FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHIES

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS IN GENDER RESEARCH

EDITED BY

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Umeå, June 2023

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CONTENTS

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LINDA BERG

REFLEXIVE ETHNOGRAPHY IN GENDER RESEARCH

1.1 Can there be a feminist ethnography?

Is there something that could be called a feminist ethnography? This is a question that has been discussed by ethnographers for decades, and well, yes... I do believe there to be a methodological difference between ethnography in general and a feminist methodological approach, and I also see ethnography as a specific tradition within gender research. By this I do not refer to a method within the discipline of gender studies but instead to interdisciplinary research with a gender perspective, using a feminist lens to approach and apply methods, theories and research ethics. With this in mind, I was grateful to be given the opportunity to design a research course in ethnography of relevance to gender researchers from different disciplines and using different practical methods. In addition to myself as course leader and one of the teachers, Eva Svedmark (associate professor in Informatics) Eva Silfver (professor in Education), Catrin

Wasshede (associate professor in Sociology) and Jenny Ingridsdotter (researcher in Ethnology) also participated as teachers on the course. The interdisciplinary discussions where always related to the represented disciplines: Industrial Design, Sociology, Gender Studies, Ethnology, Informatics, Education, Religious Studies, Economics, Human Geography and Political Science. The different chapters in the book reflect topics with feminist perspectives in a larger methodological field where ethnography becomes ethnographies.

This chapter is an introduction to our joint work, to feminist ethnography with a focus on themes discussed on the course, together with reflections related to my own research. The chapter is followed by a section where all the subsequent chapters are presented.

Questions regarding feminist ethnography have been repeatedly asked for decades, specifically since the beginning of the 1990s. *A Thrice-Told Tale* (1992), by anthropologist Margery Wolf, was my introduction, as an anthropology student, to a postmodern feminist approach to ethnographic work through her writings and reflections on fieldwork in Taiwan. Wolf responds to the poststructural, feminist and anti-colonial critique against traditional ethnography by using three texts based on her research. Each of these texts consider a social situation in a community in which people are talking about a woman in their neighbourhood. The woman, Mrs. Tan, is acting unusually, and her neighbours believe she might be possessed by a god, while others think she is being manipulated by her husband to take resources from the community; still others view her as

being mentally ill. In different ways, the texts are discussing the situation and yet, at the same time, scrutinising criticism of ethnography. The first text is a short story (fiction), the second includes copies of field notes, and the third is an article published in *American Ethnologist*. Each text is followed by a commentary section in which Wolf unpacks and problematises themes such as reflexivity, polyvocality, fiction versus ethnography, and what experimental ethnography can be. *A Thrice-Told Tale* begins and ends with chapters in which the ethnographer discusses feminist critiques regarding (neo)colonial research methods and argues for the importance of responsibility as an ethnographer to listen carefully to participants but without handing over (imaginary) responsibility for the research process. I highlight this text because it captures something significant for feminist ethnography: Ethnography is not easy scholarly work devoid of affective challenges – on the contrary, it takes time, and it is a messy practice in various ways (Jauregui 2013; Silow Kallenberg 2015; Plows 2018). In an era of globalization, ethnographic work may serve as a means to capture how people, things, and both local and global spheres are interconnected – to speak with Anna Tsing, it can be a methodological approach characterised by friction (Tsing 2005). Ethnographic work involves emotional labour and, in practical terms, a series of steps that must take time. Throughout the course, we have all returned to the fact that studying social life, interactions with humans and non-humans, can be complicated, and sometimes even hard. In our discussions, in dialogue with the scholarly work of others, it has been stated that we need to recognise the importance of reflexivity, the need for different ways of understanding and doing but also of writing, and expressing (various styles, voices, formats), ethnography (Ingridsdotter & Silow Kallenberg 2018).

Sociologist Judith Stacey (1988) and anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) both wrote articles with the title 'Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?' (without knowing about the other article), inspired by postmodern theories, the results of which became classical subjects for the field. Stacey and Abu-Lughod in different ways critiqued the idea that sharing a position as 'woman' could automatically reduce a power relation. They argued instead for being uncomfortable, and viewed the search for identification as turning into something that may affect the participants' integrity. Stacey pointed at contradictions between feminist principles and the desire to obtain ethnographic material, which, ultimately, becomes results, publications, and merits to the scholar but not (necessarily) to the participant. Establishing identification through gender identity within ethnographic work can undeniably be deceptive if it carries assumptions of similarities which result in reductive answers from observations, interviews or other ethnographic work that include interactions with research participants. Abu-Lughod deepened the critique regarding 'woman' as an imagined shared position that excludes the broad differences between women's experiences. Abu-Lughod discussed problems with radical feminist ideas about 'women' with an understanding of women as sharing global, transnational, and transcultural experiences of patriarchal oppression. In line with thoughts prevalent during this time, a thread running throughout the doctoral course has

been positions of identification and the ways in which they may be fruitful, how they can strike a delicate balance, and how they can, at times, not be the space we thought they were. Sharing an identity as queer may be overshadowed by economic conditions; being migrants evidently does not erase racialised or educational differences; both participants and researchers, as entrepreneurs, cat lovers or feminists, assume identificatory positions. We have turned and twisted on positions that invite conversations, but which therefore must also be considered in ways other than positions that establish dis/identification.

Throughout the course, and reflected in the different chapters, we have discussed how theories are intertwined with our methodologies – where feminist ethnography has, just like broader discussions within gender studies, been influenced by poststructuralism, phenomenology, new materialism and new ways of approaching standpoint theories. A range of theoretical concepts and ways of doing and writing ethnography have made the field better suited to follow and discuss fluidities and multiple meanings.

Ethnographic work is, for many of us, a learning experience that develops over time. The ideas for the ethnographic work in my own doctoral thesis grew out of engagement in feminism and in the international solidarity movement (Berg 2007). Previous studies and work tasks in Central America sparked the idea of following 'aid workers' from Sweden to gain a deeper knowledge of Nicaraguans with respect to developmental cooperation. Engagement in postcolonial studies led me to a conversation between postcolonial theorist Robert Young and critical theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1991) about neo-colonialism and knowledge production, which affected the plans for my upcoming field trip to Nicaragua. The conversation between Young and Spivak addressed issues that became decisive for my work – namely, the geopolitical production of knowledge and who has the right to research (whom). More importantly, their conversation directed my attention to Swedish citizens who were committed to international solidarity with ideals revolving around how 'to contribute' to people in the so-called Global South. This resulted in a thesis that explored identity and estrangement in narratives by Swedish solidarity workers, narratives that bare traces of colonial discourses and experiences of relations, work, politics, and everyday life. These narratives often repeated a binary opposition between good and bad, with the ambition of doing good in the Nicaraguan context – but they also incorporated voices that were critical to the possibilities for developmental cooperation and, amongst other forces, the gender mainstreaming politics from Sweden. In retrospect, I can see that I avoided contributing to reductive representations of Nicaraguans, but, in my ambition to embrace a postcolonial critique, I made hard drawn power analyses on the Swedish narratives and voices from people in Nicaragua were excluded, being presented only via reflections and silences in the Swedish volunteers' stories. If I were to do this work today, I would have done a few things differently.

Mistakes have also been a theme during the course. In her long experience of doing online feminist ethnography, since the very

beginning of the internet, Eva Svedmark talked about 'productive mistakes' in her previous research and highlighted ethical dilemmas that emerge as we shape each other and are shaped by the technical scripts of which social media is built. In presentations by Eva Svedmark and Eva Silfver, they both talked about what they had learnt through difficult experiences in their ethnographic work, problems accompanying their specific positions as researchers (white, authority, social class), and how these affected choices they made in future research (Nyström 2007; Granholm & Svedmark 2018). Feminist ethnographic ideals regarding building trust, collaboration, mutual participation and egalitarian knowledge exchange are important, but the same principles can ultimately produce problematic results if the researcher does not acknowledge the power distinction between researcher (with scientific interests) and the participant (taking part in the project) (Stacey 1988, see also Davies & Craven 2016: 57-58).

A new reflexive turn led me back to Nicaragua to conduct ethnographic research among lesbian, gay and trans* activists in 2009. This turn, which at first resulted in the generation of knowledge for me, was nothing more than a few presentations to other people (Berg 2012) because of suffocating 'white guilt', and because of the failure to find ways to make something relevant out of the narratives (translating from activist communities in Central America to European academic journals became too difficult). I stayed in contact with activists in Nicaragua and performed new ethnographic research in 2019, which resulted in deepened knowledge regarding religion and politics in Nicaragua and contemporary obstacles to feminist political progress (Berg & Alm 2021; Berg & Alm 2023; Berg & Mulinari forthc.). It took me decades to formulate the first publications, but I could no longer see how not writing was a responsibility after seeking knowledge and developing a social network in Central America since the mid 1990s, with a continuous interest in social circumstances in Nicaragua and the knowledge that was lacking in the European, Swedish contexts in which I am anchored. But the need to stay with trouble whenever writing about something that relates to a Nicaraguan context remains, just as ethnographers must be reflexive wherever we do ethnographic work. This was something that all participants in the course could agree upon without hesitation: that good ethnographic work must take power dynamics into account in the social and cultural processes being targeted by the researcher (Davies 2008). In line with Beatrice Jauregui's *Dirty Anthropology* (2013), we must remember that our ambitions with our projects change over time, and that we – just as the people we study – also change. The narratives that we get are (to some extent) bound to situation, are contradictory, and affect both researcher and researched by (temporarily) driving forces when realities are being shaped.

We do not have to delimit what feminist knowledge production is, but feminist ethnography is evidently *not* something exclusive to and about women or certain groups, but is instead the study of genders and sexualities interconnected with theoretical discussions regarding geopolitics, intersectionality, racialisation, capital, ableism, queer, trans, vulnerability and the continuous

development of ideas regarding power, subjectivity and society.

1.2 Positionality, reciprocity and ethics

Following the tracks of feminist ethnographic scholars, such as Lila Abu-Lughod, Jackey Stacey and several others, discussions regarding the identity positions of the scholar and the participants have long sparked vivid debate, just as ethnography in general has discussed the challenges of being an insider or an outsider with regard to the individuals, groups, areas or situations being researched. Some argue for the importance of insider knowledge in gaining access to and legitimacy among a group, while others emphasise the importance of distance to acquire more correct knowledge – most, however, are aware of the messiness that makes it difficult to divide these positions. As Dána-Ain Davies and Christa Craven (2016) formulate it:

> Feminist ethnographers, indeed, researchers in general, typically recognize the fluidity and complexity of human experience and know that the spaces between the poles of insider and outsider are far more complicated (p. 61).

Discussions regarding experiences, identities and knowledge have long been part of gender research, including feminist ethnography. Identifying factors such as gender, class, sexuality, racialisation, place, religiosity and abilities affect perspectives and have all been discussed as part of knowledge making during our conversations in the course and as reflected in this book. Identification between participant and researcher, may be an

advantage and very fruitful for collaboration in joint knowledge production. But as feminist ethnographers, we must explore positionality when identifying problems regarding people being part of our research and in our concluding results and presentations of new knowledge. With reflexivity, it is important to emphasise that it does not refer to an 'obligatory' reflexivity section in the introduction of a thesis but rather to the ongoing critical review of dilemmas with cultural and social positions and their knowledge production. The reflexive (external and internal) dia-logue is something that follows the feminist ethnographer in various ways – amongst others, our choice of subjects and ways of reaching, producing, and using our knowledge. Some feminist ethnographers make action research, conduct memory work or, in other ways, collaborate with participants and/or use ourselves in our research. At one of the seminars, Catrin Wasshede presented autoethnography and her own experiences of putting herself at stake in research as a methodological grip within gender studies to confront knowledge production as something 'out there' (Wasshede 2020). Including fragments from oneself, with an ethnographic approach, has become a more common way to present how one's own experiences are entangled in larger political discourses.

Ethnographers in general often invite participants to express when they want something to be taken out of interviews, with the possibility to read or listen to interviews afterward if they so choose. Aiming to include participants, interlocutors, and co-writers in a joint work towards more collaborative research, possibilities and obstacles has been discussed generally within

ethnography and specifically by gender researchers as the present group of authors.

Research on humans, animals or which affect the earth must be discussed with ethics and politics in mind – and for ethnographers, this can never stop with the acceptance of a research ethics committee. This is also an area that has been important for feminist ethnographers, whose work often includes vulnerable positions and deals with sensitive topics with the need for deepened understanding. In a range of different ways, the current chapters discuss how we want to do research – with a focus on ethnographic work. Studies may be relevant for the research participants in a project, but they often do not immediately benefit from the results while they give the researcher their time and energy and risk being recognised and losing some of their personal integrity. How do we take responsibility as researchers? In this book, several of the authors discuss the challenges of getting and giving back, with an emphasis on what is fruitful for all participating in the process. In sum, all of the chapters reflect, in various ways, processes in ongoing doctoral projects, focusing on crucial issues within ethnographic work. You will find methodological choices, epistemological decisions and/or theoretical concepts anchored in various forms of feminist knowledge production. The book is divided into two sections, with chapters anchored more or less in discussions regarding positionality, reciprocity and/or ethical considerations.

A short summary and presentations by the subsequent authors follow below.

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AUTHORS AND SUBSEQUENT CHAPTERS IN BRIEF

Disa Helander, doctoral candidate in Gender Studies at Umeå Centre for Gender Studies, Umeå University.

Chapter 2.) Based on ethnographic research on the use of DNA-tests as part of migration control in Sweden, Disa Helander discusses tensions regarding asserting the authority of feminist ethnography while simultaneously recognizing the potential violence in constructing an authoritative voice, especially when it claims to represent "others".

Mimmi Norgren Hansson, doctoral candidate in Religious Studies at the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, Umeå University. Affiliated as doctoral student at Umeå Centre for Gender Studies, Umeå University.

Chapter 3.) Mimmi Norgren Hansson explores the essential aspects of respect and empathy within the context of research involving children. While empathy in interviews commonly revolves around recognizing and understanding participants' emotions and experiences, this chapter seeks to broaden the scope by highlighting the significance of respecting and appreciating children's analytical abilities and statements. Drawing inspiration from a memorable encounter with twelve years old Chloe, the author incorporates her analysis of care as a preface to the argument.

Matilda Lindgren, doctoral candidate in Gender Studies and Reproductive Medicine within the research school Womher, and at Centre for Gender Studies, Uppsala University.

Chapter 4.) Challenging the idea of fixed research positionalities, Matilda Lindgren discusses knowledge/power positionalities in relation to perceived and assumed vulnerabilities in a multi-sited ethnography. Engaging with fertility medicine and donor-conception practices as a primary field site, Lindgren suggests a framing of her own research positionality as a pending and shifting one, somewhere in-between political ally-ship and informed critique.

Quynh Le, doctoral candidate in Business Administration, Entrepreneurship at Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics, Umeå University. Affiliated as doctoral student at Umeå Centre for Gender Studies, Umeå University.

Chapter 5.) The text by Quynh Le delves into her research journey, focusing on the exploration of gendered aspects within entrepreneurial ecosystems. It highlights the significance of reflexivity in broadening perspectives, incorporating interdisciplinary approaches, and fostering collective reflection to advance knowledge in the field.

Anja Neidhardt-Mokoena, doctoral candidate in Industrial Design at Umeå Institute of Design and Umeå Centre for Gender Studies, Umeå University.

Chapter 6.) From a feminist perspective, the chapter by Anja Neidhardt-Mokoena explores ethics in participatory de-

sign workshops. Neidhardt-Mokoena articulates how ethical questions are generally approached in design research, and then looks at a concrete example to reflect on what doing the right thing(s) might entail.

Christian Liliequist, doctoral candidate in Ethnology at Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University.

Chapter 7.) Christian Liliequist is discussing how he can combine research ethics with reflexivity and an intersectional perspective throughout his research project. Liliequist is especially focusing on how he can use these tools to analyse how he as a researcher might affect the research process.

Sophia Erhard, doctoral candidate in Human Geography at Department of Geography, Umeå University. Affiliated as doctoral student at Centre for Demographic and Aging Research and Umeå Centre for Gender Studies, Umeå University.

Chapter 8.) The chapter by Sophia Erhard focuses on the tensions that can arise during the process of applying for ethical approval in relation to research in practice. It further investigates whether and how a feminist research ethic can be employed as a tool to resolve such tensions.

Elin Wallner, doctoral candidate in Ethnology at Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University.

Chapter 9.) With a specific focus on the presence/absence of interlocutors' participation in the process, the chapter by Elin Wallner explores and exemplifies the undertaking of organising, analysing and writing ethnographic material, collected through in-depth interviews.

2

DISA HELANDER

THREADING A THIN PATH BETWEEN REPRESENTATIONAL VIOLENCE AND ASSERTING THE AUTHORITY OF FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHY

Assuming and critiquing an authoritative voice in ethnographic writing

In her 1990 essay "Can there be a feminist ethnography?" Lila Abu-Lughod argues that both ethnography and feminist research have addressed the violence and power involved in the production of authoritative, objective knowledge, albeit in different ways (see also Schrock, 2013, p. 51; Davies, 2002, p. 221-225). Feminist researchers – including feminist ethnographers – have questioned the way in which the scientific ideals of objectivity are "part of a dualism that is gendered and is a mode of power" (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p. 13). Ethnographers have problematised the way in which the impersonal, realist style of ethnographic writing reproduces a sense of objectivity and authority and have sought to counter this, for example through experimental writing styles and allowing for multiple voices. Sometimes such pro-

jects question all possibilities of distinguishing between more or less well-founded knowledge. However, as Abu-Lughod argues, such a position can be difficult to reconcile with feminism because feminist research entails the conviction that knowledge is better if it is not grounded in and biased towards a masculine and western worldview (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p. 17). If all knowledge is equal, if there is no authoritative voice, this might undermine feminist research and feminism as a political project since these by definition entail a normative position. Abu-Lughod cites Nancy Hartsock and asks why it is precisely when marginalised people, in terms of gender as well as colonisation and racism, have begun to demand a voice that the possibility of an authoritative voice is questioned (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p. 17; see also Davies, 2002, p. 223). On the other hand, postcolonial feminists in particular are well aware of the potential violence in asserting an authoritative voice, and especially when it claims to represent others. In this chapter I address these tensions.

In my current research on the use of DNA-tests as part of migration control in Sweden I analyse, among other things, how hierarchies between different knowledges are established and maintained. I have interviewed civil servants within the migration authorities, laboratory staff who analyse DNA, migration lawyers and representatives from migrant rights organisations, and people who have applied for family reunification. I have also conducted laboratory observations. I analyse how DNA-testing as a form of technoscience comes to be constructed and treated as an unambiguous fact by the migration authorities, and I analyse the suspicion and devaluation of migrants' own accounts

of their families, lives and identities and the prioritisation of DNA-evidence. I argue that this is a form of epistemic violence, which is the domination by one episteme through which "a whole set of knowledges [...] have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucualt, 1980, p. 82, in Spivak, 2011, p. 76). For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2011), epistemic violence results in subjugated knowledges, experiences and voices being made unintelligible and unrepresentable.

Questions about how different knowledges are valued are thus central to my project, and hence the question of how I conceptualise, construct and represent the authoritativeness of my own research becomes particularly pressing. In this chapter I discuss how I seek to reflexively handle the valuation of different knowledges and the problem of representing and constructing voices and authoritativeness in the practice of writing ethnography. I approach this through two angles: firstly, in relation to ethnographically studying science, in this case laboratory practices, and secondly, in relation to the ethics and politics of representing "others".

Reflexivity is not an end in itself. Rather, as Charlotte Aull Davies (2002, p. 213, 222) argues, it is a means to produce more well-founded knowledge of a social reality and to ensure that research is done in an ethically sound way (see also Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). It entails situating and clarifying the observations, accounts and paths that led to the conclusions (Davies, 2002, p. 203). But, argues Davies (2002, p. 223), a feminist re-

flexivity also retains a connection to politics. One way in which Richelle D. Schrock (2013, p. 57) argues that the feminist grounding in politics should inform research is by asking of every project "Whose story is it, what is it being used for, what does it promise, and at whose expense?" (Shuman 2005, p. 162, in Schrock, 2013, p. 57) and that feminist ethnographers must ask "'in whose interests' an ethnographic text works" (Schrock, 2013, p. 58). In my project, the aim is to produce knowledge that denaturalises hierarchies of knowledge as well as current migration regimes. Being reflexive about how observations, accounts, and the voices of others as well as my own are situated, accounted for, and represented in the text should thus be a means to the end of denaturalising discourses and practices that are often taken for granted.

Studying science: unpacking and constructing authoritative knowledge

One part of my study about the use of DNA-tests in the processing of family reunification in Sweden involves exploring the process of analysing DNA in laboratories and how the results of these analyses are constructed as authoritative knowledge, both in the lab and subsequently as the lab reports move to other contexts, such as to the migration authorities. I do this by attending to the details of the processes of producing such knowledge and demonstrate that it is a gradual process of reducing ambiguities, where a messy materiality is turned into neat numbers and clear classifications. This kind of technoscientific knowledge is often treated as objective and factual, where the process

of producing this knowledge – and the ambiguities and decisions this involves – are rendered invisible (Helander, 2020; see also Kruse, 2016). The lab reports could perhaps be compared to "a realist style" of ethnographic writing (van Maanen, 2011; see also Abu-Lughod, 1990, p. 10 for how style is also an epistemological question); they are written in an impersonal mode, they present that which is reported as a simple reflection of reality, and the process of arriving at the results is omitted.

However, in one way we – I and the people working in the lab that I study – do the same thing and are in a sense colleagues as researchers. We try "to reduce the puzzlement" (Geertz, 2017, p. 16) of the complex and superimposed structures and meanings of the life and society which we study, which Clifford Geertz (2017, pp. 10-27) sees as the task of ethnography. We reduce ambiguity and try to create a somewhat coherent account out of a messy reality, even though our objects of study are different, we do this with different methods, and we present the research process and the results in different ways. Drawing out similarities between producing knowledge in a lab and through ethnography can be a way of unpacking the situatedness, partiality, simplifications and uncertainties involved in technoscience just as in ethnography.

Thinking about the lab processes and what I do as similar, has for me involved a heightened awareness of the nuances and complexities of writing about what they do. Being trained in an interdisciplinary context, I appreciate the need to also acknowledge that research is done and presented in different ways in different disciplines and not to impose one's own disciplinary

training as necessarily superior. Sometimes I have mixed feelings about the way in which I explore underlying assumptions and silences in the processes that I study and worry that people who work in the kind of labs that I have studied will object to my analyses or my representations of the laboratory processes. However, writing within a tradition of feminist critical studies of science and technology and feminist ethnography, I see it is my task to also go beyond the immediate ways in which the people I have interviewed represent and understand what they do. As Davies (2002, pp. 193-203) argues, analyses range from those that are more descriptive and stay closer to the material and those that are more abstract. Analysing something also means drawing general conclusions that go beyond immediate descriptions, which in my case involves analysing the lab processes by drawing on previous feminist studies of science and technology (e.g. M'charek, 2005; Mol, 2002; Kruse, 2016). This also means that I present the laboratory processes in a slightly different way to how those working with them see it. Thus, even though I am sometimes hesitant about it, I treat the material from observations and interviews as material to be analysed, rather than treating this material as research that I comment on as a colleague, which would require a higher degree of consideration for our varying epistemological positions.

In my project, since my aim is to critically unpack the knowledge regimes of science and migration control, and to question the hierarchical valuation of different knowledges, I need a normative ground from which to do so. As such, despite my critique of the taken for granted authority of scientific knowledge,

I do claim that through research we can get knowledge that is more than merely fiction or personal accounts of something (c.f. Schrock, 2013, pp. 51-53; Davies, 2002, pp. 221-223). As Davies (2002, p. 214) argues, ethnographic research can certainly produce important insights about society, despite ethnographic texts being crafted, just as all research products are. Denaturalising hierarchies of knowledge does not necessarily mean that all knowledge is considered equally good. Rather, for me, it means deconstructing and probing into why and how current hierarchies between knowledges are constructed and reproduced.

Within ethnographic writing, deconstructing textual authority has sometimes been a tool to also deconstruct epistemological and social authority, but sometimes it also stays at the textual level and leaves intact the political or social authority of the academic disciplines and the researchers producing the ethnographies (Davies, 2002, p. 223). Or as Abu-Lughod (1990, p.11) argues, basic epistemological or political questions have sometimes been elided by a focus on textual representation, "a decolonization at the level of the text". Textual experimentation, such as allowing for multiple voices, ambiguities, and including the situatedness of research, can indeed contribute to a weakening or deconstruction of authoritative objective knowledge, as an important part of an engagement with epistemological and political questions. However, in my project I do not use experimentation and critique on the level of the text. Abu-Lughod (1990, pp. 18-19) argues that feminist ethnographers might sometimes be concerned that extensive textual experimentation could mean that their conclusions and interventions into pre-

vious research are not taken seriously. In hindsight perhaps my rather non-experimental style of writing stems from a similar kind of concern: that too much experimentation on the textual level could risk undermining the other forms of critique and analyses that I seek to present. Thus, in this project, the project of seeking to undermine existing social and political authority is prioritised above and perhaps at the expense of undermining textual authority (see also Davies, 2002, p. 224).

Balancing the purpose and violence of representing "others"

How to represent others is a continuously discussed theme in feminist ethnography and research more generally (Davies, 2002; Schrock, 2013). Spivak (2011) has, for instance, argued that it is impossible to accurately or justly represent or give voice to the subaltern or the Other, and that representations of the Self also inevitably entail constructions of the Other that to some extent reproduce existing violent discourses and epistemic regimes. However, I agree with Schrock (2013, p. 50-51) who, drawing on Ong and Shuman among others, argues that we ought to continue to attempt to represent the voices of others, despite the perils of doing so and it being "a process fraught with representational and ethical landmines" (Schrock, 2013, p. 50, referring to Shuman). In my research on the use of DNA-tests in migration control, interviewing people about their experiences of undergoing this process has, for instance, been invaluable to the exploration of the power and epistemic violence involved in this process. It also very tangibly runs the risk of itself doing epistemic violence, particularly since I construct my writing as to some

extent authoritative. Even though my representation of others will always be fraught, I argue that in this case it nevertheless serves the larger political motivation of denaturalising migration control. However, it is important to think about *how* others are represented as well as the purpose of doing so. I will reflect on three issues in relation to this.

Firstly, the question of who is considered an "other", or distinctions between the self and the other, are not clear cut or something that can be straightforwardly assumed. For me to reflect upon how I represent others might be seen as particularly important because some of the people that I have interviewed would generally be considered very different from me: they have come from war-torn countries or dictatorships and gone through a very difficult journey of migrating to Europe; I have not. But the question of which similarities and differences are seen to matter is not a given, it is a contextual and analytical question. Abu-Lughod (1990) argues that both feminism and anthropology are concerned with the self and the other, albeit in different ways and from different directions. Anthropology concerns the self and the other in the way in which it was originally defined as "the study of the other" and thus implicitly being a "discourse of the [western] self" (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p. 24). At least since the 1980s, however, a straightforward distinction between self and other has become tenuous and been problematized, not least by ethnographers who are both outsiders and insiders (see e.g. Ng, 2011, 443-447) or what Abu-Lughod (1990, p. 26-27) calls "halfies", ethnographers who are both members of the societies they study and outsiders. Feminism, on the other hand, has at

least since the "crisis of difference" reworked and problematized the distinction between self and other, and rethought identity as something which is always only partial:

> By working with the assumption of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and an other that is also partially the self, we might be moving beyond the impasse of the fixed self/other or subject/object divide that so disturbs the new ethnographers (Abu-Lughod, 1990, pp. 25-26).

In my research on the use of DNA-tests in migration control, differentiations and similarities run along several different lines. Perhaps, at a first glance, racialization as well as nationality and migratory status mean that I am more similar to most of the civil servants that I interviewed. But in terms of political views and perspectives on migration control, I might be more similar to some of the people I interviewed who have gone through migration control and DNA-testing. In the queer context of which I am a part, people's ability to create the kind of family relations they want is often at odds with and heavily circumscribed by state regulations. It is not the same as having one's ability to live with one's family members restricted through migration control, but it nevertheless entails some similarities and can be a basis for solidarity. The point is that as an ethnographer, I am both similar and different to everyone that I have interviewed and represent in the text. The question of who is an "other" cannot be taken for granted.

Nevertheless, the people that I have interviewed occupy very

different positions of power. Some are completely at the mercy of the sometimes arbitrary and violent system of migration control; some are civil servants within this system and take decisions over the lives of those who apply, even though they are also as bureaucrats cogs in a system with limited possibilities to act on their own conscience. I interviewed civil servants in their professional role, whereas I interviewed people who had applied for reunification about something that is personal, and sometimes painfully experienced as a life and death issue. I thus feel very different kinds of responsibilities towards them, but this is not necessarily best captured by a distinction between self and other. Otherness is also produced through representations, and in my writing I try to produce relatability rather than to highlight differences.

Further, my object of study is the system of migration control and its use of technoscience, not other people – and even less so a culture, society or "way of life" as in much early anthropology. Thus, I do not intend or need to give a full account of others, but to instead explore migration control as a set of practices and discourses, alongside the production of knowledge in the lab and how it is interpreted at the migration authorities, *through* the experiences and interpretations of people who are in different ways involved in or affected by migration control or laboratory analyses of DNA. Experience, argues Joan W. Scott (1992, p. 25), is historically constituted, and is that which we should seek to explain rather than something to take as a starting point and a basis for knowledge. Scott argues:

> we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced (Scott, 1992, pp. 25–26).

Historical discursive processes produce subjects and structure their vision, and thus also shape how they interpret and narrate their experiences (Scott, 1992, pp. 25–26). In this way, attending to experiences and the way in which they are narrated is very informative of the historical, discursive processes that produce said experiences and their interpretations. This is how I approach the accounts of the people that I have interviewed: as windows into the processes that have produced them. This goes for both civil servants and for people who have applied for reunification. It is thus not people in themselves who I study, but the structures and discourses which produce their experiences and their ways of making sense of these.

Lastly, one way in which I attempt to handle the inevitable violence of representing others is by trying not to give a sense that my representations are in any way "full" accounts. Feminist and other ethnographers have sought to avoid writing in a way that constructs the ethnographer's (impersonal) voice as the only and authoritative account, by for example not ascribing coherent meaning to the lives and experiences accounted for, and to instead allow for multiple voices in the text and an openness to various interpretations (see e.g. Schrock, 2013, pp. 56-57; Lykke, 2010, pp. 163-183; Lather and Smithies, 1997). Not imposing the ethnographer's interpretation as the only one is a way of recognising the representational violence of representing others, the situatedness of all accounts, and that all accounts are always only partial. In my writing I do not work with the kind of experimental writing where the voices of others are given extended space or to a large extent left to stand for themselves. However, I try to avoid representational violence by not giving what might be read as full accounts of the people represented in my text. By letting their stories, voices and experiences sometimes be fragmented and perhaps contradictory, I seek to make room for the fact that all attempts by me to account for the experiences and voices of others and to create some kind of coherence will always involve misrepresentations and simplifications. I want the reader to experience the people in the text as human and relatable, particularly since dehumanisation of migrants is one thing which enables and underwrites the violence of migration control. I have therefore sometimes considered whether my way of no providing more coherent portraits of people makes them less relatable, and the text harder to follow for the reader. However, even fragments of someone and partial accounts can very effectively convey personhood and humanity, perhaps even more so than more full accounts. If we as readers are open to it, it may give a sense that there is much more to a person and a life than what is being said and it may prompt our imagination (see e.g. Lorenzoni, 2021, pp. 36-39).

Asserting authority and representing others: in whose interest and with what aim?

In this chapter I have addressed two partly connected tensions. Firstly, the tension between critiquing the potential violence of hierarchising knowledges, while at the same time recognising that feminist research and politics need to assert some knowledge as better than other. And secondly, the tension of on the one hand taking seriously the violence involved in representing others, while on the other hand problematising the self/other distinction and acknowledging the way in which representing others might serve important political purposes, which may also be in the interest of the same "others", despite the pitfalls of representation. However, there is no single correct way of handling these tensions, these questions must be addressed contextually. Here I discussed them in relation to my current project concerning the knowledge/power regimes involved in the migration authorities' use of technoscientific evidence, but in a different context I might have approached these questions differently. As Schrock (2013, p. 57-58) argues, we must ask of every project "in whose interest" it works and, depending on the answer, we must also consider how the above discussed tensions are best handled to serve the aim of the project at hand.

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3

MIMMI NORGREN HANSSON

TALKING TO CHLOE - LEARNING TO APPRECIATE THE META-PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDREN'S THOUGHTS

Introduction

Chloe tells me that her friends are usually more open about their feelings when they aren't in school. She adds that she doesn't know why. They probably don't want everyone to know that something happened. If they talk about it at school, someone might hear and tell others, she thinks aloud. The friendly child I'm interviewing continues to talk about the differences between caring in the classroom and outside in the schoolyard, at recess. Meanwhile, I'm thinking to myself that I didn't ask Chloe why, but she assumed I wanted to know. She was right. I was studying caring within peer relations in school, and as a researcher, I usually want to know why.

I also pride myself on listening with empathy and respect to the children who participate. When children tell me about their experiences, I want to take them seriously. Chloe, however, didn't tell me about her experience; instead, she told me why and what

caring was about. Meeting with Chloe got me thinking about the analytic meta-perspective of children. What exactly was Chloe trying to tell me? And how might that affect the way I ought to listen? Chloe told me why; in this text, I respond with an appreciation for her analytic abilities and meta-perspective on caring. I do this by presenting 12-year-old Chloe's analytical understanding of caring. With her analysis in mind, I take on a more general question. How can we, as researchers, balance respect for emotional experiences with respect for children's analytical statements as well?

I met Chloe while interviewing sixth grade children about their experiences with caring. In this methodological text, I will return to this one interview and attend to Chloe's way of presenting her answers from a meta-perspective. First, I will give some examples from the interview that demonstrate how Chloe attempts to provide a holistic and theoretical response to the question of caring as a phenomenon in school. Then, I will make some suggestions about how to make use of children's knowledge and allow them to present their own analytical agenda. Finally, I use these conclusions for a preliminary discussion of the ethnographic method and argue for a greater appreciation of children's meta-perspectives.

When conducting research with children, there are specific ethical considerations that must be taken into account. The age gap between the adult researcher and the participating child creates a power dynamic that needs to be approached sensitively (Davies, 2002, p. 108). Therefore, careful ethical deliberation is necessary for research involving children (Gardner, 2010,

p. 151). However, studying children's experiences solely from an adult perspective is insufficient (Dybile, 2005; Grover, 2004). This presents a dilemma for researchers working with young participants, as they must consider the tension between exploitation and exclusion (Alderson & Morrow, 2011, p. 4; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017, p. 5).

Historically, child research has been predominantly concerned with child development. Due to criticisms of treating children as objects, child research has gradually moved toward an attitude that conducts research *with* children. This is often referred to as a child-centred approach based on children's rights. For example, to adopt this approach, researchers are encouraged to reflect on their own perspectives of children, ensure the informed consent of children as research participants, offer control over recording devices, provide opportunities to ask questions, and use child-friendly language (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017, Ch. 3). In addition, power asymmetry requires the researcher to build trusting, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with participating children (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, & Bottrell, 2015, p. 52). A concrete example of this is involving children in data analysis (Alderson & Morrow, 2011) or, in more extensive projects, inviting children to participate throughout the entire research process (Davis, 2009).

In terms of the ethical dimension of research with children, I have tried to approach the children I interview with empathy and to listen to their stories with the utmost seriousness and respect. In this chapter, I will reflect on what this respect might entail in terms of listening. Empathy in interviews often has to

do with awareness of participants' feelings, not least in research with children. I would like to broaden this view to include respect and appreciation for children's analytic statements. The inspiration for this text, as I wrote at the beginning, comes from my encounter with Chloe. Therefore, it seems appropriate to preface my argument with her analysis.

The study was also approved by the Swedish Ethics Committee, and Chloe's name is figurative.

The meaning of care according to Chloe

The girl in front of me looks shy, but at the same time, there is a sense of determination in her face. She is thin and very much still a child. We talk for a little while about her guinea pigs. She is helpful; even though my questions are a bit off, she answers and tries to contribute to that somewhat relaxed state you wish to enter before the interview starts for real. I am thankful for her nice manners; she smiles, and we go on to the questions about caring in school.

The interview was structured around two fundamental questions. "Do you remember a time at school when another pupil showed that they cared about you?" and "Do you remember a time at school when you showed that you cared about another pupil?". There were other questions of course, but these were the core of the interviews. The aim was to collect concrete caring experiences within peer-relations for later analysis. From the interviews I did get rich, interesting, and sometimes touching material to work with, as with Chloe, which also made me think about the conditions of interviewing children.

When my voice faded, she began to talk. I asked about her experiences of getting care, and she told me about the day when one of her sister's pets died. It was in third grade; she was a little sad, so she talked to one of her friends at school. When at home that afternoon, her friends visited, they brought her two gingerbreads, with crystyr hearts decorating the gift. Chloe felt better. This was a grand gesture of caring.

Me: How nice, do you have another example?

Chloe: Well, not so many big things like that, but my friends are waiting for me when I tie my shoes.

Me: That's great. Can you tell me more?

Chloe: Yes, my shoelaces come up when we go somewhere, then they stop and wait while I tie them.

Me: Right, do they stop by themselves, or do you shout out?

Chloe: They usually stop by themselves.

Me: Why do you think you came to think about that shoelace thing?

Chloe: Because it happens quite often, so to speak. If one of them ties their shoelaces, then the rest stop too; it happens a little now and then.

At this point, I am slightly puzzled. Usually, the children tell me one example, and slowly the examples might get more sensitive, emotional, and closer to the heart, but rarely the other way around. Afterwards, when I was making the transcript, I realized that Chloe wanted to tell me a story constructed in a different manner. Her intention was not only to recount her own caring experiences, but also to explore the concept of caring itself. She did this by creating contrasts in her examples; she started with the grand and intuitive understanding of caring. She was sad, and her friends did something extraordinary to help her deal with that emotional state. When I asked for another ex-

ample, she had already outlined one of the extremes of caring. It is grand, emotional, and rare. Then she moves to the other side of the line. The contrasting shoelace care, the one that is minor, neutral, and commonly performed. Chloe is not solely presenting her experiences, but an analysis of caring.

We continued by talking about Chloe as a caregiver. She humbly chooses to talk about the "small scale" version of care. When Chloe and her friends are walking home from school, she will carry their things in her bicycle basket. She does not think they give it any special thought, she doesn't either. "Why did you come to think about that?" I ask. Her answer is the same, it happens quite often. We go on to talk about feelings, and whether it is easy to recognize the feelings of others. Chloe thinks it is, especially if you know the person in question. Some are easier than others, and some try to hide how they feel. They pretend that they are happy, or at least act in a neutral way. Chloe thinks it is important to ask people how they feel, but not to push too hard; some things might be private. Then I continue, searching for concrete examples of caring.

Me: Right, when I asked before, for an example, now that we've talked for a while, can you think of another example?

Chloe: No, not really... It's like trying to compromise so that everyone gets what they want. Instead of only one person being allowed to do what they want all the time.

Me: Tell me more about that.

Chloe: If everyone decides together and one person tries to outvote the others to get what they want, then it won't be so fun for the others. It will be better if you try to decide everything together or if you take turns deciding different things.

Me: Mm. And that, to you, if I understand it correctly, is an example of caring?

Chloe: Yes.

Me: How do you do it then? How do you create that compromise?

Chloe: First, you may have to say if there is something you don't want to do, so that you don't just let it pass and sort of not do what you want. Then, whoever decides, may have to ask something like, "Do you want to do this?" and then "Should we do something else?".

Me: Right, who is the one that decides then?

Chloe: Well, it depends. It may be the one who is most sure of what they want to do; that person may overrule the others. Like complaining a bit about what others want to do to get what they want.

Me: Right. And then caring becomes trying to compromise with that person?

Chloe: Yes, then you care about the others, who may not want to do it.

Chloe does not want to talk about a specific situation. She does not answer my request for one example from her own experiences. Instead, she merged several experiences into a caring process of compromising. I ask for the concrete, and she chooses to make it more abstract. Instead of talking about that one time, she wants to explain what caring is about. Chloe talks about "persons" rather than naming her friends; this makes her story more distant from herself, but at the same time, more relatable to someone else.

We are getting to the end. Chloe seems to be done; she answers politely, but the decisiveness from the start of the interview is fading. She has provided her analysis, in a pedagogical sense, and I think I got it. A quiet consensus of "that's the end of that" is making itself visible. I ask if

there is anything else to add. Something adults might not think about? She answers that there are a lot of things that we do not think about, children just help each other. Normal things, you just do them. I ask if that is true for everyone; Chloe thinks it is.

Methodological insights based on Chloe's analysis.

The first thing I came to notice when I started to work with the transcript from the interview was how Chloe intentionally created a holistic understanding of care. When she answered a question, she was aware of the bigger picture. She wanted to talk with me about the phenomenon itself and used her own experiences as pedagogical examples. It became evident that she considered the interview from a meta-perspective; she was trying to communicate her perception of caring. In doing this, she contrasted her answers with each other and abstracted her responses to make them more relatable. The examples were not merely her lived experience; they were her selections, her excerpts, grounded in her analytical ability.

The holistic awareness that Chloe expressed throughout the interview is the foundation for the following methodological suggestions for how researchers can appreciate children's meta-perspective and analytical abilities. These approaches are not overarching methodological solutions that need to be considered in all cases. Rather, they can be used as inspiration for anyone that wants to grasp the analytical foundation of qualitative interviews in general and more specifically with children. After a short presentation, I will conclude with a discussion where I elaborate on why I think this is of the utmost importance.

However, I will start with a description of four approaches to better recognize and value children's analytical abilities.

1. Ask meta-questions: To recognize children's meta-perspectives, it is necessary to ask for them. By asking participants for the reasons behind their answers, researchers can broaden their understanding of the phenomenon under examination. This is also an important component of expressing respect for the child as a research participant. Asking meta-questions is a concrete way to handle the power asymmetry in research with children and recognizing their position in knowledge production.

2. Examine the (analytical) intention: Researchers should be aware of children's analytical intentions during the interview. What intentions seem to have induced the answers provided by the children? By paying attention to analytical statements (in addition to normative ones), researchers can appreciate children's deliberate intentions and the assumptions underlying the interview. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the child's perspective.

3. Relate the answers to each other: Analytical intentions can be detected by relating the separate answers to each other. When conducting this analysis, researchers should consider the interview as a whole, not just a series of disconnected answers. Are the answers, as with Chloe, contrasting each other? Are they building up to a certain conclusion? By taking this approach, researchers can identify underlying, intentional, or unintentional, logic between the answers and understand what the child wants to communicate when the answers are considered as parts of one conversation.

4. Be aware of intentional abstractions: When people make abstractions, it is a reduction of cognitive categories, hence one form of analytical thinking. To recognize the meta-perspective of the child, intentional abstractions can function as a signal for analytical excerpts. Abstractions can be used to make an argument, experience, emotion, or other means of communication relatable to others. To make clear that this is not merely the interviewed child's experience but is valid for anyone, abstraction is a useful strategy. Researchers should be aware that intentional abstractions are different ways of communicating, not necessarily more or less valuable than concrete narratives.

Discussion

The listed approaches are based on my analysis of the interview I conducted with Chloe. These are tentative and, as I mentioned earlier, to be used as inspiration for anyone who wishes to recognize the analytical abilities of their respondents. Analytical abilities are a very extensive concept and include a wide range of cognitive functions. When thinking analytically, information is observed, interpreted, and used to gain understanding and/or solve problems. This could be performed in multiple ways, as a structural procedure, in a creative manner, or as a mixture of the two. Hence, depending on exactly what analytical ability a respondent child is using, there might be more accurate methods for recognizing it. My main contribution is therefore not to be read as a methodological checklist but as a reminder to notice the analytical intentions of children.

Perhaps my argument is best formulated if it is contrasted

with the emphasis on acknowledging the experience of the child. It is commonly stated that the experiences of children are to be considered a beneficial source of knowledge. Through the narratives, feelings, and lived experiences of children, we approach their reality. If you want to know something about children's everyday lives, it is wise to ask them about it. To this, I agree. It is one fundamental aspect of respecting the child. However, I do believe this sort of statement risks favouring emotional and personal narratives because of their intrinsic value and not, as it should be, as one form of unprocessed data. This is related to general methodological difficulties within ethnography.

Qualitative interviews aim to collect detailed data from the participants. These are often juxtaposed with the quantitative measurements within statistics. In the ethnographic tradition, empirical data is used not to represent the population but rather to render theory or increase the depth of knowledge production. The empirical data is derived from the personal experiences, thoughts and feelings of the participants. Of course, not all qualitative research has this basis, but I think it is fair to say that, in general, qualitative methods aim at gathering personal and often emotional experiences (Silverman, 2017; Whitaker & Atkinson, 2019). This becomes evident, not least in the vast methodological literature on how to handle sensitive questions, vulnerable participants, and the problem of research participants oversharing (Stacey, 1991; Thunberg, 2022). The focus on personal experiences within qualitative interviews is one underlying reason that might affect the way children's analytical abilities are understood. My argument is related to Atkinson

and Silverman's well-known critique of the personal narrative within qualitative interviewing. They argue that,

> ...in promoting a particular view of narratives of personal experience, researchers too often recapitulate, in uncritical fashion, features of the contemporary interview society. In this society, the interview becomes a personal confession, and the biographical work of interviewer and interviewee is concealed. (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997, p. 305).

In this individualistic society, the interview is a means to access the inner world of the participant and provides a false sense of authenticity, stability, and security (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997, p. 309–310). Even though I am not quite as pessimistic regarding the value of personal experiences, I do think that Atkinson and Silverman's cultural understanding of interview narratives provides a setting for my argument.

Likewise, is it interesting to consider the history of child research. As I wrote in the introduction, children were previously excluded from research. It was subsequent research about children that eventually piqued the interest of the research community. After a legitimized critique of these attitudes and perceptions of children, adjustments were made towards a child-centred approach (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). Hence, the normative outset for research with children is based on recognition of previous mistakes and a willingness to acknowledge children's experiences as valid input in knowledge production.

If you combine the commitment to the child-centred approach, and the overall ethnographic appreciation for personal experiences, I believe there is a risk to favour an unidirectional sort of respect. The perspectives are by themselves great ways to bring some justice into the researcher-participant relationship. The ethnographic research community, specifically combined with a feminist theoretical outset, has contributed to an extensive debate regarding the biased representations within traditional research (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 4, 18–19). Furthermore, even though it is not without difficulties, the importance of getting oppressed voices heard through ethnographic research can barely be overstated. In the same line of thought, who will argue against a child-centred approach when interviewing children?

Nevertheless, I ask, if the combination induces a certain kind of listening. A certain kind of respect for the child. Note that it is still respect, but perhaps partial in relation to the emotional, concrete, and lived experiences of the participating child. The problem arises when someone, like Chloe, wants to tell a different story. This calls for respect in relation to another person's meta-perspective, the respect for the participants' analysis of the subject in question. This is not the same as transferring the analysis from the participants to the researcher. The analysis performed by the child is still raw material for the researcher. Sometimes, the researcher might find that the analysis presented by the participant is compliant with their own, or at least provides inspiration for something analogous; on other occasions, it might not. Hence, this is not the reason why it is important to consider the analytical perspective of participating children.

The reason is twofold. First, it is helpful to conduct accurate and valid research. By noticing the reasons behind or logic between answers, the ethnographic researcher hopefully achieves a better understanding of the data. More importantly, it is a concrete way to handle the power asymmetry between researcher and participant. Giving prominence to children's analytical statements is one way to avoid a dualistic construction between the analytical researcher and the emotional participant. It is also a way to broaden respect for the child and pay attention to different sorts of stories. One child may want to say what happened. Another what they think that happening was about. Either way, the researcher needs to appreciate and listen to both stories, whether they are describing an event or an evaluation.

Finally, I want to recognize that there is no clear cut between emotional experiences and analytical statements, they are interconnected expressions of communication. Nevertheless, in order to fully understand both aspects, it can be helpful to temporarily separate them and recognize what the participating child is trying to convey both in terms of their personal experience and through an analytical meta-perspective.

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4

MATILDA LINDGREN

DONOR-CONCEPTION AS FIELD SITE: REFLECTIONS ON THE SHIFTING KNOWLEDGE POSITIONALITIES IN A MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY

Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork, I have repeatedly been asked how I deal with ethical issues when interviewing people about fertility treatments, egg or sperm donation, and decision-making in relation to donor conception. Underlying these questions is a strong belief that the topic I am researching is private and sensitive in nature, and that this positions my research subjects in particularly vulnerable positions when asked to be interviewed. Predominantly, this concern has been raised with regards to interviewing people in receipt of egg and sperm donations (recipient parents), but less so with regards to egg donors and clinicians.

Interestingly, this concern contrasts with my experience of recipient parents actually being the most eager to participate in interviews. As part of my online ethnography, I have also come across a wide range of podcasts, articles and social media ac-

counts (Instagram, Facebook), where recipient parents extensively share personal experiences and views on donor-conception (often with the aim of advising others, or asking for support). This open online posting not only seems to question assumptions made with regards to privacy and sensitivity, it also made visible to me the wide knowledge-sharing and knowledge-building that many of my potential interviewees, in particular recipient parents, engage in. Additionally, these same accounts have become a resource for me in understanding the complexities of today's donor-conception practices.

In this chapter, I reflect on the vulnerabilities assumed and accounted for in feminist reflexive ethnography in relation to the contextual and interpersonal makings of knowledge and power in a multi-sited ethnography. Reflexive ethnography emphasizes that research positionalities are not fixed or stable but dependent on context and interactions (Davies, 2008). This becomes especially crucial to reflect upon when doing a multi-sited ethnographic study. In my doctoral research, rather than limiting my study to one particular social group, I look at a set of contemporary practices from the point of view of differently situated actors. Thus, my main research question in itself also relates to power and positionalities as it asks about decision-making power in donor-conception practices.

Already at the early stages of my project, and in part influenced by my own online ethnography, I came to view fertility medicine and gamete donation as "knowledge-intense" fields, where medical authority is both invoked, debated and debunked among patients and former patients of fertility clinics.

By 'knowledge-intensive' I mean how a plurality of knowledge claims and information sharing is given center stage in conversations. In relation to feminist understandings of ethnography this evokes questions of the relationship between power and knowledge on the one hand, and sensitivity and ethics on the other hand. Starting from the assumption that neither vulnerability nor authority should be understood as stable positions, in this paper I reflect on the following questions: How can I account for the 'shifting' knowledge positionalities that ethnographic work with clinicians, recipient parents and egg donors entails? In what ways do I envision research participants and communities as vulnerable with regards to the aims and knowledge claims of my study? With regards to feminist critiques of non-reflexive ethnography, how can I reflect on the shifting power/knowledge positionalities created between me and participants and account for their effects on issues of access and research ethics?

In order to discuss these questions, I start by outlining my views on ethnography and power in terms of a theoretical understanding of doing research on practices in fertility medicine as a gender studies scholar. I then move on to discuss assumptions of vulnerability in relation to privacy, institutional power and different kinds of families. To conclude, I address my own research positionality in relation to *doing* and *writing* ethnography, and suggest a positioning between "the feminist ally" and "the feminist critic".

Theoretical notes on ethnography and power in studying reproductive medicine

Gender Studies as a discipline, and its close entanglement with feminist ethnography, has long been concerned with the relationship between power and knowledge. The idea that the researcher can escape her/his own positionality and selfhood in ethnographic studies and thus avoid "contaminating the data" has been called a smokescreen by feminist researchers, as it obscures the subjectivity of the researcher (Davies, 2008). In contrast, in feminist terms ethnography should not be viewed as data about "the other", but as an *interaction and a relational process* where the researcher is also co-produced as a subject (Shepherd, 2016). As such a process, ethnography entails shifting knowledge positionalities. In consequence, it is important to reflect on the different and shifting knowledge positionalities that permeate ethnographic encounters.

Ethnography, comprising qualitative interviews as well as participant observation and occasionally also other types of fieldwork (even 'document fieldwork'), has been central to feminist research on reproductive technologies (Franklin, 1997; Becker, 2000; Thompson, 2005). Feminist scholars working on reproduction have been concerned with women's embodied, and gendered, experiences in relation to reproductive and genetic technologies. Following a feminist anthropological tradition of contextualizing how the personal relates to corporate, institutional and corporeal encounters in fertility medicine, ethnographic methodologies have been used to contrast the high-speed development of the often disembodied knowledge economies in

biomedical sciences (Mamo, 2007; Deomampo, 2016). However, labeling one's ethnography as feminist, striving to change masculinist assumptions in knowledge production is not a horizontalizing endeavor that takes away power imbalances. Rather, in the words of Stacey (1988), "elements of inequality, exploitation, and even betrayal are endemic to ethnography" (p. 114), an issue I will return to below.

Reproduction and new medical technologies are often the topic of political and sometimes highly affective debates (Gunnarsson Payne & Korolczuk, 2016). In addition, societal views on what is regarded as desirable modes of reproduction are influenced by different and shifting modes of governance that depend on established forms of knowledge and authority. Engaging in knowledge production in the areas of reproductive assistance, notions of kinship, gender and parenthood, is thus not an innocent, neutral project, but heavily embedded in, and possibly contributing to, asymmetric power relations. Moreover, my focus on practices in fertility medicine means engaging with the medical community. In Sweden, fertility clinics are part of a health care system that increasingly blurs the borders between public and private care. In general, the bio-medical parts of the health care sector, including fertility medicine, are on the one hand often positioned as at the top of 'the knowledge pyramid', a 'high-power' and 'high-status' territory. On the other hand, this sector involves a range of differently situated workers and workplaces that often stretch these workers' capacities to the max in order to help and assist, sometimes under very laborious working conditions. Thus, institutional powers ought not

to be underestimated, as well as their dependency on a certain power-knowledge economy.

In line with Davis and Craven (2011), I view power as multidimensional, multi-sited and intersectional. In contrast, my interviews with recipient parents showcase a co-dependency of fertility clinic and its patients; often, a strong demarcation line is drawn with regards to who is regarded as knowledgeable, and consequently, deemed an appropriate decision-maker. While the flow of money from consumer power continuous to drive the globalized fertility industry (Mamo, 2018), having consumer choice does not automatically position paying or publicly funded patients in a position of power with regards to treatments that relate to their own bodies. Therefore, I find it crucial to discuss and scrutinize not only the flow of capital but the knowledge economy that underpins it. Next, I will discuss some of the shifting knowledge positionalities in my encounters with recipient parents, donors, and staff at medical institutions.

Shifting positionalities in a multi-sited ethnography

My doctoral research study involves different types of actors that are positioned differently with regards to questions of legal and cultural support, financial resources, work place hierarchies and knowledge positionalities. As part of my study design and ethics application, I have thus had to consider who gets positioned as "vulnerable" in my own knowledge practices.

While feminist ethnography can entail processes of studying both "up" and "down", feminist ethnography has historically relied on a commitment to issues of social and political relevance

to the "studied subjects". In line with Davis and Craven (2011), I wish to negate the "apolitical stance" of ethnographic research, and instead make visible and transparent ideological beliefs and interventionist ambitions underlying my ethnographic approach. However, as argued by Stacey (1988), fieldwork ethnography always runs the risk of exploitation, as it builds on a conflict of interest between the ethnographer as *participant and ally* (a relatable and authentic person in the field) and as an (potentially) *exploiting researcher* who will acquire data also from personal tragedies and who can 'leave' the field whenever convenient (p. 113). Furthermore, Davis and Craven (2011) conclude that for them an aim with earlier studies was to "benefit the least powerful of those we studied". This may be an important strategy, but it also needs some unpacking, as defining who has least power might not be self-evident nor consistent throughout the project. In the following, I share some reflections regarding expressed vulnerability in my project thus far.

Reproduction and family-making are culturally dense topics that regularly stir up strong emotions with regards to morality, gender and power. I argue, along with media scholar Andreassen (2022), that queer and donor-conceived families are often constructed as constantly at risk of "failing" with regards to fulfilling the promise of happiness or the "happiness object" of the family (see Ahmed, 2020). In Andreassen's analysis, non-heterosexual and solo parent family formations are consequently forced to balance this risk with practices of compensation. This means that families that are not well aligned with the nuclear family ideal will more likely have to engage in activities that

strengthen their positioning as well-planned or happy families rather than risky projects.

In my ethnography, I have come to wonder if the explicit and tacit knowledge-sharing of solo mothers and queer/lesbian couples can be understood as one such strategy of compensating for risks associated with donor-conception and non-heterosexual or non-nuclear family formations. In my interviews with recipient parents, they commonly recalled what they knew, or what wished they had known, at the time of undergoing treatment. Several respondents also explained staying up to date with regulations from the Board of Health and Welfare (for treatment in Sweden), or bringing peer reviewed articles to a gynecologist appointment (for treatment outside of Sweden). Likewise, information about good treatment options and recommendations for named clinics and named clinicians have been commonplace in the online posting as well as interviews. In addition, my own encounters with participants have equally been structured around a type of knowledge sharing and positioning where I have tried to establish myself as knowledgeable (and competent) enough to be worthy of their story, while simultaneously trying not to ask questions that will make them doubt the validity of their own claims or position them in troubling situations with regards to information they did not ask for.

In thinking through my research design, I have sometimes referred to it as involving a studying "up" *and* "down", as well as "sideways". While recipient parents have usually approached me as an ally, with the hope that more studies will bring about change in donor-conception practices, egg donors have often

related to me as yet another person to "give to" in an altruistic mission of wanting to "do good" or otherwise be of service. In contrast, some of the health care professionals seem to have feared they were being tested or exposed; at times they also expressed powerlessness in relation to issues that were out of their control or where they themselves had limited influence over either procedures or legislation.

Throughout this research project, getting access to fertility clinics and personnel has proved the most challenging. In contact with clinics, I have made sure to always reference people in the field that they had previously worked with, or that are part of the medical research community. As highlighted by Söderfeldt (2021), medical practices are not only medical; they are also positioned in a cultural and social context and do not exist "outside" of culture. Ethnographically, I approach medicine as a scientific knowledge community that exists alongside my own; thus, part of my ethnographic work lies in fostering a meeting between research questions from Gender Studies, methods from critical ethnography/feminist anthropology, and the practices and knowledge assumptions of fertility clinics in Sweden. In meetings with clinics, I have had to construct myself both as knower and not-knower; as someone wanting to learn about practices in donor-conception, while also someone knowledgeable enough to perform an ethically sound and comprehensive ethnography, a method in itself sometimes viewed with suspicion in medicine and science. Consequently, on several occasions I was told by medical staff how I should perform my studies otherwise, or that doing observations would not "make

a good study"; that they wish they could help me with the research, but that the study design was not suitable. With regards to "studying up", these encounters have made visible a range of assumptions regarding the typical, or appropriate, interviewee. While I understand and fully support that material from institutions be kept equally safe and confidential as the material from other informants, the way institutions view themselves as vulnerable (or at risk) if sharing their workplace with a researcher is worth reflecting further on.

In my first year of doing ethnography (2022), the debate around donor-conception practices and the responsibility of clinics intensified (SVT, 2022). Previously, news articles had mostly dealt with problems of accessibility, such as long waiting times or different funding schemes between regions. Lately however, wrong-doings and incorrect or missing information provided by fertility clinics have received quite some attention. In many cases, these "findings" and controversies have been brought forward by activist or semi-professional groups consisting of both donor-conceived individuals and former fertility patients. In navigating this landscape as a PhD student doing ethnography, there are plenty of considerations for me to bear in mind with regards to exposure, vulnerability and risk assessment. As discussed in a previous section, families and the making of families are often considered part of the private realm – yet, they are governed through a range of legal, financial and medical concerns. Here, *both* those providing and receiving treatments are at risk if exposed as "wrong-doers", morally weak, fraudulent or greedy. This includes both publicly financed and

private fertility clinics.

Apart from challenges in getting access to medical institutions, I have as an ethnographer often been viewed or referred to as an "ally" (compare Stacey, 1988). If first participants have wanted to know my own "route" to this field, and asked questions to evaluate how informed they believe me to be, they have then rather quickly expressed enthusiasm for the project and wanted to know its publication timeline. Many have made clear that they are now, for the interview, also talking about things more private and sensitive than what they would share online or with journalists, but I still have the sense that the motivation for them to participate is political, and that they address me as their ally. For me, encountering research participants that almost daily engage in support or advocacy work for others in the field (in particular, this refers to other recipient patients or parents) has required me to re-evaluate both what is meant by vulnerability, and what might be different strategies for countering vulnerability.

As argued by Granholm and Svedmark (2018), as researchers we are always responsible for minimizing harm to the individuals we study. This also applies to online research where we might observe conversations and posts on sensitive topics while not participating ourselves (sometimes referred to as "lurking"). A dilemma that has arisen is how to ensure that people do not experience negative consequences after having had their stories or online material used and analysed for a research publication. In the case of my own offline ethnography, an additional dilemma arose regarding how to handle and present the more pri-

vate or sensitive stories that some of the public advocates have wanted to share. Here, some of the findings might need to be highly masked or even left out, if there is a risk that accounts might still be too similar to stories shared online under one's full name.

The power-knowledge nexus of writing ethnography

The final written product of ethnographic research is an intertextual and mediated one (Davies, 2008). In other words, ethnography is not just about "reading" culture but about writing it as well (Ingridsdotter & Silow Kallenberg, 2018). Viewing ethnography as neither a neutral representation of reality, nor merely a literary activity with no connection to the social world, I view ethnographic writing as an interpreting and consciously constructed narrative with a certain purpose and intended audience. As such, the ethnographic text is not produced to stand fully on its own but can be understood as a continuation of a professional dialogue that comes with both conventions and opportunities. Therefore, reflection on the strategic choices made in writing, with regards to narrative, style and publishing, is essential to ethnographic research.

In my PhD thesis, I examine different levels of decision-making power in reproductive medicine, a practice I had little personal experience of when starting out. However, as pointed out by Davies (2008), the ethnographer cannot escape having a relationship to the field of study. If it is fair to say I started off as an outsider to the field of donor-conception, the question is, in writing and defending a thesis, will I ultimately not be positioned as a knowledgeable subject of the field? As part of my method's discussion, I wish to reflect on my own knowledge and power positionalities in the creation of this research.

In this chapter, I have drawn on Stacey's (1988) remarks regarding the unequal reciprocity of both fieldwork relationships and the writing of ethnography. How do I write about a field marked "by intrusion", with me entering into spaces where I am neither patient nor health care provider, but a knowledge producer? How do I represent self and Other in writing, and what if (when) my findings end up disappointing or upsetting participants, will they feel betrayed? These are questions I carry with me.

Overall, I need to take responsibility to the best of my abilities, not to publish or cite findings that could negatively expose those in a position of less power (Granholm & Svedmark, 2018). However, when reflecting on and trying to foresee vulnerabilities, I need to remain aware that political climates can shift abruptly, and that what might not seem sensitive in 2023 may well be so in a few years' time or when taken out of context. If one ambition of mine is to question, or lessen, institutional powers over bodies and families, I also need to account for the ways in which institutions are made up of people and knowledge networks. In addition, there might be times when I need to protect myself from exposure or from harmed relationships.

In accounting for the shifting, unstable and often contradictory social relations that underpin the ongoing ethnographic work of my doctoral studies, I want to suggest thinking of my own research positionality as somewhere between "ally-ship" and "critique". With this I mean a dual positionality building simul-

taneously on the notion of the feminist ally and the feminist critic. While Stacey (1998) has made explicit the dangers of feminist ethnographers being viewed as "allies" in the field, Davis and Craven (2011) argue for the need to make explicit ideological beliefs and who the study wants to benefit. In getting access to potential interviewees and participant observation, I have had to rely not only on relevant knowledge positionalities connected to academic work and organization but also to position myself as interchangeably in a position of *political ally-ship* and *informed critic*.

Engaging with medically assisted reproduction in general, and non-heterosexual procreation in particular, I need to take responsibility for how the knowledge created might be used or interpreted by different groups in society. My choice to write for an audience of medical practitioners can be discussed in relation to what Davies (2008) calls "ethnographic authority". Making explicit two main types of audiences that ethnographers should keep in mind when constructing the ethnography – practitioners in the field and research subjects and/or 'user groups' – she argues that the (often conflicting) relationship between these two audiences will "have great implications for the authority of the ethnographic findings" (Ibid, p. 268). However, in doing my thesis by publication instead of writing a monograph, I am not bound to be fully consistent with my choice of audience. A possibility that I intend to explore is to let the different sub-studies and articles address different audiences and thus reflect a plurality of narrative styles and conventions. In practice, this also makes visible the constant boundary-work that underpins science and academic disciplines (Gieryn, 1983).

To conclude, in this chapter I have complicated the idea of fixed research positionalities both with regards to vulnerability – how and when research subjects are referred to as vulnerable – and likewise, how and when subjects are regarded as knowledgeable and therefore in a position to exercise power, such as making decisions in fertility medicine. I have referred to practices of medically assisted reproduction and donor-conception as knowledge-intense areas where positionalities, and possibly vulnerabilities, are accounted for through relating to different kinds of knowledge claims. Here, it is crucial to read these claims in relation to institutional powers and to reflect on my own knowledge positionality when defining and taking donor-conception practices as my field of ethnographic research.

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5

QUYNH LE

UNVEILING BIAS: REFLEXIVITY IN GENDER AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH

In the context of gender and entrepreneurship, reflexivity becomes particularly important due to the complex and multidimensional nature of the subject matter. Reflexivity in the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship research refers to the practice of acknowledging and critically examining the researchers' own beliefs, biases, and positionality in relation to the research topic. It involves understanding how the researchers' identity, experiences, and perspectives may influence the research process and the interpretations of the data. Gender is a social construct that encompasses a range of identities, roles, and expectations, which can vary across cultures and time periods. Entrepreneurship, on the other hand, is influenced by various factors such as societal norms, access to resources, and institutional structures, which can also intersect with gender in different ways. Thus, it is more important for researchers in gender and entrepreneurship to be aware of their own biases and assumptions about gender roles, norms, and expectations, because these factors can shape the research questions, methods, and data interpretation. It requires both self-awareness and critical reflection on the researchers' own beliefs, biases, and positionality to bring about a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between gender and entrepreneurship to promote inclusion and diverse perspectives in the research process. As emphasized by Davies (2012), reflexivity should be considered in all research, but it plays a more critical role in ethnographic research than in other types of qualitative research; therefore, it must be reflected in all stages of the research process. Drawing upon my thesis topic and its empirical work, this chapter will incorporate my comprehension of reflexivity, emphasizing its significance in gender and entrepreneurship research.

My research topic investigates how the entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE) emergence process becomes gendered. My motivation stemmed from earlier studies that confined the entrepreneurial ecosystem within specific geographical locations such as Silicon Valley (at a local scale), London, Stockholm (at a capital scale), or Israel (at a national scale). These studies explored how regional clusters evolved into EEs, referring to it as the process of EE emergence. However, with my empirical focus on Femtech, I questioned the notion of framing the EE within territorial borders and stressed the need to recognize its continuous evolution through disruptive practices. My research ventured beyond perceiving emergence as a mere transformation of a physical

entity from a smaller to a larger scale. Instead, I embraced the understanding that emergence involves the dynamic interaction of lower-level system elements, giving rise to phenomena that manifest at a higher system level (Kozlowski & Chao, 2012). My primary aim was to challenge the geographical confinement of EEs and emphasize the crucial role of entrepreneurs as central actors responsible for constructing and sustaining the EE. They serve as catalysts for actions and interactions within the ecosystem. Furthermore, I introduced the concept of "doing gender" into the discussion, asserting that gender is an ever-present and socially constructed element (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Consequently, it is imperative to consider the influence of gender and the process of gendering when studying the emergence of EEs. By intertwining the perspectives of gender and EE emergence, my research seeks to shed light on the intricate dynamics at play and unveil the gendered dimensions within entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Initially, while acknowledging the geographic basis of the understanding of entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE) due to the influence of geographic economics researchers, I did not delve into the reasons behind their definitions and whether they would accept my alternative understanding of EE and EE emergence. However, the more I explore the phenomenon (in my case, it is the Femtech phenomenon1[1]) and immerse myself in data analysis and literature background from different angles, the more I realize the importance of reflexivity. I then started questioning the results of prior research papers and the authors' background and presence (Davies, 2012), as well as my results and background, to better understand how these factors influence different perspectives of a similar phenomenon. As an interdisciplinary researcher working at the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship, I found myself pondering whether my claim to challenge the traditional understanding of the entrepreneurial ecosystem would be considered a valuable contribution to EE research. Engaging in reflection and examining both my work and that of others, I recognized the vital role of the research community in embracing reflexivity as a "process of self-reference" (Davies, 2012, p.4) to thoroughly comprehend the foundations of prior research and appreciate the work already done, and welcome new possibilities for generating novel results that advance the field's knowledge. I realized that reflexivity should not be solely an individual endeavor but also a collective undertaking within the research community. This underscores the necessity for researchers from different disciplines to examine a social phenomenon from various lenses and adopt a collaborative approach to knowledge production.

For example, traditional researchers in the EE field should be more open to interdisciplinary research approaches, such as gender or technological aspects that bring about disruptive practices in EE. In this regard, I felt fortunate as an interdisciplinary Ph.D. student, as it enabled me to approach entrepreneurship research from a gender perspective right from the beginning. Similarly,

1 "Femtech" is a term applied to a category of software, diagnostics, products, and services that use technology to improve women's health, i.e., period-tracking app, pregnancy and nursing care, women's sexual wellness, and reproductive system health care. Femtech is currently portrayed by a community of around 1.600 Femtech startups

reflexivity is also evident in the Umeå Center of Gender studies' effort to organize the course *Ethnographic research in gender studies*, which incorporates a methodological approach that takes gendered experiences into account. However, as a gender and entrepreneurship researcher, I recognize the importance of drawing from prior research, encompassing gender studies, entrepreneurship, geographic economics, and potentially other fields, to build upon existing knowledge instead of outright denial. In the following sections, I will delve into my experiences with reflexivity, examining both the individual and collective perspectives.

Situating the self

As my research began with a new phenomenon, I formulated a research question driven by this phenomenon. To establish the boundaries of the phenomenon, I conducted exploratory interviews and observations. In the initial phase of data collection, I obtained approximately 30 interviews with Femtech entrepreneurs and various actors within the Femtech entrepreneurial ecosystem. Additionally, I spent two weeks shadowing at the empirical organization, observing ten meetings, eight events, and three competitions exclusively designed for the Femtech community. I positioned myself as an observer amidst the Femtech entrepreneurs and the ecosystem, aiming to be a participant in their activities. For this purpose, I took the opportunity to engage with Women in Tech Venture Studio (WITVS), where I found individuals and companies of interest for my study. I began building relationships with them as a Mission partner, providing support through volunteer work. This relationship

allowed me to establish trust and foster mutual appreciation. Consequently, when I introduced my research and inquired about the possibility of WITVS becoming the empirical setting for my research project, the organization's founder willingly accepted. Since the start of my Ph.D. journey, I have closely followed the organization's work and operations, which initially led to confusion regarding how I should behave during observations. I struggled with the decision between being a "participative observer" or an "observant participant" (Czarniawska, 2007). Initially, I faced challenges in determining which questions should be asked and which answers should be given, as well as the concept of "making the familiar strange" and "making the strange familiar" (O'Reilly, 2012). During one observation meeting, a participant asked if I could provide her with a list of Femtech startups and founders, given that I had interviewed many of these actors. I was hesitant about how to refuse without making them feel betrayed. Later, I learned that in ethnographic research, the researcher cannot and should not strive to be "a fly on the wall" as I had encountered in most ethnographic research in business studies. Ultimately, I chose not to adopt the role of a passive observer. Instead, I reflected on my involvement as a participant and how it influenced the version of *truth* that I would unveil in my research. I helped my participants by providing relevant information for their business, such as introducing them to relevant people or organizations I knew or providing industry reports that are important for them to know. Meanwhile, I protected all participants' information and what I collected from interviews and observations.

Through exploratory interviews and ethnographic observations, I gained a deeper understanding of the unique data that emerges from an ethnographic study, as described by O'Reilly (2012) as "data that we have collected and stored as memories alongside sensory data and emotions" (O'Reilly 2012:99). During one of the conferences I observed, I witnessed an unfortunate incident involving male hackers who attempted to disrupt the meeting by using offensive videos and doodles on the host's slide, which focused on the significance of developing digital health solutions for women's health issues. The hackers managed to disrupt the meeting within 10 minutes of its start, leaving both the hosts and attendees shocked. This incident served as a source of "sensory data" for me, as it highlighted the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the Femtech field, including societal taboos and discrimination.

One of the challenges I encountered during my ethnographic research was deciphering the underlying thoughts within my field notes, whether they were the participant's analysis or my own reflections. Given my prior experience working in an entrepreneurial environment and my background as a female entrepreneur, I sometimes found it difficult to avoid biases and the sense of "choosing sides" between male and female entrepreneurs, investors, and other stakeholders in the ecosystem. Occasionally, I couldn't help but express agreement or sympathy towards my participants during interviews or informal conversations. To maintain transparency, I diligently recorded all my thoughts and

implicit biases in my notes. During lunch with the participants at their office, they discussed the fragmentation of the Femtech ecosystem, and one of them asked for my perspective on the topic. Just as I was about to answer, one of the board members interjected, saying, "It won't be fragmented for her because of her research topic". This statement strongly resonated with me. It made me realize that spending most of my time with female founders and stakeholders within the Femtech ecosystem might lead me to view them from a feminist standpoint and inadvertently portray them as a tightly-knit community when, in reality, they may be fragmented. Consequently, I recognized the importance of considering different perspectives along the spectrum and striving for rationality. This realization prompted me to place more emphasis on incorporating and harmonizing knowledge from other relevant fields into my research, which I believe is essential for collective reflexivity.

One way to ensure consistency with reflexivity is by maintaining detailed field notes, which should encompass visual and audio recordings as fundamental components. I tried to put this into practice, following a three-step process in my preparation for writing: before, during, and after conducting interviews or observations with my participants. Before each interview or observation, I established clear objectives that I aimed to achieve. During these events, I diligently took note of any new ideas that emerged during the participants' discussions and mapped them accordingly. Subsequently, I proceeded to write down my strongest impressions, feelings, and any unexpected insights

that surfaced during the interviews or observations. These were recorded as memos in Nvivo and served as valuable sources for data analysis.

The practice of maintaining detailed field notes proved immensely helpful in the subsequent step, where I mapped out all the involved actors and their interactions. This mapping exercise went beyond merely connecting actors with arrows on a map; it also provided explanations for the meaning of these arrows, which represent the mechanisms driving the phenomenon that I am studying. To ensure efficiency, I categorized the memos into different types, such as methodological notes, theoretical notes, and empirical notes. This categorization has proven beneficial in saving time when I want to commence writing a paper without having to review all the materials from scratch.

Reflexivity from a collective perspective

Besides primary data, I selected a collection of relevant archival data, including 179 chosen Femtech podcast episodes from 2020 to 2023, 15 videos of Femtech events, and 7 recorded pitching events for Femtech startups and investor panels from 2019 to 2022. After initial analysis using both primary and archival data (though coding, visual mapping, and creating concepts map) and relating to the relevant theoretical concepts, the concept of *boundary* appears appropriate. The term *boundary* kept recurring in my thoughts while analyzing the data and contemplating the research question. Specifically, the findings revealed that at the micro-level, entrepreneurs engaged in both competitive and collaborative boundary work, operating within and at the boundaries to penetrate the ecosystem. At the meso-level, they began working through the boundaries to reshape the boundary landscape, utilizing boundaries to reconfigure patterns of interactions and design their own entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE). At the macro-level, boundary work exhibited multifaceted and recursive characteristics, illustrating how narratives and demarcations influenced the shaping of the EE (Femtech). Based on these preliminary findings, I realized a significant similarity between my research and prior studies on EE, which surprised me. As a result, I decided to trace my train of thought regarding the boundaries of the EE from the very beginning. I recalled how adamant I was in challenging the geographical boundaries of the EE, believing that it hindered the consideration of virtual or more flexible transformations of the EE and the gender dynamics evident in the Femtech phenomenon. However, over time, I gradually became more convinced that the geographical dimension should not be rigidly bound, but it should not be entirely detached either. I developed a mutual understanding and gained insight into the underlying perspectives of EE as geographical or regional entities. The initial definitions of EE were formulated during the pre-digital era (the 1990s - 2000s), influenced by the territorial business model that situated entrepreneurs and their ventures within specific territories at that time. It is understandable that the concept of EE became associated with territorial embeddedness (Kuebart & Ibert, 2019). While these EE concepts may now seem outdated, they cannot be completely disregarded as they represent the reality of the EE

concept. Even with the proliferation of information and digital technologies, high-growth entrepreneurship does not always entail high-tech ventures exclusively within a specific regional entrepreneurial territory. The EE concept may not necessarily be bounded by geographical dimensions, but its *ancestors* persist. Furthermore, entrepreneurs and other entrepreneurial actors consistently need to position themselves within one or more ecosystems and leverage resources from those ecosystems to ensure their survival.

Then, I found myself continuously questioning whether the boundaries of the entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE) are established by the entrepreneurial actors themselves or by researchers and whether the definitions of EE created by researchers truly align with the practitioners' understanding of the concept. I pondered who I was challenging in terms of the understanding of EE and whether my work focused on academic or practical issues. It became evident that the understanding of EE's boundaries in research appeared distant from how these boundaries were actually formed, and the existing body of literature had yet to address the potential for boundary changes. Researchers, including myself, may inadvertently contribute to constructing an inaccurate reality, which can lead to ineffective policies in the future and perpetuate comparisons between different regions.

This necessarily requires a multi-perspective to access an ecosystem's boundaries, a condition that will allow a better definition of the nature and characteristics of any ecosystem. Initially, my research proposal was challenged on whether the Femtech phenomenon is a global phenomenon that is *boundary-less*. Taking all the above mentioned into consideration, I learned that though we can anticipate the scope of EE beyond its geographical boundary, it is complicated to govern, measure, and study EE on a global scale. On the other hand, if we keep setting geographical boundaries for EE, it seems a never-ending process because it is naturally evolving considering both its physical boundaries (borders) and the actors who can come and go continuously. EE research lacks an understanding of how it is formed and how it emerges into different types of EE, which means there is a need for it to evolve to meet the real demand of the current actors. Therefore, I found it more important to understand why it emerges and the process of how it emerges through the agency. This concerns understanding symbolic and social boundaries (how they influence each other, especially the role of social boundaries that influence the actors to enact EE to change the symbolic boundaries). I found ecosystem typologies are worth studying because if we consider incubators or accelerators as an ecosystem, they are too small, and vice versa; a country could be too big. However, if we look at the typologies, no matter how big or small they are, they are constructed for a specific reason, for a specific audience.

The process of reflexivity assists me in not only "taking two steps back from the subject of research" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004: 274) to questioning "What do I know?" and "How do I know what I know?" but also guides me in positioning myself appropriately among other researchers in my field of study. I believe it is crucial to emphasize the importance of reflexivity as a research ethics practice among business researchers. From what

I have observed thus far, most ethnographic research in this field has not given due attention to reflexivity in various aspects.

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6

ANJA NEIDHARDT-MOKOENA

DOING THE RIGHT THING(S) WHEN IMAGINING AND CREATING WHAT IS NOT YET. ETHICS IN DESIGN RESEARCH WORKSHOPS

Introduction

Ethical questions revolve around "doing the right thing". There are different ways of defining what the right thing is, and how to approach, achieve, or evaluate it. Especially in ethnography, it is crucial to reflect on how we as researchers encounter people, how we can study cultural phenomena and contribute to knowledge creation without harming anybody. Official approvals are meant to oversight, guide, and prevent mistakes (Markham 2018:9). Especially feminist researchers have argued that these regulations can lead "to situations whereby researchers conceptualize ethics as a list of checkboxes on a form" (Ibid:2). If ethics are mainly perceived as "a set of procedural considerations taken care of prior to the conduct of a study", then there is often less attention paid to reflexivity throughout the process. This can lead to problems since "ethical dilemmas have a way of creeping

up on us, often becoming apparent only after something goes wrong" (Ibid). For these reasons, additional as well as alternative approaches to how to do the right thing have been developed. These include reflexivity on all levels and throughout the whole research project (Davies 2008), for example about one's own role in the process, but also about structural issues, and the impact that the project might have on people (Markham 2018:7). My own PhD project is rooted in design research, even though I apply a feminist approach and parts of it are inspired by ethnography. In this text, I will reflect on ethical questions in regards to one of these parts, workshops that I developed and hosted. In order to be able to do this, I will first speak about what design research is and how in general ethical questions are approached in this field. Then I will introduce my PhD project, before reflecting – with the help of the example of the workshops – on what doing the right thing(s) might entail.

Ethics in design research

Design research goes further than trying to solve problems, like which product would need to be created in order to deal with a specific issue in people's daily lives. At its core is finding and articulating urgencies, and then developing ways in which they can be approached (Redström 2017). Nowadays, it is generally understood in design research that it is impossible to find universally applicable solutions. Design researchers are increasingly used to staying with the trouble, working with tensions, for example between the general and the particular (Nelson & Stolterman 2014). With those tensions and the complexity of

life as well as the messiness and wickedness of big problems, designers and design researchers learn to not think in "good or bad", but rather in "better or worse". We explore and propose alternatives; for example, alternative products, but also alternative ways of finding and approaching urgencies, and of doing design. Our work has an experimental, creative character. We analyse what already exists, and explore what is not there yet, and with the insights we get, we contribute to knowledge production. While some experiment with materials and build prototypes, others invite participants to workshops to understand problems and to envision alternatives in collaboration. These participatory or collaborative workshops are different from experiments in fields like medicine, where researchers need to test new treatments, and at the same time need to make sure that no participant gets harmed. When it comes to these experiments in medicine, it is crucial to be able to plan exactly how a study will unfold and to strive to avoid all possible errors. In medicine, rules and official approvals are necessary in order to oversee the research process and to protect participants (and many official guidelines originate from these contexts). It would be counter-productive and even dangerous and unethical if an experiment would develop a life of its own. In participatory design workshops, where creativity and artistic freedom are important, the situation is different. Of course, participants also need to be protected from harm. However, design workshops often revolve around studying whatever is being discussed or envisioned in collaboration.

Workshops to envision alternative design museums

Situating the PhD project

My thesis and therefore the workshops that I developed and hosted are rooted in design research. The current title of my PhD project is "Disentangling Design From Oppressive Structures: Envisioning, Building, and Sustaining Alternative Design Museums". It is an exploration of potential ways in which the entanglement of design and its museums with oppressive structures might be understood and addressed in order to bring about positive change. As the title of the thesis suggests: The project is about acting, and therefore also changing; about the unstable, the fluid, open ended, – the process itself is a result. And since the questions are multi-layered and complex, and the phenomenon difficult to grasp and also quite invisible, a combination of diverse approaches and methods is needed. I study the design discipline itself with its museums as an example, but I also do research through design – by applying methods like participatory workshops, creative writing, illustrations, etc. (Frayling 1993; Redström 2021). In this I follow a feminist perspective, and *Matters of Care* as a transformative ethos (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). I am not just researching tactics as means to change the design discipline: The ways in which I research them can also be described as tactics (Certeau 2002). Things are messy, and therefore tactical moves are needed, rather than strategies. Thinking with Law (2019), maybe methods (here in this project, as well as in similar ones) could also be framed as "situated enactments" (Law 2019:155). To make decisions based on which possibilities

and limitations one encounters, entails that ethical challenges appear differently in any of these steps, and that they can hardly be foreseen. Apart from this, I also see the methods as (more or less) inventive (Lury & Wakeford 2014): For this project existing ones were changed, and also new ones created. But the methods also change by themselves while being applied. And they have the potential of changing the actual question(s) during the research journey. "[T]hinking and writing are two sides of the same coin" (Lykke et al 2016:2). Therefore, writing is present throughout my whole PhD journey. Linked to this is reflexivity which I also "[do] not [see as] the end purpose of the research; it is the means through which knowledge of a social reality outside ourselves can be approached" (Davies 2008:265). This is a result of applying the already mentioned feminist approach. I also keep a feminist journal in which I document the experiences that I make in the role of a feminist design researcher. It allows me to reflect and to take care of myself. As Granholm & Svedmark (2018:506) say, "the responsibility to protect the ones involved also includes us as researchers."

Situating the workshops

I understand the workshops as part of methodological assemblages. While my case studies are more focused on exploring the current state of how established design museums are interwoven with oppressive systems, and which attempts for change are already underway, the experiments (like the workshops) are more focused on envisioning alternatives. Systems like heteropatriarchy and white supremacy are often difficult to grasp

with empirical approaches and secondary literature. The question often still remains: How do these systems of oppression show up in real life, in the particular? With inspiration from ethnography, I ask: What if we start with how our bodies and minds experience design and/in its established museums? Autoethnography

> struggles to find a new way of working with language that begins with the cells of the body, the senses of the body, as they were in the remembered moment – to relive the moment as far as possible, and to open it up for reliving by those who are listening to it, and interrogating it (Davies & Gannon 2006:12).

This and the understanding that "[k]knowledge and insights are learned as much through our bodies as our intellects" (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 99), inspire me to combine an inventory of design museums with museum visits and with workshops to explore memories of experiences in and with design museums. These approaches give different insights, and complement and inform each other. In the workshops, we start with combining our own experiences with design museums, and then in a second step we collectively imagine how alternatives could look and feel like, museums that we would wish to encounter. So far, five workshops took place (from September 2021 until September 2022). Four of them online (on the platforms Zoom and Miro), and one in person at University of Art and Design, Halle. In total there were 30 participants. The decision to start the workshops online, was a tactical one. Since the pandemic did

not allow for in-person meetings, not to speak of travels, I had to develop a format that worked within the given constraints and the possibilities at hand. This also had advantages: I could reach more participants from various countries who would have hardly been able to meet on location. Later, in September 2022, I was able to host a workshop in person. For the development of the workshop format, I took inspiration from the beginnings of participatory design in the 1970s and 1980s, because it shared certain values and beliefs with feminism (Kensing & Greenbaum 2013:31; Suchman 1993; Matrix 1984). In projects like UTOPIA (Ehn 1988), design researchers connected workers and designers to collaboratively develop software that rather benefits the workers than their employee. In their workshops, the aim was to imagine software (and therefore work environments) that did not yet exist. They did this with the help of models: three-dimensional cardboard for example, and acting out work situations and processes. More recent projects refer to design research "in which construction — be it product, system, space, or media — takes center place and becomes the key means in constructing knowledge" (Koskinen et al 2012:5). In these projects, knowledge is co-created with participants. So, the participants themselves are not studied. At focus are the co-created models and the knowledge that emerges from interactions with these models. In my own workshop format, collaborative writing practice as well as co-creating illustrations and mind maps helped us to translate from bodily experiences to understandings of structural issues. Instead of studying the participants, they were invited to collaboratively explore a question

through sketches, models, etc. The aim was neither to design an end product or universally applicable solutions. But to use the making of a model as a way to get a grip on the question at hand, to articulate it not just through words, because maybe it is easier to do this through visuals or material and/or personal interactions. The thing that emerges in-between us during the workshop, the knowledge created, is what I study. As long as participants themselves are not studied and no sensitive data about them (regarding their health, for example) is gathered, it is more common in my field to not apply for an ethical review by a committee. It is standard though to inform participants about the overall project as well as the particular workshop, and to ask them for their consent. There is also a common understanding that workshop formats develop throughout the process, and that there are always opportunities – and the need – to adapt and react to situations. I also understand this as part of inventive methods.

Impact model of ethics in design workshops

I think of ethics as interwoven with the theoretical framework and the methodology, as well as any other part of the research project. I agree with Granholm & Svedmark (2018:505): "Ethics must be both a compass as well as a guide." In design research, workshops often develop in unexpected ways – even more so, unexpected developments are valued, because we can learn from them. So, it is important to have enough freedom for these workshops to unfold. At the same time the responsible researcher needs to guide and react, and shape it on the go. This is

why I think it is helpful to apply Markham's "impact model of ethics". She writes:

> While understanding that it is always useful for researchers to distinguish and clarify the object of study [...], the characteristics of data [...], and the characteristics of people [...], an impact model highlights this decision making as a process occurring within larger systems of action and reaction, across longer timespans (Markham 2018:7).

This model does not only draw attention to ethical decisions that are made during research processes, but also toward "possible future trajectories" (Ibid). Markham thinks that "[w]ith a speculative lens situated at a future point in time, one can look backward, to consider how this particular effect might have been caused" (Ibid). While I find this a helpful approach, I would also like to add another interpretation: In design research projects like mine, part of the task is to imagine ways in which alternative, more just futures could come about. In such cases, the realisation of workshops can itself be seen as a manifestation of how we wish encounters and collaborations would look like, and the qualities of these then therefore also qualities we might wish to see in design museums.

Some emerging ethical questions

In the following part I discuss some ethical questions that came up in the development and during the realisation of the workshops, and how I dealt with them.

Invitations and consent

I "advertised" the workshops through my own networks, which include online feminist design platforms. Even though, theoretically anyone could have joint, the majority of those who felt addressed and signed up were members of marginalized groups, such as female or non-binary and/or BIPoC trained designers or curators who feel excluded from the established design discipline. Before the workshops took place, I sent a more detailed description of the workshops and a letter for informed consent to all participants, explaining the set-up, the context in which it takes place, how and which data is collected (and that it will be handled following GDPR regulations) and the participants' rights. Even though the participants are members of marginalised groups, their identities were not studied. As Markham explains,

> Swedish law clearly states that extra care and privacy protection must be taken in study of children, or when the research covers topics related to mental or physical illness, religion, ethnicity, or sexuality (Markham 2018:5).

In my project, the research topic does not cover these topics, since it is related to (alternative) design museums. Also, nobody was actively excluded. However, the workshops were designed with the intention to attract members of communities with whom I share similar interests and who also wish for changes in the design discipline. I see myself both as an insider and an outsider (O'Reilly 2012:98): There is a power dynamic, because

I am the researcher who set up the workshop and who is collecting data and using it for my PhD research project. Beforehand, but also always throughout the process I have reflected about my role as facilitator – if it is better to participate or not, how this would influence how participants see me and therefore might act towards me, how much I should disclose about the project beforehand, or how much I should stir the workshops (Davies 2008:95).

Researcher and participant

The workshop consists of two parts, separated by a break. In the beginning of the first part consists of welcoming the participants, introducing myself and again the workshop's topic, how it forms part of the overall thesis, and also the following steps. This builds on the information that each participant already received when signing up, together with the informed consent and creates a possibility to directly ask questions. This is followed by each person introducing themselves briefly. Then I ask each participant to individually write down a moment that they remember from visiting a design museum. In groups they then combine their texts. I listen and create space and time for them to speak. Afterwards when transcribing, I listen for gaps and pauses, for stumbling, – again, not to study the participants, but to see these as indicators for example for things that are difficult to grasp. During the workshops I try to find a way in which I can participate, also to make myself vulnerable (by sharing my own texts and experiences as well), and to create a welcoming atmosphere. However, I think it is unavoidable for me to influence the process. Even if I stay outside of the groups it might reinforce the hierarchy and I might look like an observer, making the participants feel more self-conscious. One difficulty is to get involved, to an extend that allows the others to shape the team work as they feel is best, and to let them decide about the direction of the discussions, while still being the host who has an overview of the overall schedule and aims. "This balancing of involvement and detachment [...] is in fact a very creative and distinct way of being in and learning about the world", O'Reilly says (2012:106). When participating I can learn about certain experiences, thoughts and ideas without explicitly or directly asking, by simply being around. Being an insider can have advantages and disadvantages: Given my own identity as a lesbian woman and trained designer (and openly talking about it), the participants might feel more comfortable and open to talk about their own experiences and thoughts. At the same time, I'm a white cis-woman with a German passport, and a researcher employed at a Swedish university, which can also make me an outsider. Apart from this, being an insider and also participating in the workshops can allow me to more easily understand the participants, on the other hand there is the risk that I might not see what is obvious for someone who is more of an outsider. The point, I think, is to make my role explicit, to reflect on it and to honestly and openly discuss it in the workshops, but also in the thesis.

Adaptation and creation

Since the method of the workshops is inventive, ethical considerations also need to be flexible and adapted on the given situation in the moment. Markham (2018:6) argues that "'doing the right thing' requires continual adjustment in situ as they are operationalized into decisions that have consequences, small and large". During the online workshops I took notes, documented the conversation on a Miro Board (where everyone can see and is able to add as well and to also correct me or change things). On location I also took notes and additionally photos and videos. However, in both formats I recorded only bigger group discussions. Online I could see and hear the participants and easily record audio and even take screenshots, however some of the "textuality" was missing, and also, I had less access to "non-verbal cues that often inform [...] interpretations of what people say" (Davies 2008:154). Textuality is important, especially when it comes to model making and communicating through materials. The group dynamics also change depending on whether the workshop is on- or offline. The time spent together (maybe even not talking, but being in the same physical room) can allow for a different atmosphere and developments. This became clear in Halle, where the workshop developed its own dynamic and I decided to let it flow, to not be strict with time and the steps I had initially planned, however making sure we still followed the questions and values. Apart from this, I think it's important to remember that "no ethnographic study is repeatable" (Davies 2008:98). What I found easier online is to make sure everyone is heard, to allocate equal amounts of time to speak. When the

workshop took place on location, I realised that my way of facilitating it was influenced by this importance of structure to counteract certain hierarchies that always come through when not actively addressed (Freeman 1972; Davies 2008:160–161). Another reason for me to let my project be inspired by ethnography, is that "[e]thnography is essentially a relationship-building exercise" (O'Reilly 2012:100). Because one of my project's aims is to build and maintain a community of people who aim for change in the design discipline towards more just futures, and I suggest that the workshops are a way to do that. I agree with O'Reilly that

> [w]alking, eating and doing other things with people involves unspoken meanings, memories, shared understandings, and all is interaction with others in the establishment of relationships (O'Reilly 2012:100).

I find it also interesting that some of my contacts and further collaborations developed alone through the initiation to the workshops – with people who actually never found time to participate in the workshops, but still reached out to me, and we then found other ways to collaborate.

Conclusion

It becomes clear that there is no one right way of how a participatory design workshop should be done, but several right things (or even: better things) one can do. At the same time, it is difficult to recognise or know what the rights things are. Sometimes

we only realise this later. This of course can create tensions. It is then crucial to sit with this uncomfortable feeling, because it can be productive when we engage with it and constantly reflect on our decisions and their possible impact throughout a whole research project.

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7

CHRISTIAN LILIEQUIST

ABOUT ETHICS, REFLEXIVITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY WHEN STUDYING STAND-UP COMEDY

"Can You Joke About This? – An Ethnological Study of Swedish Stand-up Comedy" is the working title of my ongoing dissertation project. The aim is to investigate the terms and conditions of the Swedish stand-up industry and the ways Swedish stand-up comedians represent, relate to and renegotiate with norms and cultural notions in society. The empirical material consists of interviews with stand-up comedians, observations of stand-up comedy performances, newspaper articles, TV shows and posts on social media concerning stand-up comedy and humor.

In this chapter, I will begin by discussing how research ethics can be combined with reflexivity and an intersectional perspective, and then elaborate on how to apply this in my fieldwork. I will especially focus on how I can use these tools to analyze how I as a researcher might possibly affect the research process.

Research ethics, reflexivity and intersectionality

The first step of the research process is often to get approval from an ethics committee. In my case I received an approval from *The Swedish Ethical Review Authority* before I started with my observations and got in touch with stand-up comedians for interviews. With that said, the approval from an ethics committee should not be used as a "green card" that allows the researcher to let go of further ethical thinking during the research process (cf. Granholm & Svedmark 2018: 506). As a researcher you must always be aware of the everyday ethical dilemmas which might arise before, during and after the fieldwork (cf. Guillemin & Gilliam 2004: 264ff). Sociologist Marilys Guillemin & Lynn Gilliam, Professor in Health Ethics, suggests that the term microethics "might provide a discursive tool to articulate and to validate the kinds of ethical issues that confronts researchers on a day-to-day basis" (2004: 273). For me, this has meant that I have continuously reflected upon and discussed ethical dilemmas with my supervisors, colleagues, and interviewees. For example, when something that can be seen as a sensitive subject have been brought up in the interviews, I have discussed with my supervisors, and sometimes also with the interviewees, whether or not to include it in my dissertation. Occasionally, I have returned to my approved ethics application to check if I might have exceeded what has been approved and at the same time updated myself with the new GDPR regulations.

According to Guillemin & Gilliam, it is important that the researcher combines an ethical approach with reflexivity in his or her research to be able to deal with the ethical issues that might occur (Guillemin & Gilliam 2004: 273). Reflexivity is described as "a process of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how that knowledge is generated" (2004: 274). In other words, reflexivity refers to the researcher's critical awareness of his or her own effect on the research process (cf. Davies 2008: 8). Early ethnography was influenced by a positivist view of research, where the researcher should be objective, neutral and made invisible in the written text (Davies 2008: 12, 81). But this changed during the 1960's and 1970's, when the supposed objectivity and neutrality of the researcher was questioned by feminists, post-structuralists and postmodernists with the request to make visible the researcher's impact on the research process and that knowledge is always constructed between the researcher and the participants of the study (Ehn & Klein 1994: 11, McCall 2005: 34, Davies 2008: 5, 8, 81, 216; Sjöstedt Landén 2011: 37f). Today it is a standard requirement that ethnographers should be reflexive about how they might affect the research. The reflexive stance should be applied during all the stages of the research process – from the recruiting of interviewees, to the fieldwork and writing of the final text.

This reflexive approach goes in line with my use of political discourse theory and intersectionality as the main theories for the dissertation. According to political discourse theory you can never be a neutral researcher "outside of the discourses", but instead you must always position yourself in relation to the discourses you're studying (cf. Lindelöf 2012: 33). And as an intersectional researcher, it is important to make visible how your own subject positions relate to various power structures in

society and how this can affect your research (cf. Wasshede 2020: 148). But just listing some of your own identity categories, such as "As a white, heterosexual, male…" (which Butler has called the "embarrassed etc. clause"), in the beginning of the analysis, is not enough without doing a proper analysis of your own positionings (Davis 2014: 22, Butler 1989:143) Instead, you have to elaborate on how your specific location forms your thinking and affects the complex and ambiguous relations that you have to the field you are studying (cf. Davis 2014: 44; Carstensen–Egwuom 2014: 269).

How can I apply reflexivity and intersectionality in my research?

Reflexivity should be applied early in the fieldwork, for example by asking yourself why you want study a certain field and what kind of relation you have to the field (Davies 2008: 95). Why then did I find it interesting to study stand-up comedy and from what kind of perspective did I enter the field?

In autumn 2019, it was time for me to decide what to write about in my Master thesis. I have always been interested in humor, which for me is a creative way of playing with different subjects, norms and cultural notions, and after a while I came up with the idea of writing about stand-up comedy. As a person with leftist values and a Magister's degree in Cultural Analysis, I was aware of the effects language can have on people's lives and that humor can reproduce norms and power structures that might be harmful to marginalized groups and individuals in society. But reflecting on my choice of subject, I found an interesting conflict within myself. On the one hand I wanted to defend the artistic freedom of stand-up comedians and their right to joke about everything, on the other hand I felt that it was important to be critical of their jokes from a power perspective. This conflict has since then been an important part of both my Master thesis and my ongoing dissertation project. How do we understand stand-up comedians' jokes about stereotypes and/or sensitive subjects – should they be seen as something playful and "innocent" or as something harmful that should be avoided?

Theologian and humor scholar Ola Sigurdsson writes that what we perceive as funny can be seen as an expression of one´s humorous habitus (cf. Sigurdsson 2021: 184). In other words, categories such as class, gender, age and ethnicity can be of importance when it comes to shaping our sense of humor. In my research I think it is important to reflect over how my own sense of humor is constituted and how that possibly affects my analysis. As a white, middle class, heterosexual male with no visible disabilities (sorry for the "embarrassed etc. clause"), I do not belong to any marginalized group in society, which might affect my sense of humor in a way that I have higher tolerance for provocative jokes than people who have suffered oppression. But on the other hand, I am educated in Cultural analysis and have since long been a member of the Swedish Left Party, which has made me strongly aware of the power structures and inequalities of society and have affected my sense of humor as well.

Davies emphasizes the importance to reflect over one owns relationships with the research participants during the fieldwork, and how these relationships can change both one's own

and their perception of the field over time (Davies 2008: 91f). By interviewing stand-up comedians, I have been able to deepen my perspectives on humor and how this might change my own humorous habitus. Sometimes my own idea of what is funny to joke about has been challenged by the interviewees. For example, from an intersectional perspective I can find it problematic when non-disabled persons are joking about disabilities in a demeaning way. But in an interview with a stand-up comedian with a disability, he told me that he encourages non-disabled comedians to tell jokes about disabilities, since it can be a way to "let off steam" and to treat persons with disabilities as anyone else. According to him it is common that non-disabled persons not used to stand-up comedy become uncomfortable and don't laugh at those kinds of jokes, but when he has been in the audience himself and laughed loudly, other people have also become more comfortable and started laughing. This example shows that it is not obvious on beforehand how you would interpret humor from various subject positions. My prejudice had been that a person with a disability might be offended when non-disabled persons tell jokes about disabilities, which turned out not to be the case in this situation. Instead, it was I, a non-disabled person, who found those kinds of jokes offensive, which might have to do with my education, values, background and/or lack of experience with stand-up comedy. As an intersectional researcher it is important to have a reflexive stance against your own theoretical and methodological concepts (Carstensen-Egwuom 2014: 267). If you in advance decide how theoretical categories such as age, class, gender, (non)disabilities, ethnicity etc. are

shaped, there is a risk that those categories will be essentialized. A better approach is to be open to how people describe themselves and how they experience the world, and not on beforehand decide how they are supposed to relate to various power structures (cf. Carstensen-Egwuom 2014).

As a researcher, you have to gain access to the group you want to study. This can sometimes be a frustrating process when you feel that the group members can be suspicious against you as a researcher, or that you are shut out because of other reasons, such as your ethnicity, gender or age (O'Reilly 2012: 86f). In my contact with stand-up comedians, I have been worried that they will see me as a "politically correct academic" who has no sense of humor and wants to sort out what is "good" or "problematic" stand-up comedy. To avoid this, I have sometimes thought about leaving out words such as "norms" and "intersectionality" in my interview requests, since it might frighten away some stand-up comedians. But at the same time, it is an important part of the informed consent that the research participants know what the study is about and on what terms they are participating (Guillemin & Gilliam 2004: 272), and therefore I decided not to leave out any of those concepts. An effect of this might be that the stand-up comedians that accepted the interview request already had knowledge about and were comfortable with the concepts, while others who were unacquainted with or skeptical of the concepts chose not to participate.

I have also reflected over how my questions and presentation of myself have affected what the interviewees have chosen to talk about. For example, in one of the interviews with a stand-up

comedian from the north of Sweden, we discussed stereotypical jokes regarding Norrlanders and how this can be connected to class. After the interview, the interview person said she would not have talked so much about that subject if she did not know that I also am from Norrland. In this way, my subject position as a Norrlander steered the interview in a direction which produced specific knowledge that might have been left out if I were from the south of Sweden. I have also asked quite a lot of questions about gender issues in the interviews and many of the interviewees opened up about the male norm and discrimination of women in the stand-up business. But maybe they would have talked even more and/or differently about this if they did not identify me as a man? This I will never know, but during the fieldwork process it is important to continuously reflect upon how the interviewees together with me as a researcher create knowledge about stand-up comedy as a cultural phenomenon.

During a participant observation, it is possible for the researcher to enter four different roles: complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer and complete participant (see Davies 2008: 82). However, the quality of the observation does not depend upon how participatory you are, but rather on your reflexive awareness of your participation and how it suits the research (Davies 2008: 84). Sociologist Karen O'Reilly suggests we should abandon the dualistic view of the researcher as an insider or outsider, since we are often both at the same time (O'Reilly 2012: 98). When I am performing observations at live stand-up comedy shows, I could in a way be said to take the role of participant since I am part of the audience, but at the

same time I am more of an observer in relation to the stand-up comedians (since I am not performing stand-up myself) (cf. Davies 2008: 82). In that way, I can at the same time position myself as an insider (as an audience member who observes other audience members) and an outsider (in relation to the stand-up comedians). An advantage of taking an insider position as a researcher is that you have better knowledge of the field you are studying, while a disadvantage is that you risk being too familiar with the field and therefore do not take notice of things that an outsider would see (O'Reilly 2012: 98). In my study, I think an advantage of being an outsider could be that it is easier for me to get a distance to the stand-up comedians' jokes and see how they can reproduce or challenge power structures and norms, while a disadvantage could be that I don't fully understand how it is to write jokes and perform on a stage.

Since I am a part of the audience, I must be aware of how my reactions to the performances, for example in the form of laughter, applauds, cheering or silence can have some effect on the outcome of the show. Stand-up comedians often interact with the audience, and at some observations they have asked me questions and then made fun of my answers. I always write down fieldnotes during and/or after my observations, where I try to be reflexive about my own interpretations of the performances and how I might affect the room with my appearance. As Davies writes, field notes are always partial and reflect the researchers' subjective impressions of a situation (2008: 256). Therefore, the final written text will be an interpretation of already interpreted material (Ibid). If I have been at a stand-up

performance together with a friend, I have asked them afterwards what their impression of the performance was, just to see if they have interpreted it differently and if I have missed or misunderstood any of the jokes.

Finally, I would like to make some short reflections about the empirical material which consists of stand-up comedy shows and clips that are published on online platforms such as *Youtube, Instagram, Facebook* and *TikTok*. In my digital observations, I take the role as "complete observer", since I do not interact with anyone (cf. Davies 2008: 82). Since these clips are published on public forums and are intended to entertain and reach as many people as possible, I have not asked the stand-up comedians for consent to analyze the material (cf. Davies 2008: 167f). But when it comes to the comments of the videos, I have been more cautious. As a researcher it can be tempting to "lurk" in online forums – that is to analyze posts, comments and discussions without participating and making your presence known (Davies 2008: 156). But even though the comments are written in public forums that can be read by all, it does not mean that they were *meant* to be read by everyone, and especially not analyzed by a researcher. For example, one of the comments to a video that I have analyzed expresses a joke which is clearly racist. If I would choose to write about this joke, it would be very easy for the readers of my dissertation to find the comment and the account who has written it, even if I did not quote it. Since it probably would not be likely to get a consent from the author of the comment to use it in my dissertation, I have decided not to include that comment, or any other similar comments in my analysis.

Summary

To summarize, in my dissertation I am combining an ethical stance with reflexivity and an intersectional perspective. Even though the approval from an ethics committee is an important first step and foundation of one's study, you cannot rely entirely on it throughout the whole research process. It is also important to validate the everyday ethical dilemmas that might come up during the research process. With a reflexive, intersectional approach I can make visible and reflect upon how my various subject positions in relation to power structures might affect the research. It is important to be reflexive throughout the whole research process and to have a reflexive stance against your own theoretical and methodological concepts. In my research I want to be open to how the study participants relate to various power structures in different ways, and how they together with me as a researcher creates knowledge about stand-up comedy.

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8

SOPHIA ERHARD

CAN MOMENTS OF ETHICAL TENSION BETWEEN THE PROCEDURAL PHASE AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE BE RESOLVED THROUGH A FEMINIST RESEARCH ETHIC?

Introduction

In general, ethical tensions can arise at any stage of a research project. In this chapter, I argue that it is helpful to draw on a feminist research ethic as proposed by Ackerly & True (2020) for general guidance as well as to resolve ethical tensions throughout the research process. To illustrate this argument, I have decided to focus on the tension between the process of applying for ethical approval and the possible reality of "doing" the research in practice. For the last couple of months, I have been simultaneously preoccupied with an ethical approval application and the preparation for data collection for my PhD project. I therefore draw on my experiences from this process to demonstrate how several "moments of tension" became visible at different times.

During the process of ethical review, some concerns can arise (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 267). In the case of the ethical review application to the Swedish Ethical Review Board (Etikprövningsmyndigheten), some of my concerns were, for example, related to questions of research context, language, and formalities of the process, while others were more connected to questions of practicalities of the (future) data collection. The first part of this chapter will describe the different moments of tension that I have experienced and contextualize them by mainly drawing on the insights of Guillemin & Gillam (2004) and Markham (2018). Despite focusing on the tensions and issues between procedure and practical application, I want to emphasize that I do understand the process of applying for ethical approval as necessary and important. However, the journey of going through this process for the first time has been very non-linear and a written documentation of it seems like an appropriate exercise.

The second part of this chapter will focus on the application of a feminist research ethic throughout the research project. Consciously choosing a feminist research ethic as a guideline to inform the research process as proposed by Ackerly & True (2020), arguably overlaps with and incorporates the ethical principles discussed by Guillemin & Gillam (2004) and Markham (2018). This part therefore focuses more on future considerations and goals of the research project, despite also drawing on some of the reflections about decisions I already had to make.

Background of the research project

My dissertation project investigates how informal (unwaged) elder care, performed by, for example, relatives, friends, volunteers and low-paid (or even unpaid) migrant workers plays an

increasing, yet spatially variegated role in the Swedish welfare state despite its universalized and professionalized care system. As my main method I conduct semi-structured interviews with various informants representing different institutions and interest organizations active in or related to informal elder care. This includes people working at the municipality as well as people volunteering for organizations that engage in elder care in some shape or form. It also involves the formal (waged) side of elder care, namely people working for private homecare companies or in staffing agencies. As I was drafting the ethics application for what would become my thesis project, I had already established contact with some people in one of the municipalities by participating in meetings. Additionally, I had been taking reflective notes before, during and after these meetings and during my travels to and from there.

Moments of tension

There have been several "moments of tension" between the process of applying for ethical approval with my research project at the Ethical Review Board in Sweden and decisions concerning the practical side of the research process so far. These tensions were mainly related to an unfamiliarity with the Swedish system, language barriers and general formalities of the research process.

Coming from research contexts (Germany and Denmark) where there is no equivalent to the research ethics committee application in social science that is mandatory in Sweden (only for medical research), my first expectation was that this process would be a mere formality (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 263).

Once I started looking into the formal process, I realized how detailed the application process was and that it was mandatory to write about all the stages of the research process, such as research questions, research design, participants, method, timeframe, ethical considerations, as well as to anticipate the future consequences of the research. Additionally, as a non-Swedish speaker, having to write everything in Swedish was demanding and time-consuming. Having to translate the instructions for filling in the form into English first and then the answers back into Swedish meant that it took much more time than I had originally planned to spend on it. Another aspect of the learning process regarding the application was navigating its focus on biomedical research and terminology. This procedure, therefore, very quickly started to feel frustrating (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 267) and unnecessarily time-consuming given the pressures of the PhD to finish on time.

In addition to feelings of fear of not getting the ethical approval in time for the PhD project (Markham, 2018, p. 6), some contradictory moments developed. It, for example, became difficult to tell what the "right way" of doing things was, both regarding the application for approval as well as ethically. One of the first moments of friction I felt was when I travelled to one of the possible locations where I wanted to conduct a part of my research. The main aim was to see whether the context of the place was the right fit for the project. At the same time, it became a way of establishing contact with possible interview participants, especially when I went there the second time to attend and observe a meeting between representatives from

the municipality and different voluntary organizations. I took factual as well as reflective notes before, during and after this meeting. However, in connection to the question of how I could possibly use these notes, it felt like there was a tension between the procedurally correct way of collecting data only after getting the ethical approval and the practicality of being in a situation that allowed me to establish contact with possible future interview participants and that, at the same time, informed my research project. Ultimately, I could not use these notes and observations as qualitative data sources in the research project, but they proved to be a great source for creating well-informed interview questions and for finding out who to contact for interviews during the data collection phase.

Another such tension between the procedural side of the application and the more practical research process is connected to the mentioned situation of attending a meeting. During this meeting between representatives of the municipality and different voluntary organizations, it became very clear that interviews conducted in English would most likely not be feasible with all of the representatives that were present due to language barriers. Instead, I started looking for alternative ways of how this kind of research could be made possible. One solution that seemed both practical and feasible was to use the help of a student assistant for those interviews that would have to be conducted in Swedish. The idea was that the student would conduct the interviews together with me. This would enable for the questions to be asked in Swedish by the student assistant and at the same time allow me to formulate follow up questions

that could be translated to the participant on the spot. However, since the ethical approval application was also running parallel to this more practical process, the questions of where to write about using a student assistant and how to phrase this in the application form were somewhat difficult decisions to make, as there are, for example, potential risks connected to the lack of experience of students as research assistants (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 264). At the same time, the interviews conducted in Swedish would also have to be transcribed by a native speaker, which might be the same student assistant, but could also fall on someone else due to time constraints of the student. Simultaneously, there could be ethical concerns regarding the access to interview recordings in this case (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 264). In the end, I decided to clearly state the involvement of research assistants in the letter to the participants that will have to get ethical approval first before it is sent out to the future interview participants.

Despite these initial feelings of frustration with the procedural side of the ethical approval application, it also became obvious that systematically following the application form forced me to make practical decisions about, for example, participants, methods, and theoretical concepts for the progression of the PhD project. At the same time, the reflective questions of the application form gave some guidance about what kind of considerations could be important at each research stage, such as possible benefits and risks for research participants, questions of privacy and consent (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 268).

However, as these scholars also point out, the careful consid-

erations at the ethical application stage cannot replace the continuous practical considerations that are needed at all stages during the data collection process (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 262; Markham, 2018, p. 2). For example, the questions about potential risks for the participants in the ethical application form were very difficult to answer for me before I had started with the interviews. Of course, I can think about the possibility of sensitive information regarding topics such as health being brought up during the interview, but I cannot predict whether or when this will happen or how the situation will unfold exactly. As is mentioned by Markham (2018, p. 5) in the Swedish context, this relates to the category of vulnerability as research focusing on any mental or physical illness is considered to involve vulnerable participants. Since my research topic focuses not mainly on health but informal elder care, it does not completely fall into this category. However, health as a possibly sensitive topic is still related to it and the likelihood of ethical dilemmas arising during the interview needs to be considered. In general, predicting harm at the procedural stage is therefore difficult since it will most likely arise while I interact with the participants during the interview situation or could be inflicted through the decisions I make about analysing/writing about the interaction in the end (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 272).

To sum up, as also pointed out by these scholars, the principles for ethical approval which include minimizing harm, guaranteeing informed consent and the protection of privacy along with values such as integrity, respect and beneficence directly relate to and should inform what happens after the approval process despite not being enforced by it (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, pp. 269–270). Ultimately, as the researcher, I sometimes have to decide what the ethically reasonable way to proceed is while I am already interacting with people.

Towards a feminist research ethic

All those experiences of tension between the procedural side of the ethical approval application and the uncertainty about the practical unfolding of the data collection have exemplified the necessity for me to continuously come back to the ethical considerations at all stages of the research process. Seeing ethics, therefore, as a continuum instead of a fixed state that allows for questions to remain unanswerable for a certain amount of time (Markham, 2018, p. 9), seems to be a much more helpful perspective on the further research process. The agency and responsibility of me as the researcher, therefore, become much more central in the actual execution of an ethical research praxis (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 269). The impact-driven model of ethics proposed by Markham (2018) which puts the focus on the active decisions made continuously by the researcher during the research, is therefore a valuable tool to account for this process. The function of this impact-driven model of ethics also overlaps with the suggestion by Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p. 273) to place the concept of reflexivity at the heart of an ethical research practice. Reflexivity is seen as a continuous and active process of critical reflection about the "type" as well as the "how" of knowledge production which happens throughout the entire research process (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, pp. 274–275). However, this

reflexive process might not only include questions regarding knowledge production, but also ethical questions in research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 275).

For my research project, I am therefore choosing to adopt a feminist research ethic which provides a tool for critically assessing my research according to feminist standards throughout the entire research process (Ackerly & True, 2020, p. 19). Its elements include paying attention to power, boundaries such as marginalization and silence, relationships as well as my own sociopolitical positionality (Ackerly & True, 2020, p. 20). Systematic reflection based on these elements is therefore implemented from the beginning of the research (i.e., the research question) until the finalization (i.e., publication or presentation of the results) (Ackerly & True, 2020, p. 7). The feminist research ethic is systematically implemented through a set of questioning practices related to the mentioned elements of paying attention to power, boundaries, relationships and positionality at all points of the research process (Ackerly & True, 2020, p. 19). In my project, I specifically want to pay attention to the lack of knowledge about the situation of older people and their caretakers in the Swedish society which exemplifies the unevenness of power relations in knowledge production. At the same time, I aim to examine different class, gender and racial boundaries that are bound up within my research topic. The element of carefully questioning relationships throughout the research project arguably overlaps most with the questions of research ethics discussed above as the reflections of vulnerabilities and power dynamics between me as a researcher and my research participants become central

(Ackerly & True, 2020, p. 30). As Davies (2008, pp. 87–88) has also pointed out, language can become a barrier in some parts of the research project. Since I have not been able to learn Swedish to a sufficient level to conduct interviews by myself due to time constraints, I need the support of a student assistant to be able to give the interview participants the opportunity to answer the interview questions in Swedish. It is, however, important to pay particular attention to the power dynamic between me as a researcher and the student assistant. I am aware that there are relations of power at play since I am the leading researcher who makes the decisions in the research project. At the same time, I will be dependent on the student assistant for facilitating the interviews in a way that makes it possible for the Swedish-speaking participants to share their experiences with me and create the data that I will use for my academic work. Additionally, the fact that we are two people conducting the interviews could also have an influence on the interview situation.

Relating to the final element of a feminist research ethic, I want to reflect about my own situatedness as a researcher at different stages of the project. Since I have not lived in one of the communities that I will study nor have any prior connections to it, I am very aware of my "outsider"-position as a non-Swedish person coming into the social context of a rural Swedish municipality. As an outsider, I am still learning about the Swedish context and the particular situation of informal carers of older persons. I might therefore have an advantage in having to ask people to explain their experiences and circumstances in detail. One possibility is that it will enable me to get more detailed

descriptions of lived experiences of informal carers (Davies, 2008, p. 88). At the same time, not speaking the everyday language of the people living in this community, sometimes makes me insecure about missing out on important information or people not feeling comfortable to talk to me. Simultaneously, I have privilege that comes from being able to "blend in" as a white, able-bodied cis-woman, and by having the authority of affiliation with a university. However, it is equally important to extend this reflection to consider "the researchers' social, political, and economic relationships to research subjects" (Ackerly & True, 2020, p. 35). This therefore means paying attention to the invisibility and silences of certain groups of people that arise from specific socio-economic and political circumstances. Taking time to pause and reflect on these relationships continuously throughout the research process with the help of a feminist research ethic, can therefore help to deal with the expected ethical challenges that arise in research (Ackerly & True, 2020, p. 35).

Conclusion

Tensions between the ethical and practical aspects of research pose a challenge to scholars. In this chapter I have argued that a feminist research ethic can help to deal with and overcome these challenges.

It has become much clearer to me throughout this process that the ethical approval application procedure is necessary and helpful and can at the same time be in tension with the practical implementation of the research. Additionally, it is important to understand how the ethical principles – such as informed consent, minimizing harm and protection of privacy – that the ethical approval application process focuses on, can be operationalized during the further stages of the research process. Having an ethical tool to not only acknowledge but also to continuously reflect on all the stages of the research process is therefore necessary to ensure that the right decisions can be made when ethically important moments occur. A feminist research ethic arguably provides the systematic reflection necessary for the further process of my research project through its questioning practices that pay attention to power dynamics, boundaries, relationships, and positionalities. A feminist research ethic is therefore able to provide the continuous scrutiny and reflexivity to not only questions of methodology, but also to myself as a researcher, the participants as well as throughout all the stages of the research process.

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9

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INTERLOCUTORS IN THE PROCESS OF ANALYSING AND WRITING ETHNOGRAPHY

This chapter explores the process of organising, analysing and writing ethnographic material. This, with a specific focus on the presence/absence of the research's interlocutors' participation in the process. The text's main aim is to be descriptive and reflective, rather than argumentative, in the hope that it may support or inspire others approaching ethnographic material. The outset for the discussion is the research process of my dissertation, and similar descriptions and phrasings may be found in its introduction. The overarching aim of my dissertation is to explore experiences and meaning-makings of patients who are discontent with their healthcare encounters regarding reproductive, sexual and hormonal health. From an ethnological perspective, I problematise the presence of norms and power relations in female and nonbinary patients' embodied experiences and meaning-making processes related to such healthcare encounters,

especially regarding knowledge production and access to healthcare. The focus of this chapter, on the interlocutors' participation in the analytical process, and the awareness of such issues, comes partly from my ethnographic and feminist stance, and partly from the theme of the dissertation which problematises individuals' experiences of not being treated as active and credible knowledge subjects (see also Wallner, 2022b). The material discussed in this chapter was collected through 21 ethnographic in-depth interviews with patients, all performed via video call. The chapter is divided in accordance with the stages of processing, thematising and writing ethnographic material, with an additional section addressing issues of positionality.

Processing

The analytical process goes on throughout the research project, but is formalised as the data collection is done (Davies, 2002, p. 193). It then includes processing and organising data as well as ethnographic and analytical writing. Often, this means less interaction with and input from the interlocutors, compared with the phase of data collection. When my interview data had been collected I analysed it thematically, inspired methodologically by the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). Notably, these phases are not approached as clear-cut, but part of an ongoing and overlapping process.

The first phase of familiarising with the data was done throughout the process of interviewing, transcribing audio recordings, and initial readings of transcriptions and fieldnotes. During this phase, input from the interlocutors is relatively

easily accessible and often recurring due to the constant interaction during and in relation to the interviews. Yet, their analytical contributions depend on how you approach the interlocutors' part in this process. Are they merely sources of information or are they seen as epistemic agents (see Fricker, 2007, pp. 132-139)? According to Fricker, the difference in these two approaches is that sources of information are treated as conditions from which you can perceive information from, whereas an epistemic agent is seen as a rational thinker and actor; someone who knows. Objects can only be sources of information while humans can be both sources of information and epistemic agents depending on the situation and how they are approached by others. A human subject who is treated as a source of information, and is thus excluded from intellectually participating in the knowledge production, is a form of objectification since they are used as a mere knowledge object; the subject is degraded from active epistemic actor into a passive state which is assessed and valued by others. In my research it is therefore relevant to consider how the interlocutors are approached as conveyors of information. Conventionally, the subjects behind interview respondents have been seen as passive vessels containing information that the interviewer is trying to access (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 13). I aim to treat the interlocutors in my study as epistemic agents in how I focus on their meaning-makings and interpretations of their experiences. Still, these meaning-makings are mainly approached as material, as something for me to analyse – not as part of the analytical process itself.

The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed.

Due to my ethnographic approach, the process of transcribing was taken on as an analytical act in its own (see Klein, 1990). Transcribing provided additional reflexive insights regarding the interview situations as such, and was an initial analytical processing of the material. Besides writing down statements, I, for example, noted pauses, tones and gestures. This was combined with fieldnotes reflecting the interview situations and my interpretations of the interactions, and reminding of aspects not available in the audio material. The transcription process demanded reflexivity, as it required constant deliberate choices, affected by for example underlying theoretical assumptions (see Davies, 2002, pp. 114-115). The interlocutors were offered to read through the transcripts afterwards, to consent to my interpretation of the interviews, and change or remove anything – if they felt misunderstood or just regretted sharing certain things. Only two out of 21 interlocutors chose to read the transcripts from their interviews. It raises questions about this form of participation as well as informed consent. Were they not interested in how the material turned out? Did they trust me and that I would make a fair interpretation (and in that case, where did this trust come from)? Did they not have time to do it (or felt they had spent enough time on the project during the interviews)? Were they discouraged by the way I presented the possibility to access the transcripts? I did not automatically send out the transcripts, I merely informed about the possibility and told them to let me know if they were interested. It is possible that my approach set an idea of what they are supposed or expected to do, that there would be extra trouble for me to send it out, or

that their mandate to change things were limited in practice. In addition, the interviews were emotionally challenging in various ways for many of the interlocutors. It is possible that they did not want to relive those experiences yet again by reading the transcripts. Those few who did read their transcripts, did not ask me to revise anything.

I have interviewed and transcribed the recordings in Swedish and then translated the interlocutors' accounts into English as I write. There are certain risks when meaning is mediated through translation like this (Seligmann & Estes, 2020), and some levels of meaning are going to be lost (Davies, 2002, p. 112). Still, the translations are made by me, who was actively present in the interviews and know their contexts (in combination with professional language reviewing before published). In some ways, this can even provide extra reflection about the situational meanings of statements, that might be easier to overlook when interviewing, transcribing and writing in the same language. I have consulted the interlocutors to approve of the translations used so they do not experience them to distort their original meaning. In contrast to the transcripts, almost all asked would read the translated excerpts sent to them. This may be the case for several reasons. Firstly, excerpts are shorter and do not require the same amount of time or effort as to read a 20-page transcript. Secondly, it might feel more relevant to read and approve parts that are actually being published (and many are surely curious about the end results of their participation). Thirdly, it might be easier to have an emotional distance to the accounts as they are analysed and translated into another language. And fourthly,

the way I approached them about this was more direct and probably suggested an expectation from my part that they would read it (in contrast to how the reading of the full transcripts was handled).

Thematising

Next, I worked out initial codes (phase two), building on recurring aspects in the material, which then developed into certain themes and subthemes (phase three). Rather than attaching codes and themes to the specific excerpts, they were cut out from the original document and organised in separate documents under these themes and subthemes. The themes have been reviewed and revised (phase four) throughout this process, as well as during my writing, until eventually more clearly defined and named (phase five) as they have developed into the chapters of the dissertation (with changes and rearrangements as the analytical process has progressed). In these thematically arranged chapters I have produced the final analysis (phase six).

The themes are mainly identified though content categories in the empirical material, but also in accordance with some of the dissertation's theoretical concepts. This thematical work has been influenced by cultural analysis, focusing on societal processes through individuals' everyday practices and experiences. Culture is thus approached as tool, as something I use to discover and understand (Frykman & Gilje, 2003, p. 48). Meaning, that most of the themes have been drawn from my ethnological gaze, exploring how culture is made by individuals in a given context (Frykman & Gilje, 2003, p. 15). For me, this meant

looking for, and forming, themes in relation to actions and meaning-makings of individuals in their everyday lives, and as cultural beings, focused on the familiar and commonplace, as well as the deviant, in order to illuminate foundational values, ideas, ideals, norms and power relations (cf. Fioretos et al., 2013). Such patterns and themes are not just 'discovered' in my material, they are created as such by my categorisation of them (see Gerholm & Gerholm, 1989). I also recognise how my own positionality and chosen theoretical tools condition what I see in the material (see Guntram & Johnson, 2018), and affect both collection and analysis of the material (see Wallner, 2022b).

I did not work on the basis of an already proposed and completed formal thesis. Rather, I began with presenting a main idea pointing to a phenomenon, and elaborated and progressed this idea throughout the chapters, and worked my way towards a more precise and fuller statement (see Emerson et al., 2011, p. 203). My writing is not just a way of communicating my results, it has its own methodology and is part of my analytical process (see Ingridsdotter & Kallenberg, 2018; Lykke, 2005; Lykke, 2014). In this, I approach my ethnographic material and the excerpts of it used in the text, not as illustrations of already made points, but as the core of the story; as "building blocks for constructing and telling the story in the first place" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 203). Thus, I apply an empirically based thematic narrative, meaning that I build up a series of thematically organised units of interview excerpts and analytic commentary (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 202). The interlocutors have not been active parts in this process. They have not been allowed or encouraged to actively

help me identify and develop the codes and themes. Still, as their accounts are the basis for the analysis and how it is organised, the interlocutors are crucial actors in this process.

Positionality

Several of the aspects mentioned above can be conditioned by my, and the interlocutors', situationally and intersectionally formed positionality – for example, their trust in how I deal with the material, or their experienced agency and possibility to influence the study's analysis and results. I enter the interviews, the analysis and this field of research (medical humanities, and particularly healthcare encounters) as an ethnologist, not a medical expert. Since I am not a part of the medical community, I am able to explore this from an outsider-perspective – at least to some degree. Though I am not diagnosed with any of the conditions shared by the interlocutors, I have indeed encountered Swedish healthcare as patient throughout my whole life, including gynaecological care, and I am in many ways part of the same societal and cultural context. The insider-perspectives, and medical knowledge, of healthcare professionals would provide access to different kinds of empirics. However, being a part of the research field also comes with preconceptions and tacit knowledge, and perhaps most importantly: a certain (power) position in relation to the interlocutors. Since I am not a medical expert, but a patient in terms of healthcare positions, I am perceived as an ally by the interlocutors. This can increase their trust in my agenda, and the way I handle the interview material – which can be beneficial in terms of accessing material, but at

the same time possibly problematic if not handled in a considerate and ethical way (see Wallner, 2022a).

Some of my own ascribed subject positions and belongings to social categories are shared with some or most of the interlocutors, and some are not. However, similar subject positions do not mean that we share the same experiences – just as different positions do not automatically mean that we would struggle to understand each other's perspectives. Rather, positionings are relevant to address in relation to how they might affect the interview situations, and my relationship with the interlocutors (and my approach to the research process at large). I recognise that the interlocutors and I approach each other from different changeable perspectives, rather than stable and collected standpoints (cf. Warren 2002:84). Such positions can change throughout the interviews, and can impact power dynamics as well as the knowledge production (see Davies 2022: 100 ff; Vähäsantanen & Saarinen 2013). Similar positionings and backgrounds can provide certain access and comfort, like being a woman interviewing another woman – but it can also be problematic, if unconsidered and assumed to be something inherently good, and if it means our perspectives are not challenged enough (cf. Enosh & Ben-Ari 2010). At the same time, I have to be aware of the privilege my whiteness and academic position might bring. One strategy to counter such possible power imbalances, was attempting to assign the interlocutors positions as experts in the interviews, while I tried to assume a position as student or listener (see Wallner, 2022b). In addition, even though I am always embodied in the interviews (and throughout the research pro-

cess) (Pink, 2015, p. 27), the digital format neutralised some of the influence our bodily appearances and functionalities might have had on the interview dynamics, as most parts of our bodies were not visible to each other.

Writing

All of my ethnographic writings (fieldnotes, transcriptions, and the dissertations' empirically based descriptions and discussions) are products of interpretation. They reflect my perceptions, and are conditioned by selection and theoretical assumptions (see Wallner, 2022b). As I write, I move between interpretations of the interlocutors' accounts, of other theoretical constructions, and my own analytical creations. In relation to this, there are a variety of voices in the text. First off, I have different voices, as analysist, interviewer, fellow human and so on (cf. Davies, 2002, p. 221). Then, there are the voices of other scholars, mediated through my interpretations. I also frequently use the interlocutors' voices in the text. This, to present them as active epistemic subjects with individual voices. However, this does not lessen the constructed nature of the written dissertation (see Davies, 2002, p. 219). I attempt to make their voices heard, but this is still mediated through my understandings, interpretations and selections. The dissertation is a mediation, and not an exact representation of a particular aspect of social reality (Davies, 2002, p. 214). Meaning, in my ethnographic knowledge production, I create knowledge and write a certain cultural context (Clifford 1986:11). To better see such conditions, I approach my writing from a perspective of critical reflexivity.

This, as an instrument for knowing others, rather than knowing myself, or being an end in itself (Davies, 2002, pp. 213, 224).

The writings in the dissertation are constructed in relation to choices of general style, rhetorical devices and literary conventions, which help me situate the study and the text methodologically, theoretically and epistemologically (Davies, 2002, p. 216). Here, the specific genre I have chosen to present my data and analyses through provides a certain perspective, and portrays the results in a specific light (see Ingridsdotter & Kallenberg, 2018, p. 64). I have chosen to write a monograph, which allows for a certain kind of writing and a certain kind of text – and is norm in ethnological research (Sjöstedt Landén, 2012). In my case, I chose the monograph genre so I would not be confined by the opinions of editors in and styles of scientific journals (if I had written articles and a compilation thesis). This choice was made after I had collected all data, as I saw a challenge in otherwise allowing my empirical data, and the voices of the interlocutors, sufficient space. The choice became even clearer as I started working with the themes and the dissertation's disposition. In many ways, this is an effect of the interlocutors' active presence in the analytical process, despite not participating in it formally. I also believe that this choice has provided a more coherent narrative and a more thoroughly worked through analysis, as I have been able to continuously reflect on, develop and revaluate my work up until the end of the project.

However, this choice of genre makes my research more or less accessible to different audiences (see Ingridsdotter & Kallenberg, 2018, p. 71). A monograph may allow me to present my fin-

dings in a more approachable way, for a broader audience. Yet, the format may be less available for different audiences in terms of distribution as a book is seldom read as much as several articles. I primarily write for three audiences: others in my field of research, my research subjects (or those who are involved in the topic of research in their everyday lives) (see Davies, 2002, p. 225), and those who work with these patient groups structurally or clinically. Throughout my research process I have sought input from all audiences, but mainly the former two. Meanwhile, my hope is that my findings will reach the latter audience most of all as I believe that can result in most impact in practice. Perhaps it would have been better to write articles and a compilation thesis in order to more sufficiently reach this audience – instead of writing a monograph that is more accessible for the interlocutors.

SUMMARISING THOUGHTS

Interlocutors in a research study, and especially in one whose main material is collected through ethnographic interviews, are very much part of the initial phases of the study. As the material is collected, their participation can vary and often they are rather absent in later stages of analysis. Interlocutors can be invited as active parts in the processes of analysing, organising and writing. Furthermore, even if not actively participating themselves, the interlocutors' accounts can be given agency in the analysis in how the material and the analytical process itself is approached. Yet, the effects and impact of either such participation is still up to the researcher.

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