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Editors' Introduction to First Person Section

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Editors' Introduction to First Person Section

“...nothing is stranger than this business of observing other humans in order to write about them” (Behar, 1996: 5).

The position forwarded in Kristina Bourne's first-person account of participant observation in feminist research challenges the widespread understanding in organization studies that the researcher should not get too involved (Rose, 1990); rather, by presenting the reader with the dynamics of co-construction necessitated for generating the research at hand, she steps out from behind a cloak of objectivity (Behar, 1996) into the fuzzy boundaries between the “researcher” and the “researched” and the often subtle power dynamics inherent to fieldwork. Like other aspects of life, participant observation is contained by formal frameworks of organizations of which we are all members. Such corporations are cultural formations as well as legal-rational ones. They determine more or less what it is we, as researchers, experience in the worlds we investigate and, therefore, what it is we can say about those worlds (Rose, 1990). Through participant observation we can address the cultural bases of those whom we research. The challenge, however, is that we also address our own culture of inquiry in the process. The introspective thrust of this paper sheds light on the author's shift in her approach to participant observation and also on the theoretical issues that arise as a result.

As the paper suggests, the writing process shapes not only the methods we employ as researchers but also our arguments (Atkinson, 1990; Richardson, 1994). This explains the drive for reflexive positioning, one in which the author turns back on the account to reflect on the events and literatures that have inspired it. Rose (1990) provides some insight into how one might produce such variegated constructions, where our texts become the site of a struggle. Accounts such as these reflect the author's voice and emotional reactions, the scholarly classics of the field, critical theories that advance that particular literature as well as conversations and voices – the concerns of the daily life of the people with whom the author participates. As the author shows us, however, this process is not straightforward. Behar (1996) expresses this tension, the hardest aspect of the work: “to bring the ethnographic moment back, to resurrect it, to communicate the distance... between what we saw and heard and our inability, finally, to do justice to it in our representations” (p. 9).

Professor Bourne's paper is a skilful example of reflexive research which Pollner (1991) has described as “an ‘unsettling,’ i.e., an insecurity regarding the basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality” (p. 370). Unlike some approaches to social science research (and perhaps some forms of journalism) which assume a social reality that requires meticulous objectivity and detachment, First Person solicits research that is reflexive and introspective, recognizes the role of researcher identity and self in the creation of research, makes rigorous use of theory to investigate first-person experience, and employs various forms of inquiry (e.g., action and dialogic, among others) to investigate organizational and pedagogical phenomena. In brief, First Person invites papers which tell the author's story and simultaneously consider its relevance to

scholarship and organization. The paper at hand offers both of these; Bourne shares with her readers some of her personal experience with research, as well as her theorized reading of its relevance to organizational inquiry.

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