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# Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

**Abstract**

This chapter explores reflexivity as a set of mutually interrelated processes and practices involving the reflexive thinking, doing, and evaluating of qualitative research. The chapter provides insights into debates surrounding the theory and practice of reflexivity and argues these are underpinned by the researcher's epistemological assumptions. Such epistemological assumptions influence the researcher's positionality on issues relating to representation and truth, to the researcher's role and power relations with others, and to criteria for evaluating qualitative research. Along with other chapters in Section Three: The Researcher, the chapter embraces the reflexive researcher as an integral aspect of qualitative research and highlights challenges involved in reflexive research practice. We also present practical guidance for critical self-reflexivity, practised as an individual and/or collective endeavour, through a series of thought-provoking questions and examples from our own and others' research in qualitative business and management research. Through the chapter we encourage readers to see the value of reflexivity in its ability to bring epistemological, methodological and criteriological challenges to the forefront as a means of acknowledging how, through our researcher positionality and as qualitative researchers, we influence the research we do and shape the knowledge we produce.

Keywords reflexivity, researcher positionality, self-reflexivity, theory and practice of reflexivity, epistemological assumptions, researcher role, reflexive research, collective reflexivity, qualitative research challenges

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## Chapter 23: Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

### Introduction

Reflexivity is considered an integral aspect of qualitative research. It involves us, as researchers, understanding how processes of doing research shape its outcomes (Hardy et al., 2001), reflecting upon the ways in which we carry out our empirical research projects, and explaining to an audience how we move through research manufacturing processes to certain conclusions. Reflection and reflexivity are sometimes used synonymously but Alvesson and Skőldberg (2009: 8) distinguish between them, conceiving 'reflexive empirical research ... as a particular, specified version of reflective research, involving reflection on several levels or directed at several themes'. Hibbert et al. (2010: 48) go further and understand reflexivity as related to, but 'qualitatively different from', reflection. For them, whilst reflection might enable researchers to observe research practice, as it might be reflected back to them from a mirror image, reflexivity involves 'exposing or questioning our ways of doing' (Hibbert et al., 2010: 48). Therefore, reflexivity has a 'self-referential characteristic of "bending-back" some thought upon the self, such that it takes the form of *subject-object-subject*' (Archer, 2009: 2) and also a recursive dimension where, 'through questioning the bases of our interpretations, reflexivity brings about change in the process of reflection' (Hibbert et al., 2010: 48). For us, therefore, reflexivity is always a self-monitoring of, and a self-responding to, our thoughts, feelings and actions as we engage in research projects.

In the following chapter we outline understandings of reflexivity, as practices of appreciating our own researcher positionality in relation to questions about; what kind

of knowledge is possible – our epistemology; the 'doing' of research and our relations with research participants and others and; evaluating qualitative management research. We acknowledge reflexivity as ambiguous and complex and consider how processes of reflexivity address researcher positionality, identity and power in research. We briefly offer practical examples of 'doing' reflexivity in management research to highlight how researchers might consider processes of reflexivity in their own qualitative management research and discuss collective reflexivity, involving research co-producers and users, as areas for future development in reflexive practice. We conclude by summarizing our discussions in the chapter and offering our 'authorial identity' (Alvesson et al., 2008: 483) reflections on the chapter we have produced.

## Reflexivity: different understandings, different practices

Reflexivity is variously conceived and has different implications for qualitative research practice and outcomes, dependent on the underlying ontological and epistemological orientations of the researcher (Day, 2012; Johnson and Duberley, 2000). For instance, in the context of discussing shifts from modern to postmodern understandings of doing qualitative research, Pillow (2003: 180) states that 'reflexivity as a methodological practice is dependent on a subject or subjects to reflect on and how the subject is thought is key then to how reflexivity is practiced'. For example, a researcher coming from a modernist understanding of self as singular and knowable will position the purposes and practices of reflexivity quite differently to someone with a postmodern understanding of self as multiple and unknowable (Pillow, 2003). For instance, a researcher with a modernist approach might argue that self-reflexive practices enable

the researcher to ‘truly’ know her/his self and, thus, to provide a ‘true’ account of how her/his subjectivity impacted the research process, whereas a postmodernist researcher might acknowledge the challenges of engaging in self-reflexive practices and qualify self-knowledge as partial and any research process account as limited (Pillow, 2003).

Notwithstanding its different understandings and practices, reflexivity is generally understood as giving ‘attention to the complex relationship between processes of knowledge production and the various contexts of such processes, as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer’ (Alvesson and Skőldberg, 2009: 8). Alvesson and Skőldberg (1990: 9) identify two basic characteristics of what they call ‘reflective mode’ empirical research: careful interpretation and reflection. Because empirical data are ‘the *results of interpretation’*, we need to pay attention to our theoretical assumptions, pre-understandings and the importance of language (Alvesson and Skőldberg, 2009: 9). Paying attention also involves a process of reflection – the ‘*interpretation of interpretation’* – involving critical self-exploration not only of how empirical data have been interpreted (and constructed) but also systematic reflection on several different levels, including the researcher, the research community and, more broadly, social, cultural, intellectual and linguistic traditions (Alvesson and Skőldberg, 2009: 9, emphasis in original). As qualitative researchers ‘doing reflexivity’, we aim to ‘bend-back’ on (Archer, 2009) and turn ‘inwards’ towards (Alvesson and Skőldberg, 2009: 9) ourselves and to think seriously about our research practices.

To help us in that endeavour, we draw on the view of reflexivity as being about questioning (Cunliffe, 2011) three aspects of research practice (Day, 2012). First,

reflexivity involves questioning our understanding of reality and the nature of knowledge and how alternative paradigms and perspectives can open up new ways of thinking about phenomena (Alvesson et al., 2008). Second, it is about questioning our relationships with the research context, the research subjects/participants and the research data. Third, reflexivity involves questioning what is considered 'valid' and valuable research. Respectively, these questions relate to the 'thinking', 'doing', and 'evaluating' of qualitative research (Day, 2012). In structuring the chapter around these three aspects, which we view as 'interconnected and mutually related' (Haynes, 2012: 85), we present and discuss questions posed by others in their writing on reflexivity and illustrate some of the practices, engaged in by ourselves and other scholars, in 'doing reflexivity'. The questions, which we discuss at appropriate points in the chapter, are summarized in the appendix.

## The reflexive 'thinking' of qualitative research

A way of understanding reflexivity relates to questions about what kind of knowledge is possible – our epistemology - or what Day (2012) refers to as the 'thinking' of qualitative methodology. In this discussion, we consider questions about our epistemological position and assumptions, and how these relate to questions of representation and truth.

### *Questions about our epistemological position and assumptions*

Johnson and Duberley (2000) argue that we need to ensure we do research consistent with our epistemological positions and maintaining such consistency 'raises issues

about reflexivity' (p. 177), for instance in being aware and critical of the origins, assumptions and implications of such positions. This form of reflexivity 'entails the researcher attempting to think about their own thinking' and how we practise this form depends on our a priori philosophical assumptions (Johnson and Duberley, 2000: 178). Similarly, Cunliffe (2011: 415) notes that thinking about the following two questions influences how we choose to engage with reflexivity:

- What are my assumptions about the nature of reality and who we are as humans?
- What do I see as the nature of knowledge?

Epistemological reflexivity appreciates how the phenomena we study are seen through our ontological and epistemological lens and thus acknowledges our assumptions - about the world and about knowledge - and their implications for the research and its findings. Although Johnson and Duberley (2003) discuss how researchers with realist ontological and objectivist epistemological positions engage in what they call methodological reflexivity, we focus, in this chapter, on qualitative research that conceptualizes social reality as being constructed. Indeed, the concept and practice of reflexivity in qualitative research can be traced back, in part, to social constructionist assumptions of social reality (Cunliffe, 2011) and to the 'linguistic turn', which Holland (1999: 466) sees as part of the 'reflexive turn', in social science research.

*Questions about representation and truth*

Acknowledging that social reality is constructed and appreciating the way in which language frames our world view, and paradoxically how it enables and inhibits understanding, is a key element in what is sometimes referred to as 'the crisis of representation' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 3) or a 'crisis of truth' (Cunliffe, 2003: 983) from which reflexivity developed. Cunliffe (2003: 983) identifies 'a crisis of representation, an emphasis on the constitutive nature of language, and a call for reflexive approaches to research' as themes which emerged from challenges to mainstream social science research and its absolute truth, objective view of the world. Reflexivity 'unsettles' representation (Cunliffe, 2003: 985) by questioning the belief that 'competent observers could, with objectivity, clarity, and precision report on their own observations of the social world, including the experiences of others' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 11). Hardy et al. (2001) trace the history of reflexivity from the 1950s-1970s, as calls for researchers, undertaking cultural anthropological and sociological studies, to declare and remove biases which were assumed, from an objectivist viewpoint, to distort the 'truth'. As it was believed that a researcher's interests, values and theoretical presuppositions could not be eradicated from their work, reflexivity became focused upon rendering biases visible through personal disclosure, so that audiences could take them into account (Hardy et al., 2001).

Scholars working from poststructuralist and postmodernist positions further developed reflexive approaches (Cunliffe, 2003; Hardy et al., 2001) by undermining assumptions that research subjects existed in any 'real' sense and that researchers could objectively report on their experiences (Hardy et al., 2001: 535). As well as accepting that observations are 'socially situated' and constructed and that accounts of experiences are

partial (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 12), scholars acknowledged that 'interpretation-free, theory-neutral facts do not, in principle, exist' (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009: 1). Rivera and Tracy's (2014) paper on 'Embodying Emotional Dirty Work: A messy text of patrolling the border' is an incredibly powerful example of this reflexivity. We have included an extract which illustrates how the researchers acknowledge their observations as socially situated, constructed and partial:

> What does dirty work feel like?
> What does researching dirty work - doing "dirty research" - feel like?
>
> In this essay, we ask and answer these research questions via a qualitative study and writing a "messy text" (Marcus, 1994) of U.S. Border Patrol agents. Messy texts acknowledge that writing is not a mirror but a way to frame the scene. Messy texts are open-ended, fractured, and emotional. They centralize writers' experiences as pivotal to the knowledge produced.
>
> As illustrated within, dirty work feels confusing, lonely, and courageous. It feels ambivalent, constrained by regulations and job descriptions that do not always seem to make sense given contradictory circumstances, contexts, and communities. And, as a researcher alongside dirty workers, it feels nerve-wracking to watch something that is usually hidden from public view. Of course, this is just the shorthand. Feelings of dirty work do not come in a neat bulleted list, but rather through the rich and embodied narratives of the scene. (Rivera and Tracy, 2014: 202)

In interpreting and writing qualitative reports of such observations, accounts and other qualitative data, we are always '*re-presenting'* (Cousin, 2010: 10, emphasis in original) our own and others' experiences and interpreting these 'from a particular stance and an available language' (Cousin, 2010: 10). Day (2012: 61-2) poses questions about representation and truth:

- In our representations of the social world, what are our underlying assumptions about the production of knowledge – how do we know, and who can claim to

know? ... who can make claims to “know” and represent others using qualitative approaches?

When social reality is conceptualized as constructed, reflexivity acknowledges the situated nature of knowledge (Alvesson et al., 2008). The knowledges we generate, as knowledge producers, are ‘limited, specific and partial’ (Rose, 1997: 306), and shaped by our particular interests and the specific circumstances in which we conduct the research. Again, Rivera and Tracy’s (2014) paper is a powerful example which acknowledges the ‘writers’ experiences as pivotal to the knowledge produced’ (p. 202). To enable us to engage in this form of reflexivity whereby we confront the ‘taken-for-granted assumptions which traditionally inform our knowledge claims’ (Johnson and Duberley, 2003: 1294), Cassell et al. (2005) offer a series of questions about how the question we develop to ‘define’ our research influences the kinds of insights we might generate and the ‘truth claims’ we make.

- How has the research question defined and limited what can be ‘found’?
- What findings/insights do I hope to generate from this question?
- On what basis will these findings/insights contribute to ‘knowledge’, i.e. what kinds of knowledges am I producing?
- How will the resultant knowledges function to shape the world, i.e. what ‘truth claims’ will I make? (Cassell et al., 2005)

Alvesson and Skőldberg (2009: 9) refer to ‘reflective’ (rather than reflexive) mode research and suggest that, in the context of empirical research, it involves taking ‘a

sceptical approach to what appear at a superficial glance as unproblematic replicas of the way reality functions', while simultaneously maintaining the belief that the interpretation of well thought-out excerpts from this reality can provide a basis for knowledge generation which 'opens up rather than closes, and furnishes opportunities for understanding rather than establishing 'truths''. Thus, making known our thinking, for instance on the nature of the truth claims we are making, enables us to 'situate knowledge reflexively' (Rose, 1997: 315). Indeed, Rose (1997) proposes that the 'crucial goal' of 'situating academic knowledge is to produce non-overgeneralizing knowledges that learn from other kinds of knowledges' (Rose, 1997: 315). An example of this comes from Sharon's (2001) PhD thesis into women academics' experiences in UK business schools. Engaging in reflexivity on her position as a researcher and woman academic when researching her own business school she wrote reflexive accounts of her own experiences. This reflexive process enabled Sharon to go beyond a surface analysis of the women academics' accounts which could have been overgeneralized to how women undermined other women (e.g. women academics being perceived as Queen Bees by other women). By identifying and exploring the contradictions and tensions in the women academics' accounts and by contrasting and comparing others' experiences with her own local knowledges, Sharon was able to move theoretically to develop 'female misogyny'. She situated this knowledge within the context of a specific gendered organisation where: promotion for women was scarce; where women were constructed as unambitious Mothers; where competition between women was hidden and; where women's negative relations with each other were used as a means of reinforcing the gendered hierarchy. Sharon included a chapter entitled 'My Voice' in the thesis and began the chapter with one of her own reflexive accounts. We have

included this account and the introduction section to the chapter to illustrate Sharon's process of reflexivity:

> *"My own experience of female misogyny is as a result of being perceived as simultaneously 'a bit on the side' of an academic man and also as 'too ambitious' as I chose to join the research culture of the Business School. Both academic men and women have told me, either as an attack or as a warning, that women in the Business School can be 'too ambitious'."*
>
> **8. Introduction**
>
> The aim of this Chapter is to contribute original theory to the existing body of knowledge and therefore I begin by highlighting the specific areas where this has been achieved, before moving to discuss them in more detail. Within this Chapter I introduce a metaphor to further interpret the narrative texts of women academics and to identify the discourses which play a part in the social constructions of their identity and place in the Business School. This allows the alternative voices of academic women participants to be heard and I amplify the conflicting voices and perceptions as they emerge. I then move to add my own voice to the story, thus locating myself within the thesis (Mavin, 2001:214).

Multi-perspective reflexivity practices, in which 'researchers use tensions among different perspectives to expose different assumptions and open up new ways of thinking' (Alvesson et al., 2008: 483), provide a means of understanding and acknowledging the influence of our theoretical perspectives on knowledge production. Multi-perspective reflexivity questions encourage us to consider:

- What are the different ways in which a phenomenon can be understood? How do they produce different knowledge(s)? (Alvesson et al., 2008: 487)
- How could the research question be investigated differently, e.g. from a different epistemological perspective? What different insights may be made by taking a different epistemological perspective? (Cassell et al., 2005)

Haynes (2012) advises that, as researchers, 'we should try to be aware of how our ontological, social and political positioning affects the work that we do by informing the choices we make about research topics, questions, approaches, methodologies and outcomes' (p. 78). She suggests practical strategies for achieving this, for instance, by writing down any theoretical assumptions and presuppositions we have about the subject of our research, revisiting these throughout the research process, and noting how these may have shifted (Haynes, 2012: 79). Sandra did this in her doctoral research project and presented diagrammatically the shifts in her understandings of different theoretical perspectives, and their implications for the framing of the research aim and focus, as a series of footsteps moving from one epistemological positioning to another (Corlett, 2009). When introducing the figure showing Sandra's movements between and shifts in ontological and epistemological positionings, she wrote:

> When considering approaches to research, Crotty (1998, p.216) proposes that "[r]ather than selecting established paradigms to follow, we [use] established paradigms to delineate and illustrate our own". Crotty's (1998) use of the word 'delineate' suggests a clearer demarcation between established paradigms than my own understandings of them would suggest. The notion of 'following' a paradigm implies movement and I have experienced this through the shifts in my understandings of different perspectives and the strength with which I have asserted particular ontological and epistemological commitments of this research over the course of the study. (Corlett, 2009: 80)

In the following section in the thesis, Sandra outlined 'the rationale for incorporating and rejecting aspects of different epistemological commitments' (Corlett, 2009: 81). For example, Sandra explained how she moved from claiming a social constructivist approach, in the early stages of the PhD project, towards social constructionism to give further attention to relational and contextual processes (of identity construction). She also explained that, whilst she did not share the research goals of critical poststructuralists in 'explor[ing] the power effect of discourses on self-identity or as a

platform for political or social activism', she subsequently considered naive her view of identity construction as a power-neutral process. Sandra's awareness of the shifts in her epistemological and political commitments enabled her to clarify the research aim of the thesis and its positioning which she described, in the section conclusion, as follows:

> ... the term and positioning of this research as relational social constructionist are employed to distinguish it from social constructivist, social constructionist and poststructuralist approaches. Whilst this research approach has elements in common with [these approaches], it diverges away from [them] in important respects relating to its, and my own, "ontological commitments, intellectual priorities and theoretical preoccupations" (Chia, 1995, p.579). (Corlett, 2009: 87)

To summarize this part of the chapter, we have discussed debates surrounding reflexivity which focus on the nature of reality and knowledge, and considered questions about our epistemological position and assumptions, including about representation and truth. Reflexive practice involves 'thinking' about and acknowledging how our own theoretical perspectives are interwoven with linguistic and other elements, such as our political agendas and social relations, in ways that shape the knowledge production process (Alvesson et al., 2008; Alvesson and Skőldberg, 2009; Day, 2012). We give more attention to the social and political elements of reflexive practice in the next part, related to the 'doing' of qualitative research, where we pose and consider a series of methodological questions.

## The reflexive 'doing' of qualitative research: methodological questions of researcher positionality

If we see reflexivity as a process of opening ourselves up to scrutiny (Cunliffe, 2003) then this involves questioning the way we do our research (Cunliffe, 2011) and

‘understanding how the process of doing research shapes its outcomes’ (Hardy et al., 2001: 533). Therefore, as researchers, we need to appraise critically our own research methods and engage in ‘methodological reflexivity’ (Johnson and Duberley, 2003; Cassell et al., 2005). This form of reflexivity involves being reflexive about our role and relationships with the research context, research participants, and research data, and about the resulting reports we produce. In other words, our reflexive practice and the reflexive texts we write ‘in some way take into account their own manufacturing conditions’ (Pels, 2000: 6). In our discussion, we explore methodological issues generated by the ‘doing’ of qualitative research and consider questions relating to methodological and method choices and about the researcher’s motivations, role, positionality, identity, power, and voice.

*Methodological reflexivity: methodological and method choices*

Methodological reflexivity accepts that the researcher makes methodological and method choices, and acknowledges that research methods, as used by researchers, are not neutral tools – each have ‘philosophical baggage’ (Gill and Johnson, 2010: 6). Therefore, continuing the theme we introduced in the reflexive ‘thinking’ part of qualitative research, we need to be aware of how our philosophical commitments influence our methodological choices (Gill and Johnson, 2010). Reflexive researchers make explicit this baggage to an audience and provide a convincing account of the knowledge ‘manufacturing conditions’ (Pels, 2000). Questions relating to methodological reflexivity include:

- What research method/s is/are used? (James and Vinnicombe, 2002; Cunliffe, 2011)
- What is the purpose of the methods? (Cassell et al., 2005)
- What is the impact of the research method(s) on the research? (Johnson and Duberley, 2003)
- What constitutes 'data'? How do I interpret the 'data'? (Cunliffe, 2011)
- What data do I 'collect'? How do I collect and analyze the data? How do I manage 'objectivity' in the data analysis? (James and Vinnicombe, 2002)
- What data have I chosen to include and to leave out in my presentation of findings/interpretations?

Our philosophical assumptions influence our understandings of what counts as data, and how data are 'collected', interpreted and presented (James and Vinnicombe, 2002). Reflexive practice acknowledges that data are produced, not collected, and that the research product is fundamentally related to the process of production (May, 2002). The researcher's personal involvement in data production need not be constructed as bad practice or bias but as a source of data in its own right (James and Vinnicombe, 2002). Indeed, Gabriel (2015: 334) discusses how the reflexive researcher cannot separate the empirical material from the self. Harding (1987), in considering feminist research processes, goes further to argue that 'the beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of the research. *This* evidence too must be open to critical scrutiny no less than what is traditionally defined as relevant evidence' (p. 9, emphasis in original). She proposes that we increase research objectivity by acknowledging 'this "subjective" element'

(Harding, 1987: 9). This form of reflexivity, exploring the researcher's relationship with the object of research (Harding, 1987), includes becoming conscious of our personal motivations and interests (Cunliffe, 2011; James and Vinnicombe, 2002; Haynes, 2012). Again Sharon's (2001) reflexive process in her PhD thesis is useful to illustrate this form of reflexivity. Sharon was 'expected' to complete a positivist approach to the research and did so via a survey to men and women academics on their experiences of careers in business schools. A change to the supervision team enabled her to move to a feminist standpoint and to focus on the social construction of women academics' experiences. Her motivations were to give voice to women academics, identify the barriers to academic careers and to surface the gendered nature of the cultures of UK business schools in the late 1990s. However one of the theoretical contributions, female misogyny, significantly challenged her motivations — that women could be 'blamed' for constraining other women's careers was not what she wanted to find. A turning inwards to engage in self-reflexivity led Sharon to rethink the complexity in the women's accounts and her own experiences. She included the following extract in her thesis:

> As a researcher I am aware that I am always engaged in living, telling, reliving and retelling my own stories. As an introduction to the analysis of the culture of the Business School and the identities and places of academic women within this culture, there are a number of issues to consider. Firstly, I am aware that at times I interpret the perceptions of women academics as a homogenous group, underpinned by the similarities in their narratives discussed in Chapter seven. Secondly, there are places within the analysis where the women give diverse perceptions of their experiences and identities within the Business School and these give rise to a number of contradictions in the analysis, which I highlight as they emerge. Thirdly, I am aware of the processes of categorisation the academic women go through in their stories and my own comments on this process come later in this Chapter. (Mavin 2001, Chapter 8:220).

*Self-reflexivity: questions about researcher motivations*

The subject-object-subject bending-back on the self (Archer, 2009), in processes of 'self-reflexivity' (Cunliffe, 2011) or 'personal reflexivity' (Willig, 2001), involves reflecting how our research projects are shaped by our interests, values, experiences, and political commitments (Willig, 2001). Researchers have posed self-reflexivity questions, relating to the chosen research topic and personal motivations and interests for studying it, as:

- Why am I undertaking the research topic I have selected? What are my personal motivations? What are my personal and political reasons for undertaking my research? What personal experiences do I have related to my research topic? (James and Vinnicombe, 2002: 97)
- What (or who) has prompted the research and why? How is the research shaped by my own personal interest and, if applicable, the interests of a sponsoring organization? Has this influenced the framing of the research question and the context in which the research is carried out? (James and Vinnicombe, 2002: 97)
- What is the motivation for undertaking this research? How am I connected to the research, theoretically, experientially, emotionally? And what effect will this have on my approach? (Haynes, 2012: 78)

Self-reflexivity presupposes that, in undertaking research projects and writing research accounts, we are disclosing something about ourselves and writing a piece of our autobiography (Pels, 2000) and that, as researchers, what we do, say and write 'defines and redefines both ourselves and the texts we produce' (Gabriel, 2015: 334). Therefore, qualitative researchers are encouraged to present honest, self-searching but not

indulgent accounts, because the idea of (re-)defining ourselves should not divert all attention away from the results of the research process itself (May, 2002). Haynes (2012) explains how her doctoral study was motivated both by particular theoretical interests and a desire to better understand herself. Kathryn combined her theoretical interests in identity, motherhood, and accounting, and her research project's aim to examine the identity politics of women accountants through their interrelations with experiences of motherhood, with 'some much more personal aims [of wanting] to try to understand, as part of a process of self-discovery, how I came to be myself, as a woman, mother, accountant and academic' (2012:78). Although reflexive research does not need to be driven by such explicit personal aims, it is important 'to acknowledge and articulate the varied motivations, theoretical and/or personal, underpinning any research, as these are likely to shape the way the research is conceived, carried out, interpreted and produced' (Haynes, 2012: 79). Sandra provides a further example of self-reflexivity in her doctoral thesis (Corlett, 2009) where she: acknowledges her interest and its possible effects on the phenomenon being studied; articulates her position in relation to the research topic; writes herself into the thesis and uses 'I' in her writing; and includes a final (reflections) chapter which considers, alongside theoretical contributions, the effects of the research on herself. For example, in a section in the thesis Introduction, entitled 'My position in relation to the subject', Sandra introduced her interest in the subject of self-identity and considered how her personal experiences may have impacted on the study's focus, its central argument and the key theories it drew on'. For instance, Sandra gave an example of tracing back her initial interest in the field of identity to the early stages of her professional experiences some twenty-five years previously, even though 'at that time, I would not have used the term 'identity' in trying to make sense of

my experiences' (p. 12). In addition to acknowledging when her interests in the topic of self-identity may have been initiated, Sandra acknowledged that, through the PhD study and its processes of research, 'I am both the researcher and 'the researched', as I try to make sense of reconstruct my self-identity to incorporate this new 'role' [as a 'researcher']' (p. 14). As one further aspect of self-reflexivity in the same section of the thesis, Sandra offered explanations for why she may have used particular theories of self-identity or particular authors' works, and focussed the study on the interrelations of vulnerability and identity work. For example, she wrote:

> I do not want to suggest that I only actively engage in identity work when I change roles, or that it is the job title or 'label' which causes me to reframe my self-identity. However, transitions of different types do seem to feature strongly in my narrative. ... Also I do tend to 'position' myself and draw on "external discursive 'social-identities'" (Watson, 2008, p.121) in making sense of who I am. It is probably also for this reason that I have been drawn, in this study, towards Harré and van Langenhove's (1999) positioning theory.
>
> Other academic texts have been important to me in making sense of my own identity work and identity construction processes, and in the design of this research study. At the start of my PhD study, I was influenced by Watson and Harris (1999). I was particularly drawn to the questions for managers raised in their study including the "ways in which moving into managerial work have involved battles about their sense of identity and how they see themselves" and the "discrepancies between the demands of the role of manager, the expectations this places on them and some sense of their 'real' self" (Watson and Harris, 1999, p.53). I now appreciate that I was drawn to this particular excerpt as it resonated so much with my own experiences of becoming. I was also struck by the idea of "battles" about self. Less consciously, this may have been the trigger for the focus within this study on vulnerability. (Corlett, 2009: 14)

Therefore subjecting the researcher's positionality to critical scrutiny is important in understanding the conditions of knowledge production. We turn now to consider further aspects of what Macbeth (2001: 35) refers to as 'positional reflexivity', for instance relating to identity and power.

*Self-reflexivity: questions about the researcher's role, identity, and power relations with others*

Macbeth's (2001) notion of 'positional reflexivity' (p. 35) encourages us to engage in self-referential analysis to understand how biography, place and the positioning of self and other shape the research process. Our earlier discussion about self-reflexivity involving questions about a researcher's motivations and interests recognizes that research is 'as much the researcher's story as it is the story of organizational participants' (Cunliffe, 2011: 415). Knowing the researcher's place makes the research understandable (Harding, 1987) and, therefore, researchers are encouraged to 'seek ways of demonstrating to their audiences their historical and geographic situatedness, their personal investments in the research, [and the] various biases they bring to the work' (Gergen and Gergen, 2000: 1027). Furthermore, knowing the researcher's positioning in relation to others gives context to the researcher's voice, to their perception of the research problem or dilemma, and enables the audiences' understanding of the findings (Day, 2012). Positional reflexivity, therefore, as a further form of self-reflexivity encourages us to recognize ourselves as an integral part of the research project (Alvesson et al, 2009). Positional reflexivity can be enabled by considering questions such as:

- What is my (expected) role as the researcher? (Cassell et al., 2005; James and Vinnicombe, 2002)
- What effects does my role have on how the research is conducted? (Cassell et al., 2005)
- What are my relationships with research subjects/participants? (Cunliffe, 2011)

Reflexive research practice considers the self as a ‘research tool’ (Cousin, 2010; Day, 2012) or ‘research instrument’ (Bourke, 2014; Haynes, 2011; Munkejord, 2009). Therefore, because we are ‘intimately connected to the methods we deploy’ (Cousin, 2010: 10) and to the roles we play (Day, 2012), self-reflexivity involves monitoring how ‘the deployment of particular research protocols and associated field roles’ generate behavioural responses, for the researcher, which impact upon the social settings under investigation (Johnson and Duberley, 2003: 1285). ‘Reflexive research methodologies ... acknowledge the ways in which the researcher’s self and subjectivity mutually and continually affect both the research process and research outcomes’ (Haynes, 2011: 134). Some research methodologies make explicit use of the researcher’s subjectivity. See, for example, Haynes’ (2011) account of the methodological, epistemological and ontological ‘tensions in ‘(re)presenting the self in reflexive autoethnographical research’ (p. 134), and Munkejord’s (2009) ‘insider’ account of collecting field data. Both researchers explore, amongst other aspects, how emotions emerge continuously and influence the research process, leading Munkejord to propose that, in the practice of reflexivity, emotions have tended to be overlooked. Munkejord explains and illustrates how reflexivity can be used, for instance, as a way of understanding the centrality of researcher emotions to interactions with research participants ‘in the field’ (p. 156). He discusses how awareness of his own emotions, and particularly his feelings of discomfort in presenting himself as a passive observer in the research setting, led to a ‘re-evaluation of my ‘“role” within the department’ and a change in his research strategy whereby he ‘decided to approach the respondents more actively’ (p. 157). Munkejord (2009: 157) concludes ‘becoming adaptive in the research

process is only possible at the point when emotions enter one's awareness as objects for thought connected to the eliciting situation.'

Day (2012) outlines three ways of understanding the self as a research tool: 1) one's role performance and the dynamic enactment of multiple and potentially conflicting roles; 2) one's multiple, co-constructed identities, prompting reflection on how, for instance, race/gender/class emerge and are made meaningful through research relationships; 3) the researcher's positionality within particular theoretical perspectives and methodological practices. For instance, Day (2012) discusses how the researcher may present the self (Goffman, 1959) in particular ways to particular audiences for particular purposes in the field. She exemplifies her discussion with Srivastava's (2006) performance, involving emotional labour, of dynamic, multiple and sometimes conflicting field roles. This view of 'the self as a meaningful research tool that shifts back and forth between multiple, and sometimes conflicting, role performances' (Day, 2012: 71) requires researchers to be reflexive about their fieldwork roles and identities.

*Identity*

Again, the researcher's epistemological position and assumptions influence understandings of researcher field roles, and the related concept of identities. For instance, when identity is viewed as an ongoing relational process, reflexive practice makes explicit how the researcher's (and the research participants') identities are (re)formed in the doing of research, within the overall research process (Corlett, 2009; Haynes, 2011) and in more specific research situations, such as interviews (Alvesson, 2003; Bryman and Cassell, 2006; Corlett, 2012). Such a relational and dynamic

perspective on identity might be reflected in a question such as "how are race/gender/class *made meaningful* in this relationship?"' (Day, 2012: 72, emphasis in original) as compared with asking, from an entitative and fixed perspective on identity, '"what impact did the researcher's race/gender/class have on the research relationship?"' (Day, 2012: 72). Cousin (2010) draws on Srivastava's (2006) work to argue that understanding identities of researcher and researched as dynamic, multiple and 'always in flux' (Cousin, 2010: 17) would deter a researcher from claiming a 'master status' positioning (p. 13), for example of working-class, white or black, which some researchers emphasize. In other words, the researcher's positionality in relation to the researched is an on-going point of debate, underpinned by researchers' different epistemological assumptions, and reflected in questions, for example, about how or indeed whether a researcher from a different class (or other social identity) can represent research participants' experiences. An example comes from Sharon's work with Gina Grandy who, as academics in business schools, comment on their reflexive journey in doing research with exotic dancers: 'What would colleagues and students think? Does this research have value to organization studies, business and management or is it just "quirky research"? How does this research threaten professional identities?' (Mavin and Grandy, 2013: 239). In the same paper Gina talks reflexively of her preparations for the data collection, highlighting her positionality in relation to the researched and the research context:

> In preparing for each period of data collection the second author was conscious of the potential power dynamics of clean and dirty and presented herself to exotic dancers as a student researcher rather than a member of the 'intellectual academic elite'. Further, in exploring sex work as a site of study in organization studies this research became very much her own identity project. She struggled with what it means to be a 'woman' and confronted her (dis)comfort with her own sexuality and bodily appearance. During data collection, she was often conscious as a woman of feeling less attractive than the women participants.

> In addition, as a heterosexual woman she reflected on how others, that is, dancers, customers and colleagues, perceived her sexuality because of the nature of the research (Mavin and Grandy, 2013: 238).

Srivastava's (2006) contribution to the debate is to argue for acknowledgement of '*the shades of grey*, and the socio-historical positioning' (p. 213, emphasis in the original) of field identities. She illustrates how identity binaries (in her case, female/male, Eastern/Western, old/young, Hindi-speaking/English speaking etc) were drawn upon by herself and her research participants in achieving *temporary shared positionalities* and in mediating researcher-participant power relations (Srivastava, 2006: 211, emphasis in original). This understanding of field identities as 'continually mediated constructs' (Srivastava, 2006: 214) might lead us to acknowledge research encounters with participants as a 'negotiation of a shared space' (Cousin, 2010: 17). Bourke (2014) conceives research as a shared space, shaped by both researcher and participants. He explains how he operationalizes positional reflexivity through exploring 'intertwined' questions such as 'What role did my positionality as a White man studying issues of race in higher education play? How did I use my positionality in different spaces? Did my positionality influence the interactions I had with student participants?' (Bourke, 2014: 2). Milner (2007) presents a framework designed to raise consciousness of the researchers' own and others' racialized positionality and cultural ways of knowing. The framework, which he proposes is transferable from its context in education research to other disciplines, includes 'researching the self' questions designed to enable the researcher to engage in critical (race and cultural) self-reflection (Milner, 2007: 395). The 'researching the self in relation to others' questions encourage us to 'acknowledge the multiple roles, identities and positions that researchers and research participants bring to the research process' (Milner, 2007: 395). Through positional reflexivity,

qualitative researchers can consider the impact of positionality, identity and power in producing knowledge. We now turn to consider in more detail how positional reflexivity, as a form of self-reflexivity, acknowledges the politics of the 'doing' of qualitative methodology (Day, 2012).

*Power*

The different ways in which qualitative researchers conceptualize power have implications for their reflexive practices (Day, 2012). For instance, Day (2012) critiques power conceived as a possession which shifts between the researcher and the researched, and associated reflexive practices which question who holds more or less power at any given point in time and/or which consider how participants might be empowered. Such assumptions fail to contextualize research relationship power imbalances beyond the researcher-researched interaction in the immediate research setting, or to engage in reflexive analysis of broader relations of power (Day, 2012). A broader contextual understanding of power in the research relationship can be conceptualized by taking a Foucauldian approach whereby 'power is not something that is intrinsically held by persons; it is the effect of discursive struggles over the realm of meaning and production of knowledge ... [and] is distributed throughout social relationships' (Day, 2012: 67). Such a relational understanding of power enables consideration of the ways in which researchers and research participants are 'variously located within relations of power' (Day, 2012: 67). Orr and Bennett (2009) claim that they became 'more attuned' (p.90) to the political dynamics underpinning their academic-practitioner research project, by engaging in 'an exercise in self-reflexivity' (p.88) using Cunliffe's (2003) notion of radical reflexivity. They reflected upon and

examined their research endeavours by, amongst other reflexives practices, exploring how their co-production of research 'involves the active interweaving and collision of different participant stories' and by 'surfacing and questioning' their relationships, as authors and co-producers, and with the research participants (Orr and Bennett, 2009: 88). For instance, they explain how, in response to Bennett's 'insider' status, Orr 'consciously and deliberately invoked his outsider status – as a political resource' (Orr and Bennett, 2009: 97) – in eliciting participant accounts. [For further reflexive practice examples of, and debate about, insider/outsider roles see, amongst others, Day (2012), Srivastava (2006) and Bourke (2014)].

Although sharing epistemological assumptions of research as a process of constitutive negotiation, Rose (1997) might take exception to Orr and Bennett's (2009: 87) claim to 'make *transparent* the political processes that underpin our research' (our italics) as she suggests that such 'transparent reflexivity' (p. 305) is impossible to achieve. Cousin (2010) makes a similar point when critiquing the notion of 'positional reflexivity' and its suggestion, if unproblematized, that a researcher's privileged position/standpoint (e.g. feminist) comes with 'a special pair of glasses' (p. 11). By drawing on Butler's (1990) Foucauldian account of performativity, Rose (1997: 311) challenges assumptions, about the researcher's agency as conscious and knowable and about the 'context' or structure of power as visible and knowable, to argue for the impossibility of the search for positionality through transparent reflexivity. Rose's (1997) argument is founded on the contradiction of understanding differences between the researcher and the researched as distances (for example, as higher or lower, central or marginal, insider or outsider) in a 'landscape of power' (p. 312). Rather than the 'all-seeing' researcher

(Rose, 1997: 316) attempting to ‘map’ difference as distance between distinctly separate and conscious agents in a visible landscape of power, reflexivity becomes a process of ‘tracing’ how difference is constructed through mutually constitutive social relations between the researcher and the researched (pp. 313-4). From this relational understanding of position (Rose, 1997) and of research (Cunliffe, 2003, 2011; Hosking and Pluut, 2010; Rose, 1997), reflexivity acknowledges the ‘political dynamics’ of our research endeavours (Orr and Bennett, 2009: 87) and the ‘inherently political nature’ of our relationships with research participants (Cunliffe, 2011: 414), through which positionalities, identities and knowledges emerge. In itself, reflexivity is not a means of overcoming issues of power. However engaging with reflexivity, provoked by the following questions, may enable us ‘to surface issues about the politics of knowledge production and fieldwork’ (Orr and Bennett, 2009: 86).

- What role do positionality, identity, and power play in the process of knowledge production? (Day, 2012)
- What is my power relationship with the people I am researching? (Cousin, 2010)
- Am I researching *with* or *on* people? (Cousin, 2010)
- How does the relationship between the researchers (and the research participants) influence the research? (Orr and Bennett, 2009)

As an endnote, we acknowledge the issue of power in knowledge production applies equally to the researcher’s relationship with text (Day, 2012) as data (see, for example, Alvesson et al.’s (2008) discussion of reflexivity as textual practice). In their consideration of reflexive practices of writing about research, Alvesson et al. (2008:

483) describe multi-voicing practices which focus on ‘the authorial identity of the field worker’. These practices involve questioning the relationship between the researcher and research subjects and asking how the researcher can speak authentically of the Other’s experience (Alvesson et al., 2008: 483). We now end this discussion by exploring this type of question relating to issues of voice.

*Voice*

Reflexive practices which make explicit one’s positionality give context to the researcher’s voice (Day, 2012). In response to the crisis of representation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), notions of voice, authorship, and authenticity are questioned, as follows:

- Who speaks, if natural facts and social groups are unable to speak for themselves? (Pels, 2000: 2)
- Who is ‘author’? Whose is the reflexive voice – the researcher’s and/or ‘subjects’? How can we recognize the interplay of voices without privileging ourselves and excluding the voices of others? (Cunliffe, 2003: 994)
- Can I speak authentically of the experience of the Other? If so, how? (Alvesson et al., 2008)
- How do I make sense of the lived experience of others? What are the consequences of making sense of and speaking for others? Whose voices does this sense making exclude? (Cunliffe, 2011)

Reflexivity ‘systematically takes stock of and inserts the positions and perspectives of *spokespersons* in social-scientific reports about the world. Reflexive texts tend to reiterate the question: Who says so?’ (Pels, 2000: 2, emphasis in original). Feminist and poststructuralist research has experimented with reflexive practices to ‘forefront “voice” and the construction of our research texts’ (Pillow, 2003: 186). For instance, multi-voicing reflexive practices attempt to ‘decentre’ authors as authority figures by opening up texts to multiple readings and/or by giving research subjects and/or readers a more active role in interpreting meaning (Alvesson et al., 2008). As a practical example in a doctoral study, Williams (2010) extended engagement with some of her research participants, beyond the initial data collection interview, by asking them to comment on her data interpretations as presented in a draft thesis chapter. In the final chapter of her thesis, when reflecting on the reflexive engagement of and debate with the research participants, Williams (2010) wrote:

> All three participants affirmed my interpretations, adding comments or insights to particular points through the chapter, which I reflected upon and responded to, making changes or commenting on issues raised in Chapter Five. I received positive feedback from Holly for following through on my initial invitation to review my interpretations. Holly commended me on following through by sending my interpretations and engaging in a debate with the reflexive feedback I received in response. I also received affirmation from Sophia and Holly on how I had been sensitive to, and inclusive of participants’ voices in my methodological choices. ... Sophia in her reflexive follow up interview commented ... ‘I think is a really good validation of your methodological choices because it gives the power to the interviewees.’ (Williams, 2010: 283)

However, even reflexive practices, such as Williams (2010) used of sharing the data analysis with research participants, may be critiqued for ‘perpetuat[ing] a colonial relationship’ of ‘giving’ power to research participants (Pillow, 2003: 185). Therefore, like the earlier discussion of power assumptions within transparent reflexivity, multi-voicing reflexive practices have been criticized for failing to appreciate the

impossibility, in spite of the researcher's best intentions, of giving all those involved with the research – 'researcher, research subject and reader – a voice, let alone an equal voice' (Alvesson et al., 2008: 488).

To summarize our discussions so far, we have considered how processes of reflexivity acknowledge that the researcher's motivation, role, position, identity, power and voice all impact on the 'doing' of qualitative research. We now turn to questions and issues relating to the reflexive 'evaluating' of qualitative research (Day, 2012; Johnson, 2015) and consider the case for criteria that fit the particular research project's philosophical positioning (Johnson et al. 2006; Johnson, 2015).

**The reflexive 'evaluating' of qualitative research**

Johnson (2015: 322) argues for reflexivity to be brought to 'the forefront of any research evaluation so as to enable criteriological judgements that fit the philosophical positioning of any research under consideration'. His call for a 'more permissive, pluralistic and reflexive approach to research evaluation' (Johnson, 2015: 320) is founded on the diversity of qualitative management research and its array of different epistemological and ontological stances. Johnson et al. (2006) elaborate this argument for the 'reflexive application of the appropriate evaluation criteria' (p. 131) and suggest this requires qualitative researchers to: 'subject their philosophical assumptions to sustained reflection and evaluation through their confrontation with possible alternatives; deliberate the implications of their informed choices for research practice; be consistent in their actual engagements with management practices, and; be clear

about how they meet specific but philosophically contingent evaluation criteria‘ (p. 148). Sandra provides a practical example of this type of reflexive application of ‘contingent’ criteria (Johnson, 2015; Johnson et al. 2006) to qualitative research evaluation in her PhD thesis (Corlett, 2009). For instance, she discussed the shifts in her understandings of different perspectives and the strength with which she asserted particular ontological and epistemological commitments over the course of study (Corlett, 2009: 80). She considered methodological choices, including in a separate thesis section entitled ‘implications of methodological decisions for this study’ (p. 116). At various points in the thesis she reflected on how she had maintained a focus on her stated objective of ‘tak[ing] a consciously reflexive approach throughout the research process’ (p.12). Finally, she detailed how she believed she had met philosophically contingent evaluation criteria which, in her case, involved complementing Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) evaluative framework with other criteria appropriate to her narrative study. In opening discussion on the evaluation criteria, Sandra wrote ‘This, as with any other research account, is a “rhetorical construction” (Watson and Harris, 1999) and a crafted and shaped piece of writing (Watson and Harris, 1999; Watson, 1994; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 2007). So how can I persuade the reader that the research is trustworthy and its findings are “worth taking account of” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 290)?’ (Corlett, 2009: 108). This question is similar to others posed by scholars who reflexively consider the criteria for judging qualitative research.

- How does one put into practice the reflexive techniques and address methodological issues in a way that results in ‘valid’, good-quality social research? (Day, 2012: 61)

- How can I engage in reflexive ‘theorizing’ and ‘explanation’? What is ‘useful’ knowledge and how can I produce it within a reflexive frame? (Cunliffe, 2003: 997)

Day (2012: 76) proposes that reflexivity problematizes ‘the taken-for-granted use’ of validity as a means of evaluating qualitative research. Like Johnson (2015) and his colleagues (Johnson et al., 2006), Day argues for the application of research project-specific evaluation criteria, by drawing on Cho and Trent’s (2006: 319) proposition of a ‘recursive, process-oriented view of validity’. As a practical example of inclusion of project-specific evaluation criteria, Williams (2010) explains why, given her concern for plurivocality (as discussed above), she used Seale’s (1999) addition of authenticity to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) evaluation framework in her PhD study: ‘Seale suggests the addition of authenticity ... brings the trustworthiness criteria closer to an appreciation of plurivocality’ (Williams, 2010: 282). However, not all qualitative scholars agree with the use of contingent criteria or, indeed, any ‘definition’ of qualitative criteria (see, for example, Symon and Cassell (2012: 204), for further details of the ‘criteriology debate’) and advocate universal criteria frameworks, some of which include reflexivity. For example, Tracy’s (2010: 840) universal end goal model for quality in qualitative research incorporates ‘self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s)’ as a means/practice for achieving sincere and ethical research. Nevertheless, evidencing reflexivity as part of the ‘doing’ or writing up of qualitative research does not guarantee the quality of theory development and knowledge production (Day, 2012; Gabriel, 2013, 2015). Reflexivity needs to go beyond “a box-ticking exercise”’ (Gabriel, 2015: 333), for instance ‘”Did I question my assumptions?’

Ticked ... “Did I surface my values?” Ticked.’ (Gabriel, 2013), as such a reductionist approach will not guarantee ‘good’ quality qualitative research. We propose that Sharon’s research with Gina Grandy (2016), on ‘Developing a Theory of Abject Appearance: Women elite leaders’ intra-gender ‘management’ of bodies and appearance’, avoids such reductionist reflexive tendencies. The process of reflexivity involved critical discussions with each other to question the fundamental assumptions we had made in interpreting the women’s accounts, for instance did we just find what we wanted to find? As a result we did further work to re-analyse the data by the sectors the women leaders worked in and included this in the paper. We also included the interview questions that the women’s accounts were in response to. Thus we were able to highlight the quality of our research approach and more strongly argue for our theorisation of Abject Appearance as emerging across the women’s accounts, regardless of organisational contexts. We also engaged in reflexivity as women researchers in-relation-to our women participants and included the following in the paper.

> Like Sarah, many of the women elite leaders commented on women’s weight in their accounts. We also identified with the notion of women’s fat bodies being a source of disgust and attraction when in positions of power, as well as a site for women’s intra-gender relations. We reflected on our identity work associated with our own thin-fat-thin-fat bodies in-relation-to other women both inside and outside the work place (Mavin and Grandy 2016: 13)

This discussion of the reflexive ‘evaluating’ of qualitative research, and its introduction to the criteriology debate, completes our consideration of the three aspects of reflexivity. However, before concluding the chapter, we consider a further contemporary debate, about reflexivity as an individual and/or collective process, as the basis for identifying future developments informed by emergent reflexive research practice.

**Future developments: Reflexivity as collective practice**

The concept of self-reflexivity and its 'self-referential characteristic of "bending-back" some thought upon the self' (Archer, 2009: 2) may convey the assumption of an individual activity. However, we agree with Gilmore and Kenny (2015: 55) that the prevalent assumption that self-reflexivity is 'the responsibility of the lone researcher' limits its understanding and practice. We have already referred to Orr and Bennett's (2009) co-authored reflexive paper, produced following a 'recursive' process of reflexivity involving repeated critical exchange between the two researchers (p. 86). Gilmore and Kenny (2015) call for further innovative and meaningful methods, and detailed accounts of the practice, of collective reflexivity. They propose a 'reflexive pair interview' method involving 'two (or more) "critical friends" working together' (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015: 73). This collective approach was found to facilitate 'a deeper reflection on the research process and in particular to our own selves-as-researchers' (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015: 73). Acknowledging the limitation that they carried out the pair interviews subsequent to their (individual) fieldwork, Gilmore and Kenny (2015) recommend use of the method as ongoing practice as a research project progresses. Examples of developing and employing collective reflexive processes and methods, as ongoing practice, arise from Sharon's research with women elite leaders (Mavin et al., 2015; Mavin and Grandy, 2016) where the three research assistants completed individual reflexive templates as well as personal research diaries on their experiences of interviewing and then came together to discuss and consider the impact on the data collection. Sharon gives details about how the research assistants were impacted emotionally when conducting the interviews and how the co-authors

responded emotional in their re-readings of the data transcripts (Mavin and Grandy, 2016: 3). Collective discussions about these 'reflexive experiences' guided them towards the research focus and enabled them to become 'reflexively aware of the body as a site for identity work' (Mavin and Grandy, 2016: 3). Furthermore, the collective reflexive practice they engaged in helped surface how they were 'connected to the research, theoretically, experientially, [and] emotionally' (Haynes, 2012: 78) and supports the view that reflexivity involves questioning emotions as well as assumptions (Gabriel, 2015; Munkejord, 2009). On a different project (Mavin and Williams, 2012), the same group of four researchers individually completed analysis of media texts, identified key discourses in the data and then completed an individual reflexive template. They then came together in pairs to discuss their findings, and to agree similarities and differences in the discourses and their reflexive templates. Finally the two pairs came together to discuss the individual and paired reflexive templates and again agree similarities and differences in the discourses. These examples illustrate how collective reflexive methods, practiced through dialogue with others, enabled individual researcher's thoughts, feelings, doubts, dilemmas, and possibilities to be surfaced and knowledge claims to be unsettled and settled, thereby facilitating a 'turning back on oneself' (Lawson, 1985: 9).

Beyond co-researchers and co-authors, examples of collective reflexive practice involve research participants (Corlett, 2012; Riach, 2009) and research users. For example, building on Riach's (2009) exploration of participant-focussed reflexivity in the research interview where participants may 'consciously consider themselves in relation to their own production of knowledge' (p. 360), Sandra illustrates how conceiving

research as a dialogic process ‘with’ others may enable critical self-reflexivity and learning for research participants (Corlett, 2012). Attending to participant-focussed reflexivity enables participants, as users of our research, to shape its direction and to evaluate its theoretical and practical contributions. An opportunity for future development of collective reflexivity in management research comes from Brandon (2016) who engages users in participatory health research (PHR) (see rwire.co.uk). PHR has gone beyond models of service user consultation through the positioning of service users as experts in their own circumstances. This is a fundamental relocation of power towards service users as they become ‘co-producers’ of research (Realpe and Wallace, 2010). Therefore, moving from research participants in management research to user-led co-produced research projects builds on relational understandings of research, and of researcher/researched positionality, which opens up opportunities for further development of theory and practice of reflexivity as collective practice.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed understandings of research reflexivity, as processes and practices involving the reflexive ‘thinking’, ‘doing’ and ‘evaluating’ of qualitative management research. Although we have presented discussion of these reflexive processes and practices in distinct parts of the chapter, we see them as ‘interconnected and mutually related, [and] not necessarily separate and discrete facets of reflexivity’ (Haynes, 2012: 85). We have argued that epistemological assumptions influence reflexivity practices and the researcher’s positionality on issues relating to representation and truth, to the researcher’s role and power relations with others, and to

criteria for evaluating qualitative research. However, Tomkins and Eatough (2010) are critical of coupling reflexivity with one's overall epistemology because of the risk of missing out, in practice terms, on the richness and diversity of reflexivity theory. In response to their critique, we hope the chapter has provided some insights into the debates surrounding the theory and practice of reflexivity and has opened up opportunities for critical self-scrutiny of research practice, through the questions posed and collated in the Appendix and through the practical examples of different processes of individual and collective reflexivity from our own and others' work.

Alvesson et al. (2008: 497) conclude that, just as 'knowledge more generally is a product of linguistic, political, and institutional influences, so too is reflexivity. ... what we – as members of a research community – know to be reflexivity is shaped by practices carried out by researchers in producing texts which are accepted as being reflexive'. We acknowledge we have given a 'situated' and partial account of reflexivity theory and practice, informed by our epistemological assumptions founded on social constructionism and poststructuralism, and by the reflexive practices in which we have engaged. Furthermore our broader research interests, for instance in the area of identity, may have influenced the attention we have given to some debates and questions, such as the role of identity and power in processes of knowledge production. Also, as committed as we are to reflexivity and researcher positionality, we do not see reflexivity as 'a universal cure-all' (Day, 2012: 82) for the challenges involved in conducting qualitative management research. Indeed, excessive reflexivity may, for instance, reduce our practice to paralysis or lead us to self-indulgence and narcissism (Weick, 1999). Nevertheless, we see the value of reflexivity in its ability to bring

epistemological, methodological and criteriological challenges to the forefront as a means of recognising how we, as qualitative researchers, shape the research we do, the knowledge we produce and its subsequent political effects.

Reflexivity in research can be uncomfortable but, building on Gina Grandy, Ruth Simpson and Sharon's views (2015: 347), we see 'that our richest and most illuminating research encounters are those that make us feel uncomfortable. If we acknowledge the discomfort and reflexively work through it … we argue that as researchers and practitioners we garner unique insights into the complexity of social reality'. Therefore, we continue to advocate for reflexivity and researcher/researched positionality and end with two final questions, adapted from Cunliffe (2011: 416), to encourage critical self-scrutiny of our individual and collective research practices and processes:

- Where do my/our ideas on reflexivity fit? Are any of these approaches [and questions] appropriate for my/our research/or how can I/we find my/our own approach?

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**Appendix 1 Thought provoking questions about reflexivity in qualitative research**

Developed and extended from: Alvesson et al. (2008), Cassell et al. (2005), Cousin (2010), Cunliffe (2003, 2011), Day (2012), Hardy et al. (2001), (Haynes, 2012), James and Vinnicombe (2002), Johnson and Duberley (2003), Orr and Bennett (2009), Pels (2000)

As you read the questions in the table, critically self-reflect on these overarching questions:

- Where do my ideas on reflexivity fit? Are any of these questions appropriate for my/our research/or how can I/we find my/our own approach? (Cunliffe, 2011: 416)

| **The reflexive 'thinking' of qualitative research (Day, 2012)** | **The reflexive 'doing' of qualitative research (Day, 2012)** | **The evaluation of qualitative research (Day, 2012)** |
|---|---|---|
| ***Questions about our epistemological position and assumptions***<br>• What are my assumptions about the nature of reality and who we are as humans? (Cunliffe, 2011)<br>• What do I see as the nature of knowledge? (Cunliffe, 2011)<br><br>***Questions about representation and truth***<br>• In my representations of the social world, what are my underlying assumptions about the production of knowledge – how do I know, and who can claim to know? ... who can make claims to "know" and represent others using qualitative approaches? (Day, 2012)<br>• How has the research question defined and limited | ***Methodological and method reflexivity questions***<br>• What research method/s is/are used? (James and Vinnicombe, 2002; Cunliffe, 2011)<br>• What is the purpose of the methods? (Cassell et al., 2005)<br>• What is the impact of the research method(s) on the research? (Johnson and Duberley, 2003)<br>• What constitutes 'data'? How do I interpret the 'data'? (Cunliffe, 2011)<br>• What data do I 'collect'? How do I collect and analyze the data? How do I manage 'objectivity' in the data analysis? (James and Vinnicombe, 2002)<br>• What data have I chosen to include and to leave out in my presentation of findings/interpretations?<br><br>***Self-Reflexivity questions about researcher motivations***<br>• Why am I undertaking the research topic I have selected? What are my personal motivations? What are my personal and political reasons for undertaking my research? What personal experiences do I have related to my research topic? (James and Vinnicombe, 2002)<br>• What (or who) has prompted the research and why? How is the research shaped by my own personal interest and, if applicable, the interests of a sponsoring organization? Has this influenced the framing of the research question and the context in which the research is carried out? (James and Vinnicombe, 2002)<br>• What is the motivation for undertaking this research? How am I connected to the research, theoretically, experientially, emotionally? And what effect will this have on my approach? (Haynes, 2012) | ***Questions about criteria***<br>• How do I put into practice the reflexive techniques and address methodological issues in a way that results in valid, good-quality social research? (Day, 2012)<br>• How can I engage in reflexive 'theorizing' and 'explanation'? What is 'useful' knowledge and how can I produce it within a reflexive frame? (Cunliffe, 2003) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| what can be 'found'? What findings/insights do I hope to generate from this question? On what basis will these findings/insights contribute to 'knowledge', i.e. what kinds of knowledges am I producing? How will the resultant knowledges function to shape the world, i.e. what 'truth claims' will I make? (Cassell et al., 2005)<br>• What are the different ways in which a phenomenon can be understood and how do they produce different knowledge(s)? (Alvesson et al., 2008)<br>• How could the research question be investigated differently, e.g. from a different epistemological perspective? What different insights may be made by taking a different epistemological perspective? (Cassell et al., 2005) | ***Self-reflexivity questions about the researcher's role, identity, and power relations with others***<br>• What is my (expected) role as the researcher? (Cassell et al., 2005; James and Vinnicombe, 2002; Johnson and Duberley, 2008)<br>• What effects does my role have on how the research is conducted? (Cassell et al., 2005)<br>• What are my relationships with research subjects/ participants? (Cunliffe, 2011)<br><br>***Questions about positionality, identity and power***<br>• What role do positionality, identity, and power play in the process of knowledge production? (Day, 2012)<br>• What is my power relationship with the people I am researching? (Cousin, 2010)<br>• Am I researching *with* or *on* people? (Cousin, 2010)<br>• How does the relationship between the researchers (and the research participants) influence the research? (Orr and Bennett, 2009)<br><br>***Questions about voice***<br>• Who speaks, if natural facts and social groups are unable to speak for themselves? (Pels, 2000)<br>• Who is 'author'? Whose is the reflexive voice – the researcher's and/or 'subjects'? How can we recognize the interplay of voices without privileging ourselves and excluding the voices of others? (Cunliffe, 2003)<br>• Can I speak authentically of the experience of the Other? If so, how? (Alvesson et al., 2008)<br>• How do I make sense of the lived experience of others? What are the consequences of making sense of and speaking for others? Whose voices does this sense making exclude? (Cunliffe, 2011) | |