

The Only Way is Ethics: Methodological Considerations for a Working-Class Academic

Abstract

Ethnography as a methodological approach presents the fieldworker with many ethical crossroads throughout the research process. This is because of the unique position that ethnographers find themselves in, the environments that they research and the relationships which are formed. This paper presents four confessional vignettes from a broader ethnographic research project that illuminate the underside of fieldwork, and how the author dealt with a number of difficulties and dilemmas in the field as a working-class academic. Fieldwork was undertaken in a Welsh (UK) secondary school for one full academic year, and the paper argues that researcher identity must be remain fluid so that successful field relations are established and maintained. The paper concludes that researchers must think intersectionally about their endeavours and to also consider how one's own social baggage might impact upon the research process.

Key Words: Ethnography; Education; Ethics; Working-class; Goffman; Fine

Introduction

There are many ‘sliding doors’ moments that a fieldworker encounters as part of his/her endeavours. Data collection can be seemingly progressing unabated when something (or someone) plunges the ethnographer into a dilemma or even a crisis (Delamont, 2009).

Traditionally, ethnographers have been eager to side line the extent to which their own presence has impacted (and influenced) the various stages of the research process (Parker, 2002). Nonetheless, the critical reflections offered in this paper have long been called for, and for Fleming (1995, p. 52), the virtues of such an approach are three-fold by design:

First, it allows the researcher to engage in a process of systematic reflexivity; second, it allows the researcher’s interpretivist stance to be made clear from the outset; and third, it also enables the researcher to ‘come clean’ about the way in which the research was conducted, and make the nature of the creative process explicit.

With this in mind, this paper presents four confessional vignettes from a broader ethnographic research project conducted in a Welsh (UK) working- class school in 2013-14 (McInch, 2018). The school was selected for its disproportionately high level of Free School Meal recipients (one of the highest in England and Wales). Whilst a full conceptual discussion around social class is beyond the scope of this paper, the Free School Meal indicator (eFSM)¹ is still the proxy for measuring the social class of pupils in the UK compulsory education sector (House of Commons Education Committee, 2014). Indeed, whilst school-based research in the UK is a well-trodden path, key lessons were learnt by the researcher as a white, working-class male who entered the field thinking intersectionally about his practice and place. Uncovering some of the more personal/biographical aspects of the research reveals some of the emotional traumas and ethical dilemmas that the author faced, and how these impacted the development and mediation of field relations. The outline of this paper is as follows: firstly, the role of the researcher is identified, secondly, the nature of the fieldwork is presented, and this is followed by the four situational vignettes which outline the methodological dilemmas encountered. The paper concludes with methodological considerations for ethnographic researchers investigating educational environments.

¹ Eligibility for Free School Meals is a UK compensatory educational policy in the UK in which pupils receive a free meal on school premises daily. Eligibility is determined by household employment and income

Role of the researcher

Traditionally, it has been noted that gaining access to educational settings is challenging and multifaceted (Burgess, 1984). Hammersley (2018) has stressed that this problem has recently been further exacerbated because of the increasing bureaucratic demands being placed on schools. The fear of bad publicity can often cause anxieties for gatekeepers, and even when there is potential for good publicity, it can still cause disputes between the researcher and the organisation further down the line with regards to meeting the needs of the school and how the research is represented (Hammersley, 2018).

My social ‘baggage’ as a white, working-class male academic unequivocally played a positive role in the negotiation and continuation of access, further contributing to a successful period of fieldwork as it has done for other educational researchers (Benjamin, 2002).

Candidly, whilst I may now live and work in a middle-class field, I possess the requisite levels of cultural and social capital needed to successfully navigate both middle and working-class fields (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). My middle-class habitus is one that affords me the skills, knowledge, and networks required to ‘play the game’ in the educational field (i.e. working with teachers/practitioners/policy makers). Nonetheless, my working-class habitus is also still enacted on a daily basis and the embodiment of my cultural tastes, practices and dispositions (for example, my social network of friends, how I consume leisure etc.) certainly raised the ethical awareness through the data illuminated in this paper, especially when researching young working-class people. This brought with it tensions, dilemmas and decisions that middle-class researchers may have internalised and documented in a totally different way.

At the beginning of fieldwork whilst I still had to conform to official protocols when obtaining access (e.g. obtaining an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) disclosure²; gaining ethical clearance from my institutional ethics committee; seeking permission from the school’s governors), I was able to draw on my personal network in order

² The Disclosure and Barring Service is a UK Government agency that carry out extensive safeguarding checks so that employers can make safer, informed recruitment decisions.

to gain and maintain access, the importance of which has been stressed by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007). Being a native to the area I had a close friend that was a well-respected and long-serving member of teaching staff at the school and he was able to initiate an initial meeting with Jane³ (Assistant Headteacher). At our initial meeting she wanted to know what I was researching and I responded that I wanted to investigate how young working-class people currently orientate toward schooling, and she appeared happy with my response. She too was a long serving member of staff and provided me with a detailed breakdown of the perennial problems that the school had faced during her tenure. She was very keen for me to play an active role but warned against disciplining the pupils first hand if I witnessed any misbehaviour, and instead I was to notify the nearest available permanent member of staff. We concluded the meeting by completing the mandatory paperwork and agreed an immediate start date.

Due to the multiple roles a fieldworker may encounter, it has been suggested that a potential limitation of conducting ethnographic research is its labour intensiveness (Delamont, 2012). Especially the case in schools, these multiple roles may lead to an identity crisis on the part of the researcher given that one may have to undertake roles that are not conducive to the best vantage point for data collection, or indeed best match the ethnographer's skill-set/capabilities. With this in mind, I followed other educational ethnographers like Willis (1977) and Corrigan (1979) by adopting a non-authoritarian role in the school that facilitated trust and rapport between myself and staff/pupils. Within timetabled lessons I mainly sat at a desk at the back of the classroom and observed lessons, sometimes being asked to join in/facilitate tasks with the pupils when prompted by the teacher. Unlike the experiences of other educational researchers who have reported problems with role assimilation (see, for example, Ball, 1981), for me, being a classroom observer worked well. As fieldwork unfolded, I was 'utilised' by teachers in various ways, which was pleasing given that this was not outlined in the initial meeting. I was used more formally as a Teaching Assistant and also as a scribe in examinations for pupils with additional learning needs. I attended parents' evenings, the release of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination

³ Pseudonyms used here and throughout

results and I also ran two workshops for Sixth Form pupils related to preparing a personal statement for their University and Colleges Admissions Service⁴ (UCAS) applications.

Following Burgess (1984), I became a chameleon within the school, constantly consumed with issues related to Goffman's (1959) ideas around impression management in the various roles that I encountered and embodied. A case in point was the way that I described what it was that I was actually doing to the various stakeholders at the school, and my own social class positioning was important here. For instance, to the pupils I was just there to 'write a book about the school', to the teachers I was the awkward academic who wanted to be 'nosey', scrutinising their practises as the custodians of knowledge. To the educational psychologists I was a *bona fide* researcher and they seemed to be the ones that had all of the answers to my research questions. The School Secretary who managed the reception area where I used to sign in and out thought I was simply there to 'help out', and to the Teaching Assistants I was a 'researcher of some sort', although I always got the impression that no one was entirely clear what exactly it was that I was doing, and this positive ambiguity worked well for field acceptance and maintenance.

Doing fieldwork: Setting the scene

The research sought to investigate how social-class impacted educational attainment and progression in a working-class Welsh (UK) school. The fieldwork was traditional ethnography, following the precepts outlined by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007). Hammersley (2018) has recently revisited the debate about what contemporary ethnography looks like and has provided a list of key characteristics which is as follows:

- Relatively long-term data collection process,
- Taking place in naturally occurring settings,
- Relying on participant observation, or personal engagement more generally,
- Employing a range of types of data
- Aimed at documenting what actually goes on,
- Emphasises the significance of the meanings people give to objects, including themselves, in the course of their activities, in other words culture, and
- Holistic in focus

⁴ The University and Colleges Admissions Service is the UK central agency that administers student applications to UK institutions

Fieldwork lasted for one full academic year and consisted of three twelve-week terms in the 2013-14 academic session. The school was visited on a total of 78 days, which also included extracurricular events, such as parents' evenings and the distribution of examination results. The main method of data collection in this study was observational fieldnotes and these were written up at the end of every school day in a communal space in the school using a multimedia tablet. Delamont (2012) is a strong advocate for the traditional pen and notebook, however my approach worked for several reasons. Firstly, in a contemporary society, it is far more pragmatic to write electronic notes with the opportunity to store data in several (easily accessible) cloud-based locations. Writing up fieldnotes in front of participants has been seen both as a positive (see: Graham, 1995), and a negative (see: Sugden, 2002) for ethnographers. My view was that using this approach looked far more inconspicuous than trying to record notes in private settings within the school. Indeed, for all that my respondents knew, I could have been browsing the internet or paying a utility bill. The supplementary methods of data collection were semi-structured interviews with pupils, teaching and auxiliary staff, and documentary evidence which included: school performance tables; pupil attendance and welfare reports; and photographs of artefacts on school premises.

The school was part of a federation due to a forced move by the Local Education Authority (LEA). The partner school was also situated in the same suburban area and has one of the largest percentages of eligibility for Free School Meals (eFSM) recipients in England and Wales. Continuous underperformance had forced the schools to amalgamate in the earlier part of the decade, and whilst each school had its own management structure, there was one Head Teacher and one Board of Governors and the schools were financed by the same budget. Interestingly, at the time of fieldwork the school managed to avoid being placed into special measures⁵, until the inspectorate for education in Wales (ESTYN) enforced it in December 2016. The entrance to the school sat on a main road and was adjacent to a public house that was widely known (in the local area) for social disorder and illegal substance misuse. Next door to the public house was a row of local amenities that characterise a working-class locale; newsagent, bookmaker, a Chinese takeaway restaurant, and a small

⁵ Special measures is a term widely used by regulators and watchdogs of sub-standard public services in the UK

convenience store. This area was a popular social space for pupils before and after school (as well as at lunchtimes) and was also the setting for many occurrences of disorder that spilled onto the school premises (and sometimes the other way around) during the course of the research. Over 96% of enrolled pupils live in the surrounding area which experiences significantly higher levels of crime, unemployment, and poverty in relation to other parts of Wales, and indeed the UK.

The school building itself was in a state of significant and worsening disrepair. From the outside the building looked presentable, with a recent extension added to the side of the building that supplied the local community with social inclusion and (re)training services related to employment and vocational opportunities. The reception area was newly carpeted, with two permanent fixtures in the area. The first was a trophy cabinet that contained awards that alumni had won for various goodwill gestures and good behaviour in the local community. The second was a school/parent liaison notice board that acted as a showcase for various attempts to engage parents in school related events in both formal and extra-curricular capacities. The school was typical of many others in the UK, permeated with an odour of disinfectant and walls with exposed brick that had been painted with clinical colour schemes. Several corridor walls had large unrepaired holes that bore the remnants of classroom exclusions and the back of every doorway in the school was equipped with a metal frame that acted as a wall protector for the large numbers of pupils manoeuvring around the school premises in between lessons.

Outside of observing lessons I was based in what was colloquially known as ‘Room 20’ because historically it was a room used for pupil exclusions. Teachers would scale pupils’ behaviour between 1-10 and if it hit 10 they would be excluded to Room 20, as it was deemed that behaviour was twice as bad as it should be. The room housed all of the Teaching Assistants and was equipped with two round tables with eight seats apiece. There was an ‘L’ shaped sofa that ran underneath the window and spanned halfway up the adjacent wall. The walls were decorated with eccentrically themed displays ranging from famous philosophical quotations to behavioural codes of practice. The room was also home to the majority of lessons for pupils with additional learning needs and the school’s Breakfast Club. The Breakfast Club was a local initiative that borrowed from the Welsh Government’s ‘free

breakfast for primary schools' initiative that began in 2004. The scope of the initiative was to increase classroom concentration levels and also increase educational attainment (Welsh Government, 2016), however, in practice it served as more of a physiological necessity on account of the high levels of poverty and material deprivation that pupils attending the school faced.

At the end of fieldwork, leaving the school was difficult because of the personal and professional friendships that I had formed and, of course, this is the part of the research process that is so often neglected (Delamont, 2012). Because of the nature of school-based fieldwork it is easy for one to become routinised into attending school much the same as the pupils and staff, and I did not want to fall into the trap of simply entering the field, getting what I needed, and then departing without any regard for those being researched (Flick, 2008). In the summer of 2014, even though term-time and the fieldwork period had officially finished, my gatekeeper invited me to share in the events surrounding the release of Year 11 GCSE examination results, and I was keen to do this. I had got to know some of these pupils well having spent many hours with them and was eager to find out how such a pivotal event would be perceived and experienced. This moment was decisive for many different reasons as I was able to find out how all of the pupils performed, and also to wish them well in their future endeavours as this was my last formal contact with them. I had planned a comprehensive exit strategy from the school which included maintaining contact with staff and eventually presenting the findings of the research. I instigated this several times post-fieldwork but it never happened. I think the main reason for this was the fact that so much was going on structurally at the time (e.g. staffing restructure), which meant that a researcher presenting findings naturally did not feature highly on the school's priority list. As researchers we 'risk assess' the impact we have on research participants and environments, but we seldom do the same for the impact that fieldwork has on the researcher. To this end, the following four incidents document the most poignant ethical interactions that occurred during fieldwork.

Incident 1 - redundancy

As previously discussed, the school was in a precarious position, both in terms of (financial) management and performance, having been placed into Special Measures on more than one occasion in recent years. At the time of the research it was operating on a circa £1.5 million deficit, and the LEA had decided to rationalise the payroll, which is often the case in these circumstances. The following fieldnote explains an event that happened towards the end of the first half term. I entered school at the start of the day and went straight the staff room as normal whereby the site Head Teacher would undertake an ‘all-staff’ briefing. The briefings included vital information for school staff such as: any pupil issues, health and safety, classroom and school pupil exclusions and any other business. I was greeted by Matron (School Special Educational Needs Coordinator and long serving member of teaching staff) when I walked in:

Possibly the most socially awkward start to a working Friday ever. As soon as I arrive and walk in Matron greets me and exclaims: “You’ve come to see the devastation, have you?” and straight away I wondered what had happened. As it turned out today is D-Day for decisions about staff redundancies so when I walked into the Staff Briefing it was like a funeral wake. The Head walked in and was visibly distressed to the point of choking up when speaking. I don’t often feel inadequate, but I did right there and then. Here I was, lucky to be in the position that I am, on their patch collecting data for my own personal gain, whilst they’re about to receive potentially life-changing news. I sat with my head bowed and the Head proceeded to go through the motions and finally he spoke about how the redundancies would be communicated. He then left and the room remained silent – the atmosphere was tense. There was a brief moment of stillness before everyone dispersed and went off to registration

(Fieldnotes: 2/10/2013)

The ensuing day was a despondent affair. I tried my best to speak when spoken to and to stay out of everybody’s way. Luckily the teachers in the lessons that I observed all kept their jobs, as did all of the Teaching Assistants (whom I was based with outside of lesson time). As the day unfolded, I got the impression that the mist lifted as staff began to learn of their fate, as well as that of their colleagues. The severity of the situation was compounded by the fact that one of the teachers that did lose their job that morning was instantly replaced by a supply teacher who had been brought into deliver their lessons and was waiting in the school

reception area whilst the briefing was delivered. This strategy was implemented by the school because of the emotional trauma inflicted on the teacher by the devastating news. I left the field that day with a knotted stomach, thinking about people who had lost their jobs with families (and themselves) to provide for. My working-class self knew only too well how structural intervention has long affected the working-classes, and I had primary experience of redundancy with my parents, alongside many other Welsh (and British) communities who had to adjust to the deindustrialisation of many of the UK's established manufacturing areas (Blyton and Jenkins, 2012). The situation did not get any better over the weekend and such was the level of my guilt for being present, I had several conversations with two of my research supervisors who were able to offer sage advice. Whilst not as easy as one may think, I had to toughen up. This mainly focussed around reminding myself of the customs of the ethnographic enterprise, which abandons the natural science model of research practice in preference to understanding naturally occurring events and behaviour in their own terms (Brewer, 2000).

Incident 2 – managing boundaries

The second pertinent interaction occurred one day in Room 20. Whilst writing up field notes on a Wednesday afternoon in March 2014, one of the Teaching Assistants called Stacey entered the room and sat down. Fieldnotes further explain the significance of the interaction:

It was only her and I in the room, and we struck up a dialogue around the usual pleasantries. I had been privy to conversations between Stacey and her colleagues at lunchtime today whereby she had been the recipient of some tragic news regarding her terminally ill partner. I asked how she was and if she had any plans for the weekend, so as to remain neutral in the interaction and not let on that I knew what was going on. There was a brief pause before the tears started. We were sat on the same table and I had to 'think on my feet' as there were potential ramifications that I was conscious of. What if somebody walked in and assumed that I had caused the upset? What level of personal comfort is appropriate in this situation? I decided to gently rub her arm and shared my own experiences of how serious illness had affected my family too. This eased the situation dramatically and we spoke about our experiences and I think it made her feel better as I got the impression she thought that she was experiencing things alone. After the initial upset the conversation returned to some kind of normality before she apologised for 'being silly' and for 'dumping all of her problems' on me. I took this as back-handed compliment in terms of field acceptance, even though the situation was tricky to manage.

(Fieldnotes: 05/03/2014)

The dynamic in our relationship changed as the fieldwork unfolded, and speaking candidly, it was the one that needed the most surveillance and management. Referring to Fine's (1993) 'Friendly Ethnographer', my obvious plight to offer empathy and comfort appeared to be misinterpreted slightly. Indeed, over time it would be fair to say that things became a little awkward. For example, Stacey began to look for me on fieldwork days to actively instigate conversation. This was manageable at first but took a turn for the worst when she managed to obtain my mobile telephone number in her role as the school's Social Secretary, and promised to add me to a group message platform – which thankfully never happened. However, I did start to receive text messages from her outside of working hours. The messages were brief and low key at first and I responded to them, but this seemed to add fuel to the fire and they became more frequent and lengthier – and difficult to manage. Stacey was clearly vulnerable because of her domestic circumstances, but so was I as a researcher and married father of two children. All of the methodological readings and ethical codes of conduct in the world do not prepare the researcher for the minutiae of such relational dynamics.

When there is a danger that professional boundaries can be blurred in the male/female dynamic, Tomlinson (1997) called for a pragmatist approach to such situations, but this rather arbitrary proposal left me with some unanswered questions. What was I to do? Spurn her interactions and potentially thwart successful fieldwork? Accept and encourage further interactions in the pursuit of data collection, potentially comprising my personal and academic principles? And what if Stacey then told colleagues or even school management about our interactions if her intentions were not successful. In any event, her advances could clearly compromise my own domestic circumstances. Much like the insightful reflections of Parker (2002), a younger, working-class and hegemonically masculine 'me' might have sought the pursuit of sexual acquaintanceship without a second thought (Connell, 2005). Nevertheless, prior to entering the field I did not want to fall foul of the broader sociological problem of academic machismo (Bell and Roberts, 1984), and for me, maleness (and gender) and how they intersect with social class was an analytical imperative throughout the research process. My non-responses thankfully led to a natural conclusion to the situation and leaving the field further aided this.

Incident 3 - safeguarding

The third incident related to a safeguarding issue that was a fairly common occurrence in the school. The majority of pupils emanated from somewhat chaotic and often turbulent domestic circumstances that frequently made themselves the business of the school. During fieldwork there was an array of different examples of how working-class pupils had to overcome adversity. Aside from the vast majority living in poverty, there were numerous reports of domestic abuse, mental health issues, and serious (sometimes violent) crime that pupils were exposed to. The following explains a precarious interaction from the field two months into the fieldwork in the autumn of 2013:

A stark reminder today of safeguarding yourself in the field. A few weeks ago I was halted from working in a room alone with two female Year 11 pupils (with behavioural issues) as they had previously accused a male member of teaching staff of sexual harassment who was placed on gardening leave pending an investigation. I was writing up my fieldnotes in E20 (communal area) when the two girls suddenly appeared in the doorway. My heart sank but I had to think on my feet again – rationality was the key. They remained just inside the doorway approximately fifteen feet from where I was sat. We exchanged pleasantries and my strategy was to act as normal as possible and maintain the comfortable distance that was in place. Room 20 is normally a busy thoroughfare, but it was just my luck that it was eerily quiet (or it seemed that way) this afternoon. As it was a Friday I asked if they had anything nice planned for the weekend and also if they were watching the X-Factor, as I didn't want to talk about school and thought to keep the conversation nice and neutral. The one girl then asked me how my 'book' was coming along and so I replied 'Slowly!' They asked if they could read it once it was finished and I agreed. There were a couple more pleasant exchanges before Matron thankfully appeared after what seemed like an eternity, and she ushered the pair of them out of the room sharply. Now, if I hadn't had been informed of their previous accusations I wouldn't have thought any differently about such an interaction, but I was very guarded against an unsavoury scenario happening to me whereby I could have been accused of something similar.

(Fieldnotes: 21/10/2013)

This interaction was extremely problematic for me at the time, and several questions surfaced once again. Narcissistically my first thought was that these girls could accuse me of

something similar to the male member of staff who had been placed on gardening leave⁶, and potentially ‘whistle blow’ to the local community. This would have had severe consequences for me as I was a native to the area and knew the third and fourth generation relations of some of the pupils in the school. In turn, this would make my position as a researcher immediately untenable and would also likely impact my domestic circumstances. I also spared thought for the teacher who had not yet had an opportunity to clear his name, and even if the complaint was not upheld, how could he shake of the stigma of the initial accusation? Nevertheless, the successful navigation of this situation was because of my ‘working-classness’. I was able to converse using a local dialogue in a way that they could relate to and so this quashed any potential for barriers to surface right from the outset.

Incident 4 - bullying

This incident occurred whilst I was observing a lesson for pupils with additional learning needs prior to the Christmas holidays four months into fieldwork in December 2013. During fieldwork I witnessed several bouts of verbal bullying between pupils, although the following fieldnote explains the most poignant example:

I was sat in the classroom with the [Year 9 Additional Learning Needs] kids waiting for the teacher to arrive. Five minutes in and still nobody had showed up, which wasn’t a great start. The cover supervisor walked in [not a teacher, but a permanent member of staff] to take the lesson. He was, in effect, a facilitator and had been given tasks by the absent teacher for them to work through. The two things that stood out for me were firstly: even though this was a specific ALN lesson, they [the pupils] seemed more than capable of completing the assigned tasks. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, there were clear cases of bullying occurring that were left unaddressed. One girl in particular [sat on her own] was constantly verbally abused by three male pupils. She was derided for both her [academic] ability and her [physical] appearance and she was clearly materially deprived. I felt distraught leaving the room. I wanted to interject but knew that I couldn’t. I tried my best to attract the cover supervisor’s attention using non-verbal body language, but he didn’t pick up on it. Not a very good day at all.

(Fieldnotes: 10/12/2013)

⁶ Gardening leave is when an employee is suspended on full pay, normally either pending an investigation or when employment is soon to be terminated

This occurrence had a profound effect on me, and yet again I felt a strong sense of guilt about the way that I dealt with the situation. First and foremost, as a father of two, I would want someone to act in order to stop this behaviour immediately if my children had been the victims (or even the perpetrators) in this situation, but other barriers prevented me from following my gut reaction. The first was complying with one of the ‘informal’ ground rules set out in no uncertain terms by my gatekeeper prior to the start of fieldwork, which was not to discipline the pupils. There were further ethical dilemmas that I grappled with in the following days/weeks. Did the boys think that by not interjecting I advocated such behaviour, therefore condoning their actions as normal behaviour? If I had intervened then this may have caused further issues for the girl outside of the classroom, therefore making her situation even worse. Was this an ongoing issue in which my non-intervention could lead to physical/psychological harm for the girl? When speaking to my gatekeeper a few hours later I raised this issue and she was fully aware of it. Of course, the behavioural policies of the school are beyond the scope of this paper, however, after fieldwork had finished documentation from a recent ESTYN⁷ inspection reported that over half of the pupils in the school did not feel safe, nor did they feel that the school dealt with bullying effectively (Estyn, 2016). Fine’s (1993) unobtrusive ethnographer comes to the fore here. No one wishes to look bad in the field, and I certainly did my best not to in this instance. Nobody involved in the interaction expected me to intervene, and so if I had done I would have alienated the protagonists, potentially jeopardising future interactions and potential interview opportunities. I was cognisant that too great an involvement in a social scene can transform an ethnography into a field experiment.

Considerations for fieldworkers

So, why are these incidents important and what might they offer (novice) ethnographers? For Delamont (2009), there are what she terms as ‘productive’ and ‘unproductive’ uses of reflection (p. 57). The latter aligns with autoethnography, focusing upon introspective emotions, which she argues offer nothing in relation to its productive counterpart. The productive stance still engenders reflection but opens up legitimate academic issues for the social sciences. However, I propose that these approaches are not dichotomous, and that the

⁷ ESTYN is led by Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of education and training in Wales, and they carry out school inspections on quality and standards

boundaries between the two can become very blurred as interactions unfold in the field. It is impossible for researchers to detach their emotions and feelings and how they impact upon field relations and interactions, all of which are influenced by the researcher's social class.

In dynamic environments such as schools, researchers cannot have a fixed identity, but instead must embrace a much more fluid persona in order for successful interactions to take place. Fine's (1993) typology of fieldworkers proves a useful toolkit for researchers, although it must be noted that one of the problems with typologies is the fact that one could, at any one time, align with several, all, or even none of the categories presented. Fine lists these types into three broad categories: (i) the classical virtues (the kindly ethnographer; the friendly ethnographer; and the honest ethnographer), (ii) technical skills (the precise ethnographer; the observant ethnographer, and the unobtrusive ethnographer), and (iii) the ethnographic self (the candid ethnographer; the chaste ethnographer; and the fair ethnographer). For Fine, the underside of ethnographic work is important because it presents the fieldworker with a set of moral dilemmas that must be navigated, and this may be basing one's personal and public persona on what he terms as 'partial truths or self-deceptions' (p. 267).

Goffman's (1959) 'presentation of self' dovetails neatly with the work of Fine simply because it enables researchers to manage interactions in a fluid, rather than a fixed way. For Goffman, an individual that comes into contact with other individual(s) will attempt to influence their perceptions by using extensive impression management techniques, and this may involve attempts to change the setting, appearance, language usage and general manner, all of which I believe are impacted by one's social class. For example, in vignette number 4 (bullying), I had to display 'front stage' behaviours contrary to my own belief system with regards to such overt displays of bullying, and this was predominantly done to maintain good relations with my gatekeeper and the protagonists themselves as I may have interviewed them at a later date. Consequently, by revealing this data, I become a 'Candid' Ethnographer (Fine, 1993), one that is not afraid to look bad in front of other scholars by covering the personal nexus of honesty and ethics (Barnes, 1979). Nobody wishes to look bad in a situation, none more so than me and my lack of (direct) action. However, I am suggesting that ethnographers should disentangle the personal demands of self-presentation, from the question of 'what one should do in the name of science' (Fine, 1993; p. 283).

A further case in point is Incident 1, conveying sorrow and offering condolence to those that had lost their jobs was naturally difficult and so I became a 'kindly ethnographer'. Whilst there were members of this group that I previously had negative interactions with, I became sympathetic to their cause whilst in their company, although when they left the field I returned to being what Goffman (1989) calls 'a fink': a kind person that turns out to be a spy (Fine, 1993), or, in this case, a fieldworker. This is simply not the case as my working-class consciousness was only too aware of how redundancy can and has affected groups of predominantly working-class people at several different historical junctures in British society (e.g. deindustrialisation) and so these empathetic feelings were real. Of course, I still had a duty to report what went on as it was crucial to my research question(s), therefore potentially making my sympathetic stance illusionary. Lofland (1971) would term this as an agony of betrayal, however the documenting of these events could potentially improve situations for several different stakeholders such as teachers/pupils/auxiliary staff working in schools with a similar set of circumstances. The data here could also aid policy makers and educational managers in understanding how actions at the structural level impact upon delivery at the school level.

Incident 2 was the most emotionally draining because of the longevity of the situation, and this is important because of the potential sexual nature of the encounter. Fine's (1993) 'Chaste Ethnographer' affords readers an insight into the potential for ethnographers getting caught up in saucy tales of sexual acquaintanceship. Whilst flattered by my informant's advances, I was in the rare situation whereby a male rather than a female ethnographer was potentially a pursued subject. Fine (1993) remarks that such instances normally happen to female researchers and so I hope that this vignette quashes the taboo about writing about such incidents. This particular subject was currently experiencing extreme levels of personal trauma and whilst I felt very uncomfortable about how the situation was developing, her personal circumstances undoubtedly framed how I dealt with the situation.

Lastly, I became a 'friendly ethnographer' in incident 3, or as Fine (1993) would put it 'temporarily friendly' (p. 272). Ethnographers may face situations that they are

uncomfortable (and incompatible) with, and in environments such as schools, there is more chance of this happening than not. This interaction was successfully navigated by my ability to call upon my own working-class cultural consumption (such as a reality television show) in order to give the impression that the girls saw me ‘as one of them’, rather than one of the authoritarian, disingenuous males that they were used to dealing with in school. Whilst it would be harsh to say that I disliked the girls personally (as I did not get to know them), I did not like the situation that was created whether true or not. Safeguarding should not have a unilateral focus on the researched, and ethnographers will sometimes have to call upon their resources (e.g. guilty knowledge and impression management) to thwart any chance of harm for all concerned.

Conclusions

This paper has presented four confessional vignettes from a broader ethnographic research project of working-class schooling in Wales (UK) (McInch, 2018). The documenting of these experiences are important for ethnographers as even though one may question the emotive nature of field experiences and their relevance to the aims of the research, such instances illustrate that ethnographers have the unique exposure to the stresses of another individual’s way of life (Parker, 1996; 2002). The emotions experienced during fieldwork need not be burdensome for researchers and their intellectual endeavours. On the contrary, emotions experienced, both positive and negative, contribute to individual and data connectedness, thus allowing for a deeper analysis. Quite simply, researcher emotionality is normal and an essential feature of well-executed ethnography (Coffey, 1999). The somewhat taboo nature of the data provided in this article is very important for ethnographers as it unearths to the reader the emotional and personal qualities of the methodology (Goffman, 1959; Fine, 1993; Delamont, 2009). The four incidents discussed here also raise real life issues for working-class researchers working in guarded environments that have traditionally been hard to access and report about in their truest sense.

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