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# “Bringing Your Whole Self to Research”: The Power of the Researcher’s Body, Emotions, and Identities in Ethnography

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Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Despite advancements, there remains relatively little research about how researchers navigate their bodies and emotions in the context of field research. Perhaps because it represents a threat to ideas about objective or value-free research, qualitative researchers may receive the least amount of practical training about how their bodies and emotions matter in the field. The prevailing assumption is that researchers will eventually find their way or organically develop the pivotal relationships that they need to conduct their work. This uncertainty can be a tremendous source of anxiety for researchers new to the field and even for those seasoned researchers initiating new projects. In this article, I explore the factors that shape the meanings that research participants attach to researchers’ bodies and emotions and, similarly, how researchers’ emotions are implicated in their research. Drawing on constructivist grounded theory and critical feminist methodologies, I use specific examples from my ethnographic research in Brazil to highlight the complex and contradictory ways that researchers’ bodies and emotions are perceived by potential research participants and can be managed in order to enhance ethnographic research. Ultimately, this presentation is intended to explore the challenges and possibilities created when researchers marshal their bodies and emotions to bring their whole self to research.

## Keywords

embodiment, emotions, constructivist grounded theory, critical feminist methodologies

## Introduction

A few days prior to giving my keynote presentation at the *International Institute for Qualitative Methodology* conference, I attended Dr. Johnny Saldaña’s keynote address (at the same conference). Replete with metaphors that became more eloquent and poignant with each slide, his talk was no mere address: It was the embodiment of what is possible when social science unapologetically embraces performing arts (Saldaña, 2018). Rather than settle for the “sage on the stage” persona to which many of us have grown accustomed, Saldaña integrated a rigorous examination of qualitative methods with a level of emotional vulnerability that transformed his keynote into an interactive experience and conduit for deeper discussion about qualitative methodology. Equally memorable, the next day, albeit for different reasons, Kathy Bischooping presented a keynote presentation brimming with popular culture references to Grey’s Anatomy and other titillating visuals that transported the audience from Taiwan to Scotland only to return back to a peculiar account of a curious boy and a hungry lion. With no recourse, my first thought was that I should relinquish any hope

of appealing to an audience who had been primed by such riveting presentations. And, the more pressing question that I was left asking myself was: *Is there even anything new or innovative left for me to say?*

Indeed, it is this very question and my fascination with identifying what it is that researchers uniquely have to offer that drives this article. It is at the core of why I believe the notion of “Bringing Your Whole Self to Research” is such an essential contribution to qualitative research. In the tradition of Black feminist and critical researchers who have advanced concepts such as “subjugated knowledge” and “oppositional consciousness” to articulate the significance of including marginalized voices to the academy, so too is my exploration

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rooted in excavating not just the excluded voices but also the overlooked sources of data that are relegated to the margins (Collins, 2002; Ladner, 1998; Sandoval, 1991). But, the path toward innovation or what we consider the type of knowledge that expands the contours of our disciplines is one that is paved by contradiction. Our ability to forge a path toward “innovation” is a source of anxiety for individuals in the professoriate and it is also clearly a concern of our profession, itself (Travers, 2009). We, as researchers, fixate over the need to carve out a distinctive space for ourselves, which can (often) lead to “over-claiming innovation” even at the peril of our individual work and disciplinary legitimacy (Wiles, Crow, & Pain, 2011, p. 601). And, it is no longer simply a matter of researchers claiming innovation, as now there are debates over which intellectual developments constitute “authentic” innovations, which further exemplify our collective preoccupation with innovation (Travers, 2009; Wiles et al., 2011; Xenitidou & Gilbert, 2009).

My own professional anxieties about innovation involve my internal dialogue with Toni Morrison. That these private (and, yes, imaginary) conversations with Morrison even exist is testament to the way that tenure pushes junior faculty to the brink of self-delusion and irrationality. And, as is often the case, I could only recognize this more clearly in retrospect. But, in 2015, with tenure on the horizon and the impending publication of my first book, *The Color of Love*, the aspirational model that I had once found in Toni Morrison suddenly morphed into being less aspirational and more frightening. This is because my research is a qualitative sociological study that examines how Black Brazilian families socialize their family members differently based on their racial appearance and (often, though not always) in accordance to dominant notions of racial and phenotypic hierarchies (Hordge-Freeman, 2013, 2015a). Having spent over 16 months in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil and collecting interviews with 116 respondents, I systematically examined the socialization practices in Black Brazilian families focusing on the messages, practices, and affective exchanges experienced in families. One of the major findings is that affective resources are distributed differently to family members based on racial appearance, with lighter skinned members with less afro-textured hair and features (those who most closely approximated whiteness) experiencing more positive emotion and affection from family members than their more Black-looking family members. Ultimately, the research provided evidence about how dominant racial hierarchies may lead to traumatic emotional experiences especially because in many families I found that “what love looks like often depends on what you look like” (Hordge-Freeman, 2015a, p. 71).

Just a few months before this book was to be released, I learned that Toni Morrison (2016) was slated to release her newest book, *God Help the Child*. Morrison’s new book dealt, similarly, with the trauma experienced by a dark-skinned Black girl born to a mother who is disgusted by her daughter’s dark skin color. Essentially, it is a novel about how a dark-skinned girl is socialized in a family and in a broader society that over-values whiteness. Naively, in my mind, Morrison’s book could only mean one thing: the kiss of death for my book. Humorous

now, but at the time, I thought that this was a rational fear. In fact, I wrote a blog post exploring my anxieties stating,

Anyone who has read Morrison’s work knows that when she gives a theme her treatment, she forfeits the necessity of any more words. She articulates with ease in 150 pages, what I cannot accomplish with a modicum of the same impact in 350 pages. The idealistic visions of us intellectually vibing as we wrote about similar topics were now overcome with the sense that Toni Morrison had stolen my thunder. (Hordge-Freeman, 2015c)

Before even submitting the blog post for publication, I realized how completely and utterly preposterous it was to imagine Morrison “stealing my thunder” or stealing anyone else’s thunder for that matter. The thought was ridiculous for two reasons. Actually, it was ridiculous for several reasons, but I have chosen to focus on just two reasons. The first reason is that I had written an *academic* book and, by liberal estimates, it was likely that the total number of people who would actually buy the book would not even exceed 1,000. And, added to that, if I were to actually subtract the books that my family preordered, the outcome would look even bleaker. And, the second reason is because Morrison’s work is what initially inspired me to write, engendered my interest in colorism, and planted the seed that convinced me that writing could be transformational. In fact, I cite her work in *The Color of Love* to acknowledge the considerable benefits that social scientists stand to gain by engaging more directly with the field of literature (Rosenblatt, 2015). Upon closer scrutiny, it was undeniable that

my childhood memories of her books on my mother’s bookshelf, the same ones that later migrated to my own shelves trace a more accurate truth: Toni Morrison, literary genius and Nobel Laureate, does not and cannot steal anyone’s thunder—She IS the thunder! (Hordge-Freeman 2015c)

### From “Thunder” Theft to “Second-Sight”

But, what are we as qualitative researchers to make of the anxieties and fears related to our substantive ideas being stolen, about our intellectual contributions being threatened by other scholars whose work tiptoe around or even completely “infringe” on what we consider our intellectual terrain?<sup>1</sup> My argument is quite simple: When you “bring your whole self to research,” you are empowered to make new theoretical findings and discoveries that can never be made, in the same way, by others. Our qualitative research enterprise should not be driven by the fear of someone ‘stealing our thunder’. Our challenge as qualitative researchers is to identify and pursue “sensitizing concepts,” examine the critical relationships among our respondents, and engage with our social environments, in ways that marshal our unique expertise and emotional experiences, to move us closer to constantly evolving “insight” (Blumer, 1969). And, this insight is not an objective reality that we can grasp and present to the world as “the truth,” but rather it is an interpretation of the world as analyzed from our experiences, observations, and emotions.<sup>2</sup>

In all, the notion of “bringing your whole self to research” is as much about being reflexive about our bodies and emotions in the field, as it is about embracing the power of our multidimensional identities. This is an especially important reminder for those of us with marginalized identities that are discouraged from drawing on personal experiences and encouraged to ignore our emotional connections to the communities with which we study for the sake of “objective” science. In fact, Du Bois (1903) argued against this emotional distancing when he posited that Black Americans have a type of ‘second-sight’, which he suggests emerges precisely from their marginalized position in the United States. When marginalized researchers activate this second-sight, they are more likely to identify patterns, conceptual ideas, and mechanisms of domination that may have otherwise gone undetected (Hordge-Freeman & Mitchell-Walthour, 2016). It is also quite possible that second-sight did not simply refer to visually observable phenomena, but rather the concept anticipated how engaging with our emotional experiences can reveal hidden elements of the social world. When second-sight is conceptualized beyond the visual and observable, then moments of discomfort and experiences of shame, guilt, and pleasure are all sources of data that facilitate our understanding of the social world. In my own research, engaging more intentionally with emotional experiences means theorizing about why some Brazilian respondents may not be able to pinpoint moments of overt racism, but state they can “sentir ele na minha pele” (feel it in my skin).

But, it is not enough to acknowledge that there is an emotional component of domination and oppression that research participants may experience. Through my reflections, I acknowledge and interrogate the meanings and implications of my own emotional experiences in order to activate the power of Du Bois’s second-sight. I clarify how I rely on both the meanings attached to my body and identities, as well as those emerging from my emotional experiences to better understand the nature of racism in Brazil and the experiences of my respondents in my ethnographic research. First, I will outline how the use of constructivist grounded theory and critical feminist methodologies has shaped my integration of the body and emotions in my research. Next, I discuss how reflexivity relates to the perceived and performed elements of “accountability” and “approachability” in the field and has both theoretical and methodological implications (Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017). In doing so, I highlight the role of the body and emotions to reflexivity. Finally, I end by providing concrete examples of my own negotiations during the data collection process that reveal the dilemmas of managing my body and emotions in order to provide an analysis of my respondents lives that privileged their understandings.

### **Constructivist Grounded Theory and Critical Feminist Methodologies**

My approach to qualitative research is shaped in no small part by Charmaz’s (2006, 2017a, 2017b) elaboration of “constructivist grounded theory.” As its names implies, this

approach emerged from the traditional school of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and is shaped by symbolic interactionist traditions. Forgoing an extended examination of the history and ongoing debates that have catalyzed the emergence of constructivist grounded theory, below I briefly enumerate what I view as some of the major principles of constructivist grounded theory that provide the basis for which the body and emotion can and should be more intentionally centered in qualitative research.

There are several tenets of Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) that have been most relevant to my interpretation and use of the body, identity, and emotions in my research. First, CGT rejects claims of objectivity and readily acknowledges researchers “cannot help but come to almost any research project already ‘knowing’ in some ways, already inflected, already affected, already ‘infected’” (Charmaz, 2017a; Clarke, 2005, p. 12). Rather than adopt the posture of a “distant observer,” CGT compels researchers to confront their “theoretical leanings” in order to more effectively manage them during the data collection and analysis process. CGT also considers researchers’ and participants’ relative positions and standpoints as critical (rather than optional) elements of the research process (Charmaz, 2017a, 2017b; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Consistent with Black feminist scholars who align themselves with standpoint theory, which asserts “group location in hierarchical power relations produces shared challenges for individuals in those groups,” not only is prior knowledge and experience not a barrier to research, but it is the basis for which researchers can access subjugated or oppositional knowledge (Collins, 2002, p. 300). As a point of clarity, standpoint theory was originally developed to argue that the shared experiences of oppression among Black women offered those who occupied this marginalized identity access to certain understandings about the nuances of oppression. Collins (2002) further clarifies that *situated standpoint* does not presume an essentialist or uniform experience, but it does presume the belief that the fates of Black women, irrespective of their position, are linked.

Connected to CGT’s rejection of objectivity is the idea that researchers may then hold generalizations that can inhibit them from portraying the social world as respondents experience it. These generalizations require continual monitoring in the field, and CGT anticipates that the researcher may often need to change course, make adaptations to their core concepts, and even shift their approaches to data collection, which is a process referred to as *methodological self-consciousness* (Charmaz, 2017a, 2017b). The notion of methodological self-consciousness takes on even greater importance when considering that CGT conceptualizes research as co-constructed by the researcher and respondent, which means the researcher must open to integrating new insights as they emerge during this co-construction (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012).

Closely related to standpoint and objectivity is CGT’s emphasis on reflexivity particularly as it relates to how a person’s identity, personal background, values, and experiences affect what he or she is able to (and willing to) observe and analyze (Charmaz, 2017b). Because we understand our

experiences and observations through our interpretation of our emotional responses to those experiences, remaining attuned to the emotional realm is fundamental to reflexivity. As an extension, by adopting a reflexive stance, researchers are more likely to be sensitive to variation and difference as it emerges in their research. This lends itself particularly well to examining *how* a certain phenomenon unfolds but also: under what conditions does it occur? How do these conditions change over time and for which populations are these observations or findings true? (Charmaz, 2017a, 2017b). Indeed, the effective implementation of research adaptations associated with methodological self-consciousness is wholly dependent on the researcher exhibiting reflexivity.

Ultimately, CGT is differentiated from classic grounded theory largely for its insistence on offering strategies that bring the researchers' subjectivity into focus, acknowledging that there are multiple realities, and emphasizing *methodological self-consciousness* (Charmaz, 2017b). When paired with Black feminist praxis, the methods that accompany CGT can be deployed to explore Black women's day-to-day experiences with attention to their efforts to engage in activities that simultaneously resist and accommodate their oppression. Both critical feminist methodologies and Black feminist praxis highlight the importance of reflexivity, situated standpoints, power differentials, and openness to the type of flexibility that is implied by methodological self-consciousness. In this sense, the CGT approach is fully compatible with critical inquiry making it adept at addressing inequality, including (and perhaps especially) questions concerning privilege and oppression in people's day-to-day lives (Charmaz, Thornberg, & Keane, 2018).

At the same time, even those who agree that co-constructing research and demonstrating flexibility (methodological or otherwise) are both part of "best practices," it can still be daunting to accept that in the course of data collection and analysis, major themes are always emerging and constantly shifting. A CGT approach provides a praxis where what might be viewed as disconcerting can be experienced as liberating because the researcher no longer needs to perform the illusion of objectivity. Instead, the researcher is encouraged to be more transparent about how their decisions inform and are informed by their relationships, identities, and (emotional) experiences in the field and share when and why shifts to their approaches became necessary.

### The Researcher as Instrument

Both critical feminist methodologies and constructivist grounded theory have provided the foundation for why and how I choose to "bring my entire self to research." But, attention to subjectivity especially as it relates to the centrality of the body and emotions means that the researcher occupies a vastly different position than the prototypical "distant observer." Focusing on the centrality of the ethnographer to research, sociologist and ethnographer Forrest Stuart (2017) characterizes the ethnographer as the "primary instrument of data

collection and interpretation" (p. 211). The logic follows then that field experiences are opportunities for researchers to "fine-tune" their instrument, in response to feedback from the meanings respondents attach to who we are, what we are saying, how we are saying it, how we *feel* about our respondents, and how we make them *feel*. Some may interpret the suggestion that researchers are instruments as an invitation to contemplate *which* instrument they would be: a shiny saxophone, classic flute, clamoring cymbal, or a rusty tuba. While assigning oneself to a particular instrument is an entertaining thought experiment, the more germane questions are: Why and how did people talk to me? What role did my instrument play in this process? How did I play/use my instrument differently in different contexts and why? These questions allow us to move beyond static statements of positionality toward more transparent discussions about power and positionality in the field (Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017).

Personally, as a woman of color who moves between marginality and privilege in ways that I have described as being akin to being on "an off-kilter see-saw, shaky, and unpredictable," my research experiences in the field provide a useful analytic frame for understanding how researchers can successfully and ethically negotiate the intricacies of studying individuals occupying different social positions (Hordge-Freeman, 2015a, p. 22). Arguably, two of the most important concepts for a qualitative researcher and particularly an ethnographer are credibility (trustworthiness) and approachability (nonthreatening and safe). In previous research, my coauthor, Sarah Mayorga-Gallo, and I have highlighted how analyzing our performed behaviors *and* perceived characteristics allows us to incorporate "the researcher's positionality, the standpoint of the researched, and the power-laden particularities of the interaction in data analyses and fieldwork reflections" (Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017, p. 380). And while it is often easy to acknowledge that as researchers, we are the research instrument, somehow despite the ways that our actions pivot on emotional experience, in discussing our methodology, emotions are relegated as mere side note, if acknowledged at all.

### Bringing the Body Back Into View

Before moving directly to emotions, it is beneficial to examine the relationship between the researcher's body and how it shapes credibility and approachability in the field. I conducted my research largely in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. For those unfamiliar with the region, Salvador is known as the blackest city in Brazil, and as a dark-skinned African American woman, I look phenotypically similar to many people who live in this city. While this allowed me to inconspicuously circulate through the city, this held for me both advantages and disadvantages. For example, rather than being approached as though I were a tourist (like some of my White American peers), I tended to be ignored by street vendors. On the other hand, because of the meanings attached to my embodied blackness, I experienced some of the sexist and racist treatment that Black Brazilian

women face in their day-to-day lives. Of these incidents, I was often mistaken for a domestic worker, questioned when I wanted to use the “social” elevator (for residents/clients) rather than the “service” elevator (for maintenance staff), and approached in ways that presumed my sexual availability.

One of the core elements of *situated standpoint* is the notion that all Black women in the United States experience oppression based on race, class, and gender. It suggests that even while these experiences are not uniform, a consciousness develops that leads to a perspective that makes them more open to understanding what it means to be oppressed as a Black woman (Collins, 2002). I had to ask to what extent did my experiences in the United States translate to Brazil? Did my identity as a Black woman in the United States offer any insight into the conditions of Black women in Brazil or did my privilege as a North American make the idea of solidarity and understanding an impossibility. The reality is that there is no easy answer to this question. There were moments when the meanings of my body (based on race, gender, and nationality) collided and contradicted themselves in ways that had implications for my credibility and approachability, as well as for my findings.

As I have previously discussed, the most salient (or rather most traumatic) moment in Brazil that highlighted the meanings attached to my racialized and gendered body involved the police. Returning home from dinner with two White friends, the police stopped our car, pointed a long rifle to the side of my head, and ordered me out of the car. Later, I discovered that they had assumed that I was a sex worker with drugs, which apparently was the only reasonable explanation for why a Black woman would be riding in a car with two White men. With my hands shaking, I rustled through my bag to find anything that could prove my identity. In the background, I could hear my friends yelling but I couldn’t initially make out the words that they were saying. Finally, I realized that they were screaming “speak English, speak English!” With that, I explained, “I am a researcher from the United States and I study families . . .” Before I could go further the officer, not understanding a word that I was saying but now “seeing” me as an authentic American, lowered his rifle and bowed. He apologized and told me he wanted me to be able to go back to the United States and tell people I was treated with *dignidade e respeito* (dignity and respect).

For me, in the field and in Brazil, my body was an invaluable, even if at times dangerous instrument. Without any other information, I was read as a dark-skinned Black Brazilian woman, which meant that my research instrument was often immediately read as potentially sexually deviant, criminal, and vulnerable to state intervention. And, what is important to highlight is how the politics surrounding the treatment of my body reflects the implications of intersectionality and criminality in the lives Black women in Brazil. These type of field experiences are valuable not simply because they reveal how I was positioned in Brazil but also because of what they reveal about how I gained knowledge by observations, interviews, and experiences of racial and gender politics in Brazil. My *situated*

*standpoint* as a Black woman, which I had developed in the United States, was apparently still relevant (in many ways) to the experience of Black women in Brazil.

My body was an essential part of my research instrument in part because it functioned as a stimulus for social interactions. Both my credibility and approachability derived both from my intentional identity displays and performances, as much as from the perceived meanings that Brazilians attached to my body. I did adjust my bodily displays based on gendered expectations about how women should present themselves. I was required to get regular manicures and pedicures (and I was publicly sanctioned when I did not abide by those rules) and encouraged to wear clothing that reflected Bahian cultural norms. Among White Brazilians, the supposed ease with which I learned samba was attributed to the fact that by virtue of being Black, samba “*está no seu sangue*” (it is in your blood). Additionally, my embodied blackness and Americanness gave White Brazilians license to share racist and sexually charged ideas about Black Brazilians because to them, my Americanness made me less Black. Or rather, they could not imagine that I would feel solidarity with Black Brazilians due to my Americanness. In contrast, my credibility among Black Brazilians hinged on being introduced to the community by a known informant and by my performance of a particular type of “cultural credibility” including my embodied performances of popular Brazilian dance, culture, and slang (Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017, p. 381). My approachability for all Brazilians was contingent on respondents perceiving me as easy to talk to, which entailed the emotional process (for me) of stifling my responses or even smiling through deeply offensive comments in order to continue the interview.

## Bringing Emotions to Research

Shifting from an emphasis on the body to a focus on emotion, I link back to constructivist grounded theory and Black feminist methodologies to show how emotions are experienced and can be managed in the field. In her book, *The Vulnerable Observer*, noted ethnographer Ruth Behar (1996) walks the reader through her own field experiences to illustrate the salience and impact of emotions in the research setting. In describing the ways that emotions mark the research experience, she writes:

. . . as a storyteller opens her heart to a story and to a listener, recounting hurts that cut deep and raw into the gullies of the self, do you, the observer, stay behind the lens of the camera, switch off the tape recorder, keep pen in hand? Are there limits—of respect, piety, pathos—that should not be crossed, even to leave a record? But, if you can’t stop the horror shouldn’t you at least document it. (p. 2)

The above quote speaks to the centrality of emotions in building rapport with respondents, but it also reveals how ambivalence and anxiety may be associated with emotional connectedness. Confronting emotions requires that we acknowledge how it pervades the entire research process. Not only do emotions drive what we choose as the object of our

study, but researchers also develop an emotional investment in the research. Following this, researchers become emotionally embedded in the communities they study and then become emotionally invested in the experiences of their respondents and must exert considerable labor to manage these dynamics (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2009). Although I present these as stages, the process is not necessarily a linear one. Yet still, researchers often experience dilemmas of emotional intimacy that result from the unexpectedly deep relationships (friendships, romantic partnerships, and otherwise) that develop in the field (Taylor, 2011). While researchers are much more forthcoming about how emotions can direct our research and impact our relationships in the field, much less has been written about how poor management of emotions can serve to derail a project. In response to that, this section on emotions will focus on the complex role that emotions play in directing and/or derailing the researcher.

The notion that emotions can derail or destabilize a project has become increasingly clear to me in the process of collecting data for the current book that I am writing about modern slavery and labor exploitation in Brazil. I begin discussing this issue by offering what I have written as part of the introduction of this book:

Everything changed when renting a room from a Brazilian family in Salvador, Bahia, I saw Nadia (a 50 something Black Brazilian woman) sleeping on the floor. Nadia had been omni-present in the family home, which was located in an expensive high-rise near the city center. I had seen her cleaning, cooking, folding clothes, and doing other household jobs around the house; and so, I reasonably assumed she was a paid domestic worker. One morning, as I waded through an early morning haze on route to the kitchen for a drink of water, I noticed the family's teenaged son's bedroom door ajar. A casual glance into his room revealed Nadia's brown body curled up on the floor next to the young man's bedside and draped by a transparent sheet that barely covered her feet. I returned to my room haunted by the sight with tight knots folding and unfolding in my stomach. Why was Nadia sleeping on the floor? How long had this been going on? Did my presence in the house mean that I had taken the room where she normally slept? She later explained that she had been "raised by the family" and she was grateful that they had provided her a place to live (off and on) for several decades. Only later did she reveal that she had lived in the home for over 30 years and had suffered physical and emotional abuse, as well as labor exploitation. The longer we spoke, the more there were fractures in her narrative that exposed the underside of her "family" status.

For nearly 10 years, I have traveled to Brazil to interview Black Brazilian women, many like Nadia, who are referred to as *filhas de criação* (adopted daughters). These are women who were often "taken in" often by White Brazilian families under the guise of adoption with the promise of care and opportunity. The women who I interviewed often initially appeared as shadowy features in the background of families, and when the opportunity arose, I introduced myself to them and learned about their life histories. Over the course of one year in Brazil, I unexpectedly met 10 *filhas de criação* and I was

overwhelmed by a sense of anger or rather rage over what I perceived to be gross inequality. After hearing numerous narratives of abuse and exploitation, my initial impulse reflected a desire to mete out justice by exposing their "monstrous" families to the authorities, so that they might be punished for their exploitation.

However, the sensibilities of constructivist grounded theory with its emphasis on scrutinizing our interpretations of data and engaging in sustained reflexivity permitted me to allow these strong emotions to drive my motivation for the study but also demanded that I interrogate and temper this anger. I needed to move slowly and carefully in order to collect and analyze the data in more nuanced ways. This did not mean that I needed to ignore my emotions, nor did it mean that I could not critique this institution of *criação*. What it did mean was that I needed to confront the rage/anger that I was feeling and identify how it had the potential to enhance and/or ruin the entire research project. It was through the scrutiny of my emotional reactions that I identified how my desire to "save" these women and punish the "monsters" sounded eerily similar to the savior complex for which I had critiqued White transnational researchers. From what was I saving them and to what was I delivering them? Was my construction of monsters and victims even accurate? Delving deeper into my reaction, I discovered that part of me needed these families to be monsters in part because it would allow me to craft a linear, logical, and uncomplicated narrative. Indeed, framing them in this way would have satisfied the "rage monster" inside of me, but it would not have been true to the way that the women who I interviewed understood their lives.

And while constructivist grounded theory provided the tools to code and follow my own emotional reactions during this process, it is critical feminist methodologies that redirected my focus toward examining the agency of "*adopted daughters*" (*filhas de criação*), identifying their day-to-day moments of resistance even within significant structural constraints. This required that I be open to and take seriously how they (re)-conceptualized their experiences sometimes in ways that simultaneously resisted and reproduced these exploitative relationships. At one point, nearly all of the *filhas de criação* had asserted that their family treats them "como se fosse filha da casa" (as if I were a daughter of the house) and they vacillated between expressing gratitude and despair when they discussed their familial relationships. Early in the data collection process, I minimized these assertions of family, and only later after hearing more of their narratives did I return to recode the frequent occurrence of these comments as "family ideology." And, as this ideology continued to appear, I refined my interview questions to probe not only for what I could more easily identify as exploitation but also for feelings of family belonging. In this sense, my attention to CGT's *methodological self-consciousness* demanded that I develop new questions, create new codes, and challenge my initial impressions in ways that would afford me additional insight about interviewees' experiences and interpretations of their adoptive families. Furthermore, by integrating the insights of critical feminist

methodologies and Black feminist praxis, in particular, I privileged the voices and interpretations of Black Brazilian women's experiences and understandings of resistance.

Ultimately, allowing my rage to fuel my motivation but not allowing it to overtake the research led to several breakthroughs. First, I discovered that the interviewees' frequent experiences of family inclusion and belonging were used to forgive or forget the pervasive abuse. Had I dismissed the significance of family belonging for the interviewees, I would not have identified how after raising several generations of the family's children, threats of social exclusion/banishment from the family could be used to control "*adopted daughters*". Second, handling my emotions in this way allowed me to hear their fears about leaving as rooted in real structural concerns such as financial vulnerability and their inability to read, alongside (and for many most importantly) the potential loss of their social networks and the elimination of what they felt were sincere affective ties.

What I learned from this experience, in the tradition of Black feminist methodologies, is that while I identified with the oppression of Black women in Brazil, I also needed to manage my own emotional reactions to create the conditions for the legibility of Black Brazilian women's agency and resistance. My recognition of their resistance strategies could not be contingent on whether those practices aligned with my own cultural beliefs about freedom. Instead, by listening closely to Black women, I could identify moments when they offered responses that illustrated that they were not passive victims but rather were working to reach their personal goals under constrained situations. This approach elevates this research from being a project about powerless women to one that considers the myriad of ways that *filhas de criação* reinterpret and reconceptualize their experiences and resist oppression in their lives. A one-dimensional portrayal of the women and their "adoptive" families is not only inappropriate, it actually inhibits a deeper understanding of the insidious ways that love and obligation can help crystallize domination... no monsters needed.

### Emotional Embeddedness and Key Informants

Another way that emotions are implicated in the research process is through the relationships that we form with key informants and their embeddedness in our lives. As can be expected, collecting longitudinal data on family exploitation requires developing rapport, credibility, and approachability. For many of the women in my study who have not had much access to many people beyond their adopted families, the potential to speak with me about the trauma and suffering that they had silently faced easily led to the development of strong emotional connections. One of my key informants considered me "a filha que não pari" (the daughter I never had) and others referred to me as their best friend and their "voice." Sharply attuned to questions of power asymmetry, I benefited from developing kin-like relationships, but they made me feel ambivalent

because they often masked the ways that I had more power in the relationship (Hordge-Freeman, 2015b). With the growth of social media, the dilemmas of intimacy have only intensified with respondents and researchers having access to technology that allow them to maintain contact between research trips and even once the studies have ended. While in the past, distance often separated transnational researchers from informants, social media (including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp) make us more accessible and accountable than we have ever been. If in the past we conceptualized accountability in terms of the co-construction of research that reflects the lived experience of respondents, we are now faced with a new type of relationship accountability that brings all the emotional trappings of the field back to our homes, in ways that are specific to this moment of technological advancement. We have only recently begun to grapple with the implications of our emotional embeddedness in communities and in individuals' lives for our interactions in virtual spaces. But, as we increasingly engage with questions of emotional intimacy, rapport, and emotional embeddedness, debates about these questions are likely to be addressed.

### Conclusion

In all, these reflections identify the strands that connect qualitative researchers and underscore how we can more explicitly consider and manage our body, emotions, and identities in the field. I suggest that researchers relentlessly search for the gaps in our understandings and interpretations of people's behaviors and thoughts, as well as our own. As part of this, we should seek to leverage our body and emotions in ways that are intentional and productive. Researchers can also use their emotional responses (and those of their respondents) to reevaluate their interview protocol, recode data, and shift our theoretical orientations as a reflection of methodological self-consciousness. Finally, researchers should enthusiastically search for sources of inspiration far beyond our respective disciplinary canons and be open to sources of data that are beyond what is visually observable.

For critical race scholars whose goal is to unmask to inner-workings of racial privilege, oppression, pain, and resistance Coates (2015), in *Between the World and Me*, eloquently captures our charge to bring the body and emotion into our work by stating:

But all our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, White privilege, even White supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body.

If, as researchers, we are willing to look beyond our own disciplinary boundaries and beyond even the barriers of the false

dichotomy of “rational” and “emotional,” just beyond that realm are other traditions, perspectives, and ways of knowing that can unlock new possibilities in terms of how we collaborate/co-construct with respondents, challenge our thoughts, confront our emotions, and reconsider what are data and re-evaluate the process of interpreting data. Ultimately, the path to innovation that many of us seek is less a path and more about greater consciousness about the significance of the body and emotions to all social interactions. Complementing this idea, Saldaña asserts an idea that resonates with me and likely with many others that, “emotions are not an analytic nuisance” (Saldaña, 2018, p. 6). I would further argue that emotions are the “stuff” of domination, the stuff of resistance, and the stuff of humanity. Even while I affirm this idea, it does not obviate the need for emotions to be theorized in a way that offers an oppositional stance toward systemic and societal oppressions and moves beyond a limited analysis of the individual (Collins, 2016, p. 34). We cannot draw attention to the importance of emotion while ignoring the structural and ideological structures that produce them.

It is only appropriate that I end this article by returning back to Toni Morrison, who remains an author without equal. But, Morrison is not a sociologist and her approach is not grounded in the same theoretical traditions that shape my work. We do not share the same lived experiences. And, even if we did share the same experiences, our interpretations of those experiences would reflect our different sensibilities. In the end, no one can or will ever write how or what Morrison writes, but perhaps the most significant breakthrough, at least to me, is that no one can produce what I can or what you can. What we can take from Morrison is a particular approach to writing that is transformational: she writes words that leave wounds. Indeed, speaking about the emotional potential of research, Behar (1996) argues that good qualitative research “breaks your heart.” In all, when we tap into emotions, we are empowered to write stories that are persuasive, tell narratives that make power and domination visible, and produce research that stirs people deeply and viscerally. By standing on the shoulders of giants, we can learn new ways of “seeing” and if we also focus on *feeling* the reverberations of their brilliance under our feet, we just might be able to channel them in ways that allows us to make thunder of our own.

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### Notes

1. This anxiety about having not having something new to say contrasts with researchers who have historically articulated innovative and critical methodological and substantive contributions but have

been ignored because they challenge dominant hierarchies of knowledge (see Collins, 2016; Griffin, 2016; Ladner, 1998).

2. While I affirm the value of bringing your whole self to research in order to make insights that others cannot, I must also acknowledge the legitimate and historical concern about how the politics of actually recognizing research disproportionately leave the contributions of marginalized scholars, including scholars of color and women of color, in particular, invisible (Delgado, 1984). The #CiteBlackWomen movement which was created by anthropology and Black feminist Christen Smith emerged from what she perceived as the necessity of researchers being intentional about recognizing the contributions of Black women.

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