Chapter 2
Considering Positionality: The Ethics of Conducting Research with Marginalized Groups

Laura Parson

Abstract In this chapter, I outline the ethical concerns and potential methodological obstacles that can occur when conducting research with underrepresented, marginalized, or minoritized groups. Prioritizing the implications of conducting this research as a member of a dominant group and/or with privileged outsider status, I describe key methodological strategies to use when conducting social justice-oriented research to address or mitigate ethical concerns and methodological obstacles. Finally, I describe strategies for the ethical use and reporting of research findings by providing examples of existing and proposed social justice research projects.

Conducting research through a social justice lens is key to identify and explore the factors that marginalize and minoritize underrepresented groups and individuals. Historically, however, research procedures and reporting have often served to reinforce and exacerbate the marginalization of research participants and members of marginalized groups even when research was conducted with the intent of "helping" them (Goodkind & Deacon, 2004). Considering positionality allows one to identify how the research process has the potential to marginalize research participants and perpetuate structural and systemic discrimination of the researched population. By interrogating one's role, placement, and motivation, identifying one's positionality prompts researchers to explore the power and privilege inherent in one's identity. This consideration allows researchers to make decisions to mitigate the pitfalls of conducting research with marginalized groups, which includes an evaluation of if one is positioned such that they should not be conducting that research.

L. Parson (✉)
Auburn University, Auburn, AL, USA
e-mail: ljp@auburn.edu

Researchers hold a privileged status within the research process, regardless of their other salient identities. One's status as a researcher influences the research process from the selection of research questions, who is invited to participate, the selection of research methods, and decisions about how to report and share findings: "Strategies, tactics, and procedures that characterize power dynamics in research include participant selection, privacy, disclosure, interviews, observations, analysis, and the (re)presentation of research participants and their communities" (Vanner, 2015, p. 2). The ability to make these decisions in the research process represents the significant power of the researcher. Further, this decision-making power means that researchers have a significant role in creating and reifying knowledge: "Academic researchers represent centers of power, privilege, and status within their formal institutions, as well as within the production of scientific knowledge itself" (Muhammad et al., 2015, p. 1046). Reporting research results, such as through the publication process, defines what is considered knowledge, which is why decisions about what to study, how to conduct research, and what is reported convey significant power to researchers. Through a system of rewards and recognition, the research reporting and publication process confers power both to the reported "knowledge" and to the researcher/author.

The power of researchers in the power/knowledge process is significant. As a result, it is especially important to be mindful of one's place in the research process in order to identify how research might be reproducing existing power/knowledge frameworks that marginalize underrepresented groups (Muhammad et al., 2015). First, beyond selecting research parameters, researchers rebuild participant stories in ways that conform to the dominant ideology because they are recontextualizing the stories of research participants through their own lens as a member of the oppressor class. Without considering the bias inherent in one's worldview, "participants in the study are silenced, and that the last word remains with the uncontested and privileged interpretations of the author" (Arber, 2000, p. 45). Second, researchers often exploit participants in very colonizing ways. For example, if I publish a participant's words (accurate or misrepresented), then I profit via job security, accolades, or merit raises. Meanwhile, participants gain very little, if anything. I have, in essence, turned participants' "struggles in society" to my own personal gain. Considering positionality means identifying one's motivation for doing research and identifying how that research could be implicitly reinstantiating the very dynamics one hoped to document and interrupt.

Positionality prompts researchers to ask if this research should be done and if one is the researcher to be conducting this research. If one cannot really represent stories of people of color without them being implicitly and intrinsically reframed through a whiteness-infused worldview, then this is perhaps not the research that this researcher should be conducting. Further, even if researchers believe that their research is emancipatory, simply by speaking for participants in one's reports and writing, a researcher is still objectifying participants (Gordon, 2005, p. 280). Considering one's positionality is the first step toward conducting research that contributes to more equity in society, instead of reproducing inequity or diminishing it.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing the implications of conducting research from a position of privilege and critiques around privileged group members doing research with or "on" marginalized populations. Next, I define and discuss positionality, insider/outsider status, reflexivity, and the relationship between power and knowledge. Second, I discuss key strategies in the research process, beginning with research questions, the nature of participation, and reporting results. Finally, I suggest several research methodologies that incorporate ethical and participatory research methods, research methods designed with the goal of empowering participants that result in meaningful change.

Positionality

To understand the potential harms that come from doing research on marginalized populations without considering power/privilege, it is important to understand positionality and how to identify one's positionality in the research process. Suffla, Seedat, and Bawa (2015) define positionality as "the researcher's social location, personal experience, and theoretical viewpoint, the relational and institutional contexts of the research, and the bearing of these elements on the research process itself" (p. 16). Thinking about and identifying one's position in the research process is the first step toward understanding the impact of personal bias, because one's position limits them from seeing things from the perspective of someone in a different position: "One's position in the field is situated within a social hierarchy vis-à-vis other groups and individuals with regard to class, gender, ethnicity, and race, each of which potentially limits or broadens one's understanding of others" (Milgram, 2012, pp. 178–179). One's position impacts how a researcher anticipates participant needs in the research process, crafts research questions that truly seek to understand the participant's lived experiences and interprets participant's words.

To begin the process of considering positionality, one starts by identifying the salient and non-salient aspects of personal identity and the power and privilege embedded in the intersection of one's salient identities. The process of identifying one's position rejects the idea of a post-racial, post-feminist society. While one's identity, and therefore their positionality, is not limited to race, it is important that one first acknowledges that race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other identities do exist:

> Colorblindness is a complex ideology in which White people are taught to ignore race, a stance that ends by reinscribing existing power relations that privilege White people. Colorblindness maintains that race does not exist as a meaningful category and posits that the benefits accrued to White people are earned by (gifted) individuals rather than systematically conferred. (Gordon, 2005, p. 281)

Ignoring the power and privilege that come along with racial identity and perceived racial identity virtually ensures that the research one conducts will, at the very least, perpetuate the marginalization of minoritized groups: "By pretending

these implications are not real, we become complicit in reproducing them" (Gordon, 2005, p. 299). Similarly, one must also identify how their identity relates to class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age, and the power/privilege inherent in those intersecting identities.

Indeed, in social-justice-oriented research, research should seek to improve the lives of the marginalized groups of individuals whose experiences the researcher is exploring. Yet, one cannot hope to make recommendations to improve their position if the researcher does not truly understand what marginalized persons are challenged by. Defining one's identity is the first step of that process. As an example, consider *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, the movie based on Rebecca Skloot's book of the same name. In *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, Skloot's (played by Rose Byrne) exploration of the life of Henrietta Lacks and the Lacks family provides an example, both positive and negative, of the difficult and often problematic ethical issues associated with conducting research as a White, privileged outsider with a disadvantaged group. The Lacks family, whose experiences Skloot is exploring, are Black, poor, and lack formal education as evidenced by degrees. While Skloot is disadvantaged by her gender because of systemic sexism in academia and journalism, she is simultaneously privileged by her race, education level, and socioeconomic status. In contrast, the Lacks family is disadvantaged by their race, socioeconomic status, and formal education level; the men in the Lacks family may be privileged because of gender, but the stereotype of Black men as criminals that is perpetuated throughout the movie serves to disadvantage the Lacks men. Skloot's power and privilege are witnessed when she can gain access to medical records that the family has not been able to access, despite repeated attempts. As one considers Skloot's positionality, this should raise questions about whether Skloot can truly understand the experiences of the Lacks family, how she can ethnically gain access to speak to them, and if she can speak for them. If Skloot cannot gain access or she cannot understand the experiences of the Lacks family, when she speaks for them, is she really speaking for them or continuing to marginalize them?

Considering Skloot's identity in the research process is just the first step. After defining one's identity, the next step in considering positionality as it impacts the research process is to identify how one's identity is related to the identities of those whose experiences one's research seeks to explore. This is not an exercise in describing how a group of individuals are different from the researcher and therefore deficient, which is the traditional way of viewing members of marginalized groups. Instead, exploring one's identity as it relates to the identities of the group whose experiences one hopes to improve is an exploration that acknowledges differences in order to consider how the intersection of power and privilege impacts a researcher's ability to conduct research ethically. Considering positionality in order to conduct research ethically is more than identifying how one might be less able to anticipate the methodological challenges of conducting research with marginalized groups. Considering positionality also includes identifying how the privileged aspects of one's identity have structured their life such that they view others through the lens of being in power. The privileged aspects of one's identity structure their relationship with power, and the ways in which one has been a beneficiary of asymmetric power

relations may have conditioned them to see the world in ways that reproduce the goodness of their values, characteristics, and culture. That understanding of the world will impact the research process and knowingly or unknowingly impose that worldview on the data and those from whom the data originate.

To understand the identities of marginalized groups, it is important to understand the history of how they have been exploited and marginalized. Returning to *The Immortal Life of Henrietta* Lacks, the Lacks family has been exploited multiple times by researchers or people claiming to want to help the family or tell their story. Understanding how the Lacks family had been victimized in the past could have helped Skloot to approach the family differently or, perhaps, led her to reconsider the research project completely so that she did not contribute to their exploitation. In addition to considering immediate factors, it would also have been important for Skloot to consider the larger history of research and exploitation. Black Americans have been made unwilling participants in medical research since before slavery, such as the Tuskegee Syphilis study. Like many underrepresented groups, Henrietta Lacks was exploited as a patient when her cells were taken and used in research without her consent and acknowledgment. This medical invasion and ethical violation of her body is a history that was important to consider as Skloot decided how to approach the family to ask them to participate in her research.

Positionality does not just include identity differences that are apparent in how one presents themselves to the world but also research context and the researcher's role in the research process. Researchers, as a part of their identity, have power in the research process in the decisions they make about the research project. In traditional research methods, researchers decide whom to talk to, the questions participants are asked, where the research occurs, how participants' voices are used, and where to publish research results. In each step of the research process, researcher decisions take agency, and therefore power, away from participants. Researchers control the process, and therefore, the ways participants are involved, represented, and presented. This power is especially dangerous if one has not considered positionality and has not considered how one might not understand the experiences and perspectives of participants. If researchers are not asking the right questions, researcher recommendations and implications may not address the problematic, or, worse, address problems that do not exist. Further, a lack of awareness of researcher bias may lead one to frame participants, findings, and recommendations through a lens of privilege that views participants as deficient because they are unlike the researcher.

Making decisions in the research process, especially as it is designed within the modern, western university, researchers may still make decisions that marginalize participants, even if they share other characteristics with participants. Traditionally, research has been a colonizing practice even when occurring in decolonizing spaces:

> These spaces are officially decolonized but are usually characterized by a new imperialism shaped by the economic, political, military, and cultural hegemony of the West within the context of globalization. Therefore, the Western researcher represents not only a colonial past but also a neocolonial present. (Vanner, 2015, p. 1)

In addition to the researcher role, one's positionality also includes nationality. National privilege, as a western researcher, is an additional layer of identity that may impose western knowledge, culture, and values on non-western participants (Falcon, 2016, p. 176). Considering nationality is important, especially in cases where one shares certain aspects of their identity with research participants, such as race.

The intersection of one's identity interacts to privilege them in multiple ways (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, as a researcher, I am a White, middle-class, woman professor. My privilege from my race and social class interacts with my role as a professor. The power I derive by determining the research process privileges me in multiple ways and gives me even more power in the research process than I might have as a woman professor within the higher education institution. Similarly, research participants might be marginalized by their race, gender, or sexuality and then they may be further marginalized in the research process when they are identified, sometimes reductionalistically, as "subjects" and stripped of agency in the research process and control over how their voice is used. Intersectionality provides additional perspective on how a researcher's identity will influence the research process, even for researchers who identify as a member of a marginalized group. A researcher still holds power and privilege in the research process because of other aspects of their identity, like nationality or the power inherent in their roles as research decision-maker. This leads me to the concept of insider/outsider status.

Insider/Outsider Status

Researchers are often insiders as members of groups whose experiences they are exploring and outsiders by their status as academics or researchers simultaneously (Wiederhold, 2015). Suffla et al. (2015) describes the complicated navigation of considering positionality as insiders and outsiders: "In the space between, we were insiders as Blacks, as Africans, and as community-based researchers whose work centers on underrepresented and oppressed groups, and insiders through our established and recognized partnerships with the local research teams" (p. 17). Similarly, in the case of my work with women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education in the United States, I am an insider inasmuch as I am a woman, but I am an outsider as a researcher, a professor, and because of my education level. This made me simultaneously an insider and an outsider. However, without reflecting on positionality, it was hard to identify when my status as an insider shifted to outsider and how that impacted data collection and analysis: "At times as researchers we are so embedded within our work, it is difficult to determine how our insider/outsider status changes and how this impacts our research" (Kohl & McCutcheon, 2015, p. 753). Further, there were conflicts that came into play because of my role as a researcher, and I was only able to identify those conflicts because I considered the bias of my position as a researcher and the power and privilege that resulted from my position (Hoskins, 2015). If I had assumed that because I was a young(er) White woman I understood the experiences of participants, I would have neglected to explore how my experience changing

majors from STEM to political science as an undergraduate student may have been dramatically different from the experiences of participants who were majoring in math, computer science, or physics. That could have meant that I took for granted certain characteristics of my participants or did not probe for deeper meaning because I assumed I understood what participants were experiencing, leading to flawed conclusions and results. Additionally, I also ran the risk of assuming insider status and equal footing with participants and the relationship norms that went along with that, when in reality my relative power and privilege would have made that both an impossible and unethical assumption.

Racism, sexism, ableism, cisgenderism, and ethnocentrism interlock to complicate systems of oppression and exacerbate the marginalization of those who are disadvantaged because of the different groups without whom they identify. Again, intersectionality provides insight to understand how "various layers of inequality that are present in the field" (Caretta & Jokinen, 2017, p. 277). Systems of oppression influence researcher and participant power and privilege, so understanding how identity impacts the research process is complicated by one's identification as an insider and an outsider, "multiple identities can be simultaneous, inter-related and sometimes contradictory" (Muhammad et al., 2015, p. 1047).

Limitations of Positionality

Positionality is, like one's identity, a construct: "Positioning is often discussed as if it is something natural, authentic, timeless, essential, primordial; something which can fully explain and categorize them and us. Yet we find ourselves saying there is something more; that we are not just that" (Arber, 2000, p. 45). However, while identity itself is a construct, it is still important to consider; without identification, however tenuous, one might fall back into the more problematic "colorblind" view that neglects to admit or acknowledge that meaningful differences exist between members of privileged and marginalized groups, which we know they do. The goal, in the positionality process, is to understand the multiple ways that privileged aspects of a researcher's identity act as "power over" research participants. Although identity is constructed, considering positionality prompts researchers to understand where they are positioned in relationship to participants. The key is not to define participants, especially not within a deficiency framework, but to analyze the "influence of social position and the politics of identity on the interactions between researcher and research participants and the role of power and identity in everyday lives and research" (Kohl & McCutcheon, 2015, p. 752).

Similarly, defining oneself as an "insider" is problematic because it neglects to acknowledge how individual characteristics differentiate members of the same social group:

> Asserting that a meaningful difference exists between those researchers who connect with the participants due to general commonalities and those researchers experiencing the specific mutual familiarity of sharing a personal history, a social network, and an assumed

place-based investment in the future with their participants—as experiences by those schol-
ars who conduct their research in the places they call home. (Wiederhold, 2015, p. 602)

Negotiating identity is an imperfect and tenuous process. Instead one considers
identity in order to create a space between insider and outsider while acknowledg-
ing that this process is imperfect and imprecise but better than refusing to accept
that a power differential exists (Muhammad et al., 2015; Suffla et al., 2015).
Identifying positionality is not about a blind relativity of choice about the place
where one wants to be positioned, but "it is about finding the place where one has
been put. It is about defining the practices which have defined this 'putting.' It is
about stating the place from where one can speak" (Arber, 2000, p. 58).

Considering positionality is simply an expectation of doing research with mar-
ginalized groups, and it does not need to be shared or "confessed" with to peers or
participants, especially those who have been traditionally underrepresented or mar-
ginalized (Falcon, 2016, p. 177). Researchers must accept their position and our
privilege without expecting an award or recognition for doing so. There is not an
award given to the most aware White person doing research with non-White indi-
viduals. Similarly, confessing alone does not lead to the undoing of privilege nor
does it allow one to think their way into a new position. Instead, research should
create structures that dismantle systems of oppression. Indeed, this is the obligation
of researchers: "Thus although responsibility is possessed by all toward all, those
who have benefitted from structures of power bear a greater responsibility for those
who lack privilege" (Goering, Holland, & Fryer-Edwards, 2008, p. 50). Whether or
not it is identified, the identity of the researcher and the researched is part of every
study, and examining it makes the work richer and more comprehensible for readers
(Gordon, 2005, p. 280).

Strategies for Conducting Research as a Privileged Outsider

Identifying one's positionality influences the research process by guiding research
questions, research methods, participants, data analysis, and reporting.

Research Questions

Every project begins as an inquiry, and researchers cannot hope to conduct research
that promotes social justice if they start from a place that has not identified social
justice as a key goal of that work. While this is discussed in detail throughout this
text, an inquiry should "*start* by considering whether such research is likely to meet
the needs of the underserved" (Goering et al., 2008, p. 46). Researchers will not
know if the research will meet the needs of the underserved as an outsider if they
have not first asked what the challenges and problems are from members of the
group whose experiences they hope to explore. A researcher is an outsider even if

they are a member in some way of the group they are exploring, because of the power associated with leading a research project. Further, it is more likely that an insider will be blind to some challenges experienced by participants because they have neglected to consider experiences outside of their own context.

If seeking to identify how an individual or group of individuals is challenged, research questions should guide the exploration of the experiences and challenges of the groups whose experiences we would like to improve. Secondarily, or in subsequent projects, findings from that research can help the researcher to craft questions that seek to flush out understanding of the experience or challenges identified in response to the initial research question. One example is from an institutional ethnography of STEM in higher education I conducted from the standpoint of undergraduate women majoring in math and physics (Parson & Ozaki, 2017). The theoretical underpinning of an institutional ethnography is feminist standpoint theory. Standpoint theory views members of underrepresented or marginalized groups as epistemically privileged because they are able to see more clearly the institutional structures and systems that marginalize them (Smith, 2005). An institutional ethnographic exploration begins by asking participants to describe their daily activities, where they go, what they do, why they do it, and how they know where, why, how, and when to do those things in order to identify the institutional processes, practices, procedures, and discourses that coordinate their descriptions of their daily lives; a second research question then asks participants to describe the challenges they face accomplishing their daily work. By building on participant description of their daily work, the researcher seeks to identify exactly when, during the day, those challenges arise as a junction, or problematic that guides subsequent data collection to identify the institutional process or discourse that is coordinating their work. By identifying where the institution coordinates the work of participants, the goal of an institutional ethnography is to understand how the institution is creating challenges for participants. Once participant challenges are identified, subsequent research questions or projects can explore the nature of the institutional processes and procedures to identify if and how they unfairly marginalize individuals and groups (the third set of research questions). Only after identifying the institutional structures that marginalize participants can a researcher make recommendations to remedy those practices or identify structural areas that require changes (potentially, a fourth research question).

However, had I begun with the third research question, to identify if a certain institutional practice was gendered, sexist, or racist, I would have run the risk of creating a research question that was not exploring the practice or area of participant's lives that was marginalizing. Worse, if I had started with the fourth research question and developed a program or made recommendations without gathering the answers to questions one through three, I might have made an irrelevant or harmful recommendation. While a researcher does not have to ask all four questions in one research project, as I did in this institutional ethnography, a researcher does need to know the answers to the prior questions from insider sources. Insider sources could include the researcher, but the researcher should not be the sole source of information guiding a research inquiry and developing research questions.

Consider Whom We Invite to Be Participants and Researchers

When one chooses who to invite to participate in a research project, they need to consider both representation and misrepresentation: "representation involves the exercise of researcher power in making decisions about which of the participants' experiences and stories to include and on what basis these choices are made" (Hoskins, 2015, p. 398). This does not require that one include individuals from the group they are exploring as participants in their research. For example, a study on bias in STEM might ask White, men scientists to describe what a scientist looks like in order to explain how they view the ideal scientist. However, much of the research that is socially oriented will seek to include, at the very least, members from the group whose experiences the research is exploring.

Similarly, if one is exploring the experiences of multiple groups, it is especially important that the research includes the voices of those who have not frequently been included in the literature or have traditionally been misrepresented: "If claims about misrecognition can be met without introducing serious new harms or compromising the participation of other groups, meeting them is a requirement of justice" (Goering et al., 2008, p. 47). If a group is underrepresented or misrepresented in the literature, researchers have an obligation to invite participants from that group of people. However, even if a researcher has identified an individual or group that they believe will help them to respond to their research question(s), researchers need to remember that participants are not obligated to participate despite the researcher's obligation to invite them to participate in the research. Participants need to be able to decline participation (Goering et al., 2008, p. 45).

There is an important opportunity here, and some might say an integral one, to include participants in the research process. Indeed, just like insiders can confirm the validity of one's research questions, they are also able to be participant-researchers. Participatory research (McGarry, 2016; Salmon, Browne, & Pederson, 2010; Vanner, 2015) provides space for participants to influence the research process (design, data collection, analysis, and writing stages). Participatory research requires a flexible design and a fluent definition of what is means to be a researcher and a participant, "within the context of ensuring a diverse academic research group, allow teams to form organically," and "establish a system for continual self-reflexivity" (Muhammad et al., 2015, p. 1058). It also requires that researchers empower participants by engaging them in research design, data analysis, and discussion of findings (Vanner, 2015) in order to co-produce and collaborate in the research process (Oldfield & Patel, 2016). Participatory research, while non-traditional, is a powerful opportunity to influence the research process positively. Including participants in the research process also has a powerful opportunity to improve reflexivity and validity of results. Further, insiders, if they are willing, can help the research to identify who might be appropriate participants.

Finally, considering and engaging participants in the research process requires a redefinition of what it means to be a researcher. The idea of a researcher is typically designed with a gendered, classed, and raced ideal in mind, but the reality is that "researcher" looks different for everyone. Similarly, one also needs to re-evaluate how participation is defined (Salmon et al., 2010). Participation might not look the same way, and participant dedication to the project should not be assumed. This might mean a researcher needs to understand what outside obligations might prohibit a participant from arriving on time, being at every meeting, or might lead to frequent absences: "A woman's capacity to participate consistently should not be assumed, not should any single incident be taken as an indicator of her ability or willingness to participate" (Salmon et al., 2010, p. 340).

Ethics

While ethics is discussed in more detail throughout this text, there are certain considerations when seeking to mitigate positionality. First, the minimum requirement for every study with human subjects requires approval from the ethical board that governs the researcher's institution, typically an Institutional Review Board (IRB). However, context matters, so a simple review from a western institution's IRB board might not suffice as ethical approval for the research because one must also consider cultural and linguistic sensitivity. Always, but especially in cases of linguistic differences, researchers need to use multiple formats to receive consent, referred to as interactive consent. Interactive consent should be sought from each participant in every setting, "I typically adopt a multi-level form of consent, which includes written and oral consent, with an understanding that it can be withdrawn at any time" (Falcon, 2016, p. 183). Further, receiving informed consent means that a researcher also helps participants to understand not just what they are consenting to by participating in the research project but also discusses the ramifications of participating in the research study.

Finally, researchers also need to consider cultural and national norms when seeking permission for access to research sites and when requesting permission to contact participants. Some countries have national procedures and laws governing research. Additionally, different institutions may require additional permissions and forms of consent to conduct research than those required by a researcher's home institution. For example, one's IRB may just require a letter from an institutional representative giving permission to conduct research at another institution, but the institution itself may require additional permissions before a researcher can access and conduct research at that site. IRB approval is the minimum ethical requirement for a study with human subjects. The researcher must "consider the repercussions of her decisions, particularly for the most vulnerable participants or affected parties,

ask whose voice is being privileged and why, and always prioritize the safety and requests of community members over the depth of data collection" (Vanner, 2015, p. 6). Researchers also need to consider cultural and national norms and ensure that permission is obtained from all involved people, sites, and institutions.

Reflexivity

Considering positionality and navigating insider and outsider status continues throughout the research process through reflexivity. The process of reflexivity facilitates continual exploration of one's power and privilege as it impacts research. Reflexivity is a process where one examines their place in the research process through reflection. Ongoing reflection helps to mitigate identity constructed as static and unchanging. "Ongoing negotiations indicate that the relationship between researcher and research participants cannot be reduced to somewhat fixed or frozen positionalities based on social categories such as gender or class; rather they unfold over the course of the encounter" (Kaspar & Landolt, 2014, p. 109). Reflexivity often includes feedback from critical peers that can identify where and how one might not be aware of differences and conflicts between their assumptions and the lived experiences of participants. Reflexivity should ensure that one is constantly evaluating their position within the research.

The three principles of reflexive research as defined by Bourdieu (as cited in Hoskins, 2015):

> First, to avoid projecting my 'values, dispositions, attitudes and perceptions' onto the participants' social realities; second, to reflect on and acknowledge the impact of the bias of my field location; and third, to examine the epistemological and social conditions that make possible social-scientific claims of objectivity. (p. 397)

Reflexivity goes beyond identifying social place and requires that one critically identifies and explores their "assumptions, values, discourses, and practices that we deploy to portray reality and create knowledge" (Suffla et al., 2015, p. 10). Through reflexivity, researchers identify their biases and seek to understand how other contextual and power relations are influencing research. This is critical to create new knowledge and situate it in the literature (Suffla et al., 2015).

Researchers need to continue to be reflexive throughout the research process to ensure that they are mindful of their position (and ethics) and to continue to engage with research participants and fellow researchers. One such reflective strategy is kitchen table reflexivity where researchers explore and navigate their positionality with co-researchers and participants (Kohl & McCutcheon, 2015). In kitchen table reflexibility, researchers ensure that continual reflection on positionality occurs throughout the research process through informal conversations that occur naturally and fluidly (Kohl & McCutcheon, 2015). This ill-defined process is messy and may not have a satisfactory resolution. Researchers have to accept the idea of a "good

enough" reflexive relationship and "accept rather than defend against healthy tensions in fieldwork" and be attuned to these questions and how they inform and may even possibly be data (Muhammad et al., 2015, p. 1050).

Data Collection Methods

Selecting methods that consider the implications of ethics, positionality, and place requires reflection, perhaps through memoing, in order to identify which research methods are the best and most ethical way to explore your research question. To guide method selection, a researcher should reflect on their reasons for conducting the study, who should participate, and the knowledge the researcher has about their own identity development. Specific methods for data collection are discussed at length at other locations through the text, so my discussion of specific methods in this chapter is framed through positionality, approach, and ethics. Some questions to ask as one chooses their research methods might include the following questions adapted from Pennington and Prater (2016).

What Role Is Privilege Playing in the Research Design?

Exploring the role of privilege in one's research design requires that they ask who has access to the site/who does not, what theory is informing the research questions, and who will benefit from the study. Whether conducting interviews, observations, or focus groups, it is important that researchers make the process safe and comfortable for participants. First, it is important that researchers conduct our research in "safe spaces." A safe space does not look the same for everyone, and it might not look the same for one's participants as it does for the researcher—in this case, I refer to safety as comfortability and freedom from potential harms such as a loss of confidentiality or physical harm (Salmon et al., 2010). Again, it behooves researchers to ask participants or other insiders where it would be safe to conduct the research and if there is a place where it is safe. While it may be most convenient to conduct the research in one's offices or even a coffee shop, that might not be where the participant is the most comfortable. Returning to *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, the first meeting between Lacks and Skloot takes place in a fancy restaurant. It was clear that Lacks was unfamiliar with the setting and not comfortable, and her discomfort set the tone for the meeting and, possibly, the entire future of their relationship by reinforcing the class difference between Lacks and Skloot. When choosing research settings, choose spaces that are safe and comfortable for participants, but do not neglect one's own safety in that process, such as by entering a site where the researchers feel emotionally or physically unsafe.

Second, when possible, match researcher identity with that of the interviewee (Muhammad et al., 2015, p. 1057). A researcher should seek to include academic team members whose identities intersect with those of the community partners as members of the research team. Awareness requires that researchers pay attention to ethical and cultural sensitivity. Finally, researchers should not prioritize the needs of the research field or the individual researcher (e.g., getting an interview) over the needs of the community or the participant (Falcon, 2016).

What Role Is Silence Playing in Research Implementation and Data Analysis?

Researchers need to "identify a methodological design that will minimize the negative effects of power on the research participants and maximize their empowerment" (Vanner, 2015, p. 2). This can be done by integrating participatory and collaborative data collection and analysis which can be sustainable and cultivate co-learning and alignment with community partners (Muhammad et al., 2015). By involving participants in the research design, analysis, and reporting, researchers can ask who is promoting dialogue about privilege and what are the opportunities for honest privilege/power discussion.

Involving participants in the research design and analysis process can help researchers to ensure that participants' needs are being met in the research process, help researchers to continually interrogate whether the research project is continuing to consider positionality, power, and privilege, and help researchers to examine analysis and conclusions critically. One methodological example is feminist participatory action research (FPAR) (Salmon et al., 2010). FPAR blends participatory action research and critical feminist theory. In FPAR women are involved in all stages of the research process. Salmon et al. (2010) conducted an FPAR project exploring effectiveness of nursing practices in marginalized communities and involved affected women as researcher-participants. Through the involvement of researcher-participants, Salmon et al. (2010) found that researcher-participants allowed them to connect research to the community in order to address lived inequities: "congruence between the concerns of nursing with people who are marginalized and the commitments of FPAR to continually redress power inequities, hierarchies, and health and social inequities" (p. 336).

Even if the decision is made not to involve participants directly as researchers in the research process, allowing participants to shape the direction of data collection allows them continued access to the research process. For example, McGarry's (2016) exploration of the experiences of Muslim teens involved teen participants in decisions about how they represented their knowledge. Multiple forms of situated knowledge led to an understanding of the fluid and flexible power dynamics that characterize youth experience, "allowing participants to shape power dynamics and positionalities throughout the research process led to the generation of unexpected forms of situated knowledge" (McGarry, 2016, p. 352).

Finally, one's data collection methods can give control to participants to direct the nature of data collected. One example is photovoice, a method that asks participants to take pictures of the things that are most salient in their lives: "[Photovoice] espouses the idea that individuals' realities, and therefore their narratives, are situated in social configurations of class, gender, race, geography, sexuality, kind, and the like, and that their portrayal is negotiated through culturally available forms of representation" (Suffla et al., 2015, p. 12). Participants choose to take pictures of what is important to them and their lives, which directs the research process, context, and data collected.

Similar to photovoice is mobile interviewing (Wiederhold, 2015). In mobile interviewing participants talk to a researcher while physically guiding them to places that demonstrate or indicate an example of what they are talking about, similar to a community tour. Mobile interviewing can also help a researcher to build familiarity with local places and interpretations, and capitalize on participants' local knowledge. Through the processes of mobile interviewing and photovoice, researchers and participants mutually construct an understanding of the research setting through and direct the type of data collected.

What Type of Academic White Talk Is Performed by and Between the Researchers?

Finally, researchers must continually ask how participants are positioned/discussed in the analysis and reporting process by critically examining the analytical tools used to interpret the data. After a researcher has collected data, analyses and reporting begin, and it is critical that the reflexivity process continues as one checks the validity of results. One way to check validity is through member checking or asking participants to read analyses and discuss if they feel the analyses are accurate representations (Falcon, 2016; Vanner, 2015). Member checking is a requisite part of research conducted with marginalized groups by privileged outsiders to ensure that researcher representation of the participant's words reflects the participant's lived experiences from their standpoint.

When considering positionality, the practical considerations of where to publish, what conferences to present at, and status differences in different academic areas are important to consider as well (Hoskins, 2015). In reporting research findings, researchers must "incorporate the voices of others without colonizing them in a manner that reinforces patterns of domination" (Suffla et al., 2015, p. 15). As researchers report their findings, they need to ensure that they "embrace personal narratives as 'counter-storytelling' to assure minority voices are heard" (Muhammad et al., 2015, p. 1049). Similarly, researchers must explore catalytic validity, or "the extent to which research 'moves those it studies to understand the world and the way it is shaped in order for them to transform it" (Vanner, 2015, p. 8). One's reporting on research conducted to achieve social justice must report on the research with the intention to recreate a more equitable society (Falcon, 2016).

Conclusion

It is not the responsibility of one's research participants or those traditionally marginalized to assuage a researcher's guilt or congratulate them for acknowledging their privilege. If the process seems difficult, that is because it is. However, choosing not to do research or ignoring concerns of positionality and insider/outsider status are not acceptable alternatives. Instead, researchers have to reflexively and continually interrogate their positionality and resultant power and privilege in the research process in order to ensure their research does not replicate participant marginalization.

There is a complicated balance to draw between considering positionality and using it as a rationale not to conduct research with marginalized or underrepresented groups. One's positionality should not be an excuse not to conduct research; research centered around the experiences of underrepresented and marginalized groups is critical and necessary; indeed, I argue that all research should be conducted while considering positionality and this is the future of all research with "human subjects." Dismantling the White, patriarchal, cisgender, straight structures of society cannot be done by applying the same research methods that one has always used. When researchers do that, they continue to replicate the same systems that marginalize. If researchers continue to conduct research according to existing academic and social structures, they will continue to find participants lacking. This deficiency-based view of marginalized groups has resulted in the continued labeling of those different from the White, privileged norm as deficient because they do not fit into the current structure.

Considering positionality is just one step in the process of rebuilding the research process in order not only to explore and understand the experiences of traditionally marginalized groups truly but also to make recommendations to improve their experiences. Doing that requires a new approach to research, research participants, what it means to participate in research, and how researchers discuss their results. Just like "we are never done with justice, and we are always working toward it" (Goering et al., 2008, p. 49), researchers should always be working toward greater social justice in their research processes.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Pennington, J. L., & Prater, K. (2016). The veil of professionalism: An autoethnographic critique of White positional identities in the figured worlds of White research performance. *Race, Ethnicity & Education, 19*(5), 901–926.

Pennington and Prater critically examine their shifting positionality and unacknowledged White privilege as it influenced their research 12 years after the study concluded.

Sawyer, R. D., & Liggett, T. (2012). Shifting positionalities: A critical discussion of a duoethnographic inquiry of a personal curriculum of post/colonialism. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 11*(5), 628–651.

Sawyer and Liggett reflect on the colonizing practices of ethnographic research and discuss strategies to decolonize ethnographic research.

Laker, J. A. (2016). What's a nice, straight, White guy doing in an essay like this?!!! Privilege, oppression and the binary politics of positionality. *Social Alternatives, 35*(3), 57–60.

Laker calls for a critical examination of the identity, power, and privilege that comes from the positionality of being a White, cisgendered, man or woman in higher education. In his essay, he reminds White men and women in higher education that this critical examination is an obligation.

References

Arber, R. (2000). Defining positioning within politics of difference: Negotiating spaces 'in between'. *Race, Ethnicity & Education, 3*(1), 45–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320050000583

Caretta, M. A., & Jokinen, J. C. (2017). Conflating privilege and vulnerability: A reflexive analysis of emotions and positionality in postgraduate fieldwork. *The Professional Geographer, 69*(2), 275–283. https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2016.1252268

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241–1299.

Falcon, S. M. (2016). Transnational feminism as a paradigm for decolonizing the practice of research. *Frontiers, 37*(1), 174–194.

Goering, S., Holland, S., & Fryer-Edwards, K. (2008). Transforming genetic research practices with marginalized communities: A case for responsive justice. *Hastings Center Report, 38*(2), 43–53.

Goodkind, J. R., & Deacon, Z. (2004). Methodological issues in conducting research with refugee women: Principles for recognizing and re-centering the multiply marginalized. *Journal of Community Psychology, 32*(6), 721–739. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20029

Gordon, J. (2005). White on White: Researcher reflexivity and the logics of privilege in White schools undertaking reform. *Urban Review, 37*(4), 279–302. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-005-0015-1

Hoskins, K. (2015). Researching female professors: The difficulties of representation, positionality, and power in feminist research. *Gender and Education, 27*(4), 393–411. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2015.1021301

Kaspar, H., & Landolt, S. (2014). Flirting in the field: Shifting positionalities and power relations in innocuous sexualisations of research encounters. *Gender, Place & Culture, 23*(1), 107–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2014.991704

Kohl, E., & McCutcheon, P. (2015). Kitchen table reflexivity: Negotiating positionality through everyday talk. *Gender, Place & Culture, 22*(6), 747–763. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2014.958063

Laker, J. A. (2016). What's a nice, straight, White guy doing in an essay like this?!!! Privilege, oppression and the binary politics of positionality. *Social Alternatives, 35*(3), 57–60.

McGarry, O. (2016). Repositioning the research encounter: Exploring power dynamics and positionality in youth research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 19*(3), 339–354. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2015.1011821

Milgram, B. L. (2012). Tangled fields: Rethinking positionality and ethics in research on women's work in a Hong Kong-Philippine trade. *Critical Arts, 26*(2), 175–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2012.684438

Muhammad, M., Wallerstien, N., Sussman, A. L., Avila, M., Belone, L., & Duran, B. (2015). Reflections on researcher identity and power: The impact of positionality on community based participatory research (CBPR) processes and outcomes. *Critical Sociology, 41*(7–8), 1045–1063. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920513516025

Oldfield, S., & Patel, Z. (2016). Engaging geographies: Negotiating positionality and building relevance. *South African Geographical Journal, 98*(3), 505–514. https://doi.org/10.1080/03736245.2016.1217255

Parson, L., & Ozaki, C. C. (2017). Gendered student ideals in STEM in higher education. *NASPA Journal about Women in Higher Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2017.1392323

Pennington, J. L., & Prater, K. (2016). The veil of professionalism: An autoethnographic critique of White positional identities in the figured worlds of White research performance. *Race, Ethnicity & Education, 19*(5), 901–926. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2014.885431

Salmon, A., Browne, A. J., & Pederson, A. (2010). 'Now we call it research': Participatory health research involving marginalized women who use drugs. *Nursing Inquiry, 17*(4), 336–345. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1800.2010.00507.x

Sawyer, R. D., & Liggett, T. (2012). Shifting positionalities: A critical discussion of a duoethnographic inquiry of a personal curriculum of post/colonialism. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 11*(5), 628–651.

Smith, D. E. (2005). *Institutional ethnography: A sociology for people*. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.

Suffla, S., Seedat, M., & Bawa, U. (2015). Reflexivity as enactment of critical community psychologies: Dilemmas of voice and positionality in a multi-country photovoice study. *Journal of Community Psychology, 43*(1), 9–12. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21691

Vanner, C. (2015). Positionality at the center: Constructing an epistemological and methodological approach for a western feminist doctoral candidate conducting research in the postcolonial. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 14*(4), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406915618094

Wiederhold, A. (2015). Conducting fieldwork at and away from home: Shifting researcher positionality with mobile interviewing methods. *Qualitative Research, 15*(5), 600–615. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794114550440