

Online Research @ Cardiff

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/61946/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Mannay, Dawn ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7368-4111> and Morgan, Melanie 2015. Doing ethnography or applying a qualitative technique? Reflections from the 'waiting field'. *Qualitative Research* 15 (2) , pp. 166-182. 10.1177/1468794113517391 file

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1468794113517391>
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1468794113517391>>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies.

See

<http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



Qualitative Research

<http://qrj.sagepub.com/>

Doing ethnography or applying a qualitative technique? Reflections from the 'waiting field'

Dawn Mannay and Melanie Morgan

Qualitative Research published online 27 January 2014

DOI: 10.1177/1468794113517391

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://qrj.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/01/23/1468794113517391>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Qualitative Research* can be found at:

Open Access: Immediate free access via SAGE Choice

Email Alerts: <http://qrj.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://qrj.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - Jan 27, 2014

[What is This?](#)

Doing ethnography or applying a qualitative technique?: Reflections from the 'waiting field'

Qualitative Research
1-17

© The Author(s) 2014

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1468794113517391

qrj.sagepub.com



Dawn Mannay

Cardiff University, UK

Melanie Morgan

Cardiff University, UK

Abstract

Contemporary social science research is often concerned to engage with and promote particular forms of postmodern and innovative data production, such as photo-elicitation, autoethnography or free association interviews. This fascination with the latest and greatest techniques has been accompanied by an ever more fragmented range of research methods training for students where the week-by-week shift between approaches engenders a disjointed view of becoming the researcher. This individualisation of techniques has set up rival camps and critiques where the common ground of being embedded in traditional ethnography is often forgotten. For researchers, who began their academic careers in the ethnographic tradition, there is an appreciation of the holistic base of enquiry from which a family of methods can be effectively employed. However, more recently qualitative researchers have been distracted by 'the technique'; a distraction that can blind them to the occupation of ethnography. Concurrently, there have been shifts in the social and economic expectations placed on qualitative inquiry that have acted to close down spaces of ethnographic teaching and practice. In response, this article focuses on the importance of the 'waiting field'; an opportunity to explore the times where real lives carry on before they make room for the intrusion of the data production of 'the technique' and remind us that much qualitative research is, in fact, an ethnographic undertaking: one that encompasses the researcher within and beyond the field.

Keywords

data production, ethnography, fieldwork, mothers, participatory methods, psychosocial, reflexivity, visual methods

Corresponding author:

Dawn Mannay, Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences, Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff, CF10 3WT, Wales, UK.

Email: mannaydi@cardiff.ac.uk

Introduction

The seeds of this paper were planted in the conversations of the authors, in 2012, on four long train journeys from Cardiff to Oxford for the *Research Methods Festival*¹ and then a few weeks later to Liverpool for the *Doing Ethnography*² workshop. Unsurprisingly, the nature of the events led to conversations about methodology, methods and ethnography. In particular the second journey and the process of applying for the conference had brought up the question – were we ‘doing ethnography’? It was a question that Dawn had reflected on in her viva when she had been asked if she would have done anything differently. At the end of the doctoral journey, Dawn knew that she should have appreciated earlier that she was an ethnographer, not simply someone employing techniques of data production.

For Melanie, there remained confusion, was she doing ethnography? Of course, Melanie was embedded in the field, it was ethnography; but she too had been blinded by ‘the technique’ initially. However, the space of the journey, the time to think, engendered an agreement between two researchers, and two mothers, that our qualitative work could be conceptualised in the analogy for motherhood, which is an evolving identity, not a part-time occupation; for we did not simply go into the field and apply a technique – we were ethnographers, even though this privilege was not always fully realised or appreciated.

The emphasis on ‘the technique’, rather than a holistic approach to qualitative inquiry, has arguably been fostered by the critiques of, and inevitably defences of, the ethnographer’s tools. The scrutiny of individual tools, although necessary, can also work as a distraction, in that there is so much emphasis on the tools that the tool box of ethnography becomes invisible. For example, interviewing is a tool of data collection widely used by social researchers and in contemporary research many qualitative studies rely entirely, or primarily, on interview data (Hammersley, 2008). The charge of over reliance has attracted criticism alongside a more radical appraisal of interviews in which the potential for the interview to engender access to information about the social worlds in which informants live is challenged (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002).

More recently, autoethnography has been critiqued as a narcissistic preoccupation (Roth, 2009), lazy (Delamont, 2007, 2009) and antithetical to career progression (Poulos, 2010). Even the recent attractiveness of the visual has moved to a more critical juncture where the researchers are discussing the limitations of participatory visual methods (Packard, 2008) and critiquing the related philosophies, ethics and methodologies in special issues such as the *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* recent edition ‘Problematising Visual Methods’ (Lomax, 2012; Wall et al., 2012).

The problems attributed to one technique of data production are often followed by a call for innovation such as Pink’s (2009) direction to move beyond the visual to other sensory engagement. A new ‘latest and greatest’ to enter into arguments of critique and defence, which may further and refine our approaches, for we should not accept qualitative techniques at face value and risk research quality, but carefully discern their potentialities (Hammersley, 2007). However, at the same time there needs to be an awareness of the inherent dangers of engendering circular quarrels and opposing camps where we could encourage collaboration.

Arguably, autoethnographic experimental pieces can take the reader into a particular social world and convey phenomenon through depictive techniques and textual devices that foreground lived experience and carnal presence; becoming a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2011; Poulos, 2010; Taber, 2010). Arguably, interviews can offer insights into the perspectives that govern behaviour and can be a sound source of witness information about what happens in particular settings or in the world more generally (Hammersley, 2007). Visual techniques may not be 'a panacea for all ethnography's ills' (Ball and Smith, 2001: 313), but arguably they too can move beyond the repertoire of preconceived understandings of place and space, unravel the diversity of urban experience and make the familiar strange and interesting again (Mannay, 2010).

Value can be found, then, in individual techniques, but is this enough? There is an argument to triangulate and consider plurality; however, as Darbyshire et al. (2005) argue, multiple methods in qualitative research are not a guarantee of gaining more insight. Perhaps, then, what is needed is a solid and secure foundation that underpins the research journey and offers the casing for these loose tools so that they become a functional tool kit. For example, in exploring the everyday use of young people's bedroom spaces Lincoln (2012) employs interviews, observations, multi-sensory ethnography and photo-elicitation. Rather than adopting an orthodox ethnographic approach, Lincoln draws on a family of research tools; however, importantly, it is the security of the ethnographic base and her assurance of being an ethnographer that allows Lincoln to produce valuable qualitative research. In relation to such examples of best practice this article poses the question: can we move beyond 'the technique' and draw on wider ethnographic traditions to make the most of our research journeys?

Tomorrow's ethnographers?

This is a particularly salient question when considering the future of qualitative research and the new generations of researchers graduating from universities. Orsini-Jones (2010: 3) reflects on how she was 'taken aback by the levels of anxiety expressed by students with reference to their engagement with the planning of their independent piece of research'; an anxiety we recognise from our experience of the supervision process. However, in a school of social sciences, where students have been involved in two years of research methods training, it is often disappointing to find that their fears and their reluctance to engage in a holistic methodological approach are a product of the lack of epistemic cognition.

At the risk of simplifying a complex concept, the term epistemic cognition relates to an understanding of the nature of knowledge and knowing (Avramides and Luckin, 2007); and this apprehension about, and disengagement with, ontological and epistemological questions is problematic. For example, the experience of supervising social science undergraduate students in their qualitative third year dissertation projects has made us aware of a tendency for students to discuss their proposed techniques of data production/collection without reference to any secure foundation, ethnographic or otherwise. In this way, rather than demonstrating epistemic cognition, they engage in strategies to avoid what Orsini-Jones (2010: 341) refers to as 'troublesome knowledge'.

Students' epistemic cognition has been explored under a variety of conceptual frameworks, including epistemological beliefs, personal epistemology and epistemic resources (Baxter, 2004; Hammer and Elby, 2002; Schommer-Aikins, 2004); and research suggests that students lack a complex understanding of the nature of knowledge (Hofer and Pintrich, 1997). Koro-Ljungberg and Greckhamer (2005: 286) contend that they 'cannot envision rigorous qualitative research without any theoretical connections', but in the technique-led approaches often favoured by emerging researchers these inadequate foundations are evident. In this article, then, we are arguing not only that researchers move beyond 'the technique' but that as tutors we are able to enhance the students' learning and scaffold students' epistemic understanding of their qualitative research projects.

For students, and perhaps for contemporary researchers more generally, it is tempting to rush into the field armed with audio recorder and camera. However, there needs to be an opportunity to reflect on where research is located epistemologically and find ways to make 'troublesome knowledge' less troublesome: so that new researchers can engage usefully with projects of qualitative inquiry. Rather than going into the field with 'the technique', students need to be encouraged to practice rigorous qualitative research. This paper proposes an acknowledgement of ethnographic spaces as one way of addressing this problem; and although there are theoretical differences within ethnographic approaches, which cannot be adequately discussed within the current paper (see Koro-Ljungberg and Greckhamer, 2005), an ethnographic base can be a good starting ground to reflexively engage with epistemic cognition.

Ethnographic spaces

As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 2) contend, 'ethnography plays a complex and shifting role in the dynamic tapestry that the social sciences has become in the twenty-first century'; and perhaps this intricacy has made it more difficult for researchers to recognise their practice as ethnography and realise their place within an ethnographic base. For Hammersley (2005), in basic terms, ethnography is a form of social research that emphasises the importance of studying at first hand what people do and say in particular contexts; however, a more nuanced understanding can be gained by focusing on what ethnographers actually do. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 3) offer a parsimonious explanation of the craft of ethnography as involving fairly lengthy contact with people in everyday, rather than experimental, contexts; which involve participant observation and/or relatively open-ended interviews and the analysis of artefacts and documents associated with their lives.

Ethnographic approaches have many forms – classical, natural, interpretative and critical – which have been explored in detail elsewhere (Atkinson et al., 2001; Koro-Ljungberg and Greckhamer, 2005); however, commonalities can be found. The focus of ethnographic research is generally fairly small-scale to engender in-depth study and the analysis of data involves the interpretation of meanings and their relation to local and global context; a process that for Van Maanen (2009: 16) attempts to put into writing 'what it is like to be somebody else'. The contemporary ethnographer may find themselves involved in a diverse range of research techniques but the definition of ethnography remains rooted in the first-hand exploration of the research setting; as Atkinson et al.

(2001: 5) contend, it is this sense of social exploration and protracted investigation ‘that gives ethnography its abiding and continuing character’.

Ethnographic undertakings, then, are contained in a variety of perspectives; but importantly its researchers are immersed in the field where spaces are never empty – they value the in-between. This immersion engenders the possibility of serendipity not only in relation to the accidental nature of something unexpected, but importantly also the space to draw novel connections and synthesise insights (Fine and Deegan, 1996). In contrast, for new researchers, particularly undergraduates, who plan to conduct an interview between 9am and 10am, often there is a tendency to neglect the importance of the in-between. In this way qualitative research and ethnographic undertakings become reduced to the content of the interview hour in isolation: the transcript tells the tale and the research diary is something that needs to be filled in the night before submission because it is a requirement of dissertation assessment: ethnographic interviewing could offer so much more and equip our students to become more effective qualitative researchers.

For Delamont (2012: 57), what people *do* seems so much more important than anything they can, or do, *say*; and she despairs that too much research uses interviews rather than ethnography. Employing interviews *rather than ethnography* suggests the isolated form of interviewing discussed above but ethnographic interviewing offers an opportunity to use the technique of interviewing within an ethnographic undertaking. As Sherman Heyl (2007: 371) argues, ethnographic interviewing challenges the positivistic framework of interviewer as an autonomous ‘miner’ and she evokes the travel metaphor to position the interview as a ‘wandering together with’, which is characterised by twists, turns and creativity.

Interviews, visual data production and other qualitative techniques are particularly useful when ethnographic fieldwork closes down opportunities for observation. As Lincoln (2012) argues, the home is often seen as a type of sanctuary, which is particularly impervious to forms of anthropological observation and this is why she selected a range of techniques of data production from an ethnographic base. For both authors, the home has been central and interviews and visual methods have been central tools of inquiry. However, drawing from Sherman Heyl (2007) we have been careful to acquire a sense of awareness of our role in the construction of meaning within the interview process, to recognise that dialogue offers only partial knowledge and also to centralise the broader social context and the ways in which this affects participants and the interview process. Situating techniques within an ethnographic frameworks offers up the potential for engendering a more nuanced understanding of social worlds; so why are ethnographic spaces not even considered by some students and graduates of social science?

Closing down ethnographic spaces

It is, perhaps, unfair to frame students’ epistemic cognition as lacking: much academic teaching and learning comes in the form of ‘troublesome knowledge’ (Orsini-Jones, 2010: 3); however, students work hard to gain mastery of theoretical and conceptual material. That this mastery is not transferred into the active process of individual research projects could be tied to the teaching of research methods in lectures and textbooks;

where techniques are divided and the view of conducting a study somewhat compartmentalised. However, there are many excellent research guides and much topic-based teaching is compartmentalised; but students are still able to successfully make the relevant connections.

Perhaps then we need to refocus our lens of analysis to the wider research setting; exploring what Rogoff (2008) refers to as the community plane and interrogating the institutional structure and cultural technologies of intellectual activity. As Mills and Ratcliffe (2012: 147) argue, 'methods and debates over methods are prisms through which to understand the changing social and economic expectations placed upon qualitative research'; and it is important to explore why ethnography may have become less accessible to undergraduate students. What has changed in the sociopolitical and economic landscape that could serve to close down ethnographic spaces? Some insights are offered by turning to anthropology and, in particular, the contemporary position of the discipline in the UK.

In her autobiographical reflection, Delamont (2012) cites her training in anthropology as providing a lifelong commitment to ethnography; similarly for Atkinson (2012: 46 there is 'no real intellectual difference between the best of anthropology and the best of sociology': where both engage with an ethnographic imagination. Although the key strengths of ethnographic practice were nurtured in the traditions of anthropology, ethnography is not simply anthropology, and anthropology is not simply ethnography – we do not make this claim. However, as ethnographic researchers in south Wales, it is useful to look across the border to England and developments in the UK as a whole, as the fate of the anthropological tradition is moulded by force and influence, amongst complex forces and influences that impact on contemporary higher education and academic research in Wales.

Mills and Ratcliffe (2012) provide a sobering insight into the anthropological landscape by conducting interviews with academics that were trained in anthropology departments between 1990 and 2004. Some anthropologists felt that it was counterproductive to identify as 'an anthropologist' in an academic climate of the knowledge economy. Furthermore, there was a consensus that ethnographic practices were being redefined with research design moving away from exploratory and long-term fieldwork towards more tightly defined commercial frames so that the ability to conduct 'real ethnography' was curtailed.

For Mills and Ratcliffe (2012) this reflects the requirements of national and international politics and economies to train knowledge workers within an intense circulation of concepts and commodities. As in business there is a belief that organisational reform drives development and secures competitive advantage but the push for efficiency potentially narrows the opportunities to engender 'the unpredictable, the tangential and the creative': so that all that remains is 'methodological instrumentalism' (Mills and Ratcliffe, 2012: 152).

In our own institution this fear is realised in the emerging, restricted 'diets' of undergraduate programmes where anthropological pedagogies are being extinguished in the social science department – devaluing the ethnographic tradition. The business model sets out to remove inconsistencies and inefficiencies that cannot feed into the instant answers mode of inquiry and consequently destabilises the position of anthropological

approaches. This shift signifies not just a move away from funding ethnographic research and teaching but perhaps also a move away from all forms of in-depth qualitative inquiry and rigorous qualitative research. In this way, students' epistemic cognition can be seen as symptomatic of the wider high-speed, drive-by research climate that has begun to filter into their educational experience.

We cannot turn back the hands of time but we can try to sustain a methodological commitment to the lessons of an ethnographic imagination; and make space to appreciate the unexpected and unpredictable as key moments of insight: and resist the neatness and control of the economic markets that seek to erode rigorous qualitative inquiry. Ethnography is not simply a research technique but 'an open ended, iterative, non-prescriptive vision for social science, where the researcher is encouraged to acknowledge the complexity and unpredictability of the research encounter' (Mills and Ratcliffe, 2012: 155).

These external market contingencies continue to stress the business case for research output and often prevent researchers from indulging in 'slow science', which engenders flexibility and serendipity – as a combination of both chance and intuitive reasoning (Salazar and Rivoal, 2013). The qualitative researcher is expected to condense their time in the field, be reflective without time for reflexivity; and write and publish at speed to keep their ethnographic account relevant before it becomes obsolete and void of economic value: and in research-led teaching such immediacies are communicated to new generations of social scientists. When the wider socioeconomic and political forces begin to restrict both teaching and research, how can we maintain a commitment to ethnography?

Returning to the authors' conversation on the train, yes, we conducted interviews and employed visual methods of data production in our research where participants created representations of their subjective interpretations of their lives; however, this does not mean that our qualitative research was based on narrow individualism. Our training and research in the wider field of critical social psychology has always been a practice that engages with the sociological; we work in frameworks that are psychosocial and socio-cultural. Our writing and conversations with each other then, have reinforced the importance of our time in the field 'waiting' to engage in these research techniques. Waiting time in research is neither empty nor without use; and in times of waiting we often learn new things about our participants and ourselves, but the absence of an ethnographic foundation can mean that these opportunities are not always realised.

In this paper we offer reflections from our research diaries that document this waiting time; and the discoveries of others, and of self, doing ethnography in waiting spaces; which we conceptualise as the 'waiting field'. We realise that in introducing the 'waiting field' this is 'old hat' to many ethnographers, and those engaged in other forms of rigorous qualitative practice, who set out on their research with this appreciation as implicit in their craft. However, our own experience in the field, the recent shifts in higher education, and our work with new generations of student researchers, necessitates a consideration of how to retain the salience of the in-between in contemporary qualitative inquiry. The 'waiting field' is a space in need of attention and appreciation and in the following sections we discuss 'spaces previous to', 'spaces of interruption/disruption' and 'spaces of reflection'; which together form this 'waiting field': a framework that seeks to centralise the value of ethnographic approaches.

Mothers, daughters and the research process

In her four-year, Economic and Social Research Council funded study, Dawn focused on the everyday lives of mothers and daughters residing in a marginalised area in urban south Wales, UK. The research employed visual and narrative techniques of data production (Mannay, 2010) and was interested in the stigma of place, barriers to education, gendered inequalities and the role of social class (Mannay, 2011, 2013a). Melanie worked in similar marginalised Welsh locales and applied psychosocial interviews to explore the subjectivities of working-class mothers in higher education; and the mechanisms and strategies this group of women use in constructing, negotiating and managing identity/subjectivity within university: and the motivation for pursuing academic success despite the emotional and practical conflicts of doing so (Mannay and Morgan, 2013).

For Dawn, although the realisation was somewhat slower than necessary, she was able to embed her research approach directly within the field of ethnography because there were overt links. For example, ethnography expressly facilitates the desire to engage with children's and young people's own views (James, 2001) and visual technologies are highly visible within a long tradition of ethnographic fieldwork (Ball and Smith, 2001). For this reason, in comparing her approach with the work of the ethnographic community, Dawn felt that her study was accepted and welcomed; she was not simply a visualista,³ but an ethnographer.

Arguably, Dawn's reading of images was embedded in auteur theory, which premises the subjectivity of the participant creator (Mannay, 2010; Rose, 2001) rather than a relational materialism. The latter gives equal weighting to human and material elements in the photograph, actively decentring human beings as the starting point; and appreciating the 'situational, contextual and discursively inscribed' nature of social lives (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010: 525). Perhaps in this respect, theoretically, relational materialism is more closely aligned with critical forms of ethnography; acknowledging events of activities and encounters, not accorded the same significance in Dawn's approach: and this is an important point, one to hopefully pursue elsewhere.

However, this article specifically focuses on fieldwork in relation to the conversations with participants in 'the field', common to both authors' work, where the links to ethnographic practices are more immediately apparent. For both researchers interviews took place in 'the field', in participants' homes, in relatively unstructured interviews and conversations. The research was in-depth and interested in the subjective meaning making of participants: compatible with the craft of ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). There was also a commitment to observing the field and going beyond the anthropocentric gaze (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010: 526) so that other matter in reality, innate objects, were accorded significance alongside human interactions and subjectivities.

However, despite these commitments to ethnographic practices, for Melanie, working in a psychosocial framework proved somewhat problematic. Dawn had applied a psychoanalytical lens, along with other approaches, to data analysis, but Melanie's approach was far more embedded within the psychoanalytical traditions that form psychology's 'repressed other' (Parker, 1998). Psychosocial approaches, then, are not fully accepted within psychology and in relation to qualitative research in the social sciences more

widely they are often made invisible. For example, psychosocial research is absent from Denzin's and Lincoln's 1994 edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Midgley, 2006: 214) and this pattern can be seen in more recent texts on qualitative inquiry (see Mannay, 2013b).

This invisibility can act as a large 'No Entry' sign and is perhaps central in understanding why Melanie was not sure if she would be 'allowed' a place at the *Doing Ethnography* workshop; despite her arguably ethnographic attempt to enter the symbolic lifeworld of others and 'ascertain the subjective logic on which it is built and feel, hear and see a little of social life as one's subjects do' (Rock, 2001: 32). This is one more reason why it is important to emphasise the 'waiting field' to highlight both the importance of these waiting spaces for researchers and students in all fields; and the opportunity to both relate to and/or forge acceptance within ethnographic traditions, which can engender opportunities for rigour in all qualitative inquiry.

Pyjamas, wet shoes and man trouble

The following accounts are taken from Dawn's research diaries to illustrate the 'waiting field'. They are 'spaces previous to' because they record the times before the techniques of data collection were applied; that is, the spaces before participants engaged in map-making, collage creation, taking photographs, writing narratives or the related elicitation interviews. They are also 'spaces of reflection' because they were written up as research diary entries and they informed the analysis of 'the meanings, functions and consequences of human actions' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3).

Carla⁴ had forgotten that I was coming over and was sat in her pyjamas watching 'Under the Hammer' with Patricia (her mother). 'I knew I was supposed to be doing something today but I couldn't remember what' said Carla.

For ethnographers working in the field applying participant observation (for example Delamont, 2006; Hurdley, 2013; Renold, 2005; Turgo, 2012), these everyday encounters are a staple and they generate insights into social and cultural practices. However, as Lincoln (2012) contends, the home is often impervious to anthropological observation as the presence of the researcher breaches the traditional boundaries between the public and the private. For this reason, I could not immerse myself within the territory of mothers' and daughters' homes. The 'waiting field' of 'spaces previous to' then becomes particularly important for it allows an opportunity for a glimpse of the familiar practices of home life; of pyjamas, television and the 'companionate relationship' that has been documented in previous studies of family life in south Wales (Barker, 1972: 582): such 'spaces previous to' can also be useful in reflecting on the ways wider social issues impact on everyday lives.

It has been raining and I am waiting for Siân outside her house in the rain and when she arrives we go inside. Before the interview Siân said 'I will have to put the radiators on to dry my shoes as they are soaked through with rain', and she puts her shoes on the radiator. 'I've only got one pair' she explains, 'there is never any money left for me after the kids'. This is the reality of

living on low income, having to walk around in wet shoes. When your income gets higher you forget about these things, the everyday inconveniences and the small miseries. I have walked around with holes in the only shoes I've got, wet, cold feet and bronchitis on top. It becomes normal at the time and is forgotten when you have more shoes than you really need.

For me, observing the routine way in which Siân puts on the radiators to dry her shoes acts as a stark, visual reminder of the everyday inconveniences and the small miseries that make up the reality of living on a low income. Lack of resources and the routines of coping with poverty become normalised and therefore often absent and made invisible in interview talk. In this way 'spaces previous to' again provide an added depth of insight into Siân's everyday life; they provide an opportunity for serendipitous research. 'Spaces of reflection' are also important and writing the research diary acted to reinforce the point that it is all too easy to overlook the materiality of poverty, in fact the mode of writing with pen and paper, as opposed to computer keyboard, elicited a more emotional response to the data: and this 'space of reflection' augmented the possibilities of the data encountered in the fieldwork process.

I call into see Eleri and her neighbour is there and her friend and friend's sister. The neighbour was going to have a 21st birthday party at one of the local working man's clubs and had been giving her father money each week to pay off the room hire and DJ as he goes to the club. When she had called in to check something out she found there was no booking – her father had spent all the money and never paid anything off so the celebration is cancelled. This led to a conversation about the trouble with the men in these women lives; about having to watch that sons don't steal out of your purse and how its good to have a small handbag so you can carry it everywhere with you – to the toilet and you can even sleep with it. Everyone thinks badly of the neighbour's father and the other thieving sons and husbands but the worrying thing is that no one is that shocked or surprised about anything, not even me, it is seen as wrong but still expected, accepted – there is a tacit normalisation that this is what things are like.

This excerpt represents both 'spaces previous to' and 'spaces of reflection'; and the observation was particularly salient because, as I worked with a small sample of 18 participants, the charge that I may have based my research on an unrepresentative set of voices was often levied. This brief participant observation, and further experiences with a similar demographic in the area, were consistent with my interviews with participants around their own gendered relationships and those of their wider family and friendship networks.

In this way, 'spaces previous to' and 'spaces of reflection' provided an opportunity to explore the ways in which the data created with participants, rather than being unusual, was representative of some of the wider experiences of mothers and daughters within this urban locale. However, these spaces do not necessitate a form of demarcation where the 'previous to' and 'reflection' become representations of some pure and suspended research space. All spaces are characterised by fluidity and multiplicity (Massey, 1994), and for many researchers, they do not need to be named. Consequently, we are not pushing methodological boundaries by simply imposing categorisation on the journeys that already characterise rigorous qualitative inquiry. The naming of spaces, and the apparent demarcation, is a strategy in response to the arguments raised earlier in the paper in relation to the ways in which these spaces are currently threatened by invisibility in both teaching and research.

Reflecting on the ‘waiting field’, these types of records were important for capturing aspects of mothers’ and daughters’ everyday lives and my reactions and reflections. The ethnographic experience is accessible within these ‘spaces previous to’, the times where lives carry on before they make room for the intrusion of the data production techniques; however, such spaces do not exist in a vacuum, and even with the removal of the technique the intrusive presence of the researcher remains. It is essential then to recognise the dynamic relationship between the researcher and the researched in the ‘waiting field’.

Arguably, there is always some form of presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) and as Allport (1954: 5) maintains ‘thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of other human beings’. In the ‘waiting field’ notebook and audio recorder may be hidden out of sight but the researcher and research aims, and wider social norms and values are a continuing and constant influence. Perhaps, then, we need to expect, embrace and evaluate such influence; and consider whether the ‘intrusive presence’ of the researcher is ‘a threat, a benefit or simply an inescapable facet of social science research, where meanings are always negotiated, revised and co-constructed’ (Mannay, 2013c: 144).

Enlarging the scope of participant observation cannot eliminate the issue of intrusion but it is important to centralise the ‘waiting field’ as a salient aspect of the research process, which can be equally important as the time spent applying techniques of data production. Acknowledging the ‘waiting field’ offers opportunities to engage with the field in a qualitatively different way that can enable a richer perspective and act to further our understandings. For this reason, ‘spaces previous to’ and ‘spaces of reflection’ should not be neglected in research practices constrained by the drive towards perpetual organisational reform, aimed at gaining advantage in the competitive landscape that is contemporary higher education. The following section will begin to explore the ways in which ‘spaces of interruption/disruption’ are also important in the ‘waiting field’.

Cutting the grass and the mobile phone

The following accounts are taken from Melanie’s research diaries to illustrate the ‘waiting field’. They are ‘spaces of interruption/disruption’ because they intrude on the data production technique of the interview but in the same way as ‘spaces previous to’, such intrusions allow opportunities for fresh insights. The following diary entry refers to Jordan, a 21-year-old student who lives with her mum and brother; and 22-month-old son. Jordan has a very supportive family relationship that can be described as one of ‘joint organisation’ (Bott, 1971: 87), featuring considerable visiting and exchange of services between close-knit, extended, kinship networks, which have been typical of many Welsh working-class everyday lives. It is one of these family visits that intrude on the space of the interview:

During our interview at home her grandparents turned up to cut the grass. Jordan explained that she was in the middle of an interview but the grandparents insisted ‘they wouldn’t be any bother’. As a result the interview took place with the grandparents partially present, going back and forth between the living room and the garden – which really disrupted the interview. My mind went blank.

In this excerpt the visit of the grandparents is initially viewed as an interruption; it is a disruption of the data production technique of the interview – ‘*My mind went blank*’. However, applying a wider ethnographic lens that acknowledges and appreciates this rupture as allowing access to the waiting field, offers an insight into the dynamics of ‘joint organisation’ (Bott, 1971: 87) in this particular family. The grandparents have come to cut the grass, but watching the interactions between family members in these ruptures suggests that the visit is about more than cutting the grass.

Jordan’s grandmother suffers from senile dementia and neither of the grandparents are efficient gardeners; arguably, it would have been quicker and easier for Jordan, her mother or her brother to cut the grass. The visit then is not simply about gardening; it is about being together, being a family and engaging in practices that allow and engender the making and remaking of this relational unit. In this case, the space of interruption has provided an insight into an exchange of services that is not based on rationality or practicality; rather, it is an exchange centred on support and love, and care: the affective practices which ‘hold or contain’ a family, binding them together. In the following reflection we see how ‘spaces of interruption/disruption’ offer insights to the ways in which such making and remaking is also achieved through more negative practices.

Cheryl has accused Tanya of being a bad mother on several occasions because of her attendance at university/placement (even threatening to call social services), particularly when the children are ill. Indeed during my visit Tanya’s home telephone and mobile rang at least a dozen times (it seemed constant). Twice I asked Tanya if she wanted me to stop so she could answer but she said ‘it’s only my sister and she will only have a go at me’. Within the working class post industrial communities in which we live there is often a pervasive cultural attitude: it is ok to do things as a woman as long as it doesn’t interfere with what are considered to be expectations of ‘care’ and understandings of what a good mother is/does. I’m angry.

The ongoing interruptions of the phone calls can also be seen as part of the ‘waiting field’, forming a series of ‘waiting ruptures’, which again disrupt the data production technique of the psychosocial interview. However, these interruptions act to open up a backroom view, providing an insight into an interrupted/disrupted space where the omnipresent, but often hidden, relational and affective aspects of being a working class mature student mother are exposed. Experiencing these interruptions first-hand was important and powerful, the anxiety was palpable and the weight of feeling much heavier than something that could have been generated in a post-hoc and rationalised discussion of the events. In this way ‘spaces of interruption/disruption’ offer a more nuanced understanding of Tanya’s everyday life and family relations, which may not have been centralised so vividly within the interview process.

Melanie experienced first-hand how personal history, subjectivity and affective practice are formed in social relations and the affective routines of everyday family life (Wetherell, 2012), and how the patterning, knitting and knotting together of affective practices; their resistant and contradictory nature, sometimes play out at times as unbearable. Experiencing these relational fields as ‘spaces of interruption/disruption’ provided a clearer understanding of the backdrop to which higher education is conducted and pursued.

Additionally, the feelings of the researcher partially emerge during the 'waiting field' of critical ethnography – *'I'm angry'*. As Walkerdine (1997: 15) argues, social science research 'provides not only ways of seeing others, but ways of understanding ourselves'; and the anger engendered in this 'space of interruption/disruption' is important as it necessitates a recognition of the subjective nature of interpretation; and the emotional life of both researcher and researched. The role of serendipity in guiding the research journey demonstrates how important it is for the researcher to think on their feet in fieldwork and to see diversions from the planned research techniques not as wrong but simply as different (Arora, 2008); 'spaces of interruption/disruption' can potentially open up new opportunities. For all these reasons, the intrusion of the phone calls offers a far more holistic view of the research field and the actors within this field.

Concluding remarks

As we argued in the introduction, the fragmentation of social research methods teaching and the expectations of the neoliberal knowledge economy can engender a focus on applying 'the technique'; which acts to sideline the importance of ongoing traditional ethnographic and reflective engagement. For these reasons, students and new researchers may neglect the 'waiting field' and sacrifice the opportunity to enjoy the richness of ethnographic fieldwork. In response, this paper has presented research diary extracts, which centralise the salience of the 'waiting field' and its potential to produce more useful fieldwork.

Individual techniques are valid methods of inquiry but arguably they need to be embedded in traditional ethnography or forms of vigorous qualitative research that demonstrate epistemic cognition. Emphasising the importance of the 'waiting field', as an opportunity to explore the times where real lives carry on before they make room for the intrusion of the data production techniques, could prove a useful remedial strategy in contemporary research methods training. As Salazar and Rivoal (2013: 180) contend, 'in research, serendipity as such cannot be really "planned", but the conditions facilitating the process can be manipulated'; consequently, in research projects with set remits and timescales antithetical to the anthropological and ethnographic traditions, it becomes pressing to make each moment in the field count.

In short then, the article argues for an appreciation of the potential for discoveries of others, and of self, doing quality ethnography and qualitative research in the 'waiting field'.

The 'waiting field' was presented across accounts from two separate research studies, exploring the research diary as a reflective and reflexive space; and demonstrating the ways in which empirically and methodologically, it is imperative to acknowledge the ethnographic base and be mindful of 'spaces previous to', 'spaces of reflection' and 'spaces of interruption/disruption'. Importantly, the paper has centralised the need to work with a 'family of methods' (Lincoln, 2012) from a strong ethnographic base. However, where researchers or students feel that their philosophical principles cannot sit within an ethnographic approach or that there is a large 'No Entry' sign that prevents their acceptance, here perhaps there can be an engagement with the 'waiting field'; as an ideological bridge that allows movement beyond 'the technique' so that we can make the most of our research journeys.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the participants who made this article possible, and also Professor John Fitz, Professor Emma Renold and Dr Bella Dicks for supervising Dawn's research project and Professor Valerie Walkerdine and Dr Gabrielle Ivinson for supervising Melanie's research project. We would also like to thank the organisers of the '5th Economic and Social Research Council Methods Festival' and the 'Doing Ethnography' symposium, where we began to consolidate some of the ideas presented in this paper. We are grateful to Dr Sara Delamont and the reviewers for their encouragement and invaluable comments on earlier drafts of this paper; and the editorial team at *Qualitative Research* for their support.

Funding

The two doctoral research projects from which this article is drawn, titled *Mothers and Daughters on the Margins: Gender, Generation and Education* by Dawn Manney and *Class, Motherhood and Mature Studentship: a Psychosocial Exploration* by Melanie Morgan, were both funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Notes

1. The National Centre for Research Methods organised the '5th Economic and Social Research Council Research Methods Festival'. The Festival took place on 2–5 July 2012 at St Catherine's College in Oxford. The event aimed to engage social scientists across a wide range of disciplines and sectors and stimulate interest, raise issues, highlight opportunities and showcase new developments in relation to social research methods.
2. The 'Doing Ethnography' symposium was held on 28 August 2012 in the University of Liverpool Management School. The event brought together doctoral students and early career researchers engaged in ethnographic work. The session featured contributions from Professor John van Maanen and the co-editors of the *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*.
3. Visualista was a term used by Eric Margolis to address an audience of visual researchers at the 2006 International Visual Sociological Association conference in Urbino.
4. The names employed in this paper are fictitious and were chosen as pseudonyms to maintain participants' anonymity.

References

- Allport GW (1954) The historical background of modern social psychology. In: Lindzey G (ed) *Handbook of Social Psychology*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Arora V (2008) What is sacred about that pile of stones at Mt Tendong? Serendipity, complicity and circumstantial activism in the production of anthropological knowledge of Sikkim, India. In: *Knowing How to Know: Fieldwork and the Ethnographic Present*. Oxford: Berghahn, 130–150.
- Atkinson P (2012) Accidental anthropologist, sceptical sociologist, reluctant methodologist. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 38: 330–50.
- Atkinson P and Coffey A (2002) Revisiting the relationship between participant observation and interviewing. In: Gubrium JF and Holstein JA (eds) *Handbook of Interview Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 801–814.
- Atkinson P, Coffey A, Delamont S, Lofland J and Lofland L (eds) (2001) *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Avramides K and Luckin R (2007) Towards the design of a representational tool to scaffold students' epistemic understanding of psychology in higher education. *Proceedings of the Workshop on AIED Applications for Ill-Defined Domains at the 13th International Conference on Artificial Intelligence in Education*, Los Angeles, CA.

- Ball MS and Smith GWH (2001) Technologies of realism? Ethnographic use of photography and film. In: Atkinson P, Coffey A, Delamont S, Lofland J and Lofland L (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: Sage, 302–320.
- Barker D (1972) Keeping close and spoiling in a south Wales town. *Sociological Review* 20(4): 569–590.
- Baxter MB (2004) Evolution of a constructivist conceptualization of epistemological reflection. *Educational Psychologist* 39(1): 31–42.
- Bott E (1971) *Family and Social Network: Roles, Norms, and External Relationships in Ordinary Urban Families*. London: Tavistock.
- Darbyshire P, MacDougall C and Schiller W (2005) Multiple methods in qualitative research with children: more insight or just more? *Qualitative Research* 5(4): 417–436.
- Delamont S (2006) The smell of sweat and rum: teacher authority in capoeira classes. *Ethnography and Education* 1(2): 161–175.
- Delamont S (2007) Arguments against autoethnography. *Qualitative Researcher* 4: 2–4.
- Delamont S (2009) The only honest thing. *Ethnography and Education* 4(1): 51–64.
- Delamont S (2012) Milkshakes and convertibles: an autobiographical reflection. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 39: 51–69.
- Doloriert CH and Sambrook S (2011) Accommodating an autoethnographic PhD: the tale of the thesis, the viva voce and the traditional business school. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 4(4): 582–615.
- Fine GA and Deegan J (1996) Three principles of Serendip: insight, chance, and discovery in qualitative research. *Qualitative Studies in Education* 9(4): 434–447.
- Goffman E (1959) *The Presentation of Self on Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Pelican.
- Hammer D and Elby A (2002) On the form of a personal epistemology. In: Hofer BK and Pintrich PR (eds) *Personal Epistemology: The Psychology of Beliefs about Knowledge and Knowing*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 169–190.
- Hammersley M (2005) Ethnography: potential, practice, and problems. *Qualitative Research Methodology Seminar Series*. ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, University of Southampton.
- Hammersley M (2007) The issue of quality in qualitative research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 30(3): 287–305.
- Hammersley M (2008) *Questioning Qualitative Inquiry*. London: Sage.
- Hammersley M and Atkinson P (2007) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (3rd ed.). London: Taylor and Francis.
- Hofer BK and Pintrich PR (1997) The development of epistemological theories: beliefs about knowledge and knowing and their relation to learning. *Review of Educational Research* 67(1): 88–140.
- Hultman K and Lenz Taguchi H (2010) Challenging anthropocentric analysis of visual data: a relational materialist methodological approach to educational research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 23(5): 525–542.
- Hurdley R (2013) *Home, Materiality, Memory and Belonging: Keeping Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- James A (2001) Ethnography in the study of children and childhood. In: Atkinson P, Coffey A, Delamont S, Lofland J and Lofland L (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: Sage, 246–257.
- Koro-Ljungberg M and Greckhamer T (2005) Strategic turns labelled ‘ethnography’: from description to openly ideological production of cultures. *Qualitative Research* 5(3): 285–306.
- Lincoln S (2012) *Youth Culture and Private Space*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lomax H (2012) Shifting the focus: children’s image-making practices and their implications for analysis. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* (Special Issue: Problematising Visual Methods) 35(3): 227–234.

- Mannay D (2010) Making the familiar strange: can visual research methods render the familiar setting more perceptible? *Qualitative Research* 10(1): 91–111.
- Mannay D (2011) Taking refuge in the branches of a guava tree: the difficulty of retaining consenting and non-consenting participants' confidentiality as an indigenous researcher. *Qualitative Inquiry* 17(10): 962–964.
- Mannay D (2013a) 'Keeping close and spoiling': exploring the significance of 'home' for family relationships and educational trajectories in a marginalised estate in urban south Wales. *Gender and Education* 25(1): 91–107.
- Mannay D (2013b) Review article. Nollaig Frost (ed) *Qualitative Research Methods in Psychology* (2011) and Peter Banister et al. *Qualitative Methods in Psychology: A Research Guide* (2011, 2nd ed.). *Qualitative Research* 13(2): 242–244.
- Mannay D (2013c) 'Who put that on there... why why why?': power games and participatory techniques of visual data production. *Visual Studies* 28(2): 136–146.
- Mannay D and Morgan M (2013) Anatomies of inequality: considering the emotional cost of aiming higher for marginalised, mature, mothers re-entering education. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* 19(1): 57–75.
- Massey D (1994) *Class, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Midgley N (2006) Psychoanalysis and qualitative psychology: complementary or contradictory paradigms? *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(3): 213–231.
- Mills D and Ratcliffe R (2012) After method? Ethnography in the knowledge economy. *Qualitative Research* 12(2): 147–164.
- Orsini-Jones M (2010) Shared spaces and 'secret gardens': the troublesome journey from undergraduate students to undergraduate scholars via PebblePad. In: O'Donoghue J (ed) *Technology Supported Environment for Personalised Learning: Methods and Case Studies*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 341–363.
- Packard J (2008) I'm gonna show you what it's really like out here: the power and limitation of participatory visual methods. *Visual Studies* 23(1): 63–76.
- Parker I (1998) Against postmodernism: psychology in cultural context. *Theory & Psychology* 8(5): 621–647.
- Pink S (2009) *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Poulos CN (2010) Transgressions. *International Review of Qualitative Research* 3(1): 67–88.
- Renold E (2005) *Girls, Boys and Junior Sexualities: Exploring Childrens' Gender and Sexual Relations in the Primary School*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Rock P (2001) Symbolic interactionism and ethnography. In: Atkinson P, Coffey A, Delamont S, Lofland J and Lofland L (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: Sage, 26–38.
- Rogoff B (2008) Observing sociocultural activity on three planes: participatory appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship. In: Hall K, Murphy P and Soler J (eds) *Pedagogy and Practice: Culture and Identities*. London: Sage.
- Rose G (2001) *Visual Methodologies*. London: Sage.
- Roth W-M (2009) Auto/ethnography and the question of ethics. *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 10(1). Available at: <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0901381>
- Salazar NB and Rivoal I (eds) (2013) Contemporary ethnographic practice and the value of serendipity. *Social Anthropology* 21(2): 178–185.
- Schommer-Aikins M (2004) Explaining the epistemological belief system: introducing the embedded systemic model and coordinated research approach. *Educational Psychologist* 39(1): 19–29.
- Sherman Heyl B (2007) Ethnographic interviewing. In: Atkinson P, Coffey A, Delamont S, Lofland J and Lofland L (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography* (pbk ed.). London: Sage, 369–383.

- Taber N (2010) Institutional ethnography, autoethnography, and narrative: an argument for incorporating multiple methodologies. *Qualitative Research* 10(5): 5–25.
- Turgo NN (2012) A ‘balikbayan’ in the field: scaling and (re)producing insider’s identity in a Philippine fishing community. *Qualitative Research* 12(6): 666–685.
- Van Maanen J (2009) Ethnography then and now. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal* 1(1): 13–21.
- Walkerdine V (1997) *Daddy’s Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture*. London: Macmillan.
- Wall K, Hall E and Woolner P (2012) Visual methodology: previously, now and in the future. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* (Special Issue: Problematising Visual Methods) 35(3): 223–226.
- Wetherell M (2012) *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding*. London: Sage.

Author biographies

Dawn Mannay is a Lecturer in Social Science (Psychology) at Cardiff University and also held the posts of Associate Lecturer at the Open University and Visiting Lecturer at the University of Newport; as well as being involved with the Women Making a Difference Program. Her research interests revolve around class, education, gender, geography, generation, national identity, violence and inequality and she employs participatory, visual, creative and narrative methods in her work with communities.

Melanie Morgan is a doctoral student studying at Cardiff University’s School of Social Sciences. Her research interests revolve around social class, higher education, gender and psychosocial research methods. Her current research explores the subjectivities of working-class mothers in higher education in the geographical area of south Wales, UK.