
Introduction

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This Special Issue of *Work, Organisation and Emotion* is devoted to issues around emotion and embodiment in research. The guest editors of this special issue got to know each other as PhD students at the University of Warwick where, after receiving our doctorates, we belatedly realised that very little of what we had shared with each other informally about doing the research – fear, embarrassment, fatigue, and so on – had made it in to our submitted theses. We knew that what we had felt at particular moments had affected the research in some way; for example in terms of unexpected analytical insight, or operationally, in terms of roads not taken. However, we had not seen those moments as appropriate to report or reflect on as part of the document that would admit us to the ranks of professional researchers.

This realisation of self-censoring, and subsequent discovery of a small but growing literature in the area (for example Hubbard et al., 2001; Sturdy 2003) led us to organise a workshop at Warwick Business School to explore what we called ‘the hidden dynamics of the research process’ with recent doctoral students and senior academics from a range of institutions. We developed an application to the ESRC to run a seminar series on emotion and embodiment in the research process, with Matthew Brannan (Keele Management School), Elizabeth Kelan (London Business School) and Frank Worthington (Liverpool School of Management), colleagues who were also enthused by the idea of exploring these issues.

The ESRC¹ seminar series provided a starting point for discussing these issues through five seminars with a focus on different aspects of the overall themes, and gave an opportunity for early career researchers and PhD students to engage with these issues through discussion with key speakers. The initial impetus for the seminar series was based on our understanding that whilst the role of emotions in society (Thoits, 1989), organisations (Fineman, 1993), and workplaces (Bolton, 2004) is widely recognised and researched, the role and impact of emotions in the *process* of researching society, organisations and workplaces is less well documented, explored and theorised. Despite the recent ‘reflexive turn’ in fieldwork-based academic disciplines, empirical research often seems to ignore the role of researchers’ emotions in the collection of data and the creation of textual representations.

The basis of the marginalisation of the researcher’s emotions and body from fieldwork accounts is complex, but is rooted in the historical development of fieldwork disciplines and the privileging of forms of representation considered to be ‘objective’. Feminist scholars have long criticised the distinction between rational and emotional forms of knowing (see for example Hubbard et al., 2001; Reger, 2001) in the sense that traditional approaches to social science favour the former. Knights and Thanem (2006) argue that, often, even research on emotions takes a disembodied form, with the body becoming just another object to organise and order, whereas embodiment is both a point of departure and of destination but always a *provisional* condition.

The call for papers elicited a diverse and international response to this emerging field of study. This is encouraging as it would appear that researchers writing in different

traditions, for example organisation theory and health studies, have a common appreciation of these issues. Although the papers in the Special Issue come from differing methodological perspectives and draw on wide ranging empirical studies it is perhaps not surprising that many authors have used ethnographic techniques. For example, Knights and Thanem develop their theoretical understandings through what an anonymous reviewer termed ‘an auto-ethnography between men’, Southgate reflects on her experiences in carrying out an ethnographic study of sex workers in Australia and Brannan draws on an ethnographic study of a call centre. The themes of the Special Issue suggested in the Call and taken up by our contributors range from the emotion management of research work (Shaw), through the embodied and emotional aspects of creative (academic) work (Winterstorm and Essen) to the use of emotions to construct knowledge in research teams (Reitinger).

One emergent theme of the seminar series was the gap in the training offered to doctoral students as this rarely covers the emotional and embodied nature of the research process, ignoring the potential methodological implications of taking these issues into account. This concern is highlighted by a number of contributions from PhD students in this Special Issue. These papers relate to the students’ own experiences when carrying out their doctoral fieldwork and can be read together in a separate section of the journal. These papers have been edited rather than peer reviewed, giving an opportunity to early career researchers to reflect on their PhD research as emotional and embodied researchers in ways that are not commonly open to them. The papers offer insights into areas of concern that are not traditionally addressed by training courses or guides to completing a PhD. Two of the papers (Feng and Jament and Chan and Dixon) illustrate the challenges of working in very different cultural contexts. They go on to suggest that support for international students needs to take these contexts into account.

Exemplifying the central themes of this introduction, the progress of our neat story of idea-workshop-seminar series-journal special issue, has been experienced as much more erratic. Activities were delayed at various points by accidents, ill-health, maternity leave, inexplicable institutional obstacles ... The full gamut of fear, exhaustion, anger and boredom has been run – as well as the stimulation of working with new colleagues from many different disciplinary backgrounds. It is a pleasure to be able to both state these things and also to reflect that it has been worth it to facilitate an outlet for the thoughts and experiences contained in this double Special Issue.

This Special Issue contributes to the growing debates around emotion, embodiment and research and the hope is that this will encourage other researchers to engage with these themes and move the work forward. We would like to thank all the contributors and also the anonymous reviewers for their help and advice.

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Note

¹ESRC RES451260428.