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Exploring the Dynamics of Situated Emotionality in Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

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Exploring the Dynamics of Situated Emotionality in Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

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ABSTRACT

In this article we reflect on our use of feminist standpoint epistemology as a methodological framework in our doctoral research. We reflect on the merits of standpoint logic and suggest that it provides a robust and methodological framework of enquiry, however, questions arose on how to position and voice the consequences of situational emotion. Drawing on our doctoral experiences we seek to illustrate how our positioning produced emotionality in the fieldwork. We explore the dynamics of this process that led us into uncharted waters, challenging our positioning through inter-subjectivity and reflexive practice. Questions for further consideration also emerged around how to incorporate situational emotion in the knowledge produced in our work.

KEY WORDS

Standpoint epistemology methodology positionality inter-subjectivity reflexivity emotionality.

Introduction

This paper is a reflective piece about the growing recognition of emotionality in the work of social researchers. Feminist approaches to research and practice have, for many years, recognised the presence of emotion in the research process. In this paper we reflect on our use of feminist standpoint epistemology. This framework informed our research projects and our methods were designed in relation to this perspective.

During our qualitative research interviews emotion was produced as stories of emotional and physical harm were explored. The emotion was felt by the researched and researchers. We found little clarity in methodological literature about the appropriate use of emotion or how to behave professionally in the presence of emotion. The literature provided a good understanding of this philosophical approach, which requires researchers to place themselves at the heart of the research process (Finlay, 2002; Stanley and Wise, 1983; Stapele, 2013), thus reflexive practice is vital. Reflexivity encourages us as researchers to be self-aware of our positioning through inter-subjective practice and influence in the research process. The process of inter-subjectivity enables us to recognise ourselves in others through the sharing of a 'common experience' (Harding 2004). This supported our positioning and acceptance during the fieldwork process while reflexively being self-aware of our positioning. Our feminist standpoint framework, however, did not help in dealing with emotions. The standpoint literature failed to provide us with an understanding of the dynamics of this process, and how it would come to emotionally challenge our understanding of reflexive practice. Neither did it provide us with how our emotional expression could be put into academic writing. This ultimately raised questions on how we could position and voice the dynamics of situational emotion (see Holmes, 2010; Yeun, 2011) in our work. On reflection of these experiences we both embraced the emerging literature in social sciences on the role of emotion in research practice. This paper documents our current thinking on this issue. We contribute this reflective work to growing interests in emotions in research and professional practice. Our reflections leave us with an increased conviction that emotion is not only to be embraced as part of research practice but that emotion is embedded in the knowledge we produce. We co-constructed this paper in order to contribute to current discussions surrounding acknowledgement of the presence of emotion in research, a duty of emotional care for both researched and researchers and we are intellectually seeking further

collegiate discussion on incorporation of emotion into our production of knowledge. In keeping with standpoint principle of placing ourselves in our work, we have written this paper by using the first person and to alternate first person throughout the text.

Setting the Scene/ the Backdrop

We draw on our doctoral theses to illustrate our use of standpoint logic (Harding, 1987) and the consequent emotional dilemmas produced in the research process, in particular the fieldwork. We seek to show how questions were raised on how to position, embrace and voice the situational emotion we experienced in the field. However, to achieve this we think it appropriate for us to reflect on our journey and offer a backdrop to the impetus for this paper.

As two mature women with life experience we had considered ourselves equipped, and confident to handle such sensitive research. We both felt prepared for any dilemmas that may arise in the field. We were both well-read around our subject area and we felt the literature had prepared us and increased our awareness of any methodological challenges. Standpoint logic (see Harding, 1987, 2004) shaped our work and we incorporated the principles into our methodological design. We begin with an introduction to the focus of our theses, one titled: *An exploration of the knowledge women in Sunderland have of help-seeking in response to domestic violence* (see Wilcock, 2015). This research explored the level of awareness women in Sunderland had of help-seeking intervention and what was known about the agencies that respond to domestic violence, regardless of personal experiences. It examined the extent of how understanding domestic violence impacts on potential help-seeking (Wilcock, 2015). The other; *Finding a place: negotiating lesbian parental identities* (see Quaid, 2009) explored the complex series of negotiations

for lesbian couples choosing motherhood (Quaid, 2009). In both of these projects the style of interviewing created emotive moments for both our respondents and us. Sensitive research such as domestic violence has the possibility of inflicting emotional harm both upon the respondent and the researcher (Holmes, 2010). Similarly, research on family life, sexual identity and relationships potentially raise emotional feelings for respondents. Inevitably, the place of affect and emotions in research has occupied a challenging space in feminist and other social science approaches. Although we were aware of this, and the growing body of literature on emotion in sensitive research (see Blakely, 2007; Holmes, 2010; Yeun, 2011) we had not anticipated, or prepared for the impact of triggers influenced by inter-subjective reflection and reflexive practice on ourselves.

For both of us, situational emotion was produced as respondents retold their story. We suggest that the self-aware researcher acknowledges emotionality as inevitable in sensitive research, particularly on topics relating to personal family and sexual lives. However, with hindsight we also realise and recognise the challenges and difficulty of representing emotionality in academic writing, which brings with it many challenges (see Blakely, 2007; Holmes, 2010). In light of the limitations we found within the standpoint literature, and to add to the on-going debate of incorporating emotion into our work we hope to demonstrate how embracing emotion can become part of our valuable data.

To take this discussion forward we seek to demonstrate, as does Holmes (2010) that the emotionalised knowledge we produced was an integral part of the work. There is a growing awareness that the separation of knowledge from emotion, on the grounds that knowledge is separate from emotion, is a false one (McLaughlin, 2003). Our work for us produced a realisation that emotion could not be separated. We found it to be integral

to knowledge, nevertheless with this came a sense of duty of care to both ourselves and the respondents.

The literature on standpoint logic does not appear to emphasise these emotionalised risks when asserting its methodological framework (Haraway, 2004; Harding, 2004, 2009; Hartsock, 2004; Hughes, 2002). We both suggest that standpoint continues to be relevant, however, further and more recent work on emotionality reveals its limitations. Nevertheless, our work produced for us a realisation that emotion could not be separated. The experiences influenced our increasing awareness, and our willingness to contribute to what we argue is an important concept in feminist research. The process of situational and reflexive emotionalisation (Holmes, 2010) we experienced when using standpoint logic undoubtedly sparked our interest, which led us to share these experiences.

The dynamics of feminist standpoint

Feminist standpoint theory has been in existence for over four decades (see Smith, 1974; Hartstock, 1983; Harding 1987, 1991), as a resource for feminist epistemology and philosophy of science (see Crasnow, 2009; Harding, 1987, 2004, 2009; Hartstock, 1983; Haraway, 2004; Hughes, 2002; Kourany, 2009; Intemann, 2010; Roulin, 2009). 'Sandra Harding's anthology, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*' (2004) both documented and fuelled the more recent shift (Crasnow, 2009:189) in its success as a methodology within the social sciences (Crasnow, 2009).

Fundamentally, this logic of enquiry is committed to listening, and understanding the knowledge and struggles of women (Crasnow, 2009; Harding, 2004, 2009; Hughes, 2002; Kourany, 2009; Intemann, 2010; Roulin, 2009). Standpoint asserts that the positioning of women in society shapes our knowledge; importantly, it is the women who are experts in

their own lives. This is identified by Haraway (2004), as 'socially situated knowledge' and suggests the need to 'study up'. This thesis recognises that 'social location systematically influences our experiences, shaping what we know, such that knowledge is achieved from a particular standpoint' (Wylie, 2003:28). To achieve this is to begin with the lives of marginalised women and listen to the difficulties of our everyday lives (see Harding, 2004, 2009; Hartsock, 1983; Intemann, 2010; Roulin, 2009).

In order to achieve a standpoint enquiry it is vital to enable researchers to see beneath the beliefs, power and control of social relations that have become accepted as natural (Harding, 2004, 2009; Hartsock, 2004). Therefore, this 'logic of inquiry' provides a diverse framework for gathering knowledge on the histories and ideologies of individual women's lives (see Harding, 2004, 2009; Hughes, 2002; Rolin, 2009). The approach takes account of the shifting consciousness that can occur in the research process and potentially produces a collective of authentic dialogue, thus producing knowledge from the lived experiences of women. This suggests that the researcher cannot be separated from this process or to the sensitivity of the situational dynamics as they occur (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002).

Standpoint is 'seen to have arisen through consciousness-raising activities' (Hughes, 2002:153). It is embodied in differing beliefs, ideals, values and thoughts of both the researcher and the researched. This enables the relationship between the researcher and the researched to be explored democratically. By exploring relationships that exist between the 'subject' and the 'object' of the research strengthens the existence and understanding of shared experiences (Stanley and Wise, 1993), or what Weskott (1983) identifies as 'inter-subjective realities'. Indeed, experience is central to feminist theory and personal politics commences as soon as women start talking to each other and begin to make sense of

their experiences as women (Skeggs, 1997). This is what Stanley and Wise (1993) identify as consciousness-raising. It is through experience and feminist consciousness (see Hughes, 2002) that new ways of theorising develops, as well as the potential for resistance (Skeggs, 1997).

Standpoint theorists insist that inter-subjective dialogue in the field attempts to break down the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched (Finlay, 2002; Harding, 2004; Hartstock, 1983; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Stapele, 2013). The concept of inter-subjectivity 'defines knowledge as a result of on-going interaction between the researcher and the research' (Stapele, 2014:14), which allows a dialogue of common experiences to emerge. This sets the stage for knowledge production, however, this positioning requires the researcher to be reflexive. This entails researchers to 'engage in explicit self-aware meta-analysis' (Finlay, 2002:209) to enable a methodological account of our inter-subjective dialogue (see Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2002; Mauther and Doucet, 2003; Nencel, 2014; Stapele, 2014). In other words, to be reflexive we need to have a self-conscious awareness of our positioning and the relationship between researcher and 'other' (Bourke, 2014).

This process enables us to recognise ourselves in others through the 'common experience' (Harding 2004). In other words, it supports researchers to obtain 'insider status' (Bourke, 2015; Gabb, 2004). The importance of 'insider status' is evident in much work in this field (Heaphy 1998; Gabb, 2004). However, this positioning can be influenced through inter-subjective dialogue and positionality and will vary between interviews. 'As such, the identities of both the researcher and the researched have the potential to impact on the research process' (Bourke, 2014:1). Thus, it is imperative that researchers are constantly reflexive of their positionality and the 'multiple overlapping identities they may have'

(Bourke, 2014:1). It must also be noted that this process of positioning through inter-subjective dialogue can also produce emotional reactions.

The identification of the emotional impact of researching women's lives was identified by Stanley and Wise (1983), where it was related to qualitative and ethnographic work on the exploration of private lives. Whilst there seems to be an affective turn in recent years in social sciences (see Burman, 2006; Holmes, 2010; McLaughlin, 2003; Sturdy, 2003; Yeun, 2011) the need for incorporating emotion in research was acknowledged much earlier both within and outside feminist work. For example, Sturdy (2003) argued for the incorporation of emotion into studies of organisational life and suggested that emotion was only just beginning to be recognised as part of research processes. McLaughlin (2003) identified emotion as a key part of research, concluding that there is a false polarity between reason and emotion. This polarity is increasingly under scrutiny.

Throughout most of the 20th century the presence of emotional feelings in research processes was avoided in order to achieve validity. Polarities emerged between 'objective' and 'subjective', between cold/dispassionate and passionate. In mainstream research scientific approaches taught that to be subjective, or emotionally connected would contaminate the data (Riger, 2016). On reflection, the 'emotional turn' in research practice is interdisciplinary and evident in psychology, geography, sociology, education, medicine, health sciences and feminist research, the way has been opened for these considerations. There is an increasing acknowledgement that there is an inextricable link between emotional and cognitive processes (McLaughlin, 2003; Burman, 2006,).

Researchers choose to undertake work that is 'close to home' and driven by life experiences. This undoubtedly produces heightened emotions and

there is now an increasing need to incorporate such emotional processes as part of knowledge production (see Blakely, 2007; Holmes, 2010; Yeun, 2010). This entails rejection of the idea that our emotions are 'contaminants' of our work (Riger, 2016) and would rather suggest that emotion is an inevitable part of a truly reflexive research practice. If we are to include emotions in our processes then the connection between emotion, findings and interactive processes could be thought through, meaning the researcher may produce new levels of emotional literacy (Burman, 2006), as well as the ability to be a reflexive professional. Burman (2006) highlights evidence that researchers do experience emotional dilemmas and further suggests that the recognition of the emotional literacy is a progressive step in research practice. This has implications for researchers, for the conceptualisations of research and for research facilitators such as research directors, principle investigators and funders.

These arguments challenge mainstream research agendas. Emotions are now recognised as an embedded part of knowledge production as during the last fifteen years many have given impetus to the need to incorporate emotions (see Campbell, 2001; Sturdy, 2003; Mclaughlin, 2003; Blakely 2009; Yuen, 2011; Holmes, 2010; Bourke, 2014). Emotion becomes an integral part of the findings and contribution to knowledge. Blakey (2007) explored emotionality, sensitive research and feminist theory arguing that these issues were crucial to developing a sense of responsibility in our research design. However, part of this responsibility requires the researcher to be reflexive throughout the research process (see Berger, 2015; Bourke, 2014; Finlay, 2002; Holmes, 2010; Mauther and Doucet, 2003).

Reflexive practice is in itself ambiguous with many variations and as Finlay (2002) argues, researchers are left to make their own way through

this multifaceted process. As discussed earlier in this paper, reflexivity requires researchers to be self-aware of their positioning and influence in the research process. This process is problematic, as you have to first try and recognise what experiences may have an impact, then recognise how they may result in methodological inadequacies (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2002). The researcher then has to find a way to manage any impact that occurs in this process.

Holmes points out that: *'attention to the 'emotionalisation of reflexivity' is largely missed from reflexive and standpoint theoretical explanations'* (2010:139). The point here is that definitions of reflexivity need to incorporate not only reflection, but also the practices and emotions encompassed in reflexive practice. In line with Berger (2015) and Holmes (2010) we now acknowledge that reflexivity is more than simply reflection of historically lived experiences. This process also includes the interaction of emotions and those experiences, whether happy or sad (Finlay, 2002; Holmes, 2010).

Discussions about sensitive research acknowledge that there is risk of the researcher suffering emotional pain, being overwhelmed or experiencing flashbacks to personal associations (see Blakely, 2007; Renzetti and Lee, 1993; Stanko, 1997). Blakely (2007:2) points out *'that the emotionality of researching difficult and sensitive topics is a private issue for most researchers'*. Emotion, it could be argued, is integral to knowledge, although with this comes a sense of duty of care to both the researcher and the researched.

Situating and Embracing Emotion

Reflections on our fieldwork highlighted the emotional dilemmas that were faced when feminist standpoint principles (see Crasnow, 2009; Harding, 2004, 2009; Hughes, 2002; Kourany, 2009; Intemann, 2010; Roulin,

2009) were operationalised. The use of standpoint gave both of us a professional grounding for the design and process of exploring domestic violence and lesbian motherhood, which are sensitive and emotive issues. We also felt that the incorporation of the standpoint principles provided a 'safeguard' against over identification for ourselves. However, we both became aware that we were researching a topic from which we had no escape (Campbell, 2001); it was personal, emotional and political for both of us. This undoubtedly challenged us, as researchers, through those moments of heightened emotion and the dynamics of managing emotionalisation in the field.

Both of our methodological designs utilised in-depth semi-structured interviews. The process of positionality through inter-subjective dialogue enabled us as researchers to immerse ourselves in the respondents' realities, and place ourselves at the centre of the research process (see Finlay, 2002; Stanley and Wise, 1983; Stapele, 2013). We were both acutely aware of our position as researchers, and of the difference between ourselves and the respondent. As Finlay (2002) suggests, we had to constantly reflexively evaluate how our inter-subjective experiences may impact on our research. In addition, the incorporation of positionality (see Bourke, 2014) was a key concept not only in relation to our feminist standpoint, but also as researchers exploring what are private issues. In an attempt to gain 'insider status' (see Bourke, 2015; Gabb, 2004) it was our intention to challenge barriers of power through inter-subjective experiences. This would also enable the respondents to recognise that we respected and understood the sensitiveness of the topics to be explored. However, pre-conceived assumptions of positionality were challenged as we were drawn in emotionally by inter-subjective dialogue.

Fieldwork: Situational emotion in the field

Lesbian Motherhood

My story (Quaid, 2009) begins when I embarked on my Ph.D. research at a point where I had reflected on the possibility of becoming a mother myself, as an out lesbian. I considered and felt very drawn to the idea of motherhood but questioned why I wanted this, and also the consequences of my reproductive choices. Of all these my personal considerations were for the prospective child and how they would feel about my identity and place in the world in a non-normative family. I was emotionally, deeply engaged with the focus of my study. In the design and setting up of the research, we both (Quaid 2009; Wilcock, 2015) considered that face-to-face contact was important for enabling respondents to make an initial assessment of our trustworthiness (Dunne, 1997). This is about the respondents having an unspoken belief that we were not going to 'trash' their stories or their lives. In addition, and on reflection the decision was made by me (Quaid, 2009) to 'come out' to the respondents. I decided that the appropriate moment to be 'out' was when the women had contacted me to offer an interview. It was found that most of the respondents asked about my sexual identity before the information was offered. At that point some things about myself were disclosed: identity and interests in pursuing this research. Through this process I felt I had achieved 'insider status' (Heaphy, 1998) at the outset of face-to-face contact with the respondents.

During the research I sat in the houses of women with their female partners and their thriving children. The realisation that I wanted the same as these respondents was powerful and shaped my own reproductive plans. The respondents' stories affected me emotionally and led in part to my own decision to have a child. The idea took hold as I pursued the research and consequently my Ph.D. was suspended for 2-3 years whilst I embarked on my own reproductive journey, had my child

and embarked on the parenting of my daughter. My life as a researcher was in part bound up with the emotional responses to the research. This required a reflexive process of emotionally charged interviews. As Reinharz (1992) amongst others explain, this work process becomes an integral part of the topic studied.

During my interviews, moments of heightened emotion were produced and experienced over issues of homophobia, prejudice and discrimination, lack of recognition of co-parents and in negotiations of ethnic identities of families. During discussions of homophobia and discrimination, respondents spoke with indignation and annoyance at the prejudicial views of some health and social services professionals. Emotional hurt was felt, however much more sharply, when the reactions from respondents' own families of origin were laden with homophobia and negativity. For many, after several years of planning, their announcement of pregnancy to their parents was sometimes met with the most negative and hurtful responses. On announcing '*we are having a baby*' some respondents' families responded with disgust, anger, negativity and hostility to the idea. Some respondents' spoke of the emotional hurt they felt. For example:

I came out at 20 and just thought, I'll never have children...when I told my mum that Corrine and I were planning to have a child she said to me that was the worst thing I could ever do as a lesbian, to have a child (Lesley - biological mother).

Lesley's mother later accepted the family that she created with Corrine (Co-parent) and arrived with flowers and a card when the child was born.

With the exception of one of the respondents' mothers there were no celebratory responses when they announced the pregnancies or reproductive plans to the families. This emotional hurt is hard to measure but the depth of it was palpable during the interviews when interviews were paused for tears and for partners to console each other. The responses mirrored my own experience of telling my own family member of my pregnancy and they had responded by saying '*I have nothing to say to you*' and put the phone down. This mirrored experiences of the respondents and produced emotional responses I identified with, and relived these experiences and experienced emotionally engaged research. Whilst I was aware that conventions suggested that a researcher should be, to be to some extent, 'detached' from the story emotionally I was '*feeling the research instead of just thinking it*' (Blakely,2007:2).

These tensions around homophobia within families such as the mothers and fathers of the respondents changed or moved on from our initial reactions. The research evidence (2009) suggests, however, lesbian mothers/co-parents cannot assume that announcements of pregnancies and reproductive plans can be shared with families with joy and happiness. I was feeling a flashback to being hurt by my own family at this point and reflected on the appropriateness of my emotional responses.

Further questioning surrounding identity evoked heightened emotions in these interviews on the question of ethnicity. Respondents included white British, Australian, Jewish and Anglo/Asian women. The prevalence of ethnicity was foremost in the Asian woman's family and the Jewish woman's family in particular ways. For the white respondents, the issue of ethnicity was also at the forefront, as each of them had chosen the ethnicity of the donor to be white, even if this was not consciously at the 'top of the list'. Corrine (co-parent) and Lesley (biological mother) had

not specified ethnicity and later became angry when they found out that the donor was of Southern European origin. They felt that they should have been told, not so as to exclude him as a possibility, just so they would know the ethnic origin of their daughter if she ever asked. These emotional feelings about ethnicity were a surprise to me (Quaid, 2009) as the researcher, and the emotive responses from the respondents revealed a deep significance surrounding ethnic identity triggered by the questions about the donor/father. White ethnicity became the key criterion in choosing a donor. Ruth (co-parent) explained that:

We would not have accepted a black donor because there are understandably issues about two white women bringing up a black child.

For Jan (biological mother), who is of Jewish heritage, and Kate (co-parent), who is white British, Jewish emotions became heightened when discussing the choice of sperm donor. Jan's (biological mother) Jewish identity became important for her in a particular way when she thought about becoming a mother. Initially she had said to her partner that she wanted a Jewish donor. Jan (biological mother) explained:

It was important for me and that he had Mediterranean features...it felt like a compromise for me because Darren (actual donor) is Arian – blonde, blue eyes. It was hard and it raised a lot of cultural stuff. I went and talked to rabbis about it and what it means in terms of the religion....but I let it go in the end. It's not easy and it is still an issue for me that he is not circumcised...if Kate ever changed her mind then I would get him circumcised.

In this part of the interview Kate (co-parent) explained her thinking on the matter as follows-

As far as I'm concerned, he's (baby son) Jewish I suppose, I am very anti religion, it's not that I don't want him to be Jewish I don't want him to be religious (Kate co-parent).

This negotiation involved a significant compromise on the part of Jan in relation to her cultural and religious background. The atmosphere became tense and the couple found it difficult to look at each other. Emotions were heightened and I found myself in '*the role of interpreter the one that weaves pieces of silence together*' (Nencel, L, 2013:79). As I attempted to bring the dialogue forward and explore what had just been said it was too painful and Jan (Biological Mother) requested that we move on to the next area of questions. In this moment, I was outwardly asking questions but inwardly questioning myself and dealing with my own emotional response to the apparent chasm of understanding between the respondents. Such difficulties were also found in the work of Wilcock (2015). This area of questioning brought out these contradictory statements regarding the respondents' views about the importance of culture, ethnicity and language. It is important to note that the most articulate and thoughtful responses came from the women who, in the British context, have minority ethnic identities. The ethnicities of the donors are thought about by every couple in the sample, and definite choices are made about the ethnic construction of the family. Jones (2005) explored the significance of ethnicity in donor choice and considered the ways in which lesbians negotiate bio genetic continuity in their families. In a study of lesbian assisted reproductive experiences,

she argued that bio-genetic continuity is about the negotiation of kinship ties (Jones, 2005).

Domestic Violence

Through telling the story of my doctoral experiences (Wilcock, 2015) I seek to illustrate how emotion was felt, and embraced within my work (Wilcock, 2015). I hope to demonstrate how my positioning in the research process influenced the emergence of situational emotion. The depth of emotion felt was dependent on the respondent's experience and interest in the subject. For instance, if at the onset of the interview respondents disclosed personal experience of domestic violence then I would briefly share some of my experiences. If respondents had professional experience I shared commonalities from my professional background. As Stapele states; *'the ongoing interaction between the researcher and research participant sets the stage for the process of inter-subjective knowledge production'* (2014:14). Through this process it was found that where inter-subjective dialogue had taken place respondents were more open about their experiences. For example: women who had been cautious about discussing personal experience of domestic violence, after inter-subjective interaction disclosed abuse that had never been spoken about previously.

As respondents reflected on their experiences and retold their story moments of heightened emotion were produced. This challenged me both professionally and emotively throughout the fieldwork process. While my grounding was focussed on the deep-rooted conception of a researcher needing to be to some extent 'detached' from the story, emotionally I was, as Blakely puts it, *'feeling the research instead of just thinking it'* (2007:2). However, the process of reflexivity allowed me to look back and consider how inter-subjective interaction had influenced the depth of emotion felt by the respondents, and me as the researcher. It also helped

me to understand the importance of embracing the emotion as part of the research process (Yeun, 2010). As Bourke, (2014) points out, research represents a shared space that is shaped by both the researcher and the respondent. This suggests that inter-subjective dialogue becomes part of the process.

Those respondents who had experienced domestic violence, where inter-subjective interaction had been negotiated meant heightened emotion was produced as respondents retold their story of sexual and physical abuse for the first time. For some respondents their experiences were still raw.

I was absolutely on the bottom as he forced me to have an abortion. I tried to stop the abortion but he stood over me while I phoned them back (hospital). I had to rearrange the abortion and he walked me into the hospital and he said to me 'let's get this fucking nightmare over'. I lay on the bed and even then, I knew I should have had that baby. I wasn't strong enough to stop it. Then 6 months later I fell pregnant again as I was desperate for another baby. He knew I was, but he kicked me down the stairs and I miscarried. I lay on the bathroom floor bleeding, I sat and I tried to stop the blood but I couldn't (broke down). I lost my baby about three days later. The night I had the miscarriage he then said 'you have had another fucking abortion you bitch'. He let people believe that I had gone through with an abortion.

This respondent at the end of the interview did state that she had found the process quite cathartic. However, it was emotionally charged

throughout as she relived heinous experiences of domestic abuse. Upon reflection, I realised she had no immunity emotionally or physically from any part of the fieldwork process. Another highly emotive interview was with another respondent who had experienced years of domestic abuse. I felt the distress of this respondent and hopelessness in not being able to give her any closure as this was not what I was there to do.

I had been on a night out and I had been really drunk. I can remember falling asleep on the settee and the next morning when I woke I was, well you know when you have had sex. I said to my partner 'why do I feel like I have had sex'? He said, 'because we had sex last night'. I responded by saying I cannot remember that happening. He said 'you were asleep on the chair'. I was humiliated. I told him you can't do that I was asleep, but what could I do I was with him. I was asleep and I didn't say yes.

This respondent was reliving her experience of rape, which had gone unnamed. It was obvious it had left emotional scarring and she was struggling to understand why she had not been able to challenge it at the time. As I was listening to a survivor reliving her account of sexual assault I felt her depth of pain and recognised her vulnerability at that time. There was nothing in her story that could make her experiences any less subjective, or I as the researcher emotionally impartial at that point (see Blakely, 2007). I was sitting next to her feeling her pain. When listening to respondents reflecting and reliving abusive experiences it is very difficult not to be affected. *There is no line that separates us, the researchers, from them, the survivors (Blakely, 2007:61)*. I became aware of my own vulnerabilities as a woman and that it could have been

me telling that story instead of listening to it (see Blakely, 2007; Campbell, 2001; Rager, 2005).

The respondents with no direct experience of domestic violence but working within professional bodies accepted my positioning as an academic. However, questions were asked as to how I came to study this specific area. Therefore, I shared my professional background in front line statutory service provision. This appeared to influence their acceptance to discuss individual work ethic and practices, as well as some discussing personal experiences of domestic violence. While I anticipated a lower level of emotion during such interviews some became highly challenged as respondents reflected on their own relationships. This process questioned their understanding of their lived realities. As one respondent stated:

I sometimes have sex just to shut him up because he twists. Well it (sex) is a big part of his life. I just lie back and think of England (laughs), and I think women do that sometimes don't they? It keeps my husband very happy if he is having sex. I am nearly in the menopause now and he can't wait for it to really kick in as I am not going to have periods. This means more sex for him I suppose.

As she told her story the respondent began to question the dynamics of her relationship.

It's funny though because although we have a joint account, and I actually earn more than my husband I have to tell him what I have spent. This is because he keeps the accounts, but

that is a form of control isn't it? I haven't thought of it because I am a spend thrift you see and he is not, but that is just part of it. I have never thought of that as being that way. It is quite interesting that I have never realised that before.

During the interview process there was a realisation that her relationship was not as loving, caring and as honest as she thought. Such interviews evoked emotional reactions as the respondent's assumptions were challenged. This raised awareness appeared to be overwhelming and empowering in equal measure. It placed a sense of responsibility on the respondents to challenge their current situation, but it also gave them the opportunity to change it (see Wheeler-Brooks, 2009). This process was troubling, painful and complex for both the respondents and for me as the researcher. As an academic researcher and front line professional I was consciously aware of the difficulties and the barriers that the woman faced in attempting to change their situations. Personally, I was aware emotionally of the arduous journey that lay ahead. As the interviews progressed I found I was attempting to anticipate the depth of emotion that may be produced. This led to me reflecting constantly on my positioning and the depth of information shared through inter-subjective dialogue.

Respondents retold their stories and for some the process challenged their consciousness. In line with Intemann (2010), I suggest that knowledge is achieved through critical reflective thinking or '*consciousness reflection*' (Intemann, 2010:785). Through a form of consciousness-raising for example, as personal experiences were emotionalised and reconfigured the respondents began to challenge oppression that had been previously internalised (Hughes, 2002; Wheeler-Brooks, 2009). Therefore, through individual recognition of behaviour that was previously acknowledged as personal fault or shame,

part of their role, or what had become normalised in their relationships was able to be challenged as unacceptable or aberrant (Wilcock, 2015). This process of change in consciousness also impacted on me both personally and professionally as I reflected on the respondents' reconfiguration of their lived realities. Reflexive thinking means a constant interrogation of a researcher's own experiences, which meant I became attuned to their reconfiguration and the fear and risk they faced (Campbell, 2001).

This process meant I was dealing reflexively with the challenges on the respondents, such as: what they were going through, individual emotions, feelings and change to their lives. Having dealt with the situational dynamics in the field I had not been fully prepared for the challenge on myself emotionally through triggers and flash backs of the process (see Blakely, 2007). This continued as I relived their experiences during transcription, which brought to the fore the 'emotionalisation' of the reflective and reflexive process (Hertz, 1997; Holmes, 2010). This was at times overwhelming and painful, I felt guilt and anger as to what the women had experienced as well as what they had gone through as they relived the moment (see Blakely, 2007; Wheeler-Brooks, 2009). My feelings of guilt and anger were influenced not only by the harm the women had suffered at the hands of the men they loved, but also by the realisation that the situated emotion the respondents felt had been initiated by the focus of my research.

While I accepted and understood the complexities of their positioning I felt a degree of emotional exhaustion during highly emotive interviews. To manage this process, I mapped my journey through a journal, which supported the reflexive process of emotionally charged interviews. As Reinharz, (1992) amongst others explain, this work process becomes an integral part of the topic studied. In other words, for us, the emotion became part of our valuable data through the emotion-laden material we

collated (see Blakely, 2007). We both found the fieldwork an emotional experience and through inter-subjective practice our feelings were attuned to that of our respondents, inevitably this had an influence on the research itself (Blakely, 2007).

Questions and concerns inevitably emerged about how to hold and represent the emotion as a source of knowledge in the academic discourse. Although we both recognised the challenges of representing emotion in academic writing, and we were entering uncharted waters (Blakely, 2007), it was imperative to us to give 'voice' to emotionally produced knowledge. Importantly, we recognised that the emotion from both the researcher and the respondents was in itself a resource of information, which had shaped the fieldwork processes for us both. The emotion contributed to the highly charged data that had been collated. This left us both searching for answers as to how to deal with and manage the dynamics of situational emotionality.

Concluding Thoughts

The aim of writing this paper has been to illustrate the emotional dilemmas produced in the research process during our use of standpoint logic (see Harding, 1987 as a methodological framework. By drawing on our doctoral experiences we have sought to demonstrate how emotion can become an integral part of the findings and contribution to knowledge. Looking reflexively on our experiences we have recognised the importance as researchers to reflect on not only the emotional pain that can be placed on the respondent as they reflect on lived experiences, but also the emotional load of the researcher (Blakely, 2007; Holmes, 2010; Yeun, 2011). We suggest that the self-aware researcher

acknowledges emotionality as inevitable in sensitive research, particularly on topics relating to personal family and sexual lives.

The principles underpinning standpoint situates the researcher both physically and emotionally (see Harding, 1988; 2004) suggesting that knowledge production has the opportunity to be emotionally charged. We both embraced Standpoint epistemology and agree that it provides a robust framework for researching the lives of women and those most marginalised, however, standpoint offers little discussion around the risk of such emotionally charged interactions. For us both, the emotion became an embedded part of the knowledge we produced through 'shared space' and the acknowledgment of inter-subjective dialogue in the field.

For us, as others have suggested, emotion is core to the reflexive and inter-subjective process, therefore, we have to constantly reflexively evaluate how our inter-subjective experiences may impact on our research (Yeun, 2011). However, while researchers are called upon to be reflexive about their research attention to the depth of emotion felt in research processes is largely missing from methodological and reflexive theoretical explanations and writings (Holmes, 2010). The social sciences are now moving beyond the traditional ideology of rationality/feeling, and objectivity/subjectivity (Dupont, 2008) although the historic polarity between reason and emotion is increasingly under scrutiny (Mclaughlin, 2003). Nevertheless, we sought to incorporate both in our knowledge production as we recognised that emotions do not detract from the research, but enhance it (see Holmes, 2010).

Therefore, we suggest that it is imperative to give voice to emotionally produced knowledge, but how? Both our work evoked these questions; how do we represent emotionality in findings? How do we support/protect the researcher and the researched? We further suggest that in working on sensitive topics the researcher should be in a supportive and

responsive process as this would allow for emotional responses to circumstances and dialogue to be supported emotionally, as well as shared academically. Moving forward we will embrace any future situational emotion as we both now recognise the valuable contribution of emotionally charged knowledge within academic writing.

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