

Relational Ethnography: Writing and Reading in Research Relationships

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Abstract: This article introduces relational ethnography as a form of inquiry which emphasizes reflexive dialogical aspects of research relationships. I have found the use of autoethnography inspiring in speaking from within my practice as a therapist and teacher however it has limited my focus on areas of relationality in research relationships. In developing a relational ethnography, I have been able to show how all areas of ethnographic research involve relationality. I draw on systemic and social constructionist theory in understanding relational activities. I offer illustrations of reflexive, dialogical relationships between the voices of inner dialogue, the voices of outer dialogue—and between the two. By making available description of reflexive inner dialogue to readers and participants in research relationships, we increase opportunities for transparent communication and collaboration in those relationships.

First, I write about the relationships between researcher and texts reframing reading as dialogical activity. Afterwards, I explore the emergent relationship between writers and readers as they enter into an anticipatory-responsive dialogue with each other. Finally, I discuss how reflexivity is always relational and informs a relational ethics, and offer some ideas for an ethics of care and for an aesthetics of care as guiding principles for relational ethnography. I have found that teaching relational ethnography has improved students' reflexivity in their research and has enhanced the relational and aesthetic quality of their research writing.

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1. Becoming a Dialogical Reader

Since I started experimenting with how to write in ways which take relationality into account, I have become a different kind of reader. I find I am easily estranged from papers describing dialogical practices which write with a monological tone. I have developed expectations of the writer. I want them to talk to me, with me. I don't want them to talk *at* me or tell me the right way to do something. I want them to invite me into a conversation with them or spark some reflexive movement in my inner dialogue. I have come to expect a coherence between that which the writer is describing and how they are involving me in the presentation of those ideas. I am less driven to work at finding meaning in a paper. I used to think that there are some writings which I need to study more deeply to get to the usefulness of the content but now I am experiencing an ethical discomfort when meeting a contradiction between form and content. The writings which engage me the most are ones where the writer renders her- or himself visible and invites me into their tussle with ideas and practices. In such instances, I start to feel alongside the writer quite quickly. [1]

2. Writing From Within Inner Dialogue and Outer Talk

As a member of several societal groups who have had professional texts written *about* them by outsiders, I have witnessed how *about-ness* writing can become concretized into oppressive theory and dominate over a century of psychotherapeutic, psychiatric and legislative practice. I connect this style of writing to relations of power played out in language. John SHOTTER (1999, 2011) encourages a critique of *about-ness writing* which he refers to as a *monological-retrospective-objective style of writing*. He suggests that writers can write instead from within relationships and alongside the people with whom they are working. He calls this *witness-writing* and describes it as a *dialogical-prospective-relational style of writing* and invites practitioner-writers to get inside the living moment and write into and out of the micro-detail of *spontaneous responsiveness* (SHOTTER & KATZ, 1998). [2]

I have found that writing into and out of intense or even casual conversation has required me to get into a kind of meditative state in which I hear, see, remember and notice all manner of things which I must have noticed at the time but moved on from—until I started to write. In this meditative state, I start to re-feel the atmosphere, hear other voices which I moved away from quickly in order to privilege another. I remember ethical dilemmas I had about my choices or about how I was managing my choice of responses. As I started to experiment with capturing reflexivity (BURNHAM, 1992, 2005; ETHERINGTON, 2004; HEDGES, 2010) in inner and outer dialogue, I started to wonder how was I going to capture all the inner talk? Was I going to describe it as conversation or separate strands of thought? How could I lay my inner dialogue—often more cacophony than polyphony—on the page in a way which engaged the reader and did not bore or overwhelm them? [3]

2.1 An example from practice

At the end of a supervision group with therapists, I noticed something in my intonation that made me uncomfortable. It kept coming to mind. The next day I tried to write about the episode to see what I could learn.

I glance at the clock—last couple of minutes. Jane is looking tired. I wonder, if as a group, we have focused too much on suggesting there may be other things she can do with a couple who are behaving disrespectfully towards her. I wonder if she wants to find a way of ending the work with them. Her wince, when I ask about this, seems to say "I am torn." Perhaps our discussion has been too respectful to the clients and not enough to the therapist. Our time to talk is running out. Perhaps a quick example from my own work life might create another option. I tell the group how I have, on a couple of occasions, spoken directly to couples where I have felt I can no longer tolerate their rudeness. As I repeat what I might have said to the couple at the time, I am surprised and a little alarmed by the sound of real irritation in my voice—as if I am back in the moment of directness with the couple. I wonder if the group is hearing this too. I have a flash-over of inner reactions.

"Did I intend to sound that irritated? I don't think so. So how did that happen?"

"Maybe I am tired. I thought I felt fine. Am I making good judgments now?"

"I want to discuss this with someone. When is my next supervision?"

"It's not an event that is worthy of major worry."

"Nevertheless, how are the supervisees reacting to how I have just spoken? Is their apparent lack of visual response an indication of their sophistication or disinterest or am I unable to notice them at this very minute while I feel taken aback?"

"Do I need to do anything else at this ending point in the group?"

I try to qualify what I have just said in a more reflective tone. It has the intention of casting a stitch to end a row neatly but I wonder how I became a little unraveled in that moment. [4]

There is a time sequence and then, at a moment of crisis, many voices spoke in me at once in a timeless, polyphonic moment. As an ethics led practitioner and as an ethics led researcher, I am committed to a reflexive exploration of this inner dialogue and the connections with the outer dialogue. Writing slows things down and renders audible strains of voices I am not otherwise able to hear for long enough in order to make a relationship with. And as I write and listen, I hear further voices still and those vying for the position of moderator. I explore which voices have had most influence on this situation and with whose authority? I am awash in a sea of conversation, of voices and ideas, values and power dynamics. I could just get out the water and put my fingers in my ears, turn towards a modernist monological sounding voice and allow it the most volume. But that wouldn't be ethical. And yet I have to draw the line somewhere and move on—as

happened in this episode when the outside structures of time required a response to conclude the session. [5]

Peggy PENN built on BAKHTIN's work (2007 [1986]) in making some distinctions between monologue and dialogue. "Unlike the monologue, dialogical conversation is many-voiced. It listens to others and is open, inviting, relative, and endless because it is future-oriented. It awaits an answer" (PENN, 2009, p.33). In this sense, monologue and dialogue are commonly understood as part of a dualism. [6]

I have come to think of monologue *not* as a thing in itself, as if outside of a relational context. It is often difficult to attribute *monological sounding* voices and their narratives to a particular relationship or event but by entering into conversation with the concerns behind the narrative *as if it were a person with an opinion*, it can allow for conversation to develop and we find a way of going on in inner or outer conversation. PARÉ and LYSACK (2004) use the term "self-enclosed monologues" as if there is a lack of a broader conversational context. I have been considering all utterances as a form of dialogue but with different intentions based on narratives about probable social consequences. I am treating a monologue less as a fixed thing and more as a relational response, subject to change through conversational opportunities. [7]

3. Anticipating a Dialogical Reader

As part of my attempt to write dialogically, with readers in mind, I started to write "Dear Reader" at the top of each page. In script. In red. I wrote with an increased awareness of readers. But when I added "How're you doing?" I felt more of an inquiring writer who was not only in relation to her subject but to her reader. Sometimes it has worked quite well. But, on one occasion, when I tried to write a more traditional theory paper, I became quite distracted by the listening ear of the imagined academy. My draft readers pointed out that these texts had lost the very thing I wanted to highlight in my research into dialogical practice writing: relationality in writing, *live-ness* in tone, the sound of talk on the page. GERGEN says that "writing is fundamentally an action within a relationship; it is within relationship that writing gains its meaning and significance, and our manner of writing simultaneously invites certain forms of relationship while discouraging or suppressing others" (2008, p.1). [8]

This challenge of writing for readers, feels to me as if it involves more than a matter of technique or form. Social constructionism understands language as the means through which we construct narratives about each other and how relationships work in the world which then influence stories and practices of rights and responsibilities (BURR, 1995). With my ethical Geiger counter, I can feel my levels of comfort and discomfort point me towards writing practices which speak with my readers in a manner which more or less listens out for their responses, imagined and actual. In her critique of colonial research writers, VISWESWARAN (1994) warns that the subject as reader eventually writes back. [9]

4. Speaking With Other Writers

MONTUORI (2005) encourages ways of engaging with literature reviews as a form of live conversation. Literature reviews pose an interesting challenge because they usually form a chapter or a specific section in a book or paper dedicated to a systematic review of an area of practice or research and they have a preordained place—for example, within a regular dissertation structure. Despite, often being quite a dry read, such literary gatherings can be very useful as a place to go for a round-up of connections. [10]

For the writer to share some of his/her reflexive inner dialogue can offer the reader a range of voices—voices attached to particular narratives. Or perhaps narratives to which certain voices are attached? I have extended this dialogical expectation to the literature as well, meaning, I am not simply reporting what other writers say. I have tried to talk with other writers, responding as if in dialogue. Sometimes I have found it useful to introduce other characters in my texts through which I discuss the work of other writers. [11]

For example, I wrote a four act play in which the two characters debated many ethical and technical matters about writing about others and quoted actual writers at each other. I worked at characterization, the sound of talk and pacing to bring it together as one coherent piece. It served as an alternative literature review. Here they are talking about some pros and cons of sharing their inner dialogue with readers. [12]

4.1 Excerpt from the play "The Other in the Text"

Voice of God: So what opportunities might you offer me to reveal more of my inner dialogue to others?

Fellow Writer: Well, if someone offered you the opportunity to write a book on the story behind the writing of the history of the world, what sort of things would you say? Could it really just remain a chronological, monological narrative or would you share some of the tussles between your different inner voices and the artistic and strategic choices they made?

Voice of God: No, no, no—it would ruin the effect for the reader. One God, one story. I might otherwise be tempted to reveal more than I wished.

Fellow Writer: How come? Why would you be tempted?

Voice of God: Well, suppose it was you reading it, I might be tempted to tell you how I did arrive at my decisions. Because we could talk about it then. So if I was writing with you in mind ...

Fellow Writer: "It is not so much how 'I' can use language in itself that matters, as the way in which I *must* take 'you' into account in my use of it."—I'm quoting John Shotter¹. So there is some fluidity between what inner speech one chooses to keep "for oneself" and the opportunities for actual and imagined audiences. I don't agree with Vygotsky's distinction between talking to oneself and talking to others when he

1 SHOTTER (1989, p.141).

says, "Written speech and inner speech are monologic speech forms. Oral speech is generally dialogic."²

Voice of God: Speech, as a word, does have monological associations. I hate listening to speeches. One feels so spoken at and often not particularly entertained.

Fellow Writer: I am trying to write written speech and inner speech in ways which render it dialogical—in that, I know and I say "I am sharing this with you, dear reader."

Voice of God: But are they interested? I know my readers wouldn't care a jot to hear my inner dialogue about whether to call the Red Sea plain "red" as opposed to Pillarbox Red or Crimson Lake³—both of which could have been quite confusing for different reasons.

Fellow Writer: You have to kind of guess your reader, anticipate the other ...

Voice of God: Are we each other's other?

Fellow Writer: Well, yes. For now.

Voice of God: There are no others before us?

Fellow Writer: John Shotter says "We have to let the others and othernesses around us 'teach' us how to relate to them; we have to let the otherness of the other enter us and make us other than we already are."⁴ [13]

In another example of alternative literature review, I wrote a script of a radio panel with some of qualitative inquiry's more influential writers who spoke their own original words to each other along with some additional speech I added for them. I included references in ways so as not to upset the textual flow for the reader. Elaborating on people's speech, blurring distinctions between "real" and "not real" wording, flexible referencing all make for a creative but traditionally invalid text. Its validity comes from the meaning of using those words in that context, to situate extracted quotes from other texts as relationally situated speech acts. [14]

My experience of conversation in psychotherapy, teaching or research is that, like everyday talk, it can be quite chaotic. Conversations can move like a butterfly flitting from bush to bush and, as a therapist, supervisor, educator or researcher, I have to both follow the conversation and moderate my own *butterfly-ness* to take into account coordinating potential with the other person/s in a conversation. I find theory and other stories "come to mind" in response to the narrative movement in the conversation. The challenge for me is how to weave theory and practice/research writing in ways which are contextually relevant, live and interesting to the reader. [15]

2 VYGOTSKY (1986, p.271).

3 Pillarbox Red is so-called after the color of English mail boxes and Crimson Lake is also known as Carmine.

4 SHOTTER (2011, p.194).

5. Text as Social Construction

In his book "After Method: Mess in Social Science Research," John LAW asks

"What difference would it make if we were instead to apply the criteria that we usually apply to novels (or even more to poetry) to academic writing? ... if we had to write our academic pieces as if they were poems, as if every word counted, how would we write differently?" (2007, p.11) [16]

An answer from Barnett PEARCE might have been to "[t]reat all stories, your own as well as others, as incomplete, unfinished, biased and inconsistent" (PEARCE ASSOCIATES SEMINAR, 2004 [1999], p.50). [17]

I have been inspired by the bold and clear writing of Laurel RICHARDSON. She counters the dualistic true/false split of modernism with an inclusive both/and position. RICHARDSON's assertion that "a postmodernist position does allow us to know 'some-thing' without claiming to know everything. Having a partial, local, historical knowledge is still knowing" (1994, p.518) alleviates some of my dilemmas about the speaking rights from within the segregated knowing across my many selves and invites conversation between or despite them. And RICHARDSON goes on to ask, "[h]ow do we put ourselves in our own texts, and with what consequences? How do we nurture our own individuality and at the same time lay claim to 'knowing' something?" (p.518). [18]

I *could* say that the texts I have been producing are *my* stories—in that the bias must be owned by me and the descriptions of events are grounded in my lived experiences colored by gender, culture, ethnicity and those other aspects of life gathering under the expandable mnemonic of *The Social GRRRAACCCEEEESSS*⁵. Lorraine CODE (1995) points out, it is not possible for anyone to be a "surrogate knower" or writer and tell the same tale. Almost everything I write these days involves differing levels of collaboration or conversation with people who are both inside and outside of the texts: the people I speak with in research conversations, in therapy sessions, learning or supervision groups. They contribute not only with their words spoken in the context of practice or research conversations but collaborate or respond in the shaping of written texts. In this sense "my" writings could be seen as a further form of what PENN and FRANKFURT (1994) have called *participant texts* (see also PENN, 2009). [19]

I could think of the participants in the texts as a cast of characters whose voices and opinions (often monological-sounding but in the context of dialogue) are involved in some creative conversation. Most characters I invite into texts are "real" people but they are, nevertheless, portrayed through me and, as such, can only bear a resemblance to the richness of the "whole" person they are across a

5 *The Social Ggrraaaccceeeesss* is a mnemonic developed jointly by Alison ROPER-HALL (1998) and John BURNHAM (1992, 1993, 2011) to help therapists become more alert to inequalities and differences in lived experiences, is an expandable acronym for Gender, Geography, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Class, Culture, Conformity, Education, Ethnicity, Employment, Economics, Sexuality, Sexual orientation, Spirituality.

range of contexts. In other pieces of writing, characters are more deliberately fictionalized to allow for some things to be told, shared and shown which might not otherwise be possible. For example, I would not want anyone to be humiliated or upset by a portrayal which valued certain opinions over others. In these writings, I aim for descriptions of exchanges which *sound enough like* what I feel or recall having taken place. I think of this as a form of *pragmatic truth* (McNAMEE, 1994). In encouraging a more subjective relationship with writing, RICHARDSON encourages a listening for one's own voice: "We feel its 'truth'—its moral, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, intuitive, embodied, playful pull ... which should lead to writing that is more diverse, more author centered, less boring, and humbler" (1994, p.524). [20]

Some readers may wonder if they are going to get the "full" picture where I have used composite characters and a fictionalized telling of real events. My answer to this is that I have, like many researchers and writers of practice, made decisions without too much consultation about which events to paint pictures of and how to paint those pictures and with whom. On the one hand, I am not attempting realism but I want the pictures to capture enough detail for readers to recognize themselves, others, scenarios, dilemmas and narratives in the stories I tell. I am using the word "stories" as I am thinking of all practice and research tellings as fabrications. I could have provided transcriptions for readers of teaching days or therapy sessions. They would have provided some additional factual detail of what was said but transcriptions are often hard to read and, in any case, I want to show people what happened with a wider range of senses—similar to the ones I use when I am in those situations. A transcription tells a reader very little about body language, bodily responses, movement in inner dialogue, dilemmas, choices, tone and time. I want to tell stories from within my practice so readers can hear and see the characters, so they "get" what is going on in the room, so they feel they are, to some degree, there. To try to create the conditions for readers to hear the voices of other participants is not simply a literary ploy, it's an ethical choice to find ways of turning up the volume on people's concerns and abilities, struggles and achievements. [21]

Having created some literary license to have a range of responses, the reader is offered an invitation to position his- or herself in relation to the differing opinions and experiences. "Polyvocal writing stands as a critique of the criterion itself," says Ken GERGEN,

"[i]n these writings clarity and certainty of the traditional variety give way to ambiguity and ambivalence; in reaching for a full relationship through writing there is no 'comprehensive account' for space must always remain for the added voice of the reader" (2008, p.8) [22]

6. The Sound of Talk

A further project for me arising out of the need to *speak* with the reader, has been to capture the sound of talk—talk between the writer and the reader, talk within my inner dialogue, and talk between other speakers in the texts. BAZERMAN (1988, p.21) suggests that when one accepts "language as a structured social creation, this position claims that the significant social and creative action occurs in the living moment of spoken language instead of on the dead written page." And RICHARDSON asks, "[h]ow do we create texts that are vital? That are attended to? That make a difference?" (1994, p.517). [23]

I have in my mind's ear, the voice of the writer Toni MORRISON:

"When I do a first draft, it's usually very bad because my tendency is to write in the language of everyday speech, which is the language of business, the media, the language we use to get through the day. If you have friends you can speak to in your own language, you keep the vocabulary alive, the nuances, the complexity, the places where language had its original power, but in order to get there, I have to rewrite, discard, and remove the print-quality of language to put back the oral quality, where intonation, volume, gesture are all there" (MORRISON in YAGODA, 2004, p.40). [24]

This reflection from Toni MORRISON along with Laurel RICHARDSON's (1994) assertion that no-one speaks in prose have been guiding voices for me in creating the conditions to hear and decipher the muddle in the concentrated time of inner dialogue. [25]

My hearing has changed too so that the words in my ears now arrange themselves in stanza form to echo the pace, intonation, emphasis, emotion of their speaker. I had been hearing, no, rushing together lines of talk, forcing it into prose as I am doing now.

"An experiencing person is a person in a body. Poetry can re-create embodied speech in a way that standard sociological prose does not because poetry consciously employs such devices as line length, meter, cadence, speed, alliteration, assonance, connotation, rhyme and off-rhyme, variation, and repetition to elicit bodily response in readers/listeners" (RICHARDSON, 1997, p.143). [26]

Of course, writers are readers too. And listeners. There is a relationship between reader and writer when a reader reads aloud the writer's writing. Writers can hear a range of inner, and perhaps outer, responses to how someone else is performing their text. I have been experimenting with a *bricolage* of voices, pieces of writing, designed to be heard by the reader as people speaking, as a performance piece which can and has been read aloud for others. This lifts the activity of talk, of conversational practice, back into its relational first language. [27]

7. Beyond Autoethnography

I chose autoethnography as a methodological starting point for researching writing from within practice relationships because it encourages in-depth description of personal experience with a pronounced weaving of reflexivity throughout the process and content of writing (ELLIS, ADAMS & BOCHNER, 2010). As a practitioner researching and reporting on my own practice, I was also concerned to act with transparency and find ways of sharing the range of responses in my inner and outer dialogue with the reader. Writing autoethnographically has offered me ways of "laying them bare" for all to see, to invite others into a privileged and otherwise unexposed view of the inner and outer workings in the life of a practitioner. Without detailed descriptions of inner and outer dialogue, there is no way of showing reflexivity in action. I can speak about it, from outside of those moments, but autoethnography allows me to speak from within the moment of the doing and try to capture the swirl of responses I have alongside the practical and ethical choices I am making. I am "outing" the hidden inner world of the therapist, supervisor, educator or researcher by situating my responses in the moment of interactions with others with whom I am working. To "out" these activities is an ethical stance as the writer is then offering readers an opportunity to witness happenings at different levels and reflexively listen out for their own responses to the events in the dialogue. [28]

Laurel RICHARDSON speaks of narratives of the *self*:

"Narratives of the self do not read like traditional ethnography because they use the writing techniques of fiction. They are specific stories of particular events. Accuracy is not the issue; rather, narratives of the self seek to meet literary criteria of coherence, verisimilitude, and interest" (1994, p.521). [29]

Carolyn ELLIS, in one of my favorite books, "The Ethnographic 'I': A Methodological Novel" (2004), shares with the reader many examples of her inner turmoil about how best to proceed in response to her students. She writes inner dialogue as a shifting and responsive conversation in which she knows she must make a choice about how to go on in outer talk. Ellis considers and sometimes worries about what she notices about her students. She anticipates how they might react to something. She rolls out a stream of detailed and connected thoughts for the reader to "really" see what can go on for a teacher of autoethnography. And she does this through an autoethnographic approach. It is an inspired and creative way of producing useful research for others, like me, to learn both about teaching, about teaching autoethnography and about the producing of autoethnography. This approach to research has offered additional support to my professional understanding of the value of listening to my inner talk and to see this as part of my working tools—messy, yes, but invaluable to the process of doing any reflexive activity. It is an area of professional activity which has received little attention until the advent of autoethnography which has opened the field to the showing of experience from within the moment of living it. [30]

Yet I have a discomfort with the term *autoethnography*. The prefix *auto* doesn't sit very well for me. The pervasiveness of relationality on so many levels in research relationships and in writing-reading relationships moves me towards a more inclusive description of my research. [31]

8. Relational Ethnography

I feel more at home as a relationally oriented practitioner and researcher to think in terms of *relational ethnography*. Like autoethnography, relational ethnography, is more of an approach to research, a form of inquiry, than a fixed method to be performed "properly." It is a philosophical and ethical stance which embraces reflexivity, responsivity, transparency of the researcher(s), relational awareness and dialogical coherence between that which is being researched and how research material is shared with others. It encourages an attitude to knowing based on a postmodern concern with what counts as knowledge; how, with and for whom "knowledge" is produced and with what social consequences. It invites the researcher to work with a literary eye and ear in anticipation of reader-respondents. It is one of "a new array of collaborative, polyvocal, and self-reflexive methodologies" (GERGEN & GERGEN, 2002, p.13) which constitutes a form of inquiry in its own right and can act as an influencing context alongside other research methods. I have found that teaching relational ethnography has significantly improved students' reflexivity in their research and practice and has enhanced the relational and aesthetic quality of their research writing. [32]

I use the term *relational ethnography* for speaking reflexively and dialogically about *and from within* relationships—whether, for example, from within the different voices of the researcher's inner dialogue, between the researcher(s) and other texts, between the researcher and others in outer dialogue, between writers and readers of research writing. Relationality exists in every part of the research process (McNAMEE & HOSKING, 2011). Writing research is a relational activity in which the writer attempts to anticipate 1. the needs of readers and 2. a responsive dialogical readership which includes people who appear in the research writing, colleagues, members of the public and so on. Relational ethnography includes degrees of collaboration, co-creation and discussion with others in producing research into relational activities. This is supported by a social constructionist understanding of co-creating meaning, narratives and accounts. [33]

As I have already explained, I am not telling "my" tale in isolation from others. Even when I am researching "my own" practice relationships from within living moments, the shaping of my research endeavor and its telling will be influenced by many others, directly and indirectly involved with it. We are always responding to people and narratives, actually present or remotely present, which act as authorizing or prohibiting voices—from culture, family, life experience, the academy, the arts, legal, professional or social policies and so on. I am researching the *we*, the relational. It is not a study by *me* of *them*. *They* do not exist except as a participant in the *we*. I am researching how we go on together in conversation with ideas and feelings, emotional and embodied responses. As researchers involved in research relationships, it might be neither possible nor

desirable to attempt to explore our own behavior in isolation from other research participants, and theirs from ours.

"How is it possible to situate ourselves as participant-observers in the lives of others and not affect them? The social skills we use to do ethnographies attach us to real human beings. They connect us to people in deeply human ways" (RICHARDSON, 1997, p.115). [34]

In particular, relational ethnography emphasizes 1. *reflexivity in research as a relational practice* and 2. *research as a relationally responsive ethics led practice*. [35]

8.1 Relational reflexivity

While reflexivity has become part of good practice in qualitative research, it often appears to mean "self-reflection" or aims to offer the reader some transparency about researcher bias or their relationship with the research focus. Relational ethnography adopts a *relational reflexivity* (BURNHAM, 1993; HEDGES, 2010; SIMON, 2012) and *extends the idea of reflexivity beyond that of individual experience and into a relational context*. Relational reflexivity invites an increased sensitivity to the relationship between the voices in one's inner dialogue, in outer dialogue and a preparedness to find ways of connecting inner and outer dialogue. It encourages the writer to anticipate the needs of others involved in or affected by the research and write dialogically with readers in mind. [36]

Relational reflexivity involves a commitment to pro-active and inquiring inner talk about one's understandings, one's responses, one's use of spoken language and body language. It invites mindfulness of one's relationship with "knowing," not-knowing (ANDERSON, 1997) and un-knowing (McCARTHY, 2012) stances. It invites irreverence (CECCHIN, LANE & RAY, 1993) about one's attachments to stories of what counts as good research practice so as to encourage a fresh, in-the-moment responsiveness to the research, participants, theory and so on. It is the opposite of a comfortable, "lazy" thinking which assumes, for example, that one is acting without cultural bias, with gender sensitivity, that one understands what the other person is saying, that one's theory or methodology is right—whatever the feedback might be from others. [37]

Relational ethnography veers away from the monological towards the dialogical. It brings together interactivity in inner dialogue and a link with outer dialogue. It connects monologue and dialogue to voice, and voice to a narrative performance in time and place. And it encourages researchers to situate all of these within wider discourses and practices of power. [38]

In keeping with qualitative inquiry's commitment to social and political justice, I am proposing that relational ethnographers move between *local reflexivity* and *global reflexivity* (SIMON, 2012). By this, I mean that the researcher reflexivity and research writing move, as if on a piece of ethical elastic, to pan out, zoom in and make links between the detail of the immediate (local) dialogue and

happenings with broader socio-political (global) contexts and discourses. Relational ethnography can act a means of extending conversation about important topics which is transformative for participants, for a community, for the research and its outcomes. [39]

8.2 Relational ethics

Relational ethnography is ethics-led as opposed to method-led. This means the methodology emerges in response to and from within the relational activities under investigation as opposed to being pre-scribed by the researcher. Doing, writing and reading research are all dialogical activities with ethical responsibilities to not only visible participants in the text but also to the emergent relationships between writers and their readers, between readers and the writers whose work they are reading. [40]

I identified two areas of relational ethics which offer guidance for the practice of relational ethnography: an *ethics of care* and an *aesthetics of care*. [41]

8.2.1 An *ethics of care*

Exercising an *ethics of care* towards others in reflexive practice (McCARTHY & BYRNE, 2007) is perhaps my main motivation in developing this research approach. I offer some questions for attending to relational ethics in research:

- How can we bring relational awareness to all stages of research planning, process and presenting and in all activities?
- How are we to speak from within research relationships, alongside people rather than about them as if from "outside"?
- How are we to know if are writing with care, respect and concern in presenting people, characters and views?
- How can we listen to our inner dialogue, outer dialogue, texts and performance with reflexive curiosity and with an awareness of prejudicial, dominant and subjugated voices?
- How can we use transparency and reflexive, dialogical writing to show detail inner and outer dialogue, behaviors in research relationships which show dilemmas, prejudice, reactions etc?
- How can we collaborate with people and take their voices into account in our generating and presenting of research?
- How can we be reflexive about the relational consequences of choices and influencing contexts at all stages in the research process?
- Whose lives will this research change/improve and how?
- How can we commit to acting with reflexivity about one's bias, the limits of one's understanding, and ask "What might I be missing or assuming?"
- How might we act with care and awareness about the impact researchers and research participants can have on each other and on others?

- How can we write with anticipation of a dialogical and listening reader?
- How can we act with structural and theoretical irreverence to find ways of doing and presenting research which support or challenge the context for the research?
- How can we resist the pull to separate talking, writing and reading from the collaborative processes of meaning-making between conversational participants?
- How can we critically and appreciatively review what researchers and participants have done together, what it means for each of us, for others, for now and what else we might have done? [42]

8.2.2 *An aesthetics of care*

Many qualitative researchers have attended to the aesthetic aspects of presenting qualitative research out of a need to speak well from within lived experience and with an audience in mind (BOCHNER, 2000; DENZIN, 2003; ELLIS, 2000, 2009; RICHARDSON, 2000a, 2000b; TRACY, 2010). Here are some questions for holding the aesthetic challenges in mind:

- How can we "dress" the research and present it in ways which do justice to the work and which research participants recognize and are encouraged by?
- How can we present the research in ways which add to the quality of the experience for the reader and which render the research material accessible and useful?
- How do we find or create forms of presentation which fit the content and the context for the research and its intended audiences?
- How can we write dialogically and with respect for participants in the text and for the reader?
- How can we write in ways which offer readers opportunities to engage with texts and create their own connections rather than be taught something fixed?
- How can we produce research writing which is subjective, evocative and heart-felt as opposed to cognitive, "objective" and distant?
- What needs to happen to generate a text which reads easily and is written with a sensibility and sensitivity to research participants, textual others and others in the different areas of one's life?
- What permissions do we need to respond to the research focus, research design and participants with creativity, theoretical and structural freedom?
- What permissions can we create or borrow and which discourses need challenging to allow us to draw on and develop literary, artistic and creative ways of communicating with the research and non-research participants? How might these contribute to ethical research? [43]

9. A Reader Writes Back

Weeks pass. It is time to write a concluding paragraph for this article. The final paragraph means you send it off—to reviewers, to readers, to a wider public, the world. As I start to write, I am unaware of the voices surrounding me, peeping over my shoulder, frowning and shaking their heads. When I read back what I have written, it feels as if someone has managed to wring every last drop of living conversation out of the text. The sound of an imagined academic authority seems to be winning. I stare into space and eventually turn to some feedback from friend and colleague, Ann Jinks. She has gone carefully through a draft of my paper and left her responses in handwritten notes alongside my typed draft. In green ink. As I read her handwriting, I start to hear her voice. She is thinking aloud on the page, telling me her reactions to this and that. And because she isn't anticipating being written or read by others, she feels free to just speak with me. I hear a tunefulness in her voice, in her writing and I start to hear the sound of talk again, of conversation. I move back to the keyboard and hear the strains of another conversation, a writer's bind in anticipating readers ...

"Take off the paper bag," she says.

"You sound muffled. What are you wanting to say?"

"I am shy," says the head-in-the-bag.

"Writing like this

is like a coming out party.

You don't know who is out there,

Who wants to come,

How they will react."

"Take off the paper bag," she says again.

"If you don't, you'll suffocate."

"You're not hearing me."

"No-one can hear you like that.

Take off the paper bag." [44]

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