



Researching for Social Change: Ethics, Methodologies & Responsibility

Edited by Cherry Hense, Gemma McKibbin, Julie McLeod,
Caroline Phillips & Sophie Rudolph

Cover Image:

Caroline Phillips

Untitled Red, 2012

Recycled leather and plastic

Dimensions variable

ISBN 978 0 9942709 0 0

First printed February, 2015

An electronic version of this document can be obtained from

www.socialequity.unimelb.edu.au

Enquiries about reprinting information contained in this publication should be made through:

Melbourne Social Equity Institute

University of Melbourne, 3010

Victoria, Australia

social-equity@unimelb.edu.au

www.socialequity.unimelb.edu.au

Researching for Social Change: Ethics, Methodologies & Responsibility

The inaugural working paper collection of the
Melbourne Social Equity Institute Doctoral Academy

This volume of working papers has been compiled by members of the 2014 inaugural Doctoral Academy of the Melbourne Social Equity Institute [MSEI] at the University of Melbourne. A key feature of MSEI is its interdisciplinary focus and commitment to advancing scholarship in the field of social justice, alongside building collaborative projects and partnerships to address pressing social problems and challenges (<http://www.socialequity.unimelb.edu.au/>). As part of its research and engagement strategy, the MSEI developed a Doctoral Academy to support the research training and work of graduate students – the next generation of scholars and leaders. The 2014 MSEI Doctoral Academy consisted of sixteen PhD researchers, each at various stages of their projects, who met on a fortnightly basis throughout 2014 to share research, build academic skills, further understandings of collaboration and interdisciplinary research, and learn from experts in the field. The Introduction, written by the editorial committee, sets the scene for the chapters to follow. While the chapters in this volume represent diverse research projects, they are united by shared dilemmas and critical reflections on the process and challenges of doing research that is oriented to social change and informed by questions of ethics, methods and researcher responsibility.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 6 |
| From the editors | 7 |
| Acknowledgements | 13 |
| Ethical participant / research encounters & relationships | 14 |
| Feminist-informed collaborative interviewing with young people recovering from mental illness | 15 |
| Cherry Hense | |
| Between ethical obligation and feminist commitment: A researcher's experience of talking to young people who have sexually abused | 33 |
| Gemma McKibbin | |
| "You should save money for your new home rather than spending it on new electrical items...": Managing the 'subjective' self as an 'objective' qualitative researcher | 45 |
| Haslina Hashim | |
| The complexities of political and historical influences on researcher and research material | 56 |
| The Nuts and Bolts: Choosing and beginning a research project | 57 |
| Lily O'Neill | |
| Standing on the Bridge: Critical reflections on the politics of counter-memory | 64 |
| Sophie Rudolph | |
| A Collective Case Approach of Theory Building in Media and Politics: Towards understanding transparency and governmentality through design and affordance | 75 |
| Luke Heemsbergen | |
| The place and space of ethical engagement | 90 |
| Drawing on ethnographic methods in urban research | 91 |
| Hayley Henderson & Kelum Palipane | |
| Researching intercultural dialogue through participatory digital media in museums | 113 |
| David Henry | |
| Art and Social Equity: A feminist approach | 124 |
| Caroline Phillips | |

When you have art you have voice.

When you have voice you have freedom.

When you have freedom you have responsibility.

— Richard Frankland, Gunditjmara writer, musician and filmmaker

We are a mixed bunch! Our disciplinary orientations vary from education, through creative arts, to population health. We bring a diversity of life experiences to our meetings, based upon our different genders, ages and cultural backgrounds. The link between each of us is a strong commitment to a social justice agenda. We understand this agenda broadly to encompass research, policy and practice which functions both to critique repressive regimes of power, and to construct positive alternatives. The papers in the collection address the possibilities of social change in relation to a range of issues: young people's experience of mental health; feminist art practice; sexual abuse of children by other children; Indigenous land rights; participation in public environments; and settlement experiences of migrants and refugees.

As we gathered at our elite and privileged university to write the introduction to this collection, it seemed a particularly poignant time to reflect on our collective engagement with social equity. Recent events then playing out upon the global stage provoked such reflection. These events included suicide bombings carried out by young girls in Nigeria, terrorist attacks in France against the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and a Kosher supermarket, the massacre of hundreds of school children in Pakistan, violence and self-harm at Manus Island Detention Centre and most recently the appointment of Rosie Batty as Australian of the Year, highlighting the epidemic of family violence and especially men's violence against women and children.

These events are confronting and saddening, and have prompted considerable personal and collective reflection. How do power, privilege and politics intersect? How can we explain them? How can we respond to them? What role do universities play in addressing the global inequalities that frame and contribute to such incidents and phenomena? As the opening quotation by Richard Frankland encapsulates, part of having a voice and a sense of freedom implies responsibility. At times our research work can seem overwhelming, ethically fraught and can even feel to be of little consequence. Yet, each of the doctoral students in the Academy has taken on a responsibility to engage in diverse ways with the type of wide-ranging challenges and questions noted above. One collective insight has been the dominance of violence as a response to religious, political and cultural difference, and the imperative to speak back to this and its associated abuse of human rights.

Academic context

The contemporary academic context in which the papers in this collection have developed prompts a further reflection on social equity research. Many members brought to the group an interest in challenging dominant regimes of research and knowledge practices, and an impulse to explore alternative modes of inquiry. However, this was felt to be extremely difficult within current academic environments, where forms of managerialism and economic rationalism dominate and particular approaches to research, such as positivism or the privileging of large-scale quantitative studies and randomised trials as the 'gold standard' are gaining renewed traction in some social science fields. Such contexts are not necessarily amenable to experimenting with research methodologies or developing interdisciplinary research enquiry and collaborative endeavours. Indeed, the current system appears to foster and reward highly individualistic academic career pathways, which typically rely upon researchers proving knowledge accumulation and outputs. Collaborations can seem to be strategically crafted by researchers for the purpose of furthering career trajectories, hence opportunities for genuine interdisciplinary collaborations appear limited.

The MSEI Doctoral Academy has provided somewhat contrarily, just such a genuine opportunity. The resulting collaboration has helped to expand our capacity to conceptualise and articulate our work within a broader research context. We have grappled with the question of how to collectively contribute to issues of social equity when we each have our own individualised career pathways to pursue. While we do not offer any simple solutions to these issues, we nevertheless find strength and a sense of possibility in connecting across our common concerns and in exercising our own forms of collaboration.

Methodological dilemmas

Reflection often leads to recognition of dilemmas! In our case, some of the most troubling dilemmas that have arisen are methodological. We have been at pains to explore the ways in which power informs methodological choices and practices. This includes problematising traditional methodologies in relation to their seeming inability to provide an account of power relations among researchers, participants and collaborators. The papers in this collection take methodological risks and attempt to remain open to methods that could account for difference, social change, and the situated-ness of each researcher within their fields of enquiry.

In developing this work, we have shared our methodological dilemmas with one another. For some of us, the questions have involved locating the place of the researcher's self in social research, for others the perplexity lies at the intersection between practices of interviewing and those of therapeutic intervention. Still others seek to measure and clarify the working of social equity and difference in government and public institutions and social spaces.

Ethical and theoretical concerns

Reflecting on our methodological dilemmas has induced an experience of reflexivity for many members of the group. This state of reflexivity involves looking inward, and asking ourselves, for example: What does it mean to be an academic engaging with marginalised members of the community? Who speaks? Who is spoken for? What does it mean to engage with dominant or oppressive discourses?

Critically engaging with reflexivity has enabled the group to scrutinise power operations in encounters between researchers and participants. Theories about power become important tools for addressing this issue. In particular, the group has drawn upon feminist, post-structural, postcolonial, intersectional, and liberal-democratic theories. The ways in which these theories are utilised demonstrates their cross-disciplinary malleability, highlighting both their diverse capacity to illuminate as well as their limitations.

The group's reflexive practice has also lead to insights about how a researcher's life experience impacts upon how s/he situates herself in relation to her research material. The papers in this collection are, then, both personal and political; specific and linked; disciplinarily-grounded and interdisciplinary. It is perhaps precisely this complex combination of factors that make this work challenging, and that, in turn, has made the group's conversations and collaborations so enriching.

Chapter Overview

There are many ways in which the papers in this collection could be grouped according to their numerous points of connection and overlap. We have decided, however, to foreground the methodological dilemmas as a fruitful way to approach this task. The papers appear, therefore, under three broad strands:

Ethical Participant / Researcher Encounters and Relationships; The Complexities of Political and Historical Influences on Researcher and Research Material; and The Place and Space of Ethical Engagement. As is apparent, each of these methodological dilemmas involves questions about ethics generated from reflexive awareness of researcher subjectivities and concern over research engagement.

In the opening paper addressing 'Ethical Participant/Researcher relationships' Cherry Hense analyses insights generated from her study of 'Feminist-Informed Collaborative Interviewing with Young People Recovering from Mental Illness'. She reflects on her engagement with the principles and approaches of participatory research, describing the challenges she encountered in attempting to 'co-create' interviews with young people recovering from mental illness. She considers how debates in feminist qualitative methodology supported her work and helped her to develop an approach she calls 'collaborative reflexivity'. Continuing a focus on feminist methodologies, Gemma McKibbin explores the multi-layered dilemmas in interviewing young people who have sexually abused, and the tensions she experienced in her 'ethical obligation and feminist commitment'. She coins the term 'emotional labour' to represent how she worked through this tension and develops a reflexive analysis of her own performance as a researcher in the interviews. Haslina Hashim begins from the contrast between the methods textbook depiction of what research should be like and the on-the-ground experience of actually doing research: can or should researchers be objective and value-free? Drawing from her qualitative research on policies and experiences of public housing rental in Malaysia, Haslina troubles some of the disjunctions between methodological prescriptions and research practice, and offers some 'lessons' she has learnt, dwelling on questions of reflexivity, translation of subjective experience, rigour and credibility.

Section two, 'The Ethics of Political and Historical Influences on Researcher and Research Material', opens with Lily O'Neill's account of the 'nuts and bolts' of getting a research project off the ground, showing the 'messiness' of the research process. She combines attention to her initial interest in the topic as well as the practical and epistemological choices, 'false starts', and re-framing that characterised her research – which is a study of how claims for resources on land traditionally owned by Aboriginal are negotiated. Sophie Rudolph similarly explores complex ethical and subjective dimensions of research practices, focussing on the experience of undertaking archival research

to develop a genealogical study of discourses on Indigenous educational disadvantage. Her analysis of the political, ethical and epistemological contexts of archival sources produced under colonial and settler-colonial regimes is juxtaposed with a more autobiographical narrative on the limits and possibilities of historical research to address social injustices. The following paper by Luke Heemsbergen turns to the present, developing a critical analysis of the contemporary circumstances of new media and questions of governance and transparency. He continues the conversation about designing research and the affordances of working with and across different methodological approaches: he argues for an approach to studying media that can 'bricolage empirical cases of media events, political theory and traditional media studies'.

The final three papers continue the focus on how researchers adapt, build on and develop methodological approaches to suit their evolving research projects, and here underscore the significance of the 'Place and Space of Ethical Engagement'. In their co-authored paper, Hayley Henderson and Kelum Palipane contrast their ethnographic approaches in the field of urban research, with each bringing a distinctive slant to explore their respective research questions. Hayley looks to urban planning in Buenos Aires, Argentina, arguing for a case study approach that illuminates the 'peopled process' of urban planning, while Kelum elaborates an approach to 'embodied place-making practices in sites of urban regeneration, taking the suburb of Footscray in Melbourne as her example. Turning from cities to museum spaces as sites for exploring questions of cultural diversity and racism, David Henry discusses a multi-method approach to analysing a participatory engagement project, the 'Talking Difference Portable Studio'. Drawing on textual analysis, content analysis of digital media and interviews with stake holders, he shows how this combination of methods has been crucial in illuminating multiple perspectives, revealing the diverse contexts and effects of this innovative initiative between community and museum spaces. Questions of mobility and place arise in Caroline Phillips account of a feminist art project in the larger context of 'creative arts research and its intersection with social equity research'. Her focus turns to the different sites and spaces of art practice and exhibitions, such as a travelling exhibition, a bus tour of feminist art, engagement with regional communities, developing what she terms as 'an evolving, relational, iterative methodology'.

In combination, the papers in this volume showcase the process

of research 'in action' opening up spaces to reveal the evolving and reflective aspects of research practice and innovative methodologies. In doing so, they also offer examples of research projects grappling with the challenges and possibilities of engaging with social justice agendas within and beyond the academy.

Cherry Hense, Gemma McKibbin, Caroline Phillips and
Sophie Rudolph

Editorial Committee

Acknowledgements

First of all thanks must go to the contributors of this volume of papers for their commitment to the project and their role in peer reviewing each of the papers. We also acknowledge the collegiality, conversations and contributions from all members of the 2014 MSEI Doctoral Academy: Emily Cheesman, Sara Ciesielski, Haslina Hashim, Luke Heemsbergen, Hayley Henderson, Cherry Hense, David Henry, Melinda Herron, Ashraf Hosseini, Gemma McKibbin, Liz McLindon, Lily O'Neil, Kelum Palipane, Caroline Phillips, Fadillah Putra, Sophie Rudolph.

The respectful and positive culture of the MSEI Doctoral Academy has been fostered by its leader, Professor Julie McLeod, the Deputy Director of MSEI. Julie has taken an empowerment approach to the group, enabling us to develop a strong sense of self-determination. The group has thrived under her approach and a space has been created in which it is safe to reflect on the difficulties and delights of being a researcher working across disciplines. In addition, she has provided a model of a successful female academic operating within the constraints and gender politics of the contemporary university. We would all like to thank Julie for the energy and commitment she has brought to this initiative in what are always challenging times!

Finally, we would like to thank all the MSEI team (in particular, Charlene Edwards, Gary Dickson, Bernadette McSherry, Kelly Hutchinson and Deb Warr) for their initiative in creating such a generative project, their ongoing support of each member of the Doctoral Academy and our respective research projects, their technical and administrative assistance in the publication of this volume and their commitment to forming partnerships in social equity research across the whole of University of Melbourne and the wider community.

Ethical Participant / Researcher Encounters & Relationships

Section One

Feminist-informed collaborative interviewing with young people recovering from mental illness

Cherry Hense, Music Therapy, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music

Abstract

Participatory research literature abounds with clearly articulated beliefs about the equitable and collaborative ways in which research should be undertaken (Friere, 2014; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Wallerstein & Duran, 2008). I was personally drawn to a participatory approach because of the synergy of these principles with my own beliefs in striving to do research that could 'matter' to those involved. Yet, when attempting to enact Participatory principles in the application of data collection with young people accessing a mental health service I stumbled as I found the guiding theoretical literature provided little in the way of practical advice. This paper provides a reflexive account of my attempts to co-create interviews with young people recovering from mental illness. I detail how I turned to feminist literature in the search of guidance for collaborative modes of interviewing, and through this process came to conceptualise my strategies as forms of 'collaborative reflexivity'.

Key words: Participatory, collaborative interviewing, collaborative reflexivity, young people, mental illness, feminist interviewing

Tim and I sit in our third interview discussing why he chose to come to the music therapy group. I ask, "So you said you were interested in how other people play. So was it that you were interested in - their music as opposed to them or...?" Tim replies, "Ah their music and what people could come up with, you know, even as newbies." I quickly ask, "What's newbies?" He laughs at me, "A newbie, you know, a beginner...!" I laugh too, "Oh okay. Why were you interested in that - what they could come up

with?" Tim replies, "Uhm, so I could see their frustrations as well. Okay, I'm going to be honest here, it was because, I was winning a lot and if they lost, then I felt like I was winning." Now I offer an insight based upon an earlier discussion about 'failing,' "Were you starting to experience any failure at that point? Was this you desperately trying to hang on to the feeling of winning at all?" Tim sighs, "Yes. Yes it was".

In her seminal work 'Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms' Ann Oakley (1981) states "Interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets" (p. 37). This provocation resonates with me, as even now I feel a twinge of confession in providing the above vignette. After all, my technique strays far from the recommendations in traditional qualitative interview literature. Tim pokes fun at me and there is a sense of joviality. More striking, perhaps, is that I overtly offer my own insight about Tim's experience – an act that many interviewers would not recommend. Engaging in in-depth interviews with young people has challenged my own assumptions about what it is to do 'good interviewing' and lead me to seek greater understanding of how interview processes can enact forms of equal participation.

The participatory theorists who have influenced my approach to my doctoral research project offer broad principles about approaching research through collaboration and participation (Freire, 2014; Israel, Schulz, Parker, Becker, Allen, & Guzman, 2008; Wallerstein & Duran, 2008). Yet, participatory literature provides little detail in how these principles may be enacted in practical data collection and analysis scenarios. My search for guidance lead to literature on feminist approaches to interviewing (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Oakley, 1981) and collaboration in reflexivity (Arvay, 2003). This paper is a reflexive account of the interview process that evolved in this study. My aim is to illustrate the interview approach adopted and demonstrate how collaborative interviews can function as an exercise for dispelling power inequalities between researchers and participants.

Part 1: Approaching the interviewer role within a participatory project

The clinician-researcher role

The emergent participatory project described here involved repeated interviews with 11 young people attending a music

therapy group at a youth mental health service in Australia. I also facilitated this group as the registered music therapist within the service. In approaching these interviews, I was interested to learn about young people's perspectives on their musical identity during mental illness and recovery, and exploring any changes that they perceived. I was particularly interested to learn about young people who chose to engage in music therapy during recovery and therefore only interviewed young people participating in my music therapy group.

I used Constructivist Grounded Theory methods (Charmaz, 2005; 2014) of data collection and analysis to inductively generate a theory from the insights shared within the interviews. Constructivist Grounded Theory involves a process of theoretical sampling in which the researcher commences analysis with collection of the first piece of data, and uses the emerging insights to inform further data collection. Each subsequent interview provides an opportunity for the researcher to fill out analytic categories and test the emerging theory by introducing analytic ideas into the discussion. Data collection ceases once no new categories emerge. The resulting constructivist grounded theory is seen as an interpretation of the data that offers an explanation of how and sometimes why participants construct meanings about the phenomena (Charmaz, 2006; 2014).

The interviews in this study were embedded within the regular reviews and collaborative goal setting meetings that were part of the youth mental health service. This approach to care is based on Recovery philosophy in which service users and staff are viewed as equals and experts in their own experience (Davidson, Rowe, Tondora, O'Connell, & Lawless, 2008). There is an emphasis on working in collaboration to agree upon goals that are most relevant to the individual. While this youth mental health service may not practice perfect collaboration at all times, these goal-setting reviews are one of the stronger examples of collaboration.

Early in the project, I questioned how to differentiate between my role as researcher and my role as a practicing music therapist, and what impact this duality of roles might have upon the research and my relationship with the young people. Some music therapists (Aigen, 1993; O'Callaghan, 2008) describe how the therapeutic relationship can benefit the research by affording discussion of material that may only arise between those in an established, trusting relationship. However, the ethics committee reviewing this project expressed concern for the wellbeing of young people

navigating this dual role of their music therapist and the potential of coercion into participation in the study. Personally, I grappled more with the question of my own authenticity. How am 'I' going to navigate this shift from music therapist to researcher?

I was not interested in creating separate roles for myself, but in bringing a new potential into my relationship with these young people using research. I aimed to avoid drawing upon traditional 'expert researcher'- 'passive participant' roles that would construct both myself and the participating young people as objects within a hierarchical system of research (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008). Whilst I chose not to avoid the terms of researcher and participant, I aimed to challenge my assumptions surrounding these terms.

Grappling with power relations

Despite my personal commitment towards a collaborative approach, my role as a music therapist within a mental health system inevitably brought power relations into play. Traditionally, any mental health worker holds an element of power over the service user because the worker ultimately defines the nature of the interaction (Frese & Davis, 1997). I had access to highly personal information through case files and could add to young people's life stories with my notes. I reported information about them to others in the team who then interpreted their mental health status and had a strong (to put it mildly) say in their management of illness. At times, I had musical knowledge and expertise that many young people often did not, which meant I held greater capacity to direct the nature of our interactions.

Within mental health services there is also a hierarchy of professionals. As a young, female in an early-career role, I felt less powerful than some of my more senior, male colleagues. I often felt the need to legitimise my role as music therapist in relation to their well-known, medically-based professions. Whilst being a challenge to me, these experiences also provided insight into what it is like to be in a subordinate role within a mental health service. This insight fostered an immediate allegiance with the young people.

But how did becoming a researcher change this? A nudge towards legitimacy perhaps? The 'expert' researcher role offered something tempting - a ready-made status upgrade among my colleagues. Yet my discomfort with hierarchical social systems

nagged at me because of my concerns about the ways in which privilege is often leveraged by oppressing minority groups (Freire, 2014). I wanted to challenge the invitation to shift up the hierarchical ranks. However, my engagement with this research to attain an academic doctoral qualification presented a conflict that was not easily reconciled, and I had to tolerate a certain degree of tension surrounding this issue. I felt inspired by Patti Lather's (1993) assertion that creating social change relies upon those outside the norm being able to articulate their work outside of their own practice in a way that rebuts the normative oppression. So I chose to use this opportunity to loosen the boundaries of traditional roles between researcher and participant and explore notions of power 'with' rather than power 'over' others (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). At this point I delved deeper into the feminist literature.

Part 2: Problematising traditional interviewer roles

Feminist theory contributes an important perspective to the discourse on social justice research by problematizing gender and power relations in the process of knowledge production - asking who's knowledge is it, how was it generated, where and by whom? (Olsen, 2011). Postmodern feminists in particular claim that knowledge in the form of grand self-referential theories oppress minority groups by failing to account for difference or context (Flax, 2013). Renowned feminist, Judith Butler (2013), articulates how post-modernism serves to deconstruct such totalising categories to create space for multiple perspectives and voices that are equally valued.

Challenging objectivity

Broadly speaking, feminist interviewers work reflexively and relationally, and oppose traditional positivist views of the interviewer as the objective observer and the interviewee as the object (Hesse-Biber, 2012). At a methodological level, feminist theorists critique the way many qualitative researchers approach interviews as opportunities to elucidate the participant's 'true' story by carefully withholding personal bias or influence (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Oakley, 2005; Olsen, 2011). Going beyond the objectivist observer role is seen to draw in human subjectivity. Therefore researchers offering insights or opinions may contribute to the interviewee's own interpretation and influence the data. Feminists (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Oakley, 1981) highlight the underlying positivist assumptions in these arguments – that

providing the right 'conditions' will reveal the true story, ideally uninfluenced by the interviewer's contribution.

The feminist critique of these positivist perspectives is that they assume any interviewer influence to be negative for the research (Oakley, 2005). Eugenie Georgaca (2003) notes how even qualitative interviewers claiming to embrace subjectivity typically write themselves out of the interview account. She asserts that the researcher's questions, language and presence have an undeniable influence on the data that need not be hidden. Such feminist reflexive approaches to interviews contend that being explicit about the contribution of the researcher is not revealing a limitation but using and embracing the opportunity afforded by critical awareness in human interaction.

Power and hierarchy

Feminist theorists consider how interview approaches may contribute to social inequity and oppression. Anne Oakley (1981, 2005) alerts researchers to the traditionally masculine construction of the interviewer in a power hierarchy where the interviewee is constructed as subordinate in comparison to the expertise of the researcher. Oakley (1981) describes how some interviewers construct their role as a research 'tool' - a means of purely obtaining data; while others take a psychoanalytic approach of carefully probing the interviewee to divulge the required insights. In both cases the interviewee is objectified as a data source with little opportunity to benefit from the encounter. Unequal power relations are created in order for the interviewer to expertly comment on the experience. Oakley provocatively proposes that the interviewee is constructed using traditional discourse of the irrational female who would be unable to offer more than description. Oakley's interpretation offers insights into the ways interviewers may unknowingly perpetuate power imbalances unless they consciously work to do otherwise. Even use of the term 'interview' may itself be problematic in research that strives for equality when the term is derived from historical practices of hierarchy (Grace Thompson, personal communication, December 5th, 2014).

Qualitative interviews provide an opportunity to act against oppression by opening up dialogue from multiple voices (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Unequal power relations at play within the interview dynamics themselves can be alleviated through conscious choices about the ways in which the knowledge is portrayed, and

illustrated in the text by decisions about whose voice is 'privileged'. Creating opportunities to privilege the voices of minority groups aligns with the feminist agenda, however, Virginia Olsen (2011) questions the notion that researchers can portray a pure account of the participant's voice. She proposes that representation needs to be reflexively dealt with by acknowledging the role of the researcher in interpreting and constructing the 'voice' of the participant(s). In Olsen's view, research interviews are co-created interpretations of the interviewee's experience. She challenges researchers to think beyond providing an account of the experience, and to also articulate the context and process in which the story emerged.

Marjorie DeVault and Glenda Gross (2012) further challenge the notion of voice in research by claiming an inherent contradiction in using interview data to represent the voice of 'others'. They caution against altruistic ideals about the need to help others, asserting all interviews carry the researcher's own agenda. Research not only represents the voice of participants but the values and interests of the researcher co-constructing the findings. As such, DeVault and Gross argue that activist research deals with issues of politics and power not only outwardly at the macro societal level, but also internally in the ways each research project is played out. They encourage researchers to be explicit about their own agenda and how this is embedded in the interview discourse.

Collaborative Reflexivity

Researchers adopting activist interview approaches therefore need to be transparent about the power relations and the context of their interpretation. Qualitative researcher and psychotherapist Linda Finlay (2009) offers a transpersonal approach to interviewing that embodies these notions. Her approach to interviewing draws upon the researcher's 'humanness' across multiple contexts, shifting the focus away from systematic labels and roles, to the relationship between the people involved in the interaction. Finlay emphasises the value of reflexivity as a means of grappling with the unequal distribution of power (Finlay, 2005; Finlay & Evans, 2009; Finlay & Gough, 2003). She asks researchers to consciously draw upon their own subjective experiences and personal qualities within collaborative research encounters. Her use of reflexivity can be seen as an orientation that flows through each research encounter, rather than a distinct process. This includes an approach to interviewing that is not focused on the collection of existing

knowledge, but about engaging with another being in shared consciousness-raising. From a participatory research perspective, I propose this could be described as 'collaborative reflexivity'.

In the following section, I draw upon these feminist ideas in detailing my attempts to co-create interviews with young people. Through the processes described below, I sought to critically engage with the inherent power imbalances that were present in my study, in aiming to do research that was transparent and collaborative to the best of my ability.

Part 3: Processes of collaborative interviews

Using insider/outsider roles

Throughout the interviews, I aimed to draw upon my position as both an insider to the music group, as well as an outsider to young people's experience of mental illness. Participatory researchers Nina Wallerstein and Bonnie Duran (2008) portray all researchers as inherent outsiders to the participant group. But rather than see this as negative, Kathryn Herr and Gary Anderson (2005, p. 43) describe the potential of multiple roles as insider/outsider, and the ways in which these can shift throughout the research. Virginia Olsen (2011) further suggests the insider/outsider roles are constantly negotiated, even during a single interview, as both parties learn more of each other's context and experiences. I propose that collaborative interview processes themselves foster a new experience that only the interviewer and interviewee(s) are insider to.

Early activist informed researchers Arlyn Diamond and Lee Edwards (1977) urged interviewers to rely on the 'authority of experience' in shifting away from power imbalances and fostering mutual research encounters. At particular times, I chose to amplify my outsider role to enhance the position of the young person as 'expert' in their experience of mental illness and recovery. My sense was that the greatest moments of collaboration were when young people felt empowered by their knowledge and had the conviction to openly discuss and critique their experiences. Positioning myself as the outsider was not to leverage myself within an existing hierarchy but to alleviate potential power imbalances by highlighting the young person's expert knowledge of experience. In the following dialogue I aim to draw upon the young person's insider knowledge of her own recovery journey, positioning them in the expert role.

It is the middle of our second interview and Sandy and I are discussing her past difficulties tolerating shared musical experiences and how she sought private forms of music. I state, "From my understanding you're coming to groups also as an opportunity to work on being able to get along with people." Sandy confirms for me, "Yeah. That's why. Yeah". My knowledge of this is partly from Sandy directly but partly from her case file. I want to avoid slipping into hierarchical roles where I am privileged by my access to her mental health file. I focus on what I don't understand and ask Sandy to tell me about it from her own expertise, "So do you see that as part of your recovery, then?" "Yeah" "Well, how does that work? Can you explain it? I don't really know." Sandy explains, "Now I'm alone all the time. Weekends are always hard because I don't go anywhere or do anything. I just sit at home. That's why it's good that I'm doing this group to try to teach myself how to socialise with people, knowing the wrong and the right way to say things and stuff like that. It's so that feeling of abandonment, basically, it's not there..." Sandy's explanation seems to reflect some mental health jargon and so I wonder how much of this is learned. Regardless, the moment affords an opportunity for Sandy to demonstrate what she knows about her own journey of recovery and I learn from her as the outsider to this experience.

Being an insider to the music therapy group afforded opportunities for me to share insights and interpretations gained through my experiences in the group. I was able to use my own memory of the group to add context and offer another perspective to the young person's account. At times, the insider perspective facilitated greater depth and exploration of topics when I was able to ask young people questions that may not have otherwise arisen. Discussing these observations provided young people with opportunities to challenge my assumptions about the ways they engaged with music in the group. Whilst these processes facilitated depth and shared speculation about past events within the group, they also shaped the nature of the discourses and meant that the findings were based upon discussion of my observations in addition to young people's insights.

An excerpt from my final interview with Sam illustrates how I was able to bring my own experiences and observations of her in the group into the research by offering my interpretation of her musical role. This opened up an opportunity to explore a facet of Sam's musical identity that she had not yet spoken of:

Sitting with Sam in our final of four interviews, she tells me

how she supported a peer in the music group by explaining the benefits of guitar lessons. Sam does not say it, but I know from my participation in the group that she does not play guitar within the music group, but chooses to sing. However, she engages in individual guitar-based music therapy with me, and has recently commenced lessons in the community. I am curious about Sam's musical identity. I see her portraying herself as a 'guitarist' but she has not overtly stated this to me. Drawing upon this insider knowledge I say, "So from my perspective, you still maintained that identity as a guitarist within the group, even though you didn't play...what was it like to be known as a guitarist in the group?" Sam pauses, then looks up at me and smiles as she says, "Kind of cool actually." "Cool, how?" I ask. Sam replies, "Because I felt like I belonged." "How did being known as a guitarist help you to feel like you belonged?" I ask. "Because nearly everyone in the group played guitar," she replied.

Finding a shared language

Critical Theorist Paulo Freire (2014) asserts that fostering democratic dialogue is essential to diffusing power differentials in research. I felt that using non-jargonistic language that was relevant and common to the young people involved was imperative to fostering active research participation. The use of everyday language also facilitated a demystification of the research for young people because it could facilitate their active contribution to research discussions. I often used phrases such as "doing more weed" instead of "using substances", or referred to the "chilled out vibe" of music to discuss using down tempo music for self-calming. Rather than referring to illness experiences in psychiatric terminology such as "ideas of reference" I drew upon how young people themselves explained it such as "finding extra meaning in rap lyrics" or having "increased sensitivity."

Discourse theorists believe that constructions of experiences are rooted in the language used to describe them (Steier, 1991). Given I was attempting to articulate knowledge that was co-created in the interviews, I drew upon language that was meaningful to both myself and the young people. I chose not to prepare specific questions or an interview schedule to follow, and used prepared interview guides only as a 'check list' of ideas to cover. I hoped that in constructing questions within the interaction with each young person, I could draw upon shared terms and openly explore interpretations of ideas as we went along. Paula Nicholson (2003) notes how even the questions posed by interviewers contribute

to the construction of knowledge since their language is infused with their pre-interpretations. It was not my intention to remove my pre-existing understandings from the interview, and I wanted to be transparent about the influence of the mental health literature relevant to the context of the music therapy research. I was overt about my interest in recovery and often chose to explore assumptions of this term with young people.

In our first and only interview, Minna spontaneously uses the term 'recovering', "It still changed me to who I am now, today... but I'm recovering." I wonder how Minna sees recovery. I ask this question by offering two major schools of thought about recovery in lay language, "...To you is recovering getting back to where you were, or is it kind of moving on and becoming something new..." Minna replies, "its moving forward." Whilst the alternative of asking an open question such as, "what does recovery mean to you?" may generate more inductive ideas from Minna, I choose to use the opportunity to challenge two major assumptions about the term because I am interested in her perspective on existing mental health discourse.

At times, language used by other young people was brought into new interviews as I shared the emerging theory. This theoretical sampling approach (Charmaz, 2014) afforded development of a shared language that went beyond each individual interview dyad to encompass the research group at large.

In an early interview, Jordan tells me about how he finds, "whole worlds within the music." In her interview the following week Emma also refers to, "Escaping into another world" when she plays music. The slightly different use of these terms interests me. Minna's interview is later in the study. She talks about, "taking it to another place with music." I bring in the language used by Minna's peers, to see if the term fits, and to expand my understanding of the concept, "Mhm...was it like, you were going into the world of music, or was it more that music was becoming your world?"

Where I had previously explored existing assumptions of mental health terms such as recovery, the following dialogue illustrates a moment where I was challenged to think outside of my constructs of mental health language. Tim asserted a new term for a period in his life that changed the way I understood the experience of subsiding symptoms and increasing social awareness. This insight lead to a new category in the overall theory, as I compared

Tim's experience to others in the cohort of young people.

Tim and I sit filling out his map of musical identity in our final interview together. Looking at when he started to move out of acute illness I draw an arrow and say, "Okay and then we start to have, maybe, recovery?" Tim states, " You can say 'recovery', or you can say 'me failing a lot'." I'm a little surprised by Tim's language here and respond, "Yeah right? How would you put it?" Tim replies, " I'd say failure." But I seek further clarification, "Okay. You would call that your 'failure period' as opposed to 'recovery period'? It just sounds so harsh Tim, but it's interesting. That's how you would put it?" Tim says, "That's how I feel like I should put it".

Mutual curiosity and discovery

Paulo Freire (2014) refers to the process of building critical awareness as central to all participatory research because it serves to break down power imbalances generated by privileged access to knowledge. When participants gain knowledge through the research process, the research works to intervene with recurrent power inequalities by making knowledge available to communities, generating shared knowledge and dialogue between researchers and lay persons. This promotes discourse to facilitate relevant and appropriate forms of action.

At a practical level, interviewing approaches can provide a way of generating critical awareness through overtly discussing the interpretations in collaborative reflexivity (Arvay, 2003). I approached each interview as an opportunity for mutual curiosity and was later influenced by Linda Finlay (personal communication, October 10, 2014) to expand this term to include 'discovery'. Mutual curiosity and discovery describes the way each young person's research journey was an opportunity for them to benefit from these insights and increased awareness rather than being used purely as a source of data. I felt that the more young people were aware of the knowledge and aware of how their understandings could impact knowledge, the more empowered they would be to make sense of their experience and create personal change.

In our final interview Sandy and I explore how she suppresses aspects of her identity in fear of critique. I observe that she also hid her love of country music and started listening rock at this time. I ask how she sees the different genres of music she listens

to, and Sandy responds with new personal insight, "To be honest, if I look at it now, yeah, rock is more like hard and grunge and stuff like that. It's more masculine." I respond "Okay. What do you think about that now, thinking about you're use of it. Does that mean anything to you, or do you think it's completely irrelevant?" Sandy replies "To be honest I have never really thought about it until right now, hearing you say that. Now I'm saying that maybe I should just stop listening to it." I question this response, "Why would you do that?" and Sandy replies "Because now that you say that it has me thinking, 'Woah, maybe it is making me like more depressed because it's stopping me from being the real me.' Do you know what I mean?"

As collaborator, I openly, yet carefully offered my interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon based upon my experiences with the young person and the emerging grounded theory. This approach facilitated the integration of each interview into the larger body of knowledge and afforded opportunities for young people to contextualise their experience if they wished. I aimed for a negotiation of our understandings to occur within the interview as an opportunity for the young person to respond to my interpretations in the moment.

In an interview with Emmanuelle I introduce my theoretical statement about some of the data we had co-constructed in previous interviews and I had later analysed on my own. I say, "Like, the idea of being with a teacher was hard, the idea of being in a band and committing to these band social events sounded hard... And the understanding that I was starting to get from that was, it sounded like you weren't, disinterested in piano anymore, but it sounded like you weren't willing to put it into a social kind of space." This provides Emmanuelle a chance to elaborate, "Like even with the piano, we had a piano. It was in our lounge room and I only ever played it if people weren't home... so my mum ended up selling the piano, because she said I didn't use it, and I did, just when she wasn't home." Emmanuelle's response adds another dimension to my theory in the way she withdrew her music not only from social places but silenced it. As Emmanuelle describes, she played on the keyboard with, "the volume turned down."

In the final interviews I presented each young person with a visual map of their own musical identity journey, based on our interviews and the broader constructed findings of all the young people involved. This was my way of engaging the young

people in critical reflection upon their journey and raising critical awareness of the insights we had gained together. It was also an opportunity to collaboratively work through the interpretation and allow each young person to feedback and make changes to the diagram if they wished.

When seeing the theory set out in visual a map Shayna responds, "It's good seeing it on a page, 'cause you don't really think about that you've had a journey with music as well, you know you don't think of it that way." This insight prompts further discussion with Shayna about how things have changed for her over the past few months, as she integrates this map into her understanding of her broader mental health journey.

The final excerpt details a moment in Sam's final mapping process where she discovers new insight about how her musical identity relates to other aspects of her recovery. These insights occur through the sharing of what we have learned together so far.

Sam and I are creating her map of musical identity. I summarise, "It sounds to me like music was quite a private thing here (I point to an area on the map), but that you're kind of working towards this (I point to a word later in the map saying 'busking'), almost like presenting this kind of musical identity to other people... You start to use the resources around you in the inpatient unit to develop your guitar skills, and then come to the group to develop this sense of being a guitarist, and you sound like...ultimately you aim to present that, almost to the public world as 'I'm a guitarist'...That's kind of how I envisage your trajectory. What do you think about that?" Sam laughs, "That's actually really interesting. Uhm, I've noticed in other areas too that I've become a bit more, like at the start of my time in this service I was quite reserved and closed off and now I know, now I'm close to my end here, I've noticed that I've opened – opened up quite a bit... so yeah, I guess also with my music too, it's become more of a social thing rather than just keeping it to myself".

Conclusion

Feminist interviewing literature may be useful for other participatory researchers who are seeking to use interviews because the principles can also be applied to other areas of social critique (Curtis, 2012). Within my own discipline of music therapy, there is a small yet strong social justice discourse that includes feminist perspectives (Baines, 2013; Curtis, 2012;

Hadley, 2006; Hadley & Edwards, 2004). Music therapist and researcher Barbara Wheeler (2006) notes how many aspects of music therapy appear relevant to the interests of feminism: relationships, women, those who may experience disadvantage. Susan Hadley and Jane Edwards (2004) also contend that music therapy can be a form of feminist practice. They question why, given the high prevalence of women within music therapy, there are not more music therapists and researchers claiming a feminist stance. Consistent with their observation, to my knowledge this is the first attempt to detail feminist interviewing within my discipline. Feminist-informed interviewing is not only relevant to researchers in music therapy, but also offers useful insights for music therapists wishing to adopt feminist-informed approaches in their clinical work through the use of collaborative reflexivity to challenge power imbalances.

Doing these interviews has transformed the way I see interpersonal encounters within both research and music therapy practice by raising my awareness of many embedded assumptions that perpetuate power imbalances between myself and young people. Feminist perspectives have contributed to my understanding of collaboration and challenged me to seek approaches that resonate with my own beliefs and context. For some participating young people, the personal insights and awareness developed through the interviews may have lead to changes in their sense of agency and power to act in an informed way. My own insights gained through each interaction have changed the way I understand young people's experiences of mental illness and music, and the role of music therapy in recovery. I have been privileged to develop intimate knowledge of each young person's personal story and feel changed by both this knowledge and the experience.

Reference list

- Aigen, K. (1993). The music therapist as qualitative researcher. *Music Therapy*, 12, 16-39.
- Arvey, M. (2003). Doing reflexivity: A collaborative narrative approach. In L. Finlay & B. Gough (Eds.), *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences* (pp. 163-175). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Baines, S. (2013). Music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 40(1), 1-5.
- Butler, J. (2013). Gender trouble, feminist theory, and psychoanalytic discourse. In L. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2 ed.): Sage.
- Curtis, S. (2012). Music therapy and social justice: A personal journey. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 39(3), 209-213.
- Davidson, L., Rowe, M., Tondora, J., O'Connell, M. J., & Lawless, M. S. (2008). *A practical guide to recovery-oriented practice: Tools for transforming mental health care*: Oxford University Press.
- DeVault, M., & Gross, G. (2012). Feminist interviewing: Experience, talk and knowledge. In S. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis*. Thousand Oaks: CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Diamond, A., & Edwards, L. (1977). *The authority of experience: Essays in feminist criticism*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.
- Finlay, L. (2005). " Reflexive Embodied Empathy": A Phenomenology of Participant-Researcher Intersubjectivity. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 33(4), 271-292.
- Finlay, L., & Evans, K. (2009). *Relational-centred research for psychotherapists*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Finlay, L., & Gough, B. (2003). Prologue. In L. Finlay & B. Gough (Eds.), *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Flax, J. (2013). Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory. In L. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Freire, P. (2014). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th Anniversary edition ed.). London: Bloomsbury.

- Frese, F., & Davis, W. (1997). The consumer-survivor movement, recovery, and consumer professionals. *Professional Psychology Research and Practice*, 28(3), 243-245.
- Georgaca, E. (2003). Analysing the interviewer: The joint construction of accounts of psychotic experience. In L. Finlay & B. Gough (Eds.), *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences* (pp. 120-132). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Hadley, S. (2006). *Feminist perspectives in music therapy*: Barcelona Publishers.
- Hadley, S., & Edwards, J. (2004). *Sorry for the silence: A contribution from feminist theory to the discourse (s) within music therapy*. Paper presented at the Voices: A world forum for music therapy.
- Herr, K., & Anderson, G. (2005). *The action research dissertation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2012). The practice of feminist in-depth interviewing. In S. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis*: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Israel, B., Schulz, A., Parker, E., Becker, A., Allen, A., & Guzman, R. (2008). Critical issues in developing and following BCPR principles. In M. Minkler & N. Wallerstein (Eds.), *Community-based participatory research for health: From process to outcomes*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley & Sons.
- Lather, P. (1993). Fertile obsession: Validity after poststructuralism. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 34(4), 673-693.
- Nicolson, P. (2003). Reflexivity 'bias' and the in-depth interview: developing shared meanings. In L. Finlay & B. Gough (Eds.), *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences* (pp. 133-145). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- O'Callaghan, C. (2008). Lullament: Lullaby and lament therapeutic qualities actualised through music therapy. *American Journal of Hospice & Palliative Medicine*, 25(2), 93-99. doi: 10.1177/1049909107310139
- Oakley, A. (1981). Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms. In H. Roberts (Ed.), *Doing feminist research* (pp. 36-56).
- Oakley, A. (2005). *The Anne Oakley Reader: Gender women and social science*. Bristol: UK: The policy Press.
- Olsen, V. (2011). Feminist qualitative research in the millenium's first decade: Developments, challenges, prospects. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 129-146). Thousand Oaks: CA: SAGE.
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2008). Introduction. In H. Bradbury & P. Reason (Eds.), *The*

SAGE handbook of action research: Participatory inquiry and practice (2 ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Steier, F. E. (1991). *Research and reflexivity*: Sage Publications, Inc.

Wallerstein, N., & Duran, B. (2008). Historical and practical roots of CBPR. In M. Minkler & N. Wallerstein (Eds.), *Community-based participatory research for health: From process to outcomes* (pp. 25-46). San-Fransisco: CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wheeler, B. (2006). Feminist music therapy research. In S. Hadley (Ed.), *Feminist perspectives in music therapy*. Gilsum NH: Barcelona Publishers.

Between ethical obligation and feminist commitment: A researcher's experience of talking to young people who have sexually abused

Gemma McKibbin - Department of Social Work, School of Health Sciences

Abstract

In this reflective paper I explore a methodological dilemma which arose during the course of my doctoral research project. The dilemma related to a conflict between my ethical obligation to elicit rich data whilst maintaining the safety of the young people who were participating in my study, and my feminist commitment to girl victims of child sexual abuse. I draw upon interview data in order to illustrate my sense of being torn between ethical obligation and feminist commitment, and my subsequent resolution of this conflict using the theory of emotional labour. The resolution involved my recognition that I had been performing both deep and surface acting during the course of the interviews with young people who had sexually abused. This acting enabled me to bracket my long-standing commitment to girls who had been victims of sexual abuse, and to conceptualise the subjectivities of the young perpetrators in a multifaceted way. This meant that I could engage with young people who had abused in such a way so as to protect their emotional safety and to elicit the richest possible data about their perceptions of prevention of sexual abuse. The paper contributes to the literature about the utility of reflexivity in feminist research about sensitive material.

Keywords: Reflexivity, feminism, emotional labour, young people, sexual abuse, prevention

My methodological dilemma

A dilemma emerged for me during the course of fieldwork for my doctoral research project. The fieldwork involved gathering the perceptions about prevention from young people who had sexually abused another young person or child. The dilemma arose owing to my perceived conflict between an ethical obligation as researcher to elicit the richest possible data whilst keeping my participants safe, and a commitment as feminist to honouring girl victims of sexual abuse.

My feminist identity was formed as I was growing up in Perth during the 1970s and 1980s. My mother was a general practitioner working at Family Planning, which was then primarily an organisation which promoted the sexual health of women within a feminist framework. My father was an anaesthetist working in the public hospital system. Both my parents engaged with feminist ideas—mum with radical feminist approaches to female sexuality, and dad with liberal feminist ideals about equality. During my undergraduate years in the 1990s I was exposed to poststructuralism and I began to identify as a poststructuralist feminist. Feminism—in all its variations—was central to my personal and professional identity. Twenty-odd years later, I am still profoundly committed to feminism, and I bring this commitment to the work that I do, including to this doctoral research project. The project was motivated by a desire to help prevent the sexual abuse of children, especially girls. I had witnessed how destructive child sexual abuse had been for some of my (female) friends, and for some of the women I worked with professionally.

My conceptualisation of child sexual abuse had been shaped by a feminist-informed discursive formation which constructed such abuse in terms of several binary oppositions. Two of these binaries were: perpetrator/victim and male/female. These binary oppositions functioned to construct all girls as potential victims and all men as potential perpetrators of sexual abuse (Carmody, 2009). The discursive formation also construed child sexual abuse in terms of father/daughter incest (Armstrong, 2000). All fathers (and stepfathers) were a potential threat to their daughters. The discursive formation interacted with the dominant discourse of childhood, which represented children as innocent and asexual (Knabe, 2012). During my formative years, I internalised this discursive formation, and brought it with me to this research project.

My dilemma arose because it did not seem possible to reconcile my researcher-informed ethical obligation to young people who have sexually abused, and my feminist-informed commitment to

honouring girl victims of sexual abuse. How could I empathise with the perpetrators of sexual abuse in order to protect their emotional safety and elicit rich data, AND honour my feminist commitment to girl victims?

Emotional labour

I found an answer to this question in the concept of emotional labour, a term coined by American sociologist Arlie Hochschild in her book entitled *The Managed Heart* (1983). Hochschild used the term to describe the deep and surface acting which flight attendants performed upon themselves and others in order to induce a positive state-of-mind in passengers (Duncan, 2002). Over the past decade, the concept of emotional labour has been taken up by qualitative researchers working with sensitive research material, such as that exploring sexual assault or domestic violence (Carroll, 2012; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2009; Wilinska, 2013). Collecting data about sensitive material has the potential to re-traumatise participants (Doucet, 2008). Emotional labour, within this context, can be understood as the deep and surface acting performed by a researcher during fieldwork, which has the effect of inducing in participants a sense of feeling safe to talk about potentially traumatic life experiences so as to elicit the richest possible data (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009).

Reflecting on the performance of emotional labour is part of reflexive research practice, which refers to how a researcher accounts for her influence upon that which is researched, and vice versa (Probst & Berenson, 2013). The practice of reflexivity by researchers has been criticised for being a narcissistic pursuit which undermines the value of the research (Pillow, 2003). It is true that practicing reflexivity is narcissistic; it is, after all, a discourse about the researcher's self. However, this representation of the researcher's self is fundamental to the development of situated knowledge, of feminist objectivity, which seeks to acknowledge the positionality of the researcher while simultaneously developing robust empirically-based accounts of the world (Haraway, 1988).

How did emotional labour help?

I realised as the fieldwork progressed that I had, indeed, been acting—I was acting a role with the young people who had sexually abused. I was not displaying my feminist-informed commitment to honouring girl victims of sexual abuse. I've come to understand this acting in terms of the concept of emotional labour. I was

performing emotional labour in an effort to manage my feminist identity, and to elicit the richest possible data from young sexual abusers without traumatising them further.

I was acting on both deep and surface levels. The deep acting involved bracketing my feminist-informed commitment to honouring girl victims, and the concurrent adoption of an intersectional approach to perpetrators of sexual abuse. This enabled me to feel genuine empathy for participants, and to elicit from them the richest possible data about their experiences whilst maintaining their emotional safety. The surface acting involved presenting a non-judgmental countenance to participants by disguising strong negative feelings about some interview content.

Deep acting

The deep acting part of the emotional labour involved me bracketing my feminist identity and adopting an intersectional framework. Intersectionality is a discourse which holds at its forefront the relationship between power, subjectivity and social justice (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2009). Power is viewed in structural terms as a series of interwoven systems of oppression and accompanying processes of differentiation (Dhamoon, 2011). Subjectivity is construed as a collection of identifications relating to various categories of difference including gender, race, class, sexuality and age. These identifications are mutually constituting of a subject's sense of self and are characterised by various levels of privilege and disadvantage.

The adoption of intersectionality was a deep acting experience because it involved a change to my mind-set, to my deep-rooted sense of identity as feminist. The adoption of an intersectional framework is evidenced at instances in the interviews at which I validate a young perpetrator's own experience of victimisation or suffering. In an interview with a young man called Jason I was able to validate his own suffering arising from his experience. Jason had sexually abused his brother and was himself the victim of sexual abuse, which had been perpetrated by an older boy at school:

Gemma: Is it okay if you tell me a little bit more about that confusion and how you...

Jason: Probably because I was sexually abused at a young age myself, in school, by a Grade 6 and

I was in Grade 2. After that happened to me, I think that really confused me.

Gemma: Thank you for sharing that. That's a big thing to share.

Jason: Thank you.

Gemma: I really appreciate hearing that and, indeed, I'm hearing from lots of the people who are being part of the research have had an experience of being victimised themselves, so it seems to be part of what's happening.

Jason: Common theme, yeah.

I felt deeply empathic about Jason's experience of victimisation. I imagined him in Grade 2 as a little boy in the school toilets. I heard his confusion and distress about what had happened to him. I understood how his own victimisation led to perpetration. None of these thoughts or feelings about Jason would have been possible within a traditional feminist framework, which would have obfuscated Jason's own victimisation and construed him only as a perpetrator.

Likewise in an interview with Jackson, I validate the mental suffering he had experienced as a result of his perpetration of sexual abuse against his younger cousin:

Jackson: I thought about suicide before the behaviour, but more so after it. After I did what I did I had mental breakdowns. I was nearly driving myself insane, to the point where I wanted to kill myself.

Gemma: Right, well thank you for sharing that because that's fairly...

Jackson: Personal.

Gemma: The whole thing is very deeply personal yeah. So do you think the suicidal thoughts were because you felt bad or did you feel guilty?

Jackson: I felt evil.

Gemma: Gee that's a strong word. Did you feel evil because of the way people reacted... can you tell me more about feeling evil?

Jackson: It was one of the worst things someone can do to another family member and after I did it I did feel evil. I thought that it was low of me. That's not something I should be doing. According to other people I've always been a good person. I've always taken care of other people. Then realising myself that I've done - what I've done was - it hurt me, it hurt family members. That's why I think it was evil, because yes I did it and I should hate myself for it, but I didn't want to hurt anyone else. It's never an idea of mine to hurt someone else.

Gemma: So it sounds like you were really affected by what you'd done and it hurt you as well as other people and that felt really... it was a really difficult place to be inside your head yeah.

My adoption of intersectionality—my deep acting experience—enabled me strongly to empathise with Jackson, and to validate his experience of suffering arising from his perpetration. Had I not engaged with this adoption of intersectionality, I would not have been able to respond so empathically to young people who had abused, and this would have limited the richness of the data that I was able to collect. My traditional feminist identity would have stemmed my ability to view disadvantage in relation to any other category of difference except that relating to gender, and possibly to race, class and sexuality. Put differently, I would not have recognised the disadvantage associated with the intersections between masculinity, sexual abuse victimisation and mental health.

Surface acting

My experience of acting didn't stop there! I also found that I was performing surface acting. This kind of acting wasn't so much about adopting intersectionality, but about displaying a certain countenance in order to maintain an appearance of being non-judgemental. Much of this surface acting involved me disguising the true nature of my feelings about some interview content. During an interview with David, I had strong feelings of anger

about the sexual assault he had subjected his sister to. David had sexually abused his sister after school before his mum and stepdad got home from work. The sexual abuse was driven by David's viewing of pornography which he acted out on his sister:

Gemma: I was going to ask about how you engaged your sister or controlled her, or made her do what you wanted to do.

David: I kind of just tackled and pinned, and then took over. That was pretty much it. That's where that sense of power came from as well.

Gemma: It would have been yeah, and would have been something that you would have addressed in counselling, I'd imagine...

David: Yeah it was.

Gemma: ...with John. Did you do any apology work? Just while we're on that, did you do any saying sorry?

I felt angry about David's use of physical violence. It would not have been emotionally safe for David if I had openly demonstrated my anger. I needed to maintain an outward appearance of being non-judgemental. In order to do this, I disguised my genuine feelings and changed the topic to something that I did not feel so angry about: David's apology to his sister.

During another interview, this time with a young man called Craig, I again had to disguise negative feelings in order to present an outward appearance of being non-judgemental. In this case I felt very critical about Craig and his father's use of pornography:

Gemma: Is there pornography in the house where you are?

Craig: Yeah. We are always watching that stuff. Actually no, we haven't watched it in ages. We used to always put it on his iPad and stuff.

Gemma: Your dad did?

Craig: I put it on his iPad.

Gemma: You put it on your dad's iPad?

Craig: Yeah.

Gemma: Have you ever watched pornography together with your dad?

Craig: Yeah. We always used to do it. But we haven't watched it in ages. We kind of stopped.

Gemma: Is that on the TV?

Craig: TV, iPad, whatever. Used to go the shopping centres and use their computers to watch it, like in Myer and stuff. We used to go there and put it on for him and then we used to get kicked out because of it. Oh well.

Once again it would not have been in keeping with my ethical obligation to maintain the safety of participants to openly express my critical feelings about Craig and his dad's pornography use. It was necessary for me to disguise my critical feelings in order to appear non-judgemental, which in turn, enabled the collection of the richest possible data.

Displaying duplicity?

Although I have found myself engaging in this emotional labour, this deep and surface acting in order to resolve my methodological dilemma, it presented me with another problem. The problem involved my sense of duplicity. This troubled me because I wondered if it amounted to deception. I felt like I was saying one thing and thinking another, and all the while eliciting the richest possible data about really sensitive material.

On reflection, I can see moments in the interviews when I stop acting, at both deep and surface levels. These are moments when my feminist identity appears in the interview space, often, it seems, in the form of an educative intervention. In an interview with Bob, together with his worker John, I explained to Bob that the word "cunt" refers to the vagina, and that when used as a derogatory term it may be more offensive for girls than for boys:

Gemma: It's interesting, isn't it? Was that one of the words that you used?

Bob: So c u n t?

Gemma: Yeah.

Bob: Occasionally, yes. Pretty much everyone used it. Like pretty much...

Gemma: In that time you got in trouble...

Bob: No, not that time. Pretty much all the time. Maybe occasionally at that time, yes.

John: But Bob did you use that word with the girls?

Bob: No.

John: No.

Bob: Just go like to everyone, you dumb cunt. Something like that.

Gemma: To the girls?

Bob: Not the girls.

Gemma: These other kids, yeah.

Bob: Pretty much we all do it.

Gemma: Yeah so it's an interesting word, cunt, I guess. Because it refers to a vagina that's the female anatomy. So it's...

John: Were you aware of that?

Bob: Yeah. I'm aware of that.

Gemma: So there's some ways that that word is particularly negative towards girls as far as saying it. So I wonder is that something that the boys are aware of.

At this moment of explaining to Bob about how using the word "cunt" might be more negative for girls than for boys, I exposed my feminist identity. Likewise, in an interview with a young man

called Brett, I offered a feminist reading of a recent bullying incident relating to a girl that Brett liked:

Gemma: It's interesting that the cause of the bullying or the fight was this sister. It's interesting how there's a... it's like the brother owns the sister somehow.

Brett: Absolutely, she... he fights her own battles and she won't stand up. It's a part of culture and racial... definitely racial culture. Because they're from Iraq, Egyptian, Muslim family and that's why it reigns from that.

Gemma: Yes okay . . .

Brett: Because over there over in Iraq, no matter where they are they are very upright. It's harsh it's not...

Gemma: It is and it's like the girl is the property of the brother and that's often the case. In Australia we are quite... women are quite equal to men and we grow up with that idea. But yes it sounds like there are... as you say cultural issues.

Brett: Absolutely.

This is a moment, I think, in which my feminist-informed commitment to honouring girls is laid bare; my adoption of intersectionality falters. Again, it is as if I take an opportunity for educative intervention with Brett, and in so doing, I display my authentic self and stop acting.

Concluding thoughts

The concept of emotional labour, along with its practice of deep and surface acting, enabled me to resolve the methodological dilemma relating to my perceived conflict between a researcher-informed commitment to elicit the richest possible data from individuals without traumatising them further, and a feminist-informed commitment to honouring the positions of girls as victims of sexual abuse. I had been acting, and that acting constituted emotional labour. I had adjusted my feminist approach towards sexual abuse, and I was continually managing my outward appearance in order to evoke a sense in the participants of not

being judged. This was hard work for me, hard psychological work. I felt exhausted by it!

Not only did I feel exhausted, though; I also felt like I was engaging in duplicity. The performance of emotional labour resolved one dilemma but presented another. Ultimately, I think that my sense of displaying duplicity will abate as I reflect further upon the value of performing emotional labour in order to elicit rich data about sensitive research material. I think that it would not have been possible to evoke such rich data during my fieldwork had I not performed emotional labour in order to manage my feminist-informed commitment to girl victims of sexual abuse.

My feminist identity could not be eradicated—it is so much a part of me, a part of my relationship with my own femininity . . . I am my feminist identity. But it could be bracketed, in order to allow for a deeper and more complex reading of sexual abusers to emerge, where boys could be victims, girls could be perpetrators, and children could abuse one another. The place where I arrive at the end of this paper is a place of self-reflexivity; a reflection about myself as researcher and as feminist in this piece of research.

Reference list

- Armstrong, L. (2000). What happened when women said "incest". In C. Itzin (Ed.), *Home truths about child sexual abuse*. London: Routledge.
- Carmody, M. (2009). *Conceptualising the prevention of sexual assault and the role of education*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Carroll, K. (2012). Infertile? The emotional labour of sensitive and feminist research methodologies. *Qualitative Research*, 13(5), 546-561. doi: 10.1177/1468794112455039
- Dhamoon, R. K. (2011). Considerations on mainstreaming intersectionality. *Political Research Quarterly*, 64(1), 230-243.
- Dickson-Swift, V., James, E. L., Kippen, S., & Liamputtong, P. (2009). Researching sensitive topics: qualitative research as emotion work. *Qualitative Research*, 9(1), 61-79. doi: 10.1177/1468794108098031
- Doucet, A. (2008). From Her Side of the Gossamer Wall(s): Reflexivity and Relational Knowing. *Qualitative Sociology*, 31(1), 73-87.
- Duncan, R. (2002). *Shaped to Care: A Study of Subjectivity and Emotional Labour in Nursing Theory and Practice*. University of Melbourne.
- Hankivsky, O., & Cormier, R. (2009). *Intersectionality: Moving women's health research and policy forward*. Vancouver: Women's Health Research Network.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599.
- Hochschild, A. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialisation of human feeling*. California: University of California Press.
- Knabe, S. (2012). Suffer the children: National crisis, affective collectivity, and the sexualized child. *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 42(1), 82-104.
- Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(2), 175-196.
- Probst, B., & Berenson, L. (2013). The double arrow: How qualitative social work researchers use reflexivity. *Qualitative Social Work*. doi: 10.1177/1473325013506248
- Wilinska, M. (2013). Shame on me... emotions in the fieldwork on old age in Japan. *Qualitative Social Work*, 13(5), 602-618. doi: 10.1177/1473325013502508

“You should save money for your new home rather than spending it on new electrical items...” Managing the ‘subjective’ self as an ‘objective’ qualitative researcher

Haslina Hashim, School of Geography, Faculty of Science

Abstract

One of the fundamental values that any researcher is expected to embrace is to become an objective researcher. Being objective means excluding our own subjectivity in the research process. In the textbook, it is not difficult to locate the methods to ‘manage’ our subjective human side. However, once we are on the ground, it is not easy to maintain the objective, especially when we are engrained with certain values that seem to contradict with the realities or practices on the ground. This is particularly challenging when a researcher who is brought up with certain ‘middle class’ values is trying to learn about people from a lower income group. In this paper, I will share stories from the field that illuminate my own subjective values in the research. Using the two most common approaches to manage one’s own subjectivity, namely *self-reflexivity* and *spending more time in the field*, I will elaborate how this experience has given me the opportunity to reflect upon and question my own values as a researcher. It also poses a question: have I done enough in practice to ensure trustworthiness in my own research project?

Keywords: Qualitative research, objective researcher, researcher’s subjectivity, trustworthiness in research, self-reflexivity

Introduction

It is common that researchers are expected to be objective and value-free. While this expectation is obtainable in research embracing the positivist paradigm, it is not often the case with qualitative research where the purpose of the research is to observe an issue from research participants' perspectives. In doing so, it is common that qualitative researchers deal with perspectives different from their own values and expectations. I would like to think that despite the proximity between the investigator and the subject, qualitative researchers are expected to absorb information like a sponge and not throw a hint of personal judgement should differences in expectations arise. I was proven wrong soon enough when I had to deal with numerous views and responses that contradicted my own values and beliefs. In several instances, I could not help but to question certain decisions made by the respondents (thankfully, never expressed verbally), which sent me thinking long and hard about the reasons for my unexpected responses. Through negotiations with related materials focusing on rigour in qualitative research, I found two strategies that could help to provide reasonable answers and these strategies are commonly used to increase trustworthiness in qualitative research. These are self-reflexivity and prolonged engagement (Tracy, 2010; Kefting, 1991; Sandelowski, 1986). Although there are several of cases that triggered my 'uneasiness' inside, I believe the story of "Annie" included in this article is valuable for providing a context for the discussion that follows.

The rest of the article is divided into five sections. The following section introduces in brief the public rental housing policy that inspires my PhD project. It is followed by the aim of my project that guided the first data collection procedure discussed in this article. The section after is dedicated to the story of "Annie" and this is followed by an analysis of the situation I encountered. This paper is concluded with several important lessons I took home from the experience.

The Public Rental Housing Policy in Malaysia

The public rental housing program in Malaysia was first initiated in 1994 to ease the problem of acute shortage of affordable housing accessible to urban low income households (Baharuddin, 2007). The severity of housing shortage is anticipated based on the number of squatter units recorded in the different states in Malaysia. By the end of 2011, a total of 62,716 public rental units have been completed, with nearly half of the proportion

concentrated in greater Kuala Lumpur ("Quarterly Statistical Report: July - September," 2012). The program is aimed to provide affordable rental homes to urban low income families for transitional purposes for a period of six years and with the cheap rental, households are expected to save up to migrate into 'better housing' (Baharuddin, 2007). Such expectations echo the 'ladder of life' challenged in Perin's work (cited in Fincher, 2004, p. 326). The 'ladder' conveniently assumes that urban dwellers will follow certain progressive housing pathways through their lifecycles and each progression entails more 'prestige' in life; which is not often the case in the reality of housing decision making (van Ham, 2012). Interestingly, the idea still appeals to housing policy and decision makers in Malaysia.

Although not specified in the policy, 'better housing' may imply purchasing at least a low cost home or entering formal rental. This scheme aims to prevent families from reverting to squatter settlements after exiting the program. Eligible applicants are those with household income between RM650 and RM3000 (\$217 and \$1000) per month (HDC, 2014). The rental is set at RM150 (\$50) per month regardless of income level. This housing only caters for families, with priorities given to applicants from squatter settlements, although applicants from other forms of tenure (private rental, residing in parental homes, shared housing), will also be considered to be given tenancy in public housing. Despite such allowance, my recent observation suggests that households from other tenures may find it more difficult to gain entrance into public housing. Under normal procedures, applicants from squatter settlements (regardless of their income and in many cases, some households have income above average) are almost certain be given tenancy while others tend to be placed on a long waiting list even if they have fulfilled all requirements or are more needy of housing assistance than the former group.

Focus of the Research Project

Though there are several weaknesses in the policy that warrant critique – notably how it is driven to negotiate informal housing problems and systematically excludes other forms of 'legal' housing that may be equally or more precarious; the aim of my study at the timeⁱ was to assess if the expectations set by the policy makers are reflected by tenants' lived experiences in public housing. Specifically, in relation to the transition into 'better housing' I was interested to investigate if current tenants were indeed saving up for their future homes – if yes, how and if not, why?

For the purpose of this study, the case study methodology is employed and data collection is split into two stages. The experiences used to furnish this article are derived from the first stage of data collection. Seven current tenants were recruited randomly to share stories about their lived experiences in public housing, using semi structured face to face interview. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Apart from asking respondents about the difference in lived experiences in their former and current dwelling units (public housing), there was also a question about tenants' ability to save up for their future home, as envisioned in the policy. One of the stories will be shared in the following section to provide a context for the discussion that follows.

The Story of "Annie"

"Annie" is a stay at home mum age 32 years old. She has lived in public housing for the past six years with her husband and her three stepchildren. Prior to residing in public housing, Annie and her husband stayed in a squatter settlement, but without the children. Due to the poor living conditions in the squatter settlement, both decided that the children would be better off in the village, placed under the care of their paternal grandparents. Only after Annie and her husband gained tenancy in public housing did the children join them. Despite the temporary lease, Annie feels happy residing in public housing mainly because the rental is affordable. She plans to stay on even after six years. The regulated environment in the public housing estate entails cleaner surroundings and reliable access to water and electricity, which was severely lacking in their former dwelling. When asked if they could save up for their future home, Annie said it is impossible to do so because two of the children are still in school. The inability to save is also attributed to the continuous increase of living costs in Kuching. Nevertheless, Annie is hopeful that one day the unit they rent would be open for sale and through that, her family could finally own a property in Kuching.

Like any other units, Annie's flat is equipped with the necessities to make it more homely. This includes furniture and electrical appliances such as television, dining table, settee, refrigerators and washing machine located strategically within the 700 square feet built up area of the flat. Interestingly, like several other homes I observed, her unit is equipped with an expensive large flat screen television (roughly about 42") – only that Annie's television is complete with a sound system – all mounted to the wall. The entertainment system was purchased about a year ago

on a three-year instalment which amounts to RM250 (\$83) a month. So, what was my take on this?

Firstly, the strong view expressed about the impossibility to save for a future home did not correspond with the additional financial commitment they decided to make on the home theatre systemⁱⁱ. Furthermore the month-to-month commitment for the entertainment system is higher than their rental. Secondly, I could not make sense of why they chose to invest in electrical items that would not last long and depreciate in value, when trying to get a secure home seems to be more critical here. At times, I could not help but to feel that Annie and her family could have kept to the basics and made some effort to establish some form of saving for their future home, knowing that their tenancy in public housing was not for life. Despite the thought, I managed to step back and reflect on my own responses towards the given answers. Because such responses, akin to being judgmental, do not reflect the criterion of being an 'impartial' researcher – especially when qualitative research methodology is employed to address a phenomenon from eye of the research participants. Certainly, my internal conflict warrants further probing to enable me to make sense of this 'confusing' situation.

Explaining the Contradicting Evidences

Given the 'conflict' there is certainly a question about the extent to which the data captured from this first fieldwork and the interpretations are affected by my own bias. If we were to frame this question using the set of quality criteria in qualitative research, we are looking at: how can we ensure the results generated from this study are trustworthy? To answer this question, we need to understand the different quality criteria in qualitative research that implicate research trustworthiness. According to Guba (cited in Krefting, 1991), the four quality criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. How each reflects research activities have been covered extensively in literatures dedicated to practices in qualitative research. The situation highlighted in this article emphasizes the issue of research credibility, hence it is only appropriate to examine my 'conflict' against the strategies purported to increase credibility in qualitative research. For the purpose of this article, I have selected two commonly cited strategies to maintain rigor in qualitative research. They are self-reflexivity and prolonged engagement in the field. I found both are most helpful to unpack the issue in hand.

Self-reflexivity is very useful to question the researcher's own imposed subjectivity on the research, if any. According to Krefting (1991, p. 218), "reflexivity refers to assessment of the influence of the investigator's own background, perceptions, and interests on the qualitative research process". Tracy (2010, p. 841) includes the importance of self-reflexivity to maintain sincerity in a research project. In her words, "sincerity means that the research is marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher's biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys and mistakes of the research". Contrary to quantitative research where the researcher is non-intrusive and therefore able to maintain objectivity, those employing qualitative research paradigms will find it difficult to remain 'neutral'. That is, objectivity in qualitative research is limited mainly because of the minimal gap between the observer and the participant. It is also argued that for a qualitative researcher, it is extremely challenging to remain value-free. Being a person, the researcher is almost certain to bring his or her subjective experiences into the field. Recalling her early years adjusting to become a feminist researcher, Deutsch (2004) exerts the impossibility to remain value-free. Reflecting on her own positionality in the research and her interactions with the respondents, she admitted in several interactions with her respondents, that she felt 'discomfort from acting in a way contrary to her own values'. In fact, such encounter is not uncommon (see Bourke, 2014). Oftentimes, researchers engaging in qualitative research will experience difficulties in 'bracketing' out their own attitude or values because of the different backgrounds they had from the respondents (Bourke, 2014; Deutsch, 2004; Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Only by acknowledging the differences and how that may influence the research process, researchers are able to manage emerging biases in their own research.

In retrospect, it became clear that my response was guided by certain values I embrace – this includes planning for a 'better future' through owning a home. In Malaysia, homeownership has been accepted as the 'normal' form of tenure that many people aspire to – myself included. This notion is implied by the high rate of homeownership in Malaysia, which has been over 80% since the 1980s (Kim, 2012, cited in Tan, 2013). This figure is higher than that of Australia, often regarded as a nation of homeowners amongst English speaking countries. The homeownership in Australia is close to 70% (Colic-Peisker & Johnson, 2010, p. 352). Similar to Australia, the real estate industry in Malaysia is very speculative and competitive. Low income households are always

left out in the race to own a home, oftentimes due to ineligibility and inefficient allocation system characterized by corruption practices and political interference (Syafiee, 2010). Annie's attitude towards homeownership could have been shaped by the very system we are in. In many ways, the homeownership policy and implementations favour the middle and high income earners who can prove they are worthy debtors. With government's interventions, low but steady income earners could own a home but through more stringent means testing. Such procedures also mean that low irregular income households (like Annie's) are unlikely to own a home. Judging from Annie's answer that owning a home is "...impossible! There is no way we could own a home with my husband's kind of job (daily paid)", it seems apparent that Annie's attitude towards owning a home is moulded by the unmet expectations embedded in the system.

Wood (2003) argues the uncertainty of their future engenders the poor to focus on short-term commitment. Essentially, the poor tend to focus on the present since they have more control over it. In Annie's case where accumulating resources does not guarantee them penetrating the housing market, investing in homemaking materials seems to be more realistic. It is found that even if there is a notion about the future, interestingly it is tied to the present situation as evidenced in Annie's hope to purchase the unit they are in someday – although this possibility does not present in the current policy statement. Such desire is attributed to the low income's strong sense of attachment to familiar environments, as Shaw and Hagemans (in press) aptly reminded us in their work focusing on the effects of gentrification on the poor. Citing the work of Fried and Morris, they echo that there is a:

"stronger articulation of place attachment among working class than middle class residents ... [F]or those who have uncertain or low economic status and therefore fewer reasons and resources to travel and develop social ties outside the neighbourhood, place of residence becomes an important nexus around which identification and belonging are formulated" (Shaw & Hagemans, in press).

In short, people with fewer resources are more rooted to a place than their more affluent counterparts, hence explaining several respondents' (including Annie's) reluctance to leave public housing upon the expiry of their lease. Based on Annie's narratives, her sense of rootedness is probably more than just because of the improved physical environment. The affordable

tenancy in public housing means that they could finally provide a suitable environment to raise the children, contrary to their former dwelling in the squatter settlement. Similar to the public housing tenants in Australia featured in Mee's work (2007), Annie and her family may have found permanency in public housing. They may also realise that such benefits are not attainable in the private rental market where rental is at least three-fold for a property of similar quality. This, to a certain extent rationalises the stories captured during the fieldwork. It also sets as a reminder (at least to myself) that in qualitative research, the 'truth' is not mine as a researcher to decide. The truth value, as pointed out in Krefting (1991, p. 215), is subject oriented as they experienced it.

Other than self-reflexivity, another of the most cited strategies to ensure credibility in any qualitative research is to spend more time in the field with the respondents (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Krefting, 1991). Prolonged engagement provides opportunities for both researchers and informants to be accustomed to each other. While recurring encounters allow the researcher to detect and negotiate socially-desired responses, respondents on the other hand may feel more comfortable to give away even sensitive information as rapport increases between them. Therefore, with regards to Annie's narratives on the ability to save, it is difficult to discern its credibility for two reasons: firstly, the information is derived from the first and only meeting where the level of rapport is still preliminary; and secondly, questions on income (and perhaps related to income, i.e. savings) are oftentimes neglected or not answered truthfully as people generally regard such questions as very intrusive (Tourangeau & Ting, 2007, p. 863). Another probable reason for the lack of response to such questions is attributed to the fear that any information gathered may be given to a third-party – meaning, there could be fear that any data captured may reach the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) – a situation signalling the issue of trust towards the researcher which could be addressed with prolonged engagement. This experience serves as a reminder that information gathering in qualitative research travels both ways between the interviewer and the interviewee. Whether the researcher realizes it or not, his or her presence may have projected certain messages to the respondents and this in turn, can effect how certain answers are given. As we diligently capture and process information offered by the respondents, it is worthy to consider if we have taken sufficient measures to ensure data credibility. In the case of Annie's interview, a better rapport could have been established before I even started questioning the truth value of the data. On the other hand, as I put more thought

into my research design, this issue may have been addressed by the data collection procedures we set for the study. Whether it was intended or not, the first stage of data collection has helped to build rapport for me to carry forward into the second stage of fieldwork scheduled between July and September 2014.

Conclusion

For someone who is new in qualitative research, there is often a misconception that one could maintain objectivity and remain value free – akin to positivist researchers. As discussed in this paper, it is challenging to maintain neutrality when qualitative research requires a researcher to study a phenomenon from the ‘eyes of the subjects’ – meaning, the distance between the researcher and the researched can never be ‘distanced’. Hence, a researcher may impart his or her subjective values into the study at various stages of the research. In this case, I realise the ‘penetration’ of my own subjectivity took place during data collection. Sometimes new qualitative researchers (like myself) can forget that in qualitative research, it is our task to translate the realities faced by the subjects as closely as possible. Where truth value in a qualitative research project is concerned, it is subject-oriented and not defined by the researcher following established concepts of the phenomenon (Krefting, 1991; Sandelowski, 1986). As mentioned, the strategies outlined in this article are two of the most commonly cited approaches to increase trustworthiness in a qualitative research (Tracy, 2010; Krefting, 1991; Sandelowski, 1986). Between the two, I find self-reflexivity is paramount (and a ‘must-have’ in every qualitative research project) in acknowledging how life experiences (generated by the system) have taught us differently and therefore, we respond differently to certain expectations. Having said that, every research project is unique in their own ways. It is therefore the researcher’s responsibility to determine the best strategies to maintain credibility in his or her own research. In qualitative research, objectivity is hardly maintained but potentially maximised by containing researcher’s subjectivity. This is not impossible when we aim to maintain the rigour of qualitative research.

Notes

- i The thesis was repositioned following certain limitations I encountered during the first stage of data collection.
- ii Annie’s case is just another example of additional spending

made by households whom I met. Other forms of extra financial commitment include satellite pay TV subscription which could be as low as RM39.95 a month (ASTRO, 2014) or getting an additional motor vehicle.

Reference list

- ASTRO. (2014). *Online bundle deals*. Retrieved 16 Dec, 2014, from <http://www.astro.com.my/shop>
- Baharuddin, M. A. (2007). *The People's Housing Programme: A Study on the Implementation of Federal Government Housing in Peninsula Malaysia*. (PhD), University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.
- Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(18), 1-9.
- Colic-Peisker, V., & Johnson, G. (2010). Security and Anxiety of Homeownership: Perceptions of Middle-class Australians at Different Stages of their Housing Careers. *Housing, Theory and Society*, 27(4), 351-371.
- Deutsch, N. L. (2004). Positionality and the Pen: Reflections on the Process of Becoming a Feminist Researcher and Writer. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(6), 885-902.
- Fincher, R. (2004). Gender and Life Course in the Narratives of Melbourne's High-rise Housing Developers. *Australian Geographical Studies*, 42(3), 325-338.
- HDC. (2014). *PPR - Program Perumahan Rakyat*. Retrieved 16 Dec, 2014, from http://www.hdc.sarawak.gov.my/modules/web/pages.php?mod=webpage&sub=page&id=63&menu_id=0&sub_id=113
- Hess-Biber, S. N., & Leavy, P. (2006). *The Practice of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in Qualitative Research: The Assessment of Trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214-222.
- Mee, K. (2007). "I Ain't Been to Heaven Yet? Living Here, This is Heaven to Me": Public Housing and the Making of Home in Inner Newcastle. *Housing, Theory and Society*, 24(3), 207-228.
- Quarterly Statistical Report: July - September. (2012)*. Retrieved 7 March, 2013, from ehome.kpkt.gov.my/en/main.php.
- Shaw, K., & Hagemans, I. (in press). 'Gentrification without displacement' and the consequent loss of place. The effects of class transition on low-income residents of secure

housing in gentrifying areas. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.

Syafiee, S. (2010). *Low Income Housing Allocation System in Malaysia: Managing Housing Need for the Poor*. Paper presented at the 22nd International Housing Research Conference, Istanbul.

Tan, T.-H. (2013). *Homeownership Schemes in Malaysia for First Homebuyers*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Innovation and Sustainability (1st), Bandar Sunway, Petaling Jaya. <http://eprints.sunway.edu.my/id/eprint/209>

Tourangeau, R., & Ting, Y. (2007). Sensitive Questions in Surveys. *Psychological Bulletin*, 133(5), 859-883.

Van Ham, M. (2012). Housing Behavior. In D. F. Clapham, W. A. V. Clark & K. Gibb (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Housing Studies* (pp. 47-65). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Wood, G. (2003). Staying Secure, Staying Poor: The "Faustian Bargain". *World Development*, 31(3), 455-471.

The Complexities of Political and Historical Influences on Researcher and Research Material

Section Two

The Nuts and Bolts: Choosing and beginning a research project

Lily O'Neill, Melbourne Law School

Abstract

In this paper, I discuss an aspect of my PhD research not often canvassed candidly in descriptions of research methods: the 'nuts and bolts' of how and why this research topic was chosen, how the case studies were selected and interview participants sourced. I hope that this description will give other graduate researchers some comfort in the research 'messiness' of their early years of candidature.

Keywords: case study research; empirical legal research; agreement making between traditional owners and resource companies.

Introduction

My PhD research focuses on a key idea in contemporary Australian Aboriginal policy, that agreement making over resources on traditionally owned land can help generate Aboriginal prosperity. However, while some traditional owners have reaped substantial benefits from agreement making with resource companies, others do not receive commensurate compensation for the exploitation of their land. My research explores the power dynamics that shape negotiations between traditional owners and resource companies through a qualitative case study analysis of several agreements, including those related to the proposed Browse liquefied natural gas (LNG) Precinct in the Kimberley in north-western Australia, and in relation the Curtis Island LNG Facility off Gladstone, Queensland. It investigates how and why the agreements took the forms that they did, in order to find out how native title groups can maximise the benefits potentially available to them from the agreement-making process.

Research Impetus

The impetus for this research developed out of my work as a

lawyer conducting multiple negotiations on behalf of my clients under the same piece of legislation: the Accident Compensation Act 1985 (Vic). One particular pre-trial negotiation intrigued me. It was for a very difficult client who was claiming that she had suffered a psychiatric injury after being bullied at work. Her legal claim was, in my opinion, weak. The negotiation commenced, and her employer made a good offer to settle her claim, which I advised her to accept. She refused, and indeed continued to refuse increasingly generous offers until I prevailed upon her to say yes to an offer that befitted a much stronger legal position. Her case finalised, and my colleagues congratulated me on a negotiation that wielded such a terrific result.

Yet I knew that the result had nothing to do with my negotiation style: I had been advising her to accept far lesser offers. I realised that my knowledge of what was going on in the negotiation could only ever be partial and one-sided at best. I was also fascinated by the idea that the explanation could be something totally unexpected. I knew that speaking candidly to my negotiation opponent would likely reveal more about what was going on, but also that this would breach our professional obligations of confidentiality to our clients. Thus my research project commenced with a deep interest in explaining negotiation outcomes by reference to real life negotiations, from the point of view of all negotiation participants. I had previously worked in the area of native title agreement making and was keen that my research into negotiations be conducted in this area.

Research Design

I decided that the research design best suited to this research impetus was a qualitative case study approach: a method that I hoped would produce a holistic and meaningful account of the forces at play in negotiating native title agreements (Yin, 1984). Qualitative researchers attempt to study phenomena in their natural setting using empirical data, and attempt to explain those phenomena and the interpretations that their actors have of them, with the aim of gaining a better understanding, a 'better fix', on the chosen subject matter (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 3). Qualitative research is often said to be an appropriate research design where the researcher is seeking to understand why certain outcomes occurred, as is the case here (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006). In formulating this research design, I drew from several different qualitative methodological approaches. They all emphasise: the flexibility and reflexivity of the researcher;

the subjective nature of knowledge; the importance of checking back with research participants; and research findings that rest firmly on the data. They also emphasise the importance of 'thick description' of the research context (Denzin and Lincoln, p. 3). As a subset of qualitative research, the qualitative case study has a firm place in qualitative legal research, including in research into juries (Levine, 1996).

It could be described as a fairly intuitive approach for someone trained in the common law, focusing as it does on important and relevant individual cases (Webley, 2010). It is an approach with well-documented strengths and weaknesses. According to Robert Yin, case study research is the most appropriate methodological strategy, when, as is salient here, how and why questions are being asked, the researcher has little control over the phenomena being studied, and the research is focussed on 'contemporary phenomena within some real-life context' (Yin, 1984, p. 13). Case study research, Yin contends, is also well suited for considering broad research topics and multiple conditions and variables, as well as for the use of numerous sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). It is an approach that facilitates a deep understanding of a case, or comparison of cases (Creswell, 2007).

There were clearly other ways in which the research question could be answered, for example through doctrinal research of the publically available material or a quantitative survey administered to participants of multiple negotiations. However, given the paucity of information available on negotiations and agreement outcomes generally, the small number of people involved in these negotiations, and the level of detail required to adequately respond to the research question, I believe that the selected qualitative research design was appropriate. I chose not to conduct surveys because, with a limited pool of people to interview, semi-structured interviews were more likely to provide in-depth information (Creswell, 2007).

The refinement of my research questions came later still, an approach that follows aspects of Lincoln and Guba's Naturalistic Inquiry and Glaser and Strauss' Grounded Theory. Both advocate for a composite methodological approach whereby data collection begins before the research has a full articulation of theory or research questions. These approaches emphasises the dynamic nature of research, and in particular iterative data collection in which the focus of the research and theory articulation is refined after exploratory rounds of empirical work (Guba & Lincoln, 1986; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Choosing Case Study Sites

The choice of case studies is a key stage in any case study research; indeed identifying and bounding the cases to be studied is one of the most difficult aspects of case study research (Yin, 1984). Around the time that I was considering embarking on a PhD, my interest had been piqued by media reports of two liquefied natural gas negotiations that appeared to be developing very differently. Negotiations between Woodside Energy and traditional owners appeared to be progressing fairly smoothly in relation to Browse LNG in the Kimberley, while the negotiations over the development of Greater Sunrise LNG seemed to be hitting multiple hurdles with the Timor-Leste government. These two examples provided me with a broad research remit: Why do similar negotiations produce different outcomes? And while I would later drop Greater Sunrise as a case study, and the Browse LNG negotiation became a far more fractious affair, this remained my motivating question throughout my PhD candidature.

A series of happy events had Browse LNG firm up as a case study from which I would be able to gather sufficient data. I already knew that Woodside Energy was an industry partner of the Agreements, Treaties and Negotiation Settlements (ATNS) Project, the Australian Research Council project I was a PhD student with, and believed that this would make it more likely that they would cooperate with my research. Then, in June 2011, the Browse LNG agreements were made publically available and it was clear that they were highly favourable to traditional owners. The availability of the full agreements is very unusual and was further justification for studying this case. It was a welcome, although unexpected development, upholding Robert Creswell's observation that serendipity plays a 'significant' role in social science research (Creswell, 2007 p. 5). By that time it had also become apparent that negotiations between the Timor-Leste government and Woodside were stalemated and unlikely to result in an outcome in the near future.

The prospect of Curtis Island LNG — part of the larger Gladstone LNG development — as a potential case study site did not arise until at least six months into the project, before any interviews had been conducted. Negotiations were being conducted at a similar time to Browse LNG, the land was also intended for the building of LNG processing plants and I had heard rumours that the deal traditional owners had obtained was not terribly good. It therefore seemed a valuable opportunity to study a negotiation that had led to an unfavourable outcome for traditional owners.

It also appeared to have the advantage of involving another one of the ATNS Project's industry partners, Santos. I believed that these case studies had enough in common to make studying their outcomes instructive. In doing so, I was following Creswell's advice to choose case studies based on their ability to show different perspectives on the research question (Creswell, p. 74). The agreements for the Curtis Island LNG have never been made public, nor have I seen them, perhaps attesting to another observation of social science research: that ambiguity and difficulty are the rule, rather than the exception (Creswell, p. 5).

Sourcing Research Participants

I commenced the interview phase of my research, seeking to interview as many people as I could from traditional owner groups, relevant land councils, state and federal governments and LNG companies. Later in the process, I decided to also interview people in opposition to the gas hubs as it became clear that this opposition was — at least in the case of Browse LNG — a shadow presence in the negotiating room. To find research participants I relied on my professional networks, media reports, desktop research and 'snowballing' whereby I asked each interviewee who else I should be talking to (Yin, 1984). All potential interviewees were sent a plain language statement of my research that had been approved by the University of Melbourne's human ethics committee. The process of sourcing interviewees took up a considerable amount of my PhD candidature: my last interview was conducted more than three years after my commencement.

The very nature of this research means that my research participants were never going to be chosen from a random sample. I found that the response rate for a request for interview was good, with the majority of people agreeing, however many significant people did not agree to an interview on my first request (or indeed my second request) and several agreed more than two years after I first approached them. Robert Yin suggests that a good case study researcher is curious and a good listener (Yin, 1984 p84). I would also add persuasive, persistent and patient to that list.

Sourcing participants from the Curtis Island negotiations required a lot of initial persistence and a fair bit of luck. I was introduced to my first interviewee, a traditional owner of Curtis Island, following a serendipitous conversation with his sister at a conference. Many other people were sourced in a similar manner. I found

that Curtis Island traditional owners were happy to talk with me once I had tracked them down, a fact that I put down largely to their dissatisfaction with the process they had gone through, and their desire to have it more widely known. I was invited to attend a two-day meeting on the health of the Gladstone Harbour by one of my research participants. This meeting was attended by several key Curtis Island traditional owners and allowed me time to quietly introduce myself to people. Somewhat surprisingly, the most difficult person to contact proved to be an ex-senior Queensland politician who took months to track down.

Finding participants from the Browse LNG negotiation was an easier task, although persuading them to talk to me was sometimes more difficult given the highly controversial nature of the Browse LNG development. One of my supervisors, Professor Ciaran O’Faircheallaigh, had been involved in the negotiations in a consultative capacity. He wrote a letter of introduction on my behalf to the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), the Aboriginal organisation who had represented traditional owners in the negotiation, who responded favourably. The KLC agreed to give me a desk in their office for the time that I was in Broome, which I had requested so as to become a known ‘face’ with staff and traditional owners. I believe that this helped when I asked people for an interview, as did my association with Professor O’Faircheallaigh.

I found that potential interviewees were often interested in who else had agreed to be interviewed: this appeared to give the research legitimacy in their eyes and, by the end of my data collection phase I had interviewed key representatives of all negotiation participants.

Conclusion

As is the case in many research related endeavours, the way in which we approach, refine and conduct research can be explained in many ways. What I have attempted to do here is show the ‘nuts and bolts’ of how I came to my research design, including the mess, hard work, false starts and good luck. Qualitative research is sometimes criticised for lacking scientific rigour, and highlighting the improvised nature of this research design potentially opens it up to such criticism. Yet, while the manner in which it was formulated may not have been smooth — or confined to the first phase of my candidature — I believe that my research design is rigorous, and has produced empirical data

that is richer than I envisaged, despite the design's significant divergence from the original plan.

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the Australian Research Council Linkage Project *Poverty in the Midst of Plenty: Economic Empowerment, Wealth Creation and Institutional Reform for Sustainable Indigenous and Local Communities*, and the Melbourne Social Equity Institute. She also thanks David Henry for his insightful comments on an earlier draft of this work.

Reference list

- Creswell, R. (2007) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds), (1998) *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967) *The discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Guba, E. and Yvonna S. Lincoln (1989) *Fourth generation evaluation*, Newberry Park: Sage Publications.
- Levine, JP. (1996) 'The Case Study as a Jury Research Methodology' 24(4) *Journal of Criminal Justice*
- Mahoney, J. and Goertz, G. (2006) 'A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research' 14 *Political Analysis* 227
- Stake, R. (2006) *The Art of Case Study Research*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Webley, L. (2010) 'Qualitative Approaches to Empirical Legal Research' in Peter Cane and Herbert M. Kritzer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Empirical Legal Research*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Yin, K. (1984) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Yin, K. (2003) *Applications of Case Study Research*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Standing on the Bridge: Critical Reflections on the Politics of Counter- Memory

Sophie Rudolph - Melbourne Graduate School of Education

Abstract

The settler-colonial context of Australia presents a range of dilemmas associated with archival research. These have contributed to the methodological design of the project I draw on in the paper – a genealogical investigation of the notion of ‘achievement gap’ attributed to Indigenous students through the national policy ‘Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage’. Following Foucault’s conception of genealogy this historical work seeks to challenge the institution of the archive as an objective, whole, static, record of the past. In this paper I examine the possibilities that this approach to the archive affords in creating a ‘counter memory’ and for using historical analysis to make a critical intervention into a politically pressing present problem. In doing this I also explore some of the ongoing dilemmas and ethical dimensions of archival work in the settler colonial context, drawing on my narrative-based research reflections written throughout the inquiry process. These reflections are woven through the discussion to explore the affective and political dimensions of engaging in this work and to argue for the importance of continued attention to the ways in which the archive and historical inquiry are located in entanglements of power and performance relevant to the political present.

Keywords: Indigenous, education, policy, politics, race, history, power, colonialism.

Prologue

This paper engages with the political and ethical dimensions of a research project investigating how, why and with what effects the notion of ‘achievement gap’ has become the dominant way of describing and addressing Indigenous educational disadvantage

in Australia. This project seeks to develop a Foucauldian-inspired genealogical understanding of contemporary 'gap' discourse and as such the study is a critical work. This involves 'unmasking' and 'denaturalizing' practices that look for 'small stories', marginalised perspectives and 'taken-for-granted' narratives (Meadmore et al, 2000, p. 466). These practices form what Foucault described as 'counter-memory' (1977, p. 160). As a method that seeks to engage with dominance, power, silences and marginalization, it is used to investigate injustices and contribute to establishing social justice. However, as postcolonial scholar Edward Said states, 'criticism in short is always situated' (1983, p. 26). In Australia in particular, as Goenpul woman and critical race scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson points out, the production of knowledge about Indigenous people is strongly linked to powerful ideas of racial hierarchy and colonial expansion, she states:

It is academics who represent themselves as 'knowers', whose work and training is to 'know'. They have produced knowledge about Indigenous people but their way of knowing is never thought of by white people as being racialised despite whiteness being exercised epistemologically. (Moreton-Robinson 2011[2004], p. 75)

So while the very purpose of my research is to expose and confront the ways in which knowledge is produced and becomes dominant, thus shaping norms and frequently reproducing exclusions, the act of this research is itself bound up in these politics and issues. Therefore, even a method with morally aware intentions is bound by, and encounters, the dominance and power of the institutions of which it is attempting to examine. This puts the critic in a position of continual struggle and it is this struggle that I am endeavouring to make visible in this article. I am going to reflect on the politics of knowledge associated with being a non-Indigenous researcher engaging with issues of race, power, history, memory and colonisation. I will do this through presentation of excerpts from some reflections written during the research process. Firstly, however, a brief discussion of the 'archive' and counter-memory is presented, followed by an explanation of my use of the metaphor of the 'bridge'.

The Archive and Counter-Memory

Through archival research focused on two politically significant periods in Australian history (the late 1930s and late 1960s) this project seeks to develop a Foucauldian-inspired genealogical

understanding of contemporary 'gap' discourse.

In the context of my project the archival material under investigation is from public government archives. The material within these archives was collected during colonial and settler colonial periods in Australia, creating particular political conditions for the information that is recorded in these documents. Some of the documents contain Indigenous voices or perspectives, some silence them, and all of the material is mediated by contact experiences between coloniser or settler and 'native'. While there are many challenges and tensions due to this context, the records that have been archived, have been important for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia in creating historical understanding. To create a 'counter-memory' is not, therefore, to contest the relevance of the archive necessarily or to de-legitimise the entire historical record, but to use the archive to give insight into the political, moral and ethical tensions that have produced what is understood as 'normal' today. The archive, therefore, becomes a window into the ways in which a society constructs ways of knowing itself and its subjects. This is articulated by Foucault as such:

I shall call an archive, not the totality of texts that have been preserved by a civilization or the set of traces that could be salvaged from its downfall, but the series of rules which determine in a culture the appearance and disappearance of statements, their retention and their destruction, their paradoxical existence as *events* and *things*. (Foucault, 2008[1968], p. 309, original emphasis)

In endeavouring to trace the ways ideas and thinking have travelled through time, archival sources are examined not for their bias or 'truth' but to establish insight into the political tensions and power relations that generated the record as it is. Anthropologist and historian Ann Stoler, through her examination of colonial archives, articulates this conception of the 'archive' and the ways in which 'knowledge' is established, understood, recorded and encountered in such institutions. She contends that:

I treat these colonial archives both as a corpus of writing and as a force field that animates political energies and expertise, that pulls on some "social facts" and converts them into qualified knowledge, that attends to some ways of knowing while repelling and refusing others. (Stoler, 2009, p. 38)

The archive, therefore, can be a site for interrupting colonial logics, for generating other ways of seeing and acting in the present, through understanding the ways that institutions such as the 'archive', the State, the 'education system' hold knowledge in particular ways, for particular purposes. As Michael Roth notes, however, 'writing a history of the present means writing a history in the present; self-consciously writing in a field of power relations and political struggle' (1981, p. 43). It is the tensions inherent in this difficult task that are investigated in a series of research reflections I have written during the archival, reading and analysis phases of this project.

The Bridge: a Metaphor

Research and academic convention in university institutions typically requires explication of methodology and theoretical framework, followed by the findings and outputs of the research. What this means is that the process – the labour undertaken to generate the findings – is often glossed over or erased. The conventional academic thesis, therefore, often omits the 'bridge' that takes the researcher from plan and set up to product and conclusions. However it is in this process, I argue, that important political and ethical tensions are grappled with and intellectual and emotional struggle occurs. This bridge is therefore significant and I suggest symbolic in multiple ways. It is a way of making visible the connection between methodology and practice, theory and analysis. It is a way of highlighting process as an important passage in generating outcomes. And it is a way of viewing and surveying the landscape. The bridge gives a perspective from which we can see the space it connects with on either side, as well as what is below, what we pass over and what passes under us. This is a way of seeing a singular project as part of a much larger picture. A bridge is also a passageway from one place to the next – we may stop on the bridge but it is ultimately a place of movement, of activity, an aide in carrying us in a particular direction. In this way it is also a support structure and a conduit for ideas that have helped to shape the project. In this article I want to stand on the bridge for a while and in doing this ponder what may be visible from this vantage point.

For the purposes of this working paper I present reflections related to archival work conducted for this project, which is a contemplation on the ethics of engagement in public archives in the settler colonial context of Australia.

The Archives

Reflections: June 2013, Melbourne

It is cold but there is also some welcome morning sunshine, weakly gesturing warmth. I get on my bike and start the journey to 'the archives' in North Melbourne. As an 'accidental historian' this is the first time I have visited the archives and thus my journey begins with a strange mixture of excitement and uncertainty. I take my usual route to the university but about two-thirds into my ride I turn left where I would usually go straight ahead. Over the narrow bridge across the Maribyrnong River, under the massive concrete freeway overpass and across the railway lines, one wrong turn, a correction, and I arrive. I remove my thick gloves and leave my trusty steed tied against a pole in the street. I head across the car park towards the large sign – Public Record Office – beside this is a poster proudly announcing the 40-year celebrations. The sliding door permits my entry but this is not the main entrance and I follow the signs down a long white walled corridor and wind my way up numerous flights of stairs. This has the effect of adding to my already well developed feeling of being an imposter, of being out of place. But I emerge from the stairwell into the main entrance – a light filled, open space with views onto the large plane tree lined street – and I'm quietly amused by my characteristic unconventional arrival. Here I receive a key for a locker and am given instructions on what I may and may not enter the archives with. I stuff my abundance of paraphernalia – due to Melbourne seasonal changeability and bicycle transportation – into the modest locker I've been assigned and use the security card to venture forth through another sliding door into the expansive reading room.

Here the novice in me rises to the surface and I feel clumsy, inept. I ask at the desk for some guidance and find out I am talking to someone from the National Archives – a woman with a round, jovial face and officious manner – she points further down the counter and indicates the Public Record Office staff. I learn that this is a shared space that is not easily visually delineated, but that each organisation has their own distinct processes, material and staff. No one, however, appreciates the sight of a pen, I note, as an older man is chastised for this misdemeanor and asked to put the pen in his pocket immediately. I go to the computers and use the catalogue to search for some materials of relevance to my project. This turns out to be a rather disorienting process as I realise that this catalogue is not like a library catalogue – it is layered in a specific way and I have to search for items within series, within agencies, within groups. I have some limited

success and after requesting the assistance of another staff member I have identified some boxes that might be of interest.

When my material arrives it is lined up on the table and I am left alone to ponder the contents of these boxes – papers that have been sorted and stacked and stored – traces of thoughts, words, interactions, debates, waiting to be encountered. The ethics of this encounter pulls at me insistently here and I become more intensely aware of the strangeness of my surrounds. These white walls, white pages, white people, white searchers, seekers, finders. This building standing on Indigenous land – I am not even sure if this is Wurundjeri or Boonwurrung land and I can't find an acknowledgement anywhere obvious that might help me decipher this. This is a public archive and as such open to the entire community. But what mechanisms operate to enable even public spaces and institutions to exclude? How would this place feel to those who are not white? To those whose voices, actions, practices, particulars have been recorded and now appear to me on these pages? The rules, the restrictions, the surveillance of this place. This strange contradiction between the need to protect traces of history, memories, stories; and an echo of injustice from the past, these same practices used to confine, conceal and control the Indigenous peoples of this land. I think of Sara Ahmed's recent work on the notion of institutional whiteness; her assertion that the norms developed in institutions create a situation in which 'the arrival of some bodies is more noticeable than others', which 'reveals an expectation of who will show up' (2012, p. 42). I wonder about the institution of the archive and who is expected to show up. These are not straightforward or simple questions and I am acutely aware of the challenges of this terrain I seek to walk – it is fraught with emotion, with shame, with discomfort, with unease, uncertainty. I wonder if I should just do something simpler, more straightforward, less difficult. It reminds me of a poem penned one evening on a bus in South Africa as the sun was gently leaving the sky, painting that complex, beautiful land a deep orange. A time that seems so long ago now, a time when I was so different and yet what has actually changed? It's a strange thing – history – it is pulled into the present and at the same time it demands to be left in the past. How does one account for this ambiguity, this sense of change and continuity bound together? And how does one approach these remnants of another time now laid out before me? I turn again to an evocation from my own past – a piece of advice I found useful at another time, a time also presenting me with ethical challenges. It is in Yorta Yorta language, a phrase

used when foreigners first set foot on Yorta Yorta land so the people could get a sense of the kinship and purpose of the visitor - Ngina gaka daya minhetguda? What do you come here for? (James, 2003). So yes, what do I come here for?

I try to return to my purpose, to articulate it more clearly, to help that guide me: what do I come here for? My aim is to understand more fully how educational discourses of today continue to posit Indigenous students in deficit, in need of 'catching up', in need of 'normalisation'. It is in effect, to confront that institutional whiteness Ahmed speaks of, to bring that into focus, to understand the ways this might shape and direct inequalities experienced by Indigenous students. So while Indigenous students are the subject of my inquiry, my gaze must expand, it must look further. I am trying to see more clearly that which through its perceived naturalness falls from view or falls from the dominant view. Sharon Todd offers me some advice here in her exploration of the theorising of Levinas:

To follow Levinas, it is our openness to the Other, our susceptibility to the Other's stories, our capacity to enter into a "veritable conversation" that places us on ethical ground. When I think I know, when I think I understand the Other, I am exercising my knowledge over the Other, shrouding the Other in my own totality. The Other becomes an object of my comprehension, my world, my narrative, reducing the Other to me. What is at stake is my ego. But if I am exposed to the Other, I can listen, attend, and be surprised; the Other can affect me, she "brings me more than I contain." And insofar as I can be receptive and susceptible I can learn from the Other as one who is absolutely different from myself. (2001, p. 73)

This works for me on two levels I think. To conceptualise my engagement with both the Indigenous 'Other' and with the historical 'Other' in this way helps to establish an openness, a possibility for knowing that moves as much as possible away from colonisation and capture, and that seeks to understand problems in their complexity and multiplicity. A way of understanding that doesn't seek to homogenise. The work of Alison Ravenscroft is also useful, adding to my understanding of 'the approach'. Ravenscroft speaks of reading literary texts, of approaching Indigenous signed texts and the politics of knowing bound up in this encounter:

‘The question I can ask, the question I will insist on, is this: how would a white subject ever be able to read either Yanyuwa or Waanyi narrative, to read the country, to read skin and tattoo, to read the country as Waanyi might? How do we see, or know, or imagine, from a Waanyi point of view if we are not Waanyi?’ (2013, p. 76).

Again, perhaps this is useful in two ways for me for I can ask the questions: how do I see, or know, or imagine, from an Indigenous point of view if I am not Indigenous? And how do I see, or know, or imagine, from the point of view of being in a time and place in which I was not present? This doesn’t provide answers of course but Ravenscroft suggests a similar openness of approach to Todd:

‘This is not to argue that because a white subject cannot know, for instance, Waanyi cultural texts as a Waanyi might that a white subject should not approach these; it is not to argue for that kind of silence between Indigenous and settler. It is important to keep moving towards Aboriginal culture, art and law, but this is a movement towards understanding rather than an arrival. This is to argue for knowledge as always provisional, not a thing one possesses but a position – a situation.’ (2013, p. 78).

There are uncertainties here still, of course, but perhaps this is a way forward for now.

I open the first box in the line next to me. It contains the minutes of the Aboriginal Welfare Board meetings in the 1960s. I scan the text, looking for that which relates to education. I note things that might be of interest, I photograph the pages. I feel slightly ungrounded, as my context for this material is still loose. Time pressures also dictate my direct engagement with the material. I hope the photographic records will be able to be mulled over at a more leisurely pace later, allowing me to honour the text more adequately. I wonder if this changes how I approach it – what does this add or subtract from my engagement? The analytical work that I then do with the material also takes time – it requires a balancing of complexities and differences and layers. This is a whole other endeavour – connected, of course to these present pressing issues – but also forming a challenge of its own. In the area that my research is situated this means working within what Ann Stoler calls the ‘ruins’. She evokes Frantz Fanon’s notion of working between two poles of decay, one pole ‘an evocative figurative sense that situated the breakdown of persons, their

pathologies, and mental disabilities as imperial effects', the other, 'the material, tangible, and physical destruction' of landscapes. She suggests that,

To work between these two poles is to acknowledge both the potential and the problems in sustaining a balance between the analytic power that to ruin carries as an evocative metaphor and the critical purchase that it offers for grounding processes of decomposition and recomposition, degradation, and decay. These latter processes are of our time as they reactivate the traces of another. Such remainders impinge on the allocation of space, resources, and on the contours of material life. The analytic challenge is to work productively, if uneasily, with and across this tension. In so doing, the project is not to fashion a genealogy of catastrophe or redemption. Making connections where they are hard to trace is not designed to settle scores but rather to recognize that these are unfinished histories, not of victimized pasts but consequential histories that open to differential futures. (2008, p. 195)

This reoccurring theme of unease and of difference dances across both my physical experiences in this place and the advice I seek to deal with the tensions of my mandate. I'm not sure if it makes my path to knowledge easier or clearer at this stage but perhaps that is the point: I need somehow to learn to dance with this unease. But also to communicate it in a way that is useful – challenges that lie ahead!

I return to my bike, having retrieved my belongings and signed myself out. I leave this place heavier – a weight I cannot physically distinguish – but I have gathered stories that in due course I will have to make sense of. I pick up speed on the bike and soon I am free wheeling, the experiences of my day drifting out behind me...expanding, stretching, perhaps even dancing...

Epilogue

Standing on the bridge is always momentary. And the reflections shared here while central to the work of this research are subsequently incomplete. They cannot and do not represent the entirety of the process, nor the complexity of the procedure and practice of research. In that way they also represent the limitations inherent in such acts of creativity and pursuits of knowledge. Words will never fully capture what is experienced. Historical research will never fully comprehend the intricacy

of a moment in the past. But the time standing on the bridge is nevertheless important. This is part of the critical encounter that is central to the work of counter-memory research. It allows insight into the political and ethical dilemmas that continue to arise throughout research that intends to address issues of social equity and strive for justice. It requires holding onto the tensions that are established through imbalances of power that remain a part of the spaces in which this work takes place. It is important that struggle is present and visible.

To be a critic is to be uncomfortably aware of the ways in which both intended and unintended consequences have particular effects on people. And to also be aware that the critic cannot escape this dilemma. So as Said (1983) suggests, criticism 'must see itself, with other discourse, inhabiting a much contested cultural space' (p. 225). To make this contestation visible as part of the process of seeking transformation and social change is to commit to an ongoing engagement with matters of justice and equality and ward against complacency. Sara Ahmed (2012) offers a way of seeing knowledge production that recognises the role of critical research in uncovering, realigning and reimagining knowledge and power relations. She suggests that instead of knowledge leading to transformation, transformation can lead to knowledge (p. 173). In this way, 'transformation as a form of practical labour, leads to knowledge' (Ahmed 2012, p. 173). The critical reflections presented in this piece are an attempt to provide insight into the ethical and political dilemmas that arise through the transformative process, and that hopefully lead to new knowledge and different ways of engaging with social equity problems.

Reference List

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham; London: Duke University Press.

Foucault, M. (1998[1968]). On the Archaeology of the Sciences: Response to the Epistemology Circle. In Faubion, J.D. (Ed.) *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (pp 297-333). New York: The New Press.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. New York: Cornell University Press.

James, A. (2003). *Yanagai! Yanagai!* Strawberry Hills: Currency Press Pty Ltd.

Meadmore, D., Hatcher, C., & McWilliam, E. (2000). Getting tense about genealogy. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(5), 463–476.

Moreton-Robinson, A. (2011[2004]). Whiteness, epistemology and Indigenous representation. In A. Moreton-Robinson (Ed.), *Whitening Race: Essays in social and cultural criticism* (pp. 75–88). Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

Ravenscroft, A. (2012). *The Postcolonial Eye: White Australian Desire and the Visual Field of Race*. Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing.

Roth, M. S. (1981). Foucault's "History of the Present." *History and Theory*, 20(1), 32–46.

Said, E. (1983). *The Word, the Text and the Critic*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Stoler, A. L. (2008). Imperial debris: reflections on ruins and ruination. *Cultural Anthropology*, 23(2), 191–219.

Stoler, A. L. (2009). *Along the archival grain: epistemic anxieties and colonial commonsense*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Todd, S. (2001). On Not Knowing the Other, or Learning from Levinas. *Philosophy of Education*, 67–74.

A Collective Case Approach of Theory Building in Media and Politics: Towards understanding transparency and governmentality through design and affordance

Luke Heemsbergen, School of Culture and Communication,
Faculty of Arts

Abstract

This paper draws from the author's forthcoming work in addressing questions of governmentality in a collective case study of radical transparency apparatuses. It considers how to build a research design around four theses that arise in the reflexive research processes that are multidisciplinary in nature. The paper specifically addresses the challenges of method and methodology when working with 'new' media configurations of disclosure for purposes of governing. The methodology allows media research to move past the disciplinary siloing observable in study of transparency, politics, or media. For instance, the empirical frameworks present in modern political science and 'governance' studies tend to lack the epistemological and ontological self-awareness (Smith 2004) to enable accurate inquiry on socio-political-technological reality (Latour 2007). Hopefully, the approach suggested here can bricolage empirical cases of radical transparency, democratic theory, and media studies toward an illustrative argument relevant for both theorists and practitioners of democracy.

Keywords: Methodology, media, transparency, government, collective case study, Foucault Flusser

Introduction

This paper is interested in new methodologies to assess and influence rights of equitable access to frameworks that generate and limit opportunities in society without negating these rights for others – that which David Held (2006) defines as a critical measure of democratic efficacy. This goal can be linked back to the first experiments with democracy (in Mesopotamia, possibly before Greece) that were actualised through the construct of *isonomia*, or equality in voice when determining autonomy rights (Otanés in Held, 2006). What Held discusses in terms of equitable rights towards opportunity and limits, Crozier (2008) claims will increasingly become synonymous with information flows. This suggests that equitable information flows are democratically important. The chapter considers how to approach Crozier's claims vis-à-vis transparency projects, which seem ideally designed to fulfill such flows.

The chapter thus describes the approach to a project that addresses ways of questioning democratic governing via a collective case study of radical transparency apparatuses. Radical transparency, as defined here, functions as extra-organisational disclosure made possible by digitally networked media, and which has the potential to uproot established modes of governing. Apparatus is defined in more detail below, building from the work of Michel Foucault. Governing is elucidated through the stream of scholarship interested in the different ways of conducting conduct as 'technologies' and 'rationalities' of government (Miller & Rose, 2008).

It provides a contribution to media scholarship by exploring the utility of a reflexive research design that begins with systematic interrogation of the concept of transparency through a critical interpretive synthesis (Alston & Bowles, 1998; Dixon-Woods et al., 2006; Thomas & Harden, 2008) in order to produce inductive and iterative research questions. This means that reflexive 'hypotheses' are developed as the research questions evolve through evidence. However, each 'hypothesis' should not be read as an indicator of constrained positivist thinking. Instead, these intertwine to create a methodology that suggests a bricolage of evidence and knowledge. Strauss understood the research process through the acts of a bricoleur, who 'interrogates all the heterogeneous objects ... to discover what each of them could "signify"' (Strauss in Crotty, 1998, p. 51). This chapter describes the application of that process to heterogeneous media apparatuses that afford transparency in order to discover their significance in new understandings of governing.

This methodology shows how media research can move past the disciplinary siloing previously in use for study of transparency, politics or media. Generally, the paper hopes to avoid the empirical frameworks present in modern political science and ‘governance’ studies that tend to lack the epistemological and ontological self-awareness (Smith, 2004) to enable accurate inquiry on socio-political-technological reality (Latour, 2007). More specifically, governance studies particularly concerned with transparency often separate the affordances of specific media from the utility of sharing information through transparency; the governing that emerges here is dependent on both media affordances and the content of information. Previous scholarship on transparency (Fung et al., 2007; Graham, 2002; Lord, 2006) and governance (Hood & Held, 2006) do little to engage in the affordances of media, even if they do acknowledge their generalised role in disseminating information in new patterns. Finally, the chapter also attempts to heed the advice of Macek’s warning of a rift between new media scholarship that sympathises with ‘various movements for progressive social change’ and those ‘postmodernist ... sort of speculative, theory-heavy brand’ based on cultural studies (2006). Hopefully, through the approach suggested below, the lessons of bricolage in empirical cases of radical transparency, democratic theory and media studies will create an illustrative argument relevant for both theorists and practitioners of democracy.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, the research design used to study the mediated phenomenon of governance through transparency is explained in stages. Each stage is narrated through four interrelated (hypo)theses that have reflexively shaped the project. After outlining these reflexive processes, the chapter then justifies the methodological strategy that links these theses to desired research outcomes. The next section then transitions to identify a theoretical perspective that is situated underneath the design and is aware of the epistemological limits of any knowledge that will be produced. The research questions and theses discussed, as well as the research sites, serve as testable iterations for review of the author’s PhD research project.

Research Questions to Hypotheses

The statement of research that drives this project, considers how to observe how political, technological and cultural contexts, can in conjunction, afford certain expectations of ‘conducting conduct’ through increasing openness. How does ‘transparency’

interact with (and reconstitute) democracy? To what extent are paradigms of transparency unbound from government relations of domination and games of strategy that are described through governmentality? These questions derive four reflexive theses below that developed over the course of the project, as the data imparted new directions and nodes of importance. I will outline them briefly before exploring how they are matched to a specific theoretical perspective and methods that enable the claims to be rigorously examined.

Thesis 1: Radical democratic pluralism exists even within a concept/case most likely to disprove it: transparency.

This hypothesis is influenced by agonistic theories of democracy that discount consensus to claim radical pluralism is inextricably linked to a healthy democracy (Mouffe, 2005; Wingenbach, 2011) and modes of governing (Sullivan, 2009). In short, it seeks to falsify a singular paradigm of 'good governance' in democratic society (and network governing). It does so to validate a democratic theory from which accurate and rigorous new research can take place. The first thesis is designed to do so by questioning the disinfecting sunlight of transparency (Brandeis, 1913), which represents a democratic concept most likely to show a singular ideal regarding the conduct of conduct (or the least likely to show radical pluralism). I argue that if agonistic paradigms are found within the simple governing technology of transparency, agonistic paradigms will also be found in more complex technologies of democratic government. Thus, transparency itself can be understood as a 'critical' (Flyvbjerg, 2006) or 'crucial' (Eckstein, 1975) case to test the democratic theory of agonism. This first thesis is engaged via literatures that illuminate pluralistic – and adversarial – paradigms of transparency practice. However, how these paradigms actually come about also needs to be considered. A critical interpretive synthesis (Alston & Bowles, 1998; Dixon-Woods et al., 2006; Thomas & Harden 2008) of transparency practices and literatures shows that not only were there multiple paradigms of transparency present in the literature, but that the role of media was not adequately diagnosed in constituting each paradigm. Thus, the research design moves to fill this gap.

Thesis 2: Instances of radical transparency afford politically discrete expectations of governing due, in part, to the design of the apparatus that mediates them (and WikiLeaks and its derivatives offer a paradigmatic case of this phenomenon).

The next thesis requires exploratory research on historical radical transparency cases. The two I selected were the creation of Hansard reports in 1771 and the leaking of 'secret treaties' by Bolsheviks in 1918. These cases expose the contextual elements and available relationships between elements that constituted and enabled the methods of radical transparency at that time and space. This exploratory research suggests that context, method and effect are important to materialised forms of government from transparency in these historical cases. The research also confirms some of the categories found in the literature on transparency. To build theory from that grounded observation, the research moves to utilise Flusser's (1999) philosophy of design with Foucault's (1980) description of media apparatuses. These explain how radical transparency apparatuses' contextual elements, relational methods and design, operate in conjunction to afford specific paradigms of governing (via transparency). The theoretical explanation of apparatus-affordance is then put to use in interpretive textual analysis of digital radical transparency apparatuses.

WikiLeaks is easily designated an 'extreme case' (Flyvbjerg, 2006) of governing through transparency that is deviant from democratic norms. However, the data of WikiLeaks' use of ICT (information communication technologies) to constantly reinvent its own democratic affordances suggests a strong paradigmatic example of how (new) media may have a part in forming/exposing/affording adversarial political positions in (agonistic) democracy. The extent to which these adversarial approaches to governing can be democratically institutionalised leads to the next reflexive turn in the study on new media, transparency and governing. Specifically I hypothesise that:

Thesis 3: Radical transparency mechanisms have, and will continue to, influence the paradigms of democratic governing technologies and rationalities.

This third concern explores the extent that radical apparatuses both prevent and enable their own institutionalisation and the creation of new rationalities and techniques of government. The 'rationalities', or the thoughts that bind particular problems, and 'technologies', or the assemblages that shape, guide and direct conduct within those bounds, are what make up (the paradigms of) government (Miller & Rose, 2008). These claims are looked at via summative data from the historical cases of 1771 and 1918, and the shifts of WikiLeaks and its derivatives provide some insight to these concerns.

Thesis 4: Certain paradigms of radical transparency create a participatory form of governing that is unbound from theories of government that rely on power relationships based on domination.

One overriding theoretical aim of the project considered claims of the nature of governing and government. This final thesis allows me to consider the circumstances in which democratic governing is bound in relations dependent on a definition of productive power tied to subjectification and domination via strategic power games, and whether there are circumstances in which government can be unbound from these constraints via new creative practices. Government unbound would be viewed from a frame of emancipatory forms of organisation that sees power as the capacity 'not just to act but to act in concert' for a public-political purpose (Arendt, 1970, p. 44). Here information exchanges that are part of governing are a normatively positive communicative relation rather than a normatively suspect and strategic one (Allen, 2002).

Methods & Methodology

This project proposes an ad hoc mixture of interpretive social science methods to answer the call, and a specific theoretical perspective of critical attitude within which to elucidate conclusions. Context appropriate methods were employed at each research site to enable triangulation within a collective case study. Stake (2000, p. 437) defines the collective case study as the joint studying of a number of cases for the investigation of a phenomenon for not only instrumental use in understanding, but hopefully better theorising about a larger collection of cases. Herriott and Firestone (1983) simply describe the approach as multisite qualitative research. An evolving and ad hoc (that is 'for this' purpose) approach to utilising methods is useful for researching the concept of radical transparency in democratic government across the varied time and space.

The main method used in this inquiry is interpretive textual analysis. However, the diverse times and spaces of the research both allow and demand a diversity of methods. The radical transparency apparatuses of 1771 and 1918 will require comparative historical analysis of primary sources and secondary discourses surrounding the governing radical transparency afforded in those spatio-temporal contexts. Similar non-obtrusive methods are used to interpret primary digital sources of data

from WikiLeaks. Specifically, email conversations from within the organisation from 2006 to 2009, manifestos of its derivatives and secondary sources of expert commentary regarding effects are used. Finally, semi-structured expert interviews are used to gather data from the practitioners of radical transparency projects via the OurSay experiment. Research on the OurSay project benefits from participative observation and in-depth interviews with its executives that were gained while I was serving as a research officer in a related research project.

Diversity in methods and sites improved the study in two interrelated ways. The plurality of methods triangulated findings and increased the internal validity of conclusions (Denzin, 1989). The interviews of experts and participation/observation of OurSay allowed new types of data to contribute to theoretical claims in a way textual analysis cannot. Studying numerous sites across time and space will, to a certain extent, encourage theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of the concept of (radical) transparency and its effects on governing. However, note that the project is not claiming to follow the positivist methodology of early grounded theory or even its constructivist evolution (Charmaz, 2003). On the one hand, the research attempts to discover a theory of transparency and governing 'from data systematically obtained from social research' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 2). To this end, transparency literature is used as initial data to observe what categories are deemed important by 'participants' who help define the concept. This is not (only) undertaken to refine the concept or situate future research. Rather, it exposes the multiplicity of meaning that emerges from the concept of transparency in categories of assumption within the field. Through a critical interpretive synthesis (Alston & Bowles, 1998; Dixon-Woods et al., 2006; Thomas & Harden, 2008) of transparency research a thick and saturated sample of paradigms theorised are formed. The theoretical sampling of historical radical transparency instances themselves generate further data that can confirm (or refute) the initial categories in the theoretical literature (Charmaz, 1990). That process does hold similarities to grounded theory. On the other hand, the lack of interest in basic social processes, largely textual referents of data and thus lessened utility of analytical memos to code, etc., ensures that I do not claim to utilise grounded theory too all its disciplinary requirements.

A more accurate way to understand the logic of the chosen methodology is through bricolage. Lévi Strauss understood the

research process through the acts of a bricoleur, who 'interrogates all the heterogeneous objects ... to discover what each of them could "signify" and so contribute to the definition of a set which is yet to materialise' (Strauss in Crotty, 1998, p. 51). This project applies that process to heterogeneous media apparatuses that afford transparency in order to discover their significance in new understandings of governing 'yet to materialise'. In plain language, the bricoleur-researcher should investigate what 'these items lend themselves to becoming' (Crotty, 1998, p. 50). In this sense, any findings are not positioned as general theory, but are instead meant to create useful guides for future research and government transparency policy that is yet to 'become'.

Finally, note that qualitative methods present a better fit than large 'n' comparisons as there are a small number of radical transparency cases and the nature of the research questions themselves do not reflect inquiries regarding causation or statistical concern. Quantitative comparison is complicated by radical transparency mechanisms being outliers that shift the sample. For instance, the Hansard case provides a stark example of these outliers shifting the map of what is recognised as acceptable in a democracy. As such, utility of attempting 'objective' large 'n' comparisons is reduced. We must remember then that the work presented here has no claim on causal or predictive effects concerned with a dependent variable. However, it does acknowledge that our studies of transparency can function as an illuminating part of the larger whole of democratic governing. The described trajectory from critical analytical synthesis to historical exploratory cases and finally, to original research on digital networks through theoretical concerns of Foucault and Flusser, shows a theoretically sampled approach that creates a subjective map of the limits and uses of radical transparency. That map serves to gain knowledge rather than prove effect. This knowledge is valuable in and of itself, but is also presented here as a road map for future studies on new media that require a novel methodology.

Theoretical Perspective

To make a contribution to the 'unbound democracy' thesis (T4), the study required a theoretical perspective that attempts to disassociate critique from the Habermasian ideal of critical theory and further Foucault's view that strategy and domination underlie all free social relations (Foucault, 1980). Bang and Esmark (2004) give a way forward through a perspective they label 'critical attitude' and find useful for the study of media, communication

and governing. For them, critical attitude promotes critique that is 'effective' towards concrete practice, is 'reasonable' by being interested in how communication is played out rather than established as universal and is 'productive' in opening new avenues to practice emancipation (Bang, 2004, p. 17–19). This means critical attitude becomes interested with what is and what is emerging, instead of critiquing by way of statements about what normatively should be. Ashenden and Owen (1999) trace critical attitude all the way back to Kant and the Enlightenment, but suggest that revisions to the term differentiate it against more formal critical theory that relays expectations through ideals (cf. Habermas, 1990). James Tully has made a similar argument from an alternative perspective, arguing that equating public reasonability to communicative action is a form of 'enlightened blackmail' (1999, p. 123).

Here we should understand that Bang and Esmark's critical attitude is useful in that the study of government disassociates critical inquiry from both Habermasian ideals and the 'Foucauldian tendency to conceive of all power relations as relations of domination and resistance' (Bang, 2004, p. 17). Thus, the project finds that most critiques of government are dependent on Foucault's assumption of strategic games of power over people. However, using critical attitude allows a substantial contribution to literatures on government by allowing effective modes of governing unbound from that prison-based culture of strategic domination, which is still within an envelope of the reasonable rather than ideal.

Epistemological Limits

This paper so far has reviewed a novel methodological approach to study media and government, tracing the design of research questions to implementation of specific methods for specific texts, actors and contexts. This section of the paper communicates how these actions and perspectives limit what can be known as they try to push inquiry further. To acknowledge these epistemological limitations is a crucial exercise of scholarship that defines current limits, and charts new directions. Michael Crotty's (1998) definition of constructionism is useful here to explain the epistemological assumptions that the enunciated methods, methodology and theoretical perspective reflect. Specific to our purposes here, constructionism is an epistemological view that enables techno-cultural media ecology affordances of specific relational values. Namely, the study must suppose that individuals

do not make meaning from objects in the world, but are placed within a 'world of meaning' (Crotty, 1998, p. 79) made from a mix of cultural networks. Further I employ the same logic to objects that shape thinking and behaviour. The inclusion of objects in constructionism differs from Crotty's original understanding. However, it is employed here so that media apparatuses or 'objects' of radical transparency can be included in the study. This is useful for the heterogeneous parts that together make up media 'objects' and allow them to be socio-technological-cultural nodes (as explored by Latour, 1987). Constructionism thus allows the methodology and methods suggested above to coalesce into a coherent form of knowledge that describes, as well as to some extent explains, the techno-cultural media ecology that affords specific relational value in studies as diverse as paradigms of governing, democracy and transparency.

Conclusion

The methodological approach shared above is complex. However it is offered so that scholars may think about how to move disciplinary siloing, currently prevalent in the academic inquiries of transparency, governance, media new and old, and their theoretical relations, to the topics of government and democracy. From another perspective, this research has attempted to close the gap of Steve Macek's description between the scholarship that sympathises with 'various movements for progressive social change' and the 'postmodernist ... sort of speculative, theory-heavy brand' based on cultural studies (2006). The hope of this chapter is to suggest an approach to questions of media, society and culture that can bricolage empirical cases of media events, political theory and traditional media studies to create arguments that can be illustrative to both students of theory and practice.

To summarise, this chapter has shared an approach to research design and its methodological assumptions that explores a specific way of inquiring on interdisciplinary questions of media and government. It also showcases the utility of a multisite case study to create new knowledge. In highlighting a new methodological approach, and its limits, it has identified and justified any research conclusions that may come from future research while opening the methodology for critique amongst other students of media and democracy. For projects like this to be deemed successful, a worldview that believes knowledge is constructed from a value-rich ecology of culture, technology and politics is required. This perspective allows researchers to engage

with a theoretical perspective of 'critical attitude' that not only critiques but creates concrete avenues of emancipation. Further, relating the collective case study to some aspects of grounded theory affords an inductive and reflexive creation of theory via different sites across time and space that would otherwise have been disparate entities and phenomenon. Proposing such an approach enables researchers to consider the unique methods to interpret meaning that are required at multiple sites. Their triangulation may increase the rigour of any conclusions while broadening the disciplinary toolbox that researchers can enjoy.

Acknowledgements

A version of this chapter was first presented through the conference proceedings of the ANZCA 2014 Conference, Melbourne. Many thanks are given to the MSEI's editors for helping improve the work.

Reference list

- Allen, A., (2002). Power, subjectivity, and agency: Between Arendt and Foucault. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 10(2), 131-149.
- Ashenden, S., & Owen, D. (1999). *Foucault contra Habermas: Recasting the dialogue between genealogy and critical theory*. Sage Publications Limited.
- Bang, H. P. (2004). Culture governance: Governing self-reflexive modernity. *Public Administration*, 82(1), 157-190.
- Brandeis, L. (1913). What publicity can do. *Harper's Weekly Series*. What publicity can do; December 20.
- Charmaz, K. (1990). 'Discovering' chronic illness: Using grounded theory. *Social science & medicine*, 30 (11), 1161-1172.
- Charmaz, K. (2003). Grounded theory. *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*, 2, 249.
- Crozier, M. (2008). Listening, learning, steering: New governance, communication and interactive policy formation. *Policy and Politics*, 36(1), 3-19.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. 3rd Ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Eckstein, H. (1975). Case study and theory in political science. *Handbook of political science*, 7, 79-137.
- Flusser, V. (1999). *The shape of things: A philosophy of design*. London: Reaktion.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 218-245.
- Foucault, M. (1980). The confession of the flesh. In C. Gordon (Ed.) *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977* (pp. xi, 270). Brighton: Harvester.
- Foucault, M., & Gordon, C. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Fung, A., Graham, M., & Weil, D. (2007). *Full disclosure: the perils and promise of transparency*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Graham, M. (2002). *Democracy by disclosure: The rise of technopopulism*. Washington DC:

Brookings Institution Press.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine Pub. Co.

Habermas, J. (1990). *Moral consciousness and communicative action: Studies in contemporary German social thought*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Held, D. (2006). *Models of democracy*. 3rd Ed. Cambridge: Polity.

Herriott, R. E., & Firestone, W. A. (1983). Multisite qualitative policy research: Optimizing description and generalizability. *Educational Researcher*, 12(2), 14-19.

Hood, C., & Heald, D. (2006). *Transparency: the key to better governance? Proceedings of the British Academy*, Oxford; New York.

Latour, B. (1987). *Science in action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Latour, B. (2007). Turning around politics: A note on Gerard de Vries' paper. *Social studies of science*, 37(5), 811-820.

Lord, K. M. (2006). *The perils and promise of global transparency: why the information revolution may not lead to security, democracy, or peace*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Macek, S. (2006). Divergent critical approaches to new media. *New Media & Society*, 8(6), 1031-1038.

Miller, P., & Rose, N. S. (2008). *Governing the present: administering economic, social and personal life*. Cambridge: Polity.

Mouffe, C. (2005). *The return of the political*. London: Verso.

Smith, S. (2004). Singing our world into existence: International relations theory and September 11. *International Studies Quarterly*, 48(3), 499-515.

Stake, R. (2000). Case Studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.) *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 435-454). London: Sage Publications, Incorporated.

Sullivan, H. (2009). Subversive spheres: Neighbourhoods, citizens and the 'new governance'. In M. Barnes & P. Prior (Eds.) *Subversive citizens power, agency and resistance in public services*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Tully, J. (1999). To think and act differently: Foucault's four reciprocal objections to

Habermas. In S. Ashenden & D. Owen (Eds.) *Foucault contra Habermas: Recasting the dialogue between genealogy and critical theory*. London; Thousand Oaks.

Wingenbach, E. C. (2011). *Institutionalizing agonistic democracy: Post-foundationalism and political liberalism*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company.

The Place and Space of Ethical Engagement

Section Three

Drawing on ethnographic methods in urban research

Hayley Henderson and Kelum Palipane, Melbourne School of Design

Abstract

This paper provides an overview of two distinct experiences to adopting ethnographic methods in urban research. It draws on the authors' research in Melbourne, Australia and Buenos Aires, Argentina across the built environment fields of urban planning and design. The methodological approaches developed by the authors draw on their own experiences to capitalise on 'experiential sameness' (Mohammad, 2001, p.104): to build on their knowledge of the 'researched's reality' (Ibid) or as 'insiders afterwards' (Norell, 2007, p.106). The contribution by the first author presents an argument for incorporating an ethnographic sensibility to case study research that can enable closer study of the peopled process of urban planning. The second author describes a unique approach to analysing embodied place-making practices in sites of urban regeneration as a way to counteract the inadequacies of existing community consultation methods and to better inform design outcomes that respect diversity and difference.

Key words: ethnography, reflexivity, Melbourne, spatial mapping, diversity, social equity.

Introduction

Through the presentation of two singular research endeavours, this paper illustrates the adoption of ethnographic methods in the realm of urban research. An urban ethnography tradition began through the work of Chicago School sociologists in 1915, where fieldwork observations and participation were conducted to understand how people interacted with urban social systems. Both methodological approaches to doctoral research discussed herein extend from this tradition to look at contemporary urban questions. In particular, the authors examine how ethnographic

methods can be adopted in urban studies and consider the contribution of adopting an ethnographic sensibility in studying urban questions.

This paper draws on the first author's research into urban planning processes based on two metropolitan experiences: Buenos Aires, Argentina and Melbourne, Australia. Urban planning is a process that involves guiding development in cities and it is commonly associated with a technocratic approach to city governance. However, planners draw on both political acumen and technical knowledge: 'planners do not act as apolitical technicians nor nontechnical politicians' (Hoch, 1996, p.70). In order to go beyond technocratic conceptions of the planning process, it is important to understand the practical strategies and tactics that are employed in the planning process. Still today, 'much of what takes place in everyday practice is a yet untheorised... (including) the tactics...to achieve policy decisions in the cause of social justice' (Hillier, 2002, p.ix). This paper presents an argument for incorporating an ethnographic sensibility to case study research that can enable closer study of the peopled process of urban planning.

The paper also draws from the second author's doctoral research in Footscray, Melbourne. Her research proposes to resist the homogenising effects of urban renewal projects through the understanding that the existing sensorial realm – if considered to be generated by social, sensorial and multiplicitous bodies in space – has the capacity to enable social equity. Addressing the inadequacies of the various community consultation methods local councils adopt to gain knowledge of the socio-cultural context of place, the author asserts that investing direct interest in the ways in which spaces are already occupied by people, their embodied place-making practices revealing the physical, cultural and social interplay of everyday interactions, can lead to different design outcomes that respect the diversity of existing occupants.

The uncertainty, nuance and complexity of embodied knowledge are often difficult to articulate through quantitative research or traditional qualitative methods, such as interviews. Both authors address their research questions by drawing on ethnographic methods, including observation and participation, in order to provide unique insight into the spaces of gestures, intimations, interactions and embodied engagement. Within the broader framework of an ethnographic approach, the emergence of multiplicity becomes evident as each study presented here

becomes uniquely shaped and crafted by contingencies based on professional training within specific disciplines as well as lived experience. The following extractions, at different stages of development – pre and post fieldwork - will detail this appropriation of ethnographic methods for urban studies.

An ethnographic case study approach – Hayley Henderson

Case study and ethnography are common approaches in social science research. Both tend to examine contemporary phenomena in depth within specific contexts and use a range of data collection and interpretation methods. The main difference is that while case study involves 'the study of the instance in action' (MacDonald and Walker, 1975) ethnography is the study of a group or culture. Another important distinction is that ethnography tends to involve inductive inquiry, while case study is used frequently for both inductive and deductive research. Other differences include the more commonly used 'immersion' approach in ethnography, particularly through participant observation. Notwithstanding some of the different attributes between the two approaches, some scholars have sought to 'move on from a dichotomous consideration of case study versus ethnography (to) consider instead the possibilities of assembling a combination of ethnographic and case study approaches' (White, Drew and Hay, 2009, p.18). I consider that ethnographic case study can offer a fruitful approach to researching and understanding the why, how and wherefore of actors in the planning process.

Why an ethnographic case study approach?

Urban planning is a negotiated and iterative process that is moulded or oriented in line with diverse and sometimes competing rationalities. Fundamentally, urban planners play a role in mediating between the logic of the City as the living quarters of some and as a tradeable good of others. This presents both opportunities and challenges; it necessitates the consideration of interconnected factors and networks of stakeholders. Some scholars have highlighted the complex nature of the planning process and the roles that different actors play in influencing plan-making and implementation (inter alia Albrechts, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Hillier, 2002). 'Planners do not work on a neutral stage...they work within political institutions on political issues' (Forester, 1989). Effective planning within contexts of competing

rationalities requires moving from principles to practice with 'prudence' (Hillier, 2002). 'Planning requires a fine-grained analysis of what actually takes place—in formal decision-making and implementation, in the transition from plan to formal adoption of the plan and in the actual implementation of the plan' (Albrechts, 2006).

While quantitative analysis (that is, document or statistical) can offer vital evidence on formal structures or outcomes in planning (for example, to review budget allocations or measure travel time patterns or evaluate policy impacts on household incomes), it is of little help to understanding the on-the-ground and political strategies and tactics characteristic of the planning process. Qualitative approaches to research offer a stronger platform from which to penetrate formal structures and technical procedures so that the unseen part of the planning process can be better illuminated. An ethnographic case study approach that brings together *the instance of planning with the people involved* offers an ideal path to uncovering the strategies and tactics important to advancing social norms in planning. In this regard, case study and ethnographic approaches share many similarities and I think are potentially compatible where the social interactions that drive process form the central aspect of the case study inquiry.

On the one hand, case study inquiry helps to 'understand complex social phenomena' by permitting investigators 'to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events' (Yin, 2009, p.4). Case study research can utilise a range of data collection and interpretation methods. It necessitates multiple sources of evidence so that data can converge in a process of triangulation and 'benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis' (Ibid, p.18). Furthermore, multiple cases can be considered for the purposes of making generalisable claims or making more compelling and robust studies (Yin, 2009; Herriott and Firestone, 1983). Here, the 'replication logic is analogous to that used in multiple experiments' (Yin, 2009, p.55). Importantly, case study research in this sense can 'enable us to link micro level to the macro level or large-scale structures and processes' (Neuman, 2011, p.42). Case study research is effective for illuminating theory or abstract ideas in relation to the concrete case experience. It also helps in calibrating the parameters of concepts to lived experiences (Ibid). In this sense, 'we can reshape current theories to complex cases' (Ibid, p.42).

Ethnography, on the other hand, has traditionally been used by anthropologists to study foreign groups or 'exotic tribes'. 'Ethnographic immersion goes with interpretative, symbolic and constructivist perspectives on how social realities are enacted and structured by the people that are part of and make up such realities' (Rhodes, 2007, p.3). While ethnography does not have a standard, well-defined meaning it usually involves immersion in peopled settings to participate overtly or covertly in everyday contexts (Neuman, 2011, p.2). Over recent decades it has become more common to study other groups within Western societies, evidenced by Latour's well-known ethnography of scientific laboratory work (1987) or research into organisational and political practices (Yanow et al., 2011). However, 'political practices...deep inside the policy-making process have not been studied in this way' until very recently (Rhodes, 2007, p.2).

While there is an established tradition of 'urban ethnography' -with the Chicago School as the early referent for studying urban spaces- very few studies have addressed the urban planning process itself. There are 'hardly any examples of cases analysed from the perspective of the 'implementation class' available in relation to planning, leaving decision-making to seem like a 'black-box'' (Albrechts, 2006, p.1488). There are a few notable examples, where urban scholars have employed ethnographic methods to explore 'what planners do' (Hoch, 1992) -from complete immersion through following planners 'in their daily work, attending meetings with them, conducting formal interviews, joining in their own informal discussions and generally being around for a period of six months' (Underwood, 1980, p.5) to less immersive approaches, including conversational interviewing (Hillier, 2002) and 'shadowing' planners for short time periods (Healey, 1992).

Case study and ethnographic approaches share similarities, including commonly used sources of evidence such as documentation, interviews and direct observation. Furthermore, like ethnography, 'few cases will end up exactly as planned (and will require) minor if not major changes' during the research process (Yin, 2009, p.70). Triangulation is an important technique used within both case study and ethnography to compare multiple sources of evidence. They also share a common strength in permitting the identification of causal factors. Ethnography and case study approaches have been united in various disciplines. For example, sociologists from the University of Chicago used ethnography to study different patterns of urban life and urban

ecology between the 1920s to 1950s, 'though they often labelled it 'case study'' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.2). However, there are some key differences between ethnography and case study.

In general terms, ethnographers tend to adopt less structured and more open-ended approaches to research fewer cases in an in-depth way. As stated earlier, however, the main difference is that while case study involves 'the study of the instance in action' (MacDonald and Walker, 1975) ethnography is the study of a specific group of people or culture. A deductive approach has been less common in ethnography, in order to allow the cultural group to 'speak' and define understandings of the social reality being studied to generate 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In such circumstances, the primary aim of ethnography 'should be to describe what happens, how the people involved see and talk about their own actions and those of others, the contexts in which the action takes place, and what follows from it' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.4). 'The central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view' (Spradley, 1980, p.3).

Where research involves the exploration of peopled processes in urban planning it seems fitting to adopt an ethnographic sensibility in case study investigation. An ethnographic sensibility offers a platform to better understand values, reasoning and action in urban planning based on what is said and done, as well as in relation to the cultural, historical and other social conditions of situated contexts. In this regard, and where the differences in approach can be reconciled, it is useful to consider what aspects of ethnographic methods and analysis can strengthen case study research. In terms of analysis and interpretation of data, an ethnographic sensibility is attuned to the social relations between people that produce and reproduce value in everyday practices of research interest. The term sensibility implies flexibility around the type of immersion in research and a broad view of ethnography that goes beyond the process of on-site data collection (Shatz, 2009, p.6). Put simply, an ethnographic sensibility means paying particular attention to the perspectives of people being studied and seeking to reveal the meanings people attribute to their social world through the use of multiple tools of inquiry (Ibid).

Qualitative interviewing in case study research could also be enriched through some form of participant observation. This has been varyingly adopted in urban research, for example by the

previously mentioned scholars (Underwood, 1980; Healey 1992; Hoch 1992; Hillier 2002). Despite pitfalls of ethnographic methods, such as perception fabrication in observation scenarios, there are benefits of infusing a case study approach with participant observation as a method of data collection where practicable. Some of the benefits include:

1. Enabling the researcher to uncover those practices that aren't explicitly discussed in standard interview settings;
2. Permitting further explanation of the practices employed by developing a deep understanding of local contexts;
3. Conducting interviews from spontaneous and informal conversations;
4. Interconnecting different strategies and tactics employed in practice; and
5. Better detecting inconsistencies between different sources.

Crafting my approach for research

In my research, I seek to tell both contextualised and larger stories about urban planning processes where social norms are applied to reduce inequality and disadvantage. In this sense, I propose adopting an ethnographic case study approach to illuminate understandings of social norms and the specific strategies and tactics of contemporary planning practice. Undertaking an ethnographic case study approach allows me to explore in depth multiple situations that can offer both 'thick' descriptions (Geertz, 1973) about localised experiences of urban planning, but also interpretations that could inform generalisable claims beyond local contextualisms. In this sense, it goes outside traditional ethnography in studying one group or culture to explore a number of cases to unveil the use of strategies and tactics to positively influence the social efficacy of planning. Imbuing case study research with an ethnographic sensibility will serve to highlight the agency of actors and interplay between them in the micropolitics of everyday planning practice. Contemporary understandings of ethnography fit this analytical framework: 'the analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings,

functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicate in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3).

Reflexivity and research

Attempting to employ an ethnographic sensibility in case study research isn't a straightforward task. My research interests have been directly influenced by my own experience as an urban planner in both Australia and Argentina. Similar to the second author's view on 'experiential sameness' (Mohammad, 2001), I hope to build on my existing understanding of the 'researched's reality.' For some scholars, having prior knowledge relating to the cases studied is a key strength in research (Yin, 2009). While I am not currently a 'complete member' (Adler and Adler, 1987) of the studied groups, I feel that my recollections as an 'insider afterwards' (Norell, 2007, p.106) provide a unique grounding to understanding the lived experiences of the planning process. I propose to undertake 'moderate' non-participant observation to build on this experience while maintaining 'a balance between being an insider and an outsider' (Spradley, 1980, p.61).

I will try to be aware of my own preconceptions and actively reflect upon them to detect limitations in my views and consider alternative positions and possibilities. I will try to observe the details of evidence and events in a more attentive fashion and try not to naturalise practices of planning: to still absorb what might otherwise appear mundane at each stage of data collection and analysis. In addition to being aware of these difficulties, I will try to overcome them through triangulating evidence between findings from different methods including content analysis, interviews and moderate non-participant observation. I have also chosen to study urban contexts I am familiar with but that I haven't directly worked on. Ultimately, I have tried to integrate both my 'insider's knowledge' for the purposes of problem identification and my proximity to the cases to assist uncover potential sites for rich analysis with an 'outsider's' analytical distance. While this union of proximity and detachment presents challenges and opportunities, it also drives the methodological approach.

In this regard, I will attempt to employ an ethnographic sensibility in case study research. I want to develop a reflexive account of the social life of urban planning processes that highlights participants' agency. Based on previous work experience, I have developed a more than superficial understanding of the planning

process. I believe I am already close enough to these realities that long periods of immersion and observation aren't necessary to comprehend the 'native' point of view. My experience has helped me to identify targeted questions for interviewing on the wherefore behind the diverse actions of planners. Recognising plurality in sources of knowledge and respecting different approaches in planning practice forms part of developing an ethnographic sensibility (Pader, 2014). Through in-depth and repeated dialogue with the participants, I believe opportunities will arise for spontaneous participation and even serendipitous encounters in addition to planned interviews and meetings. It is through this lens as a reflective 'insider afterwards' combined with moderate observation that I hope to develop an ethnographic sensibility for case study research. It's not yet clear what techniques will work best to achieve this desired ethnographic sensibility, however I will learn by doing and by asking the questions that an ethnographer would ask at each stage: based on this state of affairs, what is really going on here?

An ethnographic spatial mapping – Kelum Palipane

Following the definition of ethnography as 'the study of a group or culture' presented by the first author, this section presents a specific approach to ethnography that is framed by the senses. It relates to ethnographic spatial mapping in the context of urban regeneration. Urban regeneration can be described as the revitalisation of an urban environment perceived as having been subject to social, economic and physical decay (Adams, Moore, Cox, Croxford, Refaee and Sharples, 2007). The physical and spatial changes which entail this are overwhelmingly through strong ocularcentric gestures that overlook the nuanced and layered place making practices of the local communities. In addition to this, within consumer societies where the welfare state has receded and market forces are increasingly deterring the shape of urban renewal, regenerated places often become commodified spaces available for consumption – a phenomena that severely impacts issues of social equity.

Anthropologist Maree Pardy asserts that in the case of culturally diverse environments this diversity is used as a marketable commodity through which to sell the image of the cities or town centres. She explains:

Central to the urban regeneration drive is an appropriation of cultural diversity, packaged and marketed to communicate a

multicultural urbanity, attractive to the young, mobile urban professionals that the cities aim to attract. In this context cultural diversity is a 'brand' and the suburb becomes a 'lifestyle' to be sold" (Pardy, 2009).

During this process, a de-politicising of space occurs as Pardy explains, 'The presence of immigrants become desirable element of urban space, while the place-making practices of those same people are deemed dangerous...' (Pardy, 2009). This usually entails the suppression and control of the socially produced sensorial realm. Often perceived as unpleasant, disorderly and associated with dwelling practices of foreign or alien communities it carries with it the potential to impose itself on the dominant cultural order – permeating, challenging and confronting. As a counter to this, through regeneration activities a sensorially 'safe' environment is produced that is non-confronting, de-politicised, and suited for mainstream consumption.

This study centres on the inner Melbourne suburb of Footscray. Currently undergoing state sponsored urban renewal, it is a site of intensified conditions providing a rich scenario for socio-spatial research. It is also a site of contestation between two sensorial regimes – one which is socially produced and the other market led. I aim to demonstrate that careful mapping of the socially produced sensorial realm - associated with the ways in which spaces are already occupied by people - can inform design response in the context of urban renewal, thereby helping to establish plural and inclusive urban environments.

Why an ethnographic approach?

Design research by local council bodies often attempts to gain knowledge of the socio-cultural context of place through the implementation of various community consultation strategies commonly based on interviewing, workshops and survey techniques. These processes often marginalise sections of the community that lack the necessary language skills, access to multimedia and the confidence to engage in these approaches. I argue that by *directly* observing lived space and its day to day interactions a level playing field is created where one does not need to articulate one's occupation in space. Instead, appropriation is demonstrated through the everyday embodied engagement with place.

This study adopts a specifically *sensorial* approach to ethnography and so attention towards sensorial embodied activity is privileged.

A multi-sensorial approach to ethnography has been a recent development in fields that commonly adopt ethnographic methodologies (Crang, 2003; Laurier, 2010; Paterson, 2009; Pink, 2009; Sparkes, 2009). Ethnography has traditionally reflected the visual bias of Western epistemological approaches, and Andrew Sparkes writes:

While recognising the visual in ethnographic enquiry, various scholars have challenged its dominance in the process of knowing ourselves and others. For example Bull and Back (2003, p2) argued that the reduction of knowledge to the visual 'has placed serious limitations on our ability to grasp the meanings attached to much social behaviour...' Furthermore, they suggested that 'a visually based epistemology is both insufficient and often erroneous in its description, analysis and thus understanding of the social world (p3)' (Sparkes, 2009, p.5).

Within the architectural realm, most existing theoretical and practical works that explore the role of the senses in structuring space primarily construct the spatio-sensory framework through an 'essentialist' viewpoint, removing the significance of cultural practices, politics and human experience and memory (Malnar and Vodvarkar, 2004). This has not been the case in other disciplines. Notably the humanities and social sciences have investigated the socio-sensory construction of the concept of space and the significance of the culturally specific sensory order in place making practices (Howes, 2003, 2005; Vannini, Waskul and Gottschalk, 2012) These studies have brought to the fore the significance of local sensory categories in urban place making, how they operate in the everyday life and how they interact with the wider political and power configurations; all of which can influence the built fabric. However, this corpus of work involving the socio-cultural dimensions of sensoriality seems to exist outside the realm of practice with an apparent lack of structured studies exploring and demonstrating the practical application of such knowledge in the production of urban environments. This represents a serious gap in knowledge which could be invaluable in the creation of 'polysensorial' (Howes, 2005, p.330) urban environments that reflect the variety and richness of their demographic make-up and activity.

Crafting my approach for research

In interrogating the urban sensorial realm the following questions needed to be approached and negotiated - 'how to grasp it?',

'how to represent it?' and then in the designer tradition 'how to make use of it?' In the process of addressing these questions, the research methodology that was initially situated within ethnography shifted to a mapping process that began to privilege the spatial.

How to grasp it? – I proposed analysing sensory rhythms adopting Henri Lefebvre's concept of 'rhythmanalysis' supplemented by various sensory ethnographic methods. An approach that was underpinned by a conceptual framework of time, space and the social body. A multimodal approach was seen as crucial because of the understanding that sensory perception is itself multimodal with different sensory modes such as sight, sound, taste, touch, smell and kinesthesia interconnecting, overlapping and collaborating in forming sensory knowledge (Pink, 2009). Bearing this in mind, the 'collection' of information was approached through a variety of sensory ethnographic methods which would provide varying sources of information through different perceptual modes. The recording of the information utilised audio-visual multi-media techniques which evoked multi-sensoriality because of the interconnection of the senses.

The ethnographic methods used to gather experiential data that supplemented the identified rhythms could be loosely segregated into two groups - 'non-participant observation' (Thwaites and Simkins, 2007) and 'participant observation' (Pink, 2009) methods. 'Non-participant observation' involved photographic and video documentation as well as sound recordings to support the evidence of the identified sensescapes. These are visual methods as Pink writes, that 'do not record touch, taste, smell or emotion...However, an understanding of the senses as essentially interconnected suggests how (audio) visual images and recordings can evoke, or invite memories of the multisensoriality of the research encounter' (Pink, 2009, p.101). Behaviour tracing or anthropological tracking was used to investigate traces of behaviour patterns left behind as evidence in the built environment (Thwaites and Simkins, 2007). In addition to this, written notes and sketches recorded impressions, insights, and events. Lefebvre writes, 'The rhythm analyst calls on all his senses. He draws on his breathing...He thinks with his body, not in the abstract, but in lived temporality' (Lefebvre 2004, p.41). An opportunity to allow oneself to be enmeshed in the social space of the location is allowed by 'participatory observation' which transcends the visual bias of observation, demanding the use of all the senses in embodied activity. This involved joining others

in embodied activities such as eating, walking, sitting and talking (Pink, 2009, p.72) as opportunities arose, as well as sensory video tours. Here participants introduced the sensory environment and sensory embodied practices while the researcher and participant collaborated to explore a particular environment/everyday activity. The rhythmanalysis became the nexus of the methodology while the ethnographic knowledge supported the conceptual framework of space-time-social body that it was based on.

To represent the multimodal data that was gathered a mapping diagram was developed that retained the above mentioned conceptual framework of time, space and the social body intact. The sensory data is then translated into multimodal mappings based on Sergei Eisenstein's concept of 'vertical montage' (Eisenstein, 1991) where different spheres such as sound and visuals could be linked to be perceived together. As in Eisenstein's vertical montage, space, time and the corresponding multimodal information in the form of embedded video, sound, sketches and written insights are encouraged to be read together as a vertical episode. The multimodal information on a vertical column of this map is a concentrated representation of the sensory experience at a given moment in time and space.

Referring to figure 1, within the 'Insights +' category next to the text is an audio recording of the street sounds including the music that is referred to in the excerpt, underscoring what is mentioned in the text. Below this, the 'body-space' segment illustrates the corporeal engagement of those focussed on in the episode. The synchronous arrangement of these elements when perceived together allows for a simultaneous, multisensory reading of the episode.

The rhythm diagrams below indicates my perception of the sound of an idling bus, the background sound of the hip hop music and the punctuation of the sensecape by the smell of baking. The wider reading of the diagram indicates these three sensorial rhythms were a constant presence throughout the day in this space.

The 'section' segment indicates a close study of the specificities of the bodies as they appropriate the built elements for their sensory embodied activity. The postures and gestures of the men are depicted – leaning, hunched over- and their interaction with the built environment is made clear. The plan indicates the congregation of bodies, specifically oriented around an element

sound of hip hop music with conversation
[link to audio file](#)

Excerpt from mapping [Path B Spot 1]
 5pm:

Young men of African origin rendez-vous and hangout outside 'The Hip Hop Master' clothes shop. Their presence extends out into the adjacent alleyway. I can here intermittent sounds of clapping, greetings and laughter. I approach them for a photograph and they declined saying that, "...guys don't like their pictures taken, only girls do..." but "...you can take some while we are not looking". In occupying the space through their sensory embodied activity, they appropriate elements from the built environment such as the bench, street light pole and bollard. Their presence in the landscape is continuously marked by the low, thumping beat of the music from the shop.

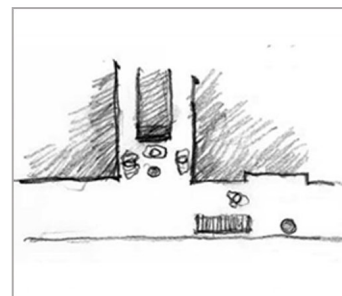
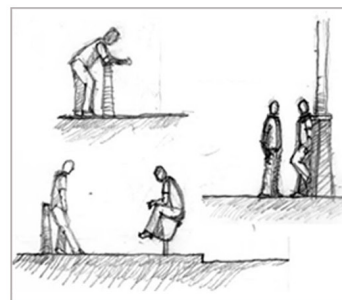


Figure 2

of the built environment such as the bollard.

The category space map encapsulates my movements in the space, indicating motion away from the original spot to the pavement in front of the shop where I had my brief conversation with the men and then a little to the right of the shop front where I stood to record. I spent around 20 minutes on the whole episode, finally returning to the original place.

Reflexivity and research

It is important to discuss positionality of the researcher in a methodological approach that draws on immersive, situational ethnographic techniques. Vannini, Waskul and Gottschalk write: 'In the context of qualitative research, reflexivity means examining our assumptions, rapport with informants, choice of topic, research questions, methods, paradigmatic choices, analytic strategies and writing styles'" (Vannini, Waskul and Gottschalk, 2012, p.78). I will begin with my choice of topic and reflect on my personal contingencies that influenced the specific methodology that I crafted above.

I have learned that I am naturally mindful of the mundane everyday sounds and smells that others usually relegate to the background. I always notice, considering the conditions from which they manifest. This particular receptiveness to the sensorial in the environment manifested in my academic work with my Master's thesis and design work exploring the spatio-sensory qualities of architecture. As an immigrant and woman of colour my personal experiences have given me a specific insight into issues of cultural identity, marginalisation and race relations. This insight instilled in me a strong sense of social justice from which stems my doctoral research. Through personal experiences and observing the experiences of other migrants - the frustrations, alienation and many times being 'unheard' I came to understand the importance of 'sitio y lengua' (Perez, 1999), a space where authentic cultural practices inscribed in bodies can be enacted and re-enacted confirming the identities of specific social groups. With the realisation that these practices contributed to generating the urban sensorial realm, a point of intersection was created between my propensity for reflexive sensorial perception and my desire to contribute towards the social equity of marginalised groups. These interests influenced my selection of the context within which the research is situated. Footscray as an immigrant environment is a site of intensified conditions. Poverty, social

discrimination, lack of skill exists alongside culturally specific behaviours, internal conflicts, aspirations and adaptation. Within this environment I am positioned not only as researcher but as part of a diasporic Asian community.

The study takes an experiential approach to sensory perception, privileging the experiences of the researcher and participants over data obtained from recording medium. This is mainly due to the lack of availability of complex instruments that would record sensory data similar to human perception which is enriched with memory, imagination and cultural constructs. As such, this study can be seen to occupy 'the realms of creative practice rather than scientific understanding' (Lucas, 2008). Because of its subjective nature, sociologist Sarah Pink highlights the importance of reflexivity in sensory ethnographic research, writing 'The self-conscious, reflexive use of the senses in this process is an important and strategic act' (Pink, 2009, p.50). Being reflexive demands one to be conscious of one's own subjectivity and biases as well as being empathetic to other's embodied experiences. Pink suggests using one's own sensorium as a 'useful comparative apparatus' (Pink, 2009, p.51) – a framework of reference against which to compare other's culturally and socially conditioned perceptions.

I was keenly aware of the shared cultural traits between the research subjects and myself. I consider my skin colour was an asset, a visual marker that allowed the assumption of shared experiences and cultural commonalities which made people comfortable in accommodating my presence and sharing their views with me. Many started their conversations with me asking where I come from. The attitudes adopted in speaking with me were at times conspiratorial, with many saying, 'you know what I mean...', 'you are same as us...' Geographer Robina Mohammad calls this 'experiential sameness' (Mohammad, 2001, p.104) in which the researcher is assumed to gain 'greater understanding of the researched's reality' (Mohammad, 2001, p.104). Although language was often a barrier, sharing aspects of identity with local ethnic groups allowed me to understand the coded meanings in familiar nuances of expression and gesture. It also allowed me to gain access to 'their space' to observe, and at times share embodied action without causing self-consciousness and intimidation. Whether this position allows one to speak on behalf of the 'other' is something that has been debated quite extensively particularly within black feminist scholarship. I will reflect on this further in the next section.

Trained in spatial thinking as an architect, the immersive ethnographical methods that I engaged in shifted into focusing on specific socio-spatial aspects of the phenomena that I observed. This was reflected in the structural components of the multimodal mapping diagram described above that coalesced the information gathered in the ethnography work. Diagrammatic plans were included giving an understanding of the density of bodies in space, their orientation towards each other/a structure and their relative positions in space. Sectional diagrams elaborate the relationship between bodies and structures/built environment. How something is touched. It also gave the traditional understandings a section provides- the volumetric space/scale relationship to bodies. The body-space segment depicted corporeal engagement in space giving insight into kinaesthetic involvement with the built environment, while my personal spatial journey within the context was noted as it responded to the sensory rhythms that evolved in the site was recorded through the category space map.

The knowledge produced in this research will always be filtered through the lenses of the recording media and the representation techniques that I chose as well as the contingencies I carry with me as an individual. Mohammed suggests that disclosing and making visible the 'situatedness, the enframed and staged nature of knowledges' (Mohammad, 2001, p.104) would contribute towards its greater legitimacy. While I strive to reveal the particularities of context and self where possible, I also accommodate a number of tactics in the methodology to move beyond the specificity of my own body. This includes using multiple sources of information to verify the phenomena such as sound/video recordings, photographs and the use of 'thick description' in describing and analyzing it. Another has been to invite others to engage in the mapping methodology – to adopt and adapt it - creating a multiplicity of outcomes that I then discuss in detail in my thesis. This extends to the 'how to make use of it?' component in my initial research question – exploring how the knowledge generated by the mappings could impact design thinking. I also attenuate the subjectivity associated with ethnography – particularly sensory ethnography - through how I spatialise and document the phenomena uncovered in the site. I do not rely heavily on interviews, but seek to observe directly how people occupy space. These observations are not only my recollections but are supported by the multimodal recording methods.

But always there is the question 'whose truth' is this? (Mohammad, 2001). Gayathri Spivak has criticized the attempts to speak on

behalf of the 'Other' claiming that any such effort brings with it an inherent 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 1987). I contend however that providing greater insight into the realm of 'spatial practice' (Goonewardena, Kipfer, Milgrom, and Schmid, 2008) can assist architects to engage in context specific and culturally aware design responses, contributing toward the need for social equity in public space.

Reference List

Adams, M., Moore, G., Cox, T., Croxford, B., Refaee, M., & Sharples, S. (2007). The 24-hour City: Residents' Sensorial Experiences. *Senses and Society*, 1(2), 201-216.

Adler, P. & Adler, P. (1987). *Membership Roles in Field Research*. California: SAGE Publications.

Albrechts, L. (2006). Shifts in strategic spatial planning? Some evidence from Europe and Australia. *Environment and Planning A*, 38 (6), 1149-1170.

Crang, M. (2003). Qualitative methods: touchy, feely, look-see?. *Progress in Human Geography*, 27(4), 494-504.

Eisenstein, S. (1991). Towards a Theory of Montage. In M. Glenny., & Taylor. R., (Eds.), *Sergei Eisenstein Selected Work Volume 2*. London: British Film Institute Publishing.

Flyvbjerg, B. (1998). *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Forester, J. (1989). *Planning in the Face of Power*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (pp.3-32). New York: Basic Books.

Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Goonewardena, K., Kipfer, S., Milgrom, R., & Schmid, C. (Eds.). (2008). *Space, difference, everyday life: reading Henri Lefebvre*. New York: Routledge.

Hammersely, M. & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. New York: Routledge.

Healey, P. (1992). Planner's Day: Knowledge and Action in Communicative Practice. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 58(1), 9-20.

Herriott, R., & Firestone, W. (1983). Multisite qualitative policy research: Optimizing description and generalizability. *Educational researcher*, 12(2), 14-19.

Hoch, C. (1994). *What Planners Do: Power, Politics, and Persuasion*. Chicago: American Planning Association.

Hillier, J. (2002). *Shadows of Power: an Allegory of Prudence*. London: Routledge.

Howes, D. (2005). Architecture of the Senses. In M. Zardini (Ed.), *Sense of the City: An*

- Alternative Approach to Urbanism* (pp.322-330). Montreal: Lars Muller Publishers.
- Howes, D. (2005). (Ed.). *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. New York: Berg.
- Howes, D. (2003). *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Laurier, E. (2010). Participant Observation. In N. Clifford., M. Cope., S. French., & T. Gillespie (Eds.), *Key Methods in Geography* (pp.116-130). London: Sage.
- Lefebvre, H. (2004). *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Continuum: New York.
- Lucas, R. (2008). Designing a Notation for the Senses. In R. Lucas., & G. Mair (Eds.), *Sensory Urbanism Proceedings 2008*, (pp.137-148). Edinburgh: The Flaneur Press.
- Macdonald, B., & Walker, R. (1975). Case Study and the Social Philosophy of Education Research. *Cambridge Journal of Education*. 5(1), 2-11.
- Malnar, J.M., & Vodvarka, F. (2004). *Sensory Design*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mohammad, R. (2001). 'Insiders' and/or 'outsiders': positionality, theory and praxis. In M. Limb., & C. Dwyer (Eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers* (pp. 101-117). London: Routledge.
- Neuman, L. (2011). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Whitewater: University of Wisconsin.
- Norell, P. (2007). Governing Karlstad: an Insider's Story. In R. Rhodes (Ed?), *Observing Government Elites* (pp.103-131). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Pader, E. (2014). Seeing with an Ethnographic Sensibility. In D. Yanow & P. Schwartz-Shea (Eds.), *Interpretation and Method* (pp. 161-175). New York: M.E. Sharpe
- Pardy, M. (2009). Multicultural incarnations: race, class and urban renewal. *The Future of Sociology: Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Australian Sociological Association*. Canberra: The Australian Sociological Association. Retrieved from <http://www.tasa.org.au/conferences/conferencepapers09/papers/Pardy,%20Maree.pdf>
- Paterson, M. (2009). Haptic Geographies: ethnography, haptic knowledges and sensuous dispositions. *Progress in Human Geography*, 33(6), 766-788.
- Perez, E. (1999). *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Pink, S. (2009). *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Rhodes, R. (2007). Understanding Governance: Ten Years On. *Organization Studies*, 28(8), 1243-1264.
- Shatz, E. (2009). *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Sparkes, A. C. (2009). Ethnography and the Senses: Challenges and Possibilities. *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, 1(1), 21-35.
- Spivak, G.C. (1987). Can the Subaltern Speak? In C.Nelson., & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp.67-111). Illinois: University of Illinois Press.
- Spradley, J. (1980). *Participant Observation*. City: Minnesota: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Thwaites, K., & Simkins, I.M. (2007). *Experiential Landscape: An Approach to People, Place and Space*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Underwood, J. (1980). Town Planners in Search of a Role. *SAUS Occasional Paper*, 6. Bristol: School for Advanced Urban Studies, The University of Bristol.
- Vannini, P., Waskul, D., & Gottschalk, S. (2012). *The Senses in Self, Society and Culture: A Sociology of the Senses*. New York: Routledge.
- White, J., Drew, S., & Hay, Y. (2009). Ethnography versus case study: Positioning research and researchers. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(1), 1–19.
- Yanow, D., Ybema, S., Wels, H. & Kamsteeg, F. (2011). *Organizational Ethnography: Studying the Complexity of Everyday Life*. California: SAGE Publications.
- Yin, R. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. California: SAGE Publications.

Researching intercultural dialogue through participatory digital media in museums

David Henry - School of Historical and Philosophical Studies

Abstract

The participatory, digital practices now commonplace in museums create new opportunities for researchers to understand the more inclusive, democratic roles contemporary museums play in the co-creation and dissemination of knowledge. The fragmentary and incomplete nature of the user-generated content produced in these projects presents challenges for contemporary museum research. This paper outlines a research design based on my doctoral research into the Talking Difference project at Melbourne's Immigration Museum. By drawing together textual analysis, content analysis and interviews with key stakeholders and participants, the method proposed in this paper is positioned to interpret themes from the content produced by participants, and to locate these themes within the broader context of the project.

Keywords: methodology; museums; digital; participation; intercultural dialogue; grounded theory; user-generated; Immigration Museum

Introduction

The embrace of digital media by museums and galleries has shifted the landscape for the relationship between the institution and the visitor. The emergence of new ways through which users can contribute digital material to museum exhibitions and programs, alongside the rise of social media, means that visitors to museums are now as likely to be considered to be collaborators and co-creators as they are passive observers (Proctor, 2010). The videos, text, and audio compiled through such means as touchscreens, online invitations, and touring interactive installations also offers a wealth of new data for researchers, particularly those concerned with the potential for

museums to play a democratizing role as forums for dialogue and exchange (Bodo, 2012). However, these new forms of data also present challenges to museum researchers. When compared with exhibition-based museum research methods – such as textual and spatial analysis of displays (Witcomb, 2003), or analysis of visitor responses to exhibition content (Falk and Derkling, 1992) – the expansion of narratives and perspectives present within these largely ‘user-generated’ programs demands a more flexible method of analysis. The inclusive, democratic nature of digital co-creation programs requires an approach to research that places the interpretation of these perspectives in relation to the context in which they were created.

This paper outlines such a methodology, which has been developed as part of an ongoing doctoral research project that investigates data produced in a touring installation at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne. The Talking Difference Portable Studio (the Studio) provides a site at which users pose and answer questions about racism and cultural diversity. In addition to democratising the narratives included in the museum by inviting participation from visitors, this project maintains a focus on cultural inclusion with its focus on racism and cultural identity. While the outcomes of the research will form the basis of future publications (Henry, in press), this paper asks what methods can be applied to produce a rigorous, ethical and comprehensive analysis of a project that is by its nature fragmentary and incomplete. In addition, the paper asks how such a research program might inform contemporary debates about the role of intercultural dialogue in contemporary multicultural contexts. In other words, my aim here is to inform both the progress of my own research, and to build on existing research approaches based on participatory museum practice.

Background

As stated, Talking Difference is a participatory community engagement project from Melbourne’s Immigration Museum, which aims to use multimedia to facilitate dialogue about racism in contemporary Australia (Museum Victoria, 2014). Aside from an active website, the public spectacle at the heart of the project is a touring installation called the Talking Difference Portable Studio, which tours to public libraries, schools and community centres. The Studio is a three by three metre coloured structure in which one or two people can comfortably operate a single touchscreen. The installation is intended to provide a space for visitors to engage with each other’s ideas about racism and cultural diversity

by creating and responding to digital questions using the touch screen and a high definition camera (Museum Victoria, 2014). Participants use the installation to view and create questions and responses in the form of text, audio, video or drawing.

The proposed research aims to evaluate the Talking Difference Portable Studio as a tool for facilitating dialogue between participants and providing a platform for responses to racism in contemporary Australia. The central approach is to review the process by which the installation was developed and identify perspectives from staff and participants as to its impact.

On this basis, the research seeks to draw conclusions to inform a critical debate on the ability of intercultural dialogue to facilitate intercultural understanding. Theorists and practitioners working with intergroup dialogue from a conflict resolution or education perspective – often applying both qualitative and quantitative empirical methods – have argued that dialogue between people of diverse cultural backgrounds can be shown to facilitate mutual understanding (Dessel & Rogge, 2008; Michael, 2012; Wayne, 2008; Paradies et. al., 2009; Aldana, 2012). David Bohm offers an influential perspective arguing that through dialogue, participants can access ‘a stream of meaning [that flows] among and through us and between us’ and that this shared meaning acts as ‘the glue or cement that holds societies together’ (Bohm, 1996, p. 6; Michael, 2012).

In addition, anthropologists, cultural critics and others have engaged with cosmopolitan theory to argue for the value of disagreement, conflict and discensus (Hage, 2003; Pardy, 2005; Papastiagiardis, 2006; Wills, 2004). These perspectives are informed by poststructuralist notions of culture that favour ‘difference and fragmentation over universality and unity’ (Peters, 2012, p. 38). This line of thinking frames intercultural encounters in terms of a continuing ‘engagement with otherness’ rather than a process that necessarily leads towards shared intercultural understanding (Pardy, 2005, p. 126). The research proposed here aims to inform this debate by interpreting interview responses, digital media and evidence of enabling discourses related to the Talking Difference Portable Studio with a view to drawing inferences as to the role of the project in facilitating such dialogue.

Notably, dialogue between and amongst advocates for qualitative and quantitative methods in research shares with the debate above a division on the basis of what is considered to be demonstrably

universal and what is not (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Informed by Denzin and Lincoln's assertion that 'each practice makes the world visible in a different way' (2005), this research project works from a constructivist perspective favouring authenticity and completeness as research outcomes over more positivist conceptions such as validity and transferability (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Lincoln et al, 2011). By taking a bricoleur approach to synthesising a variety of perspectives, I hope that something akin to 'goodness' in method can produce an interpretation of the Talking Difference program that is authentic and complete if not universally transferable (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Overall research design

Objective

The objective of this methodology is to evaluate the Talking Difference Portable Studio as a tool for facilitating dialogue between participants and providing a platform for responses to racism in contemporary Australia, and to assess the process by which the tool was developed and the perspectives of staff and participants on the project's potential impact on the development of intercultural understanding.

Methods/data collection strategy

I seek to methodologically triangulate the results of the study using three interrelated methods of data collection (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Eckhoff, 2011). While the concept of participants using a self-operated camera to record their views provides a potentially empowering participatory experience, the fact of this material being reinterpreted post hoc for the purposes of research limits its capacity to operate within the ethics of a critical arts-based inquiry (Finley, 2011) or the decolonialising methodologies of contemporary visual anthropology (Pink, 2003). Rather, following Tobin and Begley, the study employs triangulation not necessarily as a means of 'confirming existing data, but as a means of enlarging the landscape of ... inquiry, offering a deeper and more comprehensive picture' (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 393).

Textual Analysis

The Talking Difference Portable Studio is a product of its historical and policy contexts. A significant source of data, therefore, resides in text-based material related to VicHealth, Museum

Victoria, and beyond. This includes documentation of previous project-work at both organisations including documentation of research and methods previously identified as successful. This material is to be contextualised by a broader literature review exploring discourses that influence public health interventions related to racism, participatory media projects, and community development work. This approach is intended to be both a means of setting context for the project, and a way of informing an analysis of the governmental discourses that shape meaning and express power in the creation of this project (Finley, 2011; Elm-Larsen, 2006). In this way, I can understand themes emerging in qualitative data gathered through interviews and analysis of content produced in relation to the discourses evoked in the development and delivery of the project.

Content Analysis: Digital media produced in participatory programs

In its first year of touring, participants in the Talking Difference Portable Studio produced over 1000 digital responses (Henry, 2013). As discussed digital content offers a rich repository of research data not only in the ideas communicated, but also by virtue of the manner in which they are communicated (Coleman, 2010). As Corbin and Strauss note 'when doing analysis, it is important not to overlook expressed emotions and feelings, because they are part of context and often follow and/or are associated with action or inaction' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 82). Alongside transcriptions of digital content, I will include in my analysis references to body language, facial expressions, and other interpretative techniques to infer something of the emotional depth of the digital content created (Finley, 2011). As a means of evaluating the significance of the dialogue occurring in the Portable Studio, responses will be coded not only for their relevance to the core themes of the project, but also for the extent to which they respond to other material created in the Studio. In this way, the data can be located in a network of responses to identify the type of questions that elicit the strongest response from participants.

Finally, I will apply a modified version of grounded theory to identify themes as they emerge in the content itself. Within the broad boundaries of my enquiry into intercultural dialogue in the Studio, I will be open to shifting focus depending on topics that participants introduce regardless of whether they are supported in an existing theoretical framework (Charmas, 2011). More specifically, I will approach content informed by Corbin and

Strauss's approach to coding which uses sensitizing questions (what are participants trying to communicate?) alongside more theoretical questions (how do these concepts interrelate?) (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). In this way, I hope to develop a comprehensive impression from the content produced of the use to which participants put the Portable Studio in the performance of intercultural dialogue.

Interviews with staff and participants involved

Interviews with staff and participants provide two complimentary means by which the work can further explore themes emergent in the digital media content analysis. Interviews will be conducted before the formal delivery of the project and as part of a reflective follow up. They will be semi-structured with a view towards inviting informants to respond to ideas beyond the project's central frame of reference. In this way, interviews can contribute to an understanding of the project's broader meaning and impact.

The delivery of the research will require a high degree of personal reflexivity on my part as one of the staff members who worked on the Talking Difference project. Lynch and Alberti provide an instructive approach to self-evaluating work in this context by firstly outlining their perceptions of potential points of bias and positioning from their perspective, and secondly removing from their study identification of individuals involved with the project (2010). While it cannot – and should not – produce a purely objective assessment of the work, this approach goes some way to reduce the risk of bias in the assessment of projects.

Managing data

Digital content produced in the Studio is managed by the device itself in an excel spreadsheet, which records the date content was produced, the question the content responded to, as well as the age, gender, and place of birth of participants. Given the number of contributions, it makes sense to use this format for coding. As core themes and subthemes are identified, they will be added to the columns of the database and used to sort content.

Interviews are to be recorded and transcribed. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, themes may be divergent, so I will work 'back and forth' between themes emergent in my initial analysis and the broader conclusions I draw as data collection proceeds (Tobin and Begley, 2004: 391).

Analytic strategy

The analytic strategy seeks to develop a basis for conclusions as to the meaning and effectiveness of the project and to inform a contribution to relevant theoretical literature. The strategy for assessing the effectiveness of the project will work in two distinct, but interrelated ways. Firstly, the research will develop an understanding of the meaning of the project for participants and staff informed by grounded theory and led by interviews and content analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Secondly, the research will seek to evaluate the project against to its own intended outcomes: facilitating dialogue between participants, and providing a platform for responses to racism in contemporary Australia. I will apply specific codes related to dialogue and racism in analysis of interviews and digital content, and identify those digital prompts that elicit the most thematically relevant responses in the Studio. On this basis, interviews can be designed to elicit deeper responses from participants as a means of understanding why certain prompts elicited more responses.

On this basis, the process of analysis will synthesise the results into a theoretical contribution to interdisciplinary work on museums, interculturalism and dialogue. As identified above, a key tension emergent across the relevant literature hinges on whether or not it is possible to develop a shared intercultural understanding through dialogue. The analytical strategy for this research seeks to inform this debate by presenting as authentically as possible an impression of participant and staff perspectives on the project's outcomes and to balance this with a formal analysis of content produced and contextual documentation.

Dissemination and embedding strategy

The conclusions drawn from the data analysis will be presented in formal academic settings such as through description in journal articles and presentation at a wide range of academic conferences addressing racism, interculturalism, community engagement, museums, and arts practice.

Ideally the dissemination strategy would also include elements targeting professional networks through the publication of a Framework for Practice, or similar detailing those elements of Talking Difference that most successfully facilitated dialogue and encouraged participants to reflect on racism in contemporary Australia. Such an educative publication should not be understood to confer absolute transferability to the results of the study, but

rather as a new perspective within a broader discourse of useful practices (see Tobin & Begley, 2010).

Conclusion

This research design demonstrates an attempt to present reliable, rigorous and authentic research based on a project that is by its nature conflicted, fragmentary, and incomplete. The constructivist approach articulated above assembles a variety of data and infers meaning in such a way as to acknowledge the existence of multiple perspectives including through text-based analysis, interviews and content analysis. The research design offers one means by which the study can develop a picture of the meaning and impact of the Talking Difference project. On this basis I hope that this research can produce a useful contribution to a field of knowledge related to intercultural dialogue, participatory museum practice, and racism/antiracism in contemporary Australia.

Reference list

- Aldana, A., S. J. Rowley, et al. (2012). 'Raising Ethnic-Racial Consciousness: The Relationship Between Intergroup Dialogues and Adolescents' Ethnic-Racial Identity and Racism Awareness.'" *Equity & Excellence in Education* 45(1): 120-137. doi: 10.1080/10665684.2012.641863
- Bohm, D. (1996). *On Dialogue*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Coleman, G. (2010). 'Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Media' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39: 487–505. doi: 10.1146/annurev.anthro.012809.104945
- Charmas, K. (2011). 'Grounded Theory Methods in Social Justice Research.' In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds.) *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (4th ed., pp. 359-380). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dessel, A. and Rogge, M. E. (2008). 'Evaluation of Intergroup Dialogue: A Review of the Empirical Literature' *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 26(2): 199–238. doi: 10.1002/crq.230
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S., (2008). 'Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research' in N.K.Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, (3rd ed., pp. 1-44). London: Sage.
- Eckhoff, A. (2011). 'Transformative Partnerships: Designing School-Based Visual Arts Outreach Programmes' *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 30(2), 256-265. doi: 10.1111/j.1476-8070.2011.01701.x
- Elm-Larsen, J. (2006). Governing the Spaces on the Margin of Society.' In G. Marston and C. McDonald (Eds.) *Analysing Social Policy: A Governmental Approach* (pp. 67-88). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Falk, J. and Dierking, L. (1992). *The Museum Experience*. Washington: Whalesback Books.
- Finley, Susan, (2011). 'Critical Arts-Based Inquiry: The Pedagogy and Performance of a Radical Ethical Aesthetic.' In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed, pp. 435-450). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hage, G. (1998). *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. Sydney: Pluto.
- Henry, D. (in press). 'Talking Deeper about Cultural Difference: A Digital Interactive from Melbourne', Curator: The Museum Journal.

Lincoln, Y.S., Lynham S.A. & Guba, E.G. (2011). 'Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences revisited.' In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (4th ed, pp. 97-128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Lynch, B. and Alberti S. (2010). 'Legacies of prejudice: racism, co-production and radical trust in the museum,' *Museum Management and Curatorship* 25(1), 13-35. doi: 10.1080/09647770903529061

Michael, Michális S. (2012). 'Developing a Regional Interfaith and Intercultural Network in Melbourne's Northern Suburbs', *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* Volume 4(2), 15–46.

Museum Victoria. (2014). *Talking Difference Website*. Accessed October 27, 2014. <http://museumvictoria.com.au/talkingdifference>

Paradies, Y, Chandrakumar, L, Klocker, N, Frere, M, Webster, K, Burrell, M, & McLean, P. (2009). *Building on our strengths: a framework to reduce race-based discrimination and support diversity in Victoria*. (Full Report). Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

Papastiagiadis, N., (2006). 'Glimpses of Cosmopolitanism in the Hospitality of Art', *Broadsheet*, 35(2), 110-15.

Pardy, M. (2005). 'Kant in the Footscray Mall.' In C. Long, K. Shaw and C. Merlo (Eds.), *Suburban Fantasies: Melbourne Unmasked* (pp. 107-128). Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing.

Peters, M. (2012). 'Western Models of Intercultural Philosophy.' In T. Besley, and M. Peters (Eds.) *Interculturalism Education and Dialogue* (pp. 29-52). New York: Peter Lang.

Pink S. (2003). 'Interdisciplinary agendas in visual research: re-situating visual anthropology.' *Visual Studies*, 18(2), 179-192, doi: 10.1080/14725860310001632029

Proctor, N. (2010). 'Museum as Platform, Curator as Champion, in the Age of Social Media.' *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 53(1), 35–43. doi: 10.1111/j.2151-6952.2009.00006.x

Tobin G.A. & Begley C.M. (2004). 'Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48(4), 388–388. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2648.2004.03207.x

Wayne, E. K. (2008). 'Is it just talk? Understanding and evaluating intergroup dialogue', *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 25(4), 451–478. doi: 10.1002/crq.217

Wills, S. (2004). 'Losing the Right to Country: The memory of Loss and the Loss of Memory in Claiming the Nation as Space (Or Being Cruel to Be Kind in the 'Multicultural' Asylum)' *New Formations*, 51, 50–65.

Witcomb, A. (2003). *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*. London and New York: Routledge.

Art and Social Equity: A feminist approach

Caroline Phillips – School of Art, Victorian College of the Arts

Abstract

This working paper explores creative arts research and its intersection with social equity. Limitations of contemporary art and social practice are addressed through the structure of *'The f Word'* project – the creative outcome of my Phd research – and its contextualisation as an iterative, practice-led project that materialises a methodology of relatedness. Art exhibitions, forums and events are used to unearth the local conditions of feminist art practice in Australia, to provide an ethical and open platform for new voices and new knowledge to emerge.

Keywords: social equity, feminist art, dialogical aesthetics, curatorial practice, relational art, social sphere

Introduction

On International Women's Day 2014 along St. Kilda Road, Melbourne, a large bus pulled out from the footpath in front of the National Gallery of Victoria, with 52 people on board. They were not just ordinary people, they were feminists. And they were artists and art lovers. They hit the road together to meet, see, hear, smell and taste contemporary feminist art and issues in Melbourne in 2014, and to mark and celebrate International Women's Day together. Known as the *Technopia Tours Feminist Art Bus*, this creative research event is one part of my PhD research. The overall project – *The f Word* – is comprised of a series of events that each produce different outcomes: artworks, exhibitions, publications, collaborations, forums, seminars, letters, communications, networks, workshops and public events. Over a period of three years the research has developed organically and expansively in an evolving, relational and iterative methodology.

The research originated from my position as a sculptor working on my own in my studio with an interest in feminist art and a curiosity and drive to engage with others. At first all I wanted to know was 'What's happened to feminist art?' and 'Where do I fit in?' Fissures and ruptures in feminist theory over the last decades

of the twentieth century resulted in a relegation of feminist issues to either problematic post-feminist agendas or a reversion to the unseen and unheard woman from decades past. Feminism was out of fashion, I thought.

Through a process of meeting and talking to other artists, asking questions and generating projects I found strong undercurrents to suggest this was not true at all. I sought to find out more and make more visible those doing this work in Australia. Through engagement with others and a study of contemporary art that utilises feminist theory in a positive way, this research seeks to uncover contemporary feminist art practices that open up new possibilities for the future and address lived conditions of women in Australia. I use the term 'practice' akin to Tasos Zembylos' definition as 'configurations of cohesive activities that establish coordinated and collaborative relationships among the members of a community' (Zembylos, 2014, p. 1). Through a process of dialogue and collaboration a contingent methodology of relatedness emerged as the generative force of this research. I utilised conversations with others, movement and travel (both physical and conceptual) and the generation of new ideas as the processes through which art emerges, focusing on relationality, situated conditions and giving voice to others to create a new model of contemporary feminist art practice.

The Technopia Tours Feminist Art Bus turned many corners, and turned the template of a regular workshop into an emergent, contingent, performative, haptic, collaborative and fun experience. It generated new connections and unleashed creative forces that expanded the possibilities for living and working as a contemporary feminist artist, not just for me but for many of the passengers as well. The bus trip turned the trajectory of this research around a new corner, where I embraced the social space and the discursive power of connectivity to crystallize a new research question:

What new possibilities emerge for feminist art practice when considered through a methodology of relatedness?

The f Word project

To work within a social equity framework relies on an engagement with the social/public sphere and an explicit respect for and openness to difference. *The f Word* - one model of this practice - considers local Australian conditions for women and inserts a

feminist focus as a strategy to engage with current discourses in social equity and contemporary art. To do this I have worked in my studio, collaborated with my peers and engaged with institutions and public spaces. What emerged over time through this methodology was a space for dialogue, exchange and the generation of meaning through connections made between people and between works of art.

The seed of *The f Word* project was germinated in 2010 as an idea to revisit Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974-79)ⁱ which toured to ten locations around the world including Melbourne, Australia (1988). Chicago's ground breaking multidimensional art installation crystallised contemporary art debates at the time, and for some time thereafter, raising questions about authorship, craft, feminine aesthetics and institutional power relations. I saw this exhibition in my first year of art school and its effects remained with me. At the beginning of this research I wanted to seek out and talk to those of my peers working with images and materials of a feminist nature twenty plus years later. What quickly became apparent was the reticence with which many people would use the 'F' word itself, even though to me their work contained strong links to relevant issues such as sexuality or politics, hence it became the key focus and new title for the project. Other strong elements of the research included listening to multigenerational and regional voices to seek a range of points of view and engage with marginalised groups. An interdisciplinary approach was also important. As networks were established and excitement was ignited in others, collaborations and projects developed over time, in response to what emerged along the way.

Over the following three years a series of events and outcomes took place; *A Dinner Party: setting the table*, West Space, Melbourne (2012), *The Regional Feminist Art Forum*, Bendigo (2013), *The Technopia Tours Feminist Art Bus*, Melbourne (2014), *The f Word*, Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale (2014) and *The f Word*, Ararat Regional Art Gallery, Ararat (2014). These forums, workshops and exhibitions were held across Victoria, Australia, involving 35 artists, 20 writers/curators/academics, 20 different arts organisations/galleries/archives and innumerable generous volunteers. Education programs, a blog and an extensive publication provided outreach and ongoing points of reference for *The f Word* project.ⁱⁱ

The emergent and organic nature of the research meant I was constantly in a state of unknowing, yet open to sharing ideas and

generating possibilities for action and outcomes. In a spirit of great generosity, many collaborators and participants brought their own knowledge to the project, through their individual subjectivity and practice. This exchange, produced through discussions and working with materials and experiences through contemporary art, revealed a range of new knowledge and practices that can activate and extend the cultural landscape in Australia. This outcome can be elaborated through three observations and strategies; feminism needs to be visibly reinserted into social practices (in this case art), situated conditions must be taken into accountⁱⁱⁱ via movement, openness to difference and multiple iterations, and one way to create these vibrant, open spaces is to rethink feminist art through relations.

Reinserting feminism into social and cultural practices

Historically, particularly during the Modernist era, visual art in the public sphere has been relegated to the seemingly minor position of community art or the subset of public art. Distanced from the avant-garde autonomy of the single creator and/or the institutional authority of museums and art galleries, art made within these conditions has been regarded as a lower status of art practice through its 'popular' (read 'non-critical') or 'community' (ie 'non expert') participation. Over the last twenty years or so a resounding shift has taken place, brought on largely by the conditions of post-colonialism, neo liberalism and environmental crisis. The paradigm of 'social practice' has emerged and taken hold as a defining component of our global culture. In art this broke through in the 1990s as Relational Aesthetics, a defined group of artists who used participation in new ways and radically changed the contemporary (Western) aesthetic discourse. However, a number of its critics have sought to reinstate the debt to the de-materialist practices of the 1960s such as 'Happenings' and some of the early feminist practices (Marsh, 2013).^{iv}

In addition to the contemporary art discourse, the shift towards the social space has occurred across multiple disciplines including sociology, political theory, education and architecture. Coincidentally, a renewed feminist perspective is being applied across a number of these disciplines which can be useful in considering alternate formulations for feminist art. Early theorists of social practice draw on the work of Jürgen Habermas, the German twentieth century theorist who worked across the political, philosophical and sociological domain. His major theories of 'the public sphere' and 'communicative action' outline attempts to

resolve the limitations of social science (i.e. the binary opposition between the natural and human sciences) and to address uneven power relations. Habermas formulated a framework for a discursive space where social relations are inclusive and democratic and where language systems (including aesthetics) are part of the formation of knowledge and culture. Participants in this socially embedded space are involved democratically through reflexive exchange of ideas and actions. (Outhwaite, 1996)

Habermas considers art and aesthetic discourse as a useful vehicle for communicative action and a site for the generation of new knowledge, often through its mediators, for example critics or curators (Habermas, 1984, p. 20). As a form of language art can communicate thoughts and arguments and elicit responses and subjectivities that materialise ideas and give rise to actions. Habermas posits a shift from the limitations of a Marxist, economic based system to a more deliberately communicative and decentralising model of public discourse as a means to more critically integrate the individual with the society in the hope of achieving open and more ethical participation. What is crucial to Habermas' theory of communicative action is that human intersubjectivity and communication provides the path to knowledge as 'speakers... take up relations to the world, not only directly...but in a reflective way' (Outhwaite, 1996, p. 146).

A feminist critique of Habermas has been articulated by a number of theorists across political theory, media and communications and cultural studies. (Felski, 1989, Fraser, 1996, McLaughlin, 1993, Young, 1990, 2000). Their critiques are premised on the limitations apparent in Habermas' early work due to its central focus on formally organised institutions, a bourgeois heterogeneity and a separation between the public and private domains. These feminist critiques and Habermas's reworking of his own theories in his later work (Habermas, 1996) has transfigured the theorisation of the social sphere to allow for social and gender equity and the power of participation in articulating rights, responsibilities and identity (Fiig, 2011, p. 304). In particular, Young's formulation of the three activities of greeting, story-telling and rhetoric as aspects of communication to be noted (Young, 1990) are factors that have direct relevance to art practice and can be observed in a number of the works in *The f Word* project. As Fiig's analysis attests the participatory and communicative practices of discourse in the social sphere, although not directly constituting specific change in the parliamentary context, do provide valuable input into the schematization of problems in society and put moral and

existential questions back on the drawing board (Fiig, 2011, pp. 301-304).

To return more specifically to contemporary art, as noted previously the early 1990s saw Nicolas Bourriaud's theorisation of 'Relational Aesthetics' take hold as a dominant critical paradigm in mainstream art discourse. Bourriaud defined Relational Aesthetics as 'a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space' (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 113). Using a particular set of artists as case studies, practices such as organising group dinners or parties, durational events via telephone, or sensory experiences involving the participation of the general public were used to explore the shift from art as an imaginary and utopian activity to actual models of living and acting in the world, to ask the question (of art): 'Is it still possible to generate relationships with the world?' (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 9).

Whilst Bourriaud's paradigm was taken up as the new discourse in globalised art circuits in the late 1990s, many of the qualities that constituted this framework were already present two decades prior and articulated under the rubric of feminist art. Lucy Lippard, a foremost feminist art critic and writer since the late sixties, cited a number of artists at work in the seventies and grouped them as a 'socialist feminist model' (Lippard, 1980). 'Social practice' as a contemporary art model was not yet named, and the term used by Lippard may seem dated now, yet it was one of the first articulations of this shift and demonstrates the close relationship between feminist art and social practice. She writes:

One of the feminist goals is to reintegrate the aesthetic self and the social self and to make it possible for both to function without guilt or frustration. In the process, we have begun to see art as something subtle but significantly different from what is in the dominant culture. (Lippard, 1980, p.363)

Feminist art works of the past, in particular so-called 'second wave' feminist art of the 1970s, focused on experimentation and activism as artists explored new forms and contexts to represent their experience in the art world and the wider political and social milieu. Women artists, critics and historians examined the gender bias in the canon of art history, the politics and aesthetics of female imagery and issues of sexuality and gender, through a range of cutting edge practices: a reappraisal of traditional

and domestic crafts, new and experimental film techniques and a burgeoning performance art discipline. Those same 'burning issues' of relations of power, representation and identity are as important now as they ever were and persist as strong themes in feminist theory. However, I would argue their appearance in contemporary art now operates at various levels of aesthetic autonomy, at a distance from social and political discourse and many times still within oppressive power relations. This paradigm works to maintain the exclusion and repression of the feminine.

The 'F' word has been missing from this discourse in the nineties and the beginnings of the twentieth century, but over the last ten years has re-emerged in contemporary art on a global scale. In the United States 2007 was heralded as 'The Year of Feminist Art' (Burchill, 2014) with two international exhibitions held there that year,^v amongst other large solo and group shows on feminist art. 2009 saw the major *elles at pompidou* exhibition in Paris, curated by Camille Moreau, where the permanent collection halls were rehung with only women artists and rotated over an eighteen month period. Where these shows were focused on historic contextualising and brought unknown artists to the fore, what is emerging now is new generations of feminist artists connecting with their antecedents, discovering unknown histories and regenerating their art as a feminist practice. In particular in the Australian context there has been a consistent flow of feminist art projects over the last ten years culminating in two important sites of feminist art research (of which *The f Word* is a part): The *Matters of the Body* (MOB) Research Cluster at Victorian College of the Arts / University of Melbourne and the Contemporary Art and *Feminism Research Cluster* (CAF) at Sydney College of the Arts / University of Sydney / The Cross Arts Projects.

There is still enormous disparity in economic and social conditions around the world and locally, and it is often gender based. Increases in violence against women have been highlighted at a number of global and Australian sites and racism is endemic. How do we, in Australia, place ourselves culturally and politically to deal with our privilege and our shame? What can a feminist approach offer, in particular via art practices? In my view the material conditions of bodies, communities and matter itself must be taken into account in relations with others, to address negative power relations, acknowledge privilege, respect difference and enable dialogue. Art practices can represent, materialise and enact these conditions and dialogues. Feminist art, in its current global recuperation, is ripe to take a lead in driving this new direction.

As discussed we are also now in an expanded field of social practice. Many have identified the important tendencies in Relational Aesthetics as precursors to contemporary art today including Bishop who asks, 'if relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?' (Bishop, 2004, p. 65). *The f Word* project sets out to address these questions by looking at the work of certain contemporary feminist artists and soliciting their concerns, talking about the ideas they are interested in, re-contextualising them as a group of related, critical practitioners and setting up a discursive, multivalent platform via forums and exhibitions for new conversations to take place and new knowledge to be produced.

Situated conditions via movement, open-ness to difference and multiple iterations

This research is part of a transforming topology of feminist art in Australia. Although it may be a drop in the pond that began in Melbourne, the ripples have expanded across a much wider terrain. Exploiting movement and openness via a curatorial model, I placed myself as a travelling artist and curator. By literally and conceptually moving around my city, Melbourne, to regional Victorian towns and wider networks across Australia and beyond, an open-ended dialogue and evolving series of project based outcomes continues to emerge. By setting up different conditions for each event, the participants each bring their own experience which contributes to the outcome in an organic way. For example, listening and engaging with regional artists directly affects what is revealed in a forum of artists in Bendigo that is different to a forum in Melbourne. An open two-way process of engagement with artists allows for the emergence of surprising outcomes when selecting works for an exhibition. Inviting writers to think about and express what interests them sets up open conditions for new knowledge to materialise in a publication.

Curators are no longer solely the gate-keepers of cultural objects and institutions. What has emerged since the 1960s is a shift in the role of the curator away from a static and institutionally based practitioner collecting and caring for objects or arbitrating taste, to a more complex, critical and broader role engaging with 'time storage' (Obrist, 2008), constituting discourse (O'Neill, 2007), 'constellations' of cultural identity (Ramirez, 2000), art as a social system (Luhmann, 2000) or a network of forces (von Bismarck, 2012). Part of the spectrum of socially

engaged practices, the 'curatorial turn' has a number of features: collectivity, performativity, a process based, dialogic approach, and responsiveness to site. *The f Word* project is aligned with this shift as it brings participants together via an artist/curator, yet the curator is not the single author. The methodology of relatedness manifests a dialogue between artists, between ideas and between objects and their materials. What this project also brings to the contemporary curatorial and social discourse is a re-alignment to feminist principles, politics and actions to allow for more nuanced and ethical outcomes.

A key factor in a feminist paradigm is a de-centralized model, epitomised in this case by the de-segregating aspects of *The f Word* project – encouraging a wide array of participants, regional engagement, working across the institutional and not for profit sectors and activating opportunities for artists from different social and cultural backgrounds, for example Indigenous artists, young artists, older artists. The multiple events and outcomes over time and space utilised an iterative practice that constantly renews its statement of intent and creates a continual 'coming into being' of the ideas and methodology. Taking into account this complexity offers expanded possibilities for a generative openness that signals a reconfiguration of feminist aesthetics, an aesthetics of relatedness.

This generative and ethical process materialised in many of the art works chosen for the *The f Word* exhibitions. A number of artists explored the cultural and social conditions of specific groups, for example the Italian community in Mildura (Filomena Coppola), rural women and ageing (Laurene Dietrich), violence against women (Kate Just), the Stolen Generation (Georgia MacGuire). All the while, these artists were drawing on practices derived specifically from a feminist perspective in either their choice of materials, the form and content of the work or the historical references apparent. Others explored the poetic resonance of history (Clare Rae), identity (Destiny Deacon) and place (Jill Orr).^{vi}

What they all have in common is an embodied experience via cognitive, material, aesthetic or philosophical concerns. As Carolyn Barnes writes in the exhibition catalogue:

The artists you have selected for *the f word* project zone in on the symbolic orders that structure and organize activities, experience and things, while exchanging fixed and singular ideas of subjectivity and identity for more plural and complex

ones. Their work highlights the cultural and social politics circulating between the worlds of bodies, things and signs. (Barnes, 2014, p. 46)

Open spaces created to rethink contemporary feminist art through relations

This circulation of ideas and practices highlighted by Barnes is exemplified in the metaphor of the conversation, which emerged as a recurring mode of research throughout the project. Literally and figuratively an expanded dialogue with other artists, texts, and artworks has informed the outcomes. From a position of open enquiry I sought out the views of others and created a space for new ideas to emerge.

Grant Kester cites public art projects from the 1990s in Europe and the USA that use an equally generative process where conversation is an integral part of the work itself (Kester, 2005). He uses the term 'dialogical aesthetics' derived from the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin who argued that the work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation, 'a locus of differing meanings, interpretations and points of view' (Kester, 2005, p. 79). This theorisation reframes the artist as a figure 'defined in terms of openness, of listening and a willingness to accept dependence and intersubjective vulnerability. The semantic productivity of these works occurs in the interstices between the artist and the collaborator' (Kester, 2005, p. 81).

A project such as *The f Word* rethinks the constitution of feminist art to include the activities of one artist among many, contextualising my practice within those of my peers, my location, my community and the wider feminist discourse, reappraising aesthetic autonomy as aesthetic relations. Form and matter, embodied through methodology, relationships and materials, interact and merge to open up new possibilities for aesthetics, ethics and politics. These possibilities are theorised in generative ways by a number of others; for example, as Belenki's connected knowing (Kester, 2004, p.82), the connective self (Keller, 1986) and Braidotti's radical relationality (Jones, 2012, p.172). Connected knowing relies on each individual empathising with others and 'recognizing the social embeddedness and context within which others speak, judge, and act...the material conditions of the speaker'. (Kester, 2004, p. 113) Similarly, Braidotti's field of radical relations is an interactive field of positive forces where ethical implications are foregrounded by relations (Jones, 2012, p. 172).

Conclusion

So what does it mean to materialise a relational methodology for contemporary feminist art? Art practices can move in and around more fluidly than traditional methodologies. Its range across mediums, spaces and practices allows for experimentation and confrontation that can challenge assumptions about gender, politics, subjectivities and nature. Putting feminism back into the social practice discourse in a dynamic and agential fashion through projects such as *The f Word* reconfigures the social sphere and its aesthetic and political implications. Exploiting the particularities of art practice as a realm of possibilities can provide spaces that slip, de-stabilise and create gaps for the emergence of new narratives, representations, statements and poetics that can impact on the creation of knowledge and an ethical future in a feminist paradigm.

Notes

i In conversation with Victoria Duckett during The Feminist Salon Residency; the envelope at The West Wing, Melbourne, co-ordinated by myself and Sarah Lynch. Images and details available at: <http://www.westwing.org.au/project/the-feminist-salon-residency-the-envelope/>

ii For more information and images of the project go to: www.thefwordaus.wordpress.com

iii I use the term akin to Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledge', whereby a body's agency is constituted in their specific time and place, including cultural, political and social relations. In 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' she writes: "I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives. I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity." (Haraway, 1988, p. 589).

iv Marsh provides a brief summary of the arguments by Amelia Jones, Hal Foster, Claire Bishop and Grant Kester and her own critique of Relational Aesthetics, at times drawing on contemporary feminist art practices.

v WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution, curated by Connie Butler, was an international survey of 1970s feminist art and toured Los Angeles County Museum of Art, National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in New York. Global Feminisms, an international survey of contemporary feminist art curated by Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly, was held at the Brooklyn Museum, N.Y.C.

vi There were nineteen artists in the two The f Word exhibitions and not all are mentioned above. The remaining artists are Kate Beynon, Karen Buczynski-Lee, Penny Byrne, Eliza-Jane Gilchrist, Janice Gobey, Robyn Massey, Caroline Phillips, Elvis Richardson, Louise Saxton, Inez de Vega and Lyndal Walker. Images and details of works by all nineteen artists are available in the exhibition catalogue, C.Phillips (Ed.), *The f Word*, 2014, Melbourne.

Reference list

- Barnes, C. (2014). Conversation. In C. Phillips (Ed.), *The f Word*, exh.cat. (pp. 44-46). Melbourne, Australia.
- Bishop, C. (2004). *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*. October, 110, 51-79.
- Bishop, C. (Ed.). (2006). *Participation*. London & Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.
- Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational Aesthetics*. (S. Pleasance, Trans.) Dijon: Les presses du reel.
- Burchill, L. (2014). Problematizing Universals yet again ... and again! In C. Phillips (Ed.), *The f Word*, exh. cat. (pp. 20-23). Melbourne, Australia.
- de Zegher, C. (2002). The Inside is the Outside: The Relational as the (Feminine) Space of the Radical. *Invisible Culture, An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture* (Issue 04). Retrieved November 25, 2014, from <https://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/portfolio/the-inside-is-the-outside-the-relational-as-the-feminine-space-of-the-radical/>
- Felski, R. (1989). *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Fiig, C. (2011). A powerful, opinion-forming public? Rethinking the Habermasian public sphere in a perspective of feminist theory and citizenship. *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, 12(3), 291-308. doi:10.1080/1600910x.2011.621049
- Fraser, N. (1996). Rethinking the Public Sphere: A contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (pp. 109-42). Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Gablik, S. (1991). *The Reenchantment of Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- Harroway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-99.
- Habermas, J. (1984). *Theory of Communicative Action Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. (T. McCarthy, Trans.) Boston, Mass: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1996). Three Normative Models of Democracy. In S. Benhabib (Ed.), *Democracy and Difference. Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (pp. 21-30). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Jones, A. (2012). *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*. New York: Routledge.

- Keller, C. (1986). *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self*. Boston: Beacon.
- Kester, G. (2004). *Conversation Pieces, Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.
- Kester, G. (2005). Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art. In Z. Kocur (Ed.), *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985* (pp. 76-88). Malden, USA, Oxford, UK & Carlton, Australia: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lippard, L. (1980, Fall/Winter). *Sweeping Exchanges, the contribution of feminism to the art of the '70's*. *Art Journal*, 362-65.
- Luhmann, N. (2000). *Art as a Social System*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Marsh, A. (2013). Political Interventions and Relational Aesthetics. *eyeline*(No. 80), pp. 57-65.
- McLaughlin, L. (1993). Feminism, the Public Sphere, Media and Democracy. (SAGE, Ed.) *Media, Culture and Society*(15), 599-620.
- O'Neill, P. (Ed.). (2007). *Curating Subjects*. London: Open Editions.
- Obrist, H. U. (2008). *A Brief History of Curating*. Zurich: JRP Ringier.
- Outhwaite, W. (Ed.). (1996). *The Habermas Reader*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Plonowska Ziarek, E. (2012). *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ramirez, M. C. (2000, Spring). Beyond Boundaries: Rethinking Contemporary Art Exhibitions. *Art Journal*, 59(1).
- Ravetz, A., Kettle, A., & Felcey, H. (Eds.). (2013). *Collaboration through Craft*. London: Bloomsbury.
- von Bismarck, B. (2012). Introduction. In B. von Bismarck, J. Schaffaff and T. Weski (Eds.), *Cultures of the Curatorial*. Berlin and Leipzig: Sternberg Press and Kulturen des Kuratorischen an der Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst.
- Young, I. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Young, I. (2000). *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zemblyos, T. (Ed.). (2014). *Artistic Practices, Social Interactions and Cultural Dynamics*. Oxon and New York: Routledge. Available from <http://unimelb.eblib.com.au.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1664279>



MELBOURNE
SOCIAL EQUITY
INSTITUTE