Reflexivity: Interviewing Women and Men Formerly Addicted to Drugs and/or Alcohol

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This article considers how one researcher used reflexivity in two research projects. Qualitative research often involves a consideration of sensitive topics, one which may include research with individuals formerly addicted to drugs and/or alcohol. However, there is little in the literature that focuses directly on such experiences for researchers in this field; that is, a consideration of how a researcher might use reflectivity while interviewing those formerly addicted to substances. Exploring the following themes, I highlight how I reflected on the experiences that my participants (25 women and 25 men) revealed about their stories of their addiction and recovery processes: (1) my personal characteristics and my background work; (2) the importance of documenting power balance or power imbalance in my research; (3) documenting the unexpected; and (4) reflecting on the impact of my interviews/field notes. Keywords: reflexivity, women, men, addiction, recovery, interviewing

The position occupied by the researcher in relation to the participant has an influence over the production of data, subsequently affecting the researcher's relationship with the research topic. (McCorkel & Myers, 2003 as cited in Riach, 2009, p. 11)

Qualitative research often involves a consideration of sensitive topics, one which may include research with individuals formerly addicted to drugs and/or alcohol. Overall, there is little in the literature that focuses directly on such experiences for researchers in this field; that is, a consideration of the researcher's relationship with those formerly addicted to substances. Taking the above quote as a framework, I explore in this paper my reflexivity during the research process of interviewing the participants in the two research studies I conducted. Several researchers in the literature have been concerned with reflexivity on a theoretical level, however, in this paper I examine, on a more concrete level, my emotions, feelings and thoughts as I was interviewing my participants. Therefore, I consider in the following discussion my own reactions to the study, my position and my location in the study and the relationships I encountered (Hollaway & Biley, 2011).

Several issues are examined in the following discussion: the meaning and significance of the concept of reflexivity, an overview on some research on reflexivity and how I specifically dealt with reflexivity in my two research projects.

Reflexivity: Its Meaning and Significance

Literature on the concept of reflexivity is considerable (see Bishop & Shepherd, 2001; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bristow & Esper, 1988; Corbin & Straus, 2008; Day, 2012; England, 1994; Frosh & Emerson, 2005; Hollaway & Biley, 2011; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003; Mays & Pope, 2000; Riach, 2009; Walshaw, 2009; Wenger, 2002;). For example, England (1994) argued that "reflexivity is self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (p. 244) while Frosh and Emerson

(2005) interpreted reflexivity as a process of testing one's interpretations, and being accountable for the means by which they arrived at a particular "reading" of the data; in other words, making explicit the process by which they came to know (cited in Day, 2012, p. 62). Corbin and Straus (2008, p. 11) argued that "we must be self-reflective about how we influence the research process and, in turn, how it influences us". They further contend that "it is not distance that qualitative researchers want between themselves and their participants, but the opportunity to connect with them at a human level – it is a challenge that brings the whole self into the process" (Corbin & Straus, 2008, p. 13).

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 194) stated that "reflexivity makes possible a more responsible politics," ensuring that we do not misrecognize one particular mode of knowing as more valid than another (as cited in Riach, 2009). Further, "reflexivity is about the researchers' own reactions to the study, their position and location in the study and the relationships encountered which are reciprocal" (Hollaway & Biley, 2011, p. 971).

One of the important elements in qualitative research is to be cognitive of one's own role or position as it affects one's understanding in the research process. Bristow and Esper (1988) maintained that self-disclosure initiates true dialogue by allowing participants to become co-researchers. Wenger (2002) stated that resistance to self-disclosure limits the relationship between two people and increases the imbalance and distance between researcher and interviewee. This particular strategy involved reflexivity on the part of the researcher, who must consider consciously and systematically the ways in which her or his demographic and ideological characteristics may affect the work. Reflexivity is particularly valuable to qualitative research because it brings honesty to the fore, asking us not to feign objectivity or reach post hoc conclusions, but to acknowledge that multiple factors, including our personal narratives, shape the data we produce and our interpretations of this data (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003; Mays & Pope, 2000; as cited in Bishop & Shepherd, 2001).

Day (2012, p. 60) stated that a "reflexive exploration of methodological dilemmas can provide a starting point for assessing the consequences and transformative potential of our qualitative research." Riach (2009, p. 22) also argued that the research process is not only a reflexive consideration but a key dimension of being an ethical, socially responsible researcher. The following discussion considers first, some relevant research on reflexivity followed by a short overview of the research studies I conducted and, finally, how I dealt with reflexivity in my two research studies.

Relevant Research on Reflexivity

While the importance of being reflexive is acknowledged within social science research, the difficulties, practicalities and methods of doing it are rarely addressed (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 413). However, a few studies do provide some understanding of how to "do" reflexivity in research. For example, Elliott, Ryan, and Hollaway (2012, p. 433) suggested that reflexivity in qualitative and ethnographic social science research can provide a rich source of data, especially as regards the affective, performative and relational aspects of interviews with research subjects. In their paper they explored by means of three case examples different ways of accessing and using such reflexivity. The methodology of the supervision was psychoanalytic, in its use of a boundaried frame and of psychoanalytic forms of noticing oneself, of staying engaged emotionally as well as creating a reflective distance. Their examples were taken from an empirical psycho-social study into the identity transition involved when women become mothers for the first time. The examples the authors documented illustrate how this can enhance the knowledge gained of research subjects.

Keso, Lehtimäki, and Pietiläinen (2009, p. 51) wrote about the experimental narrative of reflexivity in a joint qualitative research process. They argued that the social processes

including sharing experiences and the processes of theoretical decision-making are of value in the making of work methods and in trying to understand academic work as a shared reflection. Researchers who are in the middle of field work certainly benefit thinking over how their work actually gets organized, constructed and done. Each of the authors wrote about their Ph.D. work. The first author, Keso (1999), conducted research on knowledge management. She studied the hegemonic discourses of knowledge construction in a case company, Valmet Aircraft Industry, in Tampere, Finland. Her research traced changes in the discourses that took place in a time period of 70 years. As a result, she identified how discourses enabled and hindered the organisation to take new and innovative action.

The second author, Lehtimäki (2000), examined strategy documents and the overall strategy process of the City of Tampere in Finland as well. Her research questioned the taken-for granted presumptions of strategy making and analysed the language practices of strategy narratives. As a result, she showed how language constructed actor-positions to those affected by strategy processes, and ultimately proposed a new multivoiced approach to such strategy making.

The third and final author, Pietiläinen (2002), examined female entrepreneurship in an emerging ICT (Integrated Circuit Technology) industry in Tampere. Through the analysis of city strategy documents, interviews of female entrepreneurs, and media articles about a female-owned new media company, she showed how a gendering process of female entrepreneurship evolved in an ongoing meaning production. As the main contribution, her research emphasised the need to understand the ways by which gendering was produced rather than examining gender differences per se when female entrepreneurship was discussed.

Shaw (2010), in her article with young mothers (her study aimed to investigate young women's decision-making processes and beliefs about infant feeding), argued that reflexivity is integral to experiential qualitative research in psychology. The article demonstrated the benefits of adopting a reflexive attitude by presenting "challenge-to-competency" (p. 243). The author's encounter with one of her participants, Sarah, helped to illustrate the role of reflexivity both in data generation and in interpretative analysis. Shaw (2010) postulated that reflexivity, with its grounding in hermeneutics and phenomenology, was a useful construct for guiding one's engagement in reflexivity in experiential qualitative research.

Although there seems to be numerous articles that expand on the concept of reflexivity, there seems to be little in the literature that provides an overview of actual research studies that "used" reflexivity as a feature in their discussion and nothing on researchers who interview individuals who have abused substances. The following section provides a short overview of the two research studies I conducted.

The Research Studies

"We know the world through the stories that are told about it."
(Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 45)

As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) stated in the above quote, my objective in my two research studies was to uncover participants' stories that they relayed to me regarding their addiction and recovery experiences, enhancing my understanding of their "worlds" of alcohol and/or drug abuse.

The two research projects I undertook was during the time I was teaching at two universities while living in the United States (US) during the years from 2001 to 2007. While I was teaching at Ohio University I interviewed 25 rural Appalachian women who were formerly addicted to drugs and/or alcohol. Subsequently I moved to Missouri to teach at Missouri State University and, while there, I interviewed 25 men from the Ozark region of the

US who also were formerly addicted to drugs and/or alcohol. Both studies were eventually published in book form: for the Appalachian women's study, in 2008; for the research study with men living in the Ozarks, in 2012.

Grounded theory, consistent with a symbolic interactionist approach was employed for the two studies. Qualitative research based in an interpretive paradigm is exploratory in nature, thus enabling researchers to gain information about an area in which little is known (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, as cited in Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007). My analysis centered on the following questions that considered the various ways in which participants interacted with selves, others, and controlled substances as they took on identities as addicts and, eventually, as recovering addicts: (1) What did addiction and recovery mean to my participants who were formerly addicted? (2) How did they explain their addiction? and (3) What did they think enabled them to enter recovery?

The analytical technique used in the studies featured a qualitative design with a semi-structured, open-ended interview schedule and a self-selective technique with the 50 participants who self-identified as being formerly addicted, who were 20 years of age or older, and who had been in recovery for 18 months or longer.

Both research studies looked for reasons that clarified the meanings of recovering women and men's behavior through their narratives, making explicit their place in society in a broader symbolic interactionist analysis. Stivers (1993, p. 412) stated that

> [t]he sense of self is an essentially narrative phenomenon; people conceive of themselves in terms of stories about their actions in the world, using them to make sense of the temporal flow of their lives. We find identity and meaning as a result of the stories we tell about ourselves or that others tell about us. Therefore, a narrative approach to self-understanding is not a distortion of reality but a confirmation of it.

I highlight in both studies then an understanding of how these women and men shaped their behaviors in their processes of addiction and recovery. I agree with Stevens, Berto, Frick, McSweeney, Schaaf, Tartari, Turnbull, Trinkl, Uchtenhagen, Waidner, and Werdenich (2007) that a critical approach to an understanding of drug users would be to amplify their voices as they narrated their experiences. Whiteacre (n.d., p. 21) further argued that "drawing out the voices of drug users suggests looking for ways to allow them to tell their own stories. Such an approach provided a discourse of drug users' own reality rather than researchers' images of drug users." And, too, as Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 46) argued, "Telling the stories of marginalized people can help to create a public space requiring others to hear what they do not want to hear." Further, Beverley (2000, p. 556) stated that,

> The voice that speaks to the reader through the text … [takes] the form of an *I* that demands to be recognized, that wants or needs to stake a claim to our attention.

The purpose of each study was twofold: (1) to describe, from participants' perspectives, how they became addicted to drugs and/or alcohol and how they discontinued their use of such substances through their recovery processes, and (2) to analyze the methods that enabled these participants to become addicted as well as to recover from their addictions. Here I argue that recovery is the regaining of something lost or taken away; it is a developmental process that is dynamic, fluid and can enhance growth (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). Such a developmental process was highlighted throughout the studies as participants "told" their stories of their specific experiences.

Further, as Walker (1985, p. 22) argued and as I hoped to do in my two studies:

> Qualitative researchers have helped us to understand and demystify drug taking, dispel unhelpful myths and stereotypes about drug users, build and develop theories of addiction and formulate and evaluate drug policy and practice. They have also had particular advantages in studying hidden and hard-to-reach groups, identifying emerging trends in drug consumption and researching particularly sensitive drug issues.

The following discussion highlights my two research experiences through a reflexive lens.

Dealing with Reflexivity in My Two Research Studies

My initial question to myself as I thought about writing this article raised the question, "How did I deal with reflexivity while conducting my interviews?" In my method for aiming for a reflective approach to my two research studies, I considered, first of all, my research notes which were extensive and which I wrote up after my interviews. In my notes, I not only documented how my respondents looked, but also their carriage, their clothes and their emotions as they answered my questions. Finally, I also noted how I felt as I was interviewing them. I argue that engaging in such reflexivity helped me to navigate my way through their accounts and my responses to it (Shaw, 2010). In the following section, I draw on my research experiences to illustrate how I reflected on my two research studies.

In this section, I attempt to answer this question. For purposes of the discussion in this paper, the following overview highlights the following issues I argue were central in my interviews: (1) personal characteristics and background work; (2) power balance or power imbalance; (3) documenting the unexpected; (4) and impact of interviews/field notes. Overall, during my two research projects, writing field notes was central to the reflexive production of the knowledge I gained during my interviews but also further reflection was gained by being involved in working with their contents (Elliott, Ryan, & Hollway, 2012, p. 18).

(1) Researcher's Personal Characteristics and Background Work

Stanley and Wise (1993) stated that:

> Whether we like it or not, researchers remain human beings complete with all the usual assembly of feelings, failings, and moods. And all of those things influence how we feel and understand what is going on. Our consciousness is always the medium through which the research occurs; there is no method or technique of doing research other than through the medium of the researcher. (p. 157)

England (1994, p. 248) further argued that "the biography of the researcher directly affects fieldwork," and that "the positionality [i.e., position based on class, gender, race, etc.] and biography of the researcher plays a central role in the research process, in the field as well as in the final text" (p. 252). That being stated, I found my age, gender, background, and education was an advantage during the interviews as highlighted below.

My age at the time of the interviews was those of a mature white woman as I had attended university at the age of 42 for my BA and finished my MA and PhD a few years later. I had worked in the community for several years before attending university as well as during

my time at school. In my younger years, I had worked for 12 years as a Registered Nurse, an occupation which certainly gave me discipline, responsibility, good listening skills, and a sense of empathy which carried over into the interviewing process with my participants in my two research studies. My female gender did not seem to make a difference during the interviews as all respondents were willing to talk to me regardless; perhaps for the women when they talked about the violence they had experienced in their earlier years it made it easier for them to do so.

My background work in the community involved working with women for three years on the Women and Substance Abuse (WASA) Project. This Project was funded by Health Canada and I was hired as a research consultant during that time. I worked with over 300 women formerly addicted to substances for those years giving me a certain perspective on women who were former drug addicts. During the time I was working on this Project, I was also teaching at the local university and would check out the library in order to see if there was any research on women who were addicted to substances. Finding that there did not seem to be any research whatsoever, and compelled by my anger that women were not even considered in the literature, I decided to attend university in order to obtain my PhD and to carry out research on exactly that topic – women who were former addicts.

My work on the WASA Project impacted on my beliefs about drug use/abuse (previous to this work, I had not even considered the details and ramifications of drug use/abuse; therefore, I was much enlightened on the topic by the women who I worked with on this Project). The various women I encountered would often come to my office to talk about their lives: how they became addicted to substances, how they felt about their lives and how difficult it was for them to process their recovery. Therefore, for both my research studies, before the taped interviews began, I told both groups of participants (women and men) that I had been involved in the WASA Project and that I was cognitive of problems that individuals who were once addicted had experienced. These experiences helped me to cultivate sensitivity to the women as well as the men I interviewed for these two studies. Oakley (1981, p. 49) argued, and I agree, that intimacy is important for successful interviews and that there can be "no intimacy without reciprocity." Researchers such as Harding (1987), Oakley (1981), and Reinharz (1992) advocated researcher self-disclosure as a ba¬sis for developing a close relationship with interviewees (as cited in Porter, Neysmith, Reitsma-Street, & Collins, 2009).

I feel I was successful in having my participants tell me their stories as "the touchstone of a potential researcher's experience may be a more valuable indicator of a potentially successful research endeavor than another more abstract source" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 23). Self-disclosure is a strategy for addressing power dynamics within interview interactions. In qualitative inquiry, the researchers' selves are involved, their experiences become a resource. Researchers cannot distance themselves from their participants, although they cannot fully present their meaning and experience (Hollaway & Biley, 2011, p. 968).

Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p. 48) referred to a type of nonthreatening environment as creating "a feeling of empathy for informants" that enables "people [to] open up about their feelings". Such feelings of intimacy are due to the unstructured, informal, anti-authoritative, and a nonhierarchical atmosphere in which the qualitative researcher and participants establish their relations in an atmosphere of power equality (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). I argue however that since I have never been a former addict, I needed to show respect and understanding as well as empathy to my participants. This I did through various means: listening carefully and attentively, managing few interruptions – if I did interrupt, it was to clarify something I did not understand that my participants were relaying to me, being sensitive to my participants' talk, and an overall sense of understanding. Personally, I believe I gained good listening skills through my nursing experiences; one has to listen very carefully and fully to what individuals are saying (whether in nursing in my early years or in my subsequent

research interviews).

(2) Power Balance or Power Imbalance?

> An understanding of power and power relations is integral to recognizing how we are implicated in the operation of power and how we may respond in ways that will minimize differences in power in the research process. (Daley, 2010, p. 80)

As Daley (2010) states in the above quote, it was important in my research studies to understand and clarify how I minimized the differences between myself and my participants as we both experienced the interviewing process.

Wolf (1996) also contended that power is ever-present in the research relationship and trying to equalize the relationship does not erase the researcher/researched power differentials that reflexivity reveals (cited in Day, 2012, p. 68). Day (2012) further argued that "While I, as the researcher, had the power to craft particular stories about the research subjects' experiences, my participants also had the power to challenge this, by refusing to answer, redirecting questions, confronting me as the interviewer – as well as answering questions however they choose" (p. 66).

First, in the initial stage of the interview, it was very important to establish a welcoming, nonthreatening environment in which the interviewees were willing to share personal experiences and beliefs (i.e., their stories) (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009; Scott & Garner, 2013). Such issues are part of the "power" relations experienced in qualitative research processes as Daley's (2010) quote above suggests. In my two studies I did this by various means: asking the participants where they would like to do the interviews (all agreed to meet in my university office, in the late afternoon when there would not be many people around), and an offer from me to pick them up at a place of their choosing.

Second, I also suggested for all participants in both studies to choose pseudonyms which all of them did. Third, after the interviews were transcribed, I sent them back to my participants with a self-addressed stamped envelope offering them the opportunity to make any necessary changes in their narratives. There were only two individuals (in the men's study) who sent back their transcripts with notations added.

Overall, for most participants, I felt that they got a sense of relief from their participation in the interviews, taking the opportunity to tell someone their stories. Many reiterated to me that they had not "told" their narratives at AA or NA meetings as they told them to me. I suspect this might have occurred as they felt they were in a "safe" place, were given the chance to tell their stories with no interruptions, and I certainly showed that I was extremely interested in what they had to say. Further, "reflexivity is about the researchers' own reactions to the study, their position and location in the study and the relationships encountered, which are reciprocal" (Hollaway & Biley, 2011, p. 971). It can also be a consideration of what is "in it" for the participants; an opportunity for attention and/or a "sounding board" (Scott & Garner, 2013, p. 285) for their complaints and concerns. Certainly in my two studies, participants expressed how grateful they were as I had given them the chance to speak about their lives, their problems and their relevant concerns regarding their life experiences.

The careful use of language that reflected the needs and preferences of this research population (Thulesius, Hakansson, & Petersson, 2003) together with maintaining eye contact with them were the combined techniques researchers should use to "do" empathy and to be respectful. This involved the giving of one's whole attention as committed presence, being alongside, with the ability to feel with the other (Liehr, 1989). Listening with concern and compassion but without judgement and absorbing the feelings of others were further features

of my empathic approach that was centered on the participant rather than on me as a researcher (Campbell, 2002). Overall I attempted to respect my participants' opinions, to support their feelings, to understand where they were coming from, and to recognize their responses (Berry, 1999), much of this I had learned while working on the WASA Project as well as through my nursing experiences.

(3) Documenting the unexpected

Qualitative research is reflexive, and hence contains autoethnographic elements (Hollaway & Biley, 2011). Researchers cannot exclude themselves from data collection, analysis, and reporting of the research. Walshaw (2009) called this performing the self, writing oneself into the research (as cited in Hollaway & Biley, 2011, p. 971). The self is always present in fieldwork (Hollaway & Biley, 2011, p. 971). Holland (2007, p. 204) argued that:

> Emotions play an important part in the field at a number of levels. It is important to realise that the researcher's identity and experiences shape the ideas with which they go into the field, their political and ideological stance, and there is an analytic cost if this interplay of person and research is not taken into consideration. The researcher takes assumptions and emotions into and generates emotions in the field about the researched.

The following overview highlights some of the unexpected topics I encountered when conducting the interviews and how such experiences impacted me.

Experiences of Violence in Women's Lives

My emotions certainly came into play when I heard for the first time from the women participants about their experiences of violence in their lives. Ultimately, this information had a great impact on me as this was something I had not expected to hear. Going into the research with the women participants, I was overall interested in their addiction and recovery processes and never assumed that I would hear stories of the violence some of them had experienced, either in their early years or as mature women. For example, on interviewing my women participants, 52% of them had experienced sexual and/or physical violence from male family members, including fathers, grandfathers, stepfathers, and brothers, while one participant experienced physical abuse from her mother. Eight percent of participants, most of whom were older when they became addicted, experienced violence from their husbands or partners. In total, 16 women out of the 25 I interviewed had experienced some type of abuse in their lives.

As the women narrated their stories of abuse, I documented the following in my field notes:

> The participants talked in soft, low voices, did not look at me in many cases, and remained stooped in their chairs. There was no vivacity, viability and seemingly no hope in their voices as they spoke.

It was obvious that the women were "feeling" the pain of their memories and they were having a difficult time with telling me of their experiences. Since I was teaching the course, Violence against Women, at the university where I was a visiting Assistant Professor, I was well aware of the statistics on violence perpetuated against women world-wide. Also, having worked on the WASA Project I should have been aware that these women would not be any different. But, ultimately, I was still surprised and angry; noting that it seemed to me that, again,

no woman is safe in whatever country she is living in.

Body language

What I found extremely interesting and what I wrote up in my field notes for both groups of participants was their use of body language. James (1985; as cited in Dickson-Swift et al., 2007) argued that interviewing for language is not enough. Instead we should supplement verbal communication in interviews, with attention to nonverbal communication, since often members of a subordinate group cannot clearly articulate their frustration and discontents [which] may be expressed in inchoate ways (James, 1985; as cited in Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). For example, I wrote in my field notes for the women who I interviewed the following:

> Looking back at my notes, I read again what I had written about how the women talked to me: how their body language and their voices showed how they felt about relating those experiences to me.

I wrote these field notes because I was struck by the difference in the women's body language: both as they narrated their abuse, either in their early years or as mature women and as they also narrated their recovery processes.

Overall, many of the women I interviewed were dealing not only with their own recovery but also with violence and sexual abuse in their lives. For these women, then, double jeopardy was in play: recovery along with continuing personal violence and abuse. It became obvious to me that, in order for these women to recover, they needed considerable personal courage, tenacity, and strength—attributes that my participants displayed throughout the interviews. As I wrote further in my field notes, the women's body language changed radically as they narrated their recovery stories:

> Conversely, as participants talked about recovering selves, their language changed: their voices were filled with joy, and there was a sense of passion as they recounted their successes. Some women even showed palpable anger as they told their recovery stories. The participants' body language changed radically: they sat up in their chairs, they looked me square in the eye, and their voices were raised, full of expectations and optimism. It was obvious to me that the women finally loved themselves and their recovering lives.

The male participants showed just the opposite: there was no reluctance in the men's voices not did they show any body language that mirrored their responses no matter how hard their lives had been. Most, if not all the women cried while telling me their addiction stories, but only one of the male participants did so. The men told their stories in a more business-like manner.

Men's tattoos

What I found interesting during the beginning of my interviews with the male participants was that all of them but one individual had tattoos and they offered to show them to me. I was very interested in their tattoos as I had always wanted one myself but never had the courage to get one. The interviews for the men were done during the summer months and it was easy to see their tattoos as most of them wore t-shirts which showed off their tattoos quite well. Most of the tattoos were beautiful so I asked who had done them and how many did they have on their bodies; consequently, most of the men were quite proud to show them to me

regardless where they were, i.e., on legs, arms, necks, backs and tops of their buttocks.

I believed that my interest in their tattoos (obviously a very personal part of their lives) also *broke* the ice with the men. I am and always have been interested in those individuals who do not *follow* the norm in society for whatever reason.

AIDS participant

Sensitivity, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 32) means "having insight, being tuned in to, and being able to pick up on relevant issues, events, and happenings in data. It is a trait that develops over time through close association and work with both data and people." For example, one of my participants told me that he had been diagnosed with AIDS the day before our interview; and he began to cry as he told me his situation. I offered him much condolence and stated how sorry I was to hear this. In other words, I helped him deal with his situation in that moment. Kvale (1996, p. 128; as cited in Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009) suggested that "a good contact is established by attentive listening, with the interviewer showing interest, understanding, and respect for what the subjects say". Perhaps, too, since I had nursed for many years within a hospital setting, I had garnered a sense of respect, understanding and certainly sensitivity to what my patients and ultimately the participants that I eventually interviewed had to say.

So, what impact did the interviews have on me? After the interviews with the women, it was considerable. The following discussion highlights this impact.

(4) Impact of interviews/Field Notes

Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 83) stated that "When doing analysis it is important not to overlook expressed emotions and feelings, because they are part of context - emotions and feelings cue the analysts as to the meaning of events to persons." This I was able to do in my field notes when I wrote the following regarding my women participants:

> In some ways, this was a difficult study to write. After each interview I wrote field notes, and then put them aside. After I transcribed the interviews, I referred back to these notes to refresh my memory as I began to analyze the women's narratives. I thought back to how my participants had talked about their preaddiction experiences and their immersion in their addictive lifestyles. My two data chapters, were particularly difficult for me to write. In these two chapters, the women's interviews were dark, foreboding, and full of pain. I could feel the grief in their voices as I transcribed their narratives.

As I wrote up my field notes, I was also aware that I needed to make a comparison with the women I had worked with while in Canada on the WASA Project as I stated:

> The interviews I conducted with my participants were filled with stories of poignancy and courage, similar to those of the Canadian women I previously had worked with on the Women and Substance Abuse Project. But the lives of the rural Appalachian women differed in one significant way from those of the women in Canada with whom I had worked. The area in which the rural participants lived is extremely poor and underdeveloped; there are only limited resources for women in recovery. Although there is one center that attempts to help women who are addicted, there is no provision for follow-up after they leave the program. For these women, there is little in the way of unemployment

assistance, educational help, or daycare for them and their children.

Finally, as I finished writing up both research projects, I documented the following field notes:

> Although I found many aspects of these women's/men's lives difficult to hear, transcribe, and analyze, their stories of resistance and courage give me hope for other individuals in similar situations. Writing this study, trying as it was at times, was a delight: it enabled me to counter the selective inattention of extant research toward formerly addicted individuals' experiences. The participants' survival strategies brought out hidden strengths deep inside themselves, their capacities to learn to live again in their recovery, and their abilities to enhance their diminished sense of selves. I feel honored and privileged to have had the opportunity to document these stories of addiction and recovery.

Some Concluding Thoughts

I argue that we cannot separate who we are as persons from the research and analysis that we do (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Therefore, "we must be self-reflective about how we influence the research process and, in turn, how it influences us" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 11). Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 13) further contend that "it is not distance that qualitative researchers want between themselves and their participants, but the opportunity to connect with them at a human level – it is a challenge that brings the whole self into the process." Also, I argue that "storytelling makes us human" (Hollaway & Biley, 2011, p. 969).

This article based on my two research projects contributes to the call by Kinard (1996, p. 69) for "more published accounts of investigators' experiences in dealing with the effects on researchers of conducting studies on sensitive and emotionally laden topics." Finally, Hollaway and Biley (2011, p. 970) stated and I concur:

> Being a qualitative researcher means being accountable to the participants and to the readers of the story. It also entails recognizing emotions and some of the motives of all participants—both their own and those of the people with whom they do the research. Emotions of the participants are important, and they have to be valued during data collection and writing up. Qualitative researchers need to reflect these emotions in the research account.

In conclusion, I believe that qualitative researchers should present a good story which is based on evidence but focuses on meaning rather than measurement. In qualitative inquiry, the researchers' selves are involved; their experiences become a resource (Hollaway & Biley, 2011). Qualitative evidence is distinctive, as Morse (2006) suggested; "it lies within the humanistic arena, and the experiential and behavioural nature of the context in which it occurs is of major importance" (as cited in Holloway & Biley, 2011, p. 970).

This article has been a first-hand account of two of my qualitative research projects, focusing not on the data itself, except obliquely, but on the way in which the project was conducted (Irvine & Gaffikin 2006). Its purpose has been to fill a gap within the addiction and recovery literature about how qualitative research projects may be conducted. I hope I have done some justice to what actually went on during my interviews perhaps helping other qualitative interviewers as they attempt to recount their reflexivity in their future research projects.

I learned a lot about myself and my participants when I was conducting my interviews,

but also in thinking how I would write this paper. When I was interviewing my participants, I absolutely had to reflect on what I was hearing as, many times, their stories were so filled with grief and sadness, followed by such a great sense of purpose, that I found it impossible not to document my thoughts and feelings at the time. Obviously, their stories impacted my life and my way of thinking as, many times, I was stunned into silence as they narrated their past lives as former addicts – I learned so much from their narratives – not least of which is I argue that they were absolute heroes in my eyes. In my future research, I would certainly attend to a reflective posture, using field notes and documenting after the interviews how I felt during our conservations, but also how I felt after the interviews were finished when I had time to reflect.

I encourage other qualitative researchers to do the same, to build in the reflective process as they carry out their research. They will not only learn more about their participants, but also as important, more about themselves. I argue that there is room within qualitative research for both subjectivity and objectivity. I also argue that both are necessary in order to see the "full" picture of what our research entails, as such an approach enables us to garner a more holistic view within our research. This approach also gives more "meaning" to the social context, offering a multiple reality (Shaw, 2010) of what we are hearing. Shaw (2010, p. 6) makes note that, "By engaging in reflexivity, that is, proactively exploring our self at the start of our research inquiry, we can enter into a dialogue with participants and use each participant's presentation of self to help revise our fore-understanding and come to make sense of the phenomenon anew." As qualitative researchers, we cannot ask for more.

Afterthought

There is a relevant quote in Denzin and Lincoln's most recent textbook on Qualitative Research (2011) that highlights my feelings about writing this article. A professor was narrating to his students how his most recent paper had been rejected by a journal and as he did so, he also discussed the research he had written about. The discussion was extraordinary. One of the students asked him, "Why didn't you write what you just said?" The professor answered, "Because I can't find a link between what I know and existing literature" (Krog, 2011, p. 383). In thinking about and writing this article, my thoughts concur with this professor's statement – I could not find a link either in terms of reflexivity in my work on women and men who were former addicts, but I have attempted to put words to some of my thoughts after all.

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