# Chapter 9
# (M)otherhood, Identity and Positionality In and Out of the Field

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**Abstract** In this chapter, I demonstrate that researcher positionality such as motherhood status matters beyond data gathering activities during fieldwork. I reflect on how aspects of my identity as a parent, directly and indirectly shaped the topic of my research enquiry and influenced the ways in which I experienced fieldwork and the postgraduate research process in general. I argue that researcher identity, positionality and power relations play important roles in establishing researcher credibility and reconfiguring insider-outsider status, data interpretation and representation. Drawing on encounters from the field, I examine the dilemmas of doing fieldwork as an accompanied researcher with an infant child and a dozen research assistants. The aim of this reflection is to highlight the invisible dilemmas of motherhood/parenthood status, especially for early career female researchers who combine caring, earning, and learning. An improved understanding of these issues is important for providing relevant support for researchers with young families in the workplace, especially in academic institutions.

**Keywords** Motherhood/parenthood · Identity and positionality · Insider-outsider status · Power relations · Nigeria · Accompanied fieldwork

## 9.1 Introduction

> Who you are, who you think you are, who you present yourself as being interact with who other people think you are, who they think you want to be. The combination of presentation and perception makes the difference to what you experience in social interactions and what you can possibly learn from them (Townsend 1999: 88).

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Qualitative researchers have increasingly reflected on issues of identity (Hewitt 2007), positionality in research and 'the subjectivities that are inscribed in our work' (Mullings 1999). Researcher positionality refers to the ways in which a mix of multiple aspects of researcher identity — in terms of motherhood, ethnicity, race, gender, class, nationality, educational qualification, age, and disability — relationally shapes, within power hierarchies and in a given space and time, our perspective to data generation, interpretation, and representation (Frost and Holt 2014; Mullings 1999). Social science enquiries must pay attention to this potential bias and the researcher, as an actively involved observer and participant, rather than an objective recording instrument. It is important to consider the ways in which aspects of the researcher's multiple identities, and the specific circumstances in which knowledge is produced (Rose 1997) make important contributions to the fundamental goals of social science research (Townsend 1999). Researchers need to examine critically how aspects of their own positionality in relation to shifting hierarchies of power relations are shaped between the researcher and the researched (Skelton 2001).

It is recognised in the academic literature that different aspects of a researcher's multiple identities may be projected or concealed, depending on the context, in order to gain credibility on the part of research participants (Godbole 2014). However, there are aspects of a fieldworker's identity that may be difficult to conceal, such as gender and parenthood, especially when accompanied by a child during fieldwork. 'Not-concealable identities' have varying implications for data collection and analysis. According to Townsend (1999), parenthood is a gender-based identity and fieldworkers' gender has been the most observable aspect of researchers' multiple identities to be recognised and examined. He notes that anthropologists have long argued for the implications of parenting and parenthood for fieldwork to be made more explicit in academic research (Ibid.). Weiner (1976) has shown that an approach that pays attention to the role of gender-based identities, not only in the people being observed but, in the people, doing the observing, does not obscure reality, but illuminates it. In order to illuminate the implications of motherhood for field research in actual practice and the fluidity of the insider-outsider positionality, this chapter presents reflections on fieldwork-related encounters as I negotiated my own position in my own eyes and in the eyes of my research participants. Drawing on insights from the academic literature and verbatim comments from my research participants in Nigeria, I highlight the mixed implications of motherhood status in gaining researcher credibility; negotiating insider-outsider status; and the ways in which child health risk knowledge is produced, field data interpreted and how representations of research subjects emerge. This chapter is sectioned into three. First, the role of my motherhood status in shaping the topic of my research enquiry is presented. I then examine the practicalities and impacts of doing accompanied fieldwork on researcher positionality and power relations. Lastly, I discuss subtle and complex power dynamics using examples of typical encounters with other mothers in the field, and the need to rethink insider-outsider identity claims.

## 9.2 Can I Interview Mothers of Young Children as a Non-Mother?

In this section, I discuss how changes in the context of the research project occurred due to changes in my identity as a PhD researcher. I originally designed my PhD research to investigate the resilience factors in selected communities within southern Nigeria where under-five mortality rates were significantly lower than the national average, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. The early stages of the research project involved the analysis of publicly available secondary datasets from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) in Nigeria. Based on the secondary data analysis, I identified 15 urban and five rural field communities in Edo State, southern Nigeria, for more detailed questionnaire data collection and semi-structured interviews.

During the planning phase for my fieldwork, one of the main concerns of conducting interviews with mothers of children aged under 5 years was whether they would be opened to sharing their child's health risk experiences with someone who was not a mother. A friend had asked me this question. I did not have an answer. I could not fully anticipate what my non-mother status would mean for my research, but I was determined to do my best. The vast literature notwithstanding, Merriam et al. (2001) have pointed out that given the issues of positionality, power, knowledge construction and generation in social research, it is almost impossible to anticipate fully the roles and implications of our shifting and multiple identities, positionality and power without actual fieldwork. My friend then said:

> It should not be too bad. At least you are married so you have something in common with your potential participants. I can only imagine what it would mean for a single woman like me to do your kind of research back home.

That question was a very sensitive one because it had implications beyond my research. It was personal in many ways. It connected my body, my personal and academic life, and it plagued my mind throughout the planning phase of my fieldwork. It was personal because I was a married woman in my 30s with no children. During the planning phase of my fieldwork, I was anxious about potential attitudes, usually reflected in phrases like 'it takes a mother to understand', getting in the way of honest conversations. Doing fieldwork in my home country Nigeria, I was well aware of the subtle stigma of not having a child at my age in a culture where many women tend to have their children in their 20s. I was also worried that my many years of education as a woman might be considered as amounting to almost nothing without children, as a family member did tell me that in the same month I left to the UK. However, I became pregnant in the second year of my PhD. For health and safety reasons, and in line with the advice from my supervisors who showed me incredible support throughout the PhD process, I then had to postpone doing fieldwork until my long-awaited son was born. My positionality then changed from a non-mother to a mother.

I spent most of the period of pregnancy doing further literature reviews and exploration of the DHS data. This intensive investigation marked a significant shift in the course of my research. The additional statistical analysis I conducted unveiled high levels of inequalities in under-five mortality rates across different population segments in Nigeria in ways that I had not previously paid attention. I became particularly drawn towards understanding why the wide health gaps I observed between geographical areas and social groups occurred. The focus of my PhD research evolved dramatically from health resilience research to understanding the determinants and perceptions of child health risks in Nigeria. As a mother-to-be, I could not bear the thought that the 14.5% under-five mortality proportion, derived from the DHS data I worked with, represented real children and actual tragedies for many families. I wanted to do something about it. I saw it as my role as a social scientist to illuminate societal problems such as avoidable causes of and inequalities in child mortality until they can no longer be ignored. I became interested in and explored child health risks by asking ‘why’ and ‘how’ types of research questions. My new research focus became twofold. First, to statistically examined the main geographical and social determinants of inequalities in under-five mortality across different geographical scales using quantitative methods. Second, to utilise qualitative methods to understand how mothers perceive and experience child health determinants and resilience factors in their everyday lives as discourses of resilience and risks often go hand in hand (Cairns et al. 2012). I designed my semi-structured interviews to reflect this new focus.

However, the need to narrow down my research focus to health-risks and to leave out completely issues of health resilience became very clear to me as I began to interview my participants. Mothers were more inclined towards discussing the health-risk factors within the neighbourhoods in which they lived and what they did to address these challenges, rather than talking about resilience. Economically and politically, Nigeria was in a bad state at the time of my fieldwork. In the year preceding my fieldwork, there was a global recession in the crude oil market, which is the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. Exchange rates had changed dramatically and the Nigerian Naira had weakened significantly against the USA dollar. Given that Nigeria is a country with high dependency on imported goods and services, the prices of many products including food and groceries had tripled and unemployment rates had doubled. There was a general sense of economic hardship and insecurity. These were reflected in the narratives of many research participants. Women were more inclined to talk about their experiences of risks than their strengths. This experience demonstrates the need for mixed-methods researchers doing semi-structured interviews to be flexible. The predetermined interview guide could change depending on prevailing socio-political circumstances of the fieldwork context.

I was a new mother when I arrived in Nigeria to conduct fieldwork. All of a sudden, I had not just shared a marital status but also a shared parenthood status with my research participants. I assumed that I was an insider because of this shared status, and this simplistic assumption was challenged in significant ways, which are discussed later in the chapter. My identity as a new mother significantly changed the

trajectory of the study. As Crang and Cook (2007: 3) have rightly observed social research processes, in practice, do not fit into a linear model of planning, doing and writing. They noted that the practicalities of research involve a messier process, and fieldwork plans sometimes 'go off the rails'. Research designs evolve and sometimes, new fields, both physical and conceptual, are discovered. Researchers must be prepared to deal with unexpected twists and turns, both personal and theoretical, which will inevitably be experienced. 'The field is not a bounded entity separate from the everyday life of the researcher. The field is rather a constructed entity that does not have identifiable borders' and the multiple blurrings between the body of the researcher, personal and professional life could shape the knowledge produced (Cupples and Kindon 2003: 212).

## 9.3 Doing Accompanied Fieldwork

What then happens if you need to gather data in the company of or with other people? What happens when your closest research assistant is 5 months old? Accompanied by my son, I no longer fitted into the dominant image of a lone researcher doing fieldwork in far-flung places. The image of an accompanied researcher is rarely documented in social science research methodology. The accounts of Cupples and Kindon (2003) and Lunn and Moscuzza (2014) are exceptions. In sharing experiences of the different dimensions of accompanied fieldwork in India, Lunn recognises that fieldwork images in the Global South are dominated by those of solitary and foreign researchers doing fieldwork in distant places. The reality in the field is that accompanied status — family member, friends and colleagues — is more common. Godbole (2014) rightly argues that the experiences of social science researchers during fieldwork might vary depending on whom they are accompanied by. The accompanied researcher status might be more significant for female researchers with children than their male counterparts because women are perceived as the primary carers of infants in society. It might not always be the case that researchers with families have the power to decide whether they are accompanied for fieldwork or not (ibid.). In support of their argument, I demonstrate that the power of female postgraduate researchers to choose whether to be accompanied by their partner and children may depend on a complex mix of factors, such as the ages of the children involved, availability of partner, institutional restrictions, funding conditions, immigration rules, access to social capital and affordable childcare resources.

My son was 5 months old and exclusively breastfed when I began my fieldwork in third year of my PhD. Conscious of my strict funding and UK Tier-4 visa conditions, I had no choice but to begin my fieldwork whilst my child was still little. I had no power to choose otherwise. My husband could not come with me to the field because, as a PhD student himself, he was also bound by strict visa restrictions on leaving the UK. The regulations indicated that he could not be away from his studies for more than 4–6 weeks annually. These strict regulations also deprived me

of access to paid maternity leave beyond 6 weeks. Home students are allowed to take up to 6 months of paid maternity leave but international students in the UK who required more than 6 weeks of maternity leave — paid or unpaid — had to return to their home countries with their visas confiscated. They then had to reapply for another Certificate of Sponsorship and pay for a new student visa when the period of leave was over. For me, there was no home to return to because my husband was in the UK doing his own PhD. I had taken study leave from my job in Nigeria and therefore had no extra income outside my PhD stipend. I could not afford the extra physical, emotional and financial costs of travelling between different cities in Nigeria in the company of an exclusively breastfed baby to apply for replacement student and dependant visas for my baby and myself. It was against this background that I imposed the decision on my child to accompany me for fieldwork.

I was also accompanied by 12 research assistants (RAs). Part of my fieldwork plan was to administer about 2000 questionnaire to adult women of reproductive age (18–49 years) in the selected fieldwork communities within 4 months. The plan to work with 12 research assistants to meet this questionnaire target was not entirely determined by being accompanied with a child, but the decision to double the number of RAs from six to 12 was influenced by my motherhood status given that the physical labour of carrying a young child with me on a day-to-day basis in the field would limit my speed and extent of data gathering. My RAs were my ex-students, and I felt the pressure to ensure their health and safety because I considered myself as their guardian in the field. The involvement of my ex-students as RAs constituted a two-way relationship of 'helping me' and of a continued teaching and mentoring process for them. My motherhood status made it easy for me to be identified as the leader of the group, as being a parent is often considered to be synonymous with maturity in many settings (Baker 2010). A more detailed discussion of the ethical implications of doing fieldwork with research assistants is beyond the scope of this chapter.

## 9.4 Encounters in the Field: A Mother Interviewing Other Mothers

As a new mother and an accompanied researcher interested in understanding the agency of women in relation to inequalities in child health-risks, I must acknowledge that my research participants and I were not mere research objects, but subjects with agency, distinct histories, personal idiosyncrasies and power (Godbole 2014). Our shared identities of motherhood, beliefs, and values influenced the interview trajectories, perceptions, the memories created, and how child health-risk knowledge was shared. My identity and positionality shaped my 'research eyes' and the lenses through which I observed and understood. It is evident that having a shared motherhood identity with my participants earned me credibility and empathy from my research participants, especially in the participant recruitment phase. Participant

recruitment for the one-off interviews I conducted was through door-to-door knocking. This face-to-face recruitment method is aided by the informal nature of community relations in Nigeria, and because of limited infrastructure for prior communication. Whilst it was easier to access the homes of mothers, living in rural and urban poor areas compared to mothers in wealthy urban neighbourhoods, characterised by high fences and massive security gates, showing up in front of people's homes in the company of a 5-month-old earned me significant receptiveness from mothers. However, I have to admit that with my motherhood status also came a myriad of ethical challenges during fieldwork. These challenges occurred from what Merriam et al. (2001: 209) have described as 'the interlocking [changing] nature of culture, gender and balance of power'. It is difficult to create a static balance of power during interviews. Researchers have to constantly negotiate power dynamics with their participants at every stage of knowledge construction (Harrison et al. 2001).

An awareness that power is subtle, fluid and complex, and has to be negotiated during fieldwork, and not given, broadens the 'understanding of and responses to the subtle, changing and shifting balance of power that pervade and impact on the social research process' (Frost and Holt 2014: 1). In my experience, such subtle and shifting power relations were manifested through perceptions of the researcher's identity in terms of age, class and educational attainment. For example, I was often asked by participants, who perceived me as a poor student, whether I needed to conduct the interviews to graduate from university. I was not sure if these participants understood the difference between a first degree and a postgraduate research programme, but I tried to explain. I was also asked by many participants to specify how I wanted the questions to be answered, because they thought that survey and interview responses were to be assessed as either right or wrong like elementary school homework. I was again not sure if I succeeded in convincing all participants that I was genuinely interested in understanding the health-risk issues that children faced in their everyday lives. Perhaps they merely saw me as a mother who was eager to learn for the sake of my own child.

The ages of my research participants and those of their children meant different things and influenced the research process and my positionality in many ways. My research participants were adult women aged 18–49 who are parents or guardians to at least one child under the age of 5 years. Some of the women who had other older children in addition to the under-five child felt the need to instruct me on childcare risks and ways in which to respond. Many of these women easily assumed they were older than I was and therefore were more knowledgeable about child health risks than I was. I did not expect these tensions. My transition from a non-mother to a new mother made me assume that I was an insider because of my shared motherhood status with my participants, but such encounters reminded me that issues of positionality are much more subtle and fluid and have to be negotiated. My positionality was not something that I simply ascribed to myself but what my participants ascribed to me on the basis of who they perceived me to be (Reeves 2010). It led me to pay attention to other aspects of my own positionality and those of my participants such as levels of education, class, power, and privilege and other qualities.

Difference in educational status was also a significant area of discomfort. Whilst my educational attainment appeared to be a threat to the husbands of many of the rural and less privileged urban mothers, it was not an obvious threat to the mothers who voiced similar educational aspirations for their children. Many of my interviewees in the rural areas and poor urban areas were keen to support my research to 'sow good seeds' in the hope that their children would become well educated enough to conduct their own independent research in the future. On my part, I was very moved by the poor literacy levels and living conditions of some of my participants, especially those in the rural areas. I was particularly moved that many lacked adequate access to potable water supply, which was a major risk factor for childhood diarrhoea. I felt guilty that whilst they contributed to my research, I had nothing to give back to these women. I decided that I would reciprocate their kindness by drafting a brief report to the state government to highlight the child health risks issues that had emerged from my research.

Comparatively, wealthier women in Benin City were different. First, my educational attainment was not a threat, they implied, to many of the wealthier urban mothers in high-class neighbourhoods. Some of the wealthier women pointed out that they did not bother to study further since they had all they needed to live a good life. Furthermore, they, despite having lower levels of education in comparison with me, did not perceive a postgraduate qualification as a priority. I was not sure if they discounted the relevance of postgraduate education because a more educated woman was interviewing them. In the interviews, they emphasised their socioeconomic privilege and thought that their children faced significantly lower health risks compared with children born to poorer mothers. My encounters with these mothers demonstrate that inequalities in power are a critical factor in social encounters during fieldwork (Merriam et al. 2001). On the one hand, my position as an academic staff of a university in Nigeria facilitated access to gatekeepers and participants. On the other hand, my research participants subtly repositioned my 'powerful' status by determining when and where to be interviewed, the information they shared and how they chose to perceive me as a researcher. I could not help but admire their affluence and wished that my academic career could afford me the same. I usually returned home from such encounters feeling discontented with 'low' remunerations of academic careers, especially in Nigeria. I constantly reassessed what my own priorities were, and, questioned what my priorities ought to be, a mother, a researcher or 'making' more money.

### *9.4.1 'Get Your Priorities Right: Be an Academic or Be a Proper Mother'*

As an accompanied researcher with an infant, I was perceived by many mothers as having the credibility to conduct research on child health-risk. Most of my research participants who agreed to get involved in the research saw me as both a poor

student and a brave mother who needed their support to fulfil an important requirement of earning a degree. There was a general feeling of pity for my son, who many thought was being inconvenienced in the process. However, some participants did not hesitate to express their disapproval for what several described as 'going up and down' with a young child. The term, 'going up and down' in that context was derogatory. It suggested my failure to prioritise domestic life over earning a living, as captured in the following quote by the husband of a research participant who vehemently suggested that mothering was more essential:

> Get your priorities right, be a stay-at-home mother or wife or be a student. You are a woman, what exactly are you chasing after?

No one asked why my husband was not looking after the child whilst I was in the field. I wondered if a father would have been expected to prioritise childcare over a PhD programme. To many of my participants, doing a PhD was too ambitious for a woman and meant neglecting essential family responsibilities. Some of the husbands of my participants, who were sometimes present during interviews, did not support women pursuing 'too much education'. I, on the other hand, also received encouragement from many men, mainly the partners of research participants, who expressed their desires to educate their own daughters to a postgraduate level.

As a result of these encounters, many questions plagued my mind. Do women always have to prioritise family life over career? Do we always have to choose, to retain, and to let go? In practical terms, managing a young family and academic research simultaneously was extremely difficult as well as rewarding for me, but are we even allowed to own up to a mix of emotions? Will admitting the everyday struggles of blending both personal and academic life be considered as weakness? A colleague once suggested to me over coffee,

> Be careful how you own up to the challenges of managing a young family and PhD life around here. People will think that you are weak or incompetent. Academics do not show weakness, they let it stay at home.

As a researcher, I felt similar emotions too, not just during fieldwork but also throughout the research process. I constantly questioned whether I was getting my priorities wrong. I was always conscious of the implications motherhood for my career. This is what Baker (2010) refers to as the 'child penalty' — a term used to conceptualise the earning gaps between young mothers and women with no children. I felt like I was not a proper mother because I spent many long odd hours doing research at the university away from home. I did not feel like a proper student either. I had to work at odd hours and late night on most days including weekends, which left me feeling even guiltier. Although flexible working is common amongst PhD students, caring for a young child made it difficult for me to maintain a more structured routine like many of my cohort had. There were times I wanted to quit and be a proper mother to my child. Other times, I drew strength from the need to be a role model for every girl child out there. Many times, the gentle encouraging words from my husband were priceless. 'Babe, I know this is hard but you can do it. I believe in you.' They were the much-needed oxygen for my PhD lungs.

Whilst shared motherhood and accompanied researcher status undoubtedly granted me social access, and earned me credibility and empathy with many of the mothers I interviewed, these often placed me in what Greer-Murphy (2018) describes as uncomfortable positions. These uncomfortable positions reminded me of the complexity of my own position and the danger of assuming that I was an insider simply because my field sites were in my home country. These incidents point to the need for researchers doing fieldwork in multicultural sites to be sensitive to fluid positionality and the importance of behaving in a culturally appropriate manner during fieldwork. I recall two independent conversations that I had with separate women during my fieldwork in one of the rural areas during May 2017.

'Being accompanied means being observed in those relations by those we study' (Cupples and Kindon 2003: 223). The first instance that still resonates strongly with me borders on what Chong (2008) described as the quandary of conformity and involved a reaction from a potential participant, which made me rethink my insider status. This participant was an older woman who turned down my request for an interview because she was offended that I used a baby carrier like an 'o*yibo woman'* (white woman). She thought it was culturally inappropriate to strap my baby in a baby carrier in front of me, rather than using the traditional method of strapping babies to one's back with rectangular pieces of fabric known as 'wrappers' in Nigeria. She was particularly upset by how my child's hands and head were positioned with the carrier. To me, my baby appeared comfortable enough and was sleeping soundly at the time of this encounter. She said that she had observed the baby and me for some time before I approached her but could not hold back her anger. She felt I was being too 'western' and that I had put my elite and 'o*yibo woman'* status before my child's comfort. She felt that my 'innocent baby' was being 'punished' because the baby carrier did not appear comfortable to her. I apologised and tried to explain that I genuinely did not know how to 'tie wrappers' in the Nigerian way, let alone strap a baby with it. I related how I had tried over the years to learn without success, and that it was not very practical to travel around my fieldwork communities with a baby strapped to my back with Nigerian wrappers. My explanations annoyed her even further. I was not sure how convincing my reasons were. Many people, including friends and relatives back home in Benin City had expressed their disapproval of the baby carrier on various occasions. My reaction was usually 'this is what works for me so mind your own business.' Although baby carriers are widely used and considered safe in the UK where I was a PhD student, most people who verbally voiced their disapproval in Nigeria thought the opposite. Their disapproval came across more as a negative judgement of my competency as a mother. Their opinions mattered very little because I was sure that it was safe for my child. However, the perception and reaction from a potential participant who refused to get involved in my study because she perceived me as being a culturally inappropriate mother in a rural setting carried more weight and hurt more than the opinions of my friends and relatives. This speaks to the importance of power-relations and cultural access in social interactions during fieldwork. After the incident, I decided to strap my baby on my back with the 'oyibo woman' carrier but had to put a wrapper over it (Fig. 9.1) for the rest of the fieldwork period in the

**Fig. 9.1** My child was strapped with both a baby carrier and a traditional Nigerian wrapper, May 2017. (Source: Author's)

rural areas to avoid similar damaging judgements. My perception and utilisation of baby carriers changed significantly after that encounter. I remembered that embarrassing incident every time I used the carrier afterwards until I stopped using it altogether. The carrier did not return with me to England.

### *9.4.2 A Prim and Proper City Mother*

Another encounter with a participant in a rural case study area during a questionnaire survey reminded me that I did not totally fit in as an insider. She, who finished secondary school, was more educated than most other research participants in that rural community. She wanted me to stay with her a little longer before leaving because she was concerned that the heat from the 'hot sunshine' would cause illness for my baby. I sat back to please her. Her daughter was about a year old and was playing in the wet bare ground in front of her small grocery shop. It had not rained that day so I was not sure where the wetness in front of the shop came from. Then she said:

> Participant: You have been carrying him in your hands since you got here. Put your son down and let him play with my child.
>
> Me: … Thank you Ma'am, he is still too young, he cannot sit without falling over yet.
>
> A few minutes later, she offered me a sachet of packaged water to give to my child. I was hesitant and she noticed it.
>
> Participant: Give your son some water to drink, [handed me the packaged water]. It is very hot today, you need to give him water regularly to avoid illness.
>
> Me: Thank you so much madam for your kindness, but he cannot drink water yet, he is on exclusive breastfeeding. [I began drinking the water]

> Participant: [Laughed] … You city mothers eh, always wanting to be prim and proper. You really don't want him to drink the water, do you?

I was not sure if she was offended, because we both laughed, and I carried on explaining until one RA came to interrupt the conversation with work matters. I used the opportunity to excuse myself, thanked the participant profusely for her kindness, and departed.

I realised that although I was doing fieldwork in my home country and near my hometown, Nigeria was too ethnically diverse for me to be entirely considered an insider, or for me to feel completely 'at home.' Although my RAs and I had 'dressed down,' and communicated with many research participants in Pidgin English, I could not entirely fit into the informality of rural society. Perhaps it was also obvious to that participant that I was being over-protective of my child. Power dynamics and positionality appeared much more complex as an accompanied researcher with a baby on top of the culturally diverse context of Nigeria. As an accompanied researcher in the field, my participants were observing my practices not just as a researcher in relation to the cultural context of the communities I researched in Nigeria, but also in relation to my baby. Cupples and Kindon (2003) are right, those we study not only observe us, but also observe our relations with those who accompany us.

During fieldwork, I was very careful about my accommodation, childcare and feeding. I tried to attend to every detail in caring for my son. I was very selective about what he ate, drank, or touched. My son and I judiciously slept under bed nets and attended the best nurseries. Yet, he still suffered three severe episodes of malaria that landed him in A&E each time. He had one episode of diarrhoea that halted my fieldwork for 2 weeks, in addition to developing skin rashes on his face. The rashes left two major scars on his nose and were yet to fade as I wrote this chapter. My husband and I call these scars, PhD scars. Although researchers, and those who accompany them, do not always get scarred physically from doing fieldwork, a series of encounters and varied experiences, both expected and unexpected, planned and unplanned, influence the ways in which we derive meaning from the research output, our world views, who we are and, perhaps, who we become.

The encounters presented above clearly indicate that issues of identity, positionality, and power are complex and subtle. My experiences demonstrate that it is too simplistic to assume that researchers doing fieldwork in their home country are insiders and those doing fieldwork abroad are outsiders, and that each status has inherent implications for research outcomes. Critics of positionality in social research have noted the perpetuation of an imposition of western bias, which tends to inhibit more fluid 'positional' engagement in fieldwork. In identifying the limitations of common assumptions about what it means to be a member of a socio-demographic community, Frost and Holt (2014) have argued for the complexity surrounding insider and outsider states to be made more explicit. Vanner (2015) has demonstrated that it is overly simplistic to talk of membership of a community in terms of stark socio-demographic identities without addressing questions of power and privilege. Arguing for the fluidity of researcher positionality and power,

Merriam et al. (2001) have pointed out that the real world of data collection is complex, and that in practice researchers tend to slip between insider and outsider states and shifting positions of power and privilege. It becomes problematic to conceptualise insider-outsider status in terms of neat and binary positions into which researchers can be predominantly categorised. In my case, for example, I largely assumed that I was an insider, but this simplistic assumption was challenged by the subtle way in which I was repositioned by some research participants as a cultural outsider. My position could not be categorised simply as a mother interviewing other mothers, or a black female researcher interviewing other black females in her home country. My experience demonstrated that there are differences between an international student researcher and a local researcher; an elite researcher studying in one of the top 100 universities in the world interviewing mothers in a rural setting in a developing country; or a local mother interviewing her own people at home. Critical and feminist theory, participatory (action) research, postmodernism, multicuturalism and the many of the other philosophical 'isms' have demonstrated that it is more meaningful to frame insider-outsider positionality within and across one's culture in terms of gender, class, race, ethnicity, culture, educational attainment and other identities. Although academic work on positionality and associated dilemmas is accumulating, only through doing fieldwork can researchers personally encounter these dilemmas (Frost and Holt 2014; Merriam et al. 2001; Mullings 1999; Rose 1997; Skelton 2001).

Beyond the field, issues of positionality and power transcend data gathering activities into analytical spaces. 'When it comes to thinking about how to analyse our data, we cannot ignore the phenomenologies — the experiential materialities — of bodies and places during fieldwork' (Matsutake Worlds Research Group 2009: 201). In my case, experiences of infertility, being accompanied by an infant child, and dealing with childhood diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea in the field as a mother first-hand, contributed to my analytical perspectives and research understanding. As a researcher doing research in her home country, I was drawn towards perspectives that are less emphasised in global health research the role or women agency and the need to understand ways in which mothers in Nigeria assume responsibility for child health risk management. It is important to recognise that research perspectives from insiders, outsiders and those in-betweens are needed to gain a broader understanding of child health risk perception and management in Nigeria. Researchers must acknowledge the usefulness and limitations of diverse ways of knowing depending on where a researcher is situated within the insider-outsider spectrum. No position should be elevated above the other because what an insider sees and understands will be different from, but will be as valid as, what an outsider understands at the end of the spectrum. These positions evolve, and are fluid and relative to the cultural norms and values of both the researcher and the participants (Merriam et al. 2001: 415). As a mother researching child health risks, I must recognise that my experiences in the field and my personal subjectivities were inscribed in my work and influenced the object of my research enquiries in significant ways. According to Townsend (1999), parenthood status, in addition to other factors, can influence the practicalities and theoretical objects of research.

Like him, my status as a new mother influenced the choices I made in the field, the timing of my fieldwork, my theoretical perspective and research understanding, the research themes that emerged, the positions that I assented and critiqued, the voices I made visible and those that I unconsciously let slide into obscurity. It influenced the interpretation and meaning that I derived and the representation of the voices of my generous participants.

## 9.5 Conclusion

Through reflecting on my fieldwork experience as a PhD student and a mother, this chapter has demonstrated that the salience and significance of different aspects of a researcher's positionality at different stages of the research process might depend heavily on the topic of research enquiry and the identities of research participants (Frost and Holt 2014). Undoubtedly, the relevance of the researcher identity to the research enquiry does not remain static throughout the research process. The influence of unexpected changes and the ever-shifting personal subjectivities of the research work may begin as early as the construction of a research enquiry. This chapter has also discussed the practical implications of researcher identity for gaining access, credibility, and legitimacy on the part of research participants. For researchers doing child-related social research in particular, motherhood status can interact with the timing of fieldwork, the way in which the research enquiry is framed, what the research participants choose to share, the nature of data collection, and the kind of interpretations that are made visible. In line with Townsend (1999), parenthood may have different implications for male and female researchers, and experiences of researchers in the field might depend on whether researchers are accompanied, the ages of their children, and differing access to social networks, supporting services and available funding. It raises pertinent questions about whether the intersection of motherhood status with other personal identities may enhance credibility or produce discomforts during fieldwork practices. By reflecting on encounters from the field, I have illuminated the intricacies, complexities, power dynamics, the fluidity and interlocking nature of insider-outsider positionalities that I encountered in knowledge construction and representation. I challenge the notion of stark positionality and ready-made identity boundaries into which researchers are often situated. This chapter has provided stories and evidence to show that the field is a site where the professional and personal lives of the researcher converge. It is a leaky space in which 'relationships with participants shape and are shaped' by the relationships with those who accompany the researcher (Cupples and Kindon 2003: 212). We might need to reposition ourselves as our participants in turn reposition us. Being able to recognise and renegotiate our shifting identities and power remains one of the most important reflexive tools at the disposal of human geographers at all stages of the social research process.

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