appreciation of their willingness to participate, and ensuring I did not overstay my welcome.

As I approached and entered people's homes, I was careful to be observant of the appearance, from the front garden and house-type, to the layout of rooms and general ambiance of the home. In my fieldnotes I kept rich descriptions of each home so that when I re-read my notes, I could remember exactly what the home was like. My first observation was the immaculate nature of the homes I went to, which in turn affected my initial interactions with participants. I wanted to ensure that I did not 'dirty' the space as an unknown intruder. It was clear a lot of pride went into making houses feel homely, yet neat and clean, which is epitomised by this reflection from my fieldnotes:

> They were so lovely and welcoming, I asked if I should take off my shoes, and Rosemary said 'no, don't be silly, this is a home not a house.

I always offered to take off my shoes in every home I went to, although nobody asked me to. I felt this was essential as a sign of respect and appreciation when entering this private space. Particularly the women of the families I spoke to took great pride in keeping a good home and housework was often implicitly seen as a woman's responsibility. Cleaning is often used as a method of gaining a respectable and acceptable working-class femininity by distancing the self from 'dirt' and a discourse of 'lack' when comparing the self to established middle-class values that hold symbolic capital and power (Douglas, 1966; Skeggs, 1997; Evans, 2006; Mannay, 2015; 2016). A clear example of this came from my interaction with Cathy as we attempted to negotiate an interview slot. Cathy is a mother who works long night shifts as a nurse yet her biggest concern was that I would judge the appearance of her house.

Considering the pressure and difficulties of her job, I had nothing but admiration for her dedication to housework, which is highlighted here in this fieldnote excerpt:

> She said twice to me: please don't judge my house, it's a right tip, you don't do housework for one day and it looks like ten people have come over and trashed it!

This shows that the 'double' or 'second' shift (Hochschild & Machung, 1989) does still seem to play a part in Welsh mothers' lives, as they juggle both domestic and paid work, attempting to not let one slide because of the other. As Mannay (2016) notes, "In public life there has been a shift in the visibility of women in Wales, but behind closed doors many women remain physically, psychologically and symbolically embedded in a never-ending stack of dirty dishes" (p. 82). This is a clear example of the consequences of conducting research inside family homes and the insights this can give you into your participants' everyday lives (Clendon, 2007; Mannay & Morgan, 2015). The fear of the 'judging outsider' by women in my research highlights the centrality of domestic work to many Welsh mothers' lives, and also affected my navigation of and movement within the private space of the home.

The general appearance of the home however was not the only evidence of this gendered division of labour. Often my 'intrusion' into the family home coincided with women's domestic and caring responsibilities. I frequently felt as though I had to continually negotiate my presence and ensure that it was still convenient for the interview to continue. My fieldnote reflections of pre-interview interactions with Michael and his wife Tracy demonstrate domestic work in action:

> Tracy started to empty the dishwasher, and Michael said, "Oh don't worry love, I'll do that," to which Tracy replied, "No, it's okay, I'm more than capable." Michael responded with "I know you are, that's why I married you!"

Although perhaps a light-hearted comment by Michael, it still manages to show the dominance of gendered division of labour as a discursive category (Taylor, 2006; 2010). Throughout the interview, Tracy was also listening out for the babies in case they needed tending to. Emptying dishwashers, feeding babies, ironing clothes, making lunchboxes, calling the doctor for a poorly child, dropping children off at school- all are examples of the domestic and caring responsibilities women were doing previous to, or following, my 'intrusion' into the family home. By reflecting upon my intrusive presence and the implications of this for my participants, I have learned more about women's domestic roles and responsibilities, something that may not necessarily have come out of the interview interaction itself.

**Concluding thoughts and reflections: Insider/outsider dichotomy, the 'double outsider' and the 'third space'**

This paper has explored my positionality in a number of ways: how my positionality led me to my research topic; how constructions of insider/outsider boundaries were influenced by my positioning as a 'double outsider'; and how my position as the

'intrusive outsider' entering the family home helped me learn more about women's domestic responsibilities. I would like to finish with some reflections on the transient nature of being an 'outsider' and how this might be advantageous instead of a hindrance for researchers.

Much qualitative research that utilises ethnographic methods has discussed and questioned the usefulness of the 'insider/outsider' dichotomy, and how we can make 'the familiar strange' when we are insiders, and what strengths being an 'insider' may bring (see Skeggs, 1997; Mannay, 2010; McKenzie, 2015; Ingram & Abrahams, 2016). However, being an 'outsider' has not necessarily hindered this research. I do not feel that I have been treated negatively due to 'outsider' positioning as all participants seemed happy to share their stories with me, and in great detail, as there was an assumption that I may lack some local knowledge. This allowed for the mundane to be made clear as there was no previous assumption that I shared participants' localised understandings. I was often asked why I had chosen to do my research in Hiraeth as somebody not from the area, to which I (truthfully) answered that the area has a dearth of research and interest. This therefore may have helped participants to feel that their stories are important and worthy of sharing, even if with an 'outsider'.

Having distance from the community you are working in provides many benefits and perhaps people felt comfortable talking to me because it was unlikely that I would see them or people that they know regularly once the fieldwork was completed. Over the course of the fieldwork, I was spending a lot of time in the community and picking up local knowledge, although this would inevitably draw to a close as fieldwork wound up. As Ingram and Abrahams (2016) draw on Bhabba's concept of the 'third space,' it could be argued that as I picked up more local knowledge from my time spent in the community, I came to occupy a temporary 'third space.' This helped to ameliorate my 'double outsider' status as I built-up some insider knowledge but I still could not identify as an insider as somebody who lived away from the area and is not Welsh (Roberts, 2018; van den Scott, 2018). I would argue that by occupying this 'third space,' I managed to use my local knowledge to overcome some potential barriers and scepticism that can be faced by '(double) outsider' researchers coming into a new community. The concept of the 'double outsider,' I would argue, is one which is adaptable and could be used by researchers who also experience this kind of dual distancing from their participants simultaneously. Constructions of 'insider/outsider' status are complex, blurred, and continually negotiated through talk (Lisiak & Krzyżowski, 2018), which is why using the concept of occupying a 'third space' provides a theoretical hybrid for when the boundaries are not so clear cut, for instance, when more local knowledge is gained over the course of a research project yet you are still, inevitably, a '(double) outsider.'

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# Seven

# Intellect, Emotions and Values: The Reflexive Triad in Co-operative Inquiry

## Ken Yan Wong

Co-operative Inquiry is an example of a self-reflexive methodology from the participatory research paradigm (Reason, 1994). It is where researchers develop an understanding about a certain topic through their own experience of it and reflection about that experience (Heron, 1996). The constant engagement between the researchers and the topic of research means that reflexivity is an integral part of the research (Finlay, 2002). In this paper, I draw on my own reflections on the Co-operative Inquiry that I conducted as my PhD study. Reflecting on reflexivity, I theorise that reflexivity in Co-operative Inquiry is an intellectual, emotional and value-driven exploration of the research experience.

Reflexivity in qualitative research is a well-discussed topic that has seen many changes over the years. Having roots in the field of anthropology, reflexivity has developed from introspection to acknowledging and embracing researcher subjectivity, to critical self-reflexive methodologies (Finlay, 2002). These developments in reflexivity corresponded with the changes in popular research paradigms. Reflexivity in post-positivist research is considered problematic (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Post-positivist researchers negotiate reflexivity by recognising and bracketing preconceptions and prior knowledge to distance themselves from the phenomenon to be studied (Myrdal, 1970). Constructivists demonstrate reflexivity by accepting the researcher as knowers. They recognise that knowledge is constructed through a cognitive process that involves repeated forming and reforming of concepts in response to new research data (Bowden & Marton, 1998; Moon, 2004). In this sense, reflexivity is a serious consideration rather than an optional activity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Researchers in the participatory paradigm see the research itself as the reflexive process. Participatory research involves

the active participation by the researcher in the phenomenon of interest. Researchers are therefore also the subjects of the research. In this relationship, researchers and other co-researchers in a participatory study have the power to influence the methodology of the research. Reflexivity in this research paradigm is characterised by a great degree of self-awareness and critical subjectivity (Reason, 1994).

By exploring the aesthetic nature of Co-operative Inquiry, I posit that reflexive considerations in Co-operative Inquiry are necessarily aesthetic as well. I reflect on the methodology of my own research to argue that reflexivity in Co-operative Inquiry is simultaneously an intellectual, emotional and value-based exploration between the researcher and the research. Aesthetic and artistic here refer to the unity of the intellectual, emotional and value elements and also to their great degree of interconnectivity, insofar that together they offer a fuller picture than the sum of their constituent parts (Dewey, 1934). I offer these three dimensions of reflexivity as existing in a triadic relationship where they cannot be reflected upon individually. In this paper, I offer participatory researchers a way of perceiving reflexivity in their research and encourage researchers to embrace reflexivity in their own research more completely, instead of isolating the intellectual, emotional and value-based considerations of their research as separate entities. By understanding how closely these dimensions influence the research, participatory researchers can conduct Co-operative Inquiry as an artistic, self-reflexive research methodology.

**Co-operative Inquiry as an Artistic Process**

The two key principles of Co-operative Inquiry are epistemic participation and political participation. The former means that any knowledge that emerges from the research is grounded in the researcher's experience; the latter means that all those involved in the research have a part in the designing of the research as the information gathered is about themselves (Heron & Reason, 1997). From the first principle, the researcher is also the subject of the research and from the second principle, the subjects are also the researchers.

Epistemic participation is about the relationship between the researcher as the knower and the topic to be known (Heron, 1996). In a Co-operative Inquiry, researchers participate in the experience about the topic to be researched. Knowledge generated in the participatory paradigm is experiential and intersubjective. It is developed in part by the researcher himself or herself through his or her participation in the experience that he or she sets out to study (Heron, 1996).

Political participation is the application of the participants' fundamental right to be involved in decisions that concern themselves. In Co-operative Inquiry, this is achieved by allowing participants to be part of the decision-making process of the study development. In other words, the participants of the study are also treated as co-researchers in the study where they are empowered to influence the methodology (Heron, 1996).

The participatory paradigm is about flourishing as humans, and this refers to all that is part of the inquiry. Political participation encourages co-researchers and researcher to express their values and interests in the study design, affording them growth that is more than just intellectual. Beyond the development of new knowledge through research, co-researchers and researchers learn more about themselves as humans, their own values, desires, preferences (Reason & Heron, 1995). These may change, intensify, become more apparent as a result of their involvement in a research about themselves as active agents of their own environment to effect change in their lives and surroundings (Heron, 1999).

Co-operative Inquiry is about the understanding embodied experience through reflection. Claims about the human experience are questionable if they are not grounded in the researcher's own experience of them. Therefore, the researcher participating in the knowledge creation by being subjects of the research is the most rigorous way to do so (Heron, 1996).

> The researchers can't get outside, or try to get outside, the human condition in order to study it. They can only study it through their own embodiment, through the full range of their human sensibilities, in a relation of reciprocal participation and dialogue with other similarly engaged … the researchers share nonlinguistic understanding of their being in a world, generated through empathic resonance with each other's lived experience. (Heron, 1996, p. 21)

Experience is more than an itinerary of happenings, it is a mixture of intellect, actions, emotions and values that influence each other. While there are many dimensions to an experience, they are ill-defined because of how closely they relate to each other. Experience, therefore, must be understood as a whole, and not treated as a sum of these dimensions (Dewey, 1934).

Dewey (1934) believed in the artistic and fluid nature of experience. In this sense, the experience is whole and has its own individual quality. Dewey (1934) believed that we experience life in its various episodes of activity. However, each individual episode flows freely from one to the other, without pauses or blanks (Dewey, 1934).

> In experience, flow is from something to something. As one part leads into another and as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself. (Dewey, 1934, p. 36)

This leads to Dewey's (1934) argument that experience is artistic. In a piece of art, different objects and scenes blend into unity, however, each still holds on their individual character. Similarly, these various episodes of activity flow into each other in succession, however, they still retain their distinct individual characteristics. Each experience is unique in its own emotional, practical and intellectual components. However, Dewey (1934) believed that these components are not separate nor are they independent of each other. They are in fact "subtle shadings of a pervading and developing hue" (p. 37). The components fade in and out of each other; emotion, the activity and intellect do not exist in isolation. One cannot feel angry without something

to be angry about; similarly, one cannot have any thoughts not tied to an activity or emotion. The emotions, activity and intellectual components make up the individual episodes which are the constituent parts of the entire experience. In parallel, the colour, paint quality and brushstrokes make up the objects or scenes which blend harmoniously to make up the painting. Hence, experience has an artistic quality (Dewey, 1934).

As a self-reflexive methodology, reflection on the embodied experience in Co-operative Inquiry is about understanding this experience through understanding the various components of the research experience (Reason & Heron, 1995). Co-operative Inquiry is artistic because it is the study about these experiences, about their intellectual, practical and emotional dimensions as a unity.

While Co-operative Inquiry is artistic, there is a subtle difference in the elements that make it so. In my own research, I experienced the process of reflexivity as intellectual, emotional and value-driven. Unlike Dewey's (1934) theory on experience, I saw practical and intellectual dimensions in my reflexive considerations as the same. In addition, I saw that values play an important role in my reflexive considerations as well. These values refer to those belonging to me as a researcher, to those belonging to my co-researchers and the values of the Co-operative Inquiry methodology and the participatory paradigm. However, while it was easy to identify each of these dimensions of reflexivity in my own research, it was difficult to reflect on these elements isolation. Like Dewey (1934) had theorised, these elements of reflexivity are closely tied to one another. I maintain that reflexivity in Co-operative Inquiry is an artistic process because of how these elements interact so closely as "subtle shadings of a pervading and developing hue" (p. 37).

**Reflexivity in a Co-operative Inquiry about Dialogic Reflection**

My research explored the suitability of dialogic reflection in promoting professional development in the occupational therapy curriculum. Reflective practice is the central tenet of occupational therapy professional practice (College of Occupational Therapists, 2015). As a result, reflection is something that occupational therapy students are taught and assessed on before they qualify as practitioners. However, research shows that there are some issues relating to how reflection is being taught, assessed and learned in institutions (Russell, 2005; Wong, Boniface & Whitcombe, 2016). Dialogic reflection, a process where students engage with reflective conversations with their peers about their experience, was suggested as a possible alternative (Boniface, 2002; Gibbs, 1988; Johns, 2013), albeit the theories about it is rather scarce.

I recruited fourteen post-graduate diploma occupational therapy students as co-researchers for this study. We formed two action research groups for this Co-operative Inquiry. We developed our understanding of dialogic reflection through iterative cycles of participating in dialogic reflections and reflecting on our experiences of them. Both groups met regularly over a period of a year and one month. These meeting sessions were recorded, transcribed and collaboratively analysed by the respective groups in

the next session. Our Co-operative Inquiry into dialogic reflection was characterised by alternating phases of experiencing dialogic reflection and reflecting and theorising about it.

The following are three examples of the reflexive considerations in my research. In these examples, I show how the intellectual, emotional and value dimensions of reflexivity are closely related to each other and cannot be reflected upon in isolation.

**Reflexivity as an Intellectual and Emotional Exploration**

Epistemic participation was somewhat of a struggle for myself as researcher in the participatory paradigm. Fundamentally it challenged notions of objectivity and research rigour in some qualitative research traditions. Myrdal (1970) wrote about the need for researchers to liberate themselves from prior knowledge and the researcher's social, economic and political inclinations and interests. My research background was previously heavily influence by a similar perspective of qualitative research.

Despite my apprehension about epistemic participation, Co-operative Inquiry was well suited as a methodology for a research about reflection and developing knowledge from experience. Hence as a researcher, it was clear to me that I had to somehow embrace this initially alien approach towards research.

Epistemic participation is about immersing oneself in the experience of the human condition and through making sense of that experience, develop an understanding of it. This required me to share my experience, emotions and thoughts about working with my co-researchers, not all of them were positive nor was I prepared to share all of them. I had to be vulnerable in front of my co-researchers if I wanted to consider this research a Co-operative Inquiry. This was perhaps the most challenging aspect of epistemic participation. It demanded a complete appreciation and acceptance of the participatory paradigm which attacks at the fundaments of my research knowledge, where I was taught to be objective and distanced myself from my data and participants.

I first encountered this during my second session with my co-researchers when we reflected on dealing with difficult clinical educators when on our placements in the various health and social care settings. I shared my experience of being poorly treated as an occupational therapy student myself.

> I don't know why I did it. I really don't. It was as though it just came up in a normal conversation. They were talking about their experiences and sharing how bad they felt about and so I just shared it. [Co-researcher's name] was close to tears, it just felt like the right moment to do so. (My reflection on session two with group two)

My epistemic participation here was motivated largely by empathy. At that point in time, I was not aware of why I had decided to talk about an experience of that nature. It felt natural, as part of the organic development of the discussion with my co-researchers. The mood was rather sombre during that discussion. One of my co-

researcher appeared a little emotional when she shared her experience. Sharing my experience was my way of showing empathy and how I understood how that co-researcher felt.

Cathartic as that was, this was immediately met with fear that I may have compromised the rigour of the research which sparked me to write the above reflective account.

> But I don't know if I should have. While that was the basis of reflection and CI [Co-operative Inquiry], it feels somewhat wrong. (My reflection on session two with group two)

This was similar to the later sessions as I found myself having to share my analysis of our dialogic reflections. However, this eventually became normal practice, and I questioned it less.

Epistemic participation was difficult because it was a challenging idea fundamentally. It at once raised some questions about the purpose of objectivity in qualitative research and validated my experiences and knowledge as a researcher. It argues that research can be about understanding oneself and how one relates to that topic. In this sense, as a researcher and a participant of the research, I was empowered to develop an understanding of dialogic reflection by looking at my own experience of it and sharing it with others in my group, all of which is anathema to Myrdal's (1970) understanding of research. It was liberating yet frightening. There was some fear that my work would not be considered as legitimate research due to my positionality. Yet at the same time, I felt one with my research, where I was conducting a study about myself and how my co-researchers and I related to dialogic reflection.

I realised that this was because I was initially looking at my participatory research from a post-positivist perspective. While on the surface there were emotions of fear and apprehension about the nature of participatory research, beneath it was an intellectual turmoil where I struggled to suspend my post-positivist ideas about qualitative research to understand and accept the participatory paradigm.

**Reflexivity as a Value-Based and Intellectual Exploration**

Reflexivity in this research became much more complex as a result of political participation. When I decided to consider my participants as co-researchers, I relinquished some of my power to make methodological decisions on my own and introduced others who had some ability to influence them. Any consideration in relation to reflexivity and positionality becomes more dynamic than a unilateral research design (Finlay, 2002). While I had to consider my position and my influence in the research, my co-researchers are also similarly subjected to the same considerations. They had to also consider how all of us had influenced the research as a collective and to what extent are these influences individualistic. I saw these as being aware of the human flourishing that Heron and Reason (1997) wrote about.

My main struggle with political participation was the analysis of the research data. I initially proposed a thematic analysis of the transcripts of the research where I coded and mapped the themes as they emerged in the discussion. While I had done so after the first meeting with both groups, I quickly realised that it would be problematic if I had continued this method of analysis.

After coding and developing a thematic map using the methods as articulated by Attride-Stirling (2001) and Braun and Clarke (2006), I shared my analysis with my co-researchers in the following session with the intention of generating more discussion about them. This resulted in a rather uneventful session as my co-researchers merely nodded and agreed with my analysis. There was little discussion about these or any elaboration despite allowing them a week to member check the transcripts and analysis. In my own reflections at the end of the session, I wondered if I had overanalysed the transcripts such that they appear to be definitive observations of the session rather than suggestions or something worth further exploration.

Following that session, I had decided not to code the transcripts. Instead, I inserted my thoughts and comments as they came to me as I went through the transcripts. Rather than using codes, I showed my co-researchers my thought process and how some of the data may have perplexed me or inspired some interesting ideas. This was to great effect in the following sessions. My co-researchers corrected some of my interpretations, picked out some of my observations for discussion and even suggested some of their own thoughts on the data. My co-researchers started analysing with me.

Thematic analysis was not completely unsuitable. It was particularly useful to break down large amounts of data into central themes from which we could further our discussions on. As a way to make sense and meaning from a set of data, it was very useful and suitable for my study, however, the practical steps such as coding and thematic mapping were not very helpful in generating further discussion in my study.

I believe that by analysing my data in this way initially, I had disempowered my co-researchers from taking part in the process of making sense of their own data. Instead of providing a launch pad for a further inquiry like I had hoped, my co-researcher perhaps saw me as the researcher, themselves as the participants and the analysis as observations of their reactions and input in that session.

My codes were short and were a result of my interpretation of the data, which is influenced by own values, interests and knowledge about the topic. Coming from different values, interests and knowledge bases, my co-researchers may have found it hard to make sense of my thought process and my decisions in the thematic map, resulting in the lack of response. Encouraging my co-researchers to participate in the analysis of their own data was more than an intellectual concern. Lack of political participation would have fundamentally compromised the values of Co-operative Inquiry. If my research was to be considered co-operative, then my co-researchers should be able to see their own values and knowledge in the conclusions of the research. That was only possible if they participated in the process of making sense of

their own input in the sessions. They had to reflect on the discussions, along with me, to achieve political participation.

**Reflexivity as an Emotional and Value-Based Exploration**

This research was about understanding dialogic reflection, as my co-researchers and I have experienced it. The theory that was generated by my co-researchers and I is grounded in our experiences of engaging in it and reflecting on them. We were the researchers as much as we were the subjects of the matter to be studied.

This raised some further consideration in the production and sharing of the research. While I was writing up the analysis of this research in my thesis, I could not help but wonder if I should have given myself a pseudonym as well. As a participant of this research, I felt entitled to be anonymised as I had done for my other co-researchers. I shared some rather intimate experiences as part of the reflective process of the research, which contributed to the corpus of data and was part of the analysis. I was a little hesitant to quote myself and my reflections in my thesis and declaring that they were my contribution. This time, my concern was not about validity or rigour of the research. I felt vulnerable and I was afraid of being judged for my thoughts and actions in those reflections. This time it was more than just sharing with my co-researchers whom I was rather comfortable with. I was sharing it with my supervisors, my Viva examiners and others who were interested in this research. It was a terrifying thought. This changed as I was writing a draft of the introduction of my thesis.

> It would have been paradoxical to write about a research about reflection un-reflectively. (Introduction of my thesis)

This was initially to justify my use of the pronoun 'I' in my writing, however, it then hit me: acknowledging my input and my thoughts is a way of showing my reflective ability and reflexivity. It would, in fact, have been dishonest if I had not demonstrated how I had influenced the research and who I was in this research. It was also a way to identify my own contribution to new knowledge. This was a conflict between my fear of being vulnerable and the values of my research, a very important decision I had to make in my research.

**Intellect, Values, Emotions – The Reflexive Triad**

Co-operative Inquiry challenged me intellectually as a qualitative researcher. It made me question the nature of objectivity in qualitative research and in negotiating this confusion within myself as a researcher, I became emotionally engaged in the research with my co-researchers. This was significant because it fundamentally changed me from a post-positivist to a participatory researcher. Consequently, what I valued in qualitative research shifted from pristine objectivity to collaboration and participation.

Encouraging political participation in the analysis of my research was tricky. Departing from a post-positivist perspective of research, I saw the lack of participation in the analysis by my co-researchers as problematic. For my research to be participatory, I

required my co-researchers to engage in it intellectually to make sense of their own data. To do so, I had to show my co-researchers that I indeed valued their participation and I achieved this my letting them into my cognitive processes as I read the transcripts. I had to show them my epiphanies and confusions and demonstrate my need for their participation. In other words, I had to show my vulnerability as a researcher and the degree that I valued their participation in this Co-operative Inquiry.

The topic of my research required me to share unpleasant personal experiences that eventually contributed to the data. This meant I had to show these instances of vulnerability in the products of my research and discussions about it. I overcame this fear by returning to the core value of my research topic – reflection. To conduct a research about dialogic reflection, it was only appropriate that I demonstrated my own ability to reflect as a researcher.

In these examples of the the reflexive considerations in my research, the intellectual, emotional and value aspects closely interact with each other. It can even be argued that all three elements existed in all the reflexive considerations. Synthesising what I have learned in this exploration, I argue that reflexivity in Co-operative Inquiry is the careful consideration of the intellectual, emotional and value dimensions of the research. The figure below illustrates the relationship between these elements.

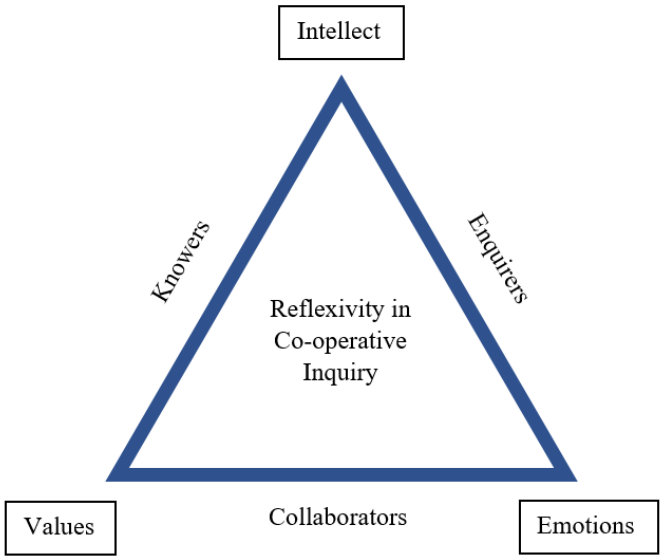

Image 1: The reflexive triad in Co-operative Inquiry

In this triad, intellectual considerations, in relation to reflexivity, refer to the practical methodological discussion. Emotional considerations refer to feelings the researchers and co-researchers' experiences while engaging with the research. Value-based considerations refer to the interaction between the values of the researchers and co-researchers and between the researchers and the paradigm of the research. Similar to Dewey's (1934) theory about the nature of experience, these three dimensions cannot be isolated. Co-operative Inquiry researchers and co-researchers, as knowers, make methodological decisions based on their understanding or curiosity about the topic and the values of research. As enquirers, they engage with the research through embodied experience and reflection which is inherently an emotional and intellectual process. As collaborators, they shape the inquiry with their emotions and values. Epistemic and political participation compels researchers and co-researchers to participate intellectually and emotionally in development of new knowledge about themselves and their experiences which is constructed disparately by their different value systems (Heron, 1996).

While reflexivity in the form of intellectual and emotional considerations are well written about (Macbeth, 2001; Finlay, 2002; Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009), values are often neglected or at least not made explicit by many researchers (Heron & Reason, 1997). Heron and Reason (1997) warned that this is dangerous since that results in a superficial inquiry that may serve little benefit to the wider community. In extreme cases, it can legitimise data collection via unethical means (Heron & Reason, 1997). When researchers and co-researchers discuss their own values and how they relate to the research, they actively engage in the axiological question of the participatory paradigm: What is intrinsically worthwhile in the research (Heron & Reason, 1997)?

Co-operative Inquiry can be carried out in a myriad of methods. When carried out in full appreciation of the participatory paradigm, it is inherently reflexive because of the principles of epistemic and political participation. However, it would be superficial to negotiate reflexivity as other researchers would in other research paradigms. This is because reflexivity sits in the core of the methodology (Reason & Heron, 1995).

The reflexive triad offers Co-operative Inquiry researchers a way of understanding the position of reflexivity in their research. It argues that Co-operative Inquiry is more than an intellectual exploration and impels researchers to negotiate the value and emotional dimensions of their research. It also highlights the fact that they are all interrelated therefore researchers should not try to reflect on these dimensions separately.

**Using Models of Reflection to Guide Reflexivity**

Finlay (2002) theorised that reflexivity can be introspective or a mutual collaboration. Considering the proposed reflexive triad, reflexivity in Co-operative Inquiry is perhaps an amalgamation of the two – a collaborative introspection, where researchers and co-researchers participate in a reflective journey together to explore how they influenced the research, as a unity and individually.

Therefore, it is possible that models of reflection may provide researchers with prompts and guidance on reflexivity. For example, Fish, Twinn, and Purr (1991) developed Strands of Reflection to assist doctors in their reflections on professional practice. The factual and retrospective strands require the reflector to recall the experience and identify important themes in the experience; the sub-stratum and connective strands encourage the reflector to think critically about personal theories that are inherent in the experience and consider how the reflection might inform future practices (Fish, 2012).

Strands of Reflection can be a useful model to be adapted to guide researchers on reflexivity. The factual strand can encourage researchers to consider the nature of their research, its topic and method. The retrospective strand can push researchers to consider the underlying values and emotions in their research, in relation to the research design and process. The sub-stratum strand can encourage researchers to see how these intellectual, emotional and value-based considerations are interrelated. Finally, the connective strand allows researchers to take a step back and consider how

the reflection may influence the developments of the research later. This would require further research and theorising. Nonetheless, it suggests that there is room for further research into developing guidance for Co-operative Inquiry researchers to be more reflexive using reflective models adapted based on the reflexive triad.

## Conclusion

Co-operative Inquiry is a methodology that is concerned with studying the human condition through the embodiment of experiences and reflection (Heron, 1996). As experience is artistic, the reflection on experience thus carries an aesthetic element as well. This aesthetic element is evident in the reflexive considerations in Co-operative Inquiry, too. However, researchers should note that the intellectual, emotional and value-based reflexive considerations are closely tied and they influence each other. Hence, they should not be reflected upon in isolation. Rather, researchers should approach reflexivity in full appreciation of the unity of these elements. In other words, reflexivity in Co-operative Inquiry should be understood aesthetically. The reflexive triad proposed encourages researchers and co-researchers to engage in deep discussions about their emotions and values and to perceive the research as more than an intellectual venture.

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# Eight

# Reflections on Researcher Positionality When Using Multiple Techniques of Qualitative Data Collection to Facilitate Participation in Research Focusing on a Sensitive Subject

## Jennifer Heath

The beliefs, values, and moral stance of a researcher are as present and inseparable from the research process as their physical or virtual presence. Therefore, it is vital that researchers maintain an informed reflexive awareness to contextualise their interpretation of data, alongside their role in and experience of the research process. From a constructionist stance, one can argue that the reflexive process undermines psychology as an objective science. However, as all research is carried out from a particular point of view, regardless of the mode of inquiry, reflexivity promotes an understanding of personal motivations involved in conducting research in a particular area, in a particular way, and enables one to document the effects of their position, ensuring the validity of the work.

It is imperative that all researchers demonstrate their position surrounding the topic under investigation in order to monitor the impact of this on the research process and relationships with participants. This approach enables researchers to maintain focus on the research agenda, their biases, values, and experiences brought to the study. Within inductive approaches to research, positionality is used to explore researcher reflections and place them within the work, considering the context, power dynamics, identities, and their point of view (England, 1994; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The process of

reflexivity often serves to inform research rather than to invalidate it as biased or contaminated by personal perspectives.

In this paper, I offer my own reflections on the research process whilst investigating a sensitive topic. The research explored the experiences of parents of burn-injured children, their access to support, whether or not this was helpful, and their opinions on peer support (Heath, Williamson, Williams, & Harcourt, 2018c). I approached this research as a clinical psychologist with experience of working clinically with burn-injured adults and an interest in peer support. I kept a reflective diary as an additional data source, documenting my own thoughts and feelings throughout this piece of work. In doing this, I learnt as much about the research process and its impact on me as a researcher as I did about the impact of a child's injury on parents.

**Sensitive research**

When research focuses on a sensitive topic – topics that potentially pose a threat to those who are, or have been, involved in them (Lee, 1993) - the method through which information is collected can be particularly important to participants. Personal data is more likely to be disclosed when assurances of privacy, confidentiality and a non-condemnatory attitude are provided (Wellings, Branigan, & Mitchell, 2000).

Burns research in general can be sensitive as it focuses on an event that is often very stressful for the participant. However, when parents are the focus of the research following an injury to their child, participation might be perceived as threatening due to feelings of guilt and the upset caused by recalling distressing events (Heath et al., 2018c; Mason, 1993). There may also be fear of judgment or stigmatisation from the researcher, and/or concerns about anonymity within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Pyer & Campbell, 2012). This issue is particularly pertinent in this population. McQuaid, Barton, and Campbell (2003) found that parents of burn-injured children could be wary of research of their or their child's experiences, sometimes suspecting that there may be an alliance between the researchers and social services. Therefore, a key underpinning of qualitative research into sensitive topics such as this is the establishment of rapport (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2009). This requires researchers to take steps to make participants feel relaxed and comfortable enough to share their experiences (Liamputtong, 2007).

Qualitative research has typically relied upon one interview method in isolation, with the face-to-face interview being viewed as the 'gold standard' (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). However, there are growing numbers of options available for researchers wishing to conduct interviews, and it is increasingly likely that more than one type of interview will be employed within a single study, for example using Skype and face-to-face interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014), or a combination of face-to-face, telephone, and email interviews (Dures, Morris, Gleeson, & Rumsey, 2011). This flexibility may improve participant access to research and help them to feel more comfortable or safer when it comes to self-disclosure. For this reason, the study described here invited participation via multiple methods of interview: face-to-face, telephone, Skype and email. Within this paper, I will offer reflections on how,

unexpectedly, different techniques of data collection influenced how I perceived my position within the research process.

**The changing position of the researcher**

The term positionality describes an individual's world view and their chosen position in relation to a specific research task (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The task of the research undertaken was to investigate parents' experiences of having a child suffer a burn-injury and their access to support (Heath et al., 2018c). Whilst conducting the interviews and analysing the data a personal reflective diary was kept. This paper is informed by the reflections noted within that diary.

Deutsch (1981) suggested that a researcher's position is not simply ascribed to them but is a process of ongoing evaluation as we are all multiple insiders and outsiders. This can result in a researcher's position shifting with experience and across different research contexts. Although I was an outsider to the group studied, throughout the task of conducting this research, I moved through various other 'positions' that I will describe below.

The 'outsider' is a non-member of the group under investigation. I was quite firmly positioned here as a woman who has never had a child. The 'insider' is a member of the group being researched (e.g. the participating parents and their peers – other parents/carers of children who have experienced a burn). However, Herod (1999) wrote that the researcher may not be an insider or an outsider, and I also perceived a third position during the process; the 'other', an intermediate position. I perceived the 'other' to be someone who can really empathise with the group under investigation without sharing the same experiential knowledge. The other is perhaps those, like me, who work within burn care, or have known or supported someone affected by a burn-injury. This position is undoubtedly influenced by my dual identity as a practitioner in the field and a researcher.

As a researcher's ethics, personal integrity, social values, and competency all influence the research process (Greenbank, 2003), a reflexive approach suggests that researchers should acknowledge and disclose their selves in the research, aiming to understand their own influence on and in the process; rather than trying to eliminate their affect. In considering this, it would be remiss not to reflect upon my shifting selves within the position of the 'other'.

As the 'other' I perceived myself to be fragmented, shifting between three distinct selves: the 'student', the 'equal', and the 'expert'. I considered myself a student who was regularly educated by participants about parenting a child with a burn-injury in order to answer the research questions I had set. I was also continuously being educated in the world of research as a PhD student. As an equal, I could provide a safe space for the discussion of this sensitive subject area. Already educated in the treatment of burns, the psychological impact, and with experience working clinically with patients, I could help participants to share their experiences in the hope that together, through research and service development, we could perhaps improve the

lives of others. However, at times, I also felt that I was an expert; expert in discussing the impact of burns, able to understand the challenges and distress experienced, and also to support people affected by burns, with the ability to adapt my interview technique when required.

Through recognition of our preconceptions, we presume to gain insights into how we might approach research and seek engagement from participants, such as by using multiple techniques of qualitative data collection to facilitate participation (Heath, Williamson, Williams, & Harcourt, 2018d). Therefore, the identities of researchers and participants shape the research and have potential to impact upon the process. Hubbard, Backett-Milburn, and Kemmer (2001) stated that, "if it is important for the research project to encourage respondents to 'open up' about sensitive issues, then researchers need to find strategies to manage emotion" (p. 134). Participants can be supported to engage in research, whilst managing their own emotional reaction, by offering transparency throughout the research process and a choice regarding how they take part. Once they are engaged, they can be supported and encouraged to tell their own story and be acknowledged as the expert themselves.

Research has also shown that many people, particularly those who identify as vulnerable, are keen to participate in research altruistically where sharing their experiences may improve the lives of others (Alexander, 2010). For some participants, the opportunity to talk about their experiences can be empowering, it can be a therapeutic process or, for others, it might be experienced as distressing. When conducting research, we are ethically obligated to consider the impact of the research on participants, their motivations for participating, the risks involved, and how informed consent is to be obtained; less consideration is given to the risks to the researcher.

It is important to acknowledge the potential impact of research on all those involved, including researchers (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009), as evidence suggests that qualitative researchers can be disturbed by revelations made by participants during interviews (Hart & Crawford-Wright, 1999). With experience working therapeutically, I felt expert in managing the impact of another person's pain on myself. However, I was to learn how participant disclosures via different interview methods would have an unanticipated emotional impact on me and, consequently, also on the research itself.

**The interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were carried out via Skype, telephone, email or face-to-face with 13 participants in order to explore their experiences of parenting a child who had suffered a burn-injury (Heath et al., 2018c). Twelve of the participants provided feedback on the reason they had chosen their particular interview method (Heath et al., 2018d). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of this methodological question produced four themes indicating that participant decisions were determined by personal convenience, their belief in their ability to be open with the researcher despite potential upset caused by the topic, their ability to get a 'feel' for the researcher, and concern about giving adequate depth in responses. It was concluded

that flexibility regarding the ways in which participants can take part in qualitative research may improve participant access to research and response-rate, particularly when a sample is geographically dispersed and the research area is of a sensitive nature (Heath et al., 2018d).

The use of different interview techniques enabled me to recruit an adequate sample of participants for the study (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) with additional data generated by myself in the form of a reflective diary. The diary illuminated the importance of considering the impact of my own feelings during the data collection process, how different feelings likely influenced the data gathered, and the need to recognise potential risks to both participants and researchers when risk assessing research protocols.

**Telephone interviews.** Interview by telephone was the most frequently chosen option, with six participants taking part in this way. Participants reported that this method was **c**onvenient, allowed them to provide greater depth in their responses, as well as to get a 'feel' for the researcher. Initially, this method of interview also seemed ideal for me. I could easily make good quality recordings for transcription and neither party had to travel. The first participant in the study chose to be interviewed by telephone; I telephoned them at the prearranged time, used a friendly, non-judgemental approach to build rapport, and worked my way through the semi-structured interview schedule in around one hour. After the interview, I debriefed the participant, asking whether there was anything more they wanted to say, and about their experience of the interview (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Once I put the telephone down, I stopped to consider how the participant might have perceived me. Did they perceive the PhD student interviewing them to be young, inexperienced, and childless? A definite outsider; an indisputable 'student'. Or, did I come across as knowledgeable and professional, an 'equal' or perhaps an 'expert' in the field?

I quickly became aware that interviewing by telephone is a skill in itself. There were several factors that I found challenging when using the telephone to collect data. Having initially felt confident about conducting interviews due to my clinical experience, I was concerned that the lack of any visual cues might result in me interrupting potentially unfinished responses from participants. I questioned whether the long pauses at the end of sentences were placed for them to collect their thoughts or to mark the end of their disclosure. Particularly during the first interview, I also found myself wondering exactly how best to respond to the participants' upset when neither of us could see each other. I tuned into the sound of children or other family members in the background and felt concerned about who they were, what they would be thinking, and how the one-sided conversation they could hear might affect them. Were these concerns affecting the way I asked questions or probed for more information? Or were the people in the background affecting what the participant was able or willing to disclose? Although participation by telephone might be a less intense way for participants to discuss a sensitive topic with a stranger, they may not be able to fully engage in the role of interviewee if they are simultaneously working as a mother to a child at home or a partner making lunch. Whilst, telephone interviews were a very convenient method of data collection, I felt this method placed me firmly in the

territory of the outsider and, with this realisation, I was a student of the interview experience.

**Email interviews.** Four participants chose to take part by email. I initially thought something along the lines of,

> Great! I will send an email and get a response that won't even need to be transcribed. Participants will see my professional signature and consider me an expert. They will appreciate that I want to understand more about what they have experienced and happy that I want to help develop support for parents…"

Participants choosing to take part by email thought that this method was convenient and that it would allow them to be open with the researcher despite any upset caused by the interview questions or process. It was clear that some participants were upset whilst answering the questions, with one participant writing, "…when I was typing my responses, I cried plus experienced the noises associated with the accident..." This response drove home concerns I had about whether participants had access to support and whether, before answering the questions, they had really been able to give informed consent. Although they may have chosen email participation to help them to manage any upset, did they anticipate this level of distress when they agreed to take part in an interview by email? This concern meant that I found interviewing via email far more personally challenging than I had anticipated.

In the email interviews, participants' answers were much briefer than answers provided by other methods, nevertheless they were full of emotion. It was hard not to imagine the parent, with tears in their eyes, typing the responses and pressing send, glad that there were no more questions. This image made it feel all the more intrusive when asking follow-up questions or for more clarity; it resulted in me sending only one follow-up email containing further questions to these participants. I wondered whether these participants felt able to withdraw from the research if a follow-up question asked too much, or whether signing the consent form would mean that they persisted even if they did not really want to. Whose responsibility was it to police this after informed consent had been given: theirs or mine? Reluctance to ask for more in depth information directly affected my data set but it did not feel ethical to me to ask further probing questions asynchronously when a participant might think that returning their answers had meant that the process was over.

This experience also brought to the fore the possibility that participants might be upset by participation in sensitive research, send their responses late on a Friday afternoon and have no one read or respond to them until Monday. Email interviewing may facilitate participants to be open despite being upset, but I believe that responding to these feelings in a sensitive and compassionate way is much more challenging when the response is delayed and via a remote method. I felt very much as though I was taking from these participants; without a free-flowing, synchronous conversation, it did not feel as though there was any reciprocity. I also felt that I was potentially re-opening wounds and, without being able to play a more active role in monitoring the process alongside the participant, it did not sit well with me. With hindsight, use of email

interviewing in this way would have benefited from more consideration of the ethical issues surrounding the process. Whether I was perceived as an expert or not, this experience certainly highlighted what a student of the research process I was.

**Skype interviews.** Two participants chose to take part in interviews via Skype. It was perceived by them to be convenient and enable them to get a 'feel' for the researcher. For me, the researcher, this was a convenient method of qualitative data collection, with the only challenge being the task of ensuring that I had access to a private room with a computer, a camera, and a good internet connection within a busy university. Skype interviews had better conversational flow than telephone interviews and I felt much more able to respond to the emotions of the participant. This mode of interview also felt very boundaried with both physical and personal limits. The participant and I sat focused at our respective desks, each with a window to the other. It felt as though we were on equal terms. In these interviews, I felt very much like the equal other; a professional interested and willing to learn about the experience of another in order to affect positive change.

**The face-to-face interview**. Only one participant chose to take part via a face-to-face interview. This participant felt that this method would allow her to provide greater depth to her responses and be open about her experience despite any upset caused by the interview questions. For the participant's convenience, I offered to conduct this interview at a location of her choosing, but she chose to be interviewed at the university at which I study. For her, the interview seemed to be about more than just research. She described being drawn to the location as it was very close to the hospital where her child was originally treated. There was a sense that the opportunity to take part in this research allowed her experience to go full circle.

Hosting the interview at a university was convenient for me but it also emphasised my student status. Despite any concern that I might be perceived as inexperienced because of this, this interview had the best conversational flow of them all. It was facilitated by easily observable body language. The ability to effectively respond to emotion allowed me to be more responsive and appropriately inquisitive throughout the interview. Although I was mindful of being perceived as inexperienced early on, I feel that in the face-to-face interview, I was able to move through the positions of student, equal, and expert as the conversation progressed and different topics were covered.

## Discussion

Research, and especially qualitative inquiry, should be considered a process and not just a product (England, 1994). It continues as we reflect upon the development of an idea, data collection, the findings, and on the implications (Bourke, 2014). Reflection on the interview process when using multiple techniques to collect sensitive data provides valuable insights. It enables researchers to better consider the potential impact of the different methods and to adequately prepare for foreseeable challenges in future work. Such consideration might be particularly important for email interviews as, despite increasing use of qualitative email interviews by researchers, there is little understanding about the appropriateness and equivalence of email interviews

compared to other qualitative data collection methods, especially for sensitive topics (Hershberger & Kavanaugh, 2017).

Nevertheless, careful interview preparation is important regardless of the interview technique employed. Johnson and Clarke (2003) found that researchers using both telephone and face-to-face interviewing methods to collect sensitive data experienced a number of difficulties. These difficulties centred on issues of lack of training and inexperience, concerns regarding confidentiality, role conflict, costs to participants, the desire for reciprocity, and feelings of isolation. As demonstrated within this paper, my experience suggests that these difficulties can also be experienced when conducting interviews using other techniques, particularly using email.

A process and reflection model of learning (Borton, 1970) can provide a systematic strategy to process the learning from this piece of research through three stages. The first stage requires the sensing of differences between the original reaction to the process, the actual effect it had, and the intended effect. The second stage requires the translation of this knowledge into relevant meaning, and the third stage requires action.

In terms of my original reaction to the process, the most striking thing was the humbling illumination of the fact that I was no expert. Although I was used to talking about the impact of a burn-injury with adults, discussing this with parents of children with a burn-injury was different. I was surprised how some participants seemed to slip, at least temporarily, into the identity of a villain rather than a victim of the accident. Rather than parents themselves feeling hurt by the accident, they could feel as though they were to blame for having not protected their child or not adequately fulfilling their parental role (Heath, Williamson, Williams, & Harcourt, 2018b). This was a narrative that I did not hear often and I felt compelled to challenge this perception during the interview due to a desire to try to alleviate their suffering. I was used to being in a position where I could try to help a client following their trauma and work with them to challenge problematic cognitions, but in the research interview the participant was helping me as the researcher; I felt a degree of tension between these two roles.

Rennie (1994) highlighted the parallels that can lie between research and therapy in terms of subjectivity and understanding, collaboration and empowerment, and holism. Both research-based and therapeutic conversations involve the participant or client telling their experiences to the interviewer or therapist who listens with a view to making sense, interpreting, reframing and understanding the narrative (Hart & Crawford-Wright, 1999). It felt as if it would be easy to for me to move into the role of a psychologist within some of the interviews and so I had to continuously monitor my own responses. I found that I often had to stop myself from challenging parents' interpretations of events and the meaning they made of these. I had to remember that this would not be ethical; the participants had consented to participate in research and not therapy.

The emotional labour of qualitative health research has been recognised and is significant. Frequent emotionally intense face-to-face encounters can be associated with high levels of emotional stress (Rager, 2005). Just as my participants experienced

guilt regarding the accident, I felt guilt for asking them to recall their painful experiences. Management of these emotions is a skilful process acquired through experience. Reflexivity, investigating one's practice and examining one's positionality, allows recognition of the influence of the self on outcomes as well as the emotional labour experienced. Within research, it is important to recognise potential risks to both participants and researchers. Academics and ethics committees are attuned to the emotional and physical risks to the participant, and are therefore well versed in sign-posting participants to appropriate sources of support when it is necessary to do so. They do not necessarily consider all of the risks to the researcher in such detail, or where the researcher should turn should they need support.

The parents in my research discussed barriers to accessing support (Heath et al., 2018c) and I believe that there can also be barriers to researchers accessing support, particularly when undertaking sensitive research. Although I received very regular supervision from very experienced researchers, I found that inhabiting the various positions of student, equal, and expert affected my perceived ability to seek help during the research process. Approaching the research as an expert in mental health and the psychological aspects of burn-injury meant that, when it came to my concern about the emotional impact of email interviews on participants, I felt shame that I had not foreseen this potential problem. This feeling of shame made it much more difficult for me to reflect openly about the research process; would I be exposing myself as less than competent? However, adopting a student role normalised the need to ask for help, advice, or guidance without that fear of judgement. As an equal, I wanted to shed light on these issues, sharing these reflections with my peers in order to facilitate their access to guidance or support with future research.

With an interest in peer support, an action that I felt was necessary was to present these reflections to my peers and also to a wider audience at a qualitative research symposium (Heath, Williamson, Williams, & Harcourt, 2018a). If there is consensus that it is helpful for participants to have the opportunity to share their story, then it is likely that it is also helpful for the researchers. To this end, ensuring that researchers have supervision scheduled during the research process to discuss process issues, ethical challenges and dilemmas is vital. Supervisors may expect that researchers will raise any issues should they arise but perhaps it would be beneficial for supervisors to explicitly invite these issues into discussion. Such an invitation for openness may reduce anxiety surround competence, particularly in less experienced researchers.

It may also be important for researchers to consider how multiple aspects of their identity might be used in different research spaces, for example, using prior transferable experience to form a peer support network (Jolley, Griffiths, Friel, Ali, & Rix, 2015). Such a network could promote positive relationships between academics, offer valuable time and space for researchers to debrief between interviews, when necessary help to signpost researchers to more appropriate support, whilst also encouraging positive health behaviours that can help to reduce stress. Such positive health behaviours could include healthy eating, physical activity, relaxation, good sleep hygiene, stress and time management, as well as allowing time for creativity (Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim, & Wilcox, 2013).

## Conclusions

The positionality of a researcher may change throughout the research process, influenced by their techniques of data collection, experience, the research context, and ongoing self-evaluation. In turn, changes in positionality can influence the data collected. Therefore, it is vital that researchers maintain an informed reflexive awareness to contextualise their interpretation of their data.

Flexibility regarding the ways in which participants can take part in qualitative research may improve participant access to research, recruitment, and response-rate. However, researchers should be aware of the procedures involved and the appropriateness of using different methods of interviewing. It is important to be aware how such methods may affect both participants and researchers at an emotional level and, in turn, how this might affect the research.

The potential emotional stress of sensitive research needs to be acknowledged and managed at an institutional level, with researchers, those training researchers, and the many others involved in the process incorporating emotion management into their roles, as such issues may not be anticipated by procedural ethics consideration alone. Openly sharing research experiences is an integral component of our continuous professional development and our ability to develop resilience as researchers.

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# Nine

# The Drama of Becoming an Autoethnographer

## Angela Blanchard

The subject of my research is childhood emotional neglect, which is recognised as a commonly occurring form of child maltreatment, yet remains under-researched and poorly understood (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002; Mullen, et al., 1996; Music, 2009; Stoltenborgh et al. 2012; Wright, et al., 2009). What research there is tends to be quantitative, typically with a narrow focus (for example, examining the link between childhood emotional neglect and a particular adult outcome), and rarely includes the participant's voice. At the other end of the spectrum are autobiographies of childhood abuse and neglect (of which David Pelzer's *A Child Called It* may be the most well-known), which are purely subjective, and lack rigour. My research aim is to fill a gap between the objective, expert-practitioner account, and the highly subjective "misery lit" personal account (Muncey, 2010), by adding the participant's voice to rigorous study (Faulkner, 2012), with the intention of empowering the participants and bringing about change.

Whilst positivist, quantitative research methods typically favour "value-neutral" inquiry, postmodern, qualitative researchers are often more interested in "value-informed practice" which makes "a commitment to social justice," (McLeod, 2011, p. 40). Feminist researchers go further, arguing that research which does not actively challenge inequality and social injustice is "indefensible" (ibid, p. 41). Autoethnography, in common with many qualitative methods, has the potential to be empowering because it privileges the individual stories of research participants, and strives to communicate the participants' actual words in some form or other, accepting and respecting their subjective realities (Harper & Thompson, 2012, p. 45).

In client work with trauma survivors, validating the story of the "experiencing self," as well as drawing attention to the reality of the "observing self," can facilitate recovery (Rothschild, 2000). In autoethnography, participants have the opportunity to tell their stories, and be validated, whilst at the same time being met as functioning adults, co-researchers, capable of stepping out of their stories and re-evaluating them in the light of adult experiences. For example, Mickey[1], one of the participants, said that the value of taking part for him was the opportunity not only to tell his story, but also to read his story in the interview transcript and comment on it. This may illustrate the way in which participants benefit from the opportunity to "reflect on and re-evaluate experiences as part of the process of research" (Letherby, 2000, p. 101).

Autoethnography takes many forms (Reed-Danahay, 1997); I have chosen to interpret it as combining auto+biography (me, telling my own story), with ethno+graphy (writing the story of a group of people), examining the narratives of the research participants alongside my own story. I had already started to explore my experience of childhood emotional neglect in an MSc dissertation, but I was left with unanswered questions. I could have chosen to limit my participants to "people like me"; white, British, middle class, middle-aged, and female. However, I was concerned that if I were to write only about my own experience, and the experiences of others like me, the phenomenon would be too easily dismissed simply as the experience of "being British" (Gerhardt, 2015, p. 85); or as what is popularly referred to as "middle-class neglect" (Pearson, 2011). I was sure that childhood emotional neglect was a wider problem, not limited to a particular time or place, or social class, so I valued the contribution of participants of different ages and stages of life, from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. At times I used the participants' stories and insights to give me a better understanding of my own experience; at times I used my own subjective understanding to interpret theirs. In exploring these stories alongside my own, I was gradually able to identify some of the qualities of childhood emotional neglect that seem to be common to all of us, whatever our background. In the autoethnographic shifting of perspective, "zooming in and out" (Chang, 2008, p. 129) from the personal to the cultural, and also from my positions as both (grown-up) child and now mother, I strived to create a detailed, multi-dimensional and highly evocative account of the phenomenon.

One challenge of using a descriptive, story-telling methodological approach such as autoethnography has been balancing sufficient rigour to satisfy the academic research community, with sufficient use of self and subjectivity to remain autoethnographic (Wall, 2008). Yet in research focused on personal experience, researcher bias and the subjective use of self may be conceptualized as a strength, rather than a limitation, adding validity and rigour, rather than undermining it (Bondi & Fewell, 2016; Price, 1999); however, in return, it demands a high level of researcher reflexivity, and requires that the researcher be visible in the research (Grant, Short & Turner, 2013).

I position myself within the research in several ways: by writing myself and my personal story into the research, by writing reflexively about the research process, and by writing creatively as part of the research process; I explore each of these aspects of my "self" writing in turn below. In the following extracts from my autoethnography of

[1] Pseudonyms used for all participants

childhood emotional neglect, I illustrate some of the ways in which hearing my story, and understanding my bias, adds transparency, and enables the reader/audience to evaluate my work more effectively.

The first of these is the "auto" of autoethnography; telling my own story, which I describe as inviting the reader/audience to look through a crack in my public, coping facade. At the start of each round of data collection, I conducted a "bracketing interview" with a trusted colleague, which provided an opportunity for me to record some of my own story, as well as an opportunity to explore bias, and a place to attend to some of the emotional burden of such sensitive and deeply personal research (Rolls & Relf, 2006).

In an extract from the first bracketing interview, I am opening up my inner world to explore my sense of 'not belonging,' which was a recurring theme in the participants' stories; and to tease out the distinction between 'non-acceptance' and 'rejection' with the help of my bracketing interviewer.

> Angela: Rejection to me feels like you've managed to get in, and you've been thrown back out. Non-acceptance was almost like, "You can't even come in," some kind of – like I was shut out… a feeling I had that I wasn't allowed in, I was shut out, I was somehow outside the circle of approval.
>
> Interviewer: Almost as if, the image I get is of, and for some reason there's just a playground has come to mind, kids playing, and people see that you're there but really you're walking around outside…
>
> Angela: Yeah, and it's interesting you should say that, because one of my vivid memories is of when we moved house when I was six years old, going to the new primary school and feeling like I didn't belong, and that feeling, on the edge of the playground is an actual memory; it was quite a close knit community and I didn't fit in, I could have done – looking back now I think I could have done if I had thought people would like me, but I think I had that tendency to hold myself aloof because I expected, I already expected not to be wanted. (Angela, bracketing interview, August 2014)

Much of the published literature on emotional neglect is quantitative, which relies on data in the form of responses to questionnaires in wherein individuals' experiences are inevitably reduced down to brief, representative statements. In telling some of the context of my story, I can put flesh on the bones of the theme of 'Compulsive self-reliance'; I can share my own understanding of the connection between childhood emotional neglect and social withdrawal (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002; Howe, 2005), and the reader/audience can begin to enter my world with empathic understanding,

Another aspect of writing my 'self' into the research is the way in which sharing my own story has facilitated participant disclosure. I illustrate this with an extract from an e-mail from one of the research participants, Muhammed, after his interview:

> As I said before I had a story to tell but I wouldn't have done this unless I felt myself close to you. I felt in that way because you said your project is auto-ethnography. I thought you could understand me, make empathy with me. I felt sympathetic to you as we share this common experience. I also felt myself as normal when you said as a 50 years old [sic] woman you still carry childhood emotional neglect's signs or consequences in your life, as it was a reassurance for me that it is such a major issue to deal with in rest of our lives. I felt normal because it was not only me struggling with it. (Muhammed, by e-mail, 19/10/16)

The process of co-creating knowledge in an unstructured interview, illustrated here by an extract from a participant interview, is another way of writing my "self" into the research:

> Miranda: [Mum] resented us a huge amount and that was very clear, there were lots of instances where she would say, um, "If only I hadn't had you, I would have gone to Australia, and if I hadn't been tied down by all you bloody kids," and all of that, um,
>
> Angela: And that was – you were an imposition,
>
> Miranda: Yes, yeah, so it became to me, I suppose, easier just to be no trouble,
>
> Angela: Yes,
>
> Miranda: and that's kind of like my whole thing in life, I suppose – to be nice, and to be no trouble, and to not kind of cause any issues at all,
>
> Angela: Yes, not cause any fuss, not cause any inconvenience,
>
> Miranda: And "not make a fuss" is the word that will be written on my gravestone, "Here lies Miranda, who did not make a fuss!"
>
> Angela: Yes,
>
> Miranda: It was absolutely vital to not make a fuss,
>
> Angela: Mmm,
>
> Miranda: And if I did even try and make a tiny little bit of fuss about anything, it was squashed down. (Miranda, individual interview, 12/12/14)

Here, the reader/audience can see some of the context in which the data was generated (Etherington, 2004b), and the way in which the participant and I develop a theme together. Rather than being a passive recipient of the participant's story in the extract above, I am actively contributing to the narrative (Ellis, 2004, p. 61), enabling the participant and myself, and the reader audience, to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under discussion (Etherington, 2004b).

Another kind of 'self' writing is the practice of writing reflexively. Precisely because it consciously involves the subjective self of the author, autoethnography requires a high level of researcher reflexivity; writing about what I have done, and why, throughout the research process, which may enable the reader to evaluate the research (Etherington, 2004b; Grant, Short & Turner, 2013). In the following excerpts from my autoethnography of childhood emotional neglect, I share some of my reflexive writing about the research process. The first example of this is my reflection about the knowledge-generating process and procedures. I illustrate this with an extract from the methodology chapter:

> After writing up three rounds of thematic analysis of the data, providing a 'worm's eye view,' I completed a final analysis of all the data to produce a 'bird's eye view.' Having assembled the themes, I repeated the process of sorting them into duplicates, related themes, and groups of themes that suggested a major theme. I was conscious of starting over again to see what groupings made sense now, at this stage, whilst inevitably still aware of how I had arranged the themes in the previous stages of the analysis process. Should the themes, I wondered, be:
>
> - What happened? (What was done/not done in childhood?)
> - How did it happen? (What socio-cultural or familial factors were involved?)
> - What did we feel as children? (What is the experience of childhood emotional neglect?)
> - What do we feel now? (What is the lasting impact – assuming there is one?)
>
> I spent several days arranging and re-arranging the themes, reflecting on the arrangements, checking against the original interview transcripts to make sure that the themes had not become so abstract that they had lost their connection with the stories (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and re-arranging again. Eventually, I drew up a list of ten major themes. Even once I had arranged the sub-themes into these ten major themes, I asked myself further questions. How are these major themes connected to each other? To what extent do they overlap, follow in a logical sequence, or contradict each other? (Draft analysis chapter, September 2017).

In striving to make this knowledge-creation process transparent, I create an opportunity for the reader/audience to follow my process, as well as critique and challenge my decisions, and therefore my conclusions, and to develop their own alternative meanings. In writing my questions into the research, I make it clear that there is no single way to interpret the data, and that I am not claiming to have arrived at any incontrovertible truth, merely further thoughts to add to the conversation (McLeod, 2001, p. 182).

A second aspect of this reflexive writing is the zooming in and out of autoethnography (Chang, 2008). This is the process of examining the data from both my 'insider'

(research subject) status and my 'outsider' (researcher) status, illustrated by an extract from an early draft of my analysis chapter:

> I remain conscious that I am still interpreting as I select and name themes. One of my process notes reads:
>
> Mickey ("And I remember I was so upset, and I punched the wall") – I coded this for "Anger", although Mickey describes himself as having been "upset."
>
> I hope that, in keeping the process of analysis as transparent as possible by including such reflexive process notes and memos, I am mitigating the negative effects of such interpretation. At the same time, my willingness to interpret the data in the light of my own subjective experience may also be an advantage. So for example, I am guided by my own experience of frequently describing myself as "upset" because anger was not permitted in childhood, and therefore not available or accessible as an emotion in my conscious awareness as an adult – even though it clearly existed below the surface. (Draft analysis chapter, September 2017)

The origins of autoethnography can be traced back to a growing mistrust of the objective, "outsider" stance of the traditional anthropologist, resulting in anthropological studies or ethnographies by "insiders" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 3). However, we all have multiple, simultaneous or overlapping roles in our lives (Meerwald, 2013); boundaries and identities are not fixed but fluid (Taylor, 2011); and whether the 'insider' or 'outsider' can carry out the best anthropological or ethnographic study is still subject to debate. In the case of my autoethnography of childhood emotional neglect, I could not honestly claim to be an objective observer or disinterested outsider; not to declare my insider status, as one of the group of emotionally neglected, would have been dishonest. Yet insider status is not straightforward; Degabriele Pace points out that we may be "insiders in some respects but outsiders in others" and that researchers, through their academic identity, may remain "outsiders of sorts inside their own community" (2015, p. 343). Thus I may be an insider in terms of my shared experience of childhood emotional neglect; but for some participants (though not all), I will also be an outsider because of my researcher role.

A third example of reflexive writing is a commitment to rigorous self-questioning (McLeod, 2001, p. 182), remaining open to alternative explanations, as illustrated by an extract from my reflexive journal:

> Reflecting on Cori's description of not mattering to your mother as feeling like "a hole in the heart" (2010, p. 75). As a young child … I remember thinking that I had a hole in my heart; this persisted through childhood and early adolescence; it eased as I went through secondary school (away from home). Did I have an inner sense of what was lacking? Or was it just that I had heard my parents talking about a girl in my class who had been born with the condition? (Reflective journal, 19/09/17)

Finally, I offer two examples of how I am using creative writing within my autoethnography. Creative writing can access deeper levels of knowledge which other forms of academic writing may not reach (Bolton, 2008); writing creatively may both facilitate my progress and illuminate the research themes in a way which engages the heart and mind, as well as the intellect, of the reader/audience, to elicit a visceral response (Bochner & Ellis, 2002).

The first strand of creative writing in my thesis is *The Fog,* a fictional creation, which intersects the academic writing of the thesis. The following is an extract from the prologue to the thesis:

> The fog has crept up on me almost without me noticing. Now, all around me is white, damp, impenetrable. I don't know where I am, and I can't see where I'm going. The ground underfoot is marshy, too, and the way ahead uncertain. I'm lost, and afraid, but I know I can't stand still; I have to move forward. If I keep still, I will sink. I inch ahead, testing each step, searching for solid ground. I have a torch with me, but the light doesn't help. I just have to find my way by touch, step by step. The fog blocks out the sunlight, and I'm cold, and I feel very alone. I can't see the moisture in the air, but I know it's there, because my clothes are damp. The fog has seeped in. (extract from prologue to thesis)

In using the metaphor of being lost in the fog, I set out to engage the reader/audience's emotions, and to convey some of the 'felt sense' of childhood emotional neglect (Gendlin, 1978/2003).

The second creative element that runs through this thesis is a series of what I have chosen to call *dramatic interludes*. I wrote these at times of heightened emotion; each one represents a moment in time during the research process, and although they are a series of snapshots, rather than scenes in a play with a clearly defined plot, there is nevertheless, just as in a series of family photographs, an element of progression, culminating in a finale at the end of the thesis. To some extent, I am writing my reflexivity into the dramatic interludes; sharing my inner dialogue during the research process, as well as telling some of the story of childhood emotional neglect; writing creatively, rather than in straightforward academic prose, enabled me to discover new aspects of my topic and my relationship to it (Richardson, 1994). In the dramatic interludes, I have also been able to say things through the fictional characters, which I clearly knew – because I wrote them – but could not say as myself. The following is positioned during the literature review, and combines process and content, incorporating methodological issues, as well as themes from the data:

> <u>Dramatis personae:</u>
>
> Angela: Researcher and researched, narrator and the subject of the narrative.
>
> The Little Girl With Big Feet: My Inner Child, whose internal life informs the research; sometimes a small child, and sometimes a stroppy teenager.

Sophia: My ideal researcher self; calm, logical and wise.

Baba Yaga: An ambiguous figure: sometimes sweet and gentle, sometimes my harsh, critical inner voice. This is not actually my mother's voice; though it might sometimes sound like my *perception* of my mother's voice.

The Grindylow: A marsh-dwelling creature from English folklore.

Chorus of Academics: A figurative, imaginary panel of academics.

<u>The Scene:</u>

*Marshland; fog swirls around and shapes are indistinct, blurry. Is that a tree in the distance, or a human form? Is that firm ground, or just a bed of reeds?*

The Little Girl With Big Feet: See! See! *(Loudly and crossly, stamping her feet)*. What happened to me was a bad, bad thing, and look what it's done to me!

Baba Yaga: *(Sweetly)* I don't know what you mean. I did my best to be a Good Mother, and I'm very pleased with how you and your sisters all turned out *(smiling a self-satisfied smile)*.

The Little Girl With Big Feet: *(Petulantly, pouting)* But I didn't feel loved, and I didn't feel wanted. That's called "'Motional 'Glect." Lots of very clever people have looked very hard at it and they say that it can make you poorly when you're a grown-up.

Baba Yaga: I don't know what you're making such a fuss about *(still smiling sweetly)*. Nobody ever laid a finger on you. You had enough to eat and drink and clothes to wear – why, you even had birthday parties!

The Grindylow: *(Reaching out for The Little Girl's feet)* There's no evidence for emotional neglect, you know. There are no hard facts. No-one can see it, touch it, measure it. It's just based on memories, and we all know how tricksy memories can be, don't we; slippery little things, getting all mixed up in our silly little minds!

The Little Girl With Big Feet: *(More doubtful now)* Yes, but…it was just this feeling I had, in between the birthday parties, like, the other 364 days of the year, that I was somehow…I don't know, overlooked?

Baba Yaga: But we were very busy! Daddy was working very hard! I don't know what you expected us to do, with three children, a dog, and a parish to run! Do you think you could have done any better? *(The smile has faded and a harsher tone crept in)*.

The Little Girl With Big Feet: *(Tearful, head hanging)* I'm sorry, I know. I know you were busy – but that was the problem. You were always so busy getting things done, I felt you didn't somehow have time to *be* with me, to see me, to listen to me. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound critical. I know you were doing your best, and I probably wasn't a very easy child – and no, I don't think I could have done any better…

The Grindylow: *(Grasping The Little Girl's ankles and pulling her towards the water)* Yeah, have you done any better? Have you? Have you? *(Sneering)*.

The Little Girl With Big Feet: *(Sobbing)* I don't know, I don't know, I've tried – I've really tried, but I worry that I've got it all terribly wrong!

Sophia: *(Calmly, gently)* But Angela, it's not your parenting, or your parents,' that's under investigation here. Don't get drawn into an argument about who's better or worse. What you're researching is "The experience of childhood emotional neglect." You're trying to describe a phenomenon, not prove a cause and effect, or attribute blame. Look at the literature. What does it say? How does it support or inform your thesis, and where are the gaps that your research might fill?

Chorus of Academics:
We need to be sure that you know the score;
You have to be seen to be thorough.
Have you checked and cross-checked? Have you followed each lead?
Have you looked from all angles, read all you can read?
We know that it's dreary, and your eyes may be weary,
But you have to be seen to be thorough.

In this dramatic interlude, I express the persisting ambivalence and uncertainty about my own perceived experience of childhood emotional neglect, captured in the theme 'Denial,' as well as another theme, 'Conditional approval,' through Baba Yaga's words: "I don't know what you're making such a fuss about." When Baba Yaga angrily rounds on The Little Girl with Big Feet, listing the burdens she has to carry, she is expressing another theme, 'Parents' own struggles'; in the face of this, The Little Girl with Big Feet crumples, illustrating two further themes, 'Avoiding conflict' and 'It must be me.' The Grindylow raises a methodological challenge that continually haunts me, the fact that for data I am relying on the selective, and potentially unreliable, memories of participants (Sparkes, 2013). Sophia, however, reminds us (the characters in the dramatic interlude, and the reader/audience) that I am not claiming incontrovertible proof of anything, or any truth in the positivist sense; I am setting out to offer a nuanced description of a perceived experience. These are some of my meanings in this dramatic interlude; however, you, the reader/audience, may find your own.

In conclusion, autoethnography is a challenging but rewarding methodology for personal experience research. 'Self' writing can be exposing for the researcher, and introduces subjective bias, but can be legitimately used to generate knowledge about a

human experience (Etherington, 2004a). Reflexive writing leads to greater transparency and potentially enhances the validity of the research (Etherington, 2004b); and creative writing can facilitate the generation and dissemination of knowledge (Bolton, 2008).

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