

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Embodied situatedness and emotional entanglement in research – An autoethnographic hybrid inquiry into the experience of doing data analysis

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### Abstract

*Background:* In clinical practice, counsellors and psychotherapists rely heavily on their emotional and embodied responses as part of their data gathering. What happens with this epistemological positioning when we generate knowledge in therapy research? Aim: As therapists– researchers, we are intrigued by what Bondi (2012, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19, 9) refers to as a gap between therapeutic practice and research. There are many angles to this ‘gap’, but we have focused on the how to conceptualise and act on our embodied responses during our data analysis phase, with an interest in the emotional entanglement between researchers and the researched. *Materials & Methods:* There is relatively little written about therapists’ relational, emotional or embodied response during the data analysis stage. Using some experiences from a recent mixed-method study into the impact of training on multilingual therapists, we will revisit our research process within an autoethnographic hybrid (Stanley 2013) approach, influenced by introspective and intersubjective reflexivity (Finlay and Gough, 2003, *Reflexivity: A practical guide*. London: Blackwell) with personal experience as a route through which to produce academic knowledge. *Results:* The study involved emotional entanglement on different levels; linguistically, personally and as an underpinning grappling with worldviews in light of the researchers’ different epistemic origins. *Concluding Discussion:* Being in a no-mans-land between old and new understandings triggered a sense of loss of theory and challenged temporarily our sense of selves. Bion (1961, *Learning from experience*. London: Karnac) and Gendlin (1997, *A process model*. New York: Focusing Institute) are examples of ‘frameworks’ which helped to welcome the feeling of lost-ness, rather than feeling threatened and overwhelmed. The process reminds of the epistemic positioning we learn to adopt in our therapeutic practice. Gendlin (1997) refers to this kind ‘staying with’ the ‘body-feel’ as means of generating new understandings. The purpose of this article has not been to offer a step by-step approach to data analysis, but rather to join Stanley’s (2013, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 44, 143) ‘call for accounts’ about what it feels like to do research. Some stages involved excitement, growth, harmony and enrichment, other felt surprisingly unsettling as our own prior understanding expanded. This article only scrapes the surface but might stimulate further discussions around the researcher’s use of self at different stages of the process. Therapists are increasingly encouraged to develop research informed practice; this article suggests that our attention also turns to practice

**Keywords:** emotional entanglement, multilingual, narrative knowing, narrative-thematic analysis, reflexivity, situatedness

doi: 10.1002/capr.12122

informed research, to create platforms for discussions around emotional entanglement with greater epistemic congruence between relational, emotionally attuned practice for both therapists and researcher.

## Introduction

In clinical practice, counsellors and psychotherapists rely heavily on their emotional and embodied responses as part of their data gathering. Feelings, such as ‘musing, contemplating, daydreaming, wondering, doubting, guessing, and intuiting’, are essential aspects of knowledge generated for what Dallos and Stedmon (2006) refer to as ‘self-critical and ethical clinical practice’ (p. 3). What happens with this epistemological positioning when we generate knowledge in therapy research? As therapists–researchers, we are intrigued by what Bondi (2012) refers to as a ‘gap between’ therapeutic practice and research. There are many angles to this ‘gap’, but we have focused on how to conceptualise and act on our embodied responses during our data analysis, with an interest in the ‘emotional entanglement’ (Takhar, 2009) between researchers and the researched. There is relatively little written about therapists’ relational, emotional or embodied response during the data analysis stage. Etherington (2004), Tordes (2007), Anderson and Braud (2011) Josselson (2013), Willig (2012), Hollway & Jefferson, 2002; Finlay (2016) and Gendlin (1997) are helpful exceptions. Finlay refers, for instance, to all stages of the research as a ‘relational centred, existential hermeneutic phenomenological approach’ (Finlay & Evans, 2009). Her data analysis is an ‘attuned inquiry’ (Finlay, 2016, p. 30), characterised by stages of ‘empathic dwelling’ (p. 30), where she uses ‘bodily experience as a way of tuning into ... participants to achieve both a kinaesthetic and emotional sensing of the other’ (p. 23).

Willig (2012) offers a comparison of her embodied responses to different interpretive frameworks, in her arguments for the impact that emotions have on our choice of framework during data analysis. She describes, for instance, how doing a phenomenological analysis made her ‘feel like someone creeping along in the dark’ (p. 145). Working with ‘grand’ theories, in this case the psychoanalytically informed psychosocial model, caused her on the other hand to feel ‘speedy’, with a sense of exhilaration and excitement around being precise and scientific, feeling ‘carried away by her own psychosocial formulations’. (p. 147). These

honest accounts of embodied responses capture the often-ignored high level of emotive involvement during the data analysis. Metaphors and images seem helpful in the researchers’ attempts to communicate subtle changes that have not yet been brought into full awareness – to a therapist trained to listen inwards such responses are always worth considering as valuable data. Tordes (2007) emphasises that ‘communicating understanding involves an aesthetic dimension in which what is revealed has the possibility of being personally appropriated ... within the realm of human participative experience’ (p.40). A participative experience involves what Gendlin (1997) refers to as a ‘felt sense’ rather than just a thought sense. Within the framework of Grounded Analysis, Rennie and Fergus (2006) refer to this felt sense as ‘an approach to interpretation in which subjectivity is drawn on productively’. Rennie and Fergus (2006) continue as follows: ‘embodiment is accompanied by memories, images, associations and word phrases that form a reservoir’ (p. 496) for knowledge. Like in clinical practice, drawing from this reservoir is part of a systematic inquiry which will be discussed further in this article, regarding the concepts ‘introspective’ and ‘intersubjective’ reflexivity.

## Repressed emotional history of research

Despite an increased attention to reflexivity and to the researchers’ positioning in the research, feelings still often seem homeless in research. Ellis and Tucker (2015) make an interesting exploration into the role of emotions in the field of social psychology. Starting with the ancient Greek definition of emotions as ‘pathos’, they trace conceptualisation of emotions over time. ‘Psychopath’ and ‘pathology’ are some of the concepts born from the Greek word pathos and the Latin word patior, which Ellis & Tucker follow through medieval theologies, enlightenment philosophy, biological understandings and towards affect theory and the development of digital emotion. Their review results in a conclusion suggesting that ‘the scientisation of psychology has to come extent repressed its emotional history’ (p. 180). Ellis and Tucker (2015) continue as follows:

Just as individuals have been in need of taming the primitive and animalistic aspects of the self, one could argue that the discipline of psychology attempts to disentangle itself from the more emotional, subjective, messy and undesirable parts of itself (p.180).

### Rational for our inquiry

Our overriding aim with this article was to contribute to a discussion about research, with emotions to the forefront, rather than as undesirable, disowned and perhaps sometimes displaced parts of the researcher's self. The focus of our review of our data analysis resonates with Stanley's (2013) autoethnographic aim to explore research with reference to its 'confidence-crushing anxiety and burnout as underexplored embodied effects'. As the main author of this article, ['SX'] brings experiences from over twenty years of research supervision. Students are repeatedly reporting feeling distressed whilst doing research, and we resonate with Stanley's suggested importance of normalising how generating new knowledge call on complex, difficult emotional responses.

### Methodology and method

With critical realism (Finlay and Ballinger 2006, Hollway and Jefferson 2000) as an overarching framework, we will revisit our experiences from a recent mixed-method study, viewed from an autoethnography-inspired perspective (Stanley 2013) with reference to introspective and intersubjective reflexivity (Finlay & Gough, 2003).

Within the plethora of literature in the field of autoethnographic research, we are particularly inspired by Stanley (2013), who wants 'to acknowledge the embodiment that is easily side-lined when we discuss academic experiences' (p. 147).

### An autoethnographic hybrid

Stanley's (2013) 'hybrid approach to autoethnography' is 'inductive, data-driven theorizing ... insights and themes that are helpful to people in conceptually comparable, but different, situations' (p. 150). Stanley positions herself between an 'evocative' and 'analytic' autoethnography. -What about a middle way? suggests Stanley (2013):

What about an evocative, verisimilitude-seeking, firmly anchored 'auto'-ethnography that focuses

squarely on one's own lived experiences but that also applies critical analysis and aims to formulate theoretical understandings, with the aim of creating understanding beyond the data itself? (p. 150).

### Reflexivity

Our approach resonates with our interest in generating knowledge with an epistemic positioning, similar to what we draw from as emotionally attuned, relational practitioners in psychotherapy. Psychotherapists typically regard both spoken and unspoken messages as significant means of 'data' and will listen to, see as well as drawing from a felt sense when trying to generate knowledge about the client. Therapists are trained to understand their responses through a mixture of experiential and theoretical training within different modalities like psychoanalytic, person-centred, CBT or systemic therapy. Each addresses a different ontological, epistemological and methodological positioning of the therapists regarding both the spoken and the unspoken.

Etherington (2004, p. 19) defines this as a reflexive stance. She compares the epistemic positioning of a reflexive researcher to 'counselling skills [with the] ability to notice our responses to the world around us, other people and events, and to use that knowledge to inform our actions, communications and understanding' (p. 19). Reflexivity is an increasingly important concept in research; it helps us to critically review the researcher's 'situatedness' (Haraway 1988) and positioning within a study. There are many definitions to reflexivity; Finlay and Gough (2003, p. 6) refer to at least to 'five reflexive variants'. This article builds on two approaches, namely the introspective and the intersubjective approach.

### Reflexivity on introspection

Reflexivity on introspection uses typically the researcher's 'introspection to yield insights [to] form the basis of a more generalised understanding' (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. 6). Both autoethnography and heuristic research are examples of reflexivity based on introspective reflection, drawing from the researcher's poems, artwork, diaries, autobiographical logs and other personal documents to recreate the lived experience in a 'full and complete' way (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. 6). The researcher is the 'most important inquiry tool [and] 'you' become a subject worthy of research' (Barber 2006, p. 3). This links into the earlier mentioned parallel between clinical practice and research in terms of drawing from our

felt sense, for example, our embodiment, as a reservoir for memories, images and associations when we generate knowledge. In our study, we have drawn from free writing as means of moving beyond the obvious during our data analysis. Free and creative writing can be both containing and illumination. Freud (1900/1976) referred to creative writing in terms of its ability to 'help us by pass the gates of reason', a little in the way that dreams might help us to access what our reason-bound self often fails to tolerate. Richardson & St Pierre (2005) refer to free writing as means of collecting 'fugitive, fleeting data' in the writing:

In my study, I use writing as a method of data collection ... For example, a pesky dream about an unsatisfying interview [or]my mother's disturbing comment that I had gotten something wrong ... These data were neither in my interview transcripts nor in my field notes where data are supposed to be ... But they were already in my mind and body ... They cropped up unexpectedly and fittingly in my writing ... Fugitive, fleeting data ... collected in the writing (p. 970).

### Intersubjective reflexivity

Reflexivity as intersubjective reflection uses the research relationship as 'both focus and object of focus' (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. 6). Psychosocial research is an example of the intersubjective research reflexivity in that it typically addresses 'unconscious intersubjective dynamics' within our research relationships, 'influenced by our emotional responses' (Hollway and Jefferson 2000, p. 93). Psychosocial research is based on 'the notion that the unconscious plays a role in the construction of our reality' and that this 'plays a significant part in the generation of research data and the construction of the research activity' (Clarke and Hodgett's 2009, p. 2). Hollway and Jefferson (2000) echo this, suggesting that:

What we say and do in the interaction will be mediated by internal fantasies which derive from our histories of significant relationships. Such histories are often accessible only through our feelings and not through our conscious awareness (Hollway and Jefferson 2000, p. 93).

It brings, as mentioned earlier, concepts like projection, transference and countertransference to the forefront. The psychoanalytic term countertransference relates typically to the client's influence on the analyst's unconscious feelings. Brown (2006),

Hollway (2009) and Price and Cooper (2012) assert that there will be similar unconscious processes at play when we generate knowledge in research. Brown (2006) draws from countertransference in research to explore 'those elements in the observer's feeling state which seem to be determined by regular projections from family members' (p. 187). To include unconscious processes in the epistemological positioning of the researcher in ways that compare with what we do in clinical practice requires systematic procedures. Supervision will, for instance, need to include attention to 'unprocessed material', as Brown (2006), Hollway (2009) and Price and Cooper (2012) assert. Like practitioners, the researchers 'will need the help of others who are not so emotionally involved with the material in order to rediscover reflective thinking capacity in relation to unprocessed data' (Price & Cooper, 2012, 167).

### A revisiting of a mixed-method study in the field of multilingual therapy

In this section, we will revisit some recent experience of acting as co-researcher within a cross-disciplinary team (Bager-Charleson et al., 2017). Our autoethnographic reflection involves revisiting this project to explore 'similarities and continuities' between our own experiences and those of others, with regard to 'how it feels to be emplaced in particular ways' (Pink, 2009, p. 63) in research. ['SX'] is a qualitative researcher and supervisor on a doctorate for practitioners within psychological therapies, and she also works as an integrative, relational therapist. ['ZX'] is a humanistic therapist trainee with a background in neurobiology and growing interest in qualitative research as part of her therapy training. The interplay between our research journals illustrates a communication between us as two multilingual therapists and researchers from different countries, age and with different modalities in therapy and in research – but with shared interests both in multilingual therapy and the pros and cons of emotionally attuned research.

### Autoethnographic and self-narratives

The reflexive 'variants' tend to blend into each other. Autoethnography can, for instance, straddle all approaches, as in the suggestion by Spry (2001) in which '[a]utoethnography can be defined as a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts' (p. 710). Stanley draws from her creative, reflective and free writing as part of her research, using 'zines' [which] 'blend personal and

public writing, somewhere between a letter and a magazine... without reference to or distribution by the publishing industry' (p. 154). In this article, our revisiting of the multilingual study will draw from both reflective, and free writings from our data analysis of seven interviews.

### Ethical guidelines

Consent, choice and decision are ambiguous terms in relational, reflexive research. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) criticise conventional 'doorsteps consent' (p. 88) on the basis that these are likely to be informed by first impressions and fantasies, rather than a rational, considered decision. In this article, only the authors' personal details are in question. Our reflexive approach is, however, anchored in Josselson's (2011) ethical thinking about that:

[w]e need to say who we are as interpreters who bring our own subjectivity to the topic or people we are writing about. Interpretive authority cannot be implicit, anonymous, or veiled. We have to come out from behind the curtain and say who we are who are claiming our authority (p. 49).

### Looking back to the multilingual study

Our multilingual study was a mixed-method study, characterised by what Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) address as a not-unusual stance to include 'both fixed and emergent aspects to the design' (p. 155). With a research team specialising in both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study was pre-arranged to include two stages (fixed design) with the first (quantitative) stage to be followed up by a qualitative phase, designed to 'emerge based on the researcher's interpretation of the results from the initial quantitative phase' (p. 155). The first stage was designed and analysed by colleagues with expertise in quantitative research. It involved using the Likert scales survey which related to nine themes which had been addressed in training for therapists in multilingual awareness. To add to the background of our data analysis in the second phase, which is the focus of this article, the training being evaluated was developed and run by mother tongue, which is an organisation that provides culturally and linguistically sensitive professional counselling to the BME community. The survey was sent to all therapists who had undergone the 2-days long training. Eighty-eight participants replied to survey, with the training themes included through the following questions: Has

the training to work with multilingualism in therapy impacted on the way you work therapeutically with multilingualism in the room with reference to the following?

- Identity including transference and projections.
- Emotional expression.
- Defence.
- Trauma.
- Repair.
- Code-switching.
- Shame.
- Early memories, emotions and relationships.
- The danger of making assumptions.

(Possible answers: 1 = not at all, 2 = not especially, 3 = so-so, 4 = quite a lot, 5 = very much).

This descriptive statistics stage involved arranging the replies according to an average score (determined by adding all the scores together and dividing by the number of survey participants) and visualising the results through graphs.

The participants rated, for instance, the impact of the training highest with regard to the danger of making assumptions. The training seemed to have had least impact on code-switching, with a mean score hovering between 'not especially' and 'so-so'. Training themes like 'emotional expression' and 'identity' showed a mean score situated half-way between 'so-so' and 'quite a lot', whilst 'defence', 'early memories, emotions and relationships', 'shame' and 'trauma' were closer towards the 'so-so' value.

### Revisiting our qualitative inquiry

Our attention turned to what this meant for the individual therapists and their clients. Emergent questions revolved, in this sense, around how the categories might translate into clinical practice for different therapists. Out of the 88 participants, seven offered to follow up with interviews. The age of these participants ranged from 30 to 59 (Mean = 47.8 years old, SD = 9.6), and their backgrounds included psychodynamic, person-centred, transactional analytical and cognitive behavioural therapy. All but one of the participants were multilingual. They were trained in English and used English as the main language in their psychotherapy practice.

Our interviews were conducted by [ZX], experienced in quantitative research but a novice in the field of qualitative research. We had prepared to structure the interviews with Josselson's (2013) relational model in mind, which meant aiming 'to understand how people construct or interpret their experiences,

rather than piecing together views of an external event' (p. 7). Having agreed on the relational approach to the interviews, the analysis of the transcripts was as mentioned conducted by two multilingual researchers. Rather than 'testing' one analysis with another, we hoped for complementary perspectives from our different readings. We had agreed to approach within the framework of thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis can be 'applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches' as a 'method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes)' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). This article will focus on the analysis of the transcribed outcome from these interviews. Following the six stages suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), we set out to the following:

- 1 Read and re-read the data, noting down initial ideas.
- 2 Generate initial codes: Code interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set (codes as the 'bricks').
- 3 Search for themes. Collate codes into potential themes – these are the 'load-bearing walls' in the analysis.
- 4 Review themes: Check if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generate a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
- 5 Define and name themes: Do an ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story. Generate clear definitions and names for each theme.
- 6 Select vivid, compelling extract examples, with final analysis of selected extracts. Relate the analysis back to the research question and literature.

This involved reading through the transcripts several times, whilst 'jotting down -ideas and potential coding schemes' (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 86) based on what 'stood out' to us in terms of the participants' emphases, repetitions or other significant features in the transcripts. We had agreed to highlighting anything and everything that might both 'seem and feel relevant'.

## Results

Kleinman and Copp (1993) assert that qualitative researchers 'only gain control of their projects by first allowing themselves to lose it' (p.3). Like in all transformative learning, the learner loses something when old understandings come into question and new

perspectives emerge. This certainly resonated with us during our data analysis. Our embodied responses to the data analysis involved 'transformative losses' for each of us on a personal, theoretical and cultural level. This section revolves around those 'losses' as the actual 'findings' of this study. It is easy to underestimate how unsettling 'transformative losses' can be during the research process, which usually construes the researcher as 'knowing' and in control.

### Resistance to hearing the participants

Both of us experienced strong emotions during our readings. The transcripts were not easy to access, and we spent considerable time feeling prevented from connecting with some of the participants' voices and accounts. There were both practical and personal aspects to our initial level of 'not hearing'. Several participants struggled to find the words:

And I spoke with her and about the research that she's doing and, ummm, one of my interests is also trying which I haven't finalised but it's trying to to do research also on my own to try to put my two fields of interest together (Z: Uh huh) so I spoke with her also in this (Z: Ok) respect (Therapists No 3:2).

Our analysis tapped into a keen desire in us both to create order. [SX] used clinical supervision and free writing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Speedy & Wyatt, 2014) to access emotions, thoughts and feelings beyond the obvious, conscious reflections. Both of us documented research experiences in journals, which as shown below, involved references to how we experienced our frameworks for understanding (theory) and our sense of being (self) thrown into question as part of the process.

#### *Loss of (old) theory*

In her journal about the overlaps and differences with her neurobiological background, [ZX] reflects initially about an excitement over experiencing herself closer to an understanding of the human mind. She writes as follows:

ZX's Journal (1). I became interested in psychology long before I started studying biology, but I ended up specialising in neurobiology, looking at how the brain cells functioned. If we could understand how the brain worked, then surely, we could decode all these mysterious concepts like consciousness, mind,

personality, emotions and instincts. I measured, counted, analysed and compared numerous aspects of brain cells. . . Only two years ago, when I started training as a psychotherapist, I realised there is another type of curiosity that is qualitative. This mysterious species uses words, experiences, personal stories to make sense of the world. No numbers, no means and standard deviations, no statistical testing, where all data is relevant and no data is an outlier. One of the first things I noticed about the qualitative research process is how much I was involved in the creation of data. I say creation and not collection of data because I was personally part of the process. In any encounter, we have an impact on the other person, whether we like it or not. Eliminating myself from the research was not only impossible, but also undesirable. How I made sense of the data was entirely relevant to the research. I began to write about my reflections during each part of the research process. I was fascinated and puzzled at the same time. . . . Imagine my delight when I received Braun and Clarke's paper (2006) outlining the analysis process in six distinct steps. (ZX, Journal 2015).

[ZX] describes, however, a shift in her involvement in the research when the analysis work begins.

#### *Loss of sense of (old) self*

The relational focus which felt so right and made much sense initially begins to change into a sense of a great unease which leaves [ZX] feeling as if she exists in a 'dark room with no window'. Having lost faith in her previous form of understanding, doubting or not making sense of the new one heightens a sense of anxiety, undermining the researcher's sense of self:

[ZX]'s Journal (2). When I actually sat down to analyse my interviews, I felt like I was in a dark room with no windows, trying to find my way out without really knowing if there was a door in the first place. I read the first interview and highlighted the parts I thought were significant. I looked at several research articles but the Methods part in journal articles do not describe the coding process in detail because the coding itself is less important than the outcome of coding, namely the themes and discussion of data [ . . . ] The more I read about thematic analysis, the less I understood the actual process of 'coding data'. It seemed arbitrary, unclear, even random. The word that describes this process for me is wrestling. Some days it looks all

messy and clumsy and some days it feels just like a beautiful dance [ZX, Journal 2015). Whilst ZX uses the metaphor of being in a dark room, SX experiences herself as if in a busy train station, overwhelmed by possibilities and bombarded by impressions. Supervision with space to explore emotional responses together with creative writing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) help [SX] to contain and explore embodied responses ranging from excitement to despair and uncertainty about everything; her curiosity included.

[SX]'s Journal (1): When I was writing, and allowing words to come as they pleased today, the Swedish phrase 'svammel' had clearly been at the forefront of my mind. 'Svammel means that something is unclear, not just difficult to hear but nonsensical; it's just a lot of noise and won't make sense. I am trying to hold onto that feeling, wondering where it comes from? We have kept the transcripts as close as to real speak as possible. I read the therapist who said:

so, that's that was ummm, kind of difficult, ummm. I suppose also umm . . .

It feels like she is suffocating, gagging for words. Is this the lived experience of multilinguals? The brain keeps sending words which cannot be delivered? Is it me, or is it the participants; where does the 'mist' come from? Why do I react so strongly to the mist? And why do I keep digging, asking, searching and seeking lost places in the first place? ([SX]'s journal).

#### **Supervision to explore emotions**

The data analysis work continues to feel like opening up a can of worms and highlighting a sense of craziness around remaining in that challenging space. Seeing a supervisor who allowed for emotions to surface helped [SX] to discuss the impact of the study, as noted in the following notes:

[SX], Journal (3). My supervisor asked how I felt about struggling to find words in a foreign language. I felt taken aback. Do I struggle? Am I unclear? A foreigner? Afterwards, I stay with the feeling. Like in the free writing, the associations arrive as they wish. I mourn having lost my mothertongue. I sit with that loss, trying to welcome it and see where it wants to go; focusing on what it feels like. An outsider. Imposter. I become curious about where these strong

reactions come from? Feeling like an outsider. Two very young parents, too young for having a baby, springs to mind. My parents. I also stay with 'svammel' and sit with some real and imaginary fears of losing one's (mine?) mind. A memory from when my now deceased father is being put into a straitjacket fills me with immense sadness. I let it come, and sit with my history and future, thinking about my private, personal split between good = making sense and intolerable = making no sense. Bion (1961) separates between 'undigested' and 'digested' facts, or aspects of our understanding. He writes about 'taming wild thoughts' as we couple opinions, constructs and ideas with feelings, and vice versa. In the moment that we do that, a sense of aha and recognition occur and we almost immediately move onto another thought, as if freed up for new discovery. The sense of where 'svammel' comes from diminishes when meeting, sitting with it; it can be 'parked' or at least separated from the study I feel more relaxed and open, interested and curious about each multilingual therapist's unique experience of words and meaning making ([SX] journal, 2015).

### Reflections

McLeod (2011) asserts that frustration and overwhelming despair is 'vital' (p. 79) to enable new possibilities of discovery. Bion (1961) and Gendlin (1997) invite us to welcome the feeling of lostness, rather than feeling threatened and overwhelmed. The process reminds of the epistemic positioning we learn to adopt in our therapeutic practice. Gendlin (1997) refers to this kind 'staying with' the 'body-feel' as means of generating new understandings:

by letting it come, I allow my body-feel to stir, to move, to do whatever it does independently of my deliberate control, while I do employ by deliberate control to keep the situation, the relevance [...] Once it has shifted, one can speak or act not just in the countless unsatisfying ways always available, but in a focused way that will carry forward what it implies... (p. 123).

### Narrative knowing

Gendlin (1997) refers to language as 'often being odd, and newly formed'; it is an interactive project in process. Narrative research felt increasingly relevant for our exploration of 'multilingualism'. A narrative

inquiry involves, as Chase (2005, p. 663) suggests, that we 'listen to the narrators' ambiguities and complexities' (p. 663).

[ZX] reflected on the personal cost of being open for 'all' possibilities; a sense of not-knowing seeps into almost all levels, the researcher's own language included. [ZX] considers the links between language and belonging:

[ZXs] Journal (3):

Nowhere feels effortless and natural [right now]. The richness of the two languages and two worlds becomes a burden. When I am 'operating' in English, I am self-conscious about my accent, my non-English looks and my 'foreign' name. I wonder whether I am being understood and how I come across. Interestingly, I notice myself becoming self-conscious in Turkey as well, losing the effortless grasp of my language. The overall feeling is that of being in-between, not quite belonging here or there, not quite an outsider either. My thoughts and feelings struggle to find expression in either language, my vocabulary becomes limiting and confusing. When gathering and analysing the data on multilingual therapists' experiences, I found it a challenge to take a step back from the data to really hear the research participants' voices. The duality of my identity struck hard – was I the researcher or the participant? Where did my voice come into the picture, if at all? As the duality of my identity determined my frame of reference when analysing and interpreting the data, I had to accept that the process of analysis was going to involve navigating this duality (ZX 2015).

Turning our attention to the therapists' 'narrative knowing' involved searching for themes – for example linking meaning units and codes – with attention to how the narrators conceptualised their respective 'self' in the narratives. How do they organise diverse experiences and events into unified and, for themselves, understandable wholes through their 'storying' of the events? Chase's reference to Bamberg (1997, in Chase, 2005, p.663) offered helpful levels of narrative positioning within the transcripts:

- 1 How do the therapists position themselves and others in their stories? Who and what is good, bad, right wrong, etc.?
- 2 How do the narrators position themselves in relation to the audience?
- 3 How do therapists construct their sense of selves in their narratives? Bamberg encourages us to look out

for how the participants position themselves to themselves [and]construct a local answer to the question 'who am I?' (Bamberg, in Chase, 2005, p.663).

A gradual impression of something multilayered, rich came across in the transcripts when comparing separate themes in context with others. Ambivalence, Fractured, Existential Migration, Openness and Empathy were some of the subthemes to which codes like 'jangly', 'fed up', 'issues', 'keen', 'curious', 'background', 'challenge' and 'future' seemed to belong.

The training had highlighted how language no longer was 'just about being better understood', as one therapist said, but rather a matter that 'some stuff will simply easier come up' in different languages. Several therapists spoke about language as 'a reference system' on different levels. One therapist described how:

languages are more than just a language, it's a whole reference system ... childhood, culture, class and different understandings. Having an awareness of different languages [is] also about considering where your thinking comes from. (3:12)

Interestingly, none of the therapists used language switching in the interviews. This is something which, in hindsight, we regard as a missed opportunity. We could have addressed or explored their choice to talk much about language switching but not actually applying it in the interviews. For us as researchers, language switching became a surprising part of the analysis. Upcoming concepts acquired through our mother tongue – like the Swedish 'svammel' (not making sense) initially overshadowed [SX]'s 'hearing' of the participants, and [ZX] experienced strong emotions around language too. Learning from the participants about the importance of language switching made us think about how we both avoided to 'hear' the participants, potential need for language switching; our own reluctance to admit language struggle highlighted a defence which we began to explore in terms of a 'cultural countertransference'. Our initial impatience felt like a projection stemming from our own ambivalence of being 'foreign'.

We both experienced an ebb and flow of connections or moments, which Gendlin (1997) refers to as when 'it jells'. He suggests that is there is 'a great physical relief when a direct referent forms. Many processes in the body return to their more usual ways, no longer carry ... the stoppage' (p. 64).

This resonated with us. Gendlin asserts, in turn, that when that happens, it is not because we have unveiled or discovered the truth; it is rather a process of allowing the data and the researcher to move organically together – accepting that the data have been removed from its original meaning.

### Concluding remarks

The purpose of this article has not been to offer a step-by-step approach to data analysis, but rather to join Stanley's (2013) 'call for accounts' about what it feels like to do research. Some stages involved excitement, growth, harmony and enrichment, but other stages are felt surprisingly unsettling as our own prior understanding expanded. Being in a no-mans-land between old and new understandings triggered a sense of loss of theory and challenged temporarily our sense of selves.

Bion (1961) and Gendlin (1997) are examples of 'frameworks' which help to welcome the feeling of lostness, rather than feeling threatened and overwhelmed. The process reminds of the epistemic positioning we learn to adopt in our therapeutic practice. Gendlin (1997) refers to this kind 'staying with' the 'body-feel' as means of generating new understandings:

by letting it come, I allow my body-feel to stir, to move, to do whatever it does independently of my deliberate control, while I do employ by deliberate control to keep the situation, the relevance [...] Once it has shifted, one can speak or act not just in the countless unsatisfying ways always available, but in a focused way that will carry forward what it implies... (p. 123).

Embodied reflexivity brings us inevitably 'into the room with our research' as the existential therapist Du Plock (2016) puts it. During the data analysis, we found ourselves removed from the opportunity to build understandings through a collaborative dialogue which otherwise is typical of the way we generate knowledge in our client sessions. For [ZX], this way of generating knowledge was initially compared with being in a dark room without any windows, whilst [SX] experienced a sense of sitting in an overcrowded train station. We used research journals as means of moving beyond the explicit in our analysis, creating an introspective space for curiosity rather than avoidance or displacement, into what happened to us on a personal, theoretical and cultural level. Staying with our responses in the way that Gendlin (1997) suggests tended to bring both a physical relief and

open up for new forms of 'hearing' when following and interpreting the narratives of our multilingual participants.

### Limitations of the study and areas for further research

We would like to know more about therapists' embodied responses to research.

As researchers, we have become increasingly intrigued by what Bondi (2012) refers to as a 'gap between' therapeutic practice and research. There are many angles to this 'gap', but to us the way therapist-researchers relate to embodied responses when attempting to generate knowledge appears a particularly vague area. Part of our 'findings' have been to recognise how difficult we experienced the process of finding a framework for reflections and discussions about our emotional entanglement in research – especially in comparison with the requirements for emotional attunement and self-awareness from our clinical training and practice. Our article revolves particularly around an 'emotional entanglement' (Takhar, 2009) between researchers and the researched during data analysis. With reference to the principles guiding introspective and intersubjective reflexivity, we have aimed to invite to a discussion about entanglement as means of involvement, exploration and engagement in contrast to attempts to disown, displace or what Ellis and Tucker (2015) refer to as a 'disentanglement', which they identify as a part of 'the scientisation of psychology which has to some extent repressed its emotional history' (p.180).

This article only scrapes the surface but might stimulate further discussions around the researcher's use of self at different stages of the process. Therapists are increasingly encouraged to develop research informed practice; this article suggests that our attention also turns to practice informed research, to create platforms for discussions around emotional entanglement with greater epistemic congruence between relational and emotionally attuned practice for both therapists and researchers.

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