The emergence and evolution of researcher identities

Experiences, encounters, learning and dialectics

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate and reflect on mutual relationships between the researcher's life experiences, encounters and personal learning, and how they can influence the research process of designing and writing research publications as well as their dialectical influences on the emergence and evolution of researcher identities in these processes.

Design/methodology/approach – This research is inspired by auto-ethnography. While the descriptions and analyses of the selected moments from the pre-research period are based on retrospective reflection and memory, the descriptions and analyses of the moments from the research period are in addition to the memories, based on notes and diary entries about my encounters with various people, documents, events and literature.

Findings – The paper shows that researchers' attempts to understand the Other through studies of certain phenomena are a production between them and their past, their experiences and people encountered, as well as between them and the research literature they use. In these encounters and processes, the researcher's multiple identities emerge and evolve with significance for how the research is socially produced.

Originality/value – The paper takes a broader perspective than usually seen in studies of researcher identities and is based on a researcher's life history rather than only on a specific field-situation. As such, it has a longitudinal character, and it implies a broader, multilevel area of reflection, emphasizing dialectical relationships between the researcher, the context(s) and people involved in these, as well as the subject(s) of research, which are characterized by mutuality and continuality.

Keywords Dialectics, Reflections, Encounters, Hyphens, Researchers' identities

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

As anyone who has written a doctoral thesis knows, many choices have to be made in the process of (socially) producing a doctoral thesis. Some choices are easier than others, some have unexpected consequences and some turn out to be better than others. While each thesis author faces a special set of choices, broadly speaking, all thesis writers must make fundamental decisions about their choice of topic, research question(s), literature, and theoretical and methodological positions that in turn channel our way(s) of collecting, interpreting and analyzing the empirical material. As Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) state, such decisions are not just choices about doing research but about and being a researcher—about our identities. These decisions are, as this study will show, not always easy, and do not happen in a vacuum, but they are "results" of specific dialectical relationships between our (life) experiences, encounters, learning, in which our (different) identities emerge and are evaluated. These identities are not fixed and unchangeable but socially constructed (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) and fluid (Alcadipani *et al.*, 2015), and as will be shown here, they always occur in and are shaped by social contexts.

In other words, the production of a doctoral thesis is both a learning process, but also a social process, in which we often encounter many people—people with different ideas and

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different interests, as well as different power positions. These encounters (that also include reading the literature) might influence us, by being inspiring, and/or broadening our thinking and strengthening our theoretical and methodological arguments. But they can also be challenging and sometimes create contradictions (e.g. between our previous knowledge and experiences and the new ones that we "encounter" in our research processes). Telling the stories behind the stories—which few organizational scholars tell in writing (e.g. Anteby, 2013; Donnelly *et al.*, 2013)—is, therefore, important because it can lead to a better understanding of the complex relationship between processes of knowledge production and the various contexts of such processes, as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2003).

In Fine's (1994) study, in which the author conceptualizes a notion of working the hyphen, we find additional reasons why it is important to tell the stories behind the stories. Working the hyphen is from Fine's point of view—a way of "unpacking notions of scientific neutrality, universal truths, and researcher dispassion" (Fine, 1994, p. 71). More specifically, Fine (1994, p. 72) suggests that researchers reflect on how they are in relation with the contexts they study and with their respondents, understanding that they are all multiple in those relations (e.g. how these relationships get us "better" data, and limit/no-limit what we feel free to say). Building on the work of Fine (1994), Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) introduce a notion of hyphen–spaces, (fluid relational spaces) by elaborating on the spaces of possibility, between the knowledge producer and the respondents in research studies. From their point of view, adopting a reflexive standpoint to explore relational spaces between researchers and respondents allow us, not only to understand how they influence each other, but also to understand identity work that takes place in these relationships. Applying the concept of hyphen–spaces to one of the author's (Karunanayake) experiences of fieldwork, they identify and reflect on four such spaces: insiderness–outsiderness (e.g. whether the researcher feels "at home" in the research site or not); similarities-differences between the researcher and respondents; emotional engagement-distance in the research process; and political activism-active neutrality (e.g. whether the researcher focuses on the experiences of oppressed groups as means of motivating social/organizational changes or not).

Furthermore, reflections on how research stories are produced are also important because they reveal the choices that researchers make in promoting certain narratives, showing aspects of these stories that are usually hidden (Donnelly *et al.*, 2013). Such reflections on the experiences make the power dynamics and struggles (Thomas *et al.*, 2009; Anteby, 2013), as well as co-constructions of researchers' and respondents' identities in research processes more explicit (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013), and in general contribute to the legitimacy, trustworthiness and richness of our research and its accounts (Langley and Klag, 2017).

This paper is one example of a story behind the stories in which I reflect on several of the encounters (that are left out in my previous writings) in particular as they relate to the following questions:

RQ1. How can mutual relationships between the researcher's life experiences, encounters and personal learning influence the (social) production of our research writing projects?

RQ2. How do such mutual relationships influence the emergence and evolution of researchers' identities as researchers engage in these processes?

My process was mediated by socio-historical relationships from my early life in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), at that time, a part republic in the Socialist Federative Republic Yugoslavia and from my life as a Swedish immigrant, (PhD) student and scholar. In a sense, this specific story, based on an auto-ethnographic approach is just one of many possible examples of how we, as researchers can contextualize our research, in order to show how our personal experiences, encounters, and learning mutually interact and affect our research

process as we study and experience the topic of investigation. Also, I show how the influence of certain social-historical conditions relevant to the lives of researchers may shape the researchers' identities as researchers in their research. In contrast to studies where researchers are presented as objective and neutral observers I show in this study how we researchers (always) take an active role (within certain social-historical conditions) in the process of shaping the ideas and interests that are (or could be) prioritized/marginalized in our research.

Thus, the overall purpose of the study is to reflect on mutual relationships between the researcher's life experiences, encounters and personal learning and how they can influence the research process of designing and writing our research accounts as well as the emergence and evolution of our identities in these processes.

The paper proceeds as follows: the first section locates the paper within the literature on reflexivity in organization and management studies, focusing on studies that deal with researchers' reflections on experiences in regard to researchers' identities, and how my paper relates to and goes beyond these. Next, in the section labeled, My Research as a Dialectic Process I narrate and illustrate my encounters before and during my dissertation research to explain the reasons for my interest in "diversity in organizations," the subject of my thesis—but also personally as a Swedish citizen of foreign origin (thus as a subject of diversity in the current Swedish context). By reflecting on my own background, and how it later influenced my research, as well as explaining how I have chosen this research topic and the work of the research process itself I raise issues related to emergence and evolution of researchers' identities, and their mutual relationships with the social production of my doctoral thesis. The narrative is structured into three phases associated with the key events of this process, each accompanied by an analytic section, called "Analytical summary" in which I discuss the evolution of academic identity and the connections between past and future that become embedded in researcher identities. I conclude with some thoughts on what we can learn from our tales of the field by reflecting on how researchers' life experiences, encounters and personal learning influenced our identities' (social) productions and the way we produce our research.

Reflexivity in research

A relatively increasing interest in reflective organizational and management studies could be related to a critical turn within this field. With this turn, more emphasis has been given to reflections on how knowledge is (socially) produced, and why it is produced in the way it is (e.g. Calás and Smircich, 1999; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2003). The concept of reflection or reflexivity in this critical turn is often seen as "a process of knowledge development where attention is paid to the way linguistic, social, political, and theoretical elements are woven together, during which empirical material is constructed, interpreted and written" (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2003, p. 5). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2003) apart from viewing reflexivity as "ways of seeing which act back and on reflect existing ways of seeing" (p. 248), emphasize importance of a broader, multilevel area of reflection, where the levels are reflected in one another (see also Alvesson and Deetz, 2000).

In spite of an increasing interest in reflexive research, reflexivity concerning the stories behind the stories that researchers tell, are, however, still very much suppressed in the majority of organizational and management research. It is, for instance, very much up to the reader to interpret the researchers' assumptions about the studied phenomenon. In most cases, readers can usually only guess at how and why authors position the studied phenomenon as they do, ask those particular research questions, or design research projects in certain ways. Or as Donnelly *et al.* (2013, p. 5) state, still all too often the organizational stories we tell do not tell us so much about how these stories come to be told the way they

are and how different narratives might have been produced as a result. The reason for this, stems according to Anteby (2013) in part from the researchers' epistemological position favoring (professional) "distance" and eschewing recognition of the value of (personal) involvement, which in turn fails to capture the complexities of organizational research and writing. This position is additionally reinforced by the publication criteria in some top-journals, where researchers are generally expected to be "invisible" and "objective" in their writings (Langley and Klag, 2017), displaying "correct" methodological procedures to avoid impact on the research process (Cassell, 2005).

In some recent studies, certain researchers have, however, engaged more deeply in reflexivity, based on their own experiences. For example, Cassell (2005) elaborates on identity dynamics in the qualitative research interview. She shows how the identities of the interviewer and of interviewees are actively constructed through the interview process, and she shows that the interview itself is a place where identity work takes place. Cassell's (2005) focus is, in particular, on the creation of interviewer identity. Cole (2013) also reflects on the fieldwork process by showing how the design of her dissertation research was constructed, by reflecting on issues such as access, identity constructions and power relations. The author illustrated, for instance, how her identity, as a white American woman, in the context of Sierra Leone—where she was collecting the empirical material—not only influenced her access to the fieldwork but also the way of collecting the empirical material and being accepted by interviewees. Jensen *et al.*'s study is also reflexive one, but it is focused on some hidden aspects and tensions in the collaborative research process, in which several researchers from different countries have been involved. More specifically, in this study the authors reflect on how they worked together, how intersections of their differences and identities, as well as search for solutions—led to the final outcomes of their research. Also, Thomas *et al.*'s (2009) study reflects on the researchers' experience in a collaborative research project. The authors elaborate on the construction of "we"/ "our" collective identity, and its implications for how the research is conducted, interpreted and reported. Unlike Jensen *et al.*'s study, Thomas *et al.* (2009) give, however, more room to power relations and struggles that appear in research collaborations.

The hidden side of organizational research is also portrayed in Koning and Ooi's (2013) study where the authors discuss the consequences of ignoring awkward encounters during fieldwork. They offer suggestions about how awkwardness arising from our different roles in the research process (e.g. the roles of researcher and friend) can be addressed. They plead for, as they label it, an inclusive reflexivity—which means in their interpretation, the (re) thinking of events and observations holistically. In Gallos' (1996) study, the author made visible and reflected on some of her own experiences that, in turn, impacted her career. Some of those experiences and illustrations are related to developing a research identity, and claiming a scholarly voice, which Gallos viewed as critical in her later process of becoming a (productive) scholar. Also Erez (1996) reflects on her own experiences that influenced the construction of her identity as a researcher. However, in her study the focus is, in particular, on the impact(s) of some aspects of her Israeli culture, which in Erez's (1996) interpretation highly values family life. She gives illustrations of how intersections between her family life and career life created a specific way of doing research and becoming a scholar.

In most of these studies, researchers explore the knowledge constructions and the position of the researcher in such processes by giving illustrations of how their identities and role emergence were affected in these processes. However, with a few exceptions (e.g. Gallos, 1996; Erez, 1996) in doing so, they do not really capture the broader conditions and long-term processes of when and how this happens. When they include the process perspective, it is rather related to a specific field-situation, such as the research interview (Cassell, 2005), observational field research (Cole, 2013) or a specific research collaboration (Jonsen *et al.*, 2012; Thomas *et al.*, 2009).

While this study draws upon developments in reflexivity concerning the stories behind the stories, and the earlier discussed studies on working with the hyphen—in terms of identifying and reflecting on mutual relationships between researches and researched, and their influences for the research and the researcher's identity—it also advances beyond these studies. This study takes a broader perspective and is based on a researcher's life history, thus including mutual relationships between the researcher's life experiences, encounters and personal learning in the pre-research and research period and their influences on the research process as well as the emergence and evolution of the researcher's identities.

Indeed, it has a longitudinal character, and it implies a broader, multilevel area of reflection, that draws on a dialectical lens to consider the evolving relationships between the researcher, the context(s) and people involved (including authors of relevant work), as well as the research subject(s) of research, the relationships that are characterized by mutuality and continuality. A dialectical lens implies a particular set of assumptions (Benson, 1977). These are, first that people socially produce their social world and are produced by it. Second, that such mutual relationships (can) result in conflict when people are thwarted in their activities by "existing" arrangements. And third, that some of such contradictions, as results of conflicting interests, as this study will show (can) initiate new encounters and learning, that then leads to reflexivity, in form of the questioning and criticism of existing social arrangements (e.g. regarding "consequences" of being treated as an immigrant, or in regard to some assumptions in the literature, rather than taking them for granted), and the search for alternatives (e.g. by being an activist and searching for new knowledge that gives alternative understandings and explanations to these already established), rather than being active neutral, by accepting the status quo. These mutual relationships, as will be shown, not only had later influences for designing and socially producing my doctoral thesis, but also for the emergence and evolution of my identities.

Methodology

This research is inspired by auto-ethnography. Auto-ethnography is seen as a certain form of ethnography where the culture of the knowledge producer's own group (and I would add own process) is textualized (Van Maanen, 1995), while the knowledge producer is seen as an insider who draws on personal experience and cultural competence to frame and shape research in a way that an outsider cannot (Karra and Phillips, 2007). An auto-ethnographic approach is usual used when researchers seek to describe and analyze personal experience by retrospectively writing about past personal experiences using hindsight (e.g. Jonsen *et al.*, 2012; Anteby, 2013).

This paper is primarily based on my memories and my written notes from the period of relevance to this story. I have selected several mutually related moments that I remember and perceive to have crucially influenced the process of writing my thesis (see Denzin, 1989). While the descriptions and analyses of the selected moments from the pre-research period are based on retrospective reflection and memory, the descriptions and analyses of the moments from the research period are in addition to my memories, based on notes and diary entries about my encounters with various people, documents and literature.

Thus, this study is not about the findings of my thesis research, but rather about how and why this research was produced in the way it was. Drawing on my life experiences, encounters and learning from the pre-research and research period, I tell, also personal stories to show how my (new) identities emerged and evolved, and what implications those issues had on the social production of my research. Through a range of examples, this study reflects on a process of the emergence and evolution of researcher identity (such as an immigrant, a PhD candidate, a critical ethnographer, and an independent scholar) and demonstrates the significance that these identity constructions have for how the research is socially produced in the way it is (see Figure 1, p. 36).

By using the auto-ethnographic method I was able to identify and reflect on important encounters from my past (which were left out of my previous writings), but which influenced how my dissertation was produced, too. Reflecting over the past was closely related to the longitudinal longer term character of this study, which enabled me to capture the complexities of the dialectical relationships between researcher's life experiences, organizational research experiences and learnings, as well as researcher's identity that reach beyond specific field-work situations.

Thus, by using the auto-ethnographic method and by exploring life events and researcher identity development over a longer periods, this study contributes to research in organization studies by showing that the encounters (and learning) of relevance for our research do not only occur in the relation between researchers and respondents within the context of a specific study, but also in a much broader context, including our encounters with our earlier experiences and our daily life, as well as our encounters with our PhD advisors, colleagues and the literature. As will be shown, all of these relationships can directly or indirectly influence how our research processes are designed, re-designed and developed, as our identities and our positionalities are shaped. At the same time, contradictions, but also power struggles (can) take a place, which are, as well mutually interconnected in the social processes of producing our research publications.

My research as a dialectical process

Phase 1: from immigrant to job-seeker to student

Becoming an immigrant. In 1992, I came to Sweden from B&H. At that time the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was divided into five (later, six) independent countries (federal units before gaining their independence) and the war had begun in B&H. My reasons for emigration were complex, but the main reason was my protest against the gradual destruction of the basic respect for the principles of diversity and equality among the various ethnic groups living in B&H. Slowly but surely, society was destabilized as these principles were forcibly deformed and reformed in a war that led to the ethnic cleansing, torture and deaths of many people. Friends, neighbors and even couples were separating along visible and invisible lines. A war that was once unthinkable among the people I knew was now a reality.

My initial response, as war in B&H became increasingly likely, was to join thousands of other people in demonstrations against war. When the war began, such demonstrations lost their intensity, and I began to think of emigration. In shock and disbelief that our, and others peaceful protests were so ineffective and with little hope that would be resolved by war, I decided to leave the country. I retain the utmost respect for the many people who remained and continued to fight for the principles of diversity and equality in a society ravaged by war. My path took me to Sweden, a country internationally recognized for its legalization of human rights. However, at the time, I did not imagine that Sweden would become my permanent home.

In coming to Sweden, I changed my country and acquired a new identity–at26 years of age, I became an immigrant—or better said, I was "assigned" this identity without anyone asking me about it. Based on my previous experiences, I did not know what it really meant to be an immigrant or that it was a well-established social identity in Sweden. However, I soon learned I could be "boxed" as the young man from Southern Europe, from B&H or from the former Yugoslavia, and that this "boxing" me in these different categories can significantly determine my position and chances, as it could for others similarly "boxed" in Swedish society. Thus, I was thrust immediately into an ethnographic mode as I learned a new culture through my daily encounters with Swedish inhabitants and Swedish life.

Before my arrival, my knowledge of Sweden was pretty limited. That and the co-construction of my identity of "The newly arrived immigrant" put me in a situation of an outsider, the Other (compared to my situation in my country of origin). I neither knew the Swedish language, nor political, economic, social and other conditions in the country, but at the same time I wished to better understand a new "reality," as well as to be understood and accepted in the new country to which I emigrated.

So, once I arrived, my real learning of Swedish culture began with my encounters with ordinary people—my neighbors, my new friends and representatives of various institutions (e.g. employment agencies, universities, banks, etc.). In these encounters, I learned about the country that has now been my home for the last 26 years. I also began to study Swedish so that I could "introduce" myself to these new acquaintances in their language. The more I learnt, the more I became aware of how some aspects of the "culture" may privilege certain interests and marginalize or ignore others. By being assigned to and taking on the identity of the immigrant from B&H had, for instance, certain implications for me, as well as for others belonging to the same category, such as our positions and possibilities on the labor market as will be discussed below.

Becoming a job-seeker. After completing the compulsory Swedish language course for Swedish immigrants, I started searching for a job. In B&H, despite the very high rate of employment, I was hired the day I graduated from university (with a degree in business). I thought, naively as it turned out, that with my fluency in Swedish and my prior education, I would soon be employed in Sweden as well. However, the standard response to my job applications letters was something like this: "Thank you for your interest, but we have employed another candidate for the position." I shared my frustration with friends at not being invited to job interviews. Some encouraged me to keep trying. Others, who had submitted more than 100 unsuccessful job applications, were less encouraging.

In that period, my encounters with Sweden's Public Employment Agency became more frequent. To my surprise, the advisers at the Agency recommended that I take various courses (that were not always related to my profession), but offered no specific employment suggestions. Moreover, some advisers suggested that I start studying IT engineering—at university—a highly sought-after profession at that time Sweden. I am now glad I did not follow that advice.

At one meeting an adviser told me:

> You're in a much better position in the labor marker than immigrants from Africa, Iraq, Iran, or Chile. You're from Europe, Southern Europe!

A charitable interpretation of this remark is that it was meant to encourage me, but later, when I thought more about it, I was more discouraged than encouraged. If this was the logic of the Swedish labor market—where country of origin was a factor in hiring decisions—then my employment opportunities, as well as those of many others, were rather limited. It seemed quite likely that job-seekers from the Scandinavian countries had an advantage. Taking a still more personal perspective, I also wondered why those of us from Southern Europe should be privileged over immigrants from the Middle East, Africa and South America.

This experience challenged my expectations about the Swedish labor market, as well as my assumptions about my own identity as an immigrant—as "other" in the context of Sweden. So, I began to think about distinctions between "us" and "other" wondering what it meant to be "a real" Swede, but also "a real" Bosnian and Herzegovinian in this—to me new, specific social-historical context of Sweden.

Becoming a student (again). As I searched for a job, I also took a variety of courses "to increase my competences," as the Employment Agency's adviser phrased it. One 18-month

training program entitled *Aspirantutbildning* (directly translated from Swedish, "Aspiration Building") was for immigrants who had completed economic/business administration and legal training in their home countries. I was very optimistic about these goals as I began the course. I think my classmates felt the same.

One event in this course was a partial inspiration for my future doctoral studies. Sitting around a table with our instructors, we, immigrant and job-seeker students, from 15 different countries, talked about our experience and job expectations. In general, we were optimistic about obtaining employment. Then a tall, gray-haired man from Iraq spoke up. (We called him "the Priest" for reasons I no longer remember.) He had a degree in economics and years of work experience in accounting in his country of origin. He spoke briefly but to the point. In essence, he said:

> Unfortunately, I have a feeling that I will not get a job even after this education […] I'm from Iraq, […] I am fifty years old […] In addition to this education, I have completed several other courses in Sweden. I have also sent hundreds of job applications to different organizations in Sweden in the 10 years since I came to Sweden […] and I did not get a job! I really no longer believe in the possibility of getting a job in Sweden. (A remembered statement)

The Priest was one of the better students in the class and spoke far better Swedish than most of us. He had training and experience in a field where there are typically job openings. He was continually increasing his competences by taking different courses, mostly arranged by the Public Employment Agency. Thus, I was baffled and shocked that he was unable to find work in Sweden.

As I thought more about the Priest, and about constructions of our new identities as immigrant's students and job-seekers I started realizing that increasing competences and being an active job-seeker is not a guarantee for (some) immigrants to get a job. Discourses around different immigrant groups were important for their possibility to get a first job in Sweden, and the co-constructions these discourses started concerning me.

Analytical summary 1

My experiences of becoming the immigrant, job-seeker and student—show that changing the country of residence, as well as the reasons for that change, also leads to questioning assumptions about one's own identity, as well as the emergence and evolution of new identities in new conditions. These processes are interconnected. On the one side, others attach various meanings to an individual, which are based on their interpretations of ambient discourses (in my case about different immigrant groups). Identities as immigrants from South Europe, from B&H and/or from former Yugoslavia are present in the broader context of Sweden, and they are also the grounding of, as Alcadipani *et al.* (2015, p. 95) labeled it a system of hierarchical structures of meaning and knowledge, which were discursively available, for instance, to the Public Employment Agency's advisers I encountered. They, in turn, used them as a resource for "classifying" and co-constructing the identities of the "less" and "more" suitable nationalities of (immigrant) job-seekers, but still the "Others" in a comparison with the "norm." However, this experience of how I was treated as a job-seeker in Sweden was different from that I had experienced previously in B&H. This feeling of being "the Other," although quite disturbing, and causing a resistance against these hierarchical divisions, also in turn stimulated me, if nothing else, to try to better understand this situation and eventually offer a different view, where the job-seeker's nationality should not be one of the central aspects of qualifying/not qualifying for a job.

On the other side, I as an individual to whom those new identities are attached began challenging my assumptions about my own identity, too. At the same time, I challenged also my expectations regarding my employment opportunities, as well as those of many others, on the Swedish labor market. Basch *et al.* (1994) write about transnationalism—the idea that

nations are constantly destabilizing, fragmenting and developing new forms in which immigrants, through their daily life activities and social, economic and political relationships, create social fields by linking together their life experiences from societies of origin and settlement. So, my experience of job-seeker identity in Sweden, as well as my past experience of B&H identity in B&H, caused me to question my assumptions about who "real" Bosnians and Herzegovinians (or any other nationality) are in Sweden and to ask who can be a "real" Swede, and who decides about this.

This very act of reflecting on and challenging those and similar assumptions, as well as of being more aware of other people's constructions of my identity (and implications of such constructions)—initiated—by looking retrospectively—a process that Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) and Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) call identity work, which they describe as the activities that individuals undertake to create, maintain and display personal and social identities. Although identity work is an ongoing process, it was, in my case, intensified during the following transitions: when I immigrated from B&H to Sweden and took on the identity of immigrant, and from being the student to becoming the job-seeker in the context of Sweden. Thus, identity work could also be seen as a part of working with hyphens (Fine, 1994) and as illustrated here this is done by both people I encountered in Sweden and myself. At the same time, the transitions and co-constructions of my, as well as other people's identities as immigrant students and job-seekers began to concern me. Why are different minority groups in Sweden positioned differently on the labor market? How important are nationality and ethnicity in this discussion? Why are some immigrant groups in Sweden more employable than others? Are there hierarchical divisions in the Swedish labor market? What relevance do the principles of diversity and equality have in the Swedish labor market? In these concerns that had, as it will be shown below, some relevance for the emergence and evolution of my academic identity, we can also recognize some aspects of as Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) labeled it, political activism-neutrality, here related to the researcher's past experiences that led to thinking deeply about positions and perspectives of marginalized and oppressed groups. Thus, some encounters and experiences outside the field-work although personal and challenging can at the same time be potentialities in the future.

Phase 2: from employee to PhD candidate

Becoming an employee. Unlike the Priest, soon after completing the Aspiration Building education, I gained employment. The job I took is best described as a kind of temporary employment. Even though my working place was at the University of Gothenburg—this employer did not formally employ me, since I received income support from the local Public Employment Agency, for a period of six months. Such support was offered to people registered as job-seekers, but they needed to have a guarantee from a potential employer that they will get a working space and some kind of mentorship during the employment period. One of the University faculties enrolled in the Aspiration Building program gave me such a guarantee by inviting me to be involved in one of her research projects.

Even though it was not permanent position, I saw this job as a good opportunity, after my long period of "acclimatization[1]", to work on a project that I was very interested in. I also thought the job might lead to an opportunity to work in the Swedish academic environment on issues important to me—the issues that are very much related to my experiences in Sweden and the experiences of others I had met in Sweden.

In this position, working with the faculty member who later became one of my thesis advisers, I was involved in a project called "Future Employment and Life in Sweden". My task was to collect and analyze demographic statistics (such as nationality, education level, age and gender) about immigrants in Western Sweden and their positions in the

labor market (such as employment status, income level and profession). After a working on this project for a few months I had assembled the required information. I was quite surprised by some results of the study such as the large number of nationalities (184) living in Western Sweden during the 1990s and the extremely high unemployment rate among some immigrant groups. I was less surprised by other results. For instance, I was not surprised that the educational level of all people of working age in Sweden—those born in Sweden and those born abroad—was similar, but that the unemployment rate in the latter group was generally much higher. I asked myself: Why do so few immigrants with higher education obtain (or rarely obtain) jobs equivalent to their educational levels? Additionally, why were some of these people still unemployed after living in Sweden ten years or more?

The identity as employee not only enabled me to obtain a monthly salary and to further improve my knowledge of the Swedish language, but the academic environment also increased my theoretical and methodological knowledge about immigrants' positions at the Swedish labor market. I obtained, for instance, partial answers to some of the above questions using macro theoretical models that explain the high unemployment among Swedish immigrants. In general, in these theoretical models, researchers identify three main factors that account for the lack of economic integration by immigrants: technological structure, economic crises and institutional circumstances, and discrimination. Apart from these main factors, researchers identify other factors such as mentality, network and language (e.g. Bevelander *et al.*, 1997). After becoming involved in this research, I was inspired to learn if there were yet other aspects that would offer further explanations.

Becoming a PhD candidate. There has been a general increase in the interest in diversity in Sweden since the middle of the 1990s. This interest, combined with my experiences of everyday life and my involvement in the above-mentioned project, led me to my research at the University of Gothenburg at the end of the 1990s when I enrolled in the doctoral program in the School of Business. Within the framework of a larger financed research program, I began a research project titled "Management of dissimilarities—a question of persistent strategy". I worked with two senior researchers on the project who had developed the ideas for this research program. Later, they became my thesis advisers.

Based on the project application, the starting point was that companies should follow a persistent strategy if they are to meet the challenges of cultural diversity. Such a strategy should be long term, focused and integrated with the company's general development strategies. However, as we worked on this project, I could not stop thinking about the Priest and the many others who lived in Sweden, and who were in the same or similar situation as he. My previous experiences from B&H "reminded" me also—from time to time—that it can be problematic for any society if some (ethnic) groups feel that they are unequally treated, and when the principles of equal rights and equal opportunities for all, independent of backgrounds are not applied. In some way, my identity as the immigrant from B&H, and my identity as the PhD candidate began to intersect leading me to new questions, on which I sought answers by learning more within the context of the doctoral program.

Thus, my interest in and reflections on the literature about immigrants' integration into the Swedish society and into the Swedish labor market was the beginning of a research process that led me to the literature on related issues. The explanations in these studies, as well as my critical assessment of them, gradually led me to the literature that focuses on stereotyping and discrimination, as well as to the literature on "Managing Diversity" that has, since the early 1990s, increasingly become an area of interest for organizational scholars. This concept prevailingly addressed the managerial and business aspects of a "diverse workforce" while marginalized other aspects, such as discrimination and segregation.

To better understand what Swedish companies were thinking and doing about the diverse workforce, one of my advisers and I conducted a first series of interviews with representatives from nine different companies in Sweden. Contrary to my earlier encounters and life experiences in Sweden, my immigrant identity, as the "Other" had, in some ways, quite "disappeared" in planning this field-work, while my professional identity as an interviewer (interested in "diversity in organizations") had become more explicit, enabling me to obtain relatively easy access to study these companies, as well as through the respondents' general interests in our research. Discourses around "diversity" were clearly significant in the construction of my identity as the interviewer by the respondents given the increased interest, in this period of time in Swedish society and also in the studied companies for "diversity." Those companies had, for instance, begun to work with "the diversity issue" or had expressed a positive attitude toward the idea of a diverse workforce. The results from this research helped me understand the different arguments in favor of diversity. Perhaps just as important, this research—as I later realized—in combination with my experiences of being treated as "the Other," when I was looking for a job in Sweden, as well as my "encounters" with the literature on different paradigmatic and methodological understandings, and the character of the gathered empirical material led me to gradually incorporate some elements of critical ethnography (e.g. Van Maanen, 1995) in my fieldwork, focusing also on diversity in terms of injustices (e.g. discrimination and marginalization) and domination (e.g. particular sectional interests in regard to diversity).

Becoming a critic. As my research progressed, I realized there was greater complexity in the issue of diversity than found in the explanations in the literature related to my research as well as in my own findings. For instance, when discrimination (and diversity) was discussed (in Swedish academic research and in the public debate) while working on my thesis, it was often in relation to ignorance, doubts and imperfect information. Alternatively, discrimination was often addressed as a search for ways to avoid stereotypes and/or to avoid prejudices and/or the basis of differences in salaries, education and employment opportunities, while excluding any discussion of the potential existence of structural hierarchies and/or ideological motives for discriminatory acts.

This way of talking about and studying discrimination as a product of stereotypes and/or prejudices was, in my view, a way to diminish or even suppress the existence of discrimination. I wanted to learn more about the assumptions underlying this way of conceptualizing social phenomenon. At the same time I asked myself: Are there alternative ways to study discrimination? If so, why have they received so little attention in most of the literature I have reviewed? Encounters with such theoretical and methodological problems, as well as colleagues' and self-criticism of my own work, motivated me to learn more about the various theoretical traditions and methodological approaches used in organizational analysis.

Becoming a visiting researcher. From September 2000 to June 2001, I visited and took doctoral courses at the University of Massachusetts (UMASS) in Amherst, USA. The decision to make this visit was motivated by my desire to deepen contact and collaboration with researchers in the USA who had longer experiences of the research field my doctoral thesis was focusing on. Another reason for this visit was to improve my English. This visit marked an important turning point in my understanding of different social phenomena that influenced the theoretical and methodological approach(es) of my thesis research. During this visit, I met two professors—Marta Calás and Linda Smircich—whose discussions in their doctoral courses, as well as discussions directly related to my thesis, provided inspiration for the approaches of my research. The idea for understanding and studying diversity in organizations, using different paradigms, for instance, stemmed from my

encounters with them. I also had inspirational talks with several other colleagues—I encountered at UMASS. One of them—just before my visit—defended her doctoral thesis taking, for that period of time, a more critical perspective on diversity issues. Her supervisors were Professors Calás and Smircich.

Thus, while at UMASS, I became aware of ways to think about paradigmatic differences that are based on the theoretical conceptualization of how social phenomena are understood as actively constructed by particular parties. Increasing understanding about this theoretical conceptualization allowed me to see diversity as a kind of conversation(s)—a part of a larger context in which diversity appears—rather than as the study of a single idea that is universal and unchangeable (as is the tendency of the afore-mentioned research on discrimination).

Thus, becoming a visiting researcher is not only purely a change of academic environment and a possibility to encounter some new colleagues within your field of interest. More importantly it can be an opportunity to learn more by challenging one's own research ideas in encounters with some of the most established researchers from your field. Also, as in my case, it may also be possible to be exposed to new paradigms, and in this way not only better understand the assumptions upon which one's own perspective(s) are based, but also to better understand where you were, where you are today, as well as where it is possible to go in the future.

Analytical summary 2

The experiences and encounters, presented above, although perhaps at first glance, seem to indicate that this was a simple learning process, in which the ambition was to find a possible way to define an overall research phenomenon and problem for a doctoral thesis, as well as to make some other choices (e.g. selecting and reviewing a relevant literature and choosing a research methodology), are more then so. These processes show dialectical relationships—where some insignificant interconnections from the researcher's past (e.g. my encounters with the Employment Agency's advisors, and with my colleague "Priest") which were not so crucial at given moments, suddenly emerged as relevant at another moment (when I began study at the doctoral program). At the same time some of my encounters led to contradictions—conflicting and opposite ideas and interests—such as those between the literature that emphasized only the business issues of "diversity" (e.g. the importance of diversity for performance)—and the experience that I had. These contradictions, somehow created a "struggle of opposites"—since on the one hand, the production of the doctoral thesis was required, according to the research application to focus on managing diversity in a strategic way, while on the other side my earlier experiences were telling me that it was not enough for advancing organizational transformations that might transform and overcome historical and systemic disadvantages—"the subjects of diversity."

The "management" of these contradictions not only (again) initiated reflections on my own and others thinking and writings, and identity constructions, but also it initiated the search for alternatives. For instance, I searched for alternatives to the established understandings and explanations, in my (new) encounters with another types of literature, as well as my new encounters with colleagues involved in similar projects that, in turn, influenced my own research.

Thus, as shown the experiences, encounters and learning of relevance for my research did not only occur in the relation between me and my respondents, or not even only in my research process, but also in a much broader context, influencing directly or indirectly how my research was designed, re-designed and developed, as my identities were co-constructed through these diverse encounters.

Phase 3: from PhD candidate to independent scholar

Becoming an interpretative researcher. Drawing inspiration from my UMASS visit I began to explore the literature on diversity in organizations from the lenses of different paradigms. In short, I examined how and why different researchers take particular theoretical and methodological approaches.

Reading and reflecting on this literature led me to studies in which different phenomena (or, more specifically, the ideas about different phenomena) are examined as socially constructed (e.g. Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Hacking, 2000). For instance, Hacking's research on women refugees in particular inspired me because it shows how the idea of the woman refugee living in Canada is socially constructed. This construction then has implications for how some women refugees feel about themselves, their experiences and their actions. In continuing my research, inspired by the prior research and the questions it provoked, I followed interpretative tradition(s) that assert that reality is socially created and socially sustained. In following this tradition, I studied different ideas about diversity as socially constructed by ongoing performance. My advisers supported me since this tradition is well established at our department. Yet they sometimes wondered how my dissertation project related to our initial idea of (persistent) strategy and how I would study its implementation in organizations.

Becoming a critical-dialectical researcher. At this point in my research, my new encounters with the organizational participants, the analysis of archival research, and with the literature inspired by critical theory (e.g. Marcuse, 1994) and by a dialectical view (e.g. Benson, 1977), combined with experiences and learning from some previous encounters and further discussions with colleagues, affected the continuation of my dissertation project. I gradually incorporated some aspects of a dialectical-critical perspective that posits that ideas about different social phenomena embody and represent certain human interests. Compared to the interpretative tradition, the dialectical-critical perspective places more emphasis on how production processes shape what can be socially produced (as well as what can be marginalized in such processes). Therefore, as the goals of my research were gradually refined, I tried to identify how general ideas and interests related to diversity (in Swedish society and at the manufacturing company that was the subject for my fieldwork) are favored/marginalized. My hope, in analyzing how this favoritism and marginalization occurs, was that my analysis might stimulate some transformative (organizational) changes that might eventually lead to "opening the door" to my classmate, the Priest and others who are in a similar situation.

The more time passed—the more intense my "encounters" with the literature became. Familiarizing myself more with the critical-dialectical perspective(s) I became more aware of the importance of challenging assumptions behind ordinary ways of perceiving and acting. This learning process influenced my identity as researcher as my ability to interpret in more reflexive way the literature I had been reading increased. This had also certain implications for the further collection of empirical material. One illustration of this is when I started, in my interviews to use an approach of negation through which I attempted to understand the topics the interviewees talked about, not as natural or rational, but as contradictory and arbitrary. For instance, according to the management team, the company's objective of increasing the proportion of women in managerial positions to 20 percent was described as "a reasonable objective." In order to stimulate new thinking, I asked some interviewees: "Why is 20 percent more reasonable than, for instance, 21 percent?" I also asked: "Were educated immigrant women included in this 20 percent goal?"

In my encounters with, and reflections over the literature I also found that some justifications for diversity, both in the literature and in the collected empirical material take somewhat narrow outlooks. For instance, by prioritizing business interests related to

diversity, other ideas about the benefits of promoting a diverse workforce are marginalized. These are ideas about equality and fairness in organizational contexts. Thus, the wider meaning of contradictions about diversity is neglected. As a result, there is little talk and place for stories like that of my classmate, the Priest. In order to counteract, from my perspective this narrow view I decided to develop a broader description of diversity work than some of the management people I interviewed offered. Therefore, I interviewed also people in non-managerial positions, for instance, two factory workers, a former employee, and a salesman who sold company products in the retail market. The salesman, in particular, gave a different perspective on the company's diversity work and policies. He was known as a "super salesman" because of his sales success among the immigrant population. Despite this record, the company never sought his input in matters related to the company's diversity policies. The interview with him and some other interviewees gave me a more multi-faceted picture of the company's diversity work and allowed me to hear voices that are normally marginalized in the management literature on diversity.

Becoming a critical ethnographer. I interpreted and analyzed the empirical material concurrently with its collection rather than waiting until the end of fieldwork. I mainly used the methodology of traditional ethnography in my research since its procedures allowed me to study closely and thickly describe other ways of life (Van Maanen, 1995). However, I also incorporated some elements of a critical orientation within ethnography in my analyses of the empirical material (see e.g. Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). In my thesis, I noted that diversity might promote privileged interests (e.g. through domination by powerful interests) and even perpetuate injustices (e.g. through marginalization of alternative opinions).

As an example, I present an excerpt from my empirical data that shows how a policy statement may be interpreted differently, depending on the perspective taken:

> The company's customers are men and women, young and old, living in most countries around the globe. For business reasons, we need more people in our management organization with experience of living and working in different countries and with experience of different cultures […]. (The studied company's first Corporate Citizenship Report, 2000)

In a traditional ethnographic study, the focus in examining this statement would be on understanding the meaning of diversity without influencing it. Therefore, the interpretation would be that the company promotes a diverse workforce simply, and only, because it is good for business—diversity can be achieved by employing more managers with different backgrounds and different experiences.

Taking a critical perspective, we can look at what the statement does not say about diversity. There is no mention of promoting fairness in its hiring policies or of promoting work equality in a society that has a national policy that promotes the integration of immigrants into the labor market. The statement implies that the company's diversity criteria could easily be achieved by employing more company managers of the same ethnicity or gender as the current managers who have experience of different cultures and/or who have experience in living and working in different countries. In this way, these "neutral" and formally democratic criteria derive from and reflect the particular experiences and perspectives of certain groups, thereby silencing those of other groups. Thus, the company frames diversity policy in a way that excludes alternative views. How the researcher interprets the statement, then, depends on the perspective taken, and there is the history behind that choice, which is often silenced in our publications.

A process of reading and reflecting over the literature, as well as collecting and analyzing empirical material in the thesis project is a long, inspiring, but sometimes difficult and challenging. In such process—the same as in most other social processes, as I earlier illustrated contradictions appear. Some of these "encounters" between conflicting ideas and

interests, which can—even though they can at first glance seem hard to bridge—lead to positive changes. An additional illustration of such conflict, which in my case became a driving force for further learning, is presented below.

Becoming an independent scholar. As mentioned above, unlike the interpretative and institutional tradition(s), the dialectical-critical perspective was not well established in my institution. My two advisers had many questions, as well as some concerns about my theoretical preference, which led to a number of meetings and discussions about my dissertation project. Often these discussions were long and interesting, but sometimes they were exhausting, too. During one of our long supervision-meetings, one of my advisers—in a sharp tone said to me—either you accept this theoretical perspective that is suggested to you or it is going to be very hard to continue this advisor–PhD student relationship. At first it was a little shock to me, since it happened in a period when I was about one–one and a half year from the defense of my thesis. I wondered: What will happen if one of my advisors does not want to supervise me in the future?

This example shows that a relationship between an advisor and a PhD student is not always the relationship which is reciprocal and equal. Rather it is, as Gadotti (1996) states, embedded in unequal power positions. This event "reminded" me that tutoring meetings might be contested terrains where those with a constructed identity of "PhD student" can be quite powerless, although the situation at the end does not have to be hopeless.

After this meeting, I had a more time to reflect about the advisor's "threat"—trying to understand it better. At the same time it became clearer to me what was important to me regarding my dissertation project—I wanted to complete it, but I wanted to complete it in a way that made the tensions between prioritizing business and marginalizing "soft" interests (e.g. equality, racism and discrimination) more transparent. This decision was not easy, but I thought that if I could further develop and refine the theoretical approach of my research then it would be easier for my advisers to better understand it, as well as to see its benefits for this specific research project.

It was possible that my adviser did not have sufficient knowledge about "my" preferred theoretical perspective, so it was easier to him to propose the theoretical perspective(s) that he was pretty much familiar with. It was also possible that my mentor might have considered my motivation and argumentation for the preferred theoretical perspective, as not strong enough, and as such insufficiently understandable and applicable. Anyhow, I saw supervision as a way of helping the doctoral students in the way of finding their own voices, rather than accepting the voices of others, which do not fully reflect the students' own views of the studied phenomena.

Thus, I decided that this adviser's "threat" should not discourage and frighten me. On the contrary, it stimulated me to further refine my knowledge of my preferred (and later chosen) theoretical and methodological perspectives. My way of refining (and at the same time questioning) it was to read more. I also continued to encounter other people who were not officially involved in my dissertation project and discussed with them some dilemmas that I was facing in the process of producing my thesis. Some of these dilemmas were related to the interpretations and analyses of the collected empirical material through the lenses of the dialectical-critical perspective.

Analytical summary 3

The collection, interpretation and analysis of empirical material, as shown above, cannot be isolated from our previous experiences and learning, nor from the literature we read, nor from our encounters with my advisors, colleagues and interviewees. It is also hard to say which of these related activities are more important or which of them had a greater impact

on the other. Illustrations from my research process show—that these and many other activities—in our research processes are (some more, some less in different periods of time) mutually related in a continuous flow, affecting each other, and resulting in our research accounts, produced in a specific context and a specific period in the researcher's life.

Thus, by focusing on these issues, my study does not only elaborate on the (relational) hyphen–spaces between researchers and respondents. My illustrations are also related to how we as researchers encounter relational spaces outside the field; such as those between us (Self) and Others (PhD advisers, colleagues and the literature) and their influences on the identity work that takes place (e.g. becoming an independent scholar) that, in turn, affects subsequent relations with and understanding of the field. As shown, there are mutual relationships between different activities in our research processes that, in turn, can directly or indirectly influence how such research processes are designed, re-designed and developed, as our identities and our positionalities are shaped in the social processes of producing our research publications. In some of these relational spaces, more than in others unequal power positions are present. For instance, engagement with a non-traditional (for the researcher's home institution) theoretical perspective can be "sensitive," especially if those with stronger influence perceive it as "problematic." However, conflicts, such as that described above between an advisor and a PhD candidate may not always be problematic. They can be a driving force for further learning in the research process, under assumptions that the education at a doctoral program presupposes (and allows), as in my case forms of transformation, such as using non-traditional—for a given institution—theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Thus, while (potentially) generating (identity) crises, such contradictions can also be important forces for change, in terms of searching for alternatives and finding a (possible) new praxis. In short, these, as well as earlier experiences, encounters and learning reflect dialectic(s) in the research process, the dialectic which is characterized by relatedness (e.g. between people and "objects" and their different ideas and interests), continuous trans-formativeness, in a given period (e.g. redesigning research focus, questions, ways of collecting, interpreting and analyzing data), contradictions (e.g. confrontations between opposing or incompatible ways of being and acting), and qualitative change (when a qualitative phenomenon takes place as a way of "solving" a contradiction, that could be a final product of our writing process (see also e.g. Gadotti, 1996).

Discussion and conclusions

This study investigates the mutual relationships between the researcher's life experiences, encounters and personal learning and the process of designing and writing research publications, as well as their dialectic influences on the emergence and evolution of researcher identities. The study draws on personal experience and learning from socially producing my doctoral thesis on "diversity in organizations" as I both studied and experienced diversity issues in Sweden, as well as the construction and evolution of my identities.

Building on prior reflexive work that focuses on "the stories behind the stories," this study examines and reflects on the coevolution of research/knowledge constructions and the emergence of researchers' identities. It advances, however, beyond previous "stories behind the stories" literature in two ways: first, this study is based on the researcher's life history rather than only on a specific field-situation. As such, it has a longitudinal character. Second, and interconnected to its longitudinal character, it takes a broader perspective, by implying a broader, multilevel area of reflection, emphasizing dialectical relationships between the researcher (and the mutuality between his past and future), the context(s) and people involved in these, as well as the subject(s) of research. Those relationships are, as shown, characterized by mutuality and continuity.

Thus, my illustrations are not only related to the influences from the field (such as that which researchers and respondents have on each other), but also how (some of) our earlier experiences (e.g. becoming and being an immigrant, a job-seeker, a student and an employee) are mutually related with our encounters with hyphen–spaces "inside the research project" such as the encounters with our respondents, PhD advisors, colleagues and the literature (see Figure 1). It is not easy, and maybe even interesting to draw a line and to say which of these related activities were more important or which of them had a greater impact on the other. As shown, they were mutually interconnected, and they were all, in one way or another, relevant to the (social) production of my doctoral thesis, in the specific socio-historical context(s). So, we could say that our scholarly selves are not separate from our personal selves and both mutually construct each other. As shown, both inside and outside the field encounters, experiences and learning can directly or indirectly influence how our research processes are designed, re-designed and developed. At the same time our multiple identities and our positionalities are shaped in the social processes of producing our research publications.

The study shows that researchers' attempts to understand the Other through studies of certain phenomena are a production between them and their past, their experiences and people encountered, as well as between them and the research literature they use. In these encounters and processes, the researcher's multiple identities emerge and evolve with significance for how the research is socially produced.

So, to tell the stories behind the stories are not only relevant because they show that it is very difficult to claim that our processes of knowledge production are neutral and objective, since we as researchers—as this study illustrates—play an active role in these processes,

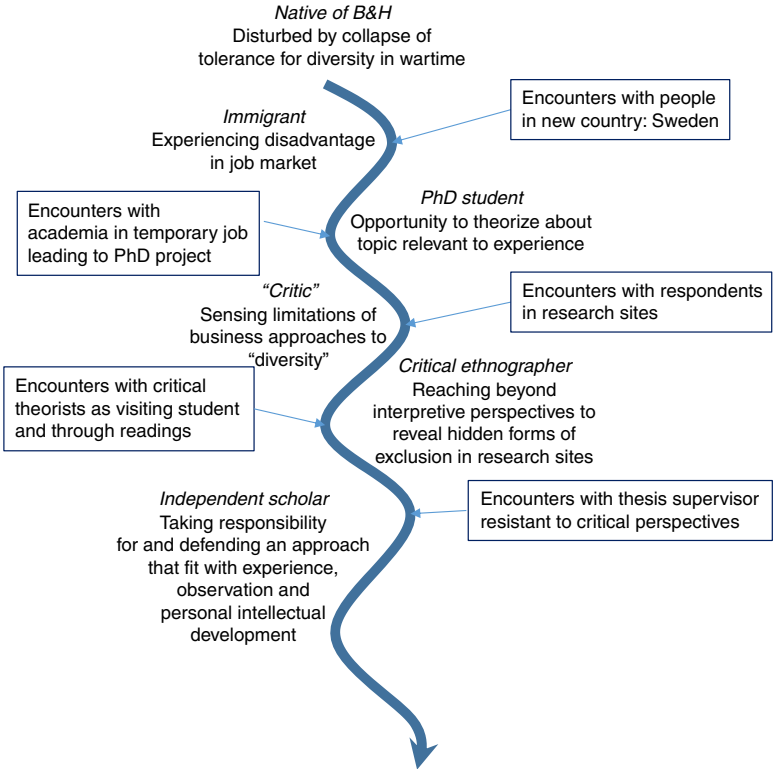

Figure 1.
Identity and learning trajectory

given certain societal conditions (e.g. who and what we include/exclude). Such stories are also important because they have potential to capture and broaden the complexity of our research (writings) including "sensitive" issues that are most often left out in our "usual" publications. To name just a few of these: contradictions, power struggles, marginalization, "othering" and unequal (social) treatment, as well as gender, race and diversity. Working with the hyphen is, thus, also a way of being sensitive in a way of representing also "non-traditional voices" and in that way avoiding, as Alvesson and Sköldberg (2003) suggest certain forms of talking, writing and questioning, but also making "visible" the researcher's positionality (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013). Working the hyphen in that way, as this study shows is also a way of working against Othering, which apart from avoiding exclusion, means also enabling contextualization and historization—the process of developing, as Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) elaborate on a sense of self.

The concept of working the hyphen, used in this study allows us, thus, to make explicit how such relationships, in particular, in qualitative research may require us to be open to surprises, and negotiate conflicts, but also to be open to and understand different perspectives, and "struggle" for its own (that emerging in the specific research process).

But one can also ask, why is this kind of reflexivity important at all? My view is that it might allow us to open up space in our publications for the previously marginalized or unheard voices, experiences, encounters and learning inside and outside the field that, in turn, can increase our understanding about and stimulate search for alternative points of view with potentiality to enrich organizational and management research. Such reflexivity can also help us to be, paraphrasing Burrell and Morgan (1979), aware of the assumptions upon which our perspective(s) are based, but it also provides an opportunity for establishing where we have been and where it is possible to go in the future.

And finally, one more reflection: since my story, like most other stories, behind the stories is based on personal experience (and not so much on how these I encountered experienced the encounters with me) one can also ask a question: Is it a good or bad thing to "allow" our personal experience to affect research experience and choices? Designing and writing this story in the way it was produced, the reader might conclude that my answer is that this relation is inevitable. However, looking at this question from a more general level, it may lead us to an important discussion about epistemology and ontology, and pose another question: whether we assume or not, based on our ontological and epistemological assumptions that it is relevant to show explicitly such relationship(s) in our publications. In this sense, I agree with Anteby (2013) who points out that it is possible to combine both personal involvement and professional distance in our personal stories, and that these go beyond a scholar's experience—they are stories that speak to many readers, too. I hope this study might be somewhat inspiring for those who are currently writing or planning to write doctoral theses, but also to other scholars who share longer experience with organizational research.

Note

1. At that time, the Swedish Government sponsored an orientation program to help acclimatize immigrants when they first arrived.

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