Article

A Delicate Balancing Act: Negotiating with Gatekeepers for Ethical Research When Researching Minority Communities

Ruth McAreavey, PhD
School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

Chaitali Das, PhD
School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

Abstract

Research and processes of knowledge production are often based on racialised and imperialistic frameworks that have led to either the exclusion or the pathologisation of minority groups. Researchers address issues of exclusion by adopting recruitment strategies that involve negotiating with gatekeepers to ensure the inclusion of minority or marginalised groups. This often involves in-depth scrutiny of gatekeepers and requires the researchers to negotiate deals and to make personal disclosures. However, there remains relatively little discussion on the pragmatic ethical issues facing researchers in the field as a result of these interactions. This article suggests that interactions with gatekeepers present ethical issues that can be effectively addressed and managed by researchers through the exercise of phronesis. Phronesis allows researchers to make critical ethical decisions based on the specific characteristics of the research sites and subjects, not least of which are those issues that emerge as a consequence of researcher positionality. Such decisions are not necessarily identified or accommodated through bureaucratic processes which govern research ethics. We advance the notion of research ethics as an ongoing process that requires researcher skills and engagement, rather than a one-off bureaucratic exercise.

Keywords: gatekeepers, research ethics, deal-making, ethical scrutiny, minority groups, phronesis

To sensitively and meaningfully access participation from minority groups for research, researchers have identified gatekeepers as important mediators (Eide & Allen, 2005). In the field, some of the initial ethical decisions that a researcher encounters are during the development of a recruitment strategy. This includes evaluating gatekeepers' motives, how routes of access affect research participation, and how the relationship between a gatekeeper and researcher is established and maintained. While scrutiny of these issues varies across review boards, they still must be negotiated by researchers in the field and have important implications for the inclusion and participation of minority groups. Typically, research ethics committees evaluate the potential vulnerability of client groups and deal with anticipated ethical concerns. This is normally considered using tools to achieve the ethical values of respect, beneficence, and justice (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). In practice, these ethical concerns are interpreted in terms of maintaining confidentiality and ensuring informed consent, but these often rely on standardised generalised templates that fail to recognise the emerging and ongoing nature of ethics (Hemmings, 2006; McAreavey & Muir, 2011; van den Hoonard, 2002). This institutional treatment of ethics results in static, one-off discussions about ethics where the moral decisions made by researchers in the field that are central to the research process are not always fully understood by research ethics committees. Indeed, ethical decisions and practices in the field are variable, subject to context, and cannot be encapsulated by universal rules (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Shaw, 2008). In some circumstances researchers feel compelled to use tactics, such as telling "the ethics review committee what they want to hear" (Tolich & Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 73).

Flyvbjerg (2001) argues that questions of values and power need to be carefully considered by social scientists through exercising critical judgment or *phronesis*, which contributes to ethical research. He writes, "Phronesis requires interaction between the general and the concrete; it requires consideration, judgment, and choice. More than anything else, phronesis requires experience" (p. 57). Drawing on Aristotle's classical work, Flyvbjerg develops the concept of phronesis to take account of power. He shows how phronesis involves a "situational ethics" (p. 130) that takes account of social and historical contexts and requires consideration of who gains and who loses from particular phenomena and how these losses are manifest. Power is central to phronetic practice and ought to be considered as something that is fluid and shifting. It may be positive and productive rather than a negative, restraining factor. Focus on the minutiae of particular situations is imperative to this type of research and allows the researcher to connect between the general and the specific (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Phronesis requires acumen from the researcher to understand the complexities of human conduct; to identify power relations and the different dimensions and biases that shape the research (such as those brought to light by Said, 1995); and to respond appropriately and swiftly to events in the field.

Issues of power, in terms of inclusion and exclusion, research methods, and research processes, have been highlighted by many researchers when studying minority groups (Jensen & Lauritsen, 2005; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Strategies for gaining access through gatekeepers as well as issues of researcher positionality have been examined by a number of researchers (Clark & Sinclair, 2008; Corra & Willer, 2002; Knight, Bentley, Norton, & Dixon, 2004; Meadows, Lagendyk, Thurston, & Eisener, 2003; Yancey, Ortega, & Kumanyika, 2006; Yu, 2009). Nevertheless, there appears to be limited literature on 'real life' ethical dilemmas that might provide insight into practical strategies for dealing with issues of participation and working with gatekeepers. Power dynamics and researcher positionality have relevance for researchers working in any area where gatekeepers are used to access participants, though these may be particularly significant in relation to research with minority groups. In this article we seek to contribute to current debate on ethical research with minority groups and to lend support to the recognition of research as an activity with professional (not bureaucratic, commercial, or alternative) aspirations (Hammersley & Traianou, 2011) where particular skills, wisdom, and expertise are required.

We explore the power dynamics associated with recruitment through gatekeepers when researching minority groups from the perspectives of two researchers with different positionalities in relation to their field of study. We consider the ethical issues in recruitment when researching minority and migrant groups. Minority and migrant groups increasingly face similar issues of marginalisation, exclusion, identity, and citizenship (Johns, 2011). Migrants have enshrined rights, not necessarily identical to those of national citizens but significant nonetheless and indicative of similarities to minority groups. It is from this broader perspective that we locate our understanding of migrants and minority groups. One researcher, Chaitali, has a predominantly insider status in her research with British-Indian adult children of divorce in the United Kingdom (UK) because she is herself a child of divorce and Indian. She shares some cultural, historical, and linguistic nuances with the British-Indian population in the UK. In this article, Chaitali shares the negotiations and ethical concerns that arose for her during her research on the sensitive topic of divorce. Meanwhile, Ruth could be considered an outsider to the research participants in her study because she is from Northern Ireland and has lived most of her life there. This article describes her experiences during a study of recent migrants to Northern Ireland, which included the way in which language barriers affected the migrants' daily experiences and how they made sense of unfamiliar social institutions. Throughout both researcher accounts we shift between different writing styles, but most of the article is written in the plural except for our personal narratives where we use the singular first person. We scrutinise interaction between gatekeepers and researchers, raising issues of ethics, trust, and power. Specifically, we examine how gatekeepers engage in ethical scrutiny prior to providing access and how researchers and gatekeepers engage in deal-making. The analysis does not intend to present a comparison of the methods of the two researchers but shows how distinct encounters require researchers to exercise critical judgement and practical wisdom (phronesis) to employ site-specific strategies to resolve issues. Both researchers reveal how the exercise of phronesis as a tool of the ethical researcher is based on multiple issues that cannot be standardised and that unfold within the field.

Frameworks of Knowledge and Ethics

Minority or marginalised communities are often misrepresented, pathologised, or problematised by research processes. Said's (1995) work on Occidentalism, in particular, reveals how colonial power, conquest, and control have shaped the study, research, and conceptualisation of colonised persons as others, as inferior and as deficit. Subsequently, it has been cogently argued that significant foundations of the research environment, including its establishment, perspectives, structures, practices, and outcomes, are based on racialised and imperialistic frameworks (Jensen & Lauritsen, 2005; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Young, 1992). These have led to the exclusion, or limited participation, of minority experiences and have reinforced stereotypes (Mitra, 1998; Moore, 1973). The literature also identifies the barriers facing researchers and minority groups in relation to securing their involvement in the research process (Fischer & Ragsdale, 2005; Knight et al., 2004; Yancey et al., 2006; Yu, 2009). Micro-interactional processes are also significant in research with minority and marginalised groups and include issues of cultural sensitivity, inclusion, and positionality (Begum, 2006; Fischer & Ragsdale, 2005; Jensen & Lauritsen, 2005; Kelman, 1972; Moore, 1973; Mullender & Hague, 2005; Sanghera & Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008; Sheikh, 2006). Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) suggests that knowledge frameworks and research methodologies become sites of struggle for marginalised or vulnerable groups who have little control or ownership of the research process.

Issues of power exist in most research encounters because they are politically embedded within particular contexts and are funded through channels that are perceived to have social relevance, such as informing policy (Moore, 1973; Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2001). Larger social structures and micro dynamics between the researcher and the researched shape power (Gottfried,

1996). Power relations tend to be asymmetrical but can be addressed through consideration of ethics that includes respect, beneficence, and justice (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). In an attempt to standardise and manage research ethics, almost all proposed research within modern research institutions is reviewed by established ethical review boards/research ethics committees. Nevertheless, such processes rely on standardised generalised templates that fail to recognise the research process and how research encounters shape ethics. They may even run counter to phronetic practice, which is variable and cannot be encapsulated by universal rules (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Shaw, 2008). While institutional processes ensure consideration of broader issues of harm and beneficence, they cannot appreciate the moral decisions made by researchers in the field and which are part of the research process. Ethics committees can provide minimum clearance but they cannot assure that all researchers will act with integrity, and they can do little to bridge "the space between conduct and compliance" (Israel & Hay, 2006, p. 131). It is in this context that phronesis becomes important for critical and ethical research.

Use of Gatekeepers for Access in Research with Minority Groups

Gatekeepers control access to a particular community or institution and as a result researchers are reliant on their input. It is generally recognised that gatekeepers play an important role in social research (de Laine, 2000), particularly for researching communities that do not trust mainstream research and are seldom heard or for research involving sensitive subjects (Eide & Allen, 2005; Knight et al., 2004; Yancey et al., 2006). They have the power to deny access to the researcher and they may also influence whether individuals opt in and out of a process. By negotiating directly with prospective research participants, gatekeepers can speed up the recruitment process (de Laine, 2000). By acting as cultural mediators or brokers (Eide & Allen, 2005; de Laine, 2000; Jezewski, 1993; Whyte, 1993) they can help the researcher become more culturally competent. Gatekeepers can act as guarantors of the researcher's legitimacy within the community (de Laine, 2000; Whyte, 1993) and, ultimately, they may save the researcher time and resources.

Gatekeepers have a keen interest in maintaining their credibility and ensuring that the researcher does not jeopardise their relationships in the community. The ethical concerns of participants can often be appropriately represented by gatekeepers, who are respected members of their communities (Eide & Allen, 2005; Sanghera & Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008). Nevertheless, gatekeepers may also have other interests and may hold preconceived, conventional, and biased ideas of what constitutes good research. In other words, how they deem the world to work and the nature of social relations, along with their understanding of how knowledge is constructed, may influence the extent and circumstances under which they grant access. It is thus not the case that all gatekeepers are equal; they have different levels of power, their motivations vary, and they hold diverse positions (Wanat, 2008).

Clark (2011) maintains that gatekeepers' engagement with researchers and the research process is not simple. The trust relationship between the researcher and gatekeeper is a critical factor (Oka & Shaw, 2000). Ultimately, they may present barriers to accessing research participants (Meadows et al., 2003; Wanat, 2008) or they may provide unlimited access to the same participants, leading to multiple studies that prevent a diverse understanding of the community (Eide & Allen, 2005; Sanghera & Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008). As such, researchers need to understand the implications of negotiating access via gatekeepers and of removing the access entitlement from the researched (Homan, 2001).

The Personal Narratives of Chaitali and Ruth

In the following section, we present our experiences from our individual perspectives in an attempt to get "close to reality" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 132) to gain insight into the particularities of certain circumstances and to place emphasis on the little things. This includes gaining access through gatekeepers and negotiating with those gatekeepers. Firstly, Chaitali describes how personal disclosure and ethical scrutiny were central to interactions with gatekeepers. Following this, Ruth highlights how active engagement with gatekeepers involved deal making to gain access to research participants.

Chaitali's Negotiations with Gatekeepers

My research was part of a PhD project which sought to explore British-Indian adult children's perspectives on parental divorce. The methodology was qualitative and examined participants' experiences through in-depth interviews. Participation was sought from all over the UK from adults who identified themselves as British-Indians, as Hindus or Sikhs, and who had experienced parental divorce.

Access Through Gatekeepers

The study aimed to recruit 'hard to reach' participants for a sensitive and personal study from a minority ethnic community. Divorce for British-Indians presents significant issues of stigma that have an inter-generational impact on divorced families (Das, 2011). British-Indians are a minority ethnic group in the UK and divorce rates within the British-Indian community are significantly lower compared to the general population in the UK, thus access and recruitment for the research was a challenge. I developed a number of strategies to help me recruit participants and sought participants both directly and through gatekeepers. In this article, I will focus on my recruitment through gatekeepers because 15 out of the 21 participants for my study were accessed in this way. (Six participants approached me directly for the study after finding out about it through newspapers, internet, and poster advertisements).

To recruit through gatekeepers, I established relationships with diverse community members by linking with organisations, temples, community centres, and shop keepers, as well as through conversations on the streets in localities with considerable Asian populations. This helped me to access a wide range of groups within the community and enabled me to be seen in the community as someone who was willing to engage openly and transparently (see Sixsmith, Boneham, & Goldring, 2003). I considered members in the community who had a community presence and could have links with possible participants for my study or could spread the word to reach possible participants as gatekeepers. Tushman and Katz (1980) offer a similar definition of gatekeepers in their article. I realised early on that many of the individuals I had identified in the community had been in the UK for a considerable period of time (and possibly were born in the UK), had high visibility, and had strong links in the community and could transfer and disseminate information to others in the community. Nevertheless, accessing participants remained a considerable challenge and took much longer than I had initially anticipated. I eventually stopped my search after recruiting 21 participants even though my goal was to recruit 30 participants. These decisions were constantly communicated and negotiated with my supervisor, and pragmatic matters played an important role in shaping the recruitment process. During this process I had to address and respond to a number of issues that various gatekeepers posed about my study. I realised that developing meaningful relationships with gatekeepers to gain access to participants was based on me successfully responding to the ethical concerns

presented by them. Below I outline some aspects of my negotiations with gatekeepers, which involved personal disclosures and responding to ethical queries.

Negotiating with Gatekeepers

Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) suggests that communities are often concerned about the ethics of research carried out with them as subjects. My attempt to engage with gatekeepers provided them with an opportunity to scrutinise the ethics of my research. Indeed, as Hurdley (2010) suggests, ethical concerns and dilemmas for minority communities can differ from mainstream ideas, and the community members were both interested in and concerned about the ethical issues that my research posed for them, even though the study had been approved by an academic ethics committee and I had communicated this to them. These personal encounters, which were enabled to a degree by my insider status (as I am of Indian ethnicity and have some language and cultural familiarity), minimised power differences by allowing me to build rapport through sharing common experiences (Tang, 2002).

Personal disclosure

One of the key ethical questions posed by gatekeepers was about me in terms of who I was, why I was doing this study, and why people should communicate with me about their personal matters. These questions are fundamental in building trust and particularly important in qualitative research as no-one can know what questions may arise or anticipate responses to those questions (Kirsch, 2005; Magolda, 2000). Trust building enables participants to have the confidence to share sensitive and personal information and to know that such divulgences will not be misused or abused (Magolda, 2000; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Disclosure varies among researchers (Lee, 1993) and self-disclosure can enhance rapport and reciprocity, but it can also introduce difficult situations where researchers may become vulnerable and emotionally entangled (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007). In my research, I chose to selectively disclose information about my identity, thoughts, and feelings around the subject of divorce to enable gatekeepers to gauge my authenticity. This selectivity was crucial because too much self disclosure could present risks to me as an individual and undermine my reputation as a researcher. I shared my feelings and hypothesis that support and provision of services for women and children in divorced Indian families merit investigation and dialogue. I also disclosed my own status as a child of divorce, how my experiences shaped my desire to study divorce, and how this history affected my ability to empathise on these sensitive matters. These responses exposed me as a person, and I believe that the 'personal' was important for gatekeepers and community members to fully assess my interest and to ultimately place their trust in me. However, I did not disclose the personal dynamics of my family or indulge in my experiences of parental divorce. Thus, for me, phronesis was learning to judge the situation and mindfully respond within the particular context that I was engaging in.

Ethical scrutiny

The community gatekeepers also asked what the benefit of the research was and how or why they should approach people and request them to share their intimate lives with me. One Asian counsellor compared me with British Television Channel 4 programmers seeking to sensationalise issues in the community:

> I know a lot of people and I come across various scenarios. But I don't think they should come to you and you go and reopen their wounds all over again and I will then have to fix it later on. Some people from channel 4 also contacted me for a programme on

divorced couples and I think it is very unfair to exploit their experiences for research. (personal research notes, September 12, 2005)

Experiences of minority communities are often 'othered,' sensationalised, and portrayed in a pathological fashion (Agyeman, 2008; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). The term research is often appropriated for many different purposes by different agencies, and community scepticism to research is often entirely legitimate. Ethical research in minority communities requires cultural sensitivity, an open-minded and non-judgmental attitude that respects the opinions of others (Weaver, 1999). While many gatekeepers were supportive, some gatekeepers denied access because of family privacy and the possibility of harm towards prospective participants. However, these concerns of harm perceived by the community were perhaps over-emphasised; most of the eventual participants in my study did not have only negative stories but also stories of resilience and growth through their experiences of parental divorce. These experiences provided me with further insights into how divorce was perceived in the community and the sensitivity of the subject (see Shenton, 2004). I was able to get a sense of the complexity of the community and the diversity of opinion, views, and multiple perspectives and realities. An exercise of phronesis for me included listening, engaging, respecting, and carefully considering my own position and responses in each situation. I began to obtain an understanding of how this sensitivity was shaped within a larger macro context where participants' experiences could be politicised negatively with difficult repercussions for their community. There is often little knowledge, information, or reflection of diversities within minority communities, or their communities within a historical context (Weaver, 1999). Minority communities are thus easily stereotyped and particular phenomenon or events that occur in these communities can be quickly exaggerated to reflect upon the entire community. Indeed, media use (and abuse) of research and the reception of research findings by the public in particular contexts can deeply hurt minority communities, further marginalising them (Sanson et al., 2000).

Another issue that gatekeepers raised was related to the approach I planned to use in my research and its implications for the community I was studying. I had aimed to consider the process and outcome of divorce from a feminist perspective. This standpoint, however, was directly challenged by an older man in a temple community who noted:

> Divorce is occurring more in the community because women have taken women's liberation too far. (personal research notes, November 14, 2005)

This comment made me highly uncomfortable, but I did not challenge his statement because the situation had the potential to jeopardise support for recruitment. It may have been more honest for me to state my position; instead, I used my judgement to evaluate the particular circumstances and to exercise patience and listen openly to his views (Weaver, 1999). By actively listening and withholding my own opinions, I was able to understand the ideas and meanings expressed by community members, such as the importance of the sense of community (as opposed to that of individualism as advanced by Western cultural frameworks). Indeed, as a result of these conversations, I was able to rethink my own position as a feminist and my values of equality as influenced by Western conceptualisations. This reflection encouraged me to consider the diversity of women's positions within different communities. It was evident that certain feminist positions can be damaging to the manner that other cultures orient their relationships and to what and how they perceive their struggles. Indeed Aziz (1997) cautioned against 'white feminism,' that is, meaning from a white perspective that upholds existing power structures. I reflected on this and re-assessed my feminist position within the context of this community, thereby recognising their agendas and positions. Through this process of dialogue, I was able to also gain insight and to

clarify my own personal and professional agendas, processes which are important to produce authentic science (McGraw, Zwonkovic, & Walker, 2000).

Other gatekeepers also challenged the potential for bias within my methodology. For example, one gatekeeper, a man in the community, was reluctant to help me because he thought the study was flawed. He suggested I go back to my university and rethink the objectives and methodology of my study:

> You should interview divorced men as part of your study as children accounts will be biased towards women as they are closer to their mothers. In divorce, both men and women are at fault and you should collect both these accounts. (personal research notes, September 21, 2005).

As a response, I consulted the literature around the concerns posed by this gatekeeper and discussed it further with my supervisor. Men's perspectives on divorce are indeed very limited within the literature. I decided that incorporating men's accounts was beyond the scope of the study. I resolved, however, to explore options for pursuing this alternative line of inquiry in the future and of recognising it as a limitation in my research.

The analysis continues with Ruth's account of how she engaged with research participants in Northern Ireland.

Ruth's Negotiations with Gatekeepers

My research sought to examine migrants' micro-level experiences, their expectations of life in Northern Ireland, and to gain insight into conducting research with migrant communities. The study was conducted in two rural areas, one close to the border with the Republic of Ireland and the other located approximately midway between this area and Belfast. It was a qualitative study comprising 18 interviews, three focus groups with migrants, and one focus group with key informants. Migrant participants received an honorarium as an incentive to participate and in recognition of their time given to the research.

My research was exploratory; therefore, a specific nationality, age-group, or particular socio-economic profile was not selected. I engaged with multiple communities and among the migrants that were interviewed, the following nations were represented: Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Latvia, and Slovakia. Participants' family circumstances varied and included singletons, those in long term relationships with partners in Northern Ireland, and those with partners in their home country. Ages spanned many different generations, from early twenties to mid-sixties. Respondents varied also in terms of their motivation for moving and qualifications held. A few worked in professional occupations, but the majority were employed in casual jobs. Interviewees had the option of doing interviews in their own language with the use of an interpreter or in English. The role of the interpreter is subject to much debate because "Speaking for, or writing about, others is always a political act in which language is used to construct self and others" (Temple, 2008, p. 8). The interpreter was thus a central part of the research process and could be described as a key informant.

Access Through Gatekeepers

The question of how gatekeepers operate, exert power, and control certain aspects of the research process and of migrants' lives was critical to the success of my research. Mindful of this, and to avoid reproducing power imbalances, I had a mixed approach to recruiting research participants. I

contacted a range of gatekeepers, including a local employer, NGOs, and statutory sector service providers. The latter included those responsible for delivering health, education, and housing services. Here I focus mainly on the way in which I gained access through one NGO—a Christian based charity which I will call 'Helpful.' I met Susan (who did voluntary work for Helpful) at a local event to consider the current needs of migrants within the locality. In keeping with many other NGOs in the area, Helpful filled a gap in public service provision by providing welfare support to migrants. Susan assured me of her ability to identify and direct me to prospective interviewees and she offered the use of Helpful's premises to conduct part of the fieldwork. Susan provided initial access to migrants and from this a snowballing technique led to the identification of additional respondents. She directed me to people with whom she had contact through her activities at Helpful, which included co-ordinating English language classes and providing advocacy and support.

In parallel to this I sought access through other means, including via several local employers and through another NGO that provided support and advocacy to migrants. These alternatives yielded mixed results. It could be claimed that gaining access through Susan did not result in sufficient diversity among respondents. But I decided to proceed in this way cognisant of the fact that there was a limited overall pool of recent migrants from which to draw and that investment in this relationship would over time lead to other gatekeepers. For me personally, I did not anticipate that my engagement with these communities would end at the completion of the initial exploratory project. Furthermore, I was conscious of wider political aspects of migration in Northern Ireland and of the value of research given the gaps in the knowledge base.

Negotiating with Gatekeepers

The study was approved by my institutional research ethics committee. Through negotiations with Susan and other gatekeepers from a health agency and from a local NGO, the research questions were developed according to the real needs identified and as part of a process of deal-making. Consequently, the health agency sought to address suspected shortcomings in the way in which some services were communicated and delivered to minority groups. As a result, while I was an outsider to the research participants, my insider status as a long term resident of Northern Ireland and as an established researcher meant that the challenge of mainstreaming research that focuses on minority ethnic groups was addressed (Papadopoulos & Lees, 2002).

Active engagement and participation

Like many of the subsequent research participants, Susan questioned me on the nature of the research, the objectives, and the end result including expected impact and dissemination. On many occasions Susan displayed personal interest; she confided that she understood and valued the research process. It appeared that she felt some degree of responsibility to assist my project. This may have stemmed from the fact that she was enrolled in a programme of study and recognised the intrinsic value of research and of the challenges associated with conducting fieldwork. As a gatekeeper, however, Susan did not overtly attempt to exert influence on the research and she was not seeking recompense. She was strongly motivated by altruism as one of the users of Helpful describes:

> Like [Susan] is helping people all her life, I mean it's just (he sighs) . . . she has a heart the size of that room. But she told me one day, [Stanislow] always treat people the way you would like to be treated. That's her motto. I mean I do like to help people, but if I help people I expect that they will help me sometimes. (interview, April 1, 2009).

As a result of her questioning and of our subsequent two-way discussions, I re-evaluated the potential impact of my research. I had initially planned to make connections with service providers through a seminar to disseminate the results. I realised that this approach would probably have minimal impact—lacking in active engagement with migrant communities; failing to address their marginal status; or not overcoming the fundamental barriers to their positive integration. Consequently, I developed a link with the major health provider in the area where I sought key practitioners' active input into the project design. Shortly thereafter, I was invited to join the local Black and Minority Ethnic steering group, which included representation from service providers, advocacy agencies, and perhaps most crucially, user groups. Susan's facilitative style of gatekeeping inadvertently shaped the research. This strategy of eliciting participation in a culturally sensitive manner directly addresses power issues and exclusion in research with minority ethnic groups (Jensen & Lauritsen, 2005; Moore, 1973; Sheikh, 2006).

The design of my research also changed when during initial interviews, interviewees and focus group members highlighted the importance of barriers to accessing health and social care as impediments to their integration. This prompted me to change my focus from the workplace, as I had initially anticipated, to health issues on which they had strong opinions. I worked with respondents to identify ways in which this evidence could inform policy. These decisions enabled me to build trust with the women who saw my research as purposeful and beneficial, linking them with influential service providers. Perhaps more crucially, power imbalances were tackled; by enhancing the discursive power of migrant communities, I was able to encourage their involvement and use the research as a tool for social change (Ungar & Nicholl, 2002, p. 148). Engaging with participants in this manner also addressed a major stumbling block identified by earlier research, specifically the challenge of involving minority ethnic groups in research and for the development of services (Begum, 2006; Mullender & Hague, 2005).

Deal making

I found myself bargaining to gain access with some gatekeepers. One individual was employed within the statutory health agency and despite numerous attempts I initially failed to make any meaningful connections. As events unfolded and needs became apparent, commonalities started to emerge; we were both interested in developing an understanding of particular issues among migrant communities. I was invited to join a network of practitioners who were working closely with minority communities. During a preliminary meeting all attendees identified their objectives, including what they wished to get out of any collaboration. The collective aims did not exactly align; for example, I was interested in the lived experiences of migrants and the health agency was promoting an agenda of health and well-being. We were able to trade-off and I agreed to incorporate health into the focus group in exchange for access to a Polish women's group. We also agreed to share the costs of interpreting. I concluded that this was not unreasonable, did not deviate significantly from my remit, and made better use of scarce resources. In the end the impact of the research was apparent:

> As a direct result of your research, we are now meeting as a Trust to inform the professional development of interpreters re mental health and I will be using the research findings to advocate their identified needs. I am delighted about this development and encouraged to see things moving as a direct result of all our partnership working and the dissemination of the research report. (personal communication from healthcare professional, January 13, 2011).

Through the Research Ethics Committee (REC), my own university as the official sponsor of the research wished to impose specific questions for the semi-structured interviews, while also

requiring written consent forms. Furthermore, the REC maintained that there would be 'an element of coercion' in relation to gaining access through employers and recommended an alternative route to that proposed (McAreavey & Muir, 2011). Rather than bargain over these critical matters, I felt compelled to stand firm and address the underlying problem of "trained incompetence" (Goffman, 1983) where universal rules are applied without due consideration of the nuances arising from the particular circumstances. I was also eager to ensure that research participants were more than objects of research (Kelman, 1972) by placing them in a position to help shape the study. I explained in some detail the nature of qualitative social research—the central role of the researcher in protecting the research respondents (with due attention to ethical values) and how qualitative study is often open-ended and so by its very nature will take the researcher down unanticipated lines of inquiry. I subsequently highlighted to the committee the minutes of a previous meeting where a representative of a central ethics committee had raised these issues. As part of these negotiations I provided background on the vulnerability of the prospective research informants and I clarified potential problems with written consent that included suspicion of paperwork and low levels of literacy. Thus, negotiating and deal making did not necessarily mean conceding on methodological aspects of the research, but it was about agreeing on a course of action that satisfied both parties. In this case, the committee had to be informed of misconceptions relating to social science research and I was required to stand firm to ensure that the research framework remained robust.

On Being Ethical and Practicing Phronesis

Having given individual accounts of our particular experiences of gaining access we now move on to consider the implications for qualitative research. Our research highlights the importance of researcher positionality and power relations as well as some of the practical issues that arose following phronetic practice within research encounters.

Managing Power Relations: Researcher Positionality

The perception of insiders and outsiders represents real barriers and opportunities when conducting research and markedly affects the way in which research is conducted. We have shown how both researchers' positionality played a key role in obtaining access to gatekeepers as well as in shaping the context for their research. Our experiences reveal how positionality is best understood as a dynamic phenomenon, so that at a single moment in time a researcher may simultaneously be an insider and an outsider. These positions in turn affect the power afforded to the researcher within the research field. As phronetic researchers we each recognised the ephemeral nature of power associated with our differing positions and used this to help us advance our research agendas

Chaitali shared some characteristics with the British-Indian community, which made her an insider. As a child of divorce and as an Indian, the rationale for her study was personal and provided her with a certain degree of insight and credibility among community members. It also enabled her to understand nuances of language and culture and to interact in culturally appropriate and sensitive ways (Mulhall, 2002). This insider position provided a shared understanding of gender and power and so enabled her to build relationships with gatekeepers. At the same time, Chaitali was simultaneously also an outsider, a position which rendered her relatively powerless in the community. As an international student she was not British and had never previously lived in Britain; she also did not have any links in the British-Indian community or contacts with agencies and communities that could have supported the study. Despite this position, community members recognised that recruiting British-Indian adult children of divorce was a difficult task and were willing to help her.

Similarly, as a person from Northern Ireland, Ruth was an outsider to the study of migrants. She attempted to overcome this potential barrier and position of relative powerlessness through identifying commonalities with research informants to establish rapport and trust. Additionally, as a long term resident in the region and a researcher in rural development, she was an insider interested in the ramifications of emerging social tension caused by racist behaviour and of negative attitudes toward recent migrants (Jarman, 2009). As an insider, she had contacts within various civil society organisations and NGOs and was able to gain access to key gatekeepers and networks in the community. NGOs were predominantly used to access participants because civil society organisations provide an extremely valuable resource within new migration destination areas (McAreavey, 2012).

It is not surprising that given this intermingling of insider/outsider positions, a tangle of obligations was evident among research participants, gatekeepers, and the researchers, which resulted in mixed responses. By exercising phronesis, Chaitali and Ruth were able to evaluate specific circumstances and offset the different degrees of power associated with their insider-outsider positions. While gatekeepers do represent community concerns (Sanghera & Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008), they are also influenced by their own interests. Chaitali was refused assistance from some of the organisations that she contacted without any reasons given for the refusal to co-operate. This may partially be due to inappropriate connections or lack of opportunities to develop commonalities or negotiate a partnership. In any case, it reveals the pivotal role of gatekeepers—a matter further exemplified by Ruth's interactions with Susan in Helpful. Susan's position as a long term resident of Northern Ireland shaped the way that she framed and conveyed information both toward Ruth, a fellow insider, and also in relation to prospective research participants as outsiders. Additionally, through Helpful, Ruth was able to align with a woman who volunteered within the community for a Christian-based organisation and who provided them with support. If individuals perceived obligations towards Susan, this may have affected personal decisions to participate as well as subsequent responses. A major risk associated with this proximity of involvement includes the question of the prospective participants' autonomy (Sanghera & Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008; Wiles, Charles, Crow, & Heath, 2004). Furthermore, it raised dilemmas over where the researchers' obligations lay (Skelton, 2001)—was it with the informants or towards the gatekeepers or the wider communities, or indeed was it with project funders or sponsors?

Practical Considerations

Not only do gatekeepers come in different guises, but the way in which researchers evaluate and negotiate with these often powerful figures is significant in shaping the research. For ethical and critical research, these interactions can be effectively managed by researchers through the exercise of phronesis. By critical, we mean research that recognises power issues within interactions and the way they shape inputs, processes, and outcomes. Critical research, drawing from critical theory, in this sense involves the development of ways of knowing that transcend the dominant constructed ways of knowing, including the recognition that knowledge may reflect empirical reality but is also socially constructed (see Fook, 2002, p. 17). This is consistent with Flyvberg's phronesis and issues of power that are discussed throughout the article.

Community gatekeepers raised significant ethical issues for Chaitali, matters on which the respective ethics committees had not paid much attention. During this scrutiny, Chaitali was placed in the centre of an ethical enquiry in terms of who she was, what she was doing, why she was doing it, and the benefits and risks involved. These questions required personal responses that significantly exposed her, while also making her an integral aspect of the research encounters. Her positionality was thus central and, no doubt, for another researcher with different

attributes the ethical issues raised in the community would differ, as indeed would their responses. Significantly, constant negotiations between the researcher and gatekeepers— in this case between personal disclosure, ethical concerns, and access—were based on the responses and ethical judgements made by Chaitali. Throughout the process, she became sensitised to the ways in which the community perceived what respect, beneficence, and justice meant in the context of the study.

Gatekeepers also engaged in making deals with researchers in exchange for access, and this was managed in diverse ways by the two researchers in their different contexts. Thus for Ruth, engagement with gatekeepers led to constructive input into the methodology of the research. In this way, the research got close to the reality of the researched and, as Flyvbjerg (2001) explains, "the phronetic researcher becomes a part of the phenomenon being studied, without going native" (p. 132). Consequently, because Ruth remained involved during all phases of the research including dissemination and publication, outside stakeholders became interested in the research (McAreavey, 2010). This resulted in invitations to participate in policy and practice events such as training for interpreters in Northern Ireland.

For Chaitali, suggestions for reconsidering the objectives for the study were critically considered but rejected. These gatekeeping tactics and power games may challenge the researcher's personal values and ideals or they may compromise the ability of the researcher to conduct research. Researchers in both cases perceived the involvement of gatekeepers within the context of power and exercised phronesis to evaluate their status, their connections to the researched, and the implications of their involvement. In the context of minority communities, this underlines the significance of a flexible approach, especially because it challenges the worldview of the researcher and predominant frameworks of knowledge and so may deviate from an expected avenue of study. But it can also bring about resistance, which happened for Chaitali when she felt pressurised to act in a way that went against her feminist interest and, indeed, when she decided to not change her study to include divorced parents. Phronesis requires a willingness to engage with and to resist, but to do so within a particular context and to make decisions after critical consideration of issues that present themselves in the course of the research.

Researchers must have the capacity to negotiate, evaluate, and act on their feet—balancing research ethics with practical considerations. In this way, phronetic researchers must juggle their conduct with compliance in a narrow sense of research ethics. But, more fundamentally, phronesis calls for attention to the way in which power is distributed across different individuals and why and how certain actions are taken. This is something that is not necessarily supported through an essentialist approach to ethics and it is not something that can be learned through general truths. Knowledge is essential, but it goes hand-in-hand with experience and practical judgement. For Ruth, this entailed swift responses to unfolding events. Meanwhile for Chaitali, it meant a process of deep critical reflection, dialogue, and negotiation with relevant gatekeepers and with academics 'outside' of the research. These important ethnographic encounters had a direct impact on the ethical conduct of the research (data collection and analysis) in terms of establishing trust, understanding the scope of harm or benefit to the community, and engaging in a critical manner while not problematising or pathologising the world views and perspectives of the community. Reflecting in this way drew attention to social and historical contexts, thus minimising the tendency to give primacy to Western frameworks of knowledge.

Conclusion

Our analysis shows that as long as researchers consider and reflect on the challenges of conducting social research, they can adopt strategies that help them to build trust, to develop

rapport, and to overcome some of the previously identified limitations of doing research with marginal groups. This reflection leads to a deeper understanding of research and, following from Said (1995), challenges orthodox approaches to conducting research, and it illuminates knowledge frameworks by drawing attention to possible struggles between the researcher and the researched. A culture where ethics are deliberated and reflected upon within the process of research would provide an ideal opportunity to underpin the non-dogmatic nature of ethics. Such a culture would stimulate debate on how to exercise practical wisdom or phronesis in the course of conducting research and when evaluating ethical implications for proposed lines of inquiry. We urge institutions to nurture opportunities for researchers to engage in such debates, including incorporating this into training and discussion of ethical research across various stages of the research process. This approach will be more effective than confining research ethics to a one-off bureaucratic and sometimes confrontational encounter with ethical review boards. It is time that as researchers we reclaim this important component of our work, albeit in partnership with relevant interest groups.

We outlined how researchers in the field make judgements and selections for their research in consideration of the prevailing circumstances of their research field and their particular positions. Advantages and disadvantages were associated with both insider and outsider status, and consideration of these particular positions become part of the astute researcher's evaluations. By assessing and negotiating the intersection of the myriad ethical and pragmatic concerns *throughout* the research endeavour, the researchers exercised phronesis. Different researchers adopt different tactics because of the research in question, the particularities of the research site and subject, and the relationship between their own positionality and the research process. Research processes cannot be standardised across researchers and ethical research requires critical thinking and reflection on these aspects. Insider-outsider status affords different degrees of power and of cultural competence. These matters become assets to the phronetic researcher and can be used to influence particular circumstances and to make ethical decisions in the field. This is not something that can be judged from afar, such as within the confines of the research ethics committee (and indeed may not be the sole purpose of these committees). Being ethical is closer to the profession of research than to the business of bureaucracy because it requires researchers to constantly reflect on their conduct and on the context of their research, rather than complying with a pre-determined blueprint.

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