
Article

Methodological Dilemmas Experienced in Researching Indo-Canadian Young Adults' Decision-Making Process to Study the Sciences

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Abstract

In this article, the author describes the various issues that need to be considered in minority research when the researcher is of the same cultural background as the participants of the study but not of the same religious background. She discusses the methodological dilemmas faced by minority researchers who research minority ethnic communities of which they are not directly a part. The observations are based on her recent qualitative research with 24 Indo-Canadian young adults exploring their perceived supports and barriers in their career decision-making process to study sciences at the postsecondary level.

Keywords: minority research

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Introduction

Culture plays an important role in an individual's development and in defining his or her internal world and perception of the environment (Egharevba, 2001; Kumar, Bhugra, & Singh, 2005). Depending on culture, individuals might vary significantly from the dominant culture in relation to perceptions, expectations, and mindsets regarding what it means to participate in research. Consequently, a participant's response to engagement in qualitative research studies can be markedly different from the response of an individual from a different culture. Integrating cultural considerations within the research design of a particular study will decrease attrition of participants and also help improve the perception of acceptability of engaging in research for participants who are children of South Asian immigrants. The term South Asian refers to the Statistics Canada classification, which includes young adults who identify as Sikh, Hindu, or Muslim religious background (Statistics Canada, 2001). In this article, the term Indo-Canadian refers to children of South Asian immigrants.

In this article, I present ideas formulated from the final phases of a 1½-year investigation of the perception of supports and barriers in the career decision-making process for Indo-Canadian youth entering the sciences at the postsecondary level. This research was funded by the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council of Canada, a funding agency that has developed a Strategic Research Initiative Grant that focuses on issues related to multiculturalism in Canada. I will begin with an overview of the method used to structure the qualitative study that explored the perception of supports and barriers that Indo-Canadian young adults experienced in their career decision-making process. I will then explore the ethical issues involved in focusing on issues of choice of research group, recruitment of participants, and access when conducting research focusing on Indo-Canadian young adults. The dilemmas identified included the participants' definition of what it meant to be Indo-Canadian, the time and effort taken to gain access to the young women and men, the role of the researcher as facilitator, communication and interaction in the consent process, and explaining the divide between a research interview and a counseling interview. I conclude with personal reflections and recommendations to future researchers regarding factors to consider when engaging in research regarding minority communities.

Method

Descriptive case study approach

Yin (2003) developed a qualitative descriptive case study approach, which I selected and used to examine the factors that contribute to the career decision-making process among Indo-Canadian young women and men entering science programs at the postsecondary level. A descriptive case study requires the researcher to begin with a theory in the literature that has established propositions. The social cognitive career theory (SCCT) contains an established set of propositions (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) that covers the scope of the proposed study and was selected as the conceptual theoretical framework. The descriptive theoretic patterns of the study can then be cross-compared to the propositions embedded within SCCT. The purpose of this method is to see whether the patterns that emerge from the data set fit the SCCT theoretical propositions under consideration and to explore the usefulness of the theory to understand the career life-planning process of an ethnic minority group (Yin, 2003).

Selection of participants

After the study went through a formal ethics review and was approved at various postsecondary institutions within Manitoba, including the institution with which the primary researcher was affiliated, participants who were interested in taking part in the study were given an official consent form. Twenty-four Indo-Canadian young women and men who were children of immigrants from a large metropolitan area in Manitoba constituted the sample for this study. It has been suggested that the ideal range of participants for a qualitative study is between 8 to 15 participants, as saturation would usually occur (Juntunen et al., 2001; Kvale, 1996). A criterion case selection strategy was used in the selection of the participants, which refers to choosing participants because of their similarity with respect to central characteristics of interest to the researcher (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The criteria established in the selection of participants to create a relatively homogenous sample included the following:

1. The participant self-identified as being Indo- Canadian.
2. Each Indo-Canadian young woman or man completed their kindergarten to Grade 12 schooling in Canada, identifying him or her as a second-generation Indo-Canadian (Zhou, 1997).

3. The participants resided in Manitoba and were pursuing undergraduate programs in science or engineering, or were currently enrolled in professional programs such as pharmacy, dentistry, and medicine.
4. Participants were between 20 and 25 years of age, which is considered young adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

Data collection

The research was conducted in five phases: (a) Participants were given a nonstandardized qualitative questionnaire, which was a modified version of Julien's questionnaire (1997) entitled *The Search for Career-Related Information by Adolescents*. (b) Participants engaged in a 1½- to 2-hour semistructured interview. The interview questions were open ended and explored participants' thoughts and reactions in the following areas: perception of vocational interest development; self-efficacy appraisals of making career decisions; perception of various social contexts that influence career choice, such as family, school, and friendships; and view of role models in the field. At the end of the interview, I invited open-ended descriptions of issues pertinent to the participant that might not have been covered in the interview. (c) Transcription of the first interview and a cross-comparison between questionnaire and the transcript were conducted by the primary researcher (the author of this article) to identify gaps. I maintained systematic case study notes documenting observations after each interview. (d) Transcription of the first interview was sent to the participant to review the accuracy of statements. (e) A second 30- to 45-minute interview was scheduled with the participant to clarify ideas that arose from reviewing the initial transcript. This second interview was also audiotaped, transcribed, and reviewed by participants.

Data analysis

Data analysis of the interviews consisted of four phases. In the first phase, the primary researcher created a list of domains of analysis based on the predefined concepts found within the social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). In the second phase, the primary researcher and research assistants independently did a line-by-line analysis of each transcript, which consisted of categorizing all interview statements into particular domains and creating a concept map. In the third phase, the primary researcher did a cross-comparison of transcripts to assess percentage of agreement between the interview statements, which had been into the most appropriate domain (Kvale, 1996). Percentage agreement ranged from 80 to 89% for the analysis of each transcript. The final phase consisted of a cross-case analysis examining the concept maps, data within a particular domain across participants, and the patterns found across cases in written form. The participants requested that the quotes selected be those used by more than one participant to protect their identity. Consequently, the depiction of the experiences provided by the young women's interview statements was limited.

Validity and reliability procedures

Validity of the data is based on Yin's (2003) three criteria: internal validity, reliability, and external validity. First, internal validity was achieved through triangulation of different sources of data, having a selective sample, and having the participants check the accuracy of their interview statements. Reliability was attained through consistent data analysis procedures, comparison of concept maps of each interview, and the establishment of two interrater reliability checks per participant interview. External validity was established through analytical generalization of the results of multiple cases to theory (Yin, 2003). The boundaries that were established to frame this study were derived from consideration of fusion of research knowledge with the researchers' experiential knowledge of engaging directly with the participants. In the next section of this article, I will explore the various research issues that affected both the participants and me, and contributed to the formulation of the research design for this study.

Assuming dual status as a researcher within the field

When I refer to maintaining a dual status as a researcher, I am referring to when the researcher is of the same cultural background as the participants of the study but not of the same religious background. The methodological dilemmas faced by ethnic minority researchers who research ethnic communities of which they might not be directly a part offers them a “dual frame of reference” by which to view the research process. The research study focused on Indo-Canadian young women and men who had made the decision to enter the sciences. It became important for the research participants to know that I was not intimately connected to their religious community. However, they still valued that I was Indo-Canadian and shared a common cultural background. They appreciated that I did not belong to their ethnic community, as they could be reassured that their privacy would be maintained. In my interviews with young Indo-Canadian men and women, their need to ensure their privacy was interconnected to their concern about securing their reputation and, subsequently, the reputation of their family within the ethnic community. Handa (2003) also found that South Asian youth were cognizant that their reputation, and the resulting family reputation, was closely monitored by ethnic community members. Consequently, how they would narrate their experience and concerns expressed regarding their family were perceived as related to issues of potentially breaching codes of privacy established within the family unit.

Issues related to the public use of personal information were a concern for the participants, and I perceived them as important to explore prior to participants’ engagement in the research process. Because the participants were concerned about their personal reputation and, subsequently, the effects it may have on their family and ethnic community, further discussion was also needed as to what my role would be as a researcher and my level of engagement within their ethnic community. Consequently, to maintain the privacy of the participants, we included in the study Indo-Canadian young women and men who were not affiliated with my ethnic community, which helped in the recruitment of participants. It was understood that the participants’ privacy within the ethnic community could be maintained, as the chances would decrease of the participants’ and researcher’s social worlds’ colliding. I maintained “dual status,” whereby a commonality of understanding was established based on cultural background, and yet I had access to particular components of Indo-Canadian young women and men life experiences that would not have been granted if I represented an Indo-Canadian researcher of their particular ethnic community. I was considered an insider to the norms of the South Asian community but was still perceived as an outsider to the specific cultural beliefs held by participants based on their religious background (Egharevba, 2001).

Choice of a research group

The criteria that I had created to help in the selection process of research participants consisted of finding Indo-Canadian young women and men between the ages of 20 and 26, in their third or fourth year of their academic program in the sciences. They all had to have completed their kindergarten to Grade 12 schooling in Canada, and both parents had to have immigrated to Canada from India. Criteria were set at the beginning of the study to delimit and set boundaries within which to explore issues.

While I was trying to select a research group, it became apparent that the criteria were restrictive. Many individuals who were interested in the study defined themselves as Indo-Canadian even if both their parents had not immigrated directly from India. For example, parents might have immigrated to Canada from Africa, Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand, or Trinidad, although the parents’ cultural ancestry and religious practice would have originated and be based on various cultural groups in India. I had to consider whether the cultural heritage of the parents was more important than their country of origin when considering issues pertaining to second-generation Indo-Canadian young women and men. The second point to consider was the idea that the norms and values associated with being Indo-Canadian

might be perceived as universal to the participants and more significant than parental origin. The participants' self-definition of Indo-Canadian versus my imposed definition needed to be reexamined. If I decided to allow participants to self-define as Indo-Canadian, there would be an inherent assumption that all Indo-Canadians would hold the same cultural norms and values despite historical influences. Within-group differences would not be acknowledged, thus creating an essentialized position from which to view the findings. Alternatively, not allowing people to self-identify and selecting participants to fit an externalized definition might be construed by the individual as being disrespectful of his or her personal understanding and position as to what it means to be Indo-Canadian.

Recruitment of participants

The most productive means of gaining participants for the study was to approach individuals who were Indo-Canadian and ask them if they would be interested in participating in the research. Another productive method involved hiring a Sikh Indo-Canadian research assistant, who could approach various individuals that he or she knew in the community. The participants all stated that if they had been left with an advertisement and had had no opportunity to meet the researcher, they would have been hesitant to participate in the study. Some individuals also recommended people that they knew who might be interested in the study. The snowball sampling approach was effective, but the individuals selected were similar in acculturation levels to themselves. The result was a very select sample of individuals.

Within qualitative research, researchers have varying perspectives as to what constitutes as appropriate social distance between the participant and the researcher. Social distance has been defined as the participants' level of identification with the researcher but also incorporates the participant's level of interest and involvement in the research process, which could be seen as (a) an educational activity, (b) an instrument for practical benefit, and (c) a scientific tool to be used for the purpose of initiating new policies for the advancement of a particular group (Maykovich, 1977). When I approached the young women and men, the degree of social distance was reduced for four reasons. First, the participants stated that they felt that a "common basis of understanding" of career life-development issues from a South Asian perspective was established based on my being Indo-Canadian. Second, I was perceived as an outsider to their particular ethnic community, which decreased the social distance, as they felt that their "privacy of family, ethnic, and educational experiences shared with the researcher would not be compromised." Third, because I was connected to the postsecondary institution that they attended, they felt that I had "insider understanding as to their educational experiences" and would understand the nuances of what it meant to navigate the waters of an educational institution. I was perceived as an insider because I was part of the postsecondary institution. However, I was an outsider to the particular faculty and the specific academic programs of which the participants were part. Paradoxically, not being affiliated with the academic program in which the participants were enrolled allowed for a decreased level of social distance between the participants and me. The participants felt more confident that their privacy of educational experiences that would be shared with me would be respected and would not be divulged to professors or other students within their academic program. Fourth, my credibility was established based on my postsecondary level of education. I represented a cultural model of "success" according to the achievement goals shared by Indo-Canadians, who attach a value to striving to complete higher levels of education (Gibson, 1988).

Social distance was reduced not only because of my ethnicity but also because an appropriate amount of distance was maintained between my social world and that of the participants. The participants' concerns and the social distance developed in relation to their interest and involvement in the research process were geared primarily toward viewing the research process as an educational and a practical activity. The participants generally equated research with the educational process of my studying and learning about their experiences but had not contemplated how the experiences that they shared would also contribute to policy and program development. I engaged in further discussion concerning how their information would

also contribute to the public domain and potentially lead to new program interventions and policy initiatives.

After the first interview, a copy of their interview transcript was sent to the participants' to review. On review of the transcript, participants were able to see the depth and breadth of their disclosures. At this point, some recognized the personal value and practical benefit of engaging in the interview process but chose to withdraw from the study, as they did not wish to have their personal responses used within a public domain and had not resolved their internal conflicts regarding their career choice. The individuals who decided to continue with the research process and engage in a second interview were able to recognize the personal value of the interview, had come to terms with their career choice, and were comfortable sharing their story with the purpose of sharing their experiences with others. Because all of the participants had a very strong sense of self-confidence, it led to a selective research sample of participants. The process of being interviewed was considered too personal for individuals who were still working through their conflicts. For the participants who were feeling conflicted over their career choice, more quantitative methods, such as filling in a survey questionnaire, would have provided them with a safe social distance from which to share their experiences and might have decreased attrition. However, having a strong sample of young women and men to study allowed me to understand the strengths that individuals bring in the face of difficulty.

Ethical issues researchers encounter in the selection of research design and during the informed consent process

Many researchers (Casas & Thompson, 1991; Hill et al., 2005; Kvale, 1996; Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002) have stated that the defining characteristics of qualitative research include, first, establishing a model of interviewing that centers on the research sessions and allows the researcher to identify the main presenting issue and define goals and outcomes of the research process; second, developing a perception of the relationship between the researcher and the participant as a pragmatic alliance and egalitarian in scope rather than a "top-down" alliance; and, third, presenting an appropriate qualitative method of analysis to the participant that documents key issues in relation to the particular issue under investigation. Generally, within this model, the research team engages in an inductive process of analyzing the interview data, which involves an ongoing utilization review of the research interviews to identify various emerging themes or outcomes (Hill et al., 2005). The type of utilization review and the documentation needed from the researcher for the purposes of review also depend on the goals of the research. Depending on the structure that the researcher imposes on the type of interview constructed, various ethical issues arise for the researcher, which will be discussed below.

Communication and interaction to establish credibility with participants

I found that entrance into the field was not a one-time activity. Credibility had to be established with participants over time. At the start of each meeting, there was a process of negotiation of roles and responsibilities. Although I might have been considered an insider by the participants based on having a shared ethnicity, I was still considered an outsider because I did not belong to their particular field of career choice or to their ethnic community. Because I did not belong to their ethnic community they had no background information as to what I was like. I had to earn their trust and confidence over time by establishing clear boundaries and demonstrating my ethical standards as to how I would engage in the research process. The manner in which ethical standards were established included my defining the divide between a research interview and a counseling interview, explaining what qualitative research was, and discussing the dissemination of the results of the data during the consent process.

Process of informed consent

For a researcher to maintain a respectful stance with a participant by viewing individuals as deserving of respect, informed consent needs to be considered integral to the research process (Henkelmann & Everall, 2001). Informed consent is expected and serves as a sign that individual autonomy is respected. It involves the participant's ability to understand the ramifications of his or her decision to engage in the research process and to make an educated decision. For a participant to be in a position to make an educated decision, it becomes important for the researcher to shift from making a decision for the participant to collaborating with him or her. The researcher role then becomes one of responsibly, enabling another to make an informed and careful decision (Henkelman & Everall, 2001).

Obtaining informed consent can sometimes be a challenging experience, as issues of culture come into play. Being able to understand the research process and foretell the ramifications of the research can be difficult for researchers in any circumstances, but in the case of cultural research it is even more difficult, as cultural differences might emerge regarding the purpose and outcome expectations of research. It is paramount for the researcher to ensure beforehand that the participant understands how research is perceived within the parameters of the study, the role of the researcher, and the type of interview in which he or she will engage (Glasoff, Gracia, Herlihy, & Remley, 1999). Because research design affects the course of the interview, it is important for participants to have a clear understanding of how research plans might limit and affect the approaches that researchers use. Researchers might choose to explain to the participant design issues related to research and their implications before entering a research relationship. Participants have the right to information on benefits, risks, and limitations associated with research.

A common question that emerged for many of the young Indo-Canadian men and women was how the results of the interview would be depicted and integrated into various forms of dissemination of the data. Many of the youth had read many qualitative studies through their academic course work and did not wish to have very specific quotes from their interview used to illustrate emergent themes, as they felt that their sense of privacy would be compromised. The participants felt that individuals in the ethnic community would be able to identify the speaker and quotes based on the familiarity established over time regarding one's speech patterns. The selection of career choice was in accordance with the norm established within the ethnic community. Consequently, the young women and men who agreed to be part of the research study wanted to maintain their privacy. First, they recognized that because a minority of Indo-Canadian young women and men within their cohort had entered the sciences, they represented a minority within a minority group and could easily be identifiable. The majority of participants also communicated discomfort with not knowing in advance what "themes" would emerge from their interviews and how they would connect to the research literature. Because the qualitative design was inductive, I could not provide participants with concrete information as to what could potentially emerge. If the potential strength of qualitative research, structured from an inductive method, stems from the dynamics of what emerges naturally from the studied phenomenon through the process of an interview, then the researcher cannot honestly inform the interviewee about what is going to happen in the study. Thus, in qualitative research, the researcher can know only where the research starts but not what direction it will take (Wise, 1987). It was expected that I would be able to establish a theoretical framework from which the interview data would be analyzed. The participants wanted to have access to written material regarding the theoretical framework under consideration. They recognized that I could not guarantee what patterns I would find in relation to their interview statements and the theoretical framework under consideration. However, they felt more comfortable providing consent if they were also in agreement with the values inherent within the particular theoretical orientation that I would select to view the interpretation of interview data from. I ended up using a "top down" deductive form of qualitative analysis of the transcript, whereby the theory selected directs the researcher's attention to the

domains of interest (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). I then proceeded to describe the common patterns and differences found between the participants.

During the consent process, individuals can be informed only to the extent to which they understand what they have been told (Henkelman & Everall, 2001). Because of his or her level of personal understanding of research, an individual might not initially understand what he or she is consenting to in a research process and might need to revisit the information at various points. In addition, as a researcher gleans more information from the interview process, the participant's needs might vary and approaches might need to deviate from the initial design selection. Discussion of this change should be addressed with the participant, and informed consent should then be revisited on a continuous basis. Not having adequate information can result in the participant's having unrealistic expectations regarding how research will be represented. Researchers need to explain to participants the limitations of their role and research design, the areas that are negotiable, and how information will be portrayed.

During the consent process in my study, I initiated a discussion regarding the difference between a research interview and a counseling interview to help maintain participants' involvement in the research. In some cases, the depth of disclosure based on the first interview was fairly deep, because the participant saw my role as tied to the educational discipline of being in counseling. As such, the rapport that I developed in relation to the participants sometimes generated disclosures that were unanticipated by the participant and took him or her "by surprise." This led them to reflect on their experiences more deeply than they would have otherwise have done. In some cases, the participants discovered feelings that they would have preferred to keep private from others or would have desired not to acknowledge even to themselves (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002; Oakley, 1981). On review of the transcript, participants recognized their degree of self-disclosure and did not feel comfortable having the information used for research purposes.

At first the participants were not aware how emotionally engaging being part of an interview process could be, were surprised by their own level of self-disclosure, and were concerned about having personal information used within the public domain. Consequently, to address creating a safe educational research environment in which issues could be explored with the participant, I decided to explain the difference between a research interview and a counseling interview during the consent process (Birch & Miller, 2000). This helped enhance maintenance of participants in the study. First, the research interview was described as being within the control of the participants. Not only did they have the right to pass on questions that they did not desire to answer, I reminded them that they also had control over the depth of disclosure and could stop recording at any point. I also let them know that they needed to share only information with me that they felt would be salient to the research question under investigation. I reinforced the importance of feeling free to refuse to answer if they felt that a question was not in keeping with their comfort level. As an insider, I knew which types of questions could be considered fairly personal, and consequently I set up the questions that were more general in nature at the start of the interview and posed more personal questions near the end. I explained this to the participants and told them that if they wished, they could view the list of questions at the start and use it as a method to pace the direction of the interview, thereby providing an empowering frame of reference for the young women and men to engage in the research process. Second, I explained the difference between the purposes of a counseling interview and a research interview to prevent participants from blurring the lines. I reiterated that the purpose of a research interview is to collect information that would be used in the future to inform a public audience about the issue being explored in a manner that would protect their privacy. I then explained that the purpose of a counseling interview is primarily for personal growth and that the interview is a mechanism by which to support a personal change process. The primary difference is that if an individual felt that he or she changed as a result of engaging in the research interview, that is considered one of the potential byproducts but not the central purpose of the interview. To engage in a research interview meant to deepen understanding of a phenomenon for oneself, the researcher, and the

public, but I would be unable to support any personal change process that might emerge based on the limited meetings and time constraints built into the research process. Developing a sense of their right to privacy and the ability to share or withhold information was a crucial element to the consent process, as it increased their sense of psychological safety and helped maintain the dignity of each participant.

Representation of interview data

A few ethical considerations need to be made when engaging in minority research. It becomes important to ensure that data representation of the participants is portrayed in a manner that is considered acceptable to the participant. As I have indicated, participants of this study wanted to ensure that they could remain anonymous, as they represented a minority within a minority. Specific demographic information and marker variables, such as age and gender, were limited, and yet the description of their experiences depicted in a manner that represented their point of view became a challenge for me. However, addressing this issue became of crucial importance, as it helped to ensure a trusting and respectful relationship between the participant and me.

Dealing with information that might discredit participants or the ethnic community

The information that the young women and men provided needed to be scrutinized carefully. I was concerned about sharing information in a public domain that could be perceived as discrediting the participants or the South Asian community, based on interview statements made by participants. As such, the young women and men felt empowered when they realized that they had the opportunity to add, change, or omit information from their interview transcript. However, the dilemma that arose for me was that the remaining information within an interview transcript could be perceived as self-reports that were created by participants for the purpose of social desirability. The participants raised the question of “who owned the research,” and they discussed it with me in relation to how the research would be depicted in a public forum. The young women and men were also concerned about how they wished to be portrayed and wanted me to represent a balanced view of them, as they were concerned that readers would generalize their experiences. However, they also discussed their need to have their privacy respected and did not wish me to share particular information of their interview transcript within the research results. Dealing with the ongoing dialectical tension of openness versus privacy on behalf of the participants was a challenge for both the participants and me. Multiple discussions ensued involving negotiation of how I would represent the interview data within a public forum. I tried to represent the experiences of the young women and men in a balanced manner that maintained their need for privacy and attempted to highlight the variations of patterns that existed between participants. However the individuals who agreed to engage in the research process represented a select sample who were open to a certain level of ambiguity in the research process.

I distilled the representations of the participants’ thoughts and ideas to protect their confidentiality, and their personal requests to not use numerous specific quotes to represent their experiences were respected. All of the participants asked me to refrain from publishing direct quotes from their interview transcript. Instead, I distilled participants’ statements. The process of distilling the data into flow charts and then writing a depiction of the flow chart maintained consistency of the findings and prevented identification of an individual. However, portrayal of the richness and texture of their experience was limited. Because I was unable to include many specific quotes, the context of what was said and the meanings established were more difficult to portray. In the end, it was negotiated between the participants and me that I could use generalized quotes that were used by the majority of the young women and men to illustrate essential ideas.

Establishing a shared worldview of the research process with the participant

Professional researchers are often expected to meet the needs of many people from varied cultural backgrounds while engaging in research. Yet, many participants from diverse cultural backgrounds pose a challenge to researchers, and it is helpful if researchers are aware of various strategies available for working with individuals from diverse backgrounds. The purpose of this section is to outline challenges that a researcher might encounter and to suggest possible ways of addressing those issues. First, I will demonstrate how educating participants about the research process can help provide a shared worldview and facilitate the research process. Worldview is defined as the way an individual perceives the world and his or her relationship to the world (Pack-Brown & Williams, 2003). Before expecting to understand the worldviews of others, the researcher needs to understand how his or her own worldview will influence the research process. This understanding is critically important, as researchers design studies that underscore their values. Researchers can become more adept at recognizing how their personal worldviews and the participants' worldviews affect research design and the interpretation of data. A final point to explore is how researchers can help facilitate participant management of perceived research barriers within the research process.

A didactic approach in the research process

Educating participants about the research process can help to provide the participant with a shared worldview to manage the situation better. Teaching about the research process is an important component of the knowledge base of a participant (Sabin, 1999). It is important for researchers to help participants understand how research is viewed within the qualitative research design selected. By providing information to participants regarding the dilemma that researchers face in trying to provide the best possible information to individuals regarding inherent methodological inadequacies, will enable the participants to understand how research is conceptualized and potentially to be involved in constructing workable strategies to address their concerns. As well, by learning about the research design by the researcher abides, the participant might discover the researcher's strategies for gaining what he or she wishes within the research framework. By understanding the researchers' frame of reference, participants might then find a method or strategy by which to convey to the researcher how to meet their needs. For example, if participants can demonstrate to the researcher that they would feel more comfortable knowing the theoretical framework in which the researcher will be situating the research, it would allow them to know the value stance of the researcher and to meet their own needs. Participants are then in a position to make an educated decision as to whether they align themselves with the values of the researcher and wish to partake in the research process. The researcher is also in a better position to find a means of representing the research in a manner that is sensitive to the participants' needs. The solution suggested would encourage a fit between the worldview of the participant and the research method selected. If a participant understands the various frameworks in which research can be situated, procedures, and underlying principles of the research design, then he or she can feel empowered to generate viable options for their concerns in the process. In my view, researchers can facilitate this process by helping participants develop alternative frames of reference and understand the research design; researchers can also help participants develop the language used in research design, so that participants have the tools needed to become their own self-advocates while participating in the research process.

Helping participants manage barriers during the research process

It is important for researchers to consider how to encourage participants to manage personal barriers that might emerge for them in the research process. For individuals of various minority groups, ensuring smooth and effective transitions between their social worlds can be a challenge, and the researcher's role in such situations becomes one of recognizing how individuals from diverse cultures negotiate boundaries successfully and how they might be impeded by barriers that prevent their connection within institutional

contexts such as a research environment. Each social world, including the research environment, contains values, beliefs, expectations, actions, and emotional responses that are familiar to insiders (Phelon, Davidson, & Yu, 1991). How participants cross these borders and manage cross-cultural transitions into different social worlds needs to be considered by the researchers. During cross-cultural transitions, researchers might have to learn culturally acceptable practices for resolving problems (Arthur, 2000). In these situations, researchers face the challenge of encouraging participants and themselves to cross barriers in a manner that is acceptable from the participant frame of reference and that also integrates the values of the research process.

Assertiveness as socially and culturally defined

Researchers need to understand how the participant perceives assertiveness when interacting within a hierarchical system. Within the researcher-participant relationship, the participant, almost uniformly, and often the researcher him- or herself will perceive unequal balances of power and influence. A fiduciary relationship develops between the researcher and the participant. A fiduciary relationship is one in which two individuals are unequal and the more powerful person is entrusted to protect the best interests of the less powerful or dependent person (Ferguson, Yonge, & Myrick, 2004; Lemmens & Singer, 1998). The participants of this particular study were aware of their position within the research process and were hesitant to voice their concerns, as they considered the position of researcher akin to being “the expert.” The participants were uncomfortable with presenting their concerns and displayed their discomfort through hesitation or by reaching over and turning off the tape recorder during the interview. Once I had identified these behaviors, it became incumbent on me to address process issues that were emerging between the participants and me. By having open discussions with participants, I was able to create an environment in which the participants’ values and perception of their role within the research process could be explored. Discrepancies between the values guiding the original research method employed in relation to the worldview of the participant could be explicated. Further discussion followed in which I could then negotiate with the participant regarding a research method that would be more conducive to the values of the participant. The informed consent process that is required before engaging in a research relationship will enable both parties to understand the social roles that they play. A process of socializing the participant into the research world involves explaining to him or her ahead of time what the process looks like, what can be expected, and how interviews unfold. Although some negotiation can occur between participant and researcher as to how the research interviews and design develop, the primary individual to make decisions related to research design will be the researcher, as he or she is accountable for the results and quality of rigor attached to the study.

The structure of the relationship that ensues between a researcher and a participant and the assertiveness that an individual will show are socially and culturally defined and are reflected in the amount of imbalance within relationships that the participant perceives as culturally acceptable based on perception of roles. The issue for the researcher and participant becomes how much social distance is deemed acceptable for the participant in relation to the researcher and how it is managed. Styles of assertion expressed by participants within a hierarchical system will be based on how they have been socialized to act within a structure with authority figures (Cooper, 1994). Individuals operate within what they perceive to be “regulated freedoms” (Faith, 1994, p. 36), in which they might assert themselves within certain parameters of what they perceive to be acceptable. For example, the model of psychotherapy considered ideal for South Asian patients has been called the guru-chela (teacher-pupil) relationship (Neki, 1973), which establishes clearly defined roles within the context of what constitutes a helping relationship. Inherent power differentials within the helping relationship would be considered culturally acceptable by both the counselor and the client. The research relationship is also composed of hierarchical relationships, and the researcher needs to be aware of how the participant views his or her role in relation to the researcher. The researcher can then explore with the participant how to structure the research interview to address how participants can effectively manage research barriers that might emerge for the participant by

exploring various participant response styles of assertion. A researcher is typically challenged by addressing different styles of assertion presented by participants. Researchers should respect the individual's style of assertion, whether he or she wants a more collaborative relationship or a more structured hierarchical relationship. The challenge to the researcher is to become aware of the participant's style of assertion and accommodate to the current situation to help the participants better manage the research barriers that participants might be experiencing.

Gibson's (1988) accommodation and acculturation without assimilation model

The process by which participants and researchers of diverse backgrounds might structure their experiences within a research process can be understood from Gibson's model of accommodation and acculturation without assimilation (Gibson, 1988; Gibson & Bhachu, 1991). Accommodation and acculturation without assimilation is a process or strategy that researchers might attempt with their participants. Assimilation refers to the process whereby an individual from one society is incorporated or absorbed culturally into another. Acculturation is defined as a process of adaptation that results when individuals from different cultures come into contact. Accommodation is a term used to reflect a process of mutual adaptation between individuals for the purpose of reducing conflict and allowing separate identities and cultures to be maintained (Gibson, 1988). For example, teaching participants about the research process and how relationships are defined is a form of acculturating the individual to the research process. A shared worldview within the research process could be established by the participant and researcher. Research within the multicultural area has already established that having a shared worldview between researcher and participant facilitates the development of a strong working alliance (Daya, 2001). Accommodation would be emphasized by a researcher's accepting the participant's personal style of interaction and personal values and building on it to make it more effective within the research design. The researcher and participant would also acknowledge that changing one's style within this particular system would be a selected research goal that might attain a particular objective. It would not be viewed by the researcher as assimilation to the situation by having to let go of their own primary values and beliefs. The process would be reframed in a more positive manner, as it might lead to successful participation within the research process and be consistent with the participant's personal values, worldview, and primary objectives.

As researchers make the cultural transition by creating a research method that integrates the participant's cultural worldview, they might be concerned about compromising important aspects of their professional values (Kenkel, Deleon, Mantell, & Steep, 2005). As such, Gibson's (1988) model of acculturation without assimilation can be used to explain how researchers can effect successful cultural transitions when working with culturally diverse participants keeping important aspects of their research but also adopting cultural aspects of the participants' worldview within the research design. Understanding the importance of how knowledge, assertion, and privacy are viewed on a cultural level by participants within the research process helps facilitate the communication needed for successful collaboration between the researcher and participant. Participants and researchers can then apply the strategy of accommodation and acculturation without assimilation within the context of research to help manage the research barriers that they experience and allow research to emerge with a participant in a manner that fits the worldview of the participant.

Future directions based on personal reflections

In this section, I will explore how I formulated experiential boundaries to help inform decisions regarding the research design of the study. My formulation of experiential boundaries consisted of reflecting on the parallel process issues that emerged between the participants and me. I have defined parallel process as what occurs when the feelings experienced by the participants are also experienced by the researcher. Through reflection on my feelings in relation to the participants, I was able to identify various process

issues that were occurring and could address them with participants. Process issues consisted of noting emotions, behaviors engaged in by the participant that reflected a particular emotion, and how the participant might be feeling at various points of being interviewed. Within counseling, the parallel process of feelings that arise in the therapist in session with a client is seen as providing actual “data” (Martin, 2005; Miller, 2004; Sullivan, 2002). As I was listening to the participants, I found that exposure to the inner world and landscape of their lives evoked feelings and thoughts. I started to develop “hunched” and recognized that for my participants to feel that they could share their experiences with me openly, my research design would need to match their personal values and sense of self. The resolution of my understanding came from exploring the process issues that were emerging between the participants and me, and sharing my observations with the participants in the here and now regarding their apparent discomfort with being interviewed. Engagement with the participant was based on sharing my hunches with them regarding their reluctance to engage in an open manner. Participants communicated that they “appreciated” my observations, viewing me as being “sensitive to their needs” and demonstrating my “commitment to their well being,” and felt “more open to discuss different strategies” that would address their concerns. Therefore, I used parallel process as another lens through which to explore the feelings and experiences of participants and to discern how to engage in dialogue with participants, and constituted as experiential knowledge that helped shape decisions regarding research design. I felt that the synthesis of experiential knowledge within the research design was important, as it represented the search for the maintenance of the dignity of the participants, who recognized that their transcripts were being “studied.” The participants appreciated that I was trying to “meet their needs” versus trying to fit them into a preexisting framework that was determined solely by me and felt that the research method selected was more in keeping with their understanding of what it meant to “engage in research.”

Prior to translating the research into accessible forms of knowledge, I found it important to differentiate between my experiential knowledge and the research knowledge that I was generating based on my experiences with the participants. I perceived research knowledge as being affiliated with understanding the experience base of others, whereas experiential knowledge draws on the experience one has by virtue of previous and immediate experiences while interviewing individuals within a particular context. One needs to analyze the experiential process, which is based on reflection and interpretation of the engagement with participants (insider point of view), in conjunction with the research knowledge (outsider point of view), which is focused primarily on trying to find consistent approaches by which to understand the participants’ experiences (Ellingson, 1998; Gitlin, Burbank, & Kauchak, 2005). Research knowledge and experiential knowledge differ in terms of perspective, but both perspectives are still needed for the researcher to make informed decisions and adjustments to the research design to meet participants’ needs. My shared ethnicity and previous experience with counseling represented experiential knowledge (insider point of view). Conversely, because the qualitative method selected to frame the research had protocols and measures in place to depict the experiences of others in a systematic manner, it represents trying to capture the outsider point of view. I found it difficult to depict the parallel process that I identified, because there is no “official” way of representing experiential knowledge. It became apparent to me that experiential knowledge also required “boundaries,” just as the research design for the study represented a “bounded system.” It became apparent that research knowledge and experiential knowledge were not diametrically opposed to one another; in fact, they were both infused with understanding of how research knowledge was produced. It became important to explore how to create boundaries in which experiential knowledge could be produced and inform the research knowledge that was being generated to capture the parallel process issues that emerged for me and for the participants.

To ensure reciprocity, I had to employ research methods that would participants would perceive as inclusive. Adopting a more positivist approach to qualitative research and trying to represent the experiences of participants through generalized statements was requested by participants. However, the challenge for me became how to represent the participants’ experiences in a manner that did not distort their personal understandings and the desire to portray their experiences in a manner that would be more

direct and accessible to the public. I had to make a mental shift from scholarly feminist research (Bodone, 2005; Harding, 1986; Kiluva-Ndunda, 2005; Oakley, 1981), which would encourage participants to have a “voice,” and recognize that the participants with whom I was engaging only “wanted to be heard but not seen.” I started to recognize that the selection of a research design is not neutral, and I struggled with the same questions that the participants had regarding who owned the data and how they would be represented. It became clear that Harding’s (1991) observation was aligned with my own experience, in that whoever gets to select what counts as a research problem, research design, and interpretation of data and how they are represented gets a powerful role in shaping research outcomes. I made choices that allowed me to represent the findings in a manner that was congruent with how the participants wished to be portrayed and represented their worldview of what “research” is to them. It became important for me to integrate the core values of the participants into consideration of the research design and to find creative solutions to address struggles that the participants and researcher experienced. My resolution of this personal challenge was in the recognition that by allowing the participants’ wishes to be integrated into the research design, I was not compromising on my own set of personal values. In actuality, within this particular context, the compromise process in itself represented an active engagement of my personal values. Thus, my sense of integrity was maintained along with respecting the dignity and personal choices that the participants desired. My understanding the lived experience of participants helped create a research friendly environment that encouraged participation of a clientele that might otherwise be missed. It was a delicate process to find different ways to move the participants to the foreground of experience and to still honor their desire to be “heard but not seen.” It became apparent that the fusion of experiential knowledge with research was difficult, as it required openness and a degree of uncertainty in experimenting with creative solutions with participants on my part. The process also views both parties as being experts, but in different domains of knowledge, which required me to find different ways to represent the different forms of knowledge. This challenge is reflexive and integrated an understanding of the parallel process that occurs between the researcher and the participant.

I also established experiential boundaries by reflecting on parallel process issues on an individual level in a systematic manner using Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) focus on the four directions of inquiry— inward, outward, forward, and backward movement of an experience—after each interview session with a participant. Part of my audit trail was to note key feelings, thoughts, and further questions that emerged based on each interview session using the four directions of inquiry. My use of this intervention served as a midpoint of reflection to examine the participants’ career decision-making process from their perspective and to recognize when my interpretations of the participants’ experiences complemented or diverged from each other in the analysis of the data. There were times when understanding my personal reactions to what participants were saying helped me to understand the process and internal feelings that emerged for the participants. Understanding the parallel process that emerged in the reading of the interview transcripts provided important clues as to what the participants were experiencing. The challenge for me revolved around being able to differentiate between the awareness of my personal thoughts and emotions for the purpose of further understanding the participants experiences as opposed to allowing my reactions or feelings based on potential overfamiliarization with the issue presented to determine the analysis of the data, became a point that was reflected on a personal level by me. It also became apparent through the process of interviewing participants that within-group differences were important to consider (Olesen, 2000). Having shared ethnicity initially helped in establishing rapport, but a certain degree of distance or detachment was necessary to account for the within-group differences that existed between perceptions of participants regarding how they constructed their ethnic identity, understanding of their social economic status, and gender role socialization in the family unit, which contributed to a set of experiences different from mine. Acknowledging the ways in which individuals are different and similar will add to understanding of the interactions between ethnicity, gender, and class (Pope-Davis & Coleman, 2001).

Over the duration of the study, it became apparent that by choosing to study South Asian issues within the context of my vicinity, I had isolated myself from the South Asian community as a social network that I could draw from. As participants valued keeping relationships “separate” to avoid conflicts of interest, it also paralleled my own position and level of personal engagement within the South Asian community. The choice not to be interconnected to the South Asian community so that I could gain participants’ trust and ensure their privacy was not made easily, as I found myself caught between social worlds.

Because our perceptions of our relationships with participants inform qualitative research, understanding and managing the parallel process of emotions that exist in the participant-researcher relationship is important to consider. As with similar qualitative research focusing on minority research, the present findings are indicative of trends and issues in the field. However, this study sheds light and focuses on a largely overlooked group and suggests that future researchers still need to consider the implications of the worldview of the participant when considering aspects of interviewing and research design within the research process. Issues related to culture need to address how research is perceived by individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds. Awareness of the methodological dilemmas faced by minority researchers who research minority ethnic communities of which they are not directly a part of is important to explore. It is also imperative for researchers to understand the participants’ view of research within a research process to moderate potential expectations that a participant might assume regarding research outcomes. A didactic approach has been suggested to address difficulties encountered when researchers work with participants to create a shared worldview. In addition, accommodation and acculturation without assimilation was applied to understand the process by which participants and researchers of diverse backgrounds could structure their experiences and manage research barriers that emerge within the research process.

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