Researching Marginalized Groups

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Researching the Educational Strategies of Marginalised Groups

Emiliano Grimaldi, Roberto Serpieri and Emanuela Spanò

INTRODUCTION[1]

This chapter reflects on some key methodological dilemmas arising within the context of researching marginalised groups (Bhopal 2010). We have intended this chapter as an epistemological exercise of reflexive sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 68). In particular, we have tried to extend to methodological issues the attitude against the 'ethnocentrism of the scientist' (ibid., 69), objectivising the researcher her/himself and her/his strategies and problematising the relation between the researcher, the researched and the wider frames of meanings/values and fields of power within which they are enmeshed.

More in detail, the chapter is organised in four sections where we use accounts that describe 'critical moments' of fieldwork activity in order to reflect on the following issues. First, we describe how the risks of symbolic violence are always 'around the corner' despite the researchers' strategic efforts to avoid them. We adopt here Bourdieu and Passeron's concept of 'symbolic violence' to refer to the endemic risk to impose and legitimate a cultural arbitrary through the production of meanings and codes in the relations between the researcher and the researched (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 4). In doing so, we show the political nature of fieldwork, which can be considered as an inherently confrontational space where 'symbolic violence' can (and often does) occur as a result of the intertwining between power relations (England 1994, 249).

Second, we address the access as a key step in the construction of the encounter and the problem of its negotiation, interpreting the relation between the researcher and the researched as a paradoxical space of 'betweenness' where collaboration, trust and empathy can co-exist with negotiations, tensions, conflicts, misunderstandings and deceits.

Third, we discuss the implication of the researcher's positionality for the process of knowledge production and the need for understanding positionality as relational, unstable, not fixed and contextually situated.

Fourth, neopositivist empiricism and ethnocentrism are analysed as specific forms of symbolic violence, which are yet very common but difficult

to discover in research with marginalised groups. We argue for the need for problematising the epistemological dimension of fieldwork, the value-laden trait of research and the actualisation of power relations in the field if we want to avoid the 'ethnocentrism of the scientist' within the context of researching marginalised groups.

The work draws and comments on accounts emerging from two qualitative ethnographic research projects on the educational, housing and mobility strategies of Roma communities living in the area of Naples (Southern Italy). The first research (hereafter *Embedding*) involved a team of sociologists of education and focused on the educational practices through which marginalisation, exclusion and early leaving were socially produced and Roma pupils and parents constructed as 'subjects' in the ordinary functioning of education (Serpieri and Grimaldi 2013). The second research (hereafter *Bridging*) was carried on by a multidisciplinary group of social activists, architects, anthropologists, media experts and, later on, sociologists, and aimed at exploring the housing conditions, the mobility processes and the educational strategies of the Roma groups living in 'camps'. Both the research projects were run using participant observations, in-depth interviews, camp visits, video recording and documentary analysis.

In the concluding section, the chapter argues for the urgency of adopting a reflexive disposition towards fieldwork activities when researching marginalised groups. The reasons for such an urgency lie in the greater risk for the researcher to reproduce asymmetrical and exploitative relationships and to be part of games of truth which subjugate the marginal as deficit. A reflexive disposition, on the contrary, allows the researcher to problematise the forms of symbolic violence and unveil the asymmetrical power relations lying at their basis. We are aware that reflexivity cannot remove power differentials and cannot be translated in methodological how-to-do lists and recipes. In fact, our chapter does not offer recipes or solutions. Rather, it deconstructs the dilemmas we have faced during what we could call what England (1994) has referred to as 'failed research' projects. However, a reflexive disposition can inspire a 'research ethic' (Appadurai 2000) with a double potential. First, it can partially open spaces for more symmetrical relations and enact an emancipatory process of mutual recognition (Fraser 1997). Second, a reflexive disposition can produce knowledge that could challenge the dominant stereotypes and could establish the '*betweenness*' (England 1994) of the researcher and researched worlds as a space of possibility for questioning the dominant regimes of truth and their subjugating effects.

THE RISKS OF SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE AS ALWAYS 'AROUND THE CORNER'

Statement 1

Fieldwork has an inherently political nature, being a confrontational space where symbolic violence, exploitation and betrayal can and do occur as

a result of the intertwining between micropolitics of personal relations and the wider discursive and structural dynamics of social reproduction and control. This is especially true when fieldwork practices involve marginalised groups. To avoid the reproduction of conventional narratives of cultural inquiry requires a close attention to the politics of social research and its settings.

Research in social sciences shows a striking tendency to misrecognise the risks of symbolic violence that are inherent to fieldwork. In most cases the lack of attention towards the 'politics of social research' (Punch 1994) and its mundane practices and settings risks reproducing conventional narratives of cultural inquiry (Thomas 2003, 45).

In contrast, the starting point of our analysis in this chapter is the recognition of the political nature of fieldwork (England 1994, 249), which can be considered as an inherently confrontational space. This space is characterised by disruption of other people's lives, violence, exploitation and betrayal (Rabinow 1977) that can (and often does) occur as a result of the intertwining between 'micropolitics of personal relations' and the wider discursive and structural dynamics of social reproduction and control (Thomas 2003). This is especially true when fieldwork practices involve marginalised and/or stereotyped groups.

In the following account drawn from *Embedding* we offer an example of *how* even the simplest event can raise complex ethical issues and even the most collaborative, horizontal and emancipatory research setting can become a site of symbolic violence:

Account 1

[We are in the meeting room of an urban primary school in a disadvantaged area in Naples with a high number of Roma people. Headteachers, teachers, local administrators, students, parents and a research team are meeting to confront and improve migrant students' inclusion and discuss how to reinforce practices of intercultural education. The spatial positioning of the participants (re)produces a distance between the school staff and the migrants, with Roma parents and pupils positioned in the back of the room. A senior researcher facilitates the discussion. The group is addressing a slippery issue, i.e. the difficulties in including Roma pupils. Suddenly a headteacher jumps in the discussion.]

HEADTEACHER A: [. . .] the problem is that Roma people do not consider education as an indispensable means to improve the quality of their life, as an opportunity!

HEADTEACHER B: In this respect, I would like to ask our friends *[i.e. the Roma parents]* how does it happen that Roma parents do not bring their children to school?

ROMA PARENT C (MALE): Our children want to go to school. The problem is that we wake up very early and go out to look for a job. We cannot bring our children to school. *[many people start to grumble]*

HEADTEACHER B: I want to ask all the parents who are here . . . to what extent do they believe the school is important for the future of their children and why . . .?

ROMA PARENT C (MALE): Our fathers and ourselves were not used to going on with their studies . . . but now we are changing, we do not move because we want our children to go to school. We know this is important for their future . . . it is late for us, but not for our children. . .

ROMA PARENT D (MALE): It is true, there are some Roma children who come late to school or come irregularly, but it is not our fault! There are some camps where there is not any bus service and we have to walk a long way to reach the school!

[. . .]

LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR: I want to make a question to this nice little girl *[a Roma girl]* . . . do you have a 'childhood dream'? For instance, to go on in your studies, to start a career, to find an interesting job, to live here in Italy or move somewhere else. . . .

ROMA GIRL: *[standing up]* My name is Cristina and my dream is to continue to study and complete secondary school.

LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR: Very good!

(Observation of a school meeting at the Ilaria Alpi School, 6th May 2010)

This dialogue can be interpreted as part of a 'tale of the field' where a research setting, projected according to a participatory and collaborative design, suddenly turns into a space in which stereotypes are enacted and subjects belonging to a 'marginal group' are constructed as deficit-like subjectivities. The location, its spatial configuration, the sequence of questions and their inscribed stereotypes, and the agenda of the meeting are all elements that contribute to the construction of an inherently asymmetrical context of interaction. In such a context Roma parents and children are subjected as mere 'respondents' and framed within a discourse of 'blame

and shame' that forces them to adhere to a cultural arbitrary if they want to avoid a negative labelling.

Such pitfalls are incredibly common and, at the same time, can be rarely anticipated and/or avoided (Punch 1994, 85). Our general point here is that such 'failures' are often neglected and underemphasised in the construction of the accounts the researchers offer to their audiences. They are dealt with as nuisances, as fuzzy noises of a rational process that is totally under the researcher control. We argue here, on the contrary, for an approach which treats these events as 'research incidents' which are inherent to the fieldwork and 'always around the corner', especially when the asymmetries between the researchers and their research object(s) are so evident as in the case of marginalised groups. These incidents need to become key points of observation and departure to undertake a necessary objectivation of the researcher and the research strategies and practices (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). This requires the adoption of 'a more reflective style of thinking' about the relationship between knowledge production, research practices, power relations, wider societal frames of meanings/values and social domination (Thomas 2003, 45).

In the next sections of the chapter we will use some specific 'research incidents' to reflect on some sensitive issues concerning the practice of researching marginalised groups and the related risks of symbolic violence.

ACCESS AND THE NEGOTIATION OF THE 'BETWEENNESS'

Statement 2

Access is a sensitive step of fieldwork in terms of research ethics. It can be interpreted as a paradoxical form of negotiation/appropriation. Especially when marginalised groups are involved, fieldwork implies an intrusion that creates a space of 'betweenness' of the researcher and researched worlds. Negotiations, tensions, conflicts, misunderstandings and deceits may occur as a paradoxical side of the researchers' attempts to soften their outsiderness through the building up of a trust relationship.

Access is commonly referred to as a sensitive step of any research. This is especially true when researching groups such as Roma people who are perceived to be 'marginal, hidden or unwilling to speak about their experiences'. Fieldwork always implies an 'intrusion' into a pre-existing social world made of well-defined roles, norms and relationships that 'the researcher is far freer than the researched to leave' (Stacey 1988, 22–23, in England 1994, 249). Such intrusion opens up a context of interaction which can be interpreted as a space of 'betweenness' of the researcher and researched worlds where negotiations, tensions, conflicts, misunderstandings and deceits may occur (Kusow 2003).

An example of how difficult it can be to manage such a space of 'betweenness' is offered by the following account drawn from *Bridging:*

Account 2

The group of Roma we were trying to talk with was a small community of 30 families (all relatives) living in a camp close to a highway. We had a very warm welcome. Our initial request was: shall we have a short talk? Their answer was: 'we are happy when someone comes here to talk with us and ask about our experience. This is rare'. But of course the curiosity about who we were and why we were there was recognisable in their facial expressions.

An architect and activist, who was supposed to be our gatekeeper, introduced our group. He tried to explain the aims of the research and reduce our 'outsiders' identity, emphasising our commitment with the Roma condition. He referred to local actors he knew in order to establish a trusting relationship.

Trying to deepen the history of the site and the authorisations they have to live there, the architect pronounced twice the word 'evacuation', referring to some voices he had heard about the planning to evacuate the site. Suddenly the faces of some Roma people changed. In the attempt to justify his reference to the 'evacuation' plan, he explained that he had heard about it at a local administrations meeting some months ago.

[. . .]

Later on, while we were entering one of their houses, a woman approached the architect differently from the rest of the group.

ROMA WOMAN: You cannot come here and make us questions and talk of evacuation plans without giving us detailed explanations! Why do you want to see our houses? Do you know something we do not know? You have to tell us! Otherwise go away. I am sorry for being so crude but I need to know who I am talking to!

(Observation of a Roma camp visit, 4th October 2012)

This story of a 'failed access' shows the relational, semantic and cultural complexities which are involved in the need for the researcher to construct the social acceptance with stereotyped groups that have developed, as a defence, to clear boundaries between 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness'. Here, the attempt to construct the space of 'betweenness' as a space of collaboration, trust and empathy has the paradoxical effect to create a dynamic of mutual deceit (Punch 1994, 93). The researchers were enacting an unintended '*I am on your side*' strategy in order to reduce their 'outsiders'

identity and emphasise their commitment with the Roma condition. As a matter of fact, this becomes a subtle and submerged form of exploitation, in order to gather sensitive data for the research. However, such strategy fails when the sensitive and 'violent' word 'evacuation' breaks the veil of the mutual strategies of 'impression management and dissimulation' (Punch 1994, 94) and brings back to the fore the diversity of meanings and interests and the potentially exploitative traits of fieldwork.

In this case, an access strategy trying to establish a trust relationship crashed with the incommensurability of meanings and the 'violent' intrusion in the everyday life of a community, with its equilibrium and its system of relationships. The equally violent response of Roma people to this process of objectivation which implicitly constructs them as a marginalised group with difficult conditions of life clearly shows the dangers associated with the gaining of social acceptance and an insider status 'when in fact the insider status is ambiguous, complex and fraught with tensions' (Bhopal 2010, 191).

No matter how democratic, fair and emancipatory are the intentions and methods adopted by the researchers, it seems that 'a degree of impression management, manipulation, concealment, economy with the truth and even deception' is constitutive of the situational and interactional level of fieldwork (Punch 1994, 95). In this respect, as Fine (1993, 283) argues, we must also take into account 'the personal demands of presentation of self', and its implications in term of censorship of information about the 'who' of researcher and her/his scopes. This requires a self-reflective style of research that is sensitive to the ethical and political dimensions of fieldwork and the exploitative or emancipatory implications of the researcher's intervention into a public interpretation of reality.

GOING BEYOND A CATEGORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF RESEARCHERS' POSITIONALITY

Statement 3

If we assume statements 1 and 2, the need arises to problematise the researcher's positionality in fieldwork activity. Researcher positionality must be understood in 'intersectional terms' as a result of multiple social belongings (gender, age, 'race'/ethnicity, sexual identity, biography, and so on) that may impede or allow for certain relationships and insights. However, it is crucial to go beyond a categorical understanding of the researcher's positionality that is relational, unstable and contextually situated within the interaction between the researchers, the researched and the social and political situation within which the interaction occurs.

The acknowledgement of the political nature of fieldwork and the ethical dilemmas implied by the access negotiation, as accounts 1 and 2 show, sheds light on the more general 'problem' of the researcher's positionality (England 1994). As a matter of fact, the researcher is always positioned by her/his gender, age, 'race'/ethnicity, sexual identity, and so on, as well as by her/his biography. These intersectional and multiple social belongings influence the 'contemplative eye' of the researcher (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 69), impeding or allowing for certain insights and affecting the researcher's attitude towards the researched.

The relevance and the potential implication of the positionality issue emerge dramatically from the events narrated in the following account drawn from *Bridging:*

Account 3

During the Bridging fieldwork, researchers entered a Roma camp where houses had no water and electricity. Rubbish was everywhere and the site looked very unhealthy. Entering the camp, the researchers' faces acquired an expression of austerity that manifested a mix of respect and compassion in line with their 'look' of middle class, politically correct researchers. They seemed to say, 'We are here to create a reciprocal relationship based on empathy and pity for your living conditions'. After the group explained the aim of the research, the Roma people started to claim for practical help. A man explicitly escaped from the construction as a research object to be 'analysed' through a very simple question.

ROMA MAN: So you are from university! Could you talk with the municipality and ask to send again a school-bus every morning?

A RESEARCHER: We are researchers, we are here to hear from you about your problems and map the living conditions of Roma people in the sites we are visiting! This is very important if we want to improve the welfare of Roma people.

ROMA MAN: [turning his face ironically to a friend] Always the same story! Everyone listen, but nobody act!

(Observation of a Roma camp visit, 12th June 2013)

Whereas this research incident shows the undeniable effect that the researchers' social class, gender and ethnic positioning has on a failed attempt to access a field (and a social world), the account also discloses the situated nature of positionality and reflects how the different forms that positionality may assume cannot be reduced to some pre-determined categories. Thus, a full problematisation of researcher positionality requires going beyond a categorical understanding in so far as it is relational, unstable, not fixed and contextually situated (Sultana 2007) within the interaction

between the researchers, the researched and the social and political situation within which the interaction occurs (Kusow 2003, 597). In this respect, researchers (especially when researching marginalised groups) have to be self-conscious and reflexive about the unequivocal difficulty of 'establishing the grounds for taking a position and the right to speak—for oneself and certainly *about* others' (England 1994, 251).

NEOPOSITIVIST EMPIRICISM AND ETHNOCENTRISM AS SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Statement 4

If fieldwork is conceived as an inherently confrontational space where symbolic violence is always around the corner, the objectivation of the researcher and the acknowledgment that the object of the scientific discourse is primarily the relation of the researcher to the object are key moves in avoiding forms of violence, exploitation and appropriation. This implies a problematisation of the epistemological dimension of fieldwork, the value-laden trait of research and the actualisation of power relations in the field. This is crucial to avoid the ethnocentrism of the scientist.

Taking seriously the issue of the researcher's positionality implies to critically address, among others, three specific aspects of fieldwork as a inherently confrontational space of objectivation where symbolic violence is always around the corner: the values and epistemological underpinnings of research practices (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 68), their relations to power (Apple et al. 2010), and the question about what knowledge is being produced for whom (Burawoy 2005, 10–11).

The urgency of these questions and the risks implied by their unproblematisation clearly emerges from the following account of the umpteenth research incident occurred during *Bridging* fieldwork:

Account 4

[Researchers are visiting a Roma camp. They have introduced themselves and described their research project. Some Roma people are showing their houses to the group. In a house the researchers observe five children sitting on a sofa and watching TV. An anthropologist makes a question to their father.]

RESEARCHER A: Do your children go to school?

ROMA PARENT B: Yes! Of course they go to school. *[The intonation of the answer reveals astonishment as if the answer was obvious.]*

RESEARCHER C: Do you experience difficulties in this respect?

ROMA PARENT D: All the children of the camp go to school regularly! The municipality sends us a school bus every

morning to catch up our children. It is several years!

ROMA PARENT E: We are in good relationship with the teachers. We go to the schools. They come here sometimes! *[A silence follows. Researchers seem disoriented as if they expected to find problems, complaints, low educational inclusion and scarce commitment to children's education. The Roma people seem to perceive it. A parent tries to prove his commitment to his children's education.]*

ROMA PARENT B: Cristina *[his 9 years old daughter]*, please come here and declaim the Italian poem you have learnt in the classroom.

[Cristina, a bit reluctant and afraid, stands up. Once she has finished, her father makes another request.]

ROMA PARENT B: And now the song . . .

[Cristina sings a nursery rhyme and immediately goes away.]

THE GROUP: Well done Cristina, very good!

ROMA PARENT B: *[Turning to the visitors with a proud expression on his face]* Have you seen how good is she in speaking Italian?

(Observation of a Roma camp visit, 14th July 2013)

Here we assisted the construction of Roma people's educational experiences as a research object through a symbolically violent linguistic game. What appears to be innocent and neutral questions manifest all their violence as they bring into play (and are rooted within) a ramified web of cultural stereotypes that construct Roma as un-committed to education and, as a consequence, actualise asymmetrical relations of force between the speakers in a transfigured form (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 142). More specifically, the questions entail symbolic violence in so far as they enact a selection of meanings that objectively define Roma culture as a symbolic system with specific negative traits (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 9), which correspond to the lacking of commitment to their children's education, and establish an asymmetrical context of judgement where a cultural arbitrary is imposed on deficit-like subjects. The ethical risks implied by the unintended enactment of these symbolically violent linguistic relations are evident in the reactions of the Roma people who are 'forced' to fabricate a performance of their adhesion to the imposed cultural arbitrary.

The account exemplifies how the risk is always around the corner to enact violent images, which arbitrarily impose symbols in ways that may perform the 'reality' according to the assumptions, the taken-for-granted

stereotypes of the researchers, especially when marginal groups are involved (Thomas 2003). Such a discursive performativity (Butler 1997) may reflect and reproduce oppressive power relations. In doing so, fieldwork can contribute to processes of knowledge reproduction that confer to 'facts' a 'meaning drawn from a pre-given paradigm that selects or excludes what is important to know', enacting research practices where 'nuances are lost and the fabrication process by which both [the researched] and the researchers' meanings are produced is obscured' (Thomas 2003, 51). In doing so, it conceals and hinders the potential to produce alternative interpretations of reality and seeing alternative meanings, connections and possibilities.

In acknowledging the risk of symbolic violence as inherent in the linguistic interactions occurring between agents belonging to different social worlds, we argue here for a reflexive stance that continuously problematises the establishment of the relations between the researchers and their research object(s) as a process of fabrication, rather than trying to pursue forms of symbolic denegation (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 143). As Bhopal argues (2010, 193), we have to be critical of notions of power—who holds it and why and how it affects the research process—and adopt a critical and reflective approach that examines mundane events 'in a way that exposes broader social processes of control, power imbalance and the symbolic mechanisms that impose one set of preferred meanings or behaviours over others' (Thomas 2003, 48).

Such a reflexive stance cannot avoid addressing a third dimension of fieldwork, epistemology, which is in fact strictly intertwined with the positionality of the researcher and the value and power issues. There are two dangers we want to warn about here, which are both rooted in a lack of problematisation of the epistemological dimension.

The first danger is that of a paradoxical and contemporary unproblematised adoption of forms of 'neopositivist empiricism' (England 1994, 242), an epistemology which specifies a strict dichotomy between object and subject as a prerequisite for objectivity and is supported by methods that position the researcher outside of the researched worlds and reduces engagement to a mere nuisance or a possible threat to objectivity. In this respect, the last linguistic interaction described in account 3 highlights the paradoxical outcomes of this epistemological stance when researching marginalised groups, and the exploitative and deceitful traits that the attempt to create an empathic bond between the researcher and the researched assumes in such an epistemological frame. Whereas apparently working to enact an 'emancipatory, non-exploitive and democratic research practice' (Punch 1994, 84), the adoption of such epistemological stance poses distance, impartiality and neutral detachment as 'a criterion for good research' and constructs the researcher as 'a carefully constructed public self' which is 'a neutral collector of facts' and objectifies the researched as a 'malleable' and passive 'mere mine of information to be exploited' (England 1994, 243). In this respect, we argue here for the need to challenge the view that 'science is intrinsically neutral and essentially beneficial' (Punch 1994, 88). Conversely, we assume as criteria for ethical research: a) the building of relations of mutual respect and recognition, and b) the abandoning of the search for objectivity in favour of critical provisional analysis based on plurality of (temporally and spatially) situated voices and silences.

However, as Bourdieu suggests, the objectivation of the researcher and its scientific discourse points out a second and more essential danger implied in the lack of problematisation of the epistemological dimension. The danger is that of 'epistemocentrism' or 'ethnocentrism of the scientist' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 69–70), which consists in 'ignoring everything that the analyst injects into his perception of the object by the virtue of the fact that he is placed outside of the object, that he observes it from afar and from above'. To avoid such 'intellectualist fallacy' requires the acknowledgement that, as social researchers, we are part of the construction of (and the struggle over) regimes of truth about the social worlds we pretend to analyse. Once again, especially when marginalised groups are involved, social researchers are powerful actors within these games of truth and establish inherently asymmetrical power relations with the researched. Researchers committed to emancipatory rather than reproductive research practices, in our view, need to strive for an antidote to the symbolic violence inherent in the practice of researching, and take into serious account Thomas's invitation to: a) avoid and challenge any ethnocentric deficit discourse and the framing of the researched as pathology or pathological; b) focus instead on difference and the related variety of meanings as well as on the cultural context that produces them, being always sensitive to alternative meanings; c) and be always critical towards the data, the research technologies through which they are collected and the processes by which they are interpreted (Thomas 2003, 52).

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A REFLEXIVE APPROACH TO FIELDWORK?

Statement 5

In assuming the previous statements we must also acknowledge that research activity has the potential to be productive and liberating. We argue here for the adoption of a reflexive disposition towards fieldwork activities when researching marginalised groups. Such disposition has to be sensitive to the connections between research, symbolic violence and the wider relations of exploitation and domination. Interpreted in this way, reflexivity can inspire a 'research ethic' with a double potential: a) opening spaces for more symmetrical relations and enacting emancipatory processes of mutual recognition; b) producing knowledge that could challenge the dominant stereotypes and transform the 'betweenness' of the researcher and researched worlds as

a space of possibility for questioning the dominant regimes of truth and the material basis of inequality, as well as their subjugating effects.

In this chapter we have discussed some key methodological dilemmas arising when researching marginalised groups. Describing some 'critical moments' of two research projects involving a marginalised group (Roma people), we have shown how even in the most collaborative, horizontal and emancipatory research setting, fieldwork can be considered as a confrontational space where 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Thomas 2003) is inherent in the practices of accessing, positioning, questioning and gathering data and interpreting them. More in detail, we have addressed the paradoxical side of the practices of accessing the field, discussing how negotiations, tensions, conflicts, misunderstandings and deceits do occur in a space of 'betweenness' of the researcher and the researched worlds despite the authentic attempts of the researcher to soften her/his outsiderness. Furthermore, our analysis has problematised the researcher positionality and its influence on the 'contemplative eye' of the researcher, arguing for an intersectional understanding of positionality as relational, unstable, not fixed and contextually situated. Such a move brought us to discuss neopositivist empiricism and ethnocentrism as specific forms of symbolic violence that are likely to be enacted in researching marginalised groups. In summing up, and following Bourdieu, we have argued for the extension to those methodological issues of the attitude against the 'ethnocentrism of the scientist' and the objectivation of the researcher and his/her relation to the researched (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 68).

In concluding our chapter we want to emphasise how the concern about the relation between the researcher, the researched and the wider frames of meanings/values and fields of power within which they are enmeshed does not have to result in an impasse. We take here Sultana's point that fieldwork, and more generally research activity, have the potential to be 'productive and liberating' (Sultana 2007, 375). What we need to challenge is the view that 'science is intrinsically neutral and essentially beneficial' (Punch 1994, 88). Research has an essentially political nature and raises 'a whole range of largely unexpected political and ethical issues'. It is always pervaded by 'a semiconscious political process of negotiations' (Punch 1994, 84).

Such political nature requires a reflexive disposition on the part of the researcher if we want to produce 'more inclusive, more flexible, yet philosophically informed methodologies sensitive to power relations' (England 1994, 251). Of course we are aware that reflexivity cannot remove power differentials. Nonetheless, it makes it possible to recognise and work with 'multiple positionalities of researchers and research participants that are constantly negotiated to create ethical relations' (Sultana 2007, 383).

Reflexivity is often misinterpreted as 'a confession to salacious indiscretions', 'mere navel gazing' and even 'narcissistic and egoistic', the implication being that the researcher let the veil of objectivist neutrality slip (England 1994, 24). On the contrary, in our view, reflexivity should be sensitive to and engage with a critical consideration of the connections between research, symbolic violence and the wider relations of exploitation and domination, or to put it another way the politics of redistribution and recognition (Apple et al. 2010, 5; Fraser 1997). In this respect, reflexivity *can* make researchers more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships (Apple et al. 2010). In doing so, it has the potential to decrease 'the power differentials between the researcher and the researched' (Bhopal 2010, 193): '[reflexivity] is necessary to recognise that power relations and knowledge are interconnected and to locate the meaning of events within the context of asymmetrical power relations, [digging] beneath surface appearances and challenging them' (Thomas 2003, 46). Moreover, reflexivity should address the researcher's positionality within a universe of cultural production (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 69), deconstructing his/her own ideas and categories and the ways they influence methods, interpretations and knowledge production.

Interpreted in this way, reflexivity can inspire a 'research ethic' (Appadurai 2000) with a double potential. First, it can open spaces for more symmetrical relations and enact an emancipatory process of mutual recognition. Second, reflexivity can enhance the producing of knowledge that could challenge the dominant stereotypes and transform the 'betweenness' of the researcher and researched worlds as a space of possibility for questioning the dominant regimes of truth and the material basis of inequality, as well as their subjugating effects. In our opinion, such a reflexive disposition 'can open up the research to more complex and nuanced understandings of issues, where boundaries between process and content can get blurred' (Sultana 2007, 376), revealing how fieldwork can be productive and liberating, as long as researchers keep in mind the critiques and undertake research that is more politically engaged, materially grounded and institutionally sensitive. In this way, this kind of disposition can 'turn the relationship researcher-researched into one of cooperation and collaboration, giving voice to hidden subjects, becoming their secretaries' (Apple et al. 2010, 5), 'contributing to the generation of emancipatory praxis and [transforming] the field settings as sites of resistance' (Punch 1994, 89).

For those researchers who are sensitive to research politics and ethics and are committed to an emancipatory, non-exploitive and democratic research practice, 'fieldwork [. . .] represents a demanding craft that involves both coping with multiple negotiations and continually dealing with [political] and ethical dilemmas' (ibid., 85) that often have to be resolved situationally.

NOTE

1. This article is the outcome of the collaboration of the authors. However, in order to ascribe responsibility, we declare that the Introduction and the Conclusion are co-authored, Roberto Serpieri wrote § 1, Emanuela Spanò is the author of §§ 2 and 3, and Emiliano Grimaldi is the author of the section § 4.

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11 A Systematic Review of Current Data Collection Techniques Used to Enhance the Involvement of "Hard to Reach" Adolescents in Research Studies

Myra F. Taylor, Julie Ann Pooley and Georgia Carragher

INTRODUCTION

The descriptor 'hard to reach' is used to identify cohorts of individuals who are under-represented in research studies (Zwart et al. 2005). In this regard, hard to reach cohorts are described as being individuals who, because of socioeconomic disadvantage and/or personal engagement barriers, experience limited opportunities to engage with research. Hence, these individuals are often referred to as the 'forgotten half' of the research cohort (Kogan et al. 2011; Zwart et al. 2005).

For the purpose of this review a broad conceptualisation of the 'forgotten half' was adopted so as to include young people aged 12–24 years who experience significant barriers to participating in research projects. Primarily, these barriers exist because marginalised youth operate on the periphery of mainstream society (Jones and Broome 2001; Kogan et al. 2011; Marpsat and Razafindratsima 2010; Melrose 2002).

The transition from a position within the mainstream to a fringe 'forgotten' position typically occurs during adolescence, the developmental time period when establishing a personal identity becomes a consuming issue (Kogan et al. 2011). Adolescents who experience mainstream rejection/alienation at this juncture typically compensate for their marginalisation by selecting a non-conforming social identity (Taylor 2012). This non-conforming selection is strengthened by the adolescent maturational desire to remain hidden from adult scrutiny. Research participation reluctance within the marginalised adolescent cohort is compounded in instances where adolescents are residing in sub-optimal living conditions (e.g., on the streets, foster-care, on remand, or in abuse/domestic violence situations) or are involved in illegal activities (e.g., substance abuse, prostitution). The situation is further complicated by the inability/unwillingness of some researchers to interact with