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Working Within Hyphen-Spaces in Ethnographic Research: Implications for Research Identities and Practice

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Abstract

Ethnographers often find themselves wrestling with choices about their relationship with respondents: choices experienced by researchers engaged in many other methodologies. This article examines the agentic and political nature of those relationships using the notion of *hyphen-spaces*: a concept that offers a way of recognizing their complexity, making choices about how to position ourselves and work within them, and understanding the implications for research identities and practice. Drawing on Fine's notion of "working the hyphens" and personal experience of ethnographic fieldwork in a tea plantation in Sri Lanka, we propose four hyphen-spaces of insiderness-outsiderness, sameness-difference, engagement-distance, and political activism–active neutrality. We believe an understanding of these relationships will help us become more informed and ethical researchers interested in engaging in different methodologies. Finally, we emphasize the fluid and agentic nature of researcher-respondent identities and the implications for practice.

Keywords

ethnography, qualitative research, interpretivism, constructivism

> There are no safe spaces, no alibis, for researchers anymore. We face ever-present and unavoidable choices about our commitments to the people with whom we work, choices that have implications for all manner of ethnographic practice.
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> —Dimitriadis (2001, p. 595)

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Organizational ethnography has a long tradition going back to the early 20th century, most notably Elton Mayo's Hawthorne Studies.[1] Based on a commitment to developing rich and detailed accounts of the daily life of a community, it requires researchers to spend extended periods in the field and recognizes that a researcher's personal experience leads to the potential for a greater understanding of the complexities of the setting (Locke, 2011). Immersion in the field often means that ethnographers become implicated in the lives of research respondents and wrestle with choices about positionality, identity, and the nature of these relationships. When researchers (qualitative and quantitative) spend any time in a research site, they find themselves deliberately and/or unconsciously reacting to respondents' actions and comments as they negotiate expectations about this relationship, try to gain access to the site and to people, determine what data can be collected and how, which voices will be heard in the research account, and what happens after the study. These issues, crucial to the success of research, are often ignored in research accounts and descriptions of methodology, and yet data collection is a human activity in which relationships emerge that may influence research in significant ways. Additionally, within organization and management studies (OMS), articles addressing research relationships and positionality are relatively rare. Zickar and Carter's (2010) positioning of researchers as reformists aiming to facilitate change, muckrakers who expose transgressive practices, or voyeurs who observe situations to better understand them, is one exception.

This article aims to make a contribution to our understanding of such relationships by drawing attention to their fluid and multiple nature in the field, explicating the various ways in which we may position ourselves in relation to our research participants, and examining the potential implications for identities, research design, and methodology and consequently the success of a research study and our development as a researcher. To do so, we build on feminist psychologist Michelle Fine's (1994b) conceptualization of "working the hyphen" and the fieldwork experience of Geetha to offer the notion of *hyphen-spaces* as a way of emphasizing not the boundaries, *but the spaces of possibility*, between researchers and respondents. In particular, we suggest that researcher-respondent relationships are often emergent (Hastings, 2010), multiple, and agentic in the sense that researchers and respondents shape each others' identities and actions. We offer four hyphen-spaces as a way of recognizing and understanding the tensions/connections in such relationships and their impact on research identities and practice.

The nature of relationships and issues of objectivity, representation, power, and identity in research have been a concern of cultural anthropologists, critical feminists, and postcolonial researchers for a number of years (e.g., Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Coffey, 1999; Giampietro, 2011). While Fine's work in particular has influenced gender studies, feminist psychology, education, geography, and sociology, her ideas are rarely acknowledged in organization studies. Briefly, she argues that researchers work in the hyphen between self-Other (researcher-respondents): a power relationship that is often asymmetrical and possibly exploitative because as we observe, analyze, and represent the lives of others, we colonize (speak for and construct their identities) and distance them by writing their voices out of our research and treating them as generalized abstractions. We do so as "inventors of some questions and repressors of others, shapers of the very contexts we study . . . interpreters of others' stories and narrators of our own" (Fine, 1994a, p. 13). This has consequences for the lives of respondents in terms of how they may be treated or educated and judged by others as a result of our work. She urges researchers to rethink the nature of this relationship and to explore "how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations" (Fine, 1994b, p. 72). In other words, understanding how we "work the hyphen" means reflexively probing how our presence influences and/or changes people and practices and how their presence influences us—intentionally or otherwise, surfacing the identity relations that may occur between ourselves and our research participants (e.g., Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008), and examining the implications for research practice. Our purpose is to offer four

hyphen-spaces as a way of thinking about the tensions, fluid and reciprocal nature, and possible positionalities within researcher-respondent relationships. By doing so, researchers may make more informed and ethical choices about those relationships, identity, research design, and methodology.

The intricacy and impact of these relationships are rarely addressed within mainstream OMS empirical and methodological accounts, yet they are often crucial to the success of a research study. Feldman, Bell, and Berger (2003) argue that gaining access, doing research, and exiting organizations are fundamentally a relational endeavor in which neither researcher nor researched are in full control. They argue that we need to pay attention to these issues and address a number of relationship-building skills. Other studies are more oriented toward the researcher, focusing on issues of establishing rapport (e.g., Dundon & Ryan, 2010), negotiating various researcher roles (e.g., Tapani, 2009), and how much researchers should disclose about themselves and their study (e.g., Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). We suggest researcher-respondent relationships are more intricate and complexly interwoven with identity issues of both researcher and respondent (Weiss & Fine, 2000) and that therefore a more nuanced understanding of how they influence our research practice and methods can lead to more informed and ethical practice.

While the context of our article is ethnography and the cultural context of the illustrative study raised a number of unique challenges, we suggest that the following ideas may also resonate with and influence the personal practice of researchers engaged in other methodologies such as case studies, action research, appreciative inquiry, and grounded theory. Indeed, any form of fieldwork can lead to feelings of doubt, frustration, and confusion as the researcher struggles with choices about the nature of relationships in the field, multiple sources of data and what is or isn't relevant, ethical dilemmas, and what this all means for theorizing and writing (Carlsen & Dutton, 2011; Jackall, 1988; Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008). Researchers using scientific survey or laboratory methods also face challenges and do much work that goes beyond scientific procedures (Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Locke, 2011). We argue these are not just choices about *doing* research but about *being* a researcher—about our identities in the field.

We begin by setting the empirical context of the article, followed by further theoretical explication of Fine's (1994b) concept of "working the hyphen." These form the basis for an elaboration of the notion of hyphen-spaces in which we draw on literature that implicitly and explicitly deals with hyphen-spaces along with illustrations from Geetha's reflective diary. We end by examining the implications for identities and practices in the field.

Hyphen-Spaces: The Empirical and Theoretical Contexts

The Empirical Context. The article is based on Geetha's experience of fieldwork while completing her PhD. Using a social constructionist perspective and discourse-based methodology, she examined how historical, socio-political macro discourses (e.g., government policies, religious texts) intertwined with micro-discursive practices (talk and interactions of management, workers, and trade union officers) to construct and maintain the identity of tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka.

Her focus was not *what* those identities were, but the *processes* of identity construction. Gaining access to a large up-country tea plantation, she conducted a 3-month ethnographic study of identity discourses and dynamics by interviewing managers; speaking formally and informally with male and female workers at work, home,[2] and other settings; "hanging out" with the midwife and in the plantation store; and plucking tea in the field. In addition, she carried out a focused analysis of historical, political, and religious texts with identity issues in mind. She concluded that worker identities, both individual and collective, were interwoven, simultaneously constructed and reinforced by both macro and micro discourses. Macro discourses refer to historically established collective understandings, practices, and rituals shaped by colonialism, religion, ethnicity, and gender; micro discourses to the daily actions and conversations taking place in both public (work) and private

(home) settings. However, despite fairly strict cultural and religious discourses and rituals, worker identities were not fixed but emerging and contested, both collectively and individually. For example, the macro historical and gendered discourse of factory work as "male work" and tea plucking as "female work" was shifting. Young women resisted by moving off the plantation to search for opportunities for a better life and the resulting shortage of female labor led plantation management to assign men to the fields to pluck tea leaves. Male workers saw this as a threat to their masculinity and complained, resisted the prescribed standards for plucking leaves, ignored quality, and plucked whatever they could to achieve the minimum requirement in the shortest time. Thus, while historically gendered identities were generally reinforced in religious texts, rituals, and social practices, both collective and individual attempts were made to change them, another example being the plantation management's instruction to the plantation nurseries to teach both boys and girls to share domestic work.

While ethnographers often use the word *field* or *site* interchangeably to refer to the place where they gather data or where the research is being carried out, in this research the word *field* literally represents the land where the tea is grown and plucked by the workers. Living and working in the field brought particular physical and emotional challenges to Geetha. As an integral part of her social constructionist research paradigm and ethnographic methodology, she explored her personal experiences and observations by writing a reflective account of passing events, the issues and challenges she faced, and how they influenced her research. Positioning herself in relation to her respondents was complex. Sri Lankan born, she was an insider in the sense of being aware of and attuned to cultural norms and practices, history, religion, and traditions. But she was also an outsider, never having been in a tea plantation and a researcher embedded in a different (English and academic) culture. She found herself working within boundaries of insiderness and outsiderness, sameness and difference in very practical ways and making choices about her research along the way. In doing so, she came to understand that these not only had implications for gaining access and developing rapport, as are usually addressed in the literature, but for her identity as a researcher, an academic, and a woman. We therefore argue that there is a need to acknowledge and explore the mutual influence of researchers and research participants on the research and each other.

The impact of "researching back home" on research design and role conflict has been addressed elsewhere (Karra & Philips, 2008). What we offer here is an account storied both in the living and telling (Clandinin, 2006) in which we weave personal reflections and academic insights about the choices Geetha—and other researchers—face in their relationships with respondents. We selected particular excerpts from Geetha's reflective journal because they illustrate her recognition of boundaries and the ways in which she attempted to negotiate them. The connection between Geetha's experience and Fine's (1994b) notion of "working the hyphen" emerged as part of our sensemaking process in writing this article. It is from this post-sensemaking process that our idea of four hyphen-spaces developed. We will now set the theoretical context for our article.

The Theoretical Context.

> *When entering into ethnographic research, the researcher starts establishing her/his own identity by emphasizing the purpose of study, her role as a researcher and also what is expected from the respondent. In other words, the researcher tries to construct boundaries in implicit and explicit ways. However, these boundaries are subject to change and renegotiation (Clandinin, 2006; Mutua-Kombo, 2009). As I became familiar with the context, the boundaries became blurred. At times, I found myself getting involved with respondents' issues. This happened unconsciously and I began questioning myself as to how I should establish my boundaries as a researcher with being a Sri Lankan investigating a community within my country*. (Geetha's reflective journal, final entry)

Blurred Boundaries, Working the Hyphen, and Hyphen-Spaces. As noted previously, the call to explore the experience of ethnographers in the field and the impact of those relationships on research is not new to other disciplines. Feminist scholars, in their critiques of disengaged and neutral science, have drawn attention to the nature, purpose, and challenges of fieldwork (e.g., Haraway, 1990; Harding, 1991), issues also of concern to organization theorists (e.g., Czarniawska, 2008; Yanow, 2009). The way we position ourselves in our research matters because it influences the nature of our relationship with "others" (respondents), the type of data we collect, and how we construct the identities of those "others," which have consequences for the way "others" are then perceived by academics and colleagues. Fine (1994b) emphasizes that in the hyphen, we find our identity and sense of self shifting in relationships with others and in the choices we make about our research design. Thus, "Self and Other are knottily entangled" (p. 72) yet often obscured in research accounts by the expectation that we must be objective and distant from our respondents. She argues that working the hyphen means exploring the "blurred boundaries" of our relationships with others, the political and privileging nature of our research accounts as we decide what and who to include and leave out of our research, and the ethics of involvement—the degree to which we become involved with our respondents' lives and work with or for them (pp. 75-79).

Fine's notion of the hyphen offers a perspective on researcher-respondent and respondent-respondent relationships based on relatedness rather than distinctive boundaries permeated by power. Boundaries are emphasized when researchers are privileged as all-seeing unbiased experts who maintain their neutrality by remaining uninvolved and distant from respondents. To explore this bounded relationship further, we turn to the common definition of *hyphen*. Hyphens *link* two words to indicate a combined or single meaning (e.g., taken-for-granted) or *divide* a word at the end of a line. A dividing hyphen may be a research space of boundaries, distance, contested meanings, relationship breakdowns, and/or separation. Fine (1994b) talks about the latter as *doubled splitting* (p. 78): where researchers separate themselves from respondents, ask them to tell their story, and then categorize them and their roles in unproblematic ways without considering the complex relationships of power and domination that may exist between ourselves and our respondents and between respondents. For example, we may study workers as a homogenous category without considering how ethnic or gendered identities may result in the marginalization of particular groups or individuals. This is problematic when our theories become the dominant academic story, a stripped and sanitized "flat caricature" (p. 79) of roles and identities that then underpins education and practice. By ignoring and minimizing difference, decontextualizing research, and creating a supposedly autonomous text, we deny the hyphen and engage in the process of "Othering" (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012).

Fine argues that we need to surface the fluidity and pluralities of our research site and relationships. We suggest this draws on the notion of a *linking hyphen* (e.g., researcher-respondent) where both researchers and respondents influence each other and understand that identity work takes place in their conversations as they account for themselves and their actions (Cassell, 2005; Cunliffe, 2003a). This means adopting a reflexive stance to explore power relations and mutual and multiple influences on the co-constructions of meanings and identities in the relational spaces that we and our research participants jointly inhabit.

We call linking hyphens *hyphen-spaces*—fluid relational spaces in which boundaries between researcher-researched are blurred, influence is mutual, and multiple meanings articulated and worked out in different ways by all research participants. The benefit of thinking and acting in this way is that the theory/practice gap is minimized to provide a richer account in which *all* research participants may take away insights that benefit their practice. This has been recognized before, often through the use of methodologies such as participant-observation (e.g., Hill & Carley, 2011), insider-outsider research teams, action/participatory research, and coproduced research (e.g., Armstrong & Alsop, 2010; Dover & Lawrence, 2010; Louis & Bartunek, 1992; Marcos &

Denyer, 2012; Ram & Trehan, 2010). Other less common approaches include consultant-researchers who have an academic role but do practice-oriented work in organizations (Ter Bogt & Van Helden, 2011) or peer research teams–community members who gather data. Ryan, Kofman, and Aaron (2011), non-Muslim researchers, talk about the double-edged sword of working with peer researchers in their study of Muslim and Bengali communities in North London. While peer and consultant researchers can gain access and obtain richer data because of a more in-depth understanding, they may also be protective of their community in relation to sensitive issues. Thus, knowledgeable insiders can also be biased insiders (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010), as can be outsiders!

The approach we suggest here differs from those aforementioned. It is not based on collaborative research nor research carried out by insiders, but on the idea that *any* research experience—whether using qualitative or quantitative methods—involves negotiating hyphen-spaces to differing degrees and that it is important to be aware of these spaces so that we may make more conscious ethical choices about research design, who we are as researchers, and how we relate with research participants. Before going on to discuss these spaces, because we argue identity is implicated, we would like to situate our notion of hyphen-spaces within the theoretical context of research identities.

Researcher Identities. Over the past 30 years, conventional conceptions of researchers as detached neutral observers and writers of truthful and factual accounts have been contested. However, much of this work focuses on the researcher rather than on the relationship between participants and researcher. Critical anthropologist James Clifford (1983) challenged the "colonial style" of ethnography, which privileges the ethnographer's objectivity and authority in mastering the culture, language, and meanings of others. He argued that "experiential, interpretive, dialogical, and polyphonic processes are at work, discordantly, in any ethnography" (p. 142), which raises questions about who the ethnographer is and whether he or she has the right to represent others. The notion of multiple researcher identities has also been addressed by a number of organizational theorists (Garud & Ahlstrom, 1997; Hatch, 1996; Tapani, 2009), who discuss the various positions and identities researchers may take. However, few organization theorists address the emotional tensions and the personal experiences of identity work in the field, Coffey (1999) being one exception. She argues that fieldwork is biographical: that ethnographers are not just biographers of others, but are also engaged in their own biographical work as they do their research. We undertake the task of focusing on this biographical relationship in this article, proposing the notion of hyphen-spaces as relational spaces in which multiple identities, meanings, and possibilities for research practice are at play.

Implications for Research Design. The nature of hyphen-spaces we encounter, and how we view them, may be mediated by our research perspective. This takes us back to Van Maanen's (1988) *Tales of the Field*, which addressed the experiential, interpretive and dialogical paradigms and processes in which a researcher's identity, practices, and textwork are implicated. Researcher identity and his or her absence or presence in the research account depends upon the tales he or she tells. Cunliffe (2011) briefly examines the mediating relationship between the researcher, research participants, and knowledge based on three problematics (metatheoretical assumptions influencing what is thinkable and doable in research): objectivism, subjectivism, and intersubjectivism. Within an objectivist problematic the researcher is absent from the research account: being separate and distant from the world and able to develop predictive theories through neutral and accurate observations. In other words, boundaries are accepted and maintained and double splitting (Fine, 1994b) a taken-for-granted part of the researcher-researched relationship.

From a subjectivist problematic the researcher is embedded in the world and mediates meanings between research subjects and academic conventions. Hyphen-spaces are integral to the research, although addressed in different ways: as a confessional tale in which the researcher writes about his or her own biases and experience of the research process (Van Maanen, 1988) or a radically-reflexive

exploration and subversion of his or her own practice in constructing knowledge (Cunliffe, 2003b; Ford & Harding, 2007; Thomas, Tienari, Davies, & Meriläinen, 2009). Such reflective and reflexive accounts are about how individual researchers work the hyphen and manage their relationship with their research: accounts that highlight the constructed and contested nature of research by offering multiple interpretations or showing that research can be a generative learning process (e.g., Carlsen & Dutton, 2011; Watson, 2009).

From an intersubjectivist problematic, we are *always in* hyphen-spaces because researchers are always in-relation-to research participants, shaping meanings between us that may result in different insights for each. A research account from this perspective may offer multiple narratives from all participants or a collaborative research narrative (Kebbe, 2012; Mahoney, 2007). Thus, our metatheoretical assumptions influence our recognition, experience, and how we make choices in the hyphen-spaces we encounter.

Hyphen-Spaces

We now go on to explicate our notion of hyphen-spaces by mapping four possible hyphen-spaces and the challenges they present. We do so by interweaving examples from studies directly and indirectly addressing issues relating to working the hyphen and with Geetha's reflections on her field work experience. Such self-reflections can be simultaneously "an exhilarating, problematic, sometimes narcissistic task" (Fine & Weis, 1998, p. 280) because they entwine theory and biography: drawing on Geetha's personal history, identity, experiences, and academic task in implicit and explicit ways. While ethnography is not always explicitly autobiographical, we suggest it is an integral part of most forms of research whether we recognize it or not.

Both subjective and intersubjective ethnographies are about creating/telling authentic and plausible stories (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993) that show a deep understanding of the culture and people under study—accomplished if the researcher can show he or she "has been there." We suggest that "being there" is a hyphen-space in which researcher-researched identities are deeply implicated and mutually influential:

> *By listening to and developing conversation with respondents, I began to reflect on my personal experiences of being a woman, a wife and a mother. The respondents expected me to understand what they were saying by saying things like "Miss, you know the situation of the country, the economy, etc." I nodded my head to show that I knew the context. I needed to fill the gaps of what they did not say so that fragmented texts became meaningful. By doing so, I became a co-producer of the taken-for-granted realities (Cunliffe, 2008; Shotter 2010). At the same time, I came across instances where the women educated me by providing detailed information about their poverty, lifestyle, problems, grievances, etc, as I was an outsider. I came to understand that what respondents narrated depended on how they perceived me, as an outsider or insider*.

As the previous excerpt shows, Geetha sees herself as subjectively present in the research as a mediator of meanings between herself and others. She begins to experience hyphen-spaces of being seen as an insider/outsider, same and different, based on her interactions and conversations with respondents. She realizes that the researcher-researched relationship is not just about asking questions and being interested in research participants, it can also be about mutual curiosity, sharing experience, and questioning of personal and research identities—and that this is implicated in data collection. This made her far more responsive to the questions asked by workers. This emerges more clearly in the second excerpt:

> *I began to experience a reciprocal relationship when talking to female respondents as they questioned me. This resulted in building two-way interaction between respondents and myself, giving more time for them to open up their thoughts. They asked about my marital status, motherhood, and my physical appearance too*. "Are you married?", "You do not look like a mother with two children", "Did your husband allow you to come all the way from the UK to study us?", "How can you stay alone here without your children?", "Who is looking after your children?", "How do your children feel without you?", "It is strange to come across somebody like you coming alone to study us" *were frequent questions and statements. They questioned my independence in coming along to the estate without my family, my husband's attitude in sending me alone to an unknown place to live and also how I coped with the practical problems that they generally faced as women. At times, they expressed their surprise when my answers did not fit with their own experience*.

Around this time Geetha began to realize that as we enter into conversation with respondents, relationships are based on similarities and differences and conversations become ongoing negotiations of meaning rather than pure data collection. She therefore began to explore differing values, expectations, and cultural understandings with her respondents rather than just focusing on her predetermined questions, realizing that this was not just an illuminating part of data collection, but it was also a means of establishing a more trusting and open relationship as the workers began to confide in her. We suggest they were also about identity because her perceived "difference" was an issue, as we see in the self-other discourse (e.g., it is not culturally acceptable for married women to go to unknown places without their husband and children) of the female plantation workers' intrigued questioning of her personal circumstances. They try to make sense of who she is: finding her both familiar (as a Sri Lankan woman) and strange because of the circumstances of her being there alone. Geetha discovered that she needed to be sensitive and respond to questions of sameness and difference moment by moment, within each encounter. These excerpts also illustrate that for ethnographers, as indeed for other researchers, the boundary between researcher and respondents is not as simple as insider or outsider, but is perhaps better thought of as hyphen-spaces of mutual influence in which "self-other" relations are critical and identity construction implicate (see Ybema et al., 2009).

We suggest there are at least four hyphen-spaces: insider-outsider, sameness-difference, engaged-distant, and politically active–actively neutral (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 defines each hyphen-space while symbolically representing their interconnected nature as often experienced in the field: relational spaces in which connections and tensions between researcher and research participants may lead to practical and ethical dilemmas for each. While, on the surface, hyphen-spaces may seem similar, there are key differences. For example, engagement-distance may appear to have connections to the insider-outsider hyphen-space, but they differ in that a researcher may be—and perceived to be—an insider without being emotionally-engaged. Equally, she or he may be an outsider and yet vested in the work and experiences of respondents. A researcher may be distant from the daily activities of his or her respondents and yet be politically-active in furthering broader social causes relating to their condition. Inequalities in a work setting or issues of poverty are good examples—while a researcher may not help individual respondents with inequalities, she or he may fight for equality at an organizational or policy-making level.

How we work in these hyphen-spaces not only has an impact on research design, methodology, and textwork, but also on the multiple identities we may find ourselves experiencing and working on with research participants. Such hyphen-spaces can be personal and emotional, constraining, and yet an opportunity for reproducing and implicating ourselves, our relationships, and our personal identities (Coffey, 1999, p. 1). We now go on to explain the four hyphen-spaces by interweaving insights from the field with work of other researchers that implicitly or explicitly deals with various aspects of working the hyphen.

Figure 1. Mapping four hyphen-spaces.

Hyphen-Spaces of Insiderness and Outsiderness

> *Being Sri Lankan, familiar with the social and cultural values, gave me some confidence as an insider to approach the research site, but by and large made me an outsider as I was naive to the study location. Brought up in the Buddhist Sinhalese religious and cultural background; I was not sure of my own capability as a woman to go alone into an unfamiliar place to conduct research in a community different from mine, where the religion is Hindu and the language is Tamil. I employed a man (age 70) and his wife (age 65) to stay with me in the plantation. The man accompanied me to different places, while his wife prepared meals. At times, the woman imposed maternal control over me, telling me not to go to certain houses, not to talk to people who seemed to be drunk. This approach was not strange for me. In my culture, it is natural for the elders to manifest such protective behaviour over younger ones, irrespective of age or relationship.*

Louis and Bartunek (1992) are often credited with drawing attention to the insider-outsider relationship within OMS. From their perspective, outsiders are external to the research site, have an ongoing research role, and are usually trained in social science research methods to develop generalized

knowledge, while insiders have an ongoing role at the site and are interested in developing knowledge of practical use (p. 120). The benefits and drawbacks of insider research have been debated elsewhere (e.g., Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Gair, 2012), and it is not our intention to restate these, but to look at the possible relationships that may emerge in this hyphen-space and how a researcher may deal with some of the dilemmas and position himself or herself in the research. Banks (1998) developed multiple ways of thinking about insider-outsider roles, based on whether we are indigenous or alien to the community we are studying. An indigenous insider is a community member and identified as such by the community, indigenous outsiders are from the community but have lived in another culture and are seen as an outsider by the community, external insiders are outsiders who have been accepted by community members as an insider because they have adopted community values and customs, and external outsiders are neither socialized into nor accepted by community members. While the latter is unproblematic to objectivist researchers using positivist methodologies, it becomes an issue from subjectivist and intersubjective perspectives if a researcher wants to generate rich, thick descriptions from members' interpretations.

At the beginning of her fieldwork, Geetha felt she was an indigenous outsider because of the nature of her relationship with plantation workers and the way they interacted with her and questioned her. Although Sri Lankan, she was seen as a stranger to the plantation and also as different because of her Sinhalese ethnicity and a woman alone, a "Nona [lady] who came from Engalanthey."[3] This had implications for data collection as she was neither spoken to nor trusted:

> *Experiencing isolation from the workers, and their suspicion and rejection, within the first two-three days, I felt uneasy. I was under pressure as to how I should approach them. In the evening of the second day of my stay in the site, I went for a walk in the direction of the line houses, thinking that I could speak to a few workers. I saw I was not welcome. One person switched off the lights and closed the door as I reached the house. Initially they saw me as an outsider and perceived me on the basis of their prior experience. They were afraid to associate with me due to the ethnic problems facing the country at large. In addition, the police had warned them not to associate with strangers in the plantation. A Talawar (union representative) who had been in police custody for a week for helping an unknown person, commented:*
>
> Actually, I wanted to come and meet you before. One Talawar warned me not to. He was afraid. He reminded me and warned me as I was in trouble once due to associating with an unknown person. He told me not to go to meet you and fall into trouble again, as we do not know who you are. . . . We inquired about you from "Kade Aiya."[4] He explained everything.
>
> *When I tried to speak to a woman who was pregnant, she ran away without responding. Later she came and spoke to me. When I asked her why she had run away, she replied with a smile:*
>
> I didn't talk because I was frightened. I knew that you are new to the estate but did not know who you are. The police came here and advised us not to harbour any strangers but to inform them immediately of the presence of strangers without getting into trouble. They warn us not to associate with outsiders. If something happened to us, my husband would scold me for talking to you. Then at the tea centre, we saw you having tea with Loku Mahattaya.[5] We know that you are staying in Kadey Aiya's place. We were told by a Talawar that you came here to study us.

While these specific cultural experiences are unfamiliar to us in the West, the reluctance to speak with "outsiders" is not; neither is Geetha's experience of isolation and suspicion at the beginning of her research because she was a stranger to the field. To deal with her feelings of isolation and the suspicion and rejection of the workers, she attempted to work within the hyphen-spaces and establish connections by employing and associating with insiders whom the plantation workers respected.

Being acknowledged by respected insiders gave her access to places she might not otherwise have and mediated her insider-outsider relationship with workers so that they began to talk with her. But she found this required patience:

> *On the third day of my stay, visiting the line houses with the midwife was a starting point in establishing my connections to the estate. I joined her on her official rounds. She introduced me to the workers. I did not start questioning them straight away, but approached them later individually and requested them to come to my place. Most workers welcomed me when I visited them a second time*.

The significance of being an insider in establishing rapport and accessing information is important (Gallais, 2008; Sherif, 2001). Geetha was able to gain trust as she began to be perceived by plantation workers as having insider knowledge and a willingness to understand the cultural, social, and religious issues that permeated their daily lives. In this way she perhaps became an indigenous insider (Banks, 1998). However, relationships and positioning in this hyphen-space were complex and emerging. For example, she found that as she became more accepted as an insider, her different ethnic identity as a Sinhalese (plantation workers were Tamil) and as a researcher encouraged plantation workers to confide in her because of her outsiderness:

> ''Had you been a person from here, I would not have said these things to you'', ''I do not know why I said all these to you, I have not said these to anybody here in the estate'', ''I do not trust anybody here'', ''Others are jealous of us'', ''Please do not tell this to anybody here''.

Thus, Geetha's insiderness and outsiderness often shifted (Naples, 1996) and she realized the perceptions of others were important in terms of their willingness to discuss issues but not something she had full control over; rather, she found herself tacking between insiderness-outsiderness depending on the situation. This meant developing a sensitivity and responsiveness to the perceptions and expectations of workers in the moment. This experience of a bifurcated identity is not limited to ethnographers. Action researcher Caroline Humphrey (2007) found herself continually crossing over between insiderness-outsiderness based on whether she was perceived as an academic or a trade union activist as she worked with each group.

We therefore suggest the hyphen-spaces of insiderness-outsiderness are not as bounded as Banks (1998) indicates. Positioning oneself as a particular type of researcher is not a one-off activity, or a linear progression as one gains and negotiates access, but a continuous interplay of multiple relationships, identities, and expectations situated in specific conversations and moments in time. Being reflexively aware of this interplay allows an ethnographer to be more conscious of, and responsive to, shifting boundaries within hyphen-spaces and their possibilities for situating and resituating himself or herself in relation to participants (Bott, 2010). This fluid positioning is particularly important to interpretive, narrative, and discursive forms of research where the nature of conversations and degree of trust are essential to gathering rich data and multiple perspectives.

We suggest that in working within these shifting spaces, researchers are not just reconstituting work, but also experiencing multiple identities and relationships as a friend/stranger, a person to trust/not trust—an issue we take up later.

Hyphen-Spaces of Sameness and Difference

> *I experienced myself as different from the female workers I was interviewing. I was indeed viewed by them as different due to my dress, education, and where I came from. All these*

situated me in a very different class: a higher position than my respondents. Soon it became clear to me that as long as they saw me as "different", it would affect my relationship with them and therefore my data collection.

Hyphen-spaces of sameness and difference play out in many moments in the research process: trying to gain access to a site and during fieldwork, data analysis, theorizing, and textwork. While sameness and difference may not be seen as an issue in more positivist studies where researchers position themselves as neutral observers, subjective and intersubjectively oriented ethnographers find themselves immersed in different cultures (societal and organizational) and present in the research, where spaces of sameness-difference are implicated and influence relationships with respondents and their willingness to speak. While sameness and difference are often interpreted in relation to social categorizations such as gender and race (e.g., Hawkins, 2010), the differences might be less obvious. The overt and subtle nature of these hyphen-spaces is highlighted by Agar (1994), who argues that culture happens when we encounter difference, it "starts when you realize that you've got a problem with language, and the problem has to do with who you are" (p. 20): your values, personality, and ways of speaking. Thus, our understanding of other cultures emerges from the way we experience and deal with differences and similarities between ourselves and others, identity differences embedded in culture, ethnicity, religion, class, education, symbolism (dress, hairstyle, carrying a notebook, video recorder), and language.

While conversing with workers, I began to understand the significance of language and cultural meanings. I came across situations where my way of using words in conversation needed rethinking as respondents held different meanings to mine. For example, when discussing marriage, they did not like using some terms such as "love affair" or "falling in love," as these words were associated with sex. Women saw these as inappropriate and instead often used the term "getting friendly with the children's father."

In the previous excerpt, the relationship between language and culture is evident as Geetha becomes aware of differences between the culture of plantation workers and her own cultural experience, which is mediated by her time in the United Kingdom. She became very aware of the linguistic interplay of sameness-difference not just in the field, but also when translating interviews from Sinhalese to English (Xian, 2008) because some words are not directly translatable or take on different meanings in English. She began to experience the multiplicity of identity issues of sameness and difference as both an opportunity and a constraint to data collection. Being Sri Lankan, she was recognized as being the same, but different because she is educated, is a researcher, speaks English and Sinhalese, dresses and acts differently, and lives in England.

My T-shirts, long trousers, boots and also my short hair made me different because it was clearly not the accepted dress for a woman on the estate. Only two other women who lived on the plantation wore long trousers, and they had come from outside to work in the strawberry factory nearby. While they were considered "not one of us," workers excused me for wearing trousers as I was an outsider and had come from Colombo to study them.

Research participants are aware of, and act upon, issues of sameness and difference, not just in terms of outward appearance, but in attributing identity (Ricoeur, 1992) and belongingness. Being a woman born in Sri Lanka meant that plantation workers expected her to behave in the same way that they did, and they were shocked when she didn't:

My appearance in the front garden of the house, near the shop at night, caused the workers to question me, "Why are you out here at this time?" Although I did not take much notice of my appearance, I could see this was important to them, they were concerned about my behaviour because it did not conform to their cultural expectations and the common saying, "when the sun goes down a woman should not stay out alone." Their concern for me helped to start informal conversations with estate workers.

She was expected to conform to expectations of women in the Tamil culture; one elderly male worker tried to educate her in her responsibilities as a married woman. So what was tolerated when she appeared to be different was questioned because she was also seen as the same, with the same traditions and values—and the interplay of sameness and difference led both to a reluctance to talk and to opportunities for conversations as the workers became curious about Geetha's experience and asked about her personal life as well as her advice on their own personal issues.

A researcher's ability to negotiate hyphen-spaces of ethnic and cultural sameness and difference is addressed by Brayboy and Deyhle (2000). Both are Native American ethnographers who struggle with hybrid identities emerging from doing traditional research in Native American communities. Brayboy talks about the difficulty in developing a balance between being a "good Indian" and a "good researcher" (p. 164). He found himself doing things typically not done by a "real Indian" such as hanging around in places he would not normally have access to, asking questions rather than listening, and going to places rather than waiting to be invited. He negotiated these identity dilemmas and the shift from friend to researcher by telling participants he had to wear different "hats" (Indian, friend, researcher, etc.) at different times and stating which hat he was wearing at a given time.

While not being so explicit, Geetha found herself trying to gain trust and establish relationships in hyphen-spaces where she was "poised between familiarity and strangeness" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996, p. 112) by holding off asking particular questions, "hanging out" in places she would be seen, and talking with respected people in the community so that she would gain some sense of acceptance in the eyes of workers. At the beginning of her research, she spent time in the plantation shop:

I was worried how to secure social acceptance and establish my links to the community. I stayed in the shop for hours talking to the shop owner and his wife while they served the customers. . . . I smiled with the workers who came to the shop but did not start any conversation. Sometimes I just asked, "How are you?" . . . Sometimes the shop owner and his wife introduced me to the workers and requested they come and talk to me once they finished their work.

The shop owner, "Kadey Aiya," was respected and admired by the workers because of his generosity, among other things, in selling goods on credit and buying the estate workers' personal monthly tea entitlement from the company. Hanging out in the shop lent Geetha some credibility with workers because it helped them position her as being important, but also in situating the importance of Kadey Aiya:

When workers saw me speaking to and entering a neighbour's house, they became inquisitive. They came to have a chat, to see what I was talking about with their neighbour. Later, some made a point of coming to see me when they came to the shop to buy things. They were also interested in seeing the set-up, the furniture, number of rooms and the facilities in the place where I was staying. By looking at these, they estimated the wealth of "Kade Aiya."

She therefore found that her sameness and difference worked in parallel as a source of curiosity about who she was and what she was doing. Both she and plantation workers explored the hyphen-spaces of sameness and difference in many ways and for many reasons: Geetha to learn about how their identity was constructed in macro and micro discourses and they to decide if they should talk to her, confide in her, ask for help, or learn about her "different world." And in the opposing position to Brayboy (as previously mentioned) of finding herself moving from researcher to confidant, she found herself dealing with ethical dilemmas as workers expected her to advise them or act on issues—an experience not unfamiliar to OMS researchers. In other words, their perception of her identity shifted as her fieldwork progressed. Geetha's experience also connects to Fine's (1994b) observation that in contexts of difference and inequality we need to be sensitive to the political and ethical elements involved in data collection and translation.

The ability of plantation workers to situate her identity was complicated by being seen as the same (Sri Lankan) but also concurrently different because of her ethnicity, dress, personal situation, and education. She found herself having to work on building relationships, credibility, and trust, slowly and with great care and flexibility, by knowing who to be seen with, when to be silent, and when to speak. And while not sharing the same identity, she and her respondents were able to share affinities that led to a degree of trust and willingness to share ideas and experiences (Sultana, 2007).

Hyphen-Spaces of Engagement and Distance

> *Experiencing working in the field plucking tealeaves was a tiring but exciting experience for me. Tea bushes are cultivated in lines, and workers assigned to each line so that they can pluck the leaves in a systematic manner without confusion, and move from one field to another without instructions. This system had to be explained to me a few times before I fully understood the situation.*

Hyphen-spaces of engagement and distance are about the degree to which we get involved epistemologically, physically, and emotionally with our respondents. "Knowledge comes from experience, the best way of understanding another person's ideas was to try to share the experiences that led the person to form those ideas" (Collins, 1989, p. 769). To do so, a researcher needs to be engaged with participants in the setting—very much as Geetha was doing as described in the previous excerpt, working side by side in the field with plantation workers. As she did so, she began to understand that becoming familiar with the culture, practices, and discourses of a research site is a complex process needing time and engagement. However, the nature of engagement varies with the research, the researcher, and the site. Louis and Bartunek (1992) talk about a researcher's physical and psychological distance from a setting. We suggest it is more. Hyphen-spaces of engagement and distance can be emotional spaces involving epistemological, methodological, and personal choices about how far we get involved in our research and what forms of knowledge we create. Epistemological distance is impossible to maintain within subjectivist and intersubjectivist problematics, where participants are seen to be implicitly knowledgeable, and therefore researchers need to work closely with participants to understand (subjectivist) and jointly shape (intersubjectivist) meanings about what is happening. This has methodological implications if we compare the distance associated with the use of secondary data, surveys and structured interviews with the engagement of action research, unstructured interviews, and participatory action research.

Closer engagement can be particularly relevant (but not solely applicable to) indigenous ethnographies because "Indigenous oral traditions do not attempt to abstract knowledge away from personalized human experience. Knowledge therefore maintains its emotional and personalized context in a dynamic fashion" (Whiteman, 2004, p. 263). Geetha came to understand that the identities of

the plantation workers was tied up not only in plantation (organizational) management and operations, but also in religious practices, rituals, caste differences, colonial traditions, and history. To understand this more fully, she observed and then participated in a monthly ritual offering "puja"[6] to the gods. Performed by female workers, the ritual invoked blessings for good health for the workers and their families, for good crops throughout the month, and also to establish harmonious relationships with the immediate superiors as a form of encouragement to work hard. She realized that observation was not enough; she had to participate to understand the full experience.

Emotions can also be an inevitable part of research as a way of understanding particular experiences. Some research sites and topics are sensitive and by their very nature are emotional spaces in which it is difficult for researchers to distance themselves. For example, studies of battered women's shelters, sex work, violence, rape, and racism can be poignant and uncomfortable experiences for the researcher (Bott, 2010; Campbell, 2002; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2009): spaces where it is difficult to be a dispassionate observer and where emotional engagement can bring unique insight (MacLean, Anteby, Hudson, & Rudolph, 2006). Geetha found herself in a number of situations where it became difficult to distance herself—a dilemma because she began her work with the idea that researchers should be detached:

> *I found myself getting emotionally involved in a few incidents that took place in the site. One such instance was when a two year old boy got his hand severely burnt while he was trying to take some potatoes out of a pot of boiling water (while his mother was attending to something else) and was brought to the medical centre. I was talking to the "apothecary" about the general health conditions of workers and some of the issues that he commonly came across. Parents' addiction to alcohol, their attitudes towards children, parents' ignorance about children's emotions, which prevents the workers from overcoming poverty. As we were talking, we heard people shouting and the midwife informed us that a small boy with a burnt hand had been taken for treatment. The apothecary pointed out that this illustrated what he had just been talking about and asked me to come to see the child. I heard the child crying, and much louder voices of elders shouting and crying. I could not go with the apothecary to see the child or to see what was happening. Then it struck me how difficult it could be in some circumstances to separate the researcher's emotions from the research. The grandfather came to see me that evening crying (I think he was drunk). He told me that the child had been admitted to hospital. He criticized his daughter-in-law for not looking after the child and justified his action of hitting her in public*.

Geetha's concern and fear for the child and her discomfort arose from being a mother. As Coffey (1999, p. 96) says, we are emotional beings engaged in fieldwork and need to acknowledge our emotional connectedness as part of the research. Yet emotional engagement can also be an uncomfortable and frightening space to be in: feelings of concern, sympathy, anxiety, and even fear can lead to a sense of vulnerability: of not knowing what to do or whether to get involved. Questions of engagement may also lead to ethical issues. For example, Russell (2005) expresses the emotional turmoil she felt at the end of her fieldwork leaving a suicidal student with whom she had spent a significant amount of time. There can be an emotional cost to the researcher making choices within hyphen-spaces of emotional engagement and distance:

> *I found myself advising a female respondent who told me about the pathetic situation that she and her children faced because her husband was serving an 8 months jail sentence. At one point I had to divert her attention to prevent her from feeling sorry for herself too much as she often said that she wanted to commit suicide. In the medical centre, quite unconsciously I became an adviser to an unmarried female respondent who was six months pregnant. The*

midwife was keeping an eye on her as she was thinking of getting an illegal abortion. These are not issues that organizational researchers in Western contexts normally face, as their respondents' public space is quite different.

As we are involved in ethnographic research, there are many things that we experience in first-hand actual occurrences as well as in discussions with the respondents or through other media such as texts or television. While the latter are often neutral, discussions and actual experiences can engender a visceral response, mediated through the values, beliefs, and the personal and cultural background of the ethnographer. They may be especially uncomfortable if the cultural norms or values of the researcher or the researched are somehow transgressed. Luff's (1999) discomfort when finding her feminist ideas and values being challenged by anti-feminist activist women can be shared by organizational researchers finding their world view challenged by participant comments or actions. This can be difficult when ethical issues arise. Geetha found herself in a situation where the ethics of her research community made her an unethical person to some of the workers, who were embedded in social relationships characterized by transaction motives and give-and-take. Being socioeconomically better off, she felt that she had an obligation to see what she could do to help plantation workers, even in very small ways, but at the same time felt that research ethics prevented this.

The tension in this hyphen-space relates to the degree we choose to get involved with our respondents. Frost (2011) eloquently argued for engagement, saying that our training as researchers

> inclines us toward abstractions that do not include consideration of the dignity and humanity of those in our lens. Our hearts, our compassion, are not engaged and we end up being outside of and missing the humanity, the 'aliveness' of organizational life. (p. 396)

Geetha experienced this "humanity": when a number of plantation workers confided in her and expressed relief at being able to talk to someone from "the outside" who would also understand:

Female plantation workers . . . spoke of sensitive issues relating to their childhood; marriage; their love affairs; family issues: a woman facing rejection from her present husband as she had been a divorcee; religious conversion and related issues; the emotions a woman felt in deciding to have an illegal abortion just because the man said so, and the economic and social problems that she faced when she decided to bring up an illegitimate child without any support from own family and society.

Deciding how to respond can often be mediated by moments of rapport, empathy, and shared experience as well as opposition, hostility, and confusion. Such moments can lead to dilemmas of identity fueled by feelings of connection and disjuncture. Geetha's identity and feelings as a mother and a Sri Lankan woman exposed to Western values and practices and her sense of what a researcher should and should not do conflicted with the relationships she formed with some plantation workers who held expectations about how she could help them. She experienced this as a conflictual space of "entanglement, co-production and the relational qualities of practice" (Gemignani, 2011, p. 518), which led to feelings of angst and vulnerability (Behar, 1996)—yet also as emotionally moving experiences that revealed a deeper understanding of the day-to-day identity issues faced by plantation workers. Ethnography can therefore also be emotion work (Hochschild, 1983) in that it calls upon our humanity. Exploring the feelings and insights evoked through deep engagement may pull or push us into the following hyphen-spaces.

Hyphen-Spaces of Political Activism—Active Neutrality

> *Normally, the stories of plantation workers touched on working class issues. Common experiences and concerns such as low income, high cost of living, hardships in their daily life, and low wages in the workplace. The respondents and I experienced these commonly in the Sri Lankan context as working class people. These topics also became common ground to start a discussion.*

The hyphen-spaces of political activism and active neutrality are about the politics of positionality—how we experience, interpret, and act upon commonalities or differences; how we make judgments about the lives of others relative to our own cultural, ideological, and knowledge community (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004; Stanley & Wise, 1990); and whether we foreground the experiences of marginalized and oppressed groups as a means of motivating social change. If we research battered women's shelters, bullying, inequalities, or unethical practices in organizations, then do we see ourselves as morally obliged to act? Hyphen-spaces of political activism–active neutrality address, head-on, the identity politics of difference and inequality between researcher-researched and between groups of people we study—a key issue in Fine's work. Thus, the tensions and dilemmas we experience in this hyphen-space mean thinking "deeply about the political and ethical pushes and pulls of our research" (Vaughan, 2008, p. 216) and their implications for our practice. Choices about positionality range from the "view from nowhere" (Nagel, 1986), which means taking no perspective or position, through interventionist research and standpoint theory, which "claims that some kinds of social locations and political struggles advance the growth of knowledge, contrary to the dominant view that politics and local situatedness can only block scientific inquiry" (Harding, 2004, p. 26).

The view from nowhere may be both objectivist and partly subjectivist in that a researcher may report (or code) the views of respondents from a "neutral" stance. Some research is explicitly interventionist in that it is oriented toward organizational, community, and/or social change (Agar, 2010). Researchers using an action research methodology are committed to change (Shotter, 2010) and sometimes "the pursuit of worthwhile purposes, for the flourishing of persons, communities, and the ecology of which we are all a part" (Reason, 2006, p. 188). Participatory action research (PAR) is a methodology oriented toward activism by bringing together researchers and participants to examine issues and act on them. Used across disciplines such as education, environmental sciences, community development, social sciences, and health care, PAR connects people, participation, and place and "recognize(s) the existence of a plurality of knowledges in a variety of institutions and locations" (Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007, p. 9). Feminist researchers, especially from a standpoint perspective, are explicitly oriented toward political action: They not only examine how dominant institutions maintain systems of oppression, but may go on to identify and engage in the political struggle necessary for change.

Geetha found herself embroiled in the hyphen-spaces of activism-neutrality because she was researching an ethnographic site where poverty, caste, gender inequalities, and a lack of opportunity for plantation workers to improve their lives raised a number of dilemmas. Some of the situations she faced not only evoked ethical dilemmas, but were frightening:

> *On the first day of my arrival to the estate, the Senior Manager introduced me to the Assistant and Deputy Managers and to the midwife at the "Tea Centre," while having tea. Having seen this, a man, no longer a worker on the estate, came to me later, requesting me to approach the management for him to obtain electricity to his house. Finding that it was not possible, he got drunk and came shouting and cursing the management. He stopped in front of the place where*

I was staying and criticized the Senior Manager and requested me to write everything he said in my research.

As in the previous example, male workers often spoke to her about their dissatisfaction with management, wages, trade unions, and so on. The question of whether researchers should be active and involved in the betterment of research participants lives is a contested one. For some, distance from the social or organizational problems they are studying is essential in ensuring an accurate and unbiased account. For other researchers, their very identity is tied up with the issue of making a difference, for example as a "committed-to-participants" researcher (Wright & Wright, 2002) or as a teller of advocacy tales that take on "certain evils in the world, show us what they have done (and are doing) and tell us what might be done about them" (Van Maanen, 2010, p. 250). For Geetha this was not an easily resolvable issue because the purpose of her research was not social change, yet the situations she encountered caused her to question whether she should take the role of activist:

Being socio-economically better off, I felt that I had an obligation to see what I could do to help them, even in very small ways, but at the same time my purpose of being in the plantation as a researcher prevented this.

As a means of reconciling this dilemma, she found small ways of helping the workers by giving small gifts such as candy, pens and pencils, shoes, storybooks, clothes, and so on to the women and children.

This hyphen-space is perhaps the most challenging for researchers in that it involves not only identity work around "who am I?" and "what are my values and responsibilities to act?" but also emotional, personal, professional, and political risk. It is the most closely connected with Fine's (1994a) focus on the political nature of our research and her call to engage in critical conversations that lead to social justice and change.

Multiple Identities Embedded in Hyphen-Spaces

The respondents used the terms "Nona" or "Miss" or "Madam," but never asked me for my name. They introduced me to others in a variety of ways which gave me multiple identities: as "a Sinhala Nona" (my ethnic identity), "Nona who is teaching in the University" (my professional identity), "Nona who has come from Colombo" (my geographical identity), "Nona who came from Engalanthey" (my geographical identity in connection to England), "Nona who has come here to study us" (my identity as a researcher), "Podi Miss" (identifying me by my small physical appearance), "Nona who is staying in the Kadey Aiya's upstairs" (identifying me by my connection to the place where I was staying and the person who owned it).

Richardson (2000) says simply that "The ethnographic life is not separable from the self" (p. 253). We see dilemmas of identity of both researcher and respondents playing through a number of the excerpts from Geetha's journal: embedded in the self-other relationships of hyphen-spaces. This is not just about establishing rapport and gaining cooperation by managing the impressions of gatekeepers and respondents: strategies that may be seen as inauthentic. This instrumental aspect of researcher identity not only has potential ethical implications in terms of misrepresentation, but can also be stressful to a researcher who feels he or she is not being true to himself or herself or has to continue playing a role as a means of continuing access. Researchers have discussed the emotional stress involved in the instrumentality of researcher identity—pretending you are something you are

not in order to gain access and trust. As a secular researcher studying an absolutist religious organization in South Korea and an educated woman in a context where "women are held to strict, culturally-defined standards of femininity, morality, and virtuousness," Chong (2008, p. 379) found herself grappling with pressures to conform within hyphen-spaces of sameness and difference by managing respondents' impressions of her and "playing dumb" on contentious issues. Identity work here can be around handling "dissonances between self-identifications and other-attributions" (Humphrey, 2007, p. 19) on the part of both researchers and respondents. For Geetha, this raised both identity and ethical dilemmas in terms of being asked to influence management (as an outsider researcher) or to advise women on personal issues (as a same female insider).

While active-neutrality means an often objectivist researcher remaining distant from respondent problems and issues, to an intersubjectivist researcher self-other relationships are entangled and identity work integral as all research participants influence and shape each others' multiple and shifting identities. Spending 3 months in the field, and working from a subjectivist perspective, Geetha found herself intuitively and consciously working with multiple identities in her conversations with others: playing down being researcher, playing up being researcher (Lavis, 2010), being "native" or not (Fournillier, 2009; Kondo, 1986), figuring out what it means to be both the same and different. This often depended on where she was, to whom Geetha was talking, and what the conversation was about. Her education was an advantage in gaining access to the site and talking to managers, and her identity as a woman and mother led a number of female workers to confide personal experiences. While the former was a deliberate way of gaining trust and obtaining data, the latter was an unanticipated part of relationships that emerged as she did her research and that she learned to be more comfortable with. This illustrates the complexity of relationships in the field, the difficulty of separating our personal self from our researcher identity, and the give-and-take of research in the sense that participants have different interests and may benefit (or otherwise) from the research engagement in different ways.

We build on Fine's work by arguing that identity work is an integral part of working the hyphen and, as seen in the previous diary excerpts, this is done by both researcher and respondents who together shape the relationship and each others' sense of identity. In other words, researcher identity is not just about how a researcher chooses to present or position himself or herself. Identity issues are implicated across all four hyphen-spaces and Geetha experienced her identity as researcher, woman, wife, and Sinhalese becoming more complex in the lived experience of her research as plantation workers positioned her in particular ways (e.g., as a mother) and questioned her actions (as a mother away from her children). Her experience of multiple identities and the dilemmas she experienced in the entanglement of self-other relations—dilemmas relating to ethnicity, gender, and caste—were reminiscent of Henry (2003), who also found her identity being challenged and multiply interpreted and constructed in conversations with her research participants. She argues that identity changes across time and contexts in a shifting field of power relationships in which a researcher's legitimacy and credibility also change. For Geetha, this began when obtaining official permission from the Deputy Chief Executive Officer and the General Manager of the plantation. They accepted her legitimacy as a researcher but were concerned that she was a woman alone, without her husband, and so assigned her to an estate managed by a manager with a family so that they would be available if needed.

The identities our respondents give us can have a major impact not just on access but also on data collection and the willingness of respondents to talk. Lumsden (2009), a young female ethnographer researching the "boy-racer" car culture in Scotland, found herself negotiating the hyphen-spaces of sameness and difference when she was "reduced to the periphery status of passenger" (p. 501), not just because of differences of gender, dress, accent, class, mannerism, but also because of her commitment to car modifications! Geetha's multiple identities played out in her relationships with plantation workers in both positive and negative ways:

> *Being an educated woman also gave me a positive image among workers. I was told by a female worker whose daughter used to visit me almost every evening after school, "I do not mind my daughter coming here to talk to you as you are educated. We do not come across Nonas (ladies) like you coming here." I also experienced that my profession, education and reading for a Ph.D. in the UK helped me to establish trust with the Senior Management, School Principal, doctor, TU representatives, and officials at Ministerial level. The Secretary to the Plantation Ministry said that she liked taking time to speak to students like me who pursued higher education, rather than talking to politicians.*

Gender and ethnic similarities between Sinhala and Tamil cultures and identities helped her to establish common ground during interviews. While being a woman was problematic in that she couldn't stay on the plantation alone and had to hire a husband and wife to live with her, her gender formed a point of connection with female plantation workers who opened up and confided concerns about their domestic roles, relationships, and responsibilities. They emphasized what they saw as common experiences:

> "We, being women, should know how to manage household affairs carefully"; "we should not create problems for our husbands"; "once you get married there are problems . . ."

Workers expressed these as shared understandings that needed no further interpretation. These conversations not only helped Geetha to understand gender-identity issues relating to her research, but may also have helped the women in some way.

Recognizing the fluidity and multiply constructed nature of identity work in research draws attention to the dangers of "othering"—creating neatly bounded subjects on which to report (Dimitriadis, 2001)—which establishes identity categories that disregard difference and power relations. It also highlights the need to be sensitive to how others perceive us and to examine the impact and responsibilities of our research.

Implications for Research

Our focus in this article has been on hyphen-spaces researchers may experience in the field: what those spaces might be and how they may impact our research, our identity as researchers, and our respondents. We now examine the implications for research practice.

Research Design, Access, and Agendas. Feldman et al. (2003) argue that research design (selecting respondents) and access (getting involvement) are interrelated and relationship-building activities over which no one person has control. Researchers and respondents make choices about who and what is important, what to disclose or not disclose. Recognizing that this occurs in hyphen-spaces means recognizing the influence researchers and respondents have on each other and that this may mean rearticulating design, access, and agendas as we try to negotiate identity attributions, fear, suspicion, doubt, trust, and friendship in our relationship with respondents. Geetha's hanging out in the store to gain trust and show she was interested in learning about their lives highlights the importance of "commitment acts," investments of time and energy that may or may not lead to a more trusting relationship (Feldman et al., 2003). Such commitment acts "humanize researchers" (p. 37) and should be out of a genuine desire to share experiences rather than personal gain.

The emerging and agentic nature of the researcher-researched relationship may require us to be fluid in many ways: being open to questions that emerge beyond our research questions, being sensitive to the impact of our presence and how our questions and categorizations of "others" might influence their lives. It also highlights that the balance of participant-observation, a methodology

fairly common to qualitative researchers, may shift during the research. For example, during his research at a community center, Dimitriadis (2001) found not only his role changing from outsider/distant observer to insider/engaged participant, but his research agenda changing from one of active neutrality using focus groups to one of political activism as he became implicated in the lives of club members. Gill (2011) also discovered that interactions with entrepreneurs she was shadowing brought all kinds of identity issues to the fore, and she proposes a move to the method of "spect-acting," in which the shadower (researcher) is just as much an actor as the shadowee (respondent) and vice versa. She advocates the use of regular discussions between spect-actors to explore what is happening. Geetha found herself struggling in this hyphen-space as she learned firsthand about poverty and gender relations in plantation workers' lives. However, she felt that as a PhD student and woman alone, this would not be a feasible or safe change in her research agenda. While Fine (1994a, 1994b) and many feminist researchers, educationalists, and sociologists are explicit about the need to be politically active, OMS researchers often eschew this.

Methodology, Methods, and Accounts. Fine and Sirin (2007) discuss the methodological implications of studying "hyphenated selves": of the need to situate "lives in and across historic, cultural and political contexts; link(ing) narratives of identity to distant local and political contexts" (p. 23). In particular they talk about the importance of participatory action research as a methodology for engaging respondents in shaping the research project, research design, questions, data collection, and interpretation. PAR is often intersubjective, with both researchers and respondents having an explicit agenda for social and organizational change, which they work on together in a hyphen-space of full engagement and political activism.

The fluid and multiply constructed nature of researcher-researched identities may also be recognized in the way that interviews are carried out. Razon and Ross (2012) offer examples highlighting how identity negotiations take place in interviews on different topics. Therefore if we see interviews as "sites of co-production" (Vaughan, 2008, pp. 223-224) where both researcher and participants work through experiences, ideas, decisions, issues of identity, and so on, they are more about dialogue than fact finding. They can also be a place where old views are disrupted and/or new perspectives and insights emerge. Being open to this possibility can lead to richer and more complex research accounts that influence practice and lead to change (e.g., Kempster & Stewart, 2010).

The political and practical aspects of "othering" can be seen in both qualitative and quantitative research. Giampietro (2011) cautions researchers to be sensitive to the impact of embedded assumptions in interviews and surveys (e.g., that we assume our respondents are familiar and comfortable with democratic dialogue and are willing and able to express their views openly without repercussions). We suggest that such assumptions also relate to choices about: gaining access to research sites, the selection and manipulation of variables, observations of activities, construction of models, and the nature of assessment of the goodness of fit of those models. Indeed, Carlson and Wu (2012) talk—albeit implicitly—about negotiating the hyphen-spaces in experimental and quasi-experimental work, in their case, statistical control-based research. They highlight the tensions of negotiating with colleagues, reviewers, editors, and organizational members regarding the selection of control variables—choices that can lead to a "misalignment of practice with purpose [that] results in a series of half-truths and fundamental misunderstandings about statistical control" (p. 414). They argue that these common misunderstandings often go unchallenged. Carlson and Wu also talk about how researchers in this area experience ambiguity and challenges of interpretation (p. 429), challenges that we suggest offer a basis for reflection on identity issues.

Recognizing and interrogating these multiple relationships and their impact through the notion of hyphen-spaces might surface these issues and help us think about what assumptions lie behind our methods, data analysis, and theorizing. We may perhaps explore mixed methods or more inclusive

methods that recognize the cultural understanding of respondents, such as: critical oral histories (Kim, 2008), indigenous methodologies, co-inquiry, participatory action research, co-constructed/analyzed surveys, research diaries, or stories (recorded or otherwise). Dodson, Piatelli, and Schmalzbauer (2007) propose interpretive focus groups, where respondents interpret, elaborate upon, and question the data gathered by the researcher(s), as a means of blurring boundaries and minimizing "othering."

Our research accounts may not address directly our experience of biographical work in the hyphen-spaces we experience, but if it does, then Richardson (2000) offers a number of questions that serve as a start point:

> How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Do authors hold themselves accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people they have studied? (p. 254)

We might also recognize the fluid, multiple, and "othering" nature of research in our accounts by using textual strategies such as: reflective and reflexive accounts (Haynes, 2011; Russell, 2005), autoethnographic vignettes (Humphreys, 2005), narrative circularity (Cunliffe, 2003b), and including the voices of respondents in the text.

Ethics. The notion of hyphen-spaces raises a number of ethical issues: To what extent is it possible for researchers to be distant and neutral—and should they be? Stanley and Wise (1990) argue that it is morally unjustifiable to treat research participants as objects and sources of information. Instead, we need to consider respondents as real people, whose lives may be influenced by our presence and our findings: to reflexively question the way we position ourselves in relation to others in the research in our methodology, interactions, and research accounts.

The ethical principles underlying PAR, for example, go beyond those normally seen in statements of research ethics. While the latter are based on institutional ethics, a PAR-based methodology also draws on interpersonal ethics: an ethics of care based on a commitment to and responsibility for others. Manzo and Brightbill (2007) outline a "participatory ethics" based on valuing different interest and perspectives, being accountable to participants and stakeholders, being socially responsive, and accepting personal responsibility.

Conclusion

While the issue of hyphen-spaces is only recently gaining explicit acknowledgment in organization studies, we suggest researchers have experienced the dilemmas of difference and the identity work implicit in researcher-respondent relationships for years—in international, multicultural, and organizational contexts. Our notion of four hyphen-spaces brings this to light and offers a way of recognizing and working with tensions. Hyphen-spaces are about moving "between coherence and difference, fixed boundaries and porous borders, neighborhoods of shared values and homes of contentious interpretations" (Fine & Weis, 2002, p. 272). They draw attention to the identity work of both researchers and respondents, to power relations and their potential impact, and to ethical choices about the way we position ourselves in relation to others in our research. This means adopting "a posture of alert vulnerability to our recognition of difference, rather than a position of empathetic understanding that tends to reduce difference to the same" (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p. 480). We believe that an understanding of the relational and political elements of research that Fine's work emphasizes—and that are embedded in any research practice—will help us become more informed

and ethical researchers as well as provide opportunities for engaging in a wider range of methodologies and methods.

An understanding of hyphen-spaces means the following:

- Becoming attuned to the complexity of our conversations with others in terms of the cultural and social assumptions and processes embedded in our interactions that shape our research—assumptions that may create ethical and identity-related tensions and dilemmas for ourselves and our research participants. We can anticipate this by rethinking our research design and the types of questions we ask, as well as being responsive to those assumptions in and after the moment. This does not mean to say that all research accounts should be explicit about identity issues, but that we consider them when designing and carrying out our research by questioning how we position ourselves in relation to our research participants, how we position them in the research in relation to each other and to the context, and the possible impact of our questions or conversations on their lives, identities, and relationships. In doing so we may avoid writing a "colonizing discourse" in which we speak for and construct the identity and worlds of others without considering the implications (Fine, 1994b, p. 70).
- Reflexively questioning our research methodology and methods in terms of how understandings emerge; what we might be taking for granted; the silences that may occur because of who we decide to include as respondents and the way we phrase our research, interview, and survey questions. This may result in more transparent and informed research accounts that recognize the consequences of our claims (Nicholls, 2009).
- Recognizing that new understandings and insights emerge in hyphen-spaces, not just about cultural practices, but also about others and ourselves. Hyphen-spaces are about the multiple and relational nature of identity work in the field. We therefore need to be sensitive and responsive to those moments of identity differences and to the attributions of ourselves and our respondents and how these might impact our relationship and our research. Geetha's experience in this specific context highlighted the impossibility of ignoring broad identity issues of family history, ethnicity, caste, religion, and the shifting nature of identity work in the field; we suggest that identity plays through any research account (qualitative or quantitative) whether we realize it or not. We suggest that the interplay of differences in the hyphen-spaces of insiderness-outsiderness, sameness-difference, engaged-distant, active-neutral and the choices we face about how to relate with research participants both draw upon and shape our identities and our positionality in our research—a positioning done by ourselves and our respondents.

Three aspects that we have not addressed in this article but are nevertheless relevant are: First, how do respondents experience hyphen-spaces *in their own lives* (e.g., Zaal, Salah, & Fine's 2007 study of how Muslim-American women negotiated multiple identities, suspicion, and surveillance in post-9/11 New York)? Second, how do respondents experience the hyphen-spaces *within our research*, and what insights have they gained about themselves and/or their practice? Third, as researchers we may also be encountering hyphen-spaces outside the field: with our PhD supervisors, colleagues, journal editors and reviewers and with external funding or grant bodies where explicit research design criteria may be imposed and research questions framed based on a narrow set of assumptions that may contradict experience (Vaughan, 2008). All of these influence our position and ethical involvement in our research and are the subject of further exploration.

To summarize, hyphen-spaces are about the dilemmas of multiple identities and positionalities as we work with relationships that "are not fixed points but emerge and shift in the contiguous processes of doing and writing about fieldwork" (Robertson, 2002, p. 790). They are always present in our research whether we choose to acknowledge them or not—and thus "our work will never

'arrive' but must always struggle 'between'" (Fine, 1994b, p. 75) as we address the differences, tensions, and connections of lived experience in the field. We need to recognize not only the fluid and emerging nature of such spaces, but the power relations and identity work going on that can have practical consequences not only for our research, but also on the lives of all research participants. Finally, to return to Agar's (1994) point about encountering difference, by explicitly understanding and exploring hyphen-spaces we gain not only "a renewed appreciation of the research process and new perspectives on how we have constructed, analyzed, and written about our research question" (Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008, p. 137), we also learn about others and ourselves in the process. We are reflected in others as they are in us, as Geetha discovered in one female plantation worker's comment:

> Yesterday [Saturday] also we had work and that is why I could not come [to see you]. Normally we do not have much work this month due to rain. But not like previous years, this month is good. Good that you came to our "Pujawa" and you blessed us by placing tealeaves in our bags. This month turned out to be a good month for us.

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Notes

1. See the 2010 *Organizational Research Methods* "Special Issue: Tales of the Field" and Zickar and Carter (2010) for reviews.
2. Most workers live and work on the plantation.
3. During the colonial period the word *Engalanthay* was used by locals to refer to England. The respondents never used the abbreviation *UK* or the word *England*.
4. The shop is referred to in Sinhala as "Kadey." In Tamil language, "Aiya" is used to address one's father's older brother or to show respect to a male person, just like "gentlemen" or "Mr." in English. Kade Aiya indicates the respect to the person and his ownership of the business.
5. Sinhala term for Boss/Senior Manager.
6. Pujawa/puja refers to a ritualistic ceremony where people make offerings to gods and goddesses and make requests/plead from them. All Hindus and most Buddhists believe that through ritualistic practices they can invoke blessings from gods and goddesses.

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