The Perils of Power in Interpretive Research

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Occupational therapy is based on core values of altruism, equality, and honoring the dignity of others. Embedded in these values is the ever-present negotiation of power. To honor the concern for the welfare of others, researchers are challenged to think about issues of power throughout the research process. This paper identifies dilemmas and raises questions researchers might ask themselves as they struggle to share power in the interpretive research process.


The value of interpretive or meaning-centered approaches to understanding others’ perspectives is well-documented in the occupational therapy literature (Clark, 1993; Frank, 1996; Mattingly, 1991, 1998; Mattingly & Fleming, 1994; Spencer, Krefting, & Mattingly, 1993). Interpretive research helps us form understandings of human experiences and impart these understandings to wider audiences. Ideally, understanding others’ experiences also helps us discover ways to honor the perspective, promote empowerment, and enhance the well-being of the people with whom we work.

As we engage in interpretive research to understand human experience so we may ultimately enhance well-being, researchers are challenged to conduct research that honors the integrity of research participants. The principles of occupational therapy are organized around the core values of altruism, equality, freedom, justice, dignity, truth, and prudence (American Occupational Therapy Association, 1993). These core values articulate a commitment to represent the human experience as authentically as possible and to protect the welfare and dignity of the people from whom we learn. As researchers we have an obligation to respect others and provide individuals with the right to exercise choice. Embedded in these values is the ever-present negotiation of power.

Power is “the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter” (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 18). Although this definition implies a positive image, power works in unexpected ways. Power or authority also has potential to oppress others, reproduce inequality, or minimize the perspective of others. Occupational therapy practitioners often work with people who are disempowered. Townsend (1996) proposes that a fundamental aim of occupational therapy is to promote empowerment in people. Empowerment is a process by which people “gain mastery over their affairs” (Rappaport, 1987, p. 122). Simon (1990) argues that a person cannot directly empower another; rather, he or she can only help to create a climate or relationship that encourages and allows the other to enhance his or her life. Scholars assert that an empowering cli-
mate can be fostered by welcoming dialectically educative dialogues (Lather, 1988) and allowing for the “sharing of power in everyday talk and actions” (Townsend, 1996, p. 183).

But reciprocal and empowering interaction does not easily or automatically occur. Thus, we must carefully consider the power and ethical implications as we strive to represent another’s experience without exploiting, trespassing, or violating human rights and responsibilities. Sue Estroff, who wrote a thoughtful analysis of a day treatment center for people with serious mental illness (1981), asks a provocative question: “What is the nature and extent of our responsibility to the people whose lives we learn from and write about during and after the actual research process?” (Estroff, 1995, p. 78). There are further questions: Who has the authority to tell the story and how does the authority get negotiated? Who benefits from the telling of the story? Is it possible to negotiate equality and empower those who participate in research projects with us?

The purpose of this article is to explicate the complexity of power relations and related dilemmas researchers face when trying to understand and represent another human’s experiences. When making choices about which pieces of the experience to preserve, to retell, and to include in the analysis and representation researchers are making decisions related to power. Although these decisions may seem mechanical and technical, they can also be seen as highly interpretive, theoretical, and complex issues. In this paper, we, the authors, will be raising, not answering, questions that arise in the course of interpretive research. These questions evolved from our reflective discussions and grappling with the tension inherent in our desire to develop collaborative relationships with research participants. Our primary and initial training as occupational therapists socialized us to value “client-centered” practice defined as:

- collaborative approaches aimed at enabling occupation with clients who may be individuals, groups, agencies, governments, corporations or others. Occupational therapists demonstrate respect for clients, involve clients in decision making, advocate with and for clients in meeting clients’ needs, and otherwise recognize clients’ experience and knowledge. (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 1997, p. 49)

As novice qualitative researchers with client-centered values, we were struck by the pervasiveness of issues related to power throughout the research process and began to discuss our dilemmas. Our discussions about power are informed by documented insights from feminist (DeVault, 1999; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1990; Wolf, 1996) and participatory action research scholars (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Simonson & Bushaw, 1993). These research approaches explicitly focus on power, social change, and the transformation of oppression into empowerment. In this paper we focus on interpretive research with more modest outcomes for participants. We do believe there is a power inequity inherent in the research relationship and that power ultimately rests with the researcher, who, at the very least, attempts to equalize interpretive authority. The reader will not find prescriptions or methodological remedies here but, rather, an exploration of some of the power issues embedded in the research process itself and a discussion of potential implications of pragmatic decisions made during the research process.

**Reflexivity**

Writing in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Fine and colleagues (2000) ask us to consider the intersubjectivity between researcher and researched. In traditional scientific research this relationship is nullified, made absent, or framed as something that needs to be controlled (for). Fine’s concern focuses on how to make explicit the often-veiled messiness inherent in the research relationship. Researchers exercise particular kinds of interpretive and representational power; they define areas of inquiry, set boundaries around their investigation, choose participants, interpret data and create a text that will be viewed as authorized knowledge (DeVault, 1999). How do we renegotiate the traditional boundaries of a research relationship to include research participants and minimize power discrepancies?

Qualitative researchers advocate reflexivity, a process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, as one approach to acknowledging the subjectivity inherent in the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). As researchers who are also human beings we have a particular window of insight through which we view a phenomenon (Beer, 1997; Crepeau, 1997; Hasselkus, 1997). Among other things, our knowledge, theoretical backgrounds, institutional locations, and life histories shape the way we come to understand phenomena. Reflecting on our own perspective helps us to be attuned to patterns, make discoveries in the data, and develop an understanding of others’ experiences (Beer, 1997; Hasselkus, 1997). A reflexive stance during research can illuminate the ways in which our understanding is both shaped and facilitated (Frank, 1997).

A “power reflexive stance” takes reflexivity one step further by asking researchers to consider not only themselves as
individuals but to consider the vector of power in all research interactions (Foucault, 1980). Considering the value of reflexivity in relation to distribution of power, Frank (2000) notes that it is important for researchers “to reflect critically on the dynamics of power when rendering an account of another’s life” (p. 158) and proposes that researchers reflect on their own perspectives and use the reflections productively toward understanding others. Moreover, Frank (2000) and others (e.g., Opie, 1992) recommend that our text retain evidence of the conflict and negotiations with the researched.

Although a power reflective stance is an ideal, we realize, nevertheless, that reflexivity is not a panacea to the formidable ethical and pragmatic dilemmas researchers face. Van Maanen (1995) satirically warns researchers to avoid focusing on the inherent trials and tribulations of the research process and turning the research into a “confessional ethnography.” How much is too much? How do we make our own analysis transparent while preserving participants’ perspectives? These overarching questions get asked over and over again as we make methodological decisions during our research process.

Eliciting

Entry Into the Research Relationship

With the exception of participatory action research in which research participants shape the research questions (Rogers & Palmer-Erbs, 1994; Whyte, 1991), most forms of research involve the researcher identifying the focus of inquiry. Thus, issues of power are present from the beginning of most research projects. Although the researcher may have framed the initial focus of inquiry, the research agenda can be a fluid process, allowing for redistribution of power and sharing.

The researcher begins the research process with a desire to establish collaborative relationships in the endeavor to understand a community or experience. The people who will be asked to participate in the research may or may not feel a need to have their experience studied and understood. In this situation, issues of power are instantly apparent. What is the theoretical reason for probing into people’s lives? The researcher will presumably benefit from contact with participants—the study will progress, potentially leading to dissemination of findings. On a personal level, there is somewhat less expectation that participants will directly benefit from involving themselves in the project. Granted, authors espouse the positive impact interpretive studies can have on participants (Kvale, 1983; Mishler, 1986; Rubin and Rubin, 1995), but benefits have traditionally been seen as a by-product and not the primary goal of research. Regardless of the outcome, at the onset of the research relationship and at many points throughout the course of the project there may be asymmetry in the needs of the researcher and participants.

Against this backdrop, researchers must decide how to present themselves, the research project, and the relationship between participants and researcher. Researchers first have an ethical responsibility to explain the project in a way that potential participants can understand (Agar, 1996; Shaffir, 1998). Participants need to know who the researcher is and what he or she is requesting of them. This explanation will affect the distribution of power in the relationship between researcher and participants.

One of the authors of this paper struggled with the presentation of self during a recent research project with parents of children with sensory integration dysfunction (Cohn, 2001). A review of the research journal notes from this study illustrates the dilemmas inherent in the very way we introduce ourselves to others:

Journal entry #4: How should I introduce myself to the parents? There is a range of possibilities. I am a parent. I could try to present myself as an insider. Merton (1972) wrote about the advantages and disadvantages of the insider role in interactions. Taking the insider approach, I would hope to create a sense of shared understanding. Maybe the parents will be more at ease because I share a similar experience. However, my parenting experience might be really different from theirs. The risk in presenting myself as parent is that the interviewee might assume I understand her perspective. Or worse, I might assume I get it, based on my own worldview. I will have to be extra careful to probe and try to listen for her voice. Other roles: I am a professor, a researcher, a doctoral student, and I worked at the clinic where her child received therapy. If I tell her I am a professor she might think that I have some expertise or a strong opinion about the therapy and I want to hear what she thinks. I like the student part because the student role implies that I am learning. Well, she will know about the student part because of the consent form. I could just start with that and see what happens.

In the dilemma described above, the researcher struggles with how to present and convey her identity to participants. Cultural assumptions related to the institutionalization of formal knowledge influence the researcher’s inclination to not emphasize her role as a university professor, in order to minimize the potential power discrepancy in the research relationship. We see the researcher’s assumption that the interviewee will perceive the student role as less dominating than a professor or researcher’s role. Embedded in this assumption is concern that the professor or researcher role carries the implication that specialized knowledge acquired through formal education is perceived by society in a particular way (Freidson, 1986).
As participants are introduced to the researcher they will naturally attempt to understand him or her and will assign a social role to the researcher (Agar, 1996). This role may evolve over the course of the research project but will always exist and will influence how the researcher is received and treated. Participants develop ideas about who the researcher is and what he or she might want to hear and know, and those ideas will influence what they share in interviews and observations. In light of this, Agar advises ethnographers to use caution in interpreting findings learned early on in the project. He further suggests that after trust has been established the researcher should attempt to discern the roles in which participants had cast the researcher. While one never really knows how others relate to the identity the researcher presents, it is nonetheless an important issue to consider in our efforts to negotiate equality.

In addition to introducing him or herself, the researcher also has to consider how to present what the participant will be asked to do. Pragmatically this involves identifying the procedure(s) and the setting in which the study will occur. The formal mechanism for presenting procedural information is through review of the informed consent paperwork. The manner in which informed consent is presented affects the balance of power in the research relationship. In American society, the signing of paperwork indicates that a business transaction is occurring. The people whose names are on the form will be accountable for what transpires in the relationship. While the intent of obtaining informed consent is to protect the rights of participants, the actual process of reading and signing paperwork can be intimidating for some participants. Americans have often been warned to “read the fine print,” an admonition that reflects a cultural expectation that one can potentially be harmed or taken advantage of by paperwork that is difficult to interpret yet legally binding. The process of obtaining informed consent could occur within this cultural context.

Conversely, instead of being intimidated by the formality of the informed consent paperwork, a participant might appear very cavalier, not even pausing to read what is written on the form. The researcher could have a multitude of emotional responses to this act. He or she may feel relief that the participant is initially comfortable with the research process and trusts the researcher, or the researcher may feel uneasiness with the level of trust demonstrated by the participant. Where does the power lie in these interactions? With the participant, whose rights the vigilant researcher, as dictated by human rights review boards, must protect? With the researcher, who holds the knowledge about research procedures and the rights and responsibilities of both researcher and researched?

An entry in Lyons’ research journal from her work with people who have Parkinson’s disease shows the variations in response to informed consent procedures:

Journal entry: November 1999, 3rd participant. When presenting the project to the first two participants I left the informed consent form on the table and pointed to the sections with a pen while I verbally paraphrased them. This seemed to work well and they quickly signed the form when I finished talking, but I wonder if I should have encouraged them to read the form before signing. Or would that have just set the tone that this will be a potentially threatening experience and I want them to be fully aware of that? With ______’s interview today, as soon as I brought the informed consent paper to the center of the table he pulled out his reading glasses, took the paper in both hands, and settled back in his chair to read it. I thought it might be rude to keep talking while he was trying to read so I said, “I’ll let you read that for a moment.” I stopped talking then started wondering whether I should do my paraphrasing when he was done. I figured it would be insulting for me to paraphrase something he had just read so I decided to just ask him if he had any questions when he finished reading. The decision made, I waited for what felt like a long period of time, wondering what he thought of the form, the project.

Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2000) write about the awkwardness of the informed consent procedure, noting that the process often highlights the differences between the position and aims of the researcher and research participants. In this potentially awkward context the researcher has to figure out how to set a tone that will allow a smooth transition into the interview or observation portion of the study in which participants become the “experts,” educating the researcher. Along with the tone of the discussion surrounding the consent procedure, researchers must carefully reflect upon the words that are used to describe the project. Participants need to have an understanding of what they will be asked to do or discuss during the research project. This is particularly difficult for the researcher to describe given the flexible nature of qualitative research.

The Setting

Occupational therapy theories embrace the notion that context dramatically shapes occupation (Dunn, Brown, & McGuigan, 1994; Law et al., 1996). Research, like other human occupations, is socially shaped by the context in which it occurs. Where research takes place influences what gets said and what gets heard in conversation. Thus, the physical setting in which research is conducted becomes yet another feature loaded with power implications.

One power issue related to setting involves deciding upon the location for interviewing or observation. Researchers must consider whether to encourage partici-
participants to choose or indicate preference for the location. This decision can greatly influence the comfort level of both researcher and participants as the sociocultural features of a physical environment have the potential to empower or disempower. While we pose an empirical question, one could imagine that the power dynamics of the research relationship fluctuate when the setting varies from university building to participant’s home to local restaurant.

Given the personal and intimate nature of qualitative research, interviews and observations often occur in the participants’ homes. Daly and Dienhart (1998) acknowledge that being in participants’ homes can facilitate the research process. The researcher is invited into and is witness to the participants’ activities and interactions in their natural settings. Norms of hospitality cast the researcher into the role of invited guest and may promote the development of rapport in the research relationship (Daly & Dienhart). However, Daly and Dienhart also note that the informal and perhaps relaxed atmosphere of a home interview might lead participants to disclose more than they ordinarily would have intended. In that way, the environment can subtly shape the direction and outcome of the research interview.

The home environment can also shape the relationship that develops between researcher and participant. In research journal entries below, Lyons writes about an interview that, at the request of the participant, occurred at the participant’s home:

**Journal entry: February 2000. Today I went to Mr. ____’s home to do the first interview. His wife stayed in the living room with us the whole time and contributed a lot to the discussion. She suggested we break for refreshment after a little less than an hour. While she prepared lemonade and cookies, Mr. ____ took me on a tour of the house, showing me the things he had made over the years.

When the interview was over they both started asking me questions about myself—was I married, did I have children, was I involved in religious activity? Four hours after I arrived, I left feeling somewhat like an adopted granddaughter. . .

March 2000. I called to schedule a follow-up interview with Mr. and Mrs. ____ and she told me to bring my bathing suit so we could relax and visit in their pool after the interview was done. What am I going to do? I think it would be odd and awkward if I took them up on the offer but I don’t want to hurt their feelings by refusing—I don’t want them to think I am only interested in them as “data” producing research participants! What reason would I give for refusing? That it isn’t appropriate? Why exactly is that? Should I make up an excuse (I hate to swim, I forgot my bathing suit)? How can I lie to them when I’m asking them to be open and honest with me?

By virtue of experiencing the interview in their home the research participants were able to show Lyons the details of their life together, such as handcrafted treasures and pictures of family. This invitation to intimacy and familiarity, while beneficial to the research agenda, can potentially create confusion for the researcher, even when the researcher desires the intimacy. It can become harder to decide where the boundaries of the research relationship are or should be.

As a novice researcher Lyons felt it was somehow inappropriate to accept the social invitation of the participants, perhaps fearful that the “perceived obligations of friendship” (Grills, 1998, p. 13) would interfere with her role as a competent and effective researcher. At the same time, she was uncomfortable addressing the issue with the participants: making up an excuse felt like dishonesty but directly refusing was awkward as Lyons did not have a clear understanding of why she felt she needed to refuse. Was it fear of emotional intimacy with the participants?

Lawlor and Mattingly (2001) eloquently discuss the uncertain interpersonal boundaries and intense emotional involvement that can result from interpretive research. Each researcher must come to terms with these issues in light of his or her personal background. The above journal entry began by reflecting on the setting of the interview but ended by speculating on the relationship with research participants. The passage illustrates how the context of the research contributes to overall power relations that develop between researcher and participant.

**The Dialogue**

Interviews are a common method of collecting data in interpretive research and feminist scholars warn researchers against reproducing dominating relationships during interviews (Finch, 1984; Wilkinson, 1998). Mishler (1986) views the interview as a dialogic process or coproduction, a complex sequence of exchanges through which interviewer and interviewee negotiate some degree of agreement on the topic and process of the talk. He asserts that the interview is not a neutral research method and feels that the interview can be structured to share power in the interview process. He suggests that allowing and encouraging participants to find their “voices” can facilitate empowerment. “That is, to be empowered is not only to speak in one’s own voice and to tell one’s own story, but to apply the understanding arrived at to action in accord with one’s own interests” (Mishler, 1986, p. 119).

As power operates in all discourse, interviewing is particularly sensitive to the distribution of power. Many factors shape the conversational negotiation process, influencing what is said and heard by both participant and researcher in an interview. Social psychologists Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson (2000) studied the effects of listener responses on narrators and found that nodding and vocalizations such as
“mhm” or wincing and exclaiming all had effects on the narrators. They argue that collaborative effects in face-to-face interview dialogues may be inevitable. Thus, a mere nodding or utterance can either invite collaboration or disempower the narrator.

Wording of the questions, along with tone, pace, and setting of the interview may also affect what the interviewee shares. A natural social response to questions is to emphasize the parts of the self that seem relevant to or are valued by the audience (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The interviewee makes decisions, perhaps unconsciously, about what to share based on his or her impression of the researcher: whom the researcher is, what the interviewee thinks the researcher wants to hear, and what the interviewee thinks the researcher can and cannot handle hearing. All of these aspects of the interview context are important in understanding the distribution of power during an interview.

The researcher, as well as the interviewee, is also figuring out how much he or she should share. Personal decisions about self-disclosure on the part of the researcher involve pragmatic decisions that carry power implications (Tewksbury & Gagne, 1997). Self-disclosure is self-defined and is bounded by each person's expectation for what is appropriate in the interview. While interpersonal communication researchers and some feminist theorists suggest that self-disclosure is positive, potentially enhancing trust and equality in relationships, negative consequences are possible as well (Baker & Benton, 1994). Others argue that self-disclosure creates a closer relationship and heightens the possibilities for exploitation (Stacey, 1988). Thus, self-disclosure by either the researcher or the research participant may be victimizing as well as empowering. Self-disclosure can support or negate someone's experience. Cohn's research journal entries offer yet another research dilemma filled with implications related to disclosure and power:

**Journal entry #12 (immediately after interview with parent):**
At the end of the interview JB asked me if I had kids and if they had ever had therapy for sensory integrative dysfunction. Why did she want to know? She had shared so much with me and I felt compelled to give something back, to share with her, to make it reciprocal. So many thoughts were running through my mind. In the spontaneity of the moment, I did tell her about my own children. We were two women talking about our children. We could have been anywhere. Even though I had just met her, I felt like her peer, her friend. Then, I began to wonder if sharing of myself had an impact on JB's perspective of the research experience.

Although in this particular situation, the conversation evolved into a reciprocal give and take, which may have been more equally distributed, the question of how the reciprocity might affect the participant immediately emerged. Does sharing of oneself have ramifications for the distribution of power in a research relationship? How does self-disclosure influence participants' perception of power?

**Understanding**

When talking with research participants and when reflecting on these interactions during data analysis, researchers strive to understand the perspective of participants so that they may convey that understanding to others. Researchers seek an understanding that is meaningful and valuable, an interpretation that clearly informs others about an experience or phenomenon. Geertz (1983) wrote that anthropological interpretation involved listening to the colloquial concepts an informant would use to define his or her world. The researcher would then create or identify related concepts that forward scientific or philosophical understanding of the participant's experience. The researcher cycles between both types of concepts; to use only the participants' words confines the researcher to the immediate experience and the vernacular. Conversely, using only scientific concepts limits the researcher to jargon and the abstract instance. The researcher must therefore incorporate both types of concepts in his or her interpretation.

Understanding is not an objective reality that can be easily identified and captured. At the heart of qualitative research is the act of interpretation, of developing concepts and theories from accounts of personal experience. The power issue at this stage is that while both researcher and participants control the developing understanding (Agar, 1996), the researcher is usually the only party who actually develops or has access to pertinent theories that describe and/or explain the participants' experiences. The onus of responsibility is on the researcher to be sure that it is the participants' actual experiences that are being described (Agar). The researcher must be sensitive to the potential for miscommunication and researcher dominance that exists at every stage and on every level of the interpretive research process.

Interpretive research seeks to understand another person's experience and that person should be able to recognize him or herself in the interpretation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest incorporating “member checks” into interpretive inquiry design. During member checks the researcher presents interpretations to members of the population being studied and asks them to offer feedback. One purpose of member checking is to realign the balance of power in the research relationship as the researcher is making a deliberate attempt to avoid misrepresentation.

While member checking can be invaluable, it has limitations. Researchers bring an interpretation to analysis that is informed by theoretical concepts that participants may be
unaware of. Participants are not social analysts and may be unable to comment on an interpretation that is couched in a “foreign” language. Does that make the interpretation less valid or meaningful? Does the balance of power swing into the hands of the researcher and the academics who are well-versed in theoretical language? Can translating the interpretation into a language that is accessible to the participant restore the balance of power?

Some researchers may prefer to share only transcripts of interviews with participants and ask them to verify that what they said was accurately recorded. This avoids the problem of having to explain or translate theoretical language but gives rise to other concerns. In sharing only transcripts the researcher is verifying what he or she heard but is not allowing the participant to access the interpretation of those words and actions. This form of member checking addresses only the words and actions that were said and done but does not give the participant a way to identify if the researcher understood the meaning behind the words and actions.

During member checking, a participant might be able to understand the researcher’s interpretation but the participant might disagree with that interpretation. Mutual understandings and interpretations are not always possible (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Do member checking and alternative interpretations add to or subtract from the researcher’s credibility? The participant’s credibility? If the participant does not feel the interpretation adequately reflects his or her experience, does that mean the interpretation is wrong? Is publishing an interpretation with which participants disagree a disempowering act, as the researcher is imposing an alternative perspective on the people’s life experiences?

Representing

Clifford (1983) suggests that a coauthorship relationship with participants should be developed. While coauthorship is a laudable goal, this is not always possible as participants may not have the time, interest, or ability to coproduce a written work. Short of coauthorship (for examples see Rebeiro and Allen, 1998; Reberio, Day, Semeniuk, O’Brien, & Wilson, 2001), some researchers have tried to present both their own and the participants’ interpretations (for examples see Frank, 2000, p. 126; Olesen, 2000, p. 232). Are there times when coauthorship or multiple interpretations is appropriate and times when it is not?

Interpretive scholars also recommend that researchers strive to disseminate polyvocal texts (Frank, 2000; Ong, 1995; Opie, 1992). This suggestion raises pragmatic questions. Does presenting multiple views help to create a more equal power distribution in the research relationship? Are extracts from interviews and conversations sufficient means of weaving others’ voices into a written presentation?

The decisions we, as researchers, make about which quotes and interpretation to present may serve as a form of power for the writer. During analysis we create an interpretation that illustrates the complexity of the data, but when writing a final manuscript we may feel that we are choosing quotations that best illustrate our interpretations. How much latitude does an author have to edit the quotations (through selection and use of ellipses)? Scholars suggest that grounding for the interpretation should be visible so that readers can assess for themselves whether the interpretation is important or useful in explaining the phenomena of inquiry. Can a reader truly assess the represented interpretation without access to the actual interview or verbatim account of the interview? Is the interpretation ever truly visible if the quotes that are presented have been edited? What is the researcher’s responsibility to participants and the potential audience?

Finally, important and overarching questions should continually be asked during research: what is the purpose of writing the interpretation? Who is the audience? What are the consequences for the writer, the reader, and most importantly the person whose story is being told?

Summary

To summarize, we have grappled with the complex dilemmas and recurrent themes of power that are present when we conduct interpretive, meaning-centered research. Throughout the interpretive research process, power is not an item to be addressed in a research protocol, but an active force embedded in every methodological decision we make. It is the researcher who ultimately has the responsibility and authority to make the methodological decisions. Since the research process is inherently imbalanced, researchers need to be attuned to issues of power throughout the research process. We have few answers to the questions raised in this paper. However, we do propose that we all continually ask the questions and struggle with the various implications embedded in every methodological choice we make. Sensitive reflection on the complex and recursive power issues in our research may help us examine for whom we are writing and what we hope to accomplish with our interpretations.▲

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