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On disagreeing with your co-researchers

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In this paper I wish to discuss the dilemma of how one should relate to disagreement in the context of co-research. Based on my own research on everyday life with ADHD, I will seek to bring the discussions of critical practice research in the tradition of Psychology from the Standpoint of the subject (PSS) as a kind of democratizing practice (Chimirri & Pedersen, 2019) into dialogue with the dilemma of how one relates to disagreements in practice research. This is done in relation to *epistemology* by way of Celikates' (2018) discussions on Critical Theory as *Critical Reconstruction*, in relation to *morals/ethics* by way of Hannah Arendt's concept of *visiting* (Matthiesen & Klitmøller, 2019) and *methodology* by way of Jensens (1992) *the interview as ideologically confrontative*. I will conclude the paper with further considerations about how disagreement figures in the practice of co-research, especially when taking account of ideological and political engagements of practice researchers and co-researchers.

Keywords: Disagreeing, co-research, critical psychology, critical theory, epistemology, methodology

Introduction – Co-researching the everyday life of ADHD as a critical psychologist

Why do we do critical research and on behalf of whom? I had to ask myself this question several times as I started work on my PhD on the problems of everyday life in ADHD in late modern Denmark. My goal was and is to try to link the problems people living with an ADHD-diagnosis face in their everyday lives to the societal conditions that take part in shaping them. I do this to understand, how society shapes and conditions the problems and suffering that is a part of everyday life with ADHD in order that these conditions might be politicised and improved. I do this in particular within the tradition of *Psychology from the Standpoint of the Subject* (PSS) (Dreier, 2008; Holzkamp, 1985; Holzkamp et al., 2013; Nissen, 2012; Pedersen, 2022)[1] a type of critical social psychology

[1] Sometimes named German Nordic Critical Psychology (Nissen, 2012, 2023)

based on Marxist foundations that tries to understand how *subjects* relate to and engage in the *practices* that constitute their *everyday lives* (Dreier, 2015). In this way PSS is a critical practice research tradition (Højholt & Kousholt, 2012; Mørck & Huniche, 2006; Nissen, 2000). An essential ethos in PSS is amongst other things to help people expand their capacity to act and gain control over the conditions of their own lives (Holzkamp, 1985) – an *emancipatory aim* in other words. This is one of the reasons that the tradition of PSS draws on a concept of *co-researchers* (Chimirri & Pedersen, 2019; Kousholt, 2016; Mørck & Christian Celosse-Andersen, 2019; Mørck & Nissen, 2005) in order to understand and appreciate psychology from the standpoint of subjects themselves (Holzkamp et al., 2013). The concept of co-researcher basically covers how people who participate in research should be regarded on an equal footing with the practice researchers themselves – there is no fundamental difference in the way the participants and the researchers are human beings, acting and trying to transform their own lives by developing knowledge about how to act and when, as well as trying to develop the practices that they participate in (Chimirri & Pedersen, 2019). The practice researchers of course spend most of their time engaged in the practice of research and (most) co-researchers do not, but with regards to their fundamental capacity to reflect, act and know, there is no difference between practice researcher and co-researcher. Knowledge production in PSS should then be viewed as a collaborative and democratic effort (Chimirri & Pedersen, 2019).

But what then if the very same people, who's first person perspective and experiences traditionally should be the starting point of PSS will argue that they do what they do, not because of conditions that have developed socially and historically, and the meanings these conditions have for them, but, rather, they believe that they were born a certain way? And that no matter what they do, they will always be and act in certain ways at least tendentially? To put the problem more generally: What if our co-researchers disagree with the very theories and ideological commitments that make us regard their experiences and self-understandings as something that grants our scientific theories validity? And how do disagreements figure in the process of developing knowledge collaboratively? These questions became more and more relevant in my research as I worked with my co-researchers on understanding their everyday lives with ADHD and this article revolves around them.

On my way into the field of everyday life with ADHD in Denmark, I wanted to understand the content on social media as well as the public debate on ADHD (e.g. *DRTV - Debatten*, 2024; Larsen, 2024; Tonning, 2024) that I assumed and later confirmed that a lot of my co-researchers were relating to. In these different media I encountered theories and assumptions about being born in a certain way – being inherently neurodivergent, being inherently ADHD. Statements like "My brain lacks dopamine" or "Those of us with different brains" or "I was born different" were frequent and often employed in relation to appeals to the science behind it, be it neuro-imaging studies or heritability estimates. A lot of this "brain and genes"-talk sounded to me as biological essentialism and reductionism, reminding me of how Holzkamps critical psychology can be seen as a dialectical materialist alternative to much of mainstream neuro-psychologies' reductionism of higher mental functions to the operation of particular brain regions or circuits (Nigrini et al., 2024). Explaining procrastination as being a result of a lack of dopamine in the brain, as some social media content would, is exactly the kind of epistemology that Holzkamp (1985) historically has critiqued as "control science" (*Kontrolwissenschaften*). A type of science that disregards the meanings and conditions for actions that subjects relate to, change and gain control over as part of actions they do in the conduct of their everyday lives (Dreier, 2015; Holzkamp, 1985). From the standpoint of PSS, the reasons people have for acting in the conduct of their everyday lives are developed through participation in collectives and practices that are part of (a historically developed) society (Dreier, 1979, 2015; Nissen, 2012). Essentially then PSS is sceptical of reducing actions, meanings and conditions to a supposed neuro-biology (Nigrini et al., 2024), even though newer calls for a further theorization of the relationship between the brain, body, affect and the subject have been made in PSS (Axel, 2022; Huniche, 2022b, 2022a; Jørgensen & Chimirri, 2025; Killi, 2012, 2014). This article, however, is not the place for an attempt at a PSS-style rearticulation of ADHD as category. I simply mean to point out that even though PSS is not *against* biological explanations it *is against* explaining subjectivity in purely biological terms, essentially because the social constitution of the subject disappears, which leads us to disregard the socially contingent conditions of actions that could be seized and changed in order to make people's lives better (Mørck & Huniche, 2006) – *the emancipatory interest of PSS* (Chimirri & Pedersen, 2019). Indeed the critique of relegating people's problems to being

just "inside their" head or as purely a result of their neuro-chemistry has been critiqued in critical psychologies before (Killi, 2012) and this goes for the ADHD-diagnoses as well (Kristensen & Mørck, 2011).

In my research I quickly learned that my co-researchers employ the terminology of the ADHD-diagnosis and related neuro-psychological, neuro-biological and evolutionary theories in different ways. Their engagement with these theories should not only be understood as being always directly about the science behind the diagnosis, but also as explanations that serve particular means as well as allows for certain self-understandings that my co-researchers find empowering and often an aid in their everyday lives. One of my co-researchers, Malthe, believes that people living with an ADHD-diagnosis in Denmark must employ "brain and genes"-talk in a Wittgensteinian language game because that is the only way they can successfully communicate their needs and ways of being. However, some of my co-researchers do indeed believe that they were "born this way" as one of my co-researchers Lars puts it, and another, Ib, wrote me a long, thorough email with feedback for this article, ending it thusly;

"Besides […], it is not correct that we cannot locate ADHD in the brain or in the genes. ADHD is just poly-genetical and therefore not one single specific gene, but rather thousands of small genetic contributions – with a few major ones. A lot of research concludes this (see links below)".

In my contribution I will address epistemological, ethical/moral and methodological challenges that revolve around the question of how we can relate to disagreement in co-research, and what implications these explorations of the question of disagreement in co-research have for our own practice as practice researchers in the tradition of PSS. But first, some further considerations on co-researchers and disagreement in PSS.

The epistemological status of Co-researchers in PSS

In PSS people must not be treated as "objects" if you wish to understand them as people (Holzkamp, 1985). People must be treated as fellow human beings i.e. *subjects* and the task is to develop descriptions and knowledge about their life conduct and the problems and contradictions inherent within (Holzkamp et al., 2013; Kousholt, 2016). However, this introduces the problem of whether the research process risks turning into subjective

"microphone-holding", where the co-researchers' statements about this or that are taken for granted and the practice researcher essentially becomes a mouthpiece for the co-researchers (Mørck & Nissen, 2005). On the other hand, PSS is committed to avoid an academic "ivory tower", where the practice researcher dictates what is relevant to the research project in spite of an active intersubjective relationship – this could be termed academic arrogance (Mørck & Nissen, 2005). But what then, when the co-researchers in the intersubjective relationship insist on theories that counterpose the theories of the practice researcher? E.g. what if people insist that they *are born* in particular ways, and that their problems *should* be explained in these biological terms?

The problem is reminiscent of some of the challenges Nissen has sought to reflect on in his long work on the question of the ideological constitution of subjectivity in practice (Nissen, 2002, 2023, 2025; Nissen & Friis, 2020). I think that the problem of disagreement is particularly troublesome if one takes the question of how ideology co-constitutes subjects seriously – because if we critically reflect on the ideological constitution of our own subjectivities together, as critical practice research should (Nissen, 2002), then what do we do if we have *ideologically driven disagreements* that cannot be resolved?

Some practice researchers have, however, thematized conflicts and divergent perspectives on the practices that we participate in and try to investigate both as practice researchers and co-researchers. In Mørck & Nissens (2005) work the *prototype* is meant to mediate diverging perspectives on practice by bringing the co-researchers as practitioners together with the practice researchers in attempting to develop the prototype *together*. However, in their contribution it remains unclear how to navigate and understand disagreements in this process. Axels (2011) work on conflictual cooperation argues that human actions in practice make for a conflictual cooperation between the subjects engaged in these practices because, even when we work together on the same goals, our knowledge, perspectives and positions in practice inform our understanding of the problem at hand entailing the possibility of conflict and disagreement over what exactly the problem is. However, Axel (2011) does not engage with the possible epistemological difficulties that this might entail when considering the relation between the *practice researcher* and the *co-researchers*. Jensen (1992), however, has developed a confrontational interview style meant to counter the use of scientific theories as reasons

for actions in practice that the co-researchers might give the practice researcher. I believe this interview style can be understood as relating to disagreement and will elaborate on this later in the article. Finally, from a different scientific tradition than PSS, Tanggaard (2007) considers many of the same ideas about disagreement in the context of research as I do. In her paper Tanggaard (2007) describes how in the context of her practice research on learning as part of vocational training in Denmark she would often disagree with her interviewees on what learning is and when it takes place. This leads her to consider the interview as a "battleground" that should allow for diverging perspectives to interact "cross swords" and through disagreement produce new meanings and new knowledge (Tanggaard, 2007). Tanggaards ideas are close to my own, and my contribution should in some ways be seen as a furthering of these considerations, but where my research is situated explicitly in a critical research approach, Tanggaards is not (at least not explicitly). In this sense you could say, that I worry about disagreement in the context of *emancipatory* research, where Tanggaards (2007) ideas are situated more broadly in qualitative research.

Chimirri & Pedersen (2019) as well as other researchers (Højholt, 2016; Kousholt, 2016) have called for a development of the theoretical implications of thinking about practice research as a democratizing practice or at least a practice that should lead to a democratization of the development of knowledge that stands in relation to the problems that the practice researchers and co-researchers try to navigate in the conduct of their everyday lives. Seeing as democracy entails politics, this makes thinking about disagreement all the more important.

Disagreement epistemologically - Celikates' critical reconstruction

The Critic's Ivory Tower and Methodological egalitarianism

A parallel discussion to the one I want to have here can be found in Robin Celikates' book Critique as Social Practice (2018). Celikates' book takes up the discussion about the relationship between the social critic and the everyday "knower" in the context of Frankfurt School style Critical Theory. To put it crudely, it is about how we should relate to the fact that the critical Marxist researchers can think that everyone else are blinded by ideology, when everyone else do not necessarily believe so themselves. Celikates (2018)

suggests that this discussion should be reopened, but in relation to parallel discussions that have been had in social theory and sociology.

Celikates (2018) critiques the status of sociological knowledge and discusses what he calls *the model of the break*. Fundamentally, the model of the break is an epistemological one based on the premise that people are not able to perceive and understand the forces that condition their social being in their everyday lives – leading to the cohesiveness and reproduction of social practices (Celikates, 2018, pp. 27-32). This means that for something to count as science epistemologically it must break with everyday understanding presuming methodologically a break with social actors' everyday understanding as well (Celikates, 2018, p. 28). Celikates argues, that researchers following the model of the break understand themselves as fundamentally, epistemologically different from the actors they study – that the knowledge that the sociologist produces is *unavailable to be reflected upon by the everyday actors in practice* (Celikates, 2018, p. 49-50). However, if it is true that the reproduction of social structures and practices is possible because there are elements of them that fundamentally go behind the backs of the participants, how can it be that there is so much heterogeneity in society's practices? And how can it be that laypeople participate in social critique of the structure of society (Celikates, 2018, pp. 55-59)?

Against the model of the break, Celikates sets a *model of symmetry*. In particular, Celikates (2018, p. 70) argues by way of ethnomethodology that human beings all have basic reflexive and critical capacities, and that these can and must be found in social life. The point is that reflexive and critical or distancing capacities are simply a prerequisite for making practice work (Celikates, 2018, p. 79). You could say that if the agents of social practice did not have these capacities, then the social situations would not be able to be reflected on at all and therefore not changed, predicted or counted on – which they can and are in many contexts in everyday life. In this way, it is not the responsibility of the social researcher from his ivory tower to be the social critic on behalf of the ideologically blinded "everyday actors". Rather, the social researcher should engage in *methodological egalitarianism*. People are already engaged in reasoning about and *critiquing* how and why life should be lived as it should in the practical contexts in which they are involved, which is why the social researcher must give way to the theorizing that the everyday actor is already doing – *they* are the ones who have the

relevant knowledge about what the social practices are like in their lives (Celikates, 2018, pp. 94-99).

But Celikates asks us if the conditions of critique in a practice could not possibly be unequally distributed? Even though all people use the same basic ability for critical reflexivity couldn't the conditions in practice for exercising this ability be better or worse? This is where we find the role of the critical theorist.

Critical theory as reconstructive critique – Critical collaboration?

Celikates suggests that critical theory should be a *critique* of *second-order pathologies*, which manifest themselves in *structural reflexivity deficits* (Celikates, 2018, p. 124). This is to be regarded as a *reconstructive critique* that seeks to challenge and criticize the conditions (psychological and social) that are required for the critical practice to function well. *Second-order pathologies* are pathologies that concern the structures that give rise to whether everyday actors encounter first-order problems and injustices. *First order problems* are the problems, injustices and challenges that arise in practice, about which, precisely according to methodological egalitarianism, it is the actors who participate in that practice who have the right knowledge of – unless they suffer from the second-order pathologies. Celikates (2018) mentions ideologies as examples of second-order pathologies that prevent the development of a form of understanding that can allow critique of first-order problems, e.g. the ideological individualization of unemployment. Celikates (2018) believes that critical theory should function as a reconstructive critique of these second-order pathologies and thereby function as a form of meta-critique – namely a critique of the conditions of critical practice.

But how should this reconstruction take place? Celikates (2018) advocates that it should be based on concrete practical situations in which actors are already in the process of formulating and working with a problem, and then, precisely as meta-critique, must support this critical practice by exercising a critique of the second-order pathologies (136-142). Celikates (2018, p. 142) finds inspiration in Habermas' understanding of psychoanalysis' model of psychoanalytic therapy in which a *critical dialogue* between analyst and analysand can lead to the *emancipation* of the analysand by offering them provisional, alternative understandings of their problems, which they can then use for *critical self-reflection* that might alleviate their suffering. However, these alternative

understandings on the part of the analyst do not correspond to an expert or a doctor's well-meaning advice and admonitions, but rather to a jointly developed construction, which is, however, assisted by the theories that the analyst has available, but cannot and must not be determined by them (Celikates, 2018).

Celikates insists that critical theory must be based on *dialogues with everyday actors under methodological egalitarianism about their concrete problems and challenges*, in order to be able to develop theoretically informed *critical reconstructions of the second-order pathologies that lead to structural reflexivity deficiencies* that inhibit or weaken the critical activity that is already underway in the practice and lives of the everyday actors. These reconstructions must not only be developed with the everyday actors, but also offered to them and subjected to critique by them, and they are really only successful analyses if the everyday actors find them useful; that is, in the very end, ideally that the everyday actors agree with them (Celikates, pp. 167-169).

Reconstructive critique – Critique of what with whom?

I believe that Celikates' reformulation of critical theory as a reconstructive critique is useful for those of us who work with a co-researcher concept, since it allows us to do two things at the same time. First, to maintain that the subjectivity and critical capacities of our co-researchers are not fundamentally different from ours as researchers. Second, to hold on to the fact that these can be realized to different degrees, which is why disagreement can be acceptable, if only temporarily. This allows us to be able to work methodically and epistemologically with disagreement, and promises another way out of the dualism of "mouthpiecing" and academic arrogance (Mørck & Nissen, 2005). We are committed to a potentially conflictual collaboration (Axel 2011; Tanggaard, 2008).

In my research I have both tried to incorporate the ideas of critical reconstruction in my interviews – presenting my theories, ideas and analyses as they developed to my co-researchers and getting their input on them as well as critically discussing them with them. An example here is from my interview with Josefine, a woman living with her husband and kids on one of the many islands of Denmark that she moved to in order to get some quiet and calm in her somewhat chaotic life. We were discussing some therapy, she was going to, and she described how meeting a "no bullshit" therapist who confronted her with what she actually needed had really helped her. This

spoke against some of the sociology I was reading at the time, but spoke to a lot of my other co-researchers' experiences and made me reflect:

> STR: One could object that […] We live in a time where the individual and the self never have been more important. [2]
> Josefine: [Giggles] That's right
> STR: We live in a totally therapeutic culture
> Josefine: Mhm [Affirmatively]
> […]
> STR: [B]ut a thought, I'm having now is, that it is as if there are two sides to this coin. On the one hand, you can see this, where it sounds like all of us in this culture are really busy with dealing with our own needs: "And I need this. And I have to do this. I just finally realized who I am." And stuff like that. But then on the flip side, you find the demands and norms and all sorts of stuff. Which at least you my co-researchers really struggle with and that…
> Josefine: And do you know why?
> STR: Why?
> Josefine: It is basically because we built our societal structure on something incredibly old. I mean our schooling system has not developed at all. At the same time that everyone else is developing and checking in with their feelings: "What kind of sexuality have I got? What kind of body have I got? Does it suit me and does it fit with my sexuality? What do I want to eat? Should I eat meat? Shouldn't I eat meat?" We develop. We feel everything. I mean everything is like nuanced and we were permitted to make it nuanced even to our appearance, how we dress. Everything. And then there is schooling. And then all of us have to be the fucking same. We all have to sit on our fat asses. We have to be completely quiet. At the same time as having developed all of these special sides to our selves. I mean how the fuck did you expect this to make sense? That you are asking all of us to find

[2] All quotes orginially in Danish – translated by me.

> our selves and feel our selves and get to the core [of the self] and what then? Then we all have to be shoved into this fucking box that barely… I mean barely any one fits into it for real right?
> STR: Right.

In this excerpt Josefine helped me understand that there are particular disciplinary institutions (Foucault, 1977) that *are still* at work in late modernity, exacerbating parts of the need for self-realisation and talking about needs and being singular (Reckwitz, 2019) that was at the back of my mind, when I was talking to her. While not an example of *disagreeing* per se, it is an example of presenting my theories and ideas as part of the critical reconstruction.

However, Celikates' work on critical theory as a critical reconstruction might involve certain dilemmas viewed from my question to co-research as a practice involving disagreement. In my research, for example, I might make the argument that the dominant discourses on ADHD as a congenital neuropsychiatric developmental disorder should be considered a second-order pathology, as it ideologically obfuscates and individualises problems that in reality are of a social nature. While I do not agree with this and must stress that I think this would be *very empirically inadequate*, it also involves a moral dilemma: Is it okay to tell people, that the explanation they have, of why they are the way they are, in reality is simply smoke and mirrors? That is; is it ethically and morally sound to confront people with your theories about their problems, if your theories disagree with their beliefs about themselves and their problems? I think it *can* be – if viewed through the lens of politics and done with great care.

Disagreeing as a moral action – On Hannah Arendt's *visiting*

If the practice researchers and co-researchers all should be considered activists in the sense, that they actively try and navigate, understand, improve and develop the practices they are engaged in (Chimirri & Pedersen, 2019), then ideological and political disagreements about the ideals of said practice can happen, and we should be able to think about how to navigate these disagreements. For me, it is the (in a certain sense) ideological question of whether our subjectivity can be said to be congenital that I disagree on with some of my co-researchers. But the point here is more general: PSS is

(or at least was) an explicitly Marxist psychology (Dreier, 1979) – how should we relate to the fact that some of our co-researchers are not Marxist? Or might not be left wing? Indeed, that they might be right wing?

This is not just a hypothetical. After one of my interviews my co-researcher Ib offered to drive me to the nearest train station. On our way there we started to discuss politics. He revealed to me, that he had run for parliament on behalf of a right-wing party in Denmark. When I revealed to him that I am a member of a political party on the left in Denmark he replied: "But of course, you are a Copenhagener!". We laughed. It occurred to me later, that disagreement is an essential part of political practices, but probably the reason why it did not seem to bother neither Ib nor me, that we had such massive political disagreements, was because we had come to a thorough understanding of each other and our positions in the interview, which was four hours long and done with Ib and his partner Helene. But what has all this got to do with Hannah Arendt?

Matthiesen & Klitmøller (2019) take Arendt's ontology of natality and plurality as a starting point to develop an understanding of empathy that is not about knowing the other as oneself, but rather about staying in a *proces*s of understanding the other to be able to act better. This development follows in the footsteps of Arendt's critique of totalitarianism in the essay *Understanding and politics (The difficulties of understanding)* from 1954, where Arendt (Arendt, 2005, s. 307–327), criticizes totalitarianism for knowing all too certainly, thereby reducing the other to a mere object of knowledge instead of respecting the other as being fundamentally different from one self, implying a certain degree of fathomless – thus our *other*, but still someone you share a common world with. The point for Matthiesen & Klitmøller (2019) is that, according to Arendt, we must understand the natality of human beings – beings who, by entering the world, bring something new with them with every act. In this way, the beginnings and thus the plurality of human beings are the starting point for a democratic political form that revolves around exploring and getting to know the world we all take part in from different places (and standpoints – a point shared by Axel [2011]), while at the same time the same world is constantly being changed by the people who act in it. Matthiesen & Klitmøller (2019) emphasise how this implies that to truly understand others, we must constantly *visit* their approach to the world. This *visiting* is not a collapsing of the different into the same (as in having the same understanding) but should be thought exactly in

terms of visiting something foreign that can then become familiar, but still having to "leave" the place you are visiting at a certain point. Visiting is then a continuous exploration of each other's reasons and lives in order to create an understanding of each other, where both self and other are respected as other for the other in a common world (Hart, 2002; Matthiesen & Klitmøller, 2019). What is also important in this context is that when we choose to act morally, we must not simply surrender to the understandings of others. Matthiesen & Klitmøller (2019) quote the theologist Hart (2002), who writes on Hannah Arendt in relation to phenomenological approaches to moral philosophy:

> "… while putting myself in the place of the others, I do not simply replace my judgement with theirs; in fact, my judgement might not even be the same as theirs.... I retain my own voice and do not count noses in order to arrive at what is right" (Hart, 2002, p. 103).

I believe that Matthiesen & Klitmøller's (2019) interpretation of Hannah Arendt helps us understand how we should relate to the understanding of our co-researchers, even if we may not agree with them ideologically or scientifically. If we were to adopt their form of understanding 1:1, it would be tantamount to erasing our (i.e. the practice researchers') own actions as beginnings and thereby denying our co-researchers the possibility of being wrong, becoming their uncritical mouthpieces. In this way, there is a special kind of democratic respect built into the moral considerations which Arendt's concept of understanding is an expression of. This allows us to maintain that disagreement can be a central starting point and result, but that understanding is still possible, even if we must start from significantly different ideologies between researchers and co-researchers. I would, however, like to stress that this should be done in a respectful and careful manner when dealing with co-researchers, who are suffering and/or marginalized.

While these ethical and moral considerations are important it still leaves the question of how we should approach disagreement in practice unclear. Here I would like to draw on some methodical considerations from the tradition of PSS itself.

Disagreeing while interviewing – The interview as ideologically confrontative

Jensen (1992) has in his article Explanatory Assumptions and Generation of Knowledge described a method he has developed, which he calls *the interview as ideologically confrontative*[3]. The interview as ideologically confrontative is about critically discussing co-researchers' explanations of their actions with them – trying to find counter examples, digging until you understand them, trying to make them describe situations, they use theories to explain, more thoroughly to figure out how and if the theory fits (Jensen, 1992). Because people do not live in an "a-theoretic bubble", scientific knowledge about, why people do what they do, becomes a part of laymen's lifeworld through academically trained practitioners, radio, tv, social media and so forth (Jensen, 1992). Jensen calls this reservoir of knowledge and understandings that are available to people that they might try and understand why they do, what they do, the *symbolic background* and this includes more or less scientific theories as well as ideologies and contexts of meaning (Jensen, 1992). If the use of these theories and ideologies is not critically discussed we might find ourselves running in epistemological circles, being offered explanations of actions from our co-researchers, which are essentially a regurgitation of theories already developed by other researchers, which *might – but only might* – relate significantly to the lives of our co-researchers. At least if taken at face value. The solution to this is precisely to challenge the co-researcher's theories and together with them develop better descriptions of and theories about why they do what they do. These better theories can of course be based on the explanations that are already present, but what is relevant is that the researcher and the co-researcher mutually discuss this theorization with each other (Jensen, 1992). These are the same points we found in Tanggaards (2008) idea about the interview as a *battleground*.

Two examples drawn from my own research are relevant here. One to illustrate the confrontational approach and another to illustrate the theoretical critique and development. The first is an interview I did with Karoline. Karoline is a social worker and divorced mother of two living with an ADHD-diagnosis. As I was interviewing her she told me about an exam that she was trying to do the night before in relation to a course in psychiatry. The exam was a formality according to the teacher of the course, and

[3] Originally termed Ideological deconstruction from the Danish *"ideologisk dekonstruktion"*. This term, however, might confuse readers familiar with Derridean deconstruction, which is why the term "interview as ideologically confrontative" has been chosen.

seemed to Karoline quite a waste of time, and yet we had discussed her spending the evening doing everything but the exam in a way, where it seemed that she thought that it was important that she did the exam. To me, however, it seemed like maybe, she did not do it, because it was a meaningless task.

> STR: But yesterday you verily were in a situation where you had to something you found to be a waste of time. Something that was meaningless.
> K: That is right.
> STR: And then you do all sorts of other things instead of doing that, I mean you avoid, yeah, uhm, avoidance behavior of course is counterproductive, but here it is quite productive because *it's a waste* [in English],
> K: […] I think that is a good point, but… […] I do have to do it, so I can avoid it right now, but I can't avoid it.
> STR: Can we discuss that a bit?
> K: Mmm [Confirming]
> STR: What happens if you don't?
> K: Uhmm… Then I won't pass the course.
> STR: Right, and then what happens?
> K: Then what happens is that I did not go to exam, when I took the psychiatric counselor course because I was on sick leave with stress, and then I might regret that a bit.
> STR: Why is that?
> K: I actually don't know, maybe it's both that […] I really, I mean beyond my studies as a social worker, in which I did quite well. Then I […] would like to show if I am able to, that I can finish something uhm… And I think that here it would annoy me, because I know I'm good at it.
> STR: Right.
> K: I just don't think the method is, well the way it's being done makes a lot of sense.
> STR: The type of examination or?

K: Yeah the synopsis and the way we have to… But the content of the course I think is really interesting and makes a lot of sense in relation to my work too.
STR: Right.
K: Uhmm… What if I did not do it? Uhm. I do not know. I actually do not know.
STR: I mean I am starting to think that […]
K: Concretely, I can't write it on my resume, I think.
STR: Right.
K: […] I mean, if I don't […] do this exam, then I don't think I can write it on my resume.
STR: Of course not.
K: And I think that might…
STR: But you yourself said
K: Annoy me, but I'm not sure it'd mean more than that.
STR: Exactly. Or, I mean, it's not that I'm sitting here trying to develop some sort of "And you really shouldn't do that because it is ridiculous".
K: I really wish you would.
STR: [Laughs] I mean. What I am trying to say is […], that in this situation you are avoiding something, that you really don't think you should do.
K: I think that… It also has to do with how busy I am at work, and I am really having trouble understanding how, if I am supposed to spend time on something work related, that that isn't my application-cases, with which I am quite far behind.

By confronting her about her reasons for wanting to do the exam but avoiding it, Karoline and I are able to discuss her reasons for her actions in a way where it becomes apparent, that her reasons for thinking she needs to do it is about security (putting it on her resume) and proving herself. The confrontational aspect of the interview as *ideologically confrontative* then can lead to productive and critical investigations of the reasons people have for actions (Jensen, 1992) and produce new meanings (Tanggaard, 2007). But what then about the ideological part?

The second example is an excerpt from my field notes in having discussed the concept of *masking* with my co-researcher Malthe. Masking is often a central concept for people living with an ADHD-diagnosis in order to explain how and why they expend so much energy in seemingly normal and mundane situations. Malthe is a young man on benefits from the Danish state, because he is too sick to work, and he lives with five diagnoses two of which are ADHD and autism. He is active in the local ADHD-association and very fond of the miniature game Warhammer. Malthe and I have had a very fruitful collaboration, and have often developed knowledge together by challenging each other's theories and presuppositions. The following excerpt is from field notes I took during a phone call we had the day after having played a game of Warhammer together with one of his friends.

> [Malthe and I] thank each other for the day before and start talking. I start by saying that to me it seemed a completely normal game of Warhammer that I had attended yesterday. In a way Malthe understands, but he thinks that masking might be a central problem here. […] This leads us to a conversation about the conditions of masking. I object [To Malthes point that he masks because of his ADHD] that everyone to a larger or smaller degree has to regulate themselves according to the situation, and that I know situations from my own life, where I have to hide how I feel […]. Malthe concedes this point, but he also believes that there is a particular way or a certain degree to which you have to mask, when you have an ADHD-diagnosis, which I completely understand. In this way we agree that masking is a condition in everyone's life, but ADHD'ers of course have to do it more or in particular ways. Malthe says: "I do not think it is a categorical difference, but it is a bigger part of our lives".[4]

In these two examples, the interview as ideologically confrontative as a method allows me to substantially nuance the explanations that my co-researchers give to their own actions. Karolines self-doubts about not being able to finish things, even though the task

[4] All field notes originally in danish – translated into English by myself.

in this case is meaningless, becomes apparent. And in the case with Malthe, a sometimes essentializing point about "ADHD'ers" need to mask due to their condition is changed to a general human condition, which takes a particular form in the case of people living with an ADHD-diagnosis. From the examples it should also be clear that the interview as ideologically confrontative does not necessarily imply that you should argue or fight with your co-researchers, but simply that disagreeing with your co-researchers on some of their explanations by way of having them further describe, argue or explain it to you can be a fruitful way in trying to understand what their lives and problems are really about.

Concluding discussion – Disagreement and democratic honing

If we take the critical reconstruction from Celikates, Arendt's concept of visiting, and Jensen's interview as ideologically confrontative, we get an opportunity to work with a co-researcher concept where disagreement is a central part of the methodology and possible, without ending up in a model of break, where only the researcher has the true knowledge. In summary, we can say that working with *disagreement* in our *critical research* is justified if:

1. It is based on the everyday life, practices and problems of people and assumes that there is a fundamental uniformity in the way these people and the practice researchers themselves are critical, reflexive and distanced from their lives – i.e. a *methodological egalitarianism that is based on a model of symmetry* (epistemological).

2. It is part of a fruitful *collaboration with the co-researchers*, where both the practice researchers and co-researchers' theories and understandings are subjected to critical investigation as part of the collaboration in an *interview as ideologically confrontative* (methodically).

3. It accepts that fundamentally, neither the subjectivity of the researcher nor the co-researcher can be reduced to the same, and that diversity and otherness must be respected as a starting point for the efforts of co-research – we must *visit other points of view* to better understand our common world (ethically and morally).

4. Its *critical reconstructions of second-order pathologies* and their accompanying structural reflexivity deficiencies may be found useful or ultimately accepted by those whose critical practice it is to assist.

Related to my research on the everyday life of ADHD in late modern Denmark, this entails some important considerations. Apart from what I have already described and discussed above, I have also had to tread lightly in my interviews regarding the moral dilemma in disagreeing with people about who they are and why they do, what they do, which can possibly be quite painful. This is especially difficult, when people base their identities on their diagnosis and certain ideas about their neurology, that I might not share (Russell, 2020). On the other hand, my co-researchers have sometimes asked me to just "spit it out", when I have been too careful and had to many considerations and reservations in my attempts to challenge their self-understandings. On the one hand my co-researchers are vulnerable people living with a psychiatric diagnosis, and some of them are really suffering. On the other hand, it is important for many of them, that their capabilities and responsibilities are recognized.

There is an important tension between *agreement as criterion for a successful critical reconstruction* in the thought of Celikates (2018) and the ethical and moral point of not reducing the other to sameness in the concept of *visiting* from Arendt (Hart, 2002; Matthiesen & Klitmøller, 2019). In short this means that agreement is central to a critical reconstruction in order that it be a critical reconstruction aiding a critical practice, but on the other hand that especially politically and ideologically, we should not surrender our understandings in the hands of the other. Can this be reconciled within co-research?

I think considerations about *what* the disagreement is a disagreement about is important in this context, as well as the *goal* of co-research. Starting with the "*what"* an example from my own research might give us a clue: The question of whether ADHD is seen as congenital or "acquired" ontogenetically, essentially because this question is of such a character that the investigation of everyday life of ADHD cannot answer it. It is both a philosophical, ideological as well as scientific question, concerning the neurological, genetic, behavioural, epidemiological evidence and so forth. So if my co-researchers and I disagree on these issues, when would this disagreement entail a model of the break? I think that would be the case, if I did not acknowledge my co-researchers'

experiences that some of the problems they face in their lives, as well as particular dynamics of their actions and emotions, are experiences that they have had for as long as they can remember. And, crucially, that no matter what they do, these dynamics have not been able to change or only change a little. If I were to *not* adopt this understanding of theirs after having interviewed them in an ideologically confrontative manner, then I would be leaving a model of symmetry. In this way I think the *what* of disagreements in co-research needs to be handled with delicacy in concrete research project and practice. Explanations can be confronted and critiqued, science and ideologies can be discussed and disagreed upon, but unless we want to go back to a model of the break, reserving critical reflexivity to the practice researcher, then the practice researcher *must* be open to being wrong about their assumptions and understandings; taking the experiences and reflections of their co-researchers seriously, while at the same time maintaining certain convictions can these not be argued differently by the co-researchers.

Coming back to the *goal* of co-research especially in light of Chimirri & Pedersen's (2019) ideas about considering co-research in the style of PSS as a democratizing practice, the question about how to participate in democracy as a participant in a co-research practice becomes important. If the goal is to democratize knowledge making that we might improve our lives together, then political and ethical questions about, what the good life is come to the fore (Sandel, 2005). In my research, ADHD is hotly debated in contemporary Denmark (e.g. Andersen, 2024; *DRTV - Debatten*, 2024; Tonning, 2024) and many different voices from different parts of the political spectrum are represented in the discussion about the status of the ADHD-diagnosis. A lot of my co-researchers relate to this debate as it reflects on them and their own considerations about their diagnosis. As a practice researcher in Denmark, it is my duty to disseminate knowledge to the public, but how should I convey the knowledge developed with my co-researchers, if we disagree on important parts of the research? Especially considering that some of them are very vulnerable and suffering?

This is related to an important point I want to make. In a study of the method of German cultural sociologist Andreas Reckwitz, the Swedish sociologist Mikael Carleheden (2024) discussed how we should consider the function of *zeit diagnosen* (social or contemporary diagnosis) in sociology. In short, Carleheden (2024), inspired by parts of critical theory, believes that the social diagnosis in sociology has the function of

honing public debate. That social diagnoses should function as part of critical, democratic, practice in a public that can assess and consider this diagnosis. In other words, that the function of critique is also honing public deliberation. I think that the public as an arena introduces some interesting dilemmas for those of us who are willing to work with disagreement in co-research. Who do we represent and how do we do it in public debate? And how should we take a position on political discussions based on our critical research, if, for example, our co-researchers take a position elsewhere in the political debate? In these contexts, I believe that those of us who work with co-researcher concepts must be able to present disagreements productively in public contexts. A clear description of what the disagreements and problems consist of after these have been developed in a thorough (co-)research process will be able to present dilemmas and problems in a more nuanced and productive way than we might be used to seeing in a polarized media image. The responsibility for the intervention in the public must of course follow the ethical considerations already described earlier. It is important that I stress disagreements in a way that acknowledges the experiences and the suffering of my co-researchers. Again, striking an important balance between recognising their difficulties and suffering, while still recognising them as subjects engaged in a political struggle, much like myself (Bertram & Celikates, 2015). Here we should also realise, that if we as practice researchers insist on explicating our part of the disagreement as what is *right*, then we are leaving the model of symmetry and no longer engaged in critical research *on behalf* of our co-researchers. But at the same time if we pretend that the disagreement is not there, we are surrendering our own understandings.

I wish here to make a final point. If those of us who work in a critical tradition of research, like those working in the tradition of German Nordic Critical Psychology, truly want to do emancipatory research and create knowledge, that will hone the public debate and bring our democratic deliberations further, then we need to be willing to work with people, with whom we disagree. Even when this disagreement is ideological and political in nature. Otherwise, our democratic legitimacy as researchers contributing much needed knowledge will be lost.

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