Ethics of relational and representational disclosures in qualitative migration research

Justyna Bell
Norwegian Social Research, Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway
Agnieszka Trąbka
Institute of Applied Psychology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland, and
Paula Pustulka
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

Purpose – This article engages with the framework of performativity to unpack ethical challenges of interviewing migrants in the setting of shared ethnic background of researchers and participants. From a temporal perspective of shifting contexts from a shared space of the research process, to the post-research reciprocity management, it focusses on the particular aspect of disclosure.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on several qualitative studies performed by the authors as Polish migrant researchers with Polish migrant communities in Norway, Germany and the United Kingdom, the article documents the ethical challenges that come from a shifting "audience" of the research performance.

Findings – Specifically, it discusses how the researchers perform their roles in the field with the focus on rapport building (relational disclosure), to then addressing how this performance changes when the dissemination of findings (representational disclosure) begins and continues over time.

Practical implications – This article contributes to the long-standing anthropological debate on self-reflection in the field. Also, demythologizing the relations between a researcher and participants, as well as cautioning research by reporting difficulties at different stages of the research process, will likely make it easier for future researchers who may now be better prepared and anticipate the complexities of doing fieldwork. From a temporal perspective, it can also help a broader scientific community avoid pitfalls from presenting unfavourable results prematurely. Thus, the authors hope that this paper may sensitize migration scholars to the possible predicaments in the process of interviewing their co-ethnics.

Originality/value – A methodological innovation lies in a clear focus on the cluster of ethical disclosure dilemmas and the article contributes to a lively debate on ethics of "insider research" in migration studies.

Keywords Ethics, Qualitative migration research, Biographical research, Performativity, Insider research, Disclosure, Rapport-building, Anti-immigration discourses, Polish migrants

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This article focusses on particular ethical dilemmas related to disclosure, encountered when conducting qualitative, in-depth interviews in migration studies, specifically tackling the problem of researching co-nationals. Undeniably, ethics has become a key feature of the know-how around conducting qualitative research, and there is a rising interest in the specificity of migration research in this regard (Van Liempt and Bilger, 2009; Carling *et al.*, 2014; Nowicka and Cieslik, 2013; Morosanu, 2015). In this article, we apply a broad approach to the ethical framework acknowledging the fact that "any research decision is an ethical decision" (Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz, 2020). To complement the existing research, we adopt the lens of performativity to shed light on being an "insider" and tackle the challenges that might stem from disclosing information both to co-nationals and about them. We demonstrate that disclosure in researching co-nationals evolves from relational (in the field) to representational (post-fieldwork) form in a circular way.

The backdrop of our theoretical framework acknowledges "shades of insiderness", which emerge as researchers interview their migrating co-ethnics (Carling *et al.*, 2014; Nowicka and Cieslik, 2013; Pustulka *et al.*, 2019) and signifies that an "insider" often has extended and easy access to the field, which fosters collection of rich empirical data. However, we focus on the less explored aspects of "insiderness" and posit that being in this position adds further dimensions and tensions to the dilemmas faced by qualitative researchers around disclosure. For that purpose, we argue that performativity is an inherent part of qualitative interviewing, on the side of both researcher and interviewees. As noted by Judith Butler, performativity does not constitute a singular act but a "reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conversations of which it is a repetition" (Butler, 1993, p. 12). During the interview, the scene is set for participants to reflect on the changes in their biographies upon migration and to perform one's self. Simultaneously, the researcher must perform two – sometimes interfering – roles of a co-ethnic abroad and a member of the scientific community. Because "performativity is not only a theory, but also a deconstructive practice (. . .) opened to discursively produced effects (. . .) of political contest" (Markussen, 2005, p. 329), it can help researchers explore ethical dilemmas, for instance, those connected to anti-immigrant discourses.

One crucial aspect of "performance" in the field is about what is disclosed, both during and after the interview (temporal perspective), another issue relates to the impact of interviewee versus other scholars as audiences or recipients of said disclosure. While both result in ethical dilemmas, research has not systematically or explicitly addressed them. Therefore, the article argues that not only during fieldwork but also every time the results of the research are thereafter presented, a new performance is initiated and requires consideration for inherent dilemmas of disclosure. As Ali and Kelly argue, ethical practice throughout the fieldwork comes down to the "professional" integrity of an individual researcher (Ali and Kelly, 2009, p. 118) and his/her understanding of being "a moral researcher" who is involved, self-aware, self-reflexive and both politically and personally responsible for the interactions within the inquiry and their consequences (Denzin, 1997, p. 277; de Laine, 2000, p. 28; Christians, 2005).

The empirical material for this article stems from four studies conducted by us as Polish researchers and among Polish migrants in Europe. We acknowledge this setting as a territory for "ethnic bias" (Morosanu, 2015) in that shared origins often overshadow the otherwise paramount differences in the experiences of migrant-interviewees and migrant-researchers. We argue that having the double role of co-ethnic abroad and being a scientist generates and imposes tensions that have not been addressed in the migration literature in a comprehensive manner so far. These might then feed back to a new "representational disclosure" in the subsequent studies within the same communities.

Framework

Qualitative, narrative interviews with migrants provide an invaluable glimpse into people's life stories and depictions of living within complex settings (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). Concurrently, for many migrants the moment of entering a new society instigates a significant reflection on self-description as a member of a particular national, ethnic or cultural group. The situation of an interview encourages sharing such re-makings of migrants' identities and provides the "stage" for the performance of self (see, e.g. Ryan, 2007; Morosanu, 2015).

The ontological position of in-depth, narrative interviews is based on the notion that people are continually attaining the nature and essence of social phenomena. Thus, the knowledge created as an outcome of the applied methods is being co-produced by the researcher and the participant from intersubjective and contextual narratives (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 54–56). Stories cannot be told arbitrarily because the speaker and the

listener are bound by mutual obligations: "The speaker has to orient his/her activity towards the listener to make sure that she/he can understand the story; the listener has to give signs of her/his ongoing understanding" (Helling, 1988, p. 223). Moreover, according to Goffman (1990), in everyday encounters people monitor the impression they give to others by controlling their appearance in terms of gestures, dress code and manner of speaking. Duncombe and Jessop deconstruct this process from an ethical perspective, asking whether scholars are "faking friendships" in the modern context where the research process has been professionalized, codified and commodified, calling for "agenda setting" around rapport and consent (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002).

Moreover, interviews with migrants cannot be separated from what migrants believe to be contained in the majority's discourses about them as has been observed in the context of anti-immigrant discourses related to Fortress Europe and refugee crisis (e.g. Schiebelhofer, 2017) or with the Brexit vote as another example (e.g. Krzyżanowski, 2019).

In the case of Polish migrants in the United Kingdom, who became one of the targets of various anti-migration campaigns around Brexit referendum after the dominant narrative revolves around evidence that makes them "good" or "deserving" migrants. In this portrayal, migrants shall be willing to "integrate", contribute to the economy by paying taxes and so on (Sotkasiira and Gawlewicz, 2020). While this has been illuminated by the United Kingdom leaving the EU, Polish migrants in other countries are not immune to these discourses either, for instance, when they strongly articulate being "good workers" with "normal families" or underscore their pride over not relying on state help to avoid being dubbed "benefit scrounger" (Bell and Bivand Erdal, 2015; Struzik et al., 2018). In such a political climate, findings may be used in a political debate with very little or no control on the side of the scientific community. In that sense, there is a specific performance and self-presentation that refer to said migrant positioning in the broader society and the representational disclosure practiced by the researchers.

Goffman identifies a strong moral dimension to interactions aimed at maintaining the order of social action (Goffman, 1990). Thus, people are not cynics who manipulate the situation of interaction, they rather share the responsibility for others and have to self-manage their professional and personal roles (see also Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). In this article, we analyse how these positions are practiced by both insider researchers and their migrant participants in the situation of a qualitative interview. Each interview is a "juggling act" (de Laine, 2000, p. 54) of managing the continuum of closeness and distance. In examining minorities (migrants), the ethics of "multiple and multicultural voices" (Christians, 2005, p. 152) fosters inter-subjectivity based on empathy, mutual care and understanding, all stemming from emotions rather than a social consensus (Christians, 2005). It also reflects what Katz-Rothman has written about the field performance in which "ethic of involvement" replaces the "ethic of objectivity" (Katz-Rothman, 1996, p. 50) because the disclosure happens in an interactive stage. And yet, these do not dissolve all limitations to rapport, especially when researchers find it hard to empathize or condone the participants' views.

It is widely acknowledged that the interview takes shape according to the manifold details associated with personality traits, gender, nationality and the position on the social strata of the interactants (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009; Morosanu, 2015). The pre-interview arrangements and the interview situation also have an impact on the narratives produced by the participants, as these might prompt them to expose or withhold some aspects of the stories they share (see also Markussen, 2005). Perhaps even more so in the case of recent migrants who are possibly suspicious of their situation potentially being influenced by what they say.

We argue in this article that an interview situation causes the researchers and the participants to take on different roles and perform them according to their current position, as well as in response to the position of the partner of the interaction. Performative acts bring

along multiple challenges in terms of the ethical considerations faced by the co-ethnic researchers.

Methods

This article is based on four studies conducted by the authors and linked by the thematic similarity of addressing different aspects of identities and practices of Polish migrants through the use of qualitative methods. Study 1 (S1) was focussed on parenting in the context of migration and comprised 37 biographic and semi-structured interviews with Polish mothers in Germany and the United Kingdom. Study 2 (S2) was also based on 28 biographic, narrative interviews and concentrated on everyday interactions of Polish migrants in various localities in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The third project (S3) was aimed at analysing the patterns of place attachment among Poles living in Oslo and London. In total, 60 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The fourth empirical contribution to this article (S4) stems from a work package of a larger study on transnational family practices of Polish migrants in Norway.

The authors submitted their projects to Ethics Committees at their respective institutions and received approvals. Participants were ensured that their anonymity will be respected and that they may withdraw their consent to take part in the interview. The collected data were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed in line with the thematic focus of each study. For this article, we decided to conduct a meta-analysis, after each researcher reflected on their empirical sources of interviews, research notes and diaries through the lens of ethical dilemmas at different points in time.

Relational disclosure

During the stage of conducting interviews, migration researchers are often embedded in the community and, as such, their work calls for "situational honesty" (de Laine, 2000, pp. 3–6), which entails co-management, relationships of trust and personal interactions (Denzin, 1997, pp. 274–287; Christians, 2005, p. 159) in the performative stage of an interview. What we deem here as "relational disclosure" can be linked to the ethic of caring which involves sharing emotional experiences (mutuality) and empathy, as well as concern for reciprocity (de Laine, 2000, p. 28; Denzin, 1997, p. 275; Reinharz, 2011).

In the case of migration, we argue, performativity becomes perhaps even more significant as both migrant interviewers and migrant interviewees find themselves performing somewhat incompatible roles: of "good, hard-working migrants" in the place of settlement; "successful migrants" in the homeland, "capable migrants" and sometimes "competitors" of the co-ethnic and other migrant groups abroad. Migration results in a form of actors' auto-surveillance of belonging to a particular national group (Morosanu, 2015). Both Ryan (2007) in her study of Irish nurses and Morosanu in discussing research on Romanians (2015) underline the role of stereotypes ascribed by others in the process of identity construction in the country of destination. Similarly, by observing co-nationals and other migrants abroad, Poles can deduce how they might be perceived by members of the majority:

> I know some of the neighbors are jealous of us. And, mind you, this is a Turkish neighborhood (. . .) Turks feel like they have more right to be here than us, even though they are the ones with all the help from the state (. . .). We have never taken unemployment, but it feels like we have to prove all the time that we will not steal people's cars (Aga [1], S1)

Various roles are played because scholars represent a formal institution, and thus a "good migrant" role surfaces at times. Yet, the co-ethnic researchers are also often versed in the realities of migration and shared country of origin, prompting a disclosure of more nuanced

narratives (see also Morosanu, 2015). Such shifts pose a challenge to the researcher having to distil the varying perspectives from the narratives.

One of the interviewees in Belfast, Natalia (S2), struggled with ambiguity of these multiple roles and sporadically implemented self-monitoring practices during her narration. Natalia was explicit in her distrust towards Polish migrants providing countless anecdotes of them cheating one another abroad, and yet, she was to tell her life story to one of them (a Polish researcher living in Belfast). From the onset of the interview she stated that she was not going to reveal much information about herself as she feared the researcher could get her into trouble (despite assurances that the interview was confidential and anonymous). Yet, in the flow of the interview, Natalia was repeatedly taken by her own narratives revealing details of her work on the black market in Belfast and many other personal details. In consequence, the interview with Natalia took the form of her circular remembering/forgetting that she was being interviewed by a Polish person. This poses a difficulty for the researcher who, on the one hand, is aware that the participant is not fully comfortable revealing her personal story and, on the other hand, is presented with rich accounts invaluable for the study. It is particularly challenging to embrace contradictory performances of the participant. As a means to abide by the ethical principles, the participant was reaffirmed about consent and special effort was made to represent the complexities of her positionalities.

Natalia was strongly preoccupied with her own physical metamorphosis since migration and referred to it as a liberating experience. During the interview in her house she was wearing a tracksuit and, on several occasions, she drew attention to the fact that, when she lived in Poland, she would have never hosted anyone in her house dressed this way. Yet, when the researcher ran into her several weeks later, on a flight to Poland, Natalia was barely identifiable in tight outfit and a white fur, with meticulously groomed hair. Natalia's case portrays a complex navigation of different selves positioned in-between countries. She felt she needed to present herself as a "successful migrant" during her visits in Poland. In the case of Bell, Polish community in Belfast was so small that she repeatedly met her interviewees and heard their stories told from the perspective of others, which often blurred the line of where does the research end. Such "accidental ethnographies" provide rich complementary features to the collected narratives and expose how complex the issue of performativity can be. At the same time, they field a range of ethical challenges for the researcher who does not shoot down her "data receptors" at the point of leaving the scene of the interview. In reporting Natalia's case, the researcher decided to subsidize the verbal account from the interview by the observation but to analyse them separately.

The interview situation creates an imbalance in disclosure when it comes to revealing information about researchers' private lives. Only after conducting several interviews did Bell notice that she avoided disclosing the nationality of her Irish boyfriend during the interviews with Polish men. On reflection, the interviewer observed that this unintentional strategy was linked to the expressions of negative attitudes – especially among Polish men – towards Polish women being in relationships with men of other nationalities (see, e.g. Siara, 2009). Same observation was shared by Pustulka, who ceased to disclose foreign nationality of her partner after a particularly aggressive reaction from a participant who used sexual expletives as a means to why she saw the researcher as a "national traitor sleeping with the enemy". As a consequence, the roles which the interviewees and the researcher take on during the interview might also be dictated by gender expectations formed in their country of origin, also showcasing that the often seen as the particularly rapport-conducive context of women-interviewing-women is not free of risks and limitations (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002).

Doing fieldwork as migrants interviewing migrants additionally creates a particular involvement that is difficult to navigate because the researchers might be expected to be a resource for the participants. For example, the researchers in S1 and S2 were asked to accompany the interviewees at the doctor's appointments or court dates, as well as tasked

with translation work. Such practices may skew the perceptions of the interviewees as "good migrants". In S1, this entailed the case of Urszula, who has been very vocal about migration being an empowering shift for her. She talked at length about becoming independent and said she had "escaped" the control of her parents and husband who tried to "bring her down". However, the post-interview events altered this interpretation because Urszula continuously asked the researcher for translations of documents indicating she was in debt and facing eviction due to legal complicity in shady dealings. Again, the researcher was torn about the ambiguity of this case in the scheme of relational disclosure at the interview moment while excluding later events, eventually deciding to focus on other aspects. In the studies presented here, the authors applied auto-observations to analyse their own behaviour towards participants. This was particularly the case when the interviewees expressed opinions or judgements that clashed with the researcher's views, causing an empathy dilemma described by Duncombe and Jessop (2002). Despite the fact that such comments made the researchers uncomfortable, it seemed necessary to remain silent. This silence or neutrality on the part of the interviewer was deemed to be a foundation for the understanding that the interviewer was there to hear the participant's stories and was not there to judge or offer her own opinions. In the case of researching Polish migrants, these topics included racism towards non-White ethnic groups abroad. It can be connected to the "competing migrants" discourse that made Polish migrants talk freely about their negative opinions about Turks in Germany or Pakistanis in the United Kingdom/Norway or related to the country of origin's politics or polarizing issues such as abortion. While some claim that lack of voicing disagreement might be a form of "faking it" in the field (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002), the layers of complexity are more numerous in researching co-ethnics. Non-disclosure of one's own worldview in these cases might reaffirm the conviction of the participant in the rightness of their statement or give an impression that the view is shared. When it comes to revealing conflicting political preferences, Ergun and Erdemir note that insider status often prevents one from taking a mask of naivety or ignorance and may require the researcher to take up a position, especially when notable dichotomies in the political climate are apparent (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010, p. 27).

Finally, another cluster of ethical considerations stems from the asymmetric character of an interview and of the privileged position of a researcher in this interaction. For example, in an attempt to restore the power balance towards the end of the interaction, participants sometimes take the position of the listener and ask to hear the researcher's story, focussing particularly on the similarities in search for the "shared grounds" (Morosanu, 2015). A short account of the researchers' experiences towards the end of the interview is a typical approach.

In a relaxed sociability framework, Trąbka was often asked after the interview if she had time for a coffee or beer. For the interviewees, this was a unique occasion to have a conversation in Polish. On the one hand, the gratitude towards participants devoting their time to a study made it extremely difficult to refuse such an invitation, on the other, however, it obviously blurred the borders of a relation between interviewers and interviewees. Moreover, the researcher's unveiling occasionally prompted the participants to share information not disclosed before (relational disclosure). Although such information was never a part of a formal data set, it could nevertheless influence data interpretation ("representational disclosure" discussed next).

Representational disclosure

Exiting the field entails the second cluster of ethical concerns. They revolve around the uncertainty on what to disclose to the academic and non-academic audience when presenting the data. The audience of the performance changes, but the researcher is still bound by loyalty to the participants. Although the responsibility of a researcher for the data he/she

presents and its consequences for the researched community is not specific for insider migration studies (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002), we argue that in this context it has some extra dimensions. First, the bonds of loyalty and solidarity towards participants may be stronger when we research co-ethnics because we perform not only the professional but also a much more personal ethnic or national identity. Secondly, from a more pragmatic perspective, it is not easy for an insider researcher to exit the field and lose contact with interviewees for the reasons of community embeddedness and size noted earlier (see also Pustulka *et al.*, 2019). Given the strengths of discourse (e.g. Sotkasiira and Gawlewicz, 2020) and how ethnic communities thrive on local gossip (Galasińska, 2010; Barglowski and Pustulka, 2018), it must be expected that sighs of transgression of disloyalty could translate to an immediate ban and the field becoming inaccessible, not only to individual researchers but also to scientific community in its entirety.

When it comes to representational disclosure, the ethical dilemmas become once more linked to "ethics of objectivity" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This is because researchers no longer perform only for the audience of the community and participants they speak to, but rather engage in the new form of performance for fellow researchers and the institutional setting of reporting and dissemination of findings. Immediately post-interviews, the representational disclosure might still be constructed as balancing between the ethical interest of assisting – or at least not harming – the researched community through portraying them in a good light. Thus, reporting on one's own ethnic community's shortcomings might require more time for reflection.

Simultaneously, professional ethics calls for reliable, sound and data-saturated observations being drawn from the analysis. For migration scholars, public discourses about migrants in the media and politics (Krzyżanowski, 2019; Schiebelhofer, 2017; Sotkasiira and Gawlewicz, 2020) operate as a landmine for potentially unethical or "grey-area" missteps. For example, the Norway-based research on Polish families (S4) coincided with the media hype around the Norwegian Child Welfare Services, resulting in representational disclosure. First, the interviewed Polish parents represented a broad array of attitudes towards this Norwegian institution. On the one end of the spectrum, they had positive first-hand experiences with the Services helping them in some particular cases. One mother praised the workshops and training support that enabled her family to smooth out the transition process abroad. Conversely, a wealth of negative accounts was mostly formed from gossip (see also Galasińska, 2010; Struzik *et al.*, 2018) and community legends about midnight kidnappings and narrow escapes that prevented parents from losing their children. In the second scenario, the parents expectedly instructed their children to lie about the situation at home, so as not to attract attention from the authorities. The ethical dilemmas of disclosing data revealed the effect of moral panic and media, which was – at that time – leading to parents making suboptimal decisions. Reluctance to bring this finding forward was exacerbated when the researchers met with the Polish embassy authorities. During an informal meeting, the researcher shared the uplifting story of the mother praising the assistance she was provided with, and yet, the governmental representative twisted the story and said he expects that the Norwegian services will "come back in one or two years to take the children away". In this context of unclear political interests and tensions between reporting and the possible implications of disclosure, the researcher decided not to publish or present results connected to this case during this period, also to avoid its politicization.

One such relationship between "relational" and "representational" disclosure could be observed for topics of trauma or guilt that migrants shared – either about their past mistakes or over leaving their children and/or elderly parents behind. Especially for women, the powerful "Euro-orphans" discourse in Poland meant that they were feeling inadequate when they mothered at a distance. The caring relationship during the interviews facilitated sharing difficult stories, and the researcher remained attentive to the emotional state of the interviewees, being aware that levels of disclosure and trust may fluctuate throughout the

interview process (Christians, 2005). For the researcher in S1, it was particularly important to tell these complex and powerful stories in a way that demonstrated how moral panics that stem from questionable research disclosure on "evil mothers" affected women's stories.

Decisions about disclosure cannot be made lightly – and are in our view ethically justified – when migration discourses are already unfavourable to migrants. A decade later, we see examples of this in migrants talking about smuggling goods, working illegally, taking up illegitimate benefits or escaping the criminal justice system. In practice, during several interviews the researchers observed "gaps" or "empty blocks" of time and softly probed into their significance. In this context, the emerging stories were told with assurances about "representational" disclosure. Specifically, the informants were checking about the data being anonymous and not linkable to their personal stories (representation), after which they were revealing criminal past and jail time, so as to explain why their biographies unfolded in certain ways. One interviewee, in particular, referred to migration as a "second chance" and said that he has not said this aloud before but believed that going abroad saved his life (relational disclosure). None of the four studies were focussed on criminal practices explicitly, so we could easily avoid them. As the research of informal networks conducted by Irek (2018) demonstrates, in such cases the publication should be postponed by at least a decade. While this was never a dataset-wide key finding that could alter our interpretations, the representational disclosure has a different function than a relational one. In migration research, it is about making sure that the researched community is not harmed further by the study outcomes that are taken out of context or used as political ammunition.

As stated earlier, in all four projects there were participants who expressed bigoted opinions in the course of the interview. Taking into account anti-immigrant discourses in many European countries (e.g. in the United Kingdom in the context of Brexit), we believed reporting the aforementioned "problematic" issues (both in terms of economic activities and expressing bigoted opinions) would provide arguments supporting these discourses. Simplified or taken out of context statements by third parties may not only negatively affect the image of participants, but also threaten the position of the researcher in the community and break the relation of trust, again affecting not only a single study/researcher but making the field closed for future investigations or interventions of any sort due to rising distrust.

Discussion

One of the inherent features of qualitative interviews encompasses disclosure in its multi-layered forms. Here, we focussed mainly on the relationship between the researcher and the participant, including the imbalance in reciprocity of unveiling. In this article, we addressed the interplay of ethical disclosure over time, tackling not only the rapport and performativity in the field (see, e.g. Duncombe and Jessop, 2002), but also by discussing researchers' choices later on, especially when engaging with audiences for presenting their studies' results. We commented on how these become even more complex in migration research, as participants might be more concerned about how they present themselves due to an unpredictable status as non-citizens or in terms of engaging with or contradicting the generalized perception of their national group abroad, especially in times of rising hostile attitudes towards migration (Morosanu, 2015; Schiebelhofer, 2017; Krzyzanowski and Zappattini, 2019).

The dilemmas related to the clashes between the narratives collected during the interviews and the performances observed in later "accidental ethnographies" correspond with the ontological perspective adopted by the researchers viewing the self as the outcome of the biographical storytelling and "not a documentary repository of all experiential history running uninterruptedly from infancy to the contemporary moment" (Smith, 1995, pp. 17–18).

Thus, there is no essential, whole, cogent and "true" self that surfaces in the various forms of performance.

The relational disclosure comes from abandoning an assumption that an in-depth interview can or should be emotion-free (de Laine, 2000; Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). It enables access to a powerful set of stories and – from an ethical stance – the researchers must manage stressful moments to the best of their ability, specifically by alternating questions, changing the topic or even abandoning certain side plots altogether. Speaking of implications of our analysis for the research practice, we advise that thinking "on one's feet" and being prepared for unexpected consequences of "relational disclosure" must be more clearly communicated in the ethics guides. In the context of unanticipated emotional effects, probing shall encourage an informant to share more information, but must also always be negotiated carefully, so as not to prompt the respondents to reveal more than they intend to, particularly in the case of "sensitive topics" (de Laine, 2000, pp. 79–80).

Moreover, in terms of practical implications, the relationship between the community and the researchers should be presented as a two-way street. It is paramount that an overly eager disclosure – for example, around crime or well-being – does not become a spark for sensationalizing, either for media or for politicians. If this happens as a result of one project, it is quite likely that an ethnic community – already feeling somewhat powerless in the anti-immigration climate – becomes justifiably reluctant to be studied. In that sense, negative implications or irresponsible disclosure could potentially worsen the situation of migrants who distrust institutions that intend to help them.

The course of the narrative production during an interview also often comes down to the question of how voluble an informant is. In our studies, there were several participants who, despite being reserved about the idea of discussing their personal experiences, at some stage of the encounter become carried away with their narratives, surprising themselves at how much they were able to remember from their past. Others were not able to get "lost in narration" and steered their accounts as far as possible from the personal issues.

Conclusions

The interview situations and later reporting of the data are presented in this article not only as acts of embedding in self-lived experiences for the informants but also as arenas for the performance of multiple roles by both the researchers and the participants. In the studies of migration, such multifaceted features of self are useful for examining migrants' different performances in various contexts of their interactions. Even if the roles they concurrently enact are contradictory, it should not be interpreted as a deceitfulness of the performance but rather as a display of the actor's continuous negotiation of the definition of self in a complex reality. For researchers, the interviews conducted with co-ethnic yield additional ethical dilemmas connected to the decision on what extent they can stop performing the role of researchers while being in the field and, later on, are crucial for the questions of what should be disclosed in different contexts.

As discussed in the article, the researchers face ethical dilemmas also when they present the research findings, although it may seem that they choose not to report on certain marginal findings to protect their own ethnic identities, a bigger picture of research being hooked into anti-immigrant discourse must be acknowledged. In our view, it justifies the practices of representational disclosure described in this work. This is also because the openness and broadness of the qualitative interviewing often result in producing more research material than can be processed within the scope of a study. The researchers have to make arbitrary decisions about how to select the data, how to analyse and present it. The representational disclosure depends on the choice of dissemination channel and the audience it is designed for. In the case of academic presentations and publications, the strategy of disclosure often

follows current scholarly debates within the topic of the study. Just like in the case of a varying performance of the interviewees, the shifts in disclosure towards the general public or policymakers are not cynical or deceitful procedures on the side of a researcher, but these are some (not always successful) attempts at managing the impact of the study.

This article, offering insight into the backstage of qualitative migration research and analysing dilemmas and entanglements of insider researchers, contributes to the long-standing anthropological debate on self-reflection in the field (e.g. Reinharz, 2011; Morosanu, 2015). Also, demythologizing the relations between a researcher and participants, as well as cautioning research by reporting difficulties at different stages of the research process, will likely make it easier for future researchers who may now be better prepared and anticipate the complexities of doing fieldwork. From a temporal perspective, it can also help a broader scientific community avoid pitfalls from presenting unfavourable results prematurely (see also Irek, 2018). Thus, we hope that this paper may sensitize migration scholars to the possible predicaments in the process of interviewing their co-ethnics.

Note

1. All names are pseudonyms.

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About the authors

Justyna Bell, PhD, is a sociologist specializing in migration studies. She currently works as a senior researcher at the Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), Oslo Metropolitan University. In the recent years, Justyna has been involved in research examining migrant involvement in welfare services; studied migrant mental health; she was involved in researched on migrant organizations; and examined the refugee settlement strategies of the Norwegian municipalities. Her research interests span migration; transnationalism; public health; studies in mental health and well-being; resilience; welfare services; family migration. She is assistant editor of the Nordic Journal of Migration Research. Justyna Bell is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: Justyna.Bell@oslomet.no

QRJ

Trąbka, PhD, is a migration researcher with a background in sociology and psychology. Since 2014, she has been working in the Institute of Applied Psychology at Jagiellonian University. In 2018, she joined Youth Research Centre of University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw as a researcher in the project "CEEYouth: The comparative study of young migrants from Poland and Lithuania in the context of Brexit". Her research interests encompass migration and mobility studies, identity research, psychology of place and qualitative research methods. She is assistant editor of the journal "Migration Studies – Review of Polish Diaspora".

Paula Pustulka is an assistant professor at the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw. At USWPS, she is the Director of the Youth Research Center and Principal Investigator for the GEMTRA project on *Transitions to motherhood across three generations of Polish women. An intergenerational longitudinal study*. Paula has extensively published on Polish migrant families settled in Europe, with a strong focus on family practices and parenting, as well as particular experiences of men, women and children in mobility projects. Her research interests revolve around gender and family studies, migration research, youth studies and qualitative research methodologies.