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CENTRE ON MIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

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Considering ethics and power relations in a qualitative study exploring experiences of divorce among British-Indian adult children.

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Abstract

This paper outlines the need for the critical scrutiny of ethics and power relations embedded in the research process, particularly when researching minority ethnic communities. Research with minority groups within institutional and structural contexts is challenging. It demands close engagement for recruitment, participation of minority community members for research. in addition, critical interpretation and reflexivity on part of researchers is vital to ensure that knowledge generated is not biased, or harmful that pathologises minority groups.

This paper systematically considers issues of recruitment, participation, and interpretation throughout the research process through a qualitative research study carried out with British-Indian adult children of divorce. In doing so, it considers the strategies used and critical discusses their outcomes. It does not present findings but considers the experiences of conducting this research within the larger contexts of inquiry focussing on minority ethnic groups. The research processes are reflexively considered by the author and emphasises the need to consider power as dynamic relationship by engaging with the positions of the researcher and the researched, differing agendas, gender, cultural and linguistic influences within the interview that have shaped the data obtained.

The paper concludes that research with minority ethnic communities is important and critical but needs to be conducted in ways that are cultural sensitivity, involve communities, provides opportunities for participation. Due to their minority status, research with this groups presents a greater need for analytical transparency-validation and critical researcher reflexivity.

Introduction

Social scientific research is based on human interaction which involves the building of human relationships. These relationships are very central in qualitative research which often involves in-depth interviews and responses to personal questions. The process of conducting enquiry based on relationships introduces issues of power where the researcher-researched relationship is also guided by larger social structures (Gottfried, 1996). In qualitative research settings, it is widely acknowledged that the researcher has power over the researched within this research relationship (Fontes, 1998). There is a recognition of biases in terms of power which need to be corrected in research not only in terms of who the gatekeepers of knowledge are (Grant et al. 1987) but also in terms of what objective facts are selected and which ones are excluded. To understand a phenomenon as an understanding of facts need not necessarily lead to the truth (Mitra, 1998). This has led to the acknowledgement of issues of research ethics and the development of processes to protect the researched. Most research now takes into account issues of ethics, and requires researchers to provide information and transparency with regards to the purpose and intended outcomes of the research, procedures in place to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, as well as clearly communicating to participants the risks or benefits of the research. All these measures are designed to enable participants to give 'informed consent'.

However, with regards to minority ethnic groups, it can be argued that the dynamics of structural power relations invites further careful consideration of power and ethics within the research process in terms of inviting participation, communication, collecting and interpretation of data.

Researchers have highlighted the issues of limited research and the limited participation of ethnic minority participants in the research process. Moore (1973) supports Mitra's arguments by indicating that sociological knowledge of minority groups is limited by research processes that:

- exclude minority experiences and expertise;
- use generalised assumptions that may not be suited to minority groups;

- omit significant variables for consideration in research with minority ethnic groups and often lead to sustained stereotypes by not allowing minority perspectives to define themselves;
- interpret research within an institutionally racist context (Moore, 1973; Jensen & Lauritsen, 2005).

Furthermore, most academic research is based within particular contexts and is politically aligned as it is funded through channels that seek to inform policy (Moore, 1973; Finch, 1986). This political aspect has aditional implications for research with minority populations since this can lead to knowledge and programmes that pathologise ethnic minority cultures and lead to more harm and control. Research within ethnic minority cultures has to consider the larger political aspects and the implications of the knowledge it generates. This perspective, which is closely aligned with feminist perspectives which considers research as a tool to direct social change, and action (DeVault, 1996; Bordeau, 2000, Kirsch, 2005; Jensen & Lauritsen, 2005). Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP), Anti-Discriminatory Perspectives (ADP), largely prominent in social care discourses, can also be usefully employed within research to enable culturally sensitive and inclusive research practices. Within social work and care, issues such as the exclusion of black and minority ethnic groups, lack of their involvement and their over-representation in the control spectrum of services parallel some of the issues that surround research with black and minority ethnic groups (Begum, 2006; Mullender & Hague, 2005). Within policy, practice and research contexts, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) involvement and perspectives remain marginalised. Indeed, AOP and ADP perspectives can be used to identify structural, cultural and personal bias systems through systemic analysis and reflexivity.

Some suggestions and strategies towards addressing these power issues in ethnic minority research include engaging with minority communities in a manner that elicits their participation, is culturally sensitive and acknowledges their inputs (Moore, 1973; Fontes, 1998; Jensen & Lauritsen, 2005; Sheikh, 2006). The need for research to take account of the involvement and the participation of ethnic minority participants is important in order to acknowledge their role in shaping ethnographic encounters and not merely reducing them to objects of research (Kelman, 1972; Koch & Harrington, 1998; Fisher & Ragsdale, 2005; Hanley, 2005; Henry, 2005). Involv-

ing BME groups in research, however, poses opportunities and challenges which are considered in further depth in the following sections of the paper.

Kelman (1972) also suggests that transparency regarding funding, and the accountability of research are important to ensure that research designs and purposes do not assess, analyse or reinforce negative stereotypes and research outcomes are not used for the control of minority ethnic groups that results in their repression. Indeed, it is critical for researchers to remain alert so that they do not become instruments of social engineering and control through funding arrangements that are linked to government agendas.

The need for researcher reflexivity and integrity in this process is critical as minority ethnic groups, by their very status in society, may not have the resources or structures to challenge research that interprets their reality incorrectly. Indeed, diversity within academia is very limited in terms of the representation of women, ethnic minorities and working class populations who are 'othered' and practices and processes that reflect white, male, middle class values (Knight et al, 2004; Jensen & Lauritsen, 2005, Archer, 2007). Reflexivity in research is important to engage with power imbalances and to consider the validity and reliability of interpretive research (Koch & Harrington, 1998; Maxey, 1999).

This paper considers some of these issues and strategies and how they were used to enable participation, involvement, and analytical transparency in a qualitative research that explored the experiences of divorce among 21 British-Indian adult children. Throughout the process, the author, as the principal researcher in the study, engaged in transparent reflexivity and contextualised herself to present issues of power dynamics and how they may have affected the research process and outcomes (Few et al, 2003; Karnielli-Miller, 2009).

Background to the research

The research aimed to highlight the experiences of adult children of divorce in the British-Indian community. Though there have been substantial research on divorce, these have largely focussed on white populations. Other minority ethnic populations in western contexts are largely understudied. The study aimed to fill this gap by exploring the experience, impact and coping of divorce among British-Indian adult children of divorce in the UK.

While a brief background to the research is presented, the findings are not the scope of this paper. It is only the experiences and strategies of the research process that are focussed on.

Research Design: The participants for the research were 21 adult children from the British-Indian community aged between 18 and 35 who had experienced parental divorce. Participation was only sought from participants identifying themselves with Hindu or Sikh religion. Though some British-Indians also belong to other religious communities, only these two religious groups were chosen as most British-Indians belong to one of these groups and because of similarities between the practices and tenets of the two religions.

Data was collected from participants through interviews using a conceptual guide developed from the literature review. The research design included a two-phase data collection process through semi-interviews. The interviews were held over the phone or in person, in accordance with the expressed wish of the participants.

In the first phased, data was collected through interviews and tape recorded, with the consent of participants. A preliminary thematic analysis was carried out to produce a preliminary report. At the second phase, participants were again contacted after this preliminary report was ready and a second interview with sixteen available participants was carried out. Only one participant refused to remain involved at the stage of the second interview, 3 participants could not be located and 3 participants could not provide the appropriate time for interviews after repeated efforts.

This second interview was conducted with a three-fold aim in mind:

1. to fill gaps in the data and explore issues that may have been left unfinished/never explored;

2. to validate the earlier data collected from the participants by a quick recap;

3. to give feedback to the participants and share the preliminary results with them and record their reactions, comments and thoughts.

A total of 15 interviews were conducted over the phone and 20 interviews were conducted in person over the sample of 21 participants totalling 35 interviews in all.

Ethics and Informed Consent: All participants were interviewed only after they had provided their informed consent. All participants were given a consent form prior to the interview which outlined the objectives of the study, their rights to anonymity, confidentiality and withdrawal. The consent form also outlined possible risks or benefits of the research to the participants.

All participation in the study was voluntary. All participants were also paid £10 as a token of recognition for their participation.

Due to the sensitive nature of divorce in the community, recruitment of participants was identified as a challenge. The researcher built links in the community to advertise the research and invite voluntary participation for the research. the followings section highlights strategies used towards this. It also outlines particular issues, challenges and encounters in the research process.

While consent for use of participant quotes was obtained, the paper also presents generic comments and reactions that the researcher obtained in her ethnic-graphic encounters in the field. these comments were not tape recorded and are recalled from the researchers reflexive diary that was maintained during the research process.

Participation and Ethical concerns

Recruitment: Many studies have noted the difficulties and challenges of recruitment of minority ethnic groups for participation in research (Knight et al, 2004; Yancey et al, 2006). Researchers contend that this is due to lack of trust ethnic minority participants exhibit in researchers' intentions and inappropriate methods of recruitment that do not consider the minority context and barriers that minority groups may face (Knight et al, 2004; Fisher & Ragsdale, 2005; Yancey et al, 2006; Yu, 2009). There are many research studies that have been able to recruit meaningful participation from ethnic minority groups and state that building trust and relationships with ethnic minority groups and communities is essential, though this may mean spending more time and resources to build these relationships and form these engagements (Knight et al, 2004; Yu, 2009). Gaining trust is in fact more important in research with minority ethnic groups than matching ethnicities or particular identities of researchers-research teams (Meadows et al, 2003; Yancey et al, 2006).

In the current study, identifying and recruiting participants posed a serious challenge. Not only is divorce stigmatised in the community, divorce rates are very low. The researcher, as a recent migrant from India studying in the United Kingdom (UK), did not have access to the British-Indian community or any social networks or capital in the UK. Yu (2009), in her research with Chinese participants, also indicated the barriers to gaining access to Chinese people in the UK, as she was also a student from China (Yu, 2009). The author engaged in a variety of methods to find ways to advertise the study and elicit participation. This included visiting community centres, Asian organisations, advertising the study in various locales, colleges in and around London, and other areas where South-Asians were resident, visiting temples, advertising in local Asian radio channels and local regional Asian newspaper, posting various blogs and discussion posts in a variety of sites aimed at British-Indian audiences. These activities were geared towards building relationships in the community. Many researchers have noted the use of community personnel and agents to help recruitment (Knight et al, 2004; Eide & Allen, 2005). The author also approached many people in the community to obtain help for recruitment. However, community members often pointed out and acknowledged the difficulties in recruiting this sample due to the personal and sensitive nature of the subject.

It is a sensitive topic. I don't know how to approach the families but I will try. (2 personal friends and 1 worker at a community centre).

I know a lot of people who are divorced …but they won't talk to you. They will say 'it's none of your business – it's their private life' (Sikh male at the post-office).

In fact, one of the participants also indicated that they were aware of the difficulties of trying to find participants for this particular study.

Participant: I felt a bit sorry for you…because I thought it was quite an admirable endeavour and it would be very difficult to find people who would help you out (male participant).

The author also had encounters with many community personnel who could be conceived as gatekeepers – these included Asian counsellors, organisers of community groups, priests and so on. While these gatekeepers had the potential to act as important links, they also resisted the researcher's attempts to contact possibly interested participants in the community. For example, one Asian counsellor reported that it was unfair for researchers to interview potentially vulnerable people.

I know a lot of people and I come across various scenarios. But I don't think they should come to you and you go and reopen their wounds all over again and I will then have to fix it later on. Some people from channel 4 also contacted me for a programme on divorced couples and I think it is very unfair to exploit their experiences for research (Asian counsellor).

Building trust and association with gatekeepers are important strategies towards building trust and gaining access as they can act as culture brokers and vouch for researchers and facilitate contact (Knight et al, 2004; Eide & Allen, 2005; Yancey et al, 2006). Davison (2005) notes how community representatives often give consent for ethnographic research to take place in the community, this also presents barriers where self appointed gatekeepers control information and limit the rights of minority ethnic people to participate. Hanley (2005) also agrees that some gatekeepers can also dominate and drown other voices. Indeed, what ethical position can one take if individuals want to participate but the community does not endorse the research (Meadows et al, 2003)? This indeed needs to be considered before using community gatekeepers as

a standard method of recruitment or over-reliance on using community gatekeepers for recruiting participants. Use of community gatekeepers can also lead to repetitive use of the same sample population for multiple studies and may limit the scope of enabling diverse voices within minority communities to emerge.

The author also engaged in various questions and ideas that many community members wanted to discuss, often suggesting alternative research questions that they believed were of interest to the community. Community members also invoked cultural concepts of age and gender to challenge the author. Often arguments were made that seemed to invite debate and sometimes challenged the author's views. For example, one community member suggested that

Divorce was more common now because children now have access to more sex because of which the novelty of sex after marriage is lost sex.

Another member suggested that:

Divorce is occurring more in the community because women have taken women's liberation too far.

Such comments made the author feel highly uncomfortable and displaced. As a feminist researcher, the author found it challenging to respond appropriately to such remarks and was unsure as to how an activist stance could be taken. In addition, the author wondered whether entering a challenging dialogue would be in her interest as it could potentially discourage these members from supporting her in the recruitment process.

Within discourses of participation and community involvement, these may be important aspects to consider to help researchers prepare for interactions in the community context. These ethnographic encounters are important and helped to challenge researcher's perspectives on the community as well as familiarise the researcher with the larger collective understanding of the subject before engaging with it in a culturally sensitive manner. In addition, getting connected with the context expresses cultural sensitivity, willingness to learn, competence on part of the researcher (Eide & Allen, 2005) and is appreciated by the minority communities.

The author was able to recruited 21 participants for the study by engaging with the community and building personal contacts and networks and through snowballing methods. Most participants were asked why they agreed to participate and two reasons were consistently provided, namely: (a)because a trusted source referred the researcher and (b) because they wanted to help the researcher.

Interviewer: Why did you participate in this study?

Participant: He's a very dear friend of mine and he said that he'd met you and you wanted to carry out some survey and whether I'd like to help out with the survey so… (Female participant)

Out of 21 participants, 12 were recruited through personal contact, 6 through advertisements online, in newspapers and community centres, 2 through counsellors and 1 through a community priest. All of the participants were approached voluntarily and expressed their desire to contribute their views. Personal interactions are more successful strategies to recruit participants from minority groups than media-based attempts as other researchers have also as they can help generate trust identified (Eide & Allen, 2005; Yancey et al, 2006).

It needs to be noted that it may not be the lack of motivation from BME groups to participate that is the issue but rather the ways and means through which researchers access the participation of minority ethnic groups.

Informed consent: Though all participants were given a summary about the study in as transparent a manner as possible and their informed consent was sought, the notion of informed consent itself presents some concerns, particularly in qualitative research as no one can know what answers or counter-questions can come up and hence a participant cannot know what they are consenting to (Kirsch, 2005). The author tried to build rapport and these connections and friendship established prior to the research were contextual factors that shaped participation by the participants. They may have trusted the researchers before critically considering issues of consent or risk. Shaw (2003) comments on the problem of obtaining consent from participants as some of them may be less aware of the issues. In addition, many may not be able to

foresee the emotive nature of the interview or the extent of disclosure during the interview (Mani, 2006). Davison (2005) argues that to address these issues regarding consent, consent should be sought in a ontinuing manner and constantly negotiated in changing circumstances. Towards enabling this, the researcher consistently pointed out issues of consent repeatedly throughout the research process – during recruitment, prior to the interview, during data collection and interview, particularly when the researcher gauged that the participant was having difficulty with continuing with the topic of discussion, at the end of the interview and also when participants were re-contacted to conduct a second interview and seek participant validation on the data collected and the interim analysis.

Data Collection: Within the design of the research, to enable participants to gain some control over the research process and their participation, they were given the choice during data collection whether they would like to be interviewed over the telephone or in person. Five participants were interviewed in person and sixteen were interviewed over the telephone during the first set of interviews. In comparing the telephone and personal interviews, the researcher felt that participants were likely to share more personal information during personal interviews. This may have been because telephone interviews eliminate non-verbal cues, body positions and gestures that can be crucial in facilitating understanding and rapport (Johnson-Bailley, 1999; Knapik, 2006).

Telephone interviews may have provided more distance, control and anonymity to participants than personal interviews. One participant indicated that they would generally prefer the personal interview but was glad to have talked at length over the telephone on the first instance.

Ten participants who were interviewed once over the telephone and once in a personal interview (across the 2 interviews that were carried out within the research design) were asked which method they had preferred. Six participants indicated a clear preference for personal interviews.

Interviewer: Do you prefer the face to face or telephone interview?

Participant: Face to face is more comfortable actually coz on the telephone sometimes you ca'nt get across. I didn't mind both to be honest. They were both ok…(female participant).

Four participants indicated that they did not mind either and both methods had been equally suitable.

I was surprised as to how much one can talk on the phone... I don't really think you couldn't got more out by being there in person. Maybe more from the phone if anything (male participant).

When participants chose personal interviews, they were also given the option to choose the location for the interview where they would be most comfortable and what would be most convenient to them. This resulted in a variety of venues for personal interviews ranging from the car of the participant, to a café, participant's residence and participant's offices as well as interviewer's office and her residence. Locations can be perceived as micro-geographies which can have an effect on the quality and content of the interviews. Interview locations provide a material place for enactment and constitution of power relations and can help to understand the interviewer better and provide participants more control, resulting in better rapport, and richer data (Elwood & Martin, 2000). One male participant who was interviewed at his home was happy to show the author his home and his achievements and elaborate on his beliefs by showing his movie collection, pictures of his girlfriend, his music as well as the pictures on his wall and objects that inspired him to cope with the adversities of divorce.

Respondent Validation: The author sought to share preliminary analysis of the study and obtain participant feedback and respondent validation for the study through the second interview. The notion of respondent validation is again complex and raises questions as to how much power participants may have to change the study or its analysis. Some researchers comment that respondent validation is not necessarily a reliable process to test validity as participants may not know or feel comfortable wirh theory (Glaser, 2002; Silverman, 2000). Lacey and Luff (2001) have also identified various issues that need to be considered in cases of respondent validation namely: (a) the generation of new data on asking for feedback from respondents, (b) the analysis of the new data, (c) how much of the feedback would be incorporated into the final analysis, and (d) how problems will be tackled in cases of respondent disinterest. Though this validation process is not free of concern, the author nonetheless presented this opportunity to enable par-

ticipants to consider the ways in which data was interpreted, the primary emerging themes as well as how issues of confidentiality and anonymity would be addressed and how their data would inform this work. The author indicated that ownership of the research process and it analysis would lie with the researchers but that any objections or comments by the participants would be noted within the research. Fourteen participants maintained interest and participated in this validation process. Ten participants gave personal interviews and four participants were re-interviewed over the telephone at this stage. This process invoked much interest in participants and most participants were also interested in accessing the finished product of the research.

Knapik (2006) stated that participants do have concerns about misrepresentation. In the current study, the researcher believed that in spite of additional concerns this respondent validation presents, this process nonetheless enhances transparency and furthers the partnership and participation process.

Power and Reflexivity

Though, it is claimed that most researchers have organisation and institutional power (Henry, 2003), the researcher in this study experienced varying levels of power and powerlessness during the different phases of the research. Karnieli-Miller et al (2009) also suggest a similar experience in their research.

The researcher felt powerless while trying to recruit participants and was constantly anxious about losing their interest during the study and during the validation phase of the study. Tang (2002) also supported this notion that the assumed dominant position of the researcher can be questioned. Grenz (2005) proposes that power is fluid and is not possessed by anybody, neither the researcher nor the researched, and hence it is not possible to conceptualize power in these terms. The author considers this movement of power between the researcher and the researched and suggests that this movement is shaped by the different positions that researcher

and researched take within the research encounter which subsequently shapes the data and outcomes of the study.

The various identities that the author as researcher and participants brought to the research encounter shaped the negotiations of power in their dialogues in accordance with the established norms between the researcher and the researched. Some of these were broadly based on gender, class, social status, shared cultural norms. These are further explored within various identities and positions of the researcher and the researched.

Researcher's positionality: The feelings of power and powerlessness were often located within the positionality of the researcher. 'Positionality' is indicative of the particular social, structural and organisational positions that individuals occupy that defines the identity, power structures and social fields of the individual which mediate their interactions.

The researcher was an Indian and shared 'Indian' ethnicity with her participants. The researcher also shared with the participants, the identity of a child whose parents had divorced. Other aspects of the researcher's identity were dissimilar to that of the participants. The researcher was of a different nationality and thus also different from the participants who were British and acculturated within the British-Indian context which was distinct from Indian culture in India. There is much literature on the identity, adaptation and acculturation of migrant second-generation populations in other contexts and this paper will not focus on this are as that is not the scope of this paper. The researcher was also a woman. These specific positions of the researcher interacted to produce insider-outsider contexts as other researchers who have conducted research within minority context and share ethnicity with participants have also pointed out (Soni-Sinha, 2008; Chawla, 2006, Few et al, 2003; Mani, 2006). The insider-status is constantly negotiated and while there are aspects of race or ethnicity that can be a unifying factor, issues of gender sexuality, nationality, class and power are constantly at work shaping the power discourse in the researcher-researched relationship. How these influenced the research process and shaped the interaction is further explored in this section.

The particular aspect of being a migrant from India, itself, placed the researcher in a vulnerable position, one in which she often felt displaced, unsure of the wider social and cultural norms. Issues of social capital and networks seemed significant as these may have made access to the

participants within the community easier as has been presented earlier in the paper. The researcher felt exposed and it was within this context of vulnerability that the researcher asked for community support and help to recruit for the research. Another aspect of powerlessness was the researcher's position as a student which does not necessarily enjoy the same organisational support as other researchers within institutions.

This identity, that of a migrant and student, shaped most of the researcher's encounters with the community as the researcher was often asked why she wanted to do this research, who was funding it and what were the outcomes of this project. However, this powerlessness also prompted help from the community and the participants. All of the participants were asked what had motivated them to participate in the study and almost all of them indicated that they had wanted 'to help the researcher'.

Interviewer: why did you participate?

Participant: Well…like...I was told that...through S, that someone needed help with the interviews and I thought ok...it was an opportunity to help someone (female participant).

My researcher's association with the Indian ethnicity as well as distance from the British-Indian identity also afforded her a status akin to the insider-outsider status. Mani (2006) elaborates on similar dynamics where she states that social distance between her and her participants was reduced due to her shared ethnicity with participants but also because an appropriate amount of distance was maintained between their social worlds which allowed for exchange and learning.

This helped to forge closer ties with participants as they felt empowered in the sense that they knew more about the community and they were helping the researcher to understand it. However, familiarity with many traditional concepts such as honour and stigma, as well as language familiarity also helped me to better understand many nuances of the participants' experiences which the researcher could identify and explore further in the interviews. Johnson-Bailley (1999) alludes that silent understandings, culture bound phrases that do not need interpretation, non verbalised hand and face gestures that are culture specific are comprehended when researcher-researched share cultural familiarity. At many points in the interview, participants used Hindi words and phrases to describe a particular experience. These words cannot be appropri-

ately translated into English and translations cannot capture the emotional and culture context in which those words are used and what they mean within the specific culture. For example, the researcher felt that some translations such as 'izzat' as 'honour' or 'sharam' as 'shame' or 'sautela' as 'step-relative' could not signify the cultural weight of these words. Cultural assumptions are embedded in language and experience (Rubin & Rubin, 1995: Cited in Tang, 2002) and this is where cultural familiarity helps in correctly analysing and interpreting the data and taking it further.

Researcher's encounters with participants often resulted in creating friendships and Kirsch (2005) does mention how this friendliness delineates boundaries and expectations within the research relationship. However, in congruence with feminist themes of recognising and reducing vulnerabilities and power imbalances, the researcher had intended to share with participants her stories and experiences if they wanted to hear them. The researcher was therefore ready to use, and did use, personal disclosure towards making the participants comfortable and reducing the hierarchical relationship between the researcher and participant. During the interview process, for example, the researcher often invoked examples of her own experiences of parental conflict and consequences when participants seemed uncomfortable with such disclosures or became emotional. The researcher's purpose was to reciprocate the vulnerability and level the power between the participant and researcher and be able to emphasise with the participant's narrative to express understanding. Taylor & Rupp (2005), and Few et al (2003), talk about levelling or sharing power through self-disclosure and by letting participants challenge the researcher. Grenz (2005) also elaborates on her experience of data collection from male heterosexual clients of prostitutes, some of whom projected their sexuality on to her making her a sexual object and seeking her participation in their sexual exercise or expression. In the current research also some participants challenged the researcher by asking personal questions about coping which presented social risks which could implicate the social reputation of the researcher. Due to the small size and close knit nature of the British-Indian community, the researcher could gain a stigmatised identity in this community herself. The researcher subsequently reconsidered her naive position of self-disclosure, her rights to confidentiality and anonymity, and right to with-hold personal information, and modified her position. Subsequently, the researcher responded to personal questions in a much more measured way and only encouraged it before or after the interview. The researcher clearly outlined this prior to the interview

while also emphasising their rights to non-respond to questions, or withdraw if they felt the interview was not what they had expected, or were uncomfortable with it.

The researcher also reflected, later, that she was more wary and less likely to make personal disclosures with male participants. Tang (2002) notes how gender, class and social status interact within the interview context. Presser (2005) also adds that a research interview can be used as a site for gendered activity and how informants and researchers use their gender relations with each other to affirm an appropriately gendered self. Taylor and Rupp (2005) comment on how negotiating power within research becomes even more complex with women interviewing men as gender power also becomes a part of the power relationship that has to be considered. Tang (2002) suggests that sharing a common experience of gender can help to build better rapport and facilitate closeness between the researcher and the researched. The researcher affirms that in this research, she was able to build better rapport, relate better, carry out better conversations with female participants than with male participants. With interviews with male participants, the researcher was more aware of her femininity, vulnerabilities, took additional precautions with regards to health and safety issues during personal interviews, was more conscious as to how she posed questions, how she presented herself, how she physically moved in their presence. Tang (2002) also suggests that past experiences can have an effect on perceptions of power. The researcher's precautionary stance towards male respondents may also have been due to the fact that she had received many 'prank' calls from men when she was trying to access and recruit participants and one instance where a potential male participant requested her picture.

Participants' positionality: Within this research, the context of participants, their positions and status, invariably shaped the power dynamics of the research interaction. Presser (2005) notes that macro-level factors of social position, status and location also yield power. Vulnerable participants, rendered vulnerable due to macro-level features, may also experience powerlessness in micro-level aspects. This is particularly true when the researcher interviewed an extremely vulnerable young mother of 18 years who had limited formal education, had been in care and had experienced extreme life situations. Poverty and experience of care system as macro contexts consistently present difficult micro-experiences and outcomes for individuals. This particular participant even sought permission from her partner before consenting to the interview.

However, in all other interviews, the participants were clear that they were helping the researcher. This altruism on part of the researched could also be a strategy by which the participants reclaimed power back by placing themselves in a 'helper' position.

Interviewer: Why did you participate in the study?

Participant: To help you (female participant).

These participants were able to present themselves within the scope of the study, even present analysis of their own life experiences, take control of the discussion and recognize and/or resist change or direction or diversions in the interview from the interviewer. Kirsch (2005) suggests a similar asymmetrical power relationship between the researcher and the participants. Grenz (2005), however, claims that in her research she did not consider or experience her participants as belonging to any marginalized group and hence being underprivileged and powerless socially. This aspect of power imbalance is developed around feminist social research with particularly marginalised people, which is where most researchers turn their gaze towards. In this research study, all of the participants (except one) had completed or were undergoing undergraduate degrees and those working were in professional positions. The researcher did not consider them as socially vulnerable as many of the participants knew about research processes and many had experience of being researchers themselves. Participant: I went through your study and it seems really interesting and I know what it's like...I've done a lot of research in psychology. (female participant).

This has implications as to how participants engaged with the research process and design in terms of their ability to understand the process and give consent, comment on the design and even use the research to suit their purposes. Within discussions of power, it is critical to take account of participants' agency and their agendas. The agency of the researched has to be considered alongside the agency of the researcher, or else there is a risk of silencing the authority of our participants and forcing a vulnerable position on them. Smart (2006) suggests that participants participate and engage in a reflexive activity through interviews that shape both the past and the future of participants. This can indeed be true as seven participants also men-

tioned that apart from helping the researcher, other motives to participate included trying to understand their own lives and parental divorce better, wanting to engage in the study because it was important and being interested in knowing the outcomes of such a study.

Conclusion

The paper at the outset outlined some ethical issues in terms of participation, representation, transparency and researcher reflexivity that needs to be acknowledged and addressed in research with ethnic minority groups. There are no doubt some critical, ethical and power issues involved in ethnic minority research. Addressing these requires researchers to engage proactively and positively to remove barriers and engage with research in a culturally sensitive manner with ethnic minority groups. There is a need to take account of political forces and implications of research that does not further pathologise minority groups or generate knowledge that can harm their communities. This can mean investment of more time and resources and engage in trust-building processes to elicit meaningful participation and partnerships for research. This investment is important and necessary to include the voices of minority groups and engage with research that can be inclusive of other groups. This is one of the most crucial ways to address minority concerns and move beyond euro-centric perspectives. In addition, the findings and motivations of participants in the research highlights that minority ethnic groups are not apathetic or opposed to research – however, their participation is incumbent on building positive relationships with the researcher and trust. Strategies to enable and foster participation in this research can indeed be transferable to other minority groups and rests on the principles of trust building and transparency.

A qualitative research on a sensitive topic with a minority ethnic group is used as an example to highlight research processes that sought to address issues of ethnic minority recruitment, participation, transparency and reflexivity throughout the process of research. The reflexive process

indicated the manner in which gender, ethnicity, culture, nationality, the researcher's agenda and the participants' motives determine the researcher-researched relationship and its outcomes. The paper also outlined the dynamic nature of power within the researcher-researched relationship through different phases of the research. Within this notion, it is important to consider these dynamics to recognise the agency of researched as well as give credence to the diversity of different positionalities within different groups as well as different participants in research. It is within this framework that the reflexivity process can be critical and enable the researcher to take into account culture and the specific macro-level and micro-level positions that researcher and researched occupy. In addition, with minority ethnic research, reflexivity and vigilance if important to ensure that interpretation of data is well contextualised and not institutionally or academically biased, through collaborating with minority ethnic groups and making the analytical process and the outcomes more transparent to minority ethnic groups on whom research is conducted.

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