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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

VIEWPOINT

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Introduction

In 2008, Sarah Moser wrote a paper on personality, questioning whether this was indeed the 'new positionality'. For me, this discussion was pivotal in uniting the previously disparate ideas of personality and positionality. Moser (2008) reflects on how aspects of her personality, including her interpersonal skills, emotional responses, mannerisms and her navigation of others' personalities, were the main standards by which research participants judged her. She offers a persuasive nudge in considering how personality can affect a researcher's access to certain individuals, and the degree to which participants may share their personal stories. In arguing her case, Moser (2008) rebuts more conventional wisdom associated with the deemed illegitimacy of the researcher if they dare to reflect on their emotions (Bondi 2005; Fuller 1999; Stanley and Wise 1993). Regrettably, since the publication of her paper there remains a deficit of research which discusses how personality affects the fieldwork process and the resultant production of knowledge. In taking a step towards remedying this, this Viewpoint forms a discussion of my positionality beyond the key categorical frames of reference including class, gender, sexuality, race and age, to also include personality and appearance. It is something of a 'hidden ethnography' (Blackman 2007, 707), in that it includes information from my fieldwork which some may perceive as too controversial for publication.

Herein, I draw on my Ph.D. research, a CASE studentship concerned with young people and community radio. For my fieldwork, I was based at my CASE partner, community radio station KCC Live[1] (situated in Knowsley Community College, Knowsley, neighbouring Liverpool, UK) for 18 months. During this time, I conducted participant observation, interviews and focus groups with the young volunteers. I reflected on my positionality continuously whilst in the field. I share some daily musings from my field diary herein. I do so not to naval-gaze (Latour 1988); rather, I believe that reflexivity is important in qualitative research where the self-as-instrument (Rew, Bechtel, and Sapp 1993) is used in data gathering and analysis. This short paper is structured as follows: first, I consider my personality during the research process, also highlighting a few studies that acknowledge the researcher as having emotions. Second, I consider my appearance when conducting research, beyond the categories of gender and skin colour. Third, I reflect on the [messy] friendships I made with the young participants during my fieldwork. Finally, this paper is drawn to a conclusion.

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Researcher personality

It is cautioned that as an adult researcher, care should be taken not to lose sight of the perspectives of young people (Caputo 1995). Being in my early twenties when I commenced my research, I did not feel out of place at KCC Live. Importantly, the target audience for the radio station is 10–24 years, and the majority of volunteers are aged 16–24. Yet, as I undertook the research and I aged, albeit only by a year or so, I worried that I would naturally find myself feeling out of touch with certain issues. I soon began to realise, however, that disconnectedness is actually very little to do with age; rather, it is related to something much more individual and complex: the personality of the researcher. Within this section, I use reflexivity, as advocated by Moser (2008), to explore how my personality affected the fieldwork process.

I am in agreement with Moser (2008) that a lack of focus on the researcher's personality is an egregious oversight, as personality is capable of shaping both the research process and the final outcome. This is particularly so when considering that 'personalities respond to other personalities in different ways' (Hoogendoorn and Visser 2012, 264). Heeding Moser (2008), I believe that my social and emotional qualities enabled a close relationship to be developed between myself and the young participants. I have an extrovert personality. I am bubbly; talkative; personable; youthful; confessedly emotional; and I enjoy making new friends. I am in further agreement with Sultana (2007) that who I am, and the way I interact with participants, is essential in developing relationships premised on trust. The following fieldnote excerpt expresses this well:

> Today MJ[2] confided in me about a boy she had started dating, she told me that I was the first person to know … I wondered what it was about my personality which allowed her to confide in me. I know I am amiable and a good listener. Or perhaps she has heard me discussing my love life before and knew it would be a welcomed topic. (Author's fieldnote diary, 10 November 2013)

Certainly, by confiding in me MJ could see that, although I am a researcher, I carry with me 'human spirits of understanding and concern' (Shaw 2005, 845). As Stanley and Wise (1993, 157) correctly point out: 'researchers remain human beings complete with all the usual assembly of feelings, failings and moods'. However, I argue that there is a tendency in the literature to dehumanise, and also disembody (see Throsby and Evans 2013), researchers, reducing them to their academic qualities and qualifications.

A rare exception to the somewhat cold descriptions of positionality is Widdowfield's (2000) piece on her emotional response to research conducted in the West End of Newcastle. The author tells of how, in speaking to housing officers and lone parents living in less desirable neighbourhoods, and in visiting these neighbourhoods, she experienced negative emotions. These emotions include: anger, upset, and distress, and Widdowfield (2000) confesses to feeling demoralised and disillusioned at times. She argues that emotions may influence the researcher's interpretation of a situation, yet this does not prevent rigorous analysis. Here, I provide an example of this from my own fieldwork:

> Today my intuitive nature told me that Modest Mouse was feeling upset. I probed him about this and he opened up to me, telling me how he was struggling with his low paid part-time job. Modest Mouse was surprised that I noticed he was upset and said that he had put on a good act, even to family and station management. (Author's fieldnote diary, 20 March 2014)

The above excerpt reveals how my instinctive character enabled me to notice when a participant was feeling down; in turn, the participant told me a personal story which was rich data. Though Stacey (1988, 23) tells that 'the lives, loves, and tragedies that fieldwork informants share with a researcher are ultimately data, grist for the ethnographic mill', I must emphasise that I did not

show care in order to obtain good data; rather, being caring is an intrinsic part of my personality. By being compassionate and emotionally investing in the young people, I developed a close rapport with participants in my role as friend, colleague and researcher (for further discussion of multiple positions in research see Throsby and Evans 2013). As a result of this close rapport, the young people confided in me about many different issues which affected them emotionally, both within the walls of the station and beyond, for instance; fallouts with friends; relationship troubles and body issues. Jansson (2010), too, discusses emotions within fieldwork. It is comforting to read the author's consideration of the 'emotional challenges' embroiled in doing research with right-wing movements (Jansson 2010, 19). Refreshingly, Jansson (2010) provides an honest account about his shy and reserved nature, and the conflict between this and his research, which is primarily interview-based. Although the author does not explicitly mention how this shyness impacts on the interview process and the resultant data collected, one can speculate that a shy researcher would be less commanding in an interviewer role, which may have both positive (the participants may feel less intimidated and more at ease) or negative (the participants may feel less engaged and therefore may be less responsive) effects. Taken together, it can be seen that personality can be clearly impactful in conducting research.

Another point to be made is that, though much effort is taken to ensure protection of research participants, little consideration is given to how the research process can be emotionally impacting for the researcher (Gilbert 2001). Rager (2005, 423) discusses 'compassion stress' in regards to qualitative researchers, and acknowledges that some research topics are likely to induce powerful emotions. Although perhaps obvious, this has not been explicitly mentioned in much literature. Researching into the self-directed learning of breast cancer patients, Rager (2005, 423) candidly tells how no one was concerned with whether she would attend to the impact of such emotionally laden research on herself. Although my research may not ostensibly appear emotionally laden, there were times when I felt over-whelmed. For instance, with the messy nature of the friendships I developed with participants (more on this later), and even by the financial struggles the station was facing – I saw first hand the fight for survival of the station and the impact of this on the young volunteers. As such, I suggest that further academic attention is not only required in considering the impact of the researcher's personality on the research process, but also the impact of the research on the personality of the researcher. Existing scholarship (and indeed Health and Safety reviews) tends to be overly focussed on physical hazards, and so emotional safeguarding is subordinated.

Researcher appearance

I wish to extend discussion of the appearance of the researcher beyond meta-categories such as gender and skin colour, to include what I term 'embellishments'; for instance: make-up, hair extensions, fake nails and false eyelashes. These are the embellishments which I considered within my research as they relate to my physical appearance, yet there are other such embellishments which different researchers may deal with, for instance; piercings; engagement and wedding rings; tattoos and unnatural hair colouring. Below, I reflect on the ways in which I believe such embellishments are important signifiers of the personality of the researcher.

The gender of the researcher is important, as gendered understandings of who we are have weighty consequences for the ways we behave and are treated (Warnke 2008). Regrettably, within the literature most researchers do not go beyond simply acknowledging whether they are male or female. One exception, albeit more concerning sexual orientation, is Jansson's (2010) discussion of interviewing individuals who hold a fundamentalist interpretation of Christianity. The author discusses how these people perceive homosexuality as a disgrace. Jansson

(2010, 21) tells that, although he is gay, he has a 'straight appearance' and speculates that his participants would have felt uncomfortable in the company of somebody who 'looked (or acted) gay'. The author sums up by saying that his straight appearance helped to make participants feel comfortable with him. Third wave feminism has critically assessed the supposition that women share a universal gender identity and set of experiences (Valentine, Jackson, and Mayblin 2014). In line with this, I argue that not only am I female, but that I am overtly feminine. I dye my hair: blonde, brunette, red; I wear hair extensions; I have fake nails applied in the salon; my daily make-up consists of brightly coloured lipstick and heavy mascara; I carry my make-up bag with me every day; I wear fake tan and false eyelashes on occasions; the clothes I wear are feminine, including skirts.

During my fieldwork, there were certain instances where my appearance was commented on by the young people who told me that I 'don't look like a Ph.D. student', or that I wore 'more fashionable clothes' than they imagined. Pertinent here is Butler's (1990, 1993) research on how the social production of gender emphasises the importance of everyday, recurring stylisations of the body to the performance of gender. The work alerts us to the ways in which the body is crafted through the performative act of dressing. Though clothing is an aspect influencing positionality which is seldom acknowledged (Longhurst, Ho, and Johnston 2008), Entwistle (2000, 10) usefully recognises that the way we dress is 'more than a shell', it is a personal facet of the experience and presentation of one's self. This is something I feel particularly strongly

about, and is something which was enforced to me during my studies for my first degree in Fashion.

Throughout my time at KCC Live, remarks were made by participants about how I 'don't have a face for radio'. Spanger (2012) notes how the attractiveness, or lack thereof, of the researcher affects the interaction between the researcher and the participants. In her ethnographic research with Thai migrant sex workers, Spanger (2012) tells how she wore no showy make-up or heeled shoes, so as to not be perceived as a threat to her participants. McCurdy and Uldam (2014) also note in their research that they dressed in casual clothes, and therefore blended in with their participants who wore similar casual attire. Owing to the fact that the majority of female volunteers at KCC Live self-identified as Scouse, donning big hair, fake tan and false eyelashes, I found myself sharing similarities with the young females:

> Today Fearne exclaimed 'babe, I like your lipstick'. I wonder how many other researchers have been called 'babe' in their time?! I sat with Fearne and Nikki for over an hour, exchanging compliments, showing them photographs of my previous hairstyles and colours. Nikki recommended a good hair salon which I could go to for a famous Scouse curly blow. We definitely bonded today. (Author's field-note diary, 20 May 2013).

Although imitating the physical appearance of research participants to achieve acceptance can damage the researcher's credibility (Leyshon 2002; Parr 1998), I wish to emphasise that I did not imitate my participants' appearance; rather, we collectively took pleasure in following certain traditions of the Scouse identity. Though I am not from Liverpool originally, the young people occasionally referred to me as an 'honorary Scouser', a term given to celebrities who make Liverpool their home, some of whom pick up the Scouse accent (see Boland 2010). For me this indicated acceptance into their community. Drawing together the above discussion, a question necessarily arises about how my positionality impacted on the friendships I made throughout my fieldwork. I devote attention to this now.

[Messy] research friendships

Research of any variety pulls the researcher into relationships; these relationships shape the setting in which emotions are expressed or suppressed (Bondi 2005). I agree with Mason's (2002) argument that, in conducting participant observation, researchers must deal with relationships which are individual, emotional, corporeal and intellectual. With regard to researcher proximity, I did not wish to be perceived as the 'omnipotent expert' (England 1994, 81). To this end, I positioned myself as 'researcher as friend', an extension of what Fuller (1999, 221) terms 'researcher as person'. Some examples of this include how: I allowed the young people to add me as a friend on Facebook; I passed on my mobile phone number; I invited volunteers to call me 'Cat' as opposed to 'Catherine'; I also enjoyed activities with the young people outside of KCC Live, including cinema excursions, shopping sprees and celebratory meals. As such, I decided not to exert my power as an adult researcher (see also Gallagher 2008; Holt 2004). This is particularly important when considering Byrne, Canavan, and Millar's (2009, 68) assertion that meaningful relationships necessitate a de-emphasising of 'researcher only' knowledge.

I appreciated that the relationships I built with participants could become troubled, and that friendship itself is a slippery concept (Monk, Manning, and Denman 2003). Blackman (2007, 711) reifies this point in stating that 'powerful feelings of emotions from love to hate grip both the researcher and the researched'. Reflecting on his difficulties in establishing clear boundaries in his ethnographic study on homeless young families, Blackman (2007, 703) tells how he could not be the participants' friend because he 'could not be like them', and did not feel he was able to

offer them advice, but that they 'shared "friendship moments"'. Blackman's (2007) work links back nicely into ideas generated by Cotterill (1992, 599), who discusses the blur between 'research friendship and friendship'. However, distinct from these authors, I believed that I could be a genuine friend to the young people and, as such, I sought to create a relationship based on mutual respect.

In fostering friendships with research participants, Stuhlmiller (2001, 67) tells that in order to 'get the story' the researcher may be required to reveal something personal. I had no issues with this; in fact, many of the young people at KCC Live already knew a lot about my personal life prior to getting to know me. To explain, I previously have appeared on a prime time reality television dating show (Take Me Out). This programme is very popular with my young participants, and as soon as I arrived to conduct fieldwork I was recognised as a contestant from the show. In particular, the young people knew that I have an identical twin sister, who appeared alongside me on the show. My participants were fascinated by this relationship and frequently asked me questions such as 'what's it like to be a twin?' and 'can you tell when she's feeling sad?' In addition to this, I found that they wanted to get to know my sister too, some of them sent her friendship requests on social media, and others eventually met her in person. Presenting my own show at KCC Live provided me with a further opportunity to reveal personal information. On air I spoke about my weekend activities, my friendships and my romantic relationships. I disclosed a lot, not solely to volunteers but also to the listening community at large. This is elucidated through the excerpt from my field diary below:

> On today's show, a Valentine's Day special, I talked about how I had overcome previous break-up disasters and provided listeners with advice for their own situations. I felt a little bashful as I walked out of the studio and into the office where the young people were sat. They now knew much more about me that I presumed the average researcher would disclose … Nikki approached me and confessed how she felt like heartbreak was the 'the worst feeling in the whole wide world', but told me she felt reassured that I had been through it too. (Author's fieldnote diary, 14 February 2013)

I divulged a lot about my personal life to the young people at KCC Live, and therefore I am in agreement with England (1994, 249, emphasis in original) that 'fieldwork *is* personal' and therefore the researcher cannot hide the personal behind the professional.

After I left KCC Live each evening, I was frequently inundated with phone calls and text messages from volunteers. Although, often, I was too busy to attend to these, I always responded – as I did with all of my friends – primarily because I considered the young people at KCC Live to be my friends, but also because I felt it was ethical and respectful to do so. Relatedly, Hall (2009, 268) tells how the anxiety over 'using' people within the field is a regular dilemma of ethnography, resulting in feelings of guilt. A further example of this is when a young male participant, Karl, asked to stay the night at my house. I lived closer to the radio station than he did, therefore it would make his journey into the station the next day, with an unusually early start, less daunting. It is important to draw once again on my multiple positioning. As aforementioned, KCC Live is based in a college; in this respect I was considered a pseudo-employee of the college, though I functioned as a KCC Live volunteer. In addition to this, Karl was not a student of the college, only a volunteer at the radio station. In this respect, there was no official safeguarding issue surrounding allowing him to stay at my house. However, the situation was complicated by the fact that I had previously been told that Karl fancied me, or as one volunteer more dramatically put it 'he's in love with you'. With this knowledge in mind, I decided not to let the participant stay and resultantly was left feeling terribly guilty.

Certainly, being told of this young person's affection towards me led me to a greatly reflexive consideration of whether my overtly feminine and embellished appearance, or indeed my bubbly

and friendly personality, was responsible for this crush. I questioned whether this situation was avoidable and even if so – why should I be concerned with avoiding it? It is natural and typically unproblematic when it occurs outside of the field. As told by Grauerholz et al. (2013, 168), who discuss attraction to those we study rather than attraction to the researcher: 'attraction is a normal, commonplace occurrence, especially among persons who spend significant amounts of time together (such as the ethnographer and respondents)'. All of this says a lot about the messiness of friendships in research, and of multiple positions. Yet despite such momentary feelings of confusion, in line with other authors (Fox 2007; Oakley 1981), I believe that intimacy between researcher and participants can lead to long-term genuine friendships. This can be demonstrated through the fact that, despite having left the field, I still maintain weekly communication with many of my research participants and spend time with them, both inside and outside of KCC Live.

Concluding comments

Within this Viewpoint piece, I have traced the connections between researcher personality, researcher appearance and research friendships. First, heeding Moser (2008), I provided insight into how my bubbly and friendly personality enabled rapport to be developed between myself and the young people in my study. The second part of this paper suggested that considerations of gender should delve deeper than simply stating 'I am a male/female researcher'. Such a simplistic categorisation fails to take account of individual attributes of the researcher such as hair colour, whether make-up is worn, and the resultant impression he/she conveys to research participants. I also devoted attention to embellishments such as hair extensions, false eyelashes and fake tan, which have been much neglected in the literature, and considered how these functioned as signifiers of my personality to the young people. This paper was drawn to a close with a consideration of how my personality and appearance impacted on the [messy] friendships I made throughout my fieldwork. Given the more extensive use of qualitative modes of enquiry, emotions are becoming increasingly topical (Blackman 2007; Jansson 2010; Widdowfield 2000). Fuelled with this new vision and the burgeoning trend towards reflexivity (Moser 2008), I hope that a space can be carved out for further discussions of researcher personality and appearance. Such conversations are long overdue.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. Owing to the nature of the CASE studentship, working in collaboration with the radio station, the actual name of the station has been used.
2. The names of the participants are pseudonyms, chosen by the participants themselves. Most of the young people opted to be named after pop stars, other famous musicians, and radio and television presenters e.g. MJ (Michael Jackson), Nikki (Nikki Minaj) and Fearne (Fearne Cotton).

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