

# Why it matters who we are: on methodological aspects of the social study of science and technology

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## Abstract

The social study of genomics has become a major research field during recent years. Following the ELSI model of the Human Genome Project (HGP) many European countries have initiated their own research programmes. It is evident that in Europe, social sciences, and particularly STS, play a much more prominent role than they have done in the initial ELSI programme of the HGP. Having empirically studied biomedicine myself, I could experience the strategic nature of the encounters with bioscientists and clinicians during the research process. I came to understand that who I am in the research process is not a given, but must be continuously negotiated with those whose work I study. Reflecting on my own experiences, I designed a research project to investigate more thoroughly how social scientists see their own role as researcher when studying genomics and biomedicine. How do they negotiate their identity and their relationship with the bioscientists and clinicians they interact with during the research process?

Using a comparative approach, I have interviewed colleagues in the field from four different countries: the Netherlands, the UK, Denmark and Austria. On this basis I will address on some important methodological implications and conclude by pointing out challenges specific to each of the discussed approaches. It is not only a practical necessity to negotiate one's own role in a given research context, but it is also a pressing science policy issue to discuss what the task of the social studies of science and technology should be and how the framework of such inquiry should be organised; a task that not only is a challenge for the social studies of genomics and biomedicine, but for science and technology studies in general.