Work-worlds colliding: Self-reflexivity, power and emotion in organizational ethnography

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Abstract

Whilst organizational ethnographers have embraced the concept of self-reflexivity, problems remain. In this paper we argue that the prevalent assumption that self-reflexivity is the sole responsibility of the individual researcher limits its scope for understanding organizations. To address this, we propose an innovative method of *collective* reflection that is inspired by ideas from cultural and feminist anthropology. The value of this method is illustrated through an analysis of two ethnographic case studies, involving a 'pair-interview' method. This collective approach surfaced self-reflexive accounts, in which aspects of the research encounter that still tend to be downplayed within organizational ethnographies, including emotion, intersubjectivity and the operation of power dynamics, were allowed to emerge. The approach also facilitated a second contribution through the conceptualization of organizational ethnography as a unique endeavour that represents a collision between one 'world of work': the university, with a second, that of the researched organization. We find that this 'collision' exacerbates the emotionality of ethnographic research, highlighting the refusal of 'researched' organizations to be domesticated by the specific norms of academia. Our paper concludes by drawing out implications for the practice of self-reflexivity within organizational ethnography.

Introduction: Ethnography and the rise of self-reflexivity

Ethnographic research methods are growing in popularity within the field of organization studies (Brannan et al., 2007; Yanow, 2009). Classic examples of organizational ethnography include Kondo's (1990) account of life in a Japanese sweet factory, Watson's (1994) in-depth study of the lives of managers in the ZTC Ryland plant, Delbridge's (1998) studies of new manufacturing techniques, and more recently Ho's (2009) account of life at a Wall Street investment bank.

Organizational ethnographers have been influenced by shifts in related disciplines. These include attempts to address the problem of 'ethnographic authority' whereby the researcher - either implicitly or explicitly - occupies a position of power, having sole control over the themes, categories and frames by which the people studied come to be represented (Van Maanen, 1988; 1995). This ideology began to crumble in the mid-1980s, as a widespread understanding of the 'constructed, artificial nature of cultural accounts' developed (Clifford and Marcus, 1986: 2). As a consequence of these debates, the ethnographic researcher has increasingly been required to be open and reflexive about their own positioning in relation to the study; their reception by participants, the process of analysis, choosing between forms of representation, and so on (Geertz, 1973).

Ideas of self-reflexivity have been embraced by some organizational ethnographers who acknowledge their immersion in a specific, historically contingent research setting (Ybema et al., 2010: 315). Overall, these developments have led to researcher self-reflexivity now taking centre stage and becoming a requirement in this kind of research (Alvesson, 2003; Hardy et al., 2001; Holland, 1999; Thomson and Hassencamp, 2008) – as it is in qualitative management research more generally (Johnson and Duberly, 2003) – with significant space being given to making these issues clear (see also Watson, 1997: 4).

Yet even with this 'rise of self-reflexivity', certain areas remain under-explored. As detailed in this paper, these include the emotional engagement of the ethnographer with the research experience, the ambiguous power relationships that accompany such research, and the ways in which ethnographers are themselves influenced and changed by their interactions with the people they study. These topics have concerned scholars in other areas including cultural and feminist anthropology, and qualitative communication research, but have as yet been under-utilized by organizational ethnographers. However, these ideas have the potential to enrich ethnographies of organizations.

We begin by outlining the limitations of existing understandings of self-reflexivity. These problems include the downplaying of emotions in published research, the 'token' way in which reflexivity is deployed, and simplistic representations of power relations between researcher and researched. We argue that a key issue with existing perspectives, which exacerbate the limitations we identify, is that self-reflexivity is seen as an individual concern, the responsibility of the lone researcher. Inspired by authors who have proposed more collective approaches, we then propose and develop an innovative 'pair-interview' method for enhancing researchers' engagement with self-reflexivity, and we use this to analyze two recent case studies. We show how this method yields interesting findings that relate to the practice of organizational ethnography itself and assist in overcoming some of the issues raised. Next, we discuss the implications of these findings for theoretical approaches to organizational ethnography, and we conclude by outlining some practical outcomes for researchers. Before proceeding, it is important to note that reflexivity, as deployed by organization scholars, is an ambiguous concept associated with many different meanings (Ybema et al., 2010); our specific focus is on self-reflexivity.

Organizational ethnography and self- reflexivity: Limitations and potentials

There has in recent years been a growing awareness of the importance of self-reflexivity within organizational ethnography. The idea is that through self-examination and accounting for the process, researchers must honour their commitment and debt to those they study (Cunliffe, 2003; Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Hardy et al., 2001; Pullen, 2006; Wray-Bliss, 2003; Yanow, 2009). Yet even with these developments, some 'blind spots' tend to persist in authors' self-reflexive accounts.

Silence around ethnographers' emotions

First, the emotional aspect of the research can tend to be played down in such self-reflection exercises; there is a 'silence' surrounding ethnographers' emotional experiences (Brannan, 2011). As anthropologist Catherine Lutz notes, researchers' feelings tend to be relegated to an unspoken, hidden place that is considered to be 'ultimately and utterly private' (Lutz, 1988: 41, see also Coffey, 1999). Within organization studies specifically, this relates to a more general lack of attention to organization researchers' own emotions, even where the emotions of the research participants are the focus of the study, and most likely relates to the attempt to produce a neat and rational account for publication (Fineman, 2005, see also Pullen, 2006).

This omission could reflect the difficulty involved in being reflexive (or even consciously aware) about one's own feelings, particularly when such writing is for academic consumption, as authors may fear that discussing emotions might appear 'immature, primitive, or even pathological' (Lutz, 1988: 41). It may also relate to the fact that a 'rational/ objectivist' tendency remains strong within ethnography (Foley, 2002), with researchers regarding themselves as somewhat detached, objective observers – as witnessed in the 'realist' stance outlined by Van Maanen (1988).

In general therefore, a researcher's emotional journey tends to be seen as 'embarrassing' and 'to be avoided' in the final text (Lutz, 1988: 41). Some notable exceptions include Kondo's (1990) account of life at a Tokyo sweet factory where she discusses how she was required to adopt the identity of a Japanese woman and suppress her "American-Japanese" self in order to fit into her ethnographic setting. Placing these emotional struggles at the heart of her ethnography, she shows how the fragmentation of her identity increased her sense of emotional dissonance, leading to her becoming 'other' in her own mind and requiring her to reassert her own identity as an American researcher. Another is Brannan's (2011) ethnography of a UK call-centre, in which he paints the experience as 'an emotional encounter' (2011: 324). His study illustrates the ways in which attentiveness to emotions, such as shame and guilt, can reveal important aspects of the experience of participant observation in a customer service department. This resonates with Tracy's (2000 and 2004) ethnographic studies that are directly concerned with the affective. In her participant observations of staff on board a luxury liner (Tracy, 2000), she shows how power, self-subordination, and the discursive construction of identity are intertwined with issues of emotional labour and employee burnout. Whilst the primary focus in Tracy's ethnographic work concerns the experiences of her respondents, her exploration of sexuality within two US penal institutions (Tracy, 2004) not only highlights its pervasiveness but also provides an account of her own sexualisation by the inmates and officers. Also from an organizational communication perspective, Lindemann's (2010) description of the sexualities of quadriplegic rugby athletes is intertwined with the story of his own sexual coming of age with a disabled father. In blending his personal narratives with those of the athletes he studied, the struggle in locating disabled sexualities that are often invisible in able-bodied societies is made clearer through the exploration of his own experiences. This is also witnessed in Jago's (2002) autoethnographic account of her depression. Using a 'layered

account', Jago's personal narrative locates her illness within the context of the academy and explores the complex interweaving of depression with her personal and professional lives.

Given that ethnographic research necessarily involves a prolonged, intensive immersion in a new social setting, and given ethnography's long-standing concern with self-reflexivity, it is particularly surprising that emotions do not feature more prominently in this type of research (Brannan, 2011), despite the above exceptions. It appears that there is a need to explore how this might be done, with new methodological approaches being required.

Power and authority: Is self-reflexivity meaningless?

A second issue that requires further exploration in studies of self-reflexivity involves power relations between researcher and researched. While researcher reflexivity was introduced to overcome such problems, critics lately note that it is increasingly used in an instrumental manner that risks being meaningless or worse, acting as a panacea. The now-standard practice of including a short reflection by the author at the end of the methods section can appear as a formulaic afterthought, a device intended to 'invite trust' (Hardy et al., 2001: 534), but deployed merely to authenticate one's work (Chia, 1996; Tracy, 2013; Van Maanen, 1988). For Brewer (1994) and Van Maanen (1988), this practice magnifies the problem of ethnographer authority, accentuating authorial status within the account rather than lessening it.

In addition to reflexive methods enhancing the domination of researcher over researched, accounts can present this dynamic somewhat simplistically with the researcher generally assumed to occupy the position of power. What is rarely acknowledged, for example, is the often-difficult experience of being immersed in an unfamiliar social setting in which one is a stranger (Brannan, 2011; Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Kenny, 2009). The sense of powerlessness experienced by organizational ethnographers in some situations

is overlooked. This is somewhat surprising given the range of studies in other areas of ethnography that show the complexity of this dynamic (Fleur-Lobban, 2008; Lassiter, 2005).

Scholars outside of the organization studies sphere have argued that ethnographers need to go further if the power dynamics of the research relationship are to be better understood. Alternative avenues where such phenomena are discussed include feminist ethnography. In this body of work, the 'burden of authorship' has always been a concern (Behar and Gordon, 1995), with authorship being associated with attempts to dominate 'the other': a masculine reach for power that stands in contrast to feminist ideals. The ethnographer must always therefore begin by showing that she is 'writing from home', situated, positioned and able to reflect on her own perspective (ibid: 23).

Alternative ethnographic methods have been proposed to encompass these concerns. In other disciplines such as anthropology and organizational communication, as well as some multi-disciplinary work involving medicine, technology and ethnography, scholars actively seek ways to overcome the problem of researcher domination. These include the idea of co-constructing research results with participants of the study (Ellis, 2007; Fleuhr-Lobban, 2008; Lassiter, 2005), and embracing other forms of writing and representation such as creative nonfiction genres that might widen the reach of ethnographic accounts (Behar and Gordon, 1995; Kondo, 1995).

Ideas from feminist ethnography have informed the rise of autoethnography in which the ethnographer is seen as always, inevitably present throughout the text (Crawford, 1996, see also Ellis, 2004; Fox, 2010; Goodall, 2000; Rambo, 2005); this means that any expertise or academic authority claimed by the researcher is thrown into question. In the spirit of problematizing ethnographic authority, Holland (1999) advocates that scholars engage in 'reflexive movement', an orientation to reflexivity on the part of the researcher that leaves

one open to ideas from other disciplines and new styles of thought (1999: 482). In this vein, the ideas presented here inform our later analysis.

Research as an individual endeavour?

There exists a tendency in organization studies approaches to reflexivity to portray the researcher as an individual on a lone quest to represent their organizations, themselves and their role in the research process (Hardy et al., 2001: 536). This has lead to an implicit denial of the influence of others including the community of academics in which one is embedded (Hardy et al., 2001) as well the people in the organization being researched, whose presence and influence is often ignored (Cunliffe, 2003; Linstead, 1994).

Of late, authors have highlighted the co-construction of subjectivity between researcher and researched (Coffey, 1999). Cunliffe (2003) for example describes a 'radically reflexive' approach to empirical work. Under this view, organization researchers would recognize the intersubjective, relational nature of research encounters, and account for the way the 'other', the research subject, is inescapably involved in the co-construction of meaning during the process. This means that the self and the other should not be analyzed in isolation from each other, as they co-evolve in a process of continuous interplay from which they give meaning both to one another and to the relationship in-between (see also Bradbury and Lichtenstein, 2000; Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Orr and Bennett, 2012). For Cunliffe, this co-construction of understanding implies a relation between researcher and researched that is more complex than straightforward domination of one party over another (2003: 997). Such an approach is argued to overcome simplistic assumptions about the power dynamics between researcher and the research subject(s) that tend to persist within organizational research.

These ideas have been taken up by some organizational ethnographers although examples are few. Brannan (2011), acknowledging that academic work is necessarily carried out within a wider community of practice, proposes moving away from a focus on the individual ethnographer towards an understanding of this research practice as collective (see also Hardy et al., 2001; Holland, 1999). As an example, Parker et al. (2011) describes a team of academics embarking on a collective attempt to understand their engagement with their ethnographic research site.

Towards a new approach to self-reflexivity

While these ideas are evocative, suggesting alternatives to the persistent problem of ethnographic authority, the question remains as to how this might be done; what methods might usefully assist ethnographers who are committed to self-reflexivity that is meaningful rather than token? The question of whether more appropriate approaches can be deployed, that enable lesser-articulated aspects of organizational ethnography such as those above to emerge, is at the heart of our paper. Underpinning the problems outlined above is a view of self-reflexivity as being an individual phenomenon – one that is the responsibility of the lone researcher. In contrast, we will present a *collective* approach that facilitates a deeper, shared understanding of the research encounter. We illustrate it with data from two case studies that focus on the 'doing' of organizational ethnography.

Methods: Two organizational case studies

Our research strategy was informed by the notion that a key problem with existing understandings of self-reflexivity is that it tends to be conceived of as an outcome of work carried out by individual researchers (Hardy et al., 2001; Maton, 2003). Whilst authors have lately argued for a new, collective approach to reflexivity (Brannan, 2011; Riach, 2009),

detail on how such approaches might be carried out remains scant. In order to explore how ethnographic research methods might be extended therefore, we present a 'pair interview' method for two ethnographers that uses case studies of ethnographic research.

Data collection and analysis

The case studies are based on two in-depth ethnographic engagements that had been carried out by both authors. Author 1 had been involved with a Premier League football club for four years, with the aim of studying organizational change. Author 2 had studied a non-profit international development agency that produced information technology for use in developing countries. The research involved working as a participant observer for one year with the aim of studying identity work within the organization. Particularly relevant for this study, both authors had drawn on standard understandings of self-reflexivity in order to examine their own responses to their experiences at these organizations, when developing academic journal articles (Gilmore, 2007; Kenny, 2008; 2010). A general sense that there was more to the research experience than the reflexive approach allowed, prompted the research that led to the current paper. Case study data includes reflections on these studies, drawn both from already-published accounts, and also from the adoption of a pair-interview method.

With the aim of developing reflexive accounts of our ethnographic research, the pair-interview approach involved interviewing each other using semi-structured questioning, a method with which we were both familiar, and skilled at employing. Drawing on existing literature within organizational ethnography and reflexivity, we chose a number of sensitising concepts in order to frame a set of interview questions. These questions began with general enquiries about the nature of the research; the organization, how access had been secured, whether or not work was being carried out in exchange for access and if so, what did the

work consist of? The questions then narrowed to focus on moments of emotional intensity experienced within the research process; along with our responses to the people we had studied and how they, in turn, responded to our scrutiny. Interviews lasted approximately forty minutes each and were recorded and roughly transcribed shortly after they took place.

Data analysis occurred in four linked stages. The first stage required us to immerse ourselves in the interview recordings and transcripts. This process began with us listening to the recordings of the interviews together, remaining sensitive to expressions of emotion. During this stage, the tapes would be paused to allow for further questions and comments. This probing focused on the language being used by the interviewee, repetitions, pauses and difficulties in articulation, as well as changes in vocal intonation or speed as we sought to understand the emotional content and dynamics in play, both during the interviews and their subsequent analyses, in order to engage in a deeply reflexive process.

The second stage of analysis involved our identifying the themes that emerged from this activity. While our accounts were naturally different, certain aspects emerged as we reflected together on the work we had done in our respective organizations, and also on how we had presented this work. Themes included a recognition of a deep attachment to our organizations, along with experiences of discomfort and guilt about having to 'write up' our findings for the consumption of other academics. These aspects stood out as significant as we had not explored or emphasized them in our previously published studies, nor acknowledged them to ourselves before now. The common themes were then clarified and categorised using examples from our data.

As a third step, we contrasted emergent themes with already published accounts from each research project. The final stage related these themes to extant literature concerning the practice of ethnographic research, and self-reflexivity in particular. In what follows, we

present findings from our analysis of the two cases, and the often unspoken aspects of organizational ethnography that emerged.

Findings

Through our pair interview method, a number of common aspects emerged. These will be explored in turn, prior to an analysis of the themes and their implications for self-reflexivity.

Identifying with the new organization: Attachment

Both researchers became very attached to 'their' organizations and had found themselves increasingly identifying with them, but in each case these attachments were played down in subsequent research accounts. Researcher 2 had chosen to work in a small non-profit international development agency that produced information technology for use in developing countries. The high-tech environment was one with which she was familiar. Members of the organization were roughly the same age, and had similar educational and class backgrounds.

> '…it was pretty homogenous, me included: white, middle class, well educated, that kind of thing'.

She quickly felt herself at one with the 'kinds of people' she encountered:

> 'They were engineery type people and I *get* those kinds of people; I was an engineer myself'.

In addition, she shared their altruistic outlook; people working in this organization espoused a desire to 'make a difference' with their lives, and Researcher 2 explained that she had chosen to be a participant observer in a non-profit in order for her empirical work to do some good. Researcher 2 reported strong feelings of admiration for her new colleagues; having worked with talented technical creatives before, she found herself once again in awe of these people who were 'tech geniuses' and had been doing 'really really clever stuff in technology' in their previous highly paid jobs, which they had given up in order to work in aid. Alongside this sense of admiration, Researcher 2 describes how she slowly became friends with different members of the organization, spending time with them after work and ultimately feeling included within this friendly group.

Enmeshed in these feelings of friendship, likeness and admiration was a strong sense of identification with her organization.

> 'I really got into the whole thing; I thought it was brilliant what they were doing. So I thought that I might actually quit academia (after the research) and come and join them, because it was great!'

This identification as being 'one of gang' grew over the period of research and manifested itself most strongly in a visit to the organization's donor in the UK:

> 'I would get nervous because they would all be nervous. And you felt like a gang, about seven of us would go for coffee beforehand, you know, '(whispered voice) what's our strategy?' … I would be quite nervous then hoping that the donor would like us… because in those situations I was feeling very part of the organization: you

know, us all together and I would hope that the donor would like us enough to give more money to the organization'.

This close identification made leaving the organization difficult once the research had been completed.

'I was a bit upset, that aspect upset me a little bit; you know you are really close to an organization over a while and then it's just bam: nothing…'

Researcher 1 felt similarly strongly:

'I used to feel very excited and very chirpy driving up to ****. They were very warm, very friendly…it was really nice to go somewhere where people were interested in what you were doing and you felt that you were making a contribution…that's often so difficult to do in academia because it's so abstract'.

Researcher 1 therefore felt that this new organization offered a sense of belonging that she was missing.

'For personal reasons, I definitely wanted to get away from home…the place was falling apart, literally falling apart. The roof needed doing, the outbuilding was falling down…my sense of self-esteem was at that time on the floor and it was really nice to go somewhere where people were warm and friendly…everything was diametrically opposed to what I was feeling at home in that dump of a house'.

Interestingly, she does not mention her university as offering such a sense of warmth or friendliness, and this might provide an additional reason for Researcher 1's attachment to the new organization.   She also found that her sports scientist respondents had a shared experience of the UK higher education system, which facilitated an appreciation for the research she was doing as well as fostering strong emotional bonds:

'They were definitely the same age as some of the post-grads I was teaching. Some of them had done Masters Degrees and others were completing them. One was doing a PhD and I spent quite a bit of time helping him with that'.

This facilitated a strong identification with them:

'The relationships with the sports scientists were significant. They were just starting out, they were a homogenous bunch, roughly the same age and the same shared experience of the UK HE system…they worked long hours and so did I, because they did, and they were very tightly bonded as a group of people. They liked each other, they went out with each other and you formed strong bonds with them. They're just very likeable and knew that what they were going through was special and wasn't necessarily going to last – which makes it special because it's rare'.

In Researcher 1's case, the long hours and intense ways of working combined with a teamwork ethic meant that 'researcher distance' was always going to be difficult. Indeed on the second day, she was invited to train with two of the players – which she did.

Despite their apparent importance, these attachments had been downplayed in subsequent published accounts. Discussing ethnographers' attachment to their organizations, Wengle

(1988) argues that fieldwork can be emotionally intense, and a challenge for researchers' self-identity. Ethnographers can project ideas about themselves onto research participants, leading to strong attachments developing. For Van Maanen (1988), fieldworkers can be drawn to ethnographic work as a form of 'self-exile', an escape from the real world. This resonates with Researcher 1's reflection on her attraction to the field site, in contrast with her home life.

Feeling 'other' in the new organization

This sense of identification and attachment was not always straightforward or unproblematic. In making sense of the experience, Researcher 2 described her anxieties at how her colleagues in the new organization perceived her as an academic. As a non-UK citizen, she reported feeling somewhat outside the cultural context of this nation, even prior to embarking upon the research. Her descriptions of the research experience are permeated with references to being an outsider, and for this reason she refers to her experiences as involving a 'distinct identity challenge'.

For Researcher 1, being the only woman within the specific location of the study heightened her visibility through her gender difference. This was felt and experienced by her as sometimes being unsettling for both parties. Whilst her focus on the team's performance dovetailed with the needs of her respondents, and her work (as well as her discretion) had been validated by trusted external bodies thereby securing a degree of credibility, she was an object of curiosity to the coaching staff. At first this resulted in teasing comments about note-taking and the need not to swear in her presence. Later conversations with two coaches led to discussions about their partners and current relationship difficulties. Where these conversations took place with another member of staff being present, they were generally experienced as being helpful and assisted in the development of cohesive, trusting research relationships. However, where discussions took place that were personal in nature and were

one-to-one, they engendered a greater degree of discomfort and tension for her. Interestingly these tended to occur shortly before her return to her university, with the conversations never being referred to by either party when she returned. Her experiences reflect Golde's (1970) observations on the ways in which gender identities play out in the context of female ethnographers' fieldwork. She describes for example the problematic nature of being an unmarried or divorced woman in an ethnographic setting where marital status is significant, as it is within professional football. Additionally, the use made of Researcher 1 as a confidant and source of advice could be perceived as a means of protecting her: neutralizing her sexuality through placing her in a role that is a traditionally aligned with feminized modes of behaviour (Golde, 1970: 6).

Overall, while we each felt as though we were attached to our organizations, we felt 'other' at the same time, a facet of our experience that had not been explored by either of us, either through our published accounts or on a personal level. This resonates with Brannan's (2011) discussion of discomfort and tensions experienced during his ethnographic work at a UK call centre, in which he felt that colleagues in a meeting publicly denigrated his position of academic researcher. Similarly, others explore the tensions resulting from ethnographers' experiences of being at once insider and outsider, both engaged and detached (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Duneier, 1999; Tracy, 2004).

Feelings of discomfort and guilt

Working as organizational ethnographers, we were both, at times, unwilling and unable to be a removed presence whilst engaged in the research process. For both, a sense of dissonance arose when writing up 'research findings'. This involved difficult decisions regarding how much to reveal when depicting these experiences. Researcher 1 notes:

'I wasn't comfortable when I started working on one of the first pieces…it felt uncomfortable to be putting that critical lens on people who I'd been spending a lot of time with, who I had bonds with and effectively saying "OK, I am going to put my feelings over here because I really need to be objective and look at this data without being emotional about it"''.

Researcher 2 describes a similar struggle in relation to adopting a critical lens for the purpose of data analysis and writing:

'I do work in critical theory and some of the papers I have published on this organization… haven't been overly… positive of it because I do point out the class aspect…. I mean you can tick all the boxes and be completely correct, but on some level… on the level that I was really quite friendly with these people… you wouldn't do this to your friend…'

Here we see the difficulties experienced as a result of the identification with the organization that had developed, and her attachments to people. Researcher 2 struggles with 'defining' her colleagues/ research participants both as friends and as 'subjects of analysis'. A sense of guilt emerges as she evaluates her actions in applying critical theory against what would be appropriate to a friend in the 'real world'. She went on to describe how she justified this:

'I feel that I betrayed their trust by writing critical papers. I think that technically I didn't, technically I was quite correct, because I behaved as I was told to, or as I was advised to by my supervisor. I feel as if I behaved as other ethnographers have done. I feel justified… but on some emotional level I feel a little bit guilty'.

It is interesting to see how the overt sense of guilt was accounted for. Researcher 2 justifies her actions by appealing to what she sees as being 'technically correct', because other ethnographers report doing it, and also by her supervisor's approval of the choice to write critically.

In both accounts, the development of strong attachments led to similar kinds of dissonance and struggle when the time came to shift position into that of 'detached researcher'. This kind of guilt and discomfort is echoed in Parker et al.'s (2011) description of a research team engaged in ethnographic work on a community-based project. The authors highlight how they struggled to negotiate their dual roles as academics and social justice advocates, describing the guilt that they experienced when it came to writing and representing the 'powerless' research subjects in a resulting academic text (1999: 220). Acknowledging this guilt, feminist ethnographers have long explored different ways of writing and representing (Behar and Gordon, 1995; Ellis, 2004, 2007), as will be explored further on.

The denigration of one's presence in ethnographic research

The pair interviews reveal a tendency to denigrate our influence in our respective organizations. It is natural that a person adopting a role of an academic researcher, who participates to some degree in the life of the organization, would influence the setting. This is recognized in debates on organizational research (Wray-Bliss, 2003; Yanow, 2009), and authors stress that a researcher's task is to make this engagement and influence explicit in the resulting account. Our interviews show a sense of insecurity around doing this. As soon as the issue was raised in Researcher 1's interview, there was a retreat to the use of the second person ('you formed strong bonds with them'). This was also evident in Researcher 2's description of her role, which also featured repeated use of 'just' and 'little' to describe her work for the organization:

'I had a little desk in the office, and when they needed a little bit of background research… (for example), I would just go and get the statistics of, say, the population of Kenya, and then I would just provide them with a little word document… so I would just do that sort of… Google work'.

The attempt to make 'little' of the effect that she might have had upon life in this organization is clear. This can be seen in the account of her departure, and in her discussions with colleagues concerning this event, their reluctance to accept it, and her attempt to downplay the impact of her presence:

'They would say "ah yes but you will still want to come back and work here maybe once a week", and I would think "No I won't". And I felt kind of guilty then because it was almost like I had created this friendship or bond… but I had told them from the start and I had never pretended to be (staying).'

Here we see how Researcher 2 attempted to downplay the effect that she had had on the organization, arguing that she had told them that she was a researcher and therefore the departure should be a simple process.

The pair interview process however revealed quite a different story. On some level, we were each aware that our presence had made an impact. In both cases for example, we reported feeling that we had been used to develop thinking and activity concerning issues that were at the heart of the organizations, and that we were used as a means of creating knowledge. Recalling our experiences, we both noted that from the first days of our engagement with our respective organizations we were persistently asked our views:

'Almost from the time I stepped into the organization they were asking "what do you think of us?" They were very, very keen to know what I thought, how it was going and how what they were doing compared to other clubs and organizations generally.' (Researcher 1)

Researcher 1's project morphed into a post-research consulting relationship with a remit to align the football and administrative departments of the club more closely. Exploring the responses of people within her organization, Researcher 2 felt that she was perceived as a conduit of academic knowledge by people there:

'They were sometimes a little bit in awe, to be honest, "ooh, I'm sure that there's some academic explanation for this"- a little bit like that'.

People requested that she tell them more about different theories to do with organizations and development work, and in response, Researcher 2 set up a weekly reading group where different, critical articles were assigned. Much discussion resulted from these exercises and people in the organizations responded well, even to the critical texts:

'They loved that stuff…these are very intelligent, self-reflective people who got that there are power dynamics in development, and it was nice for them to read about it. And they could analyze their own position in it.'

Moreover, Researcher 2 felt that these activities affected how members of the organization oriented themselves to their work:

'I would say that they had a heightened reflexiveness about their position in a problematic sector'.

In particular, they were determined to resist particular vested interests and problematic tendencies that they had read about by authors such as Escobar (1995) and Ferguson (1990).

Although it is accepted within the literature that participant observers will have an effect on the organizations they study, a sense of insecurity about making this explicit remains (Van Maanen, 1988; Yanow, 2009). We see here how in fact, the influence can be more than is often portrayed in subsequent academic reports of organizational ethnography. Reflecting on what it appears that we meant to these organizations, what both groups seemed to want were minds that could help them to think purposefully and reflexively, and they demanded this of us. This reflects observations made in other studies including Duneier's (1999) study of street life in New York. He reflects on how he was put to use by his research participants who, for example, saw him as a source for small change and sometimes cash loans, and also as a conduit to appearing in a book about the city and themselves (see also Brannan, 2011).

Anxieties of ethnographic research

The data from our pair interviews showed that engagement in ethnographic research features higher degrees of uncertainty, lack of clarity, anxiety and 'playing it by ear' than is typically presented within academic accounts – including our own published work resulting from these studies. Anxieties about the ethnographic process were accompanied by an insecurity of focus, once in the field. Researcher 1 for example was anxious about how an ethnographic study of an organization 'should' proceed, as so few sources of help were available:

'Doing research like this had become very, very unusual. It's almost unimaginable to get that kind of access…I was very worried about it because it (i.e. a woman doing ethnographic research within a football department) wasn't usual. I wasn't tripping up or tripping over another woman who had done something like this, or anybody come to that. There wasn't a natural reference point to go to as to how you did ethnographic research in this environment'.

There were few clear guidelines upon which she could draw, and this heightened her sense of uncertainty about the process and about her abilities as a researcher.

Whilst the published research evokes a sense of researcher assuredness and clarity of focus, this may have been a post-hoc rationalization of experiences that were in fact more fragmented and uncertain. The anxiety and doubt that pervade ethnographic experiences has been highlighted in other studies (Duneier, 1999). Authors discuss the identity slippage that comes with the experience of forming new attachments and yet feeling quite alien to the research setting, highlighting the stress and anxiety that results (Wengle, 1988). For Lindlof and Taylor (2002) ethnographers occupy a liminal space; their location in-between various social groups and psychological states often leaves researchers at the margins, or shuttling between periphery and centre. Working through the contradictions and frustrations of liminality, they argue, requires ethnographers to adopt a stance of curiosity and openness to the unexpected without any expectation that these feelings will be resolved.

In summary, the pair interviews adopted yielded different insights to those typically found in our attempts at being 'reflexive' in other pieces of work. These included the strong bonds of attachment that had developed between researchers and their new colleagues, and a contrasting sense of being 'outside' of the organization. Experiences of discomfort and guilt when it came to writing up research findings for consumption by an academic audience were

described, along with a felt need to downplay one's own presence in the research setting despite a sense that this presence was at times significant.

Analysis: Two 'worlds of work'

Through isolating and analyzing the themes above, it appears that our experiences of being *organizational* ethnographers were distinct and interesting in a number of ways. Both studies involved moving between two organizations, the learning of new kinds of work, and a necessary engagement with two sets of professional norms. These aspects: *organization*, *work* and *profession*, are discussed next.

Organization

From the emergent themes outlined above including those of attachment and otherness, we noted the importance of a 'double-membership' of organizations. While remaining affiliated to one's university, the organizational ethnographer also joins a new organization. We had each enjoyed the sense of warmth, belonging and collectivity that came with being among our new-found colleagues.

Even so, we both experienced a sense of being 'other'; in the case of Researcher 1, at times her position as the sole female, alongside her role as an academic, gave rise to tensions. For Researcher 2, she felt outside of the cultural milieu of her organization. With proximity and belonging naturally comes the danger of exclusions and feeling left out, and organizational life is no different (Kenny, 2010). However, overall, this sense of closeness, albeit sometimes an ambiguous experience, implies a deep engagement with the studied organization. Tellingly, this stood in stark contrast to the university organizations from whence we had come. It appears that being in a university is not an overly collective experience, but rather an individualizing one – as witnessed in Jago's (2002)

autoethnographic account of academic depression. The close connection offered by the researched organization, for bad and good, stands in contrast to that of the university.

Work

A second observation relating to the themes outlined above involved work itself. We saw for example how we each admired the work practices of our respondents, and felt connections in a number of ways. These included a sense of recognition and familiarity. For Researcher 2, she greatly admired the software development being carried out, referring to her new found colleagues as 'geniuses' in the context of their work. With Researcher 1, the work she was doing seemed to make a valued contribution to the development of the staff she worked with, giving her a distinct feeling of pleasure. She compares this to the practice of academic work, which is difficult to see as practically contributing 'because it is so abstract'.

Importantly, this 'worked' both ways; in each of our respective organizations, colleagues expressed their admiration for academic work; for Researcher 1, some of these were studying for a Masters degree, and members of her organization actively sought out her expertise. For Researcher 2, people sought to benefit from the practice of academic work, through instigating a reading and study group organized by her. The activity of work acted as something of a link for the organizational researcher, creating a bridge between these disparate worlds. The nature of the work involved here may be important; we both felt that inputting ideas gained from our academic activities fulfilled a desire that could not otherwise be met by the organizations we studied, and may have accounted for the feelings of acceptance and welcome we experienced. Again, this was not straightforward, with each of us experiencing some insecurity about whether academic work was perceived by colleagues as valuable.

Profession

Finally, the professional norms and demands of academia marked the research encounter. Researcher 2 found that juggling the different positions of researcher and participant, along with full immersion in this new context, represented 'a distinct identity challenge'. There was a sense of being pulled back into the position of distant researcher, when the time came to write up findings into academic papers. This experience felt unnatural after the warmth of belonging to the new organization. As Researcher 1 notes (and echoed by Researcher 2), this discomfort emerged from having to 'put a critical lens' on people she had been close to, and also having to maintain an emotional distance in writing her findings - as required by the academic norms of researcher distance and detachment towards research subjects. Despite this acknowledgement, feelings of guilt remain.

Overall, we had a sense of ourselves as researchers being forced out of one position, working in our new organization, and into another, the University where we were tasked with producing accounts of our respondents/ colleagues, framing them as products of the research to be analyzed and reported on. The norms of academia such as expectations of researcher impartiality, objectivity, and 'organized scepticism' (Merton, 1974), offer scant comfort in such situations; indeed the emphasis placed on the maintenance of a neutral stance concerning academic research and research subjects and the need for work to be exposed to critical scrutiny before it is accepted, served to exacerbate feelings of discomfort and betrayal of the attachments formed to the organizations studied.

Another source of discomfort resulting from the professional norms of academia involved the downplaying of one's involvement in the research process. Methodological and writing conventions require that academics deny or at least minimize their reported impact on the phenomenon being studied (Yanow, 2009). The implication is that the organization, the object of study, must be left untainted by one's presence. The data highlights how we both

attempted to fulfil these norms by denigrating our presence; 'I had a little desk in the office' Researcher 2 notes, before actively denying any effect of her presence on the organization or the people she was studying. We both struggled to fulfil these professional norms, and the data shows that we found it impossible to do so. In both cases, the organizations themselves actively embraced and 'put us to use'; refusing to act as the object implied by the norms of academic research methodologies. We were swiftly incorporated and became a part of the work that was being done, although we felt the need to downplay this in subsequent research findings.

A final example of the dissonance experienced between norms of academia and the practice of organizational research came from the lack of clear guidelines on the process. Despite being expected to write up findings in ways that give the impression of control over the process, both researchers had felt a marked insecurity in relation to whether we were doing the right thing at different points in the development of our work. What we saw throughout was the sense of alienation from the practice of organizational ethnography that was engendered by the professional norms of academia. This work-world demanded that we engage in certain situations that were marked by anxiety, while simultaneously forbidding acknowledgement of this struggle.

Organizational ethnography: 'Work-worlds' collide

In summarizing our observations, we see that organizational ethnographers leave their work in the university, and go to work in a second organization. The ethnographer continues to engage in practices and norms of academic work and remains a member of the university. All the while, for the period of research, she must develop proficiency in the new work she takes on, attempt to engage in the life-world of the new organization, and understand the norms of the new profession. The resulting experience gives rise to a series of connections

and clashes along a number of axes, and we find the concepts of organization, work and profession helpful in understanding this complexity.

This leads us to propose that there is something quite specific about the doing of organizational ethnography that involves a collision of worlds and gives rise to a number of tensions as well as linkages. The activity of work itself can form a bridge between worlds, and the researcher can find herself embraced by an organization and a sense of collectivity - although this might not be straight-forward. In some cases, the demands of one 'world of work' require the taming of a second, resulting in experiences of conflict with the specific norms of academia which act against the commonalities experienced through the doing of organizational ethnography itself. However, in our cases, it appears that the world of the new organization actively resisted domestication.

Discussion: Organizational ethnography and reflexivity

Embarking on a new approach to self-reflexivity in the context of two ethnographic studies enabled a number of aspects to emerge that are generally silenced in organizational ethnographic studies. In addition, it yielded interesting insights into the specific nature of this kind of ethnography, which have implications for research into self-reflexivity within organizational ethnography.

Power and authority

The insights presented above are particularly interesting for debates on power dynamics inherent to the research relationship. We saw the complexities involved in viewing these in hierarchical terms; our experiences highlight the counter-intuitive dependence of researcher upon the organization for a sense of identity and belonging, and the ways in which we felt we were used by members of the organization as knowledge conduits. We also saw feelings of

confusion, ambiguity, exclusion and insecurity emerging. At times we felt that we should be 'in charge' of our encounters, at other times we felt out of control. These observations stand in contrast to the power dynamics often assumed within organizational ethnographic research. Instead, our method revealed the ambiguity and fluctuating nature of power dynamics, echoing observations from feminist ethnographers and autoethnography on this point (e.g. Fleur-Lobban, 2008).

In addition, we see that our analysis of the specific nature of organizational ethnography points to some features of the power dynamics at play within academia itself. In this way, it echoes Deetz's (2003) call for studies that highlight political aspects of the organizations in question. Here, the discussion of the tensions inherent to the 'profession' of academia points to the ways in which we as researchers felt pulled in different directions. We felt compelled to write our findings into academic papers that adhered to the standards of the major journals in our field. For us, this demanded the representation of our experiences in an objective, detached manner, in which our own involvement in the research setting remained unspoken, with this experience leading to feelings of conflict and guilt. These sensations point to the continued, albeit implicit, demand for 'realist tales' (Van Maanen, 1988) in organizational ethnography, notwithstanding recent calls for reflexivity. In addition, the analysis illustrates other aspects of power dynamics in academia, and the ways in which these are experienced emotionally (Jago, 2002).

Emotion

As noted earlier, existing approaches to researcher self-reflexivity are lacking due to their tendency to downplay the emotional experience of the ethnographer. In the method we used, however, emotion emerged as key. We saw how the research experience – and discussion of the research experience - was infused with anxiety, a strong sense of attachment, warmth and

belonging to the organization along with a related aversion to discussing this in later writing, and feelings of guilt upon departure. The activity of work was key to this, and we saw the pleasure that attended it. Such aspects tend not to be discussed in literature on organizational ethnographies with some exceptions as noted above (Tracy, 2004; Lindeman, 2010).

Here, it is interesting to draw on ideas from other disciplines in order to enrich our understandings of self-reflexivity (Holland, 1999), namely the fields of anthropology and organization communication. Coffey (1999) argues that attention to emotion is essential for understanding the complex relationships that form between ethnographers' 'selves' and the selves of others they encounter. This is echoed in Miller's (2002) autoethnography concerning emotion management following the deaths of 12 students at her institution. Unable to 'remove' her emotions from the enactment of her job when faced with tragedy, or 'bracket off' her emotional experiences from the construction of her account for an academic audience, she exposes the profound difficulties of engaging with emotion in both domains. However she argues that the centrality of emotion in the workplace should not be construed as a negative force and highlights the value to be found in the emergent work feelings that characterized her experiences after the tragedy. Echoing Coffey (1999:6), rather than representing an 'issue' to be dealt with, she argues that the ethnographer's emotions are an intrinsically valuable part of the research process and its outcomes. Calling for such insights to be incorporated into existing ethnographies of organization, Brannan terms the existing silence surrounding emotion as a tendency towards 'alexithymia' (2011: 322) in organization studies. As with our study, he illustrates how emotional expressions give rise to interesting insights; the pleasure he experienced when promoting trade union involvement during a turbulent time for his colleagues, for example (2011: 333), and the uncertainty surrounding his identity as an academic within this work environment in which people seemed to have an ambivalent attitude toward his profession (2011: 330). When placed at the centre of

ethnographic accounts, a focus on our emotions not only provides lived insights as to the kinds of emotion associated with a workplace and occupation at a given time, it can also extend and challenge the often formulaic ways by which such accounts are written and accepted for publication (Miller, 2002: 596-7).

Intersubjectivity

Finally, we have seen the complex ways in which intersubjective dynamics play out. Shared affects marked the various experiences of being engaged in co-working within these strong collectivities. Researcher 2's strong sense of belonging was so powerful as to affect her future career plans and Researcher 1 found that her work helped her through a difficult time at home; in both cases we were somewhat changed by our experiences.

As Coffey (1999) highlights, we come to such research settings as 'selves-in-process' (1999: 158). Our own identity work is caught up in what we experience in the field, and is inevitably shaped and informed by the others we encounter (see also Lindlof and Taylor, 2002; Wengle, 1988). Despite its appeal for enriching understandings of organizational reflexivity, to date, there have been few examples of scholars incorporating such an orientation. We saw however how the collision between worlds of work gave rise to a complex struggle. Hardy et al. (2001) point to the fact that academic researchers tend to remain within the 'headspace' of the academy, even when ostensibly representing the worldview of those that they researched, and even when deep reflexivity is claimed. Drawing on Collins' (1981) insight that academic work involves compiling and coding until a text is produced, with the author remaining all the time within their own milieu (2001: 554), from our observations, it appears that the collision between worlds of work within organizational ethnography, this 'work upon work', might upset this dynamic. The new organization does not simply acquiesce to this arrangement and therefore the academic is forced out of the

comfortable habitus of the university and into a new world. In this process, we each came to be changed in the ways described above.

By illustrating this dynamic, our paper adds to debates on whether an understanding of relationality and intersubjectivity can inform organizational ethnography (Cunliffe, 2003). Moreover, we add to Cunliffe's recommendations on organizational 'radical-reflexivity' by proposing a methodological approach for studying the dynamics she outlines (2003: 991). Noting that it is difficult to embark upon such reflexive work alone, we show how the presence of an other helps this. Finally, it is important to note that the pair interview interactions and subsequent discussions described here were themselves performative, representing an intersubjective co-creation of experience and memory, rather than a process of 'excavation' in which the gathering of data was separated out from analysis and interpretation (Parker, 2010: 10).

Implications for practice: Reflexive pair interviews

Given the insights presented here: the importance of power, emotion and an intersubjective perspective, we see how intersubjective engagements with organization members should not be considered as an afterthought but rather should be embraced as part of the research project, as they inscribe every aspect of it. As Coffey (1999: 158) notes, these features can be 'epistemologically productive' in deepening our understanding of ethnographic research. With this in mind, we build on our findings to develop an approach for exploring such productivity for future research. Here, we contribute an outline of how this might be done.

First, a collective approach to reflexivity might involve two (or more) 'critical friends' working together. Academic ethnography is often carried out by individuals acting alone. This can be an alienating experience and is not always conducive to reflexive engagements. In contrast, we found that the presence of each other acted as an auxiliary to

facilitating a deeper reflection on the research process and in particular, to our own selves-as-researchers. These practices helped us to understand our interactions with our respective organizations and gain a deeper sense of them. We therefore echo other scholars in calling for a new, collective approach to ethnography (Brannan, 2011; Riach, 2009) such as the one proposed here.

Second, researchers might consider adopting the methodological approach suggested here (see section on Methods and our overview of the interview questions). We propose a semi-structured interviewing style, which allows the interviewee to expand upon their experiences and assert their emotional responses while enabling the focus of the interview to remain somewhere in the region of the research encounter. In this, the interviewer avoids making judgements about what the interviewee's account might 'mean'; instead interviews are discussed by both, either during or after the process. Importantly, the process necessitates an alertness to desires, wishes and feelings, which are used as sensitizing concepts in guiding the interviews and formulating questions.

Third, we recommend that researchers consider the co-construction of resulting research accounts, both with each other and also with participants in the field. The latter approach has been very influential among scholars who are actively concerned with the continuing problem of ethnographic authority. This can include for example 'interactive interviewing' (Ellis, 2007) in order to ensure that peoples' voices are included, along with the involvement of participants in writing reports (Duneier, 1999; Fluehr-Lobban, 2008; Parker et al., 2011).

Finally, a limitation of our study was that we carried out the pair-interviews after we had completed our fieldwork. This was valuable in enabling us to reflect on the subsequent process of writing and publication, leading to the insights presented here. However, for future

work, we recommend that ethnographers use this technique as research progresses: as an on-going practice, rather than an afterthought.

In adopting this approach, a number of considerations must be taken into account. The experience can be physically draining, given the in-depth and emotion-centred nature of this work, and researchers must allow for this. In addition, we found the avoidance of eye contact to be helpful in talking about our experiences, and discussing interviews. When remembering, surfacing and commenting on the emotional dimension of our ethnographic experiences, it was helpful to have a 'container' of thoughts and feelings, but the operation of containment was more successful when the other's physical responses were not 'available' for (unconscious and conscious) interpretation. This observation emerged from using a number of different settings for interviews and subsequent discussions – hence this practical recommendation for the interview setting.

While pair interviewing involves a mutual 'service' being carried out, this is not without consequence to those taking part. There is a responsibility to 'contain' each other's feelings and patiently, carefully work through the affective material emerging from the process. Both participants to this process had known each other professionally for some three years prior to conducting this work. How far it would be possible to engage in this process where no pre-existing relationship exists is questionable given the sensitivities involved.

Where the kind of face-to-face interaction described here is not possible and the ethnographic study is of some duration, autoethnographic 'notes from the field' could act as an alternative, potentially using formats such as Skype conversations with multiple parties, a written or video diary that could be shared via email, restricted access blogs or social media pages: tools that permit and maintain collective engagement at a distance over time and can be saved for further analysis and reference.

Concluding remarks

While some authors have noted that the practice of organizational ethnography must be seen as a distinct endeavour that brings with it certain requirements and norms of behaviour, there are as yet few studies investigating the specific nature of organizational ethnography as a phenomenon in and of itself. This leaves researchers with limited theoretical and analytic tools for understanding self-reflexivity in the research encounter, and their experiences more generally. Moreover, as we argue in this paper, researcher self-reflexivity risks becoming a token part of published accounts of organizational ethnographies, included somewhat mechanistically within the methods section and rarely used to inform the study further.

If ethnographic researchers wish to remain committed to the production of rich accounts in which the embeddedness of researcher within organizational research contexts is given space to emerge, the development of new approaches is needed. This paper contributes by demonstrating the value of a pair-interview method and showing how this can yield a deeper understanding of emotion, intersubjectivity and power dynamics within the ethnographic encounter, highlighting the specificity of organizational ethnography itself. In doing so, we conceptualize organizational ethnography as a collision of worlds that exacerbates the emotionality of the ethnographic encounter and illustrates the refusal of our case study organizations to be domesticated by the norms of academia. The insights developed here have implications for the theory and practice of organizational ethnographic research.

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