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Feeling at home in an experiential research group: Reflections on the research process in collaborative pluralism.

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Feeling at home in an experiential research group: Reflections on the research process in collaborative pluralism.

This paper presents a set of reflections on the process of conducting a qualitative pluralistic group research project. As our work progressed, we began to spend as much time discussing this group work process as we did focusing on our specific research topic. We begin by giving some background to how we got started and the research study itself as well as saying something about who the group is. We then describe our process and examine how we came to see that what we were doing shared a lot of similarities with forms of pluralistic research. We discuss some of the challenges and opportunities we faced along the way and end with some final thoughts on where we might go next. We argue that it is important to pay close attention to the research process as it plays a crucial role in shaping the insights that can be gained from a piece of research. This paper contributes to the growing literature on reflexivity in qualitative psychology in general and the exploration of the research process in in collaborative pluralistic research designs in particular.

Background

In this paper, we share some of our reflections on what we have learned through the process of working in a qualitative experiential research group. We are a group of seven researchers who came together with the aim of exploring the relationship between discursive and phenomenological aspects of experience. We set out to use our own experiences, and our accounts of these experiences, as data in order to 'get at' the interface between the phenomenological and the discursive. As such, the aims of our research group were both methodological (we were trying to find out how best to study this interface) and substantive/theoretical (we were trying to find out more about how the phenomenological and the discursive inform one another). We started by conducting a study of the experience of 'feeling/ not feeling at home". Our initial research aim in this first study was to produce a range of qualitative analyses on our own experiences of 'feeling at home/not feeling at home', and to examine how these may help us understand

how our experiences were produced and made meaningful. As the project progressed, however, we became increasingly interested in our process, development and interactions as researchers, and this became an additional focus of our reflections, alongside the methodological and substantive interest in theorising experience. Thus, in this paper we present a reflexive commentary on the process of doing this kind of group research, which we suggest has equal importance alongside the qualitative analyses and will contribute to an already existing and growing body of work on reflexivity and group work (e.g. Frost et al., 2012; Lapadat, 2017; Dempsey et al., 2019). We want to encourage discussion on how the ways in which we work collaboratively impact research practice, particularly those that utilise qualitative methods. It is important to engage with *how we work* (process and practice) as a research group, as a way to understand the way in which the subject matter we are working on is constituted and made salient in particular ways.

In particular, we focus on how the reflexive practice we developed as being part of our research group – albeit something that developed organically – led us to foster useful insights, both into how we understood the research topic but also regarding how to develop good methodological practice, especially focussing on how to actually do it, rather than simply acknowledging its importance (Gough and Finlay 2003). We hope that this will have utility beyond this project, when working with different types of research participants and different qualitative research contexts. These include considering the importance of the impact of working as a group; our differing interests as individual researchers; our identities and perceptions of each other. We also discuss how reflexivity work and pluralistic research impact on each other.

We begin by providing some brief details of the project itself, how it started and how we have been working on the topic of 'feeling at home', including how we came to see what we were doing as pluralistic research. By the term pluralistic research, we mean a study that combines more than one method of qualitative analyses (Frost and Bailey-Rodriguez, 2021). What then follows are several themes, based on reflective discussions we have had as a group. These include the challenges and opportunities we have encountered, and which have impacted us as researchers, the way we work as a group, our diverse analyses and developing understanding of the topic. The challenges and opportunities we focus on are our emotional investment in the material; grappling with epistemological diversity; encountering reflexivity in action; and the process of learning from one another. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the themes that have arisen throughout the process. Also, there is overlap between these themes which we discuss briefly, and we are aware that each theme raises further questions. However, our aim is to encourage further discussion on these issues. We end with some concluding thoughts on what we have learned and what happens next.

How the group came together

We came together in 2019 as a group of seven women, all researchers in psychology, with a broad interest in investigating the relationship between discourse and experience using qualitative methods. As individual researchers, we have a wide range of experience in conducting discursive, narrative, and phenomenological research. We started the group without a formal plan of how it would be run. Some of us had been in research groups in the past whilst others had no experience of this way of working. Although the idea of working together was the initial idea of one of us, the aim from the outset was to

collaborate within a flat structure in which we held equal responsibility for the progress of the research.

At the outset, we recognised that what we were doing shared similarities with memory work research (Haug, 1999). Memory work is a feminist research method, developed by Haug and colleagues in the 1980's. The method enables a group of researchers to examine their memories of a specific issue and analyse these to explore their broader social-cultural context (Haug, 1992). Hence, the researchers are also the research participants and are collectively involved in both the generation and analysis of their data (Haug, 1992).

Our research process also included written accounts of our own experiences in response to a specific 'trigger', the dissolving of the distinction between researcher and researched, and the analysis of our own material (Gillies et al., 2004; Stephenson and Kippax, 2017). Even so, there were some key differences: first, we agreed to focus on contemporary experiences rather than memories, aiming to 'catch' these as soon as possible after their occurrence. Additionally, as the work of the group progressed, we agreed to analyse the data individually then discuss emergent findings as a group, rather than conduct analyses collectively.

The research process

As with memory-work, we began by deciding on a trigger to prompt our writing. We were interested in experiences with an emotional and embodied dimension, that would allow for the production of rich accounts. Through a process of sharing suggestions and whittling these down by group consensus, we agreed on the experience of '*feeling*

at home' as our trigger, and that we would include experiences of its converse, '*not feeling at home'*. Over the course of a month, each of us wrote two short accounts of instances where we had experienced '*feeling at home'* or its opposite. The idea was for these experiential accounts to include as much descriptive detail as possible, facilitated by writing them soon after the experience, and that they could also include our reflections on the process of trying to capture experience through language, for example., the process of finding the 'right words'. We considered that it would be important not to edit our accounts too much. To preserve this process, some of us decided to write in long-hand rather than type our entries. Box 1 below shows an example of one account from our data set.

Box 1. Example of one account: 'In the pub'.

"Being in the pub with old friends. Feeling happy, at ease, in a different country and all the more at home because of it. An ease, a shared humour, shared history and memories, a shared future implied and negotiated. A feeling of being on solid ground, my own opinions feeling stronger than they might do otherwise. Excitement, plans, the possibility for fun. The warmth of feeling connected, affection for the people around me. Things felt light, frivolous. My actual home, though across the road, felt less real, less like home than the people around me. My memory has a warm glow, and the pub did too that evening with sun shining in. laughter. Boisterousness. Turns of phrase.

Reading this it sounds nostalgic, rose tinted. As though reality has been edited so that I might enjoy the comfort of the memory. The words all point to an ease that's maybe at the heart of feeling at home. The day's work is done, put your feet up and relax."

The accounts tended to be quite short but as can be seen in the example above, they provided rich descriptive material to work with. With this initial data set, we devoted time to discussing how best to approach analysis. Some of the things we considered included forming three small analytic 'teams', each of which would analyse the entire data set using a different qualitative approach (e.g. discursive, phenomenological, thematic). However, we were conscious of not wanting to be constrained too early in the analytic process, and to have more of a free rein in how we might use our diverse perspectives and imaginations. So instead, we decided to each choose a qualitative method based on our own interest and experience. These included critical discourse analysis, The Listening

Guide, descriptive phenomenology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, and dual focus phenomenological and narrative analysis. Over the course of six months, we each conducted individual analyses on one account from each group member sequentially. Each member's initial reading of an account was shared with the group to be thought about together. In this way we developed a deep, or thick understanding of the experience being explored, with the authors of the accounts invited to respond to and reflect upon the insights and interpretations offered, thus providing an opportunity for amplification, clarification, and further sense-making around the material. Box 2 below shows an example of two analyses of the account reproduced in Box 1.

Box 2. Analytic notes from a phenomenological and a discursive analysis of the 'In the pub' account.

1st Analysis:

How is what A is saying revelatory of the lived experience of 'feeling at home'?

For me, it evoked:

Feeling at home involves established relationships and shared experiences ("old friends", "shared humour, shared history and memories, a shared future")

A sense of familiarity and belonging ("being on solid ground", "feeling connected"

The pub as home, a social and cultural site which recreates a temporary home which has energy and is energizing ("excitement, plans, the possibility for fun", "light, frivolous", "laughter", "boisterousness)

The use of the word ‘ease’ which evokes a sense of effortlessness between the people present and enhances self-expression (“My own opinions feeling stronger than they might do otherwise”)

2nd Analysis:

How is the concept of “feeling at home” socially constructed?

What discourses are reproduced – who is excluded/included in these discourses?

What are the politics of space/place in these constructions?

The first thing that strikes me about this account is the location. Pubs are a contentious issue for me – this is more personal rather than necessarily analytical - for me they have been (sometimes for me, but certainly for a lot of people I know) very exclusionary spaces, but I think this demonstrates an example of one of my concerns regarding space and place and who they include and exclude. In this account, the pub is very evocative, and understanding pubs is required to understand the context and why it might feel like home.

There are similarities with my account – in that there is an appeal to the idea that relations with people is important for feeling at home. There is reference to “shared histories” and “memories”– making direct references to tacit understanding. Generally, the taken for granted nature of tacit knowledge is something I would want to look into further – we have to share understandings to feel what is being understood.

A pluralistic approach

Reflecting on the way we had engaged with our data led us to the realisation that our process had much in common with a pluralistic approach to qualitative research (e.g., Madill et al., 2018; Frost and Bailey-Rodriguez, 2021) as well as to

memory-work research. We acknowledge that we had not deliberately set out to conduct pluralistic research, although our starting point (i.e. working in and as a group without a commitment to a particular method of data analysis) did perhaps invite a pluralistic trajectory to the work. Reviewing our way of working together and considering the methodological steps we have taken in the research so far, it is clear that our research displays key characteristics of analytic pluralism (Clarke et al., 2015) in that it: i) combines *more than one method* of data analysis in one study, ii) understands different interpretations of the same data as *complementary* rather than competing, iii) seeks to produce *richer insights* than can be produced on the basis of one method of analysis alone, and iv) generates answers to *more than one research question*.

More specifically, our operationalisation of analytic pluralism was *collaborative* in that the different analyses were carried out by different researchers who then came together to reflect on them collectively (rather than a scenario where one researcher conducts a series of different analyses of the same data), and *simultaneous* in that the analyses were conducted concurrently and in parallel (rather than a sequential design where different analytic lenses are brought to the data, one after the other).

Finally, we have not (yet) attempted to integrate our diverse interpretations of the data to theorise a multi-dimensional understanding of *'feeling/not feeling at home'*. Instead, we are currently holding the group's multiple analytic perspectives in a layering of accounts which does not privilege any one particular reading. So, at this point we are staying with the group's multi-layered and multi-perspectival interpretations of the phenomenon of 'feeling/not feeling at home'. To what extent it will be possible (or indeed desirable) to fuse our group's diverse analyses is a question we will keep under review as we continue to engage with the data. Whatever we decide to do, it will be important to continue to monitor and reflect upon the impact any further transformations of the original

analyses may be having on the members of our group. As Frost and Bailey-Rodriguez (2021: 154) point out, it is important to remember that pluralistic research "allows for different expressions and understandings of human experience and this requires the researcher to think carefully about its impact on, and benefit to, all those taking part". In the following section we reflect on some of the impacts and benefits from working in this way.

Challenges and opportunities we faced working in a pluralistic research group

Working as a group throws up inevitable challenges and opportunities for those involved. Initially, we did not address explicitly what these might be and how we would deal with them when they arose; rather we focused on identifying our topic and practical issues such as applying for ethical approval and deciding when/where and how often we would meet. We were keen to get started and from the outset, we were comfortable with adopting an organic approach, addressing issues and ideas as they arose rather than having a strict roadmap of where we wanted to get to, how we wanted to get there and what might be thrown up along the way.

As it turned out, we were a good way through our project before a range of challenges and rewards started to take concrete shape and we began discussing our experience of them. These discussions led us to conceptualise six 'containers' created to hold our thoughts and ideas about the process of being part of the group. These comprised; our emotional investment in the data; grappling with epistemological diversity; relational dynamics in the group; the logistics of organising meetings and maintaining momentum; the process of learning from one another; and honing our reflexivity through challenging deeply held assumptions. We each separately wrote up our reflections under these

categories and ‘dropped’ them into these containers, to be shared and discussed within the group. These written reflections and notes from the subsequent discussions form the basis of the following sections, in which the reflections will be discussed under four sub-headings (our emotional investment in the material, grappling with our epistemological diversity, encountering reflexivity in action and the process of learning from one another). Interestingly, as mentioned above, this exercise reflected a shift and evolution from our original focus at the start of the project, that of a questioning of the experience/discourse relationship in the context of a specific topic, to more of an emphasis on the dynamics of being part of this sort of research group. This has been a thought-provoking shift for us, and as stated we see it as an important focus to follow through with alongside our original intention. We discuss some of these challenges and opportunities next, with illustrative extracts from group members’ reflexive notes.

Our emotional investment in the material

We are probably always emotionally invested in our research, but we found working as a group of researcher-participants and engaging in active reflection at each stage of the process, made us aware of the range of emotions that this work gave rise to. The personal significance and meanings of the substantive research topic, ‘*feeling at home*’, morphed and evolved as we worked with the material in a context of the momentous events of Brexit in the UK and the global COVID-19 pandemic (we return to these events below in the section on reflexivity). For some of us, the significance of this experience of ‘*feeling/not feeling at home’* seemed only to crystallize through our discussions and analytic work:

> I now realize that the notion of “home” has always been emotive and interesting to me.

> …the topic of 'home' had taken on much more meaning for me, and I relished the opportunity to explore my feelings about it within the context of our research group.

For some of us there was a tension inherent in the blurring of researcher and participant roles in analysing our own writing, experienced by one group member as; "the need to be emotionally detached, yet also inevitably attached", whilst for others there was a tentativeness or cautiousness in analysing co-researchers accounts:

> I realized that as a researcher having to face your participants and co-researchers so directly brought up some anxiety and, in some places, caused me to think carefully about my interpretations so as not to cause upset or insult to others.

Phenomenological and discursive analyses were experienced differently with phenomenological readings often fostering an emotional resonance or feeling of being understood, while discursive readings at times triggered feelings of being exposed, as though they uncovered meanings that the writer hadn't intended or been aware of:

> I felt uncomfortable to have what had been a felt response to my surroundings so closely read and thought about.

As a group our ethos was to be non-judgmental, accepting of difference, and supportive of each other. For example, on one occasion one group member chose not to share her account and that was fully respected by all group members. In addition, we made sure that the analyses were always shared tentatively, and we allowed space for each participant to share their response to the analyses.

Lastly, we all recognised that the process of being part of an experiential research group with six other women was something that we enjoyed and cared about, despite the challenges it raised:

> …I realise how much enjoyment the project has given me pushing me out of my comfort zone, sharing ideas, the various challenges of finding the time, pushing myself to think from alternative perspectives.

In these ways we found our experiences aligned with memory-work's commitment to an emotional engagement and enjoyment in the work and taking care with others' accounts and the potential consequences of analytic representations (Cadman et al., 2001).

Grappling with our epistemological diversity

The diverse nature of our group in terms of epistemological and theoretical positions and professional backgrounds meant that, over time, we were all confronted by and had to grapple with our differences. The following examples illustrate how most of us felt at one time or another as we sought to acknowledge, absorb and 'try-on' the different perspectives thrown up by working together:

> Our discussion of analysis has at times felt somewhat untethered and I've felt in danger of slipping into an infinite regress.

> The different perspectives/readings of the data required us as researchers to almost literally take different positions from which to look at and interrogate the data. As a result, listening to an account of a different reading sometimes felt like being dragged away from the perspectival position I currently occupied, and this generated the response of clinging to it

Both observations acknowledge being aware of multiple voices and how trying to ensure that none are side-lined or lost can be an unsettling experience. The idea of 'infinite regress' captures that sense of how the groundedness of one's usual take on things, is disrupted which can feel disconcerting. They speak to how we feel at home in our own perspective and when we are confronted with alternative ones, it can create a sense of dissonance and a desire to retreat into the comfort of what we know and are more familiar with. Bryman (2007) observed that researchers' bias or preference for given methodologies often act as a barrier to meaningful integration of mixed-methods methodologies. Having noticed our attachment to our own approaches, we have used Bryman's observation to inspire further systematic reflection on our epistemological commitments and what this might mean for the possibility of integration.

Though grappling with the diversity of approaches and epistemological orientations was demanding at times, it was also very rewarding both as a group and as individuals. As a group we found that "each method's findings complemented and shed new light on the other". We discovered that the back-and-forth movement between approaches enabled us to construct links and patterns of connection between the different readings with each informing the other. As individuals, we appreciate how working in this way has expanded our 'research lenses'. In these ways, this experience has enriched our engagement with data on this project and in other projects.

Encountering reflexivity in action

Reflexivity in research is considered an ambitious and challenging enterprise (Garret, 2013; Haggerty, 2003; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003), because it requires us to look at ourselves in relation to the subject matter of the research. Reflexivity may be defined as

"a form of critical thinking which aims to articulate the contexts that shape the process of doing research and subsequently the knowledge produced" and which helps us to "map the implications, possibilities, and limitations afforded by approaching the study of a topic in a particular way" (Lazard and McAvoy, 2020, 160).

When considering issues of reflexivity, Garret (2013), amongst others (e.g., Doucet and Mauthner, 2006), suggests thinking about different dimensions. One such dimension is, 'in whose name or on whose behalf' is the research being done. In this respect our task was rather straightforward. We were both researchers and participants, and we were doing this task from a privileged position of academic interest. We had the time and resources available to us to meet and discuss, explore, and enjoy, and we were doing so in our own names, on behalf of ourselves and maybe our academic careers. The problem of speaking on someone else's behalf was circumvented to the best of our abilities by generating our own data and then writing up our individual responses to having our data analysed by others in the group. We spoke about our responses in the group and were able to receive two-way feedback on the process. For example, we discussed, 'What is it like to have your data analysed by a particular method? What is it like to hear what effect the analysis and method you used had on the person providing the data? What did some methods elicit in us that others didn't?' This process took time and moved us away from the topic of '*feeling at home'* yet at the same time it led us to reflect on our varied experiences of feeling at home (or not) in the group. The process was deeply enlightening and enjoyable on an intellectual level, whilst also being rather unusually intense on an emotional level, eliciting anxiety, frustration, fear, excitement for different members at different times. This emotional experience is also part of the process of reflexivity

because self-reflexivity can indeed mean "frustration, emotional discomfort, and the shock of a disturbingly more accurate image of oneself" (Garret, 2013, 254).

During the course of this ever-evolving reflexivity we developed some insights about our subject matter, for instance that we had made some basic assumptions about the very expression 'feeling at home'. Dempsey et al (2019) describe how as a group of researchers using a pluralistic qualitative approach, their separate analysis of researchers' reflections on their own responses to participants' data – online accounts of depression – served to enhance their understanding of the topic and the way in which meaning was found. Unlike Dempsey et al (2019), it was not possible for us to separate researcher data from participant data so clearly, and in this respect, the reflective practice in which we engaged might be thought of as more like "stepping back" from the analysis to gain additional or different perspectives on our initial understanding. For example, when we were able to name and identify our differences, we also 'remembered' that, 'feeling at home' is not a translatable phrase in other languages spoken by some of us in the group. Before this, we were blind to the Anglo-Saxon influence on our thinking. For example, once we thought in Maltese, or Arabic, we could think of this concept as being more relational, (e.g. in Maltese the closest translation is 'inhossni komda mieghek' - I feel comfortable with you). We also started to think about how quite serendipitously, we were exploring 'feeling at home' whilst living through the era of Brexit, where many of us were not native to Britain. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic with its numerous lockdowns, its 'K*eep safe, stay home*' slogans, which inevitably changed how we collectively thought and felt about 'home'.

The process of learning from one another

The process of learning from one another has been an integral part of how the research group has operated. It overlaps heavily with other themes in this paper, including how, thus far, we have grappled with the diversity of approaches. From our earliest discussions, it was clear that a key motivation for joining the group for each of us, was an awareness of our different perspectives and preferences regarding analytic approaches and hence a desire to engage with these together in our work. Arguably, having these differing perspectives and analytic preferences means that learning from each other has been a necessary condition for being part of the group, whether implicitly assumed or eventually, explicitly discussed. Members of the group have commented that they have felt that learning from each other is both pleasurable and fruitful ("This has been the absolute best part of the whole experience… I learnt more here than I have in years of being acquainted with qualitative research"). Despite not being an explicit starting point, learning from each other has also, therefore, become an integral part of how we work pluralistically.

According to researchers who utilise group work, including memory-work, the nature of this type of collective working, as we have already mentioned, encourages the blurring of researcher/researched binary and leads to 'learning opportunities' (Hamm, 2020), including an expectation and desire to learn from different perspectives. It is also considered as necessary for critical analysis as it is a way of ensuring each individual group member is aware of "blind spots" in their own approach (Hamm, 2020). Korsgaard et al. (2020) developed a similar approach, albeit in an applied context of Education Research, whereby not only did learning from each other take place, but was considered necessary to develop better theory and practice. This "Community of

Inquiry" method was characterised by a dialogical approach (though in this case between researchers, practitioners and students, rather than just between researchers), where there was an expectation that group members would engage in equal dialogue striving for collective understanding and lead to greater 'tact' and 'attunement':

> …it is an activity in plurality, accepting the fact that human action and understanding is only possible in the knowledge of and interaction in a plurality of individual perspectives (Korsgaard et al., 2020, 501).

Our experiences are similar in that dialogical learning opportunities and development of 'attunement' are clearly evident. We have discussed how this learning made us develop a more wide-ranging understanding of both the topic at hand as well as making us more aware of the importance of being sensitive to each other's perspectives in our analyses, as described in group members' reflexive notes:

> I have learned about myself as a researcher, through noticing the differences between my data analysis and others.

> Having listened to others' reflections and comments in the group, I seem to have internalised their voices to some extent, leading to me asking myself questions such as 'what would X think about that?' or 'would this way of analysing the material seem uncritical to Y?

> I usually tend to have a clear sense of where I want to go with my research, so it's been a challenge to not advocate for a particular course of action or direction too strongly.

Inevitably, group dynamics are affected by how we learn from each other and vice versa. Indeed, we noted how our diverse perspectives and group dynamics means that, for at least some of us, the group itself is somewhere they '*felt at home'*.

A specific consideration that emerged in later discussions was the significance of our individual identities. The original memory-group work of Frigga Haug and Frauenformen was explicitly a feminist project. Ironically for us, it wasn't until these later discussions that we acknowledged that we are all women in the group and that the interplay between group dynamics and learning from one another may have been very different if there had been men in the group. Importantly, this acknowledgement prompted further discussions about other aspects of our identities including race, age, and class. Although, unlike other memory-work research we did not explicitly focus on these categories to start with (Berg, 2008; Andreassen and Myong, 2017). These later discussions led some of us to reveal how we were aware of the ways these identity dimensions may have affected our understanding of *feeling at home* both in our written accounts and approach to analyses. These were undoubtedly imbued in our understandings, even if not made explicit:

> For me, a large part of choosing/agreeing on the topic of feeling at home, when we made this decision as a group, was because …. I was already interested in how the topic could relate to inclusion/exclusion practices, and how the ways we construct our identities affect how we might also construct feeling at home – from my perspective a significant part of which involves race alongside class and gender.

As a group we can be characterized by our differences as well as our similarities. All of us were London-based at the time of writing our reflections, but some were born in different countries, Malta, Ireland, Germany, Israel, and in different parts of the UK. Some of us are also bi- or multi-lingual. Some of the group are already established academics, while others have less experience. Some of us are counselling psychologists who work as therapists in addition to academic roles. We discussed these identity dimensions, such as our perceived experience as academics (e.g. early career vs

more experienced); types of insider/outsider status where we have felt 'othered' and also pre-existing relations in the group (some members were taught/examined by another member, some are working or had worked together in the same university department) noting how "attention needs to be given to the modes of entry of group members, their status and prior relationships and their development in the course of a project" (Hamm, 2020, 70). We realised that all of us were cautious at different times when sharing our ideas and thoughts. For instance, being concerned about how they would be received, based on perceived differences in experience, age, and career status of other members:

> I recognise I've often held back or edited myself, unsure that I had something of value to contribute.

'Holding back' was experienced in different ways by all members of the group: more experienced researchers held back for fear of dominating and less experienced researchers held back for fear of having little of value to contribute. These discussions regarding identity and positioning in the group were a substantial reflective learning moment. They foregrounded aspects of our identities and made us contemplate not only how this may affect how we analyse the data, both individually and as a group, but also how this may have affected how we wrote our accounts and the very notion of "feeling at home". It also made us focus on how our identities may or may not have affected the power dynamics of the group. We will no doubt continue with our 'personal political development' (Berg, 2008) in the continual reflection and group learning we have already been developing and engaging in so far:

> …we are not only learning to work together but learning about each other as well.

It is interesting to note that we started to consider 'ourselves' more consciously when, as a group, we had to 'present ourselves' (and our work) to others at a conference. As we began to consider how others may see us, we began to look at ourselves with closer consideration. We noticed that we had made some assumptions about our homogeneity as a group of academic women and in discussion started to peel back the layers of difference, resonance, and dissonance (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg and Bertsch, 2003; Gilligan, 2015)

Some final thoughts

Our group owes its existence to a curiosity about the relationship between experience (our embodied experience) and discourse (how we talk about experience). It was also set up as a small group of academics who decided collectively to use *our own* data to analyse embodied experiences. This positioning, as both researchers and participants, necessitated us taking up a reflexive stance.

We first encountered methodological reflexivity as we began to analyse one another's texts. We began to discover the effects our preferred method of interpretation had on the way the accounts were understood. Some methods seemed to capture the essence of the feeling the author had described, others enabled us to find hidden or covert meanings. Some brought up uncomfortable conversations and really highlighted the value of participant feedback. Having stood in both positions in such a 'live' and timely way, we became more acutely aware of the political stances held by the different methods and of the very real effect they have on our participants as well as how they represent what participants say. To make a finer point of this, we could feel the pull of our investment in

our data and how sensitive it felt for someone else to draw meaning from it, meaning we might not have intended (see Willig, 2012, for a wider discussion on the ethics of interpretation). As we progressed, methodological reflexivity started to give way to a more personal reflexivity. Having our texts analysed in the group, giving feedback on that, and thinking more about our identity positions moved us further into reflexivity.

Collaborative pluralistic research, by its very nature, encourages as well as facilitates reflexivity. The involvement of several researchers who bring different backgrounds and different perspectives to the data means that each researcher is made aware that their own approach to the research is only one of several possible ways of working with qualitative data. As such, a pluralistic research design is the ideal vehicle for putting into practice the "persistence in reflexive questioning and dialogue with our participants, our colleagues and others who may see the world differently" which Lazard and MvAvoy (2020) argue is needed to ensure that researchers develop an awareness of the 'partial and positioned perspectives' that they bring to their research. An awareness of alternative interpretations is much easier to access when working pluralistically. Frost and Bailey-Rodriguez (2021, 148) draw attention to this aspect of collaborative pluralistic research:

> By providing a rationale to team members, listening to their rationale for using other methods, and addressing any questions that arise about methods and their use means that a parallel pluralistic process takes place in which the many perspectives brought by group members are carefully considered in relation to the research focus.

This means that collaborative pluralistic research provides a fertile context within which to explore how differences in the ways in which researchers approach and interact with the data shape diverse ways of making sense of the data. Other pluralistic research groups

have reflected on their experiences of the research process (e.g. King et al. 2008; Frost et al. 2010; Chamberlain et al., 2011; Madill et al. 2018), and have identified various points of impact that researchers have on the analysis of their data. These points of impact include, but are by no means confined to, a researcher's preferred analytic method. Aspects of the researcher's identities (both social and personal), their emotional responses to the data, and the language they use to talk and write about their observations have also been identified as important mediators of their engagement with the data and the research process. Finally, the researcher's impact on the research is not a one-way process; qualitative psychologists have acknowledged and reflected upon the ways in which taking part in a collaborative qualitative research project has affected them, both emotionally and as researchers (e.g. Frost et al., 2012).

It could be argued that taking part in collaborative pluralistic research can help researchers develop skills which increase the quality of qualitative research in general. Our reflections regarding the learning that has taken place within the context of our project (see 'The process of learning from one another' above) bear this out and indicate that taking part in this type of research could be seen as a valuable part of qualitative research training. Frost and Bailey-Rodriguez's (2021, 148) observation that the processes involved in conducting pluralistic qualitative research "highlight(s) and enhance(s) many quality criteria of qualitative research such as reflexivity, transparency, and trustworthiness" support this line of thought.

Where do we go from here?

Writing these reflections has confirmed our desire to continue to work in this way. An important exercise we have engaged in at different junctions of our time together has been to have meetings with no particular agenda. These have elicited some of the richest

discussions as they allowed space for sustained reflection. It is worth pointing out that there is a tension between our professional/institutional demands (e.g. REF, grant capture, publishing in high impact journals etc.) and our desire to do research which is personally fulfilling and often done in our own time. It speaks to hierarchies of what is perceived as of value within current academia. The fact that this project was not constrained by such institutional demands has allowed us to conduct and develop this organic, evolving and intensely reflexive work which otherwise might not have happened. We are aware that working in this way is a privilege. Having said that, we do not want to imply that this sort of research is a luxury that is not feasible. Rather we believe that this type of working should be encouraged to produce more creative and expansive research as well as to enhance researcher experience. Incorporating reflexivity and the practice of collaborative working into the teaching and training of developing researchers could improve not only the quality of research but the learning experience for all those involved. Going forward, we will continue to engage in this reflexivity work, and alongside this want to continue to explore and deepen our understanding of the phenomenon of interest, namely what it means to feel at home. This will mean returning to the data for further rounds of analysis. Watch this space!

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