

MARSHALL, J. 2001. "SELF-REFLECTIVE INQUIRY PRACTICES" IN P REASON AND H BRADBURY (EDS), HANDBOOK OF ACTION RESEARCH, LONDON: SAGE, PP 433-439

## CHAPTER 44 SELF-REFLECTIVE INQUIRY PRACTICES

Judi Marshall

This chapter seeks to show something of my version of the principles and practices of self-reflective inquiry. I firstly outline some of the attentional disciplines I use and aspire to. I then illustrate inquiry in action, drawing on my story of attending the American Academy of Management Annual Meeting in Chicago in August 1999. Through this material I explore themes of research as political process and as life process, and advocate paying attention to inquiry intentions.

I see having some version of self-reflective practice as a necessary core for all inquiry. For example, anyone engaging in collaborative research needs robust, self-questioning, disciplines as their base.

### **Inquiry requires attentional disciplines**

In this section I outline some of my disciplines of inquiry. These are open frames rather than rigid behaviour patterns. I seek to pursue them with soft rigour, determined and persistent, but not obsessive. Part of inquiring is making judgements about when to be focused and directed and when to be open, receptive. I have learnt about these practices from my own experience and deliberate development, and from working with postgraduate researchers on our programmes at the University of Bath (Marshall and Reason, 1998). Each person's inquiry approach will be distinctive, disciplines cannot be cloned or copied. Rather, each person must identify and craft their own qualities and practices. The questioning then becomes how to do them well, how to conduct them with quality and rigour appropriate to their forms, and how to articulate the inquiry processes and sense-making richly and non-defensively.

All of the practices I discuss here can be used generatively, appropriately, or degeneratively, inappropriately. There are no objective standards for making such judgements and as the inquirer I cannot be fixed in my evaluation. I work with this questioning, seeking to develop my craft of inquiry and my abilities to notice, reflect on and adjust my approach. In this chapter I am not claiming that I always inquire well and skillfully.

Below I offer one major and two ancillary, parallel, framings which emphasise the dynamic processes of inquiry.

### Inquiring through inner and outer arcs of attention

A key notion for me is that of engaging in inner and outer arcs of attention and of moving between these. In my own development as an inquirer I have especially paid attention to the inner arcs, seeking to notice myself perceiving, making meaning, framing issues, choosing how to speak out and so on. I pay attention for assumptions I use, repetitions, patterns, themes, dilemmas, key phrases which are charged with energy or that seem to hold multiple meanings to be puzzled about, and more. I work with a multi-dimensional frame of knowing; acknowledging and connecting between intellectual, emotional, practical, intuitive, sensory, imaginal and more knowings.

Scanning, for breadth, and tracking, for sustained curiosity, are words I currently favour to describe how I work with inner arcs of attention; I value the terms' multiple associations. Note-taking is essential to this stream of inquiring. I use notebooks and different coloured pens or pencils for over-writing previous notes, alongside computer based writing. When the scanning and tracking processes are working well, this is not "just" a stream of consciousness in the moment, unbounded. At its best, it is a discipline, a craft, a developed process. Then I can show the workings of my sense-making processes, up to a point. Awareness has its limits, as noted below. Also, taken out of real time, some (most?) of the richness of perception and breadth of associative thinking is lost. But reporting it all would not only be impossible but also too self-absorbed. And as I select from the noted and remembered array, there is another process of self-talk. How much of that should I report?

I note how presumptuous it is to say that I do all this, as if I am claiming self-awareness when this is a highly contentious notion. Any self-noticing is framed and conducted by selves beyond the screen of my conscious appreciation. (The conscious self sees an unconsciously edited version of the world, guided by purposes. "Of course, the whole of the mind could not be reported in a part of the mind." Bateson, 1973: 408.)

And simultaneously I note that reporting this level of detail about what I think/feel/sense also seems so trite. Doesn't everyone do this self-tracking and deconstruct their own potential narratives with a critical eye as they go along? (If people do, perhaps they devalue such practices. Do they respect, hone and extend them as their craft?) These may be the fine details of self-reflective practice, but they seem strange out there on the page, and they are more ephemeral and to be worked with in the moment than any descriptions may imply.

Also, reporting this internal activity makes some people concerned that I am a worrier or self-punishing, especially when I then ponder the integrity or good form of my actions. But mostly my inquiring is a compelling aspect of being inquisitive, curious and open to testing self and others; it is fun, engaging, interesting and playful, and opens me to opportunities for learning.

However, I do also need to know when to leave aspects of my life “unprocessed” in these terms.

Pursuing outer arcs of attention involves reaching outside myself in some way. (The inner attentions are operating simultaneously.) This might mean actively questioning, raising issues with others, or seeking ways to test out my developing ideas. Or it might mean finding ways to turn issues, dilemmas or potential worries into cycles of (explicit - to me) inquiry in action, perhaps seeking to influence or change something and learning about situation, self, issues and others in the process.

Sometimes the outer arcs of attention are deliberately about engaging with other people, often to inquire with them collaboratively. I might tailor forms of collaborative researching to the situation and my purposes. But some of my testing is not seeking joint exploration or affirmation from others. Sometimes this would be inappropriate or unlikely, for example if my approach comes from a more critical theory or political frame. Then I might need to monitor and critique my sense-making without direct confirmation; being disconfirmed by others may be significant in its way. So my researching is not necessarily consultative.

Notetaking takes on a slightly different form when looking outwards. The self-tracking continues, but another, more emphasised, attention runs alongside, aiming to do sufficient justice to what is going on around me, and/or what is being said by others. I seek to still myself to allow me to be more receptive. I note what is happening, interested in pattern, form as well as content. I take verbatim notes of what people say, not every word but keeping track as best I can, noting what seem to be key phrases or ways of formulating meanings, minimising translating into my languages and frames. I know, however, that my perception is selective, and sometimes my abilities to process “incoming” material lose engagement, becoming mechanical only, or break down altogether. There may be relevant reasons for this, which become material to be worked with in their own right. So my internal self-tracking remains an important, dual attention.

As I work I hold in mind the notion of thick description (Geertz, 1973) as my aim. I seek some qualitative robustness of material to work with and as a base for tentative interpretations. And I am strategic, targeting my questing and questioning to engage with selective depth or selective difference as I think appropriate. What outer arcs of attention are appropriate and possible is topic and context related. Finding appropriate contexts, to offer discord as well as accord, is part of the craft of inquiry.

And so I juggle and balance and move emphasis between inner and outer arcs of attention, seeking an alive interplay, a generative, appropriate combination and dynamic.

### Engaging in cycles of action and reflection

The second parallel frame that I use to image inquiry is that of cycling between action and reflection. At its clearest this may mean planning to engage in some action or exploration, becoming immersed in the chosen territory in an appropriate way, noting as I go along, and then taking a step back and reflecting on what I have experienced and done, later moving on again to plan another cycle of engagement. This is a classic action research format, with the potential to be tailored to inquirer, topic and situation in a multitude of ways. The rhythm and discipline of moving back and forth between action and reflection in some way or another seems to generate its own momentum, and so to enhance different forms of attention and of behavioural experimentation (Marshall and Reason, 1998; see also Chapter 42). It can become a way of life, a form of inquiring (professional) practice.

There is simplicity in this notion, and many choices that can be made. And in my experience the dynamics are seldom quite so clear-cut as the above description implies. The inner and outer tracking of attentions continues throughout, the emphasis and combination shifting as I go. As I inquire I am partly making choices about when to move from action into reflection or vice versa, and what combination of outer and inner attentions to hold. And I sometimes find myself doing these things without apparent conscious intent, and notice how my inquiring is unfolding, as if of its own volition, and then have the choice to challenge or consent to this. Tracking these movements between states and forms of activity is a key aspect of self-reflective inquiring. Rowan (1981; see also Chapter 10) describes the researcher as moving repeatedly round a project cycle of being, project planning, encounter and communication, involving phases of thinking and making sense, moving inwards and outwards. His description is rich for its attempt to articulate how any state the researcher occupies eventually becomes insufficient or is transcended in some way and how moving on therefore seems appropriate. As I notice or shape them, I might judge these movements, these shifts of consciousness, appropriate, generative, or inappropriate, degenerative. (And in retrospect, I might interpret them differently.) Is moving from reflection into trying something out, for example, a valuable testing or a flight from issues which I find too challenging? Is dwelling in reflection an avoidance of difference or of having my frames challenged? No rules of practice can resolve these dilemmas, they must be engaged in the process of inquiring.

I find the notion of cycles, of moving between, of checking back and forth helpful. If I am static or repetitive within a frame in my process this requires attention.

### Being both active and receptive

As I reflect on my practice, I realise how informed I have been - intellectually, but also fundamentally in my behaviour and being - by notions of agency and communion I drew from David Bakan many years ago. I was researching women in management and wanted to depict

styles and choices of human functioning without labelling them narrowly 'masculine' or 'feminine' (Bakan, 1966; Marshall, 1984; Marshall, 1989). I offer these notions briefly as a third parallel frame on the dynamics of living inquiry.

Agency and communion are potentially complementary coping strategies for dealing with the uncertainties and anxieties of being alive. Agency is an expression of independence through self-protection, self-assertion and control of the environment. Communion is the sense of being 'at one' with other organisms or the context, its basis is integration, interdependence, receptivity. I take from this frame another combining of approaches. I will push, pursue, shape, persist in a path of inquiry. And I will treat what happens and how I find myself acting and speaking as potentially meaningful, as having the possibility of 'in-forming' me, that is of giving shape to my way of seeing, not simply imparting information in frameworks already established. These complementary tendencies are always in dialogue, sometimes in tension, sometimes combining with fluidity. At my best, then, I am both directed and open/receptive, testing this dynamic combination in the moment.

## **Enacting inquiry**

In the following sections I turn to key aspects of enacting inquiry. To show some glimpses of myself as a self-reflective practitioner I briefly report a recent time of intense inquiring, which was rich with ideas about research. I use a thematic approach to contain the narrative.

### Inquiring with intent

Inquiry involves intent, a sense of purpose. This may be held tacitly. There may be multiple intents, in accord or discord. Often intents unfold, shift, clarify or become more complex. Working with this aspect of inquiry is vital to self-reflective practice.

Often these days I state overtly that an issue, event, theme, dilemma or whatever is an inquiry for me. This is a deliberate means to keep my questioning open and to help it develop. Doing so heightens my attention inwards and sharpens my external testing of developing ideas and of my own practice in action. It gives me a frame for noting my ever-provisional sense-making as I proceed, articulating it - to self and others - as part of the process of inquiry. I use such practices to guide and support me in living my life as inquiry as well as to study 'topics' as an academic researcher (Marshall, 1999).

The illustration of inquiring I shall use in the rest of this chapter shows some of these aspects of multiple, unfolding intents. I shall therefore introduce it here.

In August 1999 I attended the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Management, held in Chicago. This became an important experience of inquiring for me, with several dimensions. Firstly, I went to Chicago because I was invited to join people I respect in a potentially exciting session (Symposium 218: Feminism/Otherness: Celebrating Journeys of Change and Discovery on the 50th Anniversary of Beauvoir's The Second Sex and the Verge of a New Millennium).

When I accepted this invitation in December 1998, I was explicit to myself and others that I would also use the event as a gently important inquiry in my life, because it offered a valuable opportunity and would force me into some needed decision-making. There is a research study which I have been contemplating for some time but have not yet initiated. I wanted to think it through in the context of what other researchers are doing, and decide whether to proceed. This testing was my foreground inquiry intention.

The research interest is what “generativity” (loosely defined and subject to critical scrutiny as a concept) means in mid-life (and a little later), and how this affects current women and men managers and professionals, their notions of career, the ways they shape their lives and how they contribute to their organizations. A cluster of related themes and questions have held energy for me, and I have been acquiring relevant references, ideas and conversations. (To illustrate: Notions of generativity are often framed as sacrifice, as giving to future generations, perhaps through mentoring. Are these applicable to women who have adopted relationally based approaches throughout their lives? Is some measure of self-assertion more their theme in mid-life [Gallos, 1989]? What is happening to people who are seeking to be effective social change agents from inside-outsider positions [Meyerson and Scully, 1995]?) I wanted to see whether these ideas would stand scrutiny or dissolve as meaningful research topics, whether they are worthwhile or too indulgent, perhaps too related to my own life questioning.

This process of worrying away at whether to engage in a particular research area and how to formulate my expression of interests is an element in my self-reflective practice. I need to know that a potential inquiry project is viable, meaning sufficiently energising for me and well-conceived in terms of issues. I will give this process of coming to research plenty of time, I will let the ideas grow, and seek to notice if they have withered or some aspect of their formulation is wrong, incongruous in some way. I will engage in active questioning of others and myself as part of this testing, tracking how my explicated and more tacit inquiry intents change or persist.

The potential research area of generativity has been around for several years. People encourage me, say these are interesting issues. But the study has not yet started to fly properly, to engross me. Maybe I am too busy with other things. But maybe there is something more remiss than that. I wonder if this could just be comfortable narrative based research with privileged people, and therefore vacuous in a way. I have become impatient yet again for the

world to change, and yet my learning is that small wins are all I can potentially influence (Meyerson and Scully, 1995; Marshall, 1999).

In the background, as context to this specific project, I was also carrying questions about who I am as an academic these days. I have been over-busy with administration and teaching during recent years and have done relatively little focused research and writing. I pine for these activities, but sometimes wonder whether I should struggle to resurrect my researcher self or should concede to current forces, let my professional life be what it is, and pay more attention to the quality of my life generally.

As I suggested earlier, inquiry requires appropriate settings. The conference in Chicago was a potentially rich and compressed territory for me, and had resonance with my various questions. The Academy of Management (AOM) is a professional association of management educators and practitioners, based in the United States but with world-wide membership and influence. It is an important institution in terms of making meaning in management scholarship. Its Annual Meeting takes a theme to which submissions are directed and is attended by thousands of people. There are multiple, parallel streams and activities. It is an important gathering for finding out about current scholarship and advanced organizational practice, and for debating the relative importance of issues. It is an opportunity to meet old friends, make new ones, network, be seen; it is a time to account for our professional lives. It incorporates individual and collective ambivalence and tension as well as connection. I decided to use it as a deliberate opportunity for inquiry.

I carried my inquiry intents more unconsciously than consciously from December 1998 onwards. I was amused to find that even as I travelled to Chicago my sense of inquiring was highly active, as if seeded eight months earlier.

### Doing inquiry

What do I mean by conducting inquiry in this setting? There were many mutually relevant activities, enacting the inquiry practices described above.

I explored through engaging with the world and people I encountered, and through tracking my reflections, thoughts and feelings. I took notes during conference sessions and in my own reflective spaces. Some tracked material, experiences and ideas relevant to the inquiry intents introduced above. I also followed other arising issues, images, puzzles. I experienced connections with other people, some a surprise and delight, and also distance and separation. I reflected on these. As I talked with people I sometimes fed my questions and emerging ideas into our conversations, learning from hearing my voice on the issues as well as from the replies, comments and life experiences I heard back. One aspect which contributed to my sense of compressed and meaning-rich living in Chicago was the synchronicity I experienced several

times in meeting people of relevance to my curiosities, which in that crowded, diverse gathering seemed most fortuitous. The synchronicity of certain encounters, and their right-timing to contribute to my on-going inquiring, seemed amazing, breath-taking, thrilling. This does not mean that just because things happen they are very meaningful, symbolic. Rather they are ‘stuff’ to be worked with, respected, fully engaged through inner and outer arcs of attention . (As is not-happening, sluggishness etc – these are just other forms.) I am reminded of two of Brew’s (1988) axioms of phenomenological research: “entertain the possibility that everything is relevant”, immediately moderated with “if you think you know, look again”. Combining these attentions provides another potential inquiry rubric.

One of the ways that I will judge whether the opportunities which arise are to-the-point is through my experience of inquiry as a physical and intuitive, as much as an intellectual, sensing for me. Tracking is partly judging the quality of my inquiry practice in the moment. I know the signs of engaged inquiry: I feel physically alert and multi-sensing, I breathe fully, I think/feel, I am agile as I move within and between inner and outer arcs of attention, I ‘find’/experience ways of speaking which both question openly and pursue. And when I have been thus engaged for a while, I may rest back and notice that I am thoroughly tired, almost immobilised. And then I must respect this receding of energy, not push, know that it will not be permanent (although I may fear it might be) and allow what comes next. And so inquiry involves oscillations of whole-person movement, bringing as much attention as possible into the states and dynamics engaged.

In following sections I shall report some of my experience of Chicago through two themes. This is a highly selective account, in which I want to give fleeting glimpses of the conference, a form appropriate to my experiencing and memories.

### Research as political process

Noting the many ways in which research is political process was a strong theme for me throughout the conference. This is not a new realisation, but was striking and became elaborated in Chicago. Elsewhere I have written:

Research is also “political process” in many ways. Who researches and how; whose experience is researched and how that is named or categorised; what discourses gain currency and hold power; what forms of inquiry and writing are favoured by “mainstream” power-holders; and much more are political issues. “Creating knowledge” is political business. Living practice is thus politicised. (Marshall, 1999:158)

My concerns about the political nature of research took various forms.



I attended several Research Methods Division sessions on qualitative and interpretive research. I enjoyed these and felt at home to some extent, but also coming from a different place. During question times and discussions there was much reference to the unacceptability of interpretive and qualitative methods in United States' academia. (These seem tame labels for research to me.) I had a sense of embattled, enmeshed people, hostile journals, limited mainstream frames, and needing to fight for legitimacy and space. I was amused/dispirited that one questioner suggested publishing in books and in European journals, identifying these as more open to interpretive approaches. The UK's regular Research Assessment Exercises now devalue these places to publish ("international", meaning United States', journals are the ideal); we are being systematically assessed into more orthodoxy. The next five year census period closes in December 2000 and so is on our minds.

One answer to proving the rigour of qualitative research advocated at the sessions was to locate oneself in a tradition (such as hermeneutics or ethnography), and be faithful to its originating texts and ideas. I agree strongly that people should not use research terms without substance, but am concerned that adopting a tradition could become inappropriately defensive, imposing alternative orthodoxies, not engaging with the dilemmas of fully living qualitative, interpretive, action based forms of researching. And I saw that some lone qualitative researchers felt beleaguered within their organizations, unsupported - but also un-challenged by people of sufficiently like kind - likely to play out roles of defence, flamboyant radical or something else. As I processed all these impressions I both positioned myself in these debates and wondered how they are shaping emerging methods, fearing that their embattled nature may encourage restricted orthodoxy in new guises. I would rather see energy directed at developing diverse ways of doing well research that is simultaneously political, personal, intellectual and frame-challenging. But it is all very well for me to advocate such 'risks', and to support such developments in those whose context of assessment I can influence, it seems many people are operating in potentially hostile territory.

As I moved on through the conference I became especially sensitive to exciting and potentially radical content - about race, gender, identities, inter-minority relationships and so on - clothed in orthodox-seeming method. I found myself explicitly questioning presenters about the research approaches they were using. Were they committed to traditional methods or (appropriately?) playing safe? Is it too confronting to use qualitative, participative, self-reflective, action-based inquiry approaches with potentially contentious issues? At times, often, I think we have to take the radical path in content and method, to make a double leap. Otherwise the limitations in orthodox methods stifle the radical potential of inquiry.

One aspect of my inquiring in Chicago was where I placed myself in the multitude of offered activities, reflecting my own politics as a scholar. I especially felt pulled between informing myself about current "mainstream" thinking on change (a core topic at the Meeting) and attending sessions which reflected my interests in difference, marginality, ecology, race, feminism

and related issues. The latter seemed to be positioned towards the edges of the Programme, not (yet?) much incorporated into mainstream thinking. I became increasingly wilful about what sessions to attend as time went on, gravitating towards the latter stream and appreciating the stronger sense of questioning and politics/power there. Alternative, more vibrant and challenging, notions of change were being debated. I felt affirmed by acknowledging my own interests and positioning, and by having them depicted back to me through my journey through the conference.

As I developed and tested these various strands of thinking about research as political process, I used some to question and comment in sessions. I monitored my own voice and phrasing, reflecting on this, and benefited from other people's affirmation or recognition of the issues I raised. The notion of researcher as social activist began to frame up for me and excite me. I started to write this phrase in my notes, repeating it, as I listened/thought. It is not an innovative idea, but was whole, clear and forceful for me at the time. It became a collecting place for the themes I had been tracking, signalling the need for us to comport ourselves with awareness, including questioning whether we collude with dominant frames – of research, managerial norms, societal values and so on – as we create our lives as scholars. Such questioning may seem unusual or contentious in a management research setting. It raises issues about the skills required for such researching. And, at the same time, I wonder, much as I enjoy the notion, whether seeing oneself (myself) as an agent of potential social change is somewhat grandiose.

### Tracking generativity

Reflecting on my potential project on generativity was a major thread of my experience in Chicago. Issues of research as political process became thoroughly interwoven with the topic area.

Attending sessions to do with careers contributed to this thinking. Informal conversations were also highly relevant, and offered opportunities to work the issues simultaneously as academic questions and as potentially relevant to my own life situation. I talked with people, many of them women - some known, some newly met - about our work and lives. These conversations provided a valuable inter-twining and moving between aspects of self, sometimes with a hint of pleasure like a Starbucks coffee or a walk outside. In these conversations I was both more than my professional self and this more fully

My initial reason for attending the AOM also contributed significantly to my reflections on generativity. The invitation to explore Simone de Beauvoir's life and work was truly a gift. My notes testify to its importance, and to the many dimensions of relevance. For example, commentators such as Moi (1994) have noted how Beauvoir's work illustrates the interconnections of the personal, professional and intellectual. This sense of the scholar,

manager or professional as a multi-faceted person seems central to any understanding of generativity. Also, Beauvoir's positioning as a member of the intellectual elite in France in her time is noted, and how unusual and pioneering this was for a woman. Her life raises questions relevant to those who are potentially diverse and yet can now claim membership of the dominant group. Commentaries on Beauvoir suggest that her positioning simultaneously enabled and disabled her. Her access meant that she could be an independent intellectual, and yet in some ways she over-identified with prevailing, male-based, notions of desirable human qualities, and was unable to see the way she was marginalised as a woman by the ideas she identified with. I saw similar issues reflected in sessions at the AOM, for example as relevant to successful women now in mid-career, and as challenges for researchers who might want to adopt methods seen as radical, but fear for their careers.

Several key moments in Chicago brought together my thinking about generativity as a potential project. There was a relaxed, engaging conversation with a woman academic after dinner, about our lives, decisions and pathways. I articulated some of my choices, my life quality standards. I was interested in her, younger, approach. I was struck by a phrase she used, that the work is more important than the job position, the latter is just the opportunity. Yes!!

The first session I attended the next day was entitled Careers as Life Journeys (496). The first paper - 'The mid-life transition of professional women: An external and internal recalibration' - was the material of the previous night's conversation in academic form, its themes and sentiments recognisable, especially in the notion of 'recalibrations', despite the mechanical language. The other papers in the session were also interesting. I thought that mid-life women seem to be in safe hands (Gordon, Beatty and Whelan, 1999), that I might not need to do my study.

And, thirdly, in these pivotal fragments, the theme of research as political process appeared in the centre of this thinking. A young researcher I was introduced to wants to research careers using notions of agency and communion (Marshall, 1989). I heard my comment back - that these notions can seem too individualistic, too voluntaristic and need to be set in a wider political appreciation - as advice to self as well as to her. And so I came to realise strongly that I need to build a sense of political issues into the core of any research I might do next. Stories of 'generativity', for example, would need to be embedded thoroughly in (interpersonal, social, political, organizational) contexts and questionings of contexts.

### **Inquiry as life process**

In earlier papers on inquiry I have sometimes started by describing research as partly "personal process", noting how we draw on our lives and their themes to inform our inquiries. This labelling has value, yet it maintains some sense of separated selves; as if I could be non-personal, a relic perhaps of objectivity. I currently prefer the notion of inquiry as life process.

respecting how inquiring is a core of my being, and that my full (multiple) being is involved in any “researching” I undertake.

I am very aware, for example, that in Chicago there was a parallel track of my own career/life questioning to which I have referred in this chapter. My notebook shows this developing, often with a circled J attached or at an angle to other text to mark it. In my inquiry practice I recognise this parallel stream, allow it and have ways to work with it. I do not see it as detrimental to my academic scholarship – far from it. Looking inwards (which includes this life reflection and is far more than that) is essential to bringing attention to how I look outwards and act. How to work with this generatively, rather than being self-absorbed or self-indulgent, is a key challenge of self-reflective practice. I explore some principles of intertwining inquiry in life more fully elsewhere (Marshall, 1999).

When I initially agreed to attend the AOM, I thought the possible project on generativity would be my focus. But my learning in Chicago was broader than this. Whether I do the study I had envisioned matters less now than how I would do it, or anything else I approach. Through the compressed experience of the conference, I re-connected with my attachment to inquiry and re-valued issues and dilemmas about researching that concern me. This sense of re-newed commitment and possibilities could be read as part of my route to seeking generativity, an answer to my second inquiry question in a way.

But this journey has not been about me alone, interwoven though it is with my autobiography. I am a selective lens for reflecting issues of politics in the legitimation of some kinds of research and academia and the potential marginalisation of others. Acting, as I believe I do, somewhere on the margins (but relatively close-in compared to others), I use myself and my position, I test my courage and my contribution. This story shows some challenges of doing so. And the material from Chicago continually points me also at the more general picture, the scene in which researchers who are non-mainstream seek to conduct themselves with integrity, to live creatively, and to have effects.

In Chicago I was learning as I went along but let my original questions de-focus whilst I was in the midst of the conference. By its close, I felt that they had been explored and I had some key directions and further puzzles to work with, expressed more through a relaxed, reflective sense of self than through statements about what I had “learnt”. I still do not know whether I should research generativity as a topic, but my own senses of purpose have been enhanced. Sometimes inquiring brings what I invite, but not in the form or realm I anticipate.

## References

Bakan, D. (1966). The Duality of Human Existence. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Bateson, G. (1973). "Conscious Purpose vs Nature." Steps to an Ecology of Mind. London: Paladin Books, 402-414.
- Brew, A. (1988). Research as Learning. University of Bath, PhD Dissertation.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Interpretation of Cultures. New York: Basic Books.
- Gordon, J. R., Beatty, J. E. and Whelan, K. S. (1999). "The Midlife Transition of Professional Women: An external and internal recalibration." Academy of Management, Chicago.
- Marshall, J. (1984). Women Managers: Travellers in a male world. Chichester: Wiley.
- Marshall, J. (1989). "Re-visioning career concepts: a feminist invitation", in M. B. Arthur, D. T. Hall and B. S. Lawrence (Eds), A Handbook of Career Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 275-291.
- Marshall, J. (1999). "Living life as inquiry." Systemic Practice and Action Research, 12, 2, 155-171.
- Marshall, J. and Reason, P. (1998). "Collaborative and self-reflective forms of inquiry in management research" in J Burgoyne and M Reynolds (eds), Management Learning. London: Sage, 227-242.
- Meyerson, D. E. and Scully, M. A. (1995). "Tempered Radicalism and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change." Organization Science, 6, 5, 585-600.
- Moi, T. (1994). Simone de Beauvoir: The making of an intellectual woman. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rowan, J. (1981). "A dialectical paradigm for research" in P Reason and J Rowan (eds.) Human Inquiry. Chichester: John Wiley, 1981, 93-112.