**Assignment cover sheet**

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How can researchers negotiate their positionality and their influence with their participants to produce high-quality research?

The example of two (formerly) working-class academics and working-class student habitus

Assignment for Understanding Research

Spring Term 2019

June 2019

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Introduction

The focus of this paper is with researchers’ positionality, specifically how certain effects produced by qualitative researcher(s) in their research environments can be addressed methodologically so as to produce high-quality interview-led qualitative research (King et al. 2019, 210 – 219). This paper aims to explore how the positionality of a researcher with working-class experiences – these may be both cultural and/or economic – and their participants’. Researchers’ similar experiences may compromise and/or enhance their research.

I will discuss the differences and similarities of Reay et al. (2009) and Lehmann's (2014) studies, both peer-reviewed, with a focus on analysing the quality of their research, its credibility and transferability with reference to the role of the researchers as participants within the production of their work. Both Lehmann and Reay were first-generation undergraduate students at one time though now choose to work with, and on, working-class research participants that bear some resemblance to them. Therefore, these two articles appear to be a good place to begin asking the question:

How can researchers take heed of similar positionalities to their participants, and how this affects the quality of the interpretations they draw?

Postionality is a quality issue for these papers inasmuch as there is no paradigm fix for the elimination of error and ‘bias’ that stems from the researcher, and their affinity for their participants, if this is indeed what is occurring (Elliott 1990; Phelan & Reynolds 1996).

However, we can still give attention to its effects in what is reported back and to the personal and social strategies needed to address it (Norris 1997, 117; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2014, 296-298). To some extent, by announcing how commitments to *particular* values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study it is possible to preserve the transparency of research (Maxwell 2013, 123-125; Cohen *et al.* 2017 271-276). There are also a number of procedures that qualitative researchers can use to recognise the basis of the trustworthiness of their findings (Morgan and Ravitch 2018). The two more frequently used strategies, triangulation and participant validation will be discussed in the Critique section. There is also independent coding, expert panels, thick description, audit trails, and respondent feedback (King et al. 2019, 214-217).

For addressing this issue this essay starts with a summary of the two articles to explain the conducted research. Both articles look very similar in both their choice of empirical setting, research participants, similar choice of methodology and data collection too. The following section is the critique of the papers. Within this critique, the focus will be on the relationship of the research question to the aim, the different research strategies and the different paradigms used.

My position in the research

My substantive interest is in the lived experiences of class and upward mobility (Friedman 2016) or the ‘psychosocial’ (Reay 2015) aspects of university participation for working-class students. Specifically, how statistically unlikely, first-generation students negotiate the psychical demands of their University experience, primarily feelings of perceived intellectual inadequacy, anxiety, and insecurity, and their previous lives, or ‘fields’, with former family and friends (cf. Grenfell and James 1998, 14-16).

Like Lehmann (2014) and Reay *et al.* (2009), I was a first-generation undergraduate student (i.e., a student where both parents did not attend university), albeit at a time of relatively massified participation. I have chosen these papers because they present similar a researcher positionality: the ‘personal’ is not explicitly foregrounded in the paper (King et al. 2019, 176-177), nor are there any explicitly affective statements either in their analysis. It would appear that both retain a high degree of apparent disinterestedness (Cohen et al. 2017, 64). Nonetheless, to the degree that findings of the study are determined less by the “biases, motivation, interests or perspectives” of the researcher and more by the participants’ perspectives (neutrality, or Lincoln and Guba’s confirmability, 1985, p. 290) both articles retain executive authority over the descriptive and explanatory questions of their research design (who, what, when, where and ‘how’).

Trustworthiness is an overarching concept used in qualitative research to refer to procedures taken to ensure the quality, rigor, and credibility of a study while re-establishing the fit between the epistemological and ontological correspondence of the researcher with the design, implementation, and articulations of their research study. It is both an aim and a practice (Morgan and Ravitch 2018). Methodological choices and criteria of quality at the research design can make the difference. Lincoln and Guba (1985) whose quality criteria are post-positivist in their orientation, have been credited with establishing the first iteration of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Quality will be determined with reference to these evaluative criteria for validity, reliability and generalisability in qualitative research (cf. also King et al. 2019, 212-218), which are broad and flexible in their scope for the quality of research. In essence Lincoln and Guba offer four substitutes: Credibility in place of validity as a means by which researchers can establish confidence in the truth of the findings of a particular inquiry; Transferability in place of reliability, sometimes referred to trackable variance (cf. King et al. 2019) and Confirmability in place of neutrality.

Descriptive summaries of the papers

Before turning to the comparison of the two articles this section summarises each in turn. The summaries will address: 1) what the papers are about (their aim/research questions); 2) how their research was conducted (research design/data collection methods and geographical context) and; 3) what were the main findings and conclusion from the analysis? (e.g. what, if any, statistical tests? What approach to qualitative analysis?); 4) the reportage or not of ethical issues.

Lehmann, W. (2014). ‘Habitus Transformation and Hidden Injuries: Successful Working-class University Students’, Sociology of Education, 87(1), pp. 1–15. doi: 10.1177/0038040713498777.

Metric data from Sage Journals shows that since December 2016, the article has been downloaded 1,777 times and cited 123 times. In his abstract, Lehmann writes that the overall aim is of gaining ‘a better understanding of the different ways in which they [undergraduate students] consolidate their working-class habitus with the middle-class culture of the academic field’ (ibid., 1). To track these changes in the habitus (dispositions, motives, habits, beliefs, capitals) of working-class Canadian students over time, the paper uses a four-year longitudinal study for the same students at the same university (University of Western Ontario), with interviews on three occasions—in the first, second, and final years of their undergraduate studies. In the first phase 75 newly enrolled working-class students were interviewed between early September and mid-October 2005, soon after arriving on campus and beginning their studies (ibid., 3).

The overall focus of his analysis is on those students who have ‘overcome these disadvantages and been exceptionally successful at university’, but which perhaps bear ‘hidden injuries’ (ibid., 3). Success is defined not just as academic success – it does not exclude the possibility of unease or psychic problems among these students.

Although the first interview phase involved 75 participants, given his focus on the university as habitus-transforming process Lehmann restricts his final analysis in the article to a subsample of 22 participants; those who have appeared to be substantially above average in their academics, though also exhibiting social success through constructive involvement in various university clubs, organisations, or other university life (ibid. 4). Relevant to the presentation of this data, in the ‘Success’ section there is the use of one table which represents the 22 participants: their (pseudonymous) name, their father and mother’s highest levels of completed education and their occupations, the students’ University subject, and an indication of their stated future education and career plans in the final column. These 22 participants also have in common that they embraced the habitus transformative aspects of university life’ (ibid., 4). They are the numerical minority. Of these 22, the majority had either decided to continue their education in graduate or professional school programs (e.g., law school, medical school, or teacher education) or secured upwardly mobile jobs.

Lehmann’s approach to qualitative analysis presents a Findings section further sub-divided into three further sections: ‘Success’, ‘Transformations’ and ‘Hidden Injuries: Transformation and Conflict’. Lehmann chooses to quote participants either based on isolated themes. For example, gaining new knowledge, growing personally as well as their repertoire of cultural capital, changing their outlooks on life, developing new dispositions and tastes about a range of issues, from food, politics, and their future careers. However, he clearly set asides more attention to one participant called Monica who is quoted in all three sections. Here, interviewees also register ambivalences: complex allegiances to, and dismissal of, their working-class pasts – many recognise this transformative process as having strained their relationships with parents, former friends and peers. Lehmann writes that these narratives of success– although the exception to the rule– conflict with the somewhat over-deterministic story of habitus dislocation which is characterised ‘as relatively static and a source of conflict when one encounters an unfamiliar field’ (ibid., 7; cf. Bourdieu 1990; see also Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

In interpreting the successes across the three interviews the author chooses many extended direct quotes from participants. The responses are analysed partly with reference to the salience of Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990) concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and field. The psychical and inter-personal ‘injuries’ resulting from transformed habitus and the conflictual habitus of friends and family are pursued in the interviews. Here, Lehmann compares and contrasts their changes in attitudes and dispositions across time. They conclude that, overall, the students have been willing to affiliate themselves to some extent based on cultural activities and forms of professional belonging and aspiration towards further graduate study that they otherwise would not have had if they did not attend University. The findings of the paper emphasise the author’s wish not to generalise ‘from these data to all working-class students at this or any other university’ (Lehmann 2014, 4).

The final section offers Lehmann the ability to draw together some of the insights from this successful working-class group of students. The findings of the paper show that Bourdieu’s concept of a working-class habitus encountering a new field is not necessarily conflictual as previously theorised. Overall, Lehmann considers mobility through education ‘essential’. However, he also cites the strengths of working-class knowledge and experience which have not been characterised as ‘deficient and pathological’ – those not considered as narrow-minded, limiting, racist, sexist, and homophobic by some of the young people in this study.

Ethical issues are unreported, though the exclusion of such process-based details is not uncommon for the word count expected of journal articles.

Reay, D., Crozier, G. and Clayton, J. (2009). ‘‘Strangers in Paradise’? Working-class Students in Elite Universities’, Sociology. 43(6). pp. 1103–1121. doi: 10.1177/0038038509345700.

The article has been cited 538 times and downloaded on 3946 occasions since December 2016. Reay et al.’s (2009) study is embedded in larger ESRC TLRP research (ibid., 1117). Their aim, not dissimilar from Lehmann (2014), is to pinpoint the ‘complexities of identities through Bourdieu’s notions of habitus and field’ (Reay et al. 2009, 1103) –namely, how and in what ways ‘the movement of habitus across new, unfamiliar fields results in ‘a habitus divided against itself’ (Bourdieu 1999, ibid., 1103). Like Lehmann’s (2014) 22 participants, the researchers’ select nine case studies of working-class students selected who are also successful, largely academically, though in some social and psychic tension with their ‘elite’ university. Reay et al. will consider the reasons for their limited participation in the social life of the university. Again, these are somewhat exceptional students and, as such, are in some tension with Bourdieu’s thinking: they hail from former socialisation which bears relative lack of both economic and dominant capital, yet all of their sample have been effectively socialised by the schooling system, achieving at least three As at A-level (ibid., 1105). In their home and school pasts, they were often outsiders for exhibiting uncommon studiousness too. The research is more cross-sectional, taking students at a particular set of months in one academic year (some in their first-year, others are implied to be in their second or finalists). In having students provide vivid anecdotal experiences of their past (ibid., 1106), it aims to indicate how ‘the lack of fit between the field of the local working-class environment and already evolving habitus’ occurs (ibid., 1107).

For context Reay et al. begin their paper briefly situating the low overall proportion of working-class students in UK universities between 2002 and 2006 with basic descriptive statistics. Their methodology is primarily a series of interviews, combining within-case analysis and cross-case comparisons between their participants and their field so that they are able to make such statements as ‘a prioritizing of academic work that was common across all the Southern working-class students’. The main findings and conclusions are that these students appear to grasp a ‘feel’ for the academic field of an ‘Elite Middle-Class Bubble’ not through ‘doxic submission’ (Bourdieu 1997; ibid. 1113), that is, not blindly acquiescing to each and every rule, written or not, but through – arguably – a ‘critical evaluation that positions them more powerfully within their field’ (ibid. 1113).

One of the foremost conclusions that the researchers ascribe to most, if not all, of these students is that they are marked by a ‘reflexive habitus’ – able to move in and out of different identity positionings with some adeptness: [t]hese students have managed tensions between habitus and field since early childhood, generating dispositions in which ‘reflexivity ceases to reflect a temporary lack of fit between habitus and field but itself becomes habitual’ (Sweetman 2003, 541; cited in Reay et al. 2009, 1115). The degree to which this involves a psychical pain for the students is considered throughout as they try to negotiate both family and themselves academically and socially at a socially prestigious University.

Critique

In qualitative research there is no general agreement about which criteria to use ensure quality. As mentioned above, we settle on Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria which argues qualitative research should evolve a separate set of criteria from those employed in quantitative research (cf. King et al. 2019, 6-27). Concerning these issues, this section compares the two articles with each other, focusing on the RQ, research strategies and paradigms to explore their differences and similarities.

Research Questions

White (2017) lists the difference between the aim and the RQ. The latter is more specific than the former. He understands that the RQ should segment the overall aim into more particular questions which the researchers are going to answer.

Lehmann’s (2014) paper explicitly asks four research questions: (i) How do successful working-class university students describe their university experiences?; (ii) To what degree do they relate their success to their social background?; (iii) Does their success at university entail a shift toward a middle-class habitus?; (iv) Has success changed their relationship to others, such as parents and former friends and peers?’ (2014, 3). This set of four seems to be a good example of how to bring each of the desired aspects of a RQ into set of discrete, subsidiary consideration: ‘*How…’* (process of change)*, ‘to what degree…’* (extent of change)*, ‘Does’* (questioning the assumption of conflict between habitus and field), and *‘Has’* (open-ended questioning) (see White 2017, 46-47).

In contrast, the aims of Reay et al. (2009) appear not to ask an explicit RQ but to explore for these nine students, similar themes: the movement of habitus across new, unfamiliar fields results in ‘a habitus divided against itself’ (Bourdieu, 1999a) not unlike Lehmann’s two final RQs. It is not uncommon for published papers to leave out such process-based detail. This absence does not mean that the original research didn’t undertake construction of an RQ – the constrained word limits of journal papers mean that there can often be a focus on outcome/content. The apparent lack of an RQ, while not following White’s (2017) point about breaking down the aim into questions sets about collecting data concerning how these students think, act and behave.

Inasmuch as both papers have a common point of departure it is to consider to what extent the experience of upward mobility always involves an unavoidable tension between origins and journeys, and the as-yet of their destinations.

Research Strategies

The use of extant social theory for thematic analysis is partly, though not exclusively, deductive. The differences between inductive and deductive strategies guide the general direction of an investigation (Ragin & Amoroso 2011, 16). The latter ‘starts with general ideas and applies them to evidence; induction starts with evidence and assesses their implication for general ideas’ (p. 16).

At the level of overall research design, habitus is challenging to define and operationalise. Sullivan (2002, 144) argues that this concept is ‘theoretically incoherent’ and ‘impossible to operationalise meaningfully’. It is mainly used to add a ‘veneer of sophistication to empirical findings’ (p. 150). None of this appears to have weakened the popularity of these concepts. This might explain why both researchers test habitus change as a looser heuristic, working inductively upwards, rather than as an over-determining procedure with much deductive rigidity downwards.

As deductive strategies, both papers rely to some extent on the theoretical concepts of Pierre Bourdieu. While these papers partly avoid the elegance of ‘high theory’, they do not test the strengths of Bourdieu’s concepts. Commitments to the use of such concepts function more as a looser heuristic for conceptualising student agency (i.e. a habitus negotiating through, and with, their fields) (cf. Sayer 2005, 50).

However, to realise the data from transcript to theory, Lehmann’s study explicitly recognises Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) guidelines for analysis based on *grounded theory*, with interview transcription guided by relatively open categories to more specific coding hierarchies and ultimately ‘to more selective empirical and theoretical categories’ based on patterns of transformation described in the following sections – *success, transformation, and hidden injuries: transformation and conflict* (ibid. 4)*.* Grounded theory is primarily inductive, seeking to construct theory among other distinguishing characteristics (Charmaz 1996, 28). In grounded theory, coding is not simply part of the data analysis but the ‘fundamental analytic process used by the researcher’ (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 12). It is what transports researchers and their data from transcript to theory. However, the codes themselves and the coding cycles are not discussed*,* nor is the possibility of quality assurances such as independent coding of the data by other researchers (King et al. 2019, 214). It is not apparent that any such process of independent coding has been considered for these two papers. Therefore, it is a moot point to continue discussing this quality criteria in relation to them. As a research strategy, coding is iterative, inductive, though bounds and delimits as it organises text data into themes, descriptions, and theories (Walker and Myrick 2006, 549). This does not make one interpretation untrustworthy. Instead, there is the possibility for such coding, hence interpretation, to be otherwise (contingent).

Regarding the research strategies of Reay et al.’s (2009) paper, coding processes by theme appears evident, though the codes themselves are not noted (cf. Saldana 2016). In their conclusion they write that the ‘majority of these working-class students had faced the paradoxical situation of being more like a ‘fish out of water’ in their largely working-class secondary schools’. In an elite University, ‘they, at least, partially mirror and clone the self-image of the hegemonic norm’ (ibid., 1115). The researchers come to the conclusion that these responses given suggest ‘creative adaptations and multi-faceted responses’ (ibid. 1103) to be the norm among their nine students to their University and home lives. Yet, of course, this does not mean there were no other possible interpretations. In this sense, while the authors appear to begin with a deductive approach, they all but change to the inductive strategy in their conclusions. In other words, we might need a more, geographically-specific grounded theory account of how working-class academic successes happened or are happening too (i.e. a strength of Lehmann’s account).

Related to this, another prominent trustworthiness procedure related to credibility and confirmability is participant validation. This may be because the participants do not recognise themselves in the case study -- flagging up validity or 'credibility' issues (Lincoln and Guba 1985) issues. Here, the researcher returns the analysis back to the participants for feedback on how well the interpretation fits, or does not, their own lived experience (see King et al. 2019, 216). Again, it is a moot point whether this quality criteria was used. Since both articles have gone to publication, we can reasonably infer there were no major issues from students disputing their own representations and its analysis, or these simply were not probed further (King et al 2019, 216). This does not mean there may not be further disconfirming evidence to these students’ ability to reflexively handle academic success and its culture with other fields of experience (Morgan and Ravitch 2018).

Research Paradigms

This section will aim for a comparison of the two articles’ paradigms as rooted in the papers -- and not towards more general comparisons between paradigms -- but will also focus on the researchers’ stances, as these two aspects are closely related to each other.

Both Reay et al. (2009) and Lehmann (2014) appear to be grounded in interpretivism. This paradigm is premised on several elements. For Charmaz (1996) it begins with and develops analyses from the point of view of the experiencing person. Interpretivist approaches frequently place an emphasis on the importance of relationship dynamics between interviewer and interviewee and propose that researchers pay close attention to these (Finlay 2005).

Overall, case study research design is in-depth, detailed, and particular: all necessary qualities if researchers wish to examine the finer points of students' psychic and social lives (Tight 2017, 164). This appears to make the case study research design more congruent with interpretivist and contextualist paradigms.

Based on their research paradigms, the transferability (to use Lincoln and Guba’s term) from these two papers derives less from the representativeness of the case -- since the researchers do not make any such claims -- but upon how the cogency of theoretical reasoning fits, or does not, the focus on the particular (Mitchell 1983, 207; Tight 2017, 384). As we have suggested, Bourdieu’s concepts may have shortcomings not least because in both papers these working-class students do pursue demanding educational options not characteristic of some of their former friends and family (cf. Sullivan 2002, 151). For this reason, this makes these two case studies somewhat exemplary, and worth researching (cf. Tight 2017).

While it may appear that both researchers were likely to build their rapport with the participants based on a more knowing familiarity of similar socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (cf. Berger 2015, 223) does this not include the possibility of transference and counter-transference between interviewer and interviewee? This concept originally has its basis in psychoanalysis: that is, the bias source of affinities or tendencies among researchers towards their participants. In transference, interviewees project onto the interviewer their feelings, fears, desires, needs and attitudes that derive from their own experience (Scheurich 1995). In counter-transference the interviewers project onto the interviewee. As a result, respondents may produce what is assumed the interviewer wants to hear, or interviewers may accord particular features of the respondent's experience undue prominence (Lee 1993, 105). Both affect reliability (transferability). Such jeopardy to trustworthiness alluded to in an email with one of the researchers (D Reay 2018, personal communication, 19 January) which many of these concerns about positionality. Diane Reay writes:

“…As for Strangers in Paradise the research project was value-laden. I was very concerned about the working-class students in Cambridge, over the 15 years I have been there particularly those education and sociology have frequently sought me out for support. That wouldn't have been possible if they hadn't been able to identify through my work that I shared their class background. The students we interviewed were not aware of my work or class background at the outset, but we took them out for meals - breakfast, lunch and dinners and inevitably shared class experiences, and throughout the research the research team moved between a research and a mentoring role. I wouldn't see this as compromising any spurious objectivity but rather establishing as much authenticity in the research relationship as is possible. It also enhanced the impact of the research.”

It is reasonable to absolve the researchers to some degree because there is a word limit on elaborating further on researcher subjectivity. It is also dangerous to critique authors for not doing something which they did not set out to do. However, a great deal of the researcher’s place could have arguably been articulated more clearly. Similarly, though slightly different with Lehmann (W Lehmann, personal communication, 21 January), he writes:

These personal experiences definitely led me to the research in the first place. In some way, the study was an attempt also to understand my own fractured trajectory into higher education and an academic career. I would therefore also have to admit that in my research, I am “drawn” to those participants whose experiences and attitudes are similar to my own. If I felt it would help rapport and the interview process, I would speak in the interview about my own experiences, as a way of making participants comfortable; to let them know that I can understand and have shared their experiences, struggles and success. Beyond that, I did not assume a direct mentoring role; neither formally nor informally … I am also quite certain that my analytical approach is strongly shaped by my personal experience.

These reflections consider some of how researchers understood themselves within the research situation. More prosaic concerns such as word limits prohibit more reflexive, trust-led research practice. As it stands, researcher influence, mitigated by the salience of quality criteria, must therefore be treated as less potential source of ‘bias’ within the articles’ paradigms. Instead, the researcher’s subjectivity is understood as a constitutive part of data collection situation. Interpretative phenomenological analysis, for example, talks about a ‘double hermeneutic’ or interpretations whereby the participant is providing an interpretation of their own experience, and the researcher is interpreting that from their own unique position (Smith and Osborn 2008). Is this double hermeneutic unavoidably what these two papers are caught within?

As Reay et al. write, with a participant called Jude that: ‘Whereas we would want to recognize the reflexive, situated, self-constructed nature of interview talk, especially in the personally meaningful contexts that the students were trying to make sense of, Jude’s version of his childhood vividly illuminates the lack of fit between the field of the local working-class environment and his already evolving habitus’ (Reay et al. 2009, 1107). While this quote may indicate that the researchers recognise the co-constructed nature of their data that cannot be generated without their own subjectivities, within the article, however, this is one of its only self-conscious moments. This makes its inclusion only seem more superficial.

While Reay et al. (2009) attempt to identify the perceived world of participants through interviews, there are limited means for showing how their interpretations might be different. We cannot critique authors for something they did not set out to do yet it would have been a value of transferability (reliability) to see how other sources of primary research data could to understand the habitual changes occurring to the participants. This would have meant using either the unused options of data triangulation or methodological triangulation. However, as a group of three researchers there is some possibility for each to interpret differently, though this is not the same as the systematic comparison of data taken by investigator triangulation (King et al. 2019, 217).

While we have suggested that these researchers may have projected a little or a lot about themselves onto the research (Berger 2015), the extent of describing these articles as ‘projecting’ something about their researchers onto their research(ed) is indeterminate – inextricable from the epistemological and ontological assumptions which produce its data – the data of personal feelings, thoughts and interpretations of events.

Impact/Applications/Implications

Working-class and/or first-generation students in many parts of the world continue to express more scepticism about the legitimacy of their place in Higher Education than their peers. There may be deep psychological underpinnings to such beliefs (cf. Mallman 2016)

Lehmann (2014) leaves open questions to Canadian universities and policy-makers in the acts they might take in offering working-class students support in their transition to university. Institutions, he suggests, might try to better reflect on the transition support to students through mentoring programs or counselling and support services. Though transitions are key moments, it might be asked why this is analytically separate from the remaining duration of a student’s time in HE. He also touches upon the more indeterminate problem of how ‘successful integration’ of working-class students may still enforce estrangement from families and peer groups. This suggests a need for future research in this area. Reay et al. (2009) provides examples of how student reflexivity certainly involves emotional tensions between new and former communities, though not automatically a negative experience it itself.

Although there has been relative, though improved, rate of participation by first-generation student in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (Whitty et al. 2016, 78, 88), Reay et al. (2009) and Lehmann (2014) draw attention to a statistically exceptional minority, who, in the case of the former, have developed the capacity to move between cultures as a mark of their developing resilience and reflexivity that transform their habitus. This does not mean exclusion does not take place too, some of it self-imposed. There are possible lessons to be drawn regarding emotional work and stamina. While these cases are not of direct, external generalisability, there are analogues for historically under-represented students in universities both elite ‘Russell Group’ and other universities, the latter which often pools students from low-income backgrounds.

The impact of these two papers makes me appreciate how larger processes of class are generated ‘…at the intimate level as a “structure of feeling” in which doubt, anxiety and fear inform the production of subjectivity’ (Skeggs 1997, 6). The implications might I want to derive for any future professional practice will be focussed on systems of disadvantage that produce such scepticism and nervousness about being in a certain university, as much recognising the symptoms themselves.

Conclusion

This essay compared two peer-reviewed articles in order to find out how researchers can act in a way such postionality does not compromise – to a greater extent --- the quality of qualitative research. There is a need to retain concerns about quality and trustworthiness addressing them into all aspects of research design, not simply as items to be addressed. There are many ideas within the literature which serve to guide the strength and limitations of ensuring potentially high quality qualitative research vis-à-vis researcher positionality Maxwell (2013) provides eight sources: intensive, long-term involvement; rich data; respondent validation; intervention; searching for discrepant evidence; triangulation; the use of numbers and; comparison (p. 126 – 129). Reay *et al.* (2009)’s long-term involvement and Lehmann’s (2014) longitudinal study underscore the fact that a medium-to-long term involvement to build rapport may not necessarily build credibility or transferability too. However, it would appear to strengthen a researcher’s own personal understanding of that locale. This means it is not unnecessary to produce panoramic overviews using quantitative research designs too. Mixed method approaches, which understand that small-scale qualitative conclusions can both harmonise with, or have contained within them, implicit quantitative components are just one possible alternative (ibid., 128).

Both Reay et al. (2009) and Lehmann’s (2014) epistemological and ontological commitments cannot produce theory-free or ideology-free knowledge. This is the inherent nature of the interpretivist project. It would have therefore been worthwhile to have within the analysis qualifications to, and alternative interpretations of, the participants’ responses and more of them at different times, for these are always fluid and context-dependent.

Overall, Lehmann (2014), I think, is partially successful in answering his four explicitly articulated research questions though it would do justice to the expanse of longitudinal data to have it present in an extended form such as a monograph. From the overall aim that Reay et al. (2009) appear to set themselves exploring working-class students’ attitudes to academic work and social life, the project is a modest success. Paradigmatically, as well in collection methods and research design, the two articles are not so different. Their aim is not to innovate or add a new theory to existing educational research, but to nuance empirical responses with an existing –possibly over-used – sociological concept. In methodologies and research designs, the two are not especially innovative.

Reflections on the review process

This review process based on the effects of the researcher in qualitative research took me on an extended path of self-learning. I saw how it is of importance to the integrity of research and the benefit of all concerned stakeholders to include as much of details of the process which informs the research project, or to perhaps have this information availably freely elsewhere. When writing my dissertation, I will be sure to include a degree of ‘mess’, that is, data collection strategies and researcher behaviours that presented unintended consequences and what was done to, as best as possible, recognise and amend them. Also, though I have read about how to ‘do’ reflexivity as a researcher by Bourdieu (Dean 2017), this remains to be seen in practice.

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