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THE METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION
AND ANALYSIS
IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

METODY ZBIERANIA
I ANALIZY DANYCH
W BADANIACH EDUKACYJNYCH

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Who Was I? The Dual Role of the Researcher in the Study – "Dirty Work" in the Field by Family Probation Officers in Poland

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Abstract
This article aims to determine who the author was during the study. The uncertainties expressed therein include methodological and ethical challenges I encountered during a research project on the fieldwork of family probation officers in the central districts of a large city in Poland. I describe these challenges through the lens of my experiences and emotions, which accompanied me in my role as a researcher because they constituted part of the empirical material. Analytic autoethnography formed the basis to fulfil this task. The research material was derived from a several-month-long observation of the work done by family probation officers. The collected data revealed that research work in the field carries with it physical, social, moral and emotional burdens. The results of the analysis lead me to conclude that while being in the field, I conducted "dirty work" and that my role was connected with the identity I assumed due to my research and the role ascribed to me by probation officers.

Keywords: autoethnography, dirty work, observation, family probation officers, researcher in the field.

Introduction

Social rehabilitation education recognises the need to conduct qualitative or "hybrid" (qualitative-quantitative) analyses (Rubacha, 2017; Dobińska, 2020; Sawicki, 2023). This is evident in studies on Polish family probation officers, which show a clear dominance of normative strategy over an interpretative one (Okólska, 2019). Considering this, I decided to conduct qualitative studies on family probation officers[1] in the field. However, the research strategy I selected posed numerous challenges for me (Czarniawska, 2014; Michel, 2015; 2016; Ślęzak, 2015; 2016a; 2018; Okólska, 2020). This applies specifically to social rehabilitation educators who explore difficult environments, the problems of which are often the result of a criminal, total or socially neglected profile (Ciechowska & Kusztal, 2021).

In this project, I also decided to include myself as the subject of study, using the autoethnographic method (Ellis, 2004; Anderson, 2006a; Campbell, 2015). My experiences as a researcher will be the primary focus. The article describes the methodological and ethical dilemmas I encountered during my research on family probation officers working in the central districts of a large city in Poland. They are described through the lens of my experiences and emotions, which accompanied me in my role as a researcher at successive stages of data collection. The analytic autoethnography method was used as a basis to fulfil this task (Anderson, 2006a; 2006b). I conducted an analysis of my experience and related reflections, which I felt to have affected me the most whenever I came across methodological and ethical dilemmas. This revealed field work as difficult and burdening, allowing me to perceive it according to the concept of "dirty work", as proposed by Everett Hughes (1958; 1962).

My primary uncertainty is expressed in the question of who I was during the study. The methodological and ethical uncertainties inherent in this question are strongly connected. The most important challenge I experienced was the necessity to reconcile ethical principles with optimal conditions for

[1] In Poland, family probation officers execute court orders regarding foster care, juveniles and addiction treatment. Their fieldwork consists of educational, rehabilitative, diagnostic and control measures concerning people of whom they have custody (Parliament of the Republic of Poland, 2001).

observation. This triggered further questions: How to behave according to scientific research ethics when choosing observation transparency? How to retain one's identity as a researcher-observer? How not to interfere in the professional tasks of probation officers? How to create conditions for effective observation and not interfere in the observed social situations? In this article, I attempt to answer these questions and show how I handled the challenges I encountered.

Dirty Work

In my studies, I draw from the tradition of the Chicago School (Park & Burgess, 1925; Deegan, 2001). According to this tradition's assumptions, the essence of research activity is to go out into the city to find answers to questions connected with urban space issues, such as crime, homelessness or other manifestations of street life (Prus, 1996). This brings associations with experiencing the "dirt" the city carries with itself, not merely in the literal sense as physical pollution. The concept of "dirty work", which shows that work can be dirty in various ways (Hughes, 1962), turned out to be significant for the analysis of my experiences as a researcher.

Though the term "dirt" is ambiguous, it is mostly perceived in pejorative terms as something one should avoid (Ashenburg, 2007). In the concept of "dirty work", the ambiguity of "dirt" is connected with physical as well as social, moral (Hughes, 1958; 1962; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999) and emotional (Rivera & Tracy, 2014; Lesiak, 2019) experiences. These will be explained briefly. Dirt or physical burdens[2] include contact with any form of material contamination. Social burdens occur when encountering people who experience social stigmatisation. Moral burdens occur when one acts in a way that is against commonly accepted ethical values (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, pp. 415–416) or when a person's professional decisions affect other people's everyday lives (Lesiak, 2019). Emotional burdens occur when the emotions experienced at work affect a person's private life, leading to negative conse-

[2] In the article, I use the term "burdens" interchangeably with "dirt". It is less stigmatising, especially in the context of the moral and social sphere of dirty work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Lesiak, 2019).

quences (Rivera & Tracy, 2014; Lesiak, 2019). Boundaries between physical, moral, social and emotional burdens are vague, and these burdens usually occur simultaneously (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Lesiak, 2019).

According to researchers who study the issue of dirty professions, people who perform "dirty work" include healthcare professionals (Bolton, 2005; Dick, 2005; Lesiak, 2019), police officers (Dick, 2005), people who do housework such as cleaning (Anderson, 2000), soldiers (Kurashina, 2005), prison guards (Tracy et al., 2006), border guards (Kreiner et al., 2006; Rivera & Tracy, 2014), secretaries (Sotirin, 2007), concentration camp guards (Hughes, 1962), executioners (Lawler, 1991) and erotic dancers (Grandy & Mavin, 2011). Thus, dirty work is not limited to degrading or undesirable professions (Hughes, 1958) and constitutes a part of professions that serve society (Strauss et al., 1997).

The ambiguousness of dirty work is limited to not just the understanding of "dirt" but also results from the type of profession and its requirements. Dirty work is unique because the activities performed as part thereof can be both degrading and noble, beneficial for society and humiliating. The concept has evolved over the years, and in its original form, it presented dirty work as contrary to moral principles (Hughes, 1994). Subsequent researchers demonstrated that this could also be work important to society (Strauss, et al., 1997). Moreover, people who undertake it employ techniques meant to reduce the stigma of dirty work and make it valuable, thus affording them satisfaction from its performance (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

The concept of dirty work and its development by various researchers (Hughes, 1958; 1962; Strauss et al., 1997; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Rivera & Tracy, 2014; Lesiak, 2019) demonstrate that "dirt" may be treated as a professional burden, which is arguably problematic but can also bring satisfaction and does not prevent one from undertaking tasks directly connected with it. My analyses reveal that the work of researchers in the field of family probation officers belongs to the category of "dirty professions".

Autoethnography as a Research Strategy

I conducted research on the fieldwork of family probation officers using ethnography as the main research method (Angrosino, 2007; Hammersley & At-

kinson, 2007) and procedures of grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I accompanied the probation officers on their fieldwork[3] for five months. The research was conducted in two central districts of a large city in Poland. During the study, I was unable to detach myself from the emotions and reflections I experienced, which occurred in many situations I witnessed. I decided that the omission of my experiences would deprive the empirical material analysis of an important element (Newbold et al., 2014). Thus, the study was treated as a personal experience, and I perceived it from the perspective of methodological and particularly ethical dilemmas. Autoethnography was helpful to this aim (Ellis, 2004; Anderson, 2006a; 2006b; Kacperczyk, 2014; Campbell, 2015). In my research project, I used autoethnography as a method supplementing traditional ethnography. This provided significant empirical material, enabling the direction of the analysis toward my experience as I directly collected the data in the field. Considering autoethnography is a sign of a researcher's awareness of their role in the cognition process. Using individual experience, the researcher describes the social and cultural context of their actions (Kacperczyk, 2014). However, this creates certain difficulties. According to Magdalena Ciechowska and Justyna Kusztal (2021, p. 163) "autoethnographic studies are the closest researchers have ever come to the studied reality" (TN: own translation).

Anna Kacperczyk (2014, pp. 37–38) claimed that autoethnography can be understood as an "act of auto-narration", "a document created by the narrator", "a technique of collecting materials", "a research strategy" and as "a novel way of improving knowledge". In the author's research, autoethnography assumes the form of a research strategy. Kacperczyk provides the following definition of autoethnography:

> It consists in purposeful and planned acts of self-observation across a longer period of time while participating in a specific social process and reporting one's experiences and reflections in the form of notes, journals or video recordings where the actor is the author himself/herself (Kacperczyk, 2014, p. 38).

[3] The field work of family probation officers in Poland consists of visiting families with adjudicated supervision (Cywiński, 2018).

Autoethnography, defined as a research method or strategy, was developed by Leon Anderson (2006a; 2006b), who termed it "analytic autoethnography". The author developed key features of analytic autoethnography, which constituted directions and enabled the orderly use of this research method. These will be presented in short. The first feature is "complete member-researcher (CMR) status", which entails assuming the role Robert Merton (1988, p. 18) refers to as "the ultimate participant in a dual participant-observer role". This is independent of whether the people belonging to the studied world are connected or not. The next feature is "analytic reflexivity", denoting the awareness of the relationship (based on mutual influence) of the researcher with the environment and its consequences. The "narrative visibility of the researcher's self" is based on the researcher's exposition of their thoughts, reflections and changes which occurred in their perception and relationship with the environment. This indicates their personal involvement in the studied world. "Dialogue with informants beyond the self" is the next feature Anderson (2006a) mentions. It highlights that despite considering one's I, the researcher does not forget about interacting with other participants of the studied world. The final feature is "commitment to theoretical analysis", i.e. not limiting oneself to descriptions of personal experiences but also creating and improving theories on social life based thereon (Anderson, 2006a, pp. 378–388).

I wish to stress that given the article's limitations, the analysis it presents is a fragment of a broader study that included the field activities of family probation officers (Miśkiewicz, 2023). I focus on the analysis of selected threads showing my experiences.

"Dirty Work" of the Researcher in the Work Field of Family Probation Officers – An Analysis of Ethical and Methodological Dilemmas Experienced

The first dilemma revealed itself at the beginning of research planning. It was connected with the decision of whether the observation should be open or covert, which often reveals itself as a risk of a moral burden. Covert observation can perhaps be of more value than an open one (Chomczyński, 2006; Konecki & Chomczyński, 2012) because the latter may involve distortions in

the picture of the situation due to the awareness of being observed. However, the awareness of significant ethical problems accompanying this research technique prompted the choice of open participant observation. The decision to use this technique resulted primarily from the ethical premises of conducting observation (Shils, 1956; Power, 1989; Christians, 2000; Babbie, 2005; Kacperczyk, 2016). As per scientific research standards (e.g. those of the Polish Sociological Association, contained in the Code of Professional Ethics of Sociologists of March 25, 2012, or the guidelines developed by the Committee of Ethics in Science contained in the *Code of Ethics for Research* Workers of the *Polish Academy of Sciences* of June 25, 2020), the fundamental prerequisite of conducting research is to obtain informed consent for participation in a study. Moreover, Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (2007) claim that researchers should judge for themselves what is appropriate and what they should avoid. According to them, while ethical issues are important, ethnographic studies are too diverse for researchers to strictly adhere to categorically formulated rules (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 289). Researchers in the field are on their own and have to make judgements regarding what is safe (for them and the participants), ethical and neutral to the observed fragment of social reality (Michel, 2016).

The next argument for using the open observation approach was the obligation of probation officers to protect family life. It is protected by the state (Andrzejczuk, 2018), and probation officers, as representatives of state authorities, are under an obligation to ensure it for their wards. Although the private affairs of family probation officers' wards are no longer confidential once they contact the family, they are still protected by professional secrecy, ethics and law (e.g. Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council, 2016/679). The character of family probation officers' work favours open observation in the study. The probation officers enter the private space of families by visiting them in their homes. To preserve trust in state institutions and maintain their declared "relation-based work" with the supervised families, the probation officers had to know who I was and the purpose of my presence during their professional activities. I considered this my obligation, both as a researcher and an educator.

Other arguments in favour of open observation included legal and formal conditions. The justice system is subject to strict protection of personal

data and withholding the status and objective of the representatives of various agendas (including researchers) is both ethically questionable and may be fraught with legal consequences. The probation officers' duty to observe secrecy is mandated in the Act on Family Probation Officers (Journal of Laws of 2001, No. 98, item 1071). When I asked the court for permission to conduct this research, I was under an obligation to comply with the organisational and legal requirements of that institution. Moreover, before starting the observation, I had to undergo court training in personal data protection. My duty to observe secrecy was sometimes used by probation officers during visits to make individuals under supervision feel comfortable during observation.

Some researchers believe that professional public figures should not deny their consent to participate in studies, as their work is financed by public resources and should be open to public scrutiny (Woroniecka, 2001; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Miszewski, 2007). I have a different approach to this issue. First, professional transparency does not mean that an employee can be observed at any given moment. Second, the mere fact of holding a public role does not mean that one should be forced to agree to be observed, especially when the presence of an observer can impact one's work negatively.

Conducting covert research is also a burden, for reasons other than formal and organisational. It can result in moral and emotional burdens for researchers, as it is connected with the constant hiding of one's identity. Moreover, it affects the security (Ślęzak, 2016a) and legal protection of researchers and breaches the ethical conditions of conducting social studies (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). According to Earl Babbie (2005), no researcher will decide to conduct covert observation without a strong conviction that this would increase the study's reliability.

Considering the aforesaid arguments for and against, I chose the open participant observation approach for my study. It would have been easy to create organisational conditions fostering covert observation (e.g. under the pretext of an internship). However, ethical arguments and, thus, the need to reduce moral and emotional burdens where possible prevailed.

The second dilemma concerned the management of my identity by the probation officer. As mentioned earlier, open observation is also connected with ethical concerns. In the research project I undertook, this was con-

nected with the direct observation of probation officers' work with families in their homes. Though the probation officers were informed about the aim of my study, I had no influence over how I would be introduced to the supervised families. The probation officers used various methods, which represented two general strategies for managing my identity during the study. I will begin with the strategy in which I was not introduced.

At times, I was not introduced by the probation officers, and the supervised wards and their family members paid me no attention. Most (though not all) of these families benefited from social welfare. Frequent visits by representatives of institutions (social care, probation officers and police officers) have taken place over generations, constituting a peculiar family tradition. Apart from visits by probation officers, the families were in regular contact with social care workers, family assistants and district police officers (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska & Jankowski, 2013). This also made me experience social burdens, as in my studies, people under probation officer supervision usually faced social stigmatisation because of their difficult family and material situation.

Possibly, I did not also differ in appearance from the representatives of other institutions. According to Michel (2016, p. 278), direct participation in the world of the study subject requires adaptation concerning language and appearance. I chose my clothing to suit the weather and the mobile character of fieldwork (sports shoes, backpack, hat, comfortable outwear, etc.). During the study, the probation officers explained to me that I could be "unnoticeable", as the residents were accustomed to visits by employees of various departments and institutions. Consequently, they anticipated no objections or suspicion from their wards; the family members assumed I was another representative of social services.

Here, I would like to stress that while accompanying the probation officers during their visits, I did not enter into conversations with the residents; so, my contact with them was minimal. However, I was not "invisible", transparent or unnoticeable. I sometimes attracted a natural dose of trust from family members (I was allowed to enter their homes and was privy to information about them). The supervised families sometimes ascribed to me the role of probation officer ("future" or "additional"). However, determining the character of my presence was not the dominant part of the visit to the fami-

lies' homes, and the residents did not pay much attention to it. Perhaps that is why the probation officers did not comment on or correct their suggestions.

Analysis of data from the studies indicates that the research may cause significant ethical reservations and, thus, moral and emotional burdens. We are speaking here of dilemmas which accompany researchers of covert observation, especially those who use covert participant observation (Konecki, 1992; Goffman, 1959; Chomczyński, 2006; Miszewski, 2007). These dilemmas refer to assuming a role aimed at concealing a researcher's identity, i.e. a "developed identity" (Goffman, 1959). Although I did not create a new identity for myself, I was given one by the probation officers. I, in turn, as per the procedures of participant observation, did not interfere in the communication between the probation officers and the families. Ślęzak (2016a; 2016b; 2018) studied escort agencies similarly. However, while Ślęzak (2016a) chose the semi-covert observation approach (the participants, i.e. escort agency employees, knew her identity while their clients did not) because of the conditions she negotiated with the agency managers, in my case, the covert character of the observation resulted from the study's aim. My observations were focused only on the tasks of probation officers. After consultations with fellow researchers and an in-depth analysis of the source literature (Babbie, 2005; Chomczyński, 2006; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Ślęzak, 2016a; 2016b; 2018), I decided that the families are not direct participants in the study and that their presence is merely a background to the activities of the family probation officers, which obviated the need for providing detailed information about my identity. It would have resulted in unnecessary interference in the course of the observed social situations.

In the source literature, researchers who use ethnographic methods (Gulczyńska, 2013; Michel, 2016) describe the stages of entering the world of the study subjects as the "passive stranger", "interactive stranger" and "active stranger" stages (Barker, 1980, after: Michel, 2016). When I was conducting my observations, I tried not to interfere in the course of the interactions. I was usually the "passive stranger" (especially in the houses of the probation officers' wards), and it was only during trips between the supervised homes that I became an "interactive stranger". Michel (2016, p. 278) indicates that "the researcher's position in the world of the subjects is fluid" (TN: own transla-

tion). This was my experience. The circumstances of the observation (mainly the location and probation officers) indicated the stage at which I was in the world of the subjects. Goffman (1959) claims that the stage dictates how actors play and the role they assume. I was assigned the role of the researcher.

During the observations, none of the family members asked me what I did. I experienced discomfort for ethical reasons; however, I could not disturb the particular structure of the probation officers' visits, which would have constituted an undesirable influence on a social situation, leading to a distorted image of the observed fragment of social reality. Moreover, it would have interrupted the work of the court-appointed family probation officers.

The second strategy for managing my identity was to ascribe to me a specific professional-social role. When presenting me, the probation officers called me "a student", "a PhD student", "an intern" or "a person from the university". These were the identities of a neutral party who observed the activities of the probation officers. Even if I were evaluating these officers' work, it would be of no significance to those under supervision (which is in line with the essence of scientific research). According to observations, the probation officers also used tactics to neutralise my presence, e.g. speaking about my commitment to observe secrecy (referred to earlier) or that I was connected with the court and represented that institution. Sometimes, the probation officers would describe my role in detail, for example, by using the following descriptions: "This is Ms Kasia, she's describing my work"; "I'm with a PhD student, whose presence is necessary for research purposes"; "the doctoral student who's doing research"; "I'm with a PhD student from the University of Łódź, who's writing a dissertation on our work"; "I'm with a PhD student whose presence is necessary for research purposes"; "I'm with a PhD student from the University"; "this is a PhD student who's writing about my work"; "this is a PhD student who's assessing my work"; and "this lady is observing my work, an invisible observer of sorts". In conversations with me, the probation officers stressed that they wanted their wards to feel safe. The descriptions were meant to give my presence a neutral character and, thus, let the families know I was there to watch the probation officers and not them. Such situations were the most comfortable and transparent, from ethical and emotional viewpoints. However, it was difficult to convince the probation officers themselves that the study's aim was not to evaluate their work. They would

sometimes tell the family members that I was present to "assess" and "control" the work of probation officers, which posed a problem to me.

However, sometimes, the probation officers' presentation imposed on me a role directly connected with supervision, using descriptions such as "I'm with an intern whom I have to 'babysit'", "a student who's watching what's happening in the wards' families", "I'm with a student who's my aid", "I'm having help", "I walk around with this lady now", "we're family probation officers", and "I'm with a doctoral student from the court". This form of presentation gave rise to significant ethical problems because the supervised families were given a signal that I was also a supervisor. This situation could be analysed from the viewpoint of reinforcing authority and intensifying supervision by probation officers (they and the other person were the supervisors).

Through strategies of managing my identity in various ways, the probation officers manipulated my image. Sometimes, this appeared pragmatic: the probation officers did not want to devote additional time to inform the families of the aim of the study. However, at times, it appeared that a specific presentation (e.g. "I'm having help") influenced the dynamics of the visits and could induce certain attitudes among residents. Sometimes, when probation officers ascribed the role of "additional supervisor" to me, the supervised families tried to neutralise the situation through laughter.

Another dilemma I encountered was connected with creating conditions for reliable observation and concerned with describing what was happening during the visits while not interfering with the professional activities of probation officers. While I was a researcher who did not become involved in the relationship between the probation officers and the individuals under supervision, I did take notes. Though I tried to do it discretely and unostentatiously, my notebook could have been visible. The force of such a message (the image of a person taking notes) was also seen by the probation officers. Some of them asked me not to take notes during visits, as it could disconcert the supervised and create a barrier between them and the probation officers.

Another difficulty that emerged during the observations, and an especially problematic one, was when probation officers encouraged my active participation during the visits. These were situations in which I was cast in the role of an "active stranger" (Gulczyńska, 2013; Michel, 2016). These behaviours created a double dilemma. First, they raised ethical doubts. Second,

they significantly interfered in the social situation under observation. Third, they constituted a burden for me. These occurred mostly when probation officers communicated in a way which was meant to embarrass the residents. My active participation was to reinforce the message of the probation officers, who informed their wards that they did not follow recommendations or that they acted inappropriately. Though such situations were not frequent, they did cause discomfort, as my observation aimed not to oversee the material and living conditions of the families (their activities and lives were not the subject of the study). However, irrespective of this, the role of critic and judge was imposed on me.

In these situations, I found it difficult to retain neutrality towards the environment (Doktór, 1964), which is characterised by the requirements of social studies methodology (Doktór, 1964; Chomczyński, 2006). Controlling my emotions during observation was a challenge primarily because the life situations of the supervised families were surprising for me and resulted in negative feelings (compassion, sadness, anger, fear). However, these experiences may prove helpful when analysing empirical material, according to the view that the internal experiences of researchers are an important element of the research process, especially when the researchers have direct contact with the observed fragment of social reality (Ossowski, 1967; Chomczyński, 2006; Ślęzak, 2015; Kacperczyk, 2016). In the case of participant observation, emotional reactions are unavoidable (Konecki, 2000; Ślęzak, 2015; Michel, 2016). When learning about the observed reality, one cannot detach oneself from emotions, as they are useful in interpreting the observed social phenomena (Ślęzak, 2015). Stanisław Ossowski (1967) claims that empathy is useful in interpreting empirical material, as it helps to understand human action, which is subject to observation. Angrosino (2007, p. 66), on the other hand, indicates that while observers are tools in themselves (Wyka, 1993), their emotional states also provide useful data for further analysis. This was also the case in my studies. However, not to lose sight of the aim of the observations, in moments of emotional stress, I had to maintain neutrality towards the social situations observed (Chomczyński, 2006). Owing to this, although some locations I visited with probation officers evoked sadness, frustration, powerlessness and fear, I meticulously described them and focused on the actions of the probation officers. However, my life beyond the professional sphere

did not remain unaffected. I relieved stress in conditions outside the research situation (usually by jogging after developing the empirical material). This helped me cope with emotionally difficult situations. After some time, I too became aware that while the family histories did not constitute empirical material, they "left a mark" on me. I was curious about the wards' lives after the study. Perhaps this curiosity was reserved for those I remembered the most, but it is difficult to determine why these families specifically – perhaps it was connected with the compassion I felt.

The family probation officers encouraged me to physically experience their workspace (to check whether light could be seen in windows and whether residents could be heard from behind the door), to try performing certain actions (e.g. listening through a closed door by pressing myself to it), to enter certain places (e.g. to a room in a supervised home to discover the mess), to sit somewhere, and to touch objects (e.g. a loose handrail, a doorknob). These were physical burdens in a research situation. While being in the field, I had to "get dirty", which was in accordance with the assumptions of the Chicago School (Prus, 1996; Deegan, 2001). These situations were difficult, as I was not used to the material "dirt" typical of the probation officers' profession (Cywiński, 2018, p. 290), especially since the buildings I entered with the probation officers belonged to the dilapidated part of the city centre. Similar experiences were shared by Gabriela Dobińska and Angelika Cieślikowska-Ryczko (2020) during their photographic walks with professional probation officers. These researchers were also given suggestions to learn the field directly.

My experiences are congruent with the assumption that emotional involvement is a process with which researchers should not struggle but which should be properly managed (Konecki, 2000; Chomczyński, 2006; Niedbalski, 2010). During the observation of social situations that differed completely from my experiences and while carrying the stigma of a "normie" (Michel, 2016, p. 283), it is difficult to maintain the perspective of the observed (Chomczyński, 2014), which is why I had to maintain discipline and focus on the study's aim. This was very difficult at times, especially in surprising situations.

Conclusions

The answer to the question of who the author was during the study is as follows: I was cast in different roles, depending on how the probation officers managed my identity. This was determined by the strategy the probation officers used in their contacts with the supervised families and the purpose they assigned to my presence (whether the observation was interpreted as an evaluation of their work). My double role was connected with the identity I assumed because of the study and the role ascribed to me by the probation officers (which would change depending on what they deemed appropriate at a given time). Respecting the ethical principles of conducting research, consistency in assuming the role of the researcher-observer and not responding to attempts by families to ascribe to me the role of probation officer was of great help.

Undoubtedly, ethical and methodological dilemmas are constant elements of the research process (Gulczyńska, 2013; Chomczyński, 2014; Michel, 2015; 2018; Szczepanik, 2015; Kacperczyk, 2016; Ślęzak, 2016a; 2018). I am aware of the limitations they impose. At the same time, they can also be a source of new solutions for the course of studies, and they can create an opportunity for discussion if the researcher is aware and considers them openly. This was the case in my study. The aforementioned reservations constituted a source of numerous problems; however, my awareness of them and their constant analysis helped me find the solutions. Moreover, my analyses show that the work of researchers in the field of family probation officers belongs to the category of "dirty professions".

The selected research problem meant that the circumstances of the observation and the act of entering into specific spaces (the environment of social exclusion) would necessarily entail numerous burdens and dilemmas. Considering this, I treated my doubts as further empirical data which were subject to analysis.

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