



# **Decoding of Bias in Qualitative Research in Disability Cultures: A Review and Methodological Analysis**

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## **Abstract**

*Prejudice and bias are described as an embarrassing phenomenon of research work in social sciences. They concern both quantitative and qualitative research. Authors working in both antagonistic paradigms such as positivist, post-positivist and constructivism, interpretivism generally point to the main patterns showing the aspects of bias. They usually indicate the bias in the process of the research design, among the subjects involved in the study or including the reliability and quality issues of the study. Gender is also mentioned as not neutral and as factor raising bias. In this review and methodological article the concept of bias is narrowed down to discussing these that concern chosen elements of research design process and the three actors involved as researcher, gate-keeper and censor. The gender issue bias, detailed analysis of design process bias, as well as quality of research bias and informant bias are briefly mentioned in the article but are extensive enough to be discussed in a separate paper.*

**Key words:** bias, qualitative methodology, field research, disability cultures.

## **Introduction**

Many social science authors, methodologists write about biases in the research process. The issues of biases are analyzed by Spradley (1979, 2016), Peshkin (1988), Norris (1997), Hammersley (1997), Onwuegbizie & Leech (2007), Pannuci & Wilkins (2010), Flick (2010, 2011), Jemielniak (2012a,b), Glinka & Hensel (2012), Sarniak (2015), Roulston & Shelton (2015) et al. The authors agree that the bias in social research work are an unfortunate phenomena, because they cause consequences throughout the entire research process that is deformed. This article is a review of bias in social research, with a special emphasis on bias in the planning of qualitative research and ethnographic field practice in vulnerable groups, including disability. Particular attention is devoted to bias and prejudices developed in qualitative research conducted in disability cultures. The paper contains analysis of bias in 3 essential contexts: 1. design-related bias, 2. Actors involved in generating bias, in which I will discuss biases on 3 sides: (a) researcher, (b) gate-keeper and (c) censor.

### *Defining Research Bias*

According to Pannuci & Wilkins (2010) prejudice are a systematic errors in social research. They are not a one-time errors in qualitative research. When, in the opinion of the authors may exhibit bias in the research? The authors agree that prejudice may occur at every stage of research, including research design, data collection, literature analysis or review.

In addition, Hammersley & Gomm (1997) point to the prejudices generated during the reporting of research results by the media that act in a biased way. Sarniak (2015) confirms that prejudices can appear in all components of qualitative research, and additionally indicates that they may be derived from improperly constructed tools such as interview matrices, questions alone. They will be the brainchild of the researcher, but also what Sarniak (2015) points out may be from the participants of research - informants.

The next definition of research bias is constructed by Roulston & Shelton (2015), while analyzing the teaching methodology of qualitative research. The authors indicate that while learning about qualitative research methods, students routinely ask questions about research biases, expressing concerns about manipulation or distortion of data. Authors continue that in the basic course of the qualitative methods, the questions and comments of students usually reflect a number of views on "prejudice", including mainly indicated bias as lack of objectivity.

The authors argue that by analogy, the idea that bias is an aspect of subjectivity as feature of naturally subjectivist qualitative research nature and that it is in fact perceived is a universally accepted issue (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Roulston & Shelton (2015) after Peshkin (1988) try to explain the idea of subjectivity linked with the qualitative research bias. They write: " Peshkin (1988) argued that problems with subjectivity arise not so much because of the ways in which one's *"class statuses, and values [interact] with the particulars of one's object of investigation"*(p. 17) but with failures to recognize and account for these, and thoughtfully shape a project in ways that manage subjectivity"(p. 333). The other conclusion of both authors reading Peshkin (1988) is that subjectivity is related to personality of the qualitative researcher and are therefore individual in qualitative research.

### *Dimension of Bias in Qualitative Research*

The authors of Roulston & Shelton (2015) indicate the following credibility-related bias:

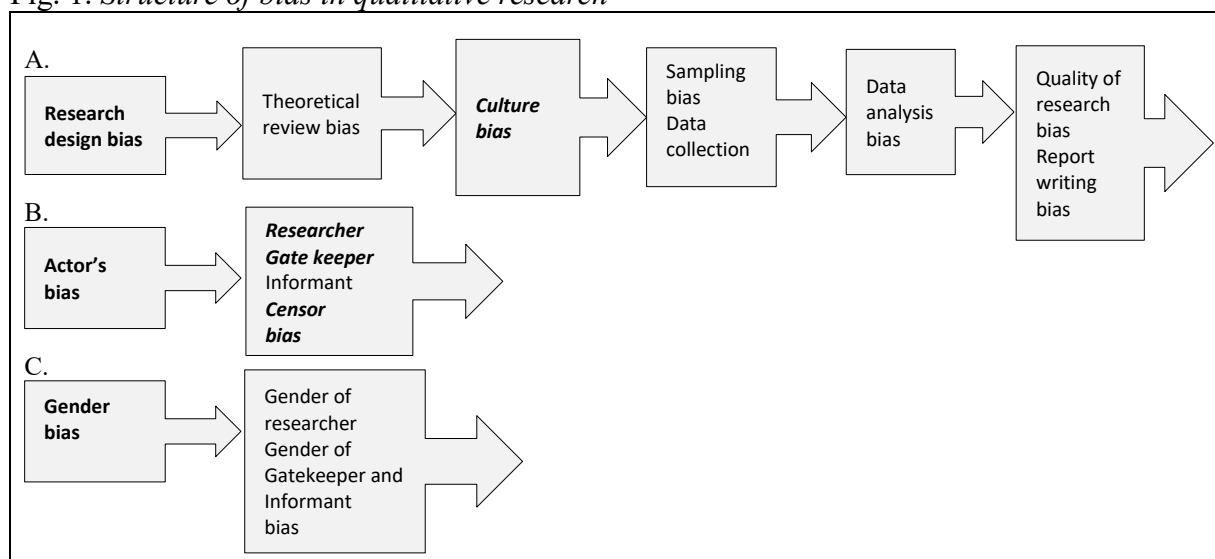
- use of terminology,
- issues of credibility and its' procedures,
- errors,
- prejudices related to confirmation of the assumptions made by the researcher,
- researcher bias (p. 241).

The authors after Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) indicate a different set of prejudices in qualitative research:

- bias in observation,
- bias in the choice of purposive sample,
- researcher bias,
- bias related to confirmation of a priori assumptions (p. 241)

In reviewing the typology and characteristics, I constructed a diagram in which concluded the key areas of the manifestation of bias. In the below parts of the article I analyze the key themes of prejudice indicated in Fig. 1. and related to (A) research design bias and (B) actors' bias. Highlighted are issues discussed in this article. It is easy to notice how extensive problems bias may concern.

Fig. 1. *Structure of bias in qualitative research*



Source: own concept Beata Borowska-Beszta

Not all the elements of the diagram are discussed in this article, giving the framework of the text. Continuing the initial typology of possible bias in qualitative research, I would like to point out three main elements: (A) prejudice about the design of a research project from which I will discuss only culture bias and (B) biases on the actors' side on which I focus more and discuss bias on 3 subjects: (1) researcher, (2) gate keeper, (3) censor. Informant bias will be analyzed in another paper.

While the role of researcher and informant is often pointed out by researchers and qualitative methodologists, among others. Sarniak (2015), Jemielniak (2012 a, b) have not mentioned however that also third actor as (3) the gate keeper, that determines the conditions of access to the site, can also be a source of prejudice in researching disability cultures. A censor has a similar role related to power, however with more hidden influences.

In addition, complex situations during field work and the possibility of prejudice appear when gate keeper is also a member of a research team that collects data and / or in the field acts as an authority, the role of an important leader in the studied culture of disability. These problems will also be clarified.

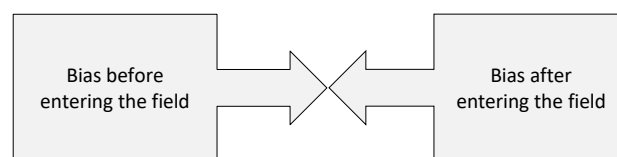
#### *A. Research Design Bias*

What do bias mean in the design phase of qualitative research? In the case of research design, prejudices will be present at each phase, including (1) preliminary literature reviews, (2) selection of purposive sample and data gathering with prejudices, (3) negotiations and rapport building in the research area, as well as (4) data analysis and report writing or essay after research, in the case of ethnographic studies. Of course, qualitative research is based on a circle model, or a funnel so prejudices will be typed into a specific circular model for collecting and analyzing qualitative data and recurrence in the field.

#### *Time as Source of Bias*

Glinka & Hensel (2012) have pointed to a slightly differentiated (than aforementioned) set of dilemmas and errors in qualitative research, that in my view may simultaneously imply partiality of the whole research process in relation to bias. The authors divided prejudices on the possible time of occurrence (1) before entering the field and on the phases of preparation of the research assumptions of the project and (2) after entering the research area.

Fig. 2. *Bias before and after entering the field*



Source: Beata Borowska-Beszta

The authors point to the following two moments of possible dilemmas before entering the field and concerning the negotiation and construction of rapport that I perceive as sources of bias:

- Formulation of negotiations in the research field in a way that changes the behavior of informants (p. 46)
- Acquiring entry into a given cultural scene at all costs when the participants of the place expressly reluctant to refer to the researcher and research proposal (p.47)

Glinka & Hensel (2012) point to the following sources of problems and dilemmas after entering field research that I also perceive as possible sources of research bias:

- *Shortcuts.* Walking by the members of the research team for short cuts and "extrapolation of observed trends" (p. 47). My former fieldwork suggests also that this bias source can be especially active when the researcher has little time to collect data or that there is poor co-operation in the research team, between data collectors.
- *Prematurely formulating conclusions* (p. 48), that is a mistake earlier pointed out by Spradley cultural anthropologists (1979, 2016).
- *Excessive concentration on the so-called "tastes"* and trivial and secondary (or random) things for a given area. Furthermore, extracting the content observed or discussed from the context (p. 48). Analogously in my opinion to the "chilly topic" of e.g. local, sensational newspapers.
- *Time and description of research field* (page 48). The authors of Glinka and Hensel (2012) do not, however, specify the sources of bias more broadly. I will add that, in my opinion, this topic should be understood as e.g. selective descriptions of time and place, research realities in teams. By skipping what actually happened in e.g. research teams that is related to the course of cooperation in the field, turbulence in cooperation, e.g. related to the gender and power. In addition, conflicts arise and their sources and/ or of what happened at the interface between the cultures of the research team and the cultural scene that is the subject of research.
- *Culture shock*, as a source of bias pointed out by Glinka & Hensel (2012) as dilemma, related to the sudden need to associate with different communities and communities (p. 49). The phenomenon of cultural shock in the study of disability I described in the article Borowska-Beszta (2008) as *Anathema of Culture Shock in Special Adult Education*.

In my opinion, bias while researching disability cultures will occur in situations of too early attempts to conclude and write the conclusions of field researchers while they are in the real phase of shock and not adapt to the new cultural scenes of disabilities. At the time of the shock, writing field notes is essential, but making key conclusions can act as a precautionary factor of bias.

- *Strong entry into the role.* In addition, Glinka & Hensel (2012) also point to the sources of dilemmas as a strong entry into the role of an attempt to modify the research field (p. 49), that in turn I perceive as a source of bias in disability cultures research (Borowska-Beszta 2013a,b). The phenomenon is especially related to researchers who are activists of disabled people and want to modify the area, i.e. of apriori, before gathering data in the form of transcripts of interviews, field notes, photographs etc.
- *Empathy.* An additional problem of bias in my opinion, identified as a dilemma in research by Glinka & Hensel (2012), may be the overwhelming empathy of the researcher. Phenomenon I identify as a metaphorical *drowning* in the studied culture. The authors Glinka & Hensel (2012) write, that while overwhelming empathy and its effects, as a problem is located on the part of the researcher, who begins to live the life of the group, losing sight of his own goal of the project (p. 49). I add that this source of prejudice is often observed among younger seminar students performing qualitative projects. Sometimes, from beginner researchers, at any stage of the research, they become rather the activists and advocates of cultural scenes, that results in the process

of data collection as losing sight of their own research objectives.

### *Culture Bias*

Sarniak (2015) distinguishes interesting cultural prejudices, grounded on the one hand in limiting the understanding of cultural diversity and at the same time ethnocentrism and the lack of sensitivity to cultural relativism and limits of knowledge, and I will add - about the culture of disability. When thinking about the environment of people with disabilities as a culture (Brown, 2002, Barnes & Mercer, 2001, Borowska-Beszta, 2012, 2013a), as pointed out by Sarniak (2015), a qualitative researcher may in my opinion make many mistakes assuming that disability cultures, people with needs related to dysfunctions in sensory-neurological, physical, emotional-behavioral or intellectual areas are identical because the researcher knows one culture already, e.g. from past own research or other kind of professional participation.

It would be a mistake for the researcher to assume that the different cultures of disability are in fact subject to the same processes, changes or identical goals. It is important to note cultural relativism in disability cultures as well that other disability-related processes and concepts are shared by adults with physical disabilities having regular intellectual potential and other by adults intellectual disability (Borowska-Beszta 2014) in different levels according to DSM-5 from mild (I.Q 70-55), moderate (I.Q 55-40) severe (I.Q 40-25), profound (I.Q 25<).

That is why I also distinguish the unique category of bias in the social qualitative research of vulnerable groups, including the cultures of disability, observed by me on the sides of almost all actors of the research processes. It concerns the investigator, gate keeper, censor, sponsor, research participants. The category is called the *clinical label bias*. This type of prejudice concerns the strong and priority action of the diagnostic label, that at specific stages of development and life were given to individual research participants in psychological-pedagogical clinics or by doctors' offices. In field research practice since 1999 I met openly with such suggestions of gate keepers and key informants: *he/she has a serious level of intellectual disability, what will he/she tell you?* - When I collected data and conducted interviews in a day care center for adults with intellectual disabilities.

I would like to add that conducting simple interviews with people with severe (I.Q 40-25) intellectual disabilities is possible, but in these cases, the gate keepers' prejudice were related to the assumptions of extensive knowledge, that he believed I should have to gather from my informants with disabilities.

In this context, the category of cultural bias, where the source is culture, as indicated by Sarniak (2015) and in addition to cultural bias - the *clinical label bias* I point to, has a broader meaning. It appears in full dimension in the disability area when researchers *will prefer of apriori the 'categorical' or group identity of the participants, having as nucleus an analysis of medically and psychologically diagnosed disability*. In my opinion, a clinical label (although essential in any supportive activities offered by specialists or educators) poses a risk of prejudice to (1) a qualitative researcher, (2) gate-keeper, (3) censor and (4) informants from the cultural scene themselves.

In addition, it must be born in mind that the cultures of disability vary in the kind and quality of experiences and external control, as discussed by Douglas (2007) and social oppression, illustrated by Shakespeare (1994), Barnes & Mercer (2001) et al. Other barriers and oppression experiences and openly describe the cultures of people with physical disabilities, other cultures with intellectual disabilities. In addition, disability cultures differ in values, norms, language and code, and taboos. Members of the terminally ill, or cancer and



members of cultures with intellectual or mental illnesses, require multidisciplinary researchers prepared for research.

I go with analysis to the thread of bias generated by the actors of entire qualitative research. I want to point out that Sarniak (2015) identified a total number of 9 types of prejudices in qualitative research and divided them into 2 general types. These are the types of bias associated with the phases of the research process and the bias of the researcher. The author points out 5 types of prejudice on the part of the researcher as (1) confirmation of assumptions, (2) prejudice on culture, (3) prejudice on the order of questions, (4) prejudice on key questions and vocabulary used by the researcher. Sarniak (2015) distinguished also 4 types of bias on the informant's side as (1) prejudice related to acquiescence, (2) prejudice related to social acceptance, (3) bias associated with habituation, (4) prejudice generated by the sponsor. In addition, I distinguish the other optional sources on the continuum of subjects that make prejudice as mentioned before researcher and informant - the (3) gate keeper and the (4) censor.

## **B. Actors' Bias**

In terms of biases on the actors of the research process, I indicate three important actors in the process of bias development: (1) researcher, (2) gate keeper and (3) censor.

### *Researcher's Bias*

According to Roulston & Shelton (2015), the researcher's bias may be individual. The authors write that prejudice developed in qualitative research can be understood as result of a unique and characteristic trait for a particular researcher (p.6). The authors continue that analysis of the bias generated by researcher researching disability cultures on a certain general plan, indicate the issues, especially related to the personal qualification of the researcher to carry out the research and his/her research experience in the field. This was confirmed earlier anthropologist Spradley (1979, 2016) thesis that qualitative research is learned during the field research practice. It turns out that different results can be achieved by researchers who know, for example, the ways of communicating with people with severe or even profound intellectual disabilities or multiple sensory dysfunctions than those without specific skills. Not difficult to notice, that lack of certain skills of performing data collection in vulnerable disability cultures can be a source of bias in perceiving the communication potential of participants of the cultural scene - persons with disabilities.

While researching various disability cultures some solution would be it would likely to focus on individual verbal and nonverbal signals and to decode individual messages that are sometimes rarely unique. Such attitude can prevent bias developed by researcher related to lack of communication competences (Borowska-Beszta 2005). In addition, what omitted by Norris (2007), writing about the field of research among people with various psychiatric disorders, I also generally would narrow down to the lack of researcher's special preparation and response during and to the psychiatric patients being interviewed. Data collection may be subject to prejudice developed due to lack of skills, strength of the researcher for particular informant's expression or behavior as sudden changes, directives, also change of emotions and moods of informant with psychiatric disorders (Borowska-Beszta 2013b, 2014b).

As I recall, Sarniak (2015) distinguished 5 types of prejudice on the part of the researcher: (1) prejudice regarding the willingness to confirm a prior hypothesis; (2) prejudice concerning cultures; (3) prejudice on the order of questions and vocabulary used by the researcher, (5) prejudice as a halo effect. From this hierarchy I find it noteworthy that some of the prejudices have their origins in errors at the level of the epistemological program and the paradigm of transferring habits and procedures from positivist research to constructivism,

what I call *paradigm chaos* on the part of the researcher (Borowska-Beszta, 2016).

### *Confirmation Bias*

In the cultural scene and field research Sarniak (2015) defined this prejudice as follows. "One of the longest known and widespread forms of bias and prejudice is when a researcher formulates a hypothesis or conviction on a topic and then uses informants to confirm that belief, opinion, or hypothesis"(Sarniak, 2015). It cannot be nor noticed that such bias often involve poor knowledge of the ethos and theoretical assumption of qualitative research or the strong quantitative background of the researcher as well as the ethics of research in general.

From the perspective of ontology research, the researcher will make this mistake as a preconception about confirming initial hypothesis when, for example, has grounded, incomplete or no knowledge of one culture of disability, he will hypothesize about another. For example, a researcher who is familiar with the realities of linguistic environments and cultures of intellectual disability, functioning below 70 pts. of IQ will assume and attempt to confirm own bias as the same level of intellectual functioning in the cultures of people with physical dysfunction. This in practice of the research translate into simplicity of tools such as interviews, simple, uncomplicated or even avoidance of narrative techniques in groups of people without intellectual disabilities but with visible serious physical dysfunction. Researchers can also construct bias as exert pressure in the field for confirmation of the hypothesis of identical intellectual functioning (such as intellectually disabled), groups of people with visible disabilities in the physical sphere.

In my view, from a research epistemology perspective, a researcher of disability and vulnerable groups can commit bias in the following three cases: first when he/she was previously firmly established in quantitative methodology and research (Borowska-Beszta, 2016). Second, when he/she experiences *research paradigm chaos* and is unaware of it. This means that researcher moves the quantitative research model without deep reflection into qualitative research model and practice. Third, when researcher conducts the mixed methods research without their proper methodological requirements of correctness. This particular research situation as a study linking two separate epistemologies needs much attention and clarity according to Creswell (2009).

### *Research Tools Bias*

The other possible sources of bias, as pointed out by Sarniak (2015), concern data collection and tools such as interview forms. The author calls them directly the *question - order bias* and *vocabulary bias*. The author believes that the phenomenon of errors and prejudices in the construction of questions consists in the fact that the erroneous order of questions causes that "one question may affect the answers to the next questions, creating prejudices in the order of the same queries. The facilitators will be prepared for the words and ideas presented in the questions, which in turn will affect their thoughts, feelings and attitude towards further questions "(Sarniak, 2015). In addition, the author points out the prejudices generated by leading questions and the use of a given vocabulary by the researcher. Sarniak (2015) deals with the type of verbal manipulation used by the investigator to confirm a prior hypothesis. Here in my opinion one can notice a double error:

- on the level of paradigmatic chaos and
- error in the construction of the tool in the qualitative research, i.e., the interview forms.

The prejudices that arise at the level of the vocabulary used, according to Sarniak



(2015) are associated with "inserting own words and sometimes ready ideas, concepts in the mouth of informants." The author continues that even when the researcher's key question and vocabulary are not saturated with prejudices in themselves, they may lead to bias and bias as results.

Sarniak (2015) believes that researchers make these mistakes because "they want to confirm their previous hypotheses, build relationships in the field, or overestimate their own understanding of informants" (Sarniak, 2015).

In the case of data collection in socially vulnerable groups, disability cultures, this kind of prejudice may in my opinion have at least three reasons. First, when the researcher is in a hurry to collecting the data and their own concepts and linguistic concepts will put in the mouth of the interlocutors. Secondly, when the researcher does not know the specific and individual language codes of the studied culture of disability, individual persons with intellectual dysfunction and thus may deform future research results. Thirdly, deformations due to poorly prepared research tool will be stronger when the researcher does not respond to the specificity of verbal concepts and expressions used in disability cultures during data collection in the field, but he/she rigidly follows the pattern of the previously prepared tool of the data collection.

#### *Preferences Bias*

In addition, Sarniak (2015) has distinguished an interesting source of bias, which is also of particular importance in the study of disability cultures. The author called it the halo-effect bias, which is referred to the selection process of the purposive sample. Sarniak (2015) writes that "moderators and respondents have a tendency to see something or someone in a certain light because of a single, positive attribute. There are several cognitive reasons for halo effect, so researchers must work to address it on many fronts. For example, and the moderator can make assumptions about a respondent because of one positive answer they've provided. Moderators should reflect on their assumptions about each respondent "(Sarniak, 2015).

#### *Automatic Translation Bias*

Except to the above mentioned by Sarniak (2015), in 2005 I indicated a kind of bias during field research in disability cultures while the data collection phase, that may be generated by the researcher (Borowska-Beszta, 2005). Bias occur when the researcher unreflectively and almost automatically translates the linguistic codes of the informer, e.g. with a moderate or severe intellectual disability into the researcher's own code and terms, deforming the essence of the transmitted content (Borowska-Beszta, 2005).

#### *Ontology of Disability Bias*

The following prejudices have been decoded successively in own publications and research reports (Borowska-Beszta, 2001, 2005, 2013a, b, 2016). They concern problems of ontology of disability issue as prior theoretical knowledge of the researcher on disability concepts and theories. It includes theoretical models of disability itself, perception of themselves by people with disabilities, prejudices related to social roles such as fathers, mothers with disabilities in the mainstream or with the sexuality of people with intellectual disabilities in Poland. I would indicate as follow:

- *Medical or social model of disability bias.* This means that the researcher entering the field has a ready hypothesis about the medical concept of disability and a priori expresses the belief that a disabled person is a sick person who can never accept a disability. There may be situations when the researcher enters the field with the

hypothesis that the disabled person is merely a subject of cultural and social oppression, from which he will never be freed, because historical data point to the oppression that has been taking place for centuries.

- *Self-perception of persons with disabilities bias.* This type of research bias is directly proportional to the lack of knowledge of disability backgrounds and cultures. A qualitative researcher enters the field with the hypothesis that a person with a disability sees himself as a sick, lifelong suffering, with a wheelchair, unable to live independently a happy.
- *Sexuality of adults with intellectual disabilities bias.* Publications in Poland on the sexuality of adults with intellectual disabilities have been taking place for years from Nowak-Lipińska (2003), Kijak (2013, 2014, and 2017). I also confirm that also qualitative research works, conducted under my supervision in years 2003-2017 with generative families members of adults with intellectual disabilities will admit parental (in fact *gate-keeper's*) bias that their son, daughter with intellectual disability (mild or moderate) is asexual, and there is no need for him/her to establish intimate ties.

### *Gate-keeper's Bias*

#### *Power Bias*

Gate-keeper is a participant in the cultural scene and also key informant. The prejudices that may be addressed by him in disability culture research may relate to researcher personally and to field bias. Both types of bias can appear separately and are associated with power. I believe that the gate-keeper has the power he/she can sometimes unknowingly abuse, while recruiting purposive sample and regulating researcher's access in the field. Power and use as regulation of access to certain data is darkening and damaging the image of the studied culture can also lead to bias.

In addition, I observed such sources of bias related to power after my own 3 field projects in foreign countries (2 individual and 1 team research): in France 2012 (shadowing and micro-ethnographic research in French inclusive schools in Lyon), Japan 2016 (visual ethnographic studies in special education schools and support facilities in Fukuoka), team research in Scotland 2017 (ethnographic studies of disability and care in opinions of Polish migrants, caretakers of disabled people in their homes in Edinburgh & Livingston).

Some of the initial conclusion are that gate – keepers can be aware and may consciously reinforce own power over a single researcher in the field or over the team. May cut off access as I observed in research in Japan, or consciously or less consciously manipulate the research team members through sharing contradictory information according to upcoming phases or parts of further research or retreat from different situations, causing additional voltages in the research team. I noticed such phenomena in team research in Scotland as well as in individual project in France.

The other issue I only briefly mention is the role of gate-keeper's gender. What I noticed after recent fieldwork in Scotland 2017 that gender of gate-keeper combined especially with his power (understood as various accesses in studied culture he could offer) are also factors of subtle tensions or even deeper conflicts among the field research team of opposite gender. Sometimes the team undergo turbulences according to changes of roles in the team while data collection what influences the data collection either. The gate-keeper can be informally appointed as a new leader of the research team, according to his power in the field, perceived goals or other form of attractiveness. It happens that the research team is totally deconstructed after leaving the field and having poor or lost abilities to work again on former

basis. On the other hand such changes, experiences and learned facts are not bad for better understanding of the real roles of power and gender of potential gate-keepers.

The other problems as the ethical side of gate-keeper's work are discussed by Duncombe & Jessop (2002). The authors write that the main task of the gate keeper is establishing relations in the human plane that will then give the data for analysis in the scientific perspective.

The gate-keeper in disability cultures may also exhibit prejudice regarding the *clinical disability label*. This kind of bias is related to the erroneous regulation of access and gate keeper's conviction that a given participant is not necessarily capable of "telling something" valuable to a researcher (Borowska-Beszta, 2013a, b). In the first place, therefore, he/she wrongly specifies that the researcher expects an eloquent informant with higher level of verbal expression assuming that one does not meet expectations. In addition, gate-keeper will assume with bias that the researcher is a total outsider in the field of disability studies and cannot communicate with people with intellectual disabilities or mental illnesses, especially those who make it difficult for regular participants in cultural scene being studies. Above depicted a few examples of biased attitudes of gate-keepers lead to prejudices related to the underestimation of communication competences of informants with disabilities and the researchers as well.

#### *Censor Bias*

##### *Shadow Figure Bias*

Sarniak (2015) writes also about the role of bias in collecting data by calling them biased by the sponsor. Sarniak (2015) pointed out that: "when informants know - or suspect who is the sponsors of research, their feelings and opinions about the sponsor may discourage their responses. The views of the sponsoring organization's mission or its core beliefs may also affect the answer to all questions related to the source of funding, as he writes" (Sarniak, 2015). However, I do not always think that the researchers or cultural scenes are always controlled or have direct contact with the sponsors of the cultural scenes. In my opinion the research findings and reports are read by the head of institutions and cultural leaders, such as the director of the care centers for persons with disabilities of those who are dependent. Therefore the foundation manager who allowed them to enter the area and who are not sponsors of the research will rather serve as censors of the research and cultural scene being studied. That's why, I think that researchers may come across in the cultures of disability facing the phenomena of real or symbolic actors of creating additional bias from behind the scenes called censors.

#### **Minimizing Bias**

Roulston & Shelton (2015) have identified 3 strategies to minimize bias that can be used in the teaching of qualitative methodologies to help reconcile prejudices:

- analyze the relationship between philosophical assumptions and method,
- exploring research roles and
- analysis of the researcher's work

The authors continue after Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007) that the search for representativeness will of course (p. 241) protect against prejudices in the selection of purposive sample of objective and observational biases.

In my opinion, useful in the field of research on disability cultures would be:

- transparency and reflection throughout the research process from design phases to field data collection, analysis and report writing
- openness to specific and non-standard ways of communicating on the ground and knowledge of the specific mental and physical performance of the participants
- triangulation of researchers and data sources
- vigilance on manifestations of *paradigm chaos* of the members of the research team (Borowska-Beszta, 2016)
- use of bracketing techniques and phenomenological approach during field work
- acceptance of *emic perspective* in the field of research
- frequent and as needed recurrences in the field after the data collection

Other interesting ways of minimizing bias and prejudice indicates Norris (1997). The author writes that "while there may not be a paradigmatic solution to error and bias, there are certainly things that can be done. It is not difficult to label a whole range of potential sources of bias in research. For example:

- *the reactivity of researchers with the providers and consumers of information;*
- *selection biases including the sampling of times, places, events, people, issues, questions and the balance between the dramatic and the mundane;*
- *the availability and reliability of various sources or kinds of data, either in general or their availability to different researchers;*
- *the affinity of researchers with certain kinds of people, designs, data, theories, concepts, explanations; the ability of researchers, including their knowledge, skills, methodological strengths, capacity for imagination;*
- *the value preferences and commitments of researchers and their knowledge or otherwise of these;*
- *the personal qualities of researchers, including, for example, their capacity for concentration and patience; tolerance of boredom and ambiguity; their need for resolution, conclusion and certainty (p. 174)*

## Conclusion

These factors are part of the possible sources of prejudices that I have examined in the article. Attention may also be paid to the problem of bias in contexts of improving quality of the field research in the context of researching vulnerable groups and disability cultures. There is some final reflection that bias in field research in disability cultures are neither avoidable nor completely eliminated. They are a complex of factors involved in the research process and involve both the design of the research, the personality and the actions of the actors in the research process and consequently the quality of the research. There are individual configurations of problems related to bias that the researcher or research team has to solve in the field or, unfortunately, what they consciously or unconsciously construct in the field.

However, efforts can be made to devise a research process to minimize the deforming effects of various bias, as long as the researcher or team of researchers will reflect reflexively on their own in the field and the actors involved in field research (gate-keepers, sponsors, informants) and openly cooperate for purposes of bias minimization.

In addition, the minimizing bias is more successful when researchers are particularly sensitive to being alert to all the factors that deform the results of the inquiry and to the

sometimes subtle manifestations of actions initiated by censors and sponsors. That requires however further, broader scientific research and methodological analysis.

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