"On slippery ground" – beyond the innocence of collaborative knowledge production

Beyond the innocense of collaborative knowledge production

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Purpose

The purpose of this article is to discuss the ethical complexity and dilemmas, which arise in the co-production of knowledge between researchers and other participants.

Design/methodology/approach

The starting-point for the article is a narrative from a conference we attended where we, as researchers, found ourselves on slippery and emotionally charged ground. Using a critical, reflexive approach informed by poststructuralism, our ambition was to deconstruct gaps between rhetoric and practice and critique normative understandings of the nature of ethically sound co-production processes in collaborative research. More specifically, at the conference, we sought to expose and discuss the gap between our good intentions and our own practice as researchers in a collaborative research project at a major hospital. However, instead of reflexive discussions with the research community, we experienced that our conduct was criticized and categorized as unethical practice.

Findings

Instead of omitting sensitive phenomena from the research process, we argue that it is an ethical imperative to investigate these phenomena in order to gain insight into what is at stake in dialogical, reflexive processes not only between researchers and research participants – but also between researchers in the research community. An awareness of the emergent nature of power relations in *all* processes of knowledge production may strengthen the practical validity of "co-produced" knowledge in action research.

Originality/value

A poststructuralist perspective on collaborative research processes reveals normative expectations regarding ethical research practice and provides insight into the tensions in collaborative research that arise irrespective of the individual competence (or not) of the researcher.

Keywords: Collaborative research, reflexivity, othering, emergence, ethics

A couple of years ago, we attended a conference on power and participation in collaborative research. As collaborative health care researchers, we apply creative methodologies such as roleplay, photo elicitation and peer observation to illuminate and deconstruct practitioners' normative and idealized understandings of what it means to be, for instance, interdisciplinary or empathic. As such, our ambition is to illuminate and investigate potential gaps between rhetoric and practice – i.e. between what practitioners think they are doing and what they are actually doing when they meet patients and relatives in complex and unpredictable encounters. At the conference, we presented a paper in which we reflected on our role as collaborative researchers and asked the questions: Do we walk the talk and live up to the democratic ideals of collaborative research in our facilitation of workshops with practitioners? Is there a difference between what we think we are doing and what we are actually doing? The purpose of the presentation was to challenge taken for granted assumptions about how difference and diversity contributes to the creation of new knowledge in collaborative learning processes. In the paper, we took a closer look at an incident that occurred as part of a research and development project with healthcare professionals where the voice of a particular participant was silenced during a collaborative workshop. As a jumping-off point for our critical reflexive moment-by-moment analyses, we showed a four-minute video sequence with footage of this incident. The audience seemed to be moved by the video and there seemed to be unrest in the room. Nevertheless, we continued our presentation as planned and Birgitte outlined our critical reflexive approach to the analysis of the emergent power/knowledge relations in the incident. In conclusion, we suggested that ethics is a critical stance and invited the research community to discuss the implications and dilemmas this perspective may have for the ways in which collaborative research is practiced. We had barely finished our presentation before several members of the audience requested to speak and posed questions such as:

- *Why did you not intervene right at the beginning of the session?*
- *How could you not see the humiliation of the participant in the specific situation?*
- *Why did you not go back and talk to the participants about your analyses?*
- *Which ethical codex did you apply here?*

Introduction

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Much research in management learning contexts focuses on positive and rewarding incidents when addressing the importance of working with reflexivity in participatory learning processes (Corlett, 2012, p. 117; Cunliffe, 2002). However, within critical, reflexive approaches and in the action research community, recent discussions address how democratic ideals of participatory research can be critiqued (Arieli, Friedman, & Agbaria, 2009; Gunnarsson, 2003; Heen, 2005; Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2004; Phillips & Kristiansen, 2013). This article contributes to these discussions by addressing the ethical complexity arising in the co-production of knowledge between researchers and participants. The implication of a critical, reflexive perspective is that, as researchers, we should dare to recognize the tensions in play in all collaborative research (as opposed to attributing problems to researcher incompetence), focus on the gaps between rhetoric and practice and deconstruct our understandings of the nature of ethically-sound research relationships in co-production processes in collaborative research.

According to Foucault, knowledge is discursively produced in societal discourses. This perspective on knowledge and knowledge production implies that both rhetoric and practice are discourses, producing knowledge in distinctive ways. A critical, reflexive approach has the potential to uncover these ways and hereby open up for the production of new knowledge. Instead of seeking to eradicate sensitive and tensional phenomena from the research process (from a Foucauldian perspective, this is not possible), it becomes an ethical imperative to investigate these phenomena in order to gain insight into what is at stake in dialogical reflexive processes. An awareness of how power relations are at play in all processes of knowledge production may strengthen the practical validity of "co-produced" knowledge in action research.

In the narrative we presented above it is clear that the audience does not think that we live up to the ideals for collaborative and democratic knowledge production. Moreover, the processes of silencing and othering appear to occur not only in the paper we presented at the conference, but also between the audience and us as researchers. Something is at stake. The question is what? According to Blackman and Sadler-Smith,

being silent or silenced in organizational settings is not only a power-invested process,

but also has ramifications for knowing, learning and organizing (Blackman & Sadler-

Smith, 2009, p. 570).

The purpose of this article is to investigate how power dynamics lead to the silencing and othering of particular participants.

Reflexively we revisit our discomfort at the conference. In this respect, you might say that we are moving onto slippery ground because it is fraught with emotions and loaded with complexity. In the words of Davies et al., we must not only:

> …engage in such an apparently fraught practice as reflexivity but also, in our engagement with research invent our own methods of meaning making as we go *and* we are in the process of deconstructing and moving beyond (Bronwyn Davies et al., 2004, p. 362)

According to Davies, it can be extremely unpleasant to look more deeply into how we contribute to meaning making processes when we deconstruct them. However, to do so is mandatory if we wish to qualify our research and position as researchers. Haynes asserts that the tensions and potentially embarrassing emotions we experience as researchers

> are central to how we experience ourselves as academics; what we stand for; how others see us; how we position, present, re-present and represent ourselves through the stories we tell (Haynes, 2011, p. 135).

In the next section, we expand on our critical, reflexive approach to ethics, othering and collaborative knowledge production before describing and analysing the conference paper and the audience's response in more detail. In the concluding discussion, we raise and discuss two generic ethical dilemmas in collaborative knowledge production: the dilemmas of responsibility and representation.

Critical approaches to reflexivity and ethics

In our critical approach to reflexivity and ethics, Foucault inspires us. According to him, ethics is a critical stance (Foucault, 1994): a stance that encourages continual reflection and critique of the process and product of knowledge production. A foucauldian conception of research ethics changes the research focus from possession to production and from subjects to processes of subjectification. Attention is paid to how a researcher and/or facilitator (co-) produces (possibilities for) subject positions in the field of study/work – including which positions she

nourishes in processes of collaborative knowledge production. In other words, research inspired by post-structuralism builds on an ethics of reflecting and exposing how any involvement in the world is a powerful and performative act. Foucault reminds us that all participants are interwoven in situated power/knowledge-relations in which all actions are understood as processes of subjectification in which meanings are negotiated across discourses. This approach does not distinguish between the power embedded in individual actions and power embedded in discourses: they are two sides of the same coin and are both active in subjectification processes in collaborative knowledge production. We suggest that a poststructuralist perspective invites a critical reflexive look at how all processes of change, including those intending to be democratic, bottom-up and empowerment-oriented, are *"non-innocent movements within a non-innocent space"* (Neidel & Wulf-Andersen, 2013, p. 157).

According to Foucault, power relations can be subjected to empirical, situated studies precisely because they are dynamic and contextual. In this article, we investigate how dynamics of knowledge and power unfold in the narrative. We assume, like Phillips and Napan (2016, p. 7), that awareness of how power/knowledge relationships are at stake in processes *"…can form a platform for a destabilisation of discourse"* (Phillips & Napan, 2016, p. 7) and, therefore, initiate a change in relationships in the situated context. In this respect, we argue that the unravelling of mechanisms of in- and exclusion in tensional situations with problematic outcomes has the potential to minimize othering and, therefore, to further the inclusion of marginalized voices. In the next section, we examine dynamics of power, identity and othering before taking a closer look at how they unfold in the narrative.

Power, identity and othering

From a Foucauldian perspective, power is *"an active productive force which mobilises subjectivity and creates subject positions"* (Usher & Edwards, 2005, p. 399)**.** As such, subjectivity is produced in the way we position ourselves or are positioned by others. The subjectification process and the concept of positioning draw attention to the dynamic aspects of interaction (Davies & Harré, 1990; Søndergaard, 1996) in which the power of dominant discourses is not absolute. This implies that subjects are not recruited passively into a certain position. Frequently, there are multiple discourses at play and in every utterance we make, we reflexively position ourselves and are positioned by one of these discourses (Bronwyn Davies & Harré, 1990). In other words, the process

of subjectification can be seen both as a process *"that originates outside the individual and is determined by forces external to the individual, and as the person's inner work"* (Christensen, 2016). Moreover, both processes *"suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to"* (Foucault, 1994, p. 334). As such, they can be seen as a product of complex interplay between the individual and his or her immediate social surroundings and contextual norms.

A basic premise of poststructuralist theory is that the primary instrument in the co-construction of identity through positioning in social interaction is the invocation of difference through relations to "the Other". Jaworski and Coupland describe how

it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what one is not, to precisely what one lacks, to what has been called the constitutive outside, that the `positive´ meaning of any term – and thus one's `identity´ – can be constructed (Jaworski & Coupland, 2005, p. 672).

Invoking difference becomes a problem when othering rests on a normative evaluation of others in which individual characteristics and/or actions are classified as right or wrong, good or bad. In addition to the normative judgement, the "other" is categorised in terms of fixed, static characteristics and dichotomous "us/them" relations are constructed between those whose characteristics and actions are normatively legitimate/prescribed and those whose characteristics and actions are normatively illegimate (outside the realms of the normatively acceptable) This way of invoking difference *"…often generates strong emotional reactions. Who would voluntarily accept being positioned by others as 'the different other'?"* (Olesen & Pedersen, 2013). As such, it entails dynamics of exclusion as well as inclusion, circumscribing the voices which can contribute to the production of new knowledge and making somebody who does not fit in the 'different other'. Thus the poststructuralist perspective is preoccupied with the "non-innocence" of any participation and involvement and with the ways in which power infuses all knowledge production processes (Christensen, 2016; Neidel & Wulf-Andersen, 2013).

Presenting a paper on othering in collaborative knowledge production

The paper we presented at the conference focused on a collaborative development and research project at two psychiatric wards. In the project, we worked alongside practitioners to improve

their psychoeducational dialogue with patients (Authors, 2013). As part of this process, we negotiated with the participants to establish a detailed framework for the workshops in order to create a space for mutual and democratic investigation of the dilemmas and challenges participants faced in their practice. We introduced peer observation in pairs (Lauvås & Handal, 2006; Nordentoft & Wistoft, 2012) and held regular workshops where the peer observation pairs shared and reflected on their experiences with the rest of the group. The workshops received extremely positive evaluations from the participants and the project at the psychiatric wards was awarded a prize in 2010 by The Nordic Network for Adult Learning for innovation in the field of competence development for healthcare professionals. In the project, we followed principles of procedural ethics – informed consent, confidentiality and consequences - both before and during the research process (Kvale, 1996; Nordentoft & Kappel, 2011). However, as mentioned, we discovered several incidents in which certain participants appeared to be silenced while reviewing video footage after the workshops.

The incident we used as part of our conference presentation occurred during the third workshop where a nurse had observed a dialogue between a healthcare assistant (HA) and a psychiatric patient who had an extremely high consumption of coffee and cigarettes. In his psychoeducation, the HA sought to encourage the patient to reduce her coffee intake. However, the nurse is critical of the HA's actions in her peer feedback. As the object of the nurse's criticism, the HA is at risk of losing face and almost becomes a "non-person" which Goffman characterizes as someone that others talk on behalf of (Aronson, 1998). Significantly, we – the researchers – did not interfere and thereby appeared to tacitly condone the nurse's critical feedback. We called our conference paper "Walking the talk" because we realized that we had failed to "walk the talk" and honour normative democratic ideals for collaborative knowledge production.

In our presentation at the conference, we drew attention to how we as researchers (explicitly or implicitly) approved the nurse's feedback and failed to register the othering processes taking place in the workshop. We summarized these emergent conundrums in collaborative knowledge production in the form of three paradoxes.

Firstly, our ambition is to engage in democratic collaboration and knowledge production; at the same time, we enact a methodology based on fixed positions and power relations.

Going through the video footage from the workshops, we noticed the multimodal impact of the way in which positions and power relations appeared to be negotiated between the other participants and us; aspects, which clearly contravened our intention of creating a space for democratic dialogue where the practitioners provided situated accounts from practice. In other words, there appears to be a tension between the epistemology we advocate and the methodology we enact which bewilders the co-production of knowledge. Contrary to our democratic ideals, for instance, we sat at the head of the table. This seating arrangement seemed to encourage a teacher-student type of interaction in which we posed the questions and the participants sought for our acceptance of their response.

In other words, contrary to our ambition, we were not able to facilitate a dialogue with the participants, which was oriented to the production of context-sensitive knowledge and rooted in detailed, theory-informed analysis of the situation. Instead, the continuous mixing of different knowledge forms was closely linked to, and shaped, the ways in which positions and power relations were negotiated and distributed among the participants. This interactional dynamic eventually led to the othering of a particular participant.

Secondly, we advocate that practitioners listen to their patients in order to meet their needs; at the same time, we do not listen to what the practitioners state they need from us.

As mentioned in the narrative, our ambition is to deconstruct practitioners' normative understandings of, for instance, what listening implies. However, the emergence of a student-teacher interactional dynamic seemed to lead to our normative understanding of what it means to listen being imposed onto the practitioners despite the fact that we, paradoxically, were inviting them to produce more context-sensitive answers. This dynamic appeared to intensify the asymmetrical nature of the relationship between the practitioners and ourselves and increase the othering process. , Arieli, Friedman & Agbaria have also analysed power asymmetry in research relations in their analysis of how cultural differences between researchers and their collaborators influenced the relationship between them. For instance, one of the community members who participated in their action research project commented that (Arieli et al., 2009, p. 280) *"Asking questions is a sign of power over and domination, in which the stronger party asks questions and the weaker party is expected to give answers"*.

Thirdly, we want to relinquish control; at the same time, we want to maintain control.

In the video footage of the workshops, we alternate between relinquishing and maintaining control. In presenting the first two paradoxes, we argued that we maintained control and acted contrary to our democratic intentions. On the other hand, there are also several instances in the video footage where we do not intervene or speak. In other words, there are moments in which we relinquish control. In line with this, Phillips & Kristiansen suggest that *"it seems as if knowledge is produced when the researchers give up being in control and begin listening to what emerges, within themselves and in relation to their various partners"* (Phillips & Kristiansen, 2012, p. 267). The incident in the narrative is such a moment and – as we have described – the nurse positions herself in a superior position and 'others' her fellow course participant. As such, this situation provides insight into how letting go of control does not necessarily result in more democratic dialogue.

After presenting the above three paradoxes we invited the audience at the conference to discuss tensions in collaborative knowledge production rather than taken-for granted, idealised-assumptions about the fruitful and successful nature of collaborative research. Specifically, we questioned how we could work with our own position as researcher/facilitator and design a collaborative space to ensure the creation of space for all voices. To tell the truth, we were a bit nervous – but also curious and excited about the feedback we would receive.

Othering processes at the conference on collaborative research

Nobody seemed to be interested in the paradoxes we had introduced. Instead, after a few moments of silence, we were overwhelmed by what seemed to us to be aggressive, accusatory questions from certain members of the audience.

It appeared as though our research colleagues were emotionally affected and ethically disturbed by our presentation. Rather than accepting our invitation to critical reflection, they appeared to condemn our practice as collaborative researchers. We knew that many of the researchers at the conference work with poststructuralist approaches to collaborative research, and we therefore assumed that there would be a consensus that researchers cannot objectively see or interpret situations they take part in any better than their co-researchers from the field of practice. Nevertheless, the reaction from the audience indicated the opposite.

At the time, we felt as if time stood still. We experienced an intense discomfort and had a distinct feeling that we had committed a major academic *faux pas* and made ourselves look like fools. Why had we invited all this critique? We strived to maintain face (Goffman, 1972) and, in hindsight, our response to the posed questions, which we heard as intimidating, must have appeared defensive and also somewhat aggressive. Our answers were "*We thought that we were supportive in making the participant formulate his experiences in his own words*" and "*We suggest that you will also find that you shut down certain voices when you facilitate collaborative processes. This kind of closure is inevitable in facilitation. Most of the time you do not realize it – because you do not record it on video*".

In the situation, we were not able to "disidentify" (Heen, 2005, p. 270) with our feelings and distance ourselves from the nature of their origin. Later on, we were able to use these feelings as information. According to Heen, feelings can *"convey quite accurate information about the outer world"* (Heen, 2005, p. 270) and, therefore, be used as the basis for investigating hypotheses about what is at stake in emotional moments.

After a while, our feelings were still there; however, we were able to distance ourselves from them and observe them, almost as if they belonged to somebody else. In this regard, Cunliffe asserts that if we engage in and reflexively investigate moments in which we become emotionally "struck", then we can make sense of our experience. Moreover, this investigation can lead to the creation of a practical, embodied and situated knowledge that emerges from the experience itself. A knowledge that illuminates the tacit and taken-for-granted aspects of practices. As such, a reflexive exploration, and perhaps understanding, of emotional situations have the potential to affect and change our entire *"being, talking and acting"* (Cunliffe, 2002, p 36).

In "My Discomfort", Lilleaas (Lilleaas, 2013) performs a critical reflexive analysis of her experience as a researcher in her field of study. Reminiscent of our experience, she describes how it was an immense challenge for her to address all of the ethical questions which surfaced during her writing process (Lilleaas, 2013, p. 112). Drawing on Bourdieu, she addresses the challenge of being critical of your own profession and advocate that there is an "academic doxa" in which disciplines and researchers contribute to a certain way of viewing and evaluating research practices. She suggests

that the researcher's practice can be seen as embodied habits and a search for legitimacy in the research field (Lilleaas, 2013, p. 117).

Lilleaas appears to refer to traditional academic norms in qualitative research when she refers to and criticizes academic doxa. However, based on our experience at the conference, we believe this doxa also applies to action research and collaborative research practices. In action research, there is a tendency to idealise knowledge production as a democratic, wholly inclusionary, transformative process. Together, researchers and practitioners are able to "identify important emerging issues that would otherwise remain invisible" (Bammer, Brown, Batilawa, & Kunreuther, 2003, p. 86) and produce new knowledge in a mutual development of practice. In this collaboration, the relationships and the local formation of "networks of power dynamics" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) are seen as essential to knowledge production and to possible outcomes of the research and change process. "Participation" is a defining characteristic of collaborative approaches based on a central premise that research is enacted "with" people rather than "on" or "for" them (Bradbury & Reason, 2001). The ideal is a democratic relationship in which both sides exercise power and shared control over the research process. Within this framework, researchers are supposed to act as committed facilitators, participants and learners rather than as distant, neutral observers, analysts or manipulators (Arieli et al., 2009).

In contrast to these ideals, at the conference we exposed our own contribution to the exclusion of other voices during the research process and we presented dynamics of exclusion (as well as inclusion) as intrinsic to all collaborative research. We therefore interpret the reactions we received from the audience as signaling a feeling of discomfort: Not only do we expose an unethical incident – we also show how we have contributed to its occurrence. Drawing on Cunliffe (Cunliffe, 2002), we assert that the audience was "struck" emotionally by watching how the voice of a participant was excluded in a way which almost made him a non-person. Just as we were struck emotionally by the response from the audience, the audience may have been struck because we – as collaborative researchers - disturbed the doxa and taken-for-granted ways of doing collaborative research. In spite of the fact that many of the participants at the conference also worked with poststructuralist approaches to collaborative research, they still, surprisingly, adopted a normative line of enquiry regarding the ethical standards we must live up to as

collaborative researchers. Their reactions appeared to be centered on questions, which invited criticism of our competencies as facilitators and collaborative researchers rather than contributing to the discussion of generic challenges in collaborative knowledge production that we had invited them to take part in.

Our discomfort and "struckness" made us aware of the contrast between acceptable and unacceptable emotions in the action research community – which emotions are recognized and acknowledged and which are dismissed and downplayed. At the conference, mutually rewarding relations clearly seemed to be nurtured and privileged over "critical, reflexive" approaches to the production of new knowledge. Somehow, this discovery did not come as a surprise. However, we suggest that both our discomfort and the discomfort of the audience can be linked to the way in which unspoken "feeling rules" in the action research community were violated. According to Hochschild (Hochschild, 1983), feeling rules can be seen as norms - that is, unspoken expectations - for how it is appropriate to feel and act out your feelings (Hochschild, 1979). Our paper presentation appeared to challenge a prominent discourse in the action research community in which action researchers and their co-researchers are viewed as working together to create mutually rewarding and flourishing relations and communities (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Our presentation, then, was a threat to this discourse of mutuality, and as the perpetrators of that threat, we were positioned as "the different other" (Olesen & Pedersen, 2013). In other words, we disturbed the audience and their normative perceptions of what it means to be a 'proper' collaborative researcher and facilitator. At the same time, we were inscribed, and actively inscribed ourselves, in a sociocultural context in which we did not fit.

In light of our experiences at the conference, it is our contention that, if collaborative researchers are to tackle the tensions between `what ought to be´ and `what is´ and thereby `walk the talk´ of co-production in action research, they must deconstruct their understandings of the nature of 'proper' research relationships and 'proper' knowledge forms. Importantly, if we as researchers argue that "we create meaning and sense of ourselves when we relate with others" (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 132), this process must include a reflexive analysis of our own emotional reactions – discomfort and failure as well as success (Heen, 2005; Levy, 2016; Lilleaas, 2013).

Concluding discussion

In the unravelling of the narrative we presented at the beginning of this article, we have been moving on "slippery", emotionally loaded ground. A poststructuralist perspective is preoccupied with the "non-innocence" of any participation and involvement, and with the ways in which power infuses all knowledge production processes (Christensen, 2016; Neidel & Wulf-Andersen, 2013). According to this understanding, differences and tensions cannot be resolved or dissolved per se. Rather, as Phillips (2011a, p. 68) suggests, they can be subjected to reflexive consideration in detailed empirical analysis of the productive role of power in emergent dynamics of in- and exclusion, whereby certain voices are privileged and others are marginalized or silenced (Gershon, 2009; Phillips, Kristiansen, Vehvilâinen, & Gunnarsson, 2013). However, this maneuver is complex. When you are emotionally struck, it seems easy to dichotomize – to establish an "us" versus "them" mentality and lose sight of the dynamic features of collaborative processes. We struggled with this in both our analysis of the incident at the psychiatric ward and of the situation at the conference. Both situations are more complex than we are capable of communicating. In an attempt to stay true to the complex process of collaborative research, we will conclude this article by introducing two generic and ethical dilemmas emerging from the narrative – dilemmas to which we do not think there are any straightforward answers.

In the narrative, we describe how the audience at the conference seemed disturbed by our presentation and the unethical nature of the way in which we had conducted the workshops in which certain participants were silenced. We exposed not only ourselves but also – importantly - the practitioners. The questions from the audience - for instance, *"Why did you not intervene from the very beginning of the session?"* And *"Which ethical codex do you apply here?"* which followed our presentation, implied that what happened among the participants in the collaborative workshop was our ethical responsibility as researchers. Thus, they seemed to confront us with our ethical obligation and responsibility as researchers from a normative ethical position. However, drawing on Foucault we suggest that even apparently `innocent situations´ are loaded with power. Christensen draws attention to how

> Whereas the traditional (Marxist) power is rather explicit, Foucault points at all the subtle mechanisms of influence that operates in our linguistic, behavioral and institutional practice (Christensen, 2016, p. 2).

In other words, because knowledge and power relations are dynamic and emergent, there is no guarantee for what happens in collaborative research processes. The premise that power exists and is being exercised even when no one seems to be dominating or dominated was not accepted at the conference (Foucault, 1994). This understanding of the dynamic of power/knowledge relationships can be deeply disturbing because it contrasts with traditional scientific ideals which emphasize the ability of science to predict future events and prevent unfortunate incidents from happening. Furthermore, it suggests that normative ethical guidelines can be seen as instrumental, over-simplistic and idealised representations of the mostly ´messy´, situated and interactional realities surrounding collaborative research processes. According to Foucault, ethics is a critical stance (Christensen, 2016). In translation to research practice, this stance implies that the researcher pays attention to what emerges in the processes of facilitation and writing in collaborative knowledge production.

The apparent clash between different conceptions of what researcher responsibility means derives from the different epistemologies in which they are embedded – from normative and traditional scientific to more post-foundational epistemological approaches. From normative oriented positions, we - as humans and researchers - have an ethical responsibility in our relationship to others. In addition, inspired by Foucault, we suggest that we can only enact this responsibility as researchers if we constantly have an open, situated and critical, reflexive discussion about our research- and facilitating practices with our colleagues. This reflexive discussion includes an awareness of the way in which we as researchers and facilitators contribute to the reflexive nature of positioning- and subjectification processes (Christensen, 2016, p. 13). Therefore - even though we consider ourselves as equally involved and committed to the research process, it does not take away our responsibility – neither in the incident with the practitioners nor at the conference together with our fellow researchers. We cannot, as Shotter says, *"relate ourselves to others and otherness as we ourselves please".* When we operate situated as researchers, *"our actions take on an ethical or moral quality"* (Shotter, 2016, p. 11).

The challenge of representation

So how can researchers expose the dynamic of othering and not expose individuals? This dilemma

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of representation is embedded in the epistemology of research. We suggest that some of the

emotional reactions after our paper presentation at the conference can be interpreted in light of the

Kantian distinction between relating to others as an end or as means to something else. According

to Kant, a fundamental principle of morality, which underlie all of our moral duties is that human

beings should be treated as an end themselves – and not as means to something else. From his

perspective, it could seem like we were exposing the poor practitioner for our own benefit and

making him a means to an end in our research. De Raeve (Raeve, 1994) takes her point of departure

in this Kantian notion when she discusses the ethical nature of research in sensitive settings. She

refers to how researchers historically has tended to view it legitimate to perform research on

vulnerable and disadvantaged people. She, moreover, argues that that as long as researchers are

focused on the completion of the research not the care of the individual subjects, then they are

still treating other people as 'means to an end'.

From a poststructuralist perspective, nobody is vulnerable per se. Instead, all participants

(including researchers) are interwoven in situated power/knowledge relations where all actions

are understood as processes of subjectification. In this dynamic process, all identities are

discursively and reflexively negotiated in the situated context. In our research, we seek to mediate

and reconcile these two, seemingly contradictory, epistemological positions. Firstly, from a

normative ethical position, we acknowledge that we have an ethical obligation as authors of the

paper. Secondly, we agree that we cannot write about our relationships with other people without

invoking distance; however, we had not envisaged the force of the ethical and emotional feeling

rules we were violating. Finally, we did not only describe the participants in our talk, we also

showed them on video. So one might ask: Do our noble intentions make it acceptable to show the

humiliating process where a person is made a non-person?

Maybe if we had read Strumińska-Kutra's argument for not revealing sensitive data we would have

known better:

Even if communication of detailed descriptive research on relations of power would not pose

an ethical risk (…) it is still prone to underestimate power inequalities (Strumińska-Kutra, 2016,

p. 3).

Ellis questions which stories researchers are allowed to share and to construct (Ellis, 2007). Interestingly, she raises the same question as one of the members of the audience at the conference: Is it ethically legitimate to present a paper, which has not been seen or approved by the involved participants? However, this question can be reversed: would it be ethically legitimate to show the video to the participants? In Lilleaas' experience, *"giving knowledge back to participants gives them the opportunity to produce new understandings of themselves and of society"* (Lilleaas, 2013, p. 118).

Still, there could also be a risk of exposing the same practitioner once again and thereby repeating and perhaps increasing the othering process. Anyhow, that is not the main reason why we chose not to return and show the video to the participants and share our analyses with them. From a poststructuralist position, power is always at play – and so we contend that it would not be possible to reconstruct or reproduce a similar context together with the practitioners and learn from it - in spite of the fact that we had recorded the previous incident on video. It would be a new and different situation in which new and different relations would emerge. A third and different route, however, could be to ask the participants involved for their acceptance of showing this specific video footage externally and with a view to engage in a discussion similar to the one we have addressed in this article (all participants had signed a general acceptance paper on being videotaped for research purposes).

In summary, there are no simple answers to ethical conundrums and, therefore, we argue that it is pertinent that such incidents not are swept under the carpet in collaborative research practices. They should instead be welcomed at conferences so it becomes possible to share our experiences free from moral judgements when collaborative research becomes emotionally challenging and we are caught off-guard as researchers. We can only learn from what we are doing as researchers and facilitators if we dare to explore sensitive incidents and gain insight into what is at stake in dialogical reflexive processes. Collaborative researchers share a normative hope for a more democratic and inclusive world. In conclusion, we suggest that striving for such a world encompasses an ethical imperative of adopting a critical reflexive approach to our own practices.

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