

### Minority Scholars and Insider-Outsider Researcher Status: Challenges along a Personal, Professional and Political Continuum

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## Minority Scholars and Insider-Outsider Researcher Status: Challenges along a Personal, Professional and Political Continuum

*Mags Crean*

**Key words:**

participatory action  
research;  
emancipatory  
research; insider-  
outsider;  
autoethnography;  
knowledge  
production; social  
class; gender

**Abstract:** In this article, I examine some of the methodological issues present for minority scholars when conducting research with an "insider-outsider" researcher status. Utilising examples from my fieldwork, I will expose how social class, care and gender identity along with positioning have impact on the research process and analysis. Based on a study that sought to collaboratively produce knowledge about how inequality is lived and challenged, I was able to gain access and build rapport with participants with my insider working class background. With my outsider positioning as a "researcher" and "academic," I encountered more nuanced relations in the research process, showing how one can also be an insider-outsider simultaneously. My additional identity and positioning as a woman and mother became influential factors to the collaborative analysis of the findings, from which I gathered new knowledge about the intersection of class and care. In placing my identity and positioning, in terms of class, care and gender, at the centre of this discussion of methodology, I raise important questions on a personal, professional and political continuum for qualitative research and the production of collaborative knowledge and action within the field of participatory research.

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## 1. The Insider-Outsider Researcher Status and Participatory Action Research

Emancipatory theory and feminist theory indicate the inclusion of experiential knowledge in understanding society and social change (LYNCH, 1999; WALKERDINE, 1990). Participatory action research (PAR) is a significant contribution to this body of thought with advanced ideas on how research methodology can be useful to the production of these new frames of knowledge, operational for social change. Jarg BERGOLD and Stefan THOMAS (2012) identify ways in which action research and participatory research converge whilst differences still exist between the two approaches. Michal KRUMER-NEVO (2009, p.281) claims that "participatory action researchers investigate reality [to]

transform it and transform the world by the very process of investigating it". The participatory element in PAR shows the emphasis from action and change to collaborative research activities (BERGOLD & THOMAS, 2012). [1]

Researchers within PAR are often situated as insider and outsider, as they conduct research with their own community, workplace or social groups whilst occupying an outside position such as that of the researcher (DWYER & BUCKLE, 2009; REASON & BRADBURY, 2001). Positionality has been established as an important component in research (CHERENI, 2014; GANGA & SCOTT, 2006), specifically in how knowledge is produced (MILLS, 1943). There is an established space within participatory qualitative research and, to a lesser degree, within the broader field of qualitative research, to reflect on the researcher position and how this has an impact on knowledge production and the research process. Katja MRUCK and Franz BREUER (2002) are referring to this when they write about how personal, social and local factors are influential to the research process and its results. [2]

In the early discussions of the insider-outsider debate in research (MERTON, 1972), the researcher status was either an insider or outsider. More recent discussions indicate the shifting contexts and complexity involved in the insider-outsider status; they show how researchers can shift from insider to outsider depending on the context in which they find themselves throughout the research process (BROWN, 2012; DWYER & BUCKLE, 2009; INNES, 2009; MERRIAM et al., 2001; MILLIGAN, 2016; NAPLES, 1996; WILLIAMS, 2015). Exploring the insider-outsider status in terms of positionality according to race, class, gender, care and culture can be a time to discover tools for understanding the dynamics of researching within and across a researcher's own social group or culture. [3]

My research reflects on this insider-outsider component of research from the perspective of a minority scholar, including people with disabilities, working class people, ethnic minorities, women, carers (especially those who do full-time primary caring), and other oppressed groups whose presence in academia becomes a challenge to the traditional dominance of white, male, middle-class, "non-disabled" academics. They are from social groups underrepresented in higher education and they face a combination of cultural and economic barriers to accessing education. These scholars face additional complexities when conducting PAR, as they find themselves embodying an insider-outsider status within the research process and within the educational institution in which they operate as a researcher. Minority scholars, therefore, described as outsiders within academia (HILL-COLLINS, 1990), are also positioned as outsiders within their own community or social group when conducting research. [4]

This is especially true for working class people who access elite universities and become researchers, as their new status shows them outside of their working class origins (JENSEN, 2012; SACKREY & RYAN, 1995). Educational status specifies significant challenges for these minority scholars when conducting PAR. To access academia, the working class scholars must have achieved educational attainment through which they can shift their class positioning. The structural

contradictions in terms of social class and educational success are captured by Kathleen LYNCH and Cathleen O'NEILL (1994) who explain how the working class person, unlike other minority scholars, can be "deprived" of their working class status on educational attainment. This indicates specific issues for insider-outsider researchers from working class backgrounds utilising PAR to research poverty and social class inequality. [5]

Although PAR is utilised across various disciplines including education, health and business, my focus in this article includes the issues that are present for minority working class scholars researching class inequality. As a researcher with a working class identity<sup>1</sup>, I situate myself as an insider-outsider within academia and within my own socio-economic group of origin. My educational success is intrinsically bound up with the inequality and sacrifices my parents endured to ensure I had a better quality of life than what they had. Both my parents died in their 60s and their experiences of illness and care at that palliative stage in their lives were as much shaped by class inequality as their working and family lives were, in the lead up to their untimely passing. Carrying this legacy is part of the survivor guilt that Barbara A. JENSEN (2012) has stated and part of what drives my interest in social change. My classed experiences of poverty and inequality have inevitably informed not only my way of knowing and navigating the world but also my interest in challenging dominant structures that continue to shape social class and poverty. This awareness of counter-hegemonic ideas of social organisation (GRAMSCI, 1971; MILLS, 1943), therefore, is grounded in personal experiences (NAPLES, 2003). [6]

My interests lie in the challenges that show when the practical issue of turning knowledge into action is a political issue, when the research aim is a sociopolitical change rather than organisational or behavioural change. This personal, professional and political continuum is a vital concern for minority scholars using PAR. Charles Wright MILLS (1943) points to the need to see the totality to effect social change beyond the self. Reflecting on my research, I attempt to move the debate from individual and self-focus to a focus on the structural relations of inequality, knowledge production and social change. In this article, I explore this insider-outsider role in PAR when it involves minority scholars doing research with their own minority or majority group of origin. I examine the influence of the researcher's identity and positioning on the research process, including data collection and analysis. However, I also extend this analysis to the insider-outsider impact on political outcomes: the point at which voice and knowledge are transformed into action for social change and the urgency thereof. [7]

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1 This subjective view shows how social class is lived rather than objectively structured. It represents how I embody my working class background, legacy and wider affective relations with working class family and friends. It reflects my class identity at a specific time in history. In structural class terms, my current income and academic credentials could position me as middle class, but therein lies the complexities in navigating and mobilising through class stratification. This contradiction between social class identity and social class positioning is documented in literature exploring class mobility and the intersection of cultural, economic, political and affective experiences of social class (JENSEN, 2012).

The article starts with a discussion on why PAR is attractive to minority scholars and why the insider-outsider status of a researcher is important to advancing the aims of PAR for minority scholars. Following the discussion is an overview of the methodological context for the study. The focus is on my insider-outsider status as a researcher in this context and the influence of that status on the research process in terms of access and relationships with participants, as well as the generation of new knowledge and frames of thinking for social class analysis. The discussion shows that the insider-outsider debate poses challenges and consideration not only on a personal and professional level but also on a political level for working class scholars. This thinking is an addition to the insider-outsider discussions on PAR, by specifying issues for minority scholars using PAR and offering a critical analysis of the limitations of PAR for political social change. Moreover, this perspective is a contribution to the literature on reflexivity in qualitative research by illustrating the need to reflect on subjective and structural conditions of the research process. [8]

## **2. Research and Minority Scholars: Creating Change Through New Forms of Knowledge**

Marit BORG, Bengt KARLSSON, Hessok Suzie KIM and Brendan McCORMACK (2012) state that the important epistemological assumption in participatory research is the belief that knowledge is embedded in the lives and experiences of individuals, and that knowledge is developed only through a cooperative process between researchers and experiencing individuals. It follows that this type of research appeals to researchers wishing to more fully engage minority groups in the research process (ODEN, HERNANDEZ & HIDALGO, 2010); moreover, it has also been of particular interest to researchers from minority groups within academia (BRYDON-MILLER & MAGUIRE, 2009). [9]

Minority scholars are attracted to PAR because it shows that different ways of experiencing and seeing the world can influence how knowledge is formed (BRAYBOY & DEYHLE, 2000). This follows through for research by and with minority groups in PAR, where the focus is on moving from voice to knowledge. According to KRUMER-NEVO (2009, p.290), listening to minority groups, such as people in poverty as "possessors of thoughts and ideas, not only experiences, is rarely manifested". PAR is part of a growing approach to research that could be situated within what Linda Tuhiwai SMITH (1999) terms "decolonizing methodologies," as it is an attempt to engage people in knowledge production beyond merely recording experiences. Affirming the notion that people can understand and change their own lives through research, education and action, we can note that PAR is an opportunity where one openly "challenges existing structures of power and creates opportunities for the development of innovative and effective solutions to the problems facing society" (BRYDON-MILLER & MAGUIRE, 2009, p.81). This type of research work follows Paulo FREIRE (1970) and other critical educators (APPLE, 1990; LYNCH, 1999) and feminists (HOOKS, 1994) in viewing the generation of knowledge as a political endeavour. PAR is a useful "methodological response to the reality that research can never

be neutral as it is always supporting or questioning social forces, both by its content and by its methods" (REASON & ROWAN, 1981, p.489). [10]

Patricia HILL COLLINS, in "Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice" (1998), discusses how black women resist oppression whilst simultaneously creating new knowledge of injustice. She argues for the importance of taking seriously the knowledge and perspectives of oppressed groups. Moreover, HILL-COLLINS (1986, 1990) stresses that this alternative way of knowing the world is not derived from an individual identity as such, but a result of relational structural hierarchies. Knowledge, therefore, is not an individual reflexive process but structural, relational and deeply political. In recognising alternative ways of knowing the world that minority scholars bring to the research process, we can note that alternative knowledge, therefore, is not individual but structural in its formation. If minority scholars are attracted to PAR as a way of using and reflecting upon experiential knowledge, then they must extend this reflexive practice beyond the self. [11]

## **2.1 The necessity and limits of individual reflexivity**

Insider research refers to an endeavour whose scholars conduct a study with populations in which they belong, so that they share the identity, language, and experiential base with the study participants (ASSELIN, 2003). The complete membership role gives researchers a certain amount of legitimacy or stigma (ADLER & ADLER, 1994). Nadia E. BROWN (2012) builds on the work of HILL-COLLINS by showing how black feminist academics are positioned to use their social location within and without the university to distinctively analyse race, class and gender in various social settings. Although BROWN (2012) shares how, with her insider-outsider identity, black female legislators were more willing to talk openly with her; furthermore, she notes how her identity is also marked by difference in age, accent, education and sexuality. For this reason, her findings are "not better because of her insider black female identity but different" (p.22). She maintains that her relative insider status as an African American woman could only take her so far and quotes Michael MOFFATT to support this claim: "identifying with 'them' does not necessarily mean you are like them, or that they are like one another, or that they all trust or identify with you, or that they want to be studied by you" (MOFFATT, 1992, p.207 in BROWN, 2012, p.23). [12]

For BROWN, "these differences made it clear that one can be an outsider even when conducting fieldwork in one's own racial[-]gender in-group" (2012, p.23). BROWN concludes her paper by highlighting the need for a reflexive understanding of identity. She maintains that the effect of the race and gender of the researcher produces different outcomes in the process of data collection and concludes that "[s]cholars must be cognizant of their own identity in preparing for, conducting, and analyzing research" (p.30). Nancy NAPLES (1996) also discusses how "outsiderness" and "insiderness" are not fixed or static positions but ever-shifting and permeable social locations, better illustrated by the "outsider phenomenon". This outsider phenomenon refers to the shifting power relations in

the research process. NAPLES (1998, p.14) maintains that a "dialogic approach to participatory research challenges the insider[-]outsider dichotomy". [13]

BROWN and NAPLES are illustrating the difficulty with the insider-outsider analysis in research, when multiple identities, shifting demographics, as well as political and social contexts exist. This focus on multiple identities and shifting demographics is useful when looking at working class minority scholars. Interestingly, although BROWN's identity changes throughout her research, as she is perceived in different ways by the black legislators in terms of her age and appearance, her black status does not change. This significant observation shows the difference that must be present for minority scholars whose insider-outsider identity is interlocked with their positioning as an academic. For working class scholars, although bringing a view of the social world shaped by structural inequalities, the structural relationship between class and educational attainment is an added element for examination when exploring the multiplicity of the researcher's identity in the research process and the implications for action. [14]

This process of reflecting on the subjective conditions in which research and the production of knowledge takes place is an established practice in participatory qualitative research (BERGOLD & THOMAS, 2012; MRUCK & BREUER, 2002). NAPLES and BROWN have utilised the same process in a manner that generates important sociological insights; however, this individual reflexive practice for minority scholars has limits. There is a need to combine subjective reflexivity to a structural reflexive practice. BERGOLD and THOMAS (2012) claim that structural reflection is a separate type of reflective practice. Kathleen ST. LOUIS and Angela Calabrese BARTON (2002) capture the ways in which positionality and subjectivity have a dual impact on the research process. In the article, ST. LOUIS explains how she wants to be an insider, but positioned as a science educator regardless of her subjective feelings of being one of "them". For the authors, subjectivity and positionality are related but distinct. This need to reflect individually but also structurally is a main concern for minority working class scholars and it is further captured in the data presented by my research. It is a concern for the research process in terms of the fieldwork and the analysis as well as for the action component of PAR, as my interest is in social change and challenging social class inequality. A dilemma shows that my double insider-outsider positioning means I am an insider-outsider in the academy and an insider-outsider within my social class of origin. My habitus and my affective relation to my working class background, and present subjective self, spur my interest in understanding and generating ideas for social class equality; however, my removal from poverty and direct experiences of working class injustices eliminates the urgency for activism or action on social class inequality. [15]

## 2.2 Moving beyond personal and professional reflexivity

BROWN's work on the role of reflexivity in the research process is informative and instrumental, as she has broken down many broad intellectual discussions into a practical focus on managing multiple identities in research as a minority scholar. ST. LOUIS and BARTON have also effectively reflected on the complex interplay between subjectivity and positionality, especially as it arises for minority groups. As much as structural relations define one's positioning, BROWN's work has shown the importance of identity. This is particularly salient at the point of research design and fieldwork for working class scholars where individual identity can have more impact than that of present positioning. The reason for this is that with personal awareness, researchers can explicitly draw on their unique biography to influence the research process. Without this personal awareness, there could be a tendency or danger for marginal groups in research to replicate dominant forms of knowledge to achieve academic affirmation. The insider-outsider researchers must determine and draw upon their identity to counter the positioning that may distance them from research participants who view them according to their present status. They must also draw on their working class legacy and biography to uphold urgency for social change, an urgency that once sat centre stage in the lives of their parents, siblings as well as wider family and community. [16]

LYNCH and O'NEILL (1994) claim that the structural aspects of educational institutions unavoidably change marginal groups, specifically in the case of social class. Although these institutions cannot take away a person's biography or experiences and ways of relating to the world, they can change the present and future cultural and material relations that shape one's life. This very act of structural "contamination" can pose significant challenges for insider-outsider knowledge and stress the importance of maintaining dialogue for the insider-outsider researchers with their roots. The interplay between individual and structural positioning has specific issues for the working class scholars on personal, professional and political levels: the guise of the researcher identifying with the group but with the group still "othering" the researcher based on the latter's positionality; the researcher having a shared biography, which helps with access and data collection but creates problems with present status and professional expectations; and the researcher having a shared interest in future social change but the group having more of an urgency for this type of political outcome from research. [17]

This link between the personal and professional issues in PAR for working class researchers and the political and social change elements of PAR have consequence for transforming knowledge into action. In this article, I will illustrate how this is interconnected with the structural contradictions between identity and positioning, when it comes to working class minority scholars; no matter how much I identify with class inequality, I am structurally removed from the adverse impacts, on an individual level, through class mobility. [18]



### 3. Setting the Methodological Context

Minority scholars can challenge the power of traditional academic knowledge by illuminating the multiple forms of knowledge outside of academic institutions especially when it comes to philosophical or social scientific knowledge. They can do this because of their own exposure and internalisation of these alternative ways of knowing the world and their access to the communities or groups they belong. KRUMER-NEVO (2009, p.291) states that

"treating people in poverty as having knowledge is the acknowledgment that they do not have only personal experiences but they also have thoughts, sometimes critical ones, ideas and recommendations, and they are capable of analysing and theorising their situations, even if they do it in non-academic language". [19]

This explorative research study was concerned with understanding how inequality is lived and challenged by working class women. My own life journey was the genesis for this study and informed research question; I wanted to use the research to talk to other working class women about the role of affective relations and affective inequalities in their experiences of social class inequality. Having a rich autoethnographic case study, I wanted to cross-reference this experiential data with other women's experience of living with inequality by conducting interviews with 10 working class women, five of whom also identified as community activists. The interviews had no structured questions and were conducted as conversations about living with inequality (CORBIN & MORSE, 2003; GRAY, 2009). The interviews were also informal, and questions were generated spontaneously during the interview. I used the interviews to share ideas, more so than just stories, with other women who lived in poverty. This led to the development of two learning circles as a third method for data collection. These circles were about engaging the women in theory building by discussing the ideas and findings from the autoethnographic material and the interviews. The circles were about shared learning between the researcher and the participants. They represented an attempt to avoid colonising research, which is often a feature of research on class inequality (LYNCH & O'NEILL, 1994). Two circles were organised, each circle involved two or three women who were recruited through community centres (three of whom also participated in the interviews). The circles met on three separate occasions, so there were six learning circle meetings. Each circle lasted from one to two hours, where ideas generated from my autoethnography (rather than their personal experiences) were discussed; 13 women were involved in the study. [20]

Because I was self-disclosing as part of the research process, ethically, it was important to ensure that there was a level of trust between the participants and me, as the researcher. This dictated how the sample was selected and the size of the sample. The women were recruited using snowball sampling through contacts with the community sector that I was familiar with from my community work. A number of community centres were provided with information about the research and women were invited to volunteer for a conversation with the researcher if they were interested in talking about inequality based on their own experiences

and opinions. Having a working class background was an important selection criterion given that I was interested in sharing and exploring experiences of class inequality. In addition, given the gendered structure of the affective system and my interest in how class and care intersect, the gender and relational identity of participants was also important. For this reason, all participants were women, and all identified as mothers or grandmothers. Five of the women also identified themselves as community activists and they were purposely selected to participate, again recruited through my knowledge of the community development sector. Having activists was significant for understanding how women live with and how they challenge inequality. [21]

The research also generated other ethical issues related to the fact that the women disclosed very intimate experiences of structural inequality at a deeply personal level. They talked about depression, anxiety and other personal, micro-level impacts of structural inequality. Based on my own experiences of childhood traumas that I was only addressing at a personal level, at the time of the research study, I was acutely aware these interviews could bring up issues for the women. It was for this reason I had recruited volunteers through community centres. This way, at least a support system was in place through a centre if the interview brought up buried memories and feelings of anger or sadness. I was also aware that once the research was conducted, the women would still be living the inequalities they shared with me during the research process. This poses an ethical issue interconnected with the epistemological and methodological issues presented in this study; new knowledge from a participatory approach to research may create new ways of understanding social class inequality. But how is this transformed into action to change the lives of the women who shared painful stories of how social class inequality had an impact on their affective relations? Is it ethical to be aware of such injustices and not act on them? Should all researchers take a normative or moral position on research findings, or is objectivity still the desired role of the researcher (SAYER, 2000, 2011)? These ethical issues are part of the conclusion, as I discuss the implications of the study for other researchers. [22]

### **3.1 Getting personal: "Sure she's Marie's daughter"**

My memory of walking into one community centre to conduct a set of interviews still makes me uncomfortable, as I recall that sense of being "with my own social class" and yet being perceived by them as someone "important" and possibly not "one of them". To me, I was still working class but to them, I knew I was "someone of status", especially because I was there to do something that is usually done by people in positions of power. I was there to interview women about their lives, something women living in poverty are very familiar with. Regardless of whether I still lived with a low income or still identified as working class, nothing changed the present fact that I was engaging them at this particular point as a person in a position of power. I recall the urge to immediately identify with them, to draw on something of my past or present that could let them see that I was not powerful or arrogant. But despite my efforts at co-identifying, my accent, my words, along with my digital recorder and notepad in hand,

somehow still distanced me from the women. Standing in the reception area, I could read this in their body language and the way in which they shared inside jokes, avoiding eye contact with me, as I waited for the first woman to join me and start an interview in a small nearby room. [23]

After my first interview, after I allowed about 10 minutes to pass so that the first interviewee could share her experience with others and possibly alleviate fears, I returned to the reception area, this time to encounter a different type of engagement. Now, the women were friendlier, eye contact was made and I was suddenly included in jokes about who was next. At this point, I was offered a cup of tea. The interesting point for reflection here is that upon entering the building, the women were aware that I was coming and that I was originally from a working class estate. Yet, this past biography was not enough for them in terms of accepting me as "one of their own". It was at the point of accepting the cup of tea and preparing for my next interview that one of the women said she did not know I was "Marie's daughter". My background had evidently been disclosed by my first interviewee during the 10-minute gap in which she had returned to the group and this other woman obviously somehow knew my mother at some stage. My mother's working class status managed to gain me acceptance in a way that my claim to working class status had not. But maybe it was more than that, maybe the other women had seen how the first interviewee left the interview feeling uplifted or "better about her life", as she told me herself at the end of the interview. Reflecting and sharing life stories can be a powerful tool in an interview process because it breaks down power differences and empowers the research participants who no longer feel like the "other" or the subject of study. The interviews that followed with the other women were to me a valuable lesson in qualitative research: who you are matters and influences the research in terms of your past, present and future self. [24]

On a personal level, as an agent of knowledge (BROWN, 2012), I drew on lived class, care and gender experiences to anchor specific ideas and claims. The women being interviewed started to mirror this skill, as they possibly fed off my confidence and belief in the significance of their life journey. When one interviewee told me "we should be writing books together", I realised they were gaining from the interview as much as they were giving. Working class people are quick at reading emotional situations (KRAUS, CÔTÉ & KELTNER, 2010). They were finding a source of empowerment in that research interview, as they shared stories with a working class woman, who still identified as working class, using her newfound status to challenge how others interpret working class experiences. The fact that I was drawing significant focus on their role as mothers and carers also illuminated a hidden value they held, which I, the researcher, found to remain at a private or personal level. By elevating this personal status as mother or carer to a politically important role, I was giving status to a role that the women knew others took for granted. Here, suddenly, my different accent, language and educational status were useful to the women, as they became a way of reflecting on their roles and relations in the social world that spoke to them and others. [25]

The learning circles, in particular, were my avenues as a researcher to further facilitate the women in thinking about inequality from a class, care and gender perspective. By providing them affirmation for their everyday work and by utilising academic ideas to illuminate their work in new ways, the women were enabled to discuss their experiences of inequality objectively. Rather than telling personal stories, the women in the learning circles were putting forward ideas and theories on social class and inequality, and how that intersect with love and care in people's lives. By being an outsider as well as an insider within my own social class group of origin I was able to bring a status, power and legitimacy to their life experiences, which, in turn, gave them permission to do the same. They could speak objectively about private and personal troubles because I was facilitating them to do so using my professional knowledge and status. [26]

### **3.2 Being professional and getting political: "You're the educated one, you tell us"**

The personal dilemma for me as the researcher, therefore, went beyond relating to the women through my past and present self, as I knew they also looked at me as a professional and as someone who could do something other than just talk about these issues. My future self, as they perceived it, was someone who could use this knowledge to do something. They asked about how I was going to use this research and how I could get "things changed" for them. When I put it back to them that they were part of the solution and that it was about working together, they were less courageous about talking publically about the love and care issues that had dominated most of our conversations about poverty. Turning the knowledge to action, for the women, was reliant on someone with access to power and it was at this point that I recognized the professional and political issues of the insider-outsider status as a minority scholar. On a personal level, my insider status had allowed me access, trust and rapport with the women who facilitated conversations and ideas on social class inequality that shifted traditional ways of understanding how class is formed and lived. Yet, as an outsider, now an educated woman with access to words and language that gave new meaning and status to their life experiences, the women looked to my professional status for action. But can the urgency with which they want change, as they live with the here and now of poverty and social welfare and housing problems, rest with a working class woman less directly connected to those same problems? The collaborative production of knowledge, a priority for the researcher in PAR on a personal and professional level, needs to be transformed into collaborative action if the intention is to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the researcher's original social group. But collaborative action is a much harder achievement given the confines of the research process and the positionality of the researcher beyond identifying with a social group of origin. [27]

Giving power away helped me on a personal and professional level during the research. But it also posed problems in terms of the personal, professional and political continuum. It posed problems personally in terms of the emotional management of each research situation and the self-disclosing that took place to gain trust and acceptance. Professionally, as the women assumed I was "one of

them", it was difficult at times to probe into specific stories where the women preferred to just say, "You know what I mean". They may have been more comfortable telling an outsider certain stories, and an outsider may have been more comfortable asking them more personal questions. At times, the interviews were so much like conversations that the table-tuned and the researched became the researcher, asking me questions and quizzing me about my plans when the research was finished. [28]

On a professional level, I still had to prove to the women that there was a reason I was the one "in charge" or "doing the research". I had to show that I was not "just one of them", as they demanded this of me. To respect their time and effort, they needed to know a purpose to my skills and a reason to be involved that went beyond simply liking the researcher. One woman, during the learning circle, in which I was trying to get the women to talk about ideas and their theories around inequality, said unapologetically, "Come on, we are here to learn from you, you're the educated one, you tell us, you can't keep asking us or there is no point in you being here". This obligation, for me, was complicated by insider-outsider status, as my urgency to act on the findings was less than that of the women's who were living what I was researching. [29]

My skills as a researcher and an intellectual (GRAMSCI, 1971) were my tools to critically analyse my own and the women's stories of lived experiences of social class inequality. With my sociological insight and knowledge, I was able to discuss these personal issues, lived at a micro level, as political and structural issues with the women. My professional status meant that my analysis gave legitimacy, at a political and sociological level, to what they narrated as personal issues. But the findings also presented a dilemma, as what we discussed at a personal level does not have a legitimate discourse at a political and sociological level without pathologising the women's lived experiences. The women were reluctant to be public about social class inequalities lived at an intimate level through affective relations and affective inequalities (CREAN, 2018). This contradiction between how social class is lived at a personal level and how it is discussed at a macro-economic level had implications for action. Although I could discuss these findings academically and generate a new understanding of how social class is lived, I could not act on these same findings with the women in a way that addressed their present experiences of social class inequalities. Professionally, I could help to name and legitimise their experiences sociologically, but politically, action was less imminent. [30]

#### 4. Conclusion

Feminist critiques of sociology often refer to a detachment, at intellectual and emotional levels, from the daily work of keeping life going, from the people whose lives are under study, and from popular political discourse. In PAR, as a methodology, researchers are able to reconnect with people's daily lives as they attach a power and significance to everyday experiences and knowledge. It specifically becomes a research tool for minority scholars within academia to use "insider-outsider" status to reconnect with their community and group of origin and further develop alternative forms of knowledge and ways of knowing and understanding the social world. My class, care and gender identity, along with positioning had a significant role in data collection and analysis. [31]

But identity and positioning also have a role in outcomes from research and the political action or social change that should follow from emancipatory and participatory research. In this regard, minority scholars face particular challenges when using PAR; they face a double insider-outsider status. Beyond personal and professional considerations in the insider-outsider discussion, there are significant challenges at a political level for minority scholars researching inequality. I have looked at this issue from the perspective of a working class minority scholar. On the one hand, I could "exploit" my biography and insider status for access and trust with participants, whilst using my outsider status to add legitimacy and purpose to the research process, all the while negotiating the practicalities and urgency of turning new knowledge into action for social change. The gain is clear for the researcher in terms of professional gain, and even possibly personal gain in the sense of belonging, gained from acceptance and trust during the research process. However, the gains for the women are less direct if they place a greater focus and urgency on action to change the unequal structural conditions in which they live. This raises ethical challenges for the insider-outsider minority scholar that may not arise for other insider-outsider scholars whose action is not founded on political change or whose positioning does not structurally remove them from their insider status as in the case of social class and educational attainment. Consequently, one of the most important tasks for a minority scholar, on a personal and professional level, is the need to manage multiple identities and positions in the research process through a reflexive practice and dialogue. However, on a political level, the challenge is to ensure that this practice of reflection and dialogue is established on a structured basis and is not simply dependent on an individual's good will or private preference. Reflexive practice, dialogue and action should be established institutionally as well as individually to overcome the range of challenges along the personal, professional and political continuum. Institutional structures would be necessary to make this collective reflexive practice feasible with the researcher and the researched engaging in a dual process of agreeing research processes and outcomes. Kathleen LYNCH (1999) suggests something similar with her idea of research coalitions. Reflexive practice, therefore, requires individual commitment on behalf of the researcher and institutional commitment in the form of innovative research structures, promoting an emancipatory and

participatory approach to research whereby scholars recognise the necessity of individual and structural reflexivity in the research process. [32]

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