

Building castles in the air: Colonising the social space in online qualitative research

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Abstract

At present there is only a relatively small field of literature on online qualitative research in education as an approach that offers several advantages to education researchers. It allows qualitative data to be gathered at a distance, as we have discovered, especially when conventional means of distance data gathering, such as telephonic interviews, are unacceptable for methodological or logistical reasons. In order to construct trustworthy online qualitative research, we need to deepen our understanding of its processes, particularly the nature of the researcher / participant relationships in this social space, and we need to deepen our understanding of the interaction between participants' and researchers' online and offline selves and how these interactions affect our understandings of the participants' lives. This paper investigates critical perspectives in online qualitative research by considering how asymmetrical power relationships between participants and researchers influence the ways in which they colonise the social space of a research conversation and how this affects the trustworthiness of research.

Keywords: interpersonal relationships, research interviews, identity, power, trustworthy

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Introduction

At present there is only a relatively small field of literature on online qualitative research in education, although a much larger one in the social sciences generally (Mann and Stewart, 2000, Chen et al, 2004, Hine, 2005). However it is an approach that offers several advantages to education researchers, allowing qualitative data to be gathered at a distance, as we have discovered, especially when conventional means of distance data gathering, such as telephonic interviews, are unacceptable for methodological or logistical reasons. In reflecting on our use of online qualitative research in education in our previous work, we have been confronted by ethical questions about the nature of privacy and confidentiality, and questions of authenticity and credibility in online interviewing, and how such issues become more complex for the educational researcher as boundaries of time and space are removed (James and Busher, 2006, 2007).

In this paper we are keen to extend such discussions by critically examining the nature of interpersonal relationships between the researcher and participant in the social space of online qualitative research. Educational researchers have explored ways of engaging with participants face-to-face where they have a physical presence in the midst of the participants being studied (Hammersley, 2005). In face-to-face research, the notion of social space includes temporal, physical, intellectual and interpersonal relationships. In online research these contexts do not necessarily apply in the same way or to the same extent. This affects the ways in which researchers and participants construct their identities and those of the other (Giddens, 1991) and how they assert their agency to make sense of the 'territory' (social space) of the online interaction. The absence of normal social frameworks of human interaction in online research is as influential as the presence of these in face-to-face research (Hardey, 2002).

Combining the researcher/participant relationships in online and offline environments can be seen as a way of contextualising and adding authenticity to research data collected online (Hine, 2000:48). Yet, the nature of human interaction in research becomes more complex when boundaries of time and space shift between online and offline interactions. This is further complicated by interpretations of the interactions between participants' and researchers' online and offline selves and how these interactions affect researchers' understandings of participants' lives. In online research, making sense of participants' experiences relies on their textual self-presentations. However, how they do this in the online space depends on the asymmetrical power relationships between participants and researcher and how these relationships are perceived and the opportunities participants have or take when engaged in online research to colonise the social space of a research conversation. Holliday (2004) argues that by participants asserting their agency in a dialogue, it is possible for them to construct new balances of power and new relationships with each other and with researchers as they develop their stories and online persona. In doing so they alter the cultures constructed in the spaces of the online qualitative research but also raise questions about the credibility of that study carried out in an online environment.

Our own studies, from which these critical reflections arise, used email interviewing as an asynchronous mode of online research. One of our studies focused on the reflections of nine psychology lecturers and the construction of their professional

identities both as teachers in higher education and within the main communities in which they worked. The other study focused on ten adult educators, who were doctoral students, and their views on coming to terms with being part-time students living outside the UK but following an extended campus programme of study of an English university. They were asked to reflect on the excitements and concerns of being a student and how these were shaped by underlying cultural conflicts between the expectations of their own cultural milieu (Bourdieu, 1990), which they experienced in their everyday lives, and those of the university they attended, albeit as part-time students; on their relationships with their tutors as mediators of university custom and practice and gatekeepers to the academy; and on their developing identities as students and teachers as a result of taking part in this programme (see Busher, 2001 and James, 2003 for a more detailed discussion of the two studies). It is important to note that in both these studies the researchers had prior knowledge of their participants offline: the first researcher was a tutor on the Doctoral programme on which the students were enrolled, and the second researcher worked (at that time) for the professional body of which the academic participants in the research were members. So face-to-face and online interactions with the participants existed for professional reasons before our studies began.

Our ontological stance through our research design was to acquire an understanding of our participants' perspectives through 'open and honest dialogue...' (Anderson and Kanuka, 2003:88) in order to (re)present those perspectives faithfully and ethically. We were concerned with the perspectives and meanings that our participants constructed on the topics in which we were interested. So we were keen in our research design not to lose the one-to-one relationship between the researcher and participant which we believed was necessary for exploring each participant's discrete view of his/her developing professional identity and life history in a variety of different macro and organisational cultures. People respond differently to questions about their professional life stories (Cazden, 2000) and we wanted to capture these differences as did. We therefore adopted in principle as a method of data collection qualitative semi-structured interviews.

However, our participants were not easily accessible face to face (offline). We encountered a range of practical constraints in contacting them because of geographical distance, access and travel costs to their institutions. Our participants were located all across the UK and outside it. Whilst telephone interviewing offered a solution to this issue, we were not sure to what extent our participants would be willing to disclose their professional experiences using a synchronous medium - we were looking for in-depth responses, rather than simply gathering information. Arksey and Knight (1999) note that telephone interviewing tends to generate short answer responses not the in-depth descriptive and reflective accounts that we were trying to elicit. So we chose to adapt our semi-structured one to one interviews to an online environment. Synchronous online group interviews seemed unsuitable to our research projects as we wanted to record our participants' individual perspectives on their social, cultural and organizational experiences.

Email interviewing offered us a number of possibilities. It allows participants to be interviewed individually and to develop a one-to-one relationship with researchers. It allows researchers to use the potential asynchronous properties of email to give participants 'space' (time) to reflect on their answers to questions rather than being

committed to reply promptly (Bampton and Cowton, 2002, James and Busher, 2007:104). It allows researchers to elaborate written dialogues with each participant that reflects participants' in-depth reflections on their experiences. It allows researchers to access participants at times convenient to themselves, regardless of the work they are doing or the time zones they inhabit. So it offered us a flexible, personal and thoughtful form of communication (Mann and Stewart, 2000) in which experiences and meanings could be shared between us and our participants confidentially, as Murray and Sixsmith (1998) discussed.

'Who are you?' Constructing credible research relationships online

Building trust in qualitative research is a fundamental prerequisite whether research takes place online or offline. As Sanders (2005) argues, if researchers are to understand how participants live their lives, they need to place themselves in a position whereby participants are willing to disclose their views. Face-to-face interview relationships are primarily interpersonal ones, albeit located in time and place (the cultural antecedents of the participants and researchers), where the researcher works at establishing 'an atmosphere in which the subject feels safe enough to talk freely about his or her experiences and feelings,' (Kvale, 1996: 125). In face-to-face interviews the success of the interaction is often a matter of 'personal affinities,' (Kivits, 2005:38). This affects the ways in which participants are prepared to present themselves in their conversations and actions, and is crucial to the conduct of research (Gatson and Zweerink, 2004: 191). One of the problems researchers encounter when using face-to-face interviews is that the outcomes of conversations can be distorted because people interpret the social characteristics of the other, such as age, race, gender and organisational status, to shape their responses to fit whatever pattern of sense making seems to be being required of them (Sproull and Kiesler, 1986, Mann and Stewart 2000).

Research relationships in email interviews are differently experienced and valued from face to face interviews (Kivits, 2005). Online text makes invisible the bodily presence as well as outward acts of movement, posture and emotional expression that are important elements in determining how individuals see themselves and how they are perceived by others (Hardey, 2002). On the face of it, then, email diminishes the risk that a researcher's physical presence will distort the outcome of an interview because it hides researchers' values and attitudes that are conveyed by their social characteristics as well as their non-verbal and verbal cues (Thach, 1995).

Although the presence of social signals in face to face research interviews is problematic for participants and researchers so, too, is their absence. The lack of physical presence means that understandings and perceptions of the other can only be negotiated by text (Markham, 2004) in online interviews because the bodily presence and gestures which can signify mutuality, commitment and trust through a sense of shared purpose (Seymour, 2001) are normally absent, although use of webcams might begin to address this problem. Consequently, the important socio-emotional aspects of interviewing are largely missing, compelling researchers who engage in online research to find different ways to build trust and to encourage participants to disclose their thoughts and reflections (Knight and Saunders, 1999). These might be, '...strategies of visibility...which make up for the lack of traditional

social cues and which indeed permit the development of a status differentiation' (Paccagnella, 1997). Some of our participants also addressed this problem. They adopted the use of emoticons to make up for the absence of conversational cues, or exaggerated punctuation and capitalisation in their written descriptions to emphasise tone and strength of feeling on a particular topic.

I wasn't always sure that I knew what you were getting at ... some of the questions seemed to overlap and I was concerned about maybe we were sometimes coming at something from different directions and maybe in e-mail communications clarification is not always easy :) !!

This raises a major question about the construction of trustful relationships in online qualitative research and whether it is possible to achieve these solely online. In interviews, participants tend to tailor their actions to the level of risk they perceive in their environments, both online and offline. Where participants are engaged in a secure or private online environment, e.g. a discussion board within a VLE, or a password protected sector of a website, there is likely to be less of a threat to their privacy and so less risk of harm to them than if they are engaged in a more open environment such as email or a public chat room or a blog (AoIR, 2002:7).

Some of our participants commented adversely on the lack of personal (face-to-face) contact inherent in the email interview process and how it raised doubts about the security of their answers as well as about the nature of the views we were seeking and the nature of their and our engagement in the research projects. As did Mann and Stewart (2000), we had to develop sensitivity in developing and preserving the email research relationship, reassuring our participants of our 'presence' if only by acknowledging receipt of emails before replying to them in greater depth at a later time. In so doing we displayed our power to sustain the research projects by meeting participants' socio-emotional needs by drawing on personal and work-related sources of power - knowledge about working with participants in research projects (Busher, 2006) – and so asserted our leadership of them. On occasions the flow of the dialogue was difficult to maintain because of other work commitments by ourselves or our participants but the records of our conversations – akin to the tape-recorded records of face to face interviews – were not erased and remained visible to participants and researchers alike. This kept intact the chronological sequence of the discussions and enabled participants' and researchers to reflect in an iterative manner on their developing conversations.

However, in email interviews that are devoid of the normal social frameworks of face-to face conversations and encounters, both researchers and participants are able to construct or reconstruct themselves through presentation and play. LeBesco (2004: 575) describes this as an 'act of identification' that relies on '...textual descriptions [that]provides individuals with the potential to present themselves unhindered by visual images.' Hardey (2004: 195) points out that '...disembodiment and anonymity allows users to take on many new identities that may have little connection to their off-line selves.' The ways in which people are willing to write their narratives, whether playfully, superficially, or in a collaborative way with the researcher, makes a considerable difference to the quality of a research project and the trustworthiness of its outcomes (James, 2003).

A consequence of the absence of bodily presence online, is that it becomes difficult to verify the identity of participants or to cross-reference their views and perspectives through normal processes of triangulation, not least through processes of observation and participating in the social situations which are being explored through other participants. Bakardjieva and Smith (2001:69) stress the need to capture ‘developments on both sides of the screen’ in order to investigate both the real-life contexts and actions of users and ‘their exploits in cyberspace.’ Paccagnella (1997:4) too also argues that it is not enough to simply explore individuals’ offline life experiences through online means of communication, as this can decrease the lack of ‘ethnographic context.’

This suggests that online research needs to have an offline component, if at all possible, in order to constitute its trustworthiness. In our studies we had prior interpersonal knowledge of our participants, as in the research of Wicksteed (2000), which helped us to verify the identities of our participants. We were not strangers, and had a clear ‘picture’ of who each participant was. We were also participating in the social situations, which were being explored online in our research studies, offline in a professional capacity. Away from the online space, one of the researchers continued to discuss the research with her participants in face-to-face conversations. In this offline space, more insights were revealed about the contexts of their lives and more personal narratives were created. In our studies, the consistency of participants’ presentation of self-concepts and identities, alongside the depth of self-exposure in online discussions, reinforced our confidence that we were engaging with participants’ authentic behaviour (Mann and Stewart, 2000) as they linked past, present and future events together in ongoing process that presented an unfolding story (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). We would, therefore, argue that by moving offline we were able to ascertain participants’ ‘*visual* and...*embodied* ways of expression’ (Orgad, 2005: 62) that complemented their online interaction and self-presentation.

An alternative approach is for researchers to recognise that the rationale for their research needs to be grounded in its context and aims rather than assuming that offline interaction will provide more authentic data than that generated by online interaction (Hine 2000). An aspect of this for online research is to accept that online persona are closely linked to people’s offline lived selves. The construction of professional identity includes a dimension of complexity and fluidity (Giola and Thomas 1996). It is inextricably linked with who we are, our commitments and values and is ‘integral and continuous’ (Kendal 1999) to us. As Mann and Stewart (2000: 210) remark, ‘for this reason it is seen to be difficult to sustain a persona which is quite divorced from the “real” self’. Processes of reflection on personal texts and narratives do not only happen in interviews and online exchanges but in everyday life, too. People tend to review and rewrite their histories and perspectives in the light of their developing experiences. So encouraging participants to reflect on their views not only did not undermine the authenticity of their accounts, but in establishing a consistent reworking of narratives gave some strength to the authenticity of them.

The construction of collaborative research relationships is another means of trying to establish the authenticity of the views participants express in online qualitative research. It is likely to lead to participants having a vested interest in the outcomes of a research project and so of engaging with it truthfully. We thought that this approach

would lead to greater disclosure, mutuality and reciprocity between researchers and the participants. Lebesco (2004) found that a collaborative approach helped her to gain rapport with her participants. Markham (2004: 174) pointed out that, '...methodologically we should not ignore this feature because as interaction constructs and reflects the shape of the phenomena being studied, interaction also delineates the being doing the research in the field'. We asserted such a culture in our projects by emphasising our common purposes with the participants: As educators, participants and ourselves were professionally interested in the processes and outcomes of the projects online and offline. We also tried to create a safe environment online to protect participants' privacy when they were disclosing their narratives, which had clear boundaries not only of how data was stored but also of how many questions were to be asked and which ones were being asked at any one time.

One means for researchers to help to foster such a culture, as Oakley (1981) noted, is for researchers' and participants' to go beyond stereotypic roles of question-asking and question-answering. In our studies as the interviews developed, the participants began to take greater ownership of the processes of narrative construction by responding to our questions in unexpected ways and directions. As researchers, we responded to these new directions by asking further questions about their texts rather than sticking to the agenda of the original interview schedules. None the less we used the original schedules to ensure that our conversations with our participants covered those aspects which we had previously chosen to investigate as well as engaging with new aspects which our participants put forward. The strengthening of participants' control raised the potential risk of the interviews having an increasingly selective focus (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000) and the risk that points that were important to us might not be fully discussed or poorly developed.

Colonising social spaces online: changing asymmetries of power

Interviews as social arenas provide both vehicles and sites through which people construct and contest explications for their views and actions (Foucault, 1979). These arenas, in which asymmetrical dialogues take place between participants and researchers with different agendas and influences on the construction of meaning in the conversations, are sites in which shifting power relationships are explored. All such dialogues take place in contexts of time, space, and participants' identities, values and beliefs, as well as the socio-political cultures of the milieu (Bourdieu, 1990) they inhabit.

One of our concerns as researchers was who had the power to control the flow and development of the interviews. Naively, when we began our studies we thought 'email brings people into contact ... and places each on equal ground' (Boshier, 1990: 51) and considered email had the potential to democratise narrative exchanges (Illingworth, 2001). As the interviews progressed we began to wonder whether email did indeed democratise the process of research by creating a more equitable process of social interaction between researchers and participants. At one level the disembodied, anonymous and asynchronous nature of email allows a relatively high degree of personal control over the interaction as both researchers and participants can write what they want to write, when they want and in their own time (Orgad 2005:62). On the other hand, in the design of our email interviews, we would argue

that we were in more powerful positions epistemologically than were our participants, not least because we shaped the original agenda of the discussions and had access to the relevant literatures underpinning the conceptual frameworks of the studies (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991). We were also in more powerful positions bureaucratically because, as Carter (1993) points out, we created the organisational structures of the studies by providing the interview schedules and the 'rules of engagement' (James and Busher, 2006). However when our participants began to take greater ownership of the processes of the research and of narrative construction, it raised questions regarding who had the power to control the flow and development of the email interviews. This highlighted how the 'multilayered and fluid nature' of power and knowledge that moves back and forth between participants and researchers can gain a 'different dynamic' when the relationship is contained in an online environment (Sanders, 2005: 76).

In face-to-face interviews researchers are usually able to keep conversations to a pre-determined agenda and prevent them extending beyond their allotted time, if not to prevent participants curtailing interviews because of other social or work-related pressures. In our email interviews, the balance of control shifted from researchers to participants as participants asserted greater control of the time frame of responses and of the agenda of discussion. Time frames for collecting data that we originally set at three weeks gradually elongated to nearly six months as participants respond to our questions at an idiosyncratic pace that suited the rhythms of their own lives irrespective of us asking them to respond promptly.

I didn't email you straight back, because I was thinking about my answer. So my responses were more carefully thought through and probably longer than if I'd tackled the whole thing in a face-to-face interview ... This is what's good about the email process ...'

Early in our studies some participants apologised for being late with their answers. Later on we and they took it for granted that answers would arrive in a slightly haphazard manner, but this seemed to be one of the charms of online qualitative interview research. Participants who were dropping out of the projects usually indicated so, either voluntarily or when prompted by us.

Both the early day apologies for tardiness and the later assertions by participants of their own timescales for response and their colonising of the agenda for discussion we see as evidence of a shift in power from researchers to participants as the latter came to recognise the control they could exert over the research projects. This shift in power, from researcher driven semi-structured interview schedules to more collaborative conversations that were responsive to participants' needs, also turned out to be fruitful in improving the quality of participants' responses. The participants wrote at their own pace and in their own time which gave opportunity for more powerful reflection on the main focii of the studies. It also allowed issues to emerge that we had not thought of, leading to the development of a number of 'substantive conceptual and thematic turns,' (Orgad, 2005: 62).

Through the negotiations of participants and researchers and the assertions and testing of values in action by participants and researchers a (collaborative) culture emerged in our studies, we think, which contained a strong element of mutual trust: participants

thought they were working in a safe environment from which would come no harm and through which interesting insights into work-related life might be gained; researchers thought they would gain the insights on working life in which they were originally interested as well as others, even if not within the timetable they had originally planned. Begley (2007) points out that in building learning communities it is important for leaders – or Principal Investigators of research projects! - to be clear about and enact their values if other participants are to be empowered to become creative members of such communities. Hodkinson (2004) argues that research is a form of work that develops expertise through the construction of communities of practice.

The emergence of and changing nature of the cultures of our research projects, we argue, is evidence that the participants of our studies colonised the social and intellectual spaces created by our email research conversations to reconstruct with the researchers discourses that had initially belonged to (were initiated by) us, the researchers. In other words the changing cultures represented shifts in the balance of power within ‘our’ research projects that led to a reconfiguration of the micro-political processes of control, as we have already illustrated. Holliday (2004, 2005) argues that the (re)construction of these discourses constitutes the creation of small cultures, i.e. a culture constructed by and belonging to the members of a particular community. Mittendorff et al (2005) refer to these as micro-cultures. Our projects each constituted such communities. However our communities were ones of inequality, at least initially, since they were originally conceived by us, the researchers, as vehicles to achieve our agenda.

Small cultures are developed to assert the ownership of their participants in particular social and organisational and, in our cases, virtual contexts. As such they exist in the overlapping spaces of national macro-cultures, organisational cultures and local community cultures – large cultures, as Holliday (1994) calls them - and people’s own personally developed values and beliefs. In our projects participants made many references to how their working lives were affected by the professional bodies and institutions of which they had membership. Their participation in our projects was also affected by these, e.g. the speed at which they responded to our questions was influenced by other demands upon them in their working and social lives. Their concerns about the processes of email interviewing were influenced by their experiences of the medium in their working lives, as well as by the values of the societies in which they lived.

So the construction of these small cultures can be understood as a process of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) that draws on elements from different dominant and marginalised cultural discourses to construct a new emergent set of cultural norms to guide practice for the members of a small culture and generate new identities at least in that context, such as the duration of a research project. As members of communities or research projects help to construct the cultures of those social entities, so their work-related identities are shaped by those entities. Participants in our projects commented on the usefulness of developing their narratives about their work-related experiences to their own understandings about their responses to work. Being part of those communities altered our understandings of what it means to be a researcher and what may be involved in conducting research, especially in an online environment.

Communities or research projects construct cultures, Holliday (1994) argues, through three main spheres of action: psycho-cultural features such as tacit protocols governing, for example, classroom interaction and relationships between staff (or researchers in this case) and between staff and students (or other participants in this case); micro-political processes; and rubrics for maintaining order informally. In our studies the protocols governing who would answer in what manner and at what speed altered from our original intentions, which strongly reflected our needs, to ones which more strongly reflected the needs of the other participants. The foci of the agenda of our discussions also altered as participants took our conversations down paths we had not originally foreseen. This represents a shift in micro-political influence as participants came to realise they, too, could construct the agenda of our conversations alongside the agenda asserted by ourselves, the researchers.

So understandings of the processes of research projects, whether online or offline, can be configured in terms of a socio-political process, the consequences of which materially affect the outcomes of the research. Online research projects such as ours may use different processes to construct their socio-political dynamics, and may have to use vehicles other than the conventional processes of human interaction in face to face qualitative research to establish their social dynamics, but none the less they still construct the small cultures / micro-cultures which Holliday (2004) and Mittendorf et al. (2005) discuss. These cultures might be fruitful and enabling, as they seem to have been in our projects (more by luck than judgment!), or they might be harmful and withering causing the research projects to generate any number of difficulties in their processes.

Conclusion

In this paper we have critically examined the nature of interpersonal relationships between researchers and participants in online research. From our experiences we would argue that how participants and researchers construct themselves online is closely related to their embodied selves (Orgad, 2005). So although combining online and offline research in a single project may offer researchers an additional dimension methodologically, it should not be done simply as a means of achieving authenticity in a research project, since that runs the risk of implying that online interactions are not as authentic as offline ones. It forces researchers to think very carefully about how they build relationships of trust with participants they cannot see and may never meet.

Regardless of whether mixed online / offline approaches to research are used or not, what emerges clearly is that the success of an online qualitative research project, like that of face to face qualitative research, is strongly related to the quality of the interpersonal relationships that the researchers build with those who choose to participate in a research project and the community that develops around and through a project. Problematic, then, is the extent to which it is possible to build collaborative conversations and trust in online qualitative research, allowing participants to feel able to explore topics in depth, when many of the normal social signal systems are absent from the conversations. Collaborative approaches to research seem to help participants to contribute enthusiastically and, we argue, truthfully to the discussions.

But genuine collaboration involves researchers sharing power with the participants, which may be challenging to researchers nervous about losing control of their projects or of the agenda or structure of them. It raises questions about the asymmetric and potentially shifting power relationships in research projects. In our studies we tried to develop a collaborative research relationship in which to reduce social distance and share our critical experiences in order to gain deeper insights into our participants' worlds. It was here our email interviews provided insights into the nature of power relations between participants and researchers. By affording our online relationships time and space to develop, the participants gradually took more control over the direction of the agenda, by responding and reflecting further on particular points during the interviews, leaving us merely to moderate them.

If our attempts to construct collaborative cultures in our research projects allowed the participants to take greater control of the discourses of the projects, it also richly served our purposes in exploring in great depth professional educators' understandings of their work-related lives. This raises some uncomfortable questions for us as researchers about the ethics of our practice. We wonder who really were the beneficiaries of our attempts to construct collaborative cultures. Certainly the participants seemed to have gained increased control of aspects of the projects. Indeed had we not helped them to remain part of the community of each project by acceding to their agenda we would not have gained sufficient data to make our projects worthwhile. But therein lies the problem, for it suggests that constructing 'collaborative' cultures in such research projects may be no more than a device for researchers retaining power softly (Lenski, 1986), in similar ways that processes of distributed leadership do, and bringing home the bacon.

And whose space was it in the first place over which the projects tried to assert some control by investigating the work-related lives of some professional educators? We hope our participants really benefitted from reflecting on their working lives – perhaps as a form of professional development. To argue that they voluntarily undertook to join our projects, and we are not aware we caused them any harm, seems little defence against the debt we owe them for the costs of time and effort they incurred as participants in our projects.

The preceding discussion suggests that not only is it fruitful to consider the micro-political processes through which qualitative online research takes place, but that researchers need to give careful consideration to the (small) cultures which they foster in the communities of their research projects. This paper has taken it for granted that the community of a research project includes the participants as well as the researchers, but in larger projects that may have to be questioned, since a group of researchers may, themselves, constitute such a community that is carrying out the practice of research.

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