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The 'Worker-Researcher': Introducing a new interview dynamic

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### The 'Worker-Researcher': Introducing a new interview dynamic

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## The ‘Worker-Researcher’: Introducing a new interview dynamic

It used to be said that academics doing ethnographic research were able to have brief forays into other cultures, but to have permanent membership would result in “career suicide”. Our methodology takes into account the changing nature of academia, both exploiting and endorsing the dual role status held by many academics who have fractional appointments at higher education institutions. We use data from a study on women’s experiences of discovering partner infidelity to explore the benefits and drawbacks of being a ‘Worker-Researcher’. Participants were interviewed whilst having an eyelash extension treatment carried out by the second author who was employed as a part-time beauty therapist. The data produced using this methodology was rich and revealing, due in part to the level of rapport engendered by the relationship between the two protagonists and also due to the confessional culture of beauty salons. The reduction or reversal of traditional researcher/participant hierarchy soothes the frequently discussed concerns about exploitation of participants. The exploitation of Worker-Researchers is discussed as a potential drawback of this methodology.

### Keywords:

Interviewing; Ethnography; Client-Participant / Worker-Researcher; Insider-Outsider; Interviewer / Interviewee hierarchy

## Introduction

Person-to-person interviewing is the traditional method for amassing qualitative data about people's attitudes and lived experiences (Braun, Clarke & Gray, 2017). Technology has opened up new channels for conducting interviews (e.g. online), and there have been exciting re-imaginings of ways to provoke responses (e.g. photo elicitation) (Braun, Clarke & Gray, 2017). But it is rare that the dynamics of the interview, in other words the interplay between interviewee and interviewer, varies. The concept of hierarchy within an interview situation, where participants' needs are inherently subordinate to researchers', is a particularly important issue, not only for ethical reasons but also because the primary conduit to good data is to have good rapport between the two players, and hierarchy is the enemy of rapport (Oakley, 1981). Ethnographic methods, where the researcher is embedded in the environment of study, are a powerful way of increasing rapport between the interviewer and interviewee (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). By immersing themselves in the culture, ethnographic researchers can access key informants and make a stronger claim to genuinely understand what those informants are saying. But ethnographic methods are extremely time consuming and raise concerns about the exploitative nature of studying a culture and then leaving, having extracted value (Irwin, 2006). In this paper we discuss a methodology we have named "Worker-Researcher" which appears to have the benefits of immersion that ethnographic research brings, with an amelioration of the ethical concerns.

The Worker-Researcher method falls somewhere between naturalistic data collection and more traditional forms of data collection. In naturalistic data collection the participants produce the data naturally, without the interference of the researcher, they are doing something they would do anyway, as opposed to traditional interviews where the participant is doing something at the behest of the interviewer (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2017). In Worker-Researcher studies the participants are doing what they do naturally (in the case we

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2  
3 discuss here, confiding in their beauty therapist) but the Worker-Researcher has the chance to  
4  
5 be more than a passive observer.  
6  
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8  
9         Ethnography sets out to better understand meanings within an environment  
10 (Hammersley, 1983). Every member of a community has specific ways of understanding their  
11  
12 own and other's behaviours within that community, so by immersing oneself in the  
13  
14 environment one can better understand the members of that community (Spradley, 2016). But  
15  
16 gaining access to the field can take a long time, relationships must be built, sometimes  
17  
18 necessitating negotiation with gatekeepers, and it takes time to gain trust (Morse, 2016).  
19  
20 Goode (2006) suggests that it can be more productive to collect data from a field in which  
21  
22 one is already a member, singling out social workers as ideal ethnographic researchers. There  
23  
24 is also a tradition of nurses conducting participant observations within health care settings  
25  
26 (see Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002), and teachers conducting research within schools (e.g. Weade  
27  
28 & Green, 1991). This type of research demonstrates the principle within ethnography to "start  
29  
30 where you are" (Madison, 2012), a principle which the Worker-Researcher approach exploits  
31  
32 to the full.  
33  
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39         There are two salient features of the method employed in this study which we want to  
40  
41 draw out: the effect of the setting and the effect of the protagonists (interviewer and  
42  
43 interviewee). We turn first to a discussion of the setting.  
44  
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#### 46 ***The role of the setting: The confessional culture of beauty salons***

47  
48         At the point of data collection for the project we discuss in this paper, the second  
49  
50 author, Clarke, was a student and had a second job as an eyelash extension technician in a  
51  
52 busy beauty salon. She had built up a network of repeat clients who visited her approximately  
53  
54 every two weeks. Unlike research done by social workers, nurses and teachers, researching  
55  
56 their clients, patients or pupils, this research methodology confounds the inherently  
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1  
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3 hierarchical nature of those relationships and all other traditional research relationships where  
4 participants take a subordinate role. Here the interviewer is a practitioner first and a  
5 researcher second, while the interviewee is a client first and a participant second, thus we  
6  
7  
8 term the roles “Worker-Researcher” and “Client-Participant”. The relationship is outside the  
9  
10 traditional caring professions of health or education and is primarily a capitalist one where  
11  
12 money is exchanged for services, the Client-Participant is actually the de facto employer of  
13  
14 the Worker-Researcher. To our knowledge no research exists which has been done in a  
15  
16  
17 setting like this with this sort of flipped relationship between the protagonists.  
18  
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22  
23 In popular culture, the archetype of the bartender who listens to his customers’  
24 troubles reflects the truth that some commercial settings provide people with space to  
25  
26 unburden themselves. Price and Arnould (1999) term these relationships “Commercial  
27  
28 Friendships” but we feel that term trivialises the depth of some of these relationships. Cowen  
29  
30 (1982) found that hairdressers are a group of professionals who are confided in by their  
31  
32 clients to a greater extent than almost any other, even more than bartenders. Probably  
33  
34 because, although there is the element of the confessional about a bar, it is a much busier  
35  
36 environment and so in-depth engagement is less possible (Cowen, McKim & Weissberg,  
37  
38 1981). To date, researchers have ignored the potential of the beauty therapist as a data  
39  
40 gatherer, despite a small but persuasive literature which reveals that beauty salons are sites  
41  
42 where customers are particularly prone to share personal stories.  
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48  
49 In 2004 Solomon et al. conducted an observational study in Northern Carolina.  
50  
51 Conversations between customers and beauticians in ten beauty salons were observed by  
52  
53 researchers with a view to seeing how the situations could be utilised to promote health  
54  
55 interventions. They concluded that the salons acted as safe spaces where women felt free to  
56  
57 share personal stories, to the extent that Solomon and their co-authors said that beauticians  
58  
59 act as ‘natural helpers’. This notion of people who work in salons being ‘natural helpers’ was  
60

1  
2  
3 first identified by Cowen et al. (1979), who said that hairdressers can be regarded as care  
4  
5 givers. They conducted interviews with ninety hairdressers who reported that approximately  
6  
7 one-third of their clients talked about serious problems in their personal life, with health and  
8  
9 marriage concerns being the most common topics. Cohen (2010) reported that emotional  
10  
11 labour was such an integral part of their role that hair salon managers felt that their economic  
12  
13 survival depended on being good at it. Cowen (1982) went so far as to say that beauty  
14  
15 therapists act as proxy mental health therapists because the material the clients share is so  
16  
17 emotionally meaningful. Sattler and Deane (2016) took this to the logical conclusion of  
18  
19 suggesting that hairdressers should have training to help them deal with this aspect of their  
20  
21 job, as they often feel unprepared to deal with revelations from their clients, particularly  
22  
23 around substance abuse or violence. Encouragingly, in the UK, a charity (BarberTalk, 2018)  
24  
25 and a local government organisation (Norfolk County Council, 2019) have recently begun  
26  
27 providing training for hairdressers on how to spot signs of domestic abuse and mental health  
28  
29 distress.  
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36 There was something particularly salient about Clarke's speciality as an eyelash  
37  
38 extension technician which may mean that this situation **deepens** the existing confessional  
39  
40 culture of the beauty salon. During the process of applying eyelash extensions, clients have  
41  
42 their eyes closed and lie on a massage table. To our knowledge, no qualitative interviews  
43  
44 have been carried out while participants have their eyes shut, yet research from the field of  
45  
46 cognitive psychology shows that recall is significantly improved with eyes closed (e.g.  
47  
48 Perfect et al., 2008). Since our study asked women to talk about their experiences of  
49  
50 discovering infidelity in the past, memory was particularly important.  
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52  
53  
54

55 On the basis of this literature we confidently concluded that a beauty salon was a  
56  
57 place where Client-Participants would feel **comfortable** talking to beauticians about deeply  
58  
59 personal aspects of their lives. Rather than passively observing beautician-client interactions  
60

1  
2  
3 in the way that Solomon et al. (2004) did, we decided to directly utilise the second author's  
4 dual expertise as both a beautician and a psychology graduate with extensive training in  
5 qualitative research methods to research a particularly sensitive topic, upon which there has  
6 been little qualitative research conducted: emotional reactions to discovering infidelity.  
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### 13 ***The role of the protagonists: Worker-Researcher methodology***

14  
15 It is not unheard of for researchers to inhabit dual roles when conducting research.  
16 Within the field of ethnography this is quite common, and a substantial body of ethnographic  
17 literature exists which discusses the impact of these multiple identities (e.g. Coffey, 1999).  
18 Lavis (2010) notes that straddling the domains of academic research on one hand, and  
19 member of the community being studied on the other, is generally seen as an advantage in  
20 that it facilitates gaining access to and maintaining relationships with research participants.  
21 However, Lavis also notes that, "Detailed consideration of researcher identities and their  
22 potential impact appears less well developed in the qualitative interviewing literature" (p.  
23 316) and she raises concerns about the potential ethical issues involved (discussed further  
24 below).  
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39 This dual position clearly harks to insider/outsider issues. The advantages and  
40 disadvantages of being an 'insider' researcher has long been debated by qualitative theorists  
41 (Unluer, 2012; Gair, 2012; Mullings, 1999). In the present study Clarke was an insider  
42 researcher. According to Adler and Adler (1987) she was a 'complete member researcher' as  
43 she was completely integrated, as evidence by the fact that she was a member of the salon  
44 'group' before this particular research project began. Three advantages of insider researchers  
45 were recognised by Bonner and Tolhurst (2002): having a deeper understanding of the  
46 culture, the flow of normal social interactions not being changed, and having a level of  
47 intimacy already recognized and acknowledged. Unluer (2012) stated that insider researchers  
48 usually know how the environment 'really works' but that this familiarity may lead to  
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3 assumptions being made (DeLyser, 2001). Rather than explicitly asking about certain  
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5 practices or probing for more information, the researcher can too easily rely on their own  
6  
7 knowledge rather than the participant's reported experiences. This could take many forms,  
8  
9 but it will be, by definition, an automatic unconscious process, thus hidden from  
10  
11 introspection. We can only ever guess at what those assumptions might be but one of the  
12  
13 most obvious assumptions that insider researchers make is to assume that their participants'  
14  
15 account are to be 'trusted'. Though, of course, this is not limited to researchers with insider  
16  
17 status, it is exacerbated by physical and emotional closeness to participants which sets  
18  
19 researchers up to assume that participants are acting in good faith.  
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24  
25 It's worth pointing out that presenting insider and outsider research as discretely  
26  
27 dichotomous is a fallacy. As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) note, this dualistic categorisation is a  
28  
29 distortion of the fact that no researcher is ever truly an outsider if they are studying a field,  
30  
31 nor are they ever a complete insider, because groups of people are not homogenous.  
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34  
35 We use illustrative data from a larger research project to explore the benefits and  
36  
37 drawbacks of a beauty therapist interviewing their own clients in a beauty salon. As we will  
38  
39 show, there are methodological implications and ethical considerations which need to be  
40  
41 considered.  
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#### 44 ***Background to the project: Research on infidelity***

45  
46 Worker-Researcher methodology is particularly applicable to topics that are private  
47  
48 and personal and thus was well suited to our research on the topic of infidelity. This was part  
49  
50 of a larger study on the emotional experiences of people who discover their partners have  
51  
52 been unfaithful.  
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54

55  
56 Around 1 in 5 married and 1 in 3 unmarried people will cheat on their partners (Luo,  
57  
58 Cartun & Snider, 2010). This is bearing in mind that researchers face challenges in defining  
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2  
3 what constitutes 'cheating' and that participants are likely to lie (Clarke, Braun & Wooles,  
4 2015). Thus, even though exclusive monogamy is the default relationship style in Western  
5 society (Sharpe, Walters & Goren, 2013), infidelity is still a common occurrence (Clarke,  
6 Braun & Wooles, 2015).  
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12  
13 There is little qualitative research on this topic (Allen et al., 2005) and what little  
14 there is has some serious flaws. As Allan and Harrison (2009) note, it is a secret and sensitive  
15 topic, thus participant recruitment is difficult. Researchers often default to asking people who  
16 haven't necessarily experienced infidelity to imagine how they would feel. In their  
17 methodological review, Blow and Harnett (2005) argue that people respond differently to  
18 hypothetical and actual infidelity. They urged researchers to study people who had first-hand  
19 experience of infidelity in an attempt to increase the validity of the conclusions that could be  
20 drawn.  
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32 Olson, Russell, Higgins, Kessler and Miller (2002) is an example of one such  
33 qualitative study. They interviewed nine people by phone about their experiences of  
34 discovering partner infidelity and used grounded theory to analyse the data. Pieluzek (2014)  
35 conducted semi-structured interviews with six men and Interpretative Phenomenological  
36 Analysis (IPA) to explore their experiences after discovering partner infidelity. These are the  
37 two most relevant pieces of literature, most of the rest is either quantitative, case studies for  
38 use by therapists, or focussed on the unfaithful party.  
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49 The dearth of qualitative literature in this field is probably because of the nature of the  
50 topic. We can see from the existing literature that people view infidelity as highly personal  
51 and very emotional. It is likely to only be discussed with close friends and confidants and,  
52 unlike topics such as sexual behaviour or health, there is no obvious way to access the  
53 population. The siting of this research in a beauty salon exploits the unique relationship  
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3 between a client and their beauty therapist and, by exploiting the Worker-Researcher dual  
4  
5 role, opens avenues to data collection that have been hitherto neglected.  
6  
7

## 8 9 **Method**

10  
11 Each Client-Participant was a regular visitor to the salon. Clarke had been doing their  
12  
13 eyelashes, on average every two weeks, for a minimum of 9 months to maximum of 4 years.  
14  
15 At some point over that time each Client-Participant who was subsequently asked to  
16  
17 participate had made it known that they had experienced a long-term partner being unfaithful  
18  
19 to them. In any research with humans, the method of recruitment of participants has ethical  
20  
21 ramifications. Participants should feel able to refuse or withdraw at any stage in the study,  
22  
23 including post-data collection. We carefully considered this in advance of data collection but  
24  
25 could see no reason why Worker- Researcher methodology is likely to reduce “voluntariness”  
26  
27 more than any other insider research paradigm. In fact, as discussed below, since the worker-  
28  
29 researcher paradigm shifts power towards the Client-Participant to a greater extent than in  
30  
31 traditional interviews, we would argue that these ethical concerns are eased.  
32  
33  
34  
35

36  
37 Before any interviews were carried out, ethical approval was granted by our  
38  
39 University Ethics Review Panel. Client-Participants were given an information and consent  
40  
41 form to read and sign before their appointment began. They were then taken to a private  
42  
43 beauty room in which their fortnightly eyelash extension treatment was carried out. During  
44  
45 this treatment the Client-Participant’s eyes were closed and they were laying on a bed with  
46  
47 faint, relaxing music playing in the background. Once their eyes had been prepared for the  
48  
49 treatment, the interview began and the lasted for most of each treatment, between 40-60  
50  
51 minutes. Clarke conducted unstructured interviews with the Client-Participants. In the way  
52  
53 that unstructured interviews are similar to a conversation, the naturalistic nature was  
54  
55 particularly suited to the situation where Clarke was physically occupied and unable to refer  
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3 to an interview schedule (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A Dictaphone was placed on a nearby tray  
4  
5 to record the interviews. Pseudonyms have been used in the subsequent discussion of data.  
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### 8 9 **Reflections on the Worker-Researcher methodology**

10  
11 Issues pertinent to this methodology can be roughly divided into two domains: those  
12  
13 affecting the interview and the data collected and those affecting the people involved  
14  
15 (although the two are obviously intertwined). Under the heading of interview related issues  
16  
17 we evaluate the practicalities of how well the interviews were conducted, particularly  
18  
19 considering that the Worker-Researcher was doing two tasks at once. We also consider how  
20  
21 **the interviews benefitted from the existing** rapport. Under the broad heading of people related  
22  
23 issues we consider the ethical implications of this methodology, both for the Client-  
24  
25 Participant and for the Worker-Researcher.  
26  
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28

#### 29 30 *Interview issues*

31  
32 To our knowledge, there are no methodologies which exist where the interviewer is  
33  
34 being paid to do another job whilst simultaneously conducting the interview. We were  
35  
36 interested to see how the practicalities of the situation affected Clarke's interviewing  
37  
38 technique.  
39  
40

#### 41 42 *Practicalities*

43  
44 Clarke was essentially doing two jobs at once and the one the Client-Participants were  
45  
46 paying for (having their eyelashes done) had to be given priority, which meant that  
47  
48 occasionally the interviewing suffered. There were points where Clarke wished she had  
49  
50 probed further:  
51  
52

53  
54 *MC: But do you actually think that?*  
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3 *Julie: Yeah I do, I just think human nature is just so unpredictable. People*  
4 *you think would never do something like that. Like the Christian*  
5 *church you get married once and that's meant to be it but look.*

6  
7  
8  
9  
10 *MC: Where did you get married the second time?*

11  
12  
13 Listening back to the interview, the Client-Participant could have been asked what  
14 they meant by human nature being unpredictable, or about their expectations of marriage,  
15 rather than changing the focus to a more mundane question about location. There were also  
16 quite substantial sections of the interviews that were not focussed on relevant material, for  
17 example sections on children and custody issues. If a semi-structured interview schedule had  
18 been used it may have resulted in a more focussed interview, but it would have seemed much  
19 less natural to the Client-Participants, spoiling the major advantage of the methodology  
20 which was that the Client-Participants felt at ease (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

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32 Having said that, the areas that we intended to probe were all covered. For example,  
33 when discussing the interviews in advance we agreed that we would want to ask Client-  
34 Participants about how their experiences of infidelity had affected their view of subsequent  
35 romantic relationships and this question was raised, in different ways, with each Client-  
36 Participant:  
37  
38  
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44 *MC: Do you think Liam had anything to do with it?*

45  
46 *Abigail: I'd been split up with Liam for, I'd say, maybe a year or two? I*  
47 *don't know. Maybe a year. No, two years I started seeing someone.*  
48 *Weren't for me and I thought, "Fuck this, I need to be on my own*  
49 *after all the shit I'd been through with that tosser". And I spent a*  
50 *good six months on my own before I met Andy...it was so raw*

1  
2  
3 *everything. Like, I was over the Liam thing but still, I was bitter*  
4  
5 *about it for a long time after all happened.*  
6  
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9

10  
11 *MC: Do you think you was a bit wary of Clive because of all that?*  
12

13 *Julie: Erm yes and no. Yes, because I'm aware now the depths people will*  
14  
15 *fucking sink to try and cover their arse. I didn't think there were*  
16  
17 *people like that really. I mean I'd read about them but I'd never*  
18  
19 *thought I'd love one.*  
20  
21  
22  
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24

25 As well as introducing the issues we had identified in advance as being of interest, the  
26 Client-Participants were frequently prompted to stay on track and finish thoughts:  
27

28  
29  
30 *Julie: Leo was a couple of days old and I remember it very clearly and*  
31  
32 *very vividly, being in our bedroom and him pointing at Leo in his,*  
33  
34 *like, bassinet and saying to me, "Do you really think I would be that*  
35  
36 *wicked to do this to you after you've just given me a son?" And I*  
37  
38 *just thought, "So you know what Jen, you are just insane." Like he*  
39  
40 *would say, "It's postnatal depression." And said to me, "It's all in*  
41  
42 *your head, there's something not right." So I said, "I will make an*  
43  
44 *appointment at the doctors and I'll get something sorted out*  
45  
46 *because this is destroying us." So then when I logged on and I*  
47  
48 *saw... And I remember saying to myself, "I'm gonna look at his*  
49  
50 *previous orders, and there is gonna be nothing there, and I'm*  
51  
52 *gonna go to the doctors, and I'm gonna let this go, cos it's me. I'm*  
53  
54 *destroying our relationship."*  
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3 *MC: And you thought Moonpig would be how you'd catch him?*

4  
5  
6 *Julie: I don't know, I don't know what I thought.*

7  
8 *MC: Well there was someone out there helping you.*

9  
10 *Julie: Well, at the time I thought the complete opposite, but now I look back*  
11  
12 *and I think, "Yeah, definitely. Definitely someone had my back."*

13  
14  
15 *Int: So you went on the previous orders...*

16  
17 *Julie: Yeah and there was a Valentine's Day card to her with pictures of*  
18  
19 *him and her in bed together and this poem he'd written her about*  
20  
21 *how beautiful she was.*

22  
23  
24 When the Client-Participant seemed to wander slightly in her narrative, she was  
25 brought back onto topic with, "So you went on the previous orders..." and space was left for  
26 her to pick the thread back up again, which she did.

### 27 28 29 30 31 *Rapport*

32  
33 When embarking on the project we anticipated that the major strength of our  
34 methodology would be the degree of connection that existed between the Worker-Researcher  
35 and the Client-Participants. When interviewing it is desirable to reduce hierarchy between  
36 interviewer and interviewee, thus putting the participant at ease and increasing rapport.  
37 Techniques to reduce perceptions of hierarchy are a hallmark of feminist interviewing  
38 (Reinharz & Chase, 2002). Lavis (2010) talks about an interview they conducted with an  
39 interviewee who seemed daunted by the situation to illustrate issues around hierarchy and  
40 rapport building. Lavis talks about setting the room up in such a way that it was less formal,  
41 choosing clothes that were more casual, and revealing her own status as a fellow student to  
42 the interviewee. As methods to reduce or eliminate perceptions of hierarchy these are well-  
43 established, however Lavis reported that these techniques did not seem to be successful and  
44 the participant remained uncomfortable. Evidence of the level of rapport in our interviews  
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3 can be seen in the friendly joking that occurred and the use of colloquial language, swearing  
4 and names (including nicknames). We interpret this as evidence of authenticity in the data  
5  
6 and would argue that it is one of the chief assets of the methodology. Swearing, in particular,  
7  
8 is used throughout. Here Abigail briefly apologises for saying “fucked”:  
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10

11  
12  
13 *Abigail: He has ruined me. He emotionally fucked me up, sorry, for a very,*  
14  
15 *very long time but it's made me who I am today*  
16

17  
18 Abigail was the Client-Participant who swore the least, **probably because** it wasn't her  
19 natural vernacular. She did go on to swear again subsequently though, without apologising:  
20  
21

22  
23 *Abigail: Yeah well, then he started getting aggressive so I just thought,*  
24  
25 *“Nah, fuck this. I ain't having this shit again.”*  
26  
27

28  
29 Abigail was the Client-Participant that Clarke had had the shortest length relationship  
30 with. We suspect that her slight reticence about using colloquial language is a function of the  
31 less well-established relationship. These and other indicators of authenticity litter the  
32 transcripts (in fact it was often hard to find many passages without swearing). The Worker-  
33 Researcher and the Client-Participants repeatedly used each other's names, including  
34  
35 nicknames, in a very natural way:  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41

42  
43 *MC: God, Abigail what is your luck?*  
44

45 *Abigail: Mills seriously I ain't got no luck mate.*  
46  
47

48 The Worker-Researcher and Client-Participants were clearly at ease with one another,  
49 they frequently laughed and joked.  
50  
51

52  
53 *MC: Once a cheat always a cheat with him do you think?*  
54

55 *Lucy: Yeah. Oh, oh, yeah! He's done it to everyone he has been with.*  
56

57 *MC: What is it with him? Has a got a magical penis or something? I don't*  
58  
59 *get it?*  
60



1  
2  
3 *Lucy: Oh, definitely not. He just has the charm. That's what it is. That's all*  
4  
5 *it is. He has the chat. There's no magical knob.*  
6  
7

8 They even made jokes at each other's expense:  
9

10  
11 *Julie: I don't know how he got into it, but I know that he went away to*  
12  
13 *Wiltshire and we used to write to each other.*  
14

15  
16 *MC: Shut up you used to write to each other! You're showing your age now*  
17  
18 *Ju.*  
19

20  
21 *Julie: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We used to write real letters to each other every*  
22  
23 *month.*  
24

25  
26 The rapport also gave space to emotions. Throughout the interviews the Client-  
27  
28 Participants did not just report emotions but they seemed to re-experience them, particularly  
29  
30 anger. This was seen in the use of swearing and raised voices. Throughout the interviews  
31  
32 Client-Participants made **statements using aggressive language**:  
33  
34

35  
36 *Lucy: I will tell her one day when [their daughter] is older, but this is how*  
37  
38 *much of a fucking pig he is.*  
39

40  
41 *Julie: What is the point Millie? He is a fucking liar he is only after*  
42  
43 *preserving his self and his image and he's not gonna admit to me*  
44  
45 *how revolting he behaved.*  
46

47  
48 When describing the initial discoveries of infidelity the Client-Participants used sharp,  
49  
50 harsh tones of voice, emphasising the anger and disgust they felt towards their ex-partners.  
51  
52 As their narratives progress other emotions emerged. For example, Abigail recounted the  
53  
54 dangerous situation she found herself in when her husband realised his infidelity was about to  
55  
56 be discovered:  
57  
58  
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3 *Abigail: I managed, literally managed to run past him and get to the door*  
4  
5 *and I run to the lift [starts laughing, slightly hysterical?] literally I*  
6  
7 *was sprinting down the corridor, you should of seen me Millie I was*  
8  
9 *a fucking mess.*

10  
11  
12 *MC: Sounds like a film.*

13  
14  
15 *Abigail: Honestly, it was horrendous. Got down to the lobby and I had to*  
16  
17 *wait in a queue finally got the queue and he [the concierge] was*  
18  
19 *like, "Can I help you?" and I was like, "[erratic screaming*  
20  
21 *noises]," literally broke down. I was like, "You gotta help me." I*  
22  
23 *was a fucking state. He'd been throwing me around the room*  
24  
25 *slapping me and pulling me hair out. He tried everything. I didn't*  
26  
27 *have a single bit of makeup, all my jewellery, everything.*

28  
29  
30  
31 *MC: Oh my god.*

32  
33 *Abigail: So I was like, "Oh my god, you gotta help me." So security went*  
34  
35 *up there and then like this lady, bless her she was like immaculate*  
36  
37 *looking, she was like really pretty, young like, hair immaculate,*  
38  
39 *makeup immaculate, like nice, like, like, skirt suit thing, in her*  
40  
41 *heels, and she was like, "Oh let's go get your stuff," and I was like*  
42  
43 *a... I was mortified cos I looked like an absolute fucking mess.*

44  
45  
46  
47 As she talked Abigail's voice became higher pitched, displaying anxiety and fear, and  
48 she repeated herself and her words came faster and more garbled. We found compelling  
49 evidence of emotional honesty in all the interviews. The women were generous with their  
50 experiences and feelings. They even confided in Clarke things that they explicitly said she  
51 mustn't tell other particular people:  
52  
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3 *Lucy: Yeah, yeah. Oh! And this is another thing and I don't think*

4  
5 *[daughter] knows about this, so you can't tell her.*

6  
7  
8 *MC: No I won't, go on...*

9  
10 *Lucy: I will tell her one day when she's older, but this is how much of a*

11  
12 *fucking pig he is and if I tell her this I think it would crucify her.*

13  
14  
15 This clearly raises ethical implications, which leads into our next set of  
16  
17 considerations.

### 18 19 20 ***People issues***

21  
22 These next issues obviously have a direct effect on the way the interview was  
23  
24 conducted, but we have distinguished them from the previous issues which are more relevant  
25  
26 to the quality of the interview. The following matters are more relevant in terms of impact on  
27  
28 the protagonists themselves, rather than on the nature of the data collected.  
29  
30

### 31 32 ***Exploiting the Client-Participants***

33  
34 Throughout this research project we were acutely aware of the ethical issues involved  
35  
36 in using Clarke's existing role within salon culture. We had qualms about using the  
37  
38 relationships which had built up between Clarke and her clients to further our research aims.  
39  
40 We are not the first to wrestle with this ethical dilemma. Theorists have argued that having  
41  
42 intimate relationships between participants and interviewers is *more* ethical than not, since  
43  
44 remaining detached perpetuates inequalities between researchers and the researched (Oakley,  
45  
46 1981). And conversely, others have argued that intimacy is not a panacea for exploitation and  
47  
48 that, in fact, friendliness can be manipulative as it masks data-gathering goals (Irwin, 2006).  
49  
50 Irwin concludes that, "We should avoid arguing that any behavior in the field is inherently  
51  
52 unethical or ethical" (p.170). We thoroughly agree with this statement yet want to make an  
53  
54 argument that there is something unique about doing Client-Participant work, particularly  
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3 when the cultural domain (in this case the beauty salon) has been penetrated well in advance  
4 of data gathering. In this case Clarke, was there for genuine reasons: to make money to  
5 supplement her student finances. This was the primary reason for her presence in the salon  
6 rather than to “use” the clients as sources of data.  
7  
8  
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12

13 Additionally, in a reverse of any data gathering situation we are aware of, Client-  
14 Participants *paid the interviewer* for the session where data was collected. This is a radical  
15 shift of power and hierarchy which, to our knowledge, is completely novel. This changes the  
16 dynamic of the relationship entirely. As Ward, Campbell and Keady (2016) note, beauticians  
17 services can inspire Client-Participant loyalty and patronage. In the interviews there was a  
18 sense that the Client-Participants felt they were “in it together” with Clarke. These extracts  
19 are from the start of the recordings:  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29

30 *Lucy: So go on then, what do you wanna know?*

31  
32 And:

33  
34  
35 *Julie: Ready to hear about my crazy life again then?*  
36  
37

38 The interviews did not read as unequal exchanges, they read more like collaborative  
39 endeavours. Participation may even be of benefit for the Client-Participants (although we did  
40 not examine this), for example, Ortiz (2001) found that the interview process can be cathartic  
41 for participants.  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47

48 Ethnographic researchers have discussed another way in which participants may  
49 experience inequality: they are left in the field when the researcher is able to leave and return  
50 to academia. Thus, participants may feel deserted, abandoned and hurt (Irwin, 2006). We  
51 believe that the Client-Participant methodology reduces the potential for this source of pain  
52 for participants. Since the researcher is firmly embedded within the culture, because their  
53 position there is authentic, in practice they will not desert the Client-Participant.  
54  
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3 Another risk of insider research is gaining access to information that is *too* sensitive  
4 and personal, that the participants may go further than they might with an unfamiliar  
5 researcher who was not embedded to such an extent. This may be exacerbated through the  
6 use of unstructured interviews. Unlike other interviews, unstructured interviews give  
7 participants considerable control over the interview. But researchers such as Corbin and  
8 Morse (2003) have raised concern that unstructured interviews can lead to ‘emotional  
9 distress’ when talking about sensitive topics because the interview lacks boundaries and can  
10 drift into unexpectedly intense topics.  
11  
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21

22 In the following quote Clarke can be seen to push the Client-Participant more than  
23 another interviewer might have:  
24  
25

26  
27 *MC: Why did you, not that I'm saying it was completely wrong because it's*  
28 *all ended up perfect for you now, but why would you do that to*  
29 *another woman?*  
30  
31  
32

33  
34 *Lucy: What?*  
35

36 *MC: Meet up with him when you knew he was married.*  
37

38  
39 *Lucy: I can honestly say, and this is the honest truth, I didn't think there*  
40 *was anything in it and I was just enjoying myself because of what...*  
41  
42

43 *MC: Did you not think about the other girl that he was married to though?*  
44

45  
46 *Lucy: Yeah, but, I know, they were, they were having proper fist fights*  
47 *and...*  
48

49  
50 *MC: Really?*  
51

52  
53 *Lucy: Yeah, they weren't right. I would never do anything to hurt anyone,*  
54 *you...come on...you know I'm not that person I wouldn't do*  
55 *anything....*  
56  
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3 Lucy is clearly responding to Clarke's judgement of her actions and trying to defend  
4 herself. Clarke did reflect on this aspect of her 'self' in her field notes, that she has had  
5 experience of infidelity herself and has a very negative view of perpetrators. In this case the  
6 interview continued, and the Client-Participant seemed untroubled by being challenged about  
7 the morality of their choices. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the relaxed rapport between  
8 Client-Participant and Worker-Researcher might be *too* intimate at times and the Worker-  
9 Researcher could easily overstep and upset their Client-Participant.  
10  
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19

### 20 *Exploiting the Worker-Researcher*

21  
22 Client-Participants were clearly comfortable, as evidenced by the fact that they talked  
23 about very intense emotional reactions. Here Julie describes feeling suicidal:  
24  
25

26  
27 *Julie: After a few years we brought a house and we got married and then*  
28 *obviously we found out he couldn't have children and we had to go*  
29 *through IVF.*

30  
31  
32  
33  
34 *MC: So they did use his swimmers?*

35  
36  
37 *Julie: Yeah he is Leo's dad, he is his biological father.*

38  
39 *MC: I bet that was so stressful.*

40  
41 *Julie: Millie it was horrendous because I became obsessed.*

42  
43 *MC: In what sense?*

44  
45  
46 *Julie: In the sense that I thought if I couldn't become a mum I didn't really*  
47 *wanna be here anymore.*  
48  
49  
50

51 We have concerns about the ramifications on the Worker-Researcher of dealing with  
52 revelations like this. However, conducting a research interview where this type of  
53 information is revealed is no more emotionally impactful on the Worker-Researcher than  
54 their ordinary role where revelations are often unasked for. Clearly, beauticians are often the  
55  
56  
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1  
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3 recipient of highly personal information, supporting Sattler and Deane's (2016) call to equip  
4  
5 people who receive these types of confidences with appropriate training.  
6  
7

8 Lavis (2010) also notes that this type of research is not easy for structural reasons.  
9  
10 Performing multiple identities means that there is tension between inhabiting those dual roles  
11  
12 and negotiating the feelings of disingenuity that are engendered. Clarke's field notes do not  
13  
14 report this as a problem, possibly she was protected against this due to the authenticity of her  
15  
16 position in the salon. There was no sense that she was "Researching Down", she reported  
17  
18 feeling that she was "Researching Across": not only was she a genuine member of the  
19  
20 culture, there was a lack of hierarchy. In fact, due to the employer/employee dynamic, it  
21  
22 could be argued that she was "Researching Up", unlike any previous interview studies that  
23  
24 we are aware of. Gimlin (1996) suggests that while beauty therapists feel their emotional  
25  
26 relationships with clients nullifies status differences, their clients resist this and still perceive  
27  
28 themselves to be superior.  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33

34 Our last major concern that relates to the exploitation of the Worker-Researcher is  
35  
36 more broad: the only reason that Client-Participant research is possible is because of the  
37  
38 straddling of two career domains by the Worker-Researcher. Irwin (2006) said that while  
39  
40 academics are able to have brief forays into other cultures, to have permanent membership  
41  
42 results in "career suicide", presumably because they did not consider it possible to live up to  
43  
44 the demands of the job on a fractional contract, or to return to academia after a hiatus. That  
45  
46 was written more than a decade ago and the landscape of academia has shifted enormously  
47  
48 since then. Casualisation of the academic workforce is rampant in most countries leading to  
49  
50 an increase in 'periphery employment' (Broadbent, Troup & Strachan, 2013; Kenny, 2017).  
51  
52 Smith (2011) says of UK universities that there's no longer any such thing as the "traditional  
53  
54 researcher". The intersection of academic and client facing roles is not as unusual as it might  
55  
56 once have been, people are increasingly likely to have part-time academic positions alongside  
57  
58  
59  
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3 **part-time service sector positions.** This then leads to a follow-up concern: does promoting the  
4  
5 use of additional employment as a channel for data collection actually endorse the  
6  
7 casualisation of academic posts? Could it be used as a justification for making more part-time  
8  
9 appointments? We cannot answer that question at this point but do acknowledge that the  
10  
11 potential is there.  
12  
13

14  
15 Alternatively, it could be argued that the Client-Participant methodology has wider  
16  
17 benefits in terms of breaking down class divides. When we were designing this study it  
18  
19 seemed surprising to us that no one had thought of utilising people's additional jobs, outside  
20  
21 academia, as sites of data collection. Irwin (2006) talks about there being a snobbery within  
22  
23 academia towards working class occupations, particularly those traditionally associated with  
24  
25 the working-class (Irwin specifically discusses tattooing). It may be worthwhile to  
26  
27 acknowledge that people can do traditionally working-class occupations at the same time as  
28  
29 being members of academia. We feel that we can be excited by the views afforded by these  
30  
31 standpoints.  
32  
33  
34

### 35 36 37 **Discussion**

38  
39 We expected that our Worker-Researcher methodology would create an interview  
40  
41 environment with high rapport, because we were exploiting the already existing rapport  
42  
43 between Clarke and her clients. Unsurprisingly, we found this to be the case. Client-  
44  
45 Participants gave full, rich answers to Clarke's questions. The most difficult aspect of  
46  
47 working with Client-Participants was not, as we had feared, the theoretically located concerns  
48  
49 about insider status and role conflict, it was far more mundane: Clarke occasionally let the  
50  
51 Client-Participants go off track and talk about unrelated areas. Yet, although there were some  
52  
53 points at which Clarke felt she could have probed the Client-Participants further, this is  
54  
55 probably true of almost every interview that a qualitative researcher conducts in their  
56  
57 academic lifetime. In fact, when looking through the transcripts, the dual role that Clarke was  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 playing did not seem to interfere with her performance as an interviewer (nor how she  
4 performed as a beauty therapist). Having said that, this is a well-known drawback of  
5 unstructured interviews, but they are by far the most suitable interview technique for Worker-  
6 Researchers to use. To mitigate this problem we suggest that, after reviewing each transcript,  
7 a follow-up interview could be conducted with Client-Participants, thus affording the  
8 opportunity to fill in any gaps.  
9

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17  
18 When thinking about dual roles we referred in the discussion to Dwyer and Buckle's  
19 (2009) observation that the distinction between insider-outsider research is a false dichotomy.  
20 In their paper they refer to Kanuha's (2000) work on "strategies for researching at the hyphen  
21 of insider-outsider" (p.443). This idea of researching "at the hyphen" is highly applicable to  
22 the Worker-Researcher and Client-Participant roles. Clarke was constantly straddling the two  
23 roles, as were the Client-Participants. It could almost be thought of as a dance between them  
24 where, when Clarke moved towards inhabiting the researcher role, the Client-Participants  
25 moved towards the participant role. In other words, not only were both protagonists  
26 straddling that hyphenated space between roles, their positions were dynamically shifting.  
27 We feel that this dynamic duality warrants further research.  
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41 This methodology relies entirely on the existence of a Worker-Researcher who is  
42 embedded, or able to embed themselves, in a culture which facilitates conducting interviews.  
43 In this example the Worker-Researcher siting was ideal, in that Client-Participants were  
44 repeat customers and the situation was private and relaxed and the work was physical and  
45 repetitive and thus had little cognitive load. It does not *have* to be this way though. We would  
46 like to see research conducted by other Worker-Researchers, for example bar staff, personal  
47 trainers and hairdressers.  
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3 The feelings of authenticity that come with a genuine engagement were heightened by  
4  
5 the length of time that Clarke has been performing her beautician role. Again, this is not  
6  
7 essential although it does help to mitigate against potential feelings of conflict within the  
8  
9 Worker-Researcher.  
10  
11

### 12 13 **Conclusion**

14  
15 We have shown that the Worker-Researcher methodology produces rich, revealing  
16  
17 data, and is particularly suited to areas which have been under-researched because of  
18  
19 limitations in existing data collection techniques. Concerns that we had about role conflict  
20  
21 and potential feelings of exploitation did not emerge. The interviews read like collaborative  
22  
23 endeavours, probably because the authenticity of the Worker-Researcher's role meant that the  
24  
25 traditional hierarchy between researcher and participant was disrupted by the more tangible  
26  
27 real-world relationship.  
28  
29  
30  
31

32 Concerns that we had about the potential exploitation of the so-called commercial  
33  
34 friendship between Clarke and her clients were largely laid to rest. In fact, we feel confident  
35  
36 that this methodology is less exploitative of the Client-Participants than any other we are  
37  
38 aware of. Our final concern was about the exploitation of Clarke herself. Here we are less  
39  
40 confident. It could be argued that although this methodology breaks down the hierarchical  
41  
42 relationships between interviewer and interviewee, it does it by reifying the Worker-  
43  
44 Researcher's non-academic role, and thus supports the trend towards casualisation and  
45  
46 periphery employment that is endemic in academia (Broadbent, Troupe & Strachen, 2013).  
47  
48  
49  
50

51 Worker-Researchers should give careful consideration to the ways in which their dual  
52  
53 roles can enhance or conflict with each other, in advance of data collection. Clarke's  
54  
55 experience was overwhelmingly positive but there are potential pitfalls, which we have  
56  
57 discussed. We feel that her experience as an eyelash extension technician was particularly  
58  
59  
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1  
2  
3 well suited to the Worker-Researcher role, and other workplaces might bring up different  
4  
5 issues.  
6  
7

8 In summary, we propose this methodology as a practical response to the decades of  
9  
10 debate about the inherently exploitative nature of research. By providing a service to a client  
11  
12 at the same time as interviewing them, hierarchies are reduced or removed and the data is  
13  
14 better for it.  
15  
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