6 Reflexivity and research

Feminist interventions and their practical implications

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Thanks in large part to the work of feminist scholars (within international relations scholarship and beyond) such as Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), England (1994), and Holland (1999), the use of reflexivity as a tool of investigation and engagement has gained both momentum and respect. However, despite the promise that reflexivity offers to reveal new insights, dynamics, relationships, and awareness, even the greatest proponents of its use apply its tools in what often appears to be an afterthought. This chapter has two aims. First, we explore some practical examples of how reflexive practice shapes each step of the academic research process from topic choice, framing of research questions, methodology, and interpretation and analysis. Second, we critically examine the three overarching interpretations of reflexivity (positionality, practice, and critique) in this anthology in the context of producing scholarship, teaching, and higher education administration.

To begin, we want to reflexively situate ourselves in this discussion. We approach the topic of reflexivity from our disciplinary "home" of women's studies. Through the works of Oakley (1981), Reinharz (1992), and Wasserfall (1993), each of us came to understand reflexivity as an analytical tool within the context of women's studies, while in graduate school together and as professional colleagues. We continue to employ its feminist tenets independently, and related to "reflexivity-in-relation", a topic we will address later, in our roles as researchers, teachers, and administrators. Reflexivity does not apply to only certain epistemological approaches—no approach should be immune from considering its origins, commitments, methodologies, and consequences. We have practiced and continue to practice reflexivity in moments of transition, as our professional and academic roles, authority, and identities transform and shift. This chapter will include examples from our own experiences, where we continue the many conversations about these and other topics in writing, encouraging each other to push beyond what we can see on our own, and what we even thought we might be capable of understanding. This includes reaching beyond our comfort zones by expanding our theoretical perspectives, considering alternative points of view, extending our disciplinary practices, and/or consulting marginalized methodologies (or mainstream ones, depending on how we situate ourselves). We delineate some

of the benefits of each of these interpretations of reflexivity, and also model it in our explanations and illustrations.

In *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher*, Etherington (2004) outlines several different ways in which reflexivity has been defined and used. We define reflexivity as both a practice and a methodology, rooted in feminist epistemology, that focuses on the researcher/writer reflecting upon the power relationships inherent in the research (or other scholarly or political endeavor), and making those power dynamics explicit. Reflexivity is not only reflection, although some researchers and theorists have used these terms interchangeably. Other scholars such as Finlay (2002) and Woolgar (1988) have engaged in poignant debates about the differences between reflection and reflexivity. We argue that reflexivity necessitates an analysis of power, with attention to multiple epistemologies and interpretations, and extends beyond just reflection, which can sometimes refer to self-awareness and internal discovery. While reflection is a necessary first step to approach reflexivity, it alone is insufficient. A more careful understanding of systems of power, institutional privilege and marginalization, and the social symbols that communicate status and hierarchy, are necessary in order to situate oneself within political structures in order to disclose one's subject position in the context of research.

Reflexivity and the academic research process

We now turn to practical examples of how reflexive practice shapes each step of academic research process from topic choice, the framing of research questions, methodology, interpretation, and analysis. Arguably individual identities, experiences, biases, institutional structures, and many other multiple forces always already influence research in any and all academic disciplines. We believe that objectivity is a myth, that is, that there is an impartial, neutral, detached observer—is never possible. Instead, we employ a reflexive framework—a process that simply articulates and makes explicit what is already operating at all levels of research.

Because knowledge cannot be separated from its observer as DuBois (1983) states, researchers are ethically obligated to situate themselves in relation to their research so that readers and/or consumers can make an informed assessment about the knowledge that is produced. Believers of objectivity support the notion of a singular truth, a "Truth" (with a capital "T"), that is created by an omniscient observer. We argue that researchers, all of us, are telling partial truths (with a small "t") which contribute to larger, broader, bodies of scholarship. Reflexivity serves as a tool of accountability in narrating the difference between many voices telling many stories, and the idea of a unique owner and supplier of information. Using this tool can help to disrupt this assumption of power of the "truth teller".

For example, when beginning a project, researchers and practitioners might consider: Why is this a topic in which I am interested? What draws me to this

line of inquiry? What is it about this particular question that I want to know? What questions are not being posed? Why? What is lost by not considering these unasked questions? What theoretical perspectives are framing my research questions? Why? What theories and approaches am I choosing not to engage? How do my identities and experiences inform what I want to know? What domains of power are implicit and subsumed in these questions and in this topic? Where do I have privilege, advantage, power, and where am I marginalized, oppressed, disadvantaged? Getting clear about the answers to these questions can help shape the subsequent steps in the research process, and also has additional benefits.

For example, investigating a chosen research method can also benefit from such inquiries. Why do I think that this method is the best way to approach the answers to my research questions? How does my training influence these choices? What could be learned from considering additional or alternative methodologies? What does this method prohibit me from knowing? How does this method reflect a set of epistemological assumptions I hold? What are the political implications of choosing this method, aside from the research topic itself?

Similarly, at the point of analyses, researchers might ask: why is this tool of analysis the most appropriate for this question? This topic? This method? Where applicable, one might ask, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using this particular software (e.g. SPSS, NVivo, MPlus) over others? Am I using this program and set of tools because it is the one I happen to know? What if I ran another kind of statistical test? What if I searched for other themes, terms, or linguistic phrases? What more might I find if I examined the pauses, silences, the "ums" and "ahs" in this interview? Why am I committed to this tool of analysis?

At the level of interpretation, there are many questions to ponder, such as: What am I devoted to discovering? What do I want to avoid knowing in this study? What are the theories, perspectives, and assumptions that affect how I make meaning of this information? Am I relying on a survey or other scale to serve as an "objective" measure of attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, ideologies, identities? In an important study in feminist psychology, Landrine, Klonoff and Brown-Collins (1995) were curious about how different words may have different meanings between women of different ethnic groups. They asked white women and women of color to rate a set of adjectives as they described themselves. While there were no differences between their self-ratings, the women in the two groups understood and interpreted some of the terms to have different meanings. For example, women of color largely believed the term "passive" to mean "don't say what I really think", while white women mostly thought it meant, "am laid-back/easy-going". Women of color said that "assertive" was more likely to mean "say whatever's on my mind", and white women mostly meant "stand up for myself". This study demonstrates that while scales and measures might be validated and reliable, our assumptions about how our participants interpret the language of the items is always

clouding how we make meaning of the results. In other words, if we interpret the average score on a survey item that contains the word "passive" to mean something, we miss the underlying complexities and implications, crudely assessing an importance (or lack thereof) that does not exist.

We think it is important to acknowledge that reflexivity as a process may seem foreign, complicated, and onerous to those trained in traditional social science disciplines. It takes time and practice to hone these skills, including additional reading and a reliance upon the wisdom and guidance of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary scholars who have successfully used these approaches before. Some traditional and/or conservative scholars may criticize reflexive methods as being "too soft", distracting, yielding information that is secondary at best and perhaps even a waste of time. While this may seem outside the scope of what IR scholars are usually concerned with, the point here is that reflexivity simply makes apparent what is always already inside the scope of what IR scholars want to know.

Moreover, international relations could use reflexivity to do what other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, women's studies, and ethnic studies have been doing for generations—to tell a more complete story with more lenses of analysis that fashions a more responsible and informed kind of knowledge. The assumption of an objective knower precludes many different kinds of knowledge, dismissing alternative perspectives. Simply put, as scholars, we should be trying to know more, think more, ask more. Reflexivity is another mechanism or tool for thinking critically. As Ilan Baron (Chapter 9 in this volume) states, "reflexive research is normative research" and it provides "a methodological guide" for understanding, that without asking questions about our own biases and assumptions, we neglect to consider a myriad of ways of knowing and the knowledge that is tied to them.

The reflexive questions we pose here present important self-interrogations, but we do not assume that the individual alone has the ability to answer them in ways that pose challenging and transformative responses. For example, one could perhaps answer all or most of these questions without moving outside one's own pre-existing perspective. We believe that while reflexivity can certainly be attempted in a "room of one's own", a more fruitful knowledge yields from relational dialogue, to which we will speak more directly at the end of this chapter. We agree with Amoureux (Chapter 1 in this volume), that reflexivity requires a "willing".

Positionality

> *Positionality* … is understood as a scholarly exercise that discloses the scholar's (or the scholarly field's) social/political position as (potentially) relevant for research, or as an exploration of the implications of the inseparability of subject and object for IR scholarship.
>
> (Amoureux and Steele, Introduction to this volume)

We came to understand reflexivity as feminist practice in graduate school in the late 1990s, and have found it invaluable in our scholarship. As we navigated our roles as graduate students, then faculty and administrators, we have had to continually learn the different and sometimes shifting systems of power and privilege, codes of membership and exclusion, that intersect with the "staples" of feminist reflexivity of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, body size, nationality, and physical ability (to name a few). While all firmly situated within academia, a location itself that deserves some reflexive attention as noted by Caracciolo and Hozic (Chapter 7 in this volume), each of our roles posed new challenges to ideas about how knowledge is created and sustained alongside how policies are derived and regulated. After all, "texts are living things" (Dauphinee, Chapter 2 in this volume).

Andrea

As a doctoral student in psychology and women's studies, my dissertation focused on the ways in which social identities, especially race and ethnicity, are understood and experienced by black and white men and women in the Midwest. It was a mixed method study, mostly qualitative, with 135 interviews with black men and women in their 50s and 60s. I closely examined responses to the interview question that asked: "Do you think about your own racial identity much these days? What kind of things cause you to think about it?" The framework of the study expanded the definition of race and ethnicity to include whiteness, with a specific interrogation of white racial and ethnic identities. Because race is a relational social construction, I was interested in exploring the experiences of people of color alongside the psychology of whiteness, uncovering the strategies, mechanisms, and consequences that recreate and maintain privilege while disavowing and distancing from it at the same time. One piece of this analysis by Dottolo and Stewart (2008 and 2013) explored how both blacks and whites talked about discrimination and white privilege.

Throughout the research process, I had to consider (and write about) how the analysis triggered my own interpretive concerns. I found myself increasingly uncomfortable interpreting some of the experiences of discrimination as articulated by blacks, questioning my right and the limits of my social position in doing so. As an Italian-American woman from upstate New York who came of age during the 1980s and 1990s, *who was I* to make claims about black experiences in the Midwest from those who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s? Although I am fundamentally *not* sympathetic to standpoint epistemology, suddenly I doubted what I might be able to say, especially regarding particularly painful accounts of racist cruelty expressed again and again by the participants.

For example, many black participants described being called a "nigger". I am familiar with the debate about the benefits and costs of using or repeating this word by both blacks and whites, and its resulting popular solution, "the

N-word". I have never been a proponent of censorship and do not believe that prohibiting its use promotes any kind of self-reflection or anti-racist activism. In fact, I tend to believe it does more harm than good and can further assist racist disguises in an academic context. However, after repeatedly encountering the ways that "nigger" appeared in the interviews, I began to question my role as a white researcher in repeating it. My feminist training spurred me to carefully consider my relationship to the use of the term and the effect it had on your meaning making. Kennedy's (2002) review of its usage helped to re-center my belief that it was my responsibility as a researcher in general, but even more as a white researcher interpreting black experiences to include and explore this "troublesome word" as an important element of their experiences. It seemed more important to document the ways black participants used the term "nigger" as part of their reflections and accounts, highlighting that this word became part of their responses to questions about racial identities, rather than to silence them or avoid engaging in this difficult and painful task, or replacing their language with the term "the 'N' word". Furthermore, I needed to take responsibility for the fact that the interview questions invoked these responses, calling the participants into these conversations. I reminded myself that these responses did not appear out of nowhere; these were their responses, and I knew I had a duty to try to understand them.

In contrast to my feelings of awkwardness and inadequacy in interpreting black experiences of discrimination, I was completely comfortable in "calling out" white expressions of racism, whether overt or covert. As an Italian American in the Midwest, my racial identity was constantly questioned by acquaintances, colleagues, and strangers in a way I had never experienced before, especially being from Syracuse, New York. My olive skin and dark features seemed to designate me as "Other" in a sea of blond, blue-eyed Midwesterners. In Michigan, my appearance was not read as Italian, but as various other ethnic or racial categories (including: Latina, African-American, Arab, and biracial or mixed race). For example, at a doctor's appointment on campus, a white nurse practitioner marveled at my "great Hispanic musculature", and connected this to my potential to carry children with ease (which will, of course, according to her, inevitably occur). A fellow graduate student fumbled when I clarified that my last name is Italian because there had evidently been "talk" in the department that I was Latina. Most commonly, strangers and acquaintances alike would ask, "What are you?" sometimes questioning if I could speak English. I had great difficulty finding a hair stylist, and found that salons charged extra to cut "ethnic hair". The treatment that I received in these brief moments of "raced" experiences both infuriated me, and as a result of my reflexive training, also helped me to recognize the privilege that often surrounds me, fueling my anti-racist politics.

Therefore, when analyzing narratives about white racial identities, I delighted in revealing some of the psychological mechanisms that might inform their racist tendencies. I rarely wanted to give such narratives the benefit of the doubt in their ideas about race and was more than willing to

expose their privilege, probably informed by several motivations. First, as a researcher with my own marginalized identities around gender, class, and sexuality, I was sympathetic to experiences of discrimination and "angry" at its offenders. Second, this project was partially inspired by my own experiences with conditional whiteness in the Midwest, and the few glimpses of personal mistreatment based on phenotype that I had ever encountered occurred in this particular region of the United States. And I certainly wanted to distance myself from the "bad" whites, unaware, hiding, negligent in their privilege.

I am not suggesting I experienced racism in any way similar to the black participants in my study, but needless to say, particular performances of Midwestern whiteness had left me with a bad taste. For these reasons, and probably others, I was especially invested in exposing those expressions of racism. I identify as white, and believe that Italians have white privilege. I struggled to be sympathetic toward whites in the study, but nonetheless as a white woman I was familiar with the ways they talked about race. As a racial insider in a racist culture, I was privy to the discourses noted by Roediger (1991) and Guglielmo (2003) about racial hierarchies, especially those that confound race and class, often blaming race for economic inequality. I recognized the white participants' ambivalence and contradictory statements and, like many forms of covert oppression, sometimes they were the most painful to negotiate.

Engaging in the process of reflexivity positions the researcher in relation to the subject, participants, and knowledge that is created. This is always already happening with every academic endeavor, but feminist politics requires us to make these relationships to power structures explicit. For example, as a white, Italian American, working class lesbian from upstate New York, I was able to "see", understand, and interpret particular elements of these black and white racial narratives. If an African American man in his 60s from the Midwest were to read and interpret these interviews, he might "discover" other elements and themes in this study. Or, maybe not. A Vietnamese immigrant woman living in California might also approach this work from a different perspective, yielding a very different set of results. And this is not only true for qualitative research. My study also included a quantitative portion, a survey with several different kinds of items. How we might conceive of the statistical analyses and then how to interpret the results are all shaped by who we are. While it seems logical that our different experiences, identities, and cultures shape our perspectives, careful attentiveness to the multiple ways in which this occurs and its related effect on meaning making highlights why reflexivity is central to the responsible production of knowledge.

This is not to say that any one of these identities, or any set of these identities is more useful, valid, or important. It is not the case that one of these researchers has the more "accurate" findings. But making the relationship between the researcher and the researched explicit creates a space where the researcher can be conscious of their own understanding and meaning making,

and allows for the reader to also be aware of these relationships, also important in situating and contextualizing the scholarship within a body of literature. There are many styles and strategies of explicating the relationship between researcher and researched, including a systematic examination of social identities, access to resources, knowledge, and institutional structures. Another type of strategy is discussed in the following section of this chapter on practice.

I am also not suggesting that these are interchangeable analytical categories or lenses of analyses. It is not that one is just as good as the next, as long as they say it. Knowledge is inherently situated at every level of its conception and construction. Furthermore, I argue that these identities or categories are *not* fixed, monolithic, or deterministic. Not all members of groups are the same, with great variation within. In other words, another researcher who is an Italian American, working class lesbian from upstate New York may very well see, interpret, and create meaning from this very same study in a completely different way than I did. This hypothetical doppelganger, for example, might be light skinned. Or she might not have interpreted this racist treatment as problematic, or may have fueled her racism instead of an anti-racist political commitment.

There are only a handful of scholars that write about whiteness, especially in psychology, but as I continue to study and critically interrogate white privilege as I did for the special issue on whiteness in *Lesbian Studies* (Dottolo 2014), I must continue to question, examine, and position my investment in my questions, methods, and the knowledge produced as result.

Sarah

My graduate school experience in women's studies in the late 1990s and early 2000s was one of discovery, question, learning, and understanding. It was also a time of incredible transition for me professionally and personally. I was entering the world of professional academia and beginning to understand myself more as a theorist and faculty member and less as only a student. I began my doctoral research exploring the social, political, and cultural representations of fat women and their bodies during a time when I, too, identified and was also marked by others as a fat woman.

My research was centered on the complexity of constructing and maintaining an identity based on being fat. For the purpose of my project, fatness was defined, not by a feeling or emotion, but by the occupation of a body that was larger than "normal", a body that was deemed unacceptable by cultural standards of beauty and typical pant sizes (anything larger than a women's size 16 or 18 is generally sold separately or not at all in typical clothing stores in the US). I was interested in knowing how fat women (and some men) understood their own bodies and self worth in a culture that consistently devalued their existence. I explored the mixed messages that fat women must contend with in their daily existence—from weight-based appearance

discrimination, to plus-size fashion magazines, and the popularity of weight loss surgeries and drugs. By interrogating these messages and images in our culture, I argued that fat identity is nuanced and complex, and that women and men who identify as fat politically or socially do so against a landscape that both terrorizes their existence (in most cases) and/or validates their experiences (in rare cases).

Within my department and in certain scholarly communities, my authority to speak on the subject of fatness, fat women, and fat bodies was never questioned. In fact, it was embraced and possibly expected to some degree. The study of fatness and body size was an area of inquiry that I thought feminist theory had largely ignored. And not to say that feminist scholars were not interested in discussing women's bodies. The solipsism of thinness in US contemporary culture, and the impact of a singular, normalized, thin, and white body on various communities based on gender, race, class, and sexuality were well documented by the works of Brumberg (1988), Chapkis (1986), and Chernin (1981). The work in these areas abounded, but in my opinion and as argued in my dissertation (Tillery 2007), that left a gap where fat bodies, their representations, identities, and impact were ignored and further marginalized.

As a fat woman, my research on fat women's bodies was unquestioned by my dissertation committee and other faculty mentors. I was never asked to explain or justify why this work was important to me, or what authority I had to speak about it. Arguably, the idea that one would study something closely related to who one is is a common phenomenon in social science research. In his work, "Research to Me-Search", Christopher Avilés (2011) acknowledges that research often evolves from and into the study of the self. As researchers, we are frequently drawn to study the things that also impact and affect us as individuals. Hence the joke, "It's not research, it's me-search!" Despite the fact that one of the basic tenants of feminist research is to be reflexive about who we are in relationship to our projects, my "me-search" went relatively un-interrogated until my authority to speak was called into question.

Over the course of nine years in graduate school, my life and my body transformed rather radically. As I lost weight, the expectations about explaining myself in relation to my research project became more overt. My "privilege" to talk about the "other" (in this instance, fat women) disappeared, and suddenly I was being asked to be reflexive and acknowledge my own transitioning outsider status from the community of people to which I had once belonged. In one instance, I had a women's studies faculty member ask me in a hushed voice if I would still be researching fat women's bodies for my dissertation. This question came after I had successfully defended my proposal and completed a bulk of the work for the project. Other questions and comments were far more personal, such as "Did you lose weight on purpose?" and "How will you be able to talk about your research as a thinner woman?" Suddenly, I realized that in the eyes of others, I had lost the authority to write and research on a topic to which I felt intimately

connected. My body betrayed that connection to outsiders, and it was in this transformation and revelation that I had to engage a very strategic reflexivity in my work in order to acknowledge the duplicity of my insider and outsider status to fatness.

Unlike Amanda Russell Beattie's (Chapter 8 in this volume) argument that the exiled subject is well placed to question the status quo, my own "exiled" status in relation to professional research was cause for further concern and attention to my own subjectivity in that research that had previously not been addressed. While my changing status to other faculty and colleagues became cause for question, in the end, it reinforced a kind of reflexivity to happen as author/producer of my own work. As a result, it also affected the knowledge I was able to produce. It forced a critical awareness of myself in relation to the communities of fat women, their identities, and their bodies that might have remained unchecked otherwise. As a feminist researcher, I was trained that being reflexive about my relationship to my work would be part of the process and I knew that I would need to write about my positionality along the way, but it was the shift in my own body that prompted the expectation more explicitly from others.

Although the pressure from others to explain why and how my body transformed felt invasive and unprofessional for me personally, being asked to acknowledge my increasing body size privilege (ironically as my body became smaller!) was appropriate, transparent, and critically needed. Moreover, it impacted how I asked my research questions and what knowledge I was able to produce.

Practice

> … a *practice* approach that sees reflexivity as a socially meaningful practice for international and/or global politics. This form of reflexivity foregrounds agency as a kind of *grappling with* the world and the regimes of knowledge that influence political actors within.
>
> (Amoureux and Steele, Introduction to this volume)

Reflexivity can be described as a critical appraisal of one's own practice, considering, for example: why we frame issues or questions in particular ways, what drew us to our research questions, how we investigate and interpret, how our approaches lead us to particular kinds of knowledge and not others, and ways that our social identities (race, class, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, etc.) shape our relationships and knowledge. Reflexivity informs not only the kinds of questions we ask and how they are framed, but how those questions are operationalized, put to action, represent a shift and connection between thinking and knowing, doing and practice. The examples we provide in the following section illustrate the translation and mobilization of reflexivity as behavior—in the classroom and with colleagues in professional contexts, all the while critically reflecting upon these relationships. Andrea engages in reflective

practice with her students, modeling it for them as she offers instruction in the psychology and women's studies classroom. In this way, she guides students to be reflexive themselves, which is built into the structure and design of the course from required readings to assignments. Sarah integrates her experiences as both faculty member and administrator, gathering multiple perspectives in order to problem solve, communicate, and manage in a fuller and more synthesized way.

Andrea

Here it may be helpful to offer an example of an exercise I used to teach about reflexivity with graduate students in Community and Social Psychology who were serving as interns at community practicum sites. For example, some students worked at domestic violence shelters, offices of local political leaders, schools, hospitals, and community centers. I begin by discussing reflexivity including a definition and why it is necessary in knowledge production. Students are then asked to consider ways in which their social identities influence their relationships at their practicum sites. For example:

- What (and/or who) prompted your placement in your practicum and why?
- Who do you interact with when you are there? How are your identities similar or different from the various individuals you interact with at your practicum site? In what ways do these similarities or differences shape what you can know, understand, observe?
- What is the nature of the work you do? What kinds of tasks do you do each day?
- What has been the focus of your practicum? What do you hope to accomplish for and with the people with whom you work?
- What has not been considered? Who has not been considered? What remains invisible?
- What are the intended outcomes for both you and the people at your practicum site?

Students were asked to explicate specifically how race, class, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, and ability (able-bodiedness) were at play in their experiences, and then paired up to process and analyze these insights. I encouraged students to think about how each social identity might be understood in response to each of the above questions, and then as a whole, integrating an intersectionality perspective. For example, for the question about who the student interacts with at the practicum site, I ask them to consider: How is this about race? How is the student's racial identity situated among her co-workers? Her employers? Her clients? How does her racial privilege or marginalization affect what she can know? How does she have power over others based on race? How do others have power over her based on race? How are messages about race communicated in this space? Then, the same

question is asked about again, this time considering: How is this about gender? We replace "race" in the above questions with "gender". And then again, now asking questions about sexuality, and again about class, then age, and nationality, followed by able-bodiedness. I often find that this is the first time students have ever been asked to consider these identity categories in their academic work and I noticed that students react in a variety of ways, including confused, defensive, resistant, curious, relieved, and enthused. Next, I ask the students to consider what social identity or axis of power is missing from the list. Finally, we consider all of these identities together. Echoing my previous discussion, I model for them: What does it mean that I am a working class, Italian American, lesbian, able-bodied, academic from the northeast in my study on black and white middle aged men and women from the Midwest? What does it mean about what I can and cannot know in that particular classroom, at that moment, with those individual students, in that space, at that time?

Asking these questions about their experiences in their practicum sites then leads to a discussion of "helping" behaviors and professions, and the assumptions and expectations of who "helps" and who *needs* help. Students explored their host organizations/practicum and their demographic compositions, who makes decisions, who is deferred to and why, how much is explicit and what is implied. We discussed how policies at the organizations are constructed, negotiated, and implemented, how informal social functions happen (e.g. who eats lunch together and where). I encourage students to investigate the history of their organizations, who serves on the board, who is included and excluded. One student discussed that bilingual services were offered at her site, but recognized that it was only Spanish and English that were spoken, and did not adequately accommodate the many clients from across the globe. We then discussed how they will make meaning of their experiences in writing about their practicum site, who interprets and who gets interpreted.

It is important to note that this exercise may not be easily implemented at every institution or in every classroom, taking into account group dynamics, as well as the safety of the students and faculty in various campus climates. In fact, even in the most welcoming social contexts, individual and personal safety should always be considered and acknowledged, with the recognition that individuals exist at various levels of awareness and understanding of themselves and others. In addition, the exercise need not be conducted in pairs, but could be a written exercise. Of course, the questions considered in this exercise can be applied to a variety of contexts, including academic research; internships; field research; international organizing; education; medicine; service provision by non-governmental organizations; disarmament; demobilization and reintegration (DDR) processes in post-conflict environments; and virtually any domain where inquiry takes place and individuals or groups are asked to respond.

Sarah

Like Andrea, another example of practicing reflexivity comes from within my professional career as an administrator at a community college. In the last four years, I have worked for a community college in Portland, Oregon where the relationship between the faculty and academic staff with management/administration is negotiated by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) union. In my first two years with the college, I worked as an academic staff and part-time faculty member. My position was "continuously appointed" (a status much like tenure) and, therefore, protected by our union contract. When I transitioned to a management position, my status as a union member was dissolved and I was charged with managing and supervising colleagues with whom I had once shared union membership.

Managing this professional transition effectively meant that I constantly had to invert my questions and critical framework for understanding a situation back onto my former self as a member of the union. In other words, I would call upon my own experience as a faculty member in an effort to understand and retain some perspective as a manager for my actions and decisions. It meant consciously acknowledging and taking into account my previous experience and existence in order to gain a broader understanding of any situation I found myself in with faculty and staff. One example of this came when I had to ask a faculty member to be explicit about her office hours on campus. From my position as her manager, there was a concern that she was not present on campus or fulfilling her obligations as a faculty member. As a former faculty member, however, I know that much of the work of an academic is done off campus, at home, in the coffee shop, etc., and the "production" of work is not always visible by someone's presence on campus. In talking with this faculty member about her contractual obligation to hold a certain number of office hours each week on campus, we were able to find a compromise. She understood that she needed to meet that obligation and be explicit with the department and her students about when she would be available in her office, and I was able to acknowledge that she was getting her job done in other ways that might not be seen by her colleagues or me. This kept the conversation productive and amicable. The reflexive practice in this moment, meant holding two possibly competing expectations up against one another and acknowledging them both as valuable. This type of reflexivity turned out to benefit both me and the faculty member in finding a common ground to work together, but mostly it instructed me on how to make meaning of my role in this relationship.

Similar to my dissertation project, my transitioning role from union member to manager meant both honoring and interrogating both the insider and the outsider status for the purpose of pushing beyond my present awareness and job classification. In the example above, it would have been quite easy to just dictate the contract rules to my faculty member and force her to be on campus a certain number of hours. As a manager, it would have been

within my purview to handle the situation in this manner. No doubt, my power in the relationship would have allowed this to happen, but it also would have destroyed my relationship with her and potentially impacted our ability to work collaboratively together in the future. By remaining reflexive in the situation, and calling on my own previous experience, I was able to express empathy and understanding, while also clarifying my desires as her manager to see her meet the contractual obligation. Not only did this result in her coming to campus more consistently, but our relationship to one another was not compromised in the process.

Critique

> *Critique* involves actors (including scholars) confronting others (oftentimes from within collective selves) to stimulate self-reflexivity. Such critique may target identity, political action, and discourse.
>
> (Amoureux and Steele, Introduction to this volume)

We would like to suggest an approach to critique that we are calling "reflexivity-in-relation". This involves extending beyond the more solidary activity of reflection, to rely upon our scholarly communities, especially our trusted relationships, to mirror, interrogate, and query our positionality and connections to our research and practice.

Scholars such as Finlay (2002) and Fine (1998) have written about reflexivity as central to research, and it is often described as a process of individual critical appraisal. While this is necessary as a first step, we believe that sharing reflexive insights with others who also value the methodology is necessary. This intends to extend the processes that Steele names (Chapter 3 in this volume) of "documenting" and "provoking" to include others in that process. Perhaps informed by Andrea's psychology training, it seems we cannot really know ourselves alone, without the reflections, observations, and insights of others. We have found invaluable benefit in critiquing each other's reflexive process, both to improve the other as both scholars and administrator, and also to inform our own processes of reflexivity. For example, Sarah often observes an added layer of complexity or dimension to Andrea's scholarship that is difficult for her to see based on her perspective at the time. And, Andrea may attribute an academic exchange to gender or sexuality, when Sarah reminds her that class and race are also operating at the same time.

Andrea

As a doctoral student at the University of Michigan, I was introduced to the idea that I might not be middle class. In other words, it was the first time that I was in an environment where my class status was questioned or that I became aware that I did not have middle-class roots. As many scholars like hooks (2000) and McIntosh (2001) have explained, the class system in the

United States is predicated upon the myth of meritocracy, and unless folks are extremely wealthy or poor, most believe they are "middle class". Our class-segregated society means we are rarely exposed to individuals or communities who are not from the same (or similar) class backgrounds. It was only in Michigan where I was generally surrounded by middle-class people, and for the first time, I recognized that I was a class minority in that space.

My awareness of my class status became more acute when I engaged with another research project, analyzing interviews with graduate students in the social sciences and humanities about their experiences of academic socialization. I focused on responses to the question, "How are issues of race/ethnicity, gender and/or sexuality visible in your program?" While responses were "rich" with information, some students also mentioned social class, although they were not explicitly asked about class. As I read the transcripts I noticed these transcripts were bleeding with emotion, reflecting back to me experiences I was having at the same time. I struggled with how to make sense of this new knowledge, of how to now understand my own identity, class structure, and the intention and motivations of all those around me who were "teaching" me that I did not belong. In this confusing and intense period, I turned to my dear friend Sarah, who came to Michigan to visit on several occasions. Sarah identifies as middle class, although we never really discussed it much in the years of our friendship before then. I vividly remember how she witnessed the university community, offering her own observations and analysis to my experiences and research. Confused, I asked her then (and continue to do so) about how to make meaning of this academic culture, of the subtle messages and implications, juxtaposed against the overt assertions of my peers and advisers that something was wrong with me. That no matter how hard I tried, I would never seem to be part of this club, an experience new and strange.

Sarah validated my experiences, watching in horror and in recognition—interpreting and decoding for me, pushing me, and reflecting back to me what I told her. She helped me to see what was *not* being said, gave me tips on navigating wine and cheese mixers (talk about nothing), and how to avoid recruitment weekend (by conveniently being "out of town"). She observed and translated the many brief, seemingly non-substantive messages and exchanges in this social terrain, including the annoying niceties and unending discussions of the weather. My relationship to the research and the process of situating my interpretations would not have been possible without this "reflexivity-in-relation" experience. It also prompted Sarah to be reflexive of her own academic contexts and class position where I learned from her process—echoing, mirroring, ranting, making meaning—together.

In addition to being a gifted theorist and insightful scholar, Sarah has been an influential teacher and dear friend to me for sixteen years. We have grown together as feminists, scholars, and administrators over that time. Our notion of reflexivity-in-relation is not about being emotional companions, though we are. We are suggesting that reflexivity should not happen alone;

that it is required to advance our scholarship, as members in a community of responsible academics and practitioners. I discuss my relationship with Sarah here because we respect each other as intellectuals, and this component is one that is necessary in order to push each other toward finer and more sophisticated insights. I might gain similar kinds of understanding at a conference, in a classroom, or in a writing group, with individuals I may or may not particularly like. The point is that we try on our reflexive analyses with others, *in relation.*

Sarah

Reflexivity in relation is about knowing something differently (and arguably more thoroughly) by knowing it in comparison and in contrast to the ideas and perspectives of someone and something else. And we argue here, it is not just about acknowledging one's own position and/or identity to one's research or work (though that is an important aspect), but about understanding that position as a constantly moving target. This moving target is often identified *in relation* to other constants in our lives. Just as Andrea described knowing and understanding her own class consciousness in her transition to graduate school at the University of Michigan more explicitly by juxtaposing it to mine, I too have had similar experiences of transition where being reflexive-in-relation has moved me from one point of understanding to another. As Andrea described, we have been close colleagues and friends for more than a decade. As such, we have come to know our own experiences better because we can compare to each other's framework for understanding, thus leading us to question, validate, and reinforce what we know and what we think we know.

One of my first professional positions after graduate school was a job I took in student affairs at a very small, exclusive private liberal arts college on the west coast. Although I was raised in an environment that was solidly middle class and I had all the privilege and support that a middle-class upbringing afforded me, I had zero experience with this type of college environment. My own education had been completed at the community college and the large public regional universities in my area, but my class privilege never allowed me to question whether I would "fit" or successfully transition to this new college environment. Until one day, I was walking through campus in mid-October, and I noticed that all the flowerbeds on campus had been overturned and new flowers were being put in their place. This struck me as particularly funny since I thought the "old" flowers looked perfectly nice. Later that evening, Andrea and I were catching up over the phone and I benignly mentioned this business about the flowers and how I did not understand what was going on. Immediately, she commented that the school was likely preparing for a parent's weekend given the time of year and instantly, I knew she was right. Andrea explained that her first year of college took place at a school very similar to my institution and she distinctly

remembered (the feeling of shock and confusion) when the campus suddenly became “prettier” for all the parents upon their return that fall.

This shared experience of reflexivity-in-relation is notable for two reasons. One, my own class privilege protected me from feeling ignorant in not understanding the situation to its full capacity. And therefore, my ability to be self-reflexive in the situation (from the perspective of middle-class white woman) didn’t serve me. Two, it was only in relation to Andrea’s life experience that I was able to grasp a fuller picture of a very routine campus practice and make more meaning out of it. In this way, we can see how reflexivity is a process with components that can be used separately and together. By acknowledging our positionality to the situation or the research, we provide the information needed to understand where/how our perspective is generated. By practicing reflexivity, we attempt to make meaning from what we study or from the questions we ask. And finally, by doing reflexivity-in-relation we expand the meaning we are able to make to include new perspectives and new practices.

Conclusion

In the following passage, Fine (1998) questions the relationship between researcher and researched, interrogating, or “working the hyphen” between self and other in the context of qualitative methods:

> By working the hyphen I mean to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations. I mean to invite researchers to see how these “relations between” get us “better” data, limit what we feel free to say, expand our minds and constrict our mouths, engage us in intimacy and seduce us into complicity, make us quick to interpret and hesitant to write. Working the hyphen means creating occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is, and is not, “happening between,” within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence.
>
> (Fine 1998, p. 135)

While Fine is referring specifically to qualitative research, the questions she poses can be applied to all methodologies in all disciplines, urging us to consider these multiple layers of reflexivity. In this chapter, we have demonstrated ways in which reflexivity can foster understandings that are enhanced in a variety of scholarly and professional academic environments. In this way, the potential of reflexivity to have both theoretical and practical benefits is compelling. While we have emphasized psychology and women’s studies, reflexivity is not disciplinarily bound, with its benefits extending to all levels and roles in academia, including students, faculty, and administrators.

In her description of "working the hyphen", Fine (1998) also refers to the three interpretations of reflexivity discussed here, including positionality, practice, and critique in her discussion of reflection, behavior, and relationships, respectively. While some scholars may continue to need justifiable reasons for adopting a reflexive approach in their next project or class session, it is our mutual hope that reflexivity become integrated into the academic work of IR scholars in such a way that even the smallest pause for consideration of some of the tools we outline here might offer a more authentic and transparent scholarship, offering possibilities to enrich, extend, and deepen the production of knowledge.

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