10 Videoconferencing as a Tool Facilitating Feminist Interviews with Muslim Women Who Wear the Niqab

ANNA PIELA

Introduction

In recent years Muslim women wearing a niqab have been the focus of policymakers, journalists and academics' attention. The niqab has become a politically loaded symbol of Islam, denoting the otherness of women who wear it (Abu-Lughod 2002). Its place in contemporary societies has been frequently debated in the last decade, infamously during the 'Jack Straw controversy' in 2006 (Khiabany and Williamson 2008). The controversial 'burka bans', recently introduced in France and Belgium, and proposed in other European countries, have led to much academic discussion questioning the legality of such prohibitions (including Ferrari and Pastorelli 2013). Furthermore, research has been conducted with non-Muslims and Muslim non-niqab wearers to investigate their perceptions of the niqab and the women who wear it. However, to my knowledge there are no UK studies that focus on views and experiences of women who wear the niqab themselves. Given the volatile attention on the niqab, it is unclear why there is so little research with them in Europe and globally. This is certainly against the grain of the social science research tradition whereby voices of the researched are not only included, but treated as central in research investigations (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002). The scarcity of systematic study of niqab wearers' voices may be related to the fact that they are a minority among Muslim women who choose to wear Islamic attire (Tarlo 2007) and they are therefore a hard-to-reach and potentially vulnerable population despite the fact that their numbers have been recently growing both in Europe and South Asia (Lewis 2007). Only very recently have two substantial publications based on interviews with UK-based niqab-wearing women been published (Bouteldja 2014; Open Society Foundations 2015).

I argue that this paucity of inclusive research *with* those most immediately concerned in the niqab controversies, also noted by the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (2013) is conspicuous; while research on wider (largely non-Muslim) population's perceptions of the niqab and niqab wearers in the European and American sociopolitical context is useful in its critical capacity (as it challenges established 'truths' about supposedly liberty-based European/American Judeo-Christian values), the lack of

sincere dialogue with women wearing the niqab indirectly contributes to the construction of these women as 'walking deficits' (Ghorashi 2010: 13) unable to voice their own motivations. Thus, the existing research on the niqab but without the women who wear it tells us much more about the West, its isolated cultural monologue and prejudices, than about women who wear the niqab.

It is possible `that these women's voices are not deemed important for the furthering of this pan-European and American debate, in which everybody else – politicians, media, academics, Muslim and non-Muslims – seems to claim a stake. Perhaps women who wear the niqab have never really been part of the debate; in Morey and Yaqin's words, 'the voice of the Third World woman is effectively silenced, evacuated from an argument that is about her but in which she is seldom invited to participate' (2011: 179). I argue that providing insight into niqab wearers' spoken narratives about their lives and beliefs will also inform wider debates on the place of religion in allegedly secular British society. The aims of the study were threefold:

- To acknowledge and address the ways in which women who wear the niqab understand the role of the niqab in the forming of their social identities through the use of ethnographic methods underpinned by feminist perspectives.
- To increase the understanding of niqab wearers' perceptions of their role and place in the British society.
- To respond to wider political debates in which the niqab is often (ab)used as a symbol of religious patriarchy and otherness.

Recognizing the detrimental role that some secular, white, middle-class Western feminists played by interpreting Muslim/Third world/non-white women's experiences as similar to their own, I have drawn in this research from theoretical work that emphasizes the significance of multiple subjectivities and exclusions (for example, Spivak 1993). Although a small-scale qualitative study such as this one (Piela forthcoming) is by no means a sufficient effort to bridge this gap, it begins to build up evidence on self-expressions of women whose views have not been addressed, despite their obvious central role in the matter.

Videoconferencing: An online research method on the rise

In this section I briefly introduce videoconference interviews as a relatively new type of online interview. There is a well-developed body of methodological literature on various uses of the internet in social research, as well as challenges posed by this type of research. A widely accepted differentiation in approaches to the internet as a research tool is utilitarian: whether we think of the internet as a technology facilitating data collection, or as a site of research where data collection methods may also be (although not necessarily) based on internet communication (Association of Internet Researchers, henceforth AoIR, 2012). The former focuses on various online means of communication, including asynchronous ones like email (James and Busher 2009).

The latter has an emphasis on 'online communities' fostered by participation in asynchronous discussion groups (Savicki, Lingenfelter and Kelley 1996); and synchronous 'chatrooms' (Salmon 2010). Studies on various online communities have burgeoned since the 1990s (Dawson and Cowan 2004); there is even a study of an online community of Indonesian women who wear the niqab (Nisa 2013). Asynchronous and synchronous online interactions have their particular advantages and limitations: the former entails space and time displacement, but potentially invites deeper reflection as the respondent has more time to prepare an answer; the latter only entails space displacement but does not offer extra time for reflection (Salmon 2010).

Text-based online interaction was popular long before high broadband speed necessary for videoconferencing was as widespread as nowadays. This also means that the bulk of literature on 'online research methods' is focused on text-based interactions, often in the context of ethnographies of online communities (Turkle 1997; Markham 1998) and videoconferencing, as a relative newcomer to the research scene, is a relatively under-addressed method (Deakin and Wakefield 2014). Videoconferencing is an interesting tool as it raises some methodological issues relevant to online text-based research, but due to its audio aspect, also telephone interviewing, which has a much longer history (Holt 2010) and face-to-face interviewing, due to its video facility that allows visual cues to be exchanged by the researcher and participant. It potentially overcomes criticisms aimed at asynchronous communication, including loss of spontaneity (James and Busher 2009); text-based communication charged with loss of visual cues (Hanna 2012) and traditional interviews, seen as resource-hungry: expensive, time-consuming, and difficult to organize. Criticisms of early videoconferencing applications that had no recording facilities have become obsolete with the advent of freeware that allows this, removing the need to rely on voice recorders (Hanna 2012). In this sense, it seems at least theoretically to resolve most issues that prevented other types of online interviewing from becoming as popular as the traditional face-to-face interview. However, as James and Busher suggest (2009), online research, whilst versatile, always poses specific challenges, and videoconference interviews are no exception to this observation. In particular, concerns over excluding populations who do not have access to or chose not to use new communication technologies are still valid here. This category may include those who do not own a videoconferencing-enabled device such as a PC, laptop, tablet or smartphone.[1]

Feminist interviews and videoconferencing

Qualitative research is often lauded as particularly suited for feminist research (Bryman 2008) due to its focus on partial, situated knowledges (Haraway 1988). As I aimed to identify niqab wearers' own interpretations of their identity, a qualitative approach was useful in addressing my research questions. By positioning myself at the interactionist and constructivist end of the paradigmatic continuum, away from the early 'masculine' sociology standpoint defining the researcher as a 'tool', and

the subject as a 'data-producing machine' (Oakley 2003: 248), I set particular parameters for this study. In-depth interviews emphasize nuance, complexity and roundedness of data rather than surface patterns (Mason 2006), and I considered them as a useful method in the context of the project.

When I realized that in order to interview some women, I would need to utilize videoconferencing, I considered how this may impact on the feminist focus of the project. From its conception, the intention of the project was to throw light on displaced, ignored and often silenced voices of Muslim women who live in the UK and wear the niqab (Piela 2013, 2014a, 2014b and forthcoming). This aim required conducting qualitative fieldwork in order to generate in-depth, personal narratives with these women. There are many caveats inherent in these motivations which I needed to avoid: misrepresenting and essentializing women in the sample; suggesting that the sample is representative of the population of Muslim women who wear the veil in the UK; and representing the project (and myself) as neutral and value-free. My approach assumed that the interactions between the researcher and participant were always going to be shaped by power relations, and those, by our complex intersubjectivities. Nagar (2002) argued that the fear of misrepresentation caused a widespread departure from fieldwork among feminist researchers; however, this can be prevented by delivery of politically engaged, materially grounded and institutionally sensitive research, and addressing critiques regarding voice ownership and authenticity in research. Furthermore, the claim to feminist research warrants attention to politics of knowledge production and constant reflection about power, knowledge, content and context of the research (Sultana 2007). Edwards and Mauthner (2002: 19) write:

> Indeed, discussions of the research process related to ethical issues have become a feature of feminist research, especially qualitative empirical work. Ethical decisions arise throughout the entire research process, from conceptualization and design, data gathering and analysis, and report, and literature on the topic reflects this.

To make research balanced, the focus is not exclusively on the participant; not only do feminists insist on the need to scrutinize the researcher, but the audience of the research as well: ethnographic writing ought to be 'a vehicle for readers to discover moral truths about themselves' (Denzin 1997: 284).

AoIR's updated ethical guidelines about internet research (2012: 4) state that:

> the greater the vulnerability of the community / author / participant, the greater the obligation of the researcher to protect the community / author / participant. Because 'harm' is defined contextually, ethical principles are more likely to be understood inductively rather than applied universally. That is, rather than one-size-fits-all pronouncements, ethical decision-making is best approached through the application of practical judgment attentive to the specific context.

This encourages the question why might the participants be vulnerable, and whether the participation might potentially affect their lives. As stated before, Muslim women who wear the veil, whilst themselves empowered and articulate, are under attack

from some media commentators and politicians who endeavour to gain political capital on fomenting resentment towards Muslims. Those women who do speak out publicly, are immediately silenced, maligned and dismissed (Piela 2014a). This potentially puts women participating in research, if identified, under the risk of being targeted. AoIR guidelines state that it is therefore of utmost importance to anonymize the interview transcripts as soon as possible, by removing characteristic information (people names, place names) and to store the voice recordings securely, encrypted and physically protected. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) suggest that in research with people that involves videoconferencing interviews, it is perfectly possible to conduct fieldwork with anonymous participants, who may wish to only supply their username to the researcher (but it is also possible, if perhaps awkward, to achieve in traditional interviews). These commitments, as well as aims and objectives of the research project, ought to be declared in the informed consent form that needs to be delivered to the participants prior to the interview (Salmon 2010). Sufficient time must be provided for them to read the information sheet about the research, ask questions and potentially withdraw from participating upon obtaining pertinent information or at a later stage, without having to provide reasons. I emailed the informed consent forms in advance to both participants to allow them ample time to read the information. As the next sections of this chapter demonstrate, some aspects of videoconference interviewing, especially the use of video transmitting and recording facilities, warrant further ethical reflection due to their potential repercussion.

A highly sensitive situation of this kind calls for a particular ethical framework, and I propose here an approach termed *feminist ethics of care* and underpinned by work of several feminist writers who focused on values such as 'reconciliation, reciprocity, diversity and responsibility, and with an awareness of power' (Edwards and Mauthner 2002: 23). One such author is Nel Noddings who emphasized the primacy of responsibility and relationships that ought to form an empathetic way of responding to others ethically (1984). Another author who elaborated on this ethical model is the ethnographer Norman Denzin; he argues that the researcher ought 'to step into the shoes of the persons being studied' (Denzin 1997: 273). In this sense, the feminist ethics of care seems to have its origins in the Kantian deontological theory that has respect of the individual as its central principle, in contrast to consequentialism, which is concerned with consequences of an action when evaluating it ethically (Lippert-Rasmussen 2005).

Practical considerations

As the presented project was a small pilot study with no attached funding, the costs of traditional interviewing were an important factor, similar to projects of Deakin and Wakefield (2014) who also used Skype to interview. Most participants lived in close proximity but I knew of two women who wore the niqab and were interested in participating but lived far away. One of the participants (who I refer to as Fatma), who I had previously met in the context of this research but had yet to interview, had gone

to live overseas for a long period of time. She regularly returned to the UK to visit her family, and she preferred to be interviewed via Skype as this removed the need to meet me in person and decrease the time spent with her family. Fatma used to work with a friend of my friend who 'vouched' for me, essentially fulfilling the role of a key informant (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Another participant (who I refer to as Zohra, and who I had not met before; a common acquaintance put us in touch) lived in the UK so travel was more possible, but she was busy with personal and professional commitments that prevented her from being able to be interviewed during the day in a formal setting. This was similar to the research experiences of Deakin and Wakefield (2014). Skype was then an obvious option, as two potential participants constituted a large proportion of the relatively small sample of twelve. Since women who wear the niqab are a hard-to-reach population, especially for a non-Muslim researcher, I was determined to find a way to enable these interviews to take place but also to disrupt participants' lives as little as possible (Gatenby and Humphries 2000). As videoconferencing would be closer to the other interviews I had conducted in this project, and would allow for better methodological consistency, than for example, email interviews, I decided to ask Fatma and Zohra whether they would be interested in a Skype interview, and they both agreed. All pre-interview conversations about the details of the potential participation took place via email and mobile phone.

To be able to conduct a Skype call, Skype usernames have to be exchanged prior to the call. Then, once the user is signed in, they have to find their interlocutor using their username or other credentials, such as email. This is followed by adding them to the contact list. Only then is it possible to call or video-call them. Needless to say, webcams (video cameras commonly installed in laptops and smartphones) and microphones have to be tested prior to the interviews. Mindful of such technical glitches capable of jeopardizing an interview (Hanna 2012), I downloaded and installed voice-recording software called MP3 Skype Voice Recorder in advance but also recorded both interviews on a voice recorder. This was a sensible precaution as following the interview with Fatma I realized the software had not recorded the interview due to my mistake and my only recording was the one produced by the voice recorder.

Time difference is another important factor when interviewing a participant living in another time zone, like Fatma; the researcher must ensure that calculations are correct in establishing the time of the interview, especially if there is no telephone contact between the researcher and the participant.

Opening the interview

In my experience, during the opening part, Skype interviews are more awkward than traditional interviews. This is to do with the need to ensure that the communication is properly set up. As a result, the opening phrases are usually more related to the sound and video quality than an established ritual of introductions and pleasantries. Below I include the transcripts of one of these openings:

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AP:    Er . . .
Z:     Hi.
AP:    [unclear 00.00.07]
Z:     Can you hear me OK?
AP:    Yeah. I can hear you very well. Erm.
Z:     You can hear me . . . yeah . . .
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While this opening would be unusual in a traditional interview, or a telephone interview whereby usually the quality of the connection is quite reliable, a Skype connection is dependent on the quality of broadband at both ends, and the specification of software that both interlocutors are using. A video call slows down the data transmission, which may result in sound cutting out or becoming distorted. This means that in practical terms, a researcher has to be prepared to ask, sometimes several times, about the quality of sound at the participant's end, as well as resolve any potential issues that arise. Some solutions to these problems may be restarting both the machines, or switching the video off temporarily. If the video has to be switched off for the duration of the interview, the interview assumes the qualities of a telephone interview.

TIP 1

It may be a good idea to arrange a test call a day or two prior to the interview to ensure that the technical aspect of the videoconference call does not present difficulties on the day.

I did not experience any serious problems of this kind, and the interviews commenced easily and informally. In the case of Fatma, who I had met before, we talked about her recent move abroad and her new circumstances. Both interviews posed a challenge in that the point of division between the introductions and the interview was very fluid. Fatma had been working on a PhD in social sciences, and before we moved on to the interview we had an hour-long chat about the challenges she was facing. She asked me several questions about elements of the PhD such as the literature review and the bibliography. I answered her at length, because as a researcher committed to the feminist principle of balancing the power relations in the research process, I welcomed the co-production of the agenda of the interview with the participants (Gorelick 1991). Similar to Limerick, Burgess-Limerick and Grace (1996) I saw these interviews as gifts to me from the participants and I was happy there was a way I could reciprocate.

In the case of Zohra, it was a long pre-interview conversation. We had spoken on the phone beforehand, as she wanted to know more about the project before committing to participating. She also requested samples of my previous written work to help her make this decision. The first part of the Skype interview was the last opportunity for her to potentially change her mind and withdraw, which would have

been quite easy given the circumstances (Bertrand and Bourdeau 2010). Zohra used that time to interrogate me about my motives for doing research on this topic and my interest in working with Muslim women more generally. This necessitated a reflexive and thorough account on my part about my own positionality (discussed at more length in Piela 2014b). I understand positionality as 'researcher's location within existing hierarchies of power and the ways in which the researcher's identity and affiliations are positioned among and by others' (Sehgal 2007: 331). An examination of this location is considered a part of 'good feminist research practice' (England 1994; Oakley 2003). Zohra's careful interrogation reminded me, that 'any piece of research is as much about those undertaking it as the participants in the research' (Haw 1996: 320). The research has certainly been informed by the fact that I am non-Muslim, female, Polish (and therefore with English as a second language), of no religious belief, white, married, and with an academic feminist background. I assume it was easier to recruit the participants because I was a woman, as norms related to modesty might prevent them from accepting an interview invitation from a male researcher. Furthermore, because I was not a British citizen and spoke with a foreign accent, I shared the stigma of the 'Other' with them. The fact that I had an academic affiliation was likely to provide some credentials to the project. However, these advantageous characteristics should not obscure the fact that research always remains a setting in which power relations play out and there is always a potential for exploitation (Franks 2001). The research position I found myself to be in would be difficult to define in clear-cut outsider or insider terms, partly due to my poststructuralist perspective on identities, and partly due to what Styles (in Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 86–7) describes as 'outsider and insider myths' that rely on a 'moral rhetoric that claims exclusive research legitimacy for a particular group'. However, I was particularly aware of the enormous significance of the risk of misrepresentation of the participants in the research, which may have very real and dire consequences such as Islamophobic stereotyping and verbal and physical abuse in the streets of the UK (Chakraborti and Zempi 2013).

TIP 2

Prepare for a Skype interview being longer than a traditional, face-to-face interview, as the participants are likely to slip into informal conversation or discuss issues of interest to them.

The importance of the interview setting in videoconference interviews

These two Skype interviews demonstrated the relational character of the public/private divide and highlighted the implications of this particular method for research with Muslim women who wear the niqab. The idea of such a dichotomy, whereby public

and private spheres are separate and opposing, has been critiqued by many feminist authors as contributing to exclusion of women, linked to the private sphere due to their 'biology' (Pateman 1989), from social participation outside the family, i.e. the public sphere; some contemporary feminists question whether this divide exists at all and argue it is artificially maintained in the interests of male hegemonic liberalism (Pateman 1989; Tétreault 2001). The discipline of web studies also contributed to deconstruction of this dichotomy; contemporary spatial reconfigurations of social, political, economic and cultural life blurred the boundaries of what is perceived as public and private, and computer-mediated communication has further emphasized their fluidity (Gunter 2009; West, Lewis and Currie 2009; Youngs 2009). As presented in this section of the chapter, this project has somewhat complicated and questioned the concept of 'public' as 'outside the home' and 'private' as 'inside the home'. However, it also has to be borne in mind that a similar division guides niqab-wearing Muslim women's decision on whether to put on or take off the niqab. The niqab will usually be worn in places where 'non-mahram' men may be encountered (Open Society Foundations 2011; Canadian Council of Muslim Women 2013), and this will overlap with traditional conceptualizations of the public sphere, i.e. outside the home. Female-only gatherings outside the home will often be an exception as the niqab may be taken off there.

When interviewing Fatma and Zohra, I realized that due to the video function, our individual homes, where we were physically located, were no longer separate – they became temporarily visually linked and because of that, they were no longer private. Exclusions that applied to the participants' homes (no non-mahram men present) suddenly no longer applied, as they had no authority over who was present in my house. The person in question was my husband in the adjacent room, who, according to the participants' religious belief, was not allowed to see them with uncovered faces. This potentially triggered norms associated with the public sphere and therefore raised questions for the participants whether to keep the niqab on during the interview, as illustrated by the following extract of the interview with Zohra:

Z: [So you are] doing video, are you on your own?

AP: Erm. Sorry, I'm doing video yes, er, what, what, what did you say after that?

Z: On your own, or do you, are you, have you got people there?

AP: Erm, I'm, I'm yeah, erm, I closed the door on, on everybody else, so I'm, I'm on my own. [laughs]

Z: Oh, ok, erm. You can do it on video.

AP: I don't mind, if you're, if you're not . . . comfortable with video it's fine, erm.

Z: No, no it's cool, it's cool, it's just, erm . . . I'm not usually, erm, the way that my hijab is, the way that I've covered my head, is not the usual way, but erm, so that's why I was asking if there was anyone else there, because if somebody came in then I wouldn't feel like, you know.

AP: Er, my, my husband knows not to go in, er, he understands.

Z: Oh, that's good, that's good, yeah. Erm ok we, erm, let me hang up and I'll call you on video and then we'll, we'll get on with it, yeah?

AP: Sure.

Z: OK, one minute, I don't . . . Hi!

AP: [Laughs]

Z: Ok, ok let's do this.

AP: I got you there.

Z: OK.

In this particular case, this situation was easily resolved as I was aware it was my responsibility to create an interview setting that was female-only in order to enable the participant to enact her religious belief. A failure to achieve this, for example by having a male walk into the room during the videoconference interview, would potentially cause harm to the participant as her religious norms would be compromised. This was unlikely at my home where I could exert control over the setting, and had secured cooperation and support from my husband in this undertaking. However, in an alternative scenario, for example interviewing via Skype from my work, this may have been problematic as due to the 'open door policy' a male colleague or a student could enter my office. Furthermore, when using the video facility, it is imperative to first consider whether we need the video recording of the interview for our research purposes, and if we do, consult with the participant whether they feel comfortable with this request. I never considered video recording my Skype interviews with Fatma or Zohra, for two reasons: first a video showing a woman who normally wears the niqab in places where she can be seen by non-mahram men, without her niqab on would be a very sensitive piece of data and second, I was interested in generating spoken accounts. I suspect that I would not have got the consent if I had asked, as Zohra mentioned that she would not feel comfortable being video-recorded.

On a different note, it is important to consider where in their home (or workplace) the researcher is conducting the videoconference interview. Although it is likely to be more informal than in a traditional setting, we still convey an impression (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Deakin and Wakefield (2014) argue that with the advent of mobile technologies, the place of the interview becomes more fluid and temporary; we can select the 'shot' we will appear in much more easily. In order to maintain a professional image, I endeavoured to position my webcam in such a way that no distracting or untidy background came into view. Instead, I chose a neutral, plain wall. (A background consisting of bookshelves full of thick tomes may convey a strong suggestion of authority on the part of the researcher. As it was my aim to build rapport, as opposed to a researcher–researched division, I chose to avoid including such elements. However, such choices ought to be made accounting for the wider context of the research). The researcher's clothing is another factor that is selected with a full understanding of implications it may have (Hey 1997; Delamont in Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). The decision what to wear was a dilemma for me – on the one hand, formal attire would look artificial in a home setting, but on the other, I wanted to mark the 'speciality' of the occasion and show respect for the participant. Eventually I settled for 'smart casual' clothing in both cases, although both interviews commenced in late evening and finished before midnight. This was different to interviews I conducted in traditional settings such as a Muslim school or a mosque,

where I chose very formal, conservative clothing so as not to challenge sartorial norms adopted by many Muslim women (in particular not displaying flesh other than face and hands, and wearing loose clothing concealing the curves of the body). On a more technical note, if the interview is conducted during the day, attention should be paid to the level of lighting in the room – too much light will darken out the footage transmitted to the participant.

> **TIP 3**
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> Before the interview, consider carefully how to construct a setting that will facilitate the interview, i.e. where you will be located, who else is present and likely to interrupt, and what you will wear.

Leaving the field

A final ethical consideration specific to Skype interviews I discuss in this article is the issue of the management of the researcher–participant relationship. In ethnography it is termed 'leaving the field', but it may just be the decision when to end the interview (Letherby 2003). Feminist researchers in particular have grappled with the ethical dimension of retaining the relationship, or a friendship, with women participants (for example, Hey 1997). Letherby suggests that the researcher should allow the participant to decide whether to continue or discontinue contact. In videoconference interviews, 'the field' is a much more blurred concept and so it may be difficult to pinpoint the moment when we are leaving it. After a Skype interview has been concluded, both the researcher and the participant are on each other's 'contact list'. Keeping the participant on the contact list (and remaining on theirs) may be useful in terms of future contact with them, but it may cause undesired levels of visibility, in particular if the researcher used a personal Skype account that is often updated with new statuses and avatars. I had been using my Skype account for both professional and social purposes, so it was set up in a neutral manner and I judged it appropriate to retain the participants on my contact list.

As both Fatma and Zohra expressed interest in keeping in touch (Fatma declared she might ask me for some more advice regarding her PhD, and Zohra said she would invite me to an art performance in which she played a part), I retained them on my contact list. Alas, that invitation never arrived, but interactions continued on a smaller scale. Fatma emailed me some media articles about the niqab, and we exchanged some bibliographic references. I followed Zohra on Twitter, and we exchanged some brief greetings there. As I have finished the first piece of writing in which I quote them, I will be emailing it to them soon, in order to share the analysis. Thus, as Letherby suggests (2003), the researcher–participant relationship does not end with completion of fieldwork, because the researcher still has responsibilities towards the participants. It must, however be borne in mind that these decisions

about the manner of 'exiting the field' are highly relational and contextual, also in videoconferencing settings. Some criticisms of relaxed procedures and continuing interactions are levelled by feminist researchers who see them as leading to 'false intimacy', and potential feelings of betrayal if generated data is used in a manner unexpected by the participant (Stacey 1991; Harrison, MacGibbon and Morton 2001).

> **TIP 4**
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> After the interview, consider whether you will leave the field as you would in traditional research, or maintain some form of contact via Skype. What are the implications of each decision?

Concluding thoughts about the use of videoconference interviews for feminist research

Skype appears to be of value for a feminist project as it facilitates engaging women who may belong to a hard-to-reach category that is highly geographically dispersed. In cases of projects with little or no funding it enables participation of those women who are interested in being interviewed but travel costs are prohibitive. Similarly, Deakin and Wakefield (2014: 608) talked about being able to engage 'otherwise inaccessible participants'. From the researcher's perspective, employing Skype may help to increase the sample where it is difficult to find sufficient numbers of participants willing to be interviewed in a traditional way. The main challenge I encountered in this project was recruitment: at first, I found it very difficult to find any women who wore the face veil at all. I utilized many methods of locating them, including giving out leaflets locally, but eventually I found that the most effective way of recruiting participants was through existing networks. Unfortunately, some of the women who were interested in the project lived quite far from my location so Skype was an option I was keen to consider. Where also face-to-face interviews are conducted, the aspect of exclusivity of videoconferencing (which depends on resources and skills) may be to some extent mitigated (Deakin and Wakefield 2014).

Furthermore, in some cases Skype may be useful for a feminist researcher who wishes to disrupt the participant's daily routine as little as possible. It may also be preferable to some participants who are more relaxed in the familiar home environment (James and Busher 2009) but at the same time does not require the researcher to intrude. By offering flexibility in respect to arranging and changing times of the interview at short notice (Hanna 2012), it enables the participant to fit it into the most convenient timeslot. Furthermore, it removes the need to take time to travel to the interview and so puts less pressure on participants with many commitments. Hanna (2012) argues that videoconference interviews allow more intimacy as they can be conducted from home (although they can be also conducted from a workplace or an

internet café). This removes the need to encroach on the privacy of the interviewee's home or to find a neutral, formal location appropriate for conducting an interview and convenient to both the researcher and the participant. Potentially the informality of the home setting can contribute to diminishing inequalities in power relations. James and Busher (2009) argue that online interviewing is more egalitarian due to participants being better placed to influence the direction of the interview. Furthermore, Bertrand and Bourdeau (2010) argue that Skype equalizes power relations in an interview as it gives the participants an easy way of withdrawing from research (by exiting the videoconference) without repercussions. Overall, Skype offers an interesting option for feminist researchers, provided that ethical aspects of its use are thoroughly considered. Like Deakin and Wakefield (2014) I expect that it will become much more popular in the future.

Many issues and considerations are shared by videoconference and offline interviews, including recruitment, obtaining informed consent, preparing a setting and an interview topic guide and exiting the field. Additionally, videoconferencing may help mitigate difficulties related to access and distance (Hanna 2012). However, at another level, it seems that new technologies in research may have a transformative potential, as has been seen in the case of the blurred public/private boundary during the interview with Zohra. This potential requires careful unpicking in terms of possible implications for the researcher and the participant. In offline interviews where participants had a higher degree of control over the research setting (i.e. a Muslim girls' school or a mosque), they were able to ensure that norms regarding religiously dictated modesty remained intact. Power relations became more complicated in settings where neither participants nor the researcher had control (i.e. a conference room in a local authority building) as it was impossible to ascertain the level of potential privacy there). Videoconferencing interviews where the interviewee does not exercise any control over the setting shift the ethical duty of care on to the researcher who must ensure that privacy is maintained, in particular where vulnerable populations are involved in research (AoIR 2012).