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INVOLVEMENT AND DETACHMENT IN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY STUDIES

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Abstract: Attention given to the role of researchers in qualitative methods questions the conditions of production of knowledge on the experience of persons with intellectual disabilities. The involvement of researchers has to be discussed regarding their interactions with members of a muted group labelled as having social and communicative incompetence. The article discusses the interest of first person researchers' texts in the approach to the social experience of intellectual disability. It advocates a reasonable use of personal accounts of research to explain the conditions of production of knowledge and develop comparability between studies.

What can be said of what people say of what they are and what they do? Researchers using qualitative methods inevitably address this issue when carrying out interviews in order to account for the experience interviewees have of the social and cultural context in which they live. With the development of texts using the first person and giving extensive accounts of the interactions between researchers and those under study, this issue has gained new facets. Research accounts suggest that knowledge cannot be dissociated from individuals constructing it, either in their methodological and theoretical choices governing the collection and production of data, or in the interpretation of information collected in the research process. However,

some of these accounts go far beyond the identification of personal factors permeating the research process. They convey claims for a personal involvement of researchers in their studies and tend to deny the possibility of an analysis of situations external to their own experience. As an example, one would need to be HIV positive to develop a relevant analysis of the experience of people with Aids, or homosexual to write cogently on perceptions of Aids risks. To a certain point, the importance given to the involvement of researchers as participant in situations they study questions the possibility of studying domains which are outside their private experience.

The issue of the personal experience of researchers is particularly crucial in the case

of research on the condition of people with intellectual disabilities. As, by the social definition of their competence and activity, researchers will never share the experience of intellectual disability, a radical separation takes place and question the pre-requisite of their personal involvement. In interviews, researchers are also confronted with problems of communication seldom encountered in other research situations: for example, with reference to studies I conducted with people living previously in special institutions, a limited verbal capacity to express situations and emotions, an absence of continuity in the dialogue, my perception of the irrelevance of some of their expressions, their difficulty to refer to themselves as persons distinct from the special institution, etc.. These problems are in no way comparable to those met by researchers studying distant cultures as researchers and those under study live in the same society, refer to the same language and cultural meanings even if their respective possibilities and conditions of utilisation of the social and cultural resources are radically different. In such situations, researchers have to use their own intellectual resources to interpret and to make sense of the material collected during the study. If one follows the claim for an inner experience as a condition of validity of the analysis, in their texts on intellectual disability, whether they use the first person or not, researchers would only account for their personal meeting with intellectual disability. The experience of disabled people would remain a "terra incognita" for social sciences, since they have no spokespersons

of their own. Formulated in this way, the issue leads inevitably to a dead-end regarding the production of knowledge on the experience of people with intellectual disabilities.

In opposition to this radical epistemology, I argue that a personal experience as participant does not give researchers a better insight of their study if they do not have the theoretical frames in which the observations and interviews they collect become sociologically significant. It is possible to produce a relevant analysis of the experience of persons with intellectual disabilities, provided that theoretical and methodological efforts are made to give sense to what they say. This assumption requires regarding their experience not in its private dimensions, but in its sociological dimensions, i.e. in the utilisation of units of culture to orientate and to give meanings to activity in relation to others. As researchers meet specific problems in their fieldwork, their influence on the course of research needs to be discussed regarding their possibilities to reproduce cultural stereotypes on persons with intellectual disabilities. Their personal accounts are of great interest insofar as they display the conditions of collection of first hand material and the way the analysis is gradually constructed. Then, what people say is put into methodological and theoretical context and rendered knowable

To develop this argument, I will start by presenting the context of use of the first person in sociological texts, to discuss the

necessity of a balance between involvement and detachment to produce a scientific discourse on social experience. I will then refer to the approach to intellectual disability as a muted group to stress the importance given to the discussion of the role of researchers because in speaking more of themselves, as first person texts usually do, they can reproduce the social and cultural silencing of the people they study. Referring to my research experience, I will lastly suggest a reasonable use of personal accounts centred on fieldwork in order to explain the conditions of analysis of the social and cultural experience of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

First person texts and involvement in research

Compared with the beginnings of sociology as a scientific discourse, the place taken now by the first person in sociological texts is significant of changes in the implication of researchers in their activity. Among these changes, one has certainly derived from the extensive use of face-to-face interviews to collect qualitative information. Inspired by the psychological intervention, this method is based on empathy and questions inevitably the participation of researchers in the production of data. Another change comes from the generalisation of the ethnological approach to our societies. The discussion of the

relationship to distant others, as an epistemological necessity to objectify their culture, comes even more crucial when studying near others. However, the use of first person cannot be reduced to the consequences of the development of methods in social sciences. It also expresses changes regarding the place of researchers in the research process.

The first person between authenticity and reflexivity

Two dimensions appear essential and make it possible to delimit the various references to researchers as first persons in sociological texts.

On the one hand, the use of the first person expresses a requirement of authenticity: the engagement of the author makes true what is said. According to R. Sennett (1977), this requirement of authenticity comes within the great cultural transformations of the 19th century that have resulted in the death of public space and the development of an intimate vision of the world. He describes this vision as narcissistic. *“This desire to reveal one’s personality in social dealings, and to social measure action itself in terms of what it shows of the personalities of others [...] is first a desire to authenticate oneself as a social actor through display of one’s personal qualities. What makes an action good (that is, authentic) is the character of those who engage in it, not the action itself.”* He considers that the article

“J'accuse”, written by Zola in 1898 in connection with the Dreyfus Affair in France, is the first grand text concerned by public issues in which sincerity and political motivation override an argumentation based on logical reasons to justify a statement, in this case why Captain Dreyfus should be free. Cultural value given to the authenticity of self extends gradually to the various fields of social life until influencing the production of scientific discourse on the social world. The use of “I” in social sciences inherits this cultural quest for authenticity that places subjects and their involvement in the heart of the research process.

On the other hand, the development of social sciences has led to calling into question the idea of objectivity of scientific research corresponding to a radical separation between researchers and their object. This challenge fits in what Beck (1992) analyses as the development of a personal reflexivity whereby members of mature modern societies question established pattern of life and social mores. It also applies to scientific knowledge and its claims to objectivity. Social sciences have shown that scientific knowledge proceeds from social and historical contexts in which they are formed. Under the influence of social and cultural anthropology, in which relationship to others is central in the research process, this relativism tends to penetrate sociology, even if the scientific practice remains strongly marked by objectivism. The use of “I” in texts expresses an adaptation to reflexivity,

either as a compromise with objectivity or as a new epistemological stand.

The different uses of the first person in sociological texts

The two cultural dimensions of authenticity and reflexivity delineate a space in which it is possible to locate and to differentiate texts using the first person. In a remarkable paper, Olivier de Sardan (2000) proposes to distinguish four recourses to “I” in writing from the point of view of the scientific process.

Firstly, “I” replaces the traditional “us”: it adapts the text to a contemporary cultural sensibility for less grandiloquence and for apparent greater simplicity.

The use of the first person can also proceed from an alternative epistemology to positivism in claiming for an intersubjective stand. This leads to highlight the implication of researchers in the research process and to clarify the effect of their presence and interpretation on the production of knowledge. To a certain degree, the production of empirical data is blurred by the account of the activity of researchers.

A third use of “I” can proceed from moral or political concerns seeking to present the subjects of investigation as people and not as research objects. When saying “I”, researchers involve themselves as persons

and allow those under study to exist in a symmetrical way.

The last recourse distinguished by Olivier de Sardan locates the use of “I” in the perspective of validation of fieldwork. It is now recognized that the implication of researchers plays a great role in the production of data, which are the material from which they build their analysis. As noticed by Devereux (1967), “*the analysts of behaviour must learn to admit that they never observe the behaviour that “would have taken place in their absence” and they do not hear the same narrative that the narrator would have given to other analysts*”. The use of “I” seeks to tackle the problem posed by the subjectivity of researchers in collecting information, and therefore the validity of the material for analysis.

Thus, the use of the first person in a text can express different positions as regards research. They go from the adaptation of style without challenging a scientific approach that rests on the distinction between the observer and the observee, to the radical assertion of a relativistic epistemology in rupture with the established scientific practices. In addition to the rules and principles relating to the validation of knowledge, the use of “I” invests personal authenticity as a frame of reference in research. It can thus reinforce the scientific argumentation in displaying the active role of researchers, as it can conceal shortcomings in the constitution of data and in the analysis. In referring to the personal

experience of the individual, it addresses the issue of control and validation of the analysis in the scientific community.

Research between involvement and detachment

In social sciences, the personal experience of researchers is called upon directly in fieldwork or indirectly in secondary analysis. In a cultural context of claims for authenticity, it is not possible to escape questioning this experience by considering that it is strictly personal and subjective, and not accessible to discussion with professional peers.

It is possible to tackle this question in terms of involvement and detachment of the researcher in scientific activity, as once formulated by Elias (1956). Involvement is defined as a situation in which scientists say more on themselves or on their group than on those that they study whereas, in detachment, they speak more of the others, even if they continue to say something on themselves. These two tendencies cross any research in human and social sciences. When the construction of data depends on human relationships, the implication of the researcher as member of a social group is inevitably present. “*Social scientists are liable to be caught in a dilemma. They work and live in a world in which almost everywhere groups, small and great, including their own groups, are engaged in a struggle for position and often enough for*

survival [...] Their experience of themselves as upholders of a particular social and political creed which is threatened, can hardly fail to have an emotional undertone."

This emotional load is likely to neutralize the intellectual understanding and to prevent the detachment necessary to scientific analysis. For him "*the problem confronting those who study one or the other aspects of human groups is how to keep their two role as participant [in the social and political affairs of the groups they belong to] and as inquirer clearly and consistently apart, and as a professional group, to establish in their work the undisputed dominance of the latter.*" The attention paid by researchers to the construction of the object and to the methods does not remove this difficulty even if it offers marks to avoid the encroachment of their own social participation upon their work.

In this perspective, the issue of scientific validity of social studies can be referred on the one hand to the control of the emotional implication of researchers towards the groups they study and, on the other hand, to the capacity of objectifying the effect of this implication on the production and the interpretation of the data. The answer cannot be found in radical distance, because it removes empathy to those under study necessary to have access to their experience and to understand it. It cannot either be found in a total implication, because this limits the possibility of going beyond the relationships established by researchers with the individuals they study. It has to be found in the balance researchers manage to set up

between involvement and detachment to produce knowledge on the social world, which remains the mission for which they have received a professional mandate.

Research methods and results must be capable of expressing this balance as an epistemological stand. First persons texts are expected to explain the balance adopted by researchers, and the control they have on the emotional load involved in research. This expectation is particularly important in studying the social and cultural barriers between normality and intellectual disability. In questioning the frontiers in which normality is defined, there is inevitably a tension between the defence of the normal world to which they belong and the axiological neutrality expected in research.

Research as access to voice

What makes a social group muted is that claims of its members to participate into social life are discounted and that they have internalised the idea that they are not entitled to raise their voice. They have no forum in which they can complain against the infringement of others. In qualitative research, interviews are social situations in which muted people can be heard provided that researchers do not reproduce the

configuration of mutedness and consider what people say seriously.

Intellectual disability as a liminal condition

The qualification of people with intellectual disabilities as a muted group refers to the analysis of disability as a liminal situation (Calvez, 1994, 2000). The concept of liminality has its origin in the analysis of the rites of passage by Van Gennep (1909/1960). It qualifies the moment when individual have lost a first status and have not reached a second status yet; they are in an in-between situation and float between two statuses. Specific attitudes of fear and distrust and responses of external social control are opposed to this threshold situation and individuals experiencing it in order to protect the established social and symbolic order.

The analysis of disability as liminality highlights this situation of threshold as a central configuration in the life of disabled people. This concept was used by Murphy (1987, 1988) to characterize the condition experienced by invalids in the American society. He noted that “[the disabled] exist in partial isolation from society as undefined, ambiguous people. This undefined quality, an existential departure from normality, contributes to the widespread aversion to the disabled reported by researchers.” (Murphy, 1987)

I have developed a similar approach to analyse the condition of intellectually disabled persons living in the ordinary society, stressing the importance of social and cultural contexts in the production of such configurations (Calvez, 1991, 1993). In studying relationships of daily life in which people with intellectual disabilities were involved in a local community, I have observed a scope of responses of ordinary people varying from feelings of repulsion, fear and even hostility to empathy (Calvez, 1991, 1993). Ambivalent attitudes, made of compassion and rejection, resulted in an asymmetry of relations and lead to the allocation of a minor status. Potential dangers, in particular sexual dangers, associated with their intellectual disability were used to justify the allocation of a specific status and the denial of access to local voice. These pressures conflicted with the fact that people with intellectual disabilities lived in the same neighbourhoods as people demanding their control. The tension between rejection and acceptance resulted in an in-between social and cultural configuration that the concept of liminality attempts to account for.

The mutedness of the intellectually disabled

Speaking of mutedness as a consequence of this liminal condition means mean that people with intellectual disabilities do not access to voice in ordinary conditions and that, to be heard, they must endow the status

of intellectually disabled assigned to them and make specific claims compatible with this status. This conflicts with pretensions to normality that are constituent of the fact that they live in the common world like ordinary people.

If mutedness can characterise the situation of different oppressed groups, there are some specificities in relation to intellectually disabilities. In a sociological perspective, these specificities proceed from the careers of persons with intellectual disabilities and from their conditions of socialization. To consider them, attention has to be given to the possibilities they had to constitute a repertory of words, attitudes and associated cultural meanings, and opportunities to mobilize this repertory in the everyday life, to validate and to enrich it. If these specificities depend on the potentialities of individuals themselves, they have also important social and cultural dimensions through which these potentialities are transformed into social and cultural incompetence.

Common sense relates these differences to a supposed nature of individuals and finds the evidence of their disabilities in their lack of self-control and accountability and in their difficulties to communicate according to the implicit rules of communication. What people with intellectually disabilities say is automatically dismissed insofar as they do not manage to give them forms and contents acceptable by ordinary people. This rejection expresses the superiority ordinary people claim to have over those who do not

control the social and cultural codes they use (Elias and Scotson, 1994). It takes part in the structures of social power and symbolic domination, denying people with intellectual disabilities the possibility to be heard with their own cultural resources.

If research does not grant full consideration to the speech of people with intellectual disabilities as it is and with what it conveys, it tends to reproduce the same structures of power and domination.

Access to voice in research situations

Like in every other study, what people say has to be taken seriously by researchers because they convey meanings related to their experience in using a mode of communication they have managed to domesticate and a repertoire of words and meanings they have constructed in the different circumstances of their life. The difficulties met by researchers to make interviews with people with intellectual disabilities, to understand their speeches and to interpret their contents put them explicitly in front of problems of communication and difficulties of sustained interactions met by ordinary people when interacting with people with intellectual disabilities. They express discrepancies in the access to a common cultural repertoire and in the use of cultural units to communicate and to act with others. They are also interesting in presenting researchers with problems close to those met by ordinary people, i.e. in

experiencing one side of the interactions taking place between ordinary people and people with intellectual disabilities.

However, a major difference with everyday life situations is that researchers are not supposed to participate in such interactions in defending principles and categories sustaining the ordinary world, as ordinary people would do. On the contrary, they are expected to interact in order to understand the social and cultural context from the point of view of the intellectually disabled themselves. This expectation requires researchers to question the cultural conventions the ordinary world to which they belong develops on intellectual disability. This specific configuration with its emotional undertone is a component of the entire research process and has to be investigated for it addresses the crucial issue of separation as a response to intellectual disability. Researchers have continuously to objectify their own perceptions and interpretations related to the defence of the social order to which they belong.

First person texts written by researchers are of great interest in discussing the conditions of their participation in these interactions and in describing the context in which problems of communication, situations of domination, cultural conventions are met. The implication of researchers in their texts is therefore prone to lead to an analysis of the social and cultural experience of disability.

Personal accounts in research process

Social scientists often solve problems of interpretation of information in relating them to their own inner life without always being conscious of these connections between personal experience and research concerns. Efforts to account for conditions of interpretation are interesting for research insofar as they contribute to unveil the personal implication and choices of researchers. A distinction needs to be made between accounts of authenticity tending to explain and justify the personal involvement of researchers in their theoretical choices, and accounts of reflexivity discussing the conditions of collection and interpretation of data. I will take two examples related to the study I mentioned above to illustrate these two types of accounts. The first refers to the theoretical choices guiding my approach; the second explains the development of the concept of liminality. I will present their correspondence with my personal experience and discuss the interest of these personal accounts regarding the production of knowledge.

My interest for cultural theory

A theoretical choice is not only made for scientific good reasons (i.e. the paradigms and their explanatory capacities), but also because it echoes some personal experience of the researcher. The experience to which I

would like to refer takes place in the sixties in my native village, located in the Western part of Brittany. It was a rural catholic village, with a strong sense of the community and prescribed roles. This organisation was challenged by modernisation trends. However, the community was still characterized by cultural homogeneity. When I was in primary school, there were three children a bit older than me that were “retarded” in the local parlance. One was the son of the garage mechanic. It was said that the family had no chance because girls were born normal whereas, for obscure reasons of heredity, boys were born abnormal. The boy was living in his family. For the other children, he was a simple-minded harmless big boy who could not speak properly, an infant in a huge body that was met from time to time. The second boy was the son of a blacksmith living in a remote part of the village. The father had a reputation to be a marginal man who did not take part in the social life of the community. No reason was known for the retardation of his child. According to the hearsay, the boy spent his days and nights secluded in a locked cage. From time to time, he managed to escape and went running in the countryside, terrifying other children including me. There was another boy who was at school with us. His parents were divorced and he was living with his grandmother in the next village. The children rumour said that she was very severe with him and beat him regularly. He failed at school and we took him for stupid. Constantly subject to our bullying, his only response was boxing his schoolmates.

A distant reflection on these situations, nourished by a sociological experience, guided some central questions in developing research on intellectual disability. For me, intellectual disability had to be considered with reference to a community providing principles and justifications to interpret situations and to guide attitudes and relationships. Regarding these retarded boys, as it was said, benevolence was showed to the family integrated into the community, whereas fear and rejection responded to positions at the frontier and to loss of community membership. At a first level, the difference between the three children and us could be described in simple dichotomies: kind vs. dangerous, domesticated vs. wild or savage. It referred to a definition of the community in terms of pacification and domestication, which provides principles for classifying differences and for manufacturing specific roles. However, if the three boys had the reputation to be retarded, perceptions varied from one to another.

Mary Douglas, with whom I started to work at that time, directed my attention to the variability of responses to intellectual disability, and suggested to relate it not only to the social order of a community but also to the different ways of constructing the social order in the case of cultural heterogeneity. This approach to variability in relation to social order is a key feature of her cultural theory (Douglas, 1978, 1986; Thompson, Ellis, Wildavsky, 1990). It helped me to formulate a research perspective on social integration of

individuals with intellectual disabilities. Whereas attention is usually given to individuals' competences to find their own way in an ordinary world, cultural theory focuses on the principles of affiliation and on the opportunities offered to individuals to take part in the community. Usually these principles and modes of affiliation are implicit and taken for granted. Situations generated by policies of mainstreaming challenge ordinary assumptions regarding the type of individuals prone to be met in special institutions and in the common world. In the interactions of daily life with people with intellectual disabilities, ordinary people have to provide responses to these situations and to justify them. In doing so, they call to principles about human nature, individual's accountability that are constitutive of the cultural regime of their community and that sustain their social institutions. Perceptions of intellectual disabilities come out of this process at a double level of cognition and justification. Allocation of a place and definition of a role in relation to the community respond to the perceived nature of individuals. Therefore, disability is considered as the result of interactions between individuals and communities, regarding their possibilities to fulfil the requirements of institutions sustaining the community at a functional and at a symbolic level.

This short account of the foundations of a theoretical perspective helps to understand the selection of problems and the choice of a theoretical framework. If it can have a didactic virtue, it does not give any

additional validation to a perspective that has to be discussed in the scientific community according to its professional rules. In my opinion, a first person communication, relating the conditions in which a theoretical framework is adopted, has real interest in teaching situations as its utilisation can give the strength and conviction of a personal experience to a theoretical discussion that remains often distant. Beyond this rhetorical strategy, its interest in research texts is questionable, except in giving to understand the perspective adopted.

The construction of liminality as a social experience

The conditions in which the concept of liminality has been used to qualify the social experience of people with intellectual disabilities are illustrative of the entanglement of personal and theoretical factors in the construction of an analysis. The account of the research process has an interest in identifying the echo of the presence of the researcher and in rendering the approach liable to critics regarding the distance to pre-conceived ideas and emotional implication.

When I first had to prepare a proposal for a research program on "Life spaces and social trajectories of handicapped or

maladjusted people in ordinary world”¹, I had no previous research experience in the field of intellectual disabilities. Recently appointed as a research officer in a school of social work, this program was a first opportunity of work. The starting point of my proposal was a short text of Mary Douglas, in “*Purity and danger*” (1966) referring to Van Gennep’s analysis of the rites of passage in three stages (separation, liminality, aggregation) to analyse the difficulties of former prisoners or in-patients in gaining full recognition in society. For her, without rituals of aggregation, they stayed marginal or in a liminal situation. The research proposal formulated the rationale in terms of aggregation to the community of individuals living previously in a special institution for intellectually disabled and working in a sheltered workshop.

I decided to make the study in Treguier, an historical and previously episcopal city with a population of 2,800 inhabitants for three reasons. It was one of the first experiences of de-institutionalisation of adults with intellectual disabilities in France, starting in 1976. It had a long tradition of caring for deprived and « feeble minded », in reference to the local figure of Saint Yves, i.e. a cultural concern for marginal populations. In the community, the existence of different contexts of neighbourhood allowed

comparison between attitudes to individuals with intellectual disabilities.

When I come back to my fieldwork notes, I can see that in interviewing members of the community in order to have a knowledge of the local context, I rapidly perceived that a specific distance existed between members of the community and people working in the sheltered workshop, as they were known locally. This distance was in no way comparable with the ordinary relationships within the community. In addition, ordinary demands to these people were very contradictory and different from a local neighbourhood to another. First meetings with people working in the workshop revealed attitudes of submission and dependence. My attention was then directed to the intermediate stage of liminality in the rites of passage to qualify the configuration resulting from the mainstreaming of people living previously in institutions.

One of the research problems was to know how the experience of people with disabilities in the local community was structured. The hypothesis of liminality helped to organise and make sense of the observations and interviews. The different observations made in public places draw the attention to specific behaviours that considered together came to be meaningful. Let us take, for example, a short and banal observation: two girls enter in a bar, walk hastily to a table, sit back to the wall, order a beer, drink it quickly and leave as hastily the bar. In itself, this observation has limited interest, except to point out a radical

¹ Research programm funded by the CTNERHI (Centre technique national d’études et de recherches sur les handicaps et les inadaptations), Paris.

difference of behaviour with the ordinary male consumers. When similar observations are repeated in different public places and refer to different people working in a sheltered workshop, one can think of a specific configuration. Interpretation was suggested by Breton traditional tales of the 19th century describing night travels in heath lands. For local peasant communities, heath lands were marginal spaces where dangerous encounters could happen at night because they were the kingdom of spirits and therefore forbidden to humans. Having done research on perceptions of space in local cultures, I was familiar with such representations. It lead me to consider that for people working in sheltered workshops, the local public space could be viewed as a threshold space, full of insidious dangers and therefore forbidden to them. Interviews made with individuals working in the sheltered workshop were congruent with these hypotheses regarding the perception of public space, in particular in the importance of routines.

Usually, a theoretical framework is taken for granted whereas the basic experience of research, in qualitative studies, indicates that it is progressively constructed in the confrontation between fieldwork experience, theoretical reflection and personal experience. Presenting shortly a study in progress gives opportunities for the scientific community to discuss the analysis in a more relevant way than by only examining the sociological text in which the role of the sociologist as author is blurred.

Conclusion

What people say of what they do and what they are does not immediately result in a sociological knowledge of their experience. There is a necessity to construct a theoretical frame of reference in which it gains sociological meanings in which researchers have an active role. Research on intellectual disabilities draws more specifically attention to the conditions of collection of data and to the interactions taking place in the course of the study. In addition, researchers are confronted with the social definition of competence and normality to which they have to bring responses. This confrontation conveys an emotional load that has a limited interest for research in its dimensions of inner experience of researchers. However, this load has to be examined in its implication to define the context and the course of the study. First person texts are liable to respond to methodological queries on the role of researchers in the production of knowledge.

The use of the first person in research on intellectual disability represents a crucial challenge when the social condition of people with intellectual disabilities as a muted group is taken into consideration. The risk is always present that researchers speak more of themselves and that, concerned by their own activity, they reproduce the mutedness of the group they study. On the opposite, the effect of the presence of researchers on the production of knowledge has to be clarified, especially when

individuals have not ordinary competences to account for their own life.

In my opinion, a reasonable use of the first person perspective in intellectual disabilities studies is highly desirable for at least two reasons. Firstly, research interactions are social interactions. When researchers use their professional time to discuss with individuals under study and pay attention to what they say, they seldom imagine that for people which are muted, these moments can be among the unique moments, out of the routines of daily life, in which time and attention are given to them and what they say is taken seriously. Using the first person in sociological texts is a way to make them exist as persons and not only as taking part in a research. Secondly, research interactions are the place for the production of information on which the analysis rests. Using the first person is a way of validating the fieldwork and the interpretation giving other researchers to know and to discuss the research process.

The publication of fieldwork diaries and notes would be of great interest in contributing to realise the theoretical and methodological biases in which researchers on intellectual disabilities work. Beyond its own interest, my conviction is that, combined with a relevant sociological framework, it would facilitate a comparison between situations of integration of individuals with intellectual disabilities studied by different researchers.

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