Intersectional Reflexivity: Centering Invocations and Impositions in Reflexive Accounts of Qualitative Research

Jenny K RODRIGUEZ[1], *Maranda RIDGWAY*[2]

University of Manchester, Nottingham Trent University

Abstract

How can researchers write about researcher accountability in a less self-indulgent and more honest way? This paper proposes intersectional reflexivity as an approach that supports producing more detailed accounts of researcher accountability. The paper shows researcher-participant exchanges as sites of intersectional struggle where both researchers and participants engage in invocations and impositions of intersectional identities to navigate their positionality during interactions. Most discussions about reflexivity focus on the power of the researcher, underplaying or ignoring the relevance of co-constructed dynamics and power struggles between researchers and participants. The paper proposes a working protocol to support researchers to understand and use intersectionality in their reflexive accounts to interrogate researcher-participant exchanges in a more nuanced way. The paper expands discussions about privilege and disadvantage in researcher-participant exchanges.

Keywords: intersectional reflexivity, intersectionality, reflexivity, researcher/participant exchanges, privilege, disadvantage

Introduction

Researcher accountability is one of the most important areas of discussion in qualitative research. To demonstrate accountability, qualitative social researchers are encouraged to adopt reflexivity to unveil how subjectivities, emotions, embodiment, and unexpected responses shape dynamics and processes in research praxis (see Cunliffe 2003; Mauthner/Doucet 2003).

[1] Jenny K Rodriguez (jenny.rodriguez@manchester.ac.uk), Senior Lecturer in Employment Studies, Alliance Manchester Business School, University of Manchester.

[2] Maranda Ridgway (maranda.ridgway@ntu.ac.uk), Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University.

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Reflexivity is both a principle and an action; it involves recognising, acknowledging, and addressing how researchers embody and enact symbolic and material power over the research process. In order to engage in reflexivity, researchers "focus on how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect data collection and analysis" (Pillow 2003: 176). These questions are used to understand who researchers are and what they observe, how they address, construct, interpret, and present what they explore (see Harding 1986, 1987, 1991). In adopting a reflexive approach, researchers are asked to look at themselves analytically and apply a critical lens to their research praxis. This simultaneous "being in the phenomenon and stepping outside of it" (Enosh/Ben-Ari 2015: 578) sets the expectation that a process of reflexive introspection be used as an ethical benchmark to shape responsible, inclusive, and non-oppressive qualitative research (see Haraway 1988; Alvesson/Sköldberg 2000; Ellis/Bochner 2000; Johnson/Duberley 2003; Hibbert/Coupland/MacIntosh 2010).

Despite its popularity, reflexivity has been criticized as lacking conceptual clarity (see D'Cruz 2007), being self-indulgent (see Doyle 2012), and following a subjective and ambiguous approach (see Finlay 2016). Indeed, most reflexive accounts are written as memorialization of the research process because the act of reflection also becomes a re-narration that rationalizes accounts and that can be used as a device for cathartic release and methodological redemption (see Pillow 2003). One of the most contested dimensions of reflexivity pertains to how researcher subjectivity is explored; on the one hand, most accounts focus on the role of the researcher as the most powerful actor in the research exchange, which can reproduce otherness/othering and remove research participants' agency (see Enosh/Ben-Ari 2015). On the other hand, the researcher as an identity category has been interrogated in a narrow and essentialist way that fails to engage comprehensively with the researcher as a site of complex and simultaneous identities and subjectivities.

This paper is concerned with the problematisation of the researcher identity as part of the research process (which includes not only positionality in relation to research but also the dynamics of researcher-participant exchanges) from a perspective that brings to the fore the complexity of identity. We engage with this problematisation by addressing the following question: *How can researchers write about researcher accountability in a way that captures the unspoken nuances and dynamics that shape research process exchanges?* In considering this question, we look to propose a way in which reflexive accounts offer "a reasonably lucid and decently honest statement of authorial position" (Grey/Sinclair 2006: 447). We argue that intersectional reflexivity supports such effort by framing reflexive interrogation in relation to the power dynamics inherent to research exchanges, forcing us to problematise the interplay of identity, location and positionality.

The background to this effort lies in the interest to challenge dominant ideas of reflexivity that have primarily focused on single categorical reflexive analyses – for instance, most works that interrogate aspects of difference in the research process have tended to use the gender binary to explore the researcher-participant relationship. In particular, a focus on women's sexuality and bodies and how these are problematised and oppressed during the research process has overlooked the salience of other socially-constructed categories of identity, such as race, ethnicity, age, disability, religion, among others, transforming them into dimensions that are hidden in plain sight (see Gouws 2020).With some notable exceptions (see Johnson-Bailey

1999; Phoenix 1993; Egharevba 2001; Few, Stephens and Rouse-Arnett 2003; Rodriguez/Ridgway 2023), the framing of reflexive interrogation has largely failed to recognise the usefulness and importance of an intersectionality lens to add dimensionality and depth to the reflexive praxis.

With its focus on how socially constructed categories of difference intersect and its interest in how these intersections shape lived experiences, intersectionality provides an excellent framework to strengthen reflexive efforts. There is much scope for a broader discussion about the research process as a site of multiple, interlocking power relations (see Allan 2006). Understanding the research process as a space of simultaneous privilege and disadvantage recognises the ways in which all actors involved in the research process navigate their positioning within exchanges and allows for the exploration of individual relational agendas that play out in the research process.

This topic warrants attention because reflexivity can be complacent and apologetic if its framing remains at the level of acknowledgement and a politics of mea culpa (see Olmos-Vega, Stalmeijer, Varpio and Kahlkeet 2022). Therefore, we must go beyond writing ourselves into the analysis (Gilgun/McLeod 1999: 185) and engage more critically with the nuanced dynamics that pervade research knowledge production (see Calafell 2014). Intersectionality offers significant untapped potential as a qualitative methodological tool to promote recognizing the multiplexity of individual experiences and highlight the relational dynamics that are sustained by the simultaneous mobilization of categories of difference (see King 1988). It could be argued that intersectionality upcycles reflexivity by offering a more critically reflexive analytical framework to scrutinize the interactions between researcher, participants, shifts in positionalities, and their implications for the research process.

The paper is structured in four sections: first, we discuss intersectional reflexivity and the analytical richness it brings to reflexive accounts. We then explain intersectional reflexivity as a methodological praxis, where we present a roadmap for its application and show its analytical richness using two vignettes with extracts from our doctoral fieldwork notes and diaries. We then provide an integrative analysis before closing the paper, identifying key points that researchers should find useful to understand and use intersectional reflexivity to allow for more nuance in reflexive accounts.

Intersectional Reflexivity: Recognizing the Co-Constructed Power Dynamics in Research Exchanges

Reflexivity has been one of the main approaches used in qualitative research to bring scrutiny and accountability to the role of the researcher. There is recognition that social research has an inevitable attachment of subjectivities, emotions and unexpected responses inherent to human nature (see Bellah 1982), and reflexive exercises are used with several aims: First, to explore the self-other relationship; how researchers interact with participants in the context of the research process. Second, to analyze researcher positionality within an asymmetrical axis of power that gets reconfigured at different points of interaction throughout the research process (see Cunliffe/Karunanayake 2013). Third, to recognise how researcher power is exerted in the (re)production of knowledge (see Bettez 2015; Wasserfall 1993).

The idea of *accountable positioning* (Haraway 1988) is widely used as a key aim of reflexivity. Researchers are asked to constantly examine their actions and role in their direct and indirect engagement with participants, reflecting on assumptions about participants that may drive how research questions are articulated, the politics of interaction with participants, and patterns reproduced in interpretive efforts. Scrutinizing themselves in the same way as the rest of the data encourages researchers to renounce the traditional advantageous position that sees them look down upon participants and "break down the power barrier between researcher and researched" (Cotterill/Letherby 1993:72).

As previously mentioned, the complexity of identity has been largely neglected in reflexive accounts. Our proposition here is that this undermines the rigor of the reflexive effort because identity is central to power and relational dynamics. The key argument underpinning intersectionality is that socially constructed categories of difference are interconnected and never operate in isolation (see King 1998; Choo/Ferree 2010; Hancock 2019). Thus, the lived experience of oppression and privilege must be understood as constituted of dynamics within a hierarchical system of power that locates individuals based on the intersections they inhabit (see Crenshaw 1989, 1991).

Following the genealogy of intersectionality and its roots in Black feminism and critical race theory (see Smith 2013; Collins 2019), we see *race* as central to the understanding of this hierarchical system of power. As such, an intersectional lens brings to the fore how and when intersections are invoked, deployed, or imposed, and to what effect.

There is an increase in works that adopt an intersectional approach to research to explore the features of the lived experiences as well as the structural dimensions of work, employment and organizations (see, e.g., Glenn 2002; Rodriguez, Holvino, Fletcher and Nkomo 2016, Carrim/Nkomo 2016; Tariq/Syed 2017; Rosette, de Leon, Koval and Harrison, 2018; Brown/Moloney 2019; Berghs/Dyson 2022); however, there continue to be limited efforts that turn the intersectional lens to researchers to explore how their identities shape the research process. This is important amidst calls to recognise the importance of positionality and situatedness in research and knowledge production (see Mohanty 1988; Rodriguez, Guenther and Faiz 2022). The historical focus on gender has been useful to highlight a variety of issues, in particular how gendered dynamics and stereotypes shape research interactions (see Easterday , Papademas, Schorr and Valentine 1977; Gurney 1985; Pilcher/Coffey 1996; Arendell 1997; Sampson/Thomas 2003; Pezalla, Pettigrew and Miller-Day 2012). However, these efforts do not fully engage with experiences and histories of marginalization that are not just gendered but also racialised, classed, or aged, among others. In this respect, there is much scope to engage in intersectional reflexivity as a way to unveil how we "intervene in our own complicity of the perpetuation of the status quo by unpacking the politics inherent in our lived experience" (Jones/Calafell 2012: 963).

We define intersectional reflexivity as the reflexive understanding of how intersecting socially constructed categories of difference shape the research process and help researchers to navigate and negotiate their exchanges throughout the research process. As a site of intersecting categorical simultaneity – e.g., gendered, racialized, racio-ethnicized, classed, aged, and so on (see Jones 2010: 124) –, the research process is central to the performative efforts of researchers and participants. The way their exchanges and relationships unfold are entangled with systems

of social power that are based on gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, age, (dis)ability, as well as other categories, which they deploy, invoke, and impose in order to navigate and negotiate their subject positions (Vanderbeck 2005: 388; see also Brah/Phoenix 2004; Mazzei/O'Brien 2009).

A move to intersectional reflexivity would then involve scrutinizing forms of agency and complicity where the starting point is the recognition that both researchers and participants are active in the co-creation and pursuit of their individual relational agendas as part of the research process. Analytically, we draw on Choo and Ferree (2010: 137) to highlight three key points of reflection: First, ensuring that norm-constructing operations of power are problematized; second, interrogating the significance of unmarked categories to draw out power processes; and third, focusing on intersections and the boundaries and complex inequalities they reproduce as a whole.

The first point is concerned with the structural or cultural processes that shape broader social structures and intends to locate relational inequalities within the social context in which they are produced. Following Choo and Ferree (2010), that would call for reflection that is rooted in "counterfactual questions that disturb the naturalness of existing arrangements" (Choo/Ferree 2010: 139). The second point calls for an interrogation of unmarked or unproblematised categories, exploring the meaning of the silence of an unmarked category for inequalities, and what that silence helps to reproduce. In highlighting the power of the seemingly invisible yet normalised, and often dominant, category (e.g., whiteness and masculinity), the notion of categorical default is unsettled, allowing a more comprehensive exploration of power structures and relational experiences ((Choo/Ferree 2010: 142). The third point refers to ensuring an intersectional analysis where no category is treated as static to avoid it having unexamined normative authority. This supports engaging with intersectional analysis that focuses on "multilevel systems and situates them in local relations of power [...] to expose the processes that both create and transform inequalities over time" (Choo/Ferree 2010: 145).

In this context, the exercise in accountability considers research as complex process articulated by signifiers that are put into action by all actors involved in the research process. In doing so, it centers on the relational nature of social categories and considers their implications (see Carstensen-Egwuom 2014).

The Methodological Praxis of Intersectional Reflexivity

The aim of adopting an intersectional reflexive approach is to understand how relational aspects are shaped by socially constructed categories of difference and how they are implicitly and explicitly mobilised (see Venn 2006). In this respect, the praxis of intersectional reflexivity is a knower's mirror that pays close attention to the spoken and unspoken ways in which intersections play out in research exchanges and interactions. While as an approach, intersectional reflexivity is not prescriptive about ways of reflection, the importance of centering the features of intersectional identities and how they create instances of privilege and disadvantage is fundamental. Researchers' identities permeate their exchanges (see Jones 2010), so intersectional negotiation is an inevitable part of their praxis to get to the point of insight and discovery in the

research process. For example, with regard to interviews with heterosexual male clients of prostitutes, Grenz (2005) reports that, despite perceived marginal power relations between her and participants, complex symbolic representational aspects of power and sexuality still shaped interactions with participants.

With this in mind, we propose a roadmap of guiding questions (see Table 1) that researchers can use to adopt an intersectionally reflexive approach. To illustrate how to use this roadmap, we start off by contrasting reflexivity and intersectional reflexivity. The point of this comparison is to show that whilst there is value in reflexivity, the purpose of moving to an intersectional approach is to enrich the reflexive exercise. In attending to our intersecting identities, we recognise and engage with the fluidity in the research process and do more reflexive justice to the ways in which we iteratively engage with power dynamics in our exchanges with participants. In reflexive terms, this means acknowledging and reflecting on the processes of gaining, losing, shifting, and regaining that take place as we navigate exchanges with participants.

Table 1. Guiding questions

Reflexivity	**Intersectional Reflexivity**
● What went on? ● What was my role in the way these events unfolded? ● What claims of authority am I making in the way I write? ● What actions and practices did I undertake throughout the research process to be able to make these claims?	● What is happening/going on? ● Are there any problematic moments that are taking or have taken place? What is problematic about them? ● How are socially constructed categories of difference mobilized in those moments? ● Who has mobilized them and to what effect? ● How are privilege and disadvantage in the research setting being reproduced as a result? ● How are the problematic moments related to wider hierarchies of power relations? ● What dynamics of privilege and disadvantage do these moments serve to create, challenge or perpetuate for me and others? ● How do these dynamics impact the way I (as a researcher) and participants make sense of and interpret the situation?

We identify important differences between reflexivity and intersectional reflexivity; for instance, whilst the former positions privilege in relation to the researcher role and unveils how the researcher deploys power, the latter recognises fluidity in the position of the researcher within a spectrum of privilege and disadvantage and unveils how power is negotiated. In this respect, whilst reflexivity sees power as sitting within the researcher, intersectional reflexivity recognises the research process is a co-constructed site of political possibilities for both researchers and participants.

The benefit we see in intersectional reflexivity is that it moves toward a reflexive exercise that considers not just the individual level (the researcher) but offers the scope needed to analyze three broader distinct levels: the individual relational level, the level of research setting, organization and participant group, and the structural, societal, institutional level. Drawing on work by Collins (2003), we use *micro*, *meso* and *macro* to identify these levels. Collins notes that these are "levels of social organization [...] as organized within and through power relations" and argues that "[h]ierarchical power relations operate on all three levels" (Collins 2003: 223; see Table 2).

The micro level focuses on the researcher-participant relationship. At this level, the reflexive exercise delves into the intersectional invocations and impositions that take place in exchanges and interactions. These invocations and impositions refer to the ways in which individuals bring to the fore intersectional identities for themselves and others to negotiate and navigate their position and that of others as part of exchanges. The meso level focuses on the research setting as a political site of intersectional complexities. At this level, the reflexive exercise focuses on the group or organization that serves as the site of the research project, looking to reflect on the implications of the relational dynamics. These relational dynamics serve as outcomes of reaffirmation of privilege and disadvantage that reinforce and perpetuate existing wider hierarchies of power relations. Finally, the macro level focuses on the wider role of the power dynamics in creating, challenging, and perpetuating a societal matrix of oppression through the creation of knowledge that reproduces intersectional privilege and discrimination in the theory, methodology and praxis of research.

Table 2. Levels of analysis of intersectional reflexivity

Levels of analysis	Guiding questions
Individual relational level (micro level)	What is happening/going on? Are there any problematic moments that are taking or have taken place? What is problematic about them? How are socially constructed categories of difference mobilized in those moments? Who has mobilized them and to what effect?
Research setting, organization, participant group level (meso level)	How are privilege and disadvantage in the research setting being reproduced as a result? How are the problematic moments related to wider hierarchies of power relations?
Structural, societal, institutional level (macro level)	What dynamics of privilege and disadvantage do these moments serve to create, challenge, or perpetuate for me and others? How do these dynamics impact the way I (as a researcher) and participants) make sense of and interpret the situation?

To illustrate these points, in this paper we use two vignettes which are part of our diary entries and reflexive notes from our respective doctoral fieldwork. We develop intersectional reflexive analyses on these vignettes, guided by the questions in Table 1.

Jenny's vignette

Jenny's intersectional reflexive analysis uses excerpts from her doctoral fieldwork diary. At the time of the entry, Jenny was a full-time doctoral researcher studying gender construction in organizational culture in the public sector in the Dominican Republic. Jenny is a Dominican national with skin-tone privilege (see Quiros/Dawson 2013). Participants involved in Jenny's study were Dominican professionals working in the public sector, some of whom had an established relationship with Jenny's family. This excerpt is part of her diary notes following one of the first interviews she conducted with a male participant:

> *I went to meet him and was asked to wait for him at reception. He came 20 minutes later even when we had an appointment. When he finally came, he didn't even apologize. He just said that someone had said to him that there was a 'little white girl' waiting for him at the reception. He said he had been told a researcher from England was coming to interview him. He said, "Looking at you, you're not English". He sounded slightly surprised, and I got the impression he didn't believe I was a researcher. All of this and I had not said a word. I said I was a researcher, but that I was Dominican. He laughed. He said, "You look like a student. He asked me if I knew [the minister] and I said I didn't know him personally but that he was friends with my father. He then said he was sure that a little white girl like me would have all those connections […]. The first thing he asked was whether I was a researcher or a student. I told him that I was both. He told me, "You look too young and with those clothes, you look like a student". He said it laughingly and I laughed. I told him that I already had a master's degree and was now doing my doctorate. He said he too had a master's degree but he didn't have time for a doctorate with all his responsibilities as technical director.*

Jenny's intersectional reflexive account

My fieldwork started with contact – mediated by my family connections – with government officials and people in management roles. My class privilege did not escape me, and I recognised its power – it was otherwise unlikely that any officials would take time to speak to a student. In this respect, I had unspoken expectations that aligned with that privilege – I expected expedite access and willingness because the legwork had already been done for me. This was challenged during one of my first meetings with a participant who left me waiting for 20 minutes despite us having a pre-arranged meeting. When he finally arrived, he simply alluded to his own unmet expectations about me: not English, not white, seemingly too young and looking inexperienced. The starting point of our exchange was the unsettling of my class positioning; in Dominican culture, hierarchical humiliation is used to remind others of one's importance (e.g., keeping someone waiting implies one has other more important things to attend to).

Throughout the exchange, we both made repositioning efforts: For instance, I mobilised my expectations as a young female researcher with connections whilst he simultaneously mobilised his as an older man in a top management position. Our individual invocations and impositions simultaneously mobilised and responded to intersections of race, gender, age, class and role seniority, revealing our agentic efforts to maintain privileged intersectional locations and navigate the forces of the patriarchal order of the context (see Choo/Ferree 2010: 134). These intersections created differential effects (see Collins 1998: 211) and highlighted the importance of the situated nature of our exchange. For instance, my attempt at repositioning through claiming my identity as a researcher received the intersectional backlash of a gendered/aged/inexperienced positioning. In other instances, the imposition worked to my advantage; for example, bringing to the fore my class status and not challenging the recognition that I was someone who "would have all those connections" helped me to reinforce my status during the exchange.

Underpinning these invocations is the racialised social order in the context of a strong culture of shadism and Negrophobia (see Torres-Saillant 1998) where I had the privilege of a lighter skin tone. Nevertheless, despite whiteness being an unmarked category, its mention was deployed to suggest unearned white privilege – I was neither "a little white girl" nor was I English. Alluding to both aimed to reposition me in a racialised hierarchical structure that dominates most postcolonial settings (see Brah 2020). In this respect, my privileged position was undermined by a different type of power that he could deploy during our exchange: the power of authority. This intersectional dance was both strategic as much as it was violent; each of us invoking and imposing to position ourselves and each other within the space of interaction and establish gendered, aged, seniority-based boundary-setting for our exchange.

Maranda's vignette

Maranda's account uses excerpts from reflection on field notes captured during her doctoral study. While studying, Maranda worked full-time in a professional role for the same organization as some of her participants. Maranda was in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where she experienced privilege as a Western expatriate and disadvantage as a woman of mixed ethnic heritage. Most participants in Maranda's research were men in the construction industry, originating from different countries, ethnicities, and nationalities. While all participants spoke English, it was often as a second language. This excerpt combines reflections from different interactions relating to her doctoral study research.

> *He asked me where I was from and I said, "the UK". Although we were both expatriates, we originated from different countries. He said, "But you look like us". He was Lebanese and was implying that my skin tone, hair, eyes etc. were reminiscent of those typically associated with the Middle East. I explained that my mother was born in Iran. I politely thanked him for his time and emphasized that the interview was being conducted as part of my doctoral study. Although he didn't express concern, I assured him that my role as the human resource manager shouldn't affect his ability to speak freely and openly and that the British university where I was studying had strict ethical regulations on protecting participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Laughing, he asked if he would have to call me doctor. I smiled and said that I wouldn't insist on it but if he chose to that was fine.*

Maranda's intersectional reflexive account

I had arrived in the UAE as an expatriate practitioner, employed for my professional expertise, thus I had power of knowledge and reminded myself that this power played a role in accessing participants. While working, I undertook doctoral studies and felt the tension between simultaneously being a student and an expert. The familiarity of foreignness helped me to develop rapport; as expatriates, we shared similar challenges that arose from international relocation, positioning me as an insider (see Dwyer/Buckle 2009).

While there were no explicit comments made about our individual roles, I felt exchanges with participants were often distracted by my practitioner identity. Interactions presented the challenge of expectations of compliance within the gender order (see Rodriguez/Ridgway 2019); in the context, a man would always have a higher social standing than me, especially if they were older. Sometimes, I mobilized my expertise to reposition myself in the exchange. In the vignette, by asking if he had to call me doctor, the participant was subtly testing if our social hierarchical positions would change following me receiving a doctorate, as my educational attainment would be higher than his (see Maitner 2021). My response reasserted my power in granting him permission not to use it but implying that I could. Nevertheless, during our exchanges I remained mindful that I was still a student and reliant on him (and others like him) to complete my degree; hence I was cautious about how I wielded this perceived power.

As a young woman, I was disadvantaged because men's voices are given precedence over women's and women often need their husband's (or father's) permission to work or travel. Conversely, my British citizenship was advantageous because I was perceived as an elite worker by colleagues, particularly those originating from countries in South-East Asia (see Haak-Saheem/Brewster 2017). This was further amplified because I was employed in a managerial capacity. In my daily interactions, my physical appearance also served as a conversational point to break the ice with participants. As someone of mixed ethnic heritage, this proved both an advantage and disadvantage; in some instances, I had an insider status as I shared some physical features with many people in the region (see Dwyer/Buckle 2009). Sometimes I perceived that a polite distance reserved for foreigners – a covert but constant reminder that foreigners are temporary guests in the country – did not apply to me; I was privy to in-jokes through the expectation that I spoke Arabic. However, this also led to assumptions about shared cultural values and about my acceptance that as a woman I was inferior and would always be a subordinate to the men around me, and that I did not have the right for my voice to be heard.

Integrative Analysis

Engaging in intersectional reflexivity meant engaging in self-scrutiny that addressed the simultaneity of privilege and disadvantage, which is essential to show how "the positions of seeing and saying that we take in our narrating construct us as researchers and construct our research projects" (Hatch 1996: 372-373). This was challenging for two reasons: it made us reflect on ways to purposely challenge the reflexive obscuring of the self, and it led us to make intentional efforts to unmask the self.

The problematization of ourselves and participants as agentic in the process through the invocation and imposition of intersectional positioning unveiled us as agentic, responsive, emotional actors in the context of research-participant exchanges. At the same time, this highlighted that more richness and nuance can be captured by approaching the reflexive effort with a focus on the co-construction of power relations and addressing the intersectional performative efforts of both researchers and participants.

Our vignettes highlight many themes that speak to the complexity of the researcher-participant exchange at the individual/relational, organizational/group and structural/societal levels. In what follows, we develop an integrated analysis guided by the levels, using the questions in Table 2.

Individual relational level

As younger female researchers in patriarchal settings, our interactions with male participants were characterized by struggles to maintain power, legitimacy and control. These struggles speak to the racialized and gendered expectations of young women's deferential behavior to older men in positions of power (see Acker 2012). Intersectional invocations of gender, race, age, nationality, and seniority, which implicitly alluded to our lack of legitimacy as a result of being young female students, were repeatedly made by participants to locate us in positions of subordination.

Our accounts challenge the binary framing of powerful/unpowerful positioning inherent to the researcher-researched relationship. Instead, while systematically attending to the context of knowledge construction by questioning the power of the researcher is important, not understanding researcher-participant relationality can overlook oppressive dynamics rooted in intersectional invocations and impositions. This speaks to the importance of interrogating the single story of the arrogant superiority of those who see themselves as producers of knowledge and contrast themselves with those whose experiences they capture (see Riley et al. 2003).

Our intersectional reflexive accounts helped us to unpack the nuance of co-construction and negotiation. For instance, both ourselves and participants navigated the process of subject positioning in what could be termed a *dance of legitimacy*, where we used invocations and impositions as attempts to reposition ourselves and regain power within exchanges. Resisting these impositions involved mobilizing our own ideas of self to challenge the fixed patriarchal order; looking to reassert ourselves was also an act to conceal parts of our identities which we perceived put us in a vulnerable position (see Sou 2021). In this respect, invocations are simultaneously acts of defense and attack to ultimately re-claim a position of dominance: as intellectually privileged in our case, and as authoritatively powerful in the case of participants.

Level of research setting, organization, and participant group

The iterative processes of negotiation and navigation of our exchanges and interactions with participants were contextually framed and situated. Murib and Soss (2015) note the importance of shifting "analytic attention from attributes of social actors to the attributes of relations – their terms and operations, the norms that regulate interactions, the structure of roles and role expectations" (Murib/Soss 2015: 625). In this respect, whilst centering ourselves and participants

as actors shows the relationality of power (see Choo/Ferree 2010), it is important to also reflect on the impact of the context of the way we invoked and imposed intersections.

As work-related, our research settings presented themselves as specific sites of co-construction for ourselves and participants in distinct roles. For instance, rapport trajectories largely rely on the use of informal strategies to find commonality and familiarity to develop trust (see Pitts/Miller-Day 2007); however, in workplace settings, issues of professionalism, credibility and legitimacy help to establish rapport and influence the strength of the researcher-participant relationship. For example, discussions highlight the challenges of interviewing up (see Smith 2006) as well as the politics of interviewing that may see participants affirm their own importance as sources of unique information. Some argue that research in organizational settings requires "maintaining good etiquette with all participants to ensure the highest professional standards" (Harvey 2010: 193). As a result, our research settings dictated which and how intersectional invocations and impositions were mobilised.

This situatedness is also important in terms of distinctions between our experiences that the intersectional reflexive lens allowed us to capture; for instance, interpersonal legitimacy relied on the contextual framing where ideas of privilege are differentially constructed, despite both settings sharing similarities in terms of genealogies of coloniality (see Rodriguez/Ridgway 2023). Whilst we both self-identify as ethnic minority women, the invocations and impositions that operated for both of us within an intersectional spectrum that included race, gender, class, age, nationality, role, intellect, and authority were mobilised contextually in different ways. Whereas for one of us privilege was articulated in relation to classed ethnicity, for the other, privilege was articulated in relation to nationality.

Structural, societal, institutional level

Wider societal structures and hierarchies of inequality were reproduced within our research exchanges with participants based on accepted/expected ideas of prestige, recognition, values and norms that reflect the racialised, gendered, aged and classed societal order. Both of us were doctoral students in universities in the Global North (United Kingdom) conducting research in the Global South (Dominican Republic and UAE). In this respect, our experiences of fieldwork are also experiences of academic domination, where invocations and impositions served the purpose of reaffirming our roles within a research tradition of intellectual entitlement.

Whilst we recognise these as instances of negotiated gains, losses, and shifts, these are interconnected where ours and participants' subjectivities and the relational dynamics we developed sit within a matrix of power relations that ultimately drives the production of research knowledge. At the center of this matrix sits the academic imperialism embedded in both society and academia (see Kim 2020). As such, how we construct ourselves also served the purpose of the broader macro-structures that reproduce controlling mechanisms, e.g control of the research, of our portrayed personas as researchers from British universities, of narratives, of disclosure.

The invocations and impositions we have identified must also be located as part of the structural fabric of the societies where we conducted our doctoral projects. The salience of the patriarchal social order in both contexts (see Baud 1997; Rodriguez 2013; Rodriguez, Ridgway and

Kemp 2019) is important to understand what shapes the structures, societal dynamics, and institutions in our research settings. In this respect, negotiating and navigating the researcher-participant relationship was not detached from the regulatory impositions placed by this order and the survival of our research fieldwork required accommodating our compliance and resistance, engaging in acceptable forms of agency that ultimately (re)produced academia as well as the contexts of our work.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have shown the usefulness of intersectional reflexivity to develop more insightful reflexive accounts that help to highlight the complexities of researcher-participant exchanges that ordinarily are not brought to the spotlight in reflexive accounts. We expanded the discussion about reflexivity showing the importance of an intersectionality lens to explicitly address the ways in which racialised, gendered, classed, aged invocations and impositions shape researcher-participant exchanges, which is the first contribution of this paper. The problematisation of how researchers and participants deploy intersecting identities during research interactions to respond to the co-constructed and co-produced dynamics with participants highlights the structural relations of domination central to how the research process unfolds (see Hulko 2009). Thus, the paper has enriched methodological discussions by adding further insight into how to enhance reporting of researcher accountability.

We have shown the benefit of intersectional reflexivity where we approach the reflexive process with intersectional intentionality to avoid binary thinking that neglects nuances in the researcher-participant relationship. This is fundamental as we grapple with research as an embodied experience where we articulate what is of importance and decide how we approach its exploration (see Prasad 2014; Pullen/Rhodes 2014, 2015; Thanem/Knights 2019). The paper contributes to an understanding of how, through our choices, we "use the political to reflect on the cultural, social and political" (Jones/Calafell 2012: 957), where our vulnerabilities are used to illustrate not only privilege and its implications, but also disadvantage as well as the ways in which we challenge, renegotiate or navigate them as part of a wider framework of reflexivities of discomfort (see Pillow 2003).

In general, the paper calls for the adoption of intersectional reflexivity by shifting the understanding of research and recognising that it is a co-constructed process where multiple selves engage in agentic intersectional multiplicity. The result is a bricolage of intersectional invocations and impositions entangled as part of individual techniques of the self that help both researchers and participants to navigate research exchanges and interactions. To support the adoption of an intersectional reflexive approach, the paper makes a third contribution in the form of a working tool to help researchers engaging in reflexivity to understand how they can adopt an intersectional lens and the benefits of doing so to move beyond the narration of researcher power in reflexive accounts and engage with questions that unveil the in-betweenness of researcher-participant exchanges.

Considering future avenues of methodological advancement, the main points raised in this paper pertain to how processes of fluidity and multiplicity of identity are complex and shape whom and how researchers become during exchanges with participants. Less self-indulgent and

more honest reflexive accounts of researcher accountability should move away from reflections that manufacture sanitized accounts; given the focus on the simultaneity of privilege and disadvantage, which calls for the recognition of agency and purpose in the way we mobilize our identities, intersectional reflexivity facilitates a more nuanced interrogation. In addition, the different levels of intersectional reflexive analysis that we have proposed enable a richer intertextual effort that considers micro, meso and micro levels. This has much potential to show the research process as a site of gendered, racialized, ethnicized, aged, and classed dynamics. This is important in order to recognise how the research process is impacted by the encounter of the array of intersecting identities of both researcher and participants (see Ramazanoglu 1989).

In sum, research exchanges and interactions must be looked at in a more nuanced way and we should reformulate the exploration of researcher self-accountability. In addition, scrutinizing how intersectional identities are (re)positioned in research exchanges and interactions also has the potential to make us rethink how, through our methodological praxis, we address some of the ethical and social justice dilemmas that characterize qualitative research. Finally, intersectional reflexivity is an analytical tool with the potential to challenge oppressions embedded within methodology and methods, an emerging area of discussion (see Kingdon 2005; Macbeth 2001; Ryan/Gokten 2006) where more work is still needed.

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