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“Me-search”

Challenges and opportunities regarding subjectivity in knowledge construction

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to discuss the experiences with me-search among scholars in the field of education, defined as the conduct of research about one’s own identity or in one’s own setting.

Design/methodology/approach – Centered around the tensions inherent in the training received around objectivity and subjectivity, these individuals discuss how they came to conduct me-search and the challenges inherent in it, with a particular focus on the teaching and advising of students conducting this kind of qualitative work.

Findings – Applying Richardson and St. Pierre’s (2005) concepts of writing stories, the following reflections provide a grounding of the “me” in methodology, with an eye toward using this methodology to create social change.

Originality/value – While this is a common research approach, relatively little guidance exists on the practice of “me-search”, particularly for young scholars.

Keywords Advocacy, Subjectivity, Objectivity, Backyard research

Paper type Conceptual paper

Navel-gazing.
Backyard research.
Me-search.

Known by many names, the concept of me-search generally refers to research that involves the researcher in some shape or form. For example, the topic might hit close to home, context might be shared or study may even be autoethnographic in nature. Regardless of what it is called or how it is situated, me-search readily invokes negative



associations of self-indulgence, being touchy-feely, overly emotional or therapeutic (Golub, 2008). Underlying these negative associations is the undergirding of subjectivity.

Many of us have been taught that “good” research is objective research, characterized by research that is “unbiased” or in which the researcher is “impartial” or “distinterested”. Subjectivity in research, therefore, is not as highly valued, with me-search considered as the ultimate in subjective research due to the perception of its lack of neutrality and a sense of self-involvement. In a popular educational research textbook, the authors point out, “The preferred research role is that of a person who is unknown at the site – in other words, an *outsider*” (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010, p. 335). Indeed, Creswell (2003, p. 184) comments that doing what he terms

Backyard research [...] often leads to compromises in the researcher’s ability to disclose information and raises difficult power issues. The problems of reporting data that are biased, incomplete, or compromised are legend.

The message here is that subjectivity implies a lack of rigor, whether methodological or analytical.

At the same time, scholars like Denzin (2005) have convinced researchers of the myriad benefits of engaging in scholarship that is emancipatory, participatory and critical. In these kinds of scholarly inquiry, the researcher aims to take an active role in contributing to social change. Such types of inquiry, however, may be fraught with challenges for the researcher, requiring what Holman Jones (2005, p. 764) referred to as a “balancing act”, as the researcher must negotiate attention to cognitive domains of “truth” while expressing the affective dimensions of one’s narrative (Patton, 2002). This balancing act is also discussed in other scholars’ work, such as Hill Collins’ (1986) conceptualization of the outsider-within in critical feminist scholarship or in works by native scholars such as Ranco (2006), who discussed the struggle to balance research and advocacy for their communities.

For those who conduct research in their backyard or on topics related to self, this balance is delicate. Weiss (1994, p. 125) offered his voice to this discussion in regard to the role of interviewer, remarking:

At such times I feel myself to be split, with one part functioning professionally, asking questions and monitoring responses, while another part is identified with the respondent. Identification can become so strong that I feel my contact with my own core self has been loosened.

To overcome this, Weiss discussed the importance of neutrality:

My aim is to enable myself to emotionally understand someone’s account without allowing my attention to be captured by my own feelings and thoughts [...] it is almost necessary that we achieve this kind of neutralization (p. 126).

Given the unique role that education researchers may play – often acting as both participant and observer in the institutions they study – the line of neutrality may be blurred. Moreover, when education researchers engage in scholarship that relates to either their own identities or their educational contexts, issues relating to neutrality and objectivity may become even more tenuous. At the same time, however, the concepts of neutrality and objectivity within critical and social change research may in themselves be suspect, given that a researcher’s identities, intentions and values shape research decisions throughout the inquiry process (Patton, 2002).

In this article, six of us scholars present the values, complexities and opportunities inherent in me-search. As we highlight, instead of subjectivity, me-search becomes a search for insight and inspiration. Instead of a lack of rigor, me-search becomes a methodological

choice and a clearly delineated relationship to the topic. At a minimum, we forward, me-search becomes an incorporation of one's person and one's identity with the work that the individual does as a researcher. Moreover, such research can be focused on creating social or organizational change. We argue, then, that keeping ourselves distant from our research in the end may be a disservice to what we have to offer as researchers and the potential social change that can result.

To further our argument, we begin with an overview of the methods, or the construction of these reflections, followed by the presentation of each scholar's me-search experiences. We conclude with a larger discussion bridging all six scholars' essays, wherein we focus on the implications of such narratives for the teaching of qualitative research.

The making of the "me-search" reflections

At the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) annual meeting, six higher education scholars presented at a well-attended and well-received symposium on the topic of me-search. As we framed it then, and here again in this article, me-search can be defined as research with, about or connected to one's identity or positionality. In this way, the researcher makes an intentional investment – the researcher is not a disinterested party. Me-search can include autoethnographical research – defined as "autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history and ethnographic explanation" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 742) – but is not necessarily limited to it. Instead, me-search might be situated at one's workplace (e.g. a higher education scholar studying her own university) or related to one's identity (e.g. a first-generation teacher educator studying first-generation teachers). In this way, me-search tends to be qualitative in nature, but does not necessarily have to be. Regardless, me-search implies a personal connection to the subject or object of study.

So much interest was cultivated from the audience in that symposium – particularly from advanced graduate students – that several of us felt it would be helpful to turn the reflections presented on the panel into a larger set of narratives. In particular, we were interested in providing students with understandings of how individual researchers' experiences and identities can simultaneously assist with and complicate scholarship and its framing.

As we joined together to write the following accounts, we asked ourselves this question: What role does who you are play in your research? Beyond this question, however, we offered no other guidance. What becomes clear in the subsequent narratives provided by the six of us is that me-search takes on a more particular meaning akin to (Richardson and St. Pierre's 2005, p. 965) concepts of *Writing Stories and Personal Narratives*. More specifically, Richardson discussed honoring the location of the self in what she called "writing stories". She stated:

These are narratives that situate one's own writing in other parts of one's life such as disciplinary constraints, academic debates, departmental politics, social movements, community structures, research interests, familial ties and personal history (p. 965).

As Richardson (2005, p. 965) suggested, when we engage in writing stories, we are constructing another form of inquiry. Writing becomes another way of thinking, and she casts this as a thought-provoking and legitimate means of doing research. Indeed, Richardson deemed writing stories as a method through which we "can evoke deeper parts of the self, heal wounds, enhance the sense of self – or even alter one's sense of identity".

The identities presented below represent perspectives of us: six women, tenured professors at research universities in the field of education. We all teach or have taught qualitative methods and/or general research methods to graduate students and we all advise dissertations. In other words, we play an active role in graduate student socialization as future researchers. While many commonalities exist, we clarify that the perspectives offered here are specific to ourselves and we do not purport to suggest that any of these narratives represents a “group”. One of the common threads in many of our stories is our focus on feminist scholarship. While as many meanings of feminism(s) exist as there are different kinds of feminists, we find commonality in the four major tenets of feminist scholarship. Feminist scholarship focuses on the following:

- (1) reflexivity;
- (2) an action or social change orientation;
- (3) attention to the affective components of the research; and
- (4) understanding social contexts and how they influence the lives of women, including their intersectional identities (Fonow and Cook, 1991; Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011).

That being said, while feminist inquiry is not necessarily only qualitative in nature, it shares many of its core principles with qualitative methodology. In this manner, feminist scholarship and me-search – with its connection to self and a desire to bring about social change – could be considered closely connected.

Another commonality is that we were all socialized to the academy in the 1990s and early 2000s – a time when qualitative research was gaining acceptance but was still the source of some debate and striving for more legitimacy. While qualitative research has come a long way since then, the objectivity–subjectivity tension apparent in qualitative research is not resolved (Patel, 2016). This kind of scholarship – writing stories or me-search – is not yet mainstream nor is it fully accepted in the academy (Nash and Bradley, 2011). In this series of essays, we hope to assist in further legitimizing the pace and appropriateness of me-search. We hope that these reflections will help to raise critical questions in teaching and advising qualitative research.

Kelly Ward

I started to come of age as a researcher during the “paradigm wars” of the early 1990s. I sat in class after class and conference session after conference session intrigued by discourses surrounding history and philosophy of science. My identity as a researcher was shaped amid controversies and questions surrounding what it means to do educational research. It seemed like everyone around me was asking: What is knowledge? How best to attain it? There were other equally vexing questions about methodology, positionality and the meaning of the self in educational research.

Kuhn (1962) and his formative work in the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* prompted many educational researchers to grapple with the meaning of science, research and knowledge. The paradigm wars in education grew out of differing opinions on what it meant to conduct educational research and the role of epistemology, ontology and methodology in knowledge creation about issues related to education (Anderson and Herr, 1999). Kuhn grappled extensively with what it means to do research and how science evolved. He looked at different traditions of “scientific practice – examples that include law, theory, application and instrumentation together – provide models that spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research” (Kuhn, 1996, p. 10). Following his lead, many in educational research

started to chart and challenge the history of scientific discovery in education, which had been primarily dictated by positivist modes of inquiry. Leaders in educational research like Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln prompted researchers to think about knowledge and methodology in new and different ways leading many people, like myself, to question how and why they were conducting research.

My journey as it relates to me-search is grounded in initial introduction to research. I stood at the crossroads of fire in the paradigm wars, which I have to admit I watched with fascination and wonder and, on occasion, horror. As I sat in those seminars watching seasoned researchers argue about what it means to do research, what I heard was at times rather heated and venomous. Grappling with the meaning of knowledge (and the best way to conceive of it) brought out a high level of intensity in people. I knew passion was tethered to doing research and that is why I was getting my PhD and sought to conduct educational research as a career. What I did not understand is that how people conducted research, especially those who were invested in particular modes of inquiry, was so close to how people viewed themselves as scholars and as people. The arguments were personal. Challenging how people did research and what they learned from their research process went to the core of people's being, their passions and their values.

My own journey to conducting research was very much tethered to these early scenes of watching knowledge creation play out before me. As I became involved in research, the questions I asked, how I asked them and how I sought to address them were inextricably linked to how I viewed myself as a researcher and my concerns about establishing legitimacy as a researcher. On the one hand, I saw people pursue research topics that were very personal to them and in personal ways (although I perceived that they did so as already established scholars) and on the other hand, I saw senior researchers question the "rigor" of such approaches. I knew if I did "good" research, it would not matter how I did it, but questions lingered: Who would determine if it was good? If it were qualitative would it automatically be questioned? As an emerging scholar, would it be possible to be "good" and do research that was personal at the same time? It was a crazy-making time to be a young scholar.

My dissertation research was about faculty attrition. I wanted to better understand faculty socialization and how faculty thought about their early careers. In particular, I wanted to understand why some people stayed and why some people left. I went into the study wanting to know about all faculty; however, knowing socialization was particularly challenging for junior faculty of color and female faculty, I focused on these particular populations. My early research had an element of me-search in that I was a woman and eventually saw myself as a faculty member, but at that time, I still sought to be "objective" and to do "good research" independent of topic and independent of who I was as a researcher and my positionality as a researcher. I viewed the research process as a rational one in that the question and problem guided the methods I used. Even though I intellectually understood that my research approaches were tied to my worldview and how I understood knowledge, I was not sophisticated or developed enough in my own thinking to fully understand what that meant in terms of my own research. For years, I told myself and my students that research is tied to the question. While I still agree to a certain extent, I now see that it is more complex and that the questions we ask and methods we use are very much tied to who we are as researchers. I like how [Oakley \(1999, p. 247\)](#) put it:

There are other more powerful reasons why social scientists choose the research methods they do. Underlying philosophies of social science and long-held and much cherished tenets about epistemology are prime among these. Moreover, such an interplay between epistemological position and methodological decision is enormously affected by social context. We pay attention

to what other social scientists are doing, to fashions in both methodology and topic – the things it is considered proper for social scientists to study; we are affected by research funding and publishing opportunities, by the material resources available to support our work, by intraprofessional rivalries and difference, and by politics – both in its commonly understood sense and as applied to power relations between academics and those who take part in research. Apart from what we do, there is the whole issue of how others construct our work. And this is only some of what goes on. In short, it is a very complicated business.

As I came to realize for myself, my students and my research collaborators that research methods or questions do not exist in a vacuum or independent of one another. I started to see a greater interplay between who I am as a person and who I am as a researcher. It took a certain amount of time working as a researcher and coming into my own as a person and researcher to start to fully grasp my “inner me-searcher”. I had actually been a bit jaded about research, and I was perceived as self-focused or overly self-referential. I am committed to contributing to change as an integral part of the research process, so research that I perceived as being focused on the self, I saw as losing its activist and change orientation.

All that being said, as I sat in a conference session in 1998, with a new baby by my side, listening to a colleague talk about the trials and tribulations of faculty life for female faculty (and especially those who are parents), I started to wonder: What about people who do manage? What about the faculty I know who are quite happy in their positions? How do people make it work as women, academics and mothers? It was with these questions at hand that I set out on my first official me-search project, which initially I did not even recognize it as me-search. I still felt committed to maintaining some sort of “outsider” status to my project. Of course, as a mother, professor and as a pregnant researcher talking to female faculty about pregnancy, children, gender and faculty life, it is hard to be an objective outsider. The “other” was me. Again, I knew all this intellectually, but until it unfolded before me in my own research, I did not start to fully realize what it means to do research tied to my persona and my passions. As I read [Denzin’s \(2001\)](#) work about reflexive interviews, I started to more fully understand qualitative research, and interviews in particular, as a reflexive relationship where the topic really mattered to me. I was conducting the interviews because I had a story to tell and so did the broad array of women we interviewed for the project ([Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2012](#)). I felt strongly about the topic of work and family for faculty, based on a set of experiences I had as a faculty member and also because I wanted to bring to light what it was like to manage work and family in the academic context. I also wanted to highlight ways that straightforward constructs like leave policies and promotion and tenure protocols were not neutral nor a matter of free choice. The experiences of the women in the study were constrained by history, power and privilege.

I went into the project as a feminist, but not necessarily with an overtly feminist lens. It was only as the project evolved that I was able to more fully see how feminism had informed my thinking, my interactions with people in the study, my methodological approach and with writing up the project. I also saw the necessity of feminist perspectives to affect change. Power, in all its manifestations, is at the core of faculty life for female faculty, and to improve faculty life and to try and change campus structures meant looking at campus life from a feminist perspective. I was not engaged in this research project to simply report on what the women were experiencing in the academic work place; instead, I was involved in this project because I wanted to see things change to create more equal and just work places for women as mothers and as faculty members. I wanted to empower myself and other women to move away from how things “should” be for academics. For too long, I had been told and had read about that to be a “real” academic meant to do so in ways that were very narrow and exclusive of personal interests and passions (including me-search topics), and that included

and encompassed my whole life (including children and family). Many of these propositions seemed “either/or”. Either you are a real academic and pursue topics in particular kinds of ways (read: objective projects guided by “scientific inquiry”) or you are a slacker; and either you are a real academic or you are a mother. In reality, there are very few mutually exclusive either/or propositions and the human condition is one of greater integration and interludes between what seem *should* be and what *is*.

When I read *Composing a Life* by Mary Catherine Bateson (1989, p. 3), she helped me to see that careers happen in improvisational ways, “the ways we combine the familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations”. As a woman, in particular, it was not possible (or necessarily desirable, I came to find) to follow prescribed paths or realize preestablished visions for what my career and life would be like as a researcher/academic/person. The paths that had been worn by many before me either did not involve children, did not involve the tenure track, job moves, being a woman or alternative research paradigms. In much the same way, Lincoln and Guba (1985) talked about naturalistic inquiry as an emergent paradigm so too was my career as a researcher and female academic – things evolved more as an iterative process rather than as a set path. Ironically, this is much of what I found when using theories of socialization to understand faculty careers. Prevailing ideas about socialization (Baldwin and Blackburn, 1981) had been based on male career trajectories. Adding women to the mix meant that women did not measure up to prescribed ways of doing things. It took time and research to reveal that it was not necessarily that women had to change, but instead that perhaps it was prevailing notions of socialization that needed to change. I hope that my me-search helped contribute to the need to look at careers differently for women as their careers take shape.

As I sit at this juncture of my career as a researcher, it is only through hindsight that I can see how my life as a me-searcher has evolved. In the moment, I conducted me-search but was not able to embrace it as such. I felt regulated by traditional scientific discourses surrounding what it means to do research. When I first read Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry* much of what I thought about research shifted. They gave me language to use as a means to honor and defend my approach to inquiry. Initially, much like their book, much of what I did was in defense of using qualitative research and pursuing topics related to my person and my passion. As I became more established, I was able to more fully embrace multiple modes of inquiry and feminist perspectives not as something I had to defend, but as ways to do research. My life as a researcher has evolved to include me-search not as something that is self-centered and self-referential in ways that seem narrow and self-serving, but, instead, as a mode of inquiry that helps me return to my initial desire to be an educational researcher – to inform change and to make colleges and universities humane, collegial, just and interesting places to work in. I pursue topics near and dear to me because it is there that I can make a difference.

Jennifer Ng

I am a second-generation, Asian American woman whose parents immigrated to the USA in the early 1970s to pursue higher education and then stayed to begin their professional careers and family. Growing up, I frequently encountered the polite inquiry of strangers asking, “Where are you from?” After responding that I grew up in Iowa, I also learned to anticipate a look of confusion followed by a second, clarifying question: “No, where are you *really* from?” Even after I explained that I was born in California, the confusion often remained. It was not until my own higher education that I came to understand this conversational exchange seemingly particular to my individual experience was actually

shared by many others who also had dark hair, almond-shaped eyes and easy-to-pronounce English first names combined with Chinese surnames like mine – others who were also subject to the socially, historically and politically specific contexts from which notions of what it means to be “American” and the perpetual foreignness of Asians emerged and still endures (Wu, 2002).

Perhaps not surprising given the perpetual foreigner stereotype of Asian Americans, people also often remark to me, “You speak English so well”. Coupled with the model minority stereotype of Asian Americans as mathematically and scientifically inclined whiz kids, I can see why people might be surprised to learn that I majored in psychology and English literature as an undergraduate. After graduation, I aspired to be a poet but became a middle school teacher in Houston, TX, instead. My back-up plan to get certified in secondary English education ignited my desire to make a difference in the world. There is little doubt that my scholarly interest in the preparation and experiences of beginning teachers who work in urban schools has been me-search. There is little doubt that the qualitative orientation I have brought to this line of inquiry is still inspired by insights derived from reading and writing literature.

A lifetime of addressing personal questions about where I am from and who I am, relative to the assumptions or expectations of others has given me a certain perspective on why I do qualitative research. I think often about the essay by Alan Peshkin (1993) he originally titled, “Justifying Qualitative Research” but later changed to, “The Goodness of Qualitative Research”. In it, he explained the decision as a desire to consider qualitative inquiry’s generative promise starting on its own terms rather than always defending it against the issues and premises dictated by its non-qualitative detractors. More than 20 years later, though, I find I cannot always be assured that such conversational parameters are in place. My role at the methodological table often involves dispelling misconceptions and educating others who may simply have learned that research is synonymous with quantitative research or who may believe that qualitative approaches are inherently inferior to the objectivity, controls and generalizability associated with quantitative methods. These views are not difficult to understand given the history of certain disciplinary traditions, influence of faculty perspectives and our contemporary era of “scientifically based research” (National Research Council, 2002). Yet, without thoughtful challenge, the opportunity to pursue questions that require qualitative inquiry is lost along with the possibility of consequential insights. To put it in another way, “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted” (Cameron, 1963, p. 13).

I do qualitative research because I believe what results from such efforts ideally is a chance to realize Henry David Thoreau’s (1906, p. 11) appeal, “Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other’s eyes for a moment”? However, such potential demands critical understanding of both our subjects and our craft, or what Van Maanen (2011) calls the “headwork” and “textwork” involved in telling ethnographic tales. As Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012, p. 307) asserted:

A narrative can tell a flat story, which is built only on psychological determination; a dialog can be a manifestation of the participant’s “wrong” attitudes, opinions, and way of thinking; and reflexivity can be used for narcissistic purposes, giving no new insights regarding the people the researcher meets.

These outcomes are not inevitable, but they do exist alongside the magnificent possibilities of doing qualitative research.

So, because I still aspire to make a difference in the world, I want my research to work against what Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) refers to as “the danger of

a single story". A single story – like the results of just one study or the collective body of knowledge resulting from just one methodological paradigm – is inevitably incomplete. When it becomes the only story, it perpetuates overly simplistic stereotypes with accompanying, often problematic effects that play out in our lives and interactions with one another. The dominance of a single story is also about power, premised upon the authority of the storyteller to characterize its subject without being accountable for situating – or even acknowledging – its own perspective as one among many possible perspectives. Working against the danger of a single story is not just a matter of diversity for diversity's sake but a matter of equity as well, for effectively telling "counterstories" can cause dissonance enough to shake the enduring hold of "stock" stories used to justify inequality in our world as it currently is (Delgado, 1989).

An analogy can be drawn between my experiences as a qualitative researcher working among others who may not appreciate its goodness and my experiences as a person of color living in predominantly White places. While some people need not ready their children for potential harm in a racist society, I recall early warnings from my parents that others might not like me or might treat me as inferior because of our racial and cultural differences. What I took away from these conversations was a series of "have to's" – I would have to work harder, know more and do better than might be expected otherwise. As an adult now, I would also add the need to be patient, forgiving and true to one's self, even in circumstances where others' views may rightly warrant outrage, argument and continued efforts to press for change. In so many ways, I see these lessons as applicable to being a qualitative researcher, too. Do not do qualitative research because you cannot do anything else. Do it because you have to – because the questions themselves are so personally, professionally and intellectually compelling they have to be explored, and because the questions have to be explored qualitatively. Then, capitalize on all that this methodological approach affords, and exceed other's expectations.

Jeni Hart

When first presented with the idea of me-search, I immediately thought about the focus of my research as the guiding me-search principle. Specifically, I am interested in how feminism and gender influences the work lives of faculty. I am a feminist and activist faculty member, and I continuously reflect on (and often am confronted with) how my position influences my work. In addition, my me-search centers on assessing campus climate and the implications of campus climate for historically underrepresented people. In my scholarship and through teaching and service to the university, I try to challenge the status quo to transform the campus climate. I want to shine a light on inequity, microaggressions and discrimination, and I want to inspire action to eliminate these experiences.

Recently, much of my research has been conducted at home – meaning, the context for my research is often my institution, the University of Missouri. This is yet another way my research is me-search. I am an insider describing the climate where I work every day. Through my investigation, I critique the power and privilege others (and I) witness. I share what I have learned with colleagues and university administrators. I identify what I believe are problems that need to be addressed to improve the campus community and my own climate.

I have heard others refer to the sort of research I conduct as navel-gazing and lacking in objectivity. In fact, I have heard faculty in other fields make the statement "navel-gazing" about all higher education research, not just the more personal work I have described. So be it. I am adamant that trying to better understand our own lives matters.

Further contributing to what me-search is for me is my methodological standpoint. First, I think *anyone* who is conducting research is a me-searcher. No research is fully objective. We make choices about what questions to ask, what methods to use and what theories to guide us. Moreover, as scholars, it is our job to interpret findings. How we accomplish that without inserting ourselves? There are ways to mitigate some bias, but I do not know any way to mitigate all bias. And, what is wrong with bias? Although is not consistent with the ideals of the scientific method, it gives us a unique window into life – sometimes, it can help us gain access for a study or see nuances that an outsider may not.

I proudly admit qualitative methods best answer the questions I ask most often in my research – bias police beware. In my research, I do use strategies to make my study more trustworthy and credible, but I cannot take away the fact that I am a researcher and instrument. Qualitative methods then attempt to remove the hierarchy between researcher and participant and view the participant as an expert about their own lives. Nor can I ignore the role reflexivity plays in my scholarship. Even this narrative about me-search signals reflexivity through my use of first-person. I am informing the reader that these are my perspectives and my construction of reality, building on the knowledge of others.

Also, as a feminist researcher, I recognize that conventional practices associated with research are somewhat antithetical to feminism. Research involves control – controlling variables, controlling analysis, controlling the conversation. Even the idea of “giving voice” to others, especially those who are oppressed, is about power and control, even if the intentions are good. But I have chosen the professoriate, and have compromised. The compromise has not come easily. Some days I feel like I have used my “power” for good, making a difference by challenging dominant narratives. However, other days, I question whether using power can ever be fully for good.

My compromises are also rooted in reactions to the experiences of other feminist me-searchers and to warnings from colleagues about feminist me-search. Additionally, it comes from journal and conference reviewers. I still receive feedback that I need larger sample sizes and that the results are too subjective and not generalizable. These critiques send a message that qualitative work involving the researcher as instrument is suspect. Yet, I keep asking the questions in which I am interested. Trying to answer those questions means sometimes the publication outlets most open to me-search are not the “premier” journals, so I find an outlet for my work elsewhere. I recognize that this further marginalizes me-search in the eyes of many in the academy, including promotion and tenure committees. As a result, I am asked to justify my scholarship. Justifying my work has become second-nature. While I would prefer not to have to justify it, I would rather do that than conduct research about which I am not passionate.

I am not sure I have successfully navigated the associated challenges of me-search, particularly feminist me-search. Perhaps the most authentic example of me-search is autoethnography or scholarly personal narrative, methods that are less understood and respected in the primary ways we think scholarship is legitimated. In these designs, the power relationship between the researcher and participant is not as pronounced. This is not to suggest that other manifestations of power are not involved in these scholarly endeavors (e.g. peer review, the decisions we make about what is important to cite and what is not). However, in this framing, one fundamental power dynamic is eliminated and the only voice on which I rely to tell my story is my own. Yet, I have to admit that I have not used these methods in my work. When I think about why I have not used them, it is about fear. For example, I believed that using them would not be the road to tenure and promotion. I did not want to prepare to further justify my methodological choices to external reviewers and to tenure committees outside my department. I was protecting myself. Perhaps I conceded too

much. Perhaps now is my chance to embrace these feminist methods, tenure in hand. In trying to define what me-search is for me, I realize I need to further reflect (and engage in more me-search) on being an activist – What am I doing to raise consciousness about these issues? What am I doing to change the existing structure? There is still so much more to do.

Lisa Wolf-Wendel

What's the problem and how might we go about studying it? As an educational researcher, my training dictates that the answer to these questions should be the starting point for a good study. No problem – no study! Until recently, I did not see myself (or my group) as a subject of study because I did not see myself as having a problem – although I have grown to recognize that my “lack of problem” is actually the root of other larger problems in education (more about this later). A little background about me is probably helpful at this point.

I am a White, culturally Jewish (though not religious), middle-aged (that one is hard to admit) woman who holds a tenured position at a research university in the Midwest. I have two school-aged daughters approaching adolescence, and a husband who works for a university (but not as an academic). I grew up in a highly educated family and although I attended the local public school in my home state, my family orientation was always focused on which prestigious, selective college I would attend rather than if I would go to college. I fulfilled my parents' (and my) expectations of attending private selective undergraduate and graduate schools, and my charmed and privileged life led me to this place where I am today – as a researcher who studies equity issues in the context of postsecondary education.

As noted above, I have, for the most part, avoided studying topics that are directly related to who I am because the idea of investing intellectual efforts to study people who have had it easy always seemed self-indulgent at best and, at worst, a waste of time. I have been greatly influenced by Peggy McIntosh's (1989) writing about White privilege as well as Janet Helms's (1993) work on White identity development. These two concepts have helped me to believe that as a person who possesses power and privilege because of my race, social class and position, I ought to be an ally to those who have not had it so easy, to bring about change or to lay bare existing power structures. I have always wanted to believe that this is a guiding force behind my research projects. Further, I like to believe that through my research, I can bring forward a voice that might not be readily heard, as well as to question the dominant narratives that are so readily available. My goal – albeit difficult to achieve – has been to serve as somewhat of a translator through my research to help those in higher education, who may struggle to get the most out of the system and to try to make higher education more equitable and, thus, better.

In studying topics less related to me, I have benefitted from the privilege of perceived objectivity and distance. My privileged position in society means that people in power often listen to me and take what I write seriously. They (whoever *they* are) often see my research as unbiased and therefore determine that the answers that I put forward are “true”. Indeed, part of recognizing my own privilege is coming to terms with what it means to be an ally, a translator and in a position to support people who are vulnerable for a variety of reasons. My privilege also translates into access to people with power and an ability to speak their language. It is interesting to think about how distance from a topic makes others think you do not have an agenda.

There are difficulties, however, that must be recognized in studying “the problem”. First, such a study may only serve to reinforce the status quo. At some point, I came to realize that my having power and privilege is as much a problem as others not having it – especially in

the zero-sum game of higher education. Second, I am conscious that studying “the problem” tends to victimize the people who can least afford to be victimized. As such, one approach I have taken is to look at models of success – examples where programs or policies or institutions seem to be doing a better job than most at providing equitable opportunities and outcomes. In these studies – some of which have focused on the outcomes of special focus institutions (i.e. women’s colleges, historically Black colleges, Hispanic-serving colleges) and policies written to support dual career academic couples – I have looked at these models of success through the lens of both individual agency and institutional structures and norms. If one only looks at individual agency while overcoming the existing odds then this reinforces the Horatio Alger, bootstrap idea. If one only looks at institutional structures then one takes the individual out of the equation. It is important to look at both.

With all of this as background, my first real foray into the world of me-search came when I began to study academic motherhood (tenure-track women with young children). I am a member of this demographic – a mother and a professor. In studying this group, I have had to remind myself of the privileged position that these women (and I) are in relative to so many others. While “balance” may be illusive for academic mothers, it is important to think about the question: “Compared to what?” If you compare academic mothers to academic men, for instance, you will surely see gender disparities in norms, behaviors and expectations. But, the problems faced by academic women, as compared to almost any other group of workers, are pretty far up the Maslow hierarchy. Explaining the struggles and triumphs of academic mothers need to be contextualized and recognized within the position of privilege that they (and I) hold. This is part of what personal perspective and self-awareness can add to a study that detached objectivity, if such a thing exists, cannot.

So, why study academic motherhood? What is the problem? The problem is that the existing narrative and research about being a tenure-track academic and being a mother is so negative and deterministic that it has the potential to negatively influence women to pursue other professions (or to forgo having children). It seemed important to point out that despite some real structural difficulties, there are women who make it work. It seemed like a good idea to offer a narrative of opportunity and hope to counteract the narrative of despair. The problem was that we (the field) had cast the issue of being an academic and being a mother as a conflict and a problem and I felt called to study the issue to contextualize it.

Now, having engaged in research that directly relates to me, I must admit a sense of vulnerability that I had not experienced up to this point. I sense the tendency for my research on academic motherhood to be more easily dismissed under the name of bias as compared to my previous research where I was more distanced from the topic. In commenting on this research people might say, “Of course you found that”, or those who know me might say, “You have it so easy, no wonder you found that”. Some might suggest that the research is self-serving. To my knowledge, no one ever charged me with this when I was studying the outcomes of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). On its face, that my research is self-serving seems like something I should be ashamed of but I am not. I see no reason to apologize for hoping that my research (whether it is about others or about a group to which I belong) serves to address issues of equity in higher education. That is why I engage in the research in the first place – to address a problem.

With academic motherhood, because the topic is academic and personal, I am in the position to choose how vulnerable I want to be. I can stick to the research findings or disclose my personal relationship to the topic – it is not readily apparent that I am an academic mother unless you know me. I have the privilege of disclosing my connection to the topic or not. I can, if I choose, even offer personal experiences that relate directly to my findings. For example, when the news media learned of a professor who breastfed in class

I was contacted as an expert on the topic to contextualize the issue. I chose to discuss not only the results of my study but also to disclose that I had breastfed my infant while teaching. I am not only in a position to share my expertise but also to help engender empathy. I have come to recognize that as a full professor, with all the privileges that this entails, I can serve as a role model in addition to a researcher when it comes to this topic.

So what do I make of my journey into me-search? I will engage in this again – I have the freedom and privilege to do so. I learned that distance from a topic does give one a perspective – but so does being close up; it is just a different perspective. It is interesting to ask yourself, “Where do I start and end in relationship to my research”. Whether I use qualitative or quantitative methods (I use both), I believe all research is subjective and the goal should be to acknowledge one’s position relative to the topic being studied and reflect upon how it matters (and it always does). In other words, who you are influences what questions you ask, how you ask them, how you answer them and what you do with the answers.

Rebecca Ropers-Huilman

What is me-search? How am I present in my work? Put differently, how is my work really about me – my relationships and perspectives, those people and ideas I care about? In thinking about how to respond to these questions, I went to my curriculum vitae and looked at what I had listed as publications or presentations. What I was hoping to do was to use my own scholarly outputs to think about the boundaries of me-search. What counted as research that I was invested in and in which I focused at least partially on myself? And, what counted as research that was “disinterested” and in which I was not implicated in some way? If only the latter kind is valued, then I am not likely to be judged favorably. However, it is clear that there are degrees to one’s centering of oneself in research and that it is important to think through how choices around that centering affect our knowledge construction.

What I found is that all of my research has been motivated by something other than a disinterested assessment that a particular topic might be of use to given communities or further the literature. Instead, I found that most of the research that I have done has related to what I needed to learn to improve my own practice. Is this me-search? Here, I interrogate some examples to consider this question.

Shortly after joining the faculty at Louisiana State University, I was invited to help facilitate a group of women of color as they reflected in a scholarly way on their experiences in college. Four members of that group and I presented our reflections at a national conference. Two of us then wrote a chapter in my edited book on advocacy education that focuses specifically on that experience ([Ropers-Huilman and Taliaferro, 2003](#)). That chapter, written with Denise Taliaferro, described our experiences in that multiracial group in a way that I do not think would have been possible had we not be functioning as part of that group. It was incredibly hard because we had a greater stake in the project than merely producing a manuscript. We struggled to find a way to create an empowering place for all of us in a higher education environment, which I was just learning, but in which I had cultural capital as a White person, and which the women of color in the group (including Denise) felt was highly problematic and racist.

I needed to be involved in this group because I needed to learn from them. I knew how limited my own education was about issues related to race, especially as it took shape in the US’ deep south. I entered this relationship and, because I and several others cared deeply about what we were learning, we studied it carefully and systematically – taking regular field notes and transcribing our conversations – to understand our feelings and behaviors associated with one another. This process was emotionally and intellectually difficult, and I

am still amazed that we all kept coming back to the table. I suppose this experience is an example of me-search in community.

Shortly after receiving tenure, I was asked to serve as the Women’s Center Director. Again, I turned to research to learn. I needed to learn about the amazing students who met at the Center and who were dedicating so much of their lives to making positive change in the world. I believe that those of us who are privileged enough to be supported in our service as educators have an obligation to try to make this world a better place. These students were enthusiastically attempting to do what I believed I needed to do and they were doing it oftentimes at great cost to themselves. I desired to find out what motivated them and what tensions they identified as change agents in higher education environments. Their wisdom – borne through mistakes as well as successes – helped me to see possibilities and complexities that had previously been undetectable to me (Ropers-Huilman *et al.*, 2005).

That research, which focused primarily on student change agents, ended up expanding beyond the USA and into New Zealand (Ropers-Huilman and McCoy, 2010; Ropers-Huilman and McCoy, 2011). When I began my early interviews in New Zealand, asking about the role of tertiary education in promoting democracy, I wonder if I was, in fact, asking about their practices or seeking a validation to my own thinking. This was not explicit or intentional, but it was perhaps inevitable. One participant held a mirror up to my researcher-self as he questioned which form of democracy I was thinking about (as he did not want to adopt the US form) and coached me not to use the term “higher” education as it sounded elitist to many in New Zealand. My knowledge and understanding were enriched by this participant’s challenges to my research process. I was checking for confirmation of my previously held beliefs about agency and democracy in post-secondary education environments, rather than listening carefully to the many ways in which participants’ involvement in their educational communities took shape in a completely different context. While I try hard to remain open to disconfirming evidence, that very construction reaffirms that I have a viewpoint that influences the research process.

I share this example to raise a question about the possibility of objectivity in our research, when language itself is value-laden, laden with the researcher’s specific and discourse-informed values. The ways in which we approach and inform our research are always about us, in whatever state we currently are. I was practicing and refining my knowledge about how to be a better educator and change agent. At the same time, I was generating knowledge that hopefully served others’ needs for learning as well.

In a piece on feminist research, Kelly Winters and I focused on the role of the researcher in feminist research, which is a body of literature I respect and learn from regularly (Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011). In one example, we cite Burghardt and Colbeck’s (2005, p. 310) reflections on a research project with women’s studies faculty:

We wanted our collaborative effort to reflect our own feminist values [. . .]. Thus, we examined how power and control operate in patriarchal institutions such as universities to oppress women [. . .]. We also hoped to create positive change as a result of the research process and findings [. . .]. While it is impossible to know if participants experienced lasting changes, the authors have been changed. Analyzing the participants’ experiences encouraged us to reflect more closely about our own scholarly decisions and to affirm our feminist values, challenging the status quo within our institutions.

Was this me-search? Was it research in which the researchers were too close to the participants so as not to be useful? Alternatively, was it the inclusion of their own knowledge and its effects of their research relationships that made the knowledge generated especially useful? Was this research about the faculty interviewees, about the researchers or both?

While feminist research emphasizes the need to be reflexive and acknowledge one's role in research, it acknowledges that this attempt is complex. In our article, we ask:

What happens when power imbalances and varying positionalities complicate notions of sharing, reflexive thinking and the desire for a deep rapport with research participants? Whose interpretations of participants' lives are ultimately included in research findings if it is clear that the researcher and participants' positionalities have led them to different understandings? In what ways is it useful for researchers to divulge the ongoing steps of their reflexive processes and in what ways might that impede certain readings of their emergent understandings?

Feminist research typically includes an acknowledgement of the complicated roles that researchers and participants play as they develop knowledge and/or action through their inquiry. It suggests that claims of objectivity have both over-valued particular knowledge and knowledge sources as well as under-valued or silenced others. Who is granted the authority to "be objective"? What purposes do those claims serve as researchers consider the questions they ask, the relationships they form with participants and their choices of analytical tools and data representation? Feminist researchers consider how their perspectives and identities enrich or, at least, influence their motivations for research (Lewis, 1993; Richardson, 1997; Sax, 2008), ability to form certain research relationships (Bloom, 1998; Middleton, 1993; Patton, 2009) and life experiences in relation to their research (Neumann and Peterson, 1997). Are all these examples of me-search?

I end with one final example where I recently partnered with a doctoral student in another department to do research on my own teaching of issues related to race, ethnicity and equity in higher education settings. She contacted me to ask if she could do the research in my class. She collected the data, so to speak, and we processed it regularly together. She had the responsibility for writing the dissertation, while my only responsibility (in my mind) was to continue being responsive and to learn about how to get better in my relationships and usefulness with diverse students. Her findings included one that I continue to wrestle with:

A second finding is that students who were of European ancestry depended on the lived experiences of their classmates to teach them about racism. As a result, this positioned these students inequitably as teachers more often than as students (Grosland, 2011).

While I have long been troubled by this phenomenon, to see a research partner come in and point out explicitly how it takes shape and what I might do about it, suggests to me the value of me-search that is collaborative and purposeful and, eventually, shared with others.

Quantitative and qualitative researches are important in many ways to feminist and other equity-oriented approaches, as well as to other ways of thinking. For me, qualitative research helps to make me a better person, while I have not had that same kind of transformation when engaging with quantitative work. Perhaps with that line of thinking, all of my research falls into the me-search category in that I am looking for ways to understand and improve my own educational practices and contributions. I want to learn from life both in and outside academic settings (Ropers-Huilman, 2008) while, hopefully, furthering our collective knowledge bases.

Susan K. Gardner

In my pre-tenure years at the University of Maine, I was the primary grant writer for a US \$3.3m National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE grant. The year in which we were funded for an institutional transformation project, meant to "produce large-scale comprehensive change and service as a *locus* for research on gender equity and institutional transformation for academic STEM" (National Science Foundation, 2016), was the first time

the expectation to produce a social science study on the project was put into place. As the Co-PI leading this part of the grant, it was my research that became not only the foundation for the grant proposal but also for the six years of studies following the proposal. In this way, my me-search was made manifest by studying my own place of employment, in great depth, for over a decade.

This is not to say, however, that I was new to me-search; my entire research agenda, up to that point in my career, was always focused on a topic I found near and dear to my heart or to my own identity. However, up until that point, none of my research had focused on my own institution as the *locus* of inquiry. Therefore, I entered into this grant and the resulting studies with naiveté and hubris. I truly believed that “research is research”. I believed that if one was able to extensively document and assure validity, it should not matter who does the study or the place at which the study is the conducted. Now, many years later, I see how these studies changed me while they even helped change the place in which I work.

The initial study that prompted the writing of the NSF ADVANCE proposal was a small qualitative study I conducted shortly after my arrival at the university. As a new faculty member there, I sought out the institutional research office and asked, as a higher education scholar, if they had any topics of interest that they were unable to study or with which they needed help. I told them I would be willing to offer my assistance in teaching courses focused on these topics or providing internships with my students. They mentioned the one issue that had repeatedly been brought to them was the attrition of women faculty members. They regretted they were understaffed and could not find the resources to pursue this. I wrote a small grant through the Women’s Studies Program and offered a summer course on the topic, hoping to train students to conduct qualitative research while in the act of doing it. When no students enrolled but access to information and human subjects’ approval had already been granted, I felt obliged to carry out the study. I commenced the study expecting to hear about the isolated location of the campus or the lack of competitive salary. What I learned from those 12 women, however, were stories of blatant sexual harassment, bullying and horrifying discrimination. I barely was able to make it through the study, when every interview I conducted made me rethink my new place of employment. Nevertheless, I persevered and began writing up the findings. I thought little about the cautionary phone call I received from another woman faculty member on campus who, upon hearing I was conducting the study, wondered why I would want to do such a thing. As I explained to her my study’s purpose and my impetus for conducting it, she invited me to meet with her and several other women faculty members who were considering applying for an ADVANCE grant.

The expectation of the women’s studies grant was that a presentation would be made after the project’s completion. I offered to do so about a month before my tenure application was due. The timing meant little to me. But as the flyers and emails went around the campus advertising the talk, I started receiving other phone calls and messages from concerned women faculty members whom I had never met. One remarked, “I really think you should reconsider doing this presentation after you get tenure”. Another blatantly remarked, “If you present this study you won’t get tenure”. I was in shock and, truthfully, disgusted. I thought to myself, “If I’m working at the kind of institution that wouldn’t tenure me just because I presented *research* they didn’t like then I don’t want to work here”. I went ahead and presented to a record-breaking 100 people that autumn day.

Fast-forward six years. I earned tenured and I did so one year early. That grant and the associated studies helped me earn promotion to professor five years later. I am appreciative of the opportunities it afforded me, but I admittedly wear the battle scars today. After surveying, interviewing and learning about the departmental climate of nearly every single

faculty member on my campus, I know way too much. I will pass Dr Harasser in the union and wonder why he is still working here after too many complaints filed against him. I sit in meetings with Dr Sexist and see he is working hard to deny the promotion of yet another woman faculty member in his department. I know many stories. I know where all the skeletons are buried. I still work here.

I still work here because I feel I can make a difference with my data. I worked with the other Co-PIs to create an internal advisory board made up of all academic deans, the provost, president, human resources and faculty senate at which those data are presented and policies are made and changed. We saw change occur on our campus, and I know that the stories of all those faculty members were heard. My me-search has helped to make my campus a better place, and I see my role as helping carve out a path for other scholars interested in doing the same. Has it always been easy? Absolutely not. On more than one occasion, I have considered leaving this place, due chiefly to the skeletons and the weight of holding in these stories. However, I truly believe that this me-search has made a difference and I helped that happen. The attrition rate of our women faculty has decreased, and I cannot imagine anything more fulfilling than that.

Conclusion

While the perspectives offered here vary in focus and in experience, what the reader will note are the common values and sentiments about what it means to be an education researcher in our eyes: passion, a desire to make a change and the impetus to be inclusive of different kinds of knowledge. While these values are not specific to qualitative research or to feminist inquiry, we see our commonalities in these shared tenets. Education is an applied field – it is much more so than many other disciplines. The connection between and applications of our research and making a difference is inherent in our accounts.

Also evident in our accounts are the themes of vulnerability, often predicated on one's position or status, situated within the context of the power relationships in the academy and in the institutions where we work and study. From the early considerations of me-search and the individuals' connection to the topic studied as graduate students through our tenured careers, our considerations of me-search and its impact upon us and those we studied changed. Similarly, many of us stated the impact that external stakeholders had upon our decisions to undertake me-search. More specifically, considerations of voices of anonymous external reviewers, those in position of power related to tenure bids, colleagues or the larger field, all held sway in our accounts of our decision to engage in me-search.

The critical reader at this juncture may nevertheless question the value of me-search. Certainly, all me-search is not "good" research. Just because it is about *me* does not make it publishable and valuable. Nevertheless, if one is able to frame the issue and need for the study in a larger literature and discussion of researchers, coming clean about who one is in relation to the topic studied and laying that out to the reader is an inherent part of any respectable study. All research is a human endeavor. What we study, how we study it, how we collect and interpret our data are all decisions shaped by who we are. Given the applied nature of education, in particular, and its need for relevancy, one must be particularly discerning and discriminating about what is self-indulgent and personal and what makes a true contribution.

All told, our narratives point to the rewards and the challenges in the conduct of what can be termed me-search, backyard research or, more generally, research related to one's identity or one's setting. Those who endeavor to conduct such research can learn from these accounts, most importantly considering one's positionality and the extent to which the findings from such research can make a difference.

Inherent in our discussions is the conflict between what has been termed objectivity and subjectivity. As many education research textbooks will point out to burgeoning scholars, a desire for objectivity or what two such textbook authors defined as “data collection and analysis procedures from which only one meaning or interpretation can be made” (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010, p. 489), can provide the foundation for this conflict. If students are taught that objective research is the pinnacle of education research and that subjectivity is aligned with “bias” (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010), then not only does embarking in me-search prove to provide inherent conflict for the education researcher, but so does qualitative research, in general. While the scholars above discussed their coming of age in the “paradigm wars”, it is important to point out that these wars continue to rage in many colleges of education today. In fact, just recently one of our students heard his statistics professor explain, “Any research question can be answered by statistics. There’s no need for qualitative research”.

For the scholar who attempts me-search, then, the tension is perhaps even more acute. Where does the line between subjectivity and objectivity begin and end? Where does the “self” begin and end in this process? Moreover, how does one provide a sufficient accounting of validity, reliability and credibility? While the qualitative research community has moved beyond these discussions to a great degree (see Merriam, 2009), it is, nevertheless, true that many who come to qualitative research may often approach it after being introduced to the quantitative paradigm first (Merriam, 2009). Suffice it to say, those who seek to publish me-search in more conventional outlets will also face these struggles in providing an explanation of one’s “subjectivity” or how the researcher was able to determine “validity”, not to mention the oft-occurring question and comment in peer reviews, “What percentage of participants did that represent” and “Your sample size is too small to be generalizable”.

Qualitative researchers often will seek to provide a full description of positionality or reflexivity (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). The me-searcher, however, will be challenged further in this process. Through the reflexive process, it is understood that the researcher will be clear in providing assumptions, worldviews, biases and relationships to the study material to allow the reader to make better sense of the findings (Merriam, 2009). At the same time, this process may still assume that the researcher is able to extract the “me” from the research and to provide a clear understanding of one’s values and expectations and their influence on the study (Maxwell, 2005). How does one extract the “me” in me-search to provide such a neat and tidy understanding for one’s audience? Does the research maintain credibility and integrity if the intentionally included “me” is removed? Is such a division truly possible in me-search? These are all important questions for the would-be me-searcher to consider carefully.

Similarly, the line between advocacy and research can also be a challenge when one conducts me-search (Ropers-Huilman and Taliaferro, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (2000, p. 201) discussed the tension inherent in paradigmatic differences as it relates to action or advocacy, where those aligned with the quantitative traditions may see action as “a form of contamination”, which ultimately undermines objectivity. Critical theorists and post-modernists, however, have often seen advocacy as an important part of social action and transformation. This tension has ultimately resulted in what Guba and Lincoln argued was the major controversy limiting dialogue among the different paradigmatic stances. As we have demonstrated, sharing participants’ experiences in their own words to provide an opportunity for social change is part of the feminist research stance that many of us have adopted, as well as a part of the values inherent in who we are as scholars. At the same time, how does a me-searcher separate her voice from the voice of those she studies? Again, to consider me-search, the researcher must consider: Where does the “me” end, and “research”

begin? Are these two concepts really mutually exclusive? Hill Collins (1986, p. 561) spoke about Black feminist scholars saying, "For Black women who are agents of knowledge, the marginality that accompanies outsider-within status can be the source of both frustration and creativity" – this point is also true of me-searchers.

Reinharz (1997, p. 5) forwarded that we do not only *bring* ourselves to the field of study but also *create* ourselves in the field. In particular, three selves come into play in the qualitative study: research-based selves; brought selves, or those created through historic, social and personal experiences; and situationally created selves. For the me-searcher, we might also add to the pantheon of selves the meta-self, one who is at the same time research-based, brought and situationally created. In other words, the road of the me-searcher is not an easy road to travel. Balancing or integrating all of these selves will require dexterity, alertness and commitment.

Taken together, our perspectives point to me-search that produces the most committed kind of research – research that is most likely to produce change. While educational researchers may often be taught to only engage in research to the extent to which one can be disengaged, it is also true that the knowledge produced and the individual(s) producing it are inseparable. In other words, we can only know what we can see. Conducting research from multiple perspectives – or from multiple selves, in the case of me-search – ultimately produces the strongest research. In turn, the personal insights gained from conducting me-search are both enlightening and intimidating but the rewards can also be countless.

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