

From 'being there' to 'being ... where?'

## From 'being there' to 'being ... where?': relocating ethnography

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### Abstract

Purpose: Expands recent discussions of research practice in organizational ethnography through engaging in a reflexive examination of the ethnographer's situated identity work across different research spaces: academic, personal and the research site itself.

Approach: Examines concerns with the traditional notion of 'being there' as it applies to ethnography in contemporary organization studies and, through a confessional account exploring my own experiences as a PhD student conducting ethnography, considers 'being ... where' using the analytic framework of situated identity work.

Findings: Identifies both opportunities and challenges for organizational ethnographers facing the question of 'being ... where?' through highlighting the situated nature of researchers' identity work in, across and between different (material and virtual) research spaces.

Practical implications: Provides researchers with prompts to examine their own situated identity work, which may prove particularly useful for novice researchers and their supervisors, while also identifying the potential for incorporating these ideas within organizational ethnography more broadly.

Value: Offers situated identity work as a means to provide renewed analytic vigour to the confessional genre whilst highlighting new opportunities for reflexive and critical ethnographic research practice.

**Key Words**: Ethnography, identity work, space, place, reflexivity, confessional genre

**Paper Type**: Research Paper

## Introduction

Ethnographers' experiences of both methodology and method (Van Maanen 2006; Bryman 2008) have been much examined via the genre of confessional accounts (Gill 2006) and through the practice of autoethnography (Ellis, 2004). These both offer explanations of the 'researcher as ethnographer' and provide insight into the experience of 'being there'. However, despite engaging with, and drawing on, these discussions, there remain particular concerns about the practice of organizational ethnography.

Firstly, commentators express a sense of frustration with the continuing "methodological angst" (Yanow 2009, p. 186) of organizational ethnographers, who appear nervous of their legitimacy within the field of organizational studies more broadly. Secondly, there is increasing concern with the need to adapt ethnographic practice to meet the changing demands of studying contemporary organizing. As organizational life becomes increasingly fluid, flexible and fleet of foot (Brown-Saracino et al. 2008; Czarniawska 2008) 'being there', in a traditional ethnographic sense, becomes more problematic. There is more than a suspicion that what has worked in the past is not necessarily going to provide a useful guide for future research projects (Dicks et al. 2006).

Therefore, prompted by these concerns, I focus on the 'researcher as ethnographer' and 'being there' as issues of particular interest to organizational ethnographers. I utilize the concept of identity work (Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003) to facilitate an exploration of ethnography (and the ethnographer) in a variety of (material and virtual) research spaces. I argue that we can usefully follow the trend within organizational studies more broadly (Simpson and Carroll 2008) and shift from discussing the researcher's 'role' to thinking about the "socially constructed, multiple and shifting character of identities" (Collinson 2003 p. 535). In this paper, these processes are considered as taking place across a variety of (material and virtual) academic and personal spaces, as well as at the research site or in the field.

Significantly then, in light of concerns about the challenges of 'being there' within modern organizations, I focus specifically on *situated identity work* and aim to offer a more nuanced consideration of organizational ethnography by focusing attention on the problem of 'being...where?'. Ethnographers' primary concern has historically been with the 'field' or research site. As highlighted above, both place and space within organizational life are becoming increasingly fluid (Czarniawska 2008). The field is becoming a more complex place, comprising both material and virtual spaces (Hubbard *et al.*, 2004) which may be more or less accessible to individual ethnographers. Further, ethnographers' identity work may be situated in many other places and

spaces away from the organization that is the focus of their fieldwork. In this respect, I suggest that a broader consideration of both academic and personal spaces is essential to enabling an in-depth understanding of our own situated identity work, and for examining our experiences of organizational ethnography.

This examination of 'being' and 'where' is offered within the genre of a confessional account which explores my own experiences as a PhD student conducting an ethnographic study of the work of Human Resources (HR) practitioners. Through unpacking my own identity work as a novice ethnographer negotiating different spaces, I aim to generate practical insight whilst also highlighting new places for reflexive and critical research practice.

### **Ethnography and ethnographers**

'Being there' is a distinctive characteristic of ethnography and is usually depicted as involving the active participation of the researcher within the community under investigation, with an emphasis on observation as a key method of gathering information. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) propose that "ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews – in fact gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry" (p. 3). 'Being there' is thus positioned as essential in developing a thick or rich description (Geertz 1983) and is in contrast to the researchers' (both philosophical and physical) absence from quantitative research (Brewer 2004; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

However, ethnographic presence has become more "self-conscious" (Wolfinger 2002, p. 85) as both methodology and method have come under increasing scrutiny (Lecompte 2002; Humphreys et al. 2003). There has been a comprehensive challenge to the idea that an ethnographer might (by virtue of their position as an outsider along with their ability to effect 'participant-observation') produce a neutral, yet complete, cultural account (Marcus 1998). As a result there has been increased debate about the "positionality" of both researcher and researched (Madison 2005, p. 5), suggesting that both 'being' and 'there' need to be opened up to scrutiny.

In response we have seen the emergence of deconstructive (Linstead 1993); critical (Thomas 1991; Dey 2002; Madison 2005) and reflexive ethnography (Aull Davies 1999; Burawoy 2003). We have also seen the development of autoethnography (Ellis, 2004), in which the ethnographers' own experiences are subject to self-examination and become the focal subject of the research

endeavour. Increasingly then, we see analysis of the ethnographer's presence both within individual accounts and also within broader methodological reviews of the field. This often results in both personal and personalised discussions of organizational ethnography. For example, in Fine *et al's* (2008) recent review, ethnographers stand as key characters in the story, discussed by name rather than merely cited. Similarly, recent discussions by Yanow (2009), Czarniawska (2008) and Van Maanen (2006) explore the relationships between the philosophical assumptions of ethnography and the practical actions of the ethnographer. The ethnographer's identity is therefore central to current discussions about organizational ethnography.

The technical challenges of fieldwork are also much discussed, most usually via confessional accounts, which again place the ethnographer centre stage. Confessional accounts often examine "challenging fieldwork settings" (Castellano 2007, p. 705), involving exposure to physical or psychological risk, and provide accounts of the ways in which such challenges have been overcome. Such depictions often evoke images of a past anthropological age, of Malinowski (1922) and Evans-Pritchard (1940) venturing into unknown places. Others explore the challenges associated with the nature of participant-observation, of 'being there'. For example, Emerson (1981) identifies the difficulties associated with the nature and variety of fieldwork roles, including the development of trust and rapport and processes of involvement and detachment. These themes have been developed and explored in many methodological textbooks (Marcus 1998; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), with more focused accounts tackling specific issues such as ethical dilemmas (Anspach and Mizarchi 2007), political aspects (Gil 2010), emotion work (Down et al. 2006) and academic legitimacy (Armitage 2008).

While adversity and challenge therefore appear central to understandings of 'being there' these are usually reported as successfully overcome and depictions of ethnographic failure in published accounts are rare. Czarniawska's (2007) description of struggling to follow a city management official is an exception, as she notes "I wish I could report that my relationship with the FD improved but it didn't" (p. 50) and goes on to examine the methodological lessons to be learned from her difficulties. Another exception standing alongside, but in contrast to, Czarniawska's expert confession, is Pollard's (2009) account of the issues faced by PhD anthropologists. Although many of the issues raised here relate to dangerous fieldwork settings, the accounts also touch on the difficulty novice researchers' face in simultaneously managing both academic and field relationships and note how these may be interrelated in shaping the experience of fieldwork, a dynamic rarely considered in accounts of organizational ethnography.

These discussions run alongside debates about the changing and increasingly challenging nature of fieldwork in contemporary organizations (Czarniawska 2008). This highlights the need for organizational ethnographers to respond to changes in both the scale (Brown-Saracino et al. 2008) and characteristics of work, with the increasing technological mediation of organizational life as a dominant theme (Garcia et al. 2009). Through such discussions, both 'being' and 'there' have been problematized. Various terms have been coined to highlight the changing nature of the field, and the ethnographers' engagement with it, including 'virtual ethnography' (Hine 2000), 'multimodal ethnography' (Dicks et al. 2006) 'network ethnography' (Howard 2002) and 'netnography' (Kozinets 2009). As Czarniawska (2008) notes, the emergence of technological spaces within organizations has exacerbated the ethnographer's concern with being there, since 'there' is increasingly difficult to physically situate while she further usefully highlights the importance of examining "the connections between the activities inside and outside cyberspace" (p. 13).

Locating this concern within broader debates in the social sciences, Hubbard et al (2004) suggest that rather than the much vaunted death of geography (Morgan, 2004) we are instead seeing a reinvigoration and re-theorization of notions of space and place (Green, 2002). It is not possible here to do justice to the full complexity of this debate. It is, however, important to highlight the definitional complexities associated with notions of space and place, particularly the differential connotations of material and virtual within this debate. Here, space and place are considered as constructed through our personal and interpersonal engagement rather than as fixed destinations awaiting our arrival. I conceptualise place as reflecting a particular sensemaking (Weick, 1995) of space, though use the terms interchangeably in the remainder of this paper since my use is purely instrumental to prompt a re-engagement with 'there' and 'where' in ethnography. My aim is to move beyond the focus on 'the field' and the consideration of location as a purely practical concern in ethnography (Neyland, 2007). As expanded below, I suggest that this can be facilitated through examining our experiences of organizational ethnography as situated identity work which enables us to move beyond concern with 'being there' and towards a consideration of 'being ... where?'

### **Identity work**

As outlined previously, there has been much consideration of the ethnographer's role and potential for role conflict (e.g. between participant and observer roles in participant-observation, Castellano 2007). However, elsewhere in organizational studies we have seen a shift away from empirical and theoretical concerns with 'role' and an increasing interest in 'identity construction'

(Simpson and Carroll 2008; Ibarra and Barbulescu 2010; Dutton et al., 2010). Indeed, examining researcher identity from this perspective has already been considered with respect to the interview as an opportunity for interactional identity work (Cassell 2005) and has prompted discussion of the emotional labour of fieldwork (Down et al. 2006). Furthermore, there has been an exploration of both individual and group challenges to identity construction within different research and academic contexts (e.g. qualitative organizational psychologists, Symon and Cassell 2008; contract researchers, Araujo 2009; and gendered academic identities, Thomas and Davies, 2002).

This move away from a focus on 'role' requires a shift to attend to the "socially constructed, multiple and shifting character of identities" (Collinson 2003 p. 535) and contrasts with previous considerations of identity as constant or consistent character (Alvesson et al. 2008). Rooting identity in a social constructionist perspective involves a move in which "people are theorized as telling, or having the capacity to tell, many different identity stories in different contexts and at different times" (Clarke et al. 2009 p. 326). This process of storytelling has been most usefully categorised as 'identity work' in which "people are continuously engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Alvesson and Willmott 2002 p. 626; Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003 p. 1165). Such stories may be enacted (Weick 1995) with a range of material and discursive resources (Ibarra and Barbulescu 2010), access to which may be impacted by the particular context of the storytelling. Further, Clarke et al's (2009) definition, above, highlights the situated nature of identity work, which fits particularly well with my aims to analytically focus on 'being where' and to explore ethnographers' identity work within a variety of both material and virtual spaces.

Thus the switch from a role perspective to a consideration of identity work entails a change *from* considering who the ethnographer 'is' to focus on unpacking "the dynamic interplay between internal strivings and external prescriptions, between self presentation and labelling by others, between achievement and ascription and between regulation and resistance" (Ybema et al. 2009 p. 301). This positioning reflects both the internal/self and external/social aspects of identity work (Watson 2008), a positioning which nicely reflects the need to examine the ethnographer's struggle with both a sense of self-identity and their relationships with others in different research spaces.

As previously highlighted, such struggles are often most vividly depicted within the autoethnographic tradition, which places the personal experience of the researcher centre stage and is usually expressed through the "conventions of literary writing" (Ellis, 2004, p xix). There are, however, many debates about both the form and purpose of autoethnography (Denzin, 2006). In this paper I suggest that for many, and in particular for novice researchers, examining the situated

identity work of the ethnographer might allow the researcher to benefit from an increased reflexive appreciation of the research experience without the need to become completely autoethnographic.

### **Unpacking being...where?**

This paper is based on a retrospective analysis of my own situated identity work during my PhD research. While it is difficult to disentangle a general description from the analysis which follows, an initial overview is provided here to set the scene.

My PhD commenced in October 2003 (initially part-time, before becoming full-time in October 2004) and concluded with a successful viva in December 2007. In the early days, my time was split between my small home office (in Surrey) and the university library (in central London). I also spent some time in a shared PhD office, usually when attending seminars or on my way to a meeting in my supervisor's office. My fieldwork started in July 2004, with the main period running from September 2004 to June 2005 during which I spent an average of three days per week physically on site in the organization's offices in central London.

My ethnography concerned the HR department of an investment bank which had recently implemented processes, roles and technology to streamline operations and improve client service, adopting an 'Ulrich style' role-based organization (see, for example, Ulrich 1997). The HR department was split between several different office locations in central London, though an office move during 2005 saw some consolidation. My ethnographic activity involved shadowing participants during their day-to-day work, participant interviews, collecting documents, attending meetings, workshops and training courses. Research activity took place in meeting rooms, corridors, and the office cafeteria but also in social spaces outside the organization such as cafes and pubs.

In addition to time spent physically with participants, I was also in regular email contact. Much of this involved direct correspondence but I was also included on general departmental distribution lists and therefore received emails on a wide variety of topics. General internet access was, however, restricted at all the organization's sites, which meant that access to my personal email was often blocked while I was working at the organization. I also participated in many conference calls which were usually used to supplement face-to-face meetings (both as an alternative and to provide access to individuals unable to attend). I participated in conference calls both when on-site (usually with others, in a meeting room with speakerphone facilities) and from home (usually on my own, but sometimes with children and/or dog in the background).

After concluding my fieldwork, I spent most of my time on analysis and writing, working from my home office and spending no more than a day per week in the academic department. This said, I was in contact with PhD peers both virtually and face-to-face and had regular periods of academic 'immersion' during conferences. I also maintained contact with several participants well after the fieldwork had been completed. This included meeting for lunch or coffee, both to discuss my research and generally to 'chat'.

In the exploration of 'being...where' that follows, I organize my analysis through a (re)consideration of the different research spaces that I encountered during my PhD and examine my situated identity work within each, before looking across them and at the spaces in between. Utilising the geographical notions of subjective mapping (e.g. 'mental mapping' and 'sense of place'; Hubbard et al., 2004), Figure 1 (below) provides an overview of this spatial consideration:

**[Take in Figure 1: Mapping research spaces]**

It is interesting to note that van der Waal (2009) advocates a geographical exploration and mapping of the research site within the practice of organizational ethnography, but here I am broadening both the range and type of spaces to be considered. This is clearly not a true, representational map from which to plot an accurate (past or future) journey. Rather, it is an inevitably selective and partial spatial representation which draws liberally on the notions of subjective mapping (Hubbard et al., 2004) to provide a framework within which to consider 'being ... where?'

Both the map and the account that follows draw on field notes, email correspondence and interview transcripts together with notes from PhD supervisory meetings and various versions of my PhD methodology chapter, which were written throughout the research project. As previously explained I have categorised this as a confessional account (Gill, 2006) rather than an autoethnography (Ellis, 2004) and it is therefore presented in the style of an academic analysis rather than the narrative approach more common in autoethnographic accounts.

My starting point is the subjective mapping of three 'spaces' to represent my academic, personal and research sites. As previously commented, this extends the typical focus of organizational ethnography beyond 'the field'. Onto and between these three broad spaces, I have plotted specific places within which my research was situated. Virtual spaces are also graphically



highlighted, though there are limitations with this representation. Again, this is a selective list and each section below starts with an explanation of this focus. Each place is then discussed in turn and used as a prompt to unpack examples of my own situated identity work.

### ***Situated identity work in academic spaces***

Four academic places are depicted in Figure 1 (above), three of which are associated with a specific academic institution (Library, Supervisor's office and the PhD room) whilst the third – academic conferences – includes variable and temporary spaces. A key characteristic of my experience within these spaces is the proximity (physical and/or virtual) to other academics and the issues and opportunities such proximity presents.

I recall the library (both physically and virtually, with the increasing availability during my PhD of e-journals) as a 'safe' academic space. Particularly in the early days of my PhD studies, the library provided an opportunity to eavesdrop on legitimate academic conversations (as represented by peer-reviewed journals) without having to play an active role. This provides the newcomer with an introduction to the rules of the game, as far as academic identity work is concerned. Moreover, throughout my PhD 'going to the Library' also acted as a legitimate, understandable destination from other spaces; a destination that also acts to remind those in other spaces (e.g. participants and family) of my academic identity. However, those in the organization provided challenges to this identity work. Participants both laid claim research within their own identity work (for example, one junior HR practitioner commented: *"I'm more confident now because I'm researching more, I'm reading more"*) and, in contrast, depicted spending time in the library as a luxury in respect to 'normal' work commitments (for example another HR practitioner explained: *"I just sometimes wish I could have a little bit more time to read up on stuff, you know, I wish I could think, ok, I'll take, I'll spend today just reading stuff you know"*). Thus while physically present, the library may have felt like a safe space, invoking this academic space when elsewhere was sometimes problematic.

In the first year of my PhD I attended my very first academic conference and participated in a two-day doctoral workshop. As Humphrey's (2005) autoethnographic account of his own academic career suggests, conferences provide both the opportunity to experience 'expert' accounts first hand whilst also providing spaces within which new researchers can present their work and 'try out' academic identity work. As well as the 'formal' conference spaces of the 'keynote' lecture theatres and 'ordinary' syndicate rooms, academic conferences are also made up of many informal spaces. A key experience at my first conference took place while drinking in the bar with other PhD students I

had meet at the doctoral workshop. Here I was posed a perplexing question by a much younger attendee – why was I doing a PhD now, hadn't I been very clever when I was younger? I recall the collective intake of breath around the table as my identity as an 'older' (I was 38 at the time) but 'novice' PhD student was directly confronted. I was comfortable with my ability to address this question since I had worked for a well regarded management consultancy for ten years after graduating from a top UK university. However, negotiating the tension between 'age' and 'experience' became an ongoing theme within my identity work throughout my PhD across a variety of spaces and places.

As mentioned earlier, there was a small PhD room that was used as a stopping off point on my visits to other academic places, particularly en-route to my supervisory meetings. The room was a rather ramshackle place, with a random collection of broken chairs, unwanted desks and old computers. Whilst some PhD students embraced the space and set up a permanent work base, the room mainly functioned as a temporary meeting place. It was a space within the academic institution but away from academic scrutiny, a place to share concerns with other novice researchers who were going through similar experiences of 'becoming academics' regardless of their methodological positioning. Thus, like the library this seemed to be a 'safe' academic space, but did not confer a similar representational value for identity work performed elsewhere.

My supervisor's office was the venue for the majority of my initial supervision meetings, which took place approximately once a month. Identity work in this space was often a 'trying out' of accounts, providing an important opportunity to practice the verbal explanation of my ideas which would be essential later in the PhD viva. As my PhD progressed, supervision took place in a wider variety of spaces, including over lunch and at home, representing changes in the supervision relationship and, I'd like to think, an increasing shared sense of confidence in my research. This reflects my understanding of the importance of constructing the identity of an independent researcher (Johnson *et al.*, 2000) through the PhD process. Changing supervision spaces therefore appears to have supported this aspect of my identity work. Supervision was also mediated electronically. For example, initially there was an email exchange of agendas and minutes for supervision meetings and later track changes within word documents was used to 'post comments' on materials such as draft chapters or conference papers. This latter practice provides both an opportunity (to facilitate timely feedback, accurately capture supervisory feedback and prepare for later paper review process) and challenge (particularly to ownership of the text). In this way, the supervisory spaces seemed to be a critical place for identity work, particularly the 'need' to assert independent researcher status as time progresses.

Overall then, academic spaces are variably safe and challenging and can function as an active destination and as a retreat. They can act as a source of legitimacy for identity work but this has to be constantly negotiated through a variety of direct and electronically mediated interactions.

### ***Situated identity work in research site spaces***

More has been written about ethnographic identity work within research site spaces than the other spaces explored in this paper. It is also worth noting that there are some similarities between the broader institutional positioning of HR practitioners and that of organizational ethnographers, with issues of insecurity and a quest for credibility (Watson 2001; Yanow 2009, Pritchard, 2010) frequently discussed with respect to both identities.

In terms of my own identity work in these spaces, this was influenced by my past experiences of working in similar spaces as a management consultant, a career I had followed for ten years. In traditional ethnographic terms then, I was not a 'stranger' to these sorts of spaces, although I had not worked in this particular organization before. Also as a management consultant, I had experienced the process of arriving in a new organization many times, often finding it a particularly challenging experience for identity work.

Participation is presented as key in discussions of ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). To successfully lay claim to an ethnographic identity I therefore wanted to become 'a member' of the organization. Securing access was part of this process but security and reception was then a space that needed to be negotiated on a daily basis, even after permission for my ethnography had been given. Indeed, during the first two months of my fieldwork I had to be met and signed in as a visitor at each office. I felt neither like a 'proper' member of the organization nor a 'real' ethnographer. Lack of a security pass also frustrated movement within offices since there were many internal doors with electronic access control. When my pass was finally issued I felt that this went some way to confirming 'membership' and the ability to move in and out of offices opened up the opportunity to explore more freely. In particular, I could arrive at meetings as a 'regular', without needing to make special arrangements to sign in, and therefore felt more able to construct my identity as a 'participant' in the department's activities.

Much activity within the HR department took place within a row of meeting rooms that flanked the otherwise open plan office space. These were glass fronted and therefore whilst they could be physically closed, you remained on view. Meetings were very familiar territory given my management consultancy past. At these meetings I found myself weaving an unsteady course

between presenting myself as both an 'expert' (drawing on aspects of my previous work identity as a management consultant) and as a PhD student (a temporary visitor, grateful for any hospitality, who would try not to be too much a nuisance and didn't cost anything). Drawing on my past as a management consultant initially seemed more useful, as I was presenting an identity recognised by many in the organization. It also offered a higher degree of personal security in contrast to the uncertain framing of my academic identity. Moreover, the fact that I could lay claim to a particular identity - 'the ex-management consultant' - allowed me to reject less favourable associations this identity may bring (such as promoting management fads and fashions, Furnham, 2004; Sturdy *et al.*, 2006). However, I became increasingly wary of sounding too much like a 'real' management consultant but was uncertain as to how to construct myself as a researcher, particularly in this space. This was frustrating as this appeared to me as relatively effortless in the research accounts that I had heard in various academic spaces.

As my fieldwork progressed I developed relationships with many teams within the HR department. Along with participating in more formal aspects of organizational life, I also became more involved with the informal and social aspects. The office cafeteria functioned as an overspill meeting space, a venue for chats over coffee and a place to meet for lunch. While discussions about work did take place, more usually this was a venue for general chat and gossip. This space presents ethical challenges for individual identity work since it is important participants are aware of the extent of ethnographic participation. To some extent then, the researcher identity is ever present. However, I also found that this was the venue where I would talk more about my own personal life, particularly my experiences as a 'working mother'. During my time in the organization, two of the senior women became pregnant and I believe my relationship with them changed as we were able to relate to the shared issues facing working mothers; issues often discussed in these more informal spaces.

Technologically mediated identity work was a further important aspect of interactions with participants. Early requests to be placed on various distribution lists for circulation of reports and communications proved to be particularly fortuitous. I had anticipated that this would generate useful background information and enable me to learn the departmental ropes. I had not envisaged that this would also act as a means of electronic introduction and, to some extent, legitimation as others got used to seeing my email address and name added to distribution lists. Interestingly, this technological membership was far easier to achieve than the process of obtaining a security pass to enable physical access to the organization.

As already mentioned, conference calls were used regularly both to supplement and as an alternative to face-to-face meetings. For example, on one occasion I sat with a small group who 'dialled in' to a senior management presentation on departmental plans (being held in a nearby office) during which we ate sweets and chatted with the microphone on mute. Again, this presents challenges to traditional notions of ethnographic presence since it becomes potentially possible to be in two places at once when access is technologically mediated in this way.

I look back on my fieldwork with fond memories. I enjoyed being back in an organizational setting which was quite similar to many I had worked in previously, and I enjoyed working with those that I met. While on a day to day basis academic spaces seemed rather remote, as previously mentioned I could invoke places such as the library to highlight my academic identity from time to time. Rather than end my fieldwork, it was tempting to stay particularly as I felt a degree of security in my position within the organization; I had made friends and enjoyed the routine of going to work. In contrast, moving on with my PhD and returning to an academic space was a daunting prospect.

### ***Situated identity work in personal spaces***

Currently I am sitting typing on a laptop, sat on the sofa in my lounge. It is Sunday. I had a break just now and walked the dog. While out, I texted a friend to see if she had heard from our daughters who are hiking together across the South Downs as part of their silver Duke of Edinburgh award. I made a cup of tea before returning to the laptop and receiving a text from my daughter to say they were nearly at their campsite for the evening.

These are my pertinent personal spaces right now. However in the map presented previously (figure 1) there is only one identified personal space: that of my home office. I have struggled to map the personal spaces of my situated identity work more than the academic or research site spaces, which seem in contrast both more straightforward and more relevant to my ethnographic self.

My home office was, however, particularly significant since (without a laptop at that time) work at home was in part technologically restricted to the place where the desktop computer and printer were located. This was also the place where I gathered and stored materials such as articles, back up disks and documents. In the early days of my PhD it seemed a distinct, separate place. A place I went to read, to plan and write; to think about my academic identity rather than enact it. In many respects, at this stage, my identity work here was similar to the earlier discussion of the library; this was a safe space.

This changed after I 'came home' from my fieldwork, as the organization then infiltrated this space. On some days I did not seem to have left the organization at all. I heard the voices of the participants as I transcribed interviews and the company's logo carpeted my floor as I sorted through the materials I had collected. Emails continued to arrive regularly and it was difficult not to continue at least partial involvement with both the formal and informal life of the organization. In one sense however, things were now under my control as I was taking decisions about organizing, transcribing, analysing the material I had collected – it became 'my data'. After all, this is my space.

I am aware that this statement (perhaps deliberately) conceals more than it reveals, since there were significant changes in my personal circumstances during my PhD which make the ownership of this home and this space significant. I share this space with my two children and a dog. They are however embedded in my identity work with in all spaces; I am always a mother wherever I am. Moreover, the children have come to academic spaces (attending PhD seminars for example) and impacted academic activities taking place at home. For example, while attempting to make notes on an article one evening, my son borrowed my notebook to write me a series of messages which have been preserved alongside my notes. I treasure them as capturing his eight year old thoughts and I am aware that written elsewhere they may not have survived, since I took particular care of my academic materials.

Considering situated identity work within personal spaces is perhaps more challenging than in the more expected contexts of academic or organizational spaces. It also seems more controversial to open up these spaces within the academic space of a journal article. While I have stopped short of engaging fully in an autoethnography here, this retrospective analysis has prompted further reflexive consideration of the relationships between these different spaces and the ways in which they are enrolled in my identity work in, across and between them.

### ***Situated identity work across places and in spaces between***

Whilst mapping out my research spaces, I was prompted to think about the ways in which I physically moved between them. The majority of the time this movement was via public transport, itself a strangely individual yet communal experience. While doing my fieldwork, travelling as a commuter on the way to work provided a reflective space but also reaffirmed the separation of personal and other spaces. Practically speaking, this was also a working space in which to read, prepare for meetings or to write up my field notes on the way home. However, Green (2002) comments that mobile devices (such as smart phones and laptops) can be considered as "Lazarus

devices” since they offer the potential to “‘resurrect’ mobile time that would previously have been considered ‘dead’, ‘unproductive’” (p. 290). Increasingly then, spaces in between are therefore being opened up as offering both new challenges and demands for identity work – both for ourselves as researchers and for those we are interested in researching.

Previously (figure 1), I also positioned social places as acting as a bridge between different spaces. I have already commented that some PhD supervision meetings were held over lunch and on the social nature of the PhD room. I have also noted that the office cafeteria was also a partially social space. However, I also met up with participants after I had left the organization, both to catch up socially and to discuss my research. Mostly these were meetings over lunch or coffee, away from the organization’s offices so reinforcing that my membership had now lapsed and relationships had changed. At the same time, I was now presenting myself as a researcher doing analysis and while their input and reviews were very useful, the basis of participation (both mine and theirs) had fundamentally changed.

As highlighted earlier, subjective mapping is not an attempt to list or describe every space encountered. I am, however, aware that my ability to recall what I have defined as spaces in between is perhaps more suspect since they may not have seemed particularly distinctive or significant at the time. This highlights the need to attend not only to particular places we ‘go to’, our specific destinations, but also to consider the range of spaces we engage with during our research activities.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

In this confessional account I have examined my own situated identity work in a variety of academic, personal and research site spaces. Rather than considering ‘being there’ as an essential attribute of organizational ethnography, I have opened up an alternative for consideration: ‘being ... where?’. I have presented and then explored a subjective map of the different research spaces encountered during my PhD research, considering each as both a site for identity work and as a place co-constructed through identity work. I have examined selected individual research spaces and my journeys between them, whilst also exploring how they are interconnected. Indeed, I would suggest that in addition to a direct consideration of our situated identity work, it is attention to our enrolment of other spaces and places (e.g. use of the library as a marker of academic identity within the research site) that may offer the most potential for enhancing research practice as we are able

to reflect on the ways in which our understanding of different places shape and are shaped by ethnographic interaction.

I argue that this (self) analysis of situated identity work offers the potential to highlight new (material and virtual) places for reflexive and critical research practice whilst also offering a more nuanced understanding of ethnographic presence. The reflexive analysis offered here has enhanced my own understanding of how my academic, personal and research site narratives are held in tension in my account of my PhD research. I have been able to explore both conflicts and compatibilities with a new (geographically-inspired) lens. This is not to say it is necessarily desirable or possible to resolve or reduce these tensions, but rather that this analytic process has allowed a greater insight into their (material and virtual) impact on my own research practices, both as experienced in this research project and how this has influenced my exploration of new spaces (particularly academic and research sites) encountered since.

There are, however, obvious and inherent limitations to such retrospective self-analysis, which risks accusations of over indulgence in the name of reflexivity (Knights 2006). Indeed Fine's (1993) warning that "much is excluded because it passed right under our nose and through our ears and because our hands were too tired to note what was happening" (p280) must also be heeded with respect to reflexive self-analysis. Moreover, one could argue that engagement in the confessional genre acts primarily to bolster my own identity work, here within the specific academic space of a journal article.

Further, this research project was not "truly symmetric" (Czarniawska 2007, p12) in that participants' voices and interpretations of my identity work are not directly reported or analysed. Future empirical work which further investigates the interactional effects of participant and researcher identity work would seem to offer opportunities for further advancing our understanding from both a conceptual and methodological perspective. Moreover, there seems to be considerable scope to use 'being ... where?' as a prompt for exploring participants' understandings of pertinent spaces and of examining their own experiences of situated identity work.

That organizational ethnographers need to extend their personal reflexivity to new spaces (including more personal and virtual places), is both potentially inspiring and disturbing for the novice researcher setting out on their very first experience of fieldwork. It also highlights potential issues for collaborative research, in which the map of spaces may be more complex and differentially experienced by those attempting to share the same ethnographic endeavour. For both, I would suggest that a subjective mapping of research spaces provides a useful prompt for an examination of



situated identity work that extends beyond the typical focus of participant-observation within a physical research site. In short, it opens up the possibility of exploring responses to the question: 'being...where?'

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Figure 1: Mapping research spaces

