5-27-2021

The Chimera: Multiple Selves, Conflicting Desires, and Fluctuating Power Relations in Qualitative Research

Su Jung Um
Gyeonggi Institute of Education, sujung0911@gmail.com

The Chimera: Multiple Selves, Conflicting Desires, and Fluctuating Power Relations in Qualitative Research

Abstract

In this article, I (re)constructed and (re)presented a dialogic inquiry among my chimeric selves engaged in a study which I conducted from 2013 to 2017 to examine teaching experiences of graduates from a social justice-oriented preservice program. I interrogated the roles of my different, disparate, and discontinuous selves in the research process – as a former teacher, a former instructor of my research participants, a researcher with particular academic and political opinions, and as a foreigner working toward a doctoral degree from/in a U.S. higher education institution. In this article, I demonstrated how my chimeric selves with conflicting desires and agendas merged and clashed in the research process. I also portrayed how my chimeric selves added layers to the complex relationship between the participants and me and, accordingly, how power relations in the research were momentary and uncontrollably shifting.

Keywords

ethnography self-reflexivity, researcher subjectivity, power relations, poststructuralism, postcolonialism

Creative Commons License

The Chimera:
Multiple Selves, Conflicting Desires, and Fluctuating Power Relations in Qualitative Research

Su Jung Um
Gyeonggi Institute of Education, South Korea

In this article, I (re)constructed and (re)presented a dialogic inquiry among my chimeric selves engaged in a study which I conducted from 2013 to 2017 to examine teaching experiences of graduates from a social justice-oriented preservice program. I interrogated the roles of my different, disparate, and discontinuous selves in the research process – as a former teacher, a former instructor of my research participants, a researcher with particular academic and political opinions, and as a foreigner working toward a doctoral degree from/in a U.S. higher education institution. In this article, I demonstrated how my chimeric selves with conflicting desires and agendas merged and clashed in the research process. I also portrayed how my chimeric selves added layers to the complex relationship between the participants and me and, accordingly, how power relations in the research were momentary and uncontrollably shifting.

Keywords: ethnography self-reflexivity, researcher subjectivity, power relations, poststructuralism, postcolonialism

She was of divine race, not of men, in the fore part a lion, in the hinder a serpent, and in the middle a goat, breathing forth in terrible manner the force of blazing fire. And Bellerophon slew her, trusting the signs of the gods. (Homer, *Iliad*, book 6, line 181, 1999)

In Greek mythology, the Chimera is a hybrid creature, composed of the parts of more than one animal. Homer depicts the Chimera as a female, fire-breathing animal whose body consists of various bits of lion, goat, and serpent. I see a connection between the Chimera and me as I examine myself as a researcher with a reflexive glance. In a research process, I repeatedly encounter my multiple selves with different, often conflicting (but not always) desires, agendas, and positions.

In this article, I seek to examine the complex ways in which my multiple competing selves might have informed the process of my dissertation research (Um, 2017, 2019a, 2019b). I attempt to scrutinize what I knew, how I thought I knew, and how I used my ways of knowing to make decisions as a researcher, while also attempting to explain how my subjectivity had been discursively constructed within particular social, political, cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. Pillow (2003) critiques that researchers use various strategies of reflexivity in ways that depend on a singular, stable, conscious, and knowable subject to assure that their research is more valid and, consequently, to acquire a degree of comfort. Pillow proposes a concept, "reflexivity of discomfort" (p. 188), which refers to a reflexivity where researchers strive to "know" their subjects and selves while simultaneously rendering the knowing as uncomfortable and tenuous. Persuaded by Pillow's notion of uncomfortable reflexivity, I write this article as a means to keep "troubling" my position as a researcher, who might be complicit in producing linear, fixed, and deterministic accounts *about* and *for* my research subjects and

myself. Pushing myself towards "the uncomfortable," I strive to interrogate my particular ways of interpreting, (re)constructing, and (re)presenting my research participants' and my own experiences, realities, and truths. The notion of uncomfortable reflexivity pushes me to recognize my own limits of reflexivity and to commit to the constant struggles over "the problematics" of doing research, which create challenges and dilemmas without a promising solution.

I conducted my dissertation study from 2013 to 2017. I examined three public school teachers' subjective interpretations and constructions of their teaching experiences through a theoretical framework informed by Homi Bhabha (Um, 2017). More specifically, I attended to the tension the teachers might or might not feel between the ideals of social justice highlighted in their preservice program and their day-to-day school contexts. The participant teachers were graduates from a preservice program at a large private university in a northeastern state of the United States. As their instructor at the university, I had known the teachers for years. Narrative forms of qualitative inquiry provided the framework for the methodology of the study. In-depth interviews served as the primary means of data construction. In the study, I found that schools were sites shaped and constrained by various competing discourses, which delineated meanings of education in drastically different ways; the teachers encountered conflicting, and even contradictory, demands and expectations. I demonstrated how they deployed the politics of hybridity as a creative tactic for their daily negotiations (Bhabha, 1994). In other words, to negotiate the differences constituted through the competing discourses, the teachers hybridized them. For example, the teachers addressed the tension between the institutional demands of teaching to the state standards and their commitment to socially just teaching by creating a hybrid way of teaching: *standardized teaching for social justice*. I analyzed how their negotiatory acts contributed to making the existing discourses take on new meanings and unsettling the very conditions that imposed the limits on their teaching.

In this article, I aim to interrogate how my chimeric selves might have informed the research process: my different, disparate, and discontinuous selves as a former elementary school teacher, former instructor in the preservice program that my research participants graduated from, researcher with interests in poststructuralism and postcolonialism, and as a Korean working toward a doctoral degree from/in a U.S. higher education institution with a foreign passport and using English as a second language. I (re)construct and (re)present a dialogic inquiry among my multiple selves by interrogating the research process from a self-reflexive stance. I seek to question how my subjectivity might have informed the construction, interpretation, and representation of the research participants' experiences while constantly reminding myself of my limited capacity for self-reflexivity. While I attempt to speak "as" a teacher, instructor, researcher, and so on in this article, I recognize that I am not the sum of such singular, fixed, and transparent identity categories (Lather, 2000; St. Pierre, 2000). The concept of "under erasure," which refers to the practice of writing and crossing it out, offers a strategic tool to do something and critique it simultaneously. Working under erasure entails "keeping something visible but crossed out in order to avoid universalizing or monumentalizing it, keeping it as both limit and resource" (Lather & Clemens, 2011, p. 183). From this perspective, rather than withdrawing any attempts to speak "as" a this or that, I seek to enact it "under erasure". In other words, I rely on the practice of speaking as someone *and* problematize how it essentializes and limits the pursuit of my subjectivity at the same time.

Through this script, I attempt to portray how my multiple selves with conflicting desires and agendas merged and clashed in the research process and how power dynamics in the research interaction became visible and shifted. However, I would like to offer the readers a "precautionary statement":

CAUTION: DO NOT READ THIS AS THE MERE REFLECTION OF MY INNER DIALOGUE.

The voices of my chimeric selves should be considered as heuristic devices employed for analytical purposes, rather than preexisting entities. First, my chimeric selves are not mutually exclusive within preserved boundaries; rather, they are constantly influenced by each other. It is often hard to tell which statements belong where and with whom. Second, my chimeric selves do not emerge deliberately and predictably; instead, they shift from one to another momentarily, intersect in a complex way, and are all entangled with each other. Thus, the discursive interactions of my multiple selves are not neatly contained in this ordinary form of conversation in which turn-taking is the norm. Third, some parts of me that I am not aware of and, thus, are not included in this script might play invisible but significant roles in the research process. Last, my retrospective position adds to the ambiguity of this text. Writing this script in 2020, I look back my past experiences of conducting the dissertation study from 2013 to 2017. I acknowledge my inability to "return" to the "uncontaminated" past because my value systems and frames of reference constantly change over time. Therefore, the following script is unavoidably partial, fragmented, and incomplete.

My Multiple Selves with Desires and Agendas

Researcher "I": I approached the study with the assumption that interviewing is "the complex play of conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, fears, power, desires, and needs on the part of both" my research participants and me (Scheurich, 2013, p. 73). While resisting the myth of objectivity and neutrality in research, I was concerned about the possible ways in which I shaped and limited the teachers' narratives in the interviews. I questioned what desires and agendas I brought with me and inserted into the interview interactions.

Teacher "I": I was an elementary school teacher. I found myself in the stories of my research participants. Their dilemmas and concerns were not dissimilar to what I wrestled with as a teacher. When they told their stories of frustration, small victory, and accomplishment in interviews, I felt the urge to tell them my own stories. I actually shared my stories several times with the teachers in the interviews. It was out of my eagerness to communicate that I went through something similar, and thus, that I understood what they meant.

Researcher "I": However, wasn't it different from joining in a casual conversation with your teacher friends? For me, it was an interview through which I desired knowledge rather than building a relationship. I had to consider potential consequences of telling and not telling my stories to my research participants. Looking back, as a researcher, I was eager to demonstrate the affinity that I assumed to "share" with my research participants. I wished to express how I empathized with them.

Critical "I": Did you take the concept of empathy naively without considering any critique? Lather (2000) critiques "the liberal embrace of empathy that reduces otherness to sameness" (p. 19). In attempting to practice empathy toward gaining a better understanding of other individuals, researchers may overlook differences that cannot be fully acknowledged. An empathetic approach to understanding may exert a form of violence; it is the violence of "forcing understandable identities, overlooking differences for the sake of a comforting, self-justifying rush of identification" (Lather,

2000, p. 20). In the guise of empathy, researchers may seek to grasp the unknowable of their research participants and "contain" them within their own framework. Lather (2000) encourages researchers to move away from the fantasies of mutuality, consensus, and sameness that the concept of empathy signifies.

Researcher "I": I did acknowledge the competing discourses of empathy circulating in the communities of qualitative researchers. A textbook that introduced me to qualitative research stated that researchers should be able to observe and listen from the participants' standpoint and that empathy would enable them to do so; that is, empathy would help researchers uncover how people "really" think. However, I also recognized poststructuralists' critique of this romanticized conceptualization of empathy. The competing discourses of empathy actually made me feel uneasy to tell my stories to the participants as a way of communicating how I was similar to them and, thus, able to understand them. I felt uncomfortable intervening with my own stories and making any gestures that demonstrated my affinity with them.

Korean "I": It is interesting that you strived to show your similarity to the teachers while I continuously recognized how I was different from them throughout the interview process. I still cannot forget how exotic the elementary school was that I visited for the first time in the U.S. It was located in the Bay Area of northern California. The one-story brick building with a spacious playground and front lawn looked much different from the Korean schools, the cookie-cutter type of four to five-story concrete buildings with a dirt playground. The different behavioral norms, dress codes, disciplinary practices, teaching strategies, and learning materials made me feel unreal as if it was my first time to visit what is called "school." When I started to supervise student teachers in public schools in the U.S., I often found myself having difficulties in grasping what anyone would know having gone through the U.S. system themselves. While supervising student teachers, my own perception of my "foreignness" heightened the feeling of insecurity. In the interviews, my limited knowledge and experience in American schools created several moments in which I had difficulty in understanding what the research participants discussed (e.g., explanations of tenure process at school, construction of school curriculum, and the decertification procedure for students with disabilities). I was constantly reminded of my own difference in every stage of the study. In this sense, it is interesting to me that you were eager to shed light on the commonalities while hiding the differences in the closet.

Critical "I": Dealing with the differences from the teachers was an important issue to me, too. There was a case in which Jenny[1], one of the research participants, expressed her opinion that I strongly disagreed with. Jenny was teaching at Lincoln Elementary, an urban school located in a neighborhood called Burlington in a Northeastern state. Her school served predominantly Hispanic and African American students from working-class families. In the interview, describing the neighborhood environment, Jenny explained that her students were more likely to be exposed to various risk factors including parents' verbal and emotional abuse than their affluent counterparts. She gave an example. Jenny described an incident that happened a few weeks before the interview. A mother entered her classroom and confronted Jenny because she thought another kid stole her son's snack. The mother's emotion exploded. Jenny pointed out the mother's emotional instability and the possibility that it was actually hurting her

---

[1] This is a pseudonym. All names for schools, locations, and people have been provided pseudonyms as well.

son. Jenny added how she was often frustrated with some of the parents (like the one she was describing) who hurt their children in a way that they were not aware of.

I could identify the discourse of cultural deprivation in Jenny's narrative. The discourse of cultural deprivation emerged in the U.S. in the 1960s to respond to the racially and economically stratified society. President Lyndon Johnson called for a "war on poverty" (Dudley-Marling, 2007). In the 1960s, scholars such as Bloom et al. (1965), Bettleheim (1965), and Riessman (1962) proposed the theories of cultural deprivation that attributed poor and racial minorities' low achievement to their cultural deficit (Ladson-Billings, 1999). These theories supported launching of compensatory educational programs including the Head Start Program. While alternative perspectives have been proposed, the discourse of cultural deprivation still remains powerful in the current laws and policies that aim to counter the effects of poverty (e.g., Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) (Giroux & Schmidt, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1999). The discourse of cultural deprivation seemed to constitute the ways in which Jenny comprehended her students, their families, and the school neighborhood.

Teacher "I": I support your critical analysis of Jenny's narrative. Yet, I felt ambivalent. Her story reminded me of a similar experience I had as a teacher. I remembered how I interpreted it from a deficit perspective at that time. I decided to share my story with Jenny. One day, a mother came to my class. She requested a refund for her daughter's lunch money, approximately $40, for the previous month by arguing that her child often missed school meals due to frequent absences. Explaining school policies, I apologized for not being able to refund the money back. She suddenly started to yell at me. With rage, the mother questioned if I treated her in that way because she had never "bribed" me like any other "ordinary" parents. Telling this story to Jenny, I explained that I was disconcerted by these comments and that her family's socioeconomic status heightened my feeling of discomfort in the situation. I confessed that I took up the discourse of cultural deprivation to interpret the event at that moment. I added how my encounter with critical scholarship (e.g., feminism, critical race theory, disability studies, critical multiculturalism) pushed me to interrogate the deficit assumptions I made and their possible impacts on my partnerships with families.

Researcher "I": Voicing my opinion, I immediately felt inadequate as a researcher. I usually did not exhibit my thoughts overtly with my research participants in interviews. When I felt the urge to share my ideas that were different from theirs, I chose much subtler ways such as showing my surprise, requesting further explanation, and presenting alternative arguments while distancing myself from them (e.g., "some teachers argue that"). However, in this particular case with Jenny, I demonstrated my different opinion more forthrightly. I deviated from the researcher role, which I associated with the image of a curious and respectful inquirer. I was afraid that my comment could hurt Jenny's feelings and shut down her openness in the interview. Nevertheless, I simultaneously justified it as a "probe." More accurately speaking, I hoped that Jenny considered my comment as an invitation for elaborating her interpretation of the incident. However, I knew that I failed when Jenny responded to my comment. She stated:

I feel like, oh, well…maybe that'll [what you just said will] help me deal with them [parents of my students] more appropriately. I struggle because I want to show love to the parents and I want them to know that I'm not just there for my job. I'm there because I genuinely care about their children and them as parents. I think it's hard because sometimes I don't.... That's something that I need to work on: how do I get the parents

more involved and connected so that I can open that kind of communication and relationship? I feel like a lot of times the parents, you know, do those things because... trust and that [trusting] relationship's not there. So that's something that I need to work on. (Interview, May 6, 2013)

It was evident that Jenny considered my comment as her former instructor's advice, not as the researcher's probe. Taking the "advice," she identified what she would "need to work on": building a trusting relationship with the parents. My comment was far from an open-ended invitation; rather it functioned as an intervention intended to modify one's beliefs and behaviors. With the directed and close-ended comment, I limited the possibilities of what Jenny *could* and *might* have said.

Instructor "I": As you said, Jenny's response at the particular moment positioned me as her instructor once more. It resembled the responses of Jenny and many other preservice teachers who I worked with, to the feedback I offered them. I worked in the teacher education program, which emphasized teaching for social justice, for four years. One of my main roles as an instructor was to "supervise" student teachers. The job responsibilities included reading student teachers' lesson plans, observing their lessons, having debriefing sessions after their observed lessons, reading and commenting on their weekly student teaching journals, and running meetings with their cooperating teachers for midterm and final evaluation. The instructor job trained me to develop a particular "habit": *evaluating* and *teaching* student teachers based on my understanding of what "socially just teaching" meant and might look like. I often identified how their knowledge, beliefs, and practices might work against what I conceived as "socially just teaching." Then, I utilized some pedagogical strategies to push them to critically scrutinize their underlying assumptions on teaching, learning, and schooling and "revise" their knowledge, belief system, and teaching practice. The pedagogical strategies that I deployed, for the purpose of teaching, included posing questions, distributing resources such as academic articles, YouTube videos, films, and books, and sharing stories about other teachers and myself. As I was authorized to evaluate and teach student teachers, my relationship with them was inevitably implicated within an imbalanced power dynamic.

Thus, myself as a former instructor in the teacher education program seemed to intervene with my research process. I often caught myself playing my habitual role as their former instructor. When my research participants told me about their efforts to disrupt oppressive and exclusionary schooling practices, I was excited and proud of them. When their practices appeared to be heavily influenced by the dominant discourses, with which I quite often disagreed, I desired to advise and teach them to examine their underlying assumptions, explore potential consequences of the assumptions, and rethink the particular pedagogical approach. I battled with my impulse to evaluate and teach them. The interview excerpt demonstrated how I, as an instructor, slipped into the moment and inserted my agenda into our conversation.

Researcher "I": We, my multiple selves, played our habitual roles and constantly inserted our desires and agendas, which were competing and mostly conflicting, into the interview conversations. It became more evident that an interview is never transparent dialogue between fully conscious participants; rather, it is a complex, indeterminate, ambiguous, and uncontrollable process by which participants consciously and unconsciously bring their own baggage (e.g., ontological and epistemological assumptions, conceptual

schemes, background experiences, social positionality) to their interactions (Scheurich, 2013).

Unstable and Reversible Power Relations in Research

Researcher "I": Writing "Jenny's story" in my dissertation, I decided not to mention about the incident in which I commented on her telling about the mother who was upset because she believed her son's snacks were stolen. I simply focused on what Jenny experienced and how she interpreted it. I wrote:

> The discourse of cultural deprivation circulated at Lincoln Elementary and constituted the ways in which administrators and teachers comprehended the population of students and their families. This discourse informed the school-wide teaching approach and individual teachers' pedagogical decision-making as it constructed what was more urgent to teach to the "Burlington kids." The minutiae of everyday life in the school were also framed through the discourse of cultural deprivation. Jenny's understanding of "the reality" was located in this particular historical and political context. (Um, 2017, p. 156)

> I identified and critiqued the discourse of cultural deprivation that Jenny deployed to frame the particular event with the mother. I challenged the assumption about the parent, which Jenny unconsciously made.

Teacher "I": Actually, I felt relieved. When I shared my own teaching experience in the interview with Jenny, part of me became instrumentalized for the purpose of producing "better" data. Telling my story, I felt that my vulnerability was heightened. As I was positioned as an object for investigation, I sensed a certain amount of anxiety about being judged by Jenny and potentially the readers. However, as my teaching story get eliminated in the text, I could be hidden from being read and interpreted by the readers. I remained intact.

Researcher "I": Moreover, I did not want the readers to notice my unskillfulness as a researcher. I could be invisible whereas Jenny became a visible object waiting to be read, interpreted, and analyzed. As a researcher, I was given the authority to decide what to include and exclude in my writing. I had control over the ways in which my research participants as well as I were represented. This clearly showed the unequal power relation between my research participants and me.

Critical "I": How do you conceptualize power? I challenge the humanist concept of power as a property that one could "possess" and "share." I am not persuaded by the idea that power is something that can be wielded by individuals or groups through the acts of domination or coercion. Foucault (1988) states, "power is everywhere, is exercised in micro-settings and through technical means in specific institutional sites" (p. 63). Power pervades every aspect of research; it creates the "knower," the "known," and the knowledge. However, from the Foucauldian perspective, the power relations are always heterogeneous, unbalanced, and unstable. It would be important to unmask the complex ways in which power operated in the research process rather than to fixate them in one way or at one location.

Researcher "I": When taking up the Foucauldian perspective, it is impossible to totalize power relations in research. In interviews, researchers ask questions and look for answers, and their research participants are expected to have them. Thus, to some extent, the respondents are positioned in power because the interviewers are dependent on them (Spivak, 1990). Looking back, I was dependent on the participants for their narratives related to the research topic; however, they might have felt vulnerable because they were not sure if they were on the "right" track or because they were exposed to others' judgment. I was the one who set the stage, controlled the script, and initiated the questionings. Nevertheless, at the same time, the participants might have engaged in controlling some parts of the interviews even though I did not acknowledge them (Scheurich, 2013). They might have just told me what I wanted to hear or inserted their own agendas into our interviews. The power dynamics in my research might be much more fluctuating than I initially thought.

Instructor "I": I agree. Our habitual roles as an instructor or as a student added another layer to the complex relations of power between my research participants and me. We unconsciously kept returning to our former relationship. Accordingly, my interview questions did not function purely as an invitation to (co)construct narratives of their subjective experiences but also as an evaluative tool; my gestures to probe my participants' conceptual understanding were often interpreted, at least from my situated perspectives, as a pedagogical intervention. The power dynamic embedded in the research was further complicated as we unconsciously brought back our instructor-student relationship, which was also infused with power.

Korean "I": I did not feel the same way. In the U.S., I never felt fully empowered even in a situation in which I was authorized to do certain things (e.g., being authorized to evaluate and teach student teachers as their instructor). I was always too conscious of my foreignness, and this created a feeling of insecurity and anxiety. I was concerned about the potential consequences of my limited English proficiency as well as my lack of schooling in the U.S. I worried that my research participants might see me as an incompetent researcher. Living in the U.S., I witnessed how my foreignness created the gap between my understanding of who I am and others' attempts to position me. Thus, I utilized some tactics to keep my sense of self from deteriorating. As I carefully prepared for interview protocols and shared summaries of the interview questions with my participants, I tried to avoid the potential situation in which my broken English interfered with the interviews. When I had difficulty in understanding aspects of the American school in the interviews, I positioned myself as a "learner" so that it would be natural to wonder, inquire, and learn. Through these small tactics, which I deployed mostly unconsciously, I might strive to negotiate my sense of self in relation to larger social world rather than merely my research participants. Momentarily, it appeared to me that the three teachers were not simply my research participants, but members of the dominant and privileged culture. My cultural and linguistic difference made my relationship with the research participants even more unstable. This part of me, who possesses a foreign passport and speaks broken English, was missing in the self-reflexive analysis of my power-infused position as a researcher and as an instructor.

Researcher "I": I am not negating the mobile, unstable, and reversible nature of my relationship with my research participants. However, I cannot deny that under the name of researcher, I have been authorized, or authorized myself, to interpret, analyze, and write about the teachers participating in my research. Let me return to the point where I made

my Teacher "I" invisible in my research text while shedding light on Jenny. At that moment, I occupied the position of a speaking (knowing) subject while placing Jenny in the position of a spoken (knowable) object. I even invited the readers for further interpretations of what Jenny said. Jenny became an object available for external scrutiny.

Critical "I": Are you concerned about epistemic violence, which Spivak (1985) refers to as violence exerted through practices of knowledge production intertwined with hegemonic ideology? In *Feminism without Borders*, Mohanty (2003) uses the concept of epistemic violence to critique the violent appropriation of knowledge that privileges "Western" feminists over "Third World" women. Mohanty (2003) argues that "Western feminists alone become the true subjects" whereas "Third World women never rise above the debilitating generality of their object status" (p. 39). Like Mohanty, you utilized the binary of subject/object to analyze the unequal power relation between your research participants and you. Furthermore, you depended on the metaphor of vision, visible-ness/invisible-ness, to demonstrate how privileged you were as a researcher. You interrogated how the privilege was constructed in the process by which you chose to remain invisible. You felt uneasy that your invisibility might have possibly been translated into the omnipotent and authorial voice.

I would like to interrupt you with the notion of "evil eye" that Bhabha (1994) develops. This is the poem written by Meiling Jin, a black female migrant in England. Bhabha quotes this poem to critique colonial discourse that desires to fix the identity of the colonial subject.

We arrived in the Northern Hemisphere
when summer was set in its way
running from the flames that lit the sky
over the Plantation.
[…]
One day I learnt
a secret art,
Invisible-Ness, it was called
I think it worked
as even now you look
but never see me…
Only my eyes will remain to watch and to haunt,
and to turn your dreams
to chaos. (as cited in Bhabha, 1994, p. 65)

Bhabha explains that colonial discourse produces the colonized as a fixed subject that is entirely knowable and visible. However, borrowing Fanon's words, Bhabha (1994) argues that the colonial subjects are always "overdetermined from without" (p. 60). Although they are constructed as whiteness's Other through the existing scheme of representation, no one has direct access to the "essence" of who they are. Therefore, one cannot be fully recognized, and accordingly present, without his or her absence acknowledged.

Re-reading the poem in this context, Jin, the poet, probably encountered the colonial gaze that sought to fixate her. She was constituted through "the voyeuristic desire for the fixity of sexual difference and the fetishistic desire for racist stereotypes"

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 76). In the poem, Jin wrote that she learned the "secret art of invisible-ness" that enabled her to "look without being seen" (p. 47), which was to pass unnoticed. She realized that anyone would be able to fully recognize her outside the colonial discourses; that is, she could never be fixed and stereotyped because she was invisible. Invisibility did not mean disappearance. Remaining invisible, Meiling Jin's eyes kept watching those who desired to see her reversely. Bhabha (1994) call them "evil eyes." Jin returned the gaze back to the colonizer in the Northern Hemisphere.

       I find Bhabha's analysis of the poem interesting. Bhabha's notion of evil eye reminds me of the crisis in the representation of personhood. Bhabha (1994) challenges researchers to re-think their capacity to recognize and understand their research subjects. What does it mean for you that your research participants are invisible, incalculable, and, thus, unrepresentable? How does Bhabha's notion of "evil eyes" enable you to complicate the ways of framing your relationship with your research participants?

Researcher "I": As Jin writes, "as even now you look/but never see me" in her poem, my readers, as well as I, never "see" my research participants. Despite their actual words, no one can find out who they are or what they mean. I cannot simply portray the "real them"; instead, I construct an image of each of my research participants. What I need to do, as a researcher, in this postmodern crisis of representation is to persistently remind the readers and myself that something is always missed in, and exceeds, the image. That is, neither my participants nor I can be neatly contained in the partial and incomplete image that I produce as a researcher.

       Moreover, the notion of evil eye frustrates my impulse to use the binary of invisible subject and visible object to frame the unequal relationship between my research participants and me. Bhabha (1994) explains that Jin does not remain as an object of the gaze of the Master but reverses the direction of the gaze with her evil eye. The gaze is not one way. I, as a researcher, am constantly confronted by the evil eye of my research participants. While I was writing about Jenny and other teacher participants in the study, I was conscious of some of the possible ways in which they interpreted me and my writing. My research participants' ghostly presence was manifested in the research process. Therefore, I cannot totalize the unequal relationship by locking my research participants into the position of purely victimized object. I find myself constantly trying to fix and constrain my relationship with my research participants at this very moment at which I seek to reveal its ambivalence. What an irony it is!

       In this article, I have critically examined some ways in which my subjectivity might have functioned to produce and regulate the process of knowledge construction. I have sought to offer insight on, and simultaneously question, the politics of representation by making it visible how I recognized, interpreted, constructed, and represented my research participants' experience. Particularly, I have been concerned with the clash and merge of my multiple selves with competing desires, intentions, and agendas.

       This is not merely to tell a confessional tale that unmasks and demystifies the research process for methodological assurance. Rather, this self-reflexive scrutiny is to attend to the complexities of doing qualitative research and to interrupt the Enlightenment assumptions often attached to it—the researcher is a reliable, unitary, and purposeful investigator who knows what she or he is doing; the researcher can have access to the authentic lived experiences of the researched through mutual understanding and meaning sharing; power inherent in the relationship between the researcher and the researched is unidirectional; the researcher can

"empower" the researched so that she or he has more control of the processes by which her or his words are given meaning. This self-reflexive interrogation is an attempt to look "awry" at the knowledge production in the research process (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). Through this interrogation, I call into question the authority of research that searches for authenticity in others' experiences and makes truth claims.

There is the tension between the desire to know and the limits to knowability (Lather, 2007). It is important to use the tension as the force of learning to rethink what research is and the knowledge it creates (MacLure, 2013). I do not advocate for the total abandonment of conventional methodologies. Instead, we, as researchers, should "translate" our own taken-for-granted practices to those more accountable to the complexities *and* consistently challenge them. Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes translation as a process of imitating "the original" that makes slight alterations and displacements. In the interview with Rutherford (1990), Bhabha explains that "the original" is not perfectly reproduced through translation, but it is "simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum" (p. 210). The translation of our research practices may create a space for something new to come; nevertheless, the newness should be the subject of critical scrutiny because "there is no exit from the lack of innocence in discursive stagings of knowledge" (Lather, 2007, p. 41). Then, our task is to find some creative ways to translate the familiar and the comfortable while being committed to on-going self-reflexivity.

References

Bettleheim, B. (1965). Teaching the disadvantaged. *National Education Association Journal, 54*, 8-12.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.

Bloom, B., Davis, A., & Hess, R. (1965). *Comprehensive education for cultural deprivation*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Dudley-Marling, C. (2007). *Living with uncertainty: The messy reality of classroom practice*. Heinemann.

Foucault, M. (1988). *The history of sexuality, Vol. 3: The care of the self* (R. Hurley, Trans.). Vintage.

Giroux, H. A., & Schmidt, M. (2004). Closing the achievement gap: A metaphor for children left behind. *Journal of Educational Chance, 5*, 213-228.

Homer et al. (1999). *Iliad* (A. T. Murray, Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Preparing teachers for diverse student populations; A critical race theory perspective. In A. Iran-Nejad & D. Pearson (Eds.), *Review of Research in Education 24*, 211-248. American Educational Research Association.

Lather, P. (2000). Against empathy voice and authenticity. *Kvinder, Kon & Forskning, 9*(4), 16-25.

Lather, P. (2007). *Getting lost: Feminist efforts toward a double(d) science*. State University of New York Press.

Lather, P., & Clemens, J. L. (2011). Postmodern studies in educational foundations. In S. Tozer, B. P. Gallegos, A. M. Henry, M. B. Greiner, & P. G. Price (Eds.), *Handbook of research in the social foundation of education* (pp. 179-194). Routledge.

MacLure, M. (2013). Researching without representation? Language and materiality in post-qualitative methodology. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 26*(6), 658-667.

Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Duke Press.

Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as

methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(2), 175-196.

Riessman, F. (1962). *The culturally deprived child*. Harper & Row.

Rutherford, J. (1990). The third space. Interview with Homi Bhabha. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 207-221). Lawrence & Wishart.

Scheurich, J. J. (2013). A postmodernist critique of research interviewing. In J. J. Scheurich (Ed.), *Research method in the postmodern* (3rd ed., pp. 61-79). Routledge.

Spivak, G. C. (1985). Can the subaltern speak? Speculation on widow sacrifice. *Wedge, 7*(8), 120-130.

Spivak, G. C. (1990). *The post-colonial critic: Interviews, strategies, dialogues*. Routledge.

St. Pierre, E. A. (2000). Poststructural feminism in education: An overview. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 13*(5), 477-515.

Um, S. J. (2017). *Politics of hybridity: A "social justice" curriculum and (othered) teacher stories of indeterminacy* [Doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University]. ProQuest Dissertation.

Um, S. J. (2019a). A teacher's dilemma in creating a democratic and socially just classroom. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 11*(5), 429-435.

Um, S. J. (2019b). Politics of hybridity: Teaching for social justice in an era of standards-based reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 81*, 74-83.

Author Note

Su Jung Um is an associate research fellow at Gyeonggi Institute of Education, Gyeonggi, South Korea. She has completed her Ed.D. in education in 2017 at Teachers College, Columbia University in the U.S. Her research interests include postfoundational analysis of ex/inclusive schooling cultures and practices, teacher education for "social justice," and qualitative research methodology. Please direct correspondence to sujung0911@gmail.com.

Article Citation