1. Date Transcribed: 26th May 2021
2. Interviewer(s): Cathy

Respondent(s): Roger

**INT: -talking about it. But can you give me an idea of your career background? Have you always been a researcher? Or in academia?**

**[00:00:10]**

RES: No. I did at one time do what my mother terms ‘a proper job’. I did a degree and a master’s degree in sociology, and then I worked for six years for the National Health Service as a general manager. And I guess, I was on a general management career track. And I, for a variety of reasons, quit the last job I had in the NHS and went back to university to do an MSC, which was computer science (health informatics). Because that was kind of the area that I worked in, in the Health Service.

And even though that was a- you know, run by a computer science department obviously, and also the university’s school of public health- this was in [Location removed]. I actually ended up kind of, without really thinking about it, doing some qualitative research for my dissertation. I’m not sure I would have even called it that. But I wrote an information strategy for a hospital for an NHS Trust. And how I wrote it was I spent, I guess, a couple of months going around all of the senior people in the Trust and talking to them about information, and their kind of, information needs, and how they thought they were going to change, and what the shortcomings of the existing systems were, and how they might be improved. And looking back on it now, I realise it was a qualitative research project. I probably would have [unclear 00:02:09] more as a piece of consultancy. Of course, you know, management consultants use these techniques as well.

And so, that was actually, I guess, the first piece of qualitative work that I did. Though, I didn’t really have any methodological training, and I certainly wouldn’t have been able to kind of, theorise it in research terms. In a kind of, an epistemological way. So, I was kind of, maybe a bit naïve. And when I- one of the modules I did was a module on nursing informatics, which was run by the university’s school of nursing. It was one of a very small number of universities that has nursing as an academic programme in those days. And talking to the person who ran that module, she said, ‘This is a growing field and, you know, we find it very difficult to recruit people’. And one of the things she said to me which, you know, of course, kind of obvious but didn’t occur to me. She said, ‘If you wanted to work as an academic in a school of nursing, you don’t have to be professionally qualified as a nurse.’ And I thought that might be interesting. And I applied for various jobs, as well as jobs back in the health service, and got one at what’s now [University name removed], in the school of nursing. And that was- I mean, I think they vaguely felt that they ought to do something about IT, tech, computers, but they weren’t quite sure what.

So, they hired me, and I think initially, they weren’t really- didn’t really quite know what they wanted to do with me, but gradually, I developed a contribution to programmes and- and I started-

**[00:04:16]**

**INT: Is that academic programmes rather than computer programmes?**

**[00:04:20]**

RES: Yes. This was- in those days, nursing was mostly a diploma in higher education rather than a degree. But it had moved into universities by this stage. I didn’t really do any research to begin with. I mean, I probably couldn’t have done because I was kind of, finding my feet and learning how to do a new job.

And then, kind of realised that it would be a very good career move to get a PhD. And so, that was when I actually started kind of, more formal training as a researcher. So, I started work on my PhD in 1996. So, that is 25 years ago.

**[00:05:04]**

**INT: Congratulations**

**[00:05:06]**

RES: Hence it- I get these disturbing emails that say, ‘as an experienced researcher’, ‘as an experienced supervisor’. And I keep saying, “I don’t feel very experienced.” But I suppose, 25 years later, I must have learnt something. But it’s still a kind of- I mean, normally, it’s only because people want you do something. But it still seems like a strange thing to be. Does that answer your question? Or-

**[00:05:37:**

**INT: Yes. Yes, it does. I suppose you’ve actually, kind of, started to answer some of the next questions, and I’m trying to decide where to go with those.**

**Tell me a little bit more about your PhD, and what you felt you learnt from doing that. And how did that- had anything you learnt by doing the master’s translate into your PhD?**

**[00:06:03]**

RES: Well, I didn’t- I didn’t do any- in fact, ironically, considering the amount of time I spend teaching research methods, I’ve never done any research methods training in my life. And I’m not advocating that approach, but that’s just how it kind of worked out for me. I- at [University name removed], when I was there, if you did a PhD in the university, it was free. So, I kind of looked around, and there was- one of my- the person who became my supervisor was, at that time, a reader in sociology. And he’s a sociologist who’s interested in technology. All kinds of technology. But he’d done some work in healthcare. And so, I went to talk to him, and I had various ideas of things that might be a PhD.

But really, I kind of did it on a very, sort of, old fashioned apprenticeship model. There was- I mean, there were kind of- I can recollect one or two, sort of, half days of formal training. And that was it. And so, my supervisor said to me, ‘Well, what you have in mind sounds like a qualitative project, so you ought to go and do some reading.’ And I’m, you know, I’m of a generation where the people who taught me as undergraduates never gave you detailed guidance on what to read and what not to read. You know, if I’d asked for that, they would have pointed and said, ‘You see that big building over there with the tower on it?’

**[00:07:50]**

**INT: ‘Go over there.’**

**[00:07:51]**

RES: Yes. It’s- you’ll find, you know, ‘You’ll find the answers in there. But you’ll have to look’. So, I was kind of- I was accustomed to doing that for myself. And so, just- I mean, really, just kind of read text books and tested my ideas out with my supervisors. I had two who sort of said that that was okay. I mean, I didn’t- you know, I did principally, an interview-based study. And that didn’t come- that wasn’t difficult for me. I’d done, you know, a lot of that kind of work. I worked on a big information system replacement project. One of the last things that I did in the NHS. And actually, what we did was ran- I don’t know, it must have been 30 big focus groups within the hospital. So, I kind of realised, looking back on it, I’ve actually had quite a lot of practice long before I started.

But I probably didn’t know the theoretical foundations of qualitative research that well. I mean, kind of, good enough to write a methods chapter in a PhD. And then really, a lot of what I’ve learnt since then, it’s as much by- teaching it has been an important part as well as actually doing it. And of course, one of the sort of, sadnesses of being in my position in my career is, I don’t get to do fieldwork anymore, and I miss it. You know, I am so envious of my PhD and master’s students who get to go and talk to people and get to go and hang around in- well, I think they’re interesting places. Like the renal dialysis unit which I happened to be on not so long ago- pre Covid, and just had to wait for someone. And I thought, this place is absolutely fascinating. I could sit here all day. And I used to get very tetchy with students in nursing who’d said, you know, ‘Care of the elderly, it’s dead boring.’ It is rich with so many intriguing things. I almost had to restrain myself from saying, ‘Well, if you’re not sure what to do, why don’t you go and talk to some patients.’ That seemed like a good thing. So-

**[00:10:24]**

**INT: So, before I forget to ask you. We haven’t really named that PhD or given it, kind of, a context.**

**[00:10:32]**

RES: Oh, okay. So, it was a PhD in sociology in the sociology department. It was about resistance- to the implementation of computerised systems for care planning in nursing. As I worked in nursing at the time. And the then government had spent a lot of money on that as an idea, and three of the local hospitals had implemented-fortunately for me, quite different systems in quite different ways. So, it worked really nicely as three case studies. And I just interviewed the nurses who used them, and the people who’d implemented them in those individual hospitals.

So, as a, you know, as a piece of research, it was methodologically very kind of, straightforward and unremarkable. I mean, it’s- I was talking about this only yesterday. Recruiting anybody who works clinically to interview studies is quite difficult. But if you’re kind of, in that world, and because I worked in the school of nursing, I was sort of, part of it, it’s much easier to do as an insider, or sort of an insider, as I was.

But- I mean, it wasn’t anything particularly extraordinary in terms of methods. It was good enough. And I kind of realised this. It’s one of the things about PhDs. You don’t have to get a first. You just have to pass. They’re not classed. Nobody cares, as long as it’s good enough. So, I don’t know what classification my PhD would get if such things existed.

**[00:12:15]**

**INT: I dread to think of mine.**

**[00:12:17]**

RES: Well, I think most of us probably do. I [unclear 00:12:19] you know, I’m just thinking about the people I supervise and I kind of- maybe could say that some of them are better than some of the others in certain respects, but I mean, it doesn’t matter. It’s probably pointless. So, anyway, sorry. I’m rambling, which I do. So-

**[00:12:44]**

**INT: So, the next two questions then that kind of- which part of the research process would you say is your favourite part? Given that you said you miss being in the field.**

**[00:12:59]**

RES: Well, I think that’s it. I mean, I- which is ironic because that’s the thing I absolutely don’t get to do now. I hardly ever get to interview people. The project we just completed- some work for Health Education England. I did one of the interviews and that was only because it was someone I know, and like, I work with. And I was going to talk to her anyway. And so, I said, ‘Well, we’ve got this meeting arranged. Can I have an extra half an hour? Because you would be a great interviewee for this project.’ So, that was just chance.

And yes. I mean, I don’t think it would be easy to do at the moment, but any kind of ethnographic field work, I would love to do. And I don’t get the opportunity to do it. So, I mean, I enjoy presenting my research and talking about it. And I find writing hard work. I mean, it’s you know, it’s important. You can’t not do it. And it’s nice, kind of, when it’s finished. But the actual process of writing, I think- like many people, I find that quite difficult.

I like the kind of, design and figuring out what the sort of, theoretical position that we take on any study. I do a lot of interdisciplinary research, and I really enjoy working with people from sometimes very, very different disciplines, and trying to figure out how we can work together. And so, how do I design the kind of qualitive bits of much larger studies? Which may be you know, like a lot of it is something very- something like a randomised control trial.

So, that stuff, I enjoy. I enjoy teaching qualitative research. But is that part of the process itself? It’s probably easier in a way, but-

So, that’s what I like and what I- well, you know, what I like less. What was the other thing?

**[00:15:30]**

**INT: It was the- well, seeing as you’ve talked about teaching, let’s talk about- do you teach now?**

**[00:15:41]**

RES: Yes. I teach- I teach the kind of philosophical foundations of research methods, both in the business school, but also, for the kind of, faculty wide doctoral training partnership programme. I have- so, I lead the module in the business school, and I contribute to it for the faculty DTP programme.

**[00:16:12]**

**INT: Which faculty is that?**

**[00:16:14]**

RES: This is faculty of social sciences. So, we are funded by the economic social research council for PhD studentships. But the ESRC says that students must follow a particular programme of training, and they expect a whole master’s degree worth of training, ironically in light of the fact that I’ve probably only got about a day and a half. I- you know, my students now have to do a year.

So, those are the biggest things. But I also contribute to the teaching of qualitative research methods. Again, on the faculty programme. But also, within the business school. And then do, kind of, odd bits and pieces of things. So, I just- I always end up thinking, I’m sure there are people in this university who know more about this than I do. But nobody else seems to be prepared to do it.

So, things like interviewing elite groups- because one where had a group of students who particular wanted to talk about that and learn a bit more about it. And I’ve done some. So, I said, ‘Well, I’m happy to do something.’ But also- I did a seminar on sample size in qualitative research. Again, partly at someone’s request. But also, there was something I kind of, I was cross about when I read it. And I thought a more mature response would be to kind of, explain in a scholarly and rigorous way ‘why I am cross’. And ‘why I think this person is wrong’. Rather than just sort of saying, ‘what a load of old nonsense’.

**[00:17:57]**

**INT: Do you remember what that topic was?**

**[00:17:59]**

RES: Well, it was to do with- I mean, it was to do with sample size. And it’s something- especially with the kind of interdisciplinary research that I do. When you’re working with funding agencies and reviewers, and researchers who come from a much more scientific approach. Particularly in medicine. And I, and others, often get pressed on the question of sample size. And they say, ‘Well, how many people are you going to interview?’ I’ll say, ‘We’ll, you know, we’ll do kind of, roughly 30, 40. But a lot of it is going to be, you know, who can we recruit in the time available?’ And they say, ‘Well, how will you know that you’ve done enough?’ And I like, kind of want to say, ‘I can’t answer that question, and nobody can answer that question’. And I think they kind of come with this mindset that because for randomised controlled trials, or for surveys, or case control [unclear 00:18:55] studies, you can derive sample sizes scientifically. My statistician colleagues tell me it’s not as scientific as it’s cracked up to be. But, more so than what I do.

And so, I think they find it a bit annoying- I’ll say, ‘Oh, well. Just see how we get on. You know, it might be 20. Might be 50. See what comes out of the data. Want to try and get a-‘

And so, I was just- as I say, rather than- it’s when I start to complain about things like this. And my wife says, “Will you be writing to the Daily Telegraph about it?” Because apparently, that’s what I sound like. So, I’ve got to try and do something a bit more thoughtful to try and explain why, at a kind of, fundamental, philosophical level, there is a problem. And why it’s pointless to ask for a precise estimate of a sample size in advance of doing the work.

And yes actually, surprisingly, considering most of the people at the seminar were people from the faculty of medicine it went down surprisingly well. Because you know, I thought I was going to get pulled apart for not being scientific. But actually, the audience was very open to it. So, that was actually- and actually, that kind of thing is quite an enjoyable experience. Talking to scientists about these sorts of problems is actually-yes. That’s one of the nice things that I do.

**[00:20:35]**

**INT: So, if you’re- if we’re talking about- do you teach any undergraduates? Or does it tend to be postgraduates?**

**[00:20:43]**

RES: At the moment, it’s only postgraduates, but don’t tell anyone.

**[00:20:48]**

**INT: Ssshh. So, what do you most enjoy when you’re teaching, you know, the postgraduate student? And what do you find challenging?**

**[00:21:01]**

RES: Well, I don’t- it’s actually the same thing. So, it’s thinking about the- particularly the qualitative research module was- because they’re either master’s in research methods, or PhD students, they ask me difficult questions. But I really enjoy doing that. The last lot- it wasn’t that long ago. They did ask me, you know, kind of, an hour, 90 minutes worth of very difficult questions about method. But actually, I really enjoyed talking about it even though I wasn’t able to give them definitive answers, which is maybe what some of them were hoping that there might be.

**[00:21:54]**

**INT: Do you think they were searching for the ‘right’ answer?**

**[00:21:58]**

RES: I think so. And I, you know, I’ve been thinking this a lot lately. A PhD could have been devised deliberately to make people anxious. You know, everything that goes with it, you kind of think- and then we recruit a group of people who- you know, we select them for conscientiousness which is correlated with anxiety. And we say, ‘Ooh, why are PhD students so anxious?’ We select a group of people who are probably prone to that anyway, and then put them through this vicious process. So, I think, yes. The source of a lot of those questions is, they want to know they’re doing it right. And I suppose I’m hoping to get them to a position where they’re okay with not having a definitive right answer. But they’ve got *an* answer, and a defensible answer, and a rigorous one. One that’s grounded in methodological theory and is appropriate to their research, and those kinds of things.

And then really, it’s up to them. And I think a lot of it is helping them work through the process of becoming comfortable with that. And if you know you’ve got to face a viva [unclear 00:23:21] I can see- yes, it would make anybody anxious.

**[00:23:23]**

**INT: Yes vivas can do that to people, can’t they? So, the- we’re speaking, I suppose, a little in the abstract about what people find challenging. So, I wonder if there’s some examples about that. Whether it’s practical things, or theoretical things that people find challenging.**

**[00:23:44]**

RES: I mean, I think the practical thing that is probably the most challenging, but maybe this just reflects the world I inhabit, is- because we were saying a few minutes ago, recruitment. Particularly if you want to recruit healthcare professionals who are, you know, quite busy people, particularly at the moment. Though, recruiting patients can be difficult. Not least because they are by definition, you know, in some way, ill. So, they might not be the easiest people in the world to talk to, or kind of, relatives, or carers or- Again, a lot of things with patients we- I think we’re increasingly understanding that we’re not very good at recruiting marginalised people to our studies, and of course, one of the reasons is that they’re not easy to recruit.

So, that’s the kind of big, practical problem, I think for kind of, qualitative research. Ethnography- and again, this probably just reflects kind of, where I do my research. It’s kind of getting in and getting permission to go and hang around in, you know, in kind of, healthcare environments. At the moment, that’s almost impossible. I hope it’s going to get better soon. But one of my PhD students has had a rotten time over the last year because of that. Not her fault. It’s purely the pandemic, but also how the NHS has handled particularly what she wants to do.

And that’s- you know, ironically, once you’re in there, particularly in hospital, everybody’s so busy that it’s actually not that difficult to do ethnographic research. People worry about it and- but in fact, everyone’s kind of rushing around so much that this kind of person sitting in a corner with a notepad, it’s like, ‘They’re not getting in anybody’s way. They’re not asking anything. Fine, I’m just going to ignore them because I’ve got 23 more important things to do in the next 17 minutes’.

So, it’s strange. It’s hard to get past the institutional barriers and the initial, kind of, informal social barriers. But isn’t it strange that, kind of, once you’re in there, people don’t care? This was taken to extreme by a former colleague. She’s long retired now. She solved the- she said she’d solved the problem of observer effects in ethnographic research. And she did this by dint of getting a job as a cleaner in hospital. And she said, “And then you become invisible.”

And so, she did that, quite successfully, I think. There’s some ethical difficulties there. But she said, all- you know, ‘There’s a hundred years of literature and anthropology about observer effects’, and she said, ‘I made it all go away by putting on a nasty nylon overall.’ Becoming someone of so little importance to all the other people in the room that-

But- so, I always think about that story when people talk about the practical problems, including ethnography. So- sorry, go on.

**[00:27:19]**

**INT: Have you got any other stories that you like to use in particular? Whether they’re cautionary tales, or you know, ‘here’s the way to get round that’-type tales.**

**[00:27:32]**

RES: I think- you’ve kind of set me off thinking about ethnography. And this is one of mine, it’s one of my PhD students who- one of the things she did very well was kind of, engage and get to know a particular group of staff. And she worked quite hard at that for a long period of time before she started the observations. And then overheard a couple of staff members- again this is in the NHS- saying something like, “Oh, that woman’s here today.” And the other one said, “Which woman?” And the woman- the first person said, “Oh, you know. That woman with the red hair who always brings biscuits.”

But she said she realised these people had no idea what her research was about or what she was doing. And they weren’t that interested, you know, they didn’t actually care about it. But she was acceptable to them because she always brought biscuits to staff meetings. And I suppose the reason why I tell that as a story is partly, you have to work at developing a relationship with the people you're studying. You know, particularly in ethnographic studies. But also, that your research participants might very well have the strangest ideas about who you are, and what you're doing, and why you’re there, and what’s a PhD? Is that like being a medical doctor? You know, all of that sort of stuff. And firstly, you can’t fix it. And secondly, it probably doesn’t matter very much.

So, I think there’s those sorts of things. And it was- yes, she was quite proud of her informal title of *the biscuit lady* because that sort of, signified a degree of acceptance and she [unclear 00:29:21] can work with that.

So, you know, I’m usually a great teller of stories, but because you’ve put me on the spot, I can’t think of any.

**[00:29:33]**

**INT: Well, we can go back to the question of what the students find challenging. And what you find challenging to teach them, if you like.**

**[00:29:42]**

RES: I think a lot of them find the epistemological foundations of social science research quite challenging. And obviously, you know, a lot of my PhD students have come from professional training as nurses, or physios, or whatever. So, that’s quite a different world for them. But in fact, I find a lot of students who have got undergraduate social science degrees find that stuff quite hard as well. And I think that’s because it’s abstract, and most people are not- unless you’ve learnt how to do it, most people aren’t, kind of, naturally very good at abstract thinking.

So, I mean, I think that’s probably all it is. Because most of them get there in the end.

I mean, I think- the other kind of, practical- well, it’s not just practical, it’s also a kind of theoretical problem, is the- particularly with interviewing, and that’s interviewing people who you perceive to be senior to yourself. Or you perceive to have more status, or who- you know, sometimes they genuinely are kind of, important people. One of my PhD students recently interviewed the chief nursing officer for England. So, she’s quite an important person, I would say. Very senior, both professionally, and kind of, in the government, I guess.

So, and I think doctoral students particularly, find dealing with- kind of- interviewing people like that, or recruiting them, or dealing with people in authority. I think a lot of the message you get as a PhD student, wrongly, and I wish this weren’t the case, is that somehow, you’re kind of the bottom of the heap. And actually, nothing could be further from the truth. But maybe PhD students kind of internalise that- and a bit sort of, anxious about approaching people, or going through formal processes, and- yes, I guess it’s one of those things. It’s probably- it’s easy for me to be relaxed about it because I’m a professor, and I’m 57, and I’m a white bloke. So, you know- a whole bunch of stuff is running in my favour when I deal with those people. So, I’m kind of, conscious- I think that can be a struggle. I think the other thing that some students really struggle with is, kind of, presenting their work. Both written and spoken. And again, I think it’s something that I don’t find particularly difficult, but I’ve got a lot of practice. I sometimes have to work hard at supporting people through those processes, because I don’t- I’ve never found, kind of, speaking in public or anything like that particularly difficult. There’s a million things I find difficult, but that’s not one of them.

So, that’s- and the kind of, the necessity of writing, you know. Yes, it’s hard. It’s actually kind of, physically painful, weirdly. And yes, you are going to get criticised, and you are going to get criticised in a way that sort of, emotionally, is not much fun. But it’s *usually*- and we both know sometimes it’s not the case. But it’s usually not meant personally. And learning to live with that can be quite a struggle.

So, I think those sorts of things- there’s probably a kind of, recency effect here. This is just the things I’ve been thinking about and talking to people over the last year. If you asked me five years ago, I might have given you a different set of categories.

**[00:34:34]**

**INT: Indeed. If I ask you tomorrow, it might be different.**

**So, the- I think you moved departments recently. And I was wondering about that, whether qualitative research is common in this current department, or not? And what’s that like in terms of, I don’t know, community of researchers? Have you got to kind of, fight a corner? Or just generally, what’s it like?**

**[00:35:04]**

RES: I think- I’ve moved from somewhere where it’s a struggle. Nursing. To somewhere where it’s not a problem, which is the business school. And I think that’s because the business school is almost entirely composed of social science researchers. You know, they might originally be economists, psychologists, sociologists, whatever. But we’re all social scientists and there isn’t anybody who’s doing anything which is remotely like the natural sciences, the physical sciences.

So, we- on the whole, the business school is kind of, pretty- my teenage son would say, chill, methodologically. Mostly, we kind of get along with each other, and it’s not a problem.

I mean, in nursing, you’ve always got a kind of, baleful presence of scientific research, of randomised controlled trials and systematic reviews, and that whole world. Which rightly or wrongly, is viewed as being, in some way, inherently superior. I mean, it’s not that qualitative or social scientific research, it has no value. But you know, you’re not going to get in the journal of the American Medical Association, or the Lancet with a qualitative paper. And you’re not going to get a top merit award or any of those kinds of things. Certainly, in medical research. So, you know, there is a status problem. It’s nothing like as bad as it once was, but it still exists.

So, no- I mean, you know, I think the business school is probably an easier place to be as a social scientist. I don’t know what our, kind of, tame economists say when they’re, you know, behind closed doors with just the other economists. They might say, “What a load of old nonsense.” But they’re very polite in person.

So, that’s actually quite a positive move for me. The other thing that’s nice about being in a school which is principally social scientists, is people are much more comfortable with theory. Whereas in nursing, there’s always a bit of anxiety. Certainly, about social science theory.

So, that’s kind of, quite-

**[00:37:45]**

**INT: Anxiety from whom?**

**[00:37:48]**

RES: Well, I mean, there’s firstly the kind of- what I was talking about a minute ago, about, is it real research? And secondly, because physicians, nurses, all of the healthcare professionals are, by nature, doers. You know, they go to a lot of time and trouble, and it’s really, really hard work to get in and complete the course. And they do all that in order to do. To *do* stuff to patients. You know, which obviously, that’s a good thing. But I think it means that there’s a kind of, degree of scepticism about anything that sounds theoretical. And actually, what I find with kind of, medical and nursing colleagues. This isn’t a huge problem, but sometimes I’m saying, I want to- I’m like Michael Caine in the last scene of The Italian Job, where he says, “Let’s all hang on a minute and have a think about this.” Something along those lines. I’m sure Michael Caine puts it much better than me. But I kind of find that the, you know, my kind of, healthcare commercial colleagues are- always want to do, and to act. Because that’s what they learnt to do. And obviously, sometimes, you know, well, it’s really, really important. But I’d find myself saying, there are times when it might be just better to sit back and think about it for a minute.

So, I think that’s probably the root of it. Whereas, you know, if you’re trained as some kind of social scientist, you are trained to think, and to reflect, and to consider theoretical concepts and that kind of thing. It kind of goes with the territory. So, I think that’s the, you know- it’s not a bad thing per se. It’s just, it can sometimes make- well, interdisciplinary research a bit more tricky.

**[00:39:57]**

**INT: Yes. So, I’m going to kind of, take you back to, kind of, back over your whole career now, and that sense of, what things do you think have changed most since you first started researching?**

**[00:40:16]**

RES: So, it’s- fortunately for me, it’s much easier to get social scientific, qualitative research funded by the- particularly for National Institute for Health research, but also the kind of, health research charities. They’re much more relaxed. Particularly if it’s part of a kind of, a larger or wider study. So, that’s been good for me, and for other people who kind of do what I do. I think concomitantly, it’s probably harder to get money out of the research councils. ESRC in my case, but my guess is that my scientist colleagues will probably say something similar.

I’m not sure that, you know, there’s been kind of gigantic methodological advances. You know, it’s hard to see what’s kind of-

**[00:41:21]**

**INT: Ooh, can I just check. I was kind of nodding along with an assumption then, and I realised that I need to ask you, with the medical research councils, and getting money seems to be a little easier. Why do you think that is?**

**[00:41:35]**

RES: Well, I think that they have- that what probably drives that is, it’s now kind of more widely understood why kind of, translation implementation is such a problem and that the, you know, the medical school library has got shelves and shelves of papers that report randomised controlled trials of treatments that work. Why is it so difficult to get the NHS to use them? It’s not particularly an NHS problem because it’s the same in every country in the world. So, I think the- particularly the National Institute for Health research have kind of realised that those questions are important, and they’re not amenable to science. They’re principally social questions that require social scientific answers and approaches. So, I think that’s been kind of good news for us as social scientists and that we’re kind of- I think we’re becoming a bit like the statisticians and health economists that we’re kind of seen now as part of the team, in that world.

So- I mean, I think things like- I said earlier, things like research training and the process of doing a PhD is far more structured than when I did it. And I’m not offering a judgement on whether that’s better or worse. There are some things that are good about it, and I think some things which- yes, I’m not convinced.

I think we’re- it’s actually, we’ve come quite a long way in terms of the diversity of the people who are you know, learning to be social science researchers and are on that kind of track. But we’ve still got a long way to go. I had a conversation with someone who’s about the same age as myself and we were talking about a particular conference where, again, I’ve been going for more than 20 years. But I just wanted to check out my impression. I said, “Am I right? Are there more women at this conference than there used to be?” And she said, yes, she thought so too. Though, you know, neither of us had, sort of, checked and added it up.

So, you know, those kinds of things are- actually have made progress, but I think we’re becoming more and more conscious of how much more work there is to do. And I suspect that we’ve- you know, thus far it’s probably been low hanging fruit.

**[00:44:44]**

**INT: Yes. Easier to reach groups, so to speak.**

**[00:44:49]**

RES: Yes. And I had a very interesting conversation with- I was in Cambridge at a- it was like a kind of strategy thing, and I was talking to someone who- she’s an academic at the University of Cambridge, and she studied there. And she’s quite a lot younger than me. And I was an undergraduate at Cambridge. And I was asking her, you know, what changes do you think I would notice? And she said- yes, this isn’t exactly scientific. She said, ‘Well there’s more women around probably than when you were a student. But apart from that, not a lot has changed.’ And she said, ‘Probably if you went and checked, you’d find that those women were principally white and middle-class and had probably been to posh schools’.

So, there’s *a* change. But it’s a positive change. You know, things are more diverse than they used to be. We have still got a way to go. So, I think that’s- and you know, I think about all of these things, it’s like the alcoholic in the first stage of recovery. At least we know we’ve got a problem. I’m not sure we’re doing everything that we could do to fix it yet, but it’s like- I think, as a community, we’re sort of much more aware than we used to be that there is actually a problem with all of this stuff, and we need to do better.

And not least because in addition to it being, ethically, the right thing to do, it’s also, we’ll get better research and better researchers if we draw on a wider population of people. And you know, this is known. And when, you know, kind of, the Financial Times is saying corporations are more profitable if they recruit diverse staff and have diverse managers. I kind of think, well that’s pretty compelling evidence.

That’s- it is actually an important issue, and it is relevant to teaching research methods. Though I’m not sure I’m the person to ask about the answers to that.

**[00:47:14]**

**INT: Okay then. So, thinking about reflexivity and its value for the researcher, and the qualitative researcher in particular. How do you think you’ve changed since you started out?**

**[00:47:29]**

RES: Well, I- you know, I am much better at it than I used to be. And I, you know, again, ironically, it’s the thing I got kicked around on in my PhD viva. You know, they said, ‘you’ve written this whole thing, and you talk about it with this air of breezy self-confidence. Do you think there might be anything that you possibly got wrong?’ At which point, the penny dropped. I thought, ‘okay, fair enough. You got me there’. And so, that’s been quite a journey for me.

But I think, kind of, paradoxically, I’m kind of, much more aware of the various ways in which kind of, who I am, where I’ve been, and what I do affect the research that I do. But at the same time, that actually makes me kind of more confident about saying what I think because, you know, I’m not trying- I now know I’m not trying to make any sort of large or universal claim. I can only do it on the basis of what I’ve done, who I am. And I try to be as honest as I can. But kind of, weirdly, that’s quite liberating. Because as long as you- for me, as long as I’m kind of, clear about where I’m coming from theoretically and methodologically, I’m quite confident about what I’ve found, with the proviso that I know I could very well be wrong. But I’m not going to let that- I think sometimes, people become sort of, paralysed by self-doubt, and actually, as I say, it seems contradictory, but I don’t think it is. That reflexivity is actually quite- yes, I find it quite liberating in a way.

**[00:49:36]**

**INT: I’m trying not to comment too much in terms of, ‘oh, yes. I agree with you’. And reinforcing what you’re saying.**

**[00:49:47]**

RES: Oh, feel free. Or feel free to tell me I’m wrong. That would be [unclear 00:49:49] reflexivity. But-

**[00:49:52]**

**INT: I’m finding a disturbing level of agreement.**

**[00:49:55]**

RES: Oh, well. That just shows how clever we both are, Cathy.

**[00:49:58]**

**INT: Oh, yes. We can both pat each other on the back. Which, you know, I think feelings of guilt, and kind of, shame around that, rather than self-congratulation is probably a good thing about the reflexive process of, ‘oh, how do I feel about this?’ makes me feel worried rather than reassured.**

**So, in terms of practice, you’re aware that we’re going to be using this partly in our teaching. Is there anything that you might do that’s different now to when you first started out gathering research? Writing about research? Or the process of analysing your research. Are there tools that you use? Anything that’s different now to what you did, say, 20 years ago.**

**[00:50:53]**

RES: Good question. I think I’m much more open to a wider variety of theoretical positions. Kind of, social science, sociological, theoretical positions. And that’s just because I’ve had time to read more. I know more stuff. In the intervening 20 years, I clearly have done some reading. Probably not enough but- So, that’s you know, a PhD, for a lot of people, certainly for me, teaches you how to do one thing. And now I can do, sort of, several different things, theoretically and methodologically. So, that’s good. I work much more in an interdisciplinary way with a very wide group of other researchers, and indeed, other people of all kinds. And so- and actually, I kind of- I want to do even more of that and I think that it’s also, you know, kind of, being a bit older, and being a bit more senior, means that it’s probably easier to do those sorts of things.

I’m doing some work with somebody who’s a cancer biologist. A proper lab scientist. And you know, at one time, I would have thought, well what do I possibly have to contribute to that field? But now, I kind of think, well, let’s have a chat about what he’s interested in, and what he wants to do, and what’s on the horizon for him and his team, and maybe I can- you know, there might be some things I can help with or, kind of, things that I can bring that, you know, they don’t have that expertise. So, I’m much more open about doing that kind of work. And you know, it doesn’t- and it’s also, with that kind of thing, is you have to accept that sometimes it doesn’t work. Or it doesn’t work now. And it could be that you know- I find with a lot of things is that you meet people, and talk to people, and find out a little bit about what they do. And there’s not anything that you’re going to collaborate on now. But 18 months down the line, a call comes out from someone saying, we want this kind of research. And I’m thinking, ‘oh, I wish I knew a cancer biologist who studies cell signalling, because it would be great to apply for this thing together’.

So, that sort of thing is quite different for me, from where I was when I was doing my PhD. I never would have conceived of doing that kind of work.

Yes. Sorry. That’s all I’ve got on that.

**[00:54:11]**

**INT: No, that’s absolutely fine. The- I suppose, we’re nearing the end anyway. So, let’s finish on, kind of, one of the old favourites about, if you were to give your younger self a piece of advice, what would that be?**

**[00:54:27]**

RES: I guess it’s a version of what I- when I talk, particularly to PhD students and early career researchers, I’ve now dubbed it the Duran Duran principal. And I’m guessing you might be just about old enough to remember Duran Duran.

**[00:54:51]**

**INT: I remember Duran Duran. Yes. I do.**

**[00:54:53]**

RES: They were on Radio 2 this morning when I was driving home. And that’s- they had a song- a hit with a song that had the line, “you’ve got to find your own way”. And I guess it’s that- I would kind of say to my younger self, that you’ve got to figure out what works for you and kind of, where you are, and the context that you’re in. And you never- you can’t be somebody else. And one of the things I realise now, is I- kind of, a lot of people over the years have said to me- I think it’s a thing academics do. It’s as if- well, ‘you need to be just like me and then you’ll be really successful’. I kind of think now, I can’t be just like somebody else. I can only be me. And I’m not even very good at that.

So, it’s about- and I guess, related to that. And this is- I mean this as a metaphor, not as a kind of, practical strategy, is that as an academic, you’re a kind of entrepreneur. And it’s about seeing opportunities, and sometimes the opportunities are obvious. It’s a case of looking at something and thinking, ‘how could I make this work for me, and for what I want to do?’ But also, working with a wide range of people. And I was saying a minute ago, it’s worth kind of, just kind of, getting to know people a little bit and not with the intention of thinking, you know, ‘as a result of one 30-minute meeting, we’re going to go away and write a grant or a paper together’. That sort of thing happens but it doesn’t usually. But it’s more this thing of, a year down the line, something will come along where you’ll be able to go back to someone and say, “Hey, what do you think about this?”

So- and I- that’s- so, I’m not talking about entrepreneur in the making money sense of it. But in terms of seeing opportunities- there’s someone actually, I kind of- she’s now kind of, quite a distinguished and significant researcher. And what she’s absolutely brilliant at, is kind of, stitching together little bits of money, and bits of people’s time, and involving lots and lots of people to- she’s got a very clear idea of where she wants to go. And I- she might not care for this description of entrepreneur, but that’s kind of how I see her. And I think that’s why she’s so good at what she does.

And I just think that’s kind of, quite a helpful model. And that, you know, you’re- Well, what the kind of, Institute of Science and Technology shows us- so, this isn’t just my opinion, is that you know, the lone genius is not true, and never has been true. Things are accomplished by quite diverse groups of people, and not everybody always gets the credit they deserve. And yes, I kind of- I was- in a similar vein, I was talking to someone who’s applying for a fellowship. And this is- it’s quite a prestigious one, in its way. And one of the things I was saying to him was to kind of think of himself as the CEO of a kind of group of projects that he doesn’t have to do all of the science and whatever in all of them. And that- which, you know, firstly it’s totally impractical, but secondly, there’s really good people around working with this person. And you know, he found that very helpful. And it is a metaphor. He’s not, like the CEO of a corporation, but it’s just about saying, well, he’s the one who sets the strategy. He’s got the vision. He knows the overall direction that he wants this programme of research to go in. He’s the one who’s going to bring together the team. To kind of, select them and get it funded. Get everybody on board. Keep them working in the same direction.

Is that not the kind of, classic role model of what a good business CEO is doing? I mean, there are lots of business CEOs that are absolutely miserable at it, despite getting paid obscene quantities of cash. But it’s fine as a metaphor.

So, see, clearly, being in business school has rubbed off on me. I’m not talking about those things as sort of, practical techniques or activities. They’re sort of, metaphors for understanding what it is you are doing as a researcher. And you know, there is still room for people to go and spend- you know, the social theorist, Niklas Luhmann, who basically said he was going to spend the next 30 years in the library writing one book. And that’s fine. And that’s important. Somebody needs to do it. But not everybody. So- and I think if you kind of see things like that, then it makes the whole interdisciplinary thing kind of easier to do.

**[01:00:49]**

**INT: Yes. Instead of trying to think, ‘I’ve got to do everything, and I can’t-‘ you know, ‘and how’s my tiny little bit going to have any significance’**

**[01:00:57]**

RES: And also, you know, understanding that there’s a bunch of stuff that I’m, you know, I’m just rubbish at. So, other people need to do it. I got an E at A-level maths. So, don’t let me near any numbers. But though actually, someone pointed out to me the other day that it’s- she said, go away and look at what proportion of the population have got A-level maths at all.

**[01:01:25]**

**INT: Precisely my thought.**

**[01:01:27]**

RES: Yes. Maybe I’m not innumerate then. I think that’s more a reflexion on the deficiencies of the British education system than any particular credit to me. So, yes.

**[01:01:43]**

**INT: Yes. On that note, there’s a sense of, that might not be, you know, deficiencies of the British education system might not want to be your final word. But before we close for the day, is there anything in particular that you either want to say in general? Or is there anything that you think, actually, I want this- I’m going to use this piece of work that Cathy’s doing to- you know, I’d like her to make sure that this thing is said.**

**[01:02:14]**

RES: I suppose- I was going to say, I’m kind of, clichéd. If I was American, I could get away with this convincingly. But actually, a lot of what I do as a researcher is very enjoyable. And it’s just a pleasure to hang around with, you know, often really smart people and, you know, people who do things different than I do. Talk about, well, they seem like interesting and important questions to us. And you know, we get to hang around in intriguing places and talk to all of these fascinating people. And from that kind of- and from all of those people, I’ve learnt an enormous amount. And I always used to say in the days when we had proper payslips, whenever I picked up my payslip, I used to say, “All this? And, they pay us money too.”

But you know, these are the aspects of my work that are genuinely enjoyable, and actually- no, I do expect to get paid, but it’s kind of nice when- what you get paid for, and what pays the mortgage and keeps me in cheap Bulgarian Cabinet Sauvignon- is also something that I genuinely enjoy and you know, most of the people I work with as collaborators, or research participants, or whatever. I genuinely like them and enjoy spending time with them, and kind of, finding out about what they do, and how they see the world, and all those sorts of things.

It’s a pleasure, and sometimes, it’s a privilege actually. Because people are telling you stuff that’s actually very important. Or, you know, is genuinely of some wider benefit.

So, yes. Well, that was a good idea, to kind of finish on a more, kind of, cheerful and positive note. And you know, like [01:04:26]most British people I love moaning about my work. But a lot of it is very enjoyable.