

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

This article is downloaded from



<http://researchoutput.csu.edu.au>

It is the paper published as:

Author: K. Bell

Title: Participants motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process

Journal: Qualitative Social Work **ISSN:** 1473-3250

Year: 2013

Volume: 12

Issue: 4

Pages: 523-539

Abstract: This article explores what motivated participants to volunteer for a qualitative social work research project as well as the co-construction of the researcher-participant relationship. In social work research methodology literature, much attention has been given to the importance of engaging participants in democratised research relationships, but less attention has been given to the process from participants' perspectives. Often, little is known about the meanings attributed by participants to the process. Based on information from participants in a doctoral research project on psychosocial support needs in relation to assisted reproductive service use, this article considers participants' motivations to volunteer for research. Twenty-eight women were interviewed and all were asked about their motivations to volunteer; their responses highlight the mutuality of exchange and the complexity of the researcher-participant relationship. The need for social work researchers to carefully negotiate this relationship and to

acknowledge and actively respond to participants' motivations is reinforced.

DOI/URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1473325011429020>

http://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=33298&local_base=GEN01-CSU01

Author Address: kbell@csu.edu.au

CRO Number: 33298

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

Abstract:

This article explores what motivated participants to volunteer for a qualitative social work research project as well as the co-construction of the researcher-participant relationship. In social work research methodology literature, much attention has been given to the importance of engaging participants in democratised research relationships, but less attention has been given to the process from participants' perspectives. Often, little is known about the meanings attributed by participants to the process. Based on information from participants in a doctoral research project on psychosocial support needs in relation to assisted reproductive service use, this article considers participants' motivations to volunteer for research. Twenty-eight women were interviewed and all were asked about their motivations to volunteer; their responses highlight the mutuality of exchange and the complexity of the researcher-participant relationship. The need for social work researchers to carefully negotiate this relationship and to acknowledge and actively respond to participants' motivations is reinforced.

Key words – participant motivations, co-construction, qualitative methodology

6,410 words

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

Introduction and literature review

Qualitative research typically relies on the voluntary participation of people who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher uses a variety of recruitment methods to reach the relevant people and make it attractive for those people to participate. The art of attracting research participants is an important step in the research process with the researcher needing to carefully consider the methods most likely to capture the imagination of potential participants and then engage these people in the research process. The nature of the relationship between the researcher and each participant is likely to be multifaceted and multipurpose. For the qualitative researcher intent on conducting in-depth interviews for a phenomenological project, building an appropriate relationship with participants is central to the success of the research endeavour. The nature of the relationship as it develops through recruitment, initial contact, the research interview and any follow-up contact, is multidimensional. Typically, the researcher's construction of the nature of their research is systematically explored. However participants' motivations to participate and their constructions of the research process are not often directly explored. In order to avoid a 'top-down' approach to research or making assumptions about participants, it is pertinent to directly explore participants' motivations and to gain an indication of their construction of the process.

The obligation for social work researchers to 'do good' is debated in research methodology and ethics literature (e.g. Alston and Bowles, 2003; Banks, 2006; Bowles, et al. 2006; Dominelli, 2002; Hugman, 2003; Shaw, 2008). The ideal of beneficence has recently received renewed attention. Bogolub (2010) argues that to do good, social work research methodology should function as a tool of empowerment in the research process. Bloor

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

(2010: 18) builds on Bogolub's notion of obligation, broadening it into a 'continuing obligation to bring about good' throughout the 'entire course' of research 'rather than simply at its conclusion'. Bloor also argues that the ethical standard of non-maleficence, and 'fieldwork courtesies', while important, are not sufficient to constitute ethical social work research. As in Dominelli (2002), Bloor considers inter-subjectivity to be at the ontological heart of social work theory and notes that research methodology should therefore consistently and consciously reflect the interconnectedness between researchers and participants, aiming for 'power with' approaches in research rather than 'power over'.

Peled (2010), commenting on Bogolub (2010) and Bloor (2010), identifies a need for social work research to be well-planned and implemented in terms of ethics and methodology in order to maximise merit. Peled draws on feminist communitarian and action research approaches to highlight the interrelationships between researchers and participants noting that participants are regarded as 'members of a research community' in a dialogic relationship (Peled, 2010: 24). As active subjects, research participants have shared power in the research relationship, however, as Peled says, more focus is needed on enacting beneficence in social work research to encourage more thorough conceptualisation of social work research, ethical considerations and the engagement of research participants as active, empowered agents in the process. The enactment of these aims is made much more likely if there is direct exploration of participants' motivations to engage in research and if there is some attempt to actively seek participants' input on what the research means to them.

This democratisation of knowledge production (Ponic et al., 2010; Shaw, 2008) needs to be an explicit part of the research process. Failure to cultivate true collaboration between

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

researchers and participants 'will likely result in partnerships defaulting to power-over relationships [and] recreate power imbalances' (Ponic, et al., 2010: 330) – a situation seen as unavoidable by David (2002). McCormick (2011: 73) argues that it is 'obvious but often overlooked' that social work research interviews involve 'two bodies in the room' and that more attention needs to be paid to the participant in the research process. McNamara (2009: 164) notes that research collaborations should ideally benefit participants as much as the 'usual beneficiaries ... professionals and academics'. McNamara also discusses the 'long tradition' in social work research to attend to the dynamics of both the research relationship and the helping relationship. Much social work research involves giving public voice to private issues. This often challenges the traditional distinction between therapeutic interviews and research interviews, resulting in 'highly contested' and blurred boundaries between therapy and research, but with the potential for 'good' at both personal and political levels if consciously and effectively negotiated in the process of research (McNamara, 2009: 172; Dominelli and Holloway, 2008; Yegidis and Weinbach, 2002).

To avoid manipulation or exploitation of research participants it seems sensible then to explicitly assess participants' motives so that adequate negotiation and co-construction of the research participant relationship can at least be attempted. Participatory research may not necessarily produce 'better' research data but it might contribute to the ideal of ethically sound social work research and mutually beneficial collaboration between researchers and participants, especially from the participant's perspective (Holland, et al. 2010). Strier (2007: 867) issues a challenge to the profession to debate 'innovative ways' to achieve a more 'participative, action-oriented and emancipatory approach' in social work research; this paper aims to contribute to that debate.

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

The value of much qualitative research in social work is inherent in the act of empowering marginalised voices and most literature on qualitative research methods adequately attends to the engagement phase of the research relationship noting that rapport-building, trust, informed consent, risk assessment, questioning techniques and so on, are required for participants to share their experiential knowledge of the social phenomenon with the researcher (e.g. Alston and Bowles, 2003; Dominelli and Holloway, 2008; Gray and Webb, 2010; McNamara, 2008). Butler (2002), Dominelli and Holloway (2008) and Mertens and Ginsberg (2008) concur that the ontological and epistemological base of social work makes it imperative to address power relationships and control issues in the research process. The linking of 'empirically grounded descriptions of social phenomena' is a distinctive feature of qualitative social research (Dominelli and Holloway 2008: 1016). To this end, Pittaway et al. (2010) describe a human rights framework for social work research to encourage 'reciprocal benefit'. They emphasise the importance of participants' self-determination, agency and 'voice' and state that 'it cannot be assumed that research participants necessarily share a common understanding of the purpose of research' (Pittaway et al., 2010: 242).

Arguably however, there is still less attention given to methods to enact client self-determination in the research interview process (Clark, 2006), especially from participants' points of view. Little specific focus has been given to the various motivations people have for choosing to volunteer for a qualitative research interview. Deliberately seeking input from research participants on their reasons for participation is a key element in moving 'the politics of the research act' to 'centre stage' (Shaw 2008: 410) and in considering the value of the research for 'the researched' (Alston and Bowles, 2003: 13). Asking research participants about the value and meaning of the research interview to them is a rich area for

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

enquiry if the potential for beneficence in social work research is to be made explicit and actionable. With a body of literature specifically on why participants volunteer, what research means to them how they value research; social workers along with participants can also contribute more actively to debates on research ethics. In order to create opportunities for true participation as genuine, active subjects, this level of direct information is needed (Pittaway et al., 2010).

Thus, an important factor in undertaking ethical, effective social work research is a thorough, explicit exploration of participants' perspectives on the research process.

Following is a description of a social work qualitative doctoral research project exploring rural Australian women's psychosocial support needs in relation to assisted reproduction. A wide range of experiential knowledge was offered by the women who participated in the research. In this paper, the focus is narrowed to information on why participants chose to volunteer for a research interview and a range of motivations are described in order to explore the co-construction of researcher-participant relationships, the often blurred demarcation between research and therapeutic interviews as well empowerment and self-determination.

The research project

Recruitment and initial engagement

The research participants in this research project were women who had used, or were still using assisted reproductive services at In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) clinics. The aim of the project was to explore the experiences and psychosocial support needs of non-metropolitan

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

Australian women in relation to assisted reproduction. Participants were attracted using a variety of methods: display notices about the research at various locations, including IVF clinics, women's health centres, community health centres, community noticeboards and at medical practitioners' offices; women's health nurses in area health services who had distributed information about the research into small community centres and outreach services; advertisements in several newspapers in regional areas in the states of New South Wales and Victoria, Australia; and advertisements online with specialist assisted reproduction organisations.

A total of twenty nine women responded and the most effective method of attracting participants proved to be the newspaper advertisements with twenty-two women recruited via this approach. All but one of the women was located in regional and rural areas with one woman being ineligible to participate due to her metropolitan location. The women used a variety of methods to make initial contact with the researcher: eighteen telephoned and spoke directly with the researcher; ten emailed and, one used a mobile/cell telephone text message. The researcher then made follow-up telephone calls to each woman to discuss the nature of the research in more detail. Once it was established that they wished to proceed, the information sheet was either emailed or posted to them. After the women had received the information sheet, they made further contact with the researcher and a mutually convenient time for an interview was organised. Twenty-eight women were eventually interviewed.

The in-depth interview process

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

In the opening phase of each interview, once written consent had been given, a great deal of care was taken by the researcher to describe the purpose of the research and the motivations for the project. The researcher identified herself as a doctoral student who also teaches in a social work degree and stressed from the outset that if further supportive counselling was required that this could be arranged but that it was not the main purpose of the interview. A card with contact details for local support services was tailor-made for each participant and distributed at the commencement of each interview. This was a practical information-giving tool and also a useful, concrete way for the researcher to construct the research encounter. In order to assess the participants' constructions of the research encounter, each woman was then asked what had motivated her to participate in the research and what she hoped for in terms of outcomes of the interview and the project overall. This also gave an indication of the participant's perspective of the process and flagged for the researcher how the interview process might need to be negotiated. This questioning resulted in rich information being gathered on the complexities of relationships in qualitative research. In qualitative, interpretive research, these complexities must be recognised and there needs to be a measure of comfort with such complexities and multiple definitions of the interview experience and the relationship between researcher and participant.

This approach to the interview process also reflects Heidegger's ontological principles of authentic existence and reciprocity in interactions (Heidegger 1975) and is a departure from Husserl's idea of 'bracketing' whereby the researcher's views are 'detached' from the research process (Husserl 1999: 63). Wendt and Boylan (2008: 604-606) also advocate for this sort of 'co-construction' of the interview process and acknowledge that the almost

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

inevitable inequalities in the research relationship can be minimised via acknowledgement and attempting wherever possible to acknowledge the participants' multiple identities, other roles and the 'many storylines that intersect with one another'. Thorne et al. (2004: 12) and David (2002) also acknowledge that no matter how collaborative and participatory the research process, the researcher is the one who 'ultimately determines what constitutes data, which data arise to relevance' and 'how the final conceptualisations portraying those data will be structured'.

Methodology

Twenty seven of the twenty eight participants chose to be interviewed in their own homes and one chose to be interviewed at her place of employment. Most interviews were approximately 90 minutes in duration with a range of 65 minutes to 130 minutes.

There was a conscious effort to ask many open questions during the interview so as to encourage each participant to tell her own story and to ensure 'room for the unexpected to emerge'(Conroy, 2005: 36), rather than to narrowly direct the path of each interview. Each interview had a broadly consistent overall structure and pattern while still allowing for individual variation during each interview. This approach to the interviews fits nicely with the interpretive phenomenological approach to knowledge generation and the researcher spoke directly to each woman about the purpose of the interview, reinforcing that there were no 'set questions'.

Generally, most interviews followed a pattern whereby the most sensitive topics and in-depth exploration was generally undertaken in the middle phase of the interview, after

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

sufficient rapport had been built between the researcher and participant and with reference to the participant's motivation for engaging with the researcher. The ending phase of the interview was generally used to summarise and to conclude the interview in the most positive manner possible. Each woman was asked whether she had any recommendations for other women contemplating using assisted reproductive technology and for recommendations and feedback on service delivery for the clinic(s) used. This strategy recognises the participants' power in clarifying and interpreting the information gained given during the interviews and also in negotiating the outcomes of the research and the contributing to the conversations the research outcomes might eventually stimulate (Wendt and Boylan, 2008). This method then is consistent with the epistemology of the project and recognises the 'social and political context...and consequences for people's lives' and allows space 'for critical reflection and creativity' (Sprague, 2005: 5) as well as possibilities for 'doing good'.

Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed as text-based documents. In addition to allocating pseudonyms to participants after each interview, other identifying details were systematically changed during transcription and proof-reading of transcripts and also during the thematic coding process. This preserved the individuality of each participant without compromising anonymity.

As each interview was transcribed into a text document, it was imported into the NVivo 7 qualitative data handling software program. NVivo 7 was used essentially as a sophisticated way of organising the themes initially identified manually from hard copies of the transcripts and then 'cutting and pasting' themes from the transcripts into 'codes' within the database. So each interview was replayed, then transcribed, then the transcript read, descriptive

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

information was collated and topics were tentatively coded. Once all transcripts had been coded in this way, broader patterns in the topic codes could be grouped together into larger analytic codes that reflected the major theme of that code. This process ensured that the codes emerged from the interviews and that interviews were not 'slotted' into pre-existing codes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) and that the data analysis was not a simplistic exercise in content analysis.

This process meant that the initial tentative topic codes were numerous (eighty separate codes). To make the themes more accessible for interpretation, patterns in the topic codes were then organised into thirty thematic, analytic codes. Information from the code 'motivation to participate' is the focus for this paper.

In terms of the hermeneutic spiral, the interpretation of interviews was indeed a fluid process commencing concurrently as the interviews were in progress, as well as via the researcher's notes during the interviewing phase of the project, and from discussion with research supervisors and colleagues, during the transcription and replay processes, as well as with reference to the literature review and feedback from participants – all of whom received a summary of research findings along with their transcript and the option for further contact with the researcher.

Once the analytic themes from the interviews were collated into separate 'reports', they were printed as hard copy documents and re-read and 'post-coded' (Richards, 2005: 98). This process helped to conceptualise the participants' information (Glaser, 2002). Focusing on participants' reasons for participation has considerable conceptual power for qualitative researchers because participants' experiential knowledge contributes to the knowledge

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

base about research participation in qualitative social work research methodology. This contribution to the interpretive research process is consistent with social work epistemology and its ontological base in phenomenology. As Sprague (2005: 5) argues, 'methodology emerges as the terrain where philosophy and action meet, where the implications for what we believe for how we should proceed get worked out'. Thus, if the underpinning philosophy of social work research is to engage with participants ethically and with a view to potential social justice and social change outcomes, then we must also take action to understand why participants choose to engage in research.

Findings and discussion

General motivations to participate in qualitative research

Having planned the research, gained ethics clearance, attracted participants, interviewed participants, recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed the information, who then are these women? Why would someone volunteer and give up some of their time to revisit their experiences of something as personal and possibly still distressing as involuntary childlessness and reproductive technology use?

As each interviewee was asked what had motivated her to participate in the research, several significant themes emerged and for most women there seemed to be a mixture of reasons for volunteering to be interviewed. As discussed, the relationship between the researcher and 'the researched' is a co-constructed one so it was appropriate to seek information directly from participants about their motivations to volunteer for the project. For all participants, the opportunity to be interviewed about their use of reproductive

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

technology was seen, altruistically, as a way to potentially help others; some felt that their contribution was a sort of quid pro quo in relation to what reproductive technology had offered them; others stated that being interviewed was a way of helping to reconcile issues related to assisted reproduction and for some, the interview was used as a sort of ritual to end their experience of assisted reproduction.

Many women spoke of the interview as a means to provide feedback about their experiences, positive and negative, when perhaps there had been little opportunity for formal feedback to the clinic(s) they had used, particularly in relation to psychosocial needs. Some women said they wanted to bring involuntary childlessness and assisted reproduction out of the private realm and into the open; a few were curious about the latest social research and what other women had to say as well as curiosity about the researcher's motives. A few of the women had conducted research themselves and empathised with the challenges of recruiting participants and some women identified a need to highlight specific issues for rural and regional services users and saw that participating in the project was one way of raising awareness.

These responses demonstrate that for many women the act of participating in the research interview facilitated a hermeneutic shift in their frame of reference in that the decision to discuss their experiences of assisted reproduction also served to validate those experiences and to reassert a degree of power and agency in relation to the experience. Many women explicitly expressed positive feelings about their decision to participate and this is evidence of the empowering potential of the research act itself in that seeking opinions from people whose opinions about a phenomenon have not been actively or consistently sought in the past offers an opportunity to comment about a major life experience (Sprague, 2005).The

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

responses will now be discussed in more detail. Wherever possible direct quotations from research participants have been used to ensure that the account is multi-vocal (Sprague, 2005) and wherever possible the participants' words have been used verbatim. Any breaks in quotations (indicated by a series of full stops) are generally there to maintain the flow of information and mostly to exclude the artefacts of dialogue such as 'um', 'ah', 'you know', and other paralinguistic cues. As much as possible however, the individual qualities of each woman's responses have been maintained and not sanitised to a point where individuality, humour and tone are diminished. Using quotations in this way also helps to ensure that the research participants remain as participatory, active voices in the process and not to be abstracted out of the process (Sprague, 2005).

Participation to help others

Most participants identified the urge to help others as the basic motivation to participate. Many spoke of wanting to ease the way for other women and hoped that their input might be an indirect way of connecting with others who have used, or who are currently using or contemplating the use of reproductive technology:

When I saw the ad for your research I thought well, this is me and if I can help somebody else then why not? It's only taking a little bit of my time...I would like to help other women having to go through this because it is hard, no two ways about it. I thought well why not? If I can help, I can help. (Sue)

If somebody gets something out of your experience ... to help somebody else down the line...Everybody's story is certainly unique. (Lindi)

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

Lindi's comment emphasises the central importance of phenomenological research and its experiential base. Lindi clearly states that her experiences could be relevant to others and she also asserts that each individual's experiences are unique.

Some women also indicated that being part of the research was a way of highlighting the human aspects of biomedicine and asserting their own personhood that for many participants had been undermined during their experience of IVF:

When I saw the ad I said yes, yes! ... Look, people have their opinion about IVF whether it is based on religion or limited information; they don't know the human side of it ...Being more than a statistic...within the reproductive unit you are a statistic, you're not a face, not a name, a child, a success story or not-success story. So I want to be more than that...the real experience, not reduced to a number.

(Marion)

Many of the women also commented on others' reactions to their participation. A few had been urged to participate by family and friends who had also seen either the advertisement or notice about the research. Some women experienced less-than-positive reactions from others; one woman's husband was perplexed as to why she would speak to a researcher at all - 'what would you want to do *that* for?' (Sharon). Another woman's mother was concerned that confidential information had somehow been released and that the researcher had somehow 'tracked down' her daughter. Most concerns seemed to stem from a fear that privacy would be breached and/or concerns about confidentiality. One could speculate that these types of fears are related to involuntary childlessness being such a private issue for most families and to the capacity for reproductive technology itself to

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

threaten that privacy and thus participation in this research then being seen as another step towards making infertility even more public:

I told Mum I was talking to you this morning about this and she said 'oh how did she find you? Is your information out there somewhere?' I said you'd advertised and I'd answered that she that was OK with her. (Jacquie)

Participation as therapy

As discussed previously, often the interview experience is defined in various ways by those present; the researcher's focus is mainly on the research question, the purpose of the project and their skills as an interviewer; the participant might well be defining the experience in a variety of complex ways which could include their contribution to the knowledge base of an issue as well the interview being a sort of therapeutic tool for themselves. Some women directly acknowledged these therapeutic motivations and indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to at least ventilate their experiences to an interested person:

I guess I appreciate the opportunity to talk it through with somebody...It's good for us too it is something I am proud of and I like to talk about it and it is nice to be able to talk about it in a confidential situation and sort of be completely and utterly honest without having to hold back on certain things. I mean there are certain things about it that I don't want to discuss with other people because it is personal. It is nice to be able to voice them. (Lindi)

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

It should be noted that once a participant identified that they perceived there to be a self-help aspect to the interview experience, these issues were explored and the researcher ensured that each participant understood the distinction between a therapeutic interview in the context of an ongoing therapeutic relationship and a one-off research interview, albeit it with multidimensional and co-constructed purposes. Thus, the participants' desire for some supportive, therapeutic interaction was acknowledged and explored while not completely shifting the focus of the interview from research to therapy, ensuring some reciprocal benefit for researcher and participant (Pittaway et al. 2010). The information card given to each participant (with contact details for supportive follow-up counselling) reinforced this essential difference without dismissing or negating the participant's needs and when appropriate, encouragement was given to seek additional supportive, longer-term follow-up psychosocial support.

For some of the women who had positive experiences of assisted reproduction, there was an uncertainty about whether or not they would have participated in this research had their experiences been predominantly negative:

I suppose it was a fairly positive experience for me...If I'd had a horrible time of it and a really negative experience then I would be less likely to want to talk about it ...Because it is such a personal thing and if you don't have children at the end of it, who wants to re-live that? (Amber)

I guess for me it was such a positive experience and for a lot of people it is not, so I thought that it was important that people know what it is like and important that you hear what the actual participants have to say. (Leonie)

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

The participants who considered their experience to be negative overall were still motivated by altruism and a need to be heard:

...really horrible, I felt isolated and unsupported which is why I wanted to be part of this study. (Kerrianne)

I did have a rough time with IVF and any of my ... concerns ... could help somebody else. (Kylie)

For these participants, their self-determination to engage in the research gave them a more formalised voice and served as validation of their experiential knowledge.

Participation as quid pro quo

Most participants expressed gratitude that they had been able to access assisted conception services as an option in their attempts to redress involuntary childlessness. Many also stated that participation in the research was a way of making a contribution to knowledge about assisted reproduction in general. Implicit in many responses of this nature was the view that assisted conception procedures had been pioneered by others via research and development and because it had useful to them that they owed something in return:

*I always thought that I might donate eggs to help someone and ...you know I didn't do that so when I saw your ad my first thought was maybe I could do that, maybe that would provide some information that will help someone else at some point.
(Jacquie)*

I just wanted to help. IVF helped us so I just wanted to turn around and help others if we can. (Lindi)

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

Thus for these women, the research interview offered an opportunity to feel they had engaged as active agents in IVF. This potential for restoration and validation of their agency was important as many women experience assisted conception as disempowering and dehumanising (Dominelli 2002; Klein 2008; Thomson 2005).

Participation to validate or finalise the experience

Due to the considerable impacts of reproductive technology experiences on service-users' lives, it is understandable that once the experience comes to an end, one way or another, some sort of ritual finalisation could be in order to effectively accept that part of one's life story. This seemed to be particularly important for those who had not had success and for those who kept the whole assisted conception experience very private. The following excerpts exemplify these motivations to participate:

It was an important part of our life for quite a few years ... It will be a good thing almost for myself to go back and re-visit as well...I think in a way it will be sort of a closure as well. (Vikki)

I thought well, yeah, I do want to be part of this because if I can't get success I do want to see better things come out of it for other women. That is the driving force. (Judith, tearfully)

Participation as an opportunity to provide feedback on service delivery

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

Many women had not been given the opportunity to provide feedback to their clinic and some had not taken up the opportunity to give feedback on service delivery issues and they saw participation in this research as one way to redress this. Being able to communicate with a service about your experiences of service use is generally seen as indication of a balanced, mutual, respectful approach to service delivery; the absence of effectively timed and affirming service-user evaluations could be construed as disrespectful. For some women, they may well have been an option to provide feedback at the time of service use, but in the context of their broader experiences of involuntary childlessness and of assisted reproduction, they did not feel like it at the time. In terms of motivations to participate in this research, the following comments are indicative:

At the time you don't feel like going back to them and saying I wish you'd done that...

So they really wouldn't have any way of knowing. (Clarissa)

IVF needs to make some big improvements in how it practices. It is still, you know, it has come a long way but it's still got a way to go. (Judith)

As many participants felt objectified by service use, again, the participation in the research interview offered an opportunity for validation and restored agency and this opportunity would not have been so potentially powerful had information not been sought directly from the women as to their construction of the research process.

Participation to bring the private into the public domain

Disrupting the 'private' nature of assisted reproduction was another motivation identified by some participants:

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

I am tired of this being such a taboo subject; people don't like to talk about it and I think if more people talk about it people feel more comfortable with it. (Clarissa)

As the literature on assisted reproduction reveals, involuntary childlessness and the use of reproductive technology are examples of how gendered activities are often separated from public discourse and placed in the private and often also silenced realm (Dominelli, 2002; Gupta and Richards, 2008; Inhorn and Birenbaum-Camreli, 2008; Klein, 2008; Thomson, 2005). It seems that speaking out about experiences consigned to the private realm is one way of reclaiming one's power and self-determination; the very act of shedding light on something to demystify it can help not only the one speaking out but also her audience. The opportunity to articulate this as an explicit purpose in volunteering as a research participant is likewise an important part of the empowerment and democratisation process in qualitative social work research.

Other motivations

The possibility of gaining information on other women's experiences was also mentioned by several participants:

It would be good to get a feel for what other people have thought. (Amber)

A lot more people are not successful than they are successful – I want to know their story...You know the whole thing intrigues me. (Marion)

Some participants were simply pleased that someone was interested in researching women's experiences of assisted conception:

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

It was just sort of interesting, I said oh someone is doing their PhD, what a good topic to do it on, I must ring and help. (Amber)

The whole qualitative area of IVF is limited and hardly anything around at all... they have forgotten about people. (Kate)

A few women were interested in the researcher's reasons for choosing assisted reproduction as a topic:

Why are you doing this? ... What interest do you have that has brought this on? (Ivy)

I was just interested in actually what you would want to know. (Amber, laughing)

This mutuality in the research relationship is also a key feature of phenomenological, interpretive research in that the researcher's motivations or 'foregrounding' (Conroy, 2003; Bloor 2010; Peled 2010) and 'genuine presence' (McCormick 2011: 69) need to be recognised and no pretence of strict neutrality attempted. Ivy was particularly keen to discover the researcher's driving force and it is an indicator of her assertiveness as well as the level of rapport in the interview situation that she was given the 'space' to ask. Indeed a few other women asked directly and indirectly about the researcher's motivations and perhaps there was an assumption about shared experiences of involuntary childlessness and assisted reproduction where in fact there was none. The researcher usually responded to these sorts of questions in a generic way by affirming an interest in rural women's health and psychosocial support needs in general and a commitment to seeking input from women who had used reproductive technology to add to our understanding of it. In this sense, it cannot be claimed that the researcher was fully engaging in pure feminist research or in a truly equal exchange with participants in that some boundaries had been established

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

around the researcher's own situation as a mother who has no experience of involuntary childlessness (McCormick 2011). This boundary was established partly to ensure that the focus was on the women telling their own stories rather than on the interviewer's circumstances and to indicate that the interview was for research rather than therapeutic, supportive or platonic purposes. So this is certainly imperfect in terms of the ideal of equality between researcher and participant but on balance, the ethical imperatives of the research take precedence and the quality of disclosure was not apparently harmed by maintaining this degree of interviewer distance. In other ways the researcher was immediate and genuine with participants and rapport was effectively established with each woman and the potential for mutual benefit from the research was maintained (Pittaway et al. 2010).

Several participants were keen to share their expertise as non-metropolitan women; they indicated their appreciation of their intersectional disadvantages as women using biomedical services and as women with experience of involuntary childlessness and as women living outside of metropolitan areas.

In rural areas there is always a real lack of data on anything in terms of health. (Kate)

Living in the country our experiences are different and I'd like to express my opinion.

(Clarissa)

The act of making these motivations explicit, literally giving them voice, is in itself an act of empowerment. Had the researcher not asked about motivations to participate, it is likely that the participant would still have told the story of her experiences, but less likely that she would articulate her construction of the research purpose, value and meaning.

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

The validity of qualitative enquiry stems from research participants' stories as real and valuable accounts of a phenomenon. The validity of the researcher's analysis stems from how participants' information is presented, described and analysed in light of other views and ideas from the literature and from the researcher's perspective. A different researcher may well interpret participants' information in different ways and as long as the interpretation fits with what participants have offered in a logical, reasonable way, that too is part of the richness and creative potential of qualitative enquiry based on lived experiences. Much of the value and contributions made by such projects emanates from the richness and range of information discovered in participants' stories, comments, memories and opinions. Qualitative approaches offer opportunities for lesser-heard voices to have some space for expression and empowerment. In qualitative research, the exceptional voices can be heard and not smoothed away as they might be in more conventional approaches aiming for a neat, universal 'truth'. Without grounded enquiry, the nature of the knowledge base in a range of contexts remains limited and incomplete. This rationale for qualitative enquiry along with the various methods of qualitative research is well documented in research methodology literature. However what actually motivates someone to participate in research is less well documented despite it being a fruitful area for systematic enquiry. Arguably, researchers tend to **construct the research process almost unilaterally in terms of** their research question and on gaining insight from participants about the phenomenon under investigation, and not so much on the various reasons people have for choosing to participate in a research project.

Conclusion

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

This research sheds some light on motivations for research participation and describes a nuanced approach to the multilayered nature of the researcher participant relationship. For qualitative researchers to engage with research participants in a principled, respectful manner, it seems sensible to consistently and actively to seek input on participants' motivations for involvement in a project rather than the researchers simply moving with their own agenda without adequate exploration of this potentially rich source of information. In addition, seeking this sort of information from research participants also recognises their epistemic agency, maximises reciprocity and avoids treating participants as objects of research.

This information also underscores the need for a 'transformative research paradigm' (Merten and Ginsberg, 2008:510) and the imperative for social work research ethics, conceptually and procedurally, to recognise inter-subjectivity in the research process (Peled, 2010; Dominelli and Holloway, 2008). Central to this is the empowerment of research participants and the ideal to 'do good'; more explicit attention to participants as co-constructors of the research relationship is central to these aims. In directly seeking information from participants as to how they construct their involvement, a more open and explicit partnership approach in qualitative research projects is encouraged. Without such direct exploration, there remains a risk that the research process will be unilaterally constructed, based solely on the researcher's construction. Greater knowledge of what the research means to participants and discussion of these motivations in the research interview surely go some way towards enhancing the usefulness and ethical standards of qualitative social work research.

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

References

Alston, M. & Bowles, W. (2003) *Research for social workers: An introduction to methods.*

Sydney, Oxford University Press.

Banks, S. (2006) *Ethics and values in social work.* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Bloor, M. (2010) 'The researcher's obligation to bring about good' *Qualitative Social Work* 9(1): 17-20.

Bogolub, E. (2010) 'The obligation to bring about good in social work research: A new perspective', *Qualitative Social Work* 9 (1): 9-15.

Bowles, W., Collingridge, M., Curry, S., Valentine, B. (2006) *Ethical practice in social work: An applied approach.* Crows Nest, Allen & Unwin.

Butler, I. (2002) 'A code of ethics for social work and social care research' *British Journal of Social Work* 32(2): 239-248.

Clark, C. (2006) 'Moral character in social work' *British Journal of Social Work* 36(1): 75-89.

Conroy, S. (2003) 'A pathway for interpretive phenomenology' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods.* 2(3): 1-43.

[Http://www.ualberta.ca/%7Eiiqm/backissues/2_3/HTML/conroy.htm](http://www.ualberta.ca/%7Eiiqm/backissues/2_3/HTML/conroy.htm).

David, M. (2002) 'Problems of participation: The limits of action research' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology.* 5(1):11-17.

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2000). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oak, Sage.

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

Dominelli, L. (2002). 'Glassed-in': Problematizing women's reproductive rights under the new reproductive technologies. In Adams, R., Dominelli, L. & Payne, M. (Eds.) *Critical practice in social work*. London, Macmillan.

Dominelli, L. & Holloway, M. (2008) 'Ethics and governance in social work research in the United Kingdom' *British Journal of Social Work* 38(5): 1009-1024.

Glaser, B. (2002). Conceptualisation: On theory and theorising using grounded theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2). Article 3.

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijgm/>

Gray, M. & Webb, S. (2010) *Ethics and values perspectives in social work*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Gupta, J. & Richters, A. (2008). Embodied subjects and fragmented objects: Women's bodies, assisted reproduction technologies and the right to self determination. *Bioethical Inquiry*. 5:239-249.

Heidegger, M (1975) *The basic problems of phenomenology*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

Holland, S., Renold, E., Ross, N. and Hillman, A. (2010) Power, agency and participatory agendas: A critical exploration of young people's engagement in participative qualitative research' *Childhood*. 17(3): 360-375.

Hugman, R. (2003) 'Professional values and ethics in social work: Reconsidering post modernism' *British Journal of Social Work* 33(8): 1025-1041.

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

Husserl, E. (1999) *Cartesian meditations: An introduction to phenomenology*. Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Inhorn, M. & Birenbaum-Camreli, D. (2008). Assisted reproductive technologies and cultural change. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 37:177-196.

Klein, R. (2008). From test tube women to bodies without women. *Women's Studies International Forum*. 31(3):157-175.

McCormick, M. (2011) 'The lived body: The essential dimension in social work' *Qualitative Social Work*. 10(1):66-85.

McNamara, P. (2009) 'Feminist ethnography: Storytelling that makes a difference' *Qualitative Social Work*. 8(2): 161-177.

Mertens, D. & Ginsberg, P. (2008) 'Deep in ethical waters: Transformative perspectives for qualitative social work research' *Qualitative Social Work*. 7(4): 484-503.

Morse, J. (Ed). (1994). *Critical issues in qualitative research methods*. London, Sage.

Peled, E. (2010) 'Doing good in social work research: With or for participants? A commentary on 'The obligation to bring about good in social work research: A new perspective' *Qualitative Social Work* 9(1): 21-26.

Pittaway, E., Bartolomei, L. & Hugman, R. (2010) 'Stop stealing our stories: The ethics of research with vulnerable groups' *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 2(2): 229-251.

Ponic, P., Reid, C. & Frisby, W. (2010) 'Cultivating the power of partnerships in feminist participatory action research in women's health' *Nursing Inquiry* 17(4): 324-335.

Title: Participants' motivations and co-construction of the qualitative research process.

Richards, L. (2005). Handling qualitative data: A practical guide. London, Sage.

Shaw, I. (2008) 'Ethics and the practice of qualitative social work' *Qualitative Social Work* 7(4): 400-414.

Sprague, J. (2005). Feminist methodologies for critical researchers: Bridging differences. Walnut Creek, Altamira.

Strier, R. (2007) 'Anti-oppressive research in social work: A preliminary definition' *British Journal of Social Work* 37(5): 857-871.

Thompson, C. (2005). Making parents: The ontological choreography of reproductive technologies. Cambridge, MIT Press.

Thorne, S., Reimer Kirkham, S., & O'Flynn-Magee, K. (2004). The analytic challenge in interpretive description. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 3(1).

Wendt, S. & Boylan, J. (2008). Feminist social work research engaging with poststructural ideas. *International Social Work* 51(5): 599-609. Retrieved 19/08/08 from <http://www.isw.sagepub.com>.

Yegidis, B. & Weinbach, R. (2002) *Research methods for social workers*. Boston, Allen & Bacon.