

Michael Ramirez
Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi, U.S.A.

"I'm Not a Musician, But...": Negotiating the Research Process in Examining the Lives of Musicians

Abstract Identity politics have been of considerable interest to the qualitative research tradition as researchers have speculated on the extent to which identity and positionality matter in the field. In this autoethnography, I analyze private writings I composed while studying musicians' life course trajectories in musical careers, paying particular attention to the methodological implications of my fieldwork decisions. I concentrate on: 1) issues of access, 2) identity politics, and 3) the ethics of relationships in the field. I analyze the extent to which I negotiated several (sometimes conflicting) ways I presented my identity in different settings and among different populations. My presentation of self-strategies – sometimes intentional, other times haphazard – allowed me successful entrée to the music world, though I remained an outsider within. I conclude with methodological implications highlighting the ways researchers' identities may influence the research process and suggestions for qualitative researchers to consider in future studies.

Keywords Autoethnography; Reflexivity; Identity Politics; Researcher Identity; Insider–Outsider; Research Relationships; Positionality

Qualitative researchers have long struggled with the methodological and ethical implications of entering the field to gather data on people's lives. Of considerable interest is the extent to which the "politics of identity and differences pose considerable challenges for the practice of sociological research"

Michael Ramirez is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Coordinator of the Women's and Gender Studies Program at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi. He teaches courses on gender, work, the life course, and film. His research interests include gender, the life course, and identity.

email address: michael.ramirez@tamucc.edu

(McCorkel and Myers 2003:199). The ascribed statuses with which we enter the field influence our presence and shape relationships we cultivate in the field. Our identity negotiations, whether intentional or not, have consequences to the worlds we study (Sjöstedt Landén 2011; Couture, Zaidi, and Maticka-Tyndale 2012; Day 2012; Razon and Ross 2012). Challenges may emerge when researchers study individuals who differ from them in obvious and subtle ways (Berger 2001; McCorkel and Myers 2003). Contemporary qualitative researchers generally acknowledge their identities vis-à-vis their research participants, but some are forced to more deeply consider these issues upon hitting particular stumbling blocks in the field. Haney (1996), for instance, recounts:

I never knew how my "long line of adjectives" affected me in the field. My position was quite situational and variable...Identity is not a static phenomenon. It changes with context; some contexts draw out certain aspects of our "selves" and mute others. Because of this flexibility, I found it difficult to locate myself socially in my work. [p. 776]

Such was the challenge I faced as I began collecting data for a life course study of women and men pursuing musical careers in a local music scene. Throughout my project, I kept a few journals – some research oriented, others more personal – in which I documented and reflected on issues I encountered. Journals are "a form of intimate confessional; they are the space to say what cannot be said out loud" (Harvey 2011:675). I found mine to also be therapeutic, allowing me to document and explore ambivalence that otherwise would have been fleeting and unexamined.

I'm Not a Musician

In this larger project from which this piece stems, I was investigating the life course pathways of men and women pursuing careers in rock music. My data collection was comprised of 38 one-on-one interviews with musicians in a college music town. I initially gave little thought to the extent to which my identity would impact my data collection, though experiences in the field would prompt me to consider identity issues later.

In "Flirting With Boundaries," Buford May (2003) questions how his identity may compromise his research on the party scene in Athens, Georgia. Once I began interviewing musicians in the same locale,

I began wondering the same about myself. Because I am not a musician, am I too much of an outsider? And if so, will I not get or be able to develop rapport, much less gain access to the music world? In this paper, equal parts autoethnography and reflexive response on the research process, I analyze my research journals, personal journals, and other writings I composed while collecting data on musicians' life course trajectories. I find that in conducting this research project, I have negotiated several (sometimes conflicting) ways I present my identity in different settings and among different populations. These presentations of self strategies – sometimes intentional, other times haphazard – had consequences to my recruitment of, developing rapport with, and getting an "in" with research participants. Ultimately, what lessons can be culled from my experience to understand the muddy interplay of identity, access, and relationships in the research process?

I'm Not a Musician, But I Am an Autoethnographer

Autoethnography is a methodological tool of self study "that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis and Bochner 2000:738). Its emergence has contributed significant insight to understandings of qualitative paradigms, particularly in terms of methodology and ethics. First, autoethnography situates the self in the world (Spry 2001; Arnold 2006; Holmes 2010). Historically, "researchers briefly acknowledge crude aspects of their identities (such as race, class, and gender) without explicating how their data, analyses, and conclusions were shaped by their

positionality" (McCorkel and Myers 2003:200). In contrast, the entirety of the autoethnographic research process – from data collection to analysis to writing – eyes the connection of the personal to the social (Ellis 2004). Gone are the days in which "the 'I' usually disappeared after the introduction and then reappeared abruptly in the conclusion" (Ellis and Bochner 2000:734). More than simply inserting the self into the writing and analysis, it is a method that "critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts" (Spry 2001:710).

Second, autoethnography, as a genre, is aligned with postmodern epistemological assumptions regarding the multiplicity of truths (Reed-Danahay 1997; Adler and Adler 2012). It "resists Grand Theorizing and the façade of objective research that decontextualizes subjects and searches for singular truth" (Spry 2001:710). Autoethnographers can never reach the "objectivity" so clearly valued in positivist paradigms, yet can instead stake claims of authority via the deeply personal and detailed nature of using the researcher as a tool of the research.

Third, autoethnography is a conduit for the discovery of truths unattainable through other methods (Arnold 2006). It "takes us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to" (Behar 1997:14). It is a method of accidental discoveries. While many researchers often do not know where they are going at the onset of their projects, such unintended sidetracks into new directions are often more typical for the autoethnographer (Berger 2001).

Fourth, some have suggested that autoethnographies strive for dialogue in place of definitive an-

swers (Ellis and Bochner 2000). Uncertainty is uncomfortable, and autoethnography revels in that space. It is perhaps the most human method in the social sciences as it is enveloped in the human condition of uncertainty and ambivalence. It is in these spaces that discoveries are made, connections are forged, and larger questions of social life are illuminated. Intimately connected to Mills' treatise from so long ago, autoethnography "turn[s] the eye of the sociological imagination back on the ethnographer" (Ticineto Clough 2000:179).

Gaining Access

I'm Not a Musician, But I Was in the Past

Gaining access to participants' lives and worlds can be a precarious situation in qualitative studies (Brooks 2006; Mikecz 2012; Razon and Ross 2012). I, myself, often felt I was stumbling into this project or, as Kaplan Daniels (1999) terms it, "tripping" through the field. My tripping, however, was at times unintentionally eased – at times even turned into a graceful entrance into the music world – due to my identity. For instance, either during my initial contact with the musicians or during the interviews themselves, musicians would inevitably ask if I was a musician myself. I told them that although I did perform in bands in the past and still play music on my own purely for leisure, I did not consider myself to be a "real" musician. Other times musicians would assume I was a musician, such as the night I met Warren:

[w]e talked for a while and introduced ourselves to each other. Then Warren asked it, the question I often get:

"What band are you in?" I laughed and said I wasn't in one, unfortunately. He said he recognized me. He said he did [an Internet] search for my band, but couldn't find it. [Research Journal, Entry May 10, 2006]

My history with music benefitted me in numerous ways. A number of the musicians with whom I spoke would engage in "gear talk" with me – and I was (mostly) able to follow along, understanding most, but not all, of what they mentioned regarding equipment, recording, production, songwriting, and/or music theory. Others have suggested insider knowledge to be key to successfully interviewing those with elite status in particular (Holmes 2010; Mikecz 2012). My knowledge, though limited, of music culture, norms, and values proved to be an asset to securing access to this population with elite cultural status. One's personal biography, particularly where one originates from, is important to gaining access (Razon and Ross 2012). Similarly, where I originated from *musically* was equally important in this study. My history and familiarity with music – both my limited experience of performing in bands, as well as the general lexicon of the world – made me "enough" of an insider in the musicians' perspective, thus allowing me entrée to their lives. These issues – shared language, knowledge, and musical history – collectively enabled building rapport with my participants (Egeberg Holmgren 2011). I felt both like an insider – in that I was often mistaken for a musician – but also an impostor – again, because I was mistaken for a musician.

I'm Not a Musician, But I Do Know the Local Scene

I attempted to establish myself as an insider to the music scene, not as a musician, as was often

assumed by those I interviewed, but instead primarily as a fan. I made sure to demonstrate my familiarity with local bands. When it was true, I would tell the musicians that I had seen their bands perform or had purchased their music. During this time, I was affiliated with the Women's Studies Institute on campus. While planning the annual Take Back the Night events, the coordinators asked for my suggestions as to which local musicians would be a good fit for the pre-March festivities. The two musicians I suggested (both of whom I was not personally acquainted) readily agreed to participate in the event. On the day of the event, I hoped to meet the musicians. As one of the musicians was packing up her gear after the event, I approached her:

I walked towards her. She saw me and I waved. She smiled. I said, "You don't know me, but I wanted to introduce myself and tell you how much I love your music." And she said, "I do know you. I recognize you from the Internet." [Research Journal, Entry March 20, 2006]

I would inform musicians from the start that I was a free-lance music writer whose work was often published in a local newsweekly. I wrote album reviews and features on local music for the publication. In my recruitment emails to the musicians via their band websites, I would send them links to my work (archived on the newsweekly website where the above musician presumably "recognized" me). By doing so, I was attempting to establish an insider identity, not "just an academic" interested in studying them from the outside. This strategy was successful in most cases as the musicians were able

to read my work and perhaps read *me* as knowledgeable and/or trustworthy. My position was thus elevated to that of a partial insider; I was not a musician, but an acknowledged peripheral member of their world (Adler and Adler 2012).

I'm Not a Musician, But I (Apparently) Look Like One

Unintentional aspects of my identity perhaps led musicians to grant my access to their world. My everyday clothing looked youthful, I suppose. My hair, while conducting this project, was grown out. I felt comfortable in this identity; it was not a personal front I assembled to strategically pass as one of them. But, perhaps my appearance led them to assume I was young and/or a musician myself. When I was scheduled to interview a musician on teaching days, I would bring a change of clothes and switch my outfit in my car. I could have shown up in my "teaching clothes," but opted to present a different version of myself during the interview. Women researchers have constraints of presentation of self-strategies, often compelled to dress conservatively and/or professionally to be "taken seriously" and to minimize harassment (Gailey and Prohaska 2011). Due to the population I was studying, as well as my gender privilege, I could and typically did use a contrary strategy of presenting myself less formally to gain access.

My perceived identity resulted from hasty decisions at the time, and it was not until reflecting on the research process that I fully understood the consequences of them. My entrée to the music world was messy, but eased through multiple

and cumulative aspects of my identity. The symbolic power of my appearance and personal front came to light during my data collection (Goffman 1959; Day 2012). Other researchers have suggested a personal experience or insider knowledge of the topic of investigation as a key conduit to entering those worlds as a researcher (Holmes 2010; Egeberg Holmgren 2011; Mikecz 2012). Such similarities between the musicians and myself allowed me to successfully avoid the "visitor status" that would have permanently marked me as an outsider (Sjöstedt Landén 2011).

Identity Politics

I'm Not a Musician, But I'm Making Assumptions About Them

Men and Shared Masculinities

In many cases, my gender identity benefited my recruitment of participants of both sexes. With men, we typically felt an instant connection with one another due to overt or subtle issues of masculinity. To take one of many examples, when I contacted three men in a hardcore band for interviews through their website, Ben immediately responded and asked me to call him that evening. Due to a slight conflict in my personal life, I was not able to do so until the following afternoon:

Desiree and I had to work through some stuff last night, and by the time we [were done], it was just after midnight. I didn't want to risk waking Ben up, so I didn't call him until around noon today. And the call went great. I started by apologizing for not calling

last night. "No big deal," he assured me. Then I said, "My girlfriend and I got in a fight last night and had to work through some stuff." He replied something like, "I know what you mean. I've been there **many, many** times." [Research Journal, Entry April 27, 2006]

After this, it seemed like we had a bit of a connection. He opened up, told me about his post-college plans, made some references to his dating life, and just seemed to divulge more about himself, perhaps since I disclosed some aspects of myself first. We engaged in a mutual gender performance with one another, demonstrating our shared participation in gender scripts in romantic relationships (Sallee and Harris III 2011). Rapport was built immediately and easily after this exchange, and due at least partially to our gendered conversation (Pini 2005; Egeberg Holmgren 2011). Other times masculinity emerged in troubling ways. It was the rare musician who personified a misogynistic masculinity hostile towards women. Such was the case after one particularly disconcerting interview with a guitarist:

I have to say that he responded to some of [the interview questions] in pretty sexist ways. Calling feminism "nonsense" and referring to his women bosses as "girls" and women musicians as "bitches." Not good. [Research Journal, Entry March 16, 2005]

This particular musician later told me he frequently plays up his masculinity on stage with his band. The interview may have been just another gender performance, albeit in a private context.

Men often connect through the conduit of consuming alcohol, and my interactions with some men

proved no different (West 2001). A number of the men I interviewed suggested we meet for a drink before (or sometimes during) the interview, which provided a few advantages. First, the interviews become more of a natural "bar conversation" than a formal data collection between two strangers straddling a tape recorder between them. Alcohol thus assisted in making the interview a more open-ended conversation between us. Second, it created a bond – albeit a temporary one – between the men and I. That is to say, it may have been a way for me to demonstrate a normative masculinity with the men I was interviewing. Such was the case after a particularly long day with back-to-back interviews, the second of which I was tempted to reschedule since I was feeling ill:

[s]o we started the interview and I still felt like shit. I didn't even want a beer (I already had 2 earlier with Sam), but ordered one anyway. I was nursing that thing slowly and thought I wouldn't even finish it. But, maybe since he was drinking so fast, I felt obligated to finish mine too. And order another one every time he did. God, this was me trying to be a dude. [Research Journal, Entry May 19, 2006]

My unintentional tactic of bonding with men through masculine pursuits is relatively common, as other men researchers have suggested creating a connection with men participants via friendship norms (Brooks 2006). Although I did not specifically include questions about quintessential male vices – drinking, drugging, and women – in my interview schedule, they inevitably surfaced in interviews. Many men immediately felt comfortable enough to disclose personal information regarding such masculine topics –

their increased comfort presumably arising from our shared gender identities. Though a majority of the men I interviewed were not coarse in their discussions of women or sex, they did comfortably broach these topics with me, their male interviewer (Sallee and Harris III 2011). Our shared gender identities likely contributed to their being forthcoming with me (Couture, Zaidi, and Maticka-Tyndale 2012).

Women and (My) Sexism

As for my interactions to women musicians, I discovered that I sometimes worked from gendered assumptions to forge connections with them. I realized this only after comparing my behavior with women to my behavior with men and distinguishing three key differences. First, I noticed my claiming a feminist identity was inconsistent throughout my data collection. After the first few interviews with musicians, I realized I was making assumptions about gender and feminism. In interviews with men, even those who claimed a feminist identity, I rarely disclosed my being feminist. In contrast, during my first interview with a woman musician, I spontaneously took a different approach, disclosing my feminist identity and history in Women's Studies. This "micro choice," my seemingly meaningless decision to discuss my feminism, had "macro consequences" in derailing the interview for several minutes (Razon and Ross 2012:496). My being upfront with women – something I thought would benefit the interviews – backfired. Thus, I stumbled upon a new predicament:

[m]y dilemma now is: Should I hide this, or at least not announce it, during my future interviews? Initially,

I was thinking about how researchers say you should share details of your life with those you interview. Give them some of you, just as they give themselves to me. But, now I'm not so sure. Would it have been better had [she] not known I was in Women's Studies? Could I have probed more if we hadn't hit that bump? Did this leave a bad taste in her mouth? And I suppose I incorrectly assumed that hearing I was in Women's Studies would help ease her into the discussion of feminism. But, maybe that's due to some of my sexism, my thinking that women will feel comfortable upon learning of my feminist leanings. And now that I think about it, maybe I was more upfront about this **because** she is a woman. She's the first woman I've interviewed. Did I release this info because she is a woman? [Research Journal, Entry November 12, 2005]

Like other researchers in similar predicaments, I was "faced with the dilemma of sorting through identity commitments and facing the consequences I make" (Razon and Ross 2012:498). I tend to think of myself as quite anti-sexist in most aspects of my life. This predicament was a wake-up call that I am still working through some of my sexism and gender stereotypes, namely, my assumptions that most women favor pro-feminist men.

Second, in some cases, not only did I present my identity differently to women but I also behaved differently in front of some of them. For example, I was scheduled to interview a woman at her band's practice space after their rehearsal one night. I arrived as the band was packing up their instruments and gear. I made small talk with the entire band, three of whom I had interviewed previously and was thus already acquainted:

I made a dumb joke about the weather turning cold. [A male band mate] called me a pussy. And thinking about my response led me to an interesting observation. Because [two women] were there, I made sure to not use the word "pussy" in return. I could have schooled him on the etymology of the term "pussy." ... Or, I could have called [him] a pussy in return, referencing the "unmasculine" stories he told me during his interview. But, at the time, I thought it was best not to use the word "pussy." Why not, you ask. Because my instinct was that it would have offended the two women present. Honestly, had they not been present, I probably would have hurled the word "pussy" back at [him]. What's even stranger to think about is the extent to which this decision of mine mirrors what the guys in [the band] said about being in a band with women. They said that they are "more polite" in front of them. Fewer inappropriate comments and "nicer" criticisms. It looks like I was doing the same. And I feel like a bad feminist for doing so. [Research Journal, Entry November 16, 2005]

Other autoethnographers, such as Sallee and Harris III (2011), have illustrated sanctions that emerge when gender norms are violated, but I found myself in the double bind of potential sanctions based on my verbal (non)reaction. Were I to participate in the sexist lingual interplay, I ran the risk of being seen as chauvinistic by women. Were I to alternatively opt out of that exchange, I could be seen as "not masculine enough" by men. My non-response spoke volumes to me about my sexism and gendered assumptions.

Third, I realized how intimidated I was by many musicians throughout my recruitment and inter-

views. Early on, I thought I was more intimidated by men musicians, repeatedly recognizing the words "apprehension" and "intimidation" in describing my recruitment attempts in my journal. I initially thought this was another component of my sexism rearing its ugly head – I was only intimidated by men musicians. But, upon deeper analysis of my writings, I found my intimidation to be more complex. Before interviewing a band comprised of two women and three men, I wrote the following in my journal:

I have to admit that I am intimidated by them. I don't know why, exactly, that is. It may have to do with the following: Jade seems so confident, so self-assured. This air, whether intentional or not, made me apprehensive to first approach them. I mean, I'm just interested in doing my silly little study. I'm sure these cool rock stars have much better ways to spend their time. Maybe they seem so confident because I feel so full of doubt about how well I'll be able to pull this off. [Research Journal, Entry November 6, 2005]

As it turned out, I was actually intimidated by nearly all musicians, not just the men, as I initially presumed. My hesitation, apprehension, and anxiety stemmed from their having so much status in this town. Everyone knows them. Everyone loves them. As many researchers have experienced themselves, I too was "studying up," although the status difference reflected a different dimension with which others typically contend (McCorkel and Myers 2003; Day 2012; Mikecz 2012; Razon and Ross 2012). I may have been in a position of higher social class status than the musicians, due to my educational background, but the dimension of our

identities that was more central to the musical setting in which I was entering centered on social status in their subculture. The musicians were local celebrities, and their cultural status far outweighed any class status I may have had. I often felt it were the musicians themselves who held the power in our interactions, as they were an inaccessible population due to their local fame. This power divide was never explicitly stated, much less exploited by the musicians, but there was an unspoken assumption that they had significant control over my access to them.

Social Class

I concluded my interviews by asking basic demographic questions, and found a majority of the musicians came from middle class families. A few, however, identified as working class. One drummer I interviewed was particularly working class. On the day of our interview, he asked me to meet him at his workplace. Upon my arrival, he suggested to drive us to a café:

[o]n the way to his car, he begins chatting it up about, of all things, guns. He goes on about how he sold some rifle or gun of his yesterday for 600 bucks. He tells me he likes to hunt... It's been just over 4 minutes since I've met him and I feel like this will not be a good interview, like he won't like my questions, and I won't like him. We get in his car and we're off... It's then that I notice his big, black, worn-out leather boots. I, for some reason, can't keep my eyes off them. I feel like they will come to represent everything about him – dead animals, tough, dark, worn, and manly. [Research Journal, Entry March 14, 2006]

My assumptions were correct, to some degree. In his car, he talked about the many coyotes he has killed on his property, and subsequently detailed his history of gun ownership. The gun talk was followed by car talk. I was not looking forward to this interview. But, once we arrived at the café and began the interview, I soon realized his interview was one of the best I had conducted. I later felt guilty about my initial apprehension towards him:

I have to say that this interview was **amazing**. He is a great storyteller... He sees a lot of social class issues in music in Athens. And hearing him discuss class, I wonder if that has something to do with my initial apprehension towards him. Was I turned off by him at first because of his working class identity? The guns, the hunting, his obsession with cars, his leather boots? Maybe so... This was a surprisingly excellent interview. He opened my eyes to some assumptions I have been making about music, genre, and inadvertently, class. [Research Journal, Entry March 14, 2006]

Other researchers have reflected on the "uneasy moments when I realized how ethnocentric and class biased my approach to the world could be" (Kaplan Daniels 1999:178). Such was the case for me. My pre-interview banter with this musician turned me off and gave me signal regarding my classism. Guns, boots, and muscle cars were indicative of a particular identity and ideology in my mind. When his identity proved more complex than my expectations, not only was I thrown off but I was also confronted with the class markers I was reading and why. He was in many ways quite the heteronormative, idyllic "man's man," but was simultaneously thoughtful, sincere, and emotion-

al. These aspects troubled not only constructions of hegemonic masculinity but also confronted my understandings of how I read people via their identity props.

Cultivating Relationships in the Field

I'm Not a Musician, But We're Going to Be Friends

Early on in my data collection, the interviews went swimmingly. Recruiting musicians was not nearly as difficult as I imagined it would have been. The interviews themselves were enjoyable:

I love hearing their stories. I love getting the inside scoop on their music, their band mates, their songwriting. I feel like I'm holding 10,000 secrets of theirs. And I feel a connection to a number of them. I feel like, in another life, or who knows, maybe this one, we could be friends. I wonder, should I try to get friendly with the musicians? Or, should I take the advice of [rock journalist] Lester Bangs – "Don't become friends with the rock stars." Will it be harder to write about them, analyze them critically, if I become "friends" with them? Will I become a rat, a betrayer, once I write about them? [Personal Journal, Entry November 16, 2005]

It was fairly easy to get the musicians to open up about their lives. Many were schooled in the interview format (albeit for the music press), and were approachable and candid in their conversations with me. I also wondered whether I would be seen as a journalist, as someone with an agenda who was not to be trusted. Trust is a delicate issue. For whatever reason, the bands granted me theirs, perhaps

due to my familiarity with their music, my self-description of myself as a fan, or my being a music writer. And with trust comes many consequences: the potential for connection and friendship, the pressure to portray participants in a positive light, and the steadfast pressure to get the story "right."

After several interviews and some time in the field, my position as a partial insider was secured. Many of the musicians I had interviewed knew me by name, recognized me in public, and maintained contact with me long after the interviews passed. My acquaintanceship blurred into friendship with some of them:

Last night was so much fun. [A band I interviewed] was playing at the 40 Watt. So, Desiree and I went to the show. The coolest thing about last night was that I saw a lot of musicians that I've interviewed over the past few weeks – and they treated me as a friend. They came up to me, shook hands, and chatted for a while. I felt like I was one of them... Later, Emily [approached me] and we talked. She said something along the lines of her being glad that we were friends because she has a hard time making friends. I find that hard to believe, but am ecstatic she considers us friends. [Research Journal, Entry May 28, 2006]

In many ways, the development of a friendship with Emily was natural. Growing numbers of contemporary researchers advise us to intentionally forge connections with respondents (Lincoln 1995; Brooks 2006; Day 2012). Brooks insists "it is no longer acceptable for researchers to slink away in the night with collected data" (2006:197). Furthermore, if, as Rawlins suggests, friendship is defined as "somebody

to talk to, to depend on, and rely on for help, support, and caring, and to have fun and enjoy doing things with" (1992:271), then it follows that research participants can – and in some contexts and studies perhaps *should* – be friends. Friendship as method is precisely what Tillmann-Healy (2003) suggests. Both friendship and the long-term research interactions can often be characterized not only by disclosure but also "everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability" (Tillman-Healy 2003:734). I felt that the stakes became higher upon growing closer to the musicians. I desperately wanted them to feel like I "got the story right" in my analysis. These feelings ultimately forced me to be more precise in my interpretation and representation of the musicians in my study, in a sense, augmenting rigor to my work.

Conclusion

I'm Not a Musician, But What Does it Matter?

In this article, I have surveyed my personal journal writings to better understand recurring dilemmas with which qualitative researchers often contend during the research process. By analyzing my private writings, I have tried to make sense of and develop strategies for other qualitative researchers to consider in their work. My intention with this autoethnographic reflection is to "help others cope with or better understand their worlds" (Ellis 2000:275), in this case, as researchers with multiple and complex identities. I began this project by studying the worlds and lives of musicians. I did not realize I was part of this study, insofar as the issues with which I struggled were contingent to

larger social forces relevant to practices beyond the research setting. To be sure, my work was influenced directly and subtly by gender, class, age, and status.

As my research journal makes clear, I embodied hesitation as a researcher throughout many stages of the project. As others have similarly noted, "the problem of 'tripping' ... [is] an ongoing problem whenever one stands on a threshold – on the edge of a new social world or seeking entry to a group of respondents" (Kaplan Daniels 1999:179). My tripping was both exacerbated and alleviated due to particulars of my identity, as my multiple identities – stemming from my gender, age, and class, to name a few – were simultaneously helpful and distracting to my experience (Couture, Zaidi, and Maticka-Tyndale 2012). The ways in which I "did" age and gender, intentionally or not, allowed for a successful entrance to the musicians' world (Egeberg Holmgren 2011; Couture, Zaidi, and Maticka-Tyndale 2012). The musicians often performed gender in the context of my interviews and other interactions with them, but I unknowingly did so in return (Allen 2005). My identity and interests overlapped with my participants in enough meaningful ways to allow for drawing us effectively together. Ultimately, I was able to successfully maneuver my way into the musicians' worlds and became a partial insider.

This article illustrates methodological issues that may bear relevance to other researchers entering the field. Furthermore, it also proposes ways in which the numerous problems of tripping I encountered can be potentially averted or at the very least anticipated by other researchers.

First, upon developing rapport with respondents, researchers should perhaps be open to the potential development of strong connections, even genuine friendships, with those we encounter in the field. Friendship should by no means be obligatory, but we should be equally dismissive of traditional notions of severing ties with respondents once we have gathered data from them. Qualitative methodology makes for the possibility of conducting research "with an ethic of friendship, a stance of hope, caring, justice, even love" (Tillmann-Healy 2003:735). I discovered it was possible, even constructive, for the emotional dimensions of research relationships to evolve and benefit the researcher and participants alike (Brooks 2006; Swartz 2011; Day 2012). To be sure, the connection I felt to my respondents made me even more committed to their accurate representation, thus providing another level of rigor to the project overall.

Second, it would do researchers well to be attentive to the numerous decisions and assumptions we make – not only as researchers but also as human participants in the world we inhabit. I was able to do so by documenting my experiences in the field. Committing myself to keeping a research journal helped me situate the assumptions from which I was working before I consciously recognized them. In this sense, my journal logs acted as a method of inquiry (Richardson 2000). It is standard practice to be meticulous in drafting fieldnotes and transcribing interviews during the research process, but we rarely emphasize the importance of research journals. Documenting experiences in the field should become standard pro-

cedure for qualitative research. It is one means by which researchers can consider the implications of the decisions we make with our participants.

Ultimately, the issues on which this article has focused bear on issues of identity in the field. Throughout the project, I felt as if my status was constantly in flux. I was an insider one moment and an outsider the next. McCorkel and Myers suggest such shifts may be typical because "the researcher's status as both an outsider and insider is constantly shifting as relationships are continually negotiated during fieldwork" (2003:204). Though my status wavered, I remained an outsider within during the entirety of the project, a position that was in many ways ideal (Hill Collins 1986; Day 2012). I had access to a population that has been relatively unstudied. I was easily able to recruit participants. My history with music gave me some insight to their lives, while my inexperience in terms of not being a "real" musician also gave me an awareness to what I may have otherwise overlooked. Completing this project provided a broader awareness of my role as a researcher embedded in a new world or, as Kleinman describes it, a "double vision: We are all individuals who act. ... At the same time, we are all stand-ins for groups, classes, and social categories. So, we are products of social-historical circumstances and we act with or upon them" (1999:20). The multiplicity of identities that all researchers bring to the field has an impact, but not a straightforward one. I'm not a musician, but ultimately what does it matter?

It means nothing. And everything.

References

- Adler, Patricia A. and Peter Adler. 2012. "Keynote Address. Tales From the Field: Reflections on Four Decades of Ethnography." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 8(1):10-32.
- Allen, Louisa. 2005. "Managing Masculinity: Young Men's Identity Work in Focus Groups." *Qualitative Research* 5(1):35-57.
- Arnold, Bruce L. 2006. "Anticipatory Dying: Reflections Upon End of Life Experiences in a Thai Buddhist Hospice." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 2(2):21-41.
- Behar, Ruth. 1997. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Berger, Leigh. 2001. "Inside Out: Narrative Autoethnography as a Path Toward Rapport." *Qualitative Inquiry* 7:504-518.
- Brooks, Matthew. 2006. "Man-to-Man. A Body Talk Between Male Friends." *Qualitative Inquiry* 11:185-207.
- Buford May, Reuben A. 2003. "'Flirting With Boundaries': A Professor's Narrative Tale Contemplating Research on the Wild Side." *Qualitative Inquiry* 9:442-465.
- Couture, Amanda L., Arshia U. Zaidi, and Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale. 2012. "Reflexive Accounts: An Intersectional Approach to Exploring the Fluidity of Insider/Outsider Status and the Researcher's Impact on Culturally Sensitive Post-Positivist Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 8(1):86-105.
- Day, Suzanne. 2012. "A Reflexive Lens: Exploring Dilemmas of Qualitative Methodology Through the Concept of Reflexivity." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 8(1):60-85.
- Egeberg Holmgren, Linn. 2011. "Cofielding in Qualitative Interviews: Gender, Knowledge, and Interaction in a Study of (Pro)Feminist Men." *Qualitative Inquiry* 17:364-378.
- Ellis, Carolyn. 2000. "Creating Criteria: An Ethnographic Short Story." *Qualitative Inquiry* 6(2):273-277.
- Ellis, Carolyn. 2004. *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Ellis, Carolyn and Arthur Bochner. 2000. "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject." Pp. 733-768 in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gailey, Jeannine A. and Ariane Prohaska. 2011. "Power and Gender Negotiations During Interviews with Men About Sex and Sexually Degrading Practices." *Qualitative Research* 11:365-380.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Haney, Lynne. 1996. "Homeboys, Babies, Men in Suits: The State and the Reproduction of Male Dominance." *American Sociological Review* 61:759-778.
- Harvey, Laura. 2011. "Intimate Reflections: Private Diaries in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Research* 11:664-682.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. 1986. "Learning From the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* 33:14-32.
- Holmes, Mary. 2010. "The Loves of Others: Autoethnography and Reflexivity in Researching Distance Relationships." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 4(2):89-104.
- Kaplan Daniels, Arlene. 1999. "Standing on the Threshold and Tripping: Awkwardness in Becoming a Field-Worker." Pp. 169-180 in *Qualitative Sociology as Everyday Life*, edited by B. Glassner, R. Hertz. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kleinman, Sherry. 1999. "Essaying the Personal: Making Sociological Stories Stick." Pp. 19-29 in *Qualitative Sociology as Everyday Life*, edited by B. Glassner, R. Hertz. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Yvonna S. 1995. "Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 1:275-289.
- McCorkel, Jill. A. and Kristen Myers. 2003. "What Difference Does Difference Make?: Position and Privilege in the Field." *Qualitative Sociology* 26:199-231.
- Mikecz, Robert. 2012. "Interviewing Elites: Addressing Methodological Issues." *Qualitative Inquiry* 18:482-493.
- Pini, Barbara. 2005. "Interviewing Men: Gender and the Collection and Interpretation of Qualitative Data." *Journal of Sociology* 42(2):201-216.
- Rawlins, William K. 1992. *Friendship Matters: Communication, Dialectics, and the Life Course*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Razon, Na'amah and Karen Ross. 2012. "Negotiating Fluid Identities: Alliance-Building in Qualitative Interviews." *Qualitative Inquiry* 18:494-503.
- Reed-Danahay, Deborah. 1997. *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*. New York: Berg Publishers.
- Richardson, Laurel. 2000. "Writing: A Method of Inquiry." Pp. 923-948 in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sallee, Margaret W. and Frank Harris III. 2011. "Gender Performance in Qualitative Studies of Masculinities." *Qualitative Research* 11:409-429.
- Sjöstedt Landén, Angelika. 2011. "From Ethnographic 'Self'-Discovery to Process of Identification." *Qualitative Research* 11(5):536-551.
- Spry, Tami. 2001. "Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis." *Qualitative Inquiry* 7:706-732.
- Swartz, Sharlene. 2011. "'Going Deep' and 'Giving Back': Strategies for Exceeding Ethical Expectations When Researching Amongst Vulnerable Youth." *Qualitative Research* 11:47-68.
- Ticineto Clough, Patricia. 2000. *Autoaffection: Unconscious Thought in the Age of Teletechnology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tillmann-Healy, Lisa M. 2003. "Friendship as Method." *Qualitative Inquiry* 9:729-749.
- West, Lois A. 2001. "Negotiating Masculinities in North American Drinking Subcultures." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 9:371-392.
- Ramirez, Michael. 2014. "'I'm Not a Musician, But...': Negotiating the Research Process in Examining the Lives of Musicians." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 10(3):80-93. Retrieved Month, Year (http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php).