

# Chapter 11

## A Researcher, a Container, or Both?

### A Stance of a Researcher in a Qualitative Research with Bereaved Children



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The learning objectives of this chapter

- Dual role of a researcher in qualitative research poses ethical concerns
  - Aware of the boundary issues;
  - Aware of the confidentiality issues;
  - Aware of the autonomous of the clients.
- Researcher has to balance between:
  - Being a spontaneous and reflexive participant;
  - Being an objective observer and involved participant.

Being a novice researcher, I was both excited and cautious when I conducted my first qualitative research for my dissertation. Excitement results from that I have chosen a research topic that I was deeply interested in; caution comes from the diverse ethical dilemmas a researcher would face when conducting a research. This chapter focuses on the dilemmas that I encountered in the course I conducted a qualitative research.

Ethical dilemmas are not commonly presented when researchers publish their studies; the write-ups tend to be an organized version of what the researchers have done. Published articles focus on reporting the methodology and the result of the studies rather than emphasizing the difficulties researchers faced when conducting the research (Duncan, Drew, Hodgson, & Sawyer, 2009). These seldom-mentioned dilemmas should not be overlooked. By laying out the dilemmas I faced when I conducted a qualitative research, it is aimed that future qualitative researchers can be more aware of the consequences of the ethical choices they made to the research participants as well as the implication on the research result.

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## 11.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, there is a brief introduction of the assumptions underlying qualitative research. The main focus is on the axiological assumption as it gives rise to the ethical dilemmas, the focus of this chapter. The other assumptions are also mentioned as they informed qualitative researchers what actions to take when conducting a qualitative research. A qualitative research over bereaved children 3–7 years old in Hong Kong is used as an illustration of the ethical dilemmas and available choices in a qualitative research. I share how I, the researcher of the bereavement study, handled those dilemmas. It is possible that other researchers who have different world views and values may opt to act differently. It is hoped that the presentation here can raise the awareness and to stimulate more thoughts and solutions from the future researchers in handling the ambiguous situations in qualitative research rather than claiming what I did are the only correct solutions for the dilemmas.

### *11.1.1 Child Bereavement Qualitative Research*

The qualitative study using for the illustration of the ethical dilemmas is on 3–7 seven years old bereaved children in Hong Kong (Lai, 2013). This study aims to let the “forgotten mourners” (Smith, 1999) to speak and be understood. It focuses on revealing the inner world of the bereaved children who have lost one of their parents through illness. There were two parts in the study: the first was a multiple cases study that four child participants had five child-centered free play sessions. In these sessions, artwork, sand play, narrative storytelling, and conversations were utilized for data collection about the inner world of the child participants. The second part consisted of a single drawing-and-interview session for 19 child participants. The two parts both focus on how grief manifestations are revealed in sand play, artwork, and interpersonal interactions. The research contributes to helping bereaved children to turn the bereavement experience into a chance to grow. It aims at presenting the phenomenological world of the bereaved children so that helping professionals and parents can find ways to nurture and to provide suitable environments for bereaved children to cope and adjust to the parental loss.

The research was conducted in the Child and Family Bereavement Center, where I was employed as a bereavement counselor. Hence, I was a researcher as well as a counselor, though these hats were not being put on at the same time. To demonstrate the ethical dilemmas that I faced when I conducted the research, two case studies, Ben and Anna, are presented in the following.

## 11.2 Underlying Assumptions in Qualitative Research

The word “research” has its root from the Old French, meaning to deeply seek for something (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2016). In the contemporary context, a researcher seeks knowledge and answers to the research question on hand, be it a quantitative or a qualitative research. The differences between these two types of studies are their philosophical assumptions, hence, the precipitated methodology that follows.

### 11.2.1 *Philosophical Assumptions in Qualitative Research*

There are five philosophical assumptions embedded in a qualitative research, namely, the ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions (Creswell, 2013). The ontological assumption holds that people see the world from one’s point of view and create one’s reality. Hence, a researcher’s sense of reality is different from a participant’s reality and there are diverse realities among participants. The implication of this assumption in qualitative research is that using direct quotes from participants, it made known the multiple realities among the participants. Researcher interpretation beyond the observed is not supported among some of the qualitative researchers. It is believed that interpretation inevitably strips away the originality of the observed and recorded, hence, fails to record the participants’ realities.

The epistemological assumption concerns with how a researcher knows something. In a qualitative research, the researcher can either be an insider, an outsider, or somewhere in-between these two positions to seek understanding of the research question on hand (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). There is the debate over whether there are more benefits from being in one of the above-named position than the other; however, no consensus is reached. The epistemological assumption is crucial as it affects how a researcher positions oneself. A qualitative researcher often seeks knowledge through getting close to the research targets so the participants’ experiences can be captured as closely as possible.

The rhetorical assumption concerns with the form of language that is used to present the research data. Generally, qualitative researchers write in a personal style by using first-person pronoun. Such writing style aims to bring the participants word closer to the readers so that the gist of the data gathered would not be stripped away by the formal and academic language of the researcher.

The methodological assumption asks the question of how a research is done. In qualitative research, inductive rather than deductive logic is used to gain information. In other words, the researcher starts with the information given by the participants and works its way up to posit a theory to describe the observed phenomenon. It is different from a quantitative study that it uses the deductive logic to analyze the data according to the theories selected by the researcher.

Finally, the axiological assumption concerns about the value of a researcher. This assumption, among the other four assumptions mentioned above, is most closely related to the ethical dilemmas I faced in the qualitative study conducted.

### ***11.2.2 Axiological Assumption in Qualitative Research***

Qualitative researchers generally agree that everyone has own values. Values that are standards of what is important in life and what one concerns as right and wrong guide actions (Thompson & Russo, 2012). It is the synonym for ethics. The axiological assumption in qualitative research states that no research study can be value-free (Creswell, 2013); researchers should state explicitly their values to make known to readers their moral stance and their philosophical positions in ethics. Such declaration allows researchers to be more aware of and reflect on own biases, as well as for readers to judge whether the reported data or the researcher's interpretation of the research data is dependable.

## **11.3 Ethical Dilemmas Arose from the Assumptions**

The axiological, or the value-laden, assumption obligates researchers to examine and to report their endorsed values. When a researcher takes on multiple roles, multiple ethical and moral principles guide one's actions. Sometimes these multiple ethical principles can coexist but not always; when the underlying values of a researcher are incompatible with that of a practitioner because different goals are set for these two roles, it creates ethical dilemmas for the dual role researcher/practitioner.

*Dual Role and Ethical Dilemmas* Practitioners who are keen on following an evidence-based practice are likely to be drawn to running own qualitative research. These research inform practitioners with detailed data on clients' experiences, effective ways of doing assessments and treatments, and also other rich information without lumping the research participants' testimonies into lifeless numbers. Despite the gaining popularity of practitioners running their own research, ethical guidelines for qualitative researchers are lacking. Sometimes the practitioner who runs a qualitative research can only borrow the practitioner guideline when making ethical decisions for a qualitative research.

It is not entirely nonsense when one uses a practitioner ethical guideline when running a research; there are some similarities between being a practitioner and a qualitative researcher or interviewer (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). For example, it is proposed that a qualitative interviewer should be warm and empathetic in order to build a trustful relationship with the participants for data collection and long-term research relationships. This overlaps with what a practitioner would do in a therapeutic relationship, except that the bond built in this relationship is to foster the clients' growth.

Others argue that a researcher and a practitioner have significantly different roles to play; they bear different goals in mind (Thompson & Russo, 2012). A researcher is interested in collecting data and to find out the answer for one's research question while a practitioner focuses on facilitating the change of the client. In other words, the former prioritizes knowledge gaining during the research while the latter sees the client's well-being has upfront importance.

These two views contradict with each other that one sees the overlap between a qualitative researcher and a practitioner that both build a trustful relationship with the participants/clients. The other sees that a researcher and a practitioner have utterly different goals in mind hence should go into diverse ways.

When I conducted the child bereavement qualitative research, besides the obvious role of a researcher, I also played the role of a participant, and a "container" (Winnicott, 1969). Winnicott defined a container as someone being fully present for a child who creates a holding environment that is important for the growth of a child (Winnicott, 1986). The free play sessions during which I collected data from the child participants were conducted in a playroom. Such room became a geographical container, while I, a psychological container, who allowed the child to play and express safely. In general term, I was a therapist, besides a researcher, during the free play sessions who served to meet the needs of the child participants through facilitating their free emotion expression and containing their difficult emotions.

The mere presence of a person has an influence on another person's behavior (Coon & Mitterer, 2014). Hence, my presence in the playroom affected the child participant's behaviors. In turn, the child participant's emotions and thoughts expressed in the free play influenced me and my interactions with him/her. It would be, therefore, apt to say that there were two participants in the playroom: the child participant and the researcher as a participant.

The lack of consent over the similarities and differences between a researcher and a practitioner in a qualitative study has implications over ethical issues concerning research participants' right. This includes the participants' right to maintain a clear personal boundary, right to confidentiality and right of autonomy. Being a participant while a researcher can also influence the objectivity of the researcher's stance; its related dilemmas will also be discussed. Case studies from the child bereavement study are used to demonstrate these dilemmas.

## 11.4 Case Illustration of the Ethical Dilemma

*Background Information* Ben, a 5-year-old participant, lost his mother from cancer 4 days before his first interview with the researcher. Even though it was only recently that the family faced the change, Ben's father and Ben both were willing to participate in the research. Ben's father worried about his son's adjustment after his mother's death and hoped that the research could help Ben to cope.

*Ben's Father's Expectation* In the consent form, it is stated clearly that the research was done by the researcher as a graduate student of a Ph.D. program, rather than

as a counselor of the Child and Family Bereavement Center. Nonetheless, Ben's father was confused with the role between the researcher and the counselor even though the distinction between the two roles was stated explicitly. This external role confusion (Yanos & Ziedonis, 2006) affects participants' expectation setting; in turn, it influences how much one would like to disclose during the course of the interviews. Ben's father had a therapeutic expectation that he expected the researcher to carry out active interventions for Ben during the free play sessions to help Ben to cope with his loss.

*Ben's Expectation* For Ben, his willingness to participate was largely due to the attractiveness of the playroom that was used for the play sessions. He expected the sessions to be full of fun. It implies that Ben would focus on playing rather than worrying too much about the confidentiality issue when participating in a research. To ensure that Ben knew his rights when participating in the research, an assent was given to him to explain his right to confidentiality and self-determination.

*Results* During the 1-month follow-up session, Ben's father reported that Ben was continuously expressive about his feelings toward his mother. The earlier temper tantrum that the father complained of shortly after the death of Ben's mother had ceased totally. The father complimented Ben that not only had he behaved well at home and at school, he was a sensitive child who knows how to comfort the father when he sensed that the father was sad. Father commented that Ben seemed to be adapting to everything well. The initial expectation of Ben's father was met; the father found that Ben was able to cope with the loss after participated in the research.

### ***11.4.1 Researcher's Ethical Dilemmas***

Ben and his father were happy with what they have gained by participating in the research. It was the consequence of some conscious ethical decision-making by the researcher throughout the research. Simultaneously, I was a researcher, a participant, and a practitioner/container. First, I am delineating the ethical dilemmas I faced when being a researcher and a participant. Then the ethical dilemmas in the dual role of a researcher and a practitioner are explored.

#### **11.4.1.1 Being a Researcher/Participant**

*Spontaneous versus reflexive participation* The dilemma embedded in this researcher/participant dual role is whether the researcher should participate authentically. Genuine reaction to the child participant may not be helpful for the obtainment of information for the research. For example, when a researcher is curious with the child participant's ambiguous play, the spontaneous reaction would be to ask about it to clarify the ambiguity. However, such questioning might not be the most appropriate reaction to facilitate the child participant's free expression. It could turn the free play from a child-centered and child-directed one to a researcher-directed one.

On the other hand, the reflexive participation of the researcher would be to keep a similar pace with the child and reflect empathetically when the child participant is emotional, may be confused or distressed, during the play. It cultivates an accepting and containing environment that encourages the child participant to express more in-depth. The concept of reflexivity has gained much attention among qualitative researchers (Berger, 2015). It involves the researcher examining the self as well as one's influence on the research context and the relationship with the participants. It is the responsibility of the researcher to engage continuously in self-reflection and evaluation of the needs of the child participant in order to serve the purpose of the research without neglecting the needs of the child participant. Simply put, the researcher/participant participates reflexively with the awareness of the mutual influences between the researcher and the researched.

*Objective observer versus involved participant* In a quantitative study, a researcher is expected to be an objective observer who gathers information. However, a researcher cannot be totally separated from the research participants in a qualitative research, therefore seldom takes the objective observer position as those of quantitative researcher (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

When I participated in the free play sessions along with the child participants, the mutual influence between us made an objective observation hard to achieve. My own background and experiences influenced what and how I attended to the vast behaviors presented by the child participant; in turn, my attention shaped what the child participant would like to express. As a result, I was never an objective researcher; I was always an involved participant who obtained information from the child participant who was not being isolated in a room filled with toys. I gathered and analyzed this information with the personhood that was influenced by the child participant.

*The researcher's choice* It was both a deliberate choice and an inevitable fact that I was a reflexive and involved participant during the child bereavement study. Giving up the objectivity of a researcher and the spontaneity of a participant in exchange for the depth of information gathered from the child participants and creation of a supportive environment to meet the child participants' needs was totally worthy.

The drawback for being a participant rather than a distant observer was that the wider perspective of the investigating issue on hand could be missed. I could be blind or biased in my observation when I was in an interactive position with the child participants. As a result, reflexivity was necessary for me to be able to aware of my pitfalls. In the child bereavement study, I kept a reflective journal every time after meeting with the child participants in the free play sessions. It helped me to be more aware of my role in the research, my influence on the child participants, and my biases.

The reflective journal also served as a triangulated data source in the research. It triangulated with other data sources such as parental interviews, play sessions behaviors, and child participants' interviews and narratives to bring different perspectives of child bereavement together for a more comprehensive understanding of such phenomenon.

### 11.4.1.2 Being a Researcher/Practitioner

During the child-centered play sessions, I had to be sensitive to Ben's verbal and nonverbal expressions. Empathy was needed for understanding what Ben was trying to express in his play. Being empathetic, according to Adam Smith, a philosopher and economist, is to enter another person's world, as if one is being the same person as the person being empathized (Bloom, 2013). This empathetic position of a qualitative researcher is also proposed by other qualitative researchers (Gilbert, 2001; Rager, 2005). It is argued that without the named quality, a qualitative researcher would not be able to understand the participants in both cognitive and emotional level in an unbiased way (Rager, 2005). Empathy facilitates participants to express simultaneously and in-depth while fostering a positive experience even when what is being expressed is a negative one.

Empathy with Ben allowed me to gather overtly presented information as well as the latent ones. As a result, being an empathetic qualitative researcher serves not only the goal of a research but also participants' needs and well-being. However, this posits a high demand over the researcher to observe, to soothe, and to contain. Further, there are ethical dilemmas abounded in these multiple roles relate to the boundary issues between the researcher and the participants, the confidentiality and autonomy of the participants.

*Boundary issues* In order to understand the personal experiences of the participants who commonly express themselves through discourses during research interviews, researchers would probe with questions or use specific techniques and tools to acquire rich-enough information to reflect the most of the phenomenon under investigation. For example, I asked Ben for his impression of his mother when he played with the molding clay while briefly mentioned his mother. Without questioning directly, I might never know that Ben was aware of his mother being sick even though he was not being informed by the father; only through questioning that he revealed that he was perplexed by his mother's constant tiredness eyes turned yellowish. Utilized my experience as a bereavement counselor, it helped me to spot the subtlety that was not overtly expressed by the participants. These subtleties can be important information for the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

On one occasion, Ben talked about the wig he saw his mother wore after she was sick. Then rather abruptly, he changed the topic and played with the toys cheerfully. I found such hasty change unusual; with further investigation, Ben admitted that he was afraid when he saw those wigs and was still unsettled when he mentioned it during the play. I listened to Ben empathetically which helped to soothe Ben who was obviously distressed. Eventually, Ben could talk about his fear more openly. He even disclosed that he did not want his father to know about his fear because he did not want to upset him. Given the time and a safe space, geographically and psychologically, for Ben to express, Ben was able to process his fear. I also gained information about what Ben was psychologically going through during the time his mother was sick and during bereavement.

This example shows that when a researcher takes up the dual role of a researcher/practitioner (container), the clinical skills and experiences that a prac-

itioner possesses can help participants to process the difficult emotions under a safe and contained environment. It also served the purpose of a research to obtain valuable information from participants to enrich the result of the research.

The setback of what can be a win–win situation for the participant and the research is the risk of crossing the boundary of the participants and hurting their integrity when the researcher/practitioner explored deeply. A therapeutic relationship between a practitioner and the client is distinctively different from an interviewer–interviewee relationship between a researcher and the participant. There are different extents of information a participant would like to disclose under different situations. Some argue that a researcher who explores beyond what is being told is unethical (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). Without my questioning, Ben could have revealed whatever he found comfortable to reveal instead of being susceptible to the pressure of the researcher to disclose more than he wished. When Ben stopped talking about the wig, his defense system was preserving his inner well-being. Ben’s boundary would have been trespassed when I explored against Ben’s will. Ben could have been succumbed to my authority status that he talked about his fear. The unequal power status between Ben and the researcher is related to the autonomy issue to be discussed in the latter paragraphs.

Balancing the pros and cons of the dual role of being a researcher/practitioner, being able to carry out the right extent of inquisition and emotional support is necessary. The challenge is to respect the participant’s boundary while obtaining meaningful data for the understanding of the phenomenon under study. This ideal balance highly depends on the researcher having a clear understanding of one’s role and the obligations behind these roles. A researcher’s main duty is to investigate while containing the emotion of the participants is an ethical obligation to protect the participants from harm during the emotion-laden interview process.

*Confidentiality Issues* While the American Psychological Association has laid out a clear code of conduct for psychologists to know their confidentiality obligation (American Psychological Association, 2010), the obligation to confidentiality for qualitative researchers is less well-defined (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). In general, confidentiality in a qualitative research is about the protection of the participants’ private information (Thompson & Russo, 2012). Some basic practice is keeping the participants anonymous. In research relating to child participants, it is important to balance between the right to privacy of the child participants and their parents’ right to attain information about their children (Huang, O’Connor, Ke & Lee 2016).

In the qualitative study on bereaved children that I conducted in Hong Kong (Lai, 2012), the contextual background information was delineated clearly. All participants were recruited from the Child and Family Bereavement Center in the Tuen Mun Hospital. It was a small organization that serves around 300 new bereavement cases each year, which is possible for readers who are familiar with the setting to identify the anonymous cases. To avoid the risk of breaching the confidentiality of the child participants, some journals state in their guidelines that both pseudonyms and masked recruitment site information should be used (Thompson & Rosso, 2012).

For the bereavement study, I decided to keep the recruitment site information transparent. There was the concern that unclear contextual information would obscure the research result relegating the findings meaningless. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, only relevant background information were asked and reported. Information such as where the deceased parent had treatment and where the child participants lived was not explored to help obscure the identities of the participants.

Besides protecting the real identity of the participants from the public, for minors, confidentiality also applies to protecting their privacy from their parents and/or other professionals. However, in cases where the safety of the child is being compromised, confidentiality cannot be upheld. At the time of the ambiguity situation, the researcher has to decide whether the situation calls for the breach of confidentiality for the protection of the child participant.

Anna, 6-year old, was another participant in the child bereavement study (Lai, 2012). During the last of the five free play sessions, she engaged in a sexual play scene. The “prince” and the “princess” were made naked and Anna poked the private area of the prince. She also made the prince look at the private place of the princess. Later on, Anna stood the princess upside down and poured sand onto the princess’s private place. Anna commented that the princess felt itchy but she enjoyed the touch and the itchiness. Later on, Anna made the princess to sit with legs widely opened and allowed the prince’s leg to settle in the princess’s private place. She then used a miniature gun to poke the princess’s private place. When the researcher commented that it seemed like a cruel game to play between the prince and princess, Anna said it was the princess’s fault.

I found the play theme resembled one from a sexually abused child. Without sufficient time, however, I was not sure whether the sexual play scene was related to an abuse or other less threatening situations. Due to the ambiguity, I was obliged to report the case to Anna’s caseworker in the Child and Family Bereavement Center in order to have professionals to follow up with Anna to protect her from any potential harm. I reported to Anna’s mother about the professional referral and shared with her the concern about the sexual play scene. I have decided that sharing of Anna’s information with another professional and the mother was necessary since there was reasonable suspect that Anna had a child abuse history. The breach of confidentiality was to protect Anna from harm.

From Anna’s case, it shows that being an experienced practitioner, in addition, to be a researcher, had the advantage in safeguarding the well-being of the child participants. I could utilize my clinical work experience to spot the odds when observing the participants during the play sessions. Having rich clinical experiences also enabled me to judge what action would serve the best interest of Anna, that is, to balance the need to preserve Anna’s confidentiality right and to protect her from harm; participant safety always priors to other obligations.

*Autonomy Issues* Both adult and child participants have the right to remain autonomous in a research. One can refuse to answer any question asked during the research, to refuse at any time to engage in any procedure requested and finally to withdraw from participation at any time for any reason without stating the reason (Lai, 2012). These participant rights are stated explicitly in the consent and assent

form. However, in reality, participants sometimes might not exercise their rights due to the inherent power hierarchy between the researcher and the participants.

Some participants in my study had acquainted me as a counselor before the launching of the research. This first impression overshadowed my effort to make clear that I was conducting the research as a graduate student and that the study was independent of the bereavement center; participation was independent of one's right to receive service from the Child and Family Bereavement Center. Nonetheless, participants could still feel the pressure to participate. Such pressure was evidenced in the participants' external role confusion, that is, when they mix up the researcher's role with that of a practitioner (Thompson & Russo, 2012). Perceiving a researcher as a practitioner results with the perceived power imbalance that subjects one to yield to the researcher's requests and demands.

External role confusion adds to the inherited power imbalance issue between a researcher and the researched (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005; Kirk, 2007). Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) argued that interviews in research usually are researcher-directed. The researcher determines what to discuss during an interview and the dialogue between the two parties is always unidirectional. After the researcher gathered information from the participants, the researcher has the final verdict over how to interpret and report the data. These practices in research shape the imbalanced power status between the researcher and the participants. The lopsided power status between a researcher and a child participant is even more prominent; there are inherent power differences between an adult and a child.

Power imbalance contributes to the hindrance of participants' right for autonomy, that is, to withdraw or to participate in research. Take the example of Ben, his father expected his participation has a therapeutic result for Ben even though it was made clear that Ben's participation was aimed for letting the public to understand the inner world of bereaved children. External role confusion was the main reason that Ben's father agreed to participate; the pull was so strong that it yielded him to ignore his juggling between maintaining the financial stability for the family, soothing his children's emotions, and coping with his own grieves. It was fair to say that Ben and his father's participation was not entirely an autonomous decision but was clouded by an expectation resulted from external role confusion. Ben's willingness to talk about his mother's wig in spite that he was quite discomforted when recalling the situation could be the result of the power imbalance between Ben and I, as a child and an adult that resulted with the loss of Ben's autonomy.

The antidote to the inherited power imbalance between a child participant and the researcher was through the research set up. In my experience, I introduced myself to the child participants inside the playroom as a "student", who was doing homework on understanding children who have one parent died. I kindly asked the child participants if I could talk with them so that they could help me with my homework. It was hoped that my introduction could create a sense of equality with the child participants. When I emphasized that the play sessions were time for the child participants to play and talk freely, it also created a friendly atmosphere that empowered the child participants to direct the play session.

## 11.5 Conclusion and Recommendations

There are situations when a qualitative researcher takes up more than one role at a time. Possible roles that overlap with being a researcher are a participant and a practitioner. The multiple roles are the result of the philosophical assumptions underlying qualitative research. For example, the epistemological assumption relates to a qualitative researcher's position; some researchers may opt to participant along with other participants who are being researched to investigate the research question as an insider.

The dilemmas relating to the multiple roles of being a researcher and a participant are how one can position oneself as an authentic participant while not too genuine that would affect the behaviors of other research participants. There is also the question of how to maintain an objective observation of the research participants while oneself is also immersed into the situation that might yield one to lose the clear sight of what is happening in the field.

When a practitioner conducts qualitative research, sometimes, it leads to another dual-role scenario that a researcher plays a container role to support the research participants. When these two roles overlap, there are implications over participants' boundary, confidentiality and autonomy issues. These issues are even more prominent for child participants.

When a researcher has the skills and sensitivity to notice the nuance of emotions beneath the observed behaviors and presented discourses, it allows an in-depth exploration of the phenomenological world of the participants that contribute to the understanding of a phenomenon. Such experienced researcher/practitioner knows how to contain participants who get overwhelmed or disturbed by difficult emotions aroused during the course of research. This provides a humanely encounter with the participants by serving their needs rather than treating them as a means to an end, namely, meeting the goal of the research. On the other hand, a skillful researcher/practitioner can unintentionally invade the boundary of participants when utilizing one's clinical skills to find out more than the participant intends to give.

Confidentiality of the child participants can be violated when their parents expect the researcher/practitioner to unlock the hidden inner world of their children. Some parents believe they have the right to know about their children's information while some are just curious to find out what the child had expressed to the researcher that they did not know. The researcher/practitioner has to be clear on how to balance between protecting the child participants' confidentiality right and protecting them from being harmed physically or psychologically.

The autonomy issue is especially salient when the participants confuse the researcher as a counselor. Such a dual role exaggerates the power imbalance between the researcher and the participants; participants become susceptible to comply with the mighty researcher who directs the research and who can be critical to one's well-being. Participants may confuse that by refusing to participate or to withdraw from the research, the opportunity for therapeutic treatment would be denied.

While a researcher/practitioner can be more capable than a novice researcher to obtain information from the participants, it leads to many ethical issues that one should be aware of and be tactful when handling these dilemmas. Researchers have to be mindful and reflexive when handling the diverse situations in qualitative studies where each has its own unique ethical implications and dilemmas. Researchers should examine the ambiguous situations from diverse perspectives to come up with a well-balanced way to handle these situations.

### Box 11.1 Coping Strategies for Qualitative Researcher

- Awareness is the key! Be reflexive throughout the research process and know one's influence over the research and the research participants. Keeping a research journal would be helpful.
- Keep an ethical practice by prioritizing research participants' needs and rights—sacrifice the depth of information acquisition if needed.
- Take a diverse perspective: as a researcher, a container, a research participant, to balance out everyone's need.

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