Ethical Tensions as Educative Spaces in Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract: In "The Human Condition," Hannah ARENDT (1958) calls us to think deeply about our role in relationships, to be mindful of our actions and intentions. In this article, we take up the ethical tensions one of us faced while working alongside women with learning difficulties, who have been involved in the criminal justice system. The narrative inquiry is based on the doctoral research of the first author, who engaged with four women in the living and telling of their experiences. The ethical questions that surfaced were complex, multilayered, and called forth questions of commitment and responsibilities. These tensions are contemplated as educative spaces by the first author and her supervisory committee. In particular, we look at ethical considerations in terms of who we are and are becoming as researchers in relation to participants we work with. Within the ongoing discourse about qualitative research ethics, this article emphasizes the need to think about research relationships as part of an intricate web that connects us all as human beings.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

"From the beginning, I wanted Caris[1] to like me, partly because I anticipated that we would be working closely together for several months, and partly because I wanted a meaningful relationship with her. I felt compelled to develop a relationship with Caris before asking her more personal questions or inviting her to share her story. I had a strong desire to ensure reciprocity within the relationship; I wanted her to tell her story and to want me to be a part of her life, if only for a short time. I envisioned us meeting weekly and having great conversations, but also going places and meeting her friends and family. Without asking her, I had set plans for what should happen in the coming months."[2]

This excerpt is part of field notes I[3] wrote while meeting with participants. I entered the lives of participants as a stranger and over time realized how unfamiliar their worlds were to me and how I world traveled with arrogant perceptions (LUGONES, 1987). Maria LUGONES called me to attend to notions of world traveling, but also to the importance of attending to processes in research. When I began this narrative inquiry, the research puzzle[4] focused on: *What are the experiences of young women with learning difficulties[5] who have been incarcerated? How did their learning difficulties shape their experiences with the criminal justice system (CJS)*? As the participants and I inquired into their childhood experiences, as well as present and future stories, complex layers of learning difficulties, addictions, criminalization, child and social welfare interactions, violence and daily struggles emerged. Much like in the initial field note, my interactions with the participants called me to wonder about the research process and in particular my commitments and responsibilities. As researchers, when we "come face to face with [the] participants, and care about them" (ROTH, 2005, §5) tensions form within relationships. We may ask ourselves, "Why are we here?" The purpose of this article is to show how this research contributes to the ongoing discourse around ethics in qualitative research (STITH & ROTH, 2006) by making visible and discussing the ethical tensions I encountered and we contemplated together as coauthors to create educative opportunities for understanding. [1]

Narrative inquiry is "a way of understanding experience" (CLANDININ & CAINE, 2013, p.166). The inquiry process takes place through negotiations as stories are told and lived. Relationships are fundamental to narrative inquiry, as they shape the way participants and researchers negotiate the inquiry process, phenomena

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1 All names and identifiers have been changed.

2 This passage was written after I wrote Caris' narrative account and shared it with her. I did not come to this realization until our research relationship ended.

3 "I" is used in reference to the first author of this article who carried out the fieldwork. The three co-authors were involved in the conceptualization of the project, the data analysis, as well as the writing of the manuscript. In the article, we alternate between first person singular and plural to differentiate between doing the research (singular) and acting as authors (plural).

4 The term puzzle is used to emphasize that the research aim is not to answer questions, but rather an opportunity for further exploration.

5 *Learning difficulties* is used to encompass mild intellectual and/or other disabilities that have resulted in significant challenges in learning as identified by the women themselves.

under study, and as they begin to co-compose narrative accounts and final research texts. Being accountable to the participants is an ethical responsibility which stems from an understanding that lives are intertwined, calling for a deeper consideration of what we are doing in relation to others (ARENDT, 1958). [2]

As I met with participants, the need to continuously negotiate roles and responsibilities as part of the research process *and* in the relationship became evident. In narrative inquiry, relationships are not independent of the research process, but rather are central to the work (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000). Participants and researchers become part of the "web of human relationships" (ARENDT, 1958, p.181), where action is situated and immediate consequences can be felt. Our interactions, "whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life" (p.9), connected us to each other as part of the human condition. Hannah ARENDT's proposition that we "think what we are doing" (p.5) is a reminder that as human beings, actions are always in relation to those we interact with and part of an intricate matrix. I became increasingly wakeful that decisions were not based solely on any one individual, but were made by "the individual as interconnected and intertwined in meaningful relationships with others" (LARKIN, DE CASTERLÉ & SCHOTSMANS, 2008, p.235). [3]

To situate this research within relationships required a major shift in thinking from participants as subjects who are passively being investigated, to co-researchers who are an active part of the process. With time I paid particular attention to the dynamics of the relationship in terms of power differentials and a sense of equity. As human beings we are distinct in our experiences, described by ARENDT (1958) as human plurality. Plurality is revealed through speech and action, the distinction between human beings and other beings or objects in the world (ibid.). Being able to recognize and understand distinctions without losing the sense of humanness became a central ethical issue. [4]

Research, as a public endeavor, also raises questions about whose voices are being introduced into the public space. "Every time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which [...] they could never have had before" (p.50). Although participants and I negotiated the telling of private stories, we were conversing in a public realm, that is, we were bringing our experiences forward to become part of our common existence. The "space of appearance" (p.200) is the public space where people live together, and power is present as the "potentialities of action" (p.201). In telling their and our shared and co-composed stories, experiences became potential sources for action. [5]

In Section 2, we will provide an overview of ethics as part of the research process. We specifically discuss relational ethics as a perspective taken up in narrative inquiry research. In Section 3 we share the experiences of the first author as she faced ethical tensions in the field—meeting participants, interacting and developing relationships—as well as when contemplating the complexity and multiplicity within participants' lives and striving representing participants in

ethically responsible ways. In the final section we offer our interpretation of ethical tensions as opportunities for reflection and understanding in the midst of the lives that we and the participants are living. [6]

2. Background

The context of ethical practices in academic institutions, described as "doing good and avoiding harm" (ORB, EISENHAUER & WYNADEN, 2001, p.93), is based on the standards reinforced by Research Ethics Boards (REBs) in Canada.[6] Researchers are expected to protect the privacy of participants and maintaining confidentiality (HAMMERSLEY & TRAIANOU, 2012; LAZARATON, 2013). A term used to describe standard ethical practices is *procedural ethics*; the ethical guidelines that "[remind] the researcher to consider such issues as the potential risks to participants," along with confidentiality, consent, and accessible summaries of the research project for participants (GUILLEMIN & GILLAM, 2004, p.268). These procedural considerations are helpful when designing and planning a research project, but are not able to address the "everyday ethical issues that arise in the doing of research" (p.263; see also GUILLEMIN & HEGGEN, 2009; LAZARATON, 2013; TOMKINSON, 2015). Furthermore, the ethical guidelines established by REBs say little about "the researcher's role in conducting ethical research" (TOMKINSON, 2015, §6) which leads to uncertainties about relationships and interactions with participants. These murky waters may seem dangerous and unstable, but can become rich sources for development through "public reflection on the ethical dimensions related to our daily research-related work" (ROTH, 2004, §14). Indeed, sharing experiences of ethical tensions throughout the research process can change and illuminate the way we understand research ethics within the context of our own work. [7]

Beyond procedural ethics, there is an emphasis on the ethical responsibility toward participants in qualitative research[7] (CHRISTIANS, 2011; DENZIN, 2003; GUILLEMIN & GILLAM, 2004). As Sule TOMKINSON (2015) astutely points out, "ethical considerations do not terminate with the receipt of a certificate of ethics approval, but only start" (§10). This responsibility includes a need to recognize that "researchers and participants have differently tuned sensors, ways of seeing, standards, and interpretations" of the world around them (BREUER & ROTH, 2003, §16). Furthermore, the kinds of interactions between researcher and participant in research vary based on the kind of relationship which forms. The hierarchy implicit in research relationships may lead to ethical concerns with power and manipulation (COHN & LYONS, 2003; KVALE, 2006; PHELAN & KINSELLA, 2013). Therefore, we need to remind ourselves that research ethics is deeply intertwined in different facets of the research process based on our

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6   Tri-council policy guidelines are used in Canada, see
    http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf [Accessed: February, 23, 2015].

7   Ethics in qualitative research has been discussed extensively and within a wide range of disciplines including education, psychology, nursing, and rehabilitation medicine (i.e., BRINKMANN & KVALE, 2005; DOWNEY & CLANDININ, 2010; ORB et al., 2001; PHELAN & KINSELLA, 2013).

understanding of research as being done *with* participants, rather than *on* them
(ROTH, 2005). [8]

An understanding of ethics as a behavior or attitude toward participants is one
possible way of addressing ethical concerns in qualitative research
(JOSSELSON, 2007). Rather than a list of conditions to fulfill, ethical decisions
are based on "a stance that involves thinking through these matters and deciding
how best to honor and protect those who participate in one's studies while still
maintaining standards for responsible scholarship" (p.538). The constantly
changing landscape of research ethics is a reminder that ethics have been
interpreted as social constructs that are dynamic and evolving (ROTH, 2005). [9]

2.1 Relational ethics

Relational ethics is part of looking closely at the "web of human relationships"
(ARENDT, 1958, p.181), focusing "on people (whole persons) and the quality of
the commitments between them" (BERGUM & DOSSETOR, 2005, p.8). In
relational ethnography, Gail SIMON (2012) describes the work as being "ethics-
led as opposed to method-led; ... the methodology emerges in response to and
from within the relational activities under investigation as opposed to being pre-
scribed by the researcher" (§40). Similarly, narrative inquirers look to the
relationships and experiences that unfold to guide the research process, as
opposed to following a predetermined protocol (CLANDININ & CAINE, 2013). Our
interpretation of accountability expanded from being cautious and conscientious,
to being indicative of caring (SIRY, ALI-KHAN & ZUSS, 2011). In doing so, the
responsibility we feel toward participants did not stem from obligation, but a
genuine sense of relationship. [10]

An "ethic of care" perspective (BERGUM, 1994, 2003; GILLIGAN, 1982, 2011;
NODDINGS, 1986) highlights that "fidelity [to individuals] is not seen as
faithfulness to duty or principle but as a direct response to individuals with whom
one is in relation" (NODDINGS, 1986, p.497). To attend to the participants
requires a "relational space (not the space where one or the other lives but the
space that occurs between them) [...] where personal meaning is awakened"
(BERGUM, 2003, p.125). In addition to relational space, *interdependency* and
fostering authentic dialogue are two key concepts underpinning an ethic of care
perspective (AUSTIN, GOBLE & KELECEVIC, 2009; GILLIGAN, 2011).
Relational spaces, interdependency and dialogue are fostered to cultivate
openness and trust, where ethical tensions are taken up as part of experiences
(NODDINGS, 1986). [11]

Carol GILLIGAN (1982) speaks of the "ethic of care" within the "ideals of human
relationship—the vision that self and other will be treated as of equal worth"
(p.63). She emphasizes the need for relationships to be non-hierarchical; like
ARENDT (1958), she too uses the "image of web," which "changes an order of
inequality into a structure of interconnection" (GILLIGAN, 1982, p.63). Her use of
the metaphor emphasizes the intricacies, while ARENDT (1958) adds the
characteristics of intangibility and fragility within a web of relationships.

Nonetheless, relational ethics are about human connections which includes asking difficult questions in ambiguous spaces where relationships develop. [12]

Ethics in narrative inquiry builds on relational ethics and has been described in detail by Jean CLANDININ, Vera CAINE, and Janice HUBER (in press).[8] Narrative inquirers acknowledge the presence of power differentials in research and have emphasized ways for participants and researchers to be engaged and part of the process (CLANDININ & CAINE, 2013). In narrative inquiry, the emphasis on negotiation and collaboration reinforces the importance of reciprocity and equity (ibid.). Being together "with others and neither for nor against them—that is, in sheer human togetherness" (ARENDT, 1958, p.180) is a way to consider relational ethics. When "people are only for or against other people," that is, when there is a specific end in mind, "human togetherness is lost" (ibid.). In this narrative inquiry, ethical questions emerged from the struggle in maintaining "human togetherness" and resisting the tendency to see people with arrogant perceptions (LUGONES, 1987). As I began to comprehend the role of relational ethics in this work, there was a shift in the way I approached the research in relation to participants. [13]

2.2 Narrative inquiry as relational research

Narrative inquiry begins with an appreciation of experience as being understood and expressed narratively, as well as embracing narrative as a way of negotiating and co-composing knowledge and presenting this knowledge to others (CLANDININ & ROSIEK, 2007); narrative inquiry in this way is both a methodology and the phenomena under study (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000). Narrative inquirers are mindful that they are entering in the "midst of lives," lives that began long before and will continue long after a research project ends (CLANDININ, MURPHY, HUBER & ORR, 2010). The relationships that develop shape the way experiences are shared and understood. As Mark FREEMAN (2007) notes, "Relational thinking seeks to shift the angle of vision and thereby open up new, more fully human ways of figuring human lives. This aim is its great challenge and its great promise" (p.11). Thinking relationally is a critical part of narrative inquiry. "Without living in relation in wide-awake ways ... we cannot know, feel, understand, and recognize tensions" within lives and relationships (CLANDININ et al., 2010, p.83). Tensions "we experience as researchers alongside participants as we live on their landscapes" (ibid.) develop as part of the narrative inquiry process. [14]

The ontological and epistemological commitment to understanding experiences in relational ways influences the way narrative inquirers approach research. Interactions within this methodology are not structured as interviews with a list of questions, but as conversations (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000). Conversations are open in that they do not have a distinct agenda and are negotiated by participants and researchers. Accordingly, to "live alongside, to become part of lives, theirs and ours, in motion" is a critical part of the narrative

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8   See "Ethical Considerations Entailed by a Relational Ontology in Narrative Inquiry" (CLANDININ et al., in press) for a detailed discussion of ethics in narrative inquiry.

inquiry process (CLANDININ et al., 2010, p.83). Working with participants in this way takes time and often requires researchers to be flexible in the field. [15]

Field texts refer to the transcripts, field notes, reflections, and participant's writing gathered during the initial stage of "being in the field" (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000, p.92). Field texts are inquired into as whole pieces, as opposed to separating and categorizing during the analysis. Field texts are used to develop interim research texts, also called narrative accounts (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000). The narrative accounts of participants represent experiences, and are also shaped and influenced by the relationships being experienced. Final research texts develop from the narrative accounts, but are written with a broader audience in mind (CLANDININ & CAINE, 2013). [16]

Ethical tensions emerge throughout the research process. Seeing tensions as educative opportunities involves acknowledging and creating space for meaningful conversations and explorations, rather than keeping uncomfortable thoughts hidden (CLANDININ et al., 2010; HUBER, CLANDININ & HUBER, 2006). When personal narratives "bump up" against dominant social or institutional narratives, the tensions that form can lead to greater understanding and a shift in perspective for researchers, participants, professionals and policy makers (CLANDININ & RAYMOND, 2006; CLANDININ & ROSIEK, 2007). [17]

3. Research Process

The women were 20-28 years old. Two of the women were Aboriginal[9], one was of German descent, and one of French descent; all of them were born in Canada. In Alberta, the representation of Aboriginal women in custody in 2009-2010 was a little over 50% (MAHONEY, 2011). Three of the women were mothers with two or three children; none of them were married or in common-law relationships at the time I met them; two of them were initially living with boyfriends but broke up with them because they were being abused. All of them identified as hetero-sexual. The participants had been arrested and charged at least once. Their charges were for shoplifting, theft, and violating administration of justice conditions (failure to appear in court, probation breaches, etc.), which was representative of the most common offenses for women according to Canadian statistics from 2009-2010 (ibid.). Two of the women had a criminal record, and two had their records expunged under the Youth Criminal Justice Act[10]. Three of the women had been detained in custody for at least a week with the longest single period being two months. Two of the women mentioned they had been "in the system," since they were 13 years old, explained as having many interactions with police officers and being familiar with CJS procedures. One participant was categorized as a "high risk" case and assigned to a specialized caseworker. [18]

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9 Aboriginal includes First Nations, Metis and Inuit people as defined by Statistics Canada (MAHONEY, 2011).

10 The Youth Criminal Justice Act is the legislation that governs the Canadian youth justice system. It applies to young persons who are at least 12 years old and younger than 18 years old. For more information, please see: http://justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/yj-jj/tools-outils/back-hist.html [Accessed: March 21, 2016].

Each participant identified herself as having learning difficulties; these difficulties were described as having trouble keeping up in class and having specific challenges with learning. One of the participants completed high school with additional support from teachers, and the other three women did not complete high school. Two participants left school in grade 10, and one left in grade 7. Although all of the women received a clinical diagnosis—attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD/ADD), general anxiety disorder, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), and learning disabilities in math and reading—their experiences as women with learning difficulties, rather than their specific diagnoses, were the focus of the study. [19]

From an "ethic of care" perspective, the relationships with participants were paramount to the way I understood ethical tensions. I became wakeful to these tensions as I lived alongside participants in the field. I initially struggled when facing difficult questions regarding research relationships and boundaries because I was not courageous enough to speak out about the challenges I faced. As I sought out opportunities to talk about the tensions, with participants and colleagues, spaces opened up to grapple with the tensions. The ethical questions that surfaced were complex, multilayered, and called forth questions of commitment and responsibilities. Whereas the research involved four participants, in this article we focus on one participant, Caris. [20]

3.1 Meeting Caris

In the following segment we introduce Caris. Her narrative account was composed as text, which included found poems. Found poems are formed using fragments of actual transcripts and field notes and placed together as poems that are evocative and reflect some of the emotional experiences.

> **Balancing Act**[11]
> "having a kid,
> then having to deal with the law
> at the same time
> just trying to ... get by living I guess
> with a kid
>
> that's my cycle.
>
> then having to deal with my old charges,
> and then trying to understand
> how my behavior is
> so I can keep myself in control
> but still take care of my kid at the same time
> and not get so stressed out
>
> that's my cycle.
>
> that I feel that I have to use addictions
> to help me forget about all my stresses

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11 This found poem is from a transcript excerpt of a conversation with Caris on February 28, 2013.

me, going out drinking,

and then going to jail for some reason,

and then I am back in the court cases again

and still, do all my programs that my probation officer wants me to do,

and I still have to do stuff for my kid too ...

and it's hectic—all the time, it's hectic.

that's my cycle.

so I am trying to get away from the system,

and trying to do stuff for me, and my son

and trying to focus on us,

but still I have to deal with it because it's there ...

they are asking for two months, and who's gonna watch my kid?

nobody.

he's going to have to go into foster care,

so I am trying to do programming,

help me recognize I have a problem

and going and changing,

getting away from the addiction part,

so I don't go back to it all over again,

that's my cycle" [21]

3.2 Commitment

Meeting Caris was more than finding and recruiting a participant (CAINE, ESTEFAN & CLANDININ, 2013). ARENDT (1958) aptly describes the delicate and somewhat ambiguous nature of research relationships as a web. "We call this reality the 'web' of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality" (p.183). I still recall introducing myself to Caris as a student and researcher with a distinct focus, but I also emphasized my desire for a prolonged relationship. Tensions formed as I thought about who I was trying to be in her life, not only as a researcher, but also as a person—each calling forth a different commitment. The tensions I felt between professional and personal boundaries became educative opportunities to ask myself who I imagined I would become in her life. There were tensions because our interactions led to places that seemed to be at the margins of research and more akin to friendship. Rather than limit our relationship, I focused on my commitment to Caris when considering how to act in these liminal spaces. [22]

Caris was the first participant I met. When I began this narrative inquiry, I was unable to picture her life outside of this research project. I was not attentive to who Caris was in her multiplicity because I had certain expectations of what the research process would look like, including what my relationship with Caris would entail. When Anne, a community worker, introduced me to Caris, I was eager and excited about the relationship we would develop. I indicated to Caris that I wanted to meet with her several times, and I ask her to confirm that she would be available for a year or so. The "intangible quality" of the "web of human relationships" (ibid.) became a tension. I realized that I could not fit my roles into

neat little boxes that I was able to keep separate. I felt pulled by a sense of commitment to Caris as I expressed a desire to have a relationship with her, while also feeling pressure to focus on being a researcher.

> "I have trouble keeping my research separate from other areas of my life, and I would think about Caris while I was shopping for groceries or playing with my children. ... I was negotiating how I could be a part of Caris' life. I wanted to live alongside to share experiences, not just hear about them. I helped her move and I drove her to her appointments" (Fieldnotes, February, 2013). [23]

Even though I talked with participants about the importance of forming and maintaining a meaningful relationship, I failed to consider what it meant to them. During the fifteen months that I met (or tried to meet) with Caris, I struggled to understand why our relationship did not unfold as I had hoped. It became apparent only after our research relationship ended that this tension formed partly because I had never asked her what a meaningful relationship looked like for her. Yet, it was also more than this. LUGONES (1987) has compelled me to see that if "we learn to perceive others arrogantly or come to see them only as products of arrogant perceptions and continue to perceive them that way, we fail to identify with them—fail to love them—in this particularly deep way" (p.4). My commitment was shaped by a tension called forth by my failure to love in this deep way, and instead I was more concerned with the outcome of the research. As I reflect on my relationship with Caris, like Marilyn FRYE (1983, as cited in LUGONES, 1987, p.8), I too can see that "one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination." In these moments of reflection, I could see that narrative inquiry called forth a commitment to world travel to Caris' world, in ways that were hard and long term work for me. [24]

3.3 Showing commitment to multiplicity and complexity

Human plurality connects us as human beings while distinguishing each of us as unique (ARENDT, 1958). "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live" (p.8). In co-composing the narrative accounts, I was attentive to the diverse stories Caris had shared and wanted to include. These were more than the stories of experiences in relation to the criminal justice system or challenges due to learning difficulties. I had to be careful not to reduce Caris' life to particularly experiences or to categorize her experience. Vera CAINE and colleagues (2013) explain how stories foster development of identity and "this cannot be achieved by treating stories as reductionist artifacts of a research process" (p.583). [25]

A tension formed during the analysis process. I had been taught to organize and collate in order to make sense of the research findings. I wanted to keep the messiness and multiplicity that were true to the individual participants and their experiences, but I was concerned that the reader would interpret such narratives as lacking purpose or consequence. Limiting Caris' narrative account to a few pages focusing on my own research interests and conclusions would not reflect

my commitment to her, it too would limit others' understanding of who she was and was becoming. Whether it is regarded as good research practice or a commitment to be alongside participants in loving ways, there was a tension between limiting what experiences would become publicly visible and keeping a sense of plurality. [26]

Caris had been in and out of correctional centers for ten years from when she was thirteen. Yet, when I asked her to tell me about her experiences, she shrugged her shoulders and said,

> "I dunno, I never really had a problem going to jail. Probably because I mostly kept to myself and I was only friends with certain people, and the rest of the people I just never really talked to, I didn't even really acknowledge them. It's just kind of hard because you can't show too much emotions or that kind of stuff with other people. You can't show that you have like any kind of weakness right? So for real, only sometimes, like maybe when you do one-on-one programs, or you are just like the kind of person that doesn't care what other people think, then you can get help" (Caris, February 28, 2013). [27]

Caris had significant insights into her experience in jail, and yet there were also many silenced and untold stories. After reading and reflecting on Caris' narrative account, I could see how she had learned how to survive and get through her time in custody. Contemplating multiplicity in lives required a change in focus from what I expected as stories of the criminal justice system to actually listening to Caris' told and untold stories. When a question was met with silence, I had missed the opportunity to talk about what mattered to her. When Caris said, "I dunno," I interpreted her words as rejection, rather than a possible starting point. Perhaps Caris too recognized that I was not at ease in her worlds and that I was not a fluent speaker (LUGONES, 1987). Though a commitment to world traveling, other stories could have emerged; perhaps I would have come to know other stories of Caris, stories that showed plurality (or different access to the world) or love of a world that was foreign to me. Although I later realized the importance of plurality, Caris and I never had the chance to experience this as part of our relationship before we lost touch with one another. [28]

3.4 Responsibilities

ARENDT (1958) describes actions as a series of chains, so that when we act, there is a reaction. There is a "boundlessness of human interrelatedness" (p.190) in our actions, particularly when we are together without being "for or against each other" (p.180). "Action [...] always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries" (p.190). This action also calls forth responsibilities as a narrative inquirer. Caris talked about being abused, losing custody of her children, and being discrimination. Many of Caris experiences were marked by violence. This violence for ARENDT would have called forth a citizen responsibility, called forward action against misery. I was mindful of Caris willingness to share such private stories with me, but I was unsure of how to act. I thought I was getting to

know Caris, but I failed to see how my own actions and inactions were closely linked to responsibilities in the way ARENDT thought. [29]

The most intimate exchanges Caris and I had were in the car or sitting on a park bench. We went places together and talked about our lives in different settings. I got to know Caris in relation to other people in her life. At the same time, there were a number of occasions when I would go to the designated meeting place, and Caris would not be there. I would call and leave messages for a week before hearing from her. In those moments, I could not make sense of her absences and missed calls. I had this persistent fear that I had done something wrong, that I had not cared enough. I had to take a step back to realize that there was so much I did not know about Caris. I learned that trust and respect were critical elements of being in relational spaces. I had to trust Caris and accept uncertainty as part of our relationship. When I thought about how my actions did not foster "human togetherness" I could see how I had created limitations (ARENDT, 1958). [30]

The ambiguity in who I was in Caris' life and who she had become in mine pulled us apart as neither of us seemed willing to talk about how the relationship had shifted over fifteen months. I had become aware of how my expectations of the relationships with participants impacted the research itself. CLANDININ and CONNELLY (2000) refer to the formalistic view that emphasizes "the formal structures, by which things are perceived" (p.39). Only when I learned to recognize how my expectations were influencing our research relationships and the way I was interpreting the experiences. This tension helped me re-consider responsibilities within the context of actions. [31]

3.5 Representing the participants in research texts

Representing the participants was an important part of negotiating and writing Caris' narrative account. SIMON (2012) emphasizes the ethical decisions involved in the writing process pertaining to responsibilities to the "visible participants in the text but also to the emergent relationships between writers and their readers" (§40). Narrative inquirers attend to both the participants as well as the public audience as they contemplate what stories are shared and how they are shared (CLANDININ & CAINE, 2013). "Representation, as the act that arises from our relational ontology, necessitates our living with the unfitting story rather than with attempts to tame, sanitize, or analyze" (CAINE et al., 2013, p.581). I had to remind myself that I was not trying to "make these stories fit" into the research, but to stay with the "unfitting story" (ibid.). I was attentive to the possibility of losing Caris' voice if I did not discuss with her the way her experiences would be presented. Negotiating the narrative account with Caris was imperative to faithfully portray how she perceived herself and others around them. [32]

Margarete SANDELOWSKI (2006) discusses the "crisis of representation" that has been a growing concern in qualitative research where the researcher does not give "voice to the voiceless" but replaces their voice (p.10). She warns against "the dangers of misrepresentation" (ibid.) which is a potential problem in

qualitative research when negotiations with participants are not central. Caris was willing to share her experiences publicly, but I knew that due to different interpretations and perceptions within the public realm, the original stories could lose their authenticity, and their unique reality (ARENDT, 1958). I experienced significant tensions when I thought about my responsibilities of representing Caris in final research texts. [33]

Researchers are increasingly using other ways of presenting the research, such as poetry, plays and photographs (SANDELOWSKI, 2006) to show participants' perspectives and to express greater emotion (RICHARDSON, 1994). Found poetry[12] was a way to approach the concern of representation and to ensure that Caris felt her words had been heard. Emotive and evocative, the words were their own, expressed in powerful ways. The tension of presenting pieces of the narrative accounts in a way that maintained the ethical responsibility within our research relationships was addressed by using found poetry. [34]

The ethical responsibility of representing participants included giving the reader a chance to come face to face with participants and offering Caris a voice within the public sphere (ARENDT, 1958). In the "space of appearance," the public space where power is found as the "potentialities of action," the authenticity of experiences can get lost (p.201); researchers strive to interpret and analyze as a way of making the research meaningful, but risk losing the actual meaning of the work as expressed by participants. Here then responsibility is closely linked to accountability. Representing participants in the public realm is a way of acknowledging the potential power inherent in stories that can become sources of action. [35]

4. Discussion

Contemplating ethical tensions, in relation and to commitments, as educative spaces called forth difficult questions. At the same time, exploring the tensions opened up opportunities for growth and understanding. The "web of human relationships" (p.183) is not meant to be untangled, but embraced as intricate. Seeing human relationships *as they are* is necessary to understand why tensions form and why research is messy. In establishing relationships with participants, showing plurality in their stories and representing them in final research texts, we thought about who we were and are becoming in the lives of participants, and what our responsibilities are. Rather than finding the "right" answers, we had to learn to accept ambiguity and uncertainty as part of the nature of relational ethics in narrative inquiry (CLANDININ et al., 2010; HUBER et al., 2006). [36]

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12 This term is used to describe the poems created by taking words and phrases from transcripts and intentionally placing them in a certain way on the page (BUTLER-KISBER, 2002).

4.1 In the midst of lives being lived

Negotiating the relationships was important when entering into the midst of participants' lives. When I met with Caris, I had not taken time to negotiate with her what it meant to engage in relational research and to share both told and lived experiences. Uncertainty in our relationship became a tension because I initially did not see Caris in the midst of her life, and struggled to travel to a world that was foreign to me. During the seven months that Caris and I lost contact, her life circumstances significantly changed. Joanne MINAKER (2001) describes the constant flux in needs and the dynamic nature of interactions for women with similar experiences. This constant flux, which was also present in Caris' life, awakened me to how I initially had taken up dominant stories in my relationship with Caris. Being cognizant that "we enter in the midst of lives, our lives and participants' lives, and into the midst of ongoing institutional, cultural, linguistic, and social narratives" was necessary to understand that Caris was unique and that I needed to attend to her experiences directly (CLANDININ et al., 2010, p.87). To seek and find "more fully human ways" to work with participants (FREEMAN, 2007, p.11) may change the way we approach research and understand the participants living in larger social and institutional landscapes (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000). [37]

In this way a narrative account is never the final word on someone's experience, but rather is always provisional (FRANK, 2005). Attentiveness to the tensions needed to be situated in this understanding that lives continued in diverse and unexpected ways (CLANDININ et al., 2010). The aim was never to "fix" the issues that Caris faced. Seeing how our lives intertwined with one another and with broader narratives was significant for understanding who I was in relation to Caris. Although we cannot give definitive statements on what will become of the participants, we highlight the ways that relationships and interactions shape and shift the lives that are being lived (CAINE et al., 2013). Therefore, ethical tensions evolve and change based on these relationships and interactions and must be contemplated in context to be educative (ROTH, 2004, 2005). [38]

4.2 Reflexivity

Being reflexive while interacting with participants also became a way to recognize and explore the tensions as educative spaces. Reflexivity was a way for me to contemplate ethical concerns and to navigate through the process of this study (BREUER & ROTH, 2003; ETHERINGTON, 2007; FINLAY, 2002; PHELAN & KINSELLA, 2013). As I continued to meet with participants, I understood the importance of being present with openness and curiosity that ultimately fostered a sense of commitment and action. During the time when Caris and I had lost touch, I repeatedly thought about her role in the narrative inquiry. I felt a sense of weariness when I thought about possibly losing Caris as a participant. The inquiry process was significant for me and it was only when I looked back that I noticed how I had wrestled with tensions. [39]

We propose to take up social science research by thinking about ethical tensions in the research process *during* the research process, including choosing the research questions, positioning oneself in the field, documenting and interacting with participants, analyzing and interpreting as well as presenting and representing the work (BREUER & ROTH, 2003). "Reflexive focus can bring attention to discourse, attending to what has occurred with the explicit purpose of considering the complexities inherent in ethical, collaborative practices as the work is actually unfolding" (SIRY et al., 2011, § 24). By creating spaces where we can explore ethical tensions, there is an opportunity for greater awareness and understanding. From an ethical standpoint the transparency inherent in reflexivity is necessary for understanding how research texts have been created and co-composed (BISHOP & SHEPHERD, 2011; RILEY et al., 2003). Indeed, "it is only through systematic, ongoing reflexivity, however—including a continuing examination of personal subjectivity—that we can avoid self-indulgence" (BISHOP & SHEPHERD, 2011, p.1284). Rather than keeping concerns and fears "hidden away or brushed under the carpet" (BREUER & ROTH, 2003, §20), denying who we were and are becoming within the work, it is our ethical responsibility to recognize and address the tensions that arise. In doing so, we are able to reflect on our research practices and how we may engage in research in ethical ways. [40]

5. Conclusion

Some of the most profound and challenging responsibilities of relational research are in the form of ethical tensions that arise from the open-ended nature of the narrative inquiry approach, as well as the dynamic characteristics of relationships as they begin, grow and are brought to an end. The ethical tensions in this narrative inquiry were called forth as we tried to make sense of who we become in participants' lives as a researcher and a human being. These tensions were taken up and turned into opportunities for understanding; we were able to think about the web of human relationships that we are all part of and in which we carry commitment and responsibilities (ARENDT, 1958). Acknowledging the plurality and connectedness of human beings is important when considering our ethical responsibility to participants as part of this ongoing dialogue about ethical tensions as an inherent part of qualitative research. [41]

Acknowledgments

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