



REFLEXIVITY IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. DOCTORAL STUDENTS INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PREPARATION

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	Learning to conduct research, including considerations for concepts such as reflexivity, is a key component of doctoral student preparation in higher education. Yet limited attention is given to doctoral student training for conducting international research, particularly in understanding researcher reflexivity within international contexts.
Background	Incorporating reflexive practices in one's scholarship is of particular importance because international research often includes U.S.-based researchers working with cultural groups and contexts that are very different from them. Thus, we examined the following: how do novice U.S. trained researchers understand the role of their reflexivity in qualitative international research?
Methodology	We utilized qualitative inquiry to answer the study's research question. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 participants representing 11 higher education doctoral programs in the United States.
Contribution	This study provides insight on how U.S. doctoral students reflect on their researcher reflexivity as emerging international researchers utilizing three types of reflexivity as outlined by the conceptual perspectives that frame this study: introspection, social critique, and discursive deconstruction
Findings	Most participants believed that self-reflection is a critical component of reflexivity in international research. Several participants demonstrated an awareness of the privilege and power they bring to their international research based on their identities as Western-trained researchers. Participants utilized different forms of self-reflection when collecting, analyzing, and interpreting their data in

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	order to ensure that the voices of their participants were appropriately represented in their research
Recommendations for Practitioners	Our recommendations for graduate preparation programs include helping doctoral students to understand reflexivity as both a <i>research concept</i> and an <i>applied practice</i> in international context.
Recommendation for Researchers	We recommend that novice researchers learn how to incorporate reflexive practices when conducting research because as emerging scholars they can have a better sense of how who they are and how they think about research influences their research activities.
Impact on Society	Implications from this study affect Western-based education programs that seek to internationalize curriculum and research priorities.
Future Research	In terms of next steps, we recommend research that explores how faculty train doctoral students to participate in the global contexts of educational research.
Keywords	doctoral education, internationalization, reflexivity, research training, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Higher education has become increasingly interconnected and international. As a result, higher education institutions in the United States have experienced increased student mobility, collaborative research projects, and global knowledge exchange (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Knight, 2015). In response, U.S. institutions have added coursework that emphasizes internationalization in both masters and doctoral education degrees (Comparative and International Education Society, n.d.; Drake, 2011), underscoring the importance of infusing international perspectives in graduate education.

As emerging researchers, doctoral students must be prepared to conduct research that considers increasing global knowledge exchange. Given the amplified internationalization of higher education, there is a need for doctoral student researchers to be trained to work within international contexts; however, limited attention has been given towards the international preparation for nascent researchers in doctoral programs (Yao & Vital, 2016). This is of particular importance because international research often includes U.S.-based researchers working with cultural groups and contexts that are very different from them. In addition, international research includes the danger of methodological nationalism. Methodological nationalism is a concept in which researchers focus only on the boundaries of one's nation-state (Chernilo, 2006; Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013), leading to an imbalance of power within the research relationship. Thus, researchers must be aware of the lens and perspective they use in an attempt to understand these different cultural contexts.

In research, the consideration of a researcher's lens is often discussed as researcher reflexivity and positionality. Reflexivity is defined as "a way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 64), all of which are relevant to international research. Reflexivity works in tandem with positionality, which is described as how researchers are situated. Understanding where the researcher stands "in relation to 'the other'" (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411) is considered when questioning one's positionality during the research process. Simply said, reflexivity is an internal understanding of one's perspective, and positionality is how one is positioned in contrast to those being studied.

Although there is an abundance of literature on the importance of reflexivity and positionality (Glesne, 2011; Merriam et al., 2001; Patton, 2002), there is limited discussion on how doctoral students are trained to approach and conduct international research. Thus, we examine the following:

how do U.S. doctoral students understand the role of their reflexivity in qualitative international research? This study provides insight on how U.S. doctoral students reflect on their researcher reflexivity as emerging international scholars.

This study emerged from a larger project that examined doctoral students' perceptions of their preparation for international research. As we coded participant interviews, themes related to reflexivity and positionality continuously emerged from participants' experiences. In this paper, we provide a brief overview of current literature on the importance of researcher reflexivity in international research. We then outline our methods used in this study, including our own personal reflexivity statements. We illuminate findings from the participants and conclude with a discussion and implications for practice and future research.

THE ROLE OF REFLEXIVITY IN RESEARCH

Reflexivity is commonly addressed in qualitative methodology as a way to reflect on one's own position. In doing so, the researcher engages in the practice of self-reflection in order to better understand how a researcher's lens affects the research project, particularly because qualitative research often includes interactions with participants. Reflexivity allows for the inclusion of why and how a researcher gathers data so "that our work can be understood, not only in terms of what we have discovered, but how we have discovered it" (Etherington, 2007, p. 601). Therefore, reflexivity in qualitative research allows for two essential parts: one part on your actual project and the other part on you and "the ground on which you stand" (Glesne, 2011, p. 126).

Beyond self-reflection, reflexivity also requires high levels of connection with participants. Reflexivity "requires researchers to come from behind the protective barriers of objectivity" (Etherington, 2007, p. 599) and, as a result, researchers can connect with others as a way to humanize and relate to participants in the research relationship. The invitation to others allows for an interactive relationship when practicing relational reflexivity (Hibbert, Sillince, Diefenbach, & Cunliffe, 2014). Relational reflexivity prioritizes a connectedness between researchers and participants in an attempt to build theory "through engaging otherness and enacting connectedness" (Hibbert et al., 2014, p. 292). By doing so, the practice and idea of reflexivity is more inclusive of the participants and their communities, particularly those who come from different cultures and backgrounds.

REFLEXIVITY IN INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

Researcher reflexivity has been increasingly important because of the growing emphasis on internationalization and global perspectives in academia (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Knight, 2015). International research has raised additional considerations related to methodological considerations and researcher reflexivity. For example, Rubinstein-Avila (2013) problematized the challenges raised in cross-cultural/linguistic qualitative inquiry in her own work as a U.S.-based scholar conducting research in South America. Based on her own experience, researchers, particularly those in international settings, should be cognizant of their own hermeneutic horizon, which "includes their past and present, professional, community and person experiences" (Rubinstein-Avila, 2013, p. 1047). Furthermore, one's hermeneutic horizon is dynamic and by being exposed to individuals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, researchers' knowledge and experiences are enhanced, which increases one's "proficiencies and historical consciousness" (Nguyen as cited in Rubinstein-Ávila, 2013). Rubinstein-Ávila (2013) offered three perspectives for consideration for cross cultural research, which may lead to the researchers "explicitly questioning their data and the conclusiveness of their findings" (p. 1042). The three perspectives are broadly described as embracing the everyday happenings in the field, continuous contextual and methodological reflexivity, and cross-cultural/linguistic translations and interpretations.

Reflexivity in global contexts is important because international fieldwork is affected by the intersections of difference, inequalities, and geopolitics (Sultana, 2007). Thus, positionality, or how a re-

searcher's reflexivity is positioned in relation to others, is critical in ethical considerations of qualitative research. For example, Sultana, a U.S.-trained researcher born and raised in a modern city in Bangladesh, conducted her dissertation research in rural Bangladesh where community members treated her as both an insider and an outsider. Specifically, the community members considered Sultana an insider, or as a member of their community, and an outsider who represented a U.S. educational training that contrasted greatly from her participants' lived experiences. Ethical research requires the consideration of how power and subjectivity are situated within and around the international fieldwork. Thus, intersubjectivity, similar to relational reflexivity, is key to navigating within international communities while attempting to reconcile formal institutional norms of academia (Sultana, 2007). Reflexivity and positionality are essential in international fieldwork because "the production of knowledge and the power relations that are inherent in research processes in order to undertake ethical research" (Sultana, 2007 p. 382) should always be at the foundation of the researcher's project.

Reflexivity can be a helpful tool for understanding and applying ethical considerations to qualitative research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Researchers can utilize reflexivity as a "sensitizing notion that can enable ethical practice to occur in the complexity and richness of social research" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 278). International research is complex, with challenges ranging from language differences, cultural contexts, and relationship building with translators and boundary spanners. Thus, engaging in introspection and awareness as a component of reflexivity may assist in transparent and ethical research practices. The act of being transparent with the research process "calls for a positioning of reflexivity not as clarity, honesty, or humility, but as practices of confounding disruptions" (Pillow, 2003, p. 192). By embracing reflexivity, researchers allow for emancipation of the self and understanding of the studied population when navigating international contexts.

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES

Our study is framed by Finlay's (2002) discussion on the role of reflexivity in qualitative research. Finlay noted the challenges associated with reflexivity in research and the importance of the researcher "negotiating a path through this complicated landscape" (p. 212) and, by virtue of the journey, the researchers making "interesting discoveries" during their research activities (p. 212). Finlay developed a classification, or maps, of five types of reflexive practices reflected in contemporary qualitative research: introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction. These five perspectives of reflexivity in qualitative research can overlap or be used at the same time by the researcher. For the purpose of this study, we describe all five perspectives yet only focus on three of the five types of reflective practices based on findings that emerged: reflexivity as introspection, social critique, and discursive deconstruction.

Explaining reflexivity as introspection, Finlay (2002) noted "insights can emerge from personal introspection which then forms the basis for a more generalized understanding and interpretations" (p. 214). Introspection should not only be viewed as self-reflection, but also as an opportunity to become "more explicit about the link between knowledge claims, personal experiences of both participant and researcher, and the social context" (Finlay, 2002, p. 215).

Reflexivity as intersubjective reflection refers to when researchers "explore the mutual meanings emerging within the research relationship" and at the same time "focus on the situated and negotiated nature of the research encounter" (Finlay, 2002, p. 215). Involving more than reflection, this perspective is underscored by the researcher focusing on the "self-in-relation-to-others [which] becomes both the aim and object" of the analysis (Finlay, 2002, p. 216). The researcher considers the potential challenges within the research relationship while "looking at both inward meanings and outward into the realm of shared meanings" (Finlay, 2002, p.18) in order to examine the research relationship and the potential challenges that may arise with the participant.

When describing reflexivity as mutual collaboration, Finlay (2002) explained that collaborative reflexivity “offers the opportunity to hear, and take into account, multiple voices and conflicting positions” (p. 220). By incorporating the voices of the researched in the process of self-reflection, the researcher acknowledges that the research participant is also a “reflexive being” (p. 218) who mutually contributes to the data analysis component of the research process (Finlay, 2002).

Power imbalance can exist between researchers and those they research based on their social positions at the time of the research. A concern for researchers who use reflexivity as social critique is determining how to “manage the power imbalance between researcher and participant” (Finlay, 2002, p. 220). By incorporating a social critique in one’s research reflection, the researcher is able to acknowledge and address the “social construction of power” (Finlay, 2002, p. 222) and the positionality of the researcher and the research participant during the research process.

In reflexivity as discursive deconstruction, “attention is paid to the ambiguity of meanings in language used and how this impacts on modes of presentation” (Finlay, 2002, p. 222). Because language itself, the use of certain language, and the emphasis on certain aspects of language represents those being researched, the researcher will have to contend with representing the “dynamic, multiple meanings embedded in language” (Finlay, 2002, p. 222) used during the research process. In other words, the researcher will have to carefully deconstruct what the participant said while ensuring the language used does not lose its meaning during the researcher’s interpretation and representation of what was said.

METHODS

This study emerged from a larger study that examined doctoral students’ perception of their preparation for international research. We utilized qualitative inquiry to answer the larger study’s research question: what are doctoral students’ perceptions of their preparation for conducting research in international contexts? After extensive coding and refining of themes, findings related to this study emerged and provided insight on how U.S. doctoral students reflect on their researcher reflexivity and positionality as emerging critical international scholars. In addition, although we asked questions about research in general, the findings related to this current study emphasized the importance of international qualitative field work and research.

Interviewing participants was the most appropriate mode of inquiry because it helped us to better understand their lived experiences (Charmaz, 1996) as doctoral students, which emerged from the interviews. Further, this qualitative method helped us to examine doctoral students’ perceptions on how prepared they believed they were for conducting qualitative international research and allowed us to ask follow up questions regarding their positionality and reflexivity. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to further detail their individual unique experiences at their respective institutions.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited via a listserv from a national association for the field of higher education. Selection of participants was a result of purposeful sampling, which is used when “the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Recruitment emails were sent in spring of 2015 and 2016 to eligible participants who were current members of an international special interest group within a higher education association. We also utilized snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) when participants would recommend additional participants who met our study criteria.

We interviewed 22 participants (see Table 1) representing 11 different higher education doctoral programs in the United States. Each participant chose his or her own pseudonym to use in this study. Eighteen of the participants identified as women and/or female. Nine of the participants identified as international students, meaning they were born and/or raised in a country outside of the United

States. Of the nine international students, two became naturalized U.S. citizens. As a result of our participants' broad range of backgrounds and experiences, we were able to collect rich data, which is characterized by situating the complexities of participants' lived experiences within the contexts of place and time (Given, 2008). As a result, the richness from the interviews has increased the trustworthiness of the data collected (Glesne, 2011).

We recognize that the international student participants had different perceptions on the meaning of "international research;" thus, we clarified that we were interested in experiences that were facilitated by their graduate program. By doing so, we feel that we were able to get to the core element of our study, which was understanding how doctoral students perceive their preparation for conducting international research. In addition, all of the domestic study participants had at least one experience outside of the United States, either related to their prior and/or current academic experiences such as study abroad or for personal travel.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Year in program	Student status	Anticipated job after graduation	Gender	Race/ethnicity; national origin
Lydia	1	Full time	Faculty	Female	African American
Jiaoyu	5	Part time	Faculty	Female	International/East Asian
Marie	2	Full time	Policy	Female	International/South American
Ashley	4	Full time	Practitioner, Policy	Female	Black; Naturalized citizen
Onay	2	Full time	Scholar-practitioner	Female	International/South Asian
Snoopy	3	Full time	Faculty	Male	Asian
Jenny	5	Full time	Administrator	Female	African American; Naturalized citizen
Katherine	3	Part time	Policy	Female	White
Belle	2	Full time	Scholar-practitioner	Female	Black
Sonia	2	Full time	Policy	Female	International/South Asian
Priya	2	Full time	Faculty	Woman	Indian-American
Ron	3	Full time	Administrator	Male	White
Steve	2	Full time	Administrator	Male	White
Kate	3	Full time	Faculty	Female	Caucasian
Frank	2	Full time	Faculty	Cis-gender male	White
Tatenda	2	Full time	Policy	Female	International/Black African
Vanessa	5	Full time	Administrator	Female	White; Naturalized citizen

Pseudonym	Year in program	Student status	Anticipated job after graduation	Gender	Race/ethnicity; national origin
Talya	4	Full time	Faculty/Researcher	Female	Bi-racial
Carl	3	Full time	Administrator	Female	Black American
Betty	1	Full time	Administrator	Female	International/East Asian
Jenna	1	Full time	Undecided	Female	International/East Asian
Sydney	4	Full time	Faculty	Female	Black

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant either by phone, Skype, or Google Hangout during the 2015 and 2016 spring semesters. All the data collected was transcribed on an ongoing basis, including details on dates, pseudonyms, and any other notes that we took during and after the interviews. After transcribing, we used a coding scheme as outlined by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2013).

We utilized deductive coding, which includes a “start list” (Miles et al., 2013, p. 81) based on this study’s research questions, interview protocol, and conceptual framework. We first searched for broad categories and then developed themes that emerged from the participants’ experiences. Themes were coded by identifying appropriate phrases that related to our themes. We organized the first cycle codes by clustering them under common themes or patterns that emerged from the interviews. After concluding first cycle coding, we moved on to second cycle coding, which is “a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs” (Miles et al., 2013, p. 86). This was an iterative process of reflecting and clustering codes into code categories. We continuously refined the pattern codes until we felt the final codes were representative of the participants’ experiences. Common themes that emerged from the findings included the role of personal identity in research, the importance and process of reflection, and “me-search” as research. We then utilized Finlay’s (2002) maps on types of reflective practice as a way to organize findings into coherent and systematic clusters.

TRUSTWORTHINESS AND VALIDITY

We collected rich data and used thick description (Glesne, 2011), which includes presenting the “voice” of the participants, utilizing thick detailing of questions and answers, and reflecting on our personal reactions to all interviews (Ponterotto, 2006). In doing so, we increased the trustworthiness of the qualitative data collected. Our findings are based on the raw data that we collected and the exact quotes from our study participants. By utilizing multiple data sources, 22 participants and two investigators, we were able to triangulate our data, which is an effective strategy for confirming findings (Merriam, 2002). By using investigator triangulation, we were able to gain additional insights as two investigators who bring “different perspectives and different epistemological assumptions” (Given, 2008, p. 893) to the process of analyzing data. We also reviewed the interview transcripts multiple times to ensure we were capturing the full narratives of the participants and to reduce any misunderstandings in our analysis. This reliability procedure contributed to the trustworthiness of our findings (Creswell, 2007).

In addition, we consulted with scholars of international higher education when conceptualizing our study and later after collecting our data. When discussing our research project, we also shared the process by which we collected our data. We also conferred with our peers proficient in qualitative

research who critiqued our findings and provided alternative viewpoints. These discussions with experts in the field helped us to confirm that our “tentative interpretations” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31) were appropriate and congruent with the themes that we identified from our findings.

Reliability often lies within the researcher who is the primary instrument for data collection. The investigators’ positionality was used as a form of reliability (Merriam, 2009). As the researchers, we were aware that our own biases, values, and perspectives influenced our research lens; thus, our reflexivity affected how we made meaning of participants’ worldviews. We recognize that because this study emphasizes the importance of reflexivity, it is imperative that we share and emphasize our own reflections on our positionalities as researchers.

RESEARCHERS’ REFLEXIVITY

The first author identifies as an U.S.-born first-generation Chinese-American. The first author attended a doctoral program that had touted a heavy international emphasis; however, after completing her dissertation, she was left wondering if there was more training that could have guided her through her internationally-focused dissertation. This question led this author to develop this study in collaboration with the second author of this study. The first author’s research was on the experiences of Chinese international students, which led to significant self-reflection on her positionality as a U.S. born researcher. In addition, the tension of conducting interviews in English with non-native English speakers led her to consider the layers of power and privilege in using a dominant language in research.

The second author identifies as Haitian-American. She is a first-generation American as her parents immigrated to the United States from Haiti over forty years ago. The second author attended the same higher education doctoral program as the first author. When preparing to travel to Haiti to conduct her dissertation research on a higher education centered organization in the country, the second author began to examine her doctoral experiences and in particular questioned her preparation to conduct international research. While in Haiti, the second author reflected quite a bit on her role as a researcher with an insider (Haitian ethnicity) and outsider (U.S. nationality) identity in relation to her research participants.

FINDINGS

All participants were asked questions related to their positionality when conducting international research and how they incorporated reflexivity in their research in order to answer the question: how do U.S. doctoral students understand the role of their reflexivity in international research? Our findings revealed that graduate students were grappling with their roles as researchers in an international context and with the notion of incorporating reflexivity when conducting international research. The findings revolved around the main themes of our conceptual perspectives in which Finlay (2002) mapped five types of reflexivity found in qualitative research, all of which may overlap or be used at the same time by the researcher. In the subsequent sections, we expand on our findings by emphasizing three of the five types of reflective practices based on our findings: reflexivity as introspection, social critique, and discursive deconstruction.

REFLEXIVITY AS INTROSPECTION

Introspection was the most discussed aspect of reflexivity from participants. Most participants emphasized their beliefs in how self-reflection was a critical component of reflexivity in international research. For example, Snoopy shared his personal experiences with how he reflected on his approach to research in China:

I think just reflecting back and thinking I have a relationship toward my own personal interaction toward people and from talking to teachers, educators in China, about some of the issues that are happening such as teaching and learning or in engagement or even the high

stakes examination. That kind of helps me kind of reflect back to see how does that—how does this research topic that I’m hoping to create has an affect towards the future or in terms of what I hope to achieve with this project that I’m designing.

Similarly to Snoopy, Belle also reflected on her own personal background and interactions with others to examine her own positionality in research. She described her introspection with, “In terms of self-awareness, this research comes from a seed that is from within me. So, I feel like it is out of my own way of sort of understanding myself in relation to the world in some sense.” Belle believed strongly in how her own identity as a Black woman affected her approach to research. She continued to elaborate, stating:

I think if you start there and then the terms of the act of reflexivity in the research, how I’m going to collect data and being self-aware in that process. I also have to recognize a lot of it is connected to me personally but I also want to know, I want to learn things. So I am inquiring about some things that are interesting to me that are connected to me but I also don’t understand. So it’s sort of like a part of me but not at the same time which is kind of weird.

Belle’s introspection permeated most aspects of her approach to research because her identity affected how and why she conducted her international research. Talia agreed about the role of personal values affecting research. She personally had not yet had the opportunity to conduct international fieldwork, but was able to describe how she would approach introspective reflexivity when she did go abroad. She stated:

I would like to think I do more like anthropological iterative process. You know, so yes, you’re collecting interviews, observations, what not but in addition, I always memo to myself, you know, like feelings and to try to elucidate like why I’m thinking in a particular way. Where my values come in and how that might shape research questions or contexts I seek to look at. And how that actually shapes my research agenda. It has to be throughout the entire research process and as opposed to trying to resolve the issue because I don’t believe there’s ever a way of getting away from being, you can’t just say if I do all this, then I can leave it and then just collect the data. No. It’s like something you’re constantly grappling with.

Talia believed that researchers must “grapple” with self-reflection throughout the entire research process. Jenny’s experience was similar, and when asked how she engaged in reflexivity, she shared:

I think something that works for me is what is my research question? Because that would help me to give my focus at what I want to achieve with that research. So I look at my research questions to help me define how I want to be in that space. And then it would help me to understand why do I want to do this research, what is my ultimate goal? What do I want to achieve, what do I want people to learn from my research? And I think that for me whenever I was starting with my doctoral research I had to work with my professor and a couple other colleagues to try to see how I can make that question clear.

Jenny continued to describe how she thought about gathering her data, sharing her internal process:

Then how do I go about gathering my data to make sure that maybe I don’t put myself into it, but try to work with other people who would help me to bring about what I want to achieve. So I think it depends on the question and such question and what I want to achieve the goals, what I think it a good or the reason for the research.

Like Talia’s “grappling” with the influence of her lens, Jenny would consistently return back to her foundation, which is the research question. Other participants were able to describe their process for introspection a little bit differently. For example, Kate would engage in the process of self-reflection, but also found value in reflective discussions with others. This is in contrast to other participants who, like Steve, would journal as a way to reflect. As indicated by participants, introspection could be achieved in multiple ways.

REFLEXIVITY AS SOCIAL CRITIQUE

Reflexivity as social critique addresses the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched. Several participants discussed their awareness of the privilege and power they brought to their international research based on their identities as Western-trained researchers. For example, Vanessa, when asked about how she engaged in reflexivity, voiced her concerns as a U.S.-based researcher:

I think one of my biggest, usually my kind of the biggest concern when I do international research is that it's very Western focused on the frameworks, ideally American and my political background. Because of the program that I'm, because of the readings I have done in the U.S. it's usually more U.S. focused so it takes an effort to see through other perspectives to look, you know, connect with framework and kind of find something that also has been written about the same topic in India, can I see—you know—European perspective or Australian or not simply just fall into this U.S. theoretical framework which comes naturally because that's what we read here and that's what we talk about in our coursework.

Vanessa was very aware of her lens as a U.S.-trained doctoral student, and continued to explain how she reflected on her positionality in international research:

I think that would be the one area where I know I'm very conscious of the theoretical framework, also other ways the questions can be asked. Do I have biases in the questions I ask, you know does it kind of confirm, confine me to my specific I would say U.S. type of framework? Am I missing something because of the frameworks I'm using because of the questions I'm asking? So those things are certainly on my mind when I do international research and I try to dig deeper, you know, read more, talk to people

As a result of her educational training, Vanessa was aware of the potential power dynamics embedded in how she engaged with her non-U.S. participants. Part of her reflexive process was questioning her own lens and how it may influence how she interacts with her participants.

When reflecting on her positionality, Priya discussed the research relationship in the context of national identity and how those dynamics can influence the research relationship. She explained:

I think about what does my, what do my privileges as American born and educated mean in the context of working with international students. I've thought a lot about this idea of the other or me otherizing people by engaging in the research. And so what does that mean, how do I minimize that? That's one area that I think a lot about.

Frank, who identified as a gay, White cis-gendered man, spoke extensively about how his background affected his interactions with others. Like Priya, he was particularly focused on his privilege as a U.S. citizen, and he shared:

I would describe my positionality as overall very privileged, again my Whiteness, my maleness, my cis-ness. My socioeconomic background, but I'm also gay right? So I think that tends to be the single salient identity for me. Especially being at a Predominantly White Institution, like I don't have to think about my race. I really don't have to think about my maleness. So I do have to think about my sexuality. But I also think that I rarely if ever have to think about my citizenship. And so I think like that's something that I really need to flesh out and think about and articulate, but I have a lot of privilege again living in the United States. So what would that mean for the rest of my research and how I navigate in a country other than the United States, I'm not sure.

Although Frank claimed a marginalized identity as a gay man, he realized that his U.S. citizenship allowed a privilege that would provide him access and power to navigate other countries. He openly shared that although he had an interest in international research, he had not conducted any formal

research in global contexts at the time of his interview. However, he did share that he had been reflecting extensively on the power and privilege inherent in his identities.

Interestingly, Marie had a very different experience related to social critique as she was the one seemingly with less power in the research relationship. Marie, in her second year of her doctoral program, shared her personal experience when interviewing scholars and policy makers. She was very aware of the power dynamic implicit in international research. She stated:

There's a big issue in terms of gender because, especially policy makers, highly ranked officials are mostly men—older than me. I'm a woman, a younger woman and a PhD student so then there's always an issue there that's really challenging every time I try to gather data. Or try to do an interview with someone. So that is really something that I need to address. So far, I don't have a sense of how to overcome that, but that's one of the issues.

Marie was explicit with how her gender, age, and status as a student affected her interactions with policy makers who are predominantly men. She continued to describe how she engaged in self-reflection when faced with an unbalanced power dynamic by stating:

That is something that of course I have been trying to write that down to really be self-aware and try that that doesn't affect the results of what I gather—the questions I ask. How do I react to what people say?

As indicated by Marie, these participants engaged in the social critique aspect of their reflexivity. Although Marie's personal experience was a little different from Vanessa and Frank, they all were cognizant of the power dynamics in their research process.

REFLEXIVITY AS DISCURSIVE DECONSTRUCTION

Discursive deconstruction refers to researchers understanding that language is ambiguous, and reflection during and after their research activity can be helpful for interpreting the voices of their research participants. Some of the participants in this study discussed the notion of “reflexivity to deconstruct” (Finlay, 2002, p. 224) as they thought about their own research projects. Onay shared that journaling helped her in this process:

I tend to journal extensively and write free notes. I tend to read them every day and go back if I do an interview. I did a project in Pakistan over the summer and once I'm done with the interview I will come back and I will read it again and the question I am asking myself is, how much...like am I asking the questions I already know the answer to, you know? Where am I coming in here? How much more...is there too much of me and not enough of the interviewee coming in. So I think it's that process of constantly being aware of who you are and what you bring to the project and then checking and seeing, do I have the voice of the person that I needed? You know, talking to the interviewee again and saying, here's what I got from our interview together, does this make sense to you? I think those are the kinds of things that help you just be aware that it's...it is doing something together rather than doing something on your own.

Similarly, Sydney talked about her research and the importance of reflecting on her process of collecting data and the importance of reviewing her data to ensure that she understood the meaning of the data collected. She explained:

So in one of the articles that I read, one of the authors talked about how some folks who present their research, their focus on research presented still in terms of this participant said this and this participant said that and then that participant said that. That's problematic for focus group methodology because what this author is arguing is that it's the interaction between group members and the meaning that is actually generated as a result of them interacting with one another. And so making sure that when I present the research data from the focus group, I am going to follow through the interviews where I can kind of individually

talk through things, but making sure that the how is just as important as the what. So I'm still kind of thinking through this, but that's kind of how I, that I'm going to do for my dissertation, but also has me thinking a little bit more about how I'm going to be doing—making sure that I'm intentional about paying as much attention to the process as I am to the actual data that's collected in my future work. And also making sure that it's culturally responsive and culturally responsible.

Katherine had also just begun her research activities as an early career doctoral student. Like Sydney and Onay, she also discussed the need to reflect on how she would understand the perspectives of those she interviewed:

So I'm just starting out and my approach is thinking through as I do it, so I started doing some sort of pilot interviews to figure out where I'm going and I'm trying to figure out how to really draw out someone's experience while also figuring out how I decide—kind of understanding their worldview. But I think I'm still kind of thinking through it as I get some of the data.

Katherine described how she believed she would approach reconciling the cultural differences with her participants as she made meaning of their experiences and worldviews. Frank similarly discussed his approach to international research, emphasizing the importance of mutual meaning making. Frank shared:

Because I'm looking for mutual understanding between me and the research participant. Right? Like some sort of mutual concepts, maps I guess. Something that we can share and know exactly what we're meaning. So I look at the language that I use because I think the language and rhetoric are always there and they're always doing something so I want to make sure my language and rhetoric are doing what I want them to do.

Frank reflected heavily on how he presented his questions and information because he knew the impact that discourse could have on the participants and their data. He continued with how discursive deconstruction affected his approach to data analysis by stating:

Obviously as soon as the data comes in I'm already analyzing it in some way. Maybe not like explicitly, but I'm listening to it or hearing it or I'm seeing the responses and I try to, I try to write down or record my initial reaction. And then I try, to go through them, I try to go from the most literal interpretation to maybe the more symbolic in their responses and see how it all fits together.

When Talia discussed her own research process, she shared how important self-reflection was to her data analysis and that writing reflective memos helped her with interpreting her data. She expounded:

So I think that like you have to just remind yourself to do that work. You know, I think a lot of people think it's so easy to do research on other people because you're just blindly collecting data, but you're not realizing how your interpretation is actually affecting that data collection process. So just, you know, memoing helps myself a lot because then I can put it, like what day was I observing? Okay, so this is what I thought I collected and this is how I was feeling. Like how did that impact that? And looking back and what not. So yeah, definitely an iterative cycle which is great.

These study participants all discussed the need for self-reflection when collecting, analyzing, and interpreting their data in order to ensure that the voices of their research participants were appropriately represented. They believed that by doing so, they would be better able to represent the multiple meanings in language and experiences that commonly exist in international and cross-cultural interactions.

DISCUSSION

The majority of the participants discussed the role reflexivity plays in their research endeavors and almost all of them highlighted the importance of reflexivity as introspection. The process of reflecting inwards, or on the self, was exhibited in multiple ways including reflecting through journaling and by participating in reflective conversations. The participants had various reasons for introspection as well. For example, Belle said that her reflexivity in research was “sort of understanding myself in relation to the world in some sense.” Similarly, Talia shared that she reflected on her research process in order to understand “where my values come in and how that might shape research questions or contexts I seek to look at.” Both Belle and Talia engaged in introspective reflexivity in order to understand who they were in relationship to their studied population.

Glesne (2011) noted that reflexivity in qualitative research allows for two essential parts. One part is the act of conducting the actual project, which both Belle and Talia reflected on when discussing their international research. The second part of reflexivity in qualitative research emphasizes your reflections on “the ground on which you stand” (Glesne, 2011, p. 126). By reflecting on their own identities and perspectives, both Belle and Talia attempted to make sense of how their positions as researchers influenced their research activities. This underscores Rubinstein-Avila’s (2013) writings on qualitative inquiry, which emphasized that researchers should be cognizant of their “past and present experiences” (p. 1047) when conducting research in international settings.

Reflexivity as introspection allowed Snoopy and Jenny to think about how they approached international research. When discussing his research process, Snoopy questioned, “how does this research topic that I’m hoping to create [have] an affect [on] what I hope to achieve with this project that I’m designing.” By asking this question, Snoopy was getting closer to understanding how he influenced his own research. Similarly, Jenny shared that her research questions helped her to understand why she wanted to do her particular research and to define who she wanted to be in her research space. As Etherington (2007) described, reflexivity is useful so “that our work can be understood, not only in terms of what we have discovered, but how we have discovered it” (p. 601). By considering their methodological choices, both Snoopy and Jenny were able to make sense of their decision making in their research process.

Some of the participants discussed the role of power and privilege in their research experiences, which highlighted reflexivity as social critique in qualitative research. Vanessa, Frank, and Priya reflected on their U.S. academic training and citizenship and American identity and how it influenced their thinking about their research endeavors. Finlay (2002) explained that by incorporating social critique in one’s research reflexivity, the researcher is able to address the social construction of power that exists in the world. For example, Vanessa questioned how as a U.S.-based researcher, she automatically imposes a Western framework on research in and on other countries. Vanessa underscored the bias that is often inherent in U.S. research training, which brings to focus the potential of methodological nationalism (Chernilo, 2006; Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013). Thus, reflexivity as social critique can counter the negative effects of researchers only using epistemologies that are based on their own training in U.S.-based doctoral programs.

Research conducted in global contexts is influenced by the intersections of difference, inequalities, and geopolitics (Sultana, 2007). Just as Vanessa was concerned by her U.S. academic training and lived experiences, Priya was concerned about the privilege associated with her American identity and how it would influence her own approach to research. She shared her concern of “othering” her research participants and asked “what do my privileges as American born and educated mean in the context of working with international students?” This was a critical question to ask because as Finlay (2002) highlighted, a concern for researchers who use reflexivity as social critique is determining how to “manage the power imbalance between researcher and participant” (p. 220). Marie had a different concern regarding the research relationship and pondered how her gender, age, and status as a student affected her interactions with policy makers who are predominantly men in her research loca-

tion. In this instance, the power imbalance favored the research participant rather than the researcher, and Marie had to make sense of how she would address this concern prior to working in the field.

Vanessa, Priya, and Marie each had to contend with the interpersonal aspects of their research endeavors in relation to their own identities and how that impacted their participants. The process of reflexivity in the backdrop of social critique was a critical component of their research process because they could not change their own identities, and at the same time, they could not change the power imbalance that was embedded in the research relationship. Power imbalances are inherent in international research (Sultana, 2007), and this study's participants were able to make meaning of their own privilege and power by acknowledging the realities of power dynamics that may exist.

In addition to social critique, several participants shared the importance of reflexivity as discursive deconstruction due to language differences with participants. Language differences emerged in multiple ways, including meaning making and approachability of the research protocol. For example, Onay and Katherine both highlighted the importance of their participants' voices and their worldviews. By "constantly being aware of who you are," Onay was able to question, "do I have the voice of the person?" By highlighting the voice of their participants, Onay and Kate were able to ensure careful representation of participants' meanings. In doing so, they engaged in ethical reflexivity as a way to grapple with the complexities of social research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Another aspect of reflexivity as discursive deconstruction included how researchers presented themselves to their participants. Frank and Sydney both discussed how they made sense of the data, particularly with the role of verbal interactions. For example, Frank was very conscious of how his language and rhetoric affected his interactions with participants. He was aware of his "own hermeneutic horizon" (Rubenstein-Avila, 2013, p. 1047) and how that affected his approach to participants. Discursive deconstruction appeared to work in tandem with reflexivity as social critique, particularly in relation to international contexts of research. The issue of language requires a consideration of the power implicit in academic jargon and potentially even in the English language. Thus, intersubjectivity, as discussed by Sultana (2007), is critical in navigating international communities as a U.S. trained scholar. As indicated by our participants, engaging in reflexivity as discursive deconstruction, social critique, and introspection are all effective ways in beginning to address the effects of power and politics when conducting international research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Implications from this study affect Western-based education programs that seek to internationalize curriculum and research priorities. As such, doctoral students must understand that there are multiple ways of producing knowledge, particularly when considering international contexts. By having an understanding of their positionality and incorporating reflective processes when conducting research, emerging scholars can have a better sense of how who they are and how they think about research influences their research activities. Many of the participants interviewed in this study were beginning to understand reflexivity as both a research concept and an applied practice in international context.

Reflexivity as a research concept would include international researchers considering multiple methodological decisions (Rubenstein-Avila, 2013), including cultural norms, socio-historical factors, environmental contexts, and demographic considerations such as gender and age. Reflexivity training has implications for graduate preparation programs, including how doctoral programs can include reflexivity and positionality in the curriculum as an applied practice. By including these concepts in researcher training courses, doctoral students will have an understanding of how their own lived experiences, whether consciously or subconsciously, shape and influence their research decisions. As a result, faculty would need to take the lead on engaging students in considering how one's ontological view can shape the approach to international engagement. For example, faculty could incorporate classroom activities that would facilitate conversation amongst students about their own backgrounds and how that could affect their interactions with future research participants. By doing so, students

would have the opportunity to engage in both introspection as well as collective knowledge building with their classmates and faculty.

Another implication for graduate preparation programs would be an emphasis on the role power and privilege plays in international research. For example, researchers' nationality, academic training, and language abilities are factors to consider in preparing doctoral students to conduct cross-cultural research. Students could engage in discussions on how to navigate these challenges and opportunities, both in and out of the classroom. We recognize that not all research training occurs within the confines of a classroom; rather, learning can take place in other venues, such as departmental brown bags, webinars, and study abroad preparation meetings. This also contributes to doctoral students understanding that reflexivity is both a research concept and an applied practice. Brown bags and webinars can engage students in multiple topics, including the practical functions of research as well as contextual information about research locations. For example, a brown bag can be facilitated by several researchers who have experience in a specific region of the world and as such, can speak to the nuances of engaging within those cultures. As a result, students will gain increased understanding of the socio-historical contexts of their research sites that goes beyond what can be learned in a book or in journal articles. This understanding is especially important when considering the power imbalances related to gender, language, race, religion, and ways of knowing, all of which permeates multiple cultures around the world.

We recommend that early career researchers pay close attention to these recommendations for practice as a way to prepare themselves for the realities of international research. Although much of the responsibility for research training falls on the shoulders of doctoral programs and faculty, doctoral students and early career researchers have the responsibility to engage in opportunities that may develop their cross-cultural and international understanding of research. In doing so, individuals can avoid methodological nationalism in their approach to their researched international populations and communities, which may include disparities based on power and position.

We understand that power imbalance in research relationships can occur no matter the research context or location, as noted by Marie's concern regarding her gender, age, and student status in her research project. Thus, we recommend that doctoral students take the time to interrogate their own identities while in research training courses and in other informal opportunities. By doing so, students will be better prepared for the various forms of power dynamics that they may encounter in international settings. Reflecting on one's identity would enable researchers to make meaning within research relationships. As a result, ethical practice could emerge within the complexity of international research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Reflective practices could be included in coursework and during conversations with research supervisors and dissertation advisors. With these interactions, students can engage in introspective reflexivity as a way to deepen their awareness of their international research. Cross-cultural research necessitates the critical component of reflection, including U.S. based researchers who are studying other cultural contexts.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations exist for this current study. First, the participants were interviewed at one point in time during their doctoral program. Although our study provided our participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in that moment of time, it did not evaluate any changes that could potentially occur as they progressed in their doctoral programs. Also, our participants were current students, which means that they may not have much research experience. In addition, participants in this study represent multiple stages in their doctoral program, from first year students to doctoral candidates in their final year. Further, our participants represent only students in higher education programs, which limits applicability to other disciplines outside of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Recommendations for future research include interviewing current faculty to better understand how they train doctoral students to engage in reflexivity. Specifically, we recommend research that explores how faculty train doctoral students to participate in the global contexts of educational research. An examination of both curriculum and pedagogy would provide increased understanding of international researcher preparation.

Another recommendation would be to probe deeper into each aspect of reflexivity. Our findings include only three of the five types of reflexive practices as outlined by Finlay (2002). Closer examination of each aspect of reflexivity would contribute greatly to both the current literature as well as applied practice for reflexivity. We are particularly interested in the role of reflexivity as social critique as there is increased attention on power, privilege, and inequalities in international education and research. Emphasis on understanding reflexivity as social critique could assist in addressing and problematizing the power dynamics that are inherent in international and comparative research.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study provided insights on 22 higher education doctoral students' perspectives on reflexivity and positionality in international research. We questioned, how do U.S. doctoral students understand the role of their reflexivity in international research? As indicated by the findings, doctoral students in this study utilized reflexivity as introspection, social critique, and discursive deconstruction, primarily through examination of their own personal identities and how their individual identities affect their approach to international qualitative research.

Although reflexivity is a key component of researcher preparation, more attention needs to be given to the different aspects of reflexivity and how they can be used in international contexts. The participants in this study indicated that the three paths to reflexivity often work in tandem with each other when considering international contexts, much of it due to the issues of power dynamics between the researcher and researched. Thus, additional considerations must be given by doctoral preparation programs to supporting doctoral students and their reflective practices in international education and qualitative research. As indicated in the findings, many of the participants in this study were beginning to understand reflexivity as both a research concept and an applied practice in international context. As such, doctoral programs and early career researchers must engage in the process of reflexivity to move towards being better prepared for international research.

Although this study focused only on participants in higher education programs, we would argue that all disciplines are affected by increased internationalization. As such, doctoral students from various disciplines and backgrounds should be engaging in the process of reflexivity in their research process. International research, as indicated by participants in this study, includes issues of power and personal identity. Thus, doctoral programs of all academic disciplines have a responsibility to engage students in reflective research practices that are necessary for their successful entry in today's global academy society.

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BIOGRAPHIES



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