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Nomor: 059.a/D/Psi/VII/USD/2016

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Keperluan : Sebagai *Plenary Speaker* dalam *International Conference on Psychology 2016* dengan tema *"PEOPLE'S SEARCH FOR MEANING THROUGH ETHNICITY, CULTURE, AND RELIGION: Psychology's Role in Handling Conflicts and Sustaining Harmony in Multicultural Society"*
Waktu : Sabtu, 30 Juli 2016
Penyelenggara : Panitia Lustrum IV Fakultas Psikologi
Universitas Sanata Dharma Yogyakarta
Tempat : Kampus Universitas Sanata Dharma
Yogyakarta
Biaya : Penyelenggara

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Yogyakarta, 26 Juli 2016

Dekan,



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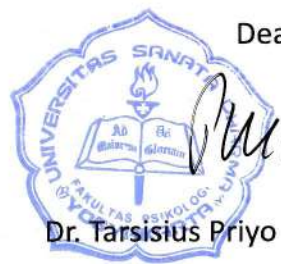
AS A **PLENARY SPEAKER**

IN RECOGNITION OF VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PSYCHOLOGY
"People's Search for Meaning through Ethnicity, Culture, and Religion: Psychology's Role in Handling Conflicts and Sustaining Harmony in Multicultural Society"



Yogyakarta, July 30, 2016
Chairman of Organizing Committee,



Dean,
Dr. Tarsisius Priyo Widiyanto, M.Si.



Robertus Landung Eko Prihatmoko, M.Psi.



Proceedings of
the International
Conference
on Psychology
2016

People's Search for Meaning through
Ethnicity, Culture, and Religion:
Psychology's Role in Handling Conflicts
and Sustaining Harmony in Multicultural Society

Edited by
YB. Cahya Widiyanto
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July 29-30, 2016

Sanata Dharma University - Yogyakarta
Mrican, Tromol Pos 29, Yogyakarta 55002
Telp. (0274) 513301, 515352 Fax. (0274) 562383

PROCEEDINGS OF THE
**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON PSYCHOLOGY 2016**

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and Religion: Psychology's Role in Handling Conflicts
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SDU Press

PROCEEDING OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PSYCHOLOGY 2016
People's Search for Meaning through Ethnicity, Culture, and Religion:
Psychology's Role in Handling Conflicts and Sustaining Harmony
in Multicultural Society

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Faculty of Psychology, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta

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Proofreader:

Titus Odong Kusumajati

Cover Illustration & Layout:

A. Harimurti

ISBN : 978-602-6369-64-2

EAN : 9-786026-369642

First published, April 2017

xviii; 194 p.; 15,5 x 23 cm.

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PUBLISHED BY:



SANATA DHARMA UNIVERSITY PRESS
First Floor USD Library
Affandi (Gejayan) Street, Mrican,
Yogyakarta 55281
Telp. (0274) 513301, 515253;
Ext.1527/1513; Fax (0274) 562383
e-mail: publisher@usd.ac.id

IN COLLABORATION WITH:



FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY
SANATA DHARMA UNIVERSITY
Paingan, Maguwoharjo, Kecamatan Depok,
Kabupaten Sleman, Daerah Istimewa
Yogyakarta 55281



Sanata Dharma University Press Member of APPTI
(Association of University Publishers in Indonesia)

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Remarks
by The Dean of Faculty of Psychology
Sanata Dharma University

Conflict and maintaining harmony in a pluralistic society such as in Indonesia remain an interesting challenge to be continuously studied. The International Psychology Conference 2016 titled "People's Search for Meaning through Ethnicity, Culture, and Religion: Psychology's Role in Handling Conflicts and Sustaining Harmony in Multicultural Society", an attempt of the Faculty of Psychology, Sanata Dharma University to actively involved in the conflict resolution and maintaining harmonious relationships within the community. The Vision and Mission of Sanata Dharma University which briefly could be stated as "Intelligent and Humanist" challenge us all to resolve conflicts and maintain harmonious relations with an intelligent way and humanist, so that the diversified way out in resolving conflict and maintaining harmony in the society should always be directed to the development of dignified community and individuals.

Articles in this proceeding are selected articles that provide positive contributions to conflicts resolution and maintaining harmonious relationships within the community. Therefore it is worthy to be read.

Thank you,
Dr. Tarsisius Priyo Widiyanto, M.Si.
Dean of Faculty of Psychology
Sanata Dharma University

**Remarks
by The Chairman Of The Committee**

Greetings to all of us. May the Lord of the Worlds is always overflowing with grace and love.

Diversity or multiculturalism could be seen as a strength, but also as a weakness. On one hand, a multicultural society has the potential to be social capital in achieving civil society. On the other hand, diversity could lead to horizontal frictions that trigger conflicts, civil wars, and violence. These, in turn, would result in destructions and other counterproductive situations. Recently we witness various events in various regions of the world related to discrimination, war, refuge-seeking, ethnic genocide, bombing, and killing that tend to use ethnic, cultural, and religious issues as means of provocation.

Indonesia, as one of the most multicultural countries in the world, is not immune to the destructive effects of such conflicts. The tendency to coerce people into certain opinions and dehumanising people with differing views appears to increase. The values of local culture inherited from generation to generation are relatively getting disintegrated, threatened to be extinct. Many lives have been lost as the result of fightings triggered by ethnic, cultural, and religious sentiments.

Psychology, as one of the disciplines that addresses human behavior and society, has a crucial role in facilitating conflict resolution and harmony maintenance. In actualizing its role, psychology scientists and practitioners need to collaborate with colleagues from various disciplines.

Given the complexity of the endeavor and the global trend of leading diversity issues into social conflicts, there is a need for a forum to examine what have been done and what can be done in the area of meaning-making, conflict resolution, and harmonization in multicultural society.

Drawing on this reflection, the Faculty of Psychology at Sanata Dharma University organises an international conference entitled "People's Search for Meaning through Ethnicity, Culture, and Religion: Psychology's Role in Handling Conflicts and Sustaining Harmony in Multicultural Society." We invite researchers, practitioners, and students to present studies and practical experiences that explore

how meaning making can foster positive personal and cultural change. This conference is held in part to commemorate the department's 20th anniversary. The theme of the anniversary is "Locally Grounded, Globally Connected." With this theme we would like to invite the participation of international academics and practitioners to present research findings and reflections that may expand our understanding on the processes and mechanisms whereby the acts of meaning making can lead to positive change in persons and cultures.

Hard work and intensive participation of all components of the faculty and the university for more than a year, supported by parties that we can not mention one by one here really describe the collaboration of various diversity that reflects the culture itself. A strong desire to bring the atmosphere of academic discussion of diversity and harmony, particularly related to issues of race, culture, and religion. Thanks to all those who have supported the implementation of this event, both from the faculty, university, government, police, sponsors, and others that we can not tell the whole one by one.

Hopefully this simple tool can facilitate debate and ongoing recommendations for the lives of people in the world in general, and Indonesian society in particular.

Thank you.

Yogyakarta, July 29, 2016
Chairman of The Committee ICP 2016
Robertus Landung Eko Prihatmoko, M. Psi., Psi.

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Researching Diversity: Othering and Reflexivity

Monica E. Madyaningrum

Sanata Dharma University

Abstract: *Whilst promising a better understanding of social heterogeneity, researching diversity also carries the risk of reinforcing the issues commonly associated with social differences such as exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Martinsson & Reimers, 2013; Vercotec, 2012; 2014). One of the socio-psychological mechanisms through which such issues can be unintentionally reproduced in research practice is through the process of Othering (Jensen, 2011; Johnson et al., 2004; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). In this paper, I aim to discuss this notion of Othering as well as to explore the notion of reflexivity (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2010; Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003) as a valuable practice in addressing the risk of Othering in the research context. The argument is built on the experience of conducting a study about a community based rehabilitation program (CBR) in Bantul district, Yogyakarta. The program sought to advocate for the equalization of opportunities and social inclusion of difabel people. Drawing on this experience, I discuss the notion of Othering and reflexivity as a way to develop a more critical approach to diversity studies. I situate the discussion specifically in the Indonesian academic context and in relation to disability issues.*

Keywords: diversity, othering, reflexivity, disability

Introduction

As reflected in its title, this conference is intended to generate discussions that promote better understanding of the notion of diversity both as discourse and as practice. For social researchers,

this conference is a call to explore theoretical and methodological frameworks through which the notion of diversity and its complexities can be better investigated and explained. Responding to this call, in this paper I offer my reflection as a novice researcher engaging with the notion of diversity through my doctoral thesis which addresses the issue of disability.

Drawing on my experience, I aim to discuss one of the challenging aspects of researching diversity as a notion that encompasses social differences (Vertovec, 2014). The particular challenge that I would like to address is what is called the risk of Othering. Othering is a process of portraying out-groups as essentially different, and with inferior classifications or characters. The manifestations of Othering can range from blatant exclusions and discriminations to subtler forms of prejudice (Jenssen, 2011; Johnson et al., 2004; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012).

In relation to research practice, some scholars have argued that the process of Othering can be unintentionally reproduced through the way researchers undertake their research into the issue of diversity (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). In this paper, I discuss this risk in reference to my experience as a non-disabled researcher undertaking research which addresses the issue of disability. Based on this experience, I would like to argue that reflexivity is a valuable practice to address the risk of Othering in the context of research.

This paper commences with a discussion on the risk of Othering and how it relates to the notions of subjectivity and researcher positioning in a study. The next section explores the concept of reflexivity (its meaning and implications) and how it may assist a researcher to be more critical in approaching the notion of diversity. Thereafter, I bring my experience as a scholar who works in the Indonesian academic setting and my current doctoral study as the context within which I situate my discussion about reflexivity.

Researching diversity as categories of difference

At the core of diversity are "categories of difference" which are based on peoples' social identities. The notion of diversity usually encompasses social categories like race, gender, ethnicity, culture, social class, religious belief, sexual orientation, age, and disability (Vertovec, 2014, p. 2). Drawing on this understanding, I use the term diversity to refer to various social identities commonly used to categorize people into different groups. In diversity studies, social identities are usually

situated as the entry point for examining a particular phenomenon. As reflected in the title of this conference, ethnicity, culture and religion are positioned as the lenses through which people make meanings of their social interactions in a plural society.

In many parts of the world, discourses on diversity are often anchored within the context of civil movements for categorical rights and recognition. In relation to this context, researching diversity is usually intended to promote respect and recognition of people's rights to express their social identities (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998; Faist, 2014; Vercotec, 2012; 2014). Within this frame, people's social identities are examined to better understand their meanings as well as their personal and communal implications. Such an understanding is considered crucial for developing ways to promote equality and tackle exclusion, marginalization and discrimination (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Faist, 2014; Martinsson & Reimers, 2013; Vercotec, 2014).

However, taking social identities as the focus of a study also comes with some risks. Despite the intention to better understand the meanings of people's social identities, studies on this topic can in fact reproduce the practice of exclusion, marginalization and discrimination. Researching social identity usually becomes a problematic process when the characteristics associated with social identity are viewed as a static attribute that can define and differentiate the persons conclusively. People are locked into a single-reductive identity with absolute characterizations. The intersections of various social categories that shape people's multiple identities are disregarded as is the permeable nature of identity (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Faist, 2014; Martinsson & Reimers, 2013; Vercotec, 2012; 2014).

The problem as described above is usually manifested in studies, which do not situate social identities as categories that are constructed in particular socio-historical and political contexts. Instead, social identities are assumed as a natural category that has constant and uniform meanings (Faist, 2014; Reyes-Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Vercotec, 2014). For example, in research about the Javanese, such a problem arises when the study fails to consider Javanese as a contested notion and assumes the existence of homogeneous meanings of being Javanese. Such a study ignores the historical and political forces, which continuously shape and reshape the idea of being Javanese, therefore, its meanings as an ethnic identity are constantly moving and negotiated.

When social identities are positioned as natural categories of difference within a study, thereby ignores their historical and political embeddedness, researchers may be at risk of reproducing stereotypical representations about the group being studied. Through

such stereotypical representations, the practice of exclusion and discrimination are usually justified and normalized. For this reason, scholars argue about the importance of unpacking the taken for granted assumptions surrounding social identities as categories of difference (Faist, 2014; Reyes-Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Vercotec, 2014). Instead of portraying the differences as neutral and natural categories, scholars need to investigate the processes through which those categories are politically constructed to maintain a social hierarchy that privileges a particular category over another (Reyes-Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Vercotec, 2014). Without such a critical approach, a study on social identities may reproduce what is called the process of Othering (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996).

The absence of reciprocity and the process of Othering

Researching diversity often involves a process of putting one's social identity under scrutiny. One's race or ethnicity or religion is examined to investigate how it affords the person distinct characterizations that differentiate him or her from those belonging to other social categories. The characterizations identified in the study are often described as the inherent attributes of the social group under study (Faist, 2014; Reyes-Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Vercotec, 2014). Often missing from such an approach is the presence of the researcher as the lens through which those characterizations are identified, interpreted and constructed. The characterizations are framed as an objective portrayal of the other. The research participants' ethnicity or religion or race is positioned as a distant object of study, outside the researcher. The researcher as the medium through which those characterizations are selected, named, labelled and analysed is absent from the description. It is through such an absence that the process of Othering is potentially present in a study (Fine, Weis, Weseen, Wong, 2000; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012).

The notion of Other is central to social sciences. In various fields of study including anthropology, sociology and psychology, the attempts to understand the Other (e.g., the natives, the indigenous, the impaired, the disordered, the abnormal) are at the core of their scientific endeavours (Dervin, 2015; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). However, as it has been widely discussed in studies about orientalism, colonialism, racism, sexism and ableism, the process of studying the Other is hardly a neutral process. Studying the Other often involves a process of comparing the Other with what is positioned as the standard or the norm. As highlighted in fields like postcolonial, gender and disability studies, studying the Other is often based on a premise of

juxtaposing white, male, heterosexual, non-disabled body, against the Other. Accordingly, those who fall outside such criteria are vulnerable to be analysed and named as the abnormal or even the inferior (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Dervin, 2015; Fine et al., 2000; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012; Reyes-Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Vercotec, 2014). The notion of Othering refers to this process of portraying the Other as "essentially different and translating this difference to inferiority" (Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012, p. 299)

The practice of Othering in psychology has always been an ongoing topic of criticism. In fact, the emergence of some streams in psychology such as feminist psychology, indigenous psychology, and liberation psychology are representing the movement against Othering in psychology (e.g., Montero & Sonn, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996;). For example, feminist psychology has been an arena in which Othering against women is critically challenged. One of the key features of feminist psychology is its resistance to the pathologizing approach which puts women as the problematic Other (for example through concepts like penis envy complex, the fear of success syndrome, pre-menstruation syndrome). By pathologizing women, psychology has ignored the role of gender inequality as the root of the problems (Gridley & Turner, 2010).

An illustration from feminist psychology as described above suggests that the representation of the Other is very much determined by the approach used by the observer or researcher. The illustration indicates that the construction of women as the problematic Other is primarily shaped by the ignorance or masculine bias of the researcher rather than by the inherent conditions of the women under study. However, the ignorance or the bias of the researcher that orients the way he or she describes the research participants is often unrecognized, let alone acknowledged. Instead, the researcher will present his or her findings as an objective description about the research participants. Referring to this kind of awareness therefore the process of Othering is often associated with the absence of reciprocity in research practice (Fine et al., 2000).

In research practice, underpinning the process of Othering is the power imbalance between the researcher and the research participants, in which the researcher has the main control in constructing the research participants as the Other. Such a power imbalance can be operated through various ways, one of them is through the absence of reciprocity in the research process (Fine et al., 2000). As researcher, "we ask for revelations from others, but we reveal little or nothing of ourselves; we make others vulnerable, but ourselves remain invulnerable" (Behar as cited in Fine et al., 2000, p. 109). In other words,

as researcher, we often problematise and question others' ethnicity or culture or religion and theorise how those identity markers orient their thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. On the other hand, we hardly problematise or question how our own ethnicity or culture or religion may influence the way we perceive others (Behar, 1996).

Through the absence of reciprocity as described above, examining the others may potentially become a source of dominance since the research participants are positioned as "given objects and not as a product of the author's selective interpretation" (Krumer-Nevo & Siddi, 2012, p. 300). In such a context, the researcher puts aside the role of her own identities (e.g., gender, disability, ethnicity, culture and religion) as the lenses through which she constructs the others. Without taking into account the influence of her own identities, a researcher is at risk of doing injustice to the research participants by claiming her selective interpretations of the research participants as an objective description about them.

With the absence of reciprocity, research becomes a one way process of investigating the research participants' subjectivity (e.g., their gender, culture, ethnicity or disability). In such a context, the researcher ignores the role of her own subjectivity in producing a selective representation about the research participants. This kind of practice may unintentionally reproduce the process of Othering for the researcher fails to recognise how her subjectivity may limit her ability to objectively represent the research participants (Behar, 1996; Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2013). For this reason, there has been an increasing literature in qualitative research, which discusses the notion of reflexivity as a strategy through which researcher subjectivity can be better integrated into a research process.

Reflexivity: making researcher subjectivity visible

The increasing concern on the notion of reflexivity stems from the acknowledgment that conducting research is hardly an objective process. Instead, research always reflects the subjectivity of the researcher. The researcher's personal and social identities (e.g., gender, disability, ethnicity, culture, religion) along with her worldviews, beliefs and values cannot be fully separated from her empirical work. As much as it is about the research participants, a research report will always reflect who the researcher is in relation to the topic under study. The researcher's presumptions, attitudes and positioning to the issues raised in the study will influence the direction of the research, selection of topic and who to study (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2010; Fine et

al., 2000; Nolas, 2011; Pillow, 2003; Probst, 2015). Grounded on such arguments, engaging with researcher subjectivity in the research process has increasingly become an area of concern, particularly in qualitative research methodology.

Under the positivist tradition, there was a certain period in psychology in which the issue of researcher subjectivity was dealt with a distancing attitude. Within the tradition, researcher subjectivity was usually approached as a potential interference, which might risk the objectivity of the investigation. Consequently, subjectivity needed to be controlled, minimized and distanced from the situation or issue under study. Drawing on this tradition, separating out the researcher from the topic of study tends to be a familiar practice in psychology. As a result, recognizing how researcher subjectivity may influence the research process is usually absent because the researcher dissociates herself from the issues and people under study (Behar, 1996; Fine et al., 2000, Pillow, 2003; Probst, 2015).

However, with the coming of the "interpretive turn" in social science, researchers have shifted toward the opposing direction in their approach to how subjectivity should be situated in academic inquiry (Pillow, 2003, p. 178). Under the interpretive tradition which views knowledge production as an interactive and contextual process, subjectivity begins to be acknowledged. One of the arguments underpinning this shift is the criticism toward the idea that disconnecting researcher subjectivity from the research process can increase the likelihood of producing an objective account of a phenomenon. By bringing in the issue of power in research relation, scholars put this idea into question. They argue that instead of promoting objectivity, disregarding subjectivity often results in the researchers' ignorance of their limitations in making an accurate description of the phenomenon under study (Behar, 1996; Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003, Probst, 2015). Consequently, what is supposed to be reported as a selective account of a phenomenon (i.e., a particular study, about particular people, by particular person, in a particular context) is reported as an objective description of the phenomenon.

Based on the criticism as described above, scholars argue about the importance of interrogating researcher subjectivity in research process through reflexivity. Reflexivity is a concept, which has been much discussed, in qualitative research. Its proliferation results in the diverse meanings associated with this term (e.g., Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2010; D'Cruz, Gillingham & Melendez, 2007; Finlay, 2002; Probst, 2015). Among others, reflexivity has been discussed as a method, a skill and an ethical positioning. For the purpose of this paper, I find Nolas (2011) provides a relevant definition. She explains that:

Reflexivity refers to the practice of situating oneself in the research context and analysing the implications of one's subjectivity both in the context of and in relation to the research being carried out. It is an awareness of, a sensitivity to and engagement with the social and cultural embeddedness of our theories, methods and research questions, as well as a way of checking and critiquing one's assumptions about the research (p.123).

The definition above suggests that reflexivity requires a researcher to make her subjectivity visible. Therefore, as argued by Pillow (2003), practicing reflexivity often involves an on-going process of being "critically conscious through personal accounting of how the researcher's self-location (across for example, gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality), position and interests influence all stages of the research process" (p. 178).

Having critical consciousness of one's own subjectivity and how it may impacts on the research process will enable the researcher to recognize, acknowledge and address her limitations in producing an accurate account of the phenomenon under study. This understanding is reflected in Pillow's (2003) article in which she describes reflexivity as "recognition of self" (p. 183). This phrase suggests that reflexivity is a process of acknowledging the presence of researcher's subjectivity in the story she builds about the particular people being studied. Making subjectivity visible potentially assists both the researcher and the readers to do justice to the story as they can better consider the extent to which the story accurately represents the particular people being studied (Behar, 1993; Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2010; Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003; Probst, 2015).

Other than addressing the issue of accuracy in representing the others, reflexivity is also valued for its potential in interrogating the researchers' ethical sensitivity. Having critical awareness on her own ideological, moral or political position and interest may enable a researcher to be more sensitive with the ethical implications of her story about the Other. Reflexivity facilitates the researcher to question the extent to which her worldviews, beliefs and values will enable her to develop a story that promotes better intergroup understanding or will they potentially reinforce the existing stereotypes and prejudices (Gullemin & Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003).

Using reflexivity as a way to interrogate the ethical implications of a study is particularly crucial when the research is dealing with groups who are structurally disadvantaged for being categorized as the

deviant others (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). One such group is difabel people. In many parts of the world, difabel people still experience systemic prejudice, discrimination and marginalization due to their difference from the 'body norm'. This context suggests that undertaking disability study carries an ethical responsibility to not reproduce the system that normalizes the oppressive practices toward difabel people (Symeonidou & Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013). In the following section, I discuss my experience of trying to put the notion of reflexivity into practice, particularly in relation to my positioning as a non-disabled researcher engaging with the issue of disability.

Practicing reflexivity: its meaning and implications

I wrote this section not from a retrospective position of having finalized my research and then looking back at how I translated the notion of reflexivity throughout the research process. This section is written from my current position as a PhD student grappling with the challenges of trying to put the notion of reflexivity into practice, particularly in relation to the issue of disability. What is presented in this section is, by no means, intended to provide a final and consolidated overview of how the notion of reflexivity is developed in my research. Rather, in this presentation, I would like to utilize my work in progress as a means of continuing a conversation about the potential and challenges of being a reflexive researcher, particularly in the Indonesian academic context and in relation to the issue of disability. Given the limited space of this presentation, I focus my discussion mainly on the conceptual aspect of reflexivity as a measure of research rigor by attending to the issue of subjectivity and researcher positioning. Discussing reflexivity as a method (i.e., the concrete steps of practicing reflexivity) is not part of this presentation.

Researcher positioning is a crucial issue in disability study, particularly in relation to the role of non-disabled researcher. The problematic position of non-disabled researcher reflects the long history of oppressive research practices experienced by difabel people. A part of that history is the domination of pathologizing approach to disability study. This approach views disability as individual abnormalities and tragedies that need to be treated and helped by non-disabled experts. Non-disabled physical characteristics and functioning are positioned as the normality toward which difabel bodies needs to be adjusted to. This approach frames difabel people as the problem and the object of research. On the other hand, non-disabled researcher is considered as a neutral subject whose her or his political and ethical views on

disability do not pose any harming implications on difabel people's life (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Stone & Priestley, 1996; DePoy & Gilson, 2011; Mallet & Runswick-Cole, 2014).

The discussion about the problematic role of the non-disabled researcher as described above became the background knowledge for my fieldwork last year. I started my fieldwork with an intention to study the meanings and implications of participating in a CBR program, which was developed to improve the equalization of opportunities and social inclusion of difabel people in Bantul district, Yogyakarta. Although knowing that disability is the key issue in the CBR program, initially I was reluctant to situate disability as one of the central frameworks of my research. Instead, I started my fieldwork with an emphasis on the role of the Non-Government Organization (NGO), which initiated and managed the CBR program.

Having knowledge on the problematic role of non-disabled researcher as described above, I avoided the complexities of studying the CBR program from the vantage point of the difabel people who participated in the program. What do I know about being difabel? What if I accidentally do more harm to them through my research? What if I cannot contribute much for their struggle as much as what they would possibly do for my personal development? Driven by this kind of question I avoided engaging with the core issue of this program. At that time, I thought I was doing the right thing by thinking that only difabel people who have right and competency to do a study on disability. However, as I started to interact more with the difabel people who participated in the program and engaged with the readings on the social model of disability (Barnes, 2012; Goodley, 2011; Mallet & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Oliver, 2009; 2013), I became aware that through my reluctance I have instead reproduced the marginalization of difabel people.

The social model of disability rejects the victim-blaming approach by asserting that disability is "a social problem requiring education, attitude change, and social adjustment on the part of both abled and disabled people" (Mertens, Sullivan & Stace, 2011, p.229). Using this perspective to contemplate on my interactions with the research participants, I realised the need to approach my research differently. Instead of approaching disability as a remote issue that exists outside of me, I needed to locate myself within the issue. Disability is not only about difabel persons but also about the socio-political and cultural system, which place non-disabled and difabel people in unequal relations (Barnes, 2012; Goodley, 2011; Mallet & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Oliver, 2009; 2013).

The awareness that I need to confront my distancing attitude

toward disability came as I engaged with the discussion about being a reflexive researcher (e.g., Behar, 1996; Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2010, Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003). The discussion has prompted me to do Probst (2015) described as "gazing in two directions at the same time" (p. 38). The phrase refers to a process in which a researcher tries to understand what is happening in the field of study and at the same time becomes aware of her own projections, assumptions and bias. Driven by such an argument, I approach my interviews with the research participants as a two-way mirror. The interviews said something about the research participants as well as about me as the researcher.

Approaching my interviews as a two-way process has helped me to be more critical of my own assumptions and prior knowledge and how they may impact on the research process. Below is an example of a particular conversation with one of the research participants, which generated a critical awareness of my own assumptions and prior knowledge, particularly in relation to my position as a non-disabled researcher:

Just because something is made by a difabel person, sometimes it is overly appreciated. Say you go to a food vendor owned by a difabel person. Honestly you think her food is just so so or lack in hygiene, but when she is asking you how's the food, you say something really nice about it. You say that her cooking is very good. You are afraid that being honest about the food will hurt her feelings. Because if something is made by a difabel person and the quality is not good enough, people usually still say that it is good enough. Difabel people are not appreciated for what they create but because of their impairment (Ilham, pseudonym)

Ilham did not direct his comment personally to me but what he said immediately prompted me to think about my position as a non-disabled person and how it afforded me a particular view, attitude and behavior toward disability. I started questioning the extent to which I had been reinforcing that kind of patronizing attitude through the way I conducted the research, particularly through the way I interacted with the research participants. Integrating this kind of questioning allows my interactions with the research participants to reshape the course of my study. The study has evolved not only because I have more extensive interactions with the research participants (which is the nature of a qualitative research), but also because I have developed an awareness of how and why I know what I know about the research

participants. This experience supports the argument that reflexivity may “promote rich insight through examining personal responses and interpersonal dynamics” (Finlay, 2002, p. 225).

Having a reflective approach to the research process has enabled me to realize the possible distortions in my research. The approach has raised awareness that avoiding the issue of disability might in fact reinforce the marginalizing assumption on disability. By not taking disability as one of the main frameworks of the study, I might have reiterated the view of disability as the problem of the individuals who experience it. I was unable to see that as a non-disabled person who is embedded in a society that normalizes discrimination against disabled people, I am part of the root cause of the problem (Mertens et al., 2011). Driven by such awareness, I then changed my approach to the study by positioning disability as one of the central frameworks of the study. Disability is interrogated in the study not to problematize the individuals who experience it but to unpack the social systems and practices that maintain the everyday prejudice and discrimination against disability in Indonesia.

Reflective note on reflexivity

The previous section outlined an example of how taking a reflective approach to research can disrupt taken for granted assumptions and prior knowledge about disability. Through the disruption, the influence of my subjectivity was made visible. Based on such an experience, I concur with Pillow (2003) who states that “To be reflexive, then, not only contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the working of our social world but also provides insight on how this knowledge is produced” (p. 178). In other words, reflexivity encourages a researcher to continuously question and be critical toward her own interpretations and knowledge production as a way to do justice to the story (Hertz, 1997).

Whilst acknowledging its potential, I agree with a body of work, which discusses the challenging aspects of practicing reflexivity (e.g., Bott, 2010; Pillow, 2003; Probst, 2015). My experience confirms the argument that being a reflexive researcher requires a particular skill and stamina, which may include critical thinking, willingness to question established beliefs, and courage to confront one’s own limitations and biases (Probst, 2015). Acquiring those skills and stamina can be quite challenging especially when using a reflexive approach is not a familiar practice in the academic atmosphere in which we operate. As a scholar, I grew up in a socio-political and cultural context in which being critical

was not in favored or even socially condoned. The context had produced academic settings, which emphasized obedience attitudes (Hadiz & Dhakidae, 2005). Coming from such a context, I find that exercising critical thinking to reexamine my beliefs, assumptions and previous knowledge is one of the challenging parts in practicing reflexivity.

As mentioned earlier in this presentation, the notion of reflexivity is nested within the interpretative/constructivist paradigm in social science (Fine et al., 2000; Pillow, 2003; Probst, 2015). Therefore, practicing reflexivity, which requires a researcher to interrogate her own subjectivity, can be a challenging process for those who are more familiar with objectivist epistemology. When I did my undergraduate in psychology, objectivist epistemology was the preferred approach. Later on, I have learned about interpretative/constructivist approaches, which are becoming more widely accepted. However, the foundational training that I received during my undergraduate years has instilled in me particular scholarly habits which are informed by the positivist tradition. One such habit is the tendency to dissociate myself as a researcher from the phenomenon or people under study. Having this habit, I find that interrogating my own subjectivity is another challenging part of practicing reflexivity. I am more familiar with the idea of a researcher investigating, analyzing and making conclusions about the research participants without questioning the role of her subjectivity as the lens through which the research participants are selectively examined.

Dealing with these challenges is still an on-going process for me. Drawing on my experience, I find that having awareness of my intersectionality is a crucial step to interrogate how my subjectivity impacts on the research process. The terms intersectionality refers to identity as a plural construct. It explains the multiple social categories, which co-exist and intersect in one's identity (Gridley & Turner, 2010; Nash, 2008; Yuval-Daviz, 2006). Being aware of intersectionality means recognizing the intersection of my multiple identities (i.e., my position as a non-disabled, my gender, social class, academic background, ethnicity and religion) and how they afford me particular beliefs, assumptions and worldviews through which I selectively interpret other persons' and my own experiences. For example, as a psychologist, I have the tendency to attribute one's behavior to his or her personal dispositions. Having awareness of my subjectivity mean being critical of how such a tendency may influence my ability to view disability as a politically contested issue.

Conclusion

Drawing on my current research journey, in this presentation I discussed the notion of reflexivity as a valuable practice to enhance research credibility by taking into account the role of researcher subjectivity in knowledge production. Particularly in relation to the topic of this conference, I argue that a reflective approach to research is crucial in developing a more critical perspective on the notion of diversity as categories of difference. Engaging in a reflective approach may prevent the researcher from reproducing diversity studies, which generate distorted representations of a particular social group as a consequence of the researcher's unrecognized limitations and biases. Practicing reflective approach is even more crucial when the study entails the issue of social justice and power in knowledge production.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Christopher Sonn, Adrian Fisher, Amy Quayle and Kirsten Meyer for their helpful comments. This work is part of the PhD candidature at Victoria University supported by the Prime Minister's Australia Asia Endeavour Postgraduate Awards.

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1b Proceeding ICP 2016 - Fulltext - M E Madyaningrum

by Monica Madyaningrum

Submission date: 06-Feb-2023 09:04AM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 2007080069

File name: 1b_Proceeding_ICP_2016_-_Fulltext_-_M_E_Madyaningrum.pdf (178.22K)

Word count: 6374

Character count: 36489

Researching Diversity: Othering and Reflexivity¹

Monica E. Madyaningrum²

Abstract

Whilst promising a better understanding of social heterogeneity, researching diversity also carries the risk of reinforcing the issues commonly associated with social differences such as exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Martinsson & Reimers, 2013; Vercotec, 2012; 2014). One of the socio-psychological mechanisms through which such issues can be unintentionally reproduced in research practice is through the process of Othering (Jensen, 2011; Johnson et al., 2004; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). In this paper, I aim to discuss this notion of Othering as well as to explore the notion of reflexivity (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2010; Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003) as a valuable practice in addressing the risk of Othering in the research context. The argument is built on the experience of conducting a study about a community based rehabilitation program (CBR) in Bantul district, Yogyakarta. The program sought to advocate for the equalization of opportunities and social inclusion of *difabel*³ people. Drawing on this experience, I discuss the notion of Othering and reflexivity as a way to develop a more critical approach to diversity studies. I situate the discussion specifically in the Indonesian academic context and in relation to disability issues.

Keywords diversity, othering, reflexivity, disability

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¹ Paper presented at the International Conference on Psychology 2016 "People's Search for Meaning through Ethnicity, Culture, and Religion: Psychology's Role in Handling Conflicts and Sustaining Harmony in Multicultural Society", Department of Psychology, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, July 29 – 30, 2016

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³ In this paper I use the term *difabel* to refer to people with disability since it is the preferred term in the Indonesian context. I am aware that the term *difabel* has a different emphasis compared to the phrase of "people with disability". However the discussion about the difference is beyond the scope of this paper. For further reference see for example Suharto, Kuipers and Dorsett (2016). In addition, I include in this paper the term *disability and non-disabled person* to emphasise the socially constructed domination and subordination embedded in the issue of disability.

As reflected in its title, this conference is intended to generate discussions that promote better understanding of the notion of diversity both as discourse and as practice. For social researchers, this conference is a call to explore theoretical and methodological frameworks through which the notion of diversity and its complexities can be better investigated and explained. Responding to this call, in this paper I offer my reflection as a novice researcher engaging with the notion of diversity through my doctoral thesis which addresses the issue of disability.

Drawing on my experience, I aim to discuss one of the challenging aspects of researching diversity as a notion that encompasses social differences (Vercotec, 2014). The particular challenge that I would like to address is what is called the risk of Othering. Othering is a process of portraying out-groups as essentially different, and with inferior classifications or characters. The manifestations of Othering can range from blatant exclusions and discriminations to subtler forms of prejudice (Jenssen, 2011; Johnson et al., 2004; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012).

In relation to research practice, some scholars have argued that the process of Othering can be unintentionally reproduced through the way researchers undertake their research into the issue of diversity (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). In this paper, I discuss this risk in reference to my experience as a non-disabled researcher undertaking research which addresses the issue of disability. Based on this experience, I would like to argue that reflexivity is a valuable practice to address the risk of Othering in the context of research.

This paper commences with a discussion on the risk of Othering and how it relates to the notions of subjectivity and researcher positioning in a study. The next section explores the concept of reflexivity (its meaning and implications) and how it may assist a researcher to be more critical in approaching the notion of diversity. Thereafter, I bring my experience as a

scholar who works in the Indonesian academic setting and my current doctoral study as the context within which I situate my discussion about reflexivity.

Researching diversity as categories of difference

At the core of diversity are “categories of difference” which are based on peoples’ social identities. The notion of diversity usually encompasses social categories like ¹² race, gender, ethnicity, culture, social class, religious belief, sexual orientation, age, and disability (Vertovec, 2014, p. 2). Drawing on this understanding, I use the term diversity to refer to various social identities commonly used to categorize people into different groups. In diversity studies, social identities are usually situated as the entry point for examining a particular phenomenon. As reflected in the title of this conference, ethnicity, culture and religion are positioned as the lenses through which people make meanings of their social interactions in a plural society.

In many parts of the world, discourses on diversity are often anchored within the context of civil movements for categorical rights and recognition. In relation to this context, researching diversity is usually intended to promote respect and recognition of people’s rights to express their social identities (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998; Faist, 2014; Vertovec, 2012; 2014). Within this frame, people’s social identities are examined to better understand their meanings as well as their personal and communal implications. Such an understanding is considered crucial for developing ways to promote equality and tackle exclusion, marginalization and discrimination (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Faist, 2014; Martinsson & Reimers, 2013; Vertovec, 2014).

However, taking social identities as the focus of a study also comes with some risks. Despite the intention to better understand the meanings of people’s social identities, studies on this topic can in fact reproduce the practice of exclusion, marginalization and

discrimination. Researching social identity usually becomes a problematic process when the characteristics associated with social identity are viewed as a static attribute that can define and differentiate the persons conclusively. People are locked into a single-reductive identity with absolute characterizations. The intersections of various social categories that shape people's multiple identities are disregarded as is the permeable nature of identity (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Faist, 2014; Martinsson & Reimers, 2013; Vercotec, 2012; 2014).

The problem as described above is usually manifested in studies, which do not situate social identities as categories that are constructed in particular socio-historical and political contexts. Instead, social identities are assumed as a natural category that has constant and uniform meanings (Faist, 2014; Reyes-Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Vercotec, 2014). For example, in research about the Javanese, such a problem arises when the study fails to consider Javanese as a contested notion and assumes the existence of homogeneous meanings of being Javanese. Such a study ignores the historical and political forces, which continuously shape and reshape the idea of being Javanese, therefore, its meanings as an ethnic identity are constantly moving and negotiated.

When social identities are positioned as natural categories of difference within a study, thereby ignores their historical and political embeddedness, researchers may be at risk of reproducing stereotypical representations about the group being studied. Through such stereotypical representations, the practice of exclusion and discrimination are usually justified and normalized. For this reason, scholars argue about the importance of unpacking the taken for granted assumptions surrounding social identities as categories of difference (Faist, 2014; Reyes-Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Vercotec, 2014). Instead of portraying the differences as neutral and natural categories, scholars need to investigate the processes through which those categories are politically constructed to maintain a social hierarchy that privileges a particular category over another (Reyes-Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Vercotec, 2014). Without such a critical

approach, a study on social identities may reproduce what is called the process of Othering (Krumer-Nevo & Siddi, 2012; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996).

The absence of reciprocity and the process of Othering

Researching diversity often involves a process of putting one's social identity under scrutiny. One's race or ethnicity or religion is examined to investigate how it affords the person distinct characterizations that differentiate him or her from those belonging to other social categories. The characterizations identified in the study are often described as the inherent attributes of the social group under study (Faist, 2014; Reyes-Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Vercotec, 2014). Often missing from such an approach is the presence of the researcher as the lens through which those characterizations are identified, interpreted and constructed. The characterizations are framed as an objective portrayal of the other. The research participants' ethnicity or religion or race is positioned as a distant object of study, outside the researcher. The researcher as the medium through which those characterizations are selected, named, labelled and analysed is absent from the description. It is through such an absence that the process of Othering is potentially present in a study (Fine, Weis, Weseen, Wong, 2000; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012).

The notion of Other is central to social sciences. In various fields of study including anthropology, sociology and psychology, the attempts to understand the Other (c.g., the natives, the indigenous, the impaired, the disordered, the abnormal) are at the core of their scientific endeavours (Dervin, 2015; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). However, as it has been widely discussed in studies about orientalism, colonialism, racism, sexism and ableism, the process of studying the Other is hardly a neutral process. Studying the Other often involves a process of comparing the Other with what is positioned as the standard or the norm. As highlighted in fields like postcolonial, gender and disability studies, studying the Other is often based on a premise of juxtaposing white, male, heterosexual, non-disabled body, against

the Other. Accordingly, those who fall outside such criteria are vulnerable to be analysed and named as the abnormal or even the inferior (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Dervin, 2015; Fine et al., 2000; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012; Reyes-Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Vercotec, 2014). ¹ The notion of Othering refers to this process of portraying the Other as “essentially different and translating this difference to inferiority” (Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012, p. 299)

The practice of Othering in psychology has always been an ongoing topic of criticism. In fact, the emergence of some streams in psychology such as feminist psychology, indigenous psychology, and liberation psychology are representing the movement against Othering in psychology (e.g., Montero & Sonn, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996;). For example, feminist psychology has been an arena in which Othering against women is critically challenged. One of the key features of feminist psychology is its resistance to the pathologizing approach which puts women as the problematic Other (for example through concepts like penis envy complex, the fear of success syndrome, pre-menstruation syndrome). By pathologizing women, psychology has ignored the role of gender inequality as the root of the problems (Gridley & Turner, 2010).

An illustration from feminist psychology as described above suggests that the representation of the Other is very much determined by the approach used by the observer or researcher. The illustration indicates that the construction of women as the problematic Other is primarily shaped by the ignorance or masculine bias of the researcher rather than by the inherent conditions of the women under study. However, the ignorance or the bias of the researcher that orients the way he or she describes the research participants is often unrecognized, let alone acknowledged. Instead, the researcher will present his or her findings as an objective description about the research participants. Referring to this kind of awareness therefore the process of Othering is often associated with the absence of reciprocity in research practice (Fine et al., 2000).

In research practice, underpinning the process of Othering is the power imbalance ⁴ between the researcher and the research participants, in which the researcher has the main control in constructing the research participants as the Other. Such a power imbalance can be operated through various ways, one of them is through the absence of reciprocity in the research process (Fine et al., 2000). As researcher, ⁴ “we ask for revelations from others, but we reveal little or nothing of ourselves; we make others vulnerable, but ourselves remain invulnerable” (Behar as cited in Fine et al., 2000, p. 109). In other words, as researcher, we often problematise and question others’ ethnicity or culture or religion and theorise how those identity markers orient their thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. On the other hand, we hardly problematise or question how our own ethnicity or culture or religion may influence the way we perceive others (Behar, 1996).

Through the absence of reciprocity as described above, examining the others may potentially become a source of dominance since the research participants are positioned ⁴ as “given objects and not as a product of the author’s selective interpretation” (Krumer-Nevo & Siddi, 2012, p. 300). In such a context, the researcher puts aside the role of her own identities (e.g., gender, disability, ethnicity, culture and religion) as the lenses through which she constructs the others. Without taking into account the influence of her own identities, a researcher is at risk of doing injustice to the research participants by claiming her selective interpretations of the research participants as an objective description about them.

With the absence of reciprocity, research becomes a one way process of investigating the research participants’ subjectivity (e.g., their gender, culture, ethnicity or disability). In such a context, the researcher ignores the role of her own subjectivity in producing a selective representation about the research participants. This kind of practice may unintentionally reproduce the process of Othering for the researcher fails to recognise how her subjectivity may limit her ability to objectively represent the research participants (Behar, 1996; Finlay,

2002; Pillow, 2013). For this reason, there has been an increasing literature in qualitative research, which discusses the notion of reflexivity as a strategy through which researcher subjectivity can be better integrated into a research process.

Reflexivity: making researcher subjectivity visible

The increasing concern on the notion of reflexivity stems from the acknowledgment that conducting research is hardly an objective process. Instead, research always reflects the subjectivity of the researcher. The researcher's personal and social identities (e.g., gender, disability, ethnicity, culture, religion) along with her worldviews, beliefs and values cannot be fully separated from her empirical work. As much as it is about the research participants, a research report will always reflect who the researcher is in relation to the topic under study. The researcher's presumptions, attitudes and positioning to the issues raised in the study will influence the direction of the research, selection of topic and who to study (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2010; Fine et al., 2000; Nolas, 2011; Pillow, 2003; Probst, 2015). Grounded on such arguments, engaging with researcher subjectivity in the research process has increasingly become an area of concern, particularly in qualitative research methodology.

Under the positivist tradition, there was a certain period in psychology in which the issue of researcher subjectivity was dealt with a distancing attitude. Within the tradition, researcher subjectivity was usually approached as a potential interference, which might risk the objectivity of the investigation. Consequently, subjectivity needed to be controlled, minimized and distanced from the situation or issue under study. Drawing on this tradition, separating out the researcher from the topic of study tends to be a familiar practice in psychology. As a result, recognizing how researcher subjectivity may influence the research process is usually absent because the researcher dissociates herself from the issues and people under study (Behar, 1996; Fine et al., 2000, Pillow, 2003; Probst, 2015).

However, with the coming of the “interpretive turn” in social science, researchers have shifted toward the opposing direction in their approach to how subjectivity should be situated in academic inquiry (Pillow, 2003, p. 178). Under the interpretive tradition which views knowledge production as an interactive and contextual process, subjectivity begins to be acknowledged. One of the arguments underpinning this shift is the criticism toward the idea that disconnecting researcher subjectivity from the research process can increase the likelihood of producing an objective account of a phenomenon. By bringing in the issue of power in research relation, scholars put this idea into question. They argue that instead of promoting objectivity, disregarding subjectivity often results in the researchers’ ignorance of their limitations in making an accurate description of the phenomenon under study (Behar, 1996; Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003, Probst, 2015). Consequently, what is supposed to be reported as a selective account of a phenomenon (i.e., a particular study, about particular people, by particular person, in a particular context) is reported as an objective description of the phenomenon.

Based on the criticism as described above, scholars argue about the importance of interrogating researcher subjectivity in research process through reflexivity.¹ Reflexivity is a concept, which has been much discussed, in qualitative research. Its proliferation results in the diverse meanings associated with this term (e.g., Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2010; D’Cruz, Gillingham & Melendez, 2007; Finlay, 2002; Probst, 2015). Among others, reflexivity has been discussed as a method, a skill and an ethical positioning. For the purpose of this paper, I find Nolas (2011) provides a relevant definition. She explains that:

² Reflexivity refers to the practice of situating oneself in the research context and analysing the implications of one’s subjectivity both in the context of and in relation to the research being carried out. It is an awareness of, a sensitivity to and engagement with the social and cultural embeddedness of our theories, methods and research questions, as well as a way of checking and critiquing one’s assumptions about the research (p.123).

The definition above suggests that reflexivity requires a researcher to make her subjectivity visible. Therefore, as argued by Pillow (2003), practicing reflexivity often involves an on-going process of being “critically conscious through personal accounting of how the researcher’s self-location (across for example, gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality), position and interests influence all stages of the research process” (p. 178).

Having critical consciousness of one’s own subjectivity and how it may impact on the research process will enable the researcher to recognize, acknowledge and address her limitations in producing an accurate account of the phenomenon under study. This understanding is reflected in Pillow’s (2003) article in which she describes reflexivity as “recognition of self” (p. 183). This phrase suggests that reflexivity is a process of acknowledging the presence of researcher’s subjectivity in the story she builds about the particular people being studied. Making subjectivity visible potentially assists both the researcher and the readers to do justice to the story as they can better consider the extent to which the story accurately represents the particular people being studied (Behar, 1993; Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2010; Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003; Probst, 2015).

Other than addressing the issue of accuracy in representing the others, reflexivity is also valued for its potential in interrogating the researchers’ ethical sensitivity. Having critical awareness on her own ideological, moral or political position and interest may enable a researcher to be more sensitive with the ethical implications of her story about the Other. Reflexivity facilitates the researcher to question the extent to which her worldviews, beliefs and values will enable her to develop a story that promotes better intergroup understanding or will they potentially reinforce the existing stereotypes and prejudices (Gullemin & Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003).

Using reflexivity as a way to interrogate the ethical implications of a study is particularly crucial when the research is dealing with groups who are structurally

disadvantaged for being categorised as the deviant others (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). One such group is *difabel* people. In many parts of the world, *difabel* people still experience systemic prejudice, discrimination and marginalization due to their difference from the ‘body norm’. This context suggests that undertaking disability study carries an ethical responsibility to not reproduce the system that normalises the oppressive practices toward *difabel* people (Symeonidou & Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013). In the following section, I discuss my experience of trying to put the notion of reflexivity into practice, particularly in relation to my positioning as a non-disabled researcher engaging with the issue of disability.

Practising reflexivity: its meaning and implications

I wrote this section not from a retrospective position of having finalized my research and then looking back at how I translated the notion of reflexivity throughout the research process. This section is written from my current position as a PhD student grappling with the challenges of trying to put the notion of reflexivity into practice, particularly in relation to the issue of disability. What is presented in this section is, by no means, intended to provide a final and consolidated overview of how the notion of reflexivity is developed in my research. Rather, in this presentation, I would like to utilize my work in progress as a means of continuing a conversation about the potential and challenges of being a reflexive researcher, particularly in the Indonesian academic context and in relation to the issue of disability. Given the limited space of this presentation, I focus my discussion mainly on the conceptual aspect of reflexivity as a measure of research rigor by attending to the issue of subjectivity and researcher positioning. Discussing reflexivity as a method (i.e., the concrete steps of practicing reflexivity) is not part of this presentation.

Researcher positioning is a crucial issue in disability study, particularly in relation to the role of non-disabled researcher. The problematic position of non-disabled researcher

reflects the long history of oppressive research practices experienced by *difabel* people. A part of that history is the domination of pathologizing approach to disability study. This approach views disability as individual abnormalities and tragedies that need to be treated and helped by non-disabled experts. Non-disabled physical characteristics and functioning are positioned as the normality toward which *difabel* bodies needs to be adjusted to. This approach frames *difabel* people as the problem and the object of research. On the other hand, non-disabled researcher is considered as a neutral subject whose her or his political and ethical views on disability do not pose any harming implications on *difabel* people's life (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Stone & Priestley, 1996; DePoy & Gilson, 2011; Mallet & Runswick-Cole, 2014).

The discussion about the problematic ³ **role of the non-disabled researcher as** described **above** became the background knowledge for my fieldwork last year. I started my fieldwork with an intention to study the meanings and implications of participating in a CBR program, which was developed to improve the equalization of opportunities and social inclusion of *difabel* people in Bantul district, Yogyakarta. Although knowing that disability is the key issue in the CBR program, initially I was reluctant to situate disability as one of the central frameworks of my research. Instead, I started my fieldwork with an emphasis on the role of the Non-Government Organisation (NGO), which initiated and managed the CBR program.

Having knowledge ³ **on the problematic role of non-disabled researcher as** described above, I avoided the complexities of studying the CBR program from the vantage point of the *difabel* people who participated in the program. What do I know about being *difabel*? What if I accidently do more harm to them through my research? What if I cannot contribute much for their struggle as much as what they would possibly do for my personal development? Driven by this kind of question I avoided engaging with the core issue of this program. At that time, I thought I was doing the right thing by thinking that only *difabel* people who have right and competency to do a study on disability. However, as I started to interact more with the *difabel*

people who participated in the program and engaged with the readings on the social model of disability (Barnes, 2012; Goodley, 2011; Mallet & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Oliver, 2009; 2013), I became aware that through my reluctance I have instead reproduced the marginalisation of *difabel* people.

The social model of disability rejects the victim-blaming approach by asserting that disability is “a social problem requiring education, attitude change, and social adjustment on the part of both abled and disabled people” (Mertens, Sullivan & Stace, 2011, p.229). Using this perspective to contemplate on my interactions with the research participants, I realised the need to approach my research differently. Instead of approaching disability as a remote issue that exists outside of me, I needed to locate myself within the issue. Disability is not only about *difabel* persons but also about the socio-political and cultural system, which place non-disabled and *difabel* people in unequal relations (Barnes, 2012; Goodley, 2011; Mallet & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Oliver, 2009; 2013).

The awareness that I need to confront my distancing attitude toward disability came as I engaged with the discussion about being a reflexive researcher (c.g., Behar, 1996; Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2010, Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003). The discussion has prompted me to do Probst (2015) described as “gazing in two directions at the same time” (p. 38). The phrase refers to a process in which a researcher tries to understand what is happening in the field of study and at the same time becomes aware of her own projections, assumptions and bias. Driven by such an argument, I approach my interviews with the research participants as a two-way mirror. The interviews said something about the research participants as well as about me as the researcher.

Approaching my interviews as a two-way process has helped me to be more critical of my own assumptions and prior knowledge and how they may impact on the research process. Below is an example of a particular conversation with one of the research participants, which

generated a critical awareness of my own assumptions and prior knowledge, particularly in relation to my position as a non-disabled researcher:

Just because something is made by a *difabel* person, sometimes it is overly appreciated. Say you go to a food vendor owned by a *difabel* person. Honestly you think her food is just so so or lack in hygiene, but when she is asking you how's the food, you say something really nice about it. You say that her cooking is very good. You are afraid that being honest about the food will hurt her feelings. Because if something is made by a *difabel* person and the quality is not good enough, people usually still say that it is good enough. *Difabel* people are not appreciated for what they create but because of their impairment (Ilham, pseudonym)

Ilham did not direct his comment personally to me but what he said immediately prompted me to think about my position as a non-disabled person and how it afforded me a particular view, attitude and behavior toward disability. I started questioning the extent to which I had been reinforcing that kind of patronizing attitude through the way I conducted the research, particularly through the way I interacted with the research participants. Integrating this kind of questioning allows my interactions with the research participants to reshape the course of my study. The study has evolved not only because I have more extensive interactions with the research participants (which is the nature of a qualitative research), but also because I have developed an awareness of how and why I know what I know about the research participants. This experience supports the argument that reflexivity may “promote rich insight through examining personal responses and interpersonal dynamics” (Finlay, 2002, p. 225).

Having a reflective approach to the research process has enabled me to realise the possible distortions in my research. The approach has raised awareness that avoiding the issue of disability might in fact reinforce the marginalising assumption on disability. By not taking disability as one of the main frameworks of the study, I might have reiterated the view of disability as the problem of the individuals who experience it. I was unable to see that as a non-disabled person who is embedded in a society that normalises discrimination against

difabel people, I am part of the root cause of the problem (Mertens et al., 2011). Driven by such awareness, I then changed my approach to the study by positioning disability as one of the central frameworks of the study. Disability is interrogated in the study not to problematise the individuals who experience it but to unpack the social systems and practices that maintain the everyday prejudice and discrimination against disability in Indonesia.

Reflective note on reflexivity

The previous section outlined an example of how taking a reflective approach to research can disrupt taken for granted assumptions and prior knowledge about disability. Through the disruption, the influence of my subjectivity was made visible. Based on such an experience, I concur with Pillow (2003) who states that “⁵To be reflexive, then, not only contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the working of our social world but also provides insight on how this knowledge is produced” (p. 178). In other words, reflexivity encourages a researcher to continuously question and be critical toward her own interpretations and knowledge production as a way to do justice to the story (Hertz, 1997).

Whilst acknowledging its potential, I agree with a body of work, which discusses the challenging aspects of practicing reflexivity (e.g., Bott, 2010; Pillow, 2003; Probst, 2015). My experience confirms the argument that being a reflexive researcher requires a particular skill and stamina, which may include critical thinking, willingness to question established beliefs, and courage to confront one’s own limitations and biases (Probst, 2015). Acquiring those skills and stamina can be quite challenging especially when using a reflexive approach is not a familiar practice in the academic atmosphere in which we operate. As a scholar, I grew up in a socio-political and cultural context in which being critical was not in favored or even socially condoned. The context had produced academic settings, which emphasized

obedience attitudes (Hadiz & Dhakidae, 2005). Coming from such a context, I find that exercising critical thinking to reexamine my beliefs, assumptions and previous knowledge is one of the challenging parts in practicing reflexivity.

As mentioned earlier in this presentation, the notion of reflexivity is nested within the interpretative/constructivist paradigm in social science (Fine et al., 2000; Pillow, 2003; Probst, 2015). Therefore, practicing reflexivity, which requires a researcher to interrogate her own subjectivity, can be a challenging process for those who are more familiar with objectivist epistemology. When I did my undergraduate in psychology, objectivist epistemology was the preferred approach. Later on, I have learned about interpretative/constructivist approaches, which are becoming more widely accepted. However, the foundational training that I received during my undergraduate years has instilled in me particular scholarly habits which are informed by the positivist tradition. One such habit is the tendency to dissociate myself as a researcher from the phenomenon or people under study. Having this habit, I find that interrogating my own subjectivity is another challenging part of practicing reflexivity. I am more familiar with the idea of a researcher investigating, analyzing and making conclusions about the research participants without questioning the role of her subjectivity as the lens through which the research participants are selectively examined.

Dealing with these challenges is still an on-going process for me. Drawing on my experience, I find that having awareness of my intersectionality is a crucial step to interrogate how my subjectivity impacts on the research process. The terms intersectionality refers to identity as a plural construct. It explains the multiple social categories, which co-exist and intersect in one's identity (Gridley & Turner, 2010; Nash, 2008; Yuval-Daviz, 2006). Being aware of intersectionality means recognising the intersection of my multiple identities (i.e., ³ my position as a non-disabled, my gender, ³ social class, academic background, ethnicity and

religion) and how they afford me particular beliefs, assumptions and worldviews through which I selectively interpret other persons' and my own experiences. For example, as a psychologist, I have the tendency to attribute one's behaviour to his or her personal dispositions. Having awareness of my subjectivity mean being critical of how such a tendency may influence my ability to view disability as a politically contested issue.

Conclusion

Drawing on my current research journey, in this presentation I discussed the notion of reflexivity as a valuable practice to enhance research credibility by taking into account the role of researcher subjectivity in knowledge production. Particularly in relation to the topic of this conference, I argue that a reflective approach to research is crucial in developing a more critical perspective on the notion of diversity as categories of difference. Engaging in a reflective approach may prevent the researcher from reproducing diversity studies, which generate distorted representations of a particular social group as a consequence of the researcher's unrecognised limitations and biases. Practising reflective approach is even more crucial when the study entails the issue of social justice and power in knowledge production.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Christopher Sonn, Adrian Fisher, Amy Quayle and Kirsten Meyer for their helpful comments. ¹¹ This work is part of the PhD candidature at Victoria University supported by the Prime Minister's Australia Asia Endeavour Postgraduate Awards.

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