

# EMOTIONALLY TRAUMATIC RESEARCH

Virtual Seminar Series

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# THE CHALLENGES OF RESEARCHING TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

## MY BRIEF

- What are the main methodological, ethical and theoretical challenges and implications of this type of research?
- What structural or institutional challenges or opportunities do you see?
- **What are the methodological and personal opportunities for this type of research?**
- What do you think are key strategies for researcher self-care and participant care in the face of sensitive research?

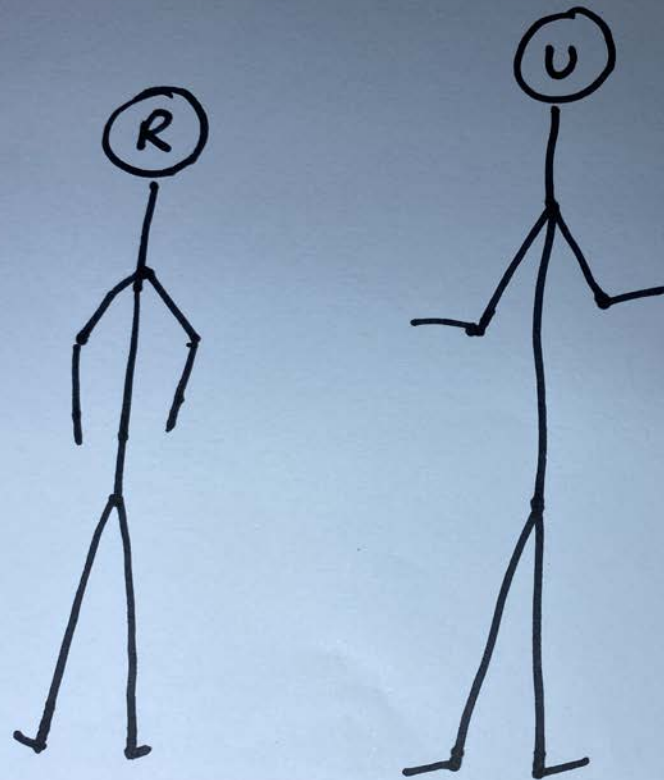
## THIS TYPE OF RESEARCH

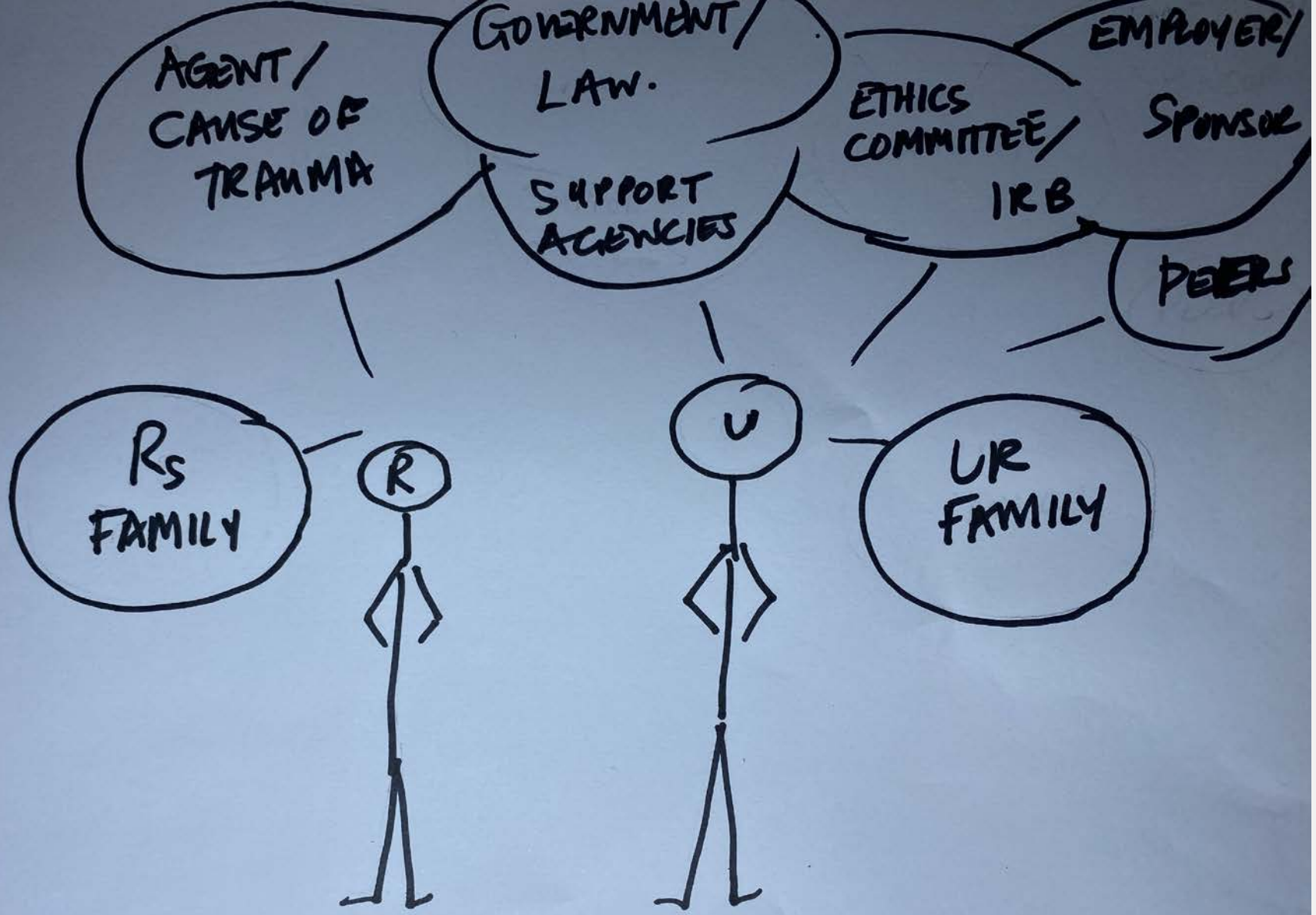
- My research experience: victims of armed conflict; combatants, state and non-state; armed groups; disabling injury due to armed conflict; child soldiers; disabled police officers in Northern Ireland; refusniks in Israel; ethnic conflict in West Africa, militias in South Africa.
- My clinical experience: family therapy, individual and couples work with child abuse, drug and alcohol use, intimate partner violence, (USA and Ireland).

## MAIN METHODOLOGICAL, ETHICAL AND THEORETICAL CHALLENGES

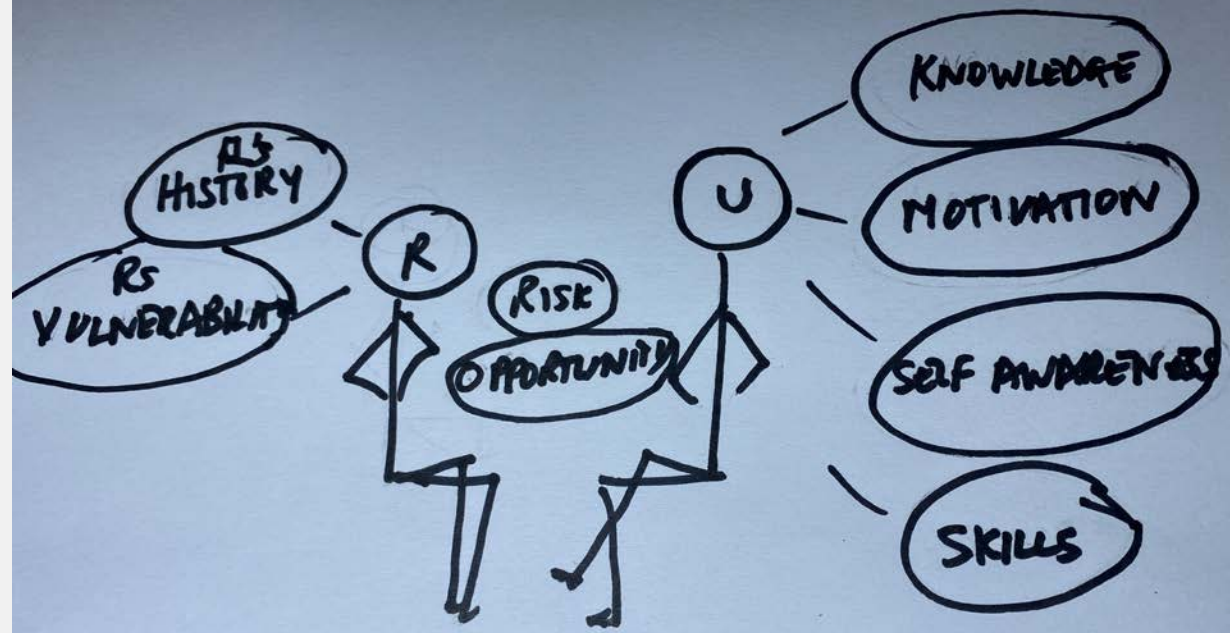
- Methodological: How do you do it? Who is it for? What results will they read and understand? What methods can deliver those?
- Ethical: why do you do it? What effect does it have? Is it possible to do no harm? Does it do any good?
  - Qui bono? (who has something to gain? usefulness or utility as a principle in estimating the value of an act or policy)
- Theoretical: how does it contribute to knowledge, what does it contribute? What does it unsettle?

STRUCTURAL OR INSTITUTIONAL  
CHALLENGES OR OPPORTUNITIES





# ETHICAL ISSUES





# ETHICAL ISSUES

- Why do you do it?
- HOW do you do it? (Inseparable from questions of methodology!)
  - Are your skills and knowledge sufficient to the task?
- What effect does it have/ will it have?
  - Have you anticipated these and mitigated the risks?
- Is it possible to do no harm? Does it do any good?
  - Qui bono? (who has something to gain? usefulness or utility as a principle in estimating the value of an act or policy)
- Under what circumstances would you stop the project?



# ETHICAL ISSUES: CONSENT

- What do participants know about the research?
- How are they involved in the initiation, design, monitoring, analysis and reporting of the research?
- How have you obtained consent for participation and what conditions are attached (for you?) Can they or you drop out and if so how?
- What undertakings have you given and can you deliver on them?
- Will you pay or reimburse participants?
- What will you do with the data? Who else will have access? When? Have participants understood and agreed this?

# ETHICAL ISSUES

- HOW do you do it? (Inseparable from questions of methodology!)
- What effect does it have/ will it have?
- Have you anticipated these and mitigated the risks?
- Is it possible to do no harm? Does it do any good?
  - Qui bono? (who has something to gain? usefulness or utility as a principle in estimating the value of an act or policy)

# KEY CARE STRATEGIES

- Key strategies for participant care
  - Scrupulous, paced, informed consent processes
  - Explain limitations to confidentiality and anonymity
  - Agree the environment for the interview – control of it important (working with a film crew!)
  - Agree boundaries of inquiry – what is on or off limits? For both of you – model personal boundaries
  - Disclosure & disclosure hangovers
  - Links to support spelled out and tested
  - Pacing
  - Humour
  - Warmth

# KEY CARE STRATEGIES

Key strategies for researcher self-care:

- Skilled supervision
- Cohesive team approach
- Pacing the work
- Regular debriefing
- Personal boundaries – work–life, help–empowerment, counter-transference...
- Division of labour – e.g. farm out transcription, but include transcribers in above
- Keep in touch with creativity
- Physical exercise & leisure balance

## SOME OTHER THINGS I HAVE SAID OVER THE YEARS

- **The uses of suffering: victims as moral beacons or icons of grievance.**  
Marie Breen-Smyth
- **Insider Outsider Issues in Research on Ethnic Conflict in Africa,** Marie Smyth
- **Using Participative Action Research with war affected populations: lessons from research in Northern Ireland and South Africa.** Marie Smyth