

Empowering Methodologies in Organisational and Social Research

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Abstract

This chapter considers the meaning and practice of empowering methodologies in organizational and social research. We begin by explaining the reasons why empowering research is urgently needed, which are related to the repositivization of research in a context of global academic precarity. Next, we reflect on the situatedness of knowing and knowledge in the context of core periphery relations between the global North and South. We discuss the epistemological arguments on which empowering methodologies rely and the ethical and political purposes they serve, drawing on concepts developed by feminist epistemologists and methodologists. We then consider the sensory, affective, embodied practice of empowering research which involves listening, seeing, moving and feeling, which we suggest can facilitate a more diverse, creative and crafty repertoire of research possibilities. Finally, we identify three aspects of empowering research, showing how they relate to each of the chapters that comprise this volume.

Keywords Empowerment, decolonization, feminism, embodiment, qualitative research

Introduction

Empowering methodologies can be understood as an ethical stance that involves creating spaces for qualitative researchers to seek to equalize power differentials ‘in their relationship with research participants by paying attention to issues of voice, interpretation, interactions, dialogue, and reflexivity’ (Davis 2012, 261). A key premise of empowering methodologies is that people who are othered, oppressed or exploited in or through organizations and management are invited to participate in the production of knowledge about them. They are also entitled to expect that the research process will involve some form of reciprocally beneficial exchange, for example by enabling their lived concerns, fears or aspirations to be voiced in a way which enables them to be heard, including by those who occupy positions of powerⁱ. In addition to systematically developing methodologies that seek to challenge established inequalities, research empowerment relies upon an incremental practice of seeking out moments when traditional power imbalances between researchers and participants are disrupted (Ross 2017). To accomplish this, empowering methodologies draw on perspectives that engage with difference and seek to challenge oppression and inequality, including feminist (Lather 1991, 2007), critical (Alvesson and Deetz 2000), decolonial (Smith 2012) and participatory (Burns, Hyde, Killet, Poland and Gray 2014) research.

A key feature of empowering methodologies concerns their role in raising epistemological questions. For feminist methodologist, Patti Lather (1991), this is founded on examination of what it means to know, by considering ‘the textual staging of knowledge’ and seeking to avoid one’s ‘own authority from being reified’ (p. 84). Empowering methodologies thus involve embracing epistemological uncertainty through the realization that knowing is ‘uncertain endeavour... [which involves] dealing with an uncertain world’ (Morgan 1983, 386). In so doing, they acknowledge that there is no such thing as value-free knowledge and

allude to the inseparability of ethics and epistemology (Code 2020). Empowering methodologies thereby introduce axiological considerations related to the importance of values in producing knowledge through research. Specifically, they present a challenge to the notion of value-free science which ‘simply drives values underground’ (Lather 1991, 51). To enable these shifts, empowering methodologies call for reconsideration of the power relations embedded in social and organizational inquiry – for there can be no exploration of research empowerment without an understanding of power in research, including the power to silence or obscure from view.

Our commitment to empowering methodologies is prompted by concerns about the effects of colonising (Ibarra Colado 2006; Gobo 2011), Anglo-American, positivist (Üsdiken 2014; Grey 2010) and masculinised (Bell, Meriläinen, Tienari and Taylor 2020) practices of knowledge production in the field of organization studies. While much work has been done by qualitative researchers to critically and reflexively analyse research practice as a series of embodied, affective relationships, much mainstream research in our own field of organization studies remains assumes a positivist epistemology that studies what are presumed to be objective truths, awaiting discovery. This is contrasted with values, which are seen as ‘subjective, undermining the pursuit of truth and a potential source of bias or error’ (Hiles 2012, 53). These epistemological commitments invite transactional, rationalist and instrumental views of research relationships which make the kinds of engagements on which empowering research relies impossible.

Our collaboration since 2011 combines two distinct and different vantage pointsⁱⁱ. Emma has drawn on feminist, decolonial, new materialist and qualitative methodologies through which she has sought to rethink what it means to know as an organization studies researcher, and the

purposes and consequences of such knowing (Kothiyal, Bell and Clarke 2018; Bell, Kothiyal and Willmott 2017; Bell and Willmott 2020; Bell, Wray-Bliss and Winchester 2020). Sunita has traced the ways in which concepts from Western psychology have been imported into Indian management research with a disregard for indigenous alternatives. Through her work on Indian values, spiritualities and cultural traditions (see for example Sengupta 1990, 2009, 2013), she has sought to highlight the importance of concepts of Indian spirituality which British colonialism and Christianity attempted to destroy and appropriate ‘as sites of resistance for indigenous peoples’ (Smith 2012, 78). At the same time, we seek to acknowledge the tensions that arise from our situatedness – Sunita in India and Emma in the UK. Bi-cultural (Smith 2012) research partnerships involving researchers in the global South working with those in the North are subject to power relations in a context where connections, including ‘academic travel... patronage and sponsorship, publication and the formation of research networks... commonly centre on prominent figures in the metropole’ (Connell 2007, 218). The publication of this book in the *Routledge India Originals*ⁱⁱⁱ series is intended as a gesture whereby we have sought to situate our collaboration, and the knowledge it has fostered, in India and the global South to a greater extent than these dynamics encourage.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. We begin by explaining the reasons why we believe empowering research is urgently needed, related to the ‘repositivization’ (Lather 2007) of research in a context of global academic precarity (Kothiyal et al. 2018). Next, we reflect on the situatedness of knowing and knowledge in the context of core periphery relations between the global North and South. In the section that follows, we discuss the epistemological arguments on which empowering methodologies rely and the ethical and political purposes they serve. We draw in particular on concepts developed by the

feminist philosopher and epistemologist, Lorraine Code, including ‘ecological thinking’ (Code 2006) and ‘epistemic responsibility’ (Code 2020). We then consider the sensory, affective, embodied practice of empowering research which involves listening, seeing, moving and feeling, which we suggest can facilitate a more diverse, creative and crafty (Bell and Willmott 2020) repertoire of research possibilities^{iv}. Finally, we identify three aspects of empowering research, showing how they relate to each of the chapters that make up this volume.

Post-positivism and repositivization in organizational research

The assumption that knowledge can aspire to be value-free has been widely challenged by feminist, postcolonial, postmodern and critical scholars who refute the logic of scientific inquiry based on the epistemology and methodology of positivism. Consequently, some commentators argue that we are entering an era of post-positivism in the human sciences, including in management research (Prasad 2005) – a period in which the socially constituted, historically and culturally embedded and value-based nature of knowledge is recognized. Empowering methodologies are aligned with the ‘methodological and epistemological ferment’ that characterises ‘post-positivist’ human science (Lather 1991, 50). Post-positivism encourages experimentation with interactive, contextualized methods of study that are oriented towards co-constructing knowledge based on lived human experience.

Despite the ambition of the post-positivist turn, our own field of organisation studies has moved little in this direction. Rather, there has been a shift towards ‘repositivization’ (Lather 2007). While there is considerable interest and diversity in qualitative research in the management disciplines, including those ‘traditionally seen as founded on objectivity, ‘facts’, numbers and quantification’ (Cassell, Cunliffe and Grandy 2018, 2), the proportion of

qualitative research that is published in prestigious journals continues to be low and is growing very slowly. This has been accompanied by a growing standardisation of qualitative management research where creativity has been constrained and practices have become more homogenous and formulaic (Cassell 2016). There has also been a move towards neo-positivism in qualitative organizational research. This is indicated by practices that involve demonstrating the objective validity and reliability of analytical procedures, for example statistical, inter-rater reliability checks (Cornelissen, Gajewska-De Mattos, Piekkari and Welch 2012), counting occurrences, and the unreflexive use of terms such as 'bias' (Bell and Thorpe, 2013).

To understand the turn towards repositivization in organization studies requires consideration of the contexts where knowledge is produced – the neoliberal, globalized business school. Organisational researchers face increased pressure to conform to conservative, technocratic and isomorphic norms of what counts as 'good' empirical research, often framed within a positivist or neo-positivist paradigm (Bell et al. 2017). Precarious working conditions, intensification of research and teaching and prescriptive managerial regimes mean that early career researchers are tacitly or explicitly told that critical, qualitative research is too risky, likely to be viewed as insufficiently 'systematic' and hence less likely to be published or enable academic employment (Bristow, Robinson and Ratle 2017). Practices of 'othering' qualitative research(ers) are also situated in patriarchal and colonial cultures, which position qualitative research as feminized (Mir 2018). Significant detrimental, professional and personal effects can arise for researchers who are 'othered' as a consequence of their failure to comply with dominant methodological norms. Ann Cunliffe (2018) offers a passionate and moving account of the oppressive effects of scientism on her identity as a qualitative organisational researcher. Her imaginative, ethnographic narrative draws attention to the

political and ethical consequences of her career choices over a twenty year period in a context where ‘opportunities to be imaginative and write differently are diminishing’ (p.9). Related sentiments are also expressed by researchers at the start of their research careers. Ruth Weatherall (2018) describes how she felt estranged from the normative, scientific conventions of academic writing that framed her doctoral thesis, which distanced her emotionally and ethically from women who had experienced domestic violence and participated in her research. She urges consideration of the uneven power relationships that shape doctoral research writing and poses questions related to the kinds of researchers we want to become and who we are writing for.

The effects of uneven power relations on researcher identity are also reflected on by Rashedur Chowdhury (2017, 1111) in a discussion of the effects of his fieldwork encounters with traumatised victims and rescuers in the Rana Plaza garment factory collapse in 2013 which ‘killed and injured at least 1135 and 2500 people respectively’. Chowdhury describes how his ‘multiple identities’ as a Bangladeshi, who had lived for 15 years in the UK, shaped ‘what I think about myself, and how I am perceived by fellow academics’ (p. 1113). For Chowdhury, feelings of double-consciousness resulted when ‘Western society and academia... fails to take victims’ feelings seriously’. He questions whether ‘victims voices’ and their ‘lives, agony, and grievances’ ‘matter at all’ in conventional research (2017, 1113-1114). Chowdhury advocates a paradigm shift in research on marginalized actors that challenges ‘the narrow, orthodox way of publishing research’ and instead makes ‘use of oral history, literary theories, art work, and alternative philosophies’ (1115-1116). As these examples powerfully attest, researchers who refuse to comply with dominant positivist norms may be constituted as the ‘other’ who does not belong, contributing to feelings of personal and professional isolation.

Situated knowing

The contributors to this book share a concern about the need to decolonize social scientific knowledge production by translating postcolonial theory into empirical and methodological research practice. Postcolonial scholarship has done much to problematize the ontological and epistemological ground on which fields like organisation studies are based through the exposure of ‘epistemic coloniality’ and ‘violence’ (Ibarra Colado 2006; Spivak 1988).

Postcolonial critiques of social scientific knowledge production trace how methods and practices (that are assumed to be universal) were, and continue to be, exported from the global North to researchers in the global South (Alatas 2003; Gobo 2011; Bell and Kothiyal 2018). In the global South, research has been a ‘site of significant struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other’ (Smith 1992, 2). In considering the role of place and power in determining how knowledge is produced, Raewyn Connell (2007) traces the influence throughout the twentieth century of ‘urban and cultural centres of the major imperial powers’, which she refers to as the ‘metropole’ (p.9) in defining the classical sociological canon. She demonstrates how sociological knowledge is linked to the imperialist gaze through the feature of ‘bold abstraction’ that was developed through the comparative method. This rests ‘on one-way flow[s] of information, a capacity to examine a range of societies from the outside, and an ability to move freely from one society to another... features which all map the relation of colonial domination’ (Connell 2007, 12). Theories are thereby claimed to be universally relevant through relating to ‘social practices and human beings *in general*’ (p.34, emphasis in original). However, this assertion overlooks global inequalities in ‘scientific’ knowledge production that arise from European and North American imperialism. In addressing this, Connell draws attention to embodied practices of social science which she suggests may be

used to challenge as well as reinforce core-periphery relations of inequality between researchers.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests that even the term “research” is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism’ and continues, through globalization and new forms of imperialism, to shape how knowledge is produced (Smith 2012, 1). Smith’s work traces how ‘indigenous peoples’, who have been constituted as ‘other’ as a consequence of practices of colonization and imperialism, are objectified through research, denied a voice and subjected to the imposition of Western authority over their knowledge, languages and cultures. To begin to redress these inequalities required key cultural ideas, beliefs and theories on which modern social science relies to be problematized, including assumptions about the nature of behaviour as causal and predictable, the hierarchical positioning of humans above nature, ‘the imputing of a Western, psychological self... to group consciousness’ (p.77), and linear views of time.

Smith’s exploration of indigenous knowledges is not simply an addition to existing ways of knowing and producing knowledge, but a means of calling into question practices of knowledge production in the global North (Connell 2007). Decolonizing methodologies thereby seek ‘to ensure that research with indigenous peoples can be more respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful’ (Smith 2012, 9). This can be enabled by the use of research methods that bring to the fore and name indigenous cultural values and practices and treat them as integral to the methodology adopted. Emphasis is placed on the *process* of research, which is seen as equally or more important than the outcome. Value is also placed on “reporting back” to people and “sharing knowledge” [... based on] a principle of reciprocity and feedback’ (Smith, 2012, 16), as well as by disseminating research to wider audiences.

Empowering research can thus be understood as a practice that relies on ‘embodied alterity’, through which ‘we grapple with how we are both the same and different from others... experientially and intellectually’ (Cunliffe 2018, 17) and use this to acknowledge our ethical responsibilities to others. Crucially, by ‘being open to others’, including ‘different ways of thinking and acting... without trying to integrate them into monologic forms of theorizing’, it becomes possible ‘to disrupt the conventional Western philosophical discourse which privileges unity and sameness over alterity and difference’ (Dahl 2001, 28-29, cited in Cunliffe 2018, 18).

Epistemologies of responsibility

To understand how the diverse ambitions of empowering methodologies may begin to be realised, we turn here to the work of feminist philosopher, Lorraine Code (1987/2020, 2006, 2020) and feminist methodologist, Patti Lather (1991, 2007). Code (2006) argues that we need to move beyond humanistic, post-Enlightenment ‘epistemologies of mastery’ (p. 21) which are based on a ‘narrowly conceived standard of rationality, citizenship and morality’ that position and privilege ‘*man* at the centre of the universe’ (p.1, emphasis in original). Feminist and decolonizing epistemologies are also critical of the concept of the autonomous self-determining and self-actualizing self, which reflects a modernist, masculinist, Western ideal (Code, 2006; Smith, 2012). Code is critical of such reductionism in promoting hegemonic conceptions of knowledge and suppressing other ways of knowing, including indigenous and traditional knowledge. Code’s ‘ecological subject’ is ‘self-critically cognizant of being part of and specifically located within a social-physical world that constrains and enables human practices, where knowing and acting always generate consequences’ (Code 2006, 5).

Working with ‘a materially constituted and situated subjectivity for which place, embodied locatedness, and discursive interdependence are conditions for the very possibility of knowledge and action... ecological thinking... naturalizes feminist epistemology’s guiding question – “whose knowledge are we talking about?”’ (Code, 2006, 21). This stance problematizes the positioning of the researcher ‘as “the one who knows”’ (Lather, 2007, 11), in a move which Lather refers to as ‘getting lost’:

In postfoundational thought, as opposed to the more typical sort of mastery project, one epistemologically situates oneself as curious and unknowing. This is a methodology of “getting lost,” where we think against our own continued attachments to the philosophy of presence and consciousness that undergirds humanist theories of agency. (Lather, 2007, 9).

This radical uncertainty deeply troubles Enlightenment ideals of knowing and naming. It implies a different relationship between the researcher and the researched, characterised by reciprocity and implying ‘give and take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power’ (Lather, 1991, 57) as well as giving (something) back, including by enabling the voices of research participants to be heard. However, empowering methodologies must also problematize the concept of voice, which can give rise to the ‘romance of the speaking subject’ (Lather, 2007, 136). ‘From the perspective of the turn to epistemological indeterminism, voice is a reinscription of some unproblematic real. This is a refusal of the sort of realism that is a reverent literalness based on assumptions of truth as an adequation of thought to its object and language as a transparent medium of reflection. The move is, rather, to endorse complexity, partial truths, and multiple subjectivities’ (p.136). This enables displacement of

‘the human researcher/observer from her/his central position (and hence as key arbiter) in the interaction between the world of events and the processes of research (Fox and Alldred, 2015, 1.3).

These ideas call into question the emancipatory ideal of enhancing the autonomy of those who are subject to oppression as a basis for liberating them from heteronomy. Code (2006) focuses instead on ‘*practices of advocacy*’ as a basis for ‘*making knowledge possible*’ (p.165, emphasis in original). The purpose of these ‘liberatory practices’ is ‘to (re)enfranchise epistemologically disadvantaged, marginalized, disenfranchised Others’ by advocating ‘in favor of the significance, cogency, validity, credibility of another person’s testimony... [or that of] a group, institution, or society’ (p.165). The word ‘testimony’ is used by Code to signal the situatedness of claims to knowledge based on ‘*someone’s* speech act’ (p.172). To be effective, advocacy relies on ‘engaging in ongoing dialogue *with* the other... and for the other(s)... in places where they themselves may not be authorized, credentialed, confident enough to speak... or may otherwise require expert advocates’ (p. 176, emphasis in original).

Code proposes ecological thinking as a way of ‘remapping... epistemic and social-political terrains’ (2006, 4) by acknowledging the interconnectedness of the human and other-than-human world in scientific and secular projects of inquiry. Ecological thinking is based on situated knowledge, as ‘not just a place *from which to know*... indifferently available to anyone who chooses to stand there... [but as a] place to know whose intricacies have to be examined for how they shape both knowing subjects and the objects of knowledge... ’ (p. 40, emphasis in original). In recent work, Code returns to the notion of ‘epistemic responsibility’ (Code 1987), as the responsibility to know ‘carefully and well’ (Code (2020, 2). She asserts that this relies on consideration of ‘*who “we” think we are*’ (Code 2020, 2, emphasis in

original), and how we enact our place in the world. This requires unsettling ‘lived assumptions about freedom and entitlement in the twenty-first-century Western world’ (Code 2020, 2). Epistemic responsibility ‘incorporates responsiveness and recognition in engaging with people, places, practices, theories, things, and situations “on their own terms,” so far as this is possible’ (Code 2020, 3).

By rejecting epistemic individualism, in favour of epistemic responsibility, empowering methodologies seek to interrupt taken-for-granted understandings and ““make strange” what passes for natural in epistemic practices and in the people, places, events, social arrangements, and phenomena’ in ways which disrupt the status quo and ‘entrenched structures of power and privilege’ (Code 2006, 71). Rather than trying to secure claims by demonstrating mastery over method, and using this to produce an authoritative account that shows the researcher’s control over knowledge, research is understood as messy (Law 2004), based on risky practices that must be craftily made and remade in each and every situated context of inquiry (Lather 2007; Bell and Willmott 2020).

Doing empowering research: listening, seeing, moving and feeling

Empowering methodologies provide a basis for ‘generating and refining more interactive, contextualized methods in the search for pattern and meaning rather than prediction and control’ (Lather, 1991, 72). Moving beyond theoretical considerations of what is meant by empowering research, we consider here how to go about doing empowering research as a sensory, affective, embodied practice that relies upon listening, seeing, moving and feeling.

Soyini Madison’s (2018) practice of performance ethnography emphasizes the importance of listening as an ethical, affective, improvisational practice. It is through listening to one

another, she suggests, that co-dependence is enabled, giving rise to the possibility of hearing ‘soundings of otherness’ (Fischlin 2015, 294, cited in Madison 2018). This involves being in the present and paying attention with the whole body; ‘it is a profound sensory experience’ (p.33) that gives rise to ‘relational labour’ where ‘consciousness shifts from self in relation to group, to body in relation to body, to movement in relation to space and time, to past in relation to present, and to fragment in relation to developing whole’ (Foster 2015, 402, cited in Madison 2018, 32). Listening thereby offers a means of enabling a form of ‘respons(ability)’ that ‘unsettle[s] the expected’ by responding to ‘each moment [as] a potential surprise’ (2018, 32). As this indicates, improvisational practices play an important role in moving away from epistemologies of mastery and towards uncertainty and alterity. Listening is also crucial in moving away from practices which position the researcher as knowing and participants as known about.

However, listening is made more difficult because the performed, embodied identity of the ‘successful’ academic relies on demonstration of authoritative knowing in order to demonstrate proficiency as a cultural member of academic communities, including those that are labelled as critical (Bell and King 2010). The practice of listening therefore needs to be cultivated, through careful attentiveness and a spirit of openness.

Methods of narrative performance based on oral history and life story interviewing can provide a basis for transforming ‘personal stories and hidden histories into public events... exceed[ing] verifiable statements [and becoming] living testimonies of competence [enabled by] socially transmitted and embodied techniques’ (Madison 2018, 119-120). These methods make explicit the relationship between researchers as listeners, and interlocuters as tellers of stories about their lives. Whether such performances are public or made for specific

audiences, staged live or video recorded, scripted and rehearsed or highly improvised, involving trained actors or participants who tell their own stories, the point is that such enactments are based on ‘many hours of embodied labour and ethics’ (p.122).

Sensory, affective and embodied research practices may be supported by visual, including arts-based methods. Visual communication combines rationality with emotion through mimesis, in contrast to the dialogical qualities of written or spoken words which tell or explain rather than show something (Bell and Davison 2013). This can be especially important when working with participants who are marginalized or disadvantaged and in dealing with sensitive topics (Kothiyal et al. 2018; McCarthy and Muthury 2016; Bell and Kothiyal 2018). Visual methods include drawing, photography and video, as a means of encouraging ‘meaningful participation’ by providing a creative means for participant’s to use their voice in a way which raises awareness of and helps to readdress power inequalities (McCarthy and Muthury 2016, 16). Photographs can be used to invite consideration of the relations between the photographer, the photographed subject and the audience and provide a powerful means of relating to memory (Roberts 2011). Research in media and memory studies (Keightley 2017), management (Vince and Warren 2012) and sociology (Bolton, Pole and Mizen 2001) has demonstrated the value of visual methods in enhancing participants’ control over representations and meaning by involving them in taking photographs. Several of the chapter authors in this book explore the potential of visual methods as an empowering methodology.

Empowering research also draws attention to bodily movement in spaces and places. For example, the walking interview method, which has been used in health studies, anthropology and geography, is founded on the premise that what people say is shaped by the situation in

which they are located. Walking through landscapes and ‘chatting with participants’ can prompt them into making ‘connections to the surrounding environment and... [they may be] less likely to try and give the ‘right’ answer’ to questions that are asked (Evans and Jones 2011, 849). Similarly, ‘go-along’ interviewing involves researchers walking ‘with interviewees as they go about their daily routines, asking them questions along the way’, in a hybrid between participant observation and interviewing which is similar to the method of ‘shadowing’ but potentially enables greater movement between locations (Evans and Jones, 2011, 850). The emphasis is on participants guiding the researcher through the ‘real or virtual space’ within which they conduct their life (Garcia, Eisenberg, Frerich, Lechner and Lust 2012, 1395). This can help to ‘balance[e] the power dynamic inherent in research and thus encourage[e] a more collaborative approach (p. 1396). It may be particularly useful when engaging with economically and socially disadvantaged participants, such as migrant or street workers, who lack ownership of private space. In addition, walking interview methods emphasize the sensory experience of walking through time and space (Murray and Järviluoma 2019).

Doing empowering research thus relies on touch and feeling. The sense of touch, including the significance of what is experienced through the skin (Brewis and Williams 2019) and enabled by bodily encounters, including with non-living materials as well as other bodies, tends to be overlooked in research. The importance of touch extends beyond the haptic, and is related to our capacity for emotional feeling, including the affective relations that enable us to be touched ‘by what we are near’ (Ahmed 2010, 30). By emphasizing embodied, sensory practices of knowing which seek to transcend the limitations of language, empowering methodologies draw attention to the importance of affective encounters (Fox and Allred 2017) in enabling greater recognition of the politics and ethics of research. As this discussion

of the sensory, affective, embodied practice of empowering methodologies highlights, this approach to research relies upon messy, creative, imaginative, improvisational practices that facilitate engagement with the elusive, multiple and continually evolving realities we encounter (Law, 2004). Empowering methodologies are thereby understood as a relational engagement between participants, researchers and other living and inanimate matter through situated, embodied and affective encounters (Barad 2007; St. Pierre 2013; Fox and Aldred 2015, 2017).

However, while we have here drawn attention to the importance of methods in empowering research, we simultaneously seek to distance ourselves from the assumption that ‘better’ methods enable ‘better’, or more ‘real’, accounts of lived experience (Lather 2007). Use of any method must be tempered by a concern to avoid ‘methodology-as-technique’, where the practice of the method becomes fetishized and mastery or ‘methodolatry’ (Chamberlain 2000), as a demonstration of scientific rigor, becomes more important than the empirical story that is told (Bell et al. 2017). Empowering methodologies thus build on a commitment to gathering and respecting empirical evidence ‘while recognizing that evidence cannot speak for itself, but achieves its status *as* evidence’ (Code 2006, 47), or does not, depending on the social and power relations within which evidence is embedded.

Three aspects of empowering research

In this, the concluding section of our chapter, we outline three aspects of empowering methodologies that are connected to the chapters in this volume. The first aspect of empowering methodologies concerns their importance as an umbrella concept (Girei and Natukunda, this volume) which can be ‘used loosely to encompass and account for a set of diverse phenomena’ (Hirsch and Levin 1999, 200). This is similar to a ‘boundary object’ (Fox

2011, 71-73) that has the power to ‘speak’ to different audiences. By having ‘the capacity to be understood by actors in more than one setting’ empowering methodologies enable establishment of a ‘shared language’ that is able to be used by actors in different knowledge communities to challenge dominant, hegemonic research practices. The concept of empowering methodologies can be used to enhance translation of research ‘across culturally defined boundaries’ and ‘between communities of knowledge or practice’, including between practitioner and scholarly communities. In so doing, and like other related umbrella concepts such as ‘research-as-craft’ (Bell and Willmott 2020), empowering methodologies can be used to drive methodological pluralism and enable consideration of ethics and politics.

A second aspect of empowering methodologies that is explored in this book concerns the importance of reflexivity (Girei and Natukunda, Jagannathan and Packirisamy, Mitra, Sinclair, all this volume). As Morgan (1980, 373) citing Gadamer (1975) argues, ‘when we engage in research action, thought and interpretation, we are not simply involved in instrumental processes geared to the acquisition of knowledge but in processes through which we actually make and remake ourselves as human beings’. When researchers enter into fieldwork relationships they, as well as research participants, are exposed to the possibility of self-reflection and identity work, including as a consequence of forming new relationships or having one’s views, beliefs and ways of knowing called into question (Coffey 1999; Bell and Taylor 2014). Reflexivity offers ‘a way of foregrounding our moral and ethical responsibility for people and for the world around us’ (Cunliffe 2016, 741). This brings responsibilities to treat others as irreplaceable and not as a means to an end, and requires that we understand knowledge as intersubjectively constructed, by appreciating that we are never separate from others, and who and how we are is always experienced relationally, through our encounters with others (Cunliffe 2016).

A final aspect of empowering methodologies that characterises the contributions to this volume involves moving beyond method, as stylized, routinized and accepted ways of doing research (Abbott 1992). One of us has argued that preoccupation with method can encourage the fetishization of technique, or methodolatry (Bell et al. 2017), whereby the demonstration of recognized methods of data collection and analysis, according to predetermined quality standards, becomes more important than the process of doing research and the relational encounters this enables. ‘Methodology’ provides a more encompassing term (Mir 2018; Wolcott 1991). It acknowledges the ‘inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically, and contextually bound’ (Fontana and Frey 2005, 695) nature of research practices which are embedded in research communities that position them normatively as ‘the right way to do things’ (Abbott 1992, 13). As several contributors to this volume argue (Manning; Vijay), empowering research is characterised by ‘embodied locatedness’, as an alternative to the ‘stringent dictates of an exaggerated ideal of scientific knowledge making’ (Code 2006, 20). We now briefly summarise each of the chapters in turn.

Girei and Natukunda discuss their experience of doing research in Sub-Saharan Africa while navigating dilemmas linked to the legacy of colonisation and wider asymmetries that characterise South/North relations. By reflecting on identity, power and knowledge production and exploring how these dynamics shape the production of management knowledge in Africa, they propose two strategies to try to decolonise management knowledge and research. First, a move toward more open-ended approaches to doing research; and second, a commitment towards transforming participants’ role in the research process. These are intended as a means of shifting the positioning of researchers away from being seen as sources of data and towards becoming full partners in knowledge production and consumption.

Manning proposes decolonial feminist ethnography as an empowering, ethically engaged methodology that can address the complexities of the lived world and the complications of power in research to bring forward different worldviews, knowledges and lived experiences. She describes how she integrated decolonial feminist theory into a critical ethnography of marginalised, indigenous Maya women who work in backstrap weaving groups in rural, remote Highland communities in Guatemala. She argues that this practice can help to achieve epistemological decolonisation by enabling research that challenges inequality, power and politics, and recognises the intersections of voice, place and privilege. Manning asserts that this practice relies on dialogic, embodied performance through which power is shared and knowledge is produced together.

The chapter by Vijay reflects on the possibility of vulnerability as praxis in studies of social suffering. Drawing on research examining the community-based palliative care movement in Kerala, she discusses what it might mean to focus on vulnerability as an ethico-political imperative in the research process. Specifically, she explores how from a condition of vulnerability, it is possible to adopt three modes of praxis: 1) *vulnerability as susceptibility*, which allows openness to silence and challenges epistemic certitude, 2) *vulnerability as collective care*, which acknowledges the role of time and generousities, and 3) *vulnerability as learning to be affected by difference*, where one learns from the wounding and the unsettled habitations that arise over the course of fieldwork.

D'Cruz, Noronha, Chakraborty and Banday detail an empirical study that involved the use of drawings to study the lived experiences of bullied children from the Bhil community who work on cottonseed farms in India. They describe their use of the 'draw followed by talk'

technique to study the organizational phenomenon of workplace bullying. The authors' account reveals the utility of drawings in enabling children to share their lifeworld, which would otherwise have been extremely difficult to investigate. Through this participative research experience, the children felt at ease in sharing their experiences of work. This technique enabled the researchers to give voice to the children and place them at the centre of their research, rather than treating them as passive respondents. The chapter also highlights the practical issues as well as ethical issues involved in using drawings in research that involves children.

In the following chapter, Hornabrook, Clini and Keightley observe that researching memories of painful pasts poses particular methodological challenges. Their study of the articulation of memories of the 1947 Partition of British India, and associated processes of migration, therefore required a participant-centred approach. Creative methods have the potential to address difficulties in elicitation through participation and collaboration. The chapter presents a creative methodological approach that was developed in the Migrant Memory and Post-colonial Imagination project. They explore how cooking, sewing and photography can evoke memories, create opportunities for participants to approach feelings of belonging, discrimination, and marginalisation in oblique ways, and provide safe spaces for their articulation. The authors argue that creative methods provide spaces for collaborative and nuanced understandings of the role memory plays in community and belonging in South Asian diasporic communities.

The focus on visual methods developed in the previous two chapters is continued by Patel and McCarthy who discuss their use of visual participatory research methods. Reflecting on a case study into corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Gujarat, India, they show how

women and men's experiences of CSR, their meaning-making, and relationships within patriarchal, caste-based systems can be surfaced through freehand, participant-led drawing. They suggest that drawing, alongside verbal reflection, can play an important role in beginning the challenging, yet ethically imperative process of empowering research. Yet these processes are complicated by our own standpoints as researchers, as cultural 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and by 'being' women in the data generation process.

An intensely reflexive turn is taken in the final three chapters of the book, starting with Jagannathan and Packirisamy, who present their autoethnographic narratives of becoming a mother and a father while working as academics. By focusing on personal experiences as an epistemic resource, they outline strategies for using autoethnographic sensibility as a methodological framework. Through their autoethnographic accounts of mother/fatherhood and academic work, they show how this research strategy can yield important personal insights connected to ethical knowledge and confronting the ideological normalisation of inequality.

Mishra's chapter analyses her experiences as an ethnographic researcher studying the lived experiences of women workers employed in a government food entitlement program in India. The ethnographic fieldwork took place in Odisha State, India, and involved communities in 64 villages. Drawing upon feminist methodologies she reflects on the fluid relationships between herself as a researcher and the women participants and explores how researcher-participant relationships are continuously shaped and re-shaped by the field-site, and the sites within herself. She argues that honesty, humaneness and humility in the field are more important than collecting data. She contends that qualitative researchers should keep a

flexible approach and allow participants to influence the researcher's position in ways which make the research process dynamic and empowering for both.

Finally, Sinclair charts her journey as a researcher, particularly her work exploring women and leadership. Through personal stories and reflections, she maps her efforts to firstly do, then write, and finally, be, in research, differently. She shows how she felt excluded, and then wanted to differentiate herself from, what she has increasingly come to see as gendered, often oppressive, understandings of the templates, processes and purposes of 'good' research. Sinclair's teachers in learning to do and write research differently have been research participants, colleagues, students and readers, as well as feminist and critical writers, each challenging her to rethink who and how she wants to be as a researcher.

The distinctiveness of the chapters in this book arises from the connections made by the contributors, between epistemology, ontology and axiology, and methodologies and methods in doing empowering research. Taken together, the chapters expand the limits of possibility in organisational and social scientific research and enable a move away from epistemologies of mastery (Code 2006), and towards an epistemology of greater uncertainty (Snitow 2015; Bell and Taylor 2014) and alterity (Cunliffe 2016). This is enabled by discussion of the significance of empowering research in contexts of their own research practice, including by providing self-reflexive accounts of research projects and collaborations. Crucially, the emphasis is on exploring the messy nature of empowering research and acknowledging that it is likely to be impossible to achieve complete empowerment, whilst emphasising the political and ethical importance of seeking to do so.

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ⁱ It could be argued that the term 'emancipation' might be preferable to 'empowerment' as a way of describing management research that seeks to challenge cultural and linguistic conventions to which people are subordinated through the 'acts of powerful agents... for the benefit of certain sectional interests at the expense of others' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: 9). However, while empowering research is also concerned with identifying and analysing the 'causes of powerlessness... [and] systemic oppressive forces', Lather argues that critical intellectuals who focus on emancipation are in danger of assuming a 'vanguard role' characterised by 'crusading rhetoric' through being 'stuck in a framework... [that] sees the "other" as the problem for which they are the solution' (Lather, 1992: 131-132). As this critique highlights, 'espousing an emancipatory model of research has not of itself freed researchers from exercising intellectual arrogance or employing evangelical and paternalistic practices' (Smith, 2012: 180). While the concept of empowerment is also open to this possibility, we use it here to signal a need to strike a balance between *a priori* theory that informs the value of emancipation against the need to be 'respectful of, the experiences of people in their daily lives' and resist the 'dangers of imposing researcher definitions on [an] inquiry' (Lather, 1991: 54, 78).

ⁱⁱ This was enabled by funding from UK-India Education Research Initiative (UKIERI) Exchange 'Building international capacity in management research' and Research Project 'Developing Empowering Methodologies in Management Research', UGC 17-18-10.

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://www.routledge.com/collections/7648> [Accessed 10.04.19]

^{iv} Similar calls have been made in sociology, where it has been argued that there is a need for 'live methods' which are more 'artful and crafty' (Back and Puwar, 2012: 9).