

## The researcher 'in the middle': Negotiating the insider/outsider dichotomy

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*Researchers, particularly those using qualitative methodologies, often position themselves as 'insiders' rather than 'outsiders' to their research domain. In this paper I discuss the role I occupied within my PhD research, including the personal experiences that led me to consider myself to be neither 'inside' nor 'outside' the research domain. I explore the ways in which my experience 'in the middle' influenced my choice of research topic, the scope of my study, access to informants, the collection and analysis of data, and the maintenance of research rigor. I argue that the insider/outsider dichotomy is simplistic, and the distinction is unlikely to adequately capture the role of all researchers. Instead, the role of the researcher is better conceptualised on a continuum, rather than as an either/or dichotomy. My role as neither an insider-researcher nor outsider-researcher maximised the advantages of each while minimising the potential for disadvantages, and meant that I was able to benefit from both in my study of grief experiences following fatal vehicle crashes in Western Australia.*

It is becoming increasingly important for social and behavioural researchers to clarify their personal motivation for their research, especially for those utilising qualitative methodologies that require reflexivity (see Creswell, 1994; Crotty, 1998; Etherington, 2004; Patton, 2002). As a component of clarifying their role in the research, these researchers often position themselves as either 'insiders' or 'outsiders' to their research domain (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). Generally, insider-researchers are those who chose to study a group to which they belong, while outsider-researchers do not belong to the group under study.

It is common, but of course not necessary, for researchers using qualitative methodologies to study a group, organisation, or culture they belong to, and in doing so, they begin the research process as an insider or 'native' (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002; Kanuha, 2000). Insider-researchers are often intimately engaged with their research domains, and, unlike outside-researchers, would rarely be described as those who "parachute into people's lives... and then vanish" (Gerrard, 1995, p. 59). Despite the researcher's best intentions, 'parachuting' often occurs because of the demands of academic pressures. Drew (2006) referred to these researchers as seagulls: "...a 'seagull' is a

researcher or consultant who flies into a community; craps all over everything then leaves the community to tidy up the mess" (p. 40). Despite the diametrically opposed pressures of academia and the commitment to community engagement, Bishop (2006) provided a number of examples of university-based research projects where the researchers were sensitive to the communities they were studying.

In a review, Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) outlined three key advantages of being an insider to the research domain: a superior understanding of the group's culture; the ability to interact naturally with the group and its members; and a previously established, and therefore greater, relational intimacy with the group. Indeed, some insider-researchers choose to conceptualise themselves as co-investigators, co-learners, facilitators, or advocates, rather than researchers; this is typically an effort to minimise the power differential between themselves and those participating in their research (DeLyser, 2001; Farnsworth, 1996; Harklau & Norwood, 2005).

However, each of these advantages is related to a disadvantage. For example, greater familiarity can lead to a loss of 'objectivity', particularly in terms of inadvertently making erroneous assumptions based on the researcher's prior knowledge and/or experience (DeLyser,

2001; Gerrish, 1997; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). Pitman (2002) argued that an insider's familiarity can provide an "illusion of sameness" (p. 285), with potentially disastrous results. In conducting insider research with gay women, Pitman shared that she left a detailed message about the research project on the answering machine of an informant, which 'outed' the woman to her university roommates. Pitman realised she had uncritically assumed that the informants were also open about their sexual orientation.

In addition, insider-researchers are often confronted with methodological and ethical issues that are largely irrelevant to outsider-researchers. Insiders often struggle to balance their insider role (e.g., nurse, psychologist, geographer, activist) and role of researcher (DeLyser, 2001; Gerrish, 1997; Kanuha, 2000). Taking on the role of the researcher often acts as a barrier that separates the insider from those in the setting they are researching. In her geographical research on a gold-mining ghost town, DeLyser (2001) wrote that she always volunteered to clean the public toilets in an effort to remain accepted by those she was researching, while Gerrish (1997), who studied nurses' perceptions of district nursing, shared that she often offered to make coffee and wash dishes in order to become accepted in the setting. Doing so, however, created another tension concerning the balance between the development of rapport with the participants and the maintenance of the distance required to make sense of the data.

Insider-researchers often report the difficulties they encountered in collecting data, especially via interviews, for two reasons. First, the insider-researcher might encounter that his or her reflections on the potentially personal nature of the data can result in a difficulty in focussing on the interview process (Kanuha, 2000). Second, the process of interviewing can be complicated by the assumption among their informants that the researcher already knows the answers. DeLyser (2001) reported that probing for information that the informants know she already knew sometimes appeared to aggravate them. Kanuha (2000) did not realise the familiarity was a potential problem – it was only when she read the interview transcripts that she realised how much of the interactions between herself and the informants had gone unsaid. In

her interviews, meaning was communicated via a shared understanding of vague comments, innuendoes, and incomplete sentences and descriptions. Gerrish (1997), DeLyser (2001), and Kanuha (2000) described engaging in numerous techniques to overcome this. However, rather than being one-size-fits-all, these techniques varied according to research context and researcher's strengths and weaknesses.

A further difficulty often encountered by insider-researchers relates to ethical codes. Ethical issues might arise, and need to be dealt with, on an individual and daily basis. Although ethical principles of privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and non-maleficence are able to guide researchers, there is often a lack of guidelines as to how these principles play out in community-based applied research (Gerrish, 1997). O'Neill (1989), and more recently, Dadich (2003-2004), provide a number of examples that illustrate the unexpected ethical dilemmas that can arise when researchers are engaged in applied community research, and discuss ways in which these issues might be ethically prevented or resolved.

The distinction between insider and outsider positions correspond to contrasting positions concerning the theory of knowledge, with epistemologies and perspectives such as constructionism, feminism, critical theory, and postmodernism being especially appropriate to the conduct of insider research. These epistemologies and perspectives are likely to (a) view their research process and products as 'co-constructions' between the researcher and the participants in the research; (b) regard the research participants or respondents as active 'informants' to the research; and (c) attempt to give 'voice' to the informants within the research domain (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Gergen, 1999; Patton, 2002). As such, these perspectives allow the researcher to conduct research 'with' rather than 'on' their group or domain of interest, which contrasts starkly with outsider-research perspectives.

As the above review demonstrates, there are strengths and limitations to both insider and outsider research. Indeed, Pugh, Mitchell, and Brooks (2000) suggested that the research partnership between an insider and an outsider would balance the advantages of both positions

while minimising the disadvantages of each. Despite emphasis on the differences between these supposedly diametrically opposed positions, and their underlying epistemologies, I considered myself to be neither an insider nor outsider in the context of my PhD research. I argue that the insider/outsider dichotomy is simplistic, and that neither term adequately captured the role I occupied throughout the research. To illustrate, I will discuss the role I played in my research, including the personal experiences that led me to consider myself to be neither inside nor outside the experience I was studying, and demonstrate how my role 'in the middle' influenced my choice of research topic, the scope of my study, access to informants, the collection and analysis of data, and the maintenance of research rigor.

### **My Role as the Researcher**

In undertaking the research, I acknowledged that my personal experiences influenced my decision to research the experience of grief following the loss of a loved one in a crash in Western Australia. Further, I acknowledged that my experiences also influenced the way I chose to research this topic. For some researchers, the motivation for their choice of topic results from a combination of experiences and moments (e.g., White, 2000). For me, it began in the very early hours of the 11th February 1999. I was holidaying in regional Victoria, Australia, with my partner Shannan when his father telephoned to tell him Shannan's sister Skye had been killed in a crash caused by a speeding motorist. We returned to Perth that night.

Skye's funeral was held a week after her death. Neither Shannan nor I had been to a funeral before. After the funeral, Shannan's mother and I were talking about it in the lounge room. She looked over at the coffee table, covered in photographs of her daughter, and hesitantly stated, "I guess I better put these away now". I recall feeling uneasy, but I did not know why. Thinking back to it, this was the first time I noticed how the social norms of grief, especially those concerning the appropriate timelines for mourning, affect mourning practices.

Soon, cards were pouring into the mailbox, and there were numerous death notices published in the newspaper. I felt extremely uncomfortable

being mentioned along with Shannan and his parents in many of these. After all, they had lost a daughter and a sister while I did not feel that Skye's death was a personal loss, especially when compared to the loss of a daughter or sister. I thought that others in their family and many of their close friends should have been acknowledged before me.

Over the subsequent days, months, and years after the crash, Shannan's family, particularly his parents, came into contact with funeral directors, the media, the coronial process, the justice system, and insurance companies. It became clear to me that the grief resulting from crashes does not occur in a vacuum, but actually involves and is affected by numerous people and systems. People bereaved through crashes likely face legal, police and coronial investigations, and health/medical and justice systems, among others. Further, grief is experienced within a network of families, friends, and the wider community.

It amazed me how generous people could be. Another family friend who I had heard of but never met, visited Shannan's parents every day for over a year, making sure they were okay and just being there with them and for them. She was also a great support for Shannan. I was also surprised at how it seemed other people could not 'deal' with Skye's death and 'disappeared'; that is, they stopped telephoning and visiting. It was during this time that I realised the importance of social support and how it does not always come from where you might expect it.

While the death of Skye was not a momentous personal loss, I was able to observe the gravity of the situation and appreciate the effect the death of a loved one has on those left behind. It is this reason that I consider myself neither an insider nor outsider to the experience I researched. It was my experiences, some of which I describe here, that influenced my choice to research the grief experiences resulting from crashes in Western Australia. I embarked on the initial stages of thesis development in 2001. In the following section, I discuss the ensuing development of the study.

### **The Development of the Study**

In the months following Skye's death, I started to think about the role that psychology could play in providing support for people

bereaved through crash fatalities. Out of personal interest, I began to search the literature for information on grief. Two of my findings motivated me to explore the topic in more depth via a thesis. First, I noticed that a significant emphasis in the grief literature was on intrapsychic or individual variables. However, understanding grief as only an intrapsychic, individual phenomenon did not fit with my observations of the experiences of Shannan's family's experiences within their social networks, legal and coronial contexts, and so on. Nor did it fit my orientation as a community psychologist. It became obvious to me that a thorough understanding of the grief experience resulting from crashes could only be articulated through understanding the wider context within which the grief occurs. It is for this reason that I took a contextual approach to the study of grief. Community psychology, with its emphasis on understanding individuals in their natural (non-manipulated) contexts (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2001; Duffy & Wong, 2003; Thomas & Veno, 1992), provided a framework for contextual analysis.

Second, I observed that the classic bereavement theories were by and large constructed from data collected from North American, white, middle-class, middle-aged, widows grieving the loss of their husbands, often after a long illness or adapted from models of dying (see Center for the Advancement of Health, 2004; Schlernitzauer et al., 1998; Stroebe, 1998; Stroebe, Stroebe, & Schut, 2003, for reviews). I began to wonder about the degree to which these findings would transfer to other bereaved populations, such as those bereaved through crashes. I wondered whether or not the findings from the classic studies were being uncritically applied to people with different bereavement circumstances and I became concerned with this possibility. Crash deaths are sudden, unexpected, violent, and usually preventable (Hobbs & Adshead, 1997; Sleet & Branche, 2004; Stewart & Lord, 2002; Waller, 2001; World Health Organization, 2004; Zaza et al., 2001). As a result, the characteristics of crash deaths differ from many other reasons for death, such as illness or old age. In addition, the victims of crash fatalities are of a significantly younger age than those who die from natural causes

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005; World Health Organization, 2004). A further characteristic of crash deaths is their 'hidden' or acceptable nature. Crash fatalities are generally not considered to be legitimate in the way that deaths through war, aeroplane crashes, natural disasters, or acts of terrorism are (e.g., Adshead, 1997; Browning, 2002; Clark, 2000; Clark & Franzmann, 2002; Di Gallo & Parry-Jones, 1996; Gregory, 1998; Mitchell, 1997; Tehrani, 2004; Vigilant & Williamson, 2003; World Health Organization, 2004; Williams, 1997), yet the experience can be just as devastating to those affected (e.g., Federation of European Road Traffic Victims, 1993, 1995; Lehman, Wortman, & Williams, 1987; Lord, 1987, 1996, 2000; Shanfield & Swain, 1984; Sprang, 1997; Tehrani, 2004; World Health Organization, 2004; Williams, 1997). For these reasons, the social, cultural, historical, and political contexts within which the bereavement experience is housed became increasingly important to me.

Congruent with my contextual line of thinking, I chose to explore the grief experience in the aftermath of crashes within the context of Western Australia. Research that attends to the context within which a phenomenon occurs is gaining increasing recognition, as an understanding of the context facilitates understanding of the experience under study. As a result, my research was developed from within the constructionist epistemology (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1999). By focussing on a particular phenomenon within a particular context, I anticipated that my research would have greater practical implications in the delivery of services to those bereaved through crashes in Western Australia.

### **Aims and Research Questions**

The broad aims of this research were to explore the experience of grief resulting from losing a loved one in a crash in Western Australia and to describe the influence of the contextual factors on the grief experience. The research questions were:

- 1 What is the experience of grief resulting from a crash?
- 2 What factors affect the experience of grief resulting from crashes? In what ways do they affect the grief experience?

- 3 Are there relationships between these factors? If so, what are they and how do they affect the grief experience resulting from crashes?
- 4 What are the implications for Western Australia in terms of service delivery pertinent to crash-related bereavement?

These emerged directly from the experiences discussed previously, and the interrogation of the research literature.

### Research Design

In the study of grief following fatal crashes in Western Australia, constructionist grounded theory was utilised because the research aims were exploratory, applied, and situated within a non-manipulated context (Creswell, 1994; Denzin, 1972; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). The epistemology and methodology were chosen because they assist in uncovering the multiple perspectives that exist within complex social and psychological phenomena (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002; Strauss, 1987). Reality is ascribed through our interactions with the world (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998; Crotty, 1998). Social constructionism suggests that both the participant and the researcher are actively involved in ascribing and co-constructing meaning (Crotty, 1998).

Immersion into the area of study was required to understand the multiple perspectives. As such, data were drawn four main avenues, maximising variability in the data: in-depth, recursive interviews (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995) with 21 Western Australians bereaved via the death of a family member in a crash at least 12 months prior to data collection; semi-structured interviews with 10 people working in the setting relevant to road safety and the aftermath of crashes (e.g., Office of the State Coroner, Victim Support Service, Police); 'scoping and profiling' to familiarise myself with the context of road crashes, crash fatalities, and grief in Western Australia (e.g., I attended various government road safety meetings, a meeting of The Compassionate Friends (a mutual-help group for bereaved parents), and the unveiling of a crash fatality remembrance memorial); and the examination of public documents such as government websites,

reports, brochures, mass media campaigns concerning road safety, and newspaper articles on road safety, crashes, and grief. The collection and analysis of data via multiple avenues aided my understanding of the setting and context of the crash deaths in Western Australia (Berg, 2001).

### Data Collection

My position as neither an 'insider' in nor an 'outsider' to the research domain proved to be both a help and a hindrance in collecting data. Generally, it is thought that the recruitment of informants can be potentially difficult when the researcher does not occupy the position of an 'insider', largely because the researcher must first establish trust and rapport with the group. However, unlike other outsider-researchers (e.g., Pitman, 2002), I did not struggle with the recruitment of bereaved informants. I concluded that a result of being 'silenced' by those around them (see Breen, 2004, 2007; Breen & O'Connor, 2007), the bereaved informants were keen to 'voice' their experiences to someone who was willing to listen to them, even if I did not share aspects of their experiences.

My position as an 'outsider' was far more apparent in my attempts to recruit and interview the setting informants. These interviews were formal, shorter, and I was rarely offered refreshments. In addition, I experienced an acute case of gate keeping by the assistant of one of the people I was keen to interview. The gatekeeper first asked me to clarify why I wanted to interview her boss, and then requested that I email the questions/topics to her. After complying with her request, she informed me that the questions were 'not very good', and so she decided to answer the questions herself via email.

As a result of immersing myself in the context of crash fatalities in Western Australia, I became aware of some important language issues. Some bereaved people do not like euphemisms for death, such as 'passed on', 'passed away', and 'no longer with us' (see Wass, 2004). Furthermore, the term 'accident' is often considered offensive to people bereaved through the actions of another, because the term implies a random event that is unpredictable and inevitable rather than preventable (see Ball-Rokeach, Hale, Schaffer, Porras, Harris, & Drayton, 1999; Howarth, 1997; Job, 1999;

Loimer & Guarnieri, 1996; Sleet & Branche, 2004; Stewart & Lord, 2002, 2003; Vigilant & Williamson, 2003). Consequently, I was careful to use the words that were used by each bereaved informant to avoid using terms that they might find offensive.

To learn from each interview, I reflected on each by maintaining a journal. The following entry was made after interviewing

'Joan' (pseudonyms are used for all informants):

I felt funny about it today – she was getting upset at the beginning, reading [to me] stuff she'd written not long after her son died, and I didn't feel sad at all, and that feels funny. I don't like it. I don't want to feel nothing, be desensitised. I feel that it is a great privilege to hear the stories I have heard. Most people wouldn't [hear them], either to protect themselves or would just never come across this number of people bereaved this way, so I do think it is a privilege. Also, I think I may have asked Joan a few leading questions. She was anxious at first, and not sure what to say, so when I elaborated on my questions, I may have been leading – need to check the transcript.

Insider-researchers have a tendency to rely solely or primarily on informants with whom they are familiar with and feel most comfortable with (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). However, I knew only three of the bereaved informants and had previously met three of the setting informants. The familiarity with three of the bereaved informants affected the interview with one of them. Although I did not ask her to do so, she referred to me in the third person, as though 'Lauren' was another person rather than someone she knew who also happened to be interviewing her. Upon revisiting the transcript and tape, I became aware of the interview's "artificial officiousness" (Kanuha, 2000, p. 443).

While the bereaved informants were keen to know why I was interested in the research topic, the setting informants appeared disinterested in my motivations. Some of the latter seemed to assume I was an outsider, as they said things that I do not believe they would say to someone they knew was bereaved through a

crash fatality. For example, the informant from the Office of the State Coroner stated;

...the thing that binds all families in sudden death, be it road trauma or others, is simply the sheer horror and the initial denial that takes place, and intelligent people deny [their grief] by asking lots of questions without actually thinking through the relevance the answer is going to have, you know? ... Really what it is, is the desire to purge their anger and their hurt on some poor unsuspecting bastard.

Our multiple identities, in terms of demographic characteristics as well as our role in the research, readily impact upon data collection, in terms of what is 'seen' and 'unseen' and what is considered 'important' and 'unimportant' (Langhout, 2006). In my mid-twenties at the time of the interviews, I believe my age was of greatest influence; this became particularly apparent when I wanted to explore with the bereaved informants the effect of their losses on their intimate relationships. The literature refers to the effect of bereavement, and particularly the death of a child, has on spousal/marital relationships in terms of their physical and emotional intimacy (Hagemester & Rosenblatt, 1997; Riches, 2005; Riches & Dawson, 1996). Despite literature support, I felt uncomfortable probing the bereaved informants with specific questions about their intimate relationships. I might have felt able to do so had I been older at the times of the interviews, or had I been an 'insider' to their experiences. Yet, even without specific questions, I was able to access detailed information about their relationships. Some candidly described instances where they verbally, and sometimes physically, fought with their spouses because they felt they were not supported or understood. Natasha spoke of how she often screamed to her husband Jim that she wished he had died, rather than their daughter Jess: "I used to thump on his chest, and say, 'Why couldn't it be you? I could live without you, but I can't live without Jess!'". Similarly, Karen also spoke of quarrels with her husband where they blamed each other for their son's death:

I've been through all of that, the guilt feelings, there's naturally guilt feelings

yeah and then there's the blame and I've been there too... I know that I have had to forgive myself for any role [in his death]... You have to reach a point to go over it and over it [and] believe me, [I] did that millions of times, to see what, what if, what could have happened if this or what if that how could it have been that, how could the outcome have been different you know if we had changed this that or something else. And we fought about it, my husband and I, it's like 'oh yes well maybe you should have been looking after him'...

Although I regarded my age as a potential hindrance, my appearance as a young, naïve researcher facilitated access to information from the setting informants. Some make comments that I do not believe they would have shared with a researcher they considered to be experienced and polished. For example, when questioning the Road Safety Council informant over the nexus between politics and the state's road safety strategy, he commented:

What [the Liberal-National party] didn't realise was that after two years the government was going to change and in came Labor. Being politicians, they looked at it and said 'we need a plan but we want it to be our plan' so what we had to do is basically go through a process of refocusing and relooking [sic] at it... So we didn't change the whole plan, because what you could say, was that one wrong? It wasn't, it was pretty right... Now, very soon, they're going to bring out their new strategy, under the Labor Government. I'm sure if they lose the election in two years time, we'll be doing the same thing again for the Liberal Party, but that's politics.

Furthermore, I questioned the Office of the State Coroner informant about the reasons why families do not perceive they are supported when viewing their deceased loved ones at the mortuary. For example, the bereaved informants reported that the mortuary employees spoke bluntly and clinically about their deceased loved ones, or were seen having a joke amongst themselves. The Office of the State Coroner

informant justified the behaviour of mortuary employees in the following manner:

Now 99 per cent of the time the viewings are done by the techies (technicians). The techies tell them everything, but they tell them in a fairly distant voice... People get annoyed and say 'oh the techie was polite but he was very cold, very distant' and you can't say to a family 'well in about an hour's time he's going to put a Stryker saw through her head. He can't really afford to get too close to you'.

### **Data Analysis**

Insider-researchers are sometimes criticised for being advocates rather than 'real' or 'legitimate' researchers (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). Kanuha (2000) wrote that "for each of the ways that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding to a population that may not be accessible to a nonnative scientist, questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised" (p. 444). It might be argued that removing oneself from the research context might reduce these criticisms. However, it is naïve to think that (a) minimal exposure to the research context would automatically reduce or eliminate bias, and (b) from a constructionist point of view, bias can ever be truly eliminated. Like those accused of 'going native' (Kanuha, 2000; Harklau & Norwood, 2005; Pugh et al., 2000), some people (both in and out of the university setting) familiar with my personal experience questioned the credibility of my analysis, and stated would be 'biased'. Interestingly, not one recommended extra care in the analytic process because I do not have the experience of losing a loved one in a crash. Indeed, being 'in the middle' made it easier to keep questioning the research material, because I was not 'inside' or 'outside' of it.

### **Maximising Research Rigor**

Rigor within the research process was maximised via the data collection and analysis procedures I engaged in as well as the adherence to a number of processes recommended by and for qualitative researchers. Traditional research outcomes like internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity are not considered appropriate in qualitative methodologies. Instead,

other terms are used, such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nagy & Viney, 1994). I utilised four main procedures in order to maximise the research rigor.

First, I employed multiple sources of data and methods of data collection (Berg, 2001; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Morse, 1994; Patton, 2002; Strauss, 1987). Second, as an audit trail, I kept a journal where I documented the daily tasks and memos (Etherington, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Morse, 1994; Nagy & Viney, 1994; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Third, I checked my interpretations with the informants to ensure accuracy (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). I invited three bereaved informants to participate in a short second interview to clarify my interpretations of the data (Breakwell, 1995; Silverman, 1993). All three appeared satisfied with my interpretations. In addition, I sent all informants a summary of my results and invited them to provide comments and clarifications where necessary. Further, an article similar to the results summary was published in *The Compassionate Friends Australian National Newsletter* in July 2004 (Breen, 2004), and was an example of the transformational psychopolitical validity of the research (Prilleltensky, 2003). Similarly, I verified or 'tried' the theory by presenting it to different audiences for comment (Strauss, 1987). Finally, I provided a detailed description of both the setting and the informants involved in the study so that readers could determine the credibility and transferability of findings to different contexts based on the level of similarity between research setting and other settings (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998; Nagy & Viney, 1994).

### Conclusion

Despite the epistemological/theoretical/paradigms we usually align ourselves with, papers where researchers explicitly discuss their position in their research are rare, even within community psychology journals where it might be expected (Langhout, 2006). Possible explanations for this scarcity include the notion that reflective papers require an adherence to a philosophical standpoint that is not dominant within disciplines such as psychology; engaging

in a reflexive process is often seen as narcissistic and navel gazing; the belief that it has the potential to undermine the legitimacy of the research and researcher, and the process requires introspection, self-questioning, vulnerability, and humility (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Farnsworth, 1996; Harklau & Norwood, 2005; Kanuha, 2000; Langhout, 2006). In writing this 'autoethnography' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), I have highlighted the extent to which my role in the research influenced all aspects of the research process – notably, the selection of the research topic, the scope of the study, access to informants, the collection and analysis of data, and the maintenance of research rigor. This highlights the need to make explicit the researcher orientation.

Some talk about the role of the researcher as a continuum between 'complete participant/member researcher' and 'complete observer' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Kearns, 2000). However, most theorists fail to differentiate between those who being a research project from within the community they are intending to study, and those who become intimately involved in the community of study as a result of research process (DeLyser, 2001). An extreme view suggests we are all insiders; "as communicating humans studying humans communicating, we are inside what we are studying" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 743). Further, DeLyser (2001) asserted, "in every research project we navigate complex and multi-faceted insider-outsider issues" (p. 442). In the context of my study, where I positioned myself as neither an insider nor an outsider to the grief experience I was studying, I concur with other social and behavioural researchers who argue that the role of the researcher is better conceptualised on a continuum, rather than as an either/or dichotomy (see Hodkinson, 2005, for a review).

In embodying an insider role, an outsider role, or any role along the continuum, applied research encompasses particular challenges requiring careful consideration and appropriate responses. Because I was not an insider to the experience of grief following crashes, I immersed myself into the domain. I was able to take the time to do so because the research was a PhD project, which reduced the likelihood of becoming a parachuter (Gerrish, 1995) or seagull

(Drew, 2006). Similarly, because I was not an outsider, I benefited from the assumption that I was independent, unbiased, and objective, all of which remain important currency within mainstream psychology. I was also more likely to be more able to identify the key players, power differentials, differences, and dynamics that existed within the research domain, which are likely to be 'unseen' by insider-researchers (Pitman, 2002). My role as neither an insider-researcher nor outsider-researcher was particularly advantageous in the context of my PhD study. It maximised the advantages of each while minimising the potential for disadvantages. It also meant that I was able to benefit from both in my study of grief responses following crashes in Western Australia.

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