

6-4-2022

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Recommended APA Citation

Mohler, E. C., & Rudman, D. (2022). Negotiating the Insider/Outsider Researcher Position within Qualitative Disability Studies Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(6), 1511-1521. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5047>

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Abstract

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Keywords

reflexivity, subjectivity, unlearning, insider position, outsider position

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Negotiating the Insider/Outsider Researcher Position within Qualitative Disability Studies Research

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The subjectivity of qualitative researchers can be a contribution to qualitative research which at the same time requires commitment to on-going critical reflexivity regarding one's positionality. More specifically, we address how to navigate the possibility that researcher subjectivity can culminate in role-confusion when the researcher is highly familiar with the research setting or research participants, when positioned as an "insider." We do this by adopting a critical paradigm approach that investigates the efficacy of "unlearning" as a strategy for challenging one's assumptions as a researcher, particularly those assumptions that challenge the co-construction of knowledge that extends from research presuppositions. Drawing upon theoretical and methodological literature, we argue that intersubjective reflection is crucial to the process of unlearning. By critically reflecting on subjectivity, it becomes possible to deconstruct our research approach and its underlying assumptions, as well as our research findings. In turn, this creates space to unpack our role in how these approaches, assumptions, and findings are formulated, as well as space to challenge and reformulate these based on dialogue with participants. Through critical reflexivity addressing subjectivity and positionality in the context of research relations, researchers are challenged to consider how their insider knowledge, based on their individual experiences and personal meanings, can impinge on the research process.

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Introduction

Issues of subjectivity and research positionality are central in many approaches to qualitative research, with interpretivist, constructivist, and critically informed qualitative research acknowledging and valuing the contributions of a researcher's social experiences, values, norms, and perspectives to the co-construction of knowledge (Finlay, 2002). Conceptualisations of researcher positionality in qualitative research have historically fore-fronted the dichotomous classification of the insider and outsider positions. However, discourses concerning these positions have increasingly been critiqued as overly simplistic given that they essentialise identity categories and are consequently unable to consider the flexible and fluid nature of identities in research processes, or the intersectional nature of positionality (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008). Ideas about the space in-between directly challenge the dichotomy of the insider/outsider position. There is increasing recognition that researchers may possess both similarities with and differences from their research participants across dimensions such as race, gender, sexuality, ability status, and religion. This means that

researchers must address how they function as insiders and outsiders concurrently, and thereby occupy a space in-between as they shift between positions of similarity and difference which has implications throughout the research process (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008).

This paper is grounded within the first author's initial negotiation of her positionality as she embarks on her dissertation research. It evolved from a paper generated in the context of a qualitative methodology course taught by the second author. The paper has materialized from a process of reading and reflexive writing by Elizabeth, receipt of comments from Debbie designed to deepen reflexivity, and on-going dialogue between the authors. The paper shares Elizabeth's reflections on key readings and how these have informed my approach to negotiating the insider/outsider research position with qualitative disability studies research. The use of the word "I" and "my" in the paper refers to the first author. After introducing the central tensions to be addressed in the paper in relation to researcher role and positionality in qualitative disability studies research, I introduce my positionality and the evolving foci of my dissertation work. I then move onto to sharing what I have learned through the processes of reading, reflexive writing, and critical dialogue, pointing to ways forward in negotiating positionality that addresses its dynamic and fluid nature.

A key concern that I begin this process with was that of the fuzzy line between myself and my experiences as a disabled person and the topics I intend to study and the participants I hope to work with. For instance, how can I bring my own lived expertise and subjectivity into my research, but also guard against my experiences and perspectives becoming dominant in the knowledge constructed? As noted by Dwyer and Buckle (2009), role confusion can result when a researcher's positionality is such that it leads to assumed familiarity with the research setting, research participants, or experience or position being studied, which in turn, can work against achieving co-constructed knowledge (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). When role confusion occurs, the researcher can veer into becoming a participant and centring themselves in the process of knowledge production and interpretation (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Within the context of my dissertation work, I have become increasingly attuned to the imperative to address subjectivity and my positionality in this sense, due to my own experiences of disability and my intention to study experiences of attendant care with disabled persons. As a qualitative researcher with a visual disability who follows a constructivist epistemological framework, I recognise that while disability might be a marker of similarity of social positioning in many ways, it is also an embodied experience that is highly subjective and interacts with various positionalities (personal and professional). Therefore, disability is heterogenous and it is important that it is understood beyond my own experiences of it, and the ways in which my experiences have influenced my viewpoints on the broader topics I seek to study. Indeed, in disability studies, researchers have raised concerns with capturing the actions of participants in an authentic way, yet they may experience difficulties in (re)interpreting the actions of their research subjects without subscribing to disablist terms that perpetuate the victimisation of disabled people (Goodley, 1999). Goodley (1999) notes that "disability research *with* participants can fall into research *on* participants – when the only person benefiting is the researcher and their career aspirations" (p. 43, emphasis in original). While it has been proposed that disabled researchers within disabilities studies can work against perpetuation of such victimisation, the intersectional nature of positionality means that positionality continues to be examined as multiple, dynamic, and as in need of on-going scrutiny even when a researcher may occupy the status of disabled.

Taking a critical paradigm approach based on Finlay's (2002) conceptualization of intersubjectivity, I explore how the subjectivity of the researcher can be a contribution to qualitative research which at the same time requires commitment to on-going critical reflexivity regarding one's positionality. I will consider "unlearning" as an ongoing process for challenging one's assumptions as a researcher, particularly those assumptions that challenge

the acquisition of new knowledge through reflexive approaches. In the context of disability studies, how can researchers reflect upon and challenge pre-existing assumptions? To what extent do researchers' positionalities enable them to challenge pre-existing assumptions? I will show that by reflecting on one's own subjectivity and how it is shaped through and within one's positionality, it becomes possible to critically deconstruct one's research approach and its underlying assumptions, as well as one's research findings, and to unpack the role of the researcher in how these are formulated (Crooks et al., 2012). In the next section, I discuss my positionality as a critical researcher. Following this, I analyse the position of the researcher in qualitative research against the backdrop of the ontological tradition of subjectivity. This is followed by a discussion of unlearning and reflexive practice. In the final section, the paper concludes with a summary of its overarching argument and some key points.

My Positionality and the Practical Implications for Research

In my own research, which is situated in an urban context in a Canadian province, I aim to critically explore the narratives of adults with disabilities who use self-managed attendant services, in order to understand how self-directed options to attendant care foster and/or constrain occupational possibilities (a term used to denote what forms of everyday activity engagement become conceptualised as ideal and "worthy" of support through such services, and what forms of activity engagement are silenced, negated, and outside the purview of such services). My goal is to unpack broader societal, economic, and socio-political contexts that shape these experiences of engagement, and their implications for what come to be seen by adults with disabilities, their attendants, and others as what activities are possible and not possible in their lives. Against the backdrop of this emergent body of research, my research study seeks to address the following questions in relation to a specific funding program in operation in the context of the study: (a) What responsibilities are required of people with disabilities to self-manage attendants through the Ontario Direct Funding Program? (b) In what ways does the Ontario Direct Funding Program facilitate and enable community integration and participation? and (c) What are some challenges to the current Ontario Direct Funding model experienced by people with disabilities?

The nature of my research and the involvement of adults with disabilities means that I will be aiming to conduct "inclusive disability research." This approach presents the opportunity to create intersubjectivity in an experiential way because of shared disability embodiment (Chaudhry, 2019). Chaudhry (2019) has provided insight into how intersubjectivity is also created in a discursive way through dialogic exchanges during the co-construction of knowledge, which are linked to embodied experiences. This is instructive for me as a researcher who is preparing to go into the field because it creates awareness of the fact that as part of these processes, dialogic exchange and shared disability are consistently intertwined. Being aware of my own positionality as a researcher with a disability, I hold the view that my embodied practices can serve as a crucial reference point via which I can develop synergies with my participants, creating an intersubjective space that promotes the co-construction of disability knowledge. At the same time, tensions exist. I must remain acutely aware of the fact that even in contexts where both researchers and participants are living with a disability, people experience disability differently and these experiences are also determined by intersectionality including age, gender, and sex (Imrie, 2004).

I have provided two family members with support to access direct funded services, meaning that I also have a unique perspective and lived knowledge on the research topic. Inasmuch as I have certain privileges as researcher who is educated and has some insight into the complexities of the systems and processes that are under investigation in this research, I am acutely aware of my shifting between insider and outsider positions, which ultimately impinges

on processes of knowledge production. Indeed, as Rinaldi (2013) has noted, it is important for the researcher to position themselves in the overarching field of disability studies by disclosing their experiences. This is due to the impact that perspective and privilege have on knowledge production. Crucial to this is the recognition that “when researchers do not position themselves in their work, they may well be positioned anyway” (Rinaldi, 2013, p. 1). My positionality as a critical researcher goes hand in hand with adopting an embodied approach, which is predicated on the assumption that disability is underpinned by bodily difference. This introduces the possibility of the misreading of experiences as researchers seek to create embodied connections with research participants. It creates a paradox whereby attempts to critically deconstruct the researcher’s role become exercises in claims to authority (Finlay, 2002) and may exacerbate the power relations that naturally exist between researchers and their participants. This is something that I must be acutely aware of when addressing my research question; I must grapple with and reflect on how my identity and experience as a disabled researcher, or how my status as an insider, ultimately shapes my epistemological position as a qualitative researcher.

Against this backdrop, reflexivity constitutes an important tool for examining the impact of my perspective, presence, and position, thus revealing the unconscious motivations and implicit assumptions in my approach (Finlay, 2002). I am inclined towards adopting an intersubjective reflection approach to reflexivity (Finlay, 2002) in my research, which I explain further below. As a researcher whose practice is rooted in a critical paradigm perspective, I completely embrace the role of subjectivity in research and recognise its merits, although I also recognise that it needs to be continually unpacked throughout the research process. Subjectivity, as per Finlay’s (2002) definition, concerns a recognition of how the positionality of the researcher comprises a set of norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions that are socially constructed and generated through interactions in the world as part of a continual dynamic process. As a researcher with a visual disability, for example, I potentially bring to my research experiences, my own subjective interpretations of disability, which I draw upon based on my social interactions and the unique experiences that come with them. If disability is understood as socially constructed, then my personal experiences are shaped by the norms of my social environment which I may project onto others during the research process. There is, however, the imperative of managing the assumptions that I hold, so that I can truly understand the disability of others based on their experiences and not mine. It is through positionality, one acknowledges and addresses the various experiences that contribute to subjectivity, focusing on existing power relations or one’s position in relation to others. The exercise of writing this paper has provided nuanced insight, particularly from a disability studies approach, on the various strategies that can be employed to do this.

Positioning the Researcher in Qualitative Studies

The role that researchers occupy in relation to the research phenomenon under study is central within qualitative methodologies. The issue of subjectivist epistemology is crucial to such discussions because of the intimate role played by qualitative researchers during the data collection, analysis, and interpretive processes (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Taylor, 2011). The centrality of the qualitative researcher in these processes is invariably linked to the epistemological and ontological traditions within which qualitative research is based. Qualitative research informed by the “alternative paradigms,” that is, outside post positivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), is predicated on the ontological tradition of subjectivism which is based upon the assumption that knowledge about human existence can only be garnered through how that existence is socially constructed via human experiences (Fink, 2000). Understanding how individuals construct their experiences socially necessitates that social

research be performed as a form of field research that entails interactions between the researcher and the phenomenon under study as it is experienced and known by participants (Fink, 2000). Thus, regardless of the membership status adopted by the researcher, the positionality of the researcher remains an omnipresent dimension of the investigation as they bring their knowledge regarding human existence into the research (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Conceptualisations of the researcher position in qualitative research have historically been based on the dichotomous classification of the insider and outsider position. According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009):

“Insider research” refers to when researchers conduct research with populations of which they are also members ... so that the researcher shares an identity, language, and experiential base with the study participants. The complete membership role gives researchers a certain amount of legitimacy and/or stigma. (p. 58, emphasis in original)

Outsider research on the other hand, refers to when researchers conduct studies with populations or subjects that they are personally unfamiliar with (Gair, 2012). This lack of familiarity is purported to have the benefit of objectivity. The insider position has increasingly become conceptualised as a privileged position that enables researchers to gain a critical awareness of, and nuanced insight into, a research phenomenon through the researcher’s identification with the lived experiences of research participants (Gair, 2012).

The insider position is privileged in current discourses (see Couture et al., 2012; Irvine et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2000; Tinker & Armstrong, 2008), given the subjectivist position that this results in shared experiential knowledge (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), although positivist research methodology literature has historically privileged objective research as comparatively robust. Proponents of this view suggest that knowledge about a phenomenon cannot be successfully garnered without *a priori* experience of it (Bridges, 2001). In-group membership associated with the insider position is therefore believed to grant researchers a level of trust, openness, and acceptance that enables them to attain a more nuanced understanding of participants’ lives because they, too, share in those first-hand experiences. Insider research means that researchers are “one of them” and via this privileged position, researchers can acquire a depth of knowledge by virtue of the access they gain to groups, and consequently, their shared status with the research subjects (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). For some authors, this position has thus become synonymous with researcher legitimacy (Gair, 2012).

The insider position is, however, not without its limitations and counterarguments point to ways shared status can undermine the research process as it progresses. One argument is that assumptions of similarity between the researcher and participants might lead a researcher to disregard the importance of individual experiences, instead focusing on those aspects that align with researcher experience (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Insider epistemology could thus lead to conflation between the personal experiences of the researcher and the experiences of the group leading to role confusion between being a researcher and being a participant, who may set boundaries on data collection and analysis processes (Asselin, 2003; Hewitt, 2007). Closeness to research subjects can also undermine critical approaches and analysis (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008). According to Tinker and Armstrong (2008), “perceiving oneself as holding similar values or beliefs to a respondent may lead a researcher to assume a particular interpretation of the data. In contrast, a sense of distance may enable him or her to remain detached and view data critically” (p. 57). In the Disability Studies literature, the insider perspective has been conceptualised as concomitant with advantages because it draws upon insiders’ direct experience of disablement and facilitates culturally appropriate research (Brown, 2009). Consequently, the insider position is often articulated as empowering people with disabilities

in the research setting because it acknowledges their values and experience (Brown, 2009). Due to their direct experiences of disablement, such researchers also hold pre-assumptions which may influence both the research process and research outcomes. In this way, the insider position can undermine the research process because pre-assumptions about the experience of disability may obstruct broader insight about others' experiences.

Critiques of the outsider position have historically revolved around three overarching arguments (Bridges, 2001). First, epistemological arguments espoused the view that outsiders cannot accurately represent or understand the experiences of their research participants because they do not have phenomenological understandings of it (Bridges, 2001). This means that outsiders are inappropriate conveyors of knowledge about their research subjects. The second critique, which is based on questions of community and belonging, suggests that it is inappropriate for researchers to articulate the views of a group if they do not belong to it, and consequently have limited knowledge about its workings, norms, values, and codes. Third, ethical arguments have focused on how the "outsider" position may provoke exploitative or discriminatory behaviours. In the case of disability studies, for instance, it has been argued that outsider researchers often hold problematic assumptions, such as the idea that the problem of disability is rooted in the disabled as opposed to social constructions of, and norms associated with, disability (Bridges, 2001). This position is problematic and unhelpful given that it serves to perpetuate outmoded views that conceptualise disability as a purely medical condition, without recognising its social and political dimensions (Bridges, 2001).

In turn, it has been argued that such discriminatory assumptions about disability ignore issues of self-determination, agency, and human rights in these outmoded narratives, damaging the interests of disabled groups that are being researched (Bridges, 2001). While acknowledging there are inherent problems associated with binary classifications pertaining to the insider/outsider position, which ignore how researchers tend to occupy "a space between" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60) as well as power issues regarding varying definitions of insider and outsider that may be held by researchers and participants (Nunokoosing, 2000), thinking about research positionality remains essential to optimizing the credibility and sincerity of qualitative work (Tracy, 2010). Researchers, as well as participants, possess multiple identities which can result in experiencing, and being viewed, as concurrently an insider and outsider, thus shaping their interactions during the process of data gathering and the lens they bring to analysis and interpretation (Couture et al., 2012). Discourses relying on the dichotomy of insiders and outsiders are problematic because they essentialise categories and are therefore unable to consider the flexible and fluid nature of identities (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008). Ideas about the space in-between directly challenge the insider/outsider dichotomy, focusing on the simplistic assumptions that underpin such dualisms (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Dialectical approaches have shown that researchers may possess both similarities and differences with their research participants across dimensions such as race, gender, sexuality, and religion, which means that "holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference" (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008, p. 54). Moreover, whether positioned as insider or outsider in a particular interaction, all researchers, by virtue of their experiences or perceptions, may hold prejudicial assumptions related to the positionalities of participants, along lines connected to disability, gender, race, sexuality, and other social markers of identity. Consequently, all researchers are concurrently insiders and outsiders in every research setting; researchers shift between these positions of similarity and difference as they navigate the research process, but also in accordance with the perceptions of participants (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008; Villenas, 1996). Thus, navigation of this dynamic positioning becomes central to qualitative research.

On the basis of on-going critical reflexivity through literature engagement and dialogue, as will be discussed in the following section, reflexive practice, particularly intersubjective

reflection, and unlearning provide practices for researchers to obtain an on-going critical awareness of such issues and thus, remain alert for how their own ways of seeing the world, their participants, and the topics they are studying may be setting unintended boundaries on their research. Even in instances in which prejudicial assumptions remain latent in the consciousness of researchers, reflexive practice can create intelligent self-awareness and evoke social sensitivity so that researchers are able to engage in self-censorship and call out the actions of others (Bridges, 2001). As noted by Tinker and Armstrong (2008), researchers' consciousness of their status and latent worldviews can be leveraged as tools for self-regulation.

Reflexive Practice and Unlearning

My evolving dissertation work is situated in a critical paradigm. From this paradigm position, I seek to embrace my positionality as a disabled researcher as a strength (Goodley, 1999), while simultaneously ensuring that I engage in on-going critical reflexivity regarding my taken-for-granted assumptions about disability and attendant care and am open to thinking otherwise. Within a critical paradigm, for example, the researcher's axiological stance, what they value, is seen as inherently informing the research, and thus requiring on-going scrutiny and openness to change to avoid imposition of assumptions that are mis-aligned with those of collectives being engaged in research (Ashgar, 2013).

The idea of "unlearning" has been widely conceptualised as a strategy for challenging one's assumptions, particularly those assumptions that themselves challenge the acquisition of new knowledge (Heydari et al., 2017). Unlearning, which encapsulates the idea of learning new things in order "forget old habits" and thereby learning new and better methods and approaches, is crucial to letting go of past and outdated knowledge, attitudes, and values (Heydari et al., 2017). Indeed, unlearning has been equally important as acquiring new knowledge, since the inability to unlearn has been shown to one of the most significant weaknesses of qualitative researchers (Heydari et al., 2017). All qualitative researchers hold personal biases and pre-existing assumptions that they derive from their subjective experiences, cultural values, and norms, and that are ultimately reflected in the research process (Heydari et al., 2017); reflexivity is crucial for opening to alternative ways of understanding.

Reflexivity is crucial to the process of unlearning. Indeed, disabled researchers have long been critical of non-reflexive positivistic approaches to the production of research that perpetuate existing hierarchies between disabled participants and non-disabled researchers (Goodley, 1999). I suggest that such hierarchies exist between disabled researchers and their disabled participants. As I have previously argued, the social model of disability frames experiences of disability as a function of not only impairments, but also the barriers that exist within society. Thus, aside from my visual impairments as a researcher, I bring to my research approach, my personal understanding of disability based on the attitudinal and environmental barriers that I have experienced. These barriers both consciously and unconsciously, shape my interpretations of disability which I must unlearn, to learn about my research subjects. The process of unlearning for me, involves attending to my embodied experiences of disability through reflection, since this is integral to the outcomes of my research. I do not understand my identity to be fixed and unchangeable; I understand that through social interactions, identities can be negotiated and co-constructed as part of the process of unlearning. This is important in the context of my research because the meanings I assign to disability may differ from those assigned by the subjects of my research. Disability is both culturally and socially constructed which I must be aware of, regardless of my own perceptions. During the research process, I must take up the process of managing the physical barriers imposed by my disability as well as the personal understandings and reactions to disability, from the perspective of my

research subjects. Reflexivity is salient for the ways it exposes relational dynamics related to the positioning of the researcher to the research culture under investigation, which, in the case of disability research, assumes a unique character (Goodley, 1999). Proponents of reflexive approaches in qualitative studies focus on positioning disabled people as active participants and authentic sources of knowledge regarding the ontological experience of being disabled, and how this experience intersects with other positionalities (Goodley, 1999). This contrasts with outmoded narratives that positioned disabled individuals as passive objects who are constrained and defined by their condition.

By reflecting critically on one's subjectivity, it becomes possible to continually challenge oneself to critically deconstruct one's research approach—one's underlying assumptions as well as one's research findings—to unpack both the contributions and boundaries that result from one's subjectivity (Crooks et al., 2012). This process can also hold guard against researcher subjectivity culminating in role confusion to work in ways that work against opening spaces to include disabled people as active participants with lived expertise (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

In disability studies, reflexive accounts have been used to provide readers and audiences with insight into the position of the researcher, and consequently, into how ideas are produced (Goodley, 1999). Ultimately, knowledge production is spatio-temporal in character and the researcher's own subjectivity features in this dynamic (Goodley, 1999). When researchers engage in processes aimed at enhancing awareness of their role in the construction or co-construction of knowledge, they concurrently become aware of the impact of inter-subjective elements on the data collection and analysis process (Finlay, 2002). This is crucial for safeguarding the transparency, trustworthiness, and accountability of the research study (Finlay, 2002). Research conducted by Crooks, Owen, and Stone (2012) has demonstrated the ways in which reflexivity can enhance transparency in disability research while simultaneously enhancing rigour by showing how researchers' various positionalities impact knowledge production. Tregaskis and Goodley (2005) also note that by addressing positionalities, reflexivity encourages knowledge co-production.

Finlay (2002) has categorised approaches to reflexivity in qualitative research as follows: intersubjective reflection, introspection, mutual collaboration, and social critique. Intersubjective reflection has gained significant traction in qualitative research whereby researchers explore "the mutual meanings emerging within the research" (Finlay, 2002, p. 215). Here, the focus is on the context and the negotiations that underpin the research encounter (Finlay, 2002). Related to on-going examination of positionality, intersubjective reflection acknowledges that the researcher, and participants, bring "inward meanings" (Finlay, 2002, p. 281) to the research as well broader shared meanings and discourses. Through intersubjective reflection, the researcher commits to exploring how knowledge generated through research is co-constituted in ways influenced by the meanings brought to the encounter. Along with this exploration, the researcher aims to shift beyond mere reflection and engage in "radical self-reflective consciousness" (Finlay, 2002, p. 215) that entails analysis of the self in relation to others and a commitment to transformation of the self through the learning involved. If the end goal of reflexivity is unlearning, then more rigorous approaches that extend beyond "navel gazing" to learn about oneself are required. It is imperative that introspection not be the end goal, but rather intersubjective reflection must serve as a launchpad for additional insight into the nexus between knowledge claims as well as into the experiences of the participants and researcher in a specific social context (Finlay, 2002). In qualitative research, accessing one's personal and possibly unconscious influences and motivations arise owing to the complex dynamics that exist between researchers and their participants (Finlay, 2002). Intersubjective reflection promotes self-consciousness and compels researchers to engage with "both inward

meanings and outward into the realm of shared meanings, interaction and discourse” (Finlay, 2002, p. 218), thus promoting unlearning.

I suggest that intersubjective reflection is a crucial aspect for addressing researcher positionality, offering a rigorous approach to reflexivity that challenges individual subjectivity in the context of research relations. By challenging individual subjectivity, it provides a basis for unlearning pre-assumptions that are the result of socially shaped presumptions and unconscious processes and that are linked to one’s position as an insider. Thus, centring practices of intersubjective reflection can enable researchers to consider how their insider knowledge based on individual experiences and personal meanings can impinge on the research process, provoking vigilance and unlearning aimed at co-construction.

Conclusion

Regardless of researcher positionality in any qualitative research, researchers do not remain separate from the study. Through reflexive practice, unlearning and intersubjective reflexivity, it is possible for researchers to continually commit to heightening awareness of assumptions related to intersections of positionalities, social norms, and unconscious processes. Even in instances where prejudicial assumptions remain latent in the consciousness of researchers, reflexive practice can create intelligent self-awareness and evoke social sensitivity. A critical paradigm perspective questions how the subjectivity of the researcher can be addressed, notwithstanding the recognition that subjectivity is a strength as opposed to a weakness in research.

I have shown that reflexivity is crucial to the process of unlearning. Indeed, disabled researchers adopt a critical attitude towards non-reflexive positivistic approaches to the production of research that perpetuates existing hierarchies between disabled participants and non-disabled researchers. By reflecting critically on positionality and subjectivity, it becomes possible to deconstruct one’s research approach, its underlying assumptions, and one’s research findings, to unpack one’s role in how these are formulated and transform these through the process of the research. In this paper, I have illustrated how researchers’ various positionalities impact knowledge production. I have argued that intersubjective reflection is key within qualitative research processes, from the initial planning stages through to interpretation and representation of knowledge constructed.

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Article Citation

Mohler, E. C., & Rudman, D. L. (2022). Negotiating the insider/outsider researcher position within qualitative disability studies research. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(6), 1511-1521. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5047>
