

## Close Up, or Inside Out? Social Justice and HE Research

Vicki Trowler

### Abstract:

When conducting research in higher education for, or about, social justice<sup>1</sup>, issues of power are usually surfaced. This often involves studying students, women, second-language speakers, or any mix of these and other attributes along familiar axes of difference. As noted by Trowler (2014:43), it is a “political choice” to study relatively marginalised or vulnerable populations, to redress the partiality (in both senses) of accounts which spotlight the advantaged. However, this choice highlights differences in positionality between those researched and the researcher – even where subjectivities may be common to both, but potentially exacerbated with increased difference.

bell hooks (1990:341-1) cautions against the appropriation of the subaltern’s experience by the researcher, often resulting in injustices of recognition and, potentially, of distribution<sup>2</sup>. Such injustices have led to researched populations including First Nations in Canada, Australia and South Africa issuing codes of ethics with which any researchers are obliged to comply as a condition of access.

This raises the question of how well “close up” research can adequately address differentials of power to the satisfaction of both researcher and researched, and how well “inside out” research (conceived, conducted and communicated by endogenous researchers) provides a solution to these issues. This chapter considers these matters,

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<sup>1</sup> One can conduct research *into* social justice in higher education, and / or one can conduct research *for* social justice in higher education. Depending on one’s orientation, one could argue that these ought – or ought not – to be the same.

<sup>2</sup> See Fraser (2013:176)

drawing on three studies which involve different degrees of “insiderness” (involving dimensions of location, time and subjectivities) and proposes an orientation toward “situated sensitivity” in conducting such research.

### Introduction:

McArthur (2016), with reference to Honneth (2007, 2003, 1995), foregrounds recognition as a mechanism of social in/justice: “To deny or misrepresent recognition to another is to do injustice”. Fraser (2013:176) distinguishes between “injustices of distribution and injustices of recognition” stressing that while the latter are not reducible to the former, they are also not “merely cultural”, a position attributed to her by critics including Butler (2008). In the context of HE research, injustices of recognition can translate into injustices of distribution, should mis/recognition in re/presentation be translated uncritically into policy.

One can conduct research *into* Social Justice in Higher Education, and / or one can conduct research *for* Social Justice in Higher Education. Depending on one’s orientation, one could argue that these ought – or ought not – to be the same. If one sets aside the myth of objectivity and steps outside of a positivist paradigm, one is further confronted with the question of whether research into social justice issues in HE can – or ought – to be studied from outside, or from within.

Research – especially research into, or for, social justice issues in HE - is often prompted by a recognition of injustice. As noted by Van Maanen (2010:338):

*A grievance or sense of righteous indignation it seems can get one to the field and keep them there. ...Without an affront, injustice, complaint, or beef to explore we might well become ciphers-qua-celebrants, happy agreeable sorts who wallow in unmitigated delight ...and, in the end, have little to say other than everything is hunky-dory.*

I noted elsewhere (Trowler 2014:43) that “it is a political choice to turn the spotlight onto the marginalised”, also it is important as an antidote to the partiality (in both senses) of accounts that consider only the experiences of the advantaged. Yet as bell hooks (1990) cautions, studying the experiences of others – especially where issues of social justice are concerned, and those under study may have relatively less power than the researchers – has moral implications:

*No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk.*

This appropriation of the subaltern’s experience by the researcher often results in injustices of recognition and, potentially, of distribution. Such injustices have led to researched populations including Inuit and First Nations in Canada, Australia and South Africa issuing codes of ethics with which any researchers are obliged to comply as a condition of access. Nordling (2017) quotes the head of the South African San Council in Upington, Leana Snyders, as saying

*When a researcher comes they enrich themselves of our culture and our knowledge. But our communities remain in poverty; their daily life does not change. We want to change that.*

The San Code of Research Ethics (South African San Institute 2017) opens with the requirement for respect and recognition – of themselves, and of their contribution to the research. “Re-writing you” is a form of denying or misrepresenting recognition, as per the Honneth observation (above). The term mis/recognition is used to convey a process of not simply failing to recognise accurately, but of simultaneously delegitimizing. Fraser (1995:280) describes mis/recognition as

*...not simply to be thought ill of, looked down on, or devalued in others' conscious attitudes or mental beliefs. It is rather to be denied the status of full partner in social interaction and prevented from participating as a peer in social life – not as a consequence of a distributive inequality (such as failing to receive one's fair share of resources or 'primary goods') but rather as a consequence of institutionalised patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem.*

Issues of mis/recognition are thus pivotal in the re/presentation of marginalised, subaltern, or less powerful subjects. One way to challenge that is through truly endogenous research – not just “close up”, but “inside out”. This, however, presents its own challenges, since those subjects do not have access to the hegemonic discourse, as I noted (Trowler 2014:44) previously:

*Subalterns are rendered mute by the 'epistemic violence' of hegemonic discourse – in order to be heard, they must adopt the thought, reasoning and language of the dominant group, and can never express their own reasoning, forms of knowledge and logic.*

Schultze (2000:7) describes the “constraints” under which a knowledge worker tries to convince others of the reliability and validity of their claims, in constructing new knowledge:

*...constraints include the format that knowledge needs to take in order to be acceptable to others, the language or symbol system within which it must operate, and the evidence ...to support ... new knowledge claims.*

For the subaltern researcher, then, the two identities are in opposition. As subaltern, one has ‘insider’ access to raw data – the lived experience of those being studied – but not to the discourse with which to make ‘knowledge claims’ that may be recognized as reliable or valid. As a researcher, one has access to the discourse with which to make,

and defend, new knowledge claims, but not authentically to the lived experience of the subaltern. Schultze (2000:8) captures it thus:

*Ethnographers... are... confronted with potentially conflicting demands. In their role as instrument they rely on their personal experience and subjective engagement with phenomena in the field to generate insights, whereas in their role as scientist they need to convince the scientific community of the trans-situational... and reliable nature of these very phenomena.*

This tension between researcher-as-instrument and researcher-as-scientist is particularly heightened when the researcher is conducting endogenous research.

### Who is an insider?

Clegg & Stevenson (2013) argue that interviewing in higher education research is a form of ethnography, because as participants in the higher education system, we are “insiders”. I have engaged more fully with this argument elsewhere (Trowler 2016), but it raises the question of exactly who can lay claim to “insider” status. I propose that there are three dimensions to this:

- Location – how close the researcher is to the site of the study. Is it sufficient to be located in the same system, as Clegg and Stevenson propose, or does one need to be located in the institution, or even the department, that one is studying? Clearly the focus of the study matters here: if the focus is system-wide, the researcher’s own location matters less than if the focus is on a specific research centre situated in a different department to the researcher’s home department, in a different institution to that which employs the researcher, and with different disciplinary affiliations to those of the researcher.
- Time – in any direction. A researcher who is researching backward in time – for example, looking at the development of a policy, or researching a particular event – may share a systems / institutional / departmental or other specific location with that which they’re researching, but may not have been present in

that specific locus at the time of the policy development or event. Likewise, a researcher may return to a system or institutional (or departmental) context where they were once located, to conduct research in the present. They may extrapolate from their own experience backward or forward in time, but the magnitude of the changes prior, or since, their being an insider may be sufficient to render them an “outsider”.

- Subjectivities – especially relative to who holds power in that context. Researchers who are differently placed are likely to be granted different levels and kinds of access, leading to the “Rashomon effect” (Heider 1988) where different researcher produce different accounts of “the same” event, process or situation. An example may be seen in considering two recent texts alongside each other: Council on Higher Education’s (2016) “Reflections of South African University Leaders” features a mix of self-penned reflective essays and interviews conducted by staff of the Council of Higher Education (CHE), while Jansen’s (2017) “As by Fire” draws on interviews the author – himself a Vice-Chancellor at a South African University at the time – conducted with other VCs. While the former publication provides some interesting insights, these lack the intimate, immediate edge of the Jansen text, where one gets a real sense of the person rather than just the role.

While the above example illustrates nuances of gaining access “upward”, similar dynamics play out when conducting research among those who (perceive themselves to) have less power. Scott (1991) refers to “hidden transcripts”, the body of information and views shared by subalterns among themselves, which differs from the “public transcripts” they share with others. These hidden transcripts are characterised by

- Taking place offstage, away from public gaze, because of the risk to the subordinates;
- Being accessible only to subalterns, and not shared with those who hold power; and
- Being rendered visible without decoding at the point of “rupture” – certain events can force these hidden transcripts into view at moments of crisis and challenge.

As widening participation (or “transformation”) policies produce results, more researchers will emerge from historically underrepresented communities with assumed access to these “hidden transcripts”. However, as I noted previously (Trowler 2014:51-2), conducting research from within “subaltern space” does not fully equate with acquisition of the “hegemonic discourse”. Rather,

*analogous to Prensky’s ‘digital immigrants’ who speak with an ‘accent’, it would appear that these subalterns master a dialect, or speak with a heavy accent, which continues to mark them out as different, and continues to exclude them [from the community of knowledge producers].*

I will consider the issues of what constitutes “insiderness” through reflecting on three studies, and my role and subjectivities vis-à-vis those who were being studied. A brief description of each of the studies will be followed by a fuller reflection, below.

### Study 1: A study of “non-traditional” HE Students

This study (Trowler 2016) set out to examine how students who define themselves as “non-traditional” in their own study contexts perceive their institutions’ attempts to engage them, and their own engagement practices, and how these affect their intentions to persist or withdraw from their studies. I interviewed 23 undergraduate students enrolled at Scottish universities three times each across a calendar year.

Was I an insider?

What we shared:

- I was also a student registered at a Scottish university – but I was not an undergraduate student, nor was I enrolled at the same university as the overwhelming majority of my respondents, so the extent to which our “being students at Scottish universities” qualified as shared experience is contestable.
- I shared some aspects of subjectivities with some of the students: I had also been the first in my family to attend university; I had also studied my undergraduate degree in a language not my first, and attended a university whose culture was

not my own; I had studied for two of my degrees part-time; I had worked while studying for two of my degrees; I had been a student-parent for some of my studies; I had been a mature student; I was an “international” student, marked by accent; I had been a student of a “race”/ ethnicity that was a minority at a university at which I had studied.

What we did not share:

- I was not an undergraduate student at the same time as the students I interviewed.
- I had not been an undergraduate student in the same place as the students I interviewed.

Thus, while sharing elements of location, time and subjectivities, there was much (in terms of location, time and subjectivities) that I did not share. I could not legitimately lay claim to “insider” status.

## Reflections

With this study, the shared aspects of subjectivities helped to build rapport and to spark genuine interest in both directions. Providing points of connection for students who felt “out of place” or “marginal” in their study contexts seemed to help them to develop trust and open up. However, the very clear differences also aided, in reminding me of my role as researcher and thus allowing me to maintain a critical distance. The different contexts also foregrounded for me the necessity of checking assumptions: while shared subjectivities and experiences can lead to empathetic bonding, it can become lead to projection if assumptions are not checked and details of experiences not elicited – and, in extreme cases, inadvertent misrecognition.

This study also caused me to reflect anew on the Clegg & Stevenson (2013) argument of interviewing in higher education research having ethnographic overtones. My experience of being located “in the system” did not locate me in the position, or the positionality, of my respondents. Sitting in a café in Glasgow interviewing a student did not magically transport me to the lived experience of entering university from the college sector, which I had not personally experienced; spending time walking around a

newer university with an informant who studied there observing the graffiti, the staffed access control and the department of many of the students, however, did give me at least some insight into the context behind his comments.

Wary of misrepresenting the students I interviewed, I made drafts of relevant sections (with explanatory notes) available to them for comment. Perhaps predictably, none of them offered any comment, and there was no discernible evidence that any of them had engaged with the drafts. While this allowed me to feel smugly compliant from an ethics perspective, it does surface concerns about how informed “informed consent” actually is in practice. These were students – literate and sophisticated in comparison to some other researched populations. Their reluctance to engage with my drafts can be understood in many ways, but I suspect that for most of them it was yet another chore competing for their time, attention and intellectual effort, when they felt under siege by so much else, coupled with a naïve faith in the academic system to which they had also committed themselves. (The “sunk cost fallacy” argues that the more you invest in something, the harder it becomes to abandon it. These students had given generously of their time and engagement – disappointment in the results of their investment may have been a risk they were not willing to take.)

The San Code of Research Ethics (South African San Institute 2017) requires high levels of transparency and informed consent, including the stipulation that complex issues be made accessible and communicated appropriately rather than assumptions being made about what the San can and cannot be expected to understand. While this seeks to avoid misrepresentation and is clearly desirable, how this translate into the context of social justice research in HE in a way that is true to the spirit of the Code? Is it sufficient to make something available, knowing that in all likelihood it won't be read, or challenged? Or does the commitment not to misrepresent and not to mispresent require a deeper, more informed form of informed consent?

## Study 2: Comparative study

The second study aimed to compare the engagement experiences of self-defined “non-traditional” HE students in Scotland (Study 1, above) with students who self-identified as “non-traditional” in a different context (a university in South Africa). This was a collaboration with a former colleague, who was employed at the South African university at the time. A few hours after we’d met to discuss the project, student protests erupted and the focus of the study shifted to focus more explicitly on that, with data being generated primarily from social media posts.

Were we insiders?

What we shared:

- We shared location, to an extent: we had both worked and studied at that university, and my former colleague was working there at the time.
- I was no longer at the university in any role, while my former colleague was; thus, our sharing of “time” was mixed.
- With respect to subjectivities, we shared a political programme with the students, as it was recorded at the time. My former colleague was black, but not a student; I was a student, but not black.

What we did not share:

- Given the protest movement’s foregrounding of intersectionality, we were very conscious of the extent to which we did not share subjectivities with many of the students, especially those aspects related to power and visibility. (Voices of LGBTQIA students, non-binary students, and students with disabilities emerged strongly alongside discussions of race, class, gender and the urban/rural divide.) We became very conscious of relative privilege along many axes of difference.

While in many ways my former colleague had a greater claim to “insider” status than I had at the time, neither of us could claim fully to be “insiders”.

## Reflections

With regard to this second study, the conflicts around “insiderness” became more pronounced. As noted above, the original intention was to generate comparative data

from a very different context, to compare experiences of students identifying as “non-traditional” and to test out tentative theory emerging from the Scottish study (Study 1, above) in the very different context of a South African university.

With our decision to shift the focus to the protests, we were confronted by scope-creep and role-blurring. We had both been active in social justice structures and activities at the university, and had a sustained history of activism on the issues that were the subject of the protests. We were thus drawn in to providing support of various kinds to the protesting students – including providing advice, using our networks to secure legal, financial and other forms of assistance. This raised questions in our own minds about critical distance and “objectivity”, and where we located ourselves, in a climate where some university staff writing opinion pieces in the media were being accused of being “mere apologists” for the protests movement, and others of “exploiting” the protest movement to boost their own profile. As McArthur (2016:4) notes,

*There can be no greater injustice than to consider social justice as simply another topic of research: an interesting and perhaps vaguely honourable area of data to be mined and processed into academic papers and promotion applications.*

This tension between our roles as social justice activists, and social justice researchers, led to us stepping back once again to review our research purpose. We suspended data collection with a view to developing a larger research proposal and seeking funding, and continued in our roles as activists.

### Study 3: Subordinate Estate of HEI

The third study (Trowler 2014) focused on demographic shifts taking place within the “non-academic” staff sector at a university in South Africa, where I was employed at the time on “non-academic” conditions of employment.

Was I an insider?

What we shared:

- We shared a location contemporaneously, and shared aspects of subjectivities, especially our location in the subordinate estate in a highly hierarchical context<sup>3</sup>.

However:

- I occupied a privileged space relative to many of the colleagues among whom I was generating data. In part, this was due to my position in the staff Union, which gave me access to social and cultural capitals (access to people in senior leadership roles, membership of committees and other governance structures). But it was also related to the study itself – as a postgraduate student (albeit at a different university) I was gaining access to the hegemonic discourse (though spoken with an “accent” – as noted above) that Spivak (1994) argues is denied to subalterns – who she claims are rendered mute by the “epistemic violence” of the hegemonic discourse.

While I felt very much an insider, I occupied a privileged space within that role.

### Reflections:

In reflecting on the third study, I am confronted to an even greater extent by issues of role-blurring and boundary confusion. I was very conscious throughout the study that my pre-existing relationships – as a colleague, as a line-manager, and as president of the staff union, for example – produced dynamics of power which shaped not only the extent to which I was granted or denied access, but also the nature of the data which emerged. As I noted (Trowler 2014) elsewhere:

*While in theory I could step outside of one role and into another, in practice it was much more difficult, and I was aware that as I stepped into my ‘researcher’ role, I brought with me knowledge repositories and networks of access associated with the multiplicity of my other roles. My*

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of the study, there were marked differences in conditions of employment between academic and “non-academic” staff. The former qualified for sabbatical leave and ad hominem promotion, could compete for research-related funding, and retired at 65, while the latter retired at 60, and were subject to micromanagement.

*being an insider both allowed me access to, and contaminated, my data. I was acutely conscious of the idiosyncrasy of my data, and the questions of reliability and validity that this raised.*

I was aware that I was utilising knowledge, data, insights that I had gained in other roles, at other times, and for which I had never sought nor been granted access as a researcher. I needed to keep resurfacing those insights consciously, verbalising them and asking permission to include them, knowing that I could not un-know them if permission was refused.

As an “insider”, unintended consequences (or “observer effect”) seemed far more acute. As I wrote up the study, I became aware that every African<sup>4</sup> respondent I was quoting had since left the university. I was crushingly familiar with the institutional climate that was perceived as hostile to black staff before undertaking the study, but reading the words of black staff who felt marginalised and alienated, and noting that each of them had left since I’d captured those words, I could not help but wonder to what extent asking them to reflect on their situation had hastened their departure. While such consequences are not peculiar to insider research, endogenous researchers are more likely to be conscious of these, since they are closer to the lived realities of those they study. It is, moreover, possible that their closeness encourages more openness or reflectivity from their study participants, and that this exacerbates these unintended consequences. This complicity will be considered further in the discussion below.

## Discussion

As a disciplinary vagrant, I have passed through many paradigms, epistemologies and traditions along my meanderings, but remember being taught that the central tenet of anthropology was “to make the strange familiar, and the familiar strange<sup>5</sup>”. For the endogenous researcher, the “culture”, phenomenon or process under study is both

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<sup>4</sup> As they were categorised for the purposes of monitoring employment equity. These were black African South African citizens, a category that – together with other black (“Indian”, or “coloured”) people, people with disabilities, and women – qualified for restorative measures in appointment and promotion.

<sup>5</sup> quote originally attributed to 18<sup>th</sup> C German poet Novalis

familiar and strange: as an insider, it is familiar, but as a researcher, it is viewed as strange. The emic (endogenous) and etic (exogenous) perspectives are thus held in tension as one moves between one's positionalities as insider and researcher.

Reflexivity is important in any form of social research, but with endogenous research it becomes paramount. As Jones (2000:159) notes,

*reflexive fieldwork strategies offer important opportunities to problematize knowledge production. They give us the chance – even force us – to re-think 'them/us'.*

In my experience, gleaned from the three projects discussed above (and others), reflexivity is easier when there are at least some aspects of difference. No community or group is ever totally homogenous, and “insiderness” is therefore always a question of degree rather than a binary yes/no. In my experience, however, the fewer the number of differences (or the less aware the researcher is of differences) between the endogenous researcher and the group under study, the easier it is to slip into assumptions without noticing, and the more tempting it is to project one's own understandings onto one's study participants. Markers of difference act as reminders to question assumptions, verify understandings and remain reflexive. They act not so much as a caution against “going native”, but against assuming that one already is.

Not being a complete insider also renders ethical considerations around access more straightforward. Because one is prompted by markers of difference into checking one's assumptions – or not making them in the first place – the researcher can feel more confident that the data or understandings have been generated overtly, as part of the research process, with the consent of the participants, rather than imported from prior “knowings”, generated covertly without the conscious consent of participants. There is less role confusion, for both researcher and informants.

Maruyama (1981) argues for a “polyocular” anthropology, which combines endogenous and exogenous epistemologies. (Binocular anthropology would combine a single endogenous viewpoint with a single exogenous one; truly polyocular anthropology

would require a team of researchers representing several “subcultures” within the group being studied, and several exogenous cultures.) As a first step toward this, he argues for endogenous research, since it combines conceptualization, design and execution from within the epistemology and structure of relevance of the culture under study. Beyond epistemological considerations, he claims endogenous researchers bring heightened awareness of other critical aspects that might otherwise distort the research.

The first of these concerns the philosophy regarding communication. Without fully understanding the role of communication in the group under study, an exogenous researcher may deploy research methods that trigger resistance or produce inauthentic responses. This has resonance with Scott’s (1991) description of the “public transcripts”, which are offered to researchers or outsiders, unlike the “hidden transcripts” which are shared “offstage” among the group themselves. An example from Study 2 (above) was the use of Twitter as a “public transcript”, and WhatsApp groups (of known, trusted insiders) as a “hidden transcript”. Relying only on Twitter, as several studies have done, thus skews the data toward only the “outward facing”.

However, as Scott also notes, “hidden transcripts” can become public at the point of rupture, and Study 3 (above) included an example of that with the use of the (public) listserv to voice frustrations in the wake of a faculty meeting held to discuss the depressing findings of the organizational climate survey, which indicated severe unhappiness among “non-academic” staff in the faculty. The presence of both academic and “non-academic” staff at the meeting, the venue of the meeting, and the tone set by the first speaker (an academic Head of Department) acted to silence the “non-academic” staff, who then found other media to air their views (notably the listserv, and an anonymous webform). This example illustrates Maruyama’s point: the organizer of the meeting (the Dean, an academic with little insight into the concerns of “non-academic” staff) had – and shared with many of the academic staff – a different philosophy of communication, which involved debate, assertion and refutation. For the majority of the “non-academic” staff, such combative discussion was read as conflict and not a “safe space” in which to discuss their concerns around the discrimination, harassment and bullying they had reported in the survey.

The second aspect raised by Maruyama concerns relevance dissonance. By this he means the understanding of the purpose of collecting data as understood by the group being studied. Maruyama (1981:231) gives the example of white middle-class people having faith that data being collected will further their wellbeing, while Native Americans have the opposite expectation – that the data will benefit the researchers, but not themselves. He argues that endogenous researchers are more likely to share research goals with the group they are researching, and are thus less likely to receive inauthentic responses.

An example from Study 1 (above): during my first interviews with the students, there was little alignment to our goals. I was seen to be “collecting” data toward a PhD; the students had volunteered to be interviewed mostly because of wanting to be visible. As a result, some of the responses were probably closer to what they thought they ought to say than what they may really have wanted to say. As rapport developed over the year, a greater awareness of a shared goal emerged – to convey authentically the experiences of those students who considered themselves to be “non-traditional” in their study contexts. Thus, with subsequent interviews, responses developed in nuance and shifted to include more “oppositional” forms of engagement rather than recounting their behavioural compliance.

Criticality dissonance is the third aspect listed by Maruyama. This concerns exogenous researchers being unaware of the dangers posed by the generation of the research data because of their lack of familiarity with the context. As an example Study 3 might have involved direct risk to participants. Detailed data I generated could have been used to negative effect – with regard to job grading, performance assessment, or disciplinary action, for example – in the wrong hands, despite my best efforts to pseudonymise data. An example from Study 2 relates to the identity and roles of the protest “leadership” – because of the threat of physical, economic and academic harm to some of the more visible protesters, some data was extremely sensitive. Arrests, suspension from studies, protracted legal and disciplinary (within the university) proceedings compromised the data that could safely be generated for use in the study.

This returns the focus to those occasions where, as a social justice researcher, one finds one's role as a researcher in tension with one's commitment to social justice. There are times when one's most useful contribution to social justice would be the generation and dissemination of data. There are other times when that feels like self-enrichment at the expense of those one is studying, when the need for more "hands on" activism surpasses the need for data – at least in one's own mind. Like the photographer torn between recording the atrocity to make the world aware, or stepping in to stop it, the tension between the roles of activist and researcher can sometimes surface into open conflict, obliging one to step back from at least one of the roles to reflect.

This is further complicated by issues of complicity, as intimated above in the reflections on Study 3. As an "insider", you are implicated in that which you are studying – which may at times seem damning to those concerned with social justice. Foucault's (1980) construct of the "specific intellectual" may be usefully deployed here. In contrast to the notion of the "universal intellectual", who is concerned with the "just-and-true-for-all", the specific intellectual works "within specific sectors, at the precise point where their own conditions of life and work situate them" (Foucault 1980: 126). Rather than trying to uncover what might be inside someone's head, the specific intellectual's project is to uncover "the political, economic institutional regime of the production of truth" since "truth is linked in circular relations with system of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (Foucault 1980: 133). The work of the specific intellectual is not invalidated ethically or politically by their complicity, but politically important because of it, since specific intellectuals have both complicity and agency. As Jones (2000: 168) notes, the "specific intellectual is someone positioned in a specific power/knowledge nexus, and therefore uniquely qualified and empowered to reflexively critique the nexus itself". As insiders, our complicity empowers us uniquely to pull back the covers and expose the truth regime which governs the space, time and subjectivities where we are situated.

## Conclusions

"Close up" research can be conducted exogenously – by "outsiders – or endogenously, by "insiders". Maruyama (1981) argues for an ideal of "polyocular" research, combining multiple exogenous and endogenous perspectives, toward which endogenous research

is an important first step. Reflecting on three research projects in which I held different degrees of “insiderness” - based upon the varying extents to which I shared location, time and subjectivities with those being studied – I would suggest that it is not just possible, but important, to hold both emic and etic perspectives in tension. Researching reflexively requires critical awareness of one’s own positionality in relation to those one is studying – especially when concerned with issues of social justice.

I have argued that rather than clinging to a binary of “insider” vs “outsider”, recognising that groups and communities are not homogenous but riven with multiple power differentials compels one to recognise that “insiderness” is not absolute but a matter of degree. Such dichotomies are unhelpful, as McArthur (2016) stresses, when pursuing social justice research. Utilising reflexive strategies to problematise “us/them”, as Jones (2000:159) suggests, can help in this regard. Being attuned to points of connection can enhance empathy and help to sensitise researchers to relevance dissonance and criticality dissonance, while remaining cognisant of markers of difference can prevent projection of assumptions and alert researchers to epistemological differences and different philosophies of communication. This “situated sensitivity” requires honesty about one’s own positionality as a researcher, even where one might consider oneself a “true” insider. Recognising our complicity in situations where we are conducting “inside out” research brings with it a recognition of our being uniquely “qualified and empowered” to deploy our insights – as “insiders” and as researchers – in the pursuit of social justice.

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