

## **Me, My\*self and I: Personal and Professional Re-Constructions in Ethnographic Research**

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reflexive  
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**Abstract:** Negotiating the tension of the various positions available for oneself in ethnographic research is the central issue of this paper. Constructing and re-constructing the very availability of different positions is a necessary element in this process and extends through all aspects of ethnography.

However, this paper focuses on the construction of the narrative, as experienced in the actual doing of an ethnographic research project and the construction of my narratory self. At the heart of one of the many challenges I faced was my desire to move beyond a single authorial writing style in my thesis. How could I interweave multiple voices and realities into the telling of the story? How could I construct a place or places for my\*self within it? How could I add the story of my own growth and development as a social researcher? I experimented with a number of representational strategies in my quest to make explicit my subjectivity and my\*self-reflexive practices. One method involved constructing an additional self by including several brief reflexive extracts from my own personal journal into the narrative of my thesis. They reflected my learning, my thoughts and feelings as I experienced them throughout the life of the research project. Another approach was to incorporate non-traditional forms of both textual and non-textual material, for instance, a poem (crafted by my sister, a poet) and a painting (courtesy of my mother, an artist) introduced the narrative. They created their own construction of my emergence as a social researcher and their art then becomes an innovative form of disclosure about my\*self and a subsequent element in my construction of my\*self as both an author and a narrator. A later addition was the article reviewer's voice, which has also been interwoven into the telling of my stories.

While such experimental writing can be seen as violating social research conventions, it can also be seen as an attempt to construct an organic whole similar to "Weber's idea of 'the webs of significance' we spin ourselves" (BOCHNER & ELLIS 1996, p.16). In spinning the story of this article, I have merged additional layers and created extra textual spaces as part of the knowledge construction process.

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## 1. Introduction

"Increasingly ethnographers desire to write ethnography which is both scientific—in the sense of being true to a world known through the empirical senses—and literary—in the sense of expressing what one has learned through evocative writing techniques and form. More and more ways of representing ethnographic work emerge" (RICHARDSON 2000, p.253).

"Our discussions of ethnographic research—what works, what does not, and the hows, whys, whens of particular practices—must be undertaken openly and honestly without sanitizing the messier, more odious, and ethically challenging aspects of our craft." (SHAFFIR 1999, "Conclusion section", para. 3).

The purpose of this paper is to discuss/explore/consider/reflect on and also construct meanings associated with the *doing* of my ethnographic research and some of the related challenges of subjectivity. Coming to social research after twenty-five years of professional business activities, I first began to glimpse dilemmas associated with meeting these challenges during my initial thinking about my research interests. [1]

These interests lie in understanding more about the ways that computer-mediated communication technologies influence human communication processes in organisational settings. The scope of my interest included what these technological changes *do to us* as well as what they can do for us. In undertaking an ethnographic study to explore these questions, subjectivity in research was one of many new ideas that I was exposed to as a novice social researcher. By the mid 1990s, the traditional notion of suppressing the researcher's subjectivity was under scrutiny with trends emerging for ethnographers to disclose how they constructed themselves as researchers and also how such constructions impacted on their research practices. Other changes were happening as well. Towards the end of the century, Patricia ADLER and Peter ADLER (1999, p.449) critiqued the state of ethnography and proclaimed that ethnography in all its forms was flourishing even though "we do not all agree on where we should be going, what we should be studying, and how we should approach the people we research". The ethnographic genre was being "blurred, enlarged and altered" into what future historians "might call the Ethnographic Era or perhaps even the Golden Age: the legitimation, adoption, and proliferation of creative analytical practices that have produced a plenitude of creative analytical practice (CAP) ethnography" (RICHARDSON 1999, p.660). [2]

However, the challenges of dealing with such epistemological and methodological issues remain problematic, particularly in the actual production of ethnographic accounts. Thus, this exploration and analysis of my experiences of facing and resolving at least some of these issues as related to my ethnographic work may interest both the novice and the seasoned social researcher particularly in light of the dearth of detailed information published. Such an accounting exposes many of the taken-for-granted elements of social research, of knowledge and knowing, with the objective of informing and also of being informed because "when thinking becomes visible, it can be inspected, reviewed, held up for consideration" (KLEINSASSER 2000, "Writing-to-Learn and Unlearn" section, para. 1). Such an accounting also produces an

"edginess regarding 'telling it like it is', admitting dilemmas, mistakes, difficult relationships, struggles, or less than perfect practices of research. However, if these things are not openly talked about we cannot learn from them, and others coming after us are discouraged when they encounter their own research realities."  
(HORSFALL, BYRNE-ARMSTRONG & HIGGS 2001, p.3). [3]

My experiences of research comprise many stories and in constructing this narrative, I invite readers to join me in a collaborative encounter as I seek to explain the diverse engagements between my\*self and my research, to both construct and expose my\*self as a social researcher and to also present and re/present some of the chaos of these experiences. [4]

### **1.1 Me, my\*self and I**

I have made a conscious choice to modify the usual typographical conventions in the way I display the reflexive pronoun "myself" in this article. By conspicuously dividing the word—my\*self—in this way, I wish to make it explicit that I am constructing my self through the use of multiple voices. This emerged as a consequence of my philosophical approach of social constructivism with its attendant subjectivity and reflexivity. In drawing upon a range of self-constructions, I am a researcher, (firstly as a novice and then becoming more experienced), an author and narrator (of both my thesis and this article), an observer and participant of organisational life and a reflexive communication practitioner and writer. Through contributions from my family, I also expose glimpses of my self-construction as a daughter and sister. In most conventional writing, multiple voices such as these are silenced and left out or, at best, implied. In contrast, I am quite explicit about bringing my multiple constructed selves to the fore. [5]

This demonstration of my practice of incorporating a range of different voices into the text may serve to encourage, teach and legitimise the inclusion of a more honest and reflexive sense within research writings. I purposively draw on the notion of honesty as many of the things I discuss are taken for granted and are not discussed (although they may be known either consciously or subconsciously by experienced researchers). Knowledge gaps such as these within the public arena do little justice particularly to those new to the academic community. [6]

### **1.2 To/two journeyings**

Like many researchers, I originally described my research project as a journey. However, as my sociological practice developed, I broadened the metaphor to encompass not one but two constructed journeys. While my research interests clearly focused on the outcome of finding out more about peoples' use of technology as an element of organisational communication, I also wanted to critically explore the research process itself as a complementary journey of discovery. In charting this second journey, I have documented significant moments of the transformation process as I progressed beyond being a novice researcher. Throughout this article, I use both words and images to illustrate my reflections on the continuing story of these two journeys. [7]

One of my objectives has been to encourage and empower others to similarly explore and open up new possibilities for harnessing the power of self-reflection and subjectivity in their research practice. In speaking about that which is traditionally unspoken and in making visible the invisible, I am both constructing and illuminating a space for dialogue between you the reader (as another constructed self) and my multi-constructed and multi-voiced self. In doing so, I challenge the boundaries of what is acceptable writing and also what it is acceptable to write about. [8]

But this is neither easy to do nor do I feel entirely comfortable doing it. How do I imagine that I may be able to influence my readers in terms of achieving such an objective when "Each reading, each interpretation inevitably indeterminately arises from the dialectical tension between the text (in whatever form, written, spoken, culture, action) and the reader's (interpreter's) situated, historically (biographically) conditioned horizon" (ROTH 2002, para 5). Clearly, being open to the possibilities I explore is dependant upon many things. One prime dimension relates to the position of each reader (and interpreter of my text) on the continuum of outcome versus process-oriented thinking. Just how such positioning influences the experience of reading research accounts is analysed further in Section 3.3. [9]

## 2. Re-Constructing Reflexivity

John CAREY'S assessment of the communication field asserted that "all scholarship must be and inevitably is adapted to the time and place of its creation" (CAREY 1989, p.148). I added another element to this combination ... "all scholarship must be and inevitably is adapted to the time and place of its creation" ... *and its creator*. He indirectly acknowledged this when he said that this "relation [of the research to the researcher] is either unconscious, disguised, and indirect or reflexive, explicit, and avowed" (CAREY 1989, p.148). Many social scientists are now writing about the self with these writings being "evocative representations," which are a "striking way of seeing through and beyond sociological naturalisms ... we struggle to find a textual place for ourselves and our doubts and uncertainties" (RICHARDSON 1994, p.521). [10]

As Debbie HORSFALL succinctly exclaimed "we have only words and words require lineal construction" whereas

"Our knowings, our understandings are often multifaceted, multidimensional and sometimes chaotic. And yet we are required to explain ourselves in one dimension; there is no room for the multitude of voices, thoughts and feelings that occur in the meaning-making in our bodies" (2001, p.88). [11]

Read on as I explain just how I contested this single-dimensional approach by constructing spaces for Debbie HORSFALL's "multitude of voices, thoughts and feelings" (2001, p.88). [12]

### 2.1 Personal journals and reflection

In my struggles to make sense of the chaos implicit in constructing satisfying and satisfactory textual places within my thesis, I drew upon an intertextual approach by blending different voices. I intermittently included some of my own reflective journal entries into the thesis as a bridge to explain the relationships between the research process and my own growth and development as a social researcher. Illustration 1 provides an example of my thesis journal entries as I reflect on my inner musings concerning some of the things that drive my research, again making visible some of that which traditionally remains unspoken and invisible.

### **Thesis Journal Entry No.1**

"... Even at the earliest stages of starting out as a novice researcher, I had strong convictions concerning the research process. One of these concerned the dissemination of my research and its outcomes. Obviously this work is my claim to an additional qualification in Communication Studies and hence I need to produce a written account or thesis—the typical product of postgraduate academic research. However, I also wanted to fully report and document my reflections on the experience of becoming a social researcher. I soon learnt that this was not typical of mainstream academic research writing although a trend challenging this was apparent (for instance, Laurel Richardson's evocative representations of 1994). I wanted to reflect on and disclose my learnings, my thoughts and feelings as experienced throughout the life of the research project."

### Illustration 1: Example of Thesis Journal Entries [13]

While reflexive explorations of this sort are being welcomed within some research communities, few scholars actually make explicit the finer details of their everyday experiences of research, in particular how they negotiate and construct their multiple selves within their research. Undoubtedly, all researchers encounter and resolve in some form, similar issues concerning the notion of subjectivity within the research process, whether this is acknowledged or not. By interweaving extracts from my journal into the thesis, I provided glimpses of my thinking as one way of acknowledging and then disclosing the subjectivity of my lived experiences (including the decisions I encountered) in the doing of ethnographic research. As Judith PREISSLE said, "All ethnographic decisions are problematic and should be subject to examination and reexamination. The givens are gone" (1999, "What do Ethnographers Study?" section, para. 6). As reflexive researchers, we must all take responsibility for the choices we make and self-exposure of such taken for granted aspects of research can only strengthen our portrayal of lived social experiences.

### **FQS Article Journal Entry No.1**

*"... Well, I have begun my first journal article by attempting to write a somewhat traditional introduction. I feel a strong sense of deja vu as I confront the challenges of writing in the accepted style while still allowing, nay encouraging, my\*self awareness to blend into the words. It was, and still is, extremely difficult to write like this. It is deja vu all over again because I continuously struggled with these questions while writing my thesis. Now, as well as then, questions tumble turbulently about in my mind, questions about how to position my\*self as author, how to concurrently be a knower, a writer and a teller of the story and also how to construct a writing space which allows me to be a part of the social world that I am exploring and constructing. Additional complications further obscure my way now as I attempt to incorporate my experiences of writing this paper into my constructed writing space. Perhaps the answer is to again include relevant short extracts from my personal journal to express another voice. Yes, perhaps, I will do just that." [14]*

My journal entries expose brief glimpses of my thinking as I faced numerous dilemmas and indicate the paths I choose to resolve them. The continuing play of intertextual voices will intermittently appear throughout this article wherever I am convinced that they are valuable aids for increasing the reader's understanding of my work. However, in making visible some of my meaning-construction processes, I seek to engage you, the reader as I invite you to also critique my thinking and my decisions. I concur with Arthur BOCHNER when he says "I want a story that doesn't just refer to subjective life, but instead acts it out in ways that show me what life feels like now and what it can mean" (2000, "Alternative Ethnographic and Qualitative Inquiry" section, para. 5). My journal entries allow me to "act out" some of my experiences while also making the situational and the consequential nature of research visible. [15]

Undoubtedly, my growing interest in subjectivity and my desire to be reflexive has had consequences for my own research practices. For instance, as I read the emerging literature within my discipline, I have become more aware of the things that are not said, the things that are taken-for-granted and that which is traditionally edited out of the account. I actively look for some disclosure from others about the doing of their research to complement the customary discussion of research outcomes. I want to learn more about the subjective experiences of the researcher and I want to be able to reflect on their reflections as a way of growing both my knowledge and my understanding of research. It is in such disclosures that the research community can also nurture these new understandings about the contextual nature of research. [16]

Another personal consequence concerns my comfort levels in that I have become more at ease with publicly discussing my subjectivity in conjunction with my reflective practices. I have become more ably prepared to expose my\*self as I push against the boundaries of long-established academic writing traditions. And, I worry less. [17]

## **2.2 Academic writing and tradition**

This tradition dictates that academic tomes are generally crafted to appear sober and bookish in their seriousness. They contain pages filled with structured and inconspicuous text that flows from beginning to end without interruption. The intertextual approach to writing challenges these traditions as authors engage in dialogue and negotiation with their readers while experimenting with new and unpredictable (and increasingly electronic) textual formats. For instance, Wolff-Michael ROTH's (2002) electronic review of two books on reflexive methodologies in this journal seeks to "tell reflexivity in a reflexive way", an objective I also aspire to. While his introductory paragraph appears in a traditional page/screen-wide single column, he quickly moves to defy standard conventions by using two columns, each of which encompasses a differing story. These "two facing columns inform one another, play of [sic] one another, are connected and contradictory. They are also bridged, by a set of common referents—or should I say references" (ROTH 2002, para. 3). [18]

I found ROTH's deviation from traditional page design to be stimulating in an intriguing way but almost impossible to read onscreen. A printed version was a little easier but the atypical flow of the text in the dual-column layout was disconcerting, to say the least. Reading through the article, my eyes automatically flowed from the end of the first column to the top of the second column on each page. At which point, it became obvious that the text I was reading in the second column did not continue on from the first column. In a seemingly random way, he also included a "set of common referents"—an indented paragraph of text that flowed across the two columns. In accommodating these "common referents", gaps of white space were created in the first column that further confused my eye and my mind. [19]

The reading difficulties I experienced through such modifications to the structured flow of text illustrate the issues that intertextuality brings to the act of reading. How can a customarily linear and ordered series of textual events be manipulated while still being inviting and easy for the reader to read? In my desire to increase the visibility of the multiple voices within first my thesis and then this article, I experimented with numerous textual design methods. My aim was to incorporate relatively unproblematic textual markers to signify a change in voice. [20]

While my primary voice is represented in the traditional textual style of published academic work, the two separate threads of personal journal entries (one of which concerns my writing of the thesis while the other encapsulates my writing this article) look different. The textual marker that I have used to identify the journal entries relating to my experiences in constructing this article is an italicised paragraph that is indented within the text. In contrast, the two journal entries that relate to the period during which I constructed my thesis are treated as illustrations (captioned Illustration 1 and 2). To further clarify and differentiate the two journal threads, each journal entry is labelled either Thesis or *FQS* article. [21]

Further complexity is added towards the end of the article when I draw two additional voices into the narrative with both my mother's and my sister's constructions of my research journeys. Their representative works (both textual and pictorial) are also shown as illustrations and captioned as Illustration 3 and 4. To further visually emphasise that the illustrations indicate a change in voice, they are shown enclosed within a black line border. [22]

### **3. Re-Constructing Audiences**

It is becoming more generally recognised and acknowledged that "research procedure constructs reality as much as it produces descriptions of it" (GUBRIUM & HOLSTEIN 1997, p.9). In moving away from dispassionate descriptions, the tension between the researcher, the researched and the research audience is being disturbed as ethnographic texts become more engaging. In 1994, Norman DENZIN claimed that "writers create their own situated, inscribed versions of the realities they describe" (p.505). He was a little more direct in 1998 when he said that "theory, writing, and ethnography are inseparable material practices.



Together they create the conditions that locate the social inside the text" (DENZIN 1998, p.406). [23]

Continuing with this theme, it is clear that further challenges exist through the need to "write persuasively so that the reader experiences 'being there'" (CRESWELL 1998, p.21). Connectedness with the audience is at issue. In essence, "the most important part of any research project is not collecting data, but publishing it in a form which will transmit the research results to interested parties" (ARBER 1993, p.47). As a generalised comment, a thesis (in its original form) is targeted towards a very small audience consisting of those who supervise the work itself and those who examine the reporting of the research. The much broader audience of the general community is reached by publishing the research results under the banner of professional/academic journals and conferences as well as other publication strategies. But what do these different audiences mean for the reporting of research accounts? [24]

### **3.1 Research supervisors as audience**

Being audience to a student's developing account of their research is but one element of the shifting phenomenon known as the relationship between supervisor and student. Barbara GRANT has suggested "that negotiating a supervision relationship is like walking on a rickety bridge" and she says that such relationships are both predictable and unpredictable; predictable in that the "institution offers a 'sound' pedagogical structure within which the interactions between supervisor and student are assumed to occur" but also unpredictable because "supervision is not static but rickety, a bridge disturbed by erratic movement" (GRANT 1999, "Closing Metaphor: Supervision as a Rickety Bridge" section). [25]

Valerie-Lee CHAPMAN and Thomas SORK (2001) have publicly opened up a dialogue exploring the problematics of the supervisory relationship within graduate education. They offer their own versions of the supervisor and graduate student experience and at one point, Valerie asks, "why did I give him power over me, to give me permission, grant me validation?" (2001, "The Story so far" section, para. 15). Lynn MCALPINE and Joel WEISS have similarly launched a discourse around the supervisory process because "language provides us with conceptual frameworks and categories to begin analysing our experiences, to confront dilemmas in our practices, to make explicit our knowledge in context" (2000, p.5). [26]

In terms of the relationships I had with my supervisors, some facets of these expert/novice dynamics arose especially when I sought to venture away from more traditional ideas regarding what a thesis should be. I tested this need for permission in regard to my desire to include my journal extracts within the thesis and my two academic supervisors responded in significantly different ways. [27]

Noting that the philosophical approach of my primary supervisor draws upon ideas associated with constructivism and interactionism with a particular affinity

for grounded methodologies and ethnographic work, she seemed to be almost noncommittal when I first began discussing the idea. Reflecting now on her response at that time, she explains that her major concern was how potential examiners would interpret them. She was also concerned that the personal tone of the entries might undermine the display of competence that is a major task of a thesis. However, by not emphasising her concerns and in the absence of her disapproval, she allowed me further space to play with the idea. As I progressed with writing the thesis, she assumed a position of qualified support for the notion and in the final editing phase, we negotiated which extracts should remain and we eventually agreed that ten journal entries should be included in the final thesis. I was content. [28]

However, returning to Barbara GRANT's metaphor of "walking on a rickety bridge" and her assertion that "negotiating it requires a certain situational attentiveness" (1999), my secondary supervisor responded in a different way to my journal entries. Although he was a little puzzled when they first began to appear in my drafts, he seemed to like the idea. He commented that they were extremely useful for him to become aware of, and to understand, my thinking during the work-in-progress stages. However, in discussions with him, he simply assumed that the journal entries were only temporary and would be removed from the final version. I did not address this assumption until the end stages of writing the thesis. Many scholars will empathise with my last minute rush as the thesis submission deadline loomed. In the final stages of working on it, I made it clear to him that I wanted some of the journal entries to remain as part of the thesis although it would be a relatively small number. Perhaps, because of the strength of my feeling about it and my commitment to critically evaluate their contribution to the whole thesis combined with the short timeframe left, he acquiesced. It is also possible that the support of my primary supervisor was crucial as I progressed across this particular section of "my rickety bridge".

#### **FQS Article Journal Entry No.2**

*"... I feel very uncertain talking about these issues. I wonder how my supervisors will react to the ways I've portrayed their roles in these events. Should I speak of these things or should they remain unspoken? I am concerned because I do not want to offend either of these two people who have mentored my becoming a social researcher. And even though my secondary supervisor expected my journal entries to be deleted from the final version, he has subsequently told me that he shows my thesis to other novice researchers as an example of a 'good' ethnographic study. Irrespective, I believe there is value in disclosing the inherent taken-for-grantedness by openly talking about and examining such experiences. In using their own experiences to critique this little story, perhaps the more experienced researchers among my readers will be transported back in time to reflect on possibility similar experiences of struggles with their own supervisors' constructing the role of readers of student accounts. Perhaps, as supervisors themselves, other readers may reflect on their own supervisory practices in the act of reading while research students may simply gain a little courage to push the boundaries through the telling of this story." [29]*

In terms of the journal entries themselves, I actively critiqued the words in the same way that I critiqued the entire 70,000 words of the thesis in terms of their contribution to the reader's understanding of my work. In addition, I also examined the language, tone, style and quantity of each specific extract to ensure they could be joined seamlessly into the whole while still retaining a discrete voice with unique characteristics. My expertise in written communication was particularly useful in dealing with these issues. [30]

### **3.2 Thesis examiners as audience**

It was clear that my primary supervisor had some "legitimate concerns about how students' work will be received should they (students) choose to breach ethnographic writing norms" (RICHARDSON 2000, p.254) particularly in terms of my journal extracts. In the early 1990s, Sharon PARRY and Martin HAYDEN considered the practices associated with higher degree supervision and investigated a range of disciplines within Australian Higher Education institutions. In their writing, they touched briefly on the process of selecting examiners and said that one problem within the social sciences and humanities related to the need "to ensure that the 'ideological position' of the examiners selected would match the approach adopted in the thesis being examined" (1994, p.41). [31]

The relationships between my\*self and my two academic supervisors (and their ideological positions) were continuously being renewed in my construction of the thesis and I came to know these two people well. In comparison, my relationships with the two scholars who examined my thesis were relatively brief and unconnected to the process of writing; rather their relationship was centred on my work, rather than flowing between my\*self and my work. As audience, there were both contrasts and similarities between my supervisors and my examiners. Within the Australian academic community, it is the primary supervisor who is formally responsible for choosing examiners of the thesis with the student having a varying range of input into the decision. In my case, I freely discussed potential examiners with my supervisors. We took particular care to select scholars who would not consider my "evocative representational style" too unconventional. [32]

In profiling my supervisors compared with my examiners, several similarities appear. The gender profile was the same with both supervisor and examiner groups comprising a woman and a man. In addition, each of the two groups comprised a local scholar and an interstate one.

#### **FQS Article Journal Entry No.3**

*"... But what do these variations mean? Why am I talking about them? Are they important? Would I have done anything differently if my thesis were to have been examined by two men—or two women?" [33]*

I believe the taken-for-granted decisions faced in writing an ethnographic study are indeed problematic and that it is useful to critically examine them. Searching out what is similar and what is different advances such analysis and helps to

illuminate areas of practice around which there is often little dialogue. Barbara GRANT opens her discussion of the complexities of supervision with the statement that "good supervision is central to successful graduate research, yet it is a pedagogy which is poorly understood" (1999). [34]

### **3.3 Journal readers as audience**

At this point in your reading, you will now understand that adding my different voices into the text (for instance, with my journal entries) interrupt the reading process by disrupting the linear flow of the text. As readers, your response to such aberrations will be coloured by your own cultural lenses. Some may experience them as additional and unwanted demands while others may become irritated because the article is harder, and perhaps more confusing, to read resulting in the need for readers to stretch themselves more. Some may simply consider them an irrelevant and inappropriate dead-end in the knowledge construction process and give up on reading the article. [35]

Conversely the challenges of critically engaging with the multiple voices in my text may be welcomed as others seek to connect with the possibilities my article suggests. Similarly, they may help readers make judgements about my ideas by bringing them into view, by making them visible and by the way they subsequently change the experience of reading. [36]

While it appears that even though the constructed nature of knowledge is acknowledged, it is the end product of research activities (the research findings) that have traditionally been privileged over the process of constructing such knowledge. This can be framed as product or outcome thinking versus process thinking. And while such dichotomies can be construed as obstructive because generally we are not wholly one nor wholly the other but rather we site ourselves at some position along the continuum, an important issue is the question of whose perspective counts. Does my article challenge both the act of reading and the actions of the reader? Is it an open invitation to consider how research outcomes are deeply intertwined with the research process? Does it demystify the research process a little and are you able to see that I have been honest in my reporting? Have I encouraged you to think a little about deeply ingrained traditions that dictate how research should be reported? Have I encouraged you to think a little? And where are you on the outcome versus process continuum? Again, whose perspective is it that counts? [37]

### **3.4 Different audiences and audience differences**

Another more practical question relates to differences between you as reader and a member of the audience of my article and my thesis audience? In considering the differences, there are more contrasts than parallels between the readers of both works. Where I knew my two supervisors and I knew of my two examiners, I know very little regarding the readers of this article. I imagine there will be many more of you (at least more than four primary readers, as was the case with my thesis) and that you belong to a very diverse community of scholars. I imagine

that you could be anywhere in the world reading this paper and even perhaps reading it in a language different to the English that I have written it in. I do not know your age, your gender, your culture or even your name and it is possible we may never meet. In my imaginings, you may currently work within an epistemological framework of "evocative ethnographies" or you may be a beginning researcher exploring different methodologies as you attempt to make sense of the complexities of researching the social world. You may have significant expertise in qualitative research methodologies or not and you may site yourself within a range of diverse social disciplines or your scholarly background may be even more varied than that. [38]

When comparing the writing of this article with the writing of my thesis, contrasts again appear for the ideas encapsulated in this paper are a very small package of the ideas and words of my thesis. Thus, there are significant differences in constructing the structure of the journal article due to the size disparities but the potentially diverse readership impacts on the structure as well. More contrasts appear due to publication differences. My thesis was bound as a traditional manuscript and printed on paper in one colour (except for a small original painting which I discuss more fully later in this paper). In contrast, as a reader of this paper, you can decide to print it, or not. If you do, you then have the option of "binding" it in whatever way you wish. Electronic publication also means that the range of colour possibilities is almost unlimited.

#### **FQS Article Journal Entry No.4A**

*"... But wait, I could use this flexibility with colour to my advantage (and to the advantage of my readers). Perhaps, I could colour code the journal entries to make the ones that refer to my experiences of writing this paper clearer and easier to identify and to further differentiate the textual marker. Good idea. But, what colour should I use? I need to be careful about online conventions, for instance, blue online text has evolved to indicate a hyperlink so perhaps **green text for the extracts that relate to my construction of this paper.** I also need to be aware of issues with choosing colours in an online environment, issues like the different ways that colours can actually appear on readers' monitors so perhaps I should stick to primary colours. And, besides, green is the colour of natural growth. Yes, I like that so yes, green it is."*

#### **FQS Article Journal Entry No.4B**

*"... But it is at this point that the FQS reviewer of my article asks 'How is this relevant and what does the colour do?' These questions cause me some anguish as I wonder if my argument has been too nebulous or if I have been unclear. Have I been too imprecise about what I want to achieve with this article? Surely, my readers understand that it is the taken-for-granted elements of research that I am interested in exploring. I want to construct a spotlight to shine on some of the things about the research process which are normally not spoken about. I want to make the invisible, visible particularly for those, like my\*self, who are new to writing about research. As one way of defining the situational nature of research, I want to speak about just where I'm coming from."*

*Thinking about the situational nature of research, I wonder just where my reviewer is located on the continuum of process versus outcome thinking. Why talk about practical differences in the writing of a thesis and a journal article? Why talk about some of the changes (like the addition of colour) that publishing in an electronic format brings to the writing process? Indisputably, these are things of value to explore so I ask, why not talk about them. But perhaps, this is not an appropriate venue for such discussions.*

*My own research exploring computer-mediated communication in organisations within a sociological frame indicates the importance of talking about the significant changes that technology brings. These technologies move us away from the more personal contact of face-to-face communication. Currently, we are in a transition stage where new norms to reduce potential misunderstandings in electronic text are emerging and preliminary norms about colour have already been established. The use of colour as a key element of textual works has become more accessible through electronic publishing. Hence, my use of the colour green as a further textual marker to indicate a different voice in this article will work, I think." [39]*

Other differences between the writing of my thesis and this journal article relate to the ways that current knowledge is used through the citation of appropriate literature sources. In my construction of this article, I have restricted both the number and the length of quotations in comparison with my thesis. [40]

Abby DAY (1996, p.41) sees referencing as a way to authorise the work while Massey posited that such authorisation was only one of the possible uses of the literature (1996, para.3). He agreed that literature could be seen as the "the foundation stone on which one's own work is built" (Section 1.3). However, he argued that it could also be considered as currency (Section 1.2). Literature reviews are "expected to be up-to-date (i.e., 'current')" and "currency has built into it the notion of value ... a good literature review can help buy the researcher's credibility". My use of the literature in my thesis encapsulated all of these aims while in writing this article, I am using the literature more like a mirror; "as a way of seeing where one's own ideas, assumptions etc. are similar to, consistent with, or different from previous research" (MASSEY 1996, Section 2.1). [41]

#### **4. Re-Constructing Re-Presentations**

Contemporary modes of ethnography offer significant prospects for enrichment as new writing genres offer fresh opportunities for interdisciplinary experimentation. These experimental approaches explore writing styles that allow the richness of diverse and complex ethnographies to shine through in new and challenging ways. But such writing is more than re-presenting research because "writing is an act that enables us to define our worlds, our cultures and our experiences in our own words" (HORSFALL 2001, p.91). As a consequence, ethnographic texts are "layered and complex" and the writer is not just "the narrator who provides the viewpoint but they also act within the scene" (MITCHELL & CHARMAZ 1996, p.153). As I write this article, I am aware that my "acting" as a member of an academic community has become more polished: I

construct my\*self more confidently as a member of a specialised academic community and my writing reflects this confidence. [42]

#### 4.1 Acting as well as narrating

An inward-looking orientation has become evident in contemporary ethnographies as researchers, for instance, RICHARDSON, (1994, 1999, 2000) along with many others, explore and write about their feelings and experiences in association with their research practices.

##### FQS Article Journal Entry No.5

*"... As the result of immersing my\*self in a broad range of methodological literature, I had sensed that many researchers seemed to believe they were putting themselves at risk by being reflexive in their writing. I was aware of these concerns while constructing my thesis, however, it felt comfortable to provide spaces within the document where I could include brief glimpses of my\*self-reflections about my research journey and I choose early on to write about my research in the first person. "*

"To write in the first person is to include one's feelings and to risk exposure ... Social science disciplines tend to view the self of the social scientific observer as a contaminant ... the self—the unique inner life of the observer—is treated as something to be separated out, neutralized, minimized, standardized, and controlled" (KRIEGER 1991, p.1, 148). [43]

#### 4.2 I's in ideas and also in writing

In considering the reflections made by eight women social scientists on their use of the self in their studies, Susan KRIEGER identified what appeared to be a common thread weaving through their stories—all were socialised early in a professional view that social science is a very limited type of science (KRIEGER 1991). This orientation on the external world (the other rather than the self) seems to count more than the inner world, particularly the inner world of the person undertaking the study. [44]

One of the women in Susan KRIEGER'S 1991 book discussed a formula of writing which she saw as being "very distant, clinical, full of jargon" (p.203) and she exclaimed that it is not the way she wants to write but acceptable journals require it. "People suffer if they do not write in this way... words and structures which conform are seen as comfortable and are a key component to belonging ... I think that the more hidden they [my emotions] are, the more credible my writing will be" (p.205). Another woman said "I choose not to use the word "I" because I think I am too exposed when I use it" (p.214). Or another, "I have felt there is something wrong with me, with my style of thinking" (p.208) and "to meet the demands of my position and to maintain respect, I had to write in the more scholarly way" (p.225). There is significant value in publicly defining and exploring such issues, particularly for novice researchers. See Illustration 2 for a short glimpse of the uncertainties I experienced around these notions during the writing of my thesis.

### **Thesis Journal Entry No.2**

"... The acceptability or otherwise of self-exposure through supplementing my research writings with an account of my\*self (complete with emotions and inner reflections) troubled me. Would I be seen to be narcissistic and self-indulgent? Was I being self-ish? Instinctively, I knew this was what I yearned to do but how should I proceed? Should I conform to the norm and write like acceptable journals require? Or, was I prepared to suffer if I didn't write in this way?"

Illustration 2: Example of my thesis journal entries exposing my uncertainties [45]

"People may want to read my ideas, but are they really interested in how and from where they have emerged, especially as it is so difficult to present this in a systematic fashion" (WILLIAMS 1993, p.11). Self-discovery is an important element of ethnographic work but as William SHAFFIR has said, "an understanding of the ethnographic research experience is intricately tied to an appreciation of how that research was shaped by the investigator's motives, aspirations, morality, and characteristics ... recognition of the importance of such attributes should not result in obsessive preoccupation" (1999, para.5). But where are the limits of "obsessive preoccupation"? Margot ELY pushed these limits when she said that "there is a need to make more public the interplay between the emotional and the intellectual in ethnographic research, since this interplay is an essential ingredient" (ELY, ANZUL, FRIEDMAN, GARNER & MCCORMACK STEINMETZ 1991, p.1).

### **FQS Article Journal Entry No.6**

*" ... Re-visiting such questions now in writing this paper (questions which I originally expressed in my thesis), I feel more at ease with the decisions I made then and the decisions I am making now. My conviction has deepened that it is necessary to consider these issues and to act against the prevailing silence. I believe it is particularly important for new scholars to better experience the chaotic nuances of what it means to research the social. "* [46]

### **4.3 Multiple re-constructions of self**

While being clear that my research journeys are part of my construction of my\*self rather than being disembodied and separated from it, I am still prey to many doubts and uncertainties. However now, like then, I feel a particular affinity towards connecting the ways that others who are significant in my life construct my journey. But how best to do that? How do I construct my\*self in my journey towards being a social researcher and how do the people who know me best construct me as that social researcher. Also, how do their constructions of me and my journeys influence and embellish my\*self-constructions?

### **FQS Article Journal Entry No.7**

*" ... Again, I feel these are really important questions: important because they seem to be excluded from most, if not all, ethnographic accounts. "* [47]



In attempting to answer these questions, I am choosing again to push against the boundaries of conventional research writing. As I did with my thesis, I am including two other constructions of my\*self and my research journey within this article. These other constructions are the work of my mother and my sister who are extremely talented, creative, imaginative, artistic and caring women. [48]

My mother is an award-winning painter with many accomplishments in the art world covering a broad spectrum of styles and media although she has a special commitment and empathy with the naïve tradition of art. In terms of my thesis, I asked her to evoke her own unique constructions of my\*self as a researcher combined with her perceptions of my journey. Illustration 3 shows the result.



Illustration 3: "Eileen's Research Journey" as painted by Doris Day, 2000 [49]

She saw my journey as a long and difficult uphill climb and she visualised the many twists and turns and even changes in direction I encountered as I struggled to keep my eyes directed towards the light at the end of the road. While her naïve representation of my journey erased any image of my\*self as well as the multiplicity of assistance I received along the way, it also removed evidence of the many rough edges and potholes into which I fell as I floundered along the path. She stripped away any sense of other elements within the landscape to represent how the research process came to obscure many other aspects of my life for a time. In a similar sense, she had restricted her palette to three fundamental colours: red, blue and yellow to direct attention to the core of my journey.

#### **FQS Article Journal Entry No.8**

*"... It feels good to be able to include mum's painting in this paper through the wonders of electronic publishing. The high costs of using colour in a paper destined for a traditionally published journal would have been prohibitive and would have meant its exclusion. " [50]*

Continuing with this theme, I also asked my sister (a published poet and wordsmith extraordinaire as well as an academic) to construct her view of my research journey using her creative energy to transform it into words and this is the result.

**Thesis by ... the Sis**  
Ideas to action  
She constructs a path, action to ideas  
What is background? foreground?  
Choices made and boundaries shift  
Twists and turns  
She slogs up hills, surfs down  
Obstacles around  
She constructs a path  
Thinking, listening, reading, writing, talking  
Back and forth, in and out, up and down  
Action, ideas, actions, {I}deals  
She constructs a path, her path  
She constructs her  
Bravo  
I salute her

Illustration 4: "Thesis by ... the Sis" Poem by Mary Day, 2000 [51]

I particularly welcomed her sensitivity and understanding of my turmoil as I continuously struggled to construct spaces for my\*self within the account. Her encouragement shines through her entire poem but it is particularly apparent in her play with the word *ideals*. It was true that I was making deals, albeit generally with my\*self, but also with my research supervisors while concurrently trying to hold onto my ideals. [52]

I received my family's artworks with joy and resolved to overcome any obstacles to their inclusion in my thesis. As occurred with my desire to include extracts from my journals, my primary supervisor initially gave conditional support to my idea of including these different representations of my\*self within the thesis. Again, we negotiated just how I would do that and specifically what space they would occupy within the thesis. Originally, my preference was to include them within my introduction in the first chapter but she felt that could be seen by my examiners as being obsessively preoccupied and too self-absorbed. We compromised and I designed a separate page titled "Researching ... In Words and Images". This page appeared as part of the traditional front matter of the thesis, after the acknowledgements page and before the table of contents page. Again, I was content. [53]

## 5. Conclusion

In concluding, I wish to revisit something that Susan KRIEGER said at the very start of her book "Social Science and the Self". Traditionally the self has been "treated as something to be separated out, neutralized, minimized, standardized, and controlled" (1991, p.1). In this article, I have critically challenged such a view of research.

- Instead of *separating* my\*self out of my research, I have included glimpses of some of my experiences as I constructed my\*self as a knower and teller of ethnographic stories.
- I have honoured and been honest about my creativity and my individuality as both a writer and a researcher while also celebrating the richness and variety of my audiences instead of *neutralising* out my subjectivity.
- Instead of allowing the multiple voices who contribute to my ongoing learning and understanding to be *minimised* and then silenced into the background, I have conspicuously brought them to the fore through my personal journal entries and also with both textual and pictorial contributions from loved others.
- The concept of *standardisation* has been rejected throughout this article as I have revelled in the opportunities to engage critically with my readers through the inventive variety of techniques I have drawn upon to represent a textual accounting of my research practices.
- And finally, has this accounting been *controlled*? In a practical sense, of course it has. One restraint has been that the article has had to meet all the normal publication requirements such as being seen to legitimately advance understandings about knowledge and its construction. And although I have rejoiced in the prospect of being able to creatively explore some of the taken-for-granted elements of research, I have been aware of my need for the legitimisation that publication brings. But these can all be constructed as part of the process to establish a practical and mutually worthwhile dialogue or connection with you, my readers. [54]

My objective has been to confront some of the silences that surround the practicalities of doing evocative ethnographies. In a subjective way, I have reflected on my subjective experiences of being an ethnographic researcher. In doing so, I have illustrated some of the proactive techniques I used in facing the epistemological and methodological challenges associated with subjectivity and research practices. I hope that my stories can help others better understand how the self is integral to social research while also providing encouragement, support and practical examples in terms of the connected-ness of imagination and creativity with reflexive social research.

### **FQS Article Journal Entry No.9A**

*"... After working through the reviewer's comments, I have chosen to further expand the voices I draw upon in this article by including his voice as well. I puzzled over how to do that for some time, as I knew that the more multifaceted the construction of voices became, the more complicated and complex it would be for the reader to follow. However, I wanted to publicly continue my disclosure and exploration of the research/writing process so I have included a couple of salient comments from him and my responses here in the last journal entry.*

*At one point, he asked me to speculate about the outcome of including the author in the text as I have done. Hmmm! Referring back to [Section 4.1](#) and [Section 4.2](#), I identify a very specific outcome: that fear and anxiety about the legitimacy of doing so is a common response from the writer. But, for me, while I am seeking to legitimise my\*self as a social researcher, there is also pleasure. I am full of joy to see my stories almost in print (electronically in this instance). My experience as a novice researcher was one of overwhelming doubts about thesis writing and the 'traditional rules'. I knew I wanted to construct a place/space for my\*self within 'the rules' but I found little practical guidance in the literature of the time. So, one outcome that would please me considerably is for even one of my readers to feel a little encouraged and more comfortable about challenging 'the rules' of academic writing.*

*A continuing thread running through many of my reviewer's comments questioned the value of doing what I have done. Again, this caused me much anguish. I was asked to substantiate my analysis of how my multiple voices within the text changed research (both for my research practices and that of others) as well as how the experience of reading was changed. I was dismayed because all along I thought that what I was doing was illustrating these things in a very pragmatic way through the stories I constructed. But, in line with Judith PREISSLE's (1999) request to examine and then reexamine our decisions, I did just that and by focussing on my reviewer's feedback, I believe I have significantly improved the telling of my stories.*

*Through them, I have illustrated that research is built on circular dynamics in that the doing of research influences how you write about it while writing about research influences your doing of it. And the sun that these dynamics circle is the reflexive researcher who honours the contribution their own subjectivity adds to the process. I have encouraged others to consider these dynamics in their own research, particularly those researchers like my\*self who are at the beginning stages of their careers as social researchers. And I have attempted to influence the ways that readers actually read. In terms of how this article may change the experience of reading, one of Laurel RICHARDSON's (2000) five criteria for reviewing ethnographic writing concerns impact. She asks, does this affect me? emotionally? intellectually? generate new questions? move me to write? move me to try new research practices? move me to action?*

*I ask my readers to make their own judgements on whether my article has impact and I would welcome the opportunity to continue this dialogue with any of my readers."*

### **FQS Article Journal Entry No.9B**

"... In terms of my reviewer's voice, there is one last addendum. After reviewing the revised and resubmitted version of my article, he suggested I think about one more thing. He seemed to be concerned that he had 'not gotten a strong sense of what the benefits are for research more broadly ... what is the take away message about the gains in writing and thinking as you have done'. He suggested including 'a paragraph to make the point much clearer than your text has'.

In considering his request about my making the benefits for research even more explicit, words that frame my thinking jostle about in a vigorous stream of ideas. These ideas form around several significant concepts. In this article, I have privileged many of the taken-for-granted facets of doing social research and I have brought them into the foreground of the discussion. This serves to inform and encourage while also illustrating practical examples about ways to integrate the self into research writings, of particular value for new researchers. My article also acts to legitimise alternative ways of writing evocative ethnographies by encouraging writers to have the confidence to enlist their own creative subjectivity, thus strengthening their own writing and research practices. And finally, readers of such research accounts benefit through their engagement with, and connection to, stories which are both challenging and absorbing to read.

Clearly, insightful and honest explorations of the relationships between the self/other and thinking/writing as experienced through the practice of research advance the knowledge construction process for us all. " [55]

In closing, the title of this article (Me, my\*self and I) fleetingly encapsulates the many self constructions that echo throughout discussions of subjectivity and reflexivity in research. [56]

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