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Thesis title: Doing Qualitative Research With People And Organisations: How Do Researchers Understand And Negotiate Their Research Relationships?  
Qualification: PhD  
Date awarded: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2009

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**PhD Thesis**

**Doing qualitative research with people and organisations: How do researchers understand and negotiate their research relationships?**

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**September 2008**

*'...if the fool persists in his folly, he will eventually become wise....'*

William Blake

## Summary

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Using the child and family research arena as a base, and by generating and analysing empirical data according to the grounded theory methodology proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), this thesis adopts an empirical approach to the study of the research relationship. More specifically, it explores how researchers (n=13) understand the research process and, in particular, how they negotiate the process of *doing* research with people and organisations. Four key social actors are identified and discussed. These are: the researchers, the funding agencies, the gate-keepers, and the research groups. Whilst, the issues involved with the post-data collection stages of research are not presented here, the issues associated with the pre-data-collection phases and data-collection phases of research are articulated. Within the pre-data collection phases of research, the process of research generation and how the interests of researchers converge with funding agencies are examined and discussed. Similarly, the roles of gate-keeping groups, who straddle the pre-data collection and data collection phases of research, are also explored and the supporting mechanisms of these relationships highlighted. Finally, the thesis explores the nature of researchers' relationships with research groups by distinguishing between categorical, collective, and formal, research groups. The mechanisms that support and challenge engagement with these groups are identified and the ethical devices that researchers use to negotiate and manage these relationships are also explored.

# Contents

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<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Chapter one:</b> Doing research on <i>doing</i> qualitative research: Reviewing the process of reviewing the research process	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter two:</b> Reviewing the process of doing research with people and organisations: Researchers, funders, gate-keepers, and research groups	<b>24</b>
<b>Chapter three:</b> Methodology: A grounded approach	<b>64</b>
<b>Chapter four:</b> The process of doing research with researchers: Grounding grounded theory	<b>82</b>
<b>Chapter five:</b> Generation, selection and justification: How do researchers understand the development and mobilisation of their research projects?	<b>114</b>
<b>Chapter six:</b> Convergence, resonance and de-alignment: How do researchers negotiate their relationships with funding agencies	<b>135</b>
<b>Chapter seven:</b> Access, selection and negotiation: The relationship between gate-keepers and researchers	<b>154</b>
<b>Chapter eight:</b> Categorical, collective and formal: The nature of research groups and the functions of research for those who engage	<b>174</b>
<b>Chapter nine:</b> Apathy, fatigue, and lack of change: Negotiating the challenges to engagement	<b>209</b>
<b>Chapter ten:</b> Managing risk: Issues of consent, intra-personal harm, and inter-personal harm	<b>230</b>

<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>266</b>

# Acknowledgements

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This PhD would not have been possible without the helpful assistance of a number of researchers who agreed to spend their valuable time talking to me about their research. I found their stories fascinating and inspiring and can only hope that I have done them justice. Similarly, without the financial support of Research in Practice (see <http://www.rip.org.uk>) and their unswerving belief in research this work would have never seen the light of day.

In addition, a great number of people have supported me during the process of doing all this and my appreciation for them all is without end. Thanks go to Dave and Pete for their supervision double-act; Susie, Clive, Paul, and 'the Gaffer', who without the helpful advice and occasional job, I would have been lost; Janine, Gill, Jenny, and Linda, for giving me things to talk about; Coll, Sarah, Deb, Dorothy, Vicky, Tim, Jeanette, Lizzy, Margret, Celia, and all of RiP's extended family, for making me feel welcome, all the tea I could drink, and giving me interesting things to do; Brian Laws; the Eastman Mandolin Co.; Paddy McGinley; the VGPS, the SCA, and the CPAS; and, all of the PhD students who I met along the way, special thanks to Tina, Kate, Morgan, Manny, Harps, Erica, Ansu, Chris, Jools, Julie, Nat, Mel, Mas, Liam, and especially Johanne (I like you best of all).

Lastly, but very definitely not least, I'd like to thank Family Clark, without whom nothing would be possible.

# Introduction

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Research, and the evidence it generates, has now become a necessary and vital component in many policymaking arenas, as well as being an intellectual pursuit in its own right. There exists a huge and ever-growing knowledge bank for researchers and policymakers to draw upon in their work. Whatever the actual purpose of all this effort, naturalistic methods that emphasise and explore social situations inevitably bring researchers into contact with other people and much qualitative work would simply be impossible without the assistance of individuals and organisations willing to engage with the research process. Put simply, research could not occur without the co-operation of various actors and organisations that are prepared to facilitate the process. Yet the majority of conventional qualitative projects will not have been commissioned or funded by those involved, nor will they have any control over the research questions or the eventual output. In this respect, many university-based social research projects remain largely external to those who are necessary to facilitate research. Indeed, whilst the research process has been variously divided into a number of stages that encompass the formulation of research questions and devising designs for research, generating funding, gaining access, fieldwork and data-collection, data analysis, and issues surrounding writing and disseminating work (see Arber 1993, for example), these stages almost inevitably require the assistance of people and organisations external to the researcher.

Given that engaging with research as a research host, gatekeeper, interested other, participant, subject, or respondent, is not compulsory, these levels of assistance are, perhaps, surprising as the lengths that are often required to support or facilitate research can often be considerable. Research interviewees, for example, are frequently asked to recount experiences that may appear to be particularly sensitive or downright dull. Equally, the disruption caused by the presence of a researcher in an organisation, who

has to be housed and given access to relevant information and people, has to be absorbed by the organisation. All of which can be avoided should the person or organisation in question decline the invitation to engage.

This requirement for active and continuing consent means that research is not something that is passively experienced by those who engage. Indeed, those who do choose to engage do not simply or idly comply with the requests of researchers. Instead, research engagement both impacts on, and is constituted by, those who engage as they continue to make decisions concerning their engagement by reflecting upon their experiences. The research experience is not just negotiated and managed by researchers, but it is also actively negotiated, managed and experienced by those who agree to be involved and who have their own motivations and expectations of engagement.

Of course, the problems and difficulties of supporting engagement are not new and there is a wide range of literature concerning issues such as access, trust, politics, and the research relationship more generally. Research, and the practice of *doing* research, is increasingly recognised as a social process just like the world it seeks to investigate and is, therefore, a valid site for sociological examination. However, despite the ever-growing amount of literature concerning the research process, very little directly addresses the process of research from the perspective of those who engage. Whilst the reflexive turn has challenged normative descriptions of research methodology that represent field-work as less messy and problematic than it actually is, much of this is articulated from the position of researcher. As a result, much work represents their values and interests rather than being concerned with the interests of those who engage.

Furthermore, the realisation of seeing the research process as a site for sociological discussion, investigation, and research, has resulted in a noisy and diffuse field. This is, in part due to the 'by-product' approach to the research process that sees method as a product of substantive research rather than being subject to the same systematic and empirical rigour that is required by the same substantive studies. As a result, the area lacks both conceptual clarity and methodological robustness.

However, there are some indications that this by-product approach to the research process is changing and the application of more rigorous sociological methods to the empirical study of sociological research practice is growing (see Rappert, 1997; Sabar, 1998; Johnson and Clarke, 2003; Payne and Williams, 2005; Tjora, 2006; Wiles et al, 2007; Pitts and Miller-Day, 2007; Corden and Sainsbury, 2005 and 2006; Bryman, 2007). This work adopts an explicitly empirical approach to the study of the research process and this overtly empirical strand to the sociology of sociology could represent a high water-mark in terms of an empirically-based disciplinary reflexivity. Studies are increasingly being specifically designed to investigate aspects of the research process in order to produce more empirically robust theory that is explicitly intended to generalise beyond individual contexts.

Using the child and family research arena as a base, and by generating and analysing empirical data according to the grounded theory methodology proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), this study fits into this broader body of work by approaching the process of research and the relationships that are formed within that process in a systematic manner. Indeed, this thesis will present the results of an exploratory study that examines how researchers understand the research process and, in particular, how they negotiate the process of *doing* research with people and organisations. Therefore, in contrast to much of the reflexive work that examines the research process, this study uses a robust methodology to empirically explore how researchers understand those that engage with the research process.

As a result, this thesis has a number of more specific aims. Firstly, the study aims to further explore the process of doing qualitative research by assessing how researchers understand the process of *doing* research with the people and organisations that facilitate and support that process. Secondly, by using an explicit methodology the study aims to establish a theoretical framework concerning the process of doing qualitative research with people and organisations that can then be developed with further investigation. Thirdly, it will contribute to a growing field of empirically-based literature that

incorporates a robust methodology to explore the research relationships that are formed in the process of doing research.

In addition to these aims, a number of more substantive research questions will be explored within this thesis. These include:

- How do researchers construct the qualitative research process?
- How do researchers understand the various mechanisms that support engagement with research and what issues do they perceive to challenge such engagement?
- How do researchers negotiate and manage their relationships with the people and organisations that they encounter during the course of a qualitative research project?

These questions will both inform and guide the thesis in two complementary ways. Firstly, they provide the substantive focus of the thesis. Secondly, they are also embedded in the representation of the process of this particular study. Hence, in addition to providing a substantive examination of how researchers understand those that engage, the thesis will also attempt to document the process of doing research on doing research by providing insight into how this particular study was conceived and carried out.

In these respects, the opening chapter will pre-empt the literature review of chapter two by attempting to map current approaches to the study of the research process as well as examining the role of a literature review within a grounded theory methodology. Further, in discussing the role of a literature review, the chapter will also describe the process of the discovery of literature and how this impacts upon the study. Chapter two will then formally presents a substantive, but not exhaustive, review of the literature concerning how researchers understand the research process in five distinct areas. These are: research generation; research funding; issues concerning negotiating with gatekeepers and gaining access to research groups; the supporting mechanisms of engagement for research groups; the challenges to engagement; and, finally, a brief review of the differing approaches to the management of risk within the research process.

Chapters three and four will describe the methodological issues involved in the study by firstly examining the grounded theory method proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and its relevance to the present study, and secondly, by substantively examining the process of conducting research on the research process. Chapter three, therefore, will explore the design of the study by introducing the reader to the central assumptions of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory by offering an overview of the method through a closer examination of its core assumptions of theoretical sampling, coding and categorising, and theoretical saturation. However, more recent critiques of such an approach have highlighted some limitations and the problems of realism, positivism, and the primacy of interviews will also be discussed in relation to the theory.

Chapter four will then move on to describe the process of doing research on the process of doing research. It will do this by outlining the process of carrying out this particular research project and seeks to ground that experience within relevant literature. Using grounded theory as its base, the first part of the chapter will describe the sampling frame that was initially used in order to orient the project to the relevant literature, and then proceed to describe the frame that was applied to participant and study selection, culminating in a brief synopsis of the participants and their projects. The chapter will then consider the actual difficulties and problems associated with doing research that has other researchers as its focus of interest. These include the problems associated with informed consent; anonymity; issues around benefits, costs and risks; interviewer and interviewee role; and technical competence. Finally, issues around the mode of the interview and the use of tape recorders in the interview situation are considered.

The remaining six chapters of the thesis are dedicated to presenting the results of the analysis. The first three of these will be broadly concerned with the pre-data collection phases of the research process, with the final three being concerned with the data collection phases. Due to a lack of data, the phases of the research process that occur after data collection are not considered within the thesis.

The three areas in relation to the pre-data collection stages of the process are explored in chapters five, six, and seven. Although a very great many research projects can be generated only a small few are actually conducted through to completion. Therefore, researchers need to make a number of decisions in order to prioritise projects. Chapter five begins to explore these decisions by assessing how researchers reconstruct the early stages of their projects by examining how projects are identified, selected, and developed. Initial discussions concern the process by which researchers develop particular projects in relation to their social context before consideration as to how these projects are then mobilised and justified in the context of the wider public realm is given.

Chapter six will develop this understanding by describing how researchers understand their relationships with the agencies that finance their projects and what research engagement offers such agencies. Identifying three types of funding agency, the local organisation, national charitable organisations with specific interests, and national organisations with research interests, the chapter explores how researchers perceive the roles of funding agencies within the research process and, more specifically, how they achieve convergence with such agencies in order to facilitate their projects.

Once projects have negotiated this process of research generation and funding obtained, potential routes of data collection need to be established. These issues of gaining access are discussed in chapter seven. Beginning with an examination of the function of gatekeepers within the research process, the chapter goes on to explore how researchers select particular gate-keepers from a large field of possible collaborators. Finally, the chapter will explore how researchers perceive the functions of research engagement for access gatekeepers and the challenges that occur in such relationships.

The final three chapters of the thesis explore the data collection phases of the research process and give particular attention to the relationship between researchers and research groups. Chapter eight will concentrate on how researchers understand, negotiate, and maintain relationships with research groups by examining how they perceive the functions and supporting mechanisms that facilitate the engagement of research groups.

However, the chapter will first recognise that all research groups are not necessarily similar in their composition, organisation, or political interest. Three ideal types are established: the categorical research group; the collective research group and the formal organisation. These supporting mechanisms are discussed in relation to the types of research groups identified. Due to a lack of data, formal organisations that act as research groups will not be considered.

Chapter nine builds upon this discussion of mechanisms that support research engagement by considering the mechanisms that challenge engagement. The chapter will assess the barriers to engagement and explore why de-alignments between researchers and research groups occur. The challenges identified are: practical barriers such as cost, location, time, and organisation; research apathy and an indifference to the research process; forms of research fatigue and being 'over-researched'; the lack of change resulting from engagement; and issues concerning identity.

Chapter ten further extends this discussion concerning the challenges to engagement by exploring how researchers reconstruct their use of ethics and ethical discourse to manage and negotiate risk within research relationship. The chapter will begin with an examination of the different ways researchers construct ethics and will highlight three different constructs: administrative; the governance of 'good outcome'; and, as a series of situated devices to manage risk in the field. These situated devices are then explored in more detail with the chapter assessing how researchers use ethical devices to negotiate particular threats to the research relationship. These include mechanisms to promote self-determination and to manage intra-personal and inter-personal risk.

## Chapter 1

# Doing research on *doing* qualitative research: Reviewing the process of reviewing the research process

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Research is now a diverse enterprise that is conducted by a variety of professionals using a variety of different perspectives and methods, with a variety of different outcomes in mind. Therefore, the meaning of research and what it entails is diffuse and often problematic. Indeed, the differing approaches to research mean that the nature of any particular research relationship depends upon the researcher, the paradigm that they are operating under, the methods they are using, and the outcomes they have in mind. Relationships formed in the process of quantitative research are often quite different from those formed in qualitative research, which are different again from those formed under more participatory circumstances. This chapter will attempt to discuss and outline the parameters for this particular study concerning the research process by highlighting the focus of investigation.

The chapter will do this by also examining the literature concerning the research process in qualitative research with particular attention given to exploring how the research relationship is represented within this work and the relationship it has with empirical research. In particular, two areas of investigation will be explored. These are: the tendency within the literature to give primacy to researcher interests and their experiences of research; and, the 'by-product' approach to the investigation of research relationships. Finally, the chapter will introduce the grounded theory methodology

developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and will discuss the position of the literature review within this methodology by describing the process of literature searching in this particular study. This discussion provides the back-ground context for the substantive literature review which follows in chapter two.

## **Defining, prescribing and *doing* research**

The meaning of 'research' has become particularly unclear in recent years due to the promotion of various sorts of policy, action, and practitioner research (Hammersley, 1995). Describing and understanding what research actually *is* and what *it* involves is, therefore, problematic and many texts have attempted to define, and refine, what the sociological research enterprise actually consists of (see, for example, Wright-Mills, 1959; Bauman and May, 2001; and, Jenkins, 2002). However, these value-laden definitions all too often describe particular visions of research and not what it actually is. Research is prescriptively, and subjectively, defined rather than actually being empirically described. Indeed, such prescriptive definitions often say more about the epistemological position of the author in question rather than describing the practice of research itself. Somewhat inevitably, this critique equally applies to the discussion that is presented below and the discussion that is presented should be treated as a brief and selective review of a potentially wide range of literature and epistemological positions. Focusing upon qualitative research, this section will explore the different meanings of research. Theoretical orientation, methodological rigour, generalisation, the relative location of researcher and funding agency, and the purpose of the research, are all highlighted in order to help articulate a working focus for the study.

To begin with a technical distinction, Hammersley (1995, p 102) distinguishes between a wide and a narrow definition of research. Wide interpretations see research as "an activity carried out by all of us when we are faced with a problem whose solution seems to depend on obtaining relevant information". This could include the work done by market researchers, news media agencies, and political parties or government agencies. A much narrower definition on the other hand, refers to research

as “an activity directed towards the accumulation of knowledge within a discipline, carried out by specialists, where the immediate audience is other researchers working in the same discipline or subdiscipline” (Hammersley, 1995, p 102). This research has an explicit theoretical orientation with an explicit set of systematic and rigorous methodological instruments that are then used as a reference point in an on-going process.

Of course, even within any given discipline there will be any number of differing schools and institutions, as well as many cross-disciplinary traditions, that influence these theoretical and methodological tools. This is certainly true in the context of qualitative sociology and the tradition of qualitative research within sociological research certainly has a complex history. Despite being a constant presence throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Schwandt (2000) argues that within the academy qualitative approaches re-acquired particular currency in the 1970’s and the field of qualitative inquiry now has all the hallmarks of an established field of inquiry including its own journals, academic associations, conferences, and university positions.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative research is a field in its own right that crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matters. This includes the traditions of foundationalism, positivism, post-foundationalism, post-positivism, post-structuralism, and the practices associated with cultural and interpretivist studies. Similarly, it has considerable history within the disciplines of education, anthropology, sociology, communication and literary studies, history, archaeology, as well as health-based fields such as medicine. This broad field of vision also means that qualitative research has a large set of methodological practices that it is associated with. These include: semiotics, narrative analysis, content analysis, discourse analysis, archival work, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermenutics, feminism, ethnography, interviews, psychoanalysis, survey research, participant observation.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) go on to highlight that as a result of this multi-disciplinary and multi-method approach that crosscuts differing epistemological approaches, it is difficult to agree on any essential definition of qualitative research as all definitions are located and shaped by the

relative position of the definer. However, similar to Hammersley's (1995) contention that research consists of a theoretical orientation and rigorous methodological instruments, Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p 8) go on to propose:

"Qualitative research is many things to many people. Its essence is two-fold: a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of post-positivism.... [It] implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on process and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency".

Moreover, they also argue that qualitative research emphasises the socially constructed nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the value-led nature of social inquiry<sup>1</sup>.

To build upon these initial frames of reference, the 'Research Governance Framework' (RGF), which set out the principals for research within Councils with Social Service Responsibilities (CSSR's), refers to research as "the attempt to derive generalisable new knowledge by addressing clearly defined questions with systematic and rigorous methods" (DoH, 2001, p 6). In this context, research does not only have a theoretical orientation and robust methodological instruments, but is also dedicated to the generation of theory that can be applied across different contexts. Indeed, Bryman and Burgess (1999) suggest that the generation, and not the testing, of theory is a central aspect of qualitative research. In the case of qualitative research, Williams (2000), argues that such generalisations should be 'moderatum generalisations' in that they are not grand sweeping sociological rules, or fixed statements about the relationships between categories, but moderate and explicit forms of expression concerning the nature of things. They are formal expressions of everyday generalisations about the modern life-world<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> To this end, Vidich and Lyman (2000) ask if all social research can be considered qualitative due to the fact that the observer is always and necessarily at the centre of the research process.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, this is only one interpretation of the role of generalisation within sociology. For further discussion, see Denzin and Lincoln (1995), and, Seale (1999).

However, the Baseline Assessment Exercise, which followed the RGF and was designed to map the nature and extent of research governance in CSSR's, makes no such distinction between a more locally based knowledge and a generalisable one. It identifies research as:

“collecting information from or about individuals, who may be either service users, their relatives and friends, members of the public or employees of the department. This may take the form of a project funded from outside the department or authority, or a project carried out by someone working within the department or authority. Interviews or surveys carried out as part of Best Value reviews or other forms of audit are included, but the routine collection of management information is not”. (Pahl, 2003, p 2)

Beyond the local-general distinction, there are also distinctions to be made concerning who is conducting the work and who is funding the work. Firstly, research can be conducted internally by an organisation, or by people or organisations that are external to it. Small-scale evaluations of courses or programmes are a good example of research that is frequently conducted 'in-house' (see Shaw and Lishman, 1999). On the other hand, much traditional university-based social research will be conducted externally to the setting it studies with little or no input from the research population beyond facilitating data collection. Secondly, and somewhat similarly, the research can be funded or sponsored by the organisation concerned or by another external source. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is a good example of an external funding agency, whereas many local authorities will fund and commission research themselves regardless of who ultimately carries it out.

Related to this particular arena of social research, conceptual distinctions are frequently made between pure and applied research. Hammersley (2000), for instance, has made one such typology<sup>3</sup>. Using both the purpose of research and the audience for that research, he distinguishes between scientific inquiry and practical inquiry. Scientific inquiry has fellow researchers as the main audience and has the broad remit of contributing to

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<sup>3</sup> There are many distinctions of this type (see Pawson, 2003, for a review).

an accumulating body of knowledge. Scientific inquiry usually takes two forms: theoretical scientific and substantive scientific research. Theoretical scientific research attempts to produce knowledge about general causal relationships, whilst substantive scientific research provides descriptions and explanations of particular cases. The audience for practical inquiry, on the other hand, is directed toward providing knowledge that is of immediate use with findings assessed in terms of relevance, timeliness, as well as validity, and the audience is made up of those who have a practical interest in the particular concerns of the research. This may include practitioners, and policymakers of various kinds, as well as other researchers. Hammersley argues that this practical inquiry typically takes two forms: dedicated, and, democratic. Dedicated research has a goal of providing specific research to a specific group of policymakers and practitioners, whereas democratic research should be of use to anyone concerned with the issue.

However, any conventional distinction between pure and applied research is problematic. Greenwood and Levin (2000, p 92), for instance, argue that the applied/pure distinction is useless, misleading, and ultimately “devastating” to the social sciences. This is because such a distinction largely ignores the armchair-like approach to research taken by positivist researchers and disengaged (and apathetic) interpretivists whose “principle social impact is on each other and the generations of young people in their classrooms...there is little chance that their actions will affect non-university people or that their work will upset the holders of power outside academia”. In short, there is a disconnection between university-based social research and social praxis.

Part of the solution to this inertia is through the continuing development of a paradigm of participatory and action-based research. Various labels under empowerment (Gomm, 1993; Barnes and Warren, 1999), emancipation (Oliver, 1992; Goodley and Lawthom, 2005), user-involvement (Beresford, 2002; Boxall et al, 2007), participatory research (Reason and Rowen, 1980; Cook et al, 2004), and action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Stringer, 2007), these approaches to research aim to break down distinctions of researcher and subject to produce a form of co-operative inquiry where the co-researchers contribute to hypothesis making, the final conclusions, and to all that goes on in between (Heron, 1981). Research is carried out *with*, rather than *on*, those who are being researched (Boxall et al

2007). Research serves as a mechanism for social change, and action becomes the explicit and expressed aim of research.

Of course, any of these distinctions are not hard and fast and many qualitative projects will incorporate the terminology of such participatory paradigms as well as sharing some of the aims. However, due to the specific emphasis on the active participation of those involved as research collaborators and the weight given to local change it is suggested here that the relationships formed in the process of doing research are substantively different from those formed in more conventional qualitative projects. Due to this, they are outside of the remit of the present study and will not be considered further.

Instead, the focus of this thesis is on the relationships that are formed within the more traditional types of empirically-based qualitative social research that has an explicit theoretical orientation and a robust methodology, and attempts to go beyond local knowledge production. In terms of qualitative research, this is an emphasis on the qualities and meanings of the social world and a commitment to a naturalistic inquiry with an emphasis on generating generalisable theory through the application of a set of systematic and rigorous naturalistic methodological instruments. These concerns can be scientifically or practically based. In terms of funding and input, the focus of research is on projects that are usually conducted externally to those who engage, and those studies that are conducted by researchers who are affiliated to academic institutions. Similarly, whilst more recent paradigms are challenging these more conventional conceptions of research by being explicitly change-based, research that is specifically participatory or action-based in design will not be covered by this review or the subsequent study.

## **The relationship between qualitative methodological investigation and empirical research**

Naturalistic methods that emphasise and explore the meanings of social situations inevitably bring researchers into contact with other people. Some

years ago, Cicourel (1964, p 75) argued that both interview situations and ethnographic encounters, the staple diet of qualitative research, cannot be seen as anything other than a "process of social interaction". As a result, they cannot be seen outside the realm of everyday life. In short, Cicourel argues that the research process is a legitimate site for empirical investigation: "the study of research techniques...becomes critical for understanding what will be considered knowledge in any given era". However, the realisation of seeing method as a site for sociological discussion, investigation, and research, has often been a noisy and diffuse field that is pluralistic to the point of being conceptually muddled and methodologically problematic. This section will explore the relationship between qualitative methodological investigation concerning the research relationship and empirical research by examining current approaches to the study of the research relationship.

Oakley (1981) argues that the conventional reporting of qualitative research has traditionally required the writer, who need not be the person who collected the data, to report on the number of interviews, the length of interviews, how the information was recorded and whether any type of standardisation were used. Whilst this assertion was made some years ago, more recently Law (2003) has suggested that these normative approaches to method frequently involve the repression (and systematic exclusion) of the invisible work that helps to produce research. This includes the uninteresting stuff that seems not to be worth telling and the obvious things that everyone knows. In some cases, research is often presented as if it were conducted in a social vacuum. Sampling methods, for example, are often described in technical detail and largely ignore the often painstaking context of collecting that data. In their efforts to mechanise and sanitise the research process, researchers can often fail to adequately and accurately represent it.

Of course, not all methodological discussion is technically descriptive and normative. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that the reflexive movement of the late 1970's and early 1980's marked the fourth<sup>4</sup> moment of qualitative research: the crisis of representation. Here, the realist and objectivist ontology created by illusions of academic authority, of which technological

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<sup>4</sup> The first being the traditional period, the second being the modernist phase, and the third being the phase of blurred genres.

methodological description was typical, were challenged by a range of standpoint epistemologies. Hence reified boundaries between knowledge, knowledge-maker, and the knower began to disintegrate. This triple crises of representation, legitimation, and praxis continued through the fifth (post-modern), sixth (post-experimental), and seventh (the future) moments of qualitative research. Research, and the practice of *doing* research, was firmly recognised as a social process, just like the world it sought to investigate<sup>5</sup>.

One consequence of these crises is in the development and increasing requirement for reflection concerning the process of doing qualitative research. This reflexive practice is the attempt by researchers to reflect upon the nature of doing research, both during and after the research process: It is "where researchers engage in explicit self-aware meta-analysis" (Finlay, 2002, p 209). Whilst there are many differing forms of reflexivity espoused in the literature and any position necessarily reflects the position of the author (see Lynch, 2000, for a review), there is a concerted effort in this work to recognise the political, social, and personal context that research invariably occurs in.

Reflexive methodological literature is often the crystallisation of this process of reflexivity and attempts to reflect back on the research process and represent it within the literature. It seeks to describe the research process as it actually was/is rather than prescribe a sanitised, and frequently dull, technical version of it. Essentially, these reflexive accounts are personalised histories of the research process in which the researcher is fully implicated in the data gathering and any subsequent writing up. They are 'warts and all' accounts of the process of *doing* sociological research. According to Bell and Newby (1976, p 10), these recognitions can be everything from the micro-politics of interpersonal relationships, to the politics of research units, institutions, universities, and government departments: all of which "vitally determine the design, implementation and outcome of sociological research". It is, to use the metaphor later suggested by Bell and Encel (1977), an attempt to get 'inside the whale' rather than remain detached from it. An early example of this writing can be found in Whyte's (1983) reflections on his experiences whilst gathering the data which would eventually go on to form the bulk of 'Street Corner Society'. Later collections of such accounts

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<sup>5</sup> For an alternative history of qualitative research see Hammersley, 2004.

include 'Sociologists at work' edited by Hammond (1964), and the British equivalent 'Doing Sociological Research' by Bell and Newby (1976).

Today, methodological reflexivity is now almost a ubiquitous form of research in the qualitative canon concerning the research relationship (see Jowett and O'Toole, 2006; Woodthorpe, 2006; or, Brogden and Patterson, 2007, for some recent examples). Often interesting stories in their own right, such work can also serve to make the research process more transparent. Indeed, Finlay (2002) has suggested that an examination of the subjective position of the researcher can actually serve to make research more useful as its limitations, biases, and situatedness are revealed (see Atkinson and Hammersley, 1995, for example).

However, such contentions can also be seen to be "regretful backward glances at positivist ideals" (Finlay, 2002, p 211), and whether it is possible for a researcher to transcend any given subjective position to overcome that situatedness, is also open to question (see Roth, 1989, for further discussion). Even the most critical reflective position will always be one's subjective analysis of one's own subjective position and practice. It will, in itself, be limited by the very same limitations and biases of the respective position. Furthermore, rarely are reflexive accounts opened up to include other interested parties and are almost always controlled by the researchers<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, Vidisch and Lyman (2000) argue that these 'tales from the field' cannot describe method as it actually occurs and are, in fact, post-hoc descriptions that are still laden with the values of the writer. In this sense, it is impossible to 'get out of the whale'.

It could also be argued further that the unreflexive reproduction of reflexive 'tales' also serves to reinforce the dominant position of the researcher in the research relationship as it is their experience that is articulated over-and-above the experience of others in the research relationship. Even Popper (1994), so often the straw-man extraordinaire for positivism within qualitative discussion, suggests that part of the task of critical discussion within the social sciences is to include those views of those who have

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<sup>6</sup> There are many reasons for this, not least because it is usually only the researcher who an interest in publishing such accounts in such specific journals. However, there are some reflexive accounts from the researched in the literature (see Hunt, 1981, for example).

experienced the consequences of research (Knepper, 2007). Despite these calls, the overwhelming majority of work on the research relationship is dominated by the views of the researcher.

Further, according to Smyth and Williamson (2004) the vast majority of work on the research relationship is also largely a by-product of other projects rather than being specifically designed to investigate it. Indeed, a large proportion of qualitative methodological discussion associated with the research relationship can loosely be described as the 'by-product' approach to the study of the research relationship<sup>7</sup>. Usually uncritically reproducing a combination of 'thick description' and a case-study approach to methodological investigation, such work is often based upon projects that are designed and conducted to examine a substantively different area of interest but are also used as a frame to offer methodological insight (see Jordan, 2006; and, Stephens, 2007, for example). It is not often made clear whether projects were designed with methodological goals in mind, or whether the methodological insight is produced post-hoc. Samples are typically based upon single case examples of research that were conducted by the authors and, again, it is often unclear what conditions they were selected under. This unsystematic approach to research design means that the knowledge produced can lack systematic rigour and any attempts to generalise are necessarily limited. This is not to suggest that such attempts to provide insight into the research relationship are without value, however, it does mean that the field is awash with concepts that have been idiosyncratically developed from studies that are often not specifically designed to investigate the subject under question. Whilst the particular substantive study in question may have specific theoretical orientation and a degree of methodological robustness, often the resulting literature that is produced concerning the research relationship will be less secure.

This approach may also be symptomatic of the wider methodological literature. According to Bloor (1978, p 54), qualitative methodological discussion has conventionally been based on the experiences and realisations

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<sup>7</sup> There are, of course, other types of literature that are concerned with the research relationship. Politico-technical discussions of method are common (Hammersley and Gomm, 1996, for example), as are value-driven arguments concerning research relationships (see Becker, 1967). Similarly, literature based upon reviews of the field are also visible (see Lee, 1993). Whilst such literature may draw upon the particular research experiences of the author, it is not empirical nor does it purport to be, which is what is being discussed here.

of researchers 'in the field' rather than projects specifically designed to investigate method: "It seems something of a commonplace among research sociologists that texts on methodology are only of very limited utility in study design". Such contentions have historical precedence. According to Goodman and Ritzer (2004 p 109), Weber saw epistemological and methodological processes as being established through the solving of substantive sociological problems and methodological work is largely secondary to this work.

There is some evidence that this trend is continuing. For instance, despite funding a wide array of methodological projects, the primary aim of the ESRC's own research method programme (see ESRC Research Methods Network, 2002-2007) is to support substantively focused research that poses interesting or novel methodological issues. The emphasis is not on the systematic investigation of the research process or method, but generating methodological insight as a by-product of other work. Similarly, recent developments in the use of GRID technology within qualitative research have taken similar by-product approaches to the exploration and development of method in the area (see Molyneux-Hodgson and Clark, 2007).

A consequence of these approaches to the research relationship and research process within the qualitative canon is that the body of work lacks conceptual and theoretical clarity as there is an emphasis on context and the situatedness of the research project or researcher in question. As a result, the empirical work concerning the qualitative research process is frequently represented as being both individual and idiosyncratic, and its investigation is not subject to anywhere near the same rigour that it applies to the investigation of the wider social world. That is not to say that the work is not useful, undoubtedly some is, but there is an implicit implication that research projects vary according to the context of the particular research project and researcher and that this variance cannot be overcome to produce a more useful and coherent framework.

In perhaps the most widely used technique in the qualitative canon, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that it is the connection of data to theory in order to produce a systematic, robust, and grounded theory that is of paramount importance when investigating the social world. In this context, the lack of

clarity in the connection of data and theory construction would be problematic for other topics, so why should research concerning the research process be treated as somehow different? Similarly, the lack of clarity in the design of qualitatively-based methodological research concerning the research process would also be likely to be viewed as problematic in projects with other substantive interests, so why is this body of work any different?

This is not to succumb to a form of naïve realism, or to an objectivist ontology that sees systematic empirical research as having a divine right to 'truth'. Nor is it an exercise in a covert post-positivism. It is, however, to explicitly move beyond the by-product approach that is uncritically reproduced in much methodological discussion and the unreflexive reproduction of 'thick description' that emphasises the individual contexts of research projects. Rather than assuming each project is necessarily individual or different, careful and deliberate comparisons are needed to systematically explore the research relationship in order to produce theory that has a greater explanatory capacity and one that is methodological robust and transparent.

Indeed, there are some indications that this by-product approach to the research relationship is changing and the application of more rigorous sociological methods to the empirical study of sociology is growing (see Rappert, 1997; Sabar, 1998; Johnson and Clarke, 2003; Payne and Williams, 2005; Tjora, 2006; Wiles et al, 2007; Pitts and Miller-day, 2007; Corden and Sainsbury, 2005 and 2006; Bryman, 2007). In this work, an explicitly empirical approach to the study of particular aspects of the research relationship, and of process and method more generally, is taken and this overtly empirical strand to the sociology of sociology could represent a high water-mark in terms of an empirically-based disciplinary reflexivity. This means that studies are specifically designed to investigate aspects of methodological interest in order to produce more empirically robust theory that is explicitly intended to generalise beyond individual contexts.

In sum, the literature concerning the research relationship is conceptually messy and diffuse with a combination of 'thick description' and 'by-product' approaches to the research relationship and the research process more

generally. Indeed, later moments of reflexive discussion concerning the research relationship have tended to amplify the local context of studies, usually in terms of 'thick description', whilst the 'by-product' approach largely develops methodological insight by idiosyncratically developing concepts as explanatory tools post data collection in the hope of generalisation rather than being specifically designed for the purpose. This means that the epistemological benefits of methodology are not exploited to a fuller and more secure potential. Similarly, whilst the reflexive turn has challenged normative descriptions of research methodology that represented field-work as less messy and problematic than it actually is, much of this is articulated from the position of researcher. As a result, much work represents their values and interests rather than being concerned with the interests of those who engage.

Therefore, this thesis aims to address these issues by using a grounded theory methodology that is explicitly designed for the purpose of exploring the relationships that are formed between researchers and researched during the process of doing children and families related research. Whilst the thesis will still focus on the perspective of the researcher, by specifically examining researcher understandings of the people and organisations that engage with research the thesis will begin to develop a systematic approach to understanding how research is experienced by those that do engage. Indeed, by employing a grounded methodology, the thesis will provide a transparent account of the design and process of the research that is open for critical inspection. As a result, the thesis will help to provide a robust theory that goes beyond the individual context of the relationships formed in particular studies. This systematic approach to theory construction will add some much needed clarity to the field which can be used as a platform for a more coherent, empirically based, and rigorous, academic exchange. Whilst the grounded theory methodology proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is articulated in more depth in chapters three and four, the method, with specific reference to literature reviewing, is introduced in the following section.

## **Grounded theory and the role of a literature review**

Grounded theory is an inductive process that aims to systematically generate theory from data. It aims to discover relevant categories and explore the relationships between them rather than testing previously identified concepts and theories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Other theories and literature should not constrain, impose, or be forced upon the data before collection and analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). The emphasis is on an inductive research process that begins without theoretical preconceptions. Indeed, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), literature should only be introduced at the data sorting stages of analysis and a literature review should not be conducted before the study.

However, the role of a literature review is more problematic than the original method would suggest. In particular, Charmaz (2006) argues that conducting the literature review after the data collection phase is over-stated, particularly by Glaser (1978). Research proposals, for instance, typically demand extensive knowledge of theories and leading studies and it is practically inconceivable to begin a project without any previous knowledge of the field. For instance, the discussion presented above that seeks to introduce the reader to the field of the research relationship and offer some justification for conducting an empirical investigation necessarily requires some knowledge of previous work.

Whilst some of these difficulties were addressed in later re-workings of the method, these approaches do diverge somewhat, and Glaser's positioning with respect to literature is still somewhat ambiguous (see Glaser 1978, 1992, 1998). However, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), previous literature can play an important role within a grounded theory approach before the data collection phase, as well as retaining a role after it. For the purposes of this thesis, it is this model that will be followed and it will be outlined below.

For Strauss and Corbin (1990), technical literature can serve as a secondary data source; it can stimulate research questions; it can direct theoretical sampling; and, it can serve as supplementary validation when writing up the findings. Perhaps most importantly, it is crucial in developing theoretical sensitivity. This refers to "the process of having insight, the ability to give

meaning to the data, the capacity to understand and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p 42). Whilst theoretical sensitivity can also be developed through personal and professional experience, the primary method of developing this sensitivity in many projects is through the use of previous literature: "By having some familiarity with these publications, you have a rich background of information that 'sensitizes' you to what is going on with the phenomena you are studying" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p 42). They go on to argue that whilst it is still not desirable to enter the field with an entire list of preconceived concepts, some themes may repeat in the literature enough to be significant to the development of the field in questions: "These you may want to bring to the field where you will look for evidence of whether or not the concepts and relationships apply to the situation that you are studying" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp 50-51).

Therefore, within the grounded theory methodology, literature can be used before the data collection in order to sensitize the researcher to the field, as well as having a purpose during the analysis phases. With respect to this study, the literature search and review was completed in two distinct phases: the initial search before the data collection; and, the review conducted after the data collection and whilst the analysis was in progress. The following section is a brief review of the process of those phases.

### **Search and search again: Finding literature**

The purpose of the initial literature search and review conducted before the data collection phases was not an attempt to map the somewhat huge, but fragmentary, field of the research relationship. Similarly, it was not meant to be a systematic review of the field (see SCIE, 2006, for example). Instead, it was to provide a platform for theoretical sensitivity that would then help to inform the subsequent development of a grounded theory. Therefore, the aim of the initial search and review was to explore and examine the literature on how researchers understand the research process and how they negotiate the process of *doing* research with people and organisations.

However, the range of the literature here is huge. Any research project that involves people has the potential to be useful in articulating some facet of

the research relationship. Developing theoretical sensitivity by means of literature review in this area is, therefore, difficult. Methodologically, the field covers all the three main data gathering techniques of survey work, interviewing and ethnographic research. Substantively the field can also cover a wide range of social research interest, from children and family research, to criminal justice research, and even health-based research.

The initial remit was to examine this problem with respect to child and family work due to the interests of the agency that provided funding for the study. Research in Practice is a department of The Dartington Hall Trust run in collaboration with the University of Sheffield, the Association of Directors of Children's Services and a network of over 100 participating children's service departments in England and Wales. They also have strong links with IDeA (the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government), NCB (National Children's Bureau), NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research), SCIE (Social Care Institute for Excellence) and a wide range of other organisations dedicated to supporting evidence-informed practice across all disciplines (see [www.rip.org.uk](http://www.rip.org.uk) for further information. However, in practice this restriction of children and families related research is sufficiently broad to actually include more than it excludes (see chapter four for further discussion). Therefore, the more established academic fields of sociology, anthropology, social psychology, and criminology could all contain useful literature, as could the practice-based disciplines of health care, social care, criminal justice and education. Exploring all these avenues was likely to be necessary in assessing the full range literature associated with the topic and to become 'theoretically sensitive'. Indeed, Charmaz (2006) suggests that a thorough literature review within grounded theory often means going across a range of fields and disciplines and not being constrained by the preconceptions that are prevalent in particular fields.

Unfortunately, this rules out very few fields of potential interest while specifically targeting little. This is problematic as literature searches can easily become overwhelming, inefficient and ineffective (Hart, 2001). This is certainly the case in this particular area as keyword search terms required by search engines are frequently generic and lack specificity. Entering Boolean combinations of 'research' and 'experience', for instance, will return an unmanageable amount of hits in many search engines.

In order to counter-balance this difficulty the search had to make pragmatic inferences and target likely areas of interest within the differing social research fields. These were as follows:

- Reflexive accounts that attempt to describe the process of the research experience rather than present a prescribed normative version of it;
- Ethical discourse that examines the impact of research engagement and the management and negotiation of risk within the research process;
- Work that explores the nature of research relationships between researchers and those who choose to engage with research (funding agencies, gatekeepers, and research groups);
- Methodological literature, in particular, that which focuses on the aspects of the research process.

In order to explore these areas of literature, a number of techniques were used. These resources included: electronic databases; reference lists; hand searching of key journals, key authors, key organisations and any associated websites; library reference systems; and informal networks.

There is also a caveat to be mentioned here. The emphasis for the initial proposal was not the researcher understandings of the research process, but on the experiences of research from the perspective of those researched. The initial search aimed to reflect this interest. In practice, however, there was very little material in this area, whilst there was much more from the perspective of the researcher and the search, and the focus of the study, was widened accordingly.

The result of this first phase of literature searching produced work that was broadly based around four inter-related themes: inter-personal dynamics within the research relationships; the politics of research; the ethics of research; and the methodological affects of engagement with research. Whilst these four themes are not exhaustive of the literature search or the literature as a whole they are representative of the work that sensitised the research. A brief summary of each of these themes is given below.

Involvement with research is a lived and meaningful experience for those who engage with it. This engagement necessarily involves inter-personal relationships between those who have an interest in the research. Within the literature these relationships are typically characterised in the form of researcher-researched interaction and it is this interaction that constitutes and facilitates the research relationship and the research itself. Indeed, certain themes are common within the literature concerning the research relationship. These issues include: discussions of gaining access (Burgess, 1984; Hornsby-Smith, 1993; Emmel et al, 2007); the impacts of research engagement at individual (see Hyman, 1954; Whyte, 1983; Boelen, 1992) and collective levels (Cohen, 1977; NERF, 2000; Ward, 2004); the costs and benefits of engagement at individual (Warwick, 1982; Phillips et al 2002; Dyregrov, 2004) and collective levels (DoH, 2001; Elson et al, 2003; Clark and Sinclair, 2008); research disengagement (Punch, 1986; Warren et al, 2003; Butt and O'Neil, 2004); and, issues of trust (Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1984; and, Crozier, 2003) and risk (Vidich and Bensman, 1964; Morgan, 1972; Lee, 1993).

However, research is not conducted in a social vacuum. Inevitably, different groups will often have different interests, values, and beliefs concerning research and the form of their engagement with the research process. Research is never value free. In terms of what should be studied, how it should be studied, and how this should be represented, research is also often seen as an expression and realisation of the power relations that are inherent in wider society. Therefore, the politics of research concerns discussions of bias (Becker, 1967; Hammersley and Gomm, 1997; Stanley, 2000); objectivity and value neutrality (Gouldner, 1973; Hammersley, 1995; Williams, 2005); interference (Wallis, 1977; Hunt, 1984; Bulmer 1987); representation (Hunt, 1981; Denzin, 1992; Law and Hetherington, 1998);

user-involvement (Beresford, 2002; Faulkner, 2004; Turner and Beresford, 2004); views of research from the perspective of those 'researched' (Kitchin, 2000; Goodenough et al, 2003; Bosworth et al, 2005); empowerment (Humphries and Truman, 1994; Hanley, 2005; Patel, 2005); emancipation (Reason and Rowen 1981; Oliver, 1992 and 1997); feminist critiques of research (Harding, 1987; Maynard, 1994; Oakley, 1998; Hodkinson, 2000); improving research impact (Walter et al, 2004) and use (Percy-Smith, 2002; EPPI-Centre, 2007); as well as a plethora of research typologies (see Pawson, 2003a, for a review; and, Pawson et al, 2003).

Ethics, on the other hand, refers to the principles that guide researcher conduct within research encounters and how risk is negotiated and managed within the process of research. However, what 'ethics' actually constitutes and means within contemporary research is actually quite difficult to define due to the increasingly fuzzy mobilisation of the term and its close relationship to politics and epistemology. However, themes of interest include: statements of ethical practice (ASA, 1999; BSA, 2002; SRA, 2003); discussions concerning ethically controversial studies (Orne and Holland, 1968; Herrera, 2001; Babbie, 2004); critical reviews of current ethical practice (Homan, 1992; Haggerty, 2004; Dingwall, 2005); the philosophical basis of ethical research (Homan, 1991; Kvale, 1996; Shaw, 2003); ethical regulation (DoH, 2001; Truman, 2003; Wiles et al, 2005); the ethics of care (Morris, 2001; Edwards and Mauthner, 2002; Held, 2005); feminist ethics (Oakley, 1981; Wise, 1987; Porter, 1999); ethical practice concerning children (Alderson, 1995; Morrow and Richards, 1996; Alderson and Morrow, 2003); ethical practice concerning other vulnerable groups (Swain et al, 1998; Valentine et al, 2001; Tarleton et al, 2004); and, more substantive discussion concerning particular areas of ethics including: informed consent (Miller and Bell, 2002; Truog, 2007; Wiles et al, 2007); harm (Warwick, 1982; Corbin and Morse, 2003; Clough, 2004); confidentiality and anonymity (Barnes, 1980; Grinyer, 2004; Giordano et al 2007); and, deception (Bulmer, 1982; Homan, 1992; Herrera, 1999).

Finally, the literature search revealed much methodological discussion concerning the research relationship and how particular facets of research method influence the research process. These issues include: the impact of the researcher on data (Cicourel, 1964; Webb et al, 1966; Adair, 1984); the

impact of identity on the research process, including ethnicity (Wax, 1979; Song and Parker, 1995; Adamson and Donovan, 2002), gender (Easterday et al, 1977; Padfield and Procter, 1995; Tang, 2002), and social position (Ostrander, 1993; Puwar, 1997; Wiles et al, 2006); research rapport (Horowitz, 1986; Wong, 1998; Gaglio et al 2006); feminist methodology (Kelly et al, 1994; Millen, 1997; Oakley, 1998); researcher roles in the field (Gold, 1958; Burgess, 1984; Adler and Adler, 1987); the different roles of research group members in the field (Tremblay, 1957; Weber and Cook, 1972; Thapar-Björkert and Henry, 2004); evaluation anxiety (Cheek et al, 1990; Donaldson, 2002; Taut and Brauns, 2003); the impact of technology (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Speer & Hutchby 2003; Lee, 2004); and, problems of transcription (Poland, 1995; White et al, 2003; Sainsbury and Corden, 2005)

However, whilst these four general areas were used as a basis for the initial research proposal and the subsequent interviews, this initial search review did not necessarily anticipate the content of those interviews or the subsequent analysis. Indeed, this is to be expected when conducting any inductive analysis and particularly the case when employing a grounded theory methodology. Although some of that material was relevant to the emergent topics that were subsequently generated, much was not. As a result, the substantive literature review presented in the following chapter is not necessarily representative of the literature search and review that was initially conducted. Indeed, much of what is discussed in the following chapter was discovered in synthesis with the analysis itself and after the initial literature searching and data collection phases. Therefore, the review is intended to sensitize the reader to the analysis that the data subsequently generated. This use of technical literature is, therefore, in keeping with the parameters laid out by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provides an introduction to the substantive literature review of chapter two by outlining the purpose of the study and places it in the context of the wider literature on the research process. It maps the current approaches to the study of such qualitative research relationships and the

research process more generally as well as examining the role of a literature review within a grounded theory methodology. Finally, in discussing the process of the literature review with particular reference to developing theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), the chapter has described the process of discovering literature in the area and how this shaped the initial stages of the study.

To summarise, the focus for the study is the research relationships formed during the course of empirically-based qualitative projects that have an explicit theoretical orientation and a robust methodology that attempt to go beyond local knowledge production. In terms of funding and input, only projects that are conducted by academically-affiliated researchers who are external to those who engage are considered. This does not include projects that are conducted under more participatory and action-based paradigms such as those found in forms of action research, or those that have the goal of local knowledge production such as that found in evaluation studies and internal audits.

Having established this focus, it is argued that much of the work on the research process is both researcher focused and lacking in conceptual clarity. Typically, the perspectives of those who choose to engage with the research process are only vicariously addressed if they happen to intersect with the interests of the researcher. Moreover, not only is the literature researcher-focused, much is not specifically designed to investigate the research relationship. This 'by-product' approach to researching the research process, and methodology more generally, means that much of the work on the research relationship lacks methodological robustness and is an area in need of more systematic exploration.

The solution to both these difficulties that is proposed here is to adopt a systematic methodology in order to begin to develop a theoretical framework concerning the experiences of those who engage. The methodology that is most suited to achieving these ends is the grounded theory methodology proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This approach offers an explicit and transparent research design that can be used to generate a coherent theoretical framework that can be used to understand a range of research

relationships beyond both their individual contexts and the perspectives of the researcher.

Whilst the grounded theory methodology is discussed further in chapters three and four, the role of the literature search and literature review in the context of grounded theory is problematic. Hence the chapter has also explored the role of a literature review within a grounded theory methodology and, in preparation for the substantive literature that follows in chapter two, the process of the discovery of literature and how this shaped the initial stages of the study is also described. It is suggested that literature is crucial in developing theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This allows the researcher to gain insight concerning the phenomena under investigation and enhances the ability of the researcher to give meaning to the data, as well as help in developing research questions, directing sampling, and validating and refuting findings.

Using an array of different search techniques and targeted areas, the result of this sensitizing process identified work that was broadly based around four inter-related themes: inter-personal dynamics within the research relationships; the politics of research; the ethics of research; and the methodological affects of engagement.

However, whilst these four general areas were used as a basis for the initial research proposal and the subsequent interviews, this initial search review did not necessarily reflect the content of those interviews or the subsequent analysis. Therefore, the substantive literature review presented in the following chapter is not necessarily representative of the initial literature search and review. Instead, the following chapter developed in synthesis with the analysis itself. As a result, rather than offering a review of the initial search process that is described in this chapter, the following review is intended to sensitize the reader to the analysis of the research process that is presented in chapters five to ten.

## Chapter 2

# **Reviewing the process of doing research with people and organisations: Researchers, funders, gatekeepers, and research groups**

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In order to do research, projects need to be generated, developed, data collected, data analysed, and the results disseminated. However, although researchers will typically drive projects through these different stages, they cannot do so in isolation and a number of relationships need to be negotiated and managed to complete research. This process involves a number of interactions between various actors who have an interest in engaging with the process. Whilst the researcher may utilise theoretical and methodological tools to drive the project, the funding agency provides the finance to enable researchers to conduct the necessary work, gate-keepers provide access to research groups, and the research groups provide the necessary information that constitutes the data for the project.

Following the previous chapter, which, in part, attempted to outline the purpose of a literature review within a grounded theory methodology and describe the process of the initial literature search, this chapter will present a substantive review of the literature concerning how researchers understand the research process in respect to six distinct areas. These are: research generation; research funding; issues concerning negotiating with gatekeepers and gaining access to research groups; the supporting mechanisms of engagement for research groups; the challenges to engagement for research groups; and, a brief review of the differing

approaches to the management of risk within the research process. Finally, by highlighting gaps in relation to these areas, the chapter will also formally present the research questions that emerge from the review.

This chapter does not attempt to present the results of the initial review or an exhaustive review of the research process. Instead, the chapter is intended to sensitize the reader to the analysis presented in the subsequent chapters. Little attention, for example, is given to the post-data collection phases of research as this is not covered in the analysis presented in later chapters. However, it remains an important but often over-looked part of the research process.

## **Research Genesis: How do researchers generate and develop projects?**

In order to conduct research and mobilise projects through to completion, researchers need to make a series of decisions. These include: choices concerning the different epistemological approaches to research; strategies of gaining access; selecting appropriate methodological techniques; and, representing and disseminating the research (see Silverman, 1999, for example). However, in order to make these decisions, researchers must first identify areas of research interest and select projects that can be developed. Projects are not automatically generated or inevitable products of the researchers who develop them. This section will explore the literature in relation to how researchers identify, select, and develop research projects.

Given that there are many areas that could be investigated by social research, the choices concerning which questions are actually addressed are value-driven. As Hammersley (1995, p 103) points out, "micro-political processes are to be found in all realms; or, indeed, that all human relations and contacts are political, as implied by the slogan 'the personal is political'". Projects, and any subsequent decisions concerning how to mobilise them, are not autonomously generated by researchers in a social and political vacuum. They are identified, selected, and developed by value-driven researchers who are themselves products of their social and political environments.

Of course, the political context of research has long been recognised and the contention that all research is value-driven is something of an accepted truism within qualitative research. Becker (1967) famously argued that the fundamental problem of research for researchers to decide is not whether we take sides, but to decide whose side we are on. It is not possible, he contends, to conduct research that is not uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies. These sympathies are likely to influence all areas of the research process. For example, Gewirtz and Cribb (2006, p 142) highlight how evaluative judgements are made at every stage of the research process and "embedded in all sociological work are views about what counts as a worthwhile research question, about what counts as a desirable process or outcome and about how responsibility for particular outcomes are or should be distributed". Researchers are central to the process of driving the research process.

Similarly, the more macro-social politics of research production are recognised in some areas. Oliver (1992), for example, highlights how many 'disabled' groups have been alienated from the research process as a result of researchers' embedded epistemological and methodological positions that fail to acknowledge the social nature of disability, and the inability of research to change the social conditions of those who engage. Research, therefore, reproduces the dominant assumptions present in wider society. Related critiques have also been highlighted in areas of gender and ethnicity (see Ashfar and Maynard, 1994; and, Reason and Rowan, 1980),

However, whilst the political and macro-social contexts of research are documented and discussed within the literature, the more micro-processes in which research is generated are less well articulated. These are the local influences and conditions in which research projects are identified, selected, and developed rather than the value-based evaluative judgements researchers make during the course of research or the collective focus and purpose of researchers. Indeed, any study needs a starting point of interest and Morse (1998) suggests that research projects can develop from a number of sources. These include: personal interest; practice knowledge; as

a result of recommendations; assigned as part of a job; and, from reading the literature and the discovery of gaps in the knowledge base.

Similarly, using empirical evidence, Platt (1976) suggests that the generation of research projects is influenced by the intellectual career of the researcher, situational determinants such as the private interests of the researcher, and, the organisation in which the researcher is located. These are dealt with in turn.

The primary public reason for the selection of a given project that Platt identifies is an intellectual interest that exists as part of a wider intellectual career. According to Platt, this intellectual career establishes expertise in particular areas of interest which in turn establishes the identity of the researcher. These intellectual careers give specific function within the academic and wider community as it helps the researcher to be identified as an expert in a particular field. Indeed, within Platt's study researchers acknowledged that research is undertaken as a requirement of a job or career development. Doing research is often a central part of an academically-based occupation and the performance of doing research is crucial in negotiating and managing the identity of 'researcher'. To be a researcher, one has to do research and the successful performance of the identity is likely to lead to career opportunities and the development of a career.

Moreover, Platt (1976) also suggests that projects can also be developed as a result of more situational determinants. These more ad-hoc influences may include the auto-biographical interests of the researcher, particular situational advantages that the researcher has according to their social circumstances, or as part of a wider political interest or awareness. Auto-biographical interests arise from previous personal experiences and result from particular situations or events that the researcher has experienced in their every-day lives. On the other hand, projects may also arise out of the situational advantages that a particular project has. This may include personal connections that allow a greater access to a particular group, or even the location of the groups in question. Further, Platt also highlights that particular projects may align with the political sympathies that the

researcher holds. Projects are developed due to an awareness of issues and orientations to particular ideologies.

Finally, Platt suggests that the organisation in which the researcher is based is also of crucial importance in generating projects and the wider interests and politics of the departments that researchers find themselves operating within will often influence the generation and selection of projects. More senior researchers within departments, for instance, often have well established research interests as well as proven methods and links that help them to mobilise research projects. This capacity to provide useful assistance can, inadvertently perhaps, direct projects, particularly where the researcher is in a more junior position. Equally, departmental research committees will often have defined, if not specific, areas of interest. Producing reports within these remits can have career advantages.

Whilst all these pressures can be relatively mild or more pronounced, Platt (1976, p 118) summarises this micro-social process by suggesting: "even where a topic is chosen quite freely the reasons for that choice may not be entirely academic ones, and that it is by no means unknown for there to be general pressures on academics to research into particular topics or fields...which relate to their personal rather than intellectual lives".

So, whilst attention in the literature has been given to the macro-processes involved in research production and the political conditions in which it is generated, relatively little discussion, empirically based or otherwise, has been given to the micro-social process of research genesis. These are the local processes under which traditional qualitative research projects are generated. Therefore, by examining how researchers reconstruct the early stages of their projects, this thesis will explore how research projects are identified, selected, and developed by researchers.

## **Getting funded: How do researchers negotiate with funding agencies?**

Generating and developing projects is, however, only the start of the research process. The vast majority of research that is carried out within the higher education sector is now funded by external bodies of some kind (Lewis, 2001). As Finer and Hundt (2001, p 3) highlight:

“Modern research practice is a far cry from the ideal-type of the dedicated scholar-scientist selflessly pursuing an independent line of inquiry in an unceasing quest for knowledge and understanding. It is a business activity: not merely in the sense that it is about securing financial backing and thence delivering to order, but in the sense that the entire intervening research operation has also, somehow, to be managed” (Finer and Hundt, 2001, p 3).

Whilst funding qualitative research within a British context is not akin to searching for the Holy Grail that has previously been portrayed as being the case in the USA (see Lidz and Ricci, 1990), qualitative researchers do not have a limitless capacity to decide what projects they would like to develop and mobilise. Increasingly, as research is more and more reliant upon attracting funding, the agendas of funding agencies influence, and even drive, the topics that are investigated by the research community (Jenkins, 2002). As a result, the research relationships that are formed within the research process stretch firmly beyond those found in the data-collection phases. Indeed, according to Finer and Hunt (2001), research is now a multi-dimensional and inter-personal process that now involves finding out about the funding priorities of funding agencies; writing proposals; liaising with other researchers; recruiting, managing, and training staff; and, writing and disseminating findings. They also go on to argue that there is little attention paid to how this achieved within the literature and how researchers negotiate and manage research relationships with funding agencies more broadly. Furthermore, Cheek (2000) highlights that any insights into the process of funding allocation, and the ways in which researchers interact with that process, remain very much outside the major focus of conventional literature. Certainly, there is very little empirically-based discussion concerning how researchers understand the development of research projects in relation to issues concerning gaining funding. Using recent literature, this section will explore the recent developments in the funding of sociological research

projects by examining the role of funding agencies within the research process and their relationship with researchers.

Funded research is research that is carried out with external financial support. According to Cheek (2000), this assistance is usually in the form of finance that goes toward the recruitment of staff or the buying out of teaching contracts, the purchase of specialist equipment, subsidising the cost of travel, as well as other expenses such as conference fees (see ESRC, 2002, as an example).

This financial assistance, Lewis (2000) argues, is typically gained from one of four sources within the social sciences: higher education funding councils, such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); research councils, such as the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC); charitable foundations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), Nuffield, and the Leverhulme trust; and, work commissioned by governmental departments such as the NHS, and local government agencies (see also, Zagury, 1995). Whilst the higher education funding councils still provide a huge amount of finance toward the wider funding of higher education institutions, this money is now predominantly seen as a means of providing for the basic research infrastructure in universities but for little more than that. It is likely that whilst such an infrastructure does provide the means to publish some forms of research, it is increasingly unlikely that substantive projects result from such sources (see HEFCE, 2005). Therefore, the remainder of the present discussion, and subsequent study, will exclude such forms of funding.

Lewis (2001) goes on to argue that such public (and occasionally private) bodies fund research in order to find something out that has direct relevance to them. From such an instrumental perspective, funding research is a means to an end with the knowledge that is produced being useful and beneficial to the particular funding agency in question.

Whilst this has, perhaps, always been the case for charitable organisations who fund research, such as JRF, developments in recent years have seen research councils becoming more and more orientated toward the utility of

research. Indeed, various forms of public funding for research are increasingly dependent upon whether it will make a contribution to the economy (Rappert, 1997). As Solesbury (2001) comments:

“the research charities like the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Nuffield Foundation have increasingly adopted an instrumental view of research, gearing it to their social priorities. And the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has been subjected to the demands of government science policy that views academic research as a means to economic and social development much more than as a cultural end in itself” (Solesbury, 2001, p 4).

In 2000, the then Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, made a clear call for the social sciences to be more responsive to the needs of society and not directed toward an ideology that paraded as intellectual inquiry or critique (Blunkett, 2000). This clearly positioned the government’s desire for funding agencies to fund projects under a social engineering model of social science research rather than an enlightenment one (see Hammersley, 1995). Too many researchers, Blunkett argued, preferred to “work on questions of little interest to those outside the research community. There is a danger of too much concentration on the micro level - what is the point of research which becomes narrower and narrower, with small groups of people responding to each other’s writing in esoteric journals, read only by themselves and relevant only to themselves?” (Blunkett, cited in Hodgkinson, 2000, p 9.4).

Despite this criticism being simplistic, largely problematic, and based on a rather out-dated conception of what social research can and cannot do (see Hodgkinson, 2001, for a response, and Stehr, 1996, for further discussion), research that falls into the engineering canon of social research *is* increasingly popular with funding agencies. The ESRC, despite being a formally independent organisation, places an emphasis upon research that meets the needs of users to enhance the United Kingdom’s competitiveness and their priorities reflect both the research community and the user

community. Indeed, over ten years ago, Rappert (1997) provided some empirical evidence that demonstrated a shift to a user-orientated approach for projects that were funded by the ESRC, a trend that is only likely to have grown. Certainly, 'what works', user-involvement, and evidence-based practice, all place an emphasis on the relevance and usefulness of research knowledge and are all current buzzwords within the social sciences.

This emphasis on commissioned research within academia is, however, not without problems. Grinyer (1999) highlights that academic freedom and independence within such contract research can quickly become compromised, with funding agencies steering projects and results toward more desirable results and representations (see Horowitz, 1967; and, Kobben and Tromp, 1999, for examples). Similarly, bias is frequently cited as a likely result of contract work as more awkward research questions are likely to be avoided in favour of research problems that are more responsive to the super-ordinate funding agency's own agenda (see Becker, 1967). Indeed, the inductive nature of qualitative research that emphasises exploration of broad areas is unpredictable in its very conception and is, perhaps, more likely to be avoided in favour of deductive projects that are much less likely to produce uncontrolled results.

Traditionally within the literature, this 'engineering' approach to research with a prescribed instrumental use is contrasted with enlightenment, disciplinary, pure, and so-called blue-skies, research:

"Here the goal of research is to contribute to knowledge in a particular discipline, with abstract theoretical knowledge being given priority. While research is seen as ultimately making a contribution to practice, that contribution is not intended to be very immediate or specific. What is involved is the production of general- purpose knowledge, which is valued as much for its own sake as for any instrumental value it has. Findings are simply put into the academic public domain for others to use: as, when and if they wish" (Hammersley, 1995, p 125)

Enlightenment research is characterised by its sociological interest and purpose, rather than having a more outward looking and prescriptive use. This 'pure' research, as it is often characterised, is researcher orientated with the researcher generating the research questions and mobilising and driving projects, with the product of research being produced for a research-based audience.

This distinction between pure and applied, enlightenment and engineering, is problematic, and perhaps, misleading. Any binary distinctions are liable to force projects into problematic positions. Indeed, beyond the problem of what actually constitutes research, there are many differing forms of research within both the enlightenment and engineering canons (see Pawson, 2003, for a brief review). Similarly, as has been suggested, the terrain in which research is funded and the discourse in which it is produced has changed dramatically in recent years and this has further blurred any distinctions to what research is 'applied' and what research is 'pure'.

Instead of distinguishing between pure and applied, Lewis (2001), a former director of research at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, identifies two modes of research production within these more recent forms of research production: these are the strong and weak user models. Within the strong user model, which mirrors more participatory and action paradigms, the researcher is a partner within the research process who offers skills and expertise to those who wish to engage with research. They themselves become co-researchers who set the agenda for research on an equal basis. The weak user mode of research, however, is described by Lewis as a process that includes: the identification of topic by the researcher; the case for the usefulness is presented (by researchers), and an assessment made upon the scientific and relevance of the project (by other researchers); funding is granted; token inclusion of users; and, a book is published that runs to a few hundred copies. Lewis goes on to argue that whilst purporting to be bridging old divides, this weak model is centrally located within the academic research environment as it is primarily serving the needs of academic researchers due to the traditional, and largely science-based, approach to presenting research findings.

Most university-based research, she goes on to argue, is conducted from this weak user position due to the over-arching structural requirements of modern university life. The primary measure of research quality within such institutions is the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and, according to Lewis (2001), such a measure necessarily constructs what quality means within a research context with the result that researchers, who inevitably have more than a degree of self-interest, pursue such a model. With an emphasis upon outputs of research that are presented in peer-reviewed articles, journals and books, such a measure has largely ignored 'relevance' in favour of researcher-orientated publications (see Wellington and Torgerson, 2005, for further discussion). Those institutions that demonstrate success in these areas then go on to generate further funding due to a 'halo' effect that sees them receiving higher research ratings and thus attracting higher levels of funding. All of which further reinforces the need to publish in scholarly journals (Willmott, 2003).

Indeed, Oakley (2004) argues, universities are dedicated to their own survival as much as researchers are to their careers. She goes on to argue that in accepting the current intellectual culture that is against a more rigorous engineering agenda, funding agencies, in particular the ESRC, are complicit in legitimating the current status quo of a weak user model by not demanding more useful research.

These recent developments in the funding of social science and sociological research are, perhaps, indicative of a tension within the relationship between the funding of research and the production of it. Indeed, researchers have to negotiate and manage the need to be seen to be useful by funding agencies on one hand, and the need to produce and publish researcher-orientated research on the other. Therefore, by examining how researchers negotiate and manage their relationships with funding agencies, this thesis will explore these dilemmas by exploring how researchers construct the generation and development of their research projects, and how they subsequently represent them as useful and relevant in the eyes of funding agencies in order to achieve funding.

## **Access gatekeepers: Facilitating contact between researchers and research groups**

Once funding has been achieved, a new set of problems arises for the researcher as the project begins the transition from the pre-data collection phase of research to the data collection. Central to accomplishing this transition is gaining access to the target research group. Indeed, researchers frequently "have to negotiate access to the settings, groups or people they study" if projects are to proceed (Hammersley, 1995, p 109).

Hornsby-Smith (1993) argues that there are two methods of gaining this access. Overt methods are those in which the researcher makes themselves known as a researcher to those engaged within the research process. Covert methods, on the other hand, are those in which the researcher identity is not revealed to those the researcher is investigating. Similarly, the institutions to which access is being sought are either open or closed. Closed institutions are those institutions that require proprietary access and have substantial barriers to prevent outsiders from entering. These barriers can be physical, bureaucratic, or social. As a result, these institutions are private rather than public and examples include social service departments, educational institutions and private organisations. Open institutions, on the other hand, have few barriers and are relatively open to access for outsiders. Hornsby-Smith suggests that public places such as parks or football matches can be considered open institutions as there are few restrictions on those who wish to participate.

Whilst such distinctions between overt and covert, and open and closed institutions, are analytically useful, they are somewhat context dependent. A football match, for instance may be relatively open, but access to a particular football hooligan group may be much more closed (see Armstrong, 1999, for instance). However, within the child and families research arena, like the social sciences more generally, covert methods are increasingly difficult to justify in the context of current ethical administration and practice. Hence, the vast majority of research is overt and the remainder of this discussion will focus upon work where the researcher is known as a researcher to those they are attempting to access. Similarly, areas of open access are less likely

to require facilitation by gatekeepers and the discussion presented below is primarily concerned with institutions that are not readily publicly accessible. Therefore, this section of the literature review will examine the nature and function of access gatekeepers within research that employs overt methods in closed settings, and attempt to map out their motivations for engaging with research.

In order to get access to target research groups within closed research sites, researchers often make reference to the presence of gatekeepers with whom access to such groups is negotiated. Typically, gatekeepers are described as the individuals, groups, and organisations that act as intermediaries between researchers and research groups. According to De Laine (2000), for example, gatekeepers are those who have the power to grant or withhold access to people required for the purposes of research. Their role may be to allow researchers into a given environment, or it may go further in providing the necessary means to gain access in terms of support or backing for the research project. Such access gatekeepers includes schools (Heath et al, 2007), social service departments (Clark and Sinclair, 2008), health trusts (Horwood and Moon, 2003), community groups (Tidmarsh et al, 2003), as well as the professionals, managers, and workers who are embedded within institutions. Similarly, regional and national organisations, such as governmental departments or other organisations, such as the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), can also have access gate-keeping functions as they often act as a stamp of approval for projects. This is particularly useful when they are held in high regard by the research groups or other gatekeepers.

However, as Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert (2007) point out, gatekeepers are situational and they can vary according to the context of the research. For instance, members of the research group itself can be considered gatekeepers, particularly where snowball sampling techniques are used as they may provide the details of other members of the research group as well as facilitating trust between researchers and other research group members (Homan, 2001). Access gatekeepers, therefore, have a relational quality that is relative to the research context and the research group being sought.

Rather than offering a definition of the term, Corra and Willer (2002) use a functional analysis in order to reveal the theoretical properties of a gatekeeper. Using Network Exchange Theory, they argue that a gatekeeper is present where an individual or group controls access to a benefit being sought by a client that is independent to both the gatekeeper and the client. However, in order to access the particular benefit, the client must use the gatekeeper as they control the flow to that benefit. Gatekeepers, therefore, control the access to the benefits that are required by prospective clients and they operate as switchmen who actively decide whether clients can pursue, and gain access to, these benefits.

Using this functional analysis, gatekeepers are omnipresent within the research process. Funding agencies, ethics committees, the individuals and organisations used for access or more general information provision, and even the research group themselves all have gate-keeping functions and interests. The researcher needs to negotiate with them all in order to secure the relative benefits for the project. However, applying this in the context of gaining access, which is where the vast majority of gate-keeping discussion is directed, access gatekeepers are likely where the research group in question is not approached directly by researchers and instead an intermediary is used in order to facilitate the required access to the target group. It is this independence from the target research group that distinguishes an access gatekeeper from, for example, a key informant. Where key informants will provide information that will be used in the end product of the research project, access gatekeepers are largely independent to the research group and will not provide the information or material that constitutes the information required for the data-collection phase of research (see Miller and Bell, 2002). Similarly, access gatekeepers need to be distinguished from formal organisations that constitute the substantive focus of the project. Whilst gatekeepers are often formal organisations, where the organisation itself is the focus of the study, rather than providing access to the research group, the organisation ceases to be an access gatekeeper and is instead the research group.

So, where researchers do not have any direct links to those they seek to engage, access gatekeepers offer a means of bridging the gap to the target group. Researchers are often unable to bridge the access gaps themselves

for a number of reasons. They may not have the time or funding to develop links themselves, they may lack the specialist knowledge required to find such groups, or they may lack the requisite identities to bridge these gaps. For example, Heath et al (2007, p 415) suggest that it is much more efficient for a researcher to seek access to institutions where they are likely to find a large volume of potential participants, even where the topics that they are interested in have little relevance to that institution. Where funding is limited, access gatekeepers provide an efficient and expedient method of access. Emmel et al (2007, p 3.4), in their research on access to socially excluded groups, highlight the necessity for a bridge that would help them to communicate with the research group: "There are few similarities of experience and no network connections between us, as researchers, and the socially excluded people in the low income neighbourhood we wished to access". With little commonality with the research group, other routes of access were required in order to facilitate the trust necessary to form more productive research relationships. Gatekeepers offer an expedient means of achieving this.

Cassell (1988) further articulates these difficulties of access by distinguishing between physical access and social access. Where physical access refers to the ability to make contact with the research group, social access is concerned with gaining social acceptance within the research group itself. In the first instance the gatekeeper is often in control of physical access to the research groups and will give permission to proceed and provide the necessary information for contact to be made. However, physical access does not ensure social access and having material contact with a group is not the same as being accepted by it (see Wallis, 1977; Burgess, 1984; and Adler and Adler, 1987). Indeed, trust, rapport, and credibility are all frequently highlighted as being important in facilitating research relationships (see Sixsmith et al, 2003, for example). Whilst positive relationship attributes are negotiated and maintained in the face to face interaction between researcher and research group, where there are pre-existing positive relationships between the access gatekeeper and the research group, these can be used (or exploited) by the researcher to facilitate the social access to the target groups. Gatekeepers, therefore, not only offer a solution to problems of contacting the research groups, but also a means of developing more productive research relationships with them.

Using their work on socially excluded groups, Emmel et al (2007) provide a typology of the features of gatekeepers on a continuum from formal to informal that, in part, reflects this distinction between physical access and social access. They use a three-fold typology to describe the attributes of different forms of gatekeepers: formal gatekeepers, informal gatekeepers, and comprehensive gatekeepers. Formal gatekeepers are those that work with the research group in question to provide a specific and formally recognised end, perhaps in a control, supervisory, or rehabilitative capacity. However, formal gatekeepers typically have vertical power relationships with the group in question and as a result of their formally driven and often short-term nature the relationships are often characterised by distrust between the group and the gatekeeper. As a result, whilst the physical access that formal gatekeepers provide may be good, the facilitative nature of these gatekeepers in terms of social access is often limited.

Informal gatekeepers, however, lack formal aims and only have limited links to more formally organised service providers. Typically, they use their own resources to address what they perceive to be the needs of those they work with and this is often their primary aim and interest. These gatekeepers will have long-standing links with the community in question and are usually embedded within it. As a result, relationships between informal gatekeepers and the community are characterised by friendship, support, protection, and even parenting. Due to their strong and trusting relationships with the research group, informal gatekeepers are highly facilitative of social access. However, due to their embedded nature they can themselves be difficult to locate and physical access may be problematic in the first instance. Similarly, due to their close links, and an ethics of protection, they are often wary of allowing engagement unless it can be shown to be beneficial to the group in question. These benefits are typically characterised by immediate and local concerns rather than delayed or generalised benefit.

Comprehensive gatekeepers, on the other hand, have a specific remit to address within the population to which they employ workers in order to achieve that remit. This type of gatekeeper may include drug-workers, health workers, and other assorted organisations. With long-standing links to the

community, these gatekeepers spend much time within the research site and a considerable level of trust characterises their relationships with the research group. As a result, they offer good levels of physical access, as well as some level of social access. However, this social access can be limited due to their formal obligations that differentiate them from the group in question.

Therefore, different gatekeepers have different relationships with the research group and they provide different types of access to that group. These relationships then influence the subsequent relationships that are initially formed between the researchers and the research group. Whilst formal gatekeepers may be able to facilitate physical access, social access is often limited. Informal gatekeepers, however, can provide much more productive levels of social access, but they themselves are often difficult to locate. Comprehensive gatekeepers, on the other hand, are much more visible and can provide some level of social access.

In light of this discussion, it is apparent that without the co-operation of access gatekeepers research opportunities in some areas would be limited due to the increases in time, expense and energy that is required to carry it out (Emmel et al, 2007). Therefore, access gatekeepers have an important function within the research process. However, due to this function, access gatekeepers also potentially occupy a powerful position within the research process. Indeed, as Corra and Willer (2002) demonstrate, where the benefits are exclusively connected to the access gatekeeper, there is a strong power structure in favour of the gatekeeper, as they control who can, and who cannot access the required group. As a result of this structural power, gatekeepers have the potential to require clients to incur obligations and concessions in order to access the benefits. Therefore, in order for a client to gain access to the benefits, a pay-off to the gatekeeper is frequently necessary.

Due to this structural advantage, access gatekeepers can, therefore, exert influence over the research process. This may be by insisting on particular methodologies or outputs, or by shaping the engagement of particular research groups (see Miller and Bell, 2002, for instance). Indeed, Broadhead and Rist (1976) argue that the pivotal concern for the gatekeeper lies within

what benefits the research can offer the agency in question or the particular careers of the gatekeeper or managers. The researcher must convince those in control of the access switch that there is some benefit either to them or their organisation if access is to be facilitated. They go on to argue that the type of benefits that the gatekeeper will be interested in will concern either the organisation itself, in terms of its public image, perhaps, or the operational and management of the organisation, for example how it can increase its capacity to achieve its aims and objectives. The gatekeeper may include insisting on particular methodologies, ethical pre-conditions, or the selection of particular participants that conform to their needs rather than that of the researchers or the wider population (Emmel et al, 2007).

According to such an analysis, unless an individual gatekeeper has a specific interest in research (see Burgess, 1984, for example), there is often a limited pay-off in allowing 'pure' academic researchers' access to the research group. Indeed, using empirical evidence, Corra and Willer (2002) demonstrate that the size of such pay-offs is determined by the value of access granted to their clients. The more value the access provides for the client, the bigger the obligation and subsequent pay-off.

At first glance, this structural advantage may seem to favour the access gatekeeper. However, Corra and Willer (2002) also provide evidence to suggest that when acting individually, the ability of gate-keepers to gain pay-offs is diminished as clients will try to avoid substantial pay-offs and seek alternative gatekeepers where the obligations are lower. Therefore, when operating at an individual level, the ability to maximise benefit from engagement, and any subsequent influence on research, is threatened. In order to negate this, the necessary response from alternative gate-keepers is to organise and form a coalition that creates a shared monopoly and the opportunity to increase those obligations. This is particularly relevant in the context of research given the recent advances in research ethics within some areas of child and family research and the prevailing conditions of granting access may be changing from individualised responses to more collectivised ones. Indeed, there is some evidence that a by-product of the national research governance framework currently being applied within health and social care is a more collectivised response to research enquires from social care departments (Clark and Sinclair, 2008). Uniform approaches to ethical

administration are having an effect upon the research that access gatekeepers engage with and the essential tension that exists between researchers and access gatekeepers may be shifting in favour of the gatekeeper in areas of social care.

Hornsby-Smith (1993), however, argues that a simple exchange approach to engagement is problematic as there are a large number of factors that could facilitate the engagement of gatekeepers, as well as a number of factors that do not support it. These are not necessarily immediately tangible or even articulated by either party. Access gatekeepers do not necessarily seek immediate gratification and decisions are not necessarily made on straightforward rational calculations made by the researcher, access gatekeeper, or research group. Indeed, issues of risk, cost, and trust have also been highlighted as important in the researcher-access gatekeeper relationship.

In terms of risk, Horwood and Moon (2002) highlight how the researcher is external and independent to the particular gatekeeper, therefore, their presence constitutes a potential risk to that individual, group, or organisation. The researcher is often a relatively uncontrolled element in an otherwise highly structured environment. Any non-positive outcomes for the access gatekeeper, therefore, need to be assessed and negotiated if access is to be achieved. These may include legal concerns (Munro et al, 2005); issues of representation (see Brewer, 1993); unwanted intrusions (see Curran and Cook, 1993); concerns for the privacy of those engaged (see Murray, 2005); and even harm to the gatekeeper or those associated with it (see Kennedy Bergen, 1993).

Somewhat problematically, these risks are not immediately tangible or applicable in every case and the perception of risk is highly subjective. What is perceived as a risky venture for one gatekeeper may not be considered risky for another (Lee and Renzetti, 1993). Broadhead and Rist (1976), for example, highlight how research is often critical of bureaucracies and organisational practice. Research can come into conflict with the representations that the gatekeeper may wish to make and the sensitivities they wish to preserve. However, not every research setting will be

particularly sensitive to, or discouraging of, such critique and intrusion. For example, the baseline assessment exercise within social care that aimed to map the range research that is conducted within social service departments found a wide variety of different levels of research activity and willingness to provide access in what are similar environments with similar concerns (see Boddy et al, 2006, for a review).

At a more practical level, non-engagement may be explained on the more material levels of lack of time, resource, and disruption to the individual or organisation. Din and Cullingford (2004), for example highlight how the community centres they approached declined to engage and cited a lack of resource and time as a reason. Similarly, Munro et al (2005) argue how research engagement within social service departments is on top of, and not part of, workloads. Finding information, providing links, answering queries, and approaching the research group in question, all divert resources away the central aims of the organisation. Moreover, within organisations good lines of communication are often needed to ensure that staff are aware of the research project and researchers. Failure to give up-dated information can cause disruption for all concerned. Even where a point of contact is established to support engagement, the staff member has to be paid for by the gatekeeper. Gatekeepers have their own primary interests that they need to pursue. This may, or may not, include research engagement. Indeed, research engagement can be particularly disruptive in organisations that act as access gatekeepers where clear lines of communication, administration, and enough resource are needed to facilitate access.

Additionally, previous experience of research engagement can influence decisions concerning whether to engage or not. Sanghera and Tharpar-Björkert (2007), for example, have documented how over-researching can occur where potential gatekeepers deny access to research groups due to a fatigue caused by their involvement in other projects. This fatigue is often compounded where researchers are perceived to 'parachute in' and leave once the data-collection phases of research have been completed and are never heard from again. A failure to give feedback contributes to feelings of distrust between marginalised communities and researchers as those who had previously engaged became worried about how their data is being used and by whom. Similarly, a recent review of the literature within the social

care field concluded that “social care practitioners and managers feel that research is often producer driven and distant from their own local needs” (Walter et al, 2004, p 19). Hence engagement can be curtailed unless it can be shown to have tangible benefit. The problem here, and as Johnson (1976) suggests, is that researchers are prone to promising what they need to in order to gain access. Where this is not delivered, and there are no perceived benefits from engagement, then future engagements are threatened.

To summarise, access gatekeepers have an important position within the research process as they provide more efficient and expedient routes to potential research groups that would otherwise be difficult to access. However, access gatekeepers have their own priorities, aims, and interests. This does not necessarily include research engagement. Indeed, engagement can be disruptive and costly to those who choose to support access. Therefore, assuming such access gatekeepers are not completely altruistic, then there must be some supporting mechanisms that encourage their engagement. Whilst some research does explore the problems and the effects gatekeepers can have on research and research ethics (see Homan, 2001; Mauthner and Miller, 2002; France, 2004; Heath et al, 2007), little work has been directed in assessing the motivations for engagement, not to mention their potential reasons for non-engagement. Similarly, given that access gatekeepers have some structural power advantage within the research process, it is somewhat surprising that there has been little work that has explored how researchers select the gatekeepers that they use in order to access research groups in order to negotiate any obstacles. Therefore, this thesis will attempt to explore how researchers perceive the roles and functions of research engagement for access gatekeepers and how they select and negotiate engagement with them. It will do this by exploring how researchers understand the motivations of both engagement and non-engagement for these access gatekeepers.

## **Research groups and the research process: Supporting engagement, challenges to engagement, and the role of ethics**

Once a project has been selected and developed, and funding and access have been secured, the project then moves into the data-collection phases of the research process. This involves negotiating and managing relationships with the target research group in order to obtain the necessary data that will form the basis of the study. Typically, those who are integral in these data collection parts of the research process are commonly termed subjects, participants, or respondents. They are the ones who are *subjected* to the research, who *participate* in the research, and *respond* to its demands. However research groups are described, and each term is loaded with epistemological assumptions that suggest more passive or active forms of engagement, the experience of engaging is rarely neutral or passively consumed. As Hammersley (1995, p 112) highlights, "research has material effects....People's lives may be affected by being researched, and by being in a context that is affected by research findings. And these effects may be for good or for ill, and can run through the whole gamut of more complex combinations and possibilities that lies between those two extremes."

Whilst the current reflexive environment has resulted in researchers being increasingly aware that research is researcher-driven and often directed toward their needs, this does not mean that those who engage are passively being acted upon. Punch (1994; pp 93), for example, highlights how he became increasingly aware during his field research "of the manipulative element in the relationships built in the field". Research groups do not idly comply with the requests of researchers, but have considerable powers of self-determination and autonomy.

Indeed, at an individual level the experience of research engagement is actively experienced and negotiated by both researchers and those research groups who engage. For instance, Hyman (1954, p 50) highlights how engagement is not necessarily positive: "I didn't want to be interviewed. Naturally, if she's walking her feet off I'll help her out....Not that I saw any point in the interview....This here interview thing is a bunch of \*\*\*\*". Similarly, speaking of their father's engagement in Street Corner Society, Doc's sons, suggest ".....that book ruined my father's life." (cited in Boelen, 1992; p 35). On the other hand, Ralph Orlandella, speaking of his engagement in the same study suggests:

“Probably most important to me was the realization that in reality our poor immigrant parents and children had enough guts and drive to overcome the pains of prejudice when they were beaten down under the brunt of a great historical injustice and refused to be suffocated by oppression, which was then bound to almost every facet of corporate and personal politics” (cited in Whyte, 1983; p 365).

At more collective and organisational levels, Cohen and Taylor (1977) report that their access to the inmates of prison was withheld when the prison authorities realised that the project was likely to be sympathetic toward the prisoners. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the project was viewed favourably by the prisoners themselves. In contrast, Hunt (1981), a participant in Miller and Gwyne’s (1978) government commissioned study of disabled care entitled ‘A Life Apart’, argues that whilst the researchers operated under the guise of being objective and detached they were essentially ‘on their own side’ and acted against the residents’ interests. According to Hunt, the ‘balanced’ researchers never allowed themselves to engage with the residents resulting in a blinkered approach that was heavily biased in favour of the researchers’ own research agenda. To make matters worse, Hunt also argues that whilst the researchers often basked in their own reflections of how the research was emotionally demanding they were ignoring the interests of the residents who were often constrained in their relationships and general social interaction by the petty rules of the institution.

So, whether at individual, collective, or organisational levels, those who engage in the data collection phases are actively experiencing, negotiating and maintaining the research relationship themselves. Therefore, a key issue in successfully negotiating the relationship between researchers and the research group is in assessing the motivations and experiences of those who are, and those who are not, willing to become engaged with the data-collection phases of research. This section will explore how researchers understand, negotiate, and maintain relationships with those who are integral in the data collection parts of the research process. Beginning with a discussion of the mechanisms that support engagement, the section will go on to explore the factors that challenge engagement, and finally explore the

ethical discourse that governs engagement with those who engage within data collection phases of research.

### **Supporting mechanisms for research engagement**

Engaging with qualitative research is non-compulsory. As Hammersley (1995, p 109) highlights, "participation is almost always voluntary; sanctions against those who refuse to comply are not usually available, and even if they are they will not usually be used". Van Maanen (1991) further suggests that researchers engaged in fieldwork do not offer much in the way of value for those who are studied and there are few, if any, compelling reasons for people to engage. Therefore, the amount of co-operation that those who engage often go to is, perhaps, surprising when the actual demands of being researched are taken into account. Those who engage with research frequently invite the researcher into their home or organisation at some disruption to their everyday or professional schedules and reveal material that could potentially be highly sensitive to them or just plain downright dull (Sigelman, 1982). However, as Bulmer (1982; p 3) somewhat dramatically suggests "no-one gives anything away for nothing, especially the truth". Given that substantial forms of payment are rare in social research (see ESRC, 2002, p 11, for example), and presuming that everyone who agrees to be a part of a project is not completely altruistic, then there must be some mechanisms that support engagement.

Within a survey context, Morton-Williams (1993) contends that respondents have two basic motivations for responding to requests for research. These are extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsically motivated respondents engage due to the survey being of inherent interest or value. Intrinsically motivated respondents, on the other hand, respond due to an interest in the interviewer or the interview process. Essentially, the project either appeals to the respondent because of the subject of the research, or the involvement results from a quality of the research process. Groves et al (1992) go further to suggest that respondents make systematic decisions concerning engagement that include an assessment of their ability to engage. Therefore, decisions are based on rational assessments of their interest, time, energy and capacity to engage, as well as more heuristic impressions that are based upon their reaction to the interviewer, previous experiences, and other situational cues such as interviewer characteristics. Other mechanisms that

may support these decisions to engage with research include; favourable recommendations from trusted professionals, altruism and a desire to help others and the researcher, having 'nothing to lose', and the therapeutic aspects of interviewing (see Peel et al, 2006).

Within more qualitative and sociological contexts, Warwick (1982) suggests four separate benefits of engaging with research: self-expression, self-satisfaction, curiosity, and utility. Firstly, Warwick argues that social research often gives participants an opportunity for self-expression and people will often derive satisfaction from having had the chance to express an opinion in subjects that they have an interest in. Oakley (1981), for instance, has highlighted that many of the pregnant women she talked to during the course of her study actually found the process therapeutic. Indeed, according to evidence provided by Wiles et al (2005), researchers often have to face the perception that research engagement will provide some sort of therapy.

Closely related to this, Warwick (1982) also suggests people may also find satisfaction in sharing important events associated with their lives with a sympathetic listener. He goes on to argue that the twelve men that eventually became aware of their preceding involvement in Humphreys' notorious 'watch-queen' study later agreed to be interviewed about their past experiences with full knowledge of the study's purpose because the men found it helpful to discuss their lives with an outsider. For Warwick, engagement can produce a cathartic response in speaking about negative events, or a certain pleasure or pride in recounting experiences or events that they are particularly proud of or events they want others to be aware of. This is likely to be enhanced if there is the suggestion that their involvement may have some effect on people similar to themselves (see Grinyer and Thomas, 2001).

Thirdly, Warwick (1982) argues that people may engage with research to satisfy a curiosity about research or to alleviate boredom. According to Whyte (1983), Doc, a high school drop-out, must have found his involvement with Whyte's research as a rare and highly interesting opportunity. The very fact of being asked to participate in or facilitate research may produce a positive reaction as elements of one's life or work is important enough for

study. As Cassell (1978; pp 138) highlights: "we all like to be found interesting".

Finally Warwick (1982) argues that engagement may lead to insights that are useful, helpful, or rewarding to those who engage. At an individual level this may lead to comments like 'that was interesting, I've never really thought about those issues before' (see Hyman et al, 1954), while Ralph Orndella, a key participant in Whyte's Street Corner Society, used the experience to assist in his own career development, and directly attribute his success to his involvement (see Whyte, 1983).

Further, engaging with research on an individual level can often have other material benefits that enhance the utility of engagement. Liebow (1967) for example, drove members of the research group to various appointments when they could not afford the taxi fare. Similarly, Abrahams (1970) lent his tape recorder to those he engaged to help them rehearse music, as well as to impress female friends. At a more organisational level, Burgess (1989), reports that the headmaster of the school he was researching perceived that his experience of education and university could be of advantage to the school.

Crozier (2003, p 86) contends that it is this utility that often drives engagement and that those who engage must be both convinced that there is something "in it for them" and that the researcher is willing to deliver something that is acceptable. Crozier (2003) highlights two studies, one by Fine et al (2000) and one by Crozier (2001) where black families, believing in the transformative power of research, thought that participation could improve the lives of their (and presumably other) children.

Indeed, research engagement is often advanced by researchers who use the rhetoric of both improvement and empowerment to either encourage or justify engagement with research (see Patel, 2005). In these situations, groups that are often assumed to be marginalised from a local or national discourse to which they are associated are given representation within that discourse through research engagement. This is often in the hope that

experience, practice or policy will change. According to Beresford (2005), such empowerment can be either personal or political. Personal empowerment refers to the strengthening of an individual's position by helping to develop skills, confidence, and ability to assert power. Political empowerment, on the other hand, refers to the ability to change the economic, cultural, social conditions of a particular group. Central to both forms of this empowerment is the acquisition and redistribution of power through research engagement. Warren et al (2003), for example, in their research concerning the health of older women report that communities that felt they were under-researched were very keen to participate in their study as it offered them a forum to articulate the voices of the women within them. Research engagement was, therefore, seen to help the groups empower themselves.

Within more collective contexts, the supporting mechanisms may also include the development of skills, practical utility, and facilitating desired or prescribed outcomes. Firstly, engagement can be supported through the development of skills that people who engage may acquire during the course of engagement which can then be further utilized by the individual or organisation. For example, Mountain (2003) suggests that positive outcomes of engagement were achieved with a group of older women involved in the European Older Women's Project (see Nuffield Institute for Health, 1997) due to their direct involvement as researchers in the project and their subsequent development of research skills. Secondly, the presence of a researcher can have a practical utility to the organisation. Burgess (1984) for example, highlights how he often found himself 'on trial' in the school where he was conducting his research until he demonstrated that his presence had a practical advantage for those around him. In this particular case this included helping out with administrative tasks and even covering classes. Finally, research may reveal ways of improving current services or policies. Engaging with research can help to contribute to more effective and efficient ways of working, thus leading to a better use of funds. For example, Fielding (1981), in his research on the National Front, found little resistance from the senior members of the group because they thought an objective researcher would help to dispel some of the myths around the party and its practices. Similarly, within a social care context Clark and Sinclair (2008) provide evidence to suggest that a number of social care departments base their decisions on

whether to engage with research on the ability of the project to contribute to the services they provide. Indeed, they go on to provide evidence to suggest that the main motivation of many departments to engage with research is in the hope that it will help them to improve services.

Whatever the motivation, and as highlighted above, those who are preparing to engage must believe that the researcher and the research engagement will be able to meet their expectations, or at least not expose them to problematic levels of risk, whatever these may be. Therefore, trust is often a crucial mediator in the relationship between the researcher and those who engage. Indeed, trust is often highlighted within the literature as a key mediating variable in the research relationship. Crozier (2001; pp 86), for example, highlights that whilst trust is directed to the collective abstraction in the first instance, it is the individual researcher who must negotiate trust. It is "only through the direct human contact that the researched can assess the integrity of the researcher". In many instances, Fielding (1982) argues that liking will precede and facilitate trust and it is this that forms the basis for many a research relationship. Finch (1981) for instance highlights that without the personal engagement with those she was working with, and without the successful completion of what can loosely be termed initiation rights, she would never have gained the access to the data that she required.

Closely related to this process of trust negotiation are issues of credibility and endorsement. In a clinical field, Willison et al (2003), has found some evidence to suggest that patients were concerned about giving their consent to participate in research funded by industry and the government. Funding by charitable foundations evoked the least concern. Similarly, Heywood et al (1995) has also found evidence to demonstrate that better response rates to survey requests amongst GP's could be achieved if the legitimacy and credibility of the research is increased. Endorsement from trusted professionals was one method of achieving this (see also Peel et al, 2006). Whilst these are clinical examples and not social ones, it does highlight how those researched respond differently to differing institutions wanting to conduct research. Credibility and legitimacy as independent and non-exploitative researchers appears to be important to some research groups.

To summarise, research groups are those groups within the research process that actually provide both the focus for the research and the information that will eventually help to constitute the research analysis. However, research engagement does have an impact on those who engage and it is both researchers and the research groups who actively constitute and negotiate the relationships that are formed within the research process. Those who engage with research, therefore, have their own motivations for sustaining those relationships. Therefore, this thesis will aim to systematically develop this literature by exploring how researchers perceive the functions of research for research groups by examining how they construct and understand the supporting mechanisms that motivate and facilitate research engagement.

### **Challenges to engagement: Refusal and the right to withdraw**

However, not all research relationships will be sustained, nor will they necessarily have a positive impact. Central to all modern disciplinary codes of ethics is a prescription that research engagement is both non-compulsory and non-coercive. The Nuremberg Code and the subsequent versions of the Declaration of Helsinki (WMA, 1964) that many social science disciplines embrace have helped to ensure that engagement with research is voluntary. Refusal to engage and the right to withdraw from research are core requirements of these codes of ethics. This means that exclusion from research can be self-determined and is, theoretically at least, acceptable for all research group types and at all stages of the research process. Engagement is dependent upon those who want to engage.

Therefore, target research groups can either refuse to engage with the research process at the point of entry, or withdraw from the process once an initial agreement has been met. Conceptually, this means that challenges to the research process can either prevent an agreement from being achieved in the first place, or, result in a de-alignment between the researcher and the research group after an initial agreement has been achieved. This section will assess the literature concerning these challenges to engagement.

Of course, it is often difficult to explore empirically these challenges to engagement as where the difficulties have been significant, research groups

are unlikely to still be engaged with research. As a result, their experiences will often go unarticulated and systematic investigation of such disengaged groups is problematic. However, Van Maanen (1991) highlights how certain patrolmen rejected his efforts to engage them, citing unwanted intrusion, lack of interest, lack of a perceived useful outcome, and questions concerning the research problem being investigated. Similarly, Shaw (2005) suggests that engagement can be challenged by suspicion, bashfulness, shame, and fear.

Within the context of research with children and young people, Murray (2005) reports that the myriad of gate-keepers involved with children often prevent them engaging with research. The reasons offered for this non-engagement include: protection from over-exposure to research; the children are 'too young'; repeated interviews for court proceedings or therapy has caused fatigue; research engagement might be damaging and the situation is 'too sensitive'; the research host or child are 'too busy'; the change in routine would be unhelpful; too many communication difficulties; and finally, that engagement would disrupt placements, both fragile and successful. Similarly, a lack of control over their engagement with the research process is also suggested as challenging. Hence, a more involving and interesting methodology can also be particularly facilitative of engagement. However, Murray also provides some evidence to suggest that this cannot be necessarily assumed and, in certain studies, the more straightforward interview approaches were preferable and feedback from those who chose to engage is often necessary.

Examining the issues of lay involvement in health research, where the barriers to engagement have been more systematically examined, Baxter et al (2001) highlight a number of issues that can act as barriers to engagement. These include: inadvertent exclusion and the problem of not being asked, particularly in cases where professional or other organised groups are involved at an access stage; lack of previous experience; difficulties with language; power differentials between researchers and 'researched'; lack of relevance; and, fear of consequences of involvement. Moreover, they also highlight that engagement takes time and the costs associated with that engagement can often be deemed too high to make engagement worthwhile. For instance, a failure to provide crèche facilities,

lack of transport, and recovery of expenses, can all contribute to the disengagement of young single mothers. Equally, if engagements are perceived to be particularly lengthy, then problems can arise with attrition (see Thomson and Holland, 2003).

Conversely, if inclusion is seen as tokenistic and not involving enough, then participation may be refused or withdrawn (see Hanley, 2005). Indeed, conflicts between the representations of particular viewpoints have often been shown to severely the research relationship. Due to his research experience, Hunt (1981) went on to produce a questionnaire in order to help other prospective participants assess whether engagement with research, and the researchers who conduct it, was in their interest. He argues:

“Disabled people increasingly find they are asked by researchers, reporters, film makers, etc, for personal information and opinions on disability. Until recently, my automatic response when approached with such requests was to co-operate willingly. However, it now seems to me that it is necessary to look much more closely at the kind of questions being asked, the assumptions on which they are based, and the purpose to which the information will be put. The fundamental question which we ourselves need to ask on such occasions is this: will our co-operation advance or retard the interests of disabled people as a whole?” (Hunt, 1981, p 48).

Clearly, his experience of engagement diminished the likelihood of further engagement unless it could be shown to be within his and the wider community’s interests. Indeed, the disappointment associated with a prescribed or desired outcome can also threaten further engagement. Frank Luongo, one of the main protagonists in Whyte’s (1983) *Street Corner Society*, notes of his later engagement with research:

“I have had enough of that. I will never again do anything for anybody from college.....I have gotten things out of the

file for them and answered all their questions as well as I could. And I have never asked for anything in return except, I would say to them, 'When you get through, send me a copy of what you write will you?' They would always say yes, they would be glad to do it, but I never have got anything back. So to hell with them" (Whyte, 1983, p 349-350)

One outcome that is often highlighted as supporting engagement is the promise of change. However, if no subsequent change in experience, policy or practice is forthcoming, then engagement can be curtailed. Warren et al, for example, describe this type of challenge: "A plethora of recent and on-going projects within the city raised the issue of the over-researching of some minority groups. Contacts advised us not to attempt to recruit from certain communities....In another, our visits were welcome but the older women did not want to participate in any more studies" (Warren et al, 2003, p 25). Engaging particular groups with research was perceived to be increasingly difficult as a direct result of a continued exposure to research engagement that had seen little benefit to those who were engaging (see also Kitchin, 2001).

Indeed, if negative or indifferent experiences are repeated across a range of individuals and projects, it may lead to research fatigue and the suggestion that groups of interest are being over-researched. Research fatigue is the process of research disengagement that occurs as a result of a previous or on-going research experience. It differs from a more straightforward apathy toward research in that the perception of further engagement changes as a direct result of other research involvement. This increasingly non-positive perception, embodied by a reduced willingness to engage, is not present before earlier engagements but exists after. The symptoms of research fatigue exist on a continuum from outright refusal to engage, to a noticeable reluctance to engage unless the project can be shown to be a valuable experience. Similarly, even where initial agreements are met there may be resistance to particular parts of the research process or a refusal to participate in them.

There is some evidence to suggest that research fatigue is being increasingly mobilised as a method to decline engagement within qualitative projects. Instances of research fatigue can be found within: mental health (Peterson, 1999; SCMH, 2002; Tomlinson et al, 2006); community research (Moore, 1996; NBCRG, 2003); education (Miller and Plant, 1999; Cordingley et al, 2002; Pickerden, 2002; McGlynn et al, 2004); older people (Seymour et al, 2002; Scharf, 2005); Lesbian groups (McClean and O'Conner, 2003); the homeless (Quilgars and Pleace, 2003); BME groups (Manderson et al, 1998; Thomas, 1990; Afshar et al, 2002; Butt and O'Neil, 2004; Pemberton et al 2006); online groups (Stewart and Williams, 2005); impaired and disabled groups (Dukett and Pratt 2001, Kitchin, 2000; Iacano, 2006); social care departments (Murray, 2005; Tidmarsh et al, 2003; Clark and Sinclair, forthcoming; Dominelli, 2005); and, sensitive areas of research (Kennedy Bergen, 1993; Coy, 2006).

Despite this recent interest, it is not a new phenomenon. Platt (1976, p 44) provides evidence that in the early 1970's there were concerns over the saturation of research fields that may lead to disengagement. As one of her interviewees pointed out: "[in] the good old day when people let you do research because it's a good thing to do research, and didn't ask awkward questions like 'what's in it for us?' and what's it going to cost". Similarly, another informed her that "sociological inquiry wasn't the great bore it's become now, people hadn't been saturated with it"; whilst another reported that a school in Birmingham had been approached by researchers more than 50 times within the space of a year.

In conclusion, the ethical prescriptions of refusal and the right to withdraw help to ensure that research engagement is voluntary and non-coercive. However, these ethical prescriptions do not typically explain or seek to understand the challenges to research engagement. Indeed, passively accepting rights of refusal and withdrawal often ignores the potential difficulties individuals and groups have with engagement and the potential effects that this may have on both experience of research. Whilst more reflexive forms of research literature may hint at the challenges within the research field, there is little systematic or theoretical development of these challenges that is based on empirical research explicitly designed for the purpose. Therefore, this thesis will explore the challenges to engagement

that research groups may face by examining how researchers understand the threats and challenges to engagement and why de-alignments between researchers and research groups occur.

### **Ethical practice and the negotiation and management of risk**

Common within the discourse of research relationships is 'ethics' and the negotiation and management of risk. However, ethical practice is neither a neutral nor straight-forward process. In both theory and practice the separation of the ethical from the political, epistemological, moral, administrative and legal, is often difficult. What 'ethics' and ethical practice actually constitute and how those decisions impacts on the experience of research is far from unproblematic. For instance, the ethical holy-grail of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and the avoidance of harm and deception, is largely based upon the medical model developed after the Nuremburg trials. As Shaw (2003) highlights, this is an epistemology which sees randomised controls as both the bench-mark and the high water mark for research standards. Just like the knowledge that is produced within such a framework, ethics also become subject to universalistic and generalisable principles. This positivistic approach to ethical practice is overtly paternalistic but also implicitly epistemologically and politically loaded as well as being in need of administration. Moreover, this is also a position that largely conceptualises research groups as broad and fragmented individuals rather than social and political actors with (sometimes conflicting) collectivised and formal interests to be advanced. This section will review how ethical approaches are used to manage risk within the research process and attempts to clarify the position of ethics and ethical practice in current research practice.

Of course, medical ethics have long been recognised as not appropriate for the social sciences to be applied in all research contexts (see Shaw, 2003; Haggerty, 2004, and Dingwall, 2006). In particular, Denzin (1997) has argued against the rationalist fallacy that all research contexts can be governed by a set of rational principles. Instead, he argues in favour of more dialogic models that are influenced by a feminist ethics of care and a communitarian epistemology. This position assumes a dialogic, participatory and empowering view of the research relationship that is 'with and for the

other' rather than one based on the rationalistic principles that construct an individual and instrumental view of the self and research engagement (Edwards and Mauthner, 2005, p 26). Denzin's hermeneutic position is heavily influenced by a feminist ethics of care that is itself critical of traditional male-dominated positivist approaches to knowledge construction and the ethical position is an extension of this epistemology. Ethics and ethical commitment are, therefore, a central part of the epistemological position of the researcher (see Wise, 1987; and, Lincoln and Guba, 1989).

Kvale (1996) has attempted to classify these different ethical approaches to research conduct into three distinct models: an ethics of duty led principles; a utilitarian ethics of consequence; and, a virtue ethics of skills. An ethics of duty led principles requires that actions are led by universal principles such as honesty, justice and respect, and outcomes are judged by intent rather consequence. A utilitarian ethics of consequence, however, values the consequence of outcome rather than that of intent and is driven by cost-benefit pragmatism. Finally, in contrast to these universalistic models, a virtue ethics of skills promotes a contextual and situational understanding of research relationships that emphasises the reflexive skill and moral values of the researcher in negotiating ethical dilemmas.

In an attempt to balance such universalistic principles with approaches that promote context and outcome, in their statement of ethical practice the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2007) points to a set of obligations to which members should normally adhere as principles for guiding their conduct. However, it also suggests that they are meant to inform members' ethical judgements rather than to impose on them an external set of standards. Indeed, the statement also recognises that it may be necessary to deviate from these principles depending upon the context: "Departures from the principles should be the result of deliberation and not ignorance" (BSA 2007, 4).

However, such a reconciliation is problematic and the differing ethical approaches are not necessarily commensurable. As Edwards and Mauthner (2005, p 15) argue: "There are clear tensions between the range of models of ethics that we can draw on to negotiate our way through the competing

demands of research.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, more situationalist and context-bound models of ethics that are based upon less deterministic principles, such as those based around a feminist ethics of care, are often constructed as being under threat from the ‘ethics creep’ of the rational medical-based model (see Haggerty, 2004). Ethics, and the management of ethical practice, is a question of politics as much as the morals associated with human conduct.

This ‘ethics creep’ is exacerbated by the increasingly rationalistic climate of litigation: research is increasingly being conducted within a context of legal scrutiny and legal culpability. Be it the health and safety requirements of researchers (see Craig et al, 2000; and, Belousov et al, 2007), the management of research required by funders and/or gate-keepers and formal organisations associated with research (see DoH, 2000), or protecting the interests of those groups that engage (see DoH, 2001), researchers and the social research process are increasingly coming under the gaze of legislation<sup>9</sup>. Written approval for consent from both individuals and organisations, for example, is increasingly a necessary requirement for research engagement and is employed as a mechanism to protect researchers and institutions against any possible future legal dilemmas (see Miller and Bell, 2005; and, Coomber, 2002). At an institutional level, the legal risks that could be associated with research needs to be managed and the administration of ethical procedure, and the formation of ethics committees to manage that risk, is employed as the most effective means of doing this. As a result, on top of morals, epistemology and politics, ethics and ethical practice also becomes a means of administration that is necessary to guard against culpability within an increasingly litigated climate.

All of this means that there is a growing lack of clarity about what ethics actually means within a social research framework. Mobilised under a catch-all heading, ethics becomes an ad-hoc mix of morals, epistemology, politics, law, and formal administration. However, rarely is the ethical literature based on systematic empirical evidence that reflects how ethical practice is

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<sup>8</sup> Although Edwards and Mauthner (2005, p 22) also note that these tensions are often not so apparent within the ethical committees that vet research proposals who tend toward the universalistic approaches of the duty based medical model.

<sup>9</sup> This is not a new dilemma. In 1980, Bulmer highlighted that “regulation of research is increasing, and social scientists are increasingly likely to find their research activities circumscribed in various ways. Apart from the intrinsic importance of such issues, they are a test of the social relevance, responsibility, usefulness, and moral stature of social science, as well as a challenge to us to explain and justify our activities to the wider society” (1980, p 124).

achieved 'in the field'. All too frequently ethics is a disembodied and theoretical discourse rather than a situated process that is realised within the research process and research encounters. Again, whilst reflexive literature breaks down normative prescriptions of how ethics *ought* to be negotiated and managed, it does so from an idiosyncratic and non-systematic perspective. Therefore, by examining how researchers reconstruct their ethical practice during research projects, this thesis will attempt to explore how researchers reconstruct their use of ethics and ethical discourse to manage and negotiate risk within research relationship.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presents a review of the literature concerning the process of doing research with people and organisations and highlights a number of phases and key actors that researchers need to negotiate in order to develop, mobilise and complete research projects. Rather than an exhaustive review of the literature, the chapter is designed to reflect the results of the research that are presented in chapters five, six, seven, eight, and nine. Indeed, the majority of the review presented here was completed in synthesis with analysis thereby complying with the recommendations of theoretical sensitivity offered by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

It is argued that in order for research to be developed, mobilised, and completed, a number of relationships need to be negotiated. Indeed, researchers cannot negotiate the research process in isolation and need to involve a number of key actors who support and facilitate the process with them. Four key actors are identified. These are: the researchers who drive projects; the funding agencies who provide the finance necessary; the gatekeepers who control access to research groups and represent their interests; and the research groups who provide the required data. More specifically, the review identifies and discusses five key areas of interest. These are: research generation; research funding; issues concerning negotiating with gatekeepers and gaining access to research groups; the supporting mechanisms of engagement for research groups; the challenges to engagement; and, ethics and the management of risk within the research process.

However, whilst much discussion has been directed towards the research process in respect to these five key areas, this review demonstrates that it is not always clear why these groups engage. Indeed, there is a relative paucity concerning the mechanisms that support and challenge engagement for these groups. Similarly, not only is it not clear why these groups engage, the review demonstrates that the literature is also lacking in methodologically robust research that seeks to explore how researchers understand, negotiate and manage their relationships with the other three key actors within the research process.

## **Research summary**

To summarise, the focus for this study are the research relationships that are formed during the course of empirically-based qualitative projects. These are relationships that are formed within research projects that have an explicit theoretical orientation and a robust methodology that attempt to go beyond local knowledge production. In terms of funding and input, only projects that are conducted by academically-affiliated researchers who are external to those who engage are considered. This does not include projects that are conducted under more participatory and action-based paradigms such as those found in forms of action research, or those that have the goal of local knowledge production such as that found in evaluation studies and internal audits.

In relation to these relationships, this thesis has a number of aims. Firstly, the study aims to further explore the process of doing qualitative research by assessing how researchers understand the process of *doing* research with the people and organisations that facilitate and support that process. Secondly, by using an explicit methodology the study aims to establish a theoretical framework concerning this process of doing qualitative research with people and organisations that can then be developed with further investigation. Thirdly, it contributes to a growing field of empirically-based literature that incorporates a robust methodology to explore the research relationships that are formed in the process of doing research.

Within this focus, and further to these aims, three over-arching and substantive research questions are explored within the remainder of this thesis. These include:

- How do researchers construct the qualitative research process?
- How do researchers understand the various mechanisms that support engagement with research and what issues do they perceive to challenge such engagement?
- How do researchers negotiate and manage their relationships with the people and organisations that they encounter during the course of a qualitative research project?

In order to address these questions, the thesis will explore the five key areas that have been identified as crucial within the research process. More specifically it will:

- explore how researchers reconstruct the early stages of their projects by assessing how research projects are identified, selected, and developed by researchers.
- explore how researchers negotiate and manage their relationships with funding agencies by examining how they represent to such organisations.
- explore how researchers perceive the functions of research engagement for access gatekeepers and how they select and negotiate engagement with them.
- explore how researchers understand, negotiate, and maintain relationships with those who are integral in the data collection phases of the research process by examining how they perceive the supporting mechanisms that facilitate research engagement as well as assessing the challenges to engagement.

- explore how researchers reconstruct their use of ethics and ethical discourse to manage and negotiate risk within research relationship.

As highlighted in chapter one, in order to explore these issues and establish a robust theoretical framework concerning the process of doing qualitative research with people and organisations, the thesis will employ the grounded theory methodology proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The following two chapters further explore this approach.

## Chapter 3

### **Methodology: A grounded theory approach**

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A primary aim of this study is to develop a theoretical framework concerning the process of doing qualitative research with people and organisations by using an explicit and robust methodology. This will enable the study to contribute to a growing field of empirically-based literature that incorporates a systematic methodology in order to explore the research relationships that are formed in the process of doing research. Grounded theory is an inductive process that aims to systematically generate theory from data rather than test previously identified theories. By using a transparent methodology, it aims to discover relevant categories and explore the relationships between them (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As a result, it is particularly suited to achieving these primary aims. Whilst chapter one briefly introduced the method, this chapter will introduce the central properties of the methodology proposed by Glaser and Strauss and explore the application of the method in the context of a study that seeks to explore how researchers understand those that they engage.

Beginning with a review of the findings of the literature search, the chapter will first explore the impact that this had on the design of the study. In particular, the requirements of the study that were revealed by the initial literature search are described, and how this then subsequently shaped the decision concerning the most appropriate method is explained. Having highlighted the necessity of a systematic qualitative methodology, the chapter continues by introducing the reader to the central assumptions of grounded theory and offers a brief overview of the method through a closer

examination of its core assumptions of theoretical sampling, coding and categorising, and theoretical saturation.

Despite the suitability of the methodology to this study, the method itself is not without some criticism. In particular, grounded theory has been accused of having a realist ontology, a methodology imbued with positivism, and of giving primacy to interview techniques. The chapter will discuss these difficulties and in response, it will be argued that a constructionist approach can offer firmer epistemological ground than more realist conceptions of the theory and, therefore, the method can produce a version of reality that is both ontologically plausible and epistemologically systematic and transparent.

## **Shaping the study: The research problem revisited**

The findings of the initial literature search revealed that there is no coherent body of knowledge in the social research literature that has attempted to systematically develop a theoretical framework concerning researcher understandings of the people and organisations that they engage with during the research process. It is suggested in chapter one that much of the literature is both researcher orientated and a by-product of other substantive projects. Therefore, the perspectives of those who engage are not sufficiently articulated and much of the literature lacks methodological rigour. As a result, it is argued, this study is primarily looking to explore how the researchers understand those they engage with research. It aims to generate theoretical insight that can be applied across a range of substantively different projects by using primary data that is explicitly collected with this purpose in mind.

Due to the lack of systematic and empirically based work, the study, therefore, needs to create primary data that is systematically collected for the purposes of generating the theory. This in turn means that the study is not verifying any pre-existing theory but looking to create theory through that process of data collection. In sum, by using primary data explicitly collected for the purpose, it is an exploratory study that aims to generate theory about the nature of research engagement and how researchers understand that process using primary data.

Given these aims, the study is directed to a limited range of methodological possibilities. Any pre-coding is likely to be methodologically problematic due to the lack of theoretical development and clarity in the area. This type of approach would force the data to be framed into prescriptive descriptions and reproduce pre-existing assumptions. Moreover, as the impacts and experiences of studies are potentially quite variable, it would be difficult to design a study *a priori* that could assess the depth and variability of these potentials. This makes the restrictive coding frames that are required by more quantitative methods unlikely to be of much analytical use and other similar deductive methods are, therefore, largely inappropriate.

By contrast, the depth of information that is traditionally associated with qualitative techniques is much more likely to be instructive as the techniques allow for a more exploratory examination of the subject under investigation whilst not necessarily framing the data in a pre-determined manner. Indeed, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that qualitative methods have three characteristics that make them suitable to this particular research problem. Firstly, they stress that qualitative methods cannot be taken off the shelf and need to be developed in relation to the particular context of the research problem. Second, they argue that qualitative techniques have an interim quality in that data collection and analysis feed into each other so that the understandings that emerge from the initial data collection feed back into later data collection. Qualitative studies have an emergent quality and changes in the data collection highlight a better understanding of the area. Whilst this can often serve to lengthen studies in directions not initially envisaged, it also has the subsequent effect of a heightened internal validity. Finally, they highlight the iterative and cyclical nature of qualitative study. Inductive investigation produces patterns and relationships that are then verified through a more deductive reasoning, which then in turn produces a more complex set of patterns of relationships.

Taken collectively, these points highlight the usefulness of qualitative methods to research problems that are inductive in nature, potentially complex, and are in need of theoretical analysis and synthesis. Indeed, one method of qualitative investigation is particularly suited to exploratory

studies that aim to generate this type of theory. Grounded theory, originally 'discovered' by Glaser and Strauss (1967), offers researchers a series of systematic, yet flexible, guidelines designed to facilitate the discovery of a *grounded* theory through the collection and analysis of qualitative data (Charmaz, 2006). Using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original text as a base, but using other literature to help articulate the approach where necessary, the next section will give an introduction to the method by describing the theory and give an account of the central propositions of the methodology: theoretical sampling, coding and categorising, and theoretical saturation.

## **Grounded Theory: A *grounded* approach to qualitative research**

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), theory in sociology is a strategy for handling data that allows researchers to describe, understand or explain the social world. Theory seeks to describe relationships between concepts and sets of concepts, which are then supported by further research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). For many qualitative researchers the formation of theory is an inductive process that occurs during or after the fieldwork stages. This is in contrast to paradigms operating under more positivistic epistemologies which stress the need to begin with theory (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). These approaches are usually deductive in nature and, according to Glaser and Strauss, can often limit the formation of theoretical constructs that emerge from the data itself. This often prevents researchers from following up interesting avenues of data.

Indeed, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967) the 'discovery' of grounded theory was necessary for two reasons. Firstly, they argue it was needed in order to respond to the over-emphasis in the verification of grand theory that occupied much qualitative research in the 1960's. This suffocated the development of more middle-range and micro-range theories. Secondly, there was an accompanying need to make the process of qualitative research more systematic in the face of increasing scepticism from the then more popular positivistic doctrines. At the time of the theory's discovery, functionalist and structuralist theories dominated qualitative sociology and a substantial gap was perceived to exist between theory and empirical

research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). As a result, qualitative techniques within American sociology were much maligned by the majority of researchers and “quantitative methodologists reigned over departments, journal boards, and funding agencies” (Charmaz, 2006, p 7). The implicit assumptions of objectivity, generalisation, replication, and falsification within these methods emphasised a unitary scientific method and a largely logico-deductive approach. These quantitative data gathering preoccupations not only limited the scope of research by ignoring research questions that did not fit such methods, but also often led to criticisms of the more qualitative techniques as being impressionistic, anecdotal, unsystematic and biased (Charmaz, 2006). The grounded strategies suggested by Glaser and Strauss sought to answer these critiques and not only close the gap between theory and research but also allow for the substantial epistemological benefits of data that emphasises interpretation and meaning to be utilised by researchers. Grounded theory offered qualitative researchers a series of systematic, yet flexible guidelines designed to facilitate the discovery of a *grounded* theory through the collection and analysis of data (Charmaz, 2006).

At the base level, grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p 2) is, therefore, directly concerned with “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research”. The approach emphasises induction and the need to conduct research that is not based upon the preconceptions, interests and biases of the researcher. This allows theories to emerge from the data rather than producing data that seeks to tests preconceived ideas. However, induction is not the only property that a grounded approach shares with other more qualitatively based approaches. The sources of data are also largely the same. Indeed, the logic of a grounded approach is compatible with all the modes of data collection that are usually associated with qualitative methods. The rich data often associated with interviews, field observations as well as many types documentary analysis can all be incorporated into a grounded approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Similarly, like other qualitative approaches, and even though it is systematic, the approach is an idiographic one that relies upon the interpretation of the researcher:

“those who use grounded theory procedures share with many other qualitative researchers a distinctive position. They accept responsibility for their interpretive roles. They do not believe it is sufficient merely to report or give voice to the viewpoints of the people, groups, or organisations studied. Researchers assume the further responsibility of interpreting what is observed, heard or read” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p 74).

As with other qualitative techniques, the data that is produced using grounded techniques ‘does not speak for itself’ but needs to be interpreted by the researcher in accordance with the guidelines set by the theory.

Moreover, like other qualitative methods, whilst grounded theory can be directed at all levels of theory, it has had mainly substantive applications with the majority of studies being directed at the micro and middle theory range. However, this is largely because of the overwhelming substantive interests of the researchers rather than because of the theory itself and the approach does allow for the development of more formal and higher level theories through the further testing. For instance, Glaser and Strauss’ original substantive analysis concerning status passage and the process of death in hospital environments was used as a base to form a more formal theory that examined status passage as a generic process across various substantive areas.

Despite these similarities, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967) the main difference between a grounded methodology and other qualitative approaches is the emphasis on a systematic method of theory development that is grounded in the data and not based on the preconceptions of the researcher. The main emphasis here is on being systematic as the methodology is transparent and provides a clear set of instruction for the researcher to work through in order to keep the analysis grounded.

For Charmaz (2006), there are seven defining components of this systematic process. First, data collection occurs simultaneously with analysis. Theory construction starts as soon as the first data has been collected, not at the end as would be typical with other approaches. Second, the analytic codes and categories are constructed from the emerging data and not from preconceived ideas and hypotheses. Therefore, as soon as transcripts are available they are examined line by line by the researcher to identify trends, with the terms then used to describe those trends that closely reflect the language used within that data. Third, a comparative method is employed whereby any newly gathered data are continually compared with previous data in order to refine any identified codes and categories. Verification is a continuous process, rather than being done post-hoc. Fourth, these refinements mean that theory is advanced at each individual stage of data collection. Fifth, any categories identified are elaborated in order to specify their properties, define the relationships between categories, and to identify gaps in the data and analysis. This allows for a greater conceptual density with meaningful variations being highlighted and articulated in detail, and, where appropriate, further detail being sought. Sixth, sampling is aimed toward theory construction, not population representativeness as would be typical in more positivistic paradigms. Sampling is guided by the requirements of the theory and not based on pre-formulated assumptions. Seventh, the literature review is conducted after the analysis so that the inductive properties of theory generation remain intact. Whilst this is not unproblematic (see chapter one), this helps to ensure that preconceptions do not cloud the emergent theory.

These components offered by Charmaz give a useful overview of the central method within grounded theory. However, according to the approach discovered by Glaser and Strauss (1967) some of the components are more central to the methodology. These issues of theoretical sampling, coding, and theoretical saturation are now discussed in turn.

### **Selecting the data: Theoretical sampling**

As stated above, one component that distinguishes grounded theory from other qualitative techniques is in the approach to sampling. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), data collection and data analysis are done

simultaneously. As categories are elaborated, relationships articulated, and gaps in the data and analysis identified, grounded theory directs researchers to go back to the field to fill those conceptual gaps:

“Theoretical sampling helps us to define the properties of our categories; to identify the contexts in which they are relevant; to specify the conditions under which they arise, are maintained, and vary; and to discover their consequences” (Charmaz, 2000, p 519).

Sampling is guided by the emergent properties of the data rather than preconceived notions concerning representativeness and is directed toward the refinement of codes and categories in order to further articulate them and make them dense and more useful. Similarly, theoretical sampling is crucial in developing more formal theory as the categories and relationships identified in a particular substantive area are then abstracted and applied beyond the original base area and into a range of different ones to test their usefulness.

Strauss (cited in Charmaz, 2000), suggests that theoretical sampling should occur early in the data collection. This then assures that the analysis is fully grounded in the data. Data cannot be collected in a single data collection phase but needs to be refined throughout the research and in response to the analytical process. The categories that are created through the initial analysis then guide the researcher in selecting the cases that will both further articulate the relationships between those codes and categories, and fill the gaps in those categories.

However, by selecting cases early in the process the approach does have the problem of shutting off potential avenues of investigation that are not given time to emerge. In response, Charmaz (2000) advocates incorporating theoretical sampling later in the data collection to avoid analysis being ‘forced’ by the data and to allow codes and categories to fully emerge. Unfortunately, however, beyond this sketchy description Charmaz does not offer guidance as to when theoretical sampling can be more usefully

employed. Whilst the issue has not been fully resolved, the more constructivist nature of her account would suggest that that is likely to be a subjective decision to be made by the researcher in reference to the emergent qualities of the data in question. The situational and idiographic nature of this decision has been seen by some to be a threat to Glaser and Strauss' emphasis on the systematic nature of the approach (see below for further discussion).

### **Coding and categorising the data**

In a grounded approach, the theory is constructed from the codes and categories that emerge from the data. In the first instance, codes are generated by reading transcripts line-by-line. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), codes serve as conceptual labels that are written alongside the transcripts and usefully describe incidents in the data. Incidents are "complete verbal expressions of an attitude or complete acts by an individual or group" (Fielding and Lee, 1995, p 29). As previously stated, these incidents are recorded as transcription is completed and are allocated to codes as the analysis progresses. Inevitably, as codes are being generated some will be repeated. When this occurs, the previously coded incidents are compared with the present one for differences and similarities.

The subsequent analysis and comparison of the theoretical properties of codes then further generates wider categories of analysis. These categories take two different forms: sociological constructs, and *in vivo* codes. Whereas sociological constructs are taken from pre-existing research and are usually formed after the memo-writing process to further elaborate the data in the writing up stages, *in vivo* codes are based upon the words used by the interviewees themselves and are usually generated at the point of coding. This iterative procedure is part of what Glaser and Strauss term the constant comparative method and helps to keep the researcher focused on the data rather than any pre-existing conceptions they may hold.

The use of memo-writing is crucial to the development of this process. Memos are written as an accompaniment in the on-going coding process and provide a format to develop description into more concrete theoretical ideas (Fielding and Lee, 1995). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990) the writing

of memos alongside the text allow for theoretical sensitising and summarising notes, as well as providing further direction for sampling. They are “a site for categorising, dimensionalising, hypothesising, and integrating theoretical ideas” (Fielding and Lee, 1995, p 32).

The second stage of analysis involves integrating the codes and categories of the data. By comparing and contrasting developing codes *in vivo*, the analysis begins to further generate the theoretical properties of the categories according to the emergent properties of the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) highlight that as these categories are developed it is important to keep returning the previously developed categories in a succession of question and answer cycles to develop and modify them. Similarly, the comparison of further any incidents with those categories helps to refine the categories further. This articulation allows the category to become increasingly conceptually dense. The constant comparative method allows categories to be clarified and further specified, whilst also allowing the interrelationships between categories to become clear (Fielding and Lee, 1995).

### **Theoretical saturation, formal theory, and assessing the usefulness of the generated theory**

As this theory emerges it should also solidify and the need for refinement should reduce as the codes and categories become saturated. Within a grounded theory approach, the criteria by which data collection and analysis is judged to be sufficient is referred to as theoretical saturation. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, p 61), this point is reached when “no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category”. Categories are seen again and again without the accompaniment of any new categories, relationships, or gaps being identified. If incidents only add to the data, but nothing new to the theory, then saturation is likely (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Charmaz (2000) suggests that reaching this point is likely when the researcher has an intimate familiarity with the research group or the research site. It is likely that this only occurs after a period of sustained field research, as opposed to a handful of cases and, according to Charmaz, theory should be tested according to the widest field of data with cases selected in order to achieve this end.

In order to evaluate the emergent theory, Strauss and Corbin (1990) provide four criteria to assess the application of grounded theory to a given area. Firstly, the theory should *fit* the phenomenon. Secondly, that it should provide *understanding*. Thirdly, that it provides *generality*. Fourth and finally, that it provides *control*. The theory should fit the phenomena under investigation by being carefully derived from the data and the everyday reality under investigation. Therefore, it should also be understandable and have meaning for those involved in the study, and for anyone who has knowledge of the given area. Due to the wide contexts that the emergent properties of the theory have been tested against, the theory should potentially be generalisable to other areas. However, any theory should also have control in that it should state the conditions to which the theory applies. This provides a boundary for the application of the theory as well identifying further avenues for investigation and development.

### **The spectre of realism and positivism, and the primacy of interviews: Critiques of Grounded theory**

As Fielding and Lee (1995) highlight, whilst the basic outline of the approach initially seems clear it has become difficult to give a succinct and adequate account of the theory. This is primarily due to two reasons: the misunderstandings around the approach and the resultant misappropriations of the term; and, the diversity of the responses posed by the critiques of the method.

To begin with the misappropriations of the term, the success of grounded theory has meant that it has been applied in many different areas and in many different contexts. Indeed, it has found particular success in disciplines such as the clinical health fields that value the allusions to reliability, validity, and replicability that the theory offers. However, Becker (1998), and Wilson and Hutchinson (1996), have both expressed doubts that, in some cases, what is actually being applied is grounded theory. Becker, for instance, highlights five common pitfalls: selective sampling rather than theoretical sampling; ignoring the emerging properties of the data; using a preconceived

theoretical lens; a failure to adhere to the constant comparative procedure; and, a reliance on computer programmes to identify codes. Of course each study needs to be assessed on its own merits, but any misappropriation of the technique does not help the clarity of the theory.

Perhaps more importantly than the misappropriation of the term, is the lack of coherence in the subsequent development of the theory itself. Since the original text critiques of the method have yielded different responses and approaches from Glaser (1978, 1998), Strauss (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), and Charmaz (2006). This further articulation, clarification, and development of the theory has somewhat muddied its clarity. Moreover, constructivist accounts that have recently been utilised in order to respond to charges of positivism and have also further developed the theory in ways not originally envisioned by Glaser and Strauss (see below).

This section will describe some of the critiques that have been discussed in relation to the theory. Three areas of interest will be discussed: the primacy of interviews, the spectre of positivism, and, the spectre of relativism.

### **The primacy of interviews within the method**

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) highlight, although the methodology may have to be slightly amended according to the particular data in question, there is nothing *a priori* that prevents researchers from applying the approach to different modes of data. Indeed, the original text (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967) states that it can be equally applied to quantitative data as much as qualitative.

However, whilst the logic of the grounded approach can, in theory, be applied to any mode of data, the approach relies upon the analysis of the transcription of data. Therefore, in practice it is much easier to apply to interviews than any other mode of data. For example, the interpretative field notes of participant observation clash with some of the value-neutral assumptions of the approach. Similarly, the analysis of more visual data is even more problematic.

Perhaps more problematically, this subtle emphasis on interviews has the accompanying danger of relying upon a one-shot representation and using it as a definitive one. A realist version of the social world can easily be reproduced by the unreflexive researcher. Indeed, Riessman (in Charmaz, 2000) highlights how the method was insufficient to represent the dynamic personal narratives that her interviewees presented her with. The necessity of the codes and categories breaks up personal stories and fractures their meaning. Narratives are rarely straightforward and authors choose evidence selectively and 'clean-up' interviewee's statements rather than representing narratives in their complex fullness. These concerns both challenge researchers' authority to interpret narratives and give voice to those they research, as well as challenging frequently assumed allusions to objectivity. Indeed, these allusions to objectivity have been particularly challenging for the approach.

### **Realism and the spectre of positivism?**

Developed in response to criticisms from quantitative paradigms, grounded theory emphasises a systematic approach to data collection and analysis. It offers a set of flexible strategies to provide the researcher with the tools to develop theory that is grounded in the data. However, the term 'grounded theory' is all too easily appropriated by researchers and applied to qualitative research in order to gain the presumed epistemological benefits the approach offers (see above). As a systematic approach with prescribed strategies toward data collection and analysis it can be seen as offering researchers a more objective methodology than other qualitative methods. Indeed, the popularity of the approach in more quantitatively based disciplines such as health is testament to this. Unfortunately, by responding to an agenda that was implicitly positivist, such an approach to conducting research has, unsurprisingly perhaps, lead to some criticism that the grounded theory approach makes a number of positivist assumptions that are imbued with realist and objectivist underpinnings. Despite the disparities between later conceptions of the approach (see Charmaz, 2000), grounded theory is, therefore, frequently seen to have a realist ontology and a positivist epistemology.

Charmaz (2000) suggests that it can be seen to have a realist ontology because the data handling strategies give primacy to a reality that exists independently to the observer and the methods by which it is produced. Reality is seen to exist 'out-there' waiting to be observed rather than being produced by the actors within it. Similarly, in emphasising the systematic nature of the theory and the necessity of the emergent properties of the data, the method can also be seen to have a positivist epistemology and methodology as the role of the researcher is a largely objective and neutral one due to the prescribed rigour of the technique. It requires the researcher to take appropriate measures in order to avoid their preconceptions guiding research in order to be led by the emerging properties of the data. The researcher assumes the passive role of a technician who discovers theory rather than a researcher who creates it in conjunction with the participants:

"Like wondrous gifts waiting to be opened, early grounded theory texts imply that categories and concepts inhere within the data, awaiting the researcher's discovery" (Charmaz, 2000, p 522).

It is, perhaps, unsurprising that Strauss and Corbin (1994) reject accusations of positivism and suggest that any theories, whether grounded or not, are always fallible and temporally limited. They contend that grounded theory makes no claims to any truth-making. Instead they argue that any given theory is an interpretation based upon the interpretations of those who provide the data. Theories necessarily incorporate multiple perspectives and differences are actively sought out in order to test the interpretations of the researcher against other interpretations. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the necessity of theoretical sensitivity, the professional knowledge and personal experience that the researcher brings to the research encounter, helps to ensure that researchers are attuned to relevant issues.

This need for theoretical sensitivity, however, was developed some time after the original discovery of the theory, and it is not clear how it fits in with the earlier prescribed requirements of avoiding preconceptions. Similarly, Strauss and Corbin's (1994) claims to 'give voice' and tell participants' stories are also difficult to accept with the emphasis that is placed upon

interpretation through this idea of theoretical sensitivity (although see Bains, 2006, for an example of how this problem can be reconciled).

### **Constructivism and the spectre of relativism?**

In deflecting such accusations of positivism, it is, perhaps, also easy to criticise grounded theory for not being able to achieve the open inductive ideals to which it seems to aspire and let the 'data speak for itself' (see Shipman, 1997, p 45, for example). Of course, entering the research field with no preconceptions whatsoever is impossible and social research does not occur in a social vacuum. Indeed, theoretical sensitivity is, in itself, a concept that appears to challenge this. However, the early texts (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967; and, Glaser, 1978) do appear to make the implicit assumption that by following the prescribed strategies, data can be collected in an unbiased manner and without the preconceptions of the researcher or interviewer interfering with that process to a significant degree. This is implied, for instance, in the suggestion to conduct the literature review after the data collection.

In view of these developments, Charmaz (2000, p 522) has recognised that the codes and categories that are formed in the analysis emerge and are constructed from the interaction between the researcher and those they engage with. Data are necessarily reconstructions of experience that are represented according to the social context in which they emerge. The categories that are used to describe the social world do not exist 'out-there' in a unified version of reality or truth. Instead the data and any subsequent description reflect the questions that the researcher construes as relevant and the interpretation of those questions by those who are engaging. Any subsequent analysis therefore represents the researcher's interpretation of that process rather than an external reality that simply exists 'out-there'. The researcher is an active constituent of the research process rather than a passive, and objective, observer of action:

"Constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognises the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretative

understandings of subjects' meanings" (Charmaz, 2000, p 510).

According to Charmaz, a constructivist grounded theory approach offers a flexible set of heuristic guidelines rather than a set of formulaic procedures that must be rigidly adhered to.

Certainly, this suggestion would seem to challenge the criticisms made by Becker (1998) and Wilson and Hutchinson (1996) that imply a unitary grounded theory technique. Indeed, the constructivist account differs from the previous and more objectivist ones in four ways (Charmaz, 2000). Firstly, results are not automatically generalisable and instead researchers seek to situate accounts in their specific contexts and how they are constructed. Secondly, constructivist grounded theory is less concerned with the often complex concepts associated with the dense and often abstract theory, demonstrated by Strauss and Corbin's (1990) complex descriptions of 'axial coding'. These concerns, it is suggested can often obscure the holistic nature of personal stories. Thirdly, it highlights the idiographic nature of qualitative theory by recognising the intuitive practice of the researcher rather than the precise and objective nature of the method. Finally, the role of participants in the analytic process is recognised and encouraged by suggesting that the theory is tested by those who engage as part of the comparative method.

At which point the emphasis on the multiple nature of those realities may edge grounded theory toward losing any notion of its presumed objectivity and associated epistemological benefits. However, Charmaz (2000) suggests that a more constructivist approach to grounded theory can strengthen research by placing an emphasis on the rich subjective meanings of the multiple realities of those who engage rather than limiting their dynamic experiences of the social world to the neutral data gathering capacity of the expert observer. Ontologically speaking, it recognises the partiality and fallibility of any representation, highlighting the dangers of representing a single reality as a definitive one. Theories do not represent any generalisable truth and are instead conditional statements. According to Charmaz (2006), they may be transported to other areas of interests to be tested and developed into more formal theories, and therefore theories retain their

explanatory capacity. Epistemologically speaking, and perhaps most practically, it gives it gives immediate primacy to the meanings and understandings social actors give to their experiences: "It means listening to stories with openness to feeling and experience" (Charmaz, 2000, p 525).

In sum, a more constructivist grounded theory provides an epistemologically plausible and transparent method of combining representational narratives to produce a relative, but systematic, theoretical account that is grounded in those narratives. Recognising the conditional nature of any 'truth' and the situated nature of knowledge helps to articulate and identify the subjective quality of all data. By reflecting on how data is constructed in the interaction between the researcher and those who engage, the researcher is able to produce a more transparent version of the reality they present.

## **Conclusion: A methodological overview**

This chapter has explored the grounded theory methodology, the relationship it has with the wider qualitative field of inquiry, and some of the critiques of the theory. It demonstrates how the nature of the wider field concerning the research process shaped the requirements for the research design, which in turn led to specific decisions being taken about the appropriate methodology. The chapter then continues by giving an overview of the method and describing the main properties of the approach. Finally, it discusses some of the difficulties of the approach and attempts to navigate a path through these difficulties.

This study attempts to explore how researchers understand the process of doing research with people and organisations. The study is exploratory in that it aims to generate theory about the nature of research engagement and how researchers understand that process using their stories of doing research as a source of primary data. In view of the inductive nature of the data gathering process, and the need for rich and detailed information, it is suggested here that a qualitative approach is arguably the most useful way to accomplish the aims proposed in chapter two. More specifically, the grounded theory methodology proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is

particularly useful as it provides a systematic methodology that can be used to generate theory. However, by recognising the partiality of representation and the conditional nature of any theory produced, the approach will be more constructionist in nature than originally conceived by Glaser and Strauss. Therefore, due to the contextual nature of both interview data and theory formation, any theory subsequently produced remains conditional to the context in which it is produced. Indeed, whilst this chapter has introduced the central properties of the methodology, the following chapter seeks to situate the process of grounded theory by exploring the present context in which those processes were realised.

## Chapter 4

### **The process of doing research with researchers: *Grounding* grounded theory**

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Despite the systematic methodology that is offered by Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory is not a straightforward process or one that can be applied in a normative one-size-fits-all manner. Indeed, as Charmaz (2006) highlights, grounded theory is a process that is grounded in the social context in which it is being applied. Not only is it a methodological process, it is also a social process that has to be negotiated by researchers who are embedded in particular social contexts. Therefore, this chapter will outline the process of carrying out this particular research project and seeks to ground that experience within the grounded theory methodology.

Beginning with a review of the sampling procedure that was applied in the study, the first part of the chapter will describe both the sampling frame and the case selection procedure that was applied to participant and study selection, culminating in a brief synopsis of the participants and their projects. The challenges of gaining access and doing grounded theory with elite groups will then be discussed and the impact that this had upon theoretical saturation evaluated. The chapter will then move on to consider the actual difficulties and problems associated with doing research that has other researchers as its focus of interest. These include the problems associated with informed consent; anonymity; issues around benefits, costs and risks; interviewer and interviewee role; and technical competence. Finally, issues around the mode of the interview and the use of tape recorders in the interview situation will be considered. Whilst the issues raised here are not distinct from those in other areas of research, the

particular context of the study places the researcher in a situation where they have an increased sensitivity to some of the practical and ethical issues raised by research. Therefore, the discussion presented here provides a valuable insight into how researchers understand those who engage.

## **Re-visiting the process of grounded theory: Theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation and the realities of interviewing elites**

Grounded theory differs from comparative analysis in that it highlights the use of groups that may previously be seen as non-comparable. The method suggests that the selection of a pre-planned set of groups which are chosen because of their similarity should be avoided. Any initial decisions concerning sampling are based only upon a general sociological perspective and on a general subject or problem area (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p 45). Pre-planned strategies, according to Glaser and Strauss, represent an attempt to hold constant strategic and purified groups in an attempt to reduce unwanted variance. Developing pre-prescribed rules often has the result of constraining the range of groups for that is available for developing theoretical properties. Instead, criteria for selection in grounded theory should have theoretical purpose and relevance, and not be based upon the preconceptions of the researcher. Arbitrary rules of evidence should not hinder the discovery of theory. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, p 51), this wider range of cases is necessary in order to develop categories to their fullest and is achieved by comparing any groups that share a similar category or property, irrespective of any perceived similarities or differences that may initially constrain the study.

Therefore, case selection begins with designating a few gross features of the processes that will be studied and a partial framework of basic concepts. This ensures that the scope of the population and the conceptual level of the theory are transparent, systematic and relevant. However, any subsequent theoretical control over the choice of groups requires continuous thought, analysis and research so that it is tailored to the needs of the theory being generated. This conscious choice of groups means that the scope of the

theory can be carefully increased and controlled (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Seemingly non-comparable groups within the same class can be sought throughout the study as is required by the theory being generated. This allows for the wider development of categories. Important differences and similarities can be further articulated, as well as the qualifying conditions under which those categories and properties vary. The remainder of this section attempts to articulate the research process in the context of this study by describing the process of recruitment and the situated challenges that are presented by doing grounded theory with researchers.

### **Case selection and grounded theory**

The central interest of this study concerned how researchers understand the research process and how they negotiate the process of *doing* research with people and organisations. Therefore the initial sample needed to focus on gaining data from researchers about the process of doing qualitative research. As the study was funded by Research in Practice (see <http://www.rip.org.uk>), an organisation whose primary interest is concerned with the improvement of service delivery in the area of child and family support, the sample for the study would initially focus on this particular area of research. Therefore, and in line with the suggestions of Glaser and Strauss (1967), the study began with a general subject area, and, as the initial literature review had shaped the study toward a grounded theory methodology, it also had a particular sociological perspective.

Moreover, this focus also revealed the level of theory that the study was aimed at. When employing the grounded theory technique, Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that analysis can be used to generate two kinds of theory: substantive and formal. Substantive theories are those that are developed in an empirical area of sociological inquiry, such as professional education or patient care, whereas formal theories concentrate on conceptual areas such as stigma, deviant behaviour, or formal organisation. They exist on "distinguishable levels of generality, which differ only in terms of degree", but are both grounded in the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p 32-33). Therefore, this study, as it aimed to utilise a more systematic approach in a wide area that often lacks conceptual clarity and theoretical development, generates theory at the formal level as it seeks to generate theory across

research rather than explore particular facets of it. A more substantive approach may wish, for example, to look at forms of empowerment in relation to those who engage. Of course the two forms of theory are not mutually exclusive, and one will often lead to the formation of the other, however, the level of investigation does have implications for the initial selection of the research sample as substantive theory is necessarily more specific.

To summarise, the remit for the initial case sample was to include researchers who had conducted a research project in the past five years that was broadly qualitative in nature within the children and families research arena, but not with explicitly action-orientated or local knowledge goals. The identification of these projects was achieved using four techniques: searching the awards made by major funding bodies; utilising search engines to identify relevant studies; identifying research groups with relevant interests; and, the utilisation of personal contacts. Each technique is dealt with in turn.

The first technique involved examining both the outputs and the awards given by major organisations that funded relevant research. This involved two methods. Firstly, available databases were electronically searched. These included those available through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Research Findings Electronic Register (REFER), and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) websites. It was known beforehand that all three organisations funded projects in the children and family research arena and all had user-friendly and comprehensive search facilities. Simple Boolean search terms were entered and results recorded. Search terms 'children', 'family', and 'young people', with a date limit of 2000-2005 were combined and this captured a wide range of studies. The second method involved examining the outputs of special interest research organisations. These included Barnardos and the Nuffield foundation. These were also electronically available and manually searched.

Secondly, more general research-based websites were utilised, such as the electronic library of social care (eLSC), and Childdata. Again, these all had searchable engines and simple Boolean searches were utilised as those described above to discover a wide variety of studies. More general search

engines were utilised, such as those available through International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS) and Cambridge Sociological Abstracts (CSA), but these produced an unmanageable amount of hits and the results often lacked clarity in terms of research design.

The third technique involved the examination of more specific and pre-existing lists of recent research studies such as those available at Research in Practice (RiP), Care Values and the Future of Welfare (CAVA), and the Policy Research Bureau (PRB). These organisations either funded projects themselves, such as RiP and CAVA, or conducted research by applying for funding through larger organisations. In all cases they offered comprehensive lists of their awards and outputs, and, in the case of RiP held further lists of associated researchers and their relevant research projects. All lists were electronically available and were manually searched.

Fourthly, personal contacts were exploited in order to identify studies. This involved talking to members of staff at the University of Sheffield in order to discover if any relevant research was taking place within the University that might be of relevance. Similarly, RiP frequently holds day workshops that involve researchers developing programmes of research interest for social care practitioners and it has good links throughout the research community. The programme of events was, therefore, scrutinised for relevance. Further, once researchers had been interviewed, discussions sometimes led to suggestions of other researchers who may be useful contacts and potentially interested in participating in the study.

All results were recorded and stored on paper and the basic information converted to electronic formats for ease of reference. This information included the name of the award holder, the title of study, the date of award, the date of publication, funding organisation, and location. Abstracts were then collated and judged for relevance and practicality. As previously stated, to be judged to be potentially relevant studies had to satisfy four basic criteria. These were to be qualitative in nature, but not action-orientated; be concerned with children and families in some respect; be conducted between 2000 and 2005; and, to be based in England.

Of course, these general conditions allowed a broad range of studies to be included and in accordance with the conventions of grounded theory this left a bank of potential participants that could then be used as cases. As stated above, the nature of grounded theory means that participants are not selected using some pre-existing constraints that are placed upon the study, and are instead selected according to the emergent properties of the data itself. Therefore, it was not theoretically satisfactory to send a blanket letter to all researchers on the initial list; however, the study did need to start somewhere in order to begin generating theory and other constraints needed to be placed on the list of studies in order to prioritise researchers and studies. Therefore, studies were prioritised according to three criteria: my interest in their study; the perceived likelihood of response, which included the presence of any relevant background publications, and the presence of any shared formal and informal networks, including colleagues, friends, and departmental or university affiliation; and finally, location.

### **Gaining access: Elite groups and barriers to theoretical sampling**

In the first instance, once potential participants had been identified according to these criteria, they were first approached by either email or letter. Seven researchers were initially identified and approached. After two weeks had elapsed from the first approach a second email was sent. If there was no response after a further two weeks a further email was sent. If no response was then received they were removed from the list. From the initial seven, only two responded, of which only one interview was eventually arranged and completed. During this time, another batch of researchers was identified and contacted in the same manner as that described above. This led to one positive response, which in turn led to a further two positive contacts with researchers that resulted in two further interviews.

After these initial successes and (perceived) failures, letters written on Research in Practice headed paper were then sent to potential interviewees. These were then followed by reminder emails at periods of two and four weeks. This led to a further three interviews, however, one was a full six months after the initial contact. In order to facilitate interview turnover, personal contacts were then utilised to attempt to speed up the interview

process. Telephone inquiries and face-to-face meetings led to four further interviews, one of which resulted in a further contact and another interview.

The methodology adopted here was an active one in which potential participants were specifically identified and approached directly. More passive approaches were considered, such as blanket approaching all identified researchers or advertising in research journals, but these were rejected because of the considerations of grounded theory and perceived need to develop personal relationships with the interviewees. Only one participant actually declined to be interviewed, and one who did not manage to allocate me any time despite an initial positive response. However, and despite the active method, many other potential interviewees failed to respond to the initial inquiries and recruitment was well below 20%. The following section discusses the problems involved in gaining interviews with researchers by placing such a group in the context of elite interviewing.

Despite a growing body of research around the issue of interviewing elites, as Richards (1996) points out, the term is rarely actually defined. Typically, "legislators, business executives, educators, union leaders, and clergy" are identified as elites (Zuckerman, 1972, p 159), as are "the most prestigious occupations...including law, medicine, and clergy" (Hertz and Imber, 1995, ix-x). Commonly to be defined as elite, the group has to have a considerable need to control information and are careful about any involvement with social scientists: "[elites] have considerable constitutional, legal and cultural resources that enable them to deflect or channel any research in which they are the object of enquiry" (Fitz and Haplin, 1994, p 48). On a more practical note, people in such positions are perceived to be busy, or busier than most, and often require gate-keepers to marshal, plan, and organise their time. Additionally, the implicit assumption is often made that the smaller the number, the higher the elite. Zuckerman (1972), for instance uses the term ultra-elite when referring to Nobel laureates.

As a result of this, Richards (1996) argues that pre-designed sampling strategies often fail in elite situations with potential interviewees much more likely to refuse an interview. Elites, by their very nature, are a much smaller sample group than many others. Whilst there are a good number of

researchers, when constraints are placed upon selection such as those described above, the number of potential candidates does indeed become limited and, in many ways, the interviewer is forced to 'take what they can get'.

However, much of the literature appears to reify elite groups, seemingly ignoring the fact that in many instances the notion of what an elite is, is relational to the researcher and the context they find themselves in. For instance, Pahl (in Puwar, 1997) comments upon how access to elite groups is much easier if the researcher 'has friends in high places'. The more prestigious, and well networked, the researcher, the higher likely-hood of success. Puwar (1997, p 4) notes that as a PhD researcher she had no such 'friends in high places', and as a result her access to female MP's was much more difficult. She notes how access is difficult "for someone on the junior rungs of the academic ladder without a reputation or a web of social networks". Indeed, in order to gain some much needed credibility she highlighted how her research was a "staff research project" that would be used in an academic book (Puwar, 1997, p 4).

In many ways, and as Imber and Hertz (1995) point out, social scientists are socialised in similar ways to such professions as they too have advanced degrees, and specialised apprenticeships. Researchers also share the characteristic of having the ability to represent reality. Whilst most (presumably) do not have a huge amount of requests for research interviews they are busy professionals, particularly as this project was targeting active researchers who had recently held research awards or continued to do so. Equally, most of the interviewees had substantial teaching commitments, or had important administrative roles to fulfil in addition to being researchers. Some had secretaries, or were protected by research teams, and at least two individuals on the identified list were at that time head of their respective department.

In respect to grounded theory, this all creates difficulty. As stated above, grounded theory requires that cases are chosen according to the emergent properties of the data. Cases are selected upon their ability to test the emerging theory according to the properties of that theory (Glaser and

Strauss, 1967). This emergent quality of theoretical selection is distinguished from a more circumstantial type of sampling as "circumstantial sampling leads to much less satisfactory integration than would theoretical sampling" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p 138). An opportunistic sampling approach could, in effect, reduce the systematic nature of the study and also any claims of a more grounded validity by not adhering to the theoretical and grounded nature of the sampling technique.

Undoubtedly, there was a circumstantial element to some of the early interviews and I did find myself quite happy to 'take what I could' in the early stages. For instance, the first interviewee recommended that I speak to two of her colleagues who were not on my original list. Despite them having similar research interests and topics to the first interviewee, I gladly incorporated them into the study frame. Despite this, studies were still selected according to both my original sampling frame, and in response to the data gained. For instance, these first three interviewees were all interested in ethnicity. Hence, later interviews attempted to move away from this subject area in order to widen the scope of the study. However, when the coding revealed a gap in the emerging theory in respect this area, a further interview was pursued. Similarly, the early interviews concentrated on projects that were broadly interview based, hence later case selection sought out projects that had more ethnographic methods.

As a result, the case selection is a broad selection that incorporates studies in the areas of ethnicity, disability, gender, childhood, education, exclusion, and social work. Similarly, the studies incorporated a broad range of qualitative approaches including visual techniques, longitudinal analysis, life-history methods, diaries, ethnography, focus groups, semi-structured interviews and one study even incorporated drama. One study was overtly partisan; some were overtly political, whilst others were carried out under more objective methodologies.

### **The realities of theoretical saturation**

Of course, these projects are not exhaustive of the huge range of studies and methodological techniques available. Criminal justice is one area, for instance, where access to an appropriate researcher could not be negotiated

within the time frame. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, p 61), theoretical saturation is reached when “no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category”. Theoretical saturation is achieved when similar theoretical instances are seen again and again. As the methodology requires the researcher to specifically test the theory against a diversity of data and cases, saturation is based upon “the widest possible range of data” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p 61).

In some ways, the cases selected for this study do represent a wide range of data that were selected in order to test the emerging theory. However, as Glaser and Strauss (1967, p 62) go on to suggest, “saturation can never be attained by studying one incident in one group”. Hence, whilst some of the issues and techniques are present in a number of the studies that were selected within this study, others were not and it cannot be confidently assumed that empirical saturation has been reached in all areas.

Indeed, within the context of this study, these theoretically idealistic conceits were balanced by the more everyday practicalities of research. The problem of studying a group with elite characteristics meant that access to theoretically desirable cases was limited. Without more resources, and more experience as a visible researcher, this would be difficult to overcome. The relatively small nature of the study also meant that time was also a factor that prevented saturation being reached. Only a project larger in scope would be likely to be able to approach saturation. Therefore, it is argued here that the results presented in chapters’ five to ten are representative of a grounded theory analysis in that the data has generated an initial theoretical framework according to the central assumptions of the theory. However, they are also conditional in that that the framework needs to be subject to further investigation in order to fully articulate and test the theory. Whilst the chapters do represent a substantive analysis of the findings they do not saturate the data or the field and further investigation is desirable.

## **The research sample**

The result of this process left the project with thirteen interviews, and twelve interviewees (one was sufficiently interested to be interviewed twice about three different projects). A description of the interviewees is presented below.

**SD:** SD conducted a locally-funded project that examined the views of pupils who had been identified as being at risk from exclusion. SD has had substantial professional links with deprived communities and has an experienced background in criminal justice.

**SG:** SG has considerable experience in applied research concerning ethnicity and disability and has worked in a variety of organisations. She was conducting a small-scale nationally funded study into the needs of black and Asian families who require respite care. The first interview concerned two separate projects that she had been involved with concerning disability and race. The second interview focused upon her experiences of working with group of mothers who felt that they were unfairly treated by social services.

**NN:** NN worked on a project alongside SG that had Local Authority funding. Again the work centred upon the needs of black and Asian families who required respite care. A professionally qualified researcher, at the time of the interview she was working for a Local Authority.

**US:** With considerable experience as a social worker, US was interviewed about his project exploring the views of ethnic minority communities concerning 'disabled' care. He has worked on a number of studies concerning black ethnic minority, communities, children, older people, and voluntary organisations.

**CF:** CF is an experienced researcher in the field of children and families research and is the co-director of a large independent research organisation. The interview was directed towards her involvement with a large-scale project that examined the experience of parents in deprived areas.

**FD:** A professor in the field of education, FD is an experienced researcher with interests in ethnicity, class, and gender. She has held numerous research grants and published widely in these areas. The interview focused upon her funded work on the relationships between parents and secondary schools with sizeable populations of ethnic minority pupils.

**SS:** An experienced researcher, SS has held a number of research grants in areas of children and family research. The interview focused upon her continuing involvement with a long-term project that was investigating the transition of young people into adulthood.

**SM:** SM is a lecturer in a criminological department and is currently working on a number of publications and projects. She has interests in ethnicity, policing, and deviance and the interview concentrated on her work around the experiences of trans-racial adoptees.

**ID:** A prolific researcher in the field of disability, ID has a substantial publishing record in his chosen field. The interview focused on his involvement with a funded project that examined the experiences of professional support from the perspective of parents who have 'disabled' children.

**FT:** FT conducted a small-scale study funded by JRF that examined the experiences of young people in multi-faith primary schools. Widely experienced in the field of community development, FT has a considerable record in community research.

**DV:** With interests in race, education, gender and class, DV is an experienced researcher and has held several major grants in the past. She was interviewed regarding her involvement in a funded project that explored how the families of excluded school-leavers of a particular ethnic group experienced their transition out of the education system.

**BT:** A professionally qualified social worker, BT's research interests are in issues around child-care and the sociology of childhood. With a substantial research output, the interview focused on her work with parent and child relations across three generations.

Within the interviews, researchers were initially invited to talk about their involvement with the particular project that suggested their involvement. These projects varied in the funding agency involved, the research design, and the scope and length of the project. All projects were judged to be methodologically robust and all researchers were in a senior position on the project that included data collection. However, within the context of the interviews, researchers did draw upon their experiences of and the discussion and analysis of the results are not limited to the initial projects. Hence, the analysis is not necessarily limited to the target projects but is substantively based upon them.

Therefore, the sample of studies included researchers in fields of education, ethnicity, health research, disability studies, social care, and community studies. Further, the range of studies discussed also incorporated a broad range of qualitative approaches including visual techniques, longitudinal analysis, life-history methods, diaries, ethnography, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. Four were funded directly by the ESRC; three were funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation; three had Local Authority funding; two had funding from national agencies; and, one had funding from a university source. Furthermore, the projects also ranged in focus, whilst one had children as the focus, others focussed on young people, whilst others collected data within a family context. Similarly, they also varied in size, with one project being relatively short-term in terms of data collection, one lasting three months, and another six months. All the remaining studies had field-work components that lasted at least a year.

## **Conducting the analysis**

As previously highlighted, within a grounded methodology the constant comparative method is used in order to conduct the analysis of the data.

Firstly, this involves generating codes from incidents in the data. Then, by comparing and contrasting these codes, the analysis generates the theoretical properties of a category according to the emergent properties of the data. These categories are developed in a cyclical nature whereby new and emerging categories are compared and contrasted against the existing codes and categories. It is this constant comparison that helps to refine the categories further. This allows categories to become conceptually dense whilst also allowing the interrelationships between categories to become clear (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Following this method, all interviews within the present sample were transcribed within a week of being conducted. These transcripts were then coded *in vivo* using terms generated by the data. For instance, all the incidents that related to 'gate-keepers' within the data were initially coded as such. It is worth noting that many of these *in vivo* codes mirrored sociological constructs as researchers were talking about the research process using the pre-existing discourse. However, in accordance with the method proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) all of the data were treated on their own merits rather than being constructed from any pre-existing theory. Hence, the analysis presented in chapter's five to ten is a product of the data rather than the product of any pre-existing theory.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), as codes are being generated some will be repeated. Where this occurs, the previously coded incidents need to be compared with the emergent categories in order to highlight any differences and similarities. Where differences are discovered between codes, the code is allocated to a new sub-category within the larger category. For example, within the present sample all incidents that were coded 'gate-keeper' were compared with each other as they were discovered. This then provided developed further sub-categories within the emergent 'gate-keeper' category. These included: the function of gate-keepers within research; how researchers select gate-keepers for involvement; the mechanisms that support engagement; and, the mechanisms that challenge engagement.

Once these sub-categories are developed, in line with the constant comparative method, they still need to be pursued further within the future

data. However, in order to guard against Charmaz's (2000) contention that a grounded analysis can be constrained by imposing theoretical sampling at an early stage preventing relevant issues from emerging, seven interviews in the present sample were initially conducted in order to provide a theoretical base. Then, in line with the constant comparative method outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), any emergent issues were pursued in the remaining six interviews in order to articulate the analysis further. To continue with the previous example, whilst the theoretical base demonstrated that how researchers selected gate-keepers was important, the specificity of how they did this was under-reported. As a result, further data was generated in the interviews to specifically articulate the factors that influenced researchers' decisions to engage with any particular gate-keeper.

In order to support this grounded analysis, NVIVO was used as a tool for data management. Despite qualitative research being the dominant paradigm within mainstream British sociology, the uptake and application of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), such as NVIVO, remains "somewhat modest" (Fielding and Lee, 1998, pp 11). Whilst a community of CAQDAS enthusiasts does exist, many researchers are unconvinced of the value of these tools. Traditionally qualitative researchers have had to rely on pens, scissors, glue, and other 'cut and paste' techniques rather than high-powered computers. This is unlike the more quantitative paradigms where many computing-related developments have been made and accepted. Indeed, within these approaches computing software is not only encouraged but is now regarded as integral and the ability to use applications such as SPSS is taken by many to be synonymous with quantitative analysis. However, Fielding and Lee (1995) highlight that due to these quantitative advances, many qualitative researchers view computing innovation as epistemologically suspicious due to the associations it is perceived to have with the more quantitative paradigms

Furthermore, there is some debate as to whether qualitative packages, such as NVIVO, are also more suited to a particular type of qualitative analysis. Coffey et al (1996) argue that the presuppositions that are embedded in software for qualitative research has led to an emergent orthodoxy within those computing innovations, especially at the level of data management. They argue that despite the fragmentation of traditional ethnography into a

multiplicity of standpoints and methodological approaches, computing software, and in particular NVIVO, has remained firmly aligned to grounded theory and its very particular methods of data collection, storage and analysis (see also Macmillan and Koenig, 2004). In response, this characterisation has been criticized by Lee and Fielding (1996) who suggest that the link between CAQDAS and grounded theory is overdrawn. Indeed, Fielding and Lee (1995) highlight how there is continuing misunderstanding concerning how these packages facilitate *analysis*. Packages are information management devices that facilitate analysis rather than the other way around. They do not do the analysis by themselves, or respond in a way congruous to that of quantitative data and SPSS for example (Macmillan and Koenig, 2002). Hence, they provide a device to manage data analysis rather than substantively constructing that analysis and they remain a valuable tool for qualitative analysis.

## **Researching researchers: The context of the research relationship**

Charmaz (2000, p 522) highlights that the codes and categories that are formed in the analysis emerge and are constructed from the interaction between the researcher and those they engage with. Data are necessarily reconstructions of experience that are represented according to the social context in which they emerge. Indeed, according to Platt (1981), standard methodological textbooks and actual interviews make a number of assumptions about the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Typically the researcher and the researched are anonymous to each other, they do not belong to the same group or organisation and they are unlikely to meet again. The relationship has no past and often only a tokenistic future. The power differential is heavily in favour of the researcher who commands the interview, the research questions, and usually has the institutional weight of a university behind them. This ensures that the interviewee has a lower status than the researcher, especially as the researched will often lack the technical knowledge to judge the research or any questions offered. In many ways, this study challenges some of these conventional assumptions, whilst bringing others into sharper focus. Indeed, Wiles et al (2006) suggest that whilst studies where researchers interview their peers do not raise ethical

issues that are distinct from those in other areas of research, they do place researchers in situations where they have an increased sensitivity to some issues. The following sections will explore the challenges presented in the context of doing research on researchers and will examine some of the issues that arose when interviewing experienced researchers. Four areas are identified and discussed. These are: ethics, including informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality; the costs and benefits of being researched; issues of role negotiation and technical competence; and, the use of technology in the interview situation. Each is dealt with in turn.

### **Ethics: Informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality**

According to point 16 of the ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association:

“As far as possible participation in sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. This implies a responsibility on the sociologist to explain in appropriate detail, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be disseminated and used” (BSA, 2007).

However, the nature of this project meant that issues around consent were unusual. Often, when issues of consent are more carefully considered, they become problematic (see Wiles et al, 2006, for example). In many cases these difficulties are due, in part, to the nature of the researcher-researched relationship. Researchers know the research process implicitly and have insider status, whereas the researched will often have only scant knowledge of what the process actually entails and have to rely on the researcher to give them the details. In many respects they have outsider status to the complex processes of research and all that that entails. Here, the reverse is true of the researched. They have an implicit insider status.

The interviewees, by their very nature of being researchers, are likely to understand the character of the project and the personal history of the interviewer more than is usual. The norms of informed consent usually dictate that the background rationale and likely outcomes of the research are given beforehand and this convention was adhered to. However, a researcher is more than likely to understand the particulars of a study and, crucially, the implications of their involvement beyond what is usually the case. They are, after all, qualified to judge the project and what their engagement will mean.

In some ways, the design of the project attempted to heighten this level of informed consent by offering a copy of the transcript for amendment after the interview. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, there is a danger in relying upon the information presented in one particular interview. This is not to submit to a radical subjectivist reading of the interview situation whereby the interview is entirely a product of the context, but to recognise the dynamic nature of a personal narrative. Capturing often complex personal stories are difficult to reduce to a once and for all, realist account. Secondly, the transcripts were offered due to my own personal ethics. In order to respect the tenets of informed consent, it was felt that the interviewees could only be fully informed by allowing them the opportunity to agree with the way they represented themselves in the interview. This allows them maximum control of their representation in the first instance.

A number of measures were also taken to attempt to ensure confidentiality and anonymity in this project. On the issue of the disclosure of identities, the Social Research Association (SRA, 2002) suggest:

“Social researchers should take appropriate measures to prevent their data from being published or otherwise released in a form that would allow any subject’s identity to be disclosed or inferred. The disclosure of identity in itself represents a potential risk of harm to a subject”  
(Social Research Association, 2002, p 21)

However, whilst prescriptive accounts such as this often provide well grounded instructions as to the necessity of anonymity and confidentiality, it is not until researchers are faced with the practicalities of an actual ethical problem that these issues can be addressed. In the case of this project, both confidentiality and anonymity are made problematic due to the specific nature of the contents of the interview and needed to be negotiated more carefully.

With regards to anonymity, interviewees were questioned on the impacts on the researched *their* research had. Of course, these particular projects do not exist by themselves but within a specific area of research, in this case the broad category of children and family research. Other knowledgeable researchers, who are the peers of the interviewees, may well recognise features from other studies that enable them to be conclusively identified. Anonymity is, therefore, threatened and confidentiality is compromised. Indeed, this danger was specifically recognised by the participants themselves who commented upon the fact. This is a difficult problem to negotiate and there were two potential options: firstly, to remove any identifying material; and, secondly, to explicitly state that anonymity could not be guaranteed. Removing all material from the transcripts that could potentially make the researcher identifiable would be likely to have the effect of sterilising the data. The advantages of the richness gained by qualitative inquiry would then be quickly lost. Similarly, this would be a time-consuming and difficult endeavour. As a result, no guarantee of anonymity was given and it was specifically stated when gaining access that this would be the case. Due to this, the study complies with point 18 of the BSA's guidelines (BSA, 2007):

“Research participants should understand how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality and should be able to reject the use of data-gathering devices such as tape recorders and video cameras” (BSA, 2007).

The fact that the researchers recognised that anonymity may be a difficulty also has some other implications for the study. On one hand it makes for a more ethically robust study with understandings of what the researched were

consenting to being more assured. On the other hand, the heightened sense of awareness of the issues at stake may have constrained the information that was represented with the researchers more effectively marshalling the data they provided. Certainly, this type of research relationship between the researcher and the researched is a unique one whereby the researcher is aware of the full implications of what they are actually consenting to. Here the researched have true insider status and are aware of any dangers (and benefits) that may result from participation.

### **The costs and benefits of being researched**

Indeed, regarding the issue of insider status, Wiles et al (2006) highlight that in situations where researchers are interviewing their peers, those who engage can often be keen to give what they perceive to be are the 'right' answers. This is particularly true with ethical issues where the issues are likely to be sensitive. As a result, when interviewing researchers there is a heightened issue concerning information management as there is the potential for researchers to put something into the public domain that is potentially harmful to their research project and their careers. For example, in their study that used researchers as interviewees, Wiles et al (2006, p 4) found that they often diverted the focus of the interview to more abstract principles rather than concentrating on how they handled data. Similarly, they also suggest a tendency to talk about other research projects when discussing 'bad practice' rather than discussing it in relation to the issues relating to their own research. They conclude by stating: "the issue of identifying researchers' private rather than public accounts of research practice is one that is particularly difficult" (Wiles et al, 2006, p 4).

Of course, it is difficult to know what has been managed, how it was managed, and why it was managed in that way. In this case, my perception was that researchers were candid, and I was quite happy for them to comment on the successes of their projects whilst also challenging them about any more problematic aspects. In fact, I did not feel that issues were being avoided or purposely managed to a degree that could be considered to be problematic.

However, rather than see information management as a problem it can itself be treated as data and as a point of interest in itself. Indeed, if it is taken that research situations and issues of cost and risk are being managed by those who engage it suggests that they are actively engaged in monitoring that process. Hence, it can also be taken as a measure of the degree of consent. Certainly, the fact that four researchers made sure that this point was salient indicates that risk was being managed and being interviewed was not perceived to be a particularly risky business for them.

Given these issues of cost, and the problems concerning anonymity and confidentiality, the fact that that they did choose tell me anything, is in itself surprising. According to Platt (1981, p 78), where researchers interview other researchers "the interviewer-respondent relationship is revealed in all its nakedness as one of instrumental use of another person". Indeed, I was asking researchers to enter into a research situation that I thought unlikely to have any tangible benefit, but could potentially have some risky consequences for them. I was implicitly aware of this when attempting to gain access and I made specific attempts in many cases to reinforce the fact that, in all likelihood, the research would not be of direct benefit to those who took part in the research, although it would go towards benefiting me in terms of my PhD research. I did, however, offer the provision that it may be useful for researchers to experience what it would be like to be 'researched', and that it was a good opportunity for reflection about their project. Indeed, the title of the letters and emails that I sent had 'Research reflection opportunity' as their title. Being clear about this achieved three ends. Firstly, it ensured that the boundaries between the researcher and researched were clearly delineated. The researchers were clearly labelled as the researched and I as the researcher. Secondly, it somewhat directly ensured a sense of ownership over any resulting work, which is important in career terms. I was aware that the power differentials between a PhD researcher and an established professional researcher may make any resulting outputs problematic especially if I heavily relied upon something that was said in the interviews. Indeed, one of the participants did comment upon the fact that it would be me who benefited from their experience. Thirdly, partly due to ethical commitments, I felt that I needed to be as honest about the process as I possibly could be. I was aware that the research relationship would not be a transitory one and there remained the possibility that I would remain in

a shared group membership (however indirectly) after the project was over. As Platt (1981, p 77) points out, "one should appear well in the eyes of people who constitute a significant reference group and with one whom one will continue to live when the research is over".

### **Interviewing 'researchers': Issues of role negotiation and technical competence**

Indeed, in a situation like this, the researcher and researched are no longer anonymous to each other and they do not move in different circles but the same ones. The relationship, whilst not necessarily having a past, is likely to have a future. Interview and interviewee paths are liable to cross again and the interviewer is likely to want to maintain face and continue to exist in those circles when the research is over. For someone who has already achieved their career goals, having a presumptuous novice questioning their research or asking them to justify their decisions regarding a particular project may be difficult, particularly if the eventual output is perceived as being critical. Unlike the conventional interview situation, anything revealed in the eventual output is likely to be read and rigorously reviewed by the technically competent interviewee. Respondent validation will be the norm, not the exception. As Wiles et al highlight:

"This is [all] a rather daunting task for a junior researcher, given the issue of power and hierarchy involved and the need to create a good impression of her research skills among the community within which she would want to work in the future" (Wiles et al, 2006, p 3).

This issue of competence also raises another related issue: is the researcher's ability to control the interview diminished? As has been suggested, the conventional power relationship of the interview becomes skewed and contestable when each party has an implicit understanding of the interview situation. On one hand the researcher is attempting to direct the interview, on the other is the experienced interviewee who may try to lead the interview in areas that they feel pertinent, regardless of the researchers questions and intentions. This problem is echoed by Wiles et al (2006) who have argued that researchers can be particularly keen to

demonstrate their knowledge of the research process by being critical (but not necessarily negative) of the interview process itself. This is also common within elite interviews (see Richards, 1996). However, even well intended comments about interview practice can undermine the researcher's skills and provoke anxiety about their performance.

As both researcher and researched share similar social worlds, there is the added problem of both how much data will be missed, or simply not offered, because of a presumed understanding of the issues involved. Even if this 'missing' data are implicitly recognised by both parties within the interview context, since it is not down on paper (or tape), it makes this material unavailable for analysis. Whilst the use of unstructured interviews has a considerable advantage in exploration and probing, it also has its drawbacks. In any unstructured interview it is easy to lose control of the conversation and a skilled technique is necessary to recover the thread. In this particular instance researchers may undertake the role of 'informant' not the desired 'respondent' (see Platt, 1981). Rather than offering raw data, researchers may be prone to offer their interpretations. In essence, attempting to do the analysis for me.

I was, however, prepared for such a difficulty and Becker (1954) argues that one way of eliciting information from the researched in such situations is by "playing dumb". This involves asking the interviewee to articulate certain relationships and attitudes which are not made explicit and assumed to be obvious or taken for granted. For instance, I was extremely interested in moving beyond the more typical responses that may be given in response to ethics. By using the descriptions in which the interviewees had given me in response to my general probing about their project I was able to draw out further information about the issues by asking interviewees to explain that decision, even if I suspected that I knew that answer. To take a particular example, in describing a sampling issue with one participant, the reasoning behind the decision was implicit in what was said but would be unlikely to be offered in conversation due to the often unspoken conventions that govern 'objective' policy studies. However, by playing dumb, and to a certain extent also exploiting the student-teacher relationship, I refused to simply take this description for granted and pursued the matter: 'your sample seems small, why did you make that decision?' Only by drawing upon the naïve approach

and adopting a student role was I able to discover that the sample number was irrelevant as before the study was designed, the results were already known and it was being conducted for political reasons rather than impartial knowledge discovery.

However, adopting a naïve approach in an interview situation like this one is also problematic. Whilst there is the potential for rich data as decisions are made explicit and available for analysis, the need to ask for an explanation alters the research relationship as it may suggest that the researcher is not knowledgeable. There are three possible effects of this. Firstly, that the interviewee is sympathetic to the interviewer and gives explicitly detailed information as requested. Secondly, that the detail requested becomes harmful to the relationship as it is thought of as nosy, impertinent, or cheeky. Particularly in this situation, it may be thought that the interviewer should already know the information and has come ill-prepared inducing thinking along the lines of 'if the interviewer does not know it already then they are not qualified to be interviewing me'. As a result, the relationship is altered and other information offered may not be as rich. Thirdly, the interviewee, being a researcher, may well be aware of the necessity to pursue such lines to suitable conclusions and screen the information anyway. However, it should also be noted that although researchers are often skilled interviewers, this does not in itself make them skilled interviewees.

Indeed, Becker (1954) comments that some successes of the interview situation can be attributed to the politeness and courtesy that the interviewees feel obliged to extend once they have given their permission to be interviewed. Once an interview has started it must be difficult to refuse to answer a question or to discuss certain issues and despite assurances of the right to withdraw, there is must be some implicit coercion that is felt by interviewees. This is not necessarily an ethical violation however, and interviews that are challenging can sometimes be particularly gratifying for interviewees. But it should be noted that researchers do, as I did, play upon this fact to elicit data for the purposes of research.

There are also some more related difficulties here. Platt (1981) has reported that when interviewing researchers, she often found herself asking questions

with lengthy preambles and apologies, and in some cases, leaving them out altogether. There is some evidence to support that conclusion here. Whilst all of the interviews did elicit material, some were undoubtedly richer than others, and in some interviews I was much more comfortable asking challenging questions than others. Indeed, whilst not being aggressive, I quite frequently found myself pursuing lines of inquiry that I knew would be difficult for researchers to justify in a way that would portray them in a good light. In particular, the more reflexive interviewees found questions around the lack of dissemination explicitly designed for participants somewhat awkward.

Interestingly, the interview relationships did not seem to vary by professional standing, nor interview mode (see below), but by the personal relationships that I developed with the interviewees. These relationships were formed quickly as in all but one instance I had not met any of the interviewees before I had made contact with them. As a result it is very difficult to pin down exactly why some relationships were more successful for me and my research purposes than others. That is not to say any of the relationships were disastrous, far from it, all were friendly at the very least.

### **Technology and the interview situation: The use of tape recorders and telephones**

Technology is now a central part of the interview situation. Indeed, the presence and use of tape recorders is often taken for granted and the use of telephones as a mode of interviewing is becoming ever more common-place. However, despite the prevalence of such technology, there remains a paucity of literature concerning the use of tape recorders and telephones. This final section of the chapter will explore the use of such technology in the context of this study and assess the impact of using tape recorders and telephones when conducting qualitative interviews.

The recording of interviews within research is now commonplace and has a number of advantages over the taking of copious notes. To begin with, the technique is less prone to the interpretative effects that inevitably occur when taking field-notes (see Speer and Hutchby, 2003; and, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Field-notes tend toward researcher accounts of the

interview rather than a more accurate description of the event. Similarly, unless the researcher is well qualified and practised in this area, practical considerations of memory mean that the ability of the researcher to note down all the information in its entirety is challenged and valuable data may be lost. Further, constant note-taking can interfere with the flow of the interview. As a result, the use of recorders in the field is now widely accepted as 'best practice' and provides a much more accurate and detailed account of what occurs (Speer and Hutchby, 2003).

However, in attempting to capture a more accurate account of what was said, some researchers (usually operating under an assumption of realism) have questioned how the use of recording apparatus influences the research encounter. This discourse is usually termed the interviewer or researcher effects, the reactive effects (see Fielding, 1993; or, Bryman, 2004), or within more psychological frameworks as the demand characteristics of the research situation (see Adair, 1984). Indeed, many participant-observation based studies avoid recording information due to the effects it may have on the observed (Judd et al, 1991). For instance, the justification of covert observation usually rests upon the assumption that to make the researcher's presence known would drastically alter the research context. Similarly, being tape-recorded is not a normal situation for many people and researchers have noted that under such situations the researched may become more anxious, alter their language, or refuse to speak altogether (see Speer and Hutchby, 2003, for a review).

However, as Speer and Hutchby (2003) point out, such realist concerns would seem to suggest that the presence of a recorder somehow contaminates or alters the research context in a way that is undesirable. They use the term 'one way mirror dilemma' to suggest that such an approach assumes that there is a realm of social interaction that methodological techniques should strive for data that is more naturalistic, more valid, and more reliable. However, rather than seeing the tape recorder as a contaminating device that prevents authentic talk, they suggest that what participants are *doing* (their emphasis) when they are being recorded, and how that plays a part in the ongoing construction of the researcher-researched relationship is of paramount importance.

In relation to this project, everybody was informed before the interview that transcripts would be sent to them, and they were reminded before the interview that it was going to be recorded. This was particularly important in the case of the telephone interviews where it may not have been obvious. No-one raised any objections to being recorded. Indeed, as researchers they would have recognised this as normal practice. However, in four instances interviewees did point out that whilst they were perfectly happy to be recorded, they intimated that they would not say anything during the interview that they would not be happy for me to use<sup>10</sup>. This also prompted some reflection about the instances where tape-recording had become an issue in their own research and some of the interviewees commented upon how it helped to facilitate their personal relationships with the interviewees. Interestingly, the interviewees who were interviewed via telephone had to be directly questioned about the issue before any information was offered and, presumably, this was because the tape recorder could not be used as a visual prompt and therefore did not act as a cue for discussion.

This is an interesting finding as the presence of a recorder might actually strengthen the consent process because it allows interviewees to more effectively marshal their information and control more of what they are consenting to. Whilst this may support the assumption that tape-recorders can help interviewees censor information<sup>11</sup>, this is not necessarily negative as it allows interviewees to see that they are still in a research situation. In this sense it can facilitate trust by strengthening the consent process because it offers a constant visual reminder to the interviewee that the words they offer are being observed and recorded. Equally, in this particular instance the presence of a device had a practical use in that it also allowed me to generate discussion around how their own interviewees responded to such devices. As Speer and Hutchby (2003) suggest, the recorder can become an interactional resource as the tape-recorder stories I was told about helped me open up conversation on a personal level with researchers.

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<sup>10</sup> Another interviewee quickly asked for some personal information to be removed from the subsequent transcript as soon as the information was given.

<sup>11</sup> However, this is not straightforward assumption to make. Whilst the interviewees suggested they would not say anything that they would not be happy for me to use, that does not in itself conclusively suggest that they hid anything from me. Indeed, there were no instances where an interviewee declined to answer a question. In any case, suggesting that the tape recorder in itself alters the research situation is to ignore the constructed nature of any research situation (see chapter 3).

However, some of these personal relationships were different to others and this may be attributable to the mode of the interview. Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) suggest that whilst there is a large body of literature relating to the interview as a method of data collection in qualitative research, there is relatively little material on the mode of the interview. The same cannot be said of more quantitative based work, where the mode of the interview is often treated as a confounding variable that can affect both respondent rates and data collection (Peneff, 1988). This paucity of literature in more qualitatively based work is, perhaps, not that surprising as the telephone interview is often seen as being appropriate in short structured interviews, or acceptable only in very specific circumstances (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Certainly, at the beginning of this project it was taken for granted that the interviews would be conducted in person. Indeed, there is an implicit assumption in many methods text-books that interviews are always conducted face-to-face, such is the paucity of discussion around the mode of the qualitative interview.

Obviously, the telephone interview does deprive the researcher of seeing and reacting to the respondents' nonverbal communication and this has not gone unnoticed elsewhere (see Cresswell, 1998, for instance). This would necessarily impact on the research relationship as without visual cues the nature and depth of information gained may be altered. A lack of personal engagement may not facilitate trust due to the facelessness of the researcher and may actually serve to distance the researcher from the researched. It is likely that these conclusions are valid ones in some contexts. As Sturges and Hanrahan (2004, p 108) comment: "suitability needs to be considered in light of the particular research endeavour." However, they qualify this remark by suggesting that in some instances the telephone interview can have direct benefits. They argue that participation in qualitative research can be time-consuming, privacy endangering, intellectually and emotionally demanding, and imposing on the researched. They go on to argue that there are four areas in which telephone interviewing may be useful. Firstly, in sensitive subject areas where participants perceive the telephone interview as having a higher degree of anonymity (see Greenfield et al, 2000). Secondly, in projects that need to access hard to reach groups, or where respondents are hard to meet in

person. Thirdly, where interviewer safety is an issue, and fourthly where there are financial considerations to be taken into account. Moreover, they also suggest that the use of the telephone may also actually assist the interviewer when conducting interviews in other more practical ways. The interviewer can take notes without distracting the interviewee, and it can be conducted where the interviewee wishes thereby avoiding busy, noisy, uncomfortable, and often unfamiliar surroundings.

Using the little empirical evidence that there is on the matter, the general conclusion made by Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) is that telephone interviews are an acceptable and useful mode of data collection. This view seems to be supported by the present study.

As has been previously described, a total of thirteen interviews were completed with twelve different interviewees. Four of these were conducted by telephone, three at the request of the interviewee and one because it was a repeat interview<sup>12</sup>. In general, the telephone interviews were slightly shorter in length than the face-to-face interviews. There may be a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the data gained in face-to-face interviews may be slightly richer than that obtained in the telephone interviews. Further, the interviewer's interviewing skills on the telephone may not be as good as they are in person. Certainly, pauses are more difficult to negotiate on the telephone due to the lack of visual turn-taking cues. It is often difficult, for instance, to fully appreciate the difference between a narrative pause and a non-verbal request for a further question. Similarly, the sole reliance on verbal communication can also create pressure for the interviewer struggling to make sense of an answer whilst trying to keep to the interview schedule. Pausing for thought is much more difficult to convey on a telephone than it is where visual cues are present. This effect is particularly enhanced in this research context as the usual power balance of the interview context was upset. The interviewer was, in fact, much less experienced in the interview situation and of research more generally than the interviewee, therefore, there was some evaluation anxiety on behalf of the interviewer to look and sound professional in front of the more senior researcher. Whilst this was the same in all interview situations, the reliance on the verbal may have

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<sup>12</sup> A further two interviewees specifically stated that they were happy to be interviewed by telephone or in person, but were, in fact, interviewed in person.

enhanced the effect. Rather than pursuing fruitful lines of narrative, I may have inadvertently moved on to the next subject on the schedule just to get another question out, rather than take the time to further probe useful lines of thought.

Finally, the difference in length may have resulted from the selection procedure with those who selected to be interviewed by phone perceived themselves to have less time to offer than those who did not. As a result, they offered less rounded answers or were more to the point.

There are no controlled repeated measures here so it is difficult to judge whether, in fact, the differences are due to individual differences as much as anything else. One telephone interview was the second time the researcher had been interviewed and they were, therefore, familiar with the lines of questioning. Additionally, in this particular interview there were problems with the recorder and that meant that certain parts had a reconstructed nature to them. Another telephone interview, whilst appearing short on paper was well within the time range of the other interviews but had a lot of pauses for reflection by the interviewee. Indeed, despite the telephone interviews being slightly shorter, the depth of the interview seems to be relatively unaffected. This is consistent with other literature in the field (see Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004).

In contrast, the use of telephone interviews may have also some direct benefits. In terms of time the telephone interview is much easier to manage than the face-to-face interview, particularly where there is significant travelling involved. A full day can easily be lost on a one-hour interview. Similarly, the saving in terms of cost can be crucial to a relatively small scale PhD project that has financial restrictions. From the perspective of those who engage, the telephone interview is much less of an imposition and they do not have to find somewhere quiet for the interview to take place. Equally, unlike the face-to-face interview, arrangements for the interview can be quickly made so that the rate of turnover is higher. Certainly, the telephone interviews in this study required much less arrangement than the face-to-

face ones. In all but one of the four telephone interviews<sup>13</sup>, the interviews were arranged and conducted in less than a period of two weeks. No face-to-face interview was negotiated as quickly, with one taking over six months to come to fruition.

To conclude, from the information presented here it appears that the telephone can successfully be used as a mode of qualitative interviewing. Indeed, it can offer a number of benefits to the researcher when dealing with research groups that are relatively mobile, busy, and professionally employed. Similarly, the low rate of imposition on the researched group appears to have facilitated participation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the process of carrying out the research project and has grounded that experience within relevant literature. Firstly describing the process of grounded theory, including case selection, the problem of interviewing elites, and theoretical saturation, the chapter then gives an overview of the research group before considering the difficulties and problems associated with doing research that has other researchers as its focus of interest. These issues include: the ethical issues involved in the study and how these were negotiated; the costs and benefits of being researched; issues of roles negotiation and technical competence; and, finally, the mode of the interview,

This chapter serves to ground the process of doing grounded theory thereby making it a more transparent one. It demonstrates how methodology is often compromised by the social context of the research situation. Within the context of this study, the idealistic conceits of theoretical saturation were balanced by the more every-day practicalities of interviewing elites and access to more theoretically desirable cases was limited. Similarly, the relatively small nature of the study also meant that time was also a factor that prevented saturation being reached. As a result, theoretical sampling

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<sup>13</sup> The outlier here took around two months to arrange, mainly because it was originally meant to be a face-to-face interview.

and theoretical saturation cannot be assumed and the study is considered to be intensive rather than extensive. Therefore, whilst the framework presented in the following chapters was generated following the central properties of the methodology and can be considered to be a grounded theory, it remains conditional. This means that the framework needs to be subject to further investigation in order to fully articulate the theory. Whilst the chapters do represent a substantive analysis of the data they do not saturate the data or the field and further investigation is desirable.

However, this compromise between methodological rigor and practicality is not entirely unhelpful and two themes reoccur within this chapter which can be seen to enhance the research process. These emergent themes are risk, and information management. In respect to these issues, it is argued that due to the insider status of researchers' concerning the research process, consent is strengthened as the researcher is fully aware of the impact of their engagement. Secondly, whilst some facets of the research relationship can be seen to limit data, others will open up the relationship to other possibilities. For example, being a junior researcher may actually help the facilitation of data as it is much easier to 'play dumb'. Further, on one hand telephone interviews may, or may not, alter the quality of the data, but on the other they may offer a number of benefits in terms of recruitment, time, and efficiency.

All research relationships and the data they elicit will vary according to the context in which they are situated. This process is often a delicate balance between methodology and practicality. This is not to submit to all out 'anything goes' relativism, nor does it mean that this study cannot be considered to use a 'grounded' methodology. Instead, articulating the subjective quality of the data that is obtained allows this particular study to reproduce a version of reality in the following chapters that is ontologically plausible, epistemologically systematic and transparent, and grounded in the data.

## Chapter 5

### **Generation, selection and justification: How do researchers understand the development and mobilisation of their research projects?**

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The social world is not an immutable structure but is constructed and maintained through the practice of human interaction. For example, policy within a local authority is continually evolving to respond to the changing demands of the particular social world in which it is situated. This inevitability of social change essentially means that research has a 'shelf-life' and social research knowledge needs to be continually updated if it is to be deemed useful. Therefore, due to its necessarily changing subject matter, social research is able to continually generate potential projects.

Moreover, the collapse of macro objectives within social research and the subsequent post-modern turn has meant an increasing emphasis on so called middle range and micro theories of social action and its accompanying actors (see Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). In practice, this has opened up the whole of the social world for investigation, description, explanation, and understanding and has, at least in part, led to an explosion in sociological research.

Indeed, these two factors have resulted in a huge number of projects that can be deemed worthy, and in need of investigation. However, funding and research resource are not limitless and not all projects that are identified can be mobilised through to completion. Therefore, decisions concerning what projects are, and are not, mobilised are necessary. Whilst the political nature of qualitative research is now something of an accepted truism within

methodological literature, to date, there has been little empirical discussion concerning the process of research genesis and how research projects are developed by researchers.

This chapter will explore the process of research generation by examining how researchers understand the development of their research projects and will attempt to map how researchers understand the generation, selection, and justification of research projects. Beginning with an examination of how projects are generated by researchers, the types of knowledge gaps that researchers 'construct' for their projects will be identified. These are the substantive gaps, epistemological gaps, and methodological gaps that researchers use to situate their projects. Once researchers have done this, however, they still need to make a number of decisions in order to prioritise potential projects and the chapter will also discuss how these decisions are influenced by their personal interests and professional interests, their need for professional development, and the research environment they find themselves in. Further, whilst researchers may identify projects according to these local interests and environments they also need to be justified in connection to the wider world. In order to appeal to this wider world, the chapter will examine three distinct forms of justification that were used by researchers: public need, political legitimation, and, research field resonance. In addition to these justifications, researchers will often give added value to projects over and above the presumed standard requirements for research. These considerations include participation and commitment to change; avoiding abusive forms of data extraction; and empowering minority researchers.

## **Project generation: How do researchers identify research projects?**

As previously highlighted, due to the explosion of possible areas for research, researchers need to identify projects from an increasing myriad of possibilities. A key method of achieving this is through the construction of some form of gap in the knowledge field. These identifications are typically framed by researchers in three ways: substantive, epistemological, and methodological. Each type of justification is dealt with in turn.

Firstly, substantive gaps occur through a lack of research in a particular area that prevents it from being described or adequately addressed. Typically these are areas that are described as being not previously addressed with enough clarity to provide an adequate level of robust knowledge within the body of knowledge. These gaps may be recognised by other interested parties, such as professional groups, but in all cases they are not perceived to have merited sufficient attention in the research literature. Such a gap is described below by one interviewee:

“[It was about] getting the views of black families with disabled children that hadn’t actually been talked to before, so that study got funding.” (SG, 2005)

If substantive gaps occur through a lack of research in a particular area, epistemological gaps typically occur through the perceived lack of a particular way of looking at the world to create that knowledge. The current world, or knowledge field, is represented in such a particular way that is not deemed epistemologically adequate or secure enough. So, for example, one study here used an actor-centred approach in order to explore trans-racial adoption from the perspective of trans-racial adoptees:

“I was trying to give these people a chance to talk about their lives and their experiences, because let’s face it, other people haven’t; so I wanted to do that as far as possible.” (SM, 2005)

Whilst a substantive gap had been addressed by research, it had not been deemed to be addressed in a way that made the current knowledge field epistemologically secure because it was not articulated from the perspective of those who were central to the field. This epistemological deficit then reconstructed a substantive gap in the research field.

As qualitative research is idiographic, value-led, and partial (see Hammersley, 1995, for further discussion), epistemological gaps are always present within any given research field. Indeed, given the proliferation of paradigms and theories within the qualitative canon, saturation is highly unlikely and once a substantive gap has been wedged open there are many different ways of epistemologically colouring that gap. Actor-centred approaches, inductive approaches, and critical approaches were just some of the epistemological lenses that researchers used to explore the social world in the present sample.

Finally, methodological facets of a given research study may inadvertently exclude particular groups and this subsequently reconstructs substantive gaps. For example a study that over-estimates the need for literacy in order to be part of the research group will exclude knowledge about those in the sub-group it has not examined. This then constructs a substantive gap as relatively little is known about that particular sub-group. One researcher made reference to such a gap when discussing his findings from other related literature:

“I found two studies, from [place] and [place], where researchers had asked young people what their lives were like, but these were *all* young people whereas I was interested in young people who were seen to be in trouble by the education system. I thought it reasonable to assume that those people could have difficulty with language, writing and reading and so on, so the methods used by the [place] researchers didn't focus particularly on young people in trouble as the young people in trouble within their sample were likely to be disadvantaged by their ability to respond as they are likely to further behind in terms of education.” (SD, 2005)

The methodology employed by a research study had an exclusory effect on a certain type of group. This methodological deficit was then used by the researcher as a means to construct a gap in the current body of knowledge.

Any methodological selection procedures do, inevitably, impact upon the identification of research projects as any selection also necessarily requires exclusion. If the exclusion that results from using organised groups is systematic and marginalises a particular and substantive research group then substantive gaps are possible. In effect, there will always be gaps in our research knowledge due to the methods of selection used in research projects: It is an inevitable consequence of doing research. As the qualitative research enterprise rarely saturates its field of enquiry, research continually generates gaps that are unlikely to be filled. Indeed, principles of generalisation are frequently mobilised to allow for this and to apply areas of knowledge outside their original context. This means that results, findings and analysis can be, and are often explicitly designed to be, applied in contexts that are perceived to be analogous.

However, this generalisation process can become problematic in some instances. Methodological gaps are always present, but only a few are ever mobilised as generating a substantive gap that is worthy of further investigation. This happens when researchers decide that the generalisations that are being made from the body of research are unstable when applied to particular social groups and contexts. The sample is no longer representative of the population it purports to address. Once a methodological gap is identified and thought to be significant enough to be mobilised, this methodological gap then achieves its status as a substantive gap worthy of investigation in its own right and a new population worthy of study is created.

To summarise, there are three forms of inter-related gaps that researchers use to situate projects and to identify projects: substantive, epistemological, and methodological. However, only a few of these gaps will actually be selected and a research project mobilised. The following section is concerned with the subsequent selection of research projects and how researchers construct study areas in terms of their own personal and professional identities.

## **Project selection: How do researchers develop particular gaps?**

There are a great number of gaps and subsequent projects that are available to the research world and the researchers that inhabit it. Once researchers have identified projects and situated them in knowledge gaps, researchers need to make a number of decisions in order to select projects that are achievable for them. Research is often time-consuming and all of the researchers in this study suggested that the topics of research they investigated were not randomly generated or plucked from a vacuum. Their particular fields of vision developed from a locus of interests within their lives and the projects they chose to be involved in were value-loaded decisions. One interviewee neatly describes this process of decision-making with regards to project selection:

“in terms of deciding what exactly to research there were a number of factors involved. I suppose one was something that would fit within the broad remit of the centre, you know that was concerned with the ideas and debates and theoretical issues that the centre was particularly identified with; there would also be issues around what would press the right buttons with the research councils; and, maybe lowest on the list would be things like personal interest, you know, what would engage me.” (BT, 2005)

Accordingly, whilst funding is dealt with in the following chapter, researchers select projects according to four inter-related factors: personal interest and professional interest, their professional development and their research environment. These are described in turn.

For some projects, the topic of investigation developed from a professional interest that they had previously had in the field, whilst for others it resulted from a personal interest they had outside of the research world. One researcher described his professional background and interest in a project:

“Well my background is in disability research and most of my work’s been with adults with learning difficulties and focused around a variety of things like activism and their

self-esteem, images around themselves as adults, but then this project came about through a colleague who was working at [place] university, and we wanted to look at the early years and particularly issues around how parents and professionals negotiate understandings of impairment and disability." (ID, 2005)

His previous intellectual career helped to guide the selection of the project. Unsurprisingly, researchers have interests that have developed over time and these interests guide their decisions about the projects they engage in.

Another researcher described their research project as fitting into a wider and over-arching interest they had in their personal life:

"...for me it came out of my interest from what happens to children, in multi-faith and multi-ethnic schools. And that for me is partly because my own children are growing in a situation where we had white children from a Christian family in a school where the majority were Muslim. And the church that we were in at the time, they were also the minority ethnic group because most of the people had a black Caribbean or a black African background. So we were living right in the heart of multi-culturalism and seeing my own children growing up and talking to their friends I suppose I started asking them questions about their backgrounds so it was that rather than me trying to break theoretical ground."  
(FT, 2005)

Rather than the previous professional research interests guiding their gap selection, the researchers' personal experiences are directing them toward their chosen gaps. This acted as a point to build their wider intellectual career.

Researchers are seldom independent within social research, however, and the majority of researchers are situated within larger institutions where the practice of research is also instrumental to a researcher's career. In order for a

career to progress a researcher must necessarily produce research. This means that research projects have an instrumental value to researchers in terms of their professional development:

“I had a post there as a contract researcher, so my employment was dependent upon generating research income so there was always a point sort of mid-way through one research project where you had to begin thinking about the next study.” (BT, 2005)

Research projects, therefore, are not altruistic exercises. If a researcher is to continue being a ‘researcher’ then he or she must be seen to be doing research. For some, being research active is the sole purpose of their job, whilst for others it is a central component. In order to continue within their chosen profession they need to fulfil this function. Hence, the needs of the institution also have to be considered when selecting projects, as one researcher suggested:

“one of the issues that the centre was particularly concerned with was social change and the family: how, if you like, the way in which people live their family lives is altering, and the cultural, historical nature of particular ideas about family life; what is the right way to ‘do’ family.” (BT, 2005)

Research institutions usually have substantive areas of interest, and often specialise in areas of methodological expertise, and these interests influence the selection of projects. Here, one researcher draws a direct link between the institution she was employed at, and the research selection:

“the study was conceived at, well before I was at [the university], I was at [a national children’s institution] doing work around PSHE [personal, social, and health education], citizenship, education, those kind of areas and the study was cooked up there really. I wrote the study when I was there.” (SS, 2005)

However, that is not to say that any given institution where the research takes place takes priority over the needs of the researcher. Indeed, not being part of a particular institution can be as much of a defining point for research as being part of one:

“I didn’t want to be some sort of advertising board if I’d wanted that I would have gone to ATRAP [Association for Trans-racially Adopted and Fostered People] or BAAF [British Association for Adoption and Fostering].” (SM, 2005)

Institutions with research interests, therefore, help to define the broad areas of interest for researchers by helping to frame their interests and to mobilise projects that fit in with the remit of the institution. Research projects are not only necessarily imbued with the personal and professional histories of the particular researcher but are also formed by the professional demands of being a ‘researcher’ and the needs of working in a research environment that is required to produce research in order to maintain itself.

It is not surprising that researchers’ decisions around what projects they select and carry out are value-laden. However, what these personal and political values allow the researcher to do, and what is often neglected in the literature around researcher values, is to use their individual personal and professional histories in order to construct a research identity amid a mass of other researchers. This helps to facilitate and enable an expert identity that allows them to function within the research community. In turn, this enables them to identify projects that help to maintain that identity: the performance of doing research is crucial to reconstructing that identity.

These intellectual histories are reconstructed as a result of drawing upon the everyday concepts that exist in the world ‘out-there’, such as children and education, and re-configuring them into research activities, such as being interested in research into the lives of disabled children or the issues around identity for young black males. The transformation of these familiar every-day

concepts into research specific ones are then being internally configured and combined in a unique way by researchers as a way to produce a specific research identity. This facilitates an external recognition by other individuals and institutions of being an expert in a specific and particular area. It is this identity that enables them to attend specialist conferences, engage with specialist literature, and identify and carry out specialist projects. In turn, this all has performative value toward the identity of researcher.

Therefore, personal and professional histories are central to the identity of an expert researcher because they help to both identify projects and ascribe a research identity to the researcher. Being part of a specialist institution, be it a university department or a specific research organisation, also helps to reinforce this identity. However, whilst that membership necessitates a particular researcher identity it also constrains the types of project that the researcher engages with. The immediate research environment similarly needs to maintain its own identity as a particular and expert institution. Having researchers carry out projects in association with them allows the institution to achieve this. Therefore, research projects are not only necessarily and purposefully imbued with the personal and professional histories of the particular researcher in order to acquire an individual and expert identity, but also formed by the professional demands of being a 'researcher' and the needs of working in a research environment that is required to produce research in order to maintain itself. It is in this process of identity maintenance and performance that helps researchers to reconstruct potential areas of investigation.

### **Project justification: How do researchers connect projects to the wider social world?**

However, this still leaves a huge number of potential projects that could be mobilised. This means that projects need to be further prioritised. The following section will detail how researchers represent and mobilise the justifications for their projects in order to prioritise particular projects from their complex personal and professional lives. The projects that the researchers described here were justified in three distinct forms: public need,

political legitimation, and research field resonance. However, whilst all researchers connected their projects to the social world in these terms, they also offered some personal drivers that gave added value for research alongside these justifications. Each will be dealt with in turn.

### **Public need**

Some research projects are justified by appealing to a wider public need for a more epistemologically secure way of knowing about a substantive area of the social world. The primary construction is that there is a lack of knowledge about a particular issue within the public arena that needs addressing. Research serves as a method of finding out something that is not currently well articulated by the current knowledge field. However, the mechanism that actually drives the public need often differs from project to project. Indeed, three different mechanisms related to public need were offered by researchers: through an insider involvement with a public issue; from the needs of a particular collective group; and, a public need driven by major organisations and institutions. These are described in turn.

Some researchers spoke of a public need for research in an area with which they had an insider involvement. This was then seen to have a perceived resonance with a wider need for knowledge. For instance, this researcher demonstrated how his knowledge of a particular field allowed him to identify a gap in the professional body of knowledge about a certain issue:

“I interviewed for a counsellor as part of the children’s service and after the interview was reflecting on just this kind of conversation with the director of the [an education group], a very forward thinking women called [name], who said ‘well, what can be done about it?’” (SD, 2005)

This insider knowledge allowed him to justify the project in terms of both his personal and professional knowledge as he had individual experience of the issue. The project was concerned with an issue that he had identified as being particularly problematic in his practice and he was sufficiently driven to think that the issue would also have particular resonance for other practitioners.

This private knowledge therefore acquired a more public need. This enabled him to successfully engage with the funding agency and drive the project as he was both an interested professional and a credible researcher.

In the next example however, the need came from an area that was justified according to a need within a particular collective group:

“[the funding agency] wanted to commission a review of research into short breaks of black disabled children because the families had identified an area that there wasn’t much literature or work that had been done on it; so I was then asked to do that work.” (SG, 2005)

Here the researcher becomes involved after the public need has been set through an engagement between a local group and a wider funding institution. The researcher was brought in specifically to mobilise and realise a project that was justified according to the unmet needs of a particular group. In this particular instance the researcher was identified and selected from a small group of potential researchers who had an interest in the area. Therefore, the wider public need converged with the personal interests of the researcher.

Finally, some projects will be conceived and justified in terms of a response to wider organisations and institutions:

“There’d always been issues at a local level amongst the communities, I knew about them because I lived there, but with the current climate concerning multi-culturalism and integration, it all went national and there was suddenly loads of stuff in the newspapers and the media...the project fitted into all of that.” (SM, 2005)

In this example, the public need is constructed within a framework of local and national institutions that were perceived to reflect public interest. The

researcher saw a need for research in the area and the project that they proposed was perceived to converge with these wider public issues.

### **Political Legitimation**

Projects are not always developed as exercises 'to find things out'. Gaps are sometimes identified and selected with a specific outcome in mind. Social research becomes a formalised process of describing something that is already known and that has already been decided. Therefore, the justification is framed and constructed in a way that emphasises political legitimation. In the following example, drawn from the policy provision field, the engagement with the research process offers a means of communicating information through a more epistemologically secure form of knowledge construction:

“we can tell you now that we know what we will find. We don't need to spend this money to get these outcomes, because we know what is going on..... [but] going through the process, writing it up formally, gathering the evidence, was something that [the funding agency] wanted to do and obviously something that [the other funding agency] wanted to do because you have to formalise it. They had already identified practice development money and what they wanted to do was to, they didn't perhaps know what all the findings would be, but they wanted to take that as a piece of work and then run a development project on it: which is what they did.” (SG, 2005)

And:

“they [the funding agency] knew and we knew, everybody knew, that there was unmet need. So the role of research here is to evidence something that people knew anyway but it's to collect something together systematically and present it formally.” (SG, 2005)

Under such a model, the gap is perceived by the researcher to be heavily influenced by those who are prepared to fund the study and those who carry it out: it is they who decide what issues need such representation. However, again it is essential that the project resonates with the personal interest of the researcher. Not only does engagement with this work enable a very particular research identity for the researcher, but it is also necessary in order to fully represent the ascribed political viewpoint. As the same researcher went on to describe:

“Certainly, in terms of the kind of work that I do is informed by values and ethics and it’s done very much in political context, you know personal with other kinds of ends in mind.” (SG, 2005)

A previous engagement with the topic and a sympathetic political interest is often, therefore, a crucial attribute rather than a merely useful, or contaminating, one.

### **Research field resonance**

The final type of justification is research field resonance. Here, gaps are connected to the social world by demonstrating a resonance with the knowledge base of the research field. Studies result from the intellectual interests of the researcher and their environment, rather than from elsewhere. Whilst other interested parties may indirectly help the researcher to identify and locate the project, the emphasis does not come from them but the researcher who devises and drives the study:

“Well it came from my head I suppose. Prior to [the study] I’d done a lot of research with parents in [a place] where I was previously before coming to [place] and I’d done quite an extensive study that turned out to be predominately white parents; it hadn’t been planned that way I’d actually wanted a racial and ethnic mix but I couldn’t get access to those schools because for that study I’d tried to access the parents through the schools. I’d also done a very small

study with afro-Caribbean parents and I wanted to extend the work by looking at other ethnic minority groups and particularly Bangladeshi and Pakistani families because as you probably know they are some of the poorest achieving children in the country so I wanted to look at these families for that reason.” (FD, 2005)

Studies such as these are exploratory in that the results are not usually known before hand, and the outcomes are primarily justified in the interests of the researcher and of the wider academic audience rather than to be used in a more public area. Another researcher described a project:

“it’s not a practice orientated piece of research, none of the research was specifically focused either on policy purely or practice issues. It really was a more sociologically research centred. So I suppose the concerns were around sociological things.” (BT, 2005)

Whilst the research may go on to be of value in some way, the value of the research is not well defined beyond contributing to the knowledge field. Therefore, the justification for the perceived research gap is heavily constructed by the researchers who devise (and drive) the study.

### **Personal drivers: Giving ‘added value’ to research justifications**

Whilst all researchers in this sample mobilised public need, political legitimisation, and research field resonance as ways of connecting projects to the social world, there are also other drivers that are used to give “added value” to these justifications. These are the justifications that are perceived as having some worth over and above those discussed above. Within the context of this study, the personal drivers discussed include: empowerment and commitment to change; avoiding abusive forms of data extraction; and empowering researchers. Each is discussed in turn.

Perhaps the most important added value justifications were constructed around the issues concerning participation and a commitment to change. In these instances, research is justified as improving the capacity for individuals and groups to act within particular social contexts, or even changing the social conditions of individuals and groups. This was clearly important in the following example:

“...there is the whole discourse around ‘nothing about us without us’, the disability slogan. And the fact that for years and years it’s been research *on* disabled people and not *with* them, so that would be a very political commitment on behalf of the research team; working alongside people and try to open up opportunities for working in participatory ways. And that’s been a success in a number of projects I’ve been involved in, particularly when those people want to be involved.” (ID, 2005)

The researcher is constructing an added justification around projects that encourage the involvement of those who choose to take an active role in the project. Indeed, the researcher is directly attributing the success of the projects around the efficacy of the research to do just that. How this can be achieved was later elaborated upon:

“it’s a partisan piece of research. It’s working with parents to look at ways in which they come up with enabling visions of their kids, but also enabling visions of care.” (ID, 2005)

The added value is the ability of a research project to explore how people empower themselves and working with them to represent this through research engagement. Not only is there a public need to examine enabling visions of care that has not been coloured by the research world, but there is extra value in mobilising a more participatory and inclusive method in order to investigate it.

Related to this type of justification is an added value framed around demonstrating a commitment to change that results from the research project. As one researcher suggested:

“[the other researcher] and I were quite clear that a commitment to the research was that services.....should improve as a result of this research and that the funder take it to their services because it’s no good it sitting on the shelf. You might as well not have bothered.” (NN, 2005)

In this example, the researcher makes a direct, and causal, connection between the research project and change in the social world, in this case a local authority service. The research project acts as mechanism to alter the parts of the social world that it is concerned with.

In addition to these drivers of participation and change, another method of achieving added value in the justification of research that was identified by researchers is concerned with the need to avoid “abusive” models of research and the perception of “parachuting in”:

“[the other researcher] and I really believed that we should not be researchers parachuting in from outside, kind of meddling around, doing something, going out again, presenting a formal report. That is really detached from the whole process....” (SG, 2005)

Models of data extraction were not thought conducive to positive research relationships or good research outcomes and could discourage further participation in projects. As a result, a research practice that detaches the researched from the research process and sees them as information providers rather than people is to be avoided. Research groups should not become a means to an end:

“if [researchers] don’t have the mission or the passion about it, it can be done as a detached intellectual exercise and people are not human beings they’re objects.” (NN, 2005)

Therefore, added value is achieved through the development of a respectful relationship between those who engage with the research process and the researchers. This means avoiding seeing those researched as passive information providers to be researched and instead actively engaging with them as people with particular interests and ideals. This may be achieved by more participatory or involving research projects, avoiding post-data collection exclusion, acknowledging the contributions of those involved, or by offering something in return for engagement.

The final form of research justification also relates to the politics of research in respect to “who does this work” and the empowerment of groups within the conduction of research. One interviewee spoke of this with regard to ethnicity:

“in the politics of research there are tensions and there are discussions to always be had about who does this work?... [The funding agency] are aware that institutional discrimination that black researchers don’t get a look into mainstream research because the networks are, well academic networks work so that people pass work on to people that they know and if most of the people are white and most of the people they know are white they’re the ones who they pass stuff on to. So why do you think that there aren’t many black researchers that are visible?” (SG, 2005)

The researcher is constructing a positive justification around who carries out the research work, rather than the gap it is being directed at. Research practice is mobilised as an empowering device for researchers who, as members of wider social groups, are structurally disadvantaged within the research world. Therefore, research justifications gain added value when those who are carrying it out are given the opportunity to challenge and change these structures.

This can have a positive and empowering effect upon the research relationship. As one researcher highlighted:

“in some senses that was a really positive thing, for example one parent had a child with the same impairment as the researcher and saw this researcher as a doctor with her child’s impairment having incredible success, and was really quite blown away by it, and I know that the researcher and the mother were crying: very positive for both of them.” (ID, 2005)

There are a number of empowering practices inherent in the research process justifications. Not only can these practices challenge structures through the substantive gaps they fill, they can also empower groups of people who conduct that research, and resultantly empower those who then see them doing that research.

## **Conclusion**

The social world provides a large number of potential areas for investigation. Hence researchers need to identify, select, and justify projects in order to mobilise them. This chapter explores this process of research generation by examining how researchers understand the development of their research projects. Beginning by addressing the question of how projects are generated by researchers it explores how researchers identify potential projects and how they then subsequently mobilise and represent the justifications for those projects. The chapter then considers how researchers incorporate personal drivers that give ‘added value’ to their respective projects.

A key method of identifying projects is through the construction of some form of gap in the research field. These identifications are typically framed in three ways: substantive, epistemological, and methodological. Whilst substantive gaps occur through a lack of engagement in a certain substantive area that

prevents it from being described or adequately addressed, epistemological gaps and methodological gaps are constructed due to gaps in the way knowledge is being constructed or the methodological facets of a given research study that excludes particular groups.

Although a very great many projects can potentially be identified according to these gaps, only a small few are actually developed. Therefore, researchers make a number of decisions in order to prioritise these projects that are identifiable. Indeed, they do so according to four inter-related factors: their personal interests and their professional interests, their need for professional development and identity, and, their research environment. In doing this, research projects are imbued with the personal and professional histories of the particular researcher. This helps them to acquire an individual and expert identity. Furthermore, projects are also formed out of the professional demands of being a researcher and the needs of working in an expert research environment that is required to produce research in order to maintain itself.

However, whilst they may identify projects according to these local interests and environments this is not always how they are justified. Indeed, if such projects are to achieve mobilisation then researchers seek to justify projects to a wider audience by appealing to three distinct forms of justification; public need, political legitimation, and, research field resonance. The primary construction for public need is that there is a lack of knowledge about a particular and public area that needs addressing. Public need projects therefore assume that research offers a more epistemologically secure way of colouring any given gap. Secondly, projects are not always constructed as naïve inductivist exercises 'to find things out' but are reconstructed around political legitimation. Areas of interest are identified by funding agencies, professional groups, researchers, and even research groups with the project being designed specifically with the outcome in mind. In these instances, social research becomes a formalised process of acquiring a more epistemologically secure way of describing something that is already known and that has already been decided. Justifications concerning research field resonance, on the other hand, are reconstructed from the interests and personal research history of the researcher. Studies result from the intellectual interests of the researcher and their environment, rather than from a public or political need elsewhere.

Moreover, in addition to these justifications, researchers will use personal drivers to give added value to projects over and above the presumed standard requirements for research. These include: empowerment and commitment to change; avoiding abusive forms of data extraction; and empowering researchers.

The analysis presented above is an attempt to capture, and conceptually organise the process of generating research projects. However, and despite the framework presented above, the process of generating, selecting, and justifying research projects is both a complex and a messy one where many different variables interact in an often fluid and changeable manner. It is not a fixed or linear process. Researchers do not simply flow through the process of project development in a linear fashion, but actively shape and interact with the process. Research projects are often not single events in a research career but are part of a series of intersecting projects and interests that are developed by (sometimes different) researchers and institutions over time and in social and political environments.

Indeed, the focus on researchers is, perhaps, a misleading one as it may be seen to imply that the decision making process is located at the level of the individual researcher and their immediate environment. Yet research projects are not just influenced by the social conditions of the researcher. The vast majority of research that is carried out within the higher education sector is now funded by external bodies of some kind (Lewis, 2001). The mechanisms involved in this mobilisation process that researchers use to achieving funding are dealt with in the following chapter.

## Chapter 6

### **Convergence, resonance and de-alignment: How do researchers negotiate their relationships with funding agencies**

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The previous chapter explored how researchers understand the generation of projects and how they identify, select, and justify their involvement with them. However, qualitative researchers do not have a limitless capacity to decide what projects they would like to develop and mobilise. Increasingly, as research is more and more reliant upon attracting funding, researchers need to generate projects that are likely to be attractive to funding agencies. This chapter will explore how researchers negotiate and manage their relationships with funding agencies, and examine how researchers represent projects as useful and relevant in order to achieve funding. The chapter will begin by introducing the concepts of convergence and resonance as a means of understanding the relationship between researchers and funding agencies and it will go on to distinguish between three different types of funding agency that researchers identified: local organisations with specific remits and interests; national charitable organisations with specific interests; and national organisations with specific commitments to fund research. With reference to this typology, the chapter will examine the particular relationships that researchers have with these different types of funding agency by exploring the mechanisms researchers use to attract funding for their projects.

## **Negotiating convergence and demonstrating resonance: How do researchers understand their relationship with funding agencies?**

Just like researchers, funding agencies have different agendas and vary in their personal and political remits. As a result, for a research project to receive funding there must be some-sort of convergence between the funding agency and the researchers. Indeed, all the research projects in this sample were funded by agencies external to themselves. Therefore the researchers here needed to think "about issues around what would press the right buttons with the research councils" (BT, 2005). This process of convergence was highlighted by one researcher:

"The [funding agency] had published aims and purposes, and my conversation with [name] showed that the study would fit in with those aims and purposes. So she felt able to show a financial interest in this project; it wasn't that one shaped the other, it was that both aims and purposes converged." (SD, 2005)

The researcher and funding agency were perceived to achieve convergence as their views concerning the aims and purposes of the project were perceived by the researcher to be congruent. This enabled the project to be mobilised.

Researchers identified three different types of funding agencies that have different funding interests: local organisations with specific remits and interests; national charitable organisations with specific interests; and national organisations with specific research commitment<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, it is not just pressing the right buttons of the funding agency that is important, but in selecting the right form of funding agency. Without the ability of researchers

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<sup>14</sup> The typology offered here does not apply to all forms of funding agencies and is limited by sample. There are other types funding agencies that are not covered here and two additions could potentially be made. These are: Local organisations who fund 'in-house' research, for example some research active local authorities; and, national organisations who fund 'in-house' research. For example, local authorities will often conduct internal evaluations of their service. Similarly, Banardos, is one organisation that conducts research internally by a team of researchers employed by, and supported by, the organisation.

to demonstrate a resonance with funding agencies in their aims, purposes, values and beliefs, convergence cannot be achieved. Researchers specifically emphasised and tailored particular properties of their research in order to achieve a resonance with the funding agencies. It is these resonance mechanisms that allow both the researcher and the funding agency to converge. Resonance mechanisms are, therefore, the justificatory mechanisms that allow researchers and funding agencies to converge. The following sections will detail the different types of agency and the resonance mechanisms that researchers use to achieve convergence with them.

### **Professional resonance: Local change and informing profession-based knowledge**

Typically, local organisations that act as funding agencies have specific local interests. Whilst the particular organisation may be a part of a broader national network or have interests that reflect broader national trends and themes, the emphasis is on local practice and this is often reflected in the projects that are funded by them. Local authorities, for instance, are part of a wider network but retain their financial and strategic autonomy to respond to local need. As a result, locally funded projects may be related by the researcher to wider debates, but their primary purpose is to be of some use to the local agency and resonate with their professional interests or practice.

Hence, convergence between the funding agency and the researcher often concerns research utility and how elements of the research can be applied to some area of the funding agency's professional world that will be of some use to that professional world. Professional resonance, the mechanism used to construct convergence with such agencies is, therefore, the presumed ability of a research project to resonate with some particular element of professional interest or practice that is relevant to that particular funding agency. These mechanisms are closely mapped on to researchers' justifications concerning substantive gaps in public need but are reconstructed by researchers in order to relate to a specific area of professional need rather than being around a more generalised version of it.

Researchers constructed two ways in which they achieved this professional resonance with funding agencies: firstly, by directly using research to change local practice; and, secondly, using a particular area of professional practice to explore a wider interest that will help to inform current knowledge about the area. These are dealt with in turn.

### **Changing local practice**

Whilst local organisations that act as funding agencies may fund research, this is often not their only function and they will typically have their own primary aims and interests that exist beyond research. Indeed, within this sample, no funding agency at the level of local organisation existed solely to fund research and all of them had other primary functions. Research funding was secondary to those functions, but was perceived by researchers to help them achieve those primary goals. One method of doing this is by highlighting the ability of research to change local practice. One researcher described the process of convergence that was achieved with a local funding agency that involved changing local practice as well as using the local agency as a site to build generalised knowledge from:

“The idea for the [name] study came from a very enthusiastic and committed research question about ‘we’re here’, why aren’t families, we know that there are families around, there aren’t that many, but we are here and why aren’t we using it?” (SG, 2005)

This fitted into a wider knowledge base, as she explained later:

“The national service framework was being developed at that time, and there was pressure within that group to make sure disabled children got adequate representation and black disabled children within that, so there was a whole host of policy initiatives and legislation at that time so this work came in at a good time to be able to say: ‘make sure disabled children, and black disabled children are represented in there.’” (SG, 2005)

The researcher is constructing a convergence with the funding agency that is not just around a public need for research, but around professional resonance as the research is immediately of use for that particular agency. This particular local need is then positioned by the researcher under a larger framework (and justification) of national policy initiatives, and therefore achieves a wider professional resonance.

### **Informing local practice**

Not all projects will be of immediate use to the local organisation, however, and some researchers described a more passive method resonance mechanism to achieve convergence. This researcher, for example, spoke of their interest in informing and exploring a specific area of professional practice within education. This helped to contribute to and inform the current knowledge base around that professional issue:

“I’m making criticisms of adult professionals...and I’m not being horribly pointed and difficult about it; what I’m saying is: ‘this is a gap in our understanding and if we work together we may be able to begin to fill some of this in’. I don’t think we’re going to sit with a few young people and ‘bingo’, ‘we understand you’, but we might be able to creep towards a better understanding of what life looks like from their perspective. I became increasingly aware that a lot of people who were referred to the service were regarded as being in trouble and they were seen to have problems that were defined by adults that didn’t seem to reflect their own view of themselves.” (SD, 2005)

Here, the researcher is investigating a substantive area of professional practice that has been revealed to him via his personal experience of working in a particular professional area. However, the purpose of the research for the funding agency is considered by the researcher not to explicitly apply that knowledge to practice but to contribute to a growing body of knowledge about that particular professional issue that can then inform their planning and

thinking around that issue. The knowledge produced is not designed to change local practice but to reveal particular aspects of it that can subsequently help to inform it. In this case, the funding agency had broader interests around raising educational standards in local schools and the study was perceived to be congruent with those aims. The needs of the researcher, to produce research according to their interests values, were considered to converge with the needs of the funding agency, in this case the agency itself, as the knowledge created will help to inform their knowledge about a particular area of their specific and local interest.

### **De-alignment: Negotiating expectation**

Achieving convergence necessarily involves some expectation on the part of both the researcher and the funding agency in question. If a positive outcome is to be achieved for both parties these expectations need to be seen to be fulfilled. Unfortunately, this does not always happen and initial convergences can become de-aligned during the research process. Indeed, this researcher spoke of the difficulties they faced when the emphasis on change was compromised by some subsequent de-alignment with the funding agency's expectations around that change:

"But what we wanted to do ideally was to have the agency involved in the work so what we left behind with them and that they had learned something about the process of engaging black families in their organisation...[However] the temptation might be with black researchers to say 'you know about race and ethnicity; you know about how to get these families so you go out and do the work'. And of course this is detached from the work they had to do, they were the one's who were here, they were the ones living in the communities, they were working there. We don't live there, we don't work there, they are the ones that have to make those relationships because, you know, community work, research, service development is about relationships. So what we tried to do was to try and get the staff to start doing the development work to try and identify the families so that they were part of that research process and they

had the links with the families that would be an investment for the future.” (SG, 2005)

This contrasted with the perceived expectations of the funding agency representative:

“One of the things that she [the scheme manager] wanted to do, because the '97 report had recommended a development worker who would be able to work with the communities and nothing had happened. What this scheme manager had wanted to do was use that for evidence to get a development worker so that they could do outreach work and actually build, because you know it is still about relationships, about trust, it's about knowing that the service will meet your needs and she wanted to try and get approval for a worker and that would have been something really concrete that would be visible and something that people would see after the research had finished.” (SG, 2005)

The researcher's expectation of change and the funding agency's expectation of change had become de-aligned. The researcher attributed this de-alignment to the difference in their perceived values and beliefs about what the research project could offer. Whilst these differences were not contradictory in this particular example, the difference in emphasis served to make continued convergence problematic during the later stages of the research process. Therefore, change, as initially envisioned by the researcher, had to be re-considered and re-negotiated during the process of actually doing the research.

This is a particular problem when local funding agencies are concerned as they have a direct interest in the specific outcomes of the project because of their practice orientation. As research funding will be secondary to the primary aims of the organisation, the local organisation will have much more of a vested interest in an outcome that helps them to fulfil their primary responsibilities. Due to this, they are more likely to be interested in research outcomes that

help them do this. This increased exposure and specific interest in the research means that if projects do deviate from initial proposals, as can happen in qualitative projects, or if particular aspects of the project are not made transparent, de-alignment may be likely.

## **National charitable organisations: Public need and public resonance**

National charitable organisations that act as funding agencies have national, but specific, interests in accordance with their particular remit. Typically, the emphasis is on a specific area of public interest that is of perceived importance. Whilst such agencies may be interested in wider debates, their primary purpose is to contribute to the debates in the specific knowledge field that the organisation is interested in. These funding agencies will fund projects as part of a broader commitment to knowledge in a particular area rather than being solely committed to research. However, they differ from the local organisation group in that they are interested in national trends, themes and issues in their particular area rather than specific local interests. Similarly, as they have specific interests these organisations will often have particular research values that are mobilised over others. Funding is often obtained from a number of different sources through both public and private investments, and organisations are often registered as charities.

As an example that was commonly mentioned within this sample, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has a specific remit to focus on research projects that encourage change, as it seeks “to fund research and development which has the capacity to change policy or practice for the better. It does not fund the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake” (JRF, 2006). This work should, in line with the interests of the JRF, focus on social problems and social policy issues rather than, for instance, projects that are of interest solely to researchers. As a result, JRF are an organisation that funds projects on a national level, have an interest in social problems and particularly issues of public policy (their specific area of public need), and are interested in social change (particular research value).

The mechanism for convergence that needs to be negotiated by researchers with the national organisation acting as a funding agency is, therefore, concerned with a public resonance. This is the ability of a research project to generate a knowledge gap that is perceived to resonate with some particular element of public interest that is relevant and important to the particular and specific remit of the funding agency concerned. Indeed, researchers demonstrated convergence by using three resonance mechanisms: highlighting the resonance of the project with the aims and purposes of the agency; demonstrating resonance with work that has been completed externally to the agency, but within similarly interested organisations; and, by appealing to the debates within wider institutions. These are dealt with in turn.

### **Internal resonance: Converging with internal aims, purposes and research**

Internal resonance refers to the ability of a project to converge with aims and purposes of the agency. There are two mechanisms that help researchers to do this: embedding projects in the agency's previous areas of funding, and, demonstrating added value by appealing to some subsidiary values that the agency holds.

In the first instance, projects achieve internal resonance by converging with the aims and purposes of the particular organisation. This researcher spoke of how her research was deemed to be convergent with the wider policy interests of the funding agency:

“The important thing is that [the funding agency] is one of the major funders in the UK for Social Policy work, particularly in the area of social exclusion, poverty and deprivation. So they were happy to fund a piece of work that looked at young people, looked at the issue of school exclusion and also the risk of social exclusion.” (DV, 2005)

By positioning the wider purposes of the project within the aims and interests of the agency the researcher was able to demonstrate internal resonance which was perceived to achieve convergence with the agency.

One way of reinforcing this internal resonance is to be seen to contribute to a knowledge field that has already been established as a field of interest for the agency. Agencies, therefore, have demonstrated a commitment to addressing related knowledge gaps that similar projects have attempted to fill and place a degree of importance on the representation it subsequently provides. This particular researcher perceived their research project to converge with the particular funding agency concerned as:

“[they] had a funding stream which was around, they called it race and disability, so there was a social care and disability committee that gave out money and prior to that there was strands of work on disabled children and families and then they brought together race and disability together under one umbrella and they’d funded a series of research projects.” (SG, 2005)

Placing the research project within a wider, but specialist, funding stream that the agency had established by funding similar projects enabled the researcher to achieve convergence with the funding agency because they constructed an internal resonance with previous research they had funded.

However, it is not just the aims and interests of funding agencies that can be important to achieve convergence. Certain projects can achieve ‘added value’ if they satisfy some of the subsidiary values that the agency holds. One researcher’s broader interests of achieving adequate representation and change within their research identity were also constructed as a mechanism to achieve convergence with the policy interests of the funding agency:

“I think some of [the funding agency’s] motives are around positive action; redressing the balance and actually getting access to work to people who wouldn’t normally do it.” (SG, 2005)

She went on to describe this process:

“They asked, I think they have some sort of steering group and funding committee, and they asked the people they were connected with if they knew of any black researchers who might be interested in doing this, so I was interested because I’d done some work with disabled children here [at the university]; I’d done some for a course, and race and ethnicity was also an area I had expertise in, and that was great and it all came together.” (SG, 2005)

This process demonstrates the dialectical process of convergence between researchers and funding agencies. In this example, the researcher did not approach the funding agency with a ‘cold’ project, and instead was invited by the agency to submit a tender that would then be considered by the agency. This convergence of values and beliefs was later re-emphasised by the researcher:

“[the agency is] an organisation that is grounded in policy, and user-led research, because they are fantastic in terms of their ethics; why they do work, what work they fund, and how they actually expect researchers to behave.” (SG, 2005)

The researcher considered the applicability of the agency to her own values and beliefs. These values and beliefs were then perceived by the researcher to converge with the agency and the project was mobilised.

### **External convergence: Resonating with external work**

Convergence between the researcher and the funding agency can also be demonstrated by appealing to previous work completed within other agencies that have similar interests, values, or remits:

“policy wise, there was quite a lot going on for disabled children and families so there was...the Department of Health (DoH) ‘Quality Protects’, and there was Joseph Rowntree and the DoH’s disabled children’s reference group which brought together, not specifically ethnic minority families, but it sat within that.” (SG, 2005)

The research project is not seen as only internally resonating with the organisation, but is also placed within a wider body of both policy issues, and research trends that were occurring externally to the funding agency. Convergence is perceived to be facilitated by placing the project within a congruent and pre-existing knowledge of public interest that the agency has not yet represented. The needs of the researcher, to produce research according to their values and interests, is considered to converge with the needs of the funding agency, to produce epistemologically secure and up-to-date representations in their particular areas of interest according to their remit and interests. In order to produce this knowledge, funding agencies need to be aware of what other types of knowledge are of public interest in order to remain current to the changing social world. Embedding research within the external work of other reputable organisations helps them to achieve this.

### **Resonating with wider institutions**

Another mechanism of convergence that was revealed by researchers was through the demonstration of resonance with wider institutions. For example, this project was perceived to converge with larger political debates that were occurring within the wider institutions at the time:

“at that time of conducting the work and the writing, it would be in the late 90’s, early 2000, when we had an outcry really within the media and at the community level about the disproportionate number of black kids that were involved [in school exclusion].” (DV, 2005)

In this example, the researcher is not referring to internal remits and knowledge or external organisations or knowledge demonstrate relevance, but is instead framing the focus of the study within the interests of wider institutions who have both local and national interests; in this case local community groups and, more generally, the media. This type of resonance helps to ensure that the funding agencies are up-to-date with issues that are perceived to be relevant at both a ground level, and at a wider national level. In turn, this means that they are responsive to areas of public concern.

## **Organisations with explicit research commitment: Research field resonance**

Organisations with explicit research commitment are organisations that have a primary responsibility to fund research. These organisations are typically national agencies and have few, if any, specifically local concerns. Whilst the research they fund may be useful or informative at a local level, knowledge that is directed at a more generalised level is of key value to such agencies.

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is one example of a national organisation with an explicit, and varied, research commitment. They exist to fund “research and training in social and economic issues” in a wide variety of fields in order to “deliver top quality social science research and world-leading social scientists” (ESRC, 2006). Whilst they do have secondary interests in making services more effective, mainly through the use of research and evidence-informed knowledge, their primary purpose is to fund contributions to research knowledge: “Our research...frequently takes a long-term view”. Their thematic priorities seek to combine scientific and national interests to “contribut[e] to the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom”. Equally, their research values are also very broad with a focus on independence (for researchers), quality, and relevance rather than particular substantive, epistemological, or methodological concerns. Funding research is the primary function of the organisation.

Whilst other resonance mechanisms may be used to add weight to justifications for research, research field resonance is the primary mechanism

that was reported by researchers in order to construct convergence with such agencies. As a result, researchers frame their relationship with these funding agencies by appealing to the research field and in terms of adding to the research knowledge field. This resonance can be achieved in two independent, but not mutually exclusive forms, external research field resonance, and internal research field resonance. Each is dealt with in turn.

### **External research field resonance**

A major method that researchers use to achieve convergence with this type of organisation is to place the study amongst other related studies that have been conducted externally to them. This resonance mechanism frames the study in the context of congruent studies in the wider research field. Researchers will then use these studies to create the substantive, epistemological, or methodological gap that the study aims to fill.

Due to this emphasis on research field resonance, funding agencies in this category are perceived to fund studies that aim to inform the wider research field rather than to directly fill a wider public need or fulfil a more locally based interest:

“it was very much an academic study and wasn’t sort of designed to recommend any kind of social action or anything like that.” (FD, 2006)

Whilst the research may have some value to a future public need, projects are considered to achieve resonance by addressing a gap in the research field rather than an explicitly professionally or public one. It is the researchers’ own interests and that of the research field that are perceived to act as the driver for the project rather than the interests of a wider public need.

### **Internal research field resonance**

However, researchers can also use their own identities to inform this process and do not need to just embed the research in wider external research but in the projects that they have been involved with. This helps to construct an

internal research field resonance. This researcher noted how she reconstructed a research field resonance to build upon her own previous research, in this instance to form a longitudinal study:

“The study began in 1996 and it’s basically been constituted through a number of different pieces of funding. We didn’t begin with the plan of doing a longitudinal study; it was only at the second stage of funding that we got that. So in a sense it’s longitudinal by default rather than design.” (SS, 2005)

The continued development and involvement in a single project allowed the researcher to build an expert identity in the (methodological) area of longitudinal research, as well as developing a researcher identity in more substantive areas. This expertise then allowed her to reconstruct substantive and methodological gaps as the continued involvement enabled the researcher to highlight and mobilise the innovative methodological component as part of the project. This internal research field resonance, the ability to get proposals to resonate with their own previous work, helps researchers to construct an expert identity in a particular field. This method of constructing researcher identity is perceived to help to demonstrate to potential funding agencies that the researcher has expertise in the area.

### **Balancing serendipity and management**

However, the above example also suggests that this identity management is not always explicitly or precisely managed, but is a process that incorporates some serendipity. Indeed, in comparison to the other types of funding agencies, researchers who achieved convergence with funding agencies in this particular area spoke very little about why they received funding. The fact that their particular study was funded meant that convergence was achieved, but researchers were either unsure or reluctant to offer views on why that particular project was chosen over another. For instance, this researcher explained why the project was turned down by other funding agencies, and could articulate his beliefs about the value of the project, but offered no discussion in relation to the agency who had funded it:

“it was initially submitted to a funding body who turned it down, which was a health care setting funding body, and we were lucky enough to get it funded by the [agency]...[We wanted to] re-inform practice and the way that we would present this to parents was in a number of ways: so one would be the dissemination, so we would be trying to hit organisations like contact a family, here are our findings and this will feed into the support networks of parents. And that was quite clear. But we were also quite clear that we wanted to inform professional practice, and again through some of the dissemination procedures we would be targeting that audience.” (ID, 2005)

Whilst the researcher recognised the merits of the project, there was little discussion concerning why this particular project received funding over other projects. As a result of this, the researcher was less certain about how convergence was achieved with the funding agencies. As a result, evaluating how to achieve convergence with this type of funding agency is more difficult. Calls for proposals by such funding agencies are frequently over-subscribed and have a reputation of being ‘difficult to get’. Indeed, getting a grant from, for example the ESRC, may be considered part of the process of gaining a higher level of researcher identity in itself, not just the mobilisation of the project. The fact that a researcher has managed to negotiate this seemingly esoteric process is, perhaps, symbolic of a greater ability to perform their required research identity.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter deals with how researchers understand their relationships with funding agencies, and how they converge with agencies in order to facilitate a project. It explores how researchers negotiate and manage their relationships with funding agencies and discusses the different types of agencies that researchers interact with in order to gain the financial means to mobilise their research projects.

Researchers identified three different types of agency according to their primary functions: local organisations with specific remits and interests; national charitable organisations with specific interests; and national organisations with specific research commitment. These organisations do not have the intellectual capital required to mobilise research projects that will help them to achieve their primary aims. Due to this, they need to acquire this from elsewhere and they use financial capital to do so. Conversely, doing research allows researchers to achieve their own organisational aims and purposes. Whilst they have the intellectual capital to generate, select and drive projects, they do not have the financial capital required for mobilisation. Research is the vehicle by which researchers and funding agencies converge to achieve these wider goals.

Convergence occurs when the respective values, beliefs and expectations about the project become sufficiently aligned with each other and refers to the ability of any given research project to act as a point of common interest for both researchers and funding agencies. This convergence is achieved by demonstrating a resonance between the funding agency and the researchers concerned. Resonance mechanisms are, therefore, the justificatory mechanisms that allow both researchers and funding agencies to converge.

Within local organisations research is often a means to an end that enables the organisation to fulfil their primary goals by changing professional practice or informing it: the research in itself is of secondary importance. As a result, the primary resonance mechanisms reported by researchers within this sample concerned changing local practice and informing professional practice. National organisations with specific interests, on the other hand, have specific areas of interest around a wider public need or interest, and ascribe particular areas of interest and particular values as being of importance. Funding research helps them to function as a particular organisation with particular a remit. Engaging with research enables them to be externally recognised as having interests in their chosen fields and allows them to enter into associated debates as the knowledge they create is seen as a more epistemologically secure representation than political rhetoric. Three primary resonance mechanisms were reported: highlighting the resonance of the project with the aims and

purposes of the agency; demonstrating resonance with work that has been completed externally to the agency, but within similarly interested organisations; and, by appealing to the debates within wider institutions. The primary function of national organisations with specific research commitment, however, is to fund research. Here researchers framed their relationships with funding agencies in terms of adding to the research knowledge field. This resonance is achieved through two mechanisms: external research field resonance, and internal research field resonance.

Of course, the resonance mechanisms offered within this typology are not mutually exclusive and these mechanisms are not confined to the particular type of funding agency concerned. Most projects, for example, will demonstrate external and internal research resonance. However, what is suggested here, is that certain types of mechanisms are more likely to be reported depending upon the type of agency concerned.

Similarly, it is further suggested that this convergence between researcher and funding agency is never full and researchers and funding agencies are only partially connected within the research process. The connection is partial because the respective groups retain their own interests and independence. They still have their own remits and goals to fulfil. This is unlike 'in-house' research where the purposes of the funding agency and researcher achieve a fuller convergence as the research funding and the researchers are controlled by the interests of the organisation<sup>15</sup>.

Indeed, it is this partial nature of the connection between the groups that can, on occasion, cause difficulties between the respective groups. De-alignment occurs between researchers and funding agencies when the values and beliefs that are held concerning the research project become sufficiently problematic as to present a threat to convergence being maintained. From the perspective of funding agencies de-alignment is more likely to occur if the research project is not perceived to help the agency to fulfil its primary goals and this can occur for two reasons. Firstly, de-alignment may occur if there is a problem with the transparency of the values, beliefs, and expectations of the researcher and the

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<sup>15</sup>The in-house researcher, for example, has little interest in wider publishing as it does not help them to perform their identity within their organisation. Indeed, spending time on un-necessary activities may actually hinder their performance in that organisation.

funding agency about the project. Secondly, de-alignment may result if the goals and interests of the project shift after the initial proposal.

In the context of this study, de-alignments were only reported in instances associated with local organisations who were acting as funding agencies. This is perhaps, in part due to the sample of the study as it only recruited projects that were successfully completed. Hence, significant de-alignments are likely to be under reported here and are worth further investigation.

## Chapter 7

# **Access, selection and negotiation: The relationship between gate-keepers and researchers**

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The previous chapter examined how researchers understand their relationships with funding agencies, and how they converge with these agencies in order to facilitate research. However, once projects have secured funding, researchers then need to turn their attention to mobilising their research project. This chapter deals with another group that are also crucial to the successful completion of projects but whose interest within the research process is often less well articulated: the gate-keeper.

As argued in chapter two, the term gatekeeper can be used in a number of different ways. However, for the purposes of this chapter gate-keepers are the individuals, groups, and organisations that act as intermediaries between researchers and research groups. They do not provide the technical expertise to carry out research, or the financial means to do so. Similarly, they do not form the substantive part of the research group in themselves and have primary aims and purposes that are independent to both the researchers and the research project. Instead, they support the research process by providing an efficient and expedient conduit for access between researchers and the research group.

This chapter will explore how researchers perceive the roles and functions of gate-keepers within the research process. More specifically, it will examine

how researchers select the groups that they wish to engage with, highlighting how perceived responsibility to engage, informal links within organisations, locality and practical efficiency, are part of the micro-political decision making process concerning selection and exclusion. Further, the chapter will also identify a number of functions that support and encourage engagement for gatekeepers as well as exploring a number of threats that can challenge this engagement.

### **Access, and facilitating trust: How do gate-keepers function within the research process?**

Once researchers have generated a research project and secured funding, they need to find ways to gain access to potential research participants. It is the ability to fulfil this function within the research process that transforms particular people and organisations into potential gate-keepers. Indeed, the key role that defines an individual or group as a gate-keeper within the research process is their ability to provide an efficient and expedient means of access to a research group. As this researcher highlighted:

“How did we get in touch with them? Well, we got in touch with them through the voluntary organisations which we knew existed.” (SD, 2005)

If any project is to be successful, researchers need to identify and access both their chosen research field and the actors within that field. Gate-keepers help researchers to do this. For example, this researcher describes the process of facilitating access in a project that was interested in Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents’ experiences of education:

“I contacted key people in the respective communities...so community leaders, community workers etc. There was a Bangladeshi centre in Shipton and that was very fortuitous because they had access to most of the Bangladeshi community.” (FD, 2005).

Similarly:

“in Iron-ore town where the Pakistani community is based we went to the Sure-Start centre, [as well as] contact[ing] the local authority, I also contacted the school.” (FD, 2005)

Recruiting research groups through gate-keepers makes very good practical sense for the researcher who will be limited by budget, time, and resource. Where these groups are not available, researchers are required to engage much more with the recruitment process, as the researcher later highlighted:

“We didn’t have the same sort of list [in another town] because there isn’t the same sort of organisation there...there was no community centre....I think we [gained access] through one of our contacts who would say, ‘there are loads of Pakistani’s here on that street’, and I think we just knocked on doors.” (FD, 2005)

Therefore, gate-keepers provide both a cost effective and labour effective method of identifying a number of potential people who fulfil their research criteria.

Researchers also identified another related function that is desirable for the people and organisations that act as gate-keepers. People and organisations are particularly useful as gate-keepers where they can help to establish trust between the researcher and the research group. This trust is primarily achieved by proxy through the trust already established between the gate-keeper and the research group. As one researcher highlighted:

“we would get, for example, referrals via professionals that we’d formed good relationships with, and if the parent trusted the professional then you’d get them.” (ID, 2005)

Essentially, the researcher utilises the positive and trusting relationships that have already been established between gate-keeper and research group. This theme of using pre-existing networks of trust was something that many of the researchers returned to:

“We didn’t have difficulties in terms of gaining those people’s trust for the simple reason that we got access to them through the various organisations and at the point at which we got access to these young people they’d already built up a relationship, a trusting relationship, and their families also had built up a trust with these organisations.”  
(DV, 2005)

Whilst trust still has to be negotiated in the one-to-one interactions of the researcher-researched encounter, the pre-existing relationships between gate-keepers and the research group were exploited to facilitate both access and to assist with the consent process.

However, the danger in using these pre-existing networks of trust is that the research group may conflate the researcher and the gate-keeper. As the same researcher highlighted:

“...although they were explicitly told that we were a research team, that we were in here to do a piece of research and their members of the family were given literature on the research and told that any time they could pull out, there’s a sense in which I’m sure that for the young people and their families, they did not distinguish between us and those voluntary organisations that were supporting them.” (DV, 2005)

For the researcher, this can make their relationship with both the research group and the gate-keeper problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it challenges the principle of informed consent as those who engage are not fully aware of implications of the research encounter. Secondly, it also elevates the

potential for harm for the relationship between the gate-keeper and research group because the researcher is conflated with the gate-keeper. If the research affects the research group in a negative manner then there is a real danger of the relationship between the gate-keeper and the research group being harmed. In using positive personal and professional relationships as a surrogate to research relationships, researchers have the potential to re-shape the original relationship, not necessarily for the better.

Further, using pre-existing networks as a proxy for trust can also have other unintended consequences. Where relationships between gate-keepers and researchers are problematic, this can be transmitted to the relationship between researcher and research group. Just as trust can be used as a proxy, negative perceptions of gate-keepers can be used by research groups to judge researchers if they are associated with the gate-keeper. If these pre-existing relationships are characterised by mistrust, for example, access is unlikely to be facilitated. This has not gone un-noticed in the literature (see Emmel et al, 2007). However, no researchers in the present sample reported such difficulties.

In some instances, gate-keepers will also act as a 'host' to the researcher in the field. Gate-keepers act as a host to research when a more formally organised group allows researchers to access particular groups of people that it is responsible for, or who are associated with it (or information concerning those people). In these instances, the gate-keeper will provide the practical space for the researcher to work 'in the field' as well as act as a conduit for access. However, the focus of the research will be concerned with a group that is associated with the host, rather than the practice and actions of the research host itself. Where the focus of the research is on the practice of the host directly, the gate-keeper becomes a formal research group. These research groups are dealt with in chapter eight. For instance, the teachers and pupils within class 7GM are a part of a formally organised group (the school). However, the pupils become an independent research group, and the school a research host, when the research group is reconstructed into a more categorical group labelled 'teenagers in trouble' rather than the members of class 7GM.

Typically, a large number of people and organisations with potential gate-keeping functions can be identified by researchers. The gate-keepers reported by researchers in this sample ranged from voluntary church groups, to local community organisations, to national organisations, to educational establishments, as well as local authorities. Further, not only will these gate-keepers have any number of interests they will also vary by location. This is particularly the case if they are part of a national network or a wider institution. For example, this researcher describes the broad range of gate-keepers that were involved in providing access to ethnic minority families with disabled children:

“[the research group] were mainly Pakistani and Bangladeshi families because there was a greater under-representation in the use of services by those groups. Also in terms of the demographic population of that particular area it seemed appropriate to use those two groups in terms of the BME groups, so that’s who the data was collected from in terms of the service users. In terms of providers [that hosted the research], they were made up of statutory providers...For example the social services would be an example of a statutory organisation, education is another, as is health, and then you have the voluntary organisations, and the voluntary providers in that area were MENCAP and SCOPE.” (NN, 2005)

The organisations did not have any significant or direct input in terms of the research funding, questions, or methods, but were involved in providing a route access to the families. That is, despite their differing interests and levels of organisation, they were all able to provide the initial contact to the families, the initial space to facilitate that contact, and the time to engage with the project. It was this ability to do this that enabled them to be identified as potential gate-keepers.

### **Which gate-keeper? The process of selection and exclusion**

As can be seen from the above examples, there are a broad range of groups that can have a gate-keeping role within the research process. This broad range means that some selection and subsequent exclusion of those people and organisations with a potential gate-keeping function is inevitably required by the researchers. This process is not random and is instead dependent upon the product of a number of micro-political decisions made implicitly and explicitly by researchers during the course of the project. This section deals with how researchers perceive this process of selection and discusses the mechanisms that researchers highlighted in order to select the groups that they use as gate-keepers. These micro-political decisions concerning selection and exclusion include: perceived responsibility to engage; informal links within organisations; locality; and practical efficiency. Each is dealt with in turn.

### **Responsibility to engage**

Researchers will often attempt to make contact with specific groups who they regard to be more sympathetic to the research project because of a presumed responsibility to engage. For example:

“I wrote to a cathedral historian at a cathedral and he put me in contact with somebody and that sort of introduced me into one network... I suppose, I would of thought, that probably, that employees of a cathedral would think that it wasn't very good manners to not reply(!)... [But] I think what he did was actually think about who might be interested in this, you know, who might find this a positive, if not a valuable experience.... I would have thought that they actually know the people who were regular attendees very well and have a lot of knowledge of families and so on.” (BT, 2005)

Researchers select gate-keepers that are likely to have a perceived responsibility to engage with the research project and, by association, less likely to decline engagement. By selecting groups in this manner researchers

increase the likelihood of agreement to engage with the project and this saves the researcher time, money and effort.

This responsibility to engage can be as part of an informal interest, as in the above example, or as more of a formal commitment to the area. For example, another researcher commented how the gate-keeper chose to help because of a “moral and civic responsibility that they had in terms of supporting potentially vulnerable young people and their families” (DV, 2005). Here, the emphasis of selection is on the perceived responsibility that the community organisation has in the area that provides the prompt for engagement. The commitment to supporting vulnerable, and mainly black minority young people and their families, was perceived by researchers to intersect with their own interests of charting and recording the experiences of how black minority children and their families overcame school exclusion. The higher the perceived responsibility to engage, the more likely they are to be selected, and ultimately engage with the project.

### **Informal links**

Researchers do not exist in a social vacuum but are part of the social world itself. As part of being a researcher in a specific area, or as a result of being actively engaged within the social world as social actors, researchers often have informal links with particular areas. Researchers will often utilise these pre-existing links in order to select gate-keepers. One researcher described this process:

“[I approached] two head-teachers, who I knew personally already, and explained about the project and why we’re doing it, and I asked to come in and interview the children so that was the way we did it.” (FT, 2005)

Using this approach means that the researcher is not entering a field in which they are unknown. Hence, researchers can select gate-keepers according to previously formed positive relationships. Moreover, this method of selection also has the effect of allowing researchers to engage with gate-keepers on an individual, and more personal, level. Not only does this enable

researchers to judge the likelihood of engagement, it also means that they can mobilise important advocates of the research within an organisation. If advocates can be mobilised then they can also operate as key contacts that can be easily accessed as and when required, as well as acting as conduits to transmit information about the project.

### **Locality**

Often running alongside the informal links to gate-keepers is the issue of locality. The same researcher described how the process of selection was influenced by the location of the school in question:

“The third school was a bit more second hand, it was a local school that I knew about and I managed to negotiate access that way.” (FT, 2005)

Evidently, it makes practical sense, in terms of cost and time, to conduct studies close to where researchers are based. Given the often large field of potential gate-keeping groups available to them, researchers are frequently not limited by location and they are able to select on more convenient grounds. Moreover, researchers are likely to know more about the issues that are likely to interest the gate-keeper or host if they are local. Local information and knowledge can then be used effectively to help researchers become more conversant with the particular group in question.

### **Practical competence: Efficiency and ethics**

Other more practical concerns may also influence the selection of potential gate-keepers. Researchers reported making selection decisions based upon practical concerns of efficiency and the ethical requirements they require. For instance, this researcher did not engage schools that were perceived as problematic in terms of their organisation and current concerns:

“we wanted not to choose schools that were in terrible trouble because we all had experience of doing educational research before and it’s not a good idea, so they were

relatively robust and were happy to have us in there.” (SS, 2005)

Part of the benefit of using gate-keepers is due to the expediency they offer in terms of time, labour, and cost. Therefore, even where consent has been granted, if the costs of utilising such groups are perceived to out-weigh the benefits, then researchers may look elsewhere and particular gate-keepers may be effectively excluded from the selection process. Here, even though consent had been granted, the perception of the school being ‘in trouble’ meant that the researcher was unwilling to engage with them due to the assumptions they made about working within such schools. This includes the emphasis the school places upon other priorities, a potential lack of organisation, poor channels of communication, and finally a lack of co-operation or interest of staff.

Similarly, this researcher based selection on the practical impact of the ethical procedures required by the research host:

“well our position was that we didn’t feel we should have to go to parents for consent and although we were happy to inform parents that it was happening and if they wanted to withdraw kids from it that was there, but we didn’t feel it was a study that needed parental consent, so that was another criteria in which we selected schools. So if the schools said you have to get parental consent to do this, and we looked at various schools who were interested, then they were out. So we were working with schools who accepted those terms and we had a short-list of schools basically.” (SS, 2005)

The ethical prescriptions that were required by the schools were perceived to be too cumbersome by the researcher who wanted to employ an opt-out approach rather than an opt-in one. An opt-in method, it was felt, would take too much time and result in a limited sample of parents actually responding to the call for participation. The costs of agreeing to these requests would

out-weigh the benefits of using the school because it would result in a limited level of participation.

## **Representation, responsibility, and change: The function of research engagement for gate-keeping groups**

Of course, this process of selection is not a one-way process. Gate-keepers are not identified and selected by researchers according to their own criteria and for their own purposes. Indeed, as previously stated, the people and organisations who act as gate-keepers have their own interests, aims and purposes in their wider social contexts. For these groups, research engagement is non-compulsory.

As has been demonstrated in chapter two, however, the reasons why gate-keepers support research engagement are not well articulated within the literature. In view of this paucity of work, this section explores why gate-keepers engage with research and examines the mechanisms that support engagement. Several mechanisms that support engagement are identified. These are: political representation, civic and moral responsibility to engage, and the identification of good practice and the facilitation of change. Each is dealt with in turn.

### **Political representation and legitimation**

Gate-keepers typically have aims, purposes and interests that exist externally to their research involvement. This means that they hold certain values and assumptions about particular areas of the social world at the expense of other values. In forwarding certain interests they are necessarily making value-based decisions. This means that they do have political interests. For instance, a local memory group believe that remembering the local past of individuals and communities is a worthwhile pursuit and commit time, labour, and finance to achieving these ends.

Therefore, one function of engagement is to represent their aims and interests and by engaging with research these people and organisations ensure that their activities are legitimated. Describing the politics of one of the voluntary groups she approached, one researcher was directly aware of their need to be recognised, and in many ways, have their struggle validated:

“Because they feel, and I say feel because that is still the case, quite angry and angry is the right word, about the fact that young black children, particularly male, are caught up in this process, so there’s a sense of frustration and anger and there is also a sense of the mainstream statutory bodies that have a statutory obligation to provide education for these young people, basically being let off the hook and not delivering on what they are supposed to deliver and leaving them as voluntary organisations, and many of them were under-funded or funded for something else, having to fill the gap, fill the void, that was created by this situation.” (DV, 2005)

And later:

“there is still this feeling of the statutory bodies, education in particular, being let-off the hook. So they wanted that to be recorded and to be made known. They also wanted the plight of the young people and their families to be made aware of, they also wanted attention, or wanted some recognition for the work that they were doing and also some recognition for the fact that they were filling this rather important void, in many cases with very little resources. So there is a sense in which for the community organisations there was a political element (with a small ‘p’) to what they were doing.” (DV, 2005)

The research engagement was perceived to validate and recognise their work by recording and representing the reality of the gate-keeper, namely that

particular statutory bodies were failing certain groups. Research engagement helps gate-keepers to represent or document their reality which is then perceived to advocate or legitimate their aims, purposes or interests. Gaining and accumulating recognition for the work that they are doing, and demonstrating the importance of it, gives them more chance to continue doing that work.

### **Civic and moral responsibility to engage**

As has been demonstrated above, there are a number of potential gate-keepers in any research project and, in part, researchers select gate-keepers that are likely to have a perceived responsibility to engage with the research project. Similarly, those gate-keepers with a higher level of civic and moral responsibility are also perceived by researchers to be more likely to engage if they have a strong commitment to the area of interest. One researcher described this process:

“they all without exception saw it as their moral responsibility to actually step in there and give assistance [to us] and this is not surprising because there’s a history within the black community of self-help within the domain of education going back to the 60’s when the supplementary schools were established in the major cities because of the disappointment. Supplementary schools are schools which are voluntarily run by community groups either within the context of the church or more broadly. The principle of a supplementary school is there to compensate for what is perceived to be the failings of the education system in terms of delivering support and, in some respects, the curriculum. So there is a tradition within the black community, it is part of the heritage it is part of the community, it is part of the cultural capital. So the issue of stepping in and giving support is part of that culture.” (DV, 2005)

The level of support that was present within the community was seen to provide the impetus for engagement because the project was perceived by

the researcher to fit into their broader commitment to the area. Therefore, they were considered to have a high level of moral and civic responsibility to engage.

Similarly, another researcher described how the gate-keeper, in this case a school, was thought to be sympathetic to the research project because it resonated with a particular targeted area of interest that had been highlighted by the local education authority as being of interest:

“the dreaded OFSTED inspectors had looked at the school systems, various ones around [place], and generally said that the schools were good in terms of curriculum and teaching quality. But, the two things that are problematic are that the buildings are lousy, generally, and that student behaviour is rather poor on occasions and that is seen as problematic from a number of stakeholder positions. So they were generally receptive to [the project].” (SD, 2005)

The project was perceived to have a function for the school because it addressed issues around those children perceived to be in trouble within the education system. Whilst this would not, in itself, facilitate change as it was a commitment to knowledge, the school had a civic responsibility to engage because the work was related to a field in which they provided a congruent service.

### **The identification of ‘good practice’ and the facilitation of change**

Another function of engagement for gate-keepers that was reported by researchers was to identify ‘good practice’ that could then be used to facilitate change within the gate-keeper in question. The information that is generated by the research project is perceived as something that can be useful to the gate-keeper. Research engagement, therefore, helps them to fulfil their aims, purposes and interests with greater effect. Indeed, this is a common function of engagement within groups that choose to host research:

“We were very clear about what were the aims of our research, and one of the main aims was to re-inform practice and we presented this to parents was in a number of ways. So, one would be the dissemination and we would be trying to hit organisations like ‘contact a family’. Here are our findings and this will feed into the support networks of parents and that was quite clear. But we were also quite clear that we wanted to inform professional practice, and again through some of the dissemination procedures we would be targeting that audience.” (ID, 2005)

The research host, the particular health service department, was going to benefit from the work the researchers were doing because the researchers had a specific commitment to local feedback. This would then help the health authority and the support organisations to achieve their aims and purposes to better effect. As the researcher went on to explain:

“If you speak to professionals they say, ‘how do you tell a parent that their child is disabled, how do you break bad news?’ and we had a case where the parent was constantly saying, ‘why is it bad? It’s just news’....So we feel sure that that has affected professionals in the way they work to varying levels.” (ID, 2005)

Engagement is perceived to be facilitated by the promise of an increased capacity to achieve their primary function. This mechanism directly appeals to local outcomes rather than more generalised claims of informing knowledge.

## **De-alignment: Threats to engagement**

All these mechanisms were highlighted by researchers as a means that helped to support the research process. However, gate-keepers do not always choose to engage with research requests. As previously suggested,

engagement is non-compulsory and gate-keepers can choose not to involve themselves with the research process if they so wish. Indeed, researchers highlighted a number of challenges that can threaten engagement. These include: methodology, representation, intrusion, and, disruption. Each is dealt with in turn.

### **Methodology**

Value-based decisions about what are considered to be useful forms of knowledge in particular areas are implicitly contained within any research proposal. However, the values concerning such decisions are not necessarily confined to the methodological politics of researchers and funding agencies. Indeed, some gate-keepers will also often value certain forms of knowledge over others. This is particularly true if the research project is perceived to help them achieve their primary goals. Therefore, methodologies that are perceived as being more useful in achieving these goals are more likely to be favoured by the gate-keeper in question. For instance, within the field of health, where there is an emphasis on the perceived reliability, validity, and replicability of the scientific method and quantitative techniques more generally, qualitative methods can sometimes be a threat to engagement:

“we had a couple of professionals, two I think really, who were quite dismissive of it, so when you started to talk about qualitative research, because it wasn’t ‘measuring stuff’, they didn’t see the merits of it.” (ID, 2005)

Moreover, the implications of not using quantitative techniques were considered to be a threat to a perceived ability of the research to be objective:

“the way we tackle that because we’re working with partners, is that we are working with you to identify ‘good practice’, and what is really interesting about that is that a number of people from the partner organisations said things like ‘if you’re not going to be objective, why bother?’. And we were like, ‘hang on, this is meant to be the kind of

research where we work together(!)' and for some people, identifying good practice or being partisan, or being alongside the insider, whatever that is, smelt like bias and lies, and they didn't quite see the validity of it." (ID, 2005)

In this example, the researcher was attempting to take a much more inclusive approach in order to produce outcomes that were more usable for those that they were working in partnership with. However, whilst these methods helped in achieving engagement with some research groups due to an enhanced ability of the research to contribute toward their primary goals, the method was also considered to be a threat to engagement with other groups who did not value the method of knowledge construction.

### **Representation**

As demonstrated earlier, gate-keepers have political interests. They, just like researchers, make value judgements about the social world. As has been highlighted, where legitimation and representation are important to the gate-keeper, then the gate-keeper needs to be sure that the researcher and the research project can represent a reality that is congruent to the one held by the group in question. If there is a perceived inability to do this, and the representation is contested, then any agreements between the two groups can become unstable. This researcher highlighted how the identity of one of the researchers was perceived by some gate-keeping professionals to threaten ability of the project to produce a version of that reality that would be acceptable to them:

"There's no doubt in my mind that [some of] the professionals have great difficulty accepting....a disabled person as a researcher when most of the time they see a disabled person as a patient. So there was like hundreds of issues there about how you actually tackle it, which range from us both saying 'I wouldn't piss on them if they were on fire', through to 'we need to work with them to work through this kind of stuff'." (ID, 2005)

Here, the threat to engagement occurs due to the perceived need to mobilise a particular version of reality over and at the expense of other potential versions.

However, this threat is not necessarily driven by the gate-keeper in question. It can also be mobilised by the researcher if they perceive the involvement of the group is too problematic and threatens the ability of the research to produce a more useful representation of reality. This can occur if the involvement of the gate-keeper is perceived to be too overtly political and engaging solely to push a particular agenda. For instance, this researcher noted:

“[the gate-keeper had] had some previous experience of researchers and they found that they completely disagreed with their findings, and they had no means for come-back. So they had a very poor experience of research and were distrusting as a result.” (US, 2005)

Again, the particular version of reality being mobilised prevents engagement. The researcher reserved the right to produce a particular representation according to their own values, rather than that of the gate-keeper.

Of course, these threats to engagement are almost entirely based on the particular values of the gate-keeper in question and the realities that they wish to be represented. If the perceived ability of the researchers to adequately represent the values of the gate-keeper is problematic, or the gate-keeper has particular values seen as problematic by the researcher, then there is a threat to engagement.

### **Intrusion**

Even if the gate-keeping group does not directly provide the data for the research, there is still the potential for intrusion. This occurs when members of the group in question perceive the research project to be entering into areas of interest that they also have an interest in protecting. Research hosts,

for instance, will often host projects that are concerned with elements of their practice and may, in some cases, be reluctant to allow researchers entry into the area. For instance, one researcher described the process of entering a health setting:

“But there were definitely cases when you would go into a health care setting and it was kind of like Foucault’s gaze, you see this kind of psychiatrist and doctor diagnosing the researcher, whether the researcher is meant to be there to work alongside them.” (ID, 2005)

Intrusion is likely to become a threat if the project is perceived as critical toward the gate-keeper in question or if it threatens to reveal an area of practice that the gate-keeper does not want to be represented within the public domain. This does not, in itself, mean that the group has something to hide that needs to be revealed, but does indicate an element of risk for the gate-keeper involved in that they can lose control of the representation of their reality.

### **Disruption**

Research engagement is rarely reimbursed financially for the gate-keeper and any cost must be absorbed. If this cost is perceived to be sufficiently high enough to disrupt the accomplishment of the primary aims, purposes and interests of the gate-keeper in question then there is a real threat to engagement. For example, this researcher recognised this difficulty:

“they have their own roles and obligations and the way they were looking at it was: Ok, it didn’t matter that I was doing a [research project], and that I’d had all my training, all they looked upon, was she’s doing a bit of research and we’re supposed to dig out these people for her to interview. And I suppose it’s more work for them and they weren’t getting anything in return, so it was more hassle than it was worth.” (SM, 2005)

The disruption and effort associated with engagement was perceived to be too high when considered alongside the benefits of that engagement. Disruption, and any associated costs in terms of staff time and organisational disruption, is more likely to be tolerated if the project can be shown to help the gate-keeper achieve their primary aims. The higher the ability of a project to do this, then the more likely that the costs associated with disruption are likely to be absorbed. However, if a project cannot do this, then de-alignment is likely.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explores how researchers perceive the roles of gate-keeping groups within the research process, and how they function in respect to the mobilisation and completion of projects. It examines how researchers perceive and manage their relationships with the people and organisations who act as gate-keepers and discusses the different ways in which they interact with each other within the research process.

Gate-keepers are often essential to the social research enterprise as they provide an efficient and expedient route of access to research groups. Further, the pre-existing relationships between gate-keepers and research groups can be used by researchers as a basis to develop and facilitate trust between themselves and research groups. On a practical level, this serves to save the researcher time, effort, and ultimately money. However, this can also serve to make relationships between research groups and the gate-keeping groups problematic and there is some suggestion here that the research groups can conflate the researchers and the gate-keeping group.

The broad range of groups with the potential to act as a gate-keeper also means that some selection and subsequent exclusion of gate-keepers is required on behalf of the researcher. This process is not random and is instead dependent upon the product of a number of micro-political decisions made, both implicitly and explicitly, by researchers during the course of the project. These micro-political decisions concerning selection and exclusion

include: perceived responsibility to engage; informal links within organisations; locality; and practical efficiency.

Moreover, it is argued here that this process of selection is not a one-way process. Gate-keepers are not identified and selected by researchers according to their own criteria and for their own purposes. Indeed, engagement is non-compulsory and gate-keeping groups can choose not to involve themselves with the research process if they so wish. Researchers identified several functions of engagement for such groups that support it. These are: political representation, civic and moral responsibility to engage, and the identification of 'good practice' and the facilitation of change. The perceived ability of the research project to fulfil these functions provides the motivation for selection and recruitment. However, researchers also highlighted a number of challenges that can act as a threat to engagement and methodology, representation, intrusion, and, disruption are all identified as preventative mechanisms that can result in de-alignment between the researchers and gate-keepers.

## Chapter 8

# **Categorical, collective and formal: The nature of research groups and the functions of research for those who engage**

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Once researchers have negotiated with gate-keepers, the research process then moves into the data-collection stages of research. Research groups are those groups within the research process that provide both the focus for the research and the information that will eventually help to constitute the research analysis. Indeed, if researchers are to do research, they have to negotiate with research groups and subsequently manage that relationship in order to facilitate and maintain involvement. This chapter explores how researchers perceive the functions of research for research groups by examining how they construct and understand the supporting mechanisms that motivate and facilitate research engagement.

The chapter is divided into two broad sections. Firstly, the chapter explores the different types of research groups that researchers identified in the interviews. These groups are: the categorical research group, the collective research group, and the formal organisation as a research group. Secondly, the chapter discusses the supporting mechanisms that researchers identified for two of these groups. Eight functions for categorical research groups are highlighted. These include: inter-subjective interest, enjoyment, curiosity, introspective interest, social comparison, therapeutic interest, material interest, and economic interest. Similarly, three supporting mechanisms are identified at the collective research group level. These include: legitimisation and representation, empowerment, and engagement as a means to facilitate

and inform change. Due to a lack of data, the mechanisms and functions associated with formal groups are not discussed and this remains a fruitful avenue for further investigation.

## **Reconstructing the researched: The nature and function of research groups**

Researchers attempt to describe, understand, and explain particular areas of the social world in particular ways and using particular methods. In terms of the research process, the various social groups that form the focus of a particular study provide the researcher with the substantive information that is required for them to use their expertise to produce research that fills the substantive, epistemological or methodological gaps that have been selected. Within the context of this study, researchers reported two broad methods that helped them to achieve this. Firstly, research groups were asked to articulate their particular experiences relating to a particular area. This was typically done through the technique of interviewing, either individually or as part of a group. However, researchers also reported that these experiences were also articulated through the medium of subject specific diaries or visual material such as photographs. Secondly, research groups were observed in the process of their particular social context, either as a passive form of observation or as a more active form of participation on behalf of the researcher. Frequently, these methods were combined in order to provide increasingly large amounts of information concerning the particular aspects of the social processes that the researchers were interested in<sup>16</sup>.

These methods can be potentially applied to many different social groups and in many contexts. As argued in chapter five, this means that there are a potentially huge number of substantive gaps that social research could

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<sup>16</sup> Whilst the choice of method is undoubtedly central to the experience of being researched, they are only pursued further here in relation to the mechanisms that are used to support and maintain engagement. However, although no method is exclusive to a particular type of research group, ethnography is more easily applied to the more collective and formal research groups because of their relative permanence. Equally, interviews, and the various forms of associated one-to-one data collection techniques, are more suited to categorical research groups due to their lack of structure (see below). However, a more thorough examination of the differences between these methods and their impact is beyond the immediate scope of this project and may need further examination (see Smyth and Williamson, 2004, for some further discussion).

address. However, in identifying and generating research projects, researchers make a number of explicit and implicit decisions about whom a particular research group includes and excludes depending upon the focus of the project. In some instances the individuals who form the focus of the project may have little association with the research group being reconstructed by the research, in other projects the group may exist before and after the project. This means that not all research groups are the same. Following Jenkins (1996), a collective group that identifies and defines itself can be characterized as a group *for* itself, while a collective group that is identified and defined by others can be characterized as a category *in* itself. Whilst all groups are necessarily also categories, all categories are not groups because the individuals within the category may not recognize themselves as a member of that group.

Indeed, some research groups may never really acquire any greater structure beyond being a research group. A random sample of working-class parents in Sheffield drawn from an electoral register is a useful example here. The group identity of 'research participant' has little meaningful internalisation and remains little more than an externally constructed research category. For some projects, however, the research categories are more closely mapped on to other social groups. Where this occurs the individuals connected to groups have some-sort of pre-existing commitment to the group that exists beyond the research project. Those researched would meaningfully identify themselves as a member of a particular social group rather than a research category. For example, a research sample of parents drawn from the members of a support group for parents of teenagers in trouble with the education system is a research group, but one that has a tangible meaning for those within the sample. The social identity exists before and after the research project.

For conceptual purposes, these differing types of research groups can be classified and identified in terms of their internal and external identification, their structural organisation, and their political interest. Internal identification refers to the extent to which the members of the group can meaningfully recognise themselves as part of the group under investigation. External identification, on the other hand, is the ability of those outside the group to recognise those within it as a category. Structural organisation refers to the

degree to which the group has a managed system of membership and the level of formally prescribed roles within it, whilst political mobilisation refers to the extent to which the group has an ability to advance a value-based position within wider society.

Using this classificatory system it is possible to identify three different of types of research groups that were reconstructed by researchers: categorical research groups, collective research groups, and formally organised research groups. The relationship between such research groups and their signifying properties is represented in table 1.

**Table 1: Research groups and their properties**

	<b>External Identification</b>	<b>Internal identification</b>	<b>Structural Organisation</b>	<b>Political mobilisation</b>
<b>Categorical research groups</b>	High	Low	Low	Low
<b>Collective research groups</b>	High	High	Medium	Medium
<b>Formally organised research groups</b>	High	High	High	High

The groups identified here are best thought of as ideal-types rather than independent and concrete entities in their own right. According to Weber (1949), ideal-types are:

“formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse,

discrete, more or less present, and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct. In its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality" (Weber, 1949, p 90).

Ideal-types are idealized descriptions of the concrete features of things that emphasise clear conceptual boundaries around the features of social things. We conceptually ignore the empirical indistinctness and ambiguity that surrounds these things, and instead develop 'pure' cases in which the relevant features are distinct and unambiguous. Therefore, the ideal-types that are presented here are not reified concepts, but are instead presented to highlight certain common elements that apply to most cases.

Similarly, the types of research group identified below are not necessarily exhaustive of all social groups and there are other research groups that are possible using this classificatory system. For example, an informal group of friends would have a high level of internal identification, but only low levels of external identification, structural organisation, and political mobilisation. However, no research groups of this type were reported by researchers and they are not covered by the analysis presented below.

### **Categorical research groups**

The first type of group that research projects use to provide data is the categorical research group. The emphasis here is on high external identification with members having little meaningful internal identification with the category and little lasting internalisation of the identity. This is usually because the group is too broad or too fragmented to achieve a meaningful membership and as a result the group has little or no structural organisation and limited collective political mobilisation. If there is any representation for the group, it is managed as a wider or subsidiary concern of a more formally organised group. One interviewee explained this process:

“What I did was ask 20 experienced secondary teachers how young people, boys and girls, 13-16, become disengaged with the education system and what they did was trot out a lot of ideas. So I then shaped up the ideas into active ways in which people can be disengaged: such as bullying, stealing, fighting; and passive ways they can be disengaged; things like not performing to perceived potential, mental truancy, there in body but not in mind. Those sorts of things I regard as passive features. Then I passed it around this group of teachers until there were no new things and people were generally saying ‘those are the ways in which young people can be disengaged’. This then became the criteria to identify troubled young people; people that were perceived as being in trouble.” (SD, 2005)

Whilst the teachers and the researchers could externally identify the group, the research group itself would not identify themselves as a group before the study. Similarly, the identity had little meaningful future for its members beyond the research encounter. As a result, they had no meaningful internalisation of the identity, no structural organisational or political mobilisation. They are a category constructed by an external interest, in this example the researchers and teachers they consulted with.

However, that is not to say that the group members cannot recognise themselves as part of the group when confronted with their research membership. Indeed, the members of the groups being constructed in the above example were well aware of their similarity:

“When we sat down some of the young people would say ‘why are only the naughty ones here?’, and it was conspicuous to them that certain children had been selected. I was very honest about it, showed them the criteria and said that this is how we have selected you and this is why we want to talk to you in particular. And it was rather like: ‘no one has listened before, and we’d like to [talk]’.” (SD, 2005)

Despite the internal recognition of an external category, in the majority of contexts the research group identity has little longevity and the underlying social category is unlikely to be transformed into a more meaningful form of identity or collective group membership. Due to the broad and often general or abstract nature of the category it has limited meaningful internalisation to those categorised on an everyday level.

Moreover, due to a lack of structure and mobilisation, the gate-keepers that are prepared to facilitate research are often crucial to locating and accessing these research groups, as well as managing their interests more widely. For instance, projects that explore service users are often categorical research groups as they often lack any meaningful internal identification for the members of the research group and have no structural organisation. Hence, service providers such as Childrens' Service Departments or Health Authorities manage their interests as part of that service provision. The formal organisation then becomes a gate-keeper rather than acting as the focus of the research itself.

### **The collective research group**

Collective research groups have a much more meaningful internal identification for those who form the group. In these groups, individual members can and do recognise themselves as part of a wider collective group who have similar interests or experiences: they are not just a research category. As a result, there is a more recognisable commitment to a pre-existing and lasting social group that exists beyond the research encounter. This identification is externally reciprocated as the group is equally as identifiable as a group to those outside of it. Similarly, there is some internal organisation and the group itself manages membership. This means that there is also some political interest and some structure with members having both informal and, perhaps, more formally recognised roles. Further, the group is not solely reliant upon professional intervention for representation and can mobilise itself. This researcher described a group of this type:

“They were families of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage and they were in two towns....I contacted key people in the respective communities, or who I thought were key people, so community leaders, community workers, there was a Bangladeshi centre in [place] and that was very fortuitous because they had access to most of the Bangladeshi community.” (FD, 2005)

Whilst the research project focused upon a more specific area of their lives, Bangladeshi and Pakistani families’ experience of education, and did to an extent, externally construct a research group, the families that formed the research group also had a wider association with an active community group that had members with recognisable similar interests and experiences. This localised and specific community had some structural organisation and political mobilisation.

However, the distinction between categorical research groups and collective groups is often fluid and strategies of access can often bridge two different types of groups. In this example the researcher explains how they recruited the research group:

“[the research group are] the parents of children aged three and above and we were asking them to tell us about their experiences of care. So, tell us about from the day the child was born or before then and to take us through their experiences of living with a disabled baby...we accessed parents more through meeting with them either in a trust setting or a parent group context.” (ID, 2005)

In this example, one group is a categorical research group who are service users accessed in the trust setting. As a group they have little internal identification, structural organisation, and political mobilisation. Whilst they may be able to recognise themselves as part of the category, they have little formal association with it and the identity is unlikely to last beyond the research encounter because there is no pre-existing or lasting group

organisation or membership. However, those accessed through a parent support group set up specifically to support parents with disabled babies are a collective group as membership will have meaningful internal identification beyond the research encounter. The group has a pre-existing structure and a political interest in supporting such families.

### **The formal organisation as a research group**

The final research group is the formal organisation. Jenkins (2006, p143) argues that organisations more generally can be conceptually distinguished from other types of groups in a number of ways: firstly, that there are always members; secondly, that there are specific and explicit objectives that serve to identify the organisation; thirdly, that there are criteria for identification and processes for recruiting members; fourthly, that a division of labour exists; and, finally that there is a recognised pattern of decision making. Similarly, the formal organisation as a research group has specific purpose and is formally structured to achieve those ends. There is a high level of identification at both the internal and external levels. This is accompanied by a clearly defined structure as well as a substantial political and interest and ability to mobilise that interest.

These groups are distinguishable from organised groups who operate as research hosts or gate-keepers because the members or actions of the individuals within the formal organisation in question will specifically provide the data and the focus for the research, not those who are associated with it by virtue of the practice of the organisation in question. Similarly, members will not be reconfigured by an external interest into a more categorical group but exist as an internally identified, and formally organised group. They will exist before and after the research project and are not reconstructed by it.

Within this the sample of this study, no formal organisation provided the sole focus of the study. Whilst some researchers did explore the practice of professional groups and organisations in specific contexts (see below), the formal organisation was not the sole focus of the study and instead acted as a gate-keeper.

As a result of this limited access to projects that had formal organisations as a focus, there is not enough data to present a more systematic picture of this research group type and the mechanisms that support engagement. Further research is necessary to develop this theoretical framework with a greater degree of clarity. Due to this, no further discussion of the formal organisation as a research group is given beyond this point.

## **Supporting engagement: The functions of research for those who engage**

Like the other relationships within the research process, engagement has to be supported and maintained between researchers and the members of a particular research group. The functions of research that are used to support engagement that were identified by researchers, however, are not always the same for each type of research group. The next sections of the chapter will consider these perceived differences and explore the supporting mechanisms of engagement that were identified by researchers. These supporting mechanism are discussed in relation to categorical research groups and collective research groups in turn.

### **Categorical research groups revisited**

Categorical research groups are those research groups that are, to a large degree, constructed externally by researchers. As a result, they have a high degree of external identification, but little internal identification. Whilst individual members may recognise themselves as part of the category, the identity has little meaningful collective identification on an every-day level. This, in turn, means that as a group they typically have little structural organisation and lack collective political mobilisation.

Part of the net result of this is that the group is largely constituted by disparate individuals and there is little collective structure to the group. As a result, the functions of research identified by researchers within these groups existed at a more individual level than for collective and formal research groups. At this individual level, the supporting mechanisms that were identified by researchers include: subjective interest, curiosity, enjoyment,

individual empowerment, introspective interest, social comparison, therapeutic interest, material interest, and, economic interest. These are dealt with in turn.

### ***Subjective interest***

Perhaps the most obvious function of engagement is a subjective interest in the focus of the study. This refers to the ability of the research to promote a positive affective interest within the members of the research group. For this researcher:

“the thing itself is interesting: it just engages you on that level of ‘yes, it would be really interesting to sit and talk about this’.” (BT, 2005)

Any member of a research group is also part of other groups and networks in society. Therefore, the more a particular facet of the research project intersects with an individual’s wider social interests and experiences, then the more likely it is that the project will have some affective interest for the individual concerned. The need to identify a research focus that involves particular social groups means that inter-subjective interests inevitably occur. For instance, in the following example the focus of the research project resonated with the life experiences of the individual taking part:

“I wanted to know why people had responded, and she just said ‘it was interesting’...she was really good, she was a really good talker, she was 45, I mean she lived through rock against racism she lived through Powellism, she had a really good set of experiences.” (SM, 2005)

As has been demonstrated above, to a greater or lesser extent, the individuals that comprise research groups are rarely isolated and do have some pre-existing group memberships, even if they are being re-constructed into a research group by the research project. It is therefore likely that at an individual level some people will have some-sort of interest in the focus of

the research project. The study would not target them if they did not. Therefore, researchers will often implicitly use this interest as a mechanism to support engagement.

### ***Curiosity***

At an individual level, involvement with the research process, and any associated facets of the process, can also satisfy some form of curiosity within members of the particular research group. This is often simply to discover what research involvement is like. In this instance, the researcher describes the curiosity that was provoked by conducting the research within a university setting:

“[the young people] chose the venue, and a number of those interviews were conducted with those young people at the university: they chose to come to the university. I think that for some of them, the fact that they were in a university and all that that involved, I think it’s feeling good about the fact they are respected enough, well-thought of, to be invited to a university. For some of them, ‘university’ in inverted commas, they know of it, well they’ve heard of university, and what a university looks like, but they’re intrigued to be there. So it’s that opportunity to be in a particular space and location was intriguing for them.” (SS, 2005)

This supporting mechanism is less likely to occur in instances where research engagement is common as curiosity concerning the process is likely to have been satiated. It is the novelty of experiencing the research process for the first time that helps to support engagement through curiosity.

### ***Enjoyment***

Similarly, the actual process of engaging with the research project can be an enjoyable activity that produces a positive affective reaction in response to the research engagement. For instance:

"I actually did the interview with the oldest generation and I think [that they] enjoyed the experience of the interview." (BT, 2005)

The research encounter can provide a positive affective reaction in the form of enjoyment. In this example, this occurred as an unexpected result of the research process rather than as a planned outcome:

"from the earliest part of the study there's a lot of picking up the microphone and maybe rapping into the microphone and sort of playing, basically, with the technology." (SD, 2005)

Part of the methodology, using a tape recorder with a microphone, enabled the researched group to respond positively to the research encounter. As a result, the research had a positive function, however fleeting, for those who engaged.

Indeed, using enjoyment as a method to support engagement is recognised by researchers and can also be driven by the researcher as a mechanism to maintain engagement. In this example, the research methods were specifically designed to appeal to the research group:

"in the first study we created a focus group methodology which was basically based around the design of the game, which was so much designed to be fun, to be non-directive, basically designed to be a research technique that would be suitable to use with children." (FT, 2005)

Such direct appeals are common within child research, but also occur in other forms of research. One such project incorporated photographic data that the research group collected themselves and were subsequently used as research tools:

“they like taking photographs with their friends, and photographs of various situations and settings that were pleasurable to them...Those photographs also led to some fascinating discussions about wider issues relating to politics, identity, racialised politics, aspirations, music, sexuality, and role-models.... Now there was no way I could conjure up a set of questions to elicit from that young person such a profound discussion about masculinities and how that interfaces with popular culture. I mean I just would not be able to find the vocabulary or even the formulations of the questions, it just would not have been possible but through those photographs.” (DV, 2005)

Therefore, enjoyment generated by the research encounter can be both researcher driven or driven by the members of the research group themselves as a function that facilitates and maintains engagement.

### ***Individual empowerment***

This use of photographic data had another supportive function that was identified by the researcher in question. Individual empowerment occurs where the research encounter facilitates the capacity of an individual to act within a particular social context:

“built into the research method was the emphasis on making the experience empowering and improving the scope of the individual to shape the research process; and that was done through the technique of photos....So there is a sense in which they were shaping part of that research process. It wasn’t just taking from them, it was them introducing topics and issues that were quite salient to them.” (DV, 2005)

Here, the open methodology helped to enable those involved to shape the project to their own requirements. Data collection is, therefore, less about extraction on behalf of the researchers and is instead concerned with enhancing the autonomy of the individual within the process of research. The research engagement functions as an environment that has a significant amount of control for those who engage:

“They were controlling in terms of what the topics were, what the issues were, the narratives that came out of the pictorial representations of their lives. Clearly, they selected bits that they were happy to share with me, or even helped them to reflect. I think it’s also where the young people were in terms of their own reflections. But the central point is, that they chose, they took the photographs, they decided on their location, their space, their topic, and they selected what they wanted to share and disclose.” (DV, 2005)

Such techniques are constructed to help the research process become a much more involving and respectful process that breaks down more traditional research power hierarchies to do research *with* people rather than *on* them. Whilst those engaged did not become co-researchers that might be more typical of action-research contexts, they did have to power to influence the research process. This individual empowerment supported continuing engagement.

### ***Introspective Interest***

At an individual level, the introspective process of being interviewed in a one-to-one situation can also be an important function for those who engage. Particularly within interview situations, research engagement will require individuals to explore their own thoughts and feelings to an interested and respected other. This opportunity to be openly introspective in an environment is an unusual one, and offers something potentially novel and attractive to those who engage:

“it is quite flattering when people say that you have had this unique experience and I think you’ve got something really interesting to say and I say I don’t think people like you are given the opportunity to talk enough. So people are going to talk.” (SM, 2005)

It is this positive experience of introspection that enables engagement to be maintained during the research encounter. Researchers were implicitly aware that the research encounter provides a unique opportunity for introspection and that the opportunity to articulate individual experiences to an interested audience is uncommon within everyday life. This idea of a space that is separate from, and usual to, every-day life is particularly important and useful within the interview encounter as it again offers something that is potentially novel and attractive to the researched. This idea was elaborated upon by another researcher:

“I think the reflexive sort of interview can lead people into revealing aspects of their own lives, it creates a separate space in which to think about it, and sometimes, from what people have said, they find that the experience of the interviews leads them to think about things in different ways...And so, sometimes that experience of thinking, talking about something, reflecting on it, has lead people to kind of see themselves or some aspect of their experience slightly differently...And perhaps it’s a bit of an awkward thing to say, but people do find themselves endlessly interesting. The chance to talk about themselves to an interested audience isn’t an un-positive experience. (BT, 2005)

Some members of the research groups recognised the usual opportunity to articulate their experiences and they used the function to drive their involvement. It is this positive experience that enables engagement to be maintained. The same researcher went on to note:

“people want to talk about themselves, well a lot of people do don’t they?!? So I think they realised they had an interesting set of experiences and they wanted to talk about it... I think it’s a chance for them to reflect and think through ideas, to ponder things, puzzle things and actually kind of voice their issues and concerns to somebody.” (BT, 2005)

This supporting mechanism is, perhaps, more likely to facilitate engagement within a categorical research groups where the individuals do not have the conceptual space of a more collective group to share their experience with interested others. Collective groups and formal organisations exist before and after the research project and as a result there is already a space to interact with an interested audience. Therefore the introspective opportunity offered by the research encounter is not unique and as a result is less likely to be a major force in supporting engagement.

### ***Social comparison***

Another more personal interest that can function as a support mechanism for engagement is in the social comparison with others. Research involvement potentially offers another unique opportunity for individuals to compare a particular aspect of their lives with the experiences of similar, but unconnected others. One researcher highlighted this function:

“I think people are certainly interested in other people’s experiences are and whether they’re similar to their own.”  
(BT, 2005)

In the first instance, the mechanism is again much more likely to facilitate research engagement in categorical research groups where individuals are not part of more structured groups and lack the ability to interact with others who have similar experiences:

"it's one way of measuring our experiences isn't it: thinking about our experiences and whether they're normal or not normal. The woman in Bristol actually said to me 'what have your other adoptees experienced because I want to know whether what I went through was normal, how were their experiences'." (SM, 2005)

This supporting mechanism is dependent upon the feedback mechanisms that the research project has in place. By their very nature, categorical research groups do not always lend themselves well to ethnographic investigation and are largely conducted largely through interviews. This usually entails separate interviews for each group members. Therefore, if such a comparative function is to be maintained then the group needs to be brought together. This can be achieved in person, either through the use of focus groups or as an explicit commitment, or in the form of research feedback, as this researcher noted:

"I found some of the younger mothers that I interviewed were particularly interested in seeing that on paper and had said 'can you send me a copy'." (BT, 2005)

Indeed, many research projects will send out research feedback as a matter of course to all of the members of the researched group. It is this research feedback that is the vehicle for social comparison.

### ***Therapeutic interest***

In some instances, however, these introspective and social comparison interests can take a more therapeutic form of function for those who engage. A therapeutic interest differs conceptually from an introspective one as the researched use the research encounter to promote some-sort of internal well-being that was previously lacking.

That said, no researchers in this study reported using a therapeutic interest as a mechanism to achieve and maintain research engagement and typically

researchers sought to distance themselves from professionally qualified counsellors, as one researcher pointed out:

"I think they were kind of hoping I would have some answers for them. I would be able to say, 'well this is why people responded to you and this is why that happened or this happened'....[and so] I said to them at the start, 'look as much as I'd want to I'm not trained to counsel you and I might make things worse if I try'....I can't do that with them because there was a relationship that we had to keep to and even though the boundaries were sort of negotiable, there were still definite yes's and definite no's. So what I did was say there is a list of organisations here, and if there are any issues that you do want to talk more then you can talk to them they are trained.'" (SM, 2005)

However, rather than explicitly avoiding a therapeutic function for those who engage, the researcher was avoiding the perception that they are a trained counsellor who can explicitly offer psychological 'help' in whatever form. Indeed, another researcher recognised the useful function of interviewing in particular and reported that the research encounter may have served as a form of therapy anyway:

"I think I ought to say, we were quite impressed of how candid these young people were and they were quite prepared to say 'we did wrong', 'I did wrong' and 'in retrospect perhaps I should not have behaved in this way'. So if they were in the wrong they would say so. However, they all described scenarios that led to the ultimate outcome of being excluded, they described the process. So for some of them it was cathartic." (DV, 2005)

The open-ended designs of many research interviews, including ethnographic ones implicitly provided a non-judgemental space that those who engage can utilise for therapeutic function:

“Two of them said it was good in a way because I was able to talk openly to someone who I hadn’t met about my experiences and it was someone who, even though they was going to be analysing the data, wouldn’t be judging me....I guess it was therapeutic for them in a way because that’s it they can get it out they can talk to someone about it rather than mulling it over to themselves in their own head.” (SM, 2005)

Again, this is more likely to be a supporting mechanism within categorical groups where the membership is fragmented and the individuals do not have recourse to talk to interested ‘others’, or see themselves as having a problem that warrants or necessitates a more professional treatment. The opportunity to talk within a largely non-judgemental space is again a novel one, and one that functions to promote or restore a feeling well-being. This enables those who engage to perceive the engagement as positive which in turn facilitates engagement.

### ***Material Interest***

Engagement can also be supported if is perceived to offer some direct material advantage that accrues as a result from the research involvement, rather than a more existential benefit. In these cases, engagement offers a specific and substantive gain for those who engage. Again, these supporting mechanisms can be intentionally driven by researchers or by those who engage.

Where this mechanism was researcher-driven, researchers were keen to stress that it is less about placing a definitive value on the time and effort on part of those who engage, or an attempt to introduce a market economy to the research enterprise, but an attempt to recognise that research involvement does take time and effort. As one researcher highlighted:

"It's not so much what it is, it's acknowledging that someone has given their time and offering something in return." (SG, 2005)

This can be achieved through a number of methods depending upon the context of the research situation. For instance, this researcher specifically supported engagement by providing access to knowledge concerning relevant support networks:

"...one of the things I did very early on with the participant information sheets was to give a list of support groups, so they could go and access a ready made support group."  
(SM, 2005)

Engagement is supported by a mechanism that provides a specific utility for the members of the research group, in this case access to knowledge concerning support networks. Here, this material return also had another advantage for the research relationship as it served to help to establish the researcher's role as it distinguished them from a counselling role. This enabled the researcher to avoid de-alignment later on in the research process that could result from a perception of function that involved counselling (see above).

On the other hand, the members of the research group can use their involvement as a vehicle in order to satisfy an intentional outcome of their own:

"Some people were there because they could get out of maths, and some people were there so they could finish early and sell cigarettes at the school gates, and they were quite open about this: they made no pretence about it. Some were there because they wanted to be with their mates, and their mates had agreed to be involved and they thought it was a good thing." (SD, 2005)

Research engagement, therefore, has a direct utility for those who choose to engage that relates to their particular social context. A particular facet of the research project is not the driving force for engagement, but engagement is used in order to gain an advantage for other means according to their own circumstances.

Conversely, some supporting mechanisms are more a process of serendipity than calculation. Often these unplanned outcomes occur in the midst of the researcher-researched interaction:

“it would often be a kind of on the day kind of basis, I mean there has been cases of doing half an hour baby sitting when they’ve popped out to get some coffee or something like that.” (SM, 2005)

Such researched-driven and unintentional functions are difficult to predict or control by researchers as they largely depend upon the idiosyncrasies of the individuals involved in the research and their wider social context. Material outcomes for individuals are potentially enormous. However, engagement is maintained through the positive outcome that is directly results from their involvement with the research process. This acts as a mechanism that allows researchers and the members of the research group to see their involvement as positive.

### ***Economic interest***

In some instances, however, such a material function will be even more explicit and there will be an indirect or direct financial reimbursement in return for engagement. As a result there is a direct economic interest that supports involvement:

“The other thing that we did, and something that other researchers do is, is they offer people something, either book tokens or vouchers or anything, and I don’t know if

you thought about that, I'm not saying that it is necessarily something we want, but it says something about how you actually negotiate." (SG, 2005)

These vicarious forms of payment are necessary as researchers construct legal and administrative barriers when considering direct financial benefits. The researcher went on to explicitly articulate this:

"...we couldn't pay money. There was no way of getting money to people without them being taxed. Bureaucracy didn't allow payment of money because we'd have had to take their names and addresses and all their personal details. And if we'd paid them money it'd all have to be declared and they'd have to be taxed....tokens were one way of giving people things without being recorded and having any official stuff and that's why we did it." (SG, 2005)

However, as well as legal and administrative barriers, researchers can also be resistant to more material payments and construct ethical barriers that would have a direct methodological consequence:

"You know there is this concept that this information that service users and organisations have, is that for sale? In a sense do we tender, do we reward people for that? Should they be paid for their experiences that they share with us and that we use? And I have no answer for that... I think if we sort of went on that route to where we look at buying experiences then it's quite a dangerous route to go down; people can say whatever they want. And also there is this thing recently around goodwill and pulling to people's natural conscience in social sciences and society, that everybody has a responsibility to do that. If they start paying people to do that, are we not commercialising that?" (NN, 2005)

There is an assumption here that non-expectation of payment leads to better forms of data as a market economy for information may result in increased difficulties around the validity and reliability of that data. For another researcher more practical consideration directed the economic interest:

"I said right at the start, this is all voluntary, I can't afford to pay you, and that's not what it's about....Good research shouldn't be about me having to pay you. But I did say that I would pay for all their expenses, stuff like that." (SM, 2005)

Similarly, another researcher noted:

"I think it's an insult to assume that money or anything like that will motivate people to come and do an interview. I think it's really a courtesy because it's a very small amount, it's only ten pounds or something. It's not really going to matter. But you also pay expenses and give them refreshments as well because they are giving time up and all of that should be covered...I think people appreciate acknowledging that we get paid for doing these things and very often people don't and they are doing it in a voluntary capacity." (SS, 2005)

In any case, monetary incentives are not necessarily passively accepted by those who engage. Indeed, in this example, they were used as a point of resistance as they, paradoxically perhaps, devalued the research involvement:

"They were all given a token, a record token, and some of them, interestingly enough refused when it was offered. They said, 'no, it's just enough that you come and talk to us, and listen to us, and respect us.'" (DV, 2005)

Evidently, if the value of being researched is high in other areas, then a material or economic function is unnecessary. The following section pursues these more collective resonance mechanisms and functions in more detail.

### **Collective research groups revisited**

Due to their individual appeal, the supporting mechanisms of engagement identified above are not necessarily limited to categorical groups. Indeed, any collectivity whether it is a categorical or collective research group is comprised of individuals. As a result, the mechanisms that support categorical research groups, can also be potentially relevant to any research project as all projects involve individuals at their base level.

However, some supporting mechanisms and functions identified by researchers were more likely to occur when researchers dealt with collective research groups rather than more fragmented ones. This is because the increased contact and organisation of similar individuals provides the researcher with a substantively different research group that has different interests to the categorical research group. Collective research groups are those groups in which the individual members can and do recognise themselves as part of a wider collective group who have similar interests or experiences. There is a more recognisable commitment to a pre-existing and lasting group that exists beyond the research encounter. This identification is externally reciprocated as the group is also identifiable as a group to those outside of it and has some political mobilisation and structure with members having both informal and, perhaps, more formally recognised roles.

The mechanisms that support engagement identified by researchers for collective groups within this sample include: representation, empowerment, and to inform change. Again, these ideal-types are dealt with in turn.

### ***Representation***

Where collective groups ties are identified with more strongly, research can be perceived as offering access to represent the interests of the group to an

external audience. Such representations are commonly perceived to help collective groups to access wider discourses that have been previously inaccessible to them. These representations can then serve to legitimate those experiences. This supporting function of research was highlighted to be important to particular groups who lack the sufficient means to represent those experiences to that external audience. In this instance, the researcher describes how the relatively open interview methodology created an environment that allowed the members of the group to articulate their own collective story in order to represent their particular experiences and ideologies:

“For many of the young people it was the first time since encountering the experience of being excluded that they felt that they’d been in a position where they’d been listened to and not judged. And that was important because for many of these young people, part of the process of being excluded from school involved them having to go to various formal meetings with the head-teacher, with governors, and basically being put on trial. So they have not only been excluded but along the way they had experienced quite adversarial and they had the feeling that were judged all along the way and not listened to and not respected. I got the impression that they did not see us as there to judge them, but to basically to listen to their side of the story.” (DV, 2005)

The research was seen to enable them to represent their particular experiences and ideologies to wider and more powerful audiences that they previously did not have access to.

However, the stories that are provided by the members of research groups are rarely presented in their full narrative glory. Indeed, researchers still occupy a position of power in determining how to represent those narratives and there are many different ways in which representations can be made. Therefore, some researchers also constructed forms of representation that are more likely to support engagement:

“another driving force there is the idea that our research and our writing and our theories should not victimise our participants. It’s very easy to say that parents of disabled children are thrown into this shitty world, policy doesn’t help them, professionals don’t help them, but, firstly, it’s kind of wrong as clearly if they were completely hopelessly they wouldn’t exist, and secondly, I think there are more interesting things to find out about what people actually do themselves to be resistant.” (ID, 2005)

The researcher highlights that there are different ways to represent the narratives contained within those research groups. Hence the function cannot be assumed. Indeed, if this supporting mechanism is to be maintained then a continual and respectful dialogue is needed in order to represent those voices and produce positive outcomes. The researcher went on to suggest:

“I think most people would like someone to come along and say ‘I’d like to hear what you have to say because I take it seriously what *you* have to say’. And in some cases the current researcher has gone back to with the analyses that were coming up, and asking if we were getting it right: some would say yes, others would say you have to tinker with that.” (ID, 2005)

There is an emphasis on not just asking what marginalised groups think within the context of a qualitative encounter, but in making sure that projects that explicitly operate under a supporting mechanism of representation do actually do that if the function is to be realised.

### ***Collective empowerment***

Related to this concept of representation, researchers also highlighted political empowerment as both a driving mechanism for research engagement as well as a function of it. This supporting mechanism occurs when the research engagement increases the ability of the group to act within political contexts. In this instance, the primary motivation for

engagement was to contribute toward their empowerment as a collective group:

“all these families had had similar experiences in particular the ways at particular points in time where their children had to be removed, but that they had come together, they had met coincidentally in some child contact visit...[they] started pooling their experiences and found they had commonalities in their experiences with social services in the kind of things people had said to them and the things that were basically ‘wrong’ with it, and they basically got together and started sharing that. They’d got really quite angry about it and they decided that they really wanted to kind of challenge the system. They made these kinds of plans and designed strategies to actually make themselves get heard and kind of get justice for themselves.” (SG, 2005)

Research engagement was perceived to be part of the group’s wider political need to act within discourses that they wanted to be part of, rather than just be represented within them. It was this desire to be politically active that supported engagement. Indeed, in this instance, research engagement assisted the group in making the transformation from a categorical group into a more collective form. Essentially, the research group used the engagement to provide a function towards their own empowerment.

This type of transformation is not caused by the research involvement, but rather functions as part of a wider political need for empowerment within previously inaccessible discourses. Positive models of empowerment, therefore, do not simply involve ‘giving voice’ but involve allowing individuals the opportunity to shape their involvement within the research process at an individual level, but also giving them a platform to articulate their own voices within particular political discourses of their choosing.

These empowering methodologies were perceived by researchers to have a number of advantages for both the research project and those who engage:

“when you say to people you want to hear their voice, one angle they can’t say is that they don’t want to know because they’re not interested. Which is something you can’t ignore really because there are good reasons why people are not interested. Research is very dull for some people. So then you have examples of people who think, ‘great, you’re on our side’ so it’s a partisan piece of research and they’ll go for you in that way, and there’s other people who are just used to people saying ‘can you tell me something’ so it’s just another numpty asking them some questions.” (ID, 2005)

Like individual empowerment, engagement can be deliberately designed to help the research process to become a much more involving and respectful process that breaks down more traditional research power hierarchies to do research *with* people and *for* them rather than *on* them. Research, therefore, becomes less about the researchers’ needs and interests, and more concerned with respectful participation on all sides because the researched can use the research to have an important function for them.

However, the same researcher also recognised that there are limitations to what can, and should, be achieved under such an empowerment banner:

“the danger I have with this is that it’s framed in terms of people have to participate in the research for the research to be participatory or emancipatory. So they have to be there, they have to be engaging with the research and they have to be informing the analyses. But it is based upon the assumption that everyone is interested in the research, I’d suggest that some of the greatest people I know are not interested in research and that’s one of the reasons that makes them so great. You know it’s dull to

some people, it's nebulous, it doesn't make any sense to people and they don't have the interest...people empower themselves so the question of the researcher is what they do in relation to that and I think that's more of an interesting one; so in what sense could we capture self empowering ways." (ID, 2005)

Research is only one of the many ways in which people can become empowered. Therefore, it is important to recognise that although empowerment can be an equally attractive function of research to certain individuals and their respective social contexts, and also in the resonance mechanisms employed by researchers and funding agencies, people are not passive actors and have the potential to empower themselves without any assistance from research. Whilst research can provide the space for empowering practices, through the particular methodologies adopted and the political mobilisation it can help to achieve, it is not essential to this process. Empowerment research, therefore, is not solely concerned with providing routes to empowerment, but instead in investigating and subsequently promoting the ways in which people empower themselves.

### ***Informing and facilitating change***

Like the relationships between researchers and funding agencies, and researchers and gate-keepers, informing change can be a key function of research involvement for research groups. This function involves the perception that the research is useful in informing some area of professional practice that is perceived to affect the lives of similar people:

"Being able to tell their story, with the hope that things might change. And there's a sense in which, and the idealistic notion, that things might change. And feeling an obligation that it is their duty to. In fact, the young people said this: 'I hope this doesn't happen to other young people and if I can do something...' So there was a generosity of spirit in terms of, 'if this stops this happening to others, if I can help along the way'." (DV, 2005)

Engagement is achieved through the perceived positive contribution their involvement has to some element of an imagined members of similar collective groups. This can function on both individual and collective levels:

“they wanted to see something long term done out of that and improve the lives of their children perhaps through services...they wanted to improve their own access and their children’s access but also the access of other families. And if they were able to share that information and it could help someone else then they were happy for that. You know some families openly said that to me. ‘You know, when I had a child no-one wanted to talk to me about it...but now I want to help them because it should help them with their experiences’.” (NN, 2005)

Here, the researcher is constructing an instrumental function for the members of the research group as the individuals concerned may see a more material benefit of change, whilst also benefiting those who have similar needs and experiences as they are contributing to research that offers the avenue for a change in service provision.

At a collective level, these functions usually require an explicit recognition that there are others in similar circumstances that will, however indirectly, benefit from the research outcome. This necessarily requires an internal identification that recognises the individual concerned as part of a wider collective group with a political interest:

“...part of that altruism is borne out of the notion of, or the sense of the moral responsibility that you have to the community, and believe you me, it’s still there within the whole community. There is this, how can I express it, there is this feeling of community, a sense of solidarity, a sense that this is your diasporic responsibility to actually assist. And it’s there, even within the young people that you are

obligated to do what you can. Not only in terms of your own situation, but to hopefully alleviate problems for individuals who may end up in the same situation.” (DV, 2005)

Whilst the collective group itself is unlikely to use the knowledge to inform ‘change’, there is the expectation that similar people to themselves will benefit from the subsequent knowledge<sup>17</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

Negotiating and maintaining relationships with research groups is crucial if a research project is to be mobilised beyond the data collection phases. These research groups provide the information that is necessary to fill any identified substantive, epistemological, or methodological gaps. Like the other relationships within the research process, this process of negotiation is managed by both researchers and research groups. Indeed, the research groups are not passive actors in this process, but actively engage with research to achieve particular functions.

However, all research groups are not the same. In some instances the individuals who form the research focus may have little association with the research group being reconstructed by the research, in other projects the group may exist before the project started and will exist after the project. Indeed, the researchers within this sample described a number of different features that are demonstrated by research groups. Internal identification refers to the extent to which the members of the group can meaningfully recognise and mobilise themselves as part of the group under investigation. External identification, on the other hand, is the ability of those outside the group to recognise those within it as a category. Structural organisation refers to the degree to which the group has a managed system of membership and development of prescribed roles within the group, whilst

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<sup>17</sup> It is likely that this a major difference between collective groups and formal organisations who act as research groups. Formal organisations will hope to use the material themselves, as well as being able to identify other organisations that the material is useful for, rather than in a more generalised fashion.

political interest refers to the extent to which the group has a value-based position of power within wider society and their ability to mobilise that interest.

Using this framework, research groups can then be conceptualised into three ideal-types: the categorical research group, the collective research group, and the formal organisation. Categorical research groups are those research groups that to a large degree are constructed externally by other interested parties and have little internal identification. This, in turn, means that as a group they have little structural organisation and lack political mobilisation: the group is largely constituted by disparate individuals and there is little collective structure. Due to this, research functions occur at a more individual level than for collective and formal research groups. The mechanisms that support engagement that were identified here include: subjective interest, curiosity, enjoyment, individual empowerment, introspective interest, social comparison, therapeutic interest, material interest, and, economic interest.

Whilst, this is unlikely to exhaust the potential list of supporting mechanisms for the categorical research group, these functions are also not necessarily limited to categorical groups. Indeed, any group whether it is a categorical, collective or formal research group is comprised of individuals. As the supporting mechanisms and functions identified within a categorical framework appeal to individual interests rather than collective ones, they are potentially relevant to any research project as all projects involve individuals at their base level.

Collective groups, however, do have some mechanisms and functions that exist above and beyond those for categorical groups. These collective research groups are the groups in which the individual members have a much higher level of internal identification, and as a result, there is a more recognisable commitment to a pre-existing and lasting group that exists beyond the research encounter. This identification is externally reciprocated as the group is also identifiable as a group to those outside of it. Similarly, there is some structural organisation and the group has the capability to manage membership. There is also a political interest and an ability to

mobilise that interest. This increased organisation of similar individuals provides the researcher with a substantively different research group that has different interests to the categorical research group. Indeed, the supporting mechanisms identified by researchers for collective groups within this sample include: representation, collective empowerment, and, to inform 'change'. Again, these concepts are unlikely to be exhaustive or necessarily limited to collective groups. The particularities of both the social groups and the social context in which they are researched will dictate the prevalence of a particular supporting mechanism or function.

## Chapter 9

### **Apathy, fatigue, and lack of change: Negotiating the challenges to engagement**

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The previous chapter explored the different types of research group and how researchers understand the mechanisms that support engagement for those groups. However, many research relationships and encounters are not unproblematic or without challenges. Indeed, according to the prescriptions of many ethical codes, any engagement with research is non-compulsory, non-coercive, self-determined and voluntary. In order to negotiate and manage this process the refusal to engage and the right to withdraw from research are core requirements of many codes of ethics. Whilst more reflexive forms of research literature may hint at the reasons for the deployment of these devices, there is little systematic exploration of the challenges to engagement.

This chapter, therefore, continues the focus on the relationship between researchers and research groups and will explore the challenges to engagement that research groups may face. It will examine how researchers understand these challenges and why de-alignments between researchers and potential research groups are perceived to occur. The challenges identified are: practical barriers such as cost, location, time, and location; research apathy and an indifference to the research process; forms of research fatigue and being 'over-researched'; lack of change; and identity. Each challenge is dealt with in turn.

#### **Practical barriers: Finance, location, time, and organisation**

People do not live in social vacuums: they are complex social actors who have complex social networks and worlds. As a result, there are a number of real-life practical barriers that do not support research engagement. These are: finance, location, time, and organisation. Each is dealt with in turn.

As has been suggested in chapter eight, research engagement is not economically rewarding. On the contrary, it can incur financial costs for those who choose to engage:

“We’ve recognised, as we’ve got older, that it might actually cost them money to be involved. So we’ve made efforts to pay expenses, if they have to take a day off work, things like that, then we try to pay for their time.”  
(SS, 2005)

Of course, at an individual level these costs are not likely to be huge but in some cases they can be significant as financial costs are relative to the particular social context of the individual and the research group. Therefore, failure to recognise this can potentially result in forms of exclusion, refusal, or withdrawal.

To compensate for this, researchers, as highlighted previously, will try to offset these costs and cover expenses so they do not prevent engagement and result in de-alignment. However, the researchers in this study only used this device at an individual level. Unfortunately, due to a lack of data, this study cannot assess how the financial impacts of research engagement affect engagement at a formal level where costs are likely to be higher.

In contrast to financial cost, some individual costs are more nebulous and difficult to compensate for. For instance, this researcher failed to engage someone of interest due to the relative locations:

“It was just practical things. One of the guys was living in [place]...but really it would have been a long trek to go all the way to [place], so it was little things like that.” (SM, 2005)

Whilst the cost of the travel could have been covered, the time and effort was perceived by the researcher to be too high for both parties and the supporting mechanisms could not compensate for this. As a result, the time that research engagement will take is often more important than the financial cost:

“He was a doctor so that’s all he could give me in terms of time. So literally he’d come out and meet me in his lunch break and stuff. It was funny because that’s when I was interviewing in Nottingham and I was having to go all the way up to Nottingham to speak to him for twenty minutes and then coming back, so it was a little bit of a hassle, but it was really good data so...” (SM, 2005)

Research engagement requires time on behalf of those who choose to engage as well from the researcher: research is not temporally neutral for either. Indeed, within more collective or formal contexts where time may be considered to be at a premium, rather than a loss of contact the practical challenge of keeping groups engaged can become something of a war of attrition as the researcher competes with the primary goals of that group:

“I think it would be fair to say that the vast majority of professionals were interested in it and were happy to help with it, but in many cases because they were so busy we’d have to ring them four or five times.” (ID, 2005)

Where practical costs become so large as to threaten the accomplishment of these primary goals and interests of that individual or organisation, then engagement becomes problematic and the costs associated with engagement can be a significant factor in challenging engagement.

However, this does not only include the more formal professions, but the informal sector also. Indeed, issues of cost and time become increasingly more important in these arenas as it is the individual, who is essentially also acting as a form of research host, who has to absorb the costs of the engagement. Informal carers, for instance, are likely to find such costs huge practical barriers to engagement. This can effectively exclude them from the research world.

The perceived impact of these costs may also vary by methodology with particular techniques constraining engagement if they are thought to be too costly in terms of time:

"...[an]other was a single mum and I think it was just a case of not having the time really. I mean it was a lot to ask, asking people to do interviews for nothing, you know it takes a few hours, when their busy it's a lot to ask I kind of appreciated that she was doing it anyway without having to say I know you're a single mum and I know you work full time but can you also fill in this diary for me, it's just doesn't work." (SM, 2005)

Whilst the innovative diary method may have produced richer data from the perspective of the researcher, from the perspective of the individual more expedient techniques were desirable. The immediacy of interviews, and the perception that they can be completed quickly and efficiently in terms of effort and time, was perceived by the researcher much more preferable for the participant.

Projects that are designed to engage research groups over a period of time, as in the example above, also have the prospect of needing up-to-date details in order to continue their engagement. This can often be challenging to the research process, particularly, in categorical groups where the research group is more fragmented:

"one of the big things is time and they get busier and busier the problem of fitting us in, particularly for certain groups, there are different ones, different kinds of young people, but for certain ones time is at an absolute premium and that's the real hassle for them, fitting us in...the majority of those people who've withdrawn have withdrawn because their lives are very chaotic and we lose track of and we can't keep their contact details. You know their phones don't work any more..." (SS, 2005)

Researchers are not always the priority of the members of research groups and they do have competing interests and values. Within more formal and collective contexts, where the group is much more stable, contact management is often less of a problem as the networks are more permanent. Within categorical groups, however, where the group is unlikely to be located in one place and is much more fragmented, the researcher is less likely to have a 'captive audience' and issues of time, cost, and effort in respect to this management become much more important. This is especially the case if there is a no research host.

### **Research apathy, indifference and lack of interest**

Even where there are limited practical barriers, research engagement is not necessarily an interesting thing to do. As has previously been suggested, as part of their on-going professional identity researchers are necessarily interested in conducting research and promoting it as a form of knowledge, not to mention other relative merits. Many other institutions and organisations share that interest and that is the basis for their subsequent engagement. However, the majority of projects will still not engage all those that they initially identify or approach. This is partly because research is not interesting to everyone and the supporting functions of engagement are not sufficiently attractive enough to facilitate engagement. Indeed, passive forms of recruitment, those that rely on the research group to respond to calls for engagement, have particularly problematic engagement rates:

“With the sort of research that we do, that sort of relies on people volunteering, you’re not working through agencies and you’re not working through social service departments, schools, things like that. Where you haven’t got a captured audience and you’re actually putting information out into a community and you’re dependent on people coming back to you and volunteering, it’s actually a very time-consuming process. You know you can put out three or four hundred leaflets and maybe get one or two replies: Not easy!” (BT, 2005)

Clearly, the prospect of research involvement does not appeal to everyone, certainly not enough to motivate them to respond to the needs of

researchers and associated organisations. The 'pull' of the functions for engagement are not high enough and many people do not imbue research with the same importance as researchers do: there is an indifference to engagement for some individuals and groups. This is not to say that it is negative response, just not positive enough to enable engagement. One researcher described an example of this indifference:

"The majority of cases we wrote to them and explained simply what we wanted to do and asked them to respond: some did, some didn't. In order that I couldn't identify the children, it was necessary to enlist the learning mentor to ring home and ask whether they had got the letter: 'are you happy for your son/daughter to be involved in this?'" (SD, 2005)

And later:

"I got the impression that they didn't care either way...I don't think [the parents] were gushingly enthusiastic to do it. But they didn't stand in the way either." (SD, 2005)

The more passive form of recruitment (posting letters) was less successful because it required an active engagement on behalf of the research group to engage. There was nothing pulling them toward engagement. However, the more active form of recruitment (the telephone calls) achieved a greater level of engagement because it necessitated a negative response to refuse. The researcher used the apathetic quality of some of the research group to 'push' them toward engagement. Another researcher more explicitly highlighted that this apathy can sometimes, paradoxically perhaps, be actively used by researchers as a mechanism to achieve engagement with research groups:

"[we] wrote to people and said 'these people are from the university and these people are doing research, we would like to give them your contact details, if you mind get in touch by such a date otherwise they'll be contacting you'. Well, very few people opted out actually, as they do, it's a bit of a trick really." (FD, 2005)

The researcher effectively relied on the apathy of individuals to pro-actively exclude themselves from consideration in order to gain a platform to 'get a foot in the door' rather than them actively having to volunteer themselves. They 'pushed' for engagement, rather than expecting the research group to pull toward it.

Research apathy is frequent in categorical research groups where there is a lack of organised political interest and the other supporting functions of engagement are also low. This is because engagement with categorical research groups often relies upon more individual functions. However, it does not necessarily follow that in more collectivised groups there will be an interest in engagement, as this researcher highlighted:

"I can think of a couple of Bangladeshi fathers...saying 'why are you asking me all these questions why didn't you just send out a questionnaire(!)', some also did say 'why are you asking me this, I don't know'." (FD, 2005)

Collective groups will also have a great many different interests and values which may also vary by individual: these do not necessarily have to include research. Where they do not, engagement is, naturally enough, challenged due to a lack of interest. Similarly, in more professionalised formal organisations and as stated above, if the research does not help it achieve its primary goals and interests, then indifference and apathy is a likely result. This also applies to the individuals within that organisation who themselves have subsidiary goals and interests according to their role within the organisation. If the research does not help them achieve these goals, then forms of apathy and indifference are again likely.

Furthermore, just because someone has agreed to engage does not necessarily mean that forms of research apathy towards particular parts of the research process do not exist:

"...if I was to say, 'right I'm holding a conference on this, I'm going to give a paper about your lives and you can come for free', I get the feeling they would say, 'I'm not coming' because it's just not their thing and you can forget

that: that's often what research is about in the real world, there are people who kind of think it might be useful in academia but it's not relevant here....They just didn't have that sort of interest" (SM, 2005)

Similarly, different methodological techniques will appeal differently to those who do engage:

"I gave all of the adoptees a little diary and some of them used it and some of them didn't...I think to be honest it just wasn't their thing. I mean the 17 year old lad, you know, he just about came and talked about his stuff and it just wasn't his thing. He's not going to sit and write in a diary." (SM, 2005)

Research involves many different stages and processes if it is to be mobilised through to completion. Research groups do not necessarily have an interest in being involved at every level or with every process. The more academically orientated the stage of any given research project is perceived to be, the less likely it is to be of interest to the research groups. Projects that require either more engagement than those who are engaged reasonably expect, or those that have methodologies that are incongruent with their own interests can, therefore, result in de-alignment.

Another difficulty that was perceived by researchers to challenge engagement is the familiarity that the members of the research group have had with research and their exposure to what it may involve. This can limit or encourage interest in research and being part of the research process. As this researcher highlighted:

"...some of [the low recruitment rate] could be to do with whether people feel that academic research is something that for them and that they feel comfortable taking part. It may be that people who have gone through university etc are going to feel much more at ease with that, whereas someone who has had no contact with academic research may hesitate about taking part." (BT, 2005)

This is particularly acute within passive forms of recruitment with categorical research groups. This is because it is much more difficult to engage in a dialogue with the target group due to their fragmentation and the emphasis that requires them to initiate that dialogue. In more active forms of recruitment with collective groups who are more localised and can be approached at a collective level, this process of negotiating engagement is less problematic to manage, as this researcher demonstrated:

“the research associate and I went along one evening and talked about the project, and they challenged us and said ‘why should we do this?’, ‘why should we help you academics?’ and they engaged us and we engaged them in a debate and they gave us a lot of support in the end.”  
(FD, 2005)

Here the researcher was able to reconstruct enough supporting mechanisms that enabled her to achieve an agreement with the (collective) group. This was possible as the researcher was able to actively enter into a dialogue with the group and because they were more localised the researchers could do this in a labour effective manner. This is usually much more problematic with categorical research groups who are, by their nature, often more fragmented. Thus, any effort to engage in, and negotiate, a dialogue about why research engagement might be an interesting thing to do (amongst other justifications) is a much more labour intensive task if the group concerned are only loosely connected to a research host.

## **Research fatigue and being ‘over-researched’**

“if you are a parent of a disabled child or if you are a disabled person you are probably one of the most researched members of the population.” (ID, 2005)

Research fatigue refers to the increased likelihood of a potential participant declining to engage with the research process as a result of a previous research experience. It differs from a more straight-forward apathy toward research in that the perception of potential engagement changes as a direct result of previous engagement rather than a lack of interest. This non-positive perception, embodied by a reduced willingness to engage with other

projects, is not present before the first engagement, but exists after. One researcher described this type of challenge:

“we’d originally identified [the town] as an area to work in, and really there had been quite a lot of linked projects there and where I was working had a very big set of linked projects and [the town] was one of the areas where they were done. Some of the researchers that I had worked with were actually finding it harder to locate people in [the town] so it was just a strategic decision really and rather than make life difficult for myself: go to a different locality that had similar characteristic but one that hadn’t had this swarm of researchers descend on them.” (BT, 2005)

As has been suggested in chapter eight, research engagement offers some unique opportunities to some categorical and collective research groups. Individual mechanisms that support engagement such as subjective interest, introspection, and social comparison, are particularly unusual within the social realm. Within projects that involve categorical research groups that lack political interest, these can be particularly facilitative support mechanisms. However, they do somewhat rely on the novelty of engagement. As a result, their ability to both facilitate and maintain convergence is likely to be reduced after an engagement.

Similarly, the curiosity that initial research involvement invokes is also significantly reduced with lengthening engagement as the research process and all it offers (or does not) is revealed and de-mystified. In essence, research loses any novelty factor the second time around and engagement is much harder to achieve on these terms.

Moreover, any legitimating effects of ‘giving voice’ are equally lessened in any subsequent engagement. From the perspective of someone outside the research world, epistemological positions or particular researchers are unlikely to be easily distinguished: one research project is likely look similar to another to those without an interest. Whether it seeks to reconstruct those voices through a grounded theory methodology, or operate under a more critical framework is, somewhat literally, academic to many individuals in the first instance, never-mind the second:

“they weren’t academics so it’s not as if I was kind of working or researching with other academics who are interested in the field, these are the sort of people, what we’d call lay people, who are just, well saw my advert and thought ‘I might be able to give some information’ and that was it.” (SM, 2005)

Therefore once someone has given an opinion and had it expressed or legitimated through a research engagement, the need for another legitimating research experience can be somewhat diminished. As these supporting functions are perceived to diminish, the effects that result from the costs of the engagement are likely to become more apparent and subsequently mobilised as a challenge to engagement.

So, research apathy may occur due to the diminishing effect of supportive resonance mechanisms and functions that decrease with repeated research engagements. This is particularly likely in categorical research groups as the supporting functions often rely on the novelty of research engagement. However, a particular form of research fatigue that is associated with more collective and formal groups due to their more political nature, however, is the perception of ‘lack of change’. This is dealt with in the following section.

## **Lack of change**

A particular form of research fatigue identified by researchers is the fatigue that results from a perceived lack of change after a previous engagement. As has been demonstrated, the justification of informing or facilitating ‘change’ is often mobilised as a central purpose for some research projects, as well as being a primary supporting mechanism for engagement. For instance, where projects involve service user groups, an immediate change in the delivery of service may be expected by those who engage.

However, as researchers are all too aware, change is not an inevitable consequence of research engagement, whether it has been mobilised as a mechanism of engagement or not. Indeed, whether any ‘change’ has been achieved is not often well defined or articulated once engagement is completed and it is often difficult for researchers to say what has changed as

a result of the research beyond contributing to their own careers or the abstracted body of knowledge. This is often of little consequence to those who engage.

So, assessing change and the relative merits of that change is conceptually and practically problematic. This is perhaps why change is often qualified with the more passive term of 'informing change' in many proposals. The emphasis somewhat subtly weakens the direct link between research and change, whilst retaining the positive connotation of 'change'. Whilst the relationship between research and practice is a complicated one and one that is beyond the focus of the study, in mobilising change, in whatever form, researchers do explicitly encourage an expectation of change from those who engage. Whilst this supporting mechanism may help researchers recruit research groups, any subsequent perception of change not occurring is, therefore, a challenging one. If there has not been any perceived change in either practice, policy, and experience of people in their every-day lives that has resulted from the engagement, it can have a negative effect on any further involvement with research: people become disillusioned with research engagement:

"we were also mindful that people had been giving their views with the view that services could improve. And our problem that we had felt from our previous experiences, was that people give you the best views with their best interest and nothing happens: that disillusions people from participating in research." (SG, 2005)

This disillusionment with research can challenge the research process at a number of levels. In the next example, the researcher used the following example to describe the closing of access doors to research hosts that resulted from a lack of a commitment to change after change had been mobilised as a supporting mechanism:

"[a second] report done by someone in social services had referred to [the original] report and said 'I'm a bit worried that nothing has happened four years on'. And then in 2001, another piece of research, four or five years later, was done on, not exactly the same, but on

very similar things. So one of the first questions my colleague was asked when she went to the racial equality council was 'is this yet another piece of research that is worth it you know? What will be different this time about this work because there have been studies before and from where we are we can't see that anything different has happened in the community'." (NN, 2005)

The lack of change experienced after three previous research engagements challenged the potential engagement with a fourth. For the social department and the research host that would provide invaluable assistance with recruitment, there was no perceptible difference attributable to their involvement and therefore there was no reason to commit any energy to further engagement. Similarly, a lack of change can also have effects at the research group level:

"the point is that sometimes some of those same people whose children may be older now may well be the ones you go back to and ask the same questions. So my colleague had to convince them that, and we had to go back to the people who commissioned it and the woman who was the key activist, and say that people that do want to know that this isn't just going to sit on the shelf and that there is going to be some difference here." (SG, 2005)

Research groups can, therefore, become disenfranchised with the research process if there is no perceived difference after their involvement and the supporting mechanisms cannot equalise that difference. This is particularly acute when some sort of service provision is being investigated and those who engage continue to use that service after engagement. Essentially, people have given their 'voice' only to be ignored.

However, the ability of the researcher to achieve and drive change can also be compromised by the practical constraints that are placed upon the researcher:

“you need a lot of time to set these things up and there wasn’t the time..... the time scale was incredibly short the money had to be spent by [date] and we couldn’t carry it over. As often happens these things take a long time and we had the first meeting in the August and we needed to spend the money by March and we were under pressure.” (SG, 2005)

Further:

“[the agency] hadn’t built [the change element] into their planning. They thought that research was about people coming in and they could just hand it over and we would just produce the report that told them what the recommendations were and they could just do it. And so it was quite hard because they weren’t geared up to do the work.” (SG, 2005)

The realities of project funding, time, and mismatches in the perception of the outcomes of research between researchers, gate-keepers and the research group, can often prevent change being achieved. This can have significant consequences, as one researcher alluded to:

“I think that does lead to research fatigue and situations where people do not want to get involved in things...it gives research a bad name” (SG, 2005)

Mobilising ‘change’ as a mechanism to achieve engagement is, therefore, a double-edged sword. On one hand, using change as a mechanism to support engagement suggests that there is a good prospect of some aspect of reality, whether it is practice or policy, being altered for the better. This is an attractive function of research and can be used by researchers to increase the likelihood of engagement. On the other hand, a subsequent lack of perceived change by those who have engaged and expected change, can result in a decreased likelihood of continuing or future engagement with research. Therefore, there are advantages for individual research projects in mobilising change as a supporting mechanism, but accompanying collective problems for the wider research field if that change is perceived by those

who engage as being absent. This is especially acute where research samples are limited and re-visited by different research projects and this can lead to research fatigue.

## **Identity**

The final challenge to engagement that was identified by researchers concerns issues of identity. Whilst the identity of 'researcher' and 'researched' may be prevalent within the research encounter, they are by no means the only identities that are important within that relationship. Indeed, within the research process, researchers are not simply researchers and the researched are not simply the researched. Both groups will inevitably embody and represent differing aspects of identity according to their particular personal and professional contexts. So, another factor that is both challenging to, and supportive of, the research relationship is identity. Indeed, researchers highlighted clear boundaries between issues of similarity and difference here: perceptions in the similarity of identity being described as helping to facilitate or maintain engagement; and, perceptions of difference being challenging to that process. As one researcher highlighted with respect to similarity:

"because they were younger, and maybe they would identify, well they would identify actually especially the girls, talking about marriage, arranged marriages, their parents expectations of them in that respect so they did disclose some of those things to the research associates...they were basing their trust on the fact that they were Muslim, they were young, and also because they saw them in a position of authority and even the most cynical of us do put some trust in authority don't we?" (FD, 2005)

The similarity in the age, gender, and ethnicity of the researchers was perceived to help to facilitate the research relationship as they are perceived to be similar to those who engaged. The perception of similarity facilitates a perception of understanding which in turn supports trust.

Furthermore, trust can also be supported by the prestige that is associated with a University position helping to support engagement:

“with regard to the communities I think being a professor and being a part of the university was also influential because there is a lot of respect for education...being a professor is a position of standing so I think it was seen that this person who’s a senior person in the university is taking these issues very seriously.” (FD, 2005)

Here, the identities are not immediately similar, but the perception of a shared interest from a position of ‘standing’ was seen by the researcher to legitimate and confirm the interests of those engaged<sup>18</sup>. This facilitates access to the group as the interests of the group, and the individuals that comprise them, are legitimated by the presence of an interested researcher.

This facilitative nature of similarity has not gone unnoticed by researchers and, in some instances, was directly employed in maintaining engagement. Indeed, another researcher pointed out that the matching of researchers and researched can be used as a supporting mechanism to help achieve and maintain involvement:

“having a matched researcher can help because we do share some of the context with some of the people and we can say we know what it’s like because we may have had uncles or cousins etc that have similar experiences. And I think that can help.” (SG, 2005)

In these instances, identity, and in particular the perception of similarity between the identities of the researcher and researched, is being used as a facilitative device to negotiate and manage the researcher-researched relationship. Similarity is constructed as tool to facilitate the perception of understanding which in turn facilitates trust.

In contrast, differences between identities were often constructed to challenge engagement. In the following instance, the different ethnicity of

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<sup>18</sup> Of course, this is not always the case. If there is a perception of difference that views researchers or academia more generally as negative, then the same identity can challenge engagement.

the researcher and researched was perceived to challenge aspects of the research relationship:

"The parents seemed to be reluctant to talk about racism to the white interviewer and I know that, well when my Bangladeshi interviewer interviewed the Bangladeshi families for instance, they'd often ask her to switch the tape-recorder off so they'd often tell her about racist abuse 'off the record' or they might be critical of British society 'off the record' but they didn't want it to be recorded because they didn't want to be seen to be, and I don't know I'm only speculating on what they said, but I think it was that they didn't want to be seen as critical because it's seen as offensive. So I think people didn't really want to say to me 'this school's racist' or 'my child's experience in racism is' because they'd see it as being indirectly of me and my 'culture' in inverted commas, I don't necessarily identify myself with these people but they identified me with them. And I've got several examples of where that happened to me." (FD, 2005)

In this instance, the perception of difference had specific impacts on the data revealed to the researcher as certain data was withheld in order to avoid disrupting the relationship. The perceived difference in identity acted as a barrier.

Moreover, whilst similarity can facilitate access, subsequent perceptions of difference that are later mobilised can threaten engagement. In this particular example, the researcher highlights how a perception of similarity initially facilitated engagement:

"I think [my ethnicity] helped me gain access as well because I could say that I am a member of the black minority ethnic community and if their going to tell me about experiences of racism I'm not going to under-play it and I can understand what it's about and I can give it a right degree of analysis..." (SM, 2005)

However, the perception of difference in age and experience that was subsequently mobilised within the research encounter threatened this initial impression of shared understanding and was later to prove challenging:

“it was things like ‘I told [name] today about my first experiences of racism and she didn’t seem to have much response so I’m wondering whether she might be a bit naïve about the experiences I have had and whether that might impinge on how she interpreted...’ and it was just stuff like that.” (SM, 2005)

Furthermore, it was not just the perception of age that challenged engagement, but the researcher role identity that avoids becoming too attached confounded that difference:

“And what I explained to her afterwards is that what it actually is, is that I didn’t want to get too emotionally attached because it’s not about me, so even though I could really sympathise with your experiences I didn’t want to sit there and say ‘I can’t believe that happened, the people that did that are right bastards’. That’s not what it was about: ‘you were talking and I didn’t want my responses to shape what you were saying and how you were saying them’...it was just different ideas about the interviewing process really.” (SM, 2005)

Whilst there was a perception of similarity between the ethnicity of researcher and researched that the researcher thought would initially support engagement, in the subsequent research encounter the differences in age were more challenging for the research relationship. Although experiences around the differences in age were perceived to be a challenge, the researcher identity also did not support the empathy that the commonality implied and that was perceived to be required for understanding, and in turn, to facilitate trust within the research relationship.

In both individual and group contexts, whilst the perception of similarity may facilitate engagement, difference may also alter or challenge it. The perception of similarity and difference is not fixed, and can change during the

course of the engagement. Equally, experiences of similarity and difference will be different across the group. As a result of these problems, using matching as a device to manage identity becomes quite problematic as a device to manage difference. At a more basic level, not only is similarity and difference fluid and context dependent, there are often very few researchers who are in a position to be matched with the people they research. So, in practice using matching to manage identity is often difficult:

“and sometimes you can’t do anything about it, you’ve got to get the interviews done and you only have this person available so she has to do it” (FD, 2005)

Projects are not unlimited by funds or by the researchers they can draw upon. Even at a broad level, matching researchers with those who choose to engage is, therefore, difficult.

Moreover, researchers also highlighted some very real epistemological concerns in assuming that matching will be beneficial:

“insider epistemology is very well and good, but it assumes, very naively, that if you are an insider then all’s good in the world and you can go into that place and you can unearth all these conditions, and I remain, well I am convinced to some extent of why it’s important to parents, but at the same time there is that issue around distance, what you can give someone outside of their context.” (ID, 2005)

Whilst similarity can be important in supporting the research process and research engagement, paradoxically perhaps, it can also simultaneously challenge it in other ways. Different ‘ways of seeing’ may both broaden the field of horizon in epistemological terms as well as positively challenge taken for granted assumptions of the research group. Therefore, whilst difference may, in some cases, challenge engagement, that difference can also bring benefits to that relationship. Unfortunately the data in respects to this is limited and cannot be pursued further.

## **Conclusion**

The right to refuse to engage with research, and the right to withdraw from research after an initial agreement has been reached, are staple devices used by researchers to manage research engagement. However, the taken for granted nature of these principles often means that the challenges to engagement have gone unarticulated in the literature. This chapter has explored the challenges to engagement that research groups may face by examining how researchers understand why de-alignments between researchers and potential research groups occur. The challenges identified by researchers are: practical barriers such as cost, time, location and organisation; research apathy and an indifference to the research process; forms of research fatigue and being 'over-researched'; lack of change; and identity.

Of course, there are more challenges to engagement than this list would initially suggest and it is not exhaustive. For instance, due to a lack of data, challenges associated with the post-data collection phases of research, and in particular, the politics of representation and dissemination, are not discussed here. Equally, any challenges associated with formal organisations are not explored and the relationship between the research group types developed in chapter eight and the challenges to engagement are also not well developed. As a result, further investigation is needed in order to produce a more comprehensive understanding.

Indeed, a more systematic exploration of these issues is likely to be important. With current levels of research activity now at unprecedented levels in many areas, research relationships that are supportive of future engagements are, therefore, increasingly necessary to the development of any present and future knowledge fields. A more systematic assessment of the challenges to engagement and how those challenges can be negotiated is likely to be crucial in retaining current levels of research involvement. Whilst there is some evidence here that researchers can successfully employ devices to negotiate some of the more practical challenges, as well as those relating to identity, there is also evidence to suggest that issues of apathy, fatigue, and a lack of change, are more difficult to navigate.

There is, of course, a wider body of discussion concerned with managing negative outcomes within qualitative research. Indeed, issues of ethics are conventionally mobilised within research to negotiate and manage risk within the research relationship. In respect to these particular challenges, the following chapter explores how researchers understand issues of ethical practice and how risk is negotiated and managed within the research process.

## Chapter 10

### **Managing risk: Issues of consent, intra-personal harm, and inter-personal harm**

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The previous chapter explores the challenges to engagement by examining how researchers understand the challenges to engagement and why de-alignments between researchers and research groups can occur. However, pre-dominant within the discourse concerning research relationships, and more specifically the problems that can arise during the course of research, is the issue of ethics and how risk is managed during the process of research. Therefore, by examining how researchers understand their ethical practice during research projects, this chapter will attempt to extend the discussion concerning the challenges to engagement by exploring how researchers use ethical devices and ethical discourse to manage and negotiate risk within research relationship.

Beginning with a conceptual distinction, the chapter will first examine how researchers understand and mobilise 'ethics' by identifying three different meanings: administrative, political, and situated. The chapter then focuses on these situated devices and how they are used in the negotiation and management of risk.

The first device that will be identified is that of informed consent and the chapter will discuss how researchers use informed consent as a device that assists with the negotiation and the management of risk. Next, the chapter will explore the issue of harm and how researchers negotiate the threat of non-positive outcome. In this context, two separate forms of harm are discussed: as a form of intra-personal trauma that results from the processes associated with the data collection phase of research, and, as a form of external disruption to the social functioning of the individual after

engagement. These different forms, and their associated devices of withdrawal, benefits, and self-determination, and anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy, are discussed in turn.

## **Reconstructing ethics: Administrative, political, and situated**

As argued previously in chapter two, understanding what ethics and ethical practice actually means is often difficult due to the catch-all nature of the term. Meanings are often prescriptive of practice, rather than descriptive of how researchers actually use and mobilise the concepts within the research process. Within this particular context of qualitative research, researchers mobilised ethics in three separate forms: firstly, as an administrative construct that deals with the requirements of the organisations that are engaged with the research process; secondly, as a situated moral and political construct regarding 'good' outcome; and thirdly, as a series of situated devices for the management and negotiation of intra and inter-personal risk. These are dealt with in turn.

Firstly, researchers constructed ethics as means of satisfying the demands of the gate-keeper or funding agency that are engaged within the process. For instance, this researcher described the experience of working through the administrative procedures at a series of local (health-based) trusts before they were able to even identify parents:

“When we got the money, after about a month of celebrating, we then put in various kind of ethics forms and we got initial clearance through the LREC [the Local Research Ethics Committee] but then it was a nightmare. We probably spent another 6 to 9 months in the [place] end, going through various procedures, for example meeting with an ethics committee of 25 people, filling out these really time consuming forms which have to be assessed by the research and development people of each trust you work with, really losing the will to live now, and luckily we did it just before the new ethics procedure which apparently is even bigger. So it was a really long process before we got to speak to the parents.” (ID, 2005)

In this context, ethics and ethical procedures are a series of performative processes that place an emphasis on satisfying the requirements of a particular organisation, in this case the local trust. The gate-keeper or funding agency thereby becomes responsible for deciding what is, and what is not, ethical practice, not the researcher and those who engage in the research process. Ethics is viewed as a concept that is mobilised to administrate what research is, and is not, associated with that particular organisation.

There is also some evidence to support the suggestion of a clinically-based 'ethics creep' within this administrative process (see Haggerty, 2004). As one researcher explained:

"Given the nature of the research and my perception of the vulnerability of the respondents I wanted to treat it with the highest possible ethical standards. So I treated it as 'health research' and went through all the permission networks for that within the University and treated it in terms of indemnity as a clinical trial. So I was keen for the reasons I've mentioned to have the highest ethical permission and highest ethical protection for all concerned. But it wasn't strictly necessary." (SD, 2005)

Operating within the field of education, the researcher used the administrative process associated with clinical fields in order to construct an administrative ethical practice. This practice was then 'seen' by interested others as being ethical as it satisfied the 'highest' demands of a clinical trial.

However, this ethical performance does not necessarily relate to the actual practice of ethics. Indeed, rather than a controlling mechanism, researchers also mobilised ethics as a concept that comprises a moral discourse that guides the purpose of research. Ethics is used as a political and moral construct that governs 'good' research practice and 'good' research outcomes:

"we spend a lot of time, you know, thinking and talking about all these ethical issues, and issues about trust. But

it's not one you can just sort out, it's an on-going issue and each time we write something we have to ask ourselves is this something OK to do, and are we betraying somebody by doing it. In some ways in social science your research at some level is always a betrayal in that your turning people's lives into knowledge. So it's like, how can you make it an acceptable betrayal rather than an unacceptable one. You can't make it entirely, well you can't have a study and make it so it has no impact on them, but it's about how to make it an acceptable." (SS, 2005)

Similarly, another researcher noted:

"I think this is irreconcilable in research of this nature where you're asking people to reflect and you're asking about these subjects that deal with emotion, hurt and trauma, I personally feel uncomfortable in just walking away. And that's what we did, we walked away and left people..." (DV, 2005)

Rather than a performative bureaucratic mechanism, ethics and ethical practice describes the internal and external discourse that guides interpersonal relationships both in the field and within the research process more broadly. This discourse involves a theoretical, political and moral discussion of practice that seeks to promote 'good' field relationships and outcomes. In part, it is through the development of such a discourse that researchers employ supporting mechanisms to enable them to achieve more positive outcomes (see chapter eight).

Finally, ethics was mobilised as a series of situated devices for the management and negotiation of those field relationships in order to minimise risk and avoid negative outcomes. Risk is the threat of harm to those who engage. This harm comes in two distinct forms: as a form of intra-personal trauma that results from the processes associated with the data collection phase of research, and, as a form of external disruption to the social functioning of the individual after engagement. In order to manage this risk, researchers identified particular devices to help them negotiate any dilemmas. These include: informed consent and the promotion of self-

determination; the avoidance of intra-personal harm; and, the avoidance of inter-personal harm. However, the realisation of these ethical devices is often complex and dependent upon the social context of the research group, as well as being related to the moral, administrative, and political discourse around the nature of research relationships. These difficulties are explored in turn.

### **Informed consent: Promoting self-determination through the negotiation of expectation**

Researchers identified two issues concerning informed consent and how they negotiated and managed the process: the presentation of a meaningful representation of the research experience that is likely to result from engagement; and, the right to refuse or withdraw from that engagement. Thus, informed consent involves the provision of information concerning what can be reasonably expected to result from the particular research experience and the right to choose whether to engage. So for example:

“We needed to get permission from the heads and the deputy heads, the year tutors, heads, we needed to get permission from the young people themselves in writing on the day, and we also needed to get permission from the parents or guardians... I told them what needed to happen and what they needed to be able to do it and if there was any doubt about it let’s have a conversation because I don’t want you to guess.” (SD, 2005)

This consent process can often serve the associated purpose of delineating the researcher from other social actors and organisations. This is particularly important in the case of marginalised groups, as this researcher explained:

“The other layer is about under researched groups, about marginalisation, etc, etc. which is about, as far as you can, making sure that they are comfortable with what will happen to this work; that it would be confidential; that their names are not going to be released; that they are not going to suddenly get twenty social workers taking their children away. There are all kinds of misconceptions, as

well as poor experiences that people have had. So in this kind of work there's that element that really needs talking through. And, in a sense, they don't need to know if they can trust the process, that's the role of the researcher in making assurances about confidentiality and how this work will be used. Actually I think it becomes quite important because you're dealing with other barriers that people have had to the services.....in this kind of context, and being let down by services, there's a whole kind of background of mistrust in officialdom." (SG, 2005)

Informed consent enables individual members of the research group to demystify the research and the research process and to be able to determine whether or not they wish to engage with that process. This information can then be used on an individual basis to decide whether or not to engage:

"I suppose people who saw it as risky or were worried about the implications of taking part, just wouldn't take part and volunteer." (BT, 2005)

To emphasise, legalise and administrate this, the process is also often conducted in a more formalised manner with the consent being formally written and signed by the individual:

"And what I did was, on my consent form there was a section at the start that said 'do you consent to this research', and they sign it and date it, and I said if you would like follow up findings from the study and that you'd like to be kept updated by the study please leave your address. And half of them did, and half of them didn't." (SM, 2005)

However, there is a problem here in making this process meaningful to those outside of the research world. Within a qualitative environment that places an emphasis on quality of detail, the presence of a written consent form does not necessarily guarantee that a meaningful understanding has been reached between researcher and those who engage:

"I've actually found that when you interview people with a long six page consent form they don't want it, but if they had an opportunity to know something about what you are doing, why you are doing it, the research process, to ask their own questions and to feel they are getting answers, and also to feel and test you a little bit, it works better."  
(BT, 2005)

Making the consent process meaningful to the particular individuals within the research group in question becomes key, rather than treating consent as a rationalised and administrative process. This involves negotiation and participation with those individuals to ensure understanding. Within this qualitative framework, informed consent needs to be consistently renewed in a manner that is meaningful to both parties throughout the data collection phases of the research encounter:

"One of our concerns in the study as it progressed, they had no idea how much we know about them because they don't see all this stuff put together. Each interview is not that revealing, but when you put them in together they become incredibly revealing....sometimes people can say more when they start talking than they actually intended...we always negotiate consent every time, how do they know what they are consenting to? And we needed, we felt the need as researchers, to communicate to them what we could see....[but] it's delicate, you can't just pass that responsibility back you do actually have to take responsibility for protecting them but we're at the stage where we're trying to take a step away from the simple protection toward a more participative approach where we negotiate with them around archiving and how can this be shared with other people, what ways of doing this would be feasible, and acceptable for them?" (SS, 2005)

Responsibility for engagement, therefore, is not simply administered and managed at the beginning of the project nor is it simply handed over for the individual to decide and take responsibility for. Within the qualitative research process, which can have any number of unanticipated effects,

informed consent at the individual level is a situated process that is renewable and needs to be negotiated within the inter-action between researchers and those who engage, not just at the beginning of a project. In this way, building informed consent into a research proposal form that receives ethical approval from an administrative board does not necessarily make something more or less ethical within the situated research encounter.

Indeed, research groups and the individuals that comprise them, will not just passively accept the representations of research that are initially provided and will actively test out the implicit meanings within this process of consent:

“They quickly tested what these things mean, ‘so if I’m going to go in the playground and smack someone in the mouth are you gonna tell anybody?’, ‘if I go and pinch so and so’s car are you gonna tell anybody?’, ‘if I’m gonna thieve a computer and sell it in the club are you gonna tell anybody’?, and they would test out where the boundaries were. These were generally young people who didn’t have safe boundaries, they did not have parameters set so they could live life safely within known safe parameters, so they very quickly wanted to test out who we were and what would press our buttons. So there was a process of testing out whether they could trust us.” (SD, 2005)

Informed consent is, therefore, a renewable and situated process whereby researchers *and* those engaged respond to the demands of the research encounter to produce a lived and meaningful relationship to both parties. Those who are engaged are perceived by researchers to be actively shaping the relationship and critically appraising its realised meaning. As a result, researchers reconstruct ‘better’ forms of informed consent as a process that occurs throughout the research process. Indeed, approaching informed consent in this manner can have some additional benefits:

“people are not going to talk intimately about themselves and their lives unless they do have some feeling of confidence in that, not just the interviewer but the research process.” (SG, 2005)

From a methodological perspective this situated and negotiated approach to ethics can have advantages over more formalised or less substantive approaches as the trust that it can potentially promote can provide a more meaningful and respectful research encounter for both parties. This is especially useful within qualitative frameworks as the detail and richness of data is of paramount importance. Of course, this situated approach to informed consent could, and probably has, been used as an instrumental technique to elicit such a 'better' relationship and resulting information. However, this is likely to be particularly dangerous to all concerned as any subsequent de-alignment is likely to be particularly more harmful to those who have engaged and invested more effort into that engagement as a result. Even so, those forms of consent that encourage self-determination through meaningful relationships should help to prevent more exploitative relationships.

Whilst exploitation by researchers may be avoided under a model that promotes them to provide clear information about the research in order to gain informed consent at individual and therefore more categorical levels, there may be other associated outcomes for research with the more collective or formal research groups. This is particularly the case within research groups that have more advanced political interests that challenge researchers own value-based positions. Detailed ethical review procedures and the increasing regulation of informed consent with emphasis on self-determination, if applied at more formal levels, could potentially allow for a closer management of projects by the institutions and organisations under scrutiny. These institutions and organisations necessarily have interests they need to protect, or others that they need to promote. Clear and detailed consent is in their interest. As a result, quality control by means of ethical review could also become political control by means of ethical review<sup>19</sup>. At the formal research group level, informed consent, especially one that is renewed, is not always or necessarily in the interests of a critical social science. Indeed, models of ethical practice that are based on an ethic of care may actually cause the research process to collapse in engagements with this type of group. Obviously, this is not in the interests of the researcher, but it is in the interests of the group in question. There may be a tension between an ethical practice that enhances self-determination in projects that

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<sup>19</sup> Equally, research that is more post-positivist in design and has more controlled aims, objectives and outcomes is also more likely to be preferred by politically orientated formal research groups than the unpredictability associated with qualitative research.

are purposively and necessarily critical (see Wise, 1987; and, Hammersley, 2000). Unfortunately, there is not sufficient data within this sample to pursue this further.

## **Harm: Managing and negotiating intra-personal and inter-personal risk**

For the vast majority of qualitative projects, the realisation of harm is perceived to be an unintended, but sometimes unavoidable, consequence of research engagement. However, it is often difficult to assess what issues of harm are relevant to qualitative social research. Dingwall (2006) has recently argued that the notion and consequence of harm within the social sciences is not the same as it is within the more clinical fields. As he somewhat dramatically suggests: "we have no research technique that carries an inherent risk of immediate death or serious physical damage" (Dingwall, 2006, p 52). Indeed, whilst harm is often mobilised within qualitative ethical discourse it is often relatively poorly defined. Similarly, the examples frequently associated with harm, Milgram (1974), Zimbardo (1973), and Humphreys (1970), are at such an extreme and unusual end of social research that they tell us little about how harm is understood or negotiated within the vast majority of qualitative projects within the contemporary social sciences. As Haggerty (2004) suggests, the majority of issues that researchers will face are of a considerably lower magnitude. This section seeks to explore how researchers construct issues of harm within qualitative research and attempts to assess what the potential risks of engagement are perceived to be.

In this context, researchers largely constructed two separate forms of harm: as a form of intra-personal risk that results from the processes associated with the data collection phase of research, and, as a form of inter-personal risk that results in a disruption to the social functioning of the individual after engagement. These are dealt with in turn.

### **Negotiating and managing intra-personal risk: Withdrawal, benefits, and self-determination**

For the members of a research group, any given research encounter is the subjective realisation of a particular experience. This may be in the form of an interview where the information is subjectively reconstructed through

articulation, or the realisation of a particular action within an ethnographic encounter. If this process can be perceived to invoke a non-positive reflection about that subjective experience or action, then research engagement can be seen to provoke some level of intra-personal risk. This is the potential for internal trauma that is caused by the research encounter. For instance:

“For some of the young people, it was very, very painful. And there were actually individuals weeping during the time they were being interviewed and they were offered the opportunity to put an end to the interview but they wanted to continue....It was certainly painful for the parents and you could see on the faces of the parents, whilst they co-operated and were grateful for the attention and support, you could see, and in fact they said this in some of the narrative: ‘I think I may have made a mistake as a mother [or a father], is this my fault, have I failed?’ So there was sense in which they were also reflecting on their own parenting. I think for some of the parents, who were my age and younger they were of Afro-Caribbean origin, had been born in Britain, had been educated in Britain, had gone through the schooling system that their children had gone through, and had experienced some of those difficulties, I think the *déjà vu* was just too painful for some of the parents: just too painful.” (DV, 2005)

The personal introspection that is required by the research interview requires the articulation of subjective experience. In this particular instance, this revealed a ‘painful’ recollection for some of those engaged concerning that experience which resulted in internal trauma.

Unfortunately, these intra-personal revelations that are revealed by the research process are often an irreconcilable part of engagement as many projects will directly seek to address subjective experiences that are likely to be non-positive. In the above example, the research process required parents to reflect on their experience of being a parent to young people who had been in trouble with the education system. This is likely to have some non-positive affect upon the interviewees. Similarly, another researcher

described the focus of their research and how it inevitably meant that some non-positive experiences would be touched upon:

“I’m asking them about their lives, so all the good things that have happened to them, but also the bad things and all the shitty things. I mean there were some cases of bullying, there was a case of self-harming, domestic violence, violence in relationships, problematic relationships they had with their family: so it was some really heavy stuff.” (SM, 2005)

Indeed, this intra-personal risk can present a challenge to engagement being achieved in the first instance. Informed consent necessarily involves informing people of the subject of the research and interviews, and the likely affects it may have. At this individual level, these non-positive attributions toward the results of the research engagement made at this point can result in a refusal to engage:

“I think there were just two older people whose own children didn’t want to be interviewed and in those cases there were quite difficult family histories. So knowing one, the person I interviewed was quite hopeful that her son would agree, but it was always questionable whether the son would agree because he’d had a very difficult life, and in the end he didn’t...I think it was just that there were things that he didn’t want to discuss.” (BT, 2005)

Refusal to engage, therefore, is used as a device by researchers to manage this risk. This refusal is not limited to the start of the research engagement, however, but can, under the principles of withdrawal, occur further on in the research process and after engagement had initially been supported. If the intra-personal trauma attributed to the research process becomes too great, and the research method requires repeat forms of engagement, then de-alignments can occur:

“The one thing that’s interesting that we found is that the young people who carry on is that people drop out and drop back in. When they drop back in their explanations of

why they dropped out are really interesting and we've found the methodology makes it very difficult for people whose lives aren't going swimmingly well because [the research] is inviting stories of success." (SS, 2005)

Whilst this is not limited to categorical research groups, this type of internally located harm is particularly prevalent in these situations as the collective supporting mechanisms, in both the research context and the wider social networks of the individuals, are absent. This is particularly problematic as the individual does not have the mechanisms of group support that may be present in collective or formal group contexts.

However, this notion of harm and when it becomes a significant challenge to engagement largely depends upon individual difference and the social context. As Haggerty (2004) highlights, the issue of trauma is a highly subjective one. Harm is a relative concept rather than a fixed and measurable one: it is not necessarily negative or unethical. In fact, the more positivist approaches to ethics that collectivise responses to harm may actually under-estimate the situated and contextual nature of these non-positive affects. Indeed, in some cases such affects may not be non-positive at all:

"Some of the older generation had lived through the war and been evacuated as children. One person I interviewed came into this country as a refugee, so the interviews weren't always sweetness and light and some aspects of them would put them in touch with memories that might have been painful in some aspects. But again, I think there is a question of the shape and the form that interview takes, so that isn't necessarily a bad experience.....some of the people who would recall some of the most potentially painful aspects of personal history were also ones who wrote to me and said what a positive experience they found it." (BT, 2005)

Whilst the research engagement may involve aspects of subjective action that could be theoretically problematic in terms of intra-personal trauma, the realisation of this in any given situated experience will largely depend upon

the social context; that is, the individual context, the supporting functions of research engagement, and the research relationship itself.

Similarly, in some cases researchers constructed very positive individual and collective benefits that directly resulted from an engagement with experiences that might be initially perceived to be problematic:

“their experience of adults was either indifference, abuse or neglect, or a mixture so it was a very brave thing to do, and if we’d have done it individually it wouldn’t have worked. It was only the fact that they were together with a peer group that it did work. And that they were encouraging each other and supporting each other and great levels of sensitivity and empathic understanding amongst the group supporting each other. They were taking about death of parents, death of siblings, major illness, past abuse, bullying, all sorts of things. Particularly in the girl group, but in the boy group perhaps other ways. Lots of touching, lots of holding, I mean physically but also in gaze: very, very sensitive to each other. I was really privileged to see the extent to which they could practically support and understand each other.” (SD, 2005)

The intra-personal trauma that might be assumed to result in such ‘problematic’ areas, was more than countered by the inter-personal relationships that were also promoted by the engagement. Of course, this is not to justify approaches that may have harmful intra-personal aspects to them. However, it does suggest that paternal and bureaucratic approaches to the ethics of harm within social research are problematic and also need to be seen in the context of situated research relationships.

There is a problem here, however, that was well recognised by some researchers. Not all researchers can necessarily promote more trusting forms of research relationships and there is much individual difference between individual approaches to situated ethical practice, as this researcher highlighted:

“there are people who work in the field who should not be allowed near people because they’re charmless, thoughtless, self-obsessed, academic tossers...they go and write these books on ‘making inclusion’ and you think well ‘how did you...?’ And I can see them in the research setting not doing that....there is something about certain researchers: you wouldn’t let them run a chip shop yet alone run a research project.”<sup>20</sup>

Hence, the values concerning ethics in terms of the political and moral discourse around outcome can differ. In this case, an instrumental use of research groups is seen as a negative approach that is particularly likely to produce non-positive outcomes for those who engage. Indeed, where intra-personal risk is a possibility, individual approaches can be problematic, especially when mobilised under headings that are likely to be receptive to ethical administrators. This is particularly problematic as researchers highlighted no formal feed-back mechanisms or requirement for members of research groups to comment upon their experiences of engagement.

Another method of negotiating this intra-personal risk may lie in the method of data collection itself. The open-ended nature of many qualitative research techniques that place an emphasis on self-determination can help individuals to control the level of intra-personal revelations they choose to articulate:

“the research participants were in charge of the interview because they weren’t responding to narrow questions they were basically telling me the story of their childhood and the story of them as parents and grandparents, and so in a sense they defined the focus and a lot of my part of the interview was more about prompting and listening.” (BT, 2005)

These open-ended approaches to gaining data can serve to strengthen the consent process and the research relationship as they can allow those engaged to have more input into the direction of the research encounter. Any areas of experience that are deemed to be problematic for the individual

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<sup>20</sup> In view of the sensitive nature of the quote, the personal identifier has been removed to ensure anonymity.

are controlled by them as the researched help to mould the direction of that research engagement. Again, principles of self-determination are used to negotiate and manage risk.

However, that is not to suggest that more direct or challenging forms of research engagement with such groups are unethical and should not be pursued. Indeed within more formal research groups, harm may actually be transformed and mobilised to avoid areas of political sensitivity. Open-ended interviews that promote self-determination to allow for the avoidance of harm can also be utilised as a more political form of control. Again, there is not enough data within the sample to explore this further.

### **Managing and negotiating inter-personal risk: Withdrawal, anonymity and confidentiality**

As previously stated, any given research encounter is the subjective realisation of a particular aspect of intra-personal experience or action. If this process can be perceived to invoke a non-positive reaction within the wider social environment of the individual in question, then research engagement can be seen to involve some level of risk to the relationships of the individual in their social environments. Therefore, inter-personal risk refers to the forms of external disruption to the social environment of the individual, or group, that results from engagement. The following account was a typical form of inter-personal risk that was described by researchers:

“one person was concerned that had one of her daughters known she had said that, it would have been hurtful to the daughter.” (BT, 2005)

The revelations resulting from the research engagement threatened to cause conflict within the inter-personal relations of the individual concerned. The research encounter was perceived to involve a degree of inter-personal risk and this presented a challenge to engagement. Researchers identified three methods of managing this risk: withdrawal, confidentiality, and anonymity. These are dealt with in turn.

The principles of informed consent dictate that those who choose to engage are aware of the inter-personal consequences of engaging with researchers.

They can refuse to participate, withdraw, or monitor their actions in order to manage any perceived inter-personal risk. For instance:

“From their perspective, there’s a lot of blame and culpability and judgement, and removal and privileges, and denial of freedom when you cooperate with adults. It was probably better for them to hide things and tell lies because that was the best strategy because even with the interested adults their involvement was seen as nosey interference.” (SD, 2005)

The researcher constructs a series of risk-related boundaries for the members of research group that exist at the inter-personal level. Each boundary presents a challenge to the research process as granting access to that world is perceived to have sufficient risk to the social networks and environment of the research group member. However, these boundaries are also perceived by the researcher to be managed by those who engage and whilst there was inter-personal risk, they still engaged with the process. Even so, if access to those boundaries becomes too challenging, then withdrawal is possible:

“at any point they could take that information away from me. If they had not been comfortable with what they had said, they could have just taken it away and that’s it.” (SM, 2005)

In order to help to manage issues of inter-personal risk, researchers, and ethical codes, also adopt the device of anonymity in order to circumvent inter-personal disruption by preventing the individual from being recognised in any subsequent work. In essence, the risk is managed through a technique that aims to ensure that the particular subjective action or experience is not to be traced to a particular individual. The unique personal identity of the individual is removed in favour of a more impersonal categorical or collective one:

“I said that it wouldn’t be possible to identify anyone or the school and I gave strict assurances to that and I made

every effort to make it confidential and anonymous.....What I did say in terms of ethics with the school is, I need to know who these young people are in terms of their initials and I need to know which bits of the inclusion criteria they meet, but it was crucially important that I didn't know who they are." (SD, 2005)

Whilst the technique has a generalising effect on the data to the wider audience<sup>21</sup>, simply anonymising data is often not enough to remove the unique social context of that individual to other interested parties, as this researcher explained:

"From my point of view, one of the things that I was concerned about was that I was interviewing different members of the same family and so in publications people might recognise each other. You know, you can offer people confidentiality, you can anonymise interviews, but it's always going to be recognisable to someone who knows who you are. And other family members would. But I think that to some extent the research participants had control over that because they knew each other and the other family members, and in a sense they only offered me what they wanted to give me. So there might be whole chunks of family history that were never revealed to me."  
(BT, 2005)

Therefore, if removing unique identifiers is to be the goal of researchers, it is also often an unattainable one that does not guarantee anonymity within the particular social networks of those individuals. That is not to say that anonymity is not possible within qualitative research, but rather that anonymity is an ideal rather than a local reality. Indeed, researchers also recognised that those who engage with research are aware of this difficulty and that they manage their behaviour accordingly. In many cases this was encouraged as it was considered to lead to a more informed, and therefore ethical, practice:

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<sup>21</sup> This technique can also be seen as part of a broader positivistic epistemological tradition. Anonymity has a generalising effect that collectivises the individual voice or action and the individual act is transformed into a collective one. This enhances the generalisability of the resulting theory by back-grounding the uniqueness of the particular case.

"I think some things were off limits ...they generally said, 'this is private, I don't want to include this one because this is private and I don't want to discuss this one.' So they set the boundaries.....They were controlling in terms of what the topics, what the issues were, and the narratives that came out of the pictorial representation of aspects of their reality, and their lives. Clearly they selected bits that they were happy to share with me, or even help them to reflect....the central point is, that they chose, they took the photographs, they decided on their location, their space, their topic, and they selected what they wanted to share and disclose." (DV, 2005)

Crucially, the methodological impact that this level of data control had on the research itself was not seen to be a problem within this particular research arena. Indeed, this self-determination was perceived to be more pertinent to the researcher, the research group, and the research encounter than a formal or administrative prescription of anonymity. Equally, the emphasis on self-determination was not constructed to be limited to the data collection phases of the research either:

"Of course in the report they were all anonymised for obvious reasons, but there's a sense in which they were given an opportunity along the whole process...the research had within it methods that enable them to shape the process, so they were involved in that element of it dictating some of the boundaries that were explored during the discussion to the very point where the dissemination took place." (DV, 2005)

Like intra-personal risk, inter-personal risk was perceived by researchers to be co-managed by the researcher and the research group through a process that emphasised the self-determination of those engaged, not as an interest of those in more legal and administrative roles. Thus, whilst formal anonymity is still an important device in the management and negotiation of risk, in itself it is not sufficient, nor even necessary, to produce research

outcomes that researchers construct to be ethical or good for the research group.

Indeed, the assumption and subsequent prescriptive need for anonymity may even be over-played in such prescriptive approaches to ethics:

“You can think, well, one of the things as researchers we talked about, well we did a lot of qualitative research and if you use verbatim, quite long verbatim sections from interviews, is this likely to make people feel exposed? But in fact, one conference I went to, where some research participants, not from my project, came and took part, and we were talking with them about that and they were much less concerned about that than we were as researchers.”  
(SG, 2005)

The increasing emphasis on meaningful and situated self-determination that views those who engage as active social actors rather than passive information providers helps can reduce the need for formal and absolute anonymity. Indeed, another researcher highlighted that knowing that their data is being used can be a very positive experience:

“They are usually extremely pleased to hear feedback from us that we’re using the data to influence policy makers and do this and that, they like that, they like it to be used.”  
(SS, 2005)

Passively taking anonymity for granted may not always be a desirable outcome for those engaged.

Another formal method employed to manage inter-personal risk is in the prescription of confidentiality. This is the requirement to keep any field data confidential and not openly accessible. However, like anonymity, this often taken for granted position is problematic, as this researcher commented:

“we struggle with this constantly: How to use this data?! Is it just for us(!). I mean it’s very difficult because in a sense it’s compelling material and it’s incredibly interesting, and

we get kind of fearful about what would happen if we opened it up for other people. So [those who engage] must also understand that we were given public money for a piece of research that would create data which would be useful to the social science research community and to the social policy community. So we have to straddle that position. And we're always experimenting with ways of writing trying to find ways where we can do justice to the material, while also not exposing people. But, yes, it's a constant struggle and sometimes we worry that we protect the young people too much actually, and they'd quite like it to be seen more...." (SS, 2005)

Two methods of management that researchers employed to counter-act these types of risk involved the use of transcriptions and going 'off-record':

"...It was highly unlikely that the daughter ever would have [seen the comment], but to reassure her so that she wasn't worried about that, that section wasn't transcribed. Again, there were a number of people who were quite happy to talk about things, but they didn't want that particular bit of the interview to go down on tape." (BT, 2005)

During the data-collection phase, any recording equipment can be switched off before any problematic issues are voiced. This allows those who engage to determine and control the research situation. Similarly, transcripts can retrospectively reviewed for any material that is problematic and removed at the discretion of those concerned. Any research outputs can be reviewed for any issues regarding confidentiality in the same manner. Again, this situated approach serves to both support a research relationship that is respectful to both parties as well as producing an ethical engagement that encourages self-determination and self-control at an individual level. Whilst confidentiality of the subsequent material cannot be formally assured, any material that is subsequently presented is less likely to be problematic<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> There is, however, a rather clear methodological distinction to be made here. No researcher suggested that they had made available any field notes for inspection. Indeed, there is a clear division between the methods in this practice. This is perhaps attributable to a conception of

At a categorical research group level, these devices to manage risk are perceived by researchers to be useful in managing and negotiating individual research relationships. This is not respondent validation, which requires the individual or organisation to validate the analysis or findings (see Bloor, 1997), but the screening of material in order to manage any perceived risk. However, at more collective and formal levels, these devices may become increasingly problematic as the review procedure, due to the political interests of the more mobilised group, may be appropriated by political interests. Due to a lack of data, this cannot be pursued further.

## Conclusion

There is a growing lack of clarity about what ethics actually means and what constitutes ethical practice within a social research framework. Mobilised under a catch-all heading, ethics can often be seen to be a mix of morals, epistemology, politics, law, and formal administration. However, rarely is the ethical literature based on empirical evidence that reflects how ethical practice is achieved 'in the field'. Whilst reflexive literature breaks down normative prescriptions of how ethics *ought* to be negotiated and managed, it does so from an idiosyncratic and non-systematic perspective. As a result, this chapter attempts to explore how researchers use ethics and ethical discourse to manage and negotiate risk within the relationship.

Beginning with a conceptual distinction, the chapter examines how researchers understand and mobilise 'ethics' by identifying three different meanings: administrative; political; and, situated. The chapter argues that as an administrative construct, ethics is reduced to a series of performative processes that place an emphasis on satisfying the requirements of an institutional or organisational other. However, this ethical performance does not necessarily relate to the actual practice of ethics between the researcher and the members of research groups. Indeed, researchers also constructed ethics as a concept that helped to inform a more moral discourse that guided the purpose of research. Ethics is used as a situated and political moral construct that governs 'good' research practice and 'good' research

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ethnographic encounters being more subjective, and therefore more under the ownership of the researcher than a formal interview which is co-produced and therefore are co-owned.

outcomes. Finally, it is argued that researchers construct ethics as a series of situated devices for the management and negotiation of those field relationships in order to minimise risk.

The first device identified by researchers to manage risk is that of informed consent and the chapter discusses how researchers use such a device to assist with the negotiation and the management of that risk. At an individual level, informed consent allows the individual, and research group more generally, to control their own actions. This means that risk is co-managed by those who choose to engage rather than being managed as the sole concern of the researcher or the institutions or organisations that they are a part of. Indeed, forms of consent are not limited to the initial engagement. Within qualitative research it is actively negotiated by both researchers and those who engage throughout the research engagement, not just at the beginning. This process of negotiation not only strengthens the consent process but also supports trust within the research engagement and promotes a more meaningful and respectful relationship between the interested parties.

The chapter also examines the issue of harm and how researchers negotiate manage the threat of non-positive outcome. In this context, researchers largely constructed two separate forms of harm: as a form of intra-personal risk that results from the processes associated with the data collection phase of research, and, as a form of external disruption to the social functioning of the individual after engagement. Like informed consent, the management of intra-personal trauma is a process that is negotiated by both researcher and members of the research group. Outcomes cannot be pre-determined and are dependent upon the context of the research relationship. Further, it is suggested that qualitative research techniques that emphasise self-determination and the quality of research relationship may actually provide a more ethical framework to manage this type of risk.

On the other hand, researchers constructed three formal devices to manage inter-personal risk: a right of withdrawal that promotes self-determination; a right to anonymity that aims to ensure that the particular subjective action or experience is not to be traced to a particular individual; and, a right to confidentiality that requires field data to be kept confidential. However, simply anonymising data is often not enough to remove the unique social

context of that individual to other interested parties to prevent inter-personal risk. Similarly, confidentiality is also compromised as selected parts of field data will be opened up for more public viewing within the research and policy community within research outputs. This is not to suggest that more formal prescriptions of anonymity and confidentiality are not useful in negotiating and managing inter-personal risk. However, they are not in themselves necessary nor sufficient to ensure what researchers construct as being ethical practice. Again, inter-personal risk is co-managed by the researcher and the members of the research group through a process of self-determination that encourages self-control as a part of a respectful research relationship. Techniques such as open-ended interviewing, recording control, and transcript or output review emphasise the prospective and retrospective control of research engagement and the joint management of subsequent material that emerges from the process.

Reflecting the literature, there is some evidence here that ethics is understood by researchers to be an administrative, political, and situated process that helps to promote the avoidance of non-positive outcome. However, in itself, the realisation of this process does not necessarily result in a positive experience with researchers recognising that positive research relationships, whatever these may be, are not dependent upon the administrative and systematic deployment of these ethical devices. Instead, ethics and ethical practice occurs at the inter-personal level and is a process that attempts to negotiate and prevent the non-positive outcomes associated with intra-personal harm and inter-personal harm by promoting the self-determination of the members of the research group. However, whilst this was seen to be largely effective for individual relationships, and as a result, effective for the relationships formed between researchers and categorical research groups, there is less clarity concerning the role of ethics and ethical practice with collective and formal research groups. This is because the emphasis on self-determination can become problematic with groups who have more political interests. The devices that are relatively successful in avoiding personal forms of harm can be appropriated to achieve more political ends at these more collective levels.

Similarly, at the administrative level, gate-keeping organisations and funding agencies that control routes of access to research groups and have systems of ethical administration in place, can also use 'ethics' to politically manage

research. In theory, whilst this may ensure a more positive outcome for the organisation in question, it may undermine more critical forms of research. Therefore, there is some evidence presented here to suggest that the situated devices associated with ethical practice can be very useful in the negotiation and management of the inter-personal research relationships between researcher and the members of the research group. However, at more collective level these devices may have some unintended consequences that make them less desirable.

## Conclusion

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This thesis presents the results of an exploratory study that examines how researchers understand the research process and, in particular, how they negotiate the process of *doing* research with the people and organisations that support and facilitate the process. In empirically investigating the research process, this thesis describes how researchers understand those that engage with qualitative research. Further, by following the method of grounded theory proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the thesis establishes a theoretical framework concerning this process of doing qualitative research that can now be developed with further investigation. Thereby, it contributes to a growing field of empirically-based literature that incorporates a robust methodology to explore the research relationships that are formed in the process of doing research.

The thesis suggests that the process of doing qualitative research can be conceptually divided into a series of three phases: the pre-data collection stages; the data collection phase; and, the post-data collection phase. Unfortunately, due to limits of space and data, the final phase is not dealt with here. Whilst the researcher is central to all these phases of research, certain social actors become more or less active during particular stages. The social actors identified as crucial to the process of doing research are, therefore, the researchers, the funding agency, gate-keepers, and the research groups.

During the pre-data collection stages of research, researchers and funding agencies are crucial in generating and mobilising research. Indeed, it is argued here that researchers, who drive the process of research, generate projects by identifying a gap in the knowledge field using their personal and professional backgrounds, as well as their local environments. They then justify their particular project selections by connecting them to the wider world in terms of public need, political legitimation, the resonance with the research field, and their own personal drivers. However, research projects

are not just influenced by the social conditions of the researcher and the vast majority of research that is carried out within the higher education sector is now funded by external bodies. Hence, researchers do not generate projects in isolation entirely according to their own needs. Instead, they have to be developed according to the interests of those prepared to fund research. Three different types of funding agencies are discussed here: local organisations with specific remits and interests; national organisations with specific interests; and national organisations with specific research commitment. In order to obtain funding, research projects need to converge with the aims, purposes, interests, and values of these organisations if they are to be mobilised. Indeed, researchers specifically emphasise and tailor particular properties of the research in order to achieve a resonance with such agencies. It is these mechanisms of professional resonance, public resonance, and, research field resonance, that allow the interests of the researcher and the funding agency to converge. Therefore, the relationship between research generation and funding is a dialectic process where projects are shaped by both the researcher interests and the interests of funding agencies in synthesis.

Gate-keepers, on the other hand, straddle the pre-data collection and data-collection phases of the research process as they provide a route of access to research groups and as a means of gaining trust with the research group. However, there is a broad range of groups that can have a gate-keeping role within the research process which means that some selection and subsequent exclusion is inevitably required by the researchers. This process is not random and is instead dependent upon the product of a number of micro-political decisions made, both implicitly and explicitly, by researchers during the course of the project. These micro-political decisions concerning selection and exclusion include: perceived responsibility to engage; informal links within organisations; locality; and practical efficiency. However, these groups are not identified and selected by researchers who simply select and exclude according to their own criteria and researchers also identified a number of functions that support and encourage engagement for the people and organisations who act as gate-keepers. These include, political representation, civic and moral responsibility to engage, and to identify good practice and facilitate change. Equally, there are also a number of threats to engagement that challenge any involvement. It is argued here that

methodology, representation, intrusion, and, disruption can all act as challenging mechanisms that can result in de-alignment between the researchers and gate-keepers.

Once researchers have negotiated with groups who have gate-keeping function, the research process then moves into the data-collection stages of research. To successfully complete this phase, data needs to be collected from research groups. Research groups are those groups within the research process that actually provide both the focus for the research and the information that will eventually help to constitute the research analysis. It is argued here, however, that all research groups are not the same. Indeed, the researchers within this sample described a number of different features that can conceptually identify different types of research groups. Internal identification refers to the extent to which the members of the group can meaningfully recognise and mobilise themselves as part of the group under investigation. External identification, on the other hand, is the ability of those outside the group to recognise those within it as a category. Structural organisation refers to the degree to which the group has a managed system of membership and development of prescribed roles within the group, whilst political interest refers to the extent to which the group has a value-based position of power within wider society and their ability to mobilise that interest.

Using such a framework, research groups can then be conceptualised into three ideal-types: the categorical research group, the collective research group, and the formal organisation. Categorical research groups are those research groups that to a large degree are constructed externally by other interested parties and have little internal identification. This, in turn, means that as a group they have little structural organisation and lack political mobilisation: the group is largely constituted by disparate individuals and there is little collective structure. Collective research groups, on the other hand, are those groups in which the individual members have a much higher level of internal identification, and there is a more recognisable commitment to a pre-existing and lasting group that will exist beyond the research encounter. This identification is externally reciprocated as the group is also identifiable as a group to those outside of it. Similarly, there is some structural organisation and the group has the capability to manage

membership. As a result, there is also some political mobilisation. The formal organisation as a research group, however, has specific purpose and is formally structured to achieve those ends. Typically, there is a high level of identification at both the internal and external levels. This is accompanied by a clearly defined structure as well as a substantial political mobilisation and interest. Unfortunately, no research groups in this particular sample were formal organisations and due to this lack of data, such groups are not pursued further and are in need of further investigation.

Due to the differing structures of these ideal-types, the mechanisms that support engagement are not always the same for each type of research group. Indeed, the particular contexts of any research situation will dictate the type of mechanisms and functions that are mobilised. Within categorical groups, due to their fragmented nature and lack of collective permanence, the functions of research occur at a more individual level than for collective and formal research groups. These supporting mechanisms include: subjective interest, curiosity, enjoyment, individual empowerment, introspective interest, social comparison, therapeutic interest, material interest, and, economic interest. However, these functions are also not necessarily limited to categorical groups. Indeed, any group whether it is a categorical, collective or formal research group is comprised of individuals. As the supporting mechanisms and functions identified within a categorical framework appeal to individual interests rather than collective ones, they are potentially relevant to any research project as all projects involve individuals at their base level.

It is argued here, however, that collective groups do have some mechanisms and functions that exist above and beyond those for categorical groups as the increased contact and organisation of similar individuals provides the researcher with a substantively different research group that has a greater political interest. Indeed, the mechanisms identified by researchers for collective groups within this sample include: representation, collective empowerment, and, to inform 'change'.

Of course, not all research relationships are successful and there can be many challenges to engagement. Researchers also identified a number of

these challenges. These include: practical barriers such as cost, time, location and organisation; research apathy and an indifference to the research process; forms of research fatigue and being 'over-researched'; lack of change; and identity.

Similarly, issues of risk can also threaten engagement between researchers and research groups. Indeed, ethics are conventionally mobilised within research to negotiate and manage any risk that occurs within the research relationship. That said, what ethics actually constitutes is often far from clear. In the context of this study, researchers identified three different meanings associated with ethics that they use to negotiate and manage research relationships: as an administrative construct; as a situated moral and political construct regarding 'good' outcome; and, as a series of situated devices for the promotion of self-determination and the management and negotiation of intra and inter-personal risk.

It is argued here that as an administrative construct, ethics is reduced to a series of performative processes that place an emphasis on satisfying the requirements of an institutional other, typically a funding agency, a gate-keeping group, or a research host. However, this ethical performance does not necessarily relate to the actual practice of ethics 'within the field' or more particular research relationships. Indeed, researchers also constructed ethics as a concept that helped to inform a more moral discourse that governs 'good' research practice and 'good' research outcomes. Finally, it is argued that researchers construct ethics as a series of situated devices that promote self-determination at the inter-personal level that can be used to minimise risk within particular research relationships. These situated devices include, the development of a meaningful form of informed consent that promoted self-determination, the avoidance of intra-personal harm through the use of the principle of withdrawal, the promotion of self-determination and beneficial outcome, and finally the avoidance of inter-personal harm through the principles of withdrawal, anonymity, and confidentiality.

In these respects the thesis describes how researchers understand the process of doing research with people and organisations, how they understand the mechanisms that support and challenges that process, and finally, some of the methods that they use to negotiate and manage their

relationships with those that they encounter during the course of *doing* qualitative research.

Equally, in documenting the process of *doing* research on doing research the thesis also provides some insight concerning how researchers do research and how they think about that process. Indeed, more generally, this thesis is concerned with me, as a researcher, learning about the nature and process of research, and my own attempts to understand why people and organisations bother to go to the often great lengths to do it, as much as it is a substantive study of that process. Whilst these reflexive attempts are not developed to their full potential due to the constraints of space, there is some attempt to represent the process of this particular study and attention is given to describing how the process of literature searching, and the mapping of current knowledge field, helped to shape the generation and development of the study, as well as the methodological choices that determined the course of the project. It is argued that the tendency within the literature to give primacy to researcher interests and their experiences of research, and, the 'by-product' approach to the investigation of research relationship and process more generally, has led to a noisy field that often lacks empirical rigour and ignores the perspectives of those who engage. Hence, these epistemological and methodological gaps require the adoption of a systematic methodology in order to develop a theoretical framework concerning the experiences of those who engage. The methodology most suitable for this task is the grounded theory methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

As a result of this focus, the project is one that primarily has a research field resonance. That is, it was shaped and moulded according to the field of research rather than directly servicing a public need or a political one. Of course, as it deals with the experiences of those who engage, it does have both public and political elements, but it is primarily driven by the research field<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Primarily due to a lack of space, little attention is given to the funding of this particular study. However, it is suggested here that the funding agency in question is a charitable organisation with a specific interest. The ability of such an organisation to fund a project that primarily has a research field resonance is, it is suggested here, due to their particular interest in promoting the use and promotion of research evidence. Hence, the ability to fund such work is well within their public interest.

Similarly, some attempt is also made within this thesis to understand how the epistemological decisions that were made in relation to the field influence the findings and their subsequent representation. It is suggested that the framework offered here is conditional rather than exhaustive and the thesis deliberately pursues a more constructivist grounded theory. By recognising the conditional nature of the framework, this approach offers an epistemologically plausible and transparent method of combining representational narratives to produce a relative, but systematic, theoretical account that is grounded in those narratives. Therefore, by reflecting on how the data is constructed in the interaction between the researcher and those who engage, the researcher is able to produce a more transparent version of the reality that is presented.

As a result of this, some effort is also made within the thesis to consider the process of inter-action between researcher and those engaged in this particular context. The process of grounded theory, including case selection, the problem of interviewing elites, and theoretical saturation, are all discussed in relation to their impact on the study. Equally, the difficulties and problems associated with doing research that has a categorical group of researchers as its focus of interest are also pursued. These issues include: the ethical issues involved in the study and how these were negotiated; the costs and benefits of being researched; issues of roles negotiation and technical competence; and, finally, the use of technology.

Due to this recognition of partiality, and the conditional nature of the knowledge generated, there are, of course, some limitations to this study that need highlighting. Firstly, despite attempting to consider the perspectives of those people and organisations who chose to engage with research, the framework is entirely based on the understandings of the researcher. Whilst researchers are a useful point of contact in developing an initial framework these results are representations of particular viewpoints rather than a comprehensive or exhaustive discussion of the issues. Therefore, it may not necessarily reflect the views of the funding agencies, gate-keepers, or research groups and any understandings are being filtered through the interpretations of the researcher, the particular methodology, and myself. As a result, further investigation is required to highlight any limitations this study will inevitably have in this respect and the development

of a framework that incorporates such views remains an interesting, if methodologically complex, avenue for further investigation.

Secondly, due to a lack of data the study is unable to develop much insight concerning the formal organisation as a research group. This is primarily due to a lack of data that exists within the present sample. More specifically, no organisation acted as the focus of interest for any of the projects that the researchers referred to. Whilst formal organisations were involved with many of the projects, they all acted as research hosts and gate-keepers rather than being the focus themselves. Therefore, the framework offers little discussion concerning these groups and further research in this area is necessary.

Indeed, the framework can not be considered exhaustive and is limited by sample. Hence, there are also other notable omissions and further investigation is needed to more fully articulate the framework in some other areas. In particular, the relationship between research group type and the challenges to engagement needs some further development, and, the relationship between the supporting and challenges mechanisms associated with research host and gate-keeping groups also needs further exploration.

Similarly, not only does the framework omit some areas of interest, the thesis also does not address the challenges of post-data-collection phases of the research relationship. This is due to both a lack of space, and a lack of data. Issues of leaving the field, dissemination, and a more substantive discussion concerning issues of representation are not discussed and need further articulation. This is particularly important as the issues involved with post-data collection are often neglected within the wider literature and these final impressions are crucial when considering how engagement is likely to be evaluated. Therefore, further exploration of these issues across all of the actors within the research process is crucial to develop a better understanding of the research relationship.

Such omissions are, in part, due to the limited sample. Indeed, the sample size is small and the study is considered to be intensive rather than extensive or comprehensive. This does have implications in terms of generalisability, particularly as all the researchers within the sample are based within the children and families research arena. Following Williams

(2000), it is argued here, that moderatum generalisations can be made from the framework presented. These generalisations are an intermediate type of limited generalisations that are both modest and pragmatic. They are not sweeping statements that can be applied across time and culture, and can be subject to change. Moderatum generalisations have a hypothetical character in that they are testable propositions that should be subject to further investigation. So, whilst the framework is descriptive of the sample, it is unlikely to account for the relationships that occur in all other areas of research. Indeed, the sample that was pursued here was necessarily general and covered a broad range of studies including health, education, social services, and communities, rather than having a more focused interest. Therefore the framework is necessarily general rather than specific and more research is required to further examine the relationships that are formed in the particular research areas that are covered by this sample, as well as the areas that are not. For instance, relationships involved in areas of health care, may be subtly different from the relationships within social care, or education. Further work is necessary to provide a more comprehensive discussion of the relationships in the areas that are covered here.

Moreover, it remains to be seen whether the framework is applicable outside the children and families research arena. The research relationships formed in police or prison studies, for example, where the ethics of care are less prevalent, may have substantially different supporting and challenging mechanisms of engagement. Indeed, outside the areas of this particular sample, the illustrative use of this framework is limited and remains conditional until it is tested.

As a result, the results presented here are illustrative of the present sample rather than an exhaustive discussion of all research relationships. Whilst they can potentially be used to provide insight into the relationships that occur in particular research arenas, they only offer a platform for understanding and further investigation is necessary in order to test the framework presented.

Presently however, this thesis does make three major contributions to the literature. Firstly, the thesis does demonstrate that an empirical approach to the study of the research relationship is possible and even desirable. Indeed, further empirical work in specific research arenas is needed to highlight how research relationships are negotiated and managed by both researchers and

those who engage. Without such an overtly empirical, and systematic, approach to the research relationship, the field is likely to continue to remain lacking in conceptual and theoretical clarity, as well as remaining focused by the interests and values of the researcher. Whilst some of the ideas here are present more generally in the literature, usually tacitly or as an aside, this thesis makes a significant contribution by presenting the issues in a systematic manner, offering the opportunity for more coherent, empirically based, academic exchange.

Secondly, the thesis also provides a rare insight into the process of doing research with people and organisations and specially highlights the interests and motivations of the social actors that constitute the relationships that exist within the research process. The interests of researchers, funding agencies, gate-keepers, and research groups are presented as part of a whole process rather than as a particular reductive part. Research relationships do not begin and end with data collection and instead need to be negotiated and maintained throughout the process of research. The study, therefore, begins to systematically represent the complex range of interests that a research project has to respond to if it is to be completed. In considering this range of perspectives, albeit from the viewpoint of the researcher, the thesis begins to address how people and organisations understand research engagement and qualitative research more generally. Whilst the ways in which science and technology are understood by the public have long been of interest (see Gregory and Miller, 1998), the literature in respect to more qualitatively-based work, and more importantly how people experience research engagement, is less well developed. If research is to increase its impact and fulfil its potential value then improving the usefulness of research at the level of research engagement is likely to be a corner-stone in increasing its impact at a wider level.

Related to this, with current levels of research activity now at unprecedented levels, research relationships that are supportive of future engagements are likely to be increasingly important to the development of any present and future knowledge fields. Given the necessity of positive research relationships in facilitating research engagement, the relative paucity of research concerning how people and organisations understand research engagement is problematic. If qualitative sociological research is to continue

at these current levels then engagement rates need to be maintained. Whilst participative paradigms are very useful in responding to the local needs of those who engage, not everyone who engages with research will want to go to the lengths that are often associated with these techniques. However, and as this thesis highlights, that does not mean that research does not have a function for the people and organisations who engage with more mainstream academic research. Therefore, developing a systematic knowledge base around the issues presented in this thesis is necessary in order to understand the mechanisms that support and challenge engagement throughout the research process. A better understanding of these mechanisms can help to reveal how research engagement can be better maintained at both local and national levels.

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