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RESEARCH

ENGAGING WITH POLICY, PRACTICE AND PUBLICS

Intersectionality and Impact

EDITED BY

SARAH MARIE HALL AND RALITSA HITEVA

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Contents

Notes on contributors	v
Foreword: Intersectionality in publics, policy and practice <i>Ruth Ibegbuna</i>	vii
one Engaging with policy, practice and publics: an introduction <i>Sarah Marie Hall and Ralitsa Hiteva</i>	1
Part I Encounters with difference	19
two Dwarfism expectations: intersections of gender, disability and (hetero)sexuality in engagements with potential participants <i>Erin Pritchard</i>	21
three 'You're not from 'round 'ere, are you?' Class, accent and dialect as opportunity and obstacle in research encounters <i>Sarah Marie Hall</i>	41
Part II Experts and expertise	59
four Participants as experts in their own lives: researching in post-industrial, intergenerational and post-colonial space <i>Michael Richardson</i>	61
five Encounter(ing) spaces and experts: negotiating stakeholder relations within infrastructure research <i>Ralitsa Hiteva</i>	79
six Theorising transdisciplinary research encounters: energy and Illawarra, Australia <i>Gordon Waitt</i>	99

Part III	Research, power and institutions	119
seven	Nomadic positionings: a call for critical approaches to disability policy in Canada <i>Pamela Moss and Michael J. Prince</i>	121
eight	Critic, advocate, enforcer: the multiple roles of academics in public policy <i>John Paul Catungal</i>	135
nine	Conclusions: encountering and building on difference <i>Ralitsa Hiteva and Sarah Marie Hall</i>	155
Index		165

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Foreword: Intersectionality in publics, policy and practice

Ruth Ibegbuna

It's August 2011 and the UK is reeling from waves of riots across key cities. Civil disobedience and urban unrest are growing, triggered by the killing of Mark Duggan in London and provoking anger in other cities and widespread fear. The prime minister is outraged, ordinary people are panicking and the media is frenziedly trying to engage the rioters directly with the question: Why are they actually rioting?

Vox pops on the news show that citizens are appalled, labelling the young rioters as 'feral rats'. It's *them* versus *us* and we can't allow them to feel they can prosper.

As the CEO of a children's charity in Manchester, UK, I found my phone ringing off the hook: eager journalists wanting the first scoop and asking if I could connect them with young black disaffected teenagers who could shine a light on the cause of their discontent. The young people became increasingly exasperated and then bemused. The journalists failed to understand that there was not one cause of the riots. That the rioters did not all share a single story. That to be a young black person in an urban location didn't mean that their lives and challenges and threats and talents were identical. Society was bellowing at black boys for answers and expecting an informative urban chorus in response.

What the journalists couldn't grasp and the young people had no vocabulary for was that there were multiple and varied factors at play that drove different young people out onto the streets those nights. For some it was class, for some gender and race, for some previous negative interactions with the criminal justice system. The media didn't have the time or energy to fully explore such nuances and so the newspapers blazed with lurid headlines of 'Broken Britain', 'Absentee Fathers' and 'Lawless Thugs'. The public saw the law come down hard on these anti-social, dangerous youths who threatened the social order and we watched as rioters received rapid so-called justice and disproportionately harsh sentences.

The UK dealt with the mass of rioters as if it knew their motivations. We didn't know their stories and, frankly, we didn't care. The other factors that drove young people out onto the streets were left unwritten and so we saw the rioters only as a seething mass of malcontent black youth.

If we think and feel that young black men are the enemy, we will ensure that they are kept on the periphery, a place where they can be warily observed by civilised society, with the expectation that they are a potential threat. The very action of labelling communities of people, without any appreciation of the intersecting factors that drive behaviour, means that our understanding of actions is cloudy and often plain incorrect.

In my work as a teacher previously, I would watch with horror as young black pupils were quickly classified as aggressive and easily excluded. Often, by the end of a long and painful process, these pupils *were* aggressive and abusive and this was because their complaints of mistreatment had fallen on deaf ears time and time again. Rather than spend time unpicking the patterns of school exclusions and researching what the factors that led some pupils to be disproportionately excluded and expelled, it was easier to believe that black pupils were somehow inherently more likely to be angry and disruptive and to exhibit anti-social behaviours. This was despite the fact that other black children in the same schools did well, worked hard

and achieved good grades. This was simply taken as proof that the school clearly didn't have racist policies and procedures.

Further breakdowns would indicate that middle-class black children were very rarely excluded; in fact, their exclusion rates were significantly lower than those of their white counterparts. However, black pupils on free school meals had a far higher level of exclusion. Finally, those pupils in the lower academic sets faced the highest exclusion levels in the school community. So, if you were a black, poor, low-ability student in the school, your rates of school exclusion were eye-wateringly high. This is not a story about *all* black pupils and to see it as such reduces the significance of the other intersecting factors.

It is of course untrue to say there have been no attempts to address this unsophisticated approach to understanding societal challenges, but in general they have failed. Many decision makers see themselves as separate from the community. This means that their interactions with 'real people' are superficial; they are studying people as objects, as opposed to engaging in authentic exchanges of knowledge that allow the time and space for depth and meaning.

There have been countless 'community consultations' in the UK over the years, usually driven by policy makers or academics, which are often an appalling waste of time. There are predictable set pieces – Post-it notes, board pens, warm-up activities, earnest listening faces of the facilitators, gushing thanks for the participants – that are unable to shake the absolute knowledge that the whole process will lead to the outcome that has been outlined long before the group was convened. That the well-meaning researchers and patient community members have given up time to share space and spend time is irrelevant as they know little of each other's lives, needs and motivations. Therefore the connection is fleeting and often transactional, rather than a deeper, shared understanding of the issues and solutions.

Rarely do these institutions consider themselves as part of the same community, even when the university or police station is

within the vicinity. Instead ‘the community’ is posited as one homogeneous group that share the same perspective and outlook, to be studied and to be steered. As other chapters in this book also highlight, it is simply othered from the researching institution, which does not have the appropriate mechanisms for understanding and engaging the multilayered views of the individuals that make up the community.

Working with young people, I despair at the lack of understanding of the workings of intersectionality and of how multiple factors combine to magnify their levels of disadvantage. Working for years in predominantly black areas and talking about working-class communities, I could see confusion in people’s faces as, surely, the working classes are white? To see a young Pakistani boy refer to himself proudly as working class or to have a young, gay black man from Moss Side define himself as ‘gifted and talented’ can confound those seeking simple solutions. So much effort was wasted trying to demonstrate that the impacts of class and race, age and sexuality, and geography are going to make professional success very difficult for a young, gay, working-class Asian woman living in Middlesbrough – but she’s there and as a society we need to do more to fully see, appreciate and nurture her.

We have watched with pride as young people repeatedly refuse to be categorised by oversimplistic labelling that doesn’t allow for the multifaceted and fascinating lives they live; whether this is redefining gender classifications or eschewing reductionist, outdated notions around professional success.

The biggest problem civil society organisations face around these issues is linked to funding. Those with money and power have not the time, energy or inclination to assess the impact of intersectionality. Funders have specific and often simplistic themes, or communities that they wish to fund. Are you BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic)? Are you disabled? Are you LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer)? Are you disadvantaged? Go online, find and tick your box,

and make your application. There is very little space for the richer conversations about what happens when multiple factors interact and how we deal with those who face a number of factors that affect the way in which society interacts with them as well as their life chances. Where is their tick box? Where is their funding?

My current work at the Roots Programme illustrates this well. Roots is a radical new initiative that believes that our society benefits if we bring together people with hugely different lives in an authentic and meaningful way. We take people from different walks of life and have them meet and eat, and talk about and debate matters that affect us all. We unite them and build understanding around their differences and, importantly, their similarities.¹

At Roots, we have often had frustrating conversations with funders and decision makers. We're speaking at cross purposes. While they – perhaps understandably – want to identify a 'disadvantaged community' and see a tangible metric that shows how we will better their lives, we are looking to build bridges across different divides in society with authenticity, equality and open-mindedness at their core. This is also an emerging and overarching theme from the chapters in this book: of the need to raise awareness of and to acknowledge the gaps and tensions between different stakeholders, and to make recommendations as to how to move forward towards genuine and meaningful engagement.

While at the Roots Programme we focus on facilitating exchanges with people from different wealth and class backgrounds, our intersectional approach makes fostering connections richer, more impactful and, in fact, easier. We have, for example, cultural exchange partners from vastly different wealth backgrounds both of whom are dealing with the many and varied challenges of their large families. We have another pair who, while living at different levels of comfort, both come from immigrant backgrounds. We ask our participants from the outset about their views, their lives, their

challenges and their possible barriers – all without judgement but to ensure that we have a rounded view of the whole person in front of us.

As long as society can create communities of ‘others’, we ignore the commonalities of their human experiences. That is not to ignore the impact of privilege across those intersections, but to acknowledge that we cannot disregard the grey areas of human experience if we want to make a more cohesive society.

For those who are privileged enough to have been granted time and access to work alongside communities, learn from them and help shape policy and future practice, see your time as an opportunity for deep engagement. Spend quality time in communities and allow people to know you, to question you, to learn about you and to trust that you care about their lives. Involve people in your work and make the effort to return when your research is complete, to share your findings and to allow residents to feel they are a part of the final achievement. Share your skills, your resources and your networks with people, and they will be more ready to share their lives with you.

Without the extra work taken to ensure the creation of authentic relationships, confidence is eroded, communities lose trust, communication deteriorates and we are destined to repeat the same mistakes and ask the same unanswerable one-dimensional questions.

Note

¹ For more see <https://rootsprogramme.org>

ONE

Engaging with policy, practice and publics: an introduction

Sarah Marie Hall and Ralitsa Hiteva

This book develops critical and original perspectives on research engagement and impact. It uses first-hand accounts from social scientists to unpack and highlight the intersectionality of their work and experiences in engaging with policy, industry, civil society and other academics. With a personal and reflexive take on experience and the politics of research engagement, including notions of social difference, power and inequality, we respond to the growing agenda and the desire of academic research for real-world influence. Our aims for this collection are, then, to provide critical reflexivity to understandings and applications of research engagement and impact strategies, within academia and with other stakeholders, namely policy makers, industry and civil society. In this introductory chapter we outline the contemporary landscapes of impact and engagement; identify important spaces of research engagement and encounter; outline key ideas about intersectionality, identity and positionality; and provide a taster of the themed sections and chapters that follow.

Contemporary landscapes of impact and engagement

Academic engagement with non-academic groups and actors – such as policy makers, industry, charities and activist groups, communities and the public – is arguably more important now than ever before. From public engagement activities such as talks, exhibitions and festivals, to the co-production of knowledge for and with interest groups, the imperative for real-world influence has moved from being an ideal in academic research to something of a normative expectation (also see Banks et al, 2019; Hardill and Mills, 2013). Indeed, such engagement, or rather ‘impact’ on industry, policy making and public opinion, is increasingly being formalised, as another marker of esteem and credibility upon which academic institutions, their staff and increasingly students are promoted, measured and ranked. This volume, which sometimes perceives such engagements to be good and responsible research practice, and at other times to be a form of top-down governance, generates timely and critical discussion about their importance for contemporary academics.

In the UK context – from which the editors and a number of contributors write – the impact agenda occupies a central place in the contemporary academy. Whether it is called ‘social responsibility’, ‘pathways to impact’, ‘public engagement’, ‘outreach’ or ‘knowledge transfer’, this is an agenda that covers the physical sciences, humanities, social sciences and arts. During the time in which we have been collating this book, the role of impact has become even more imperative. In 2019 the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK – the exercise by which universities, departments and staff have their work reviewed by a panel, which then determines access to government funding (also see Evans, 2016; Hardill and Baines, 2009; Rogers et al, 2014) – announced a number of key changes that resulted in even greater weight being attributed to impact. Where in REF 2014 outputs, impact and research environment were weighted at 65 per cent, 20 per

cent and 15 per cent respectively, in REF 2021 the weightings of the three elements have been revised to outputs at 60 per cent, impact at 25 per cent and environment at 15 per cent (REF, 2019, p 14). While other countries have measures for assessing the work of academics and institutions – with moves to institutionalise impact in Australia and New Zealand (Roa et al, 2009; Rogers et al, 2014), and a long tradition in India of applied research (Srinivasan and Kasturirangan, 2014) – the UK REF assessment is by far the most comprehensive and has the most developed means of evaluating impact and research engagement.

This is not to say that impact is only instrumental. On the contrary, many academics feel a sense of responsibility to promote their findings and learning beyond the confines of ‘the ivory tower’, to have a positive influence on the communities and environments with which and for whom they research (see Banks et al, 2019; Evans, 2016; Fuller, 2008; Hogg et al, 2014; Pain et al, 2011). Nonetheless, these changing agendas and aspirations also have real-world influence, in both a personal and a professional sense, which shapes how researchers approach their subjects, their findings and communication methods, and affects who we are and how we do research. Rogers et al (2014, p 6) describe this as the ‘anxieties relating to impact [which] are a particular sort of preoccupation bound up with power-relations and [how] there is a need for critical reflexivity here in relation to class, gender and other axes of identity’. As such, there is politics at play within research engagement, raising questions about who and what it involves and excludes, and indeed the personal politics of these extra-research encounters. These dynamics are of key concern within this book.

Given the role of multiple actors involved in engagement activities, this volume is therefore aimed at and beyond academic scholars, to include a wide array of those working and engaging with industry, civil society, policy makers and the general public. The politics of impact and impact making are

not limited to researchers and academia. There are multiple and overlapping reasons for an increased interest in impact across society. With an increased push towards inter- and multidisciplinary research as an area in which REF 2021 includes ‘additional measures’ to assess (REF, 2019, p 13), scholars too have been encouraged to work beyond the silos of their disciplinary fields and institutions. Industry partners are also now typically enrolled as collaborators on research bids, and commonly sponsor postgraduate research, through scholarships or doctoral awards (see Hogg et al, 2014). Civil society organisations and charities likewise partner and collaborate in research projects, as well as being benefactors of research findings, using such relations to fund their work and leverage their influence. We expect this to be increasingly the case in contexts where austerity cuts to local government in the UK, Europe and the US have, over the last ten years, drastically reduced income streams for many local charities as well as local councils (see Bannister and Hardill, 2013; Hall, 2017). Of more interest to us in this volume are the politics of impact, including the often invisible spaces of engagement and encounter where impact is practised and performed.

Indeed, there are concerns about how the notion of impact is being applied and transported from the physical, environmental and engineering sciences with little regard for how the social sciences might differ in their impactful activities. Srinivasan and Kasturirangen (2014) hit on this when they describe how ‘existing conceptions of academic impact treat knowledge as a product akin to software. Unfortunately, unlike software, established ethical, epistemic and pragmatic frameworks change slowly’. Moreover, it is not only the possible *type and scale* of social science research impact that differ – perhaps less so at the economic and macro levels, but within communities and social and cultural networks (see Banks et al, 2019; Pain et al, 2011). It is also the *pace and time* at which this change might occur, often unfolding gradually, with careful and sensitive negotiations (see Evans, 2016).

This can in turn have social implications. As Roa et al (2009, p 233–4) explain, in the New Zealand context much effort and time have been invested into building trusting relations with Maori communities: ‘this slower pace was needed to ensure that the coproduction of knowledge was ethical, accurate, authentic, trusted and used’. Metrics for measuring research outputs and impact can have the effect of turning off researchers from engaging with indigenous communities and, arguably, communities more generally, in favour of chasing quicker results. Policy makers are often sought-after stakeholder groups for engagement, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines and tend to be more open to engaging with academics. However, they often seek input from academics in the form of evidence to justify policy decisions, strengthening existing hierarchical structures and power asymmetries (see Hardill and Baines, 2009).

Spaces of research engagement and encounter

To explore this potentially vast subject, in this volume we open up the black box of spaces of research engagement and encounter. Everyday lives are made up of numerous forms of engagement and encounter, in the spaces of home, work, leisure, education, travel and so on. Spaces of research engagement and encounter then refer to the social and physical spaces in which these interactions may occur. Here we find that geographical debates and writings are particularly pertinent, a geographical approach being one that engages with and unpacks social relationships and processes across space, time and scale.

Encounter spaces encompass a range of formal and informal opportunities for researchers and other stakeholders to interact and learn from each other, usually outside a purely academic setting, such as at workshops, exhibitions, presentations and meetings; in fieldwork; via media; or in person. We cover

some of these and many more examples in this volume. But spaces of engagement and encounter mean more than this, for everyday research interactions in the name of impact themselves also lead to the development of social spaces; of connection and similarity, tension and difference. Far from being neutral or purely enabling, they play a key (albeit largely hidden) role in shaping engagement and impact for both academic and non-academic stakeholders.

Encounters are argued to be founded upon the meeting of difference, and a range of literatures have explored how social differences and proximities can shape everyday socio-spatial interactions (see Valentine, 2008; Valentine et al, 2015). However, not all encounters hold the same meaning, intensity or resonance. Some may be fleeting and momentary (for example Laurier and Philo, 2006), others prolonged or repeated (for example Hall, 2014). In this book we explore research encounters and engagements that take place in a bid for change, what Valentine (2008, p 325) calls ‘meaningful contact’: ‘contact that actually changes values and translates beyond the specifics of the individual moment’. Latimer and López Gómez (2019, p 251) also write of important and intimate ‘moments of “being moved” and “moving” within ‘knowledge-making work’, in which we would include research engagements and encounters. And in writings on intersectionality, to which we shall soon return, there is likewise considered a need ‘to take account of the social and affective relations of encounter and engagement’ (Lewis, 2013, p 887).

We build on personal experiences as more than anecdotes, to show how spaces shaped and created by research encounters can offer a window into structural and institutional inequality, power and privilege. Awareness of such personal politics is particularly important for ethical impact work (see Evans, 2016). As Rogers et al (2014, p 4) identify, ‘impact is messy unpredictable and may also involve risks to the communities and individuals we research, especially if academics are not

fully cognisant of the effects of their activities'. Furthermore, we also reveal how encounter spaces, and the experiences and moments they shape or are shaped by, play an important role in how researchers communicate with other actors, groups and stakeholders, how they are in turn perceived, and the nature of these interactions. In doing so we lift the veil of the tremendous emotional and embodied labour involved in navigating and performing in encounter spaces with stakeholders (see also Hardill and Mills, 2013) and hope to bring it to the attention of researchers, funders, policy makers, industry partners and civil society, as co-producers and parties vested in impact.

Added to this, the social positioning and identity of researchers – in terms of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, age, (dis)ability, faith, caste and so on, and where they intersect – has an impact on how spaces of engagement and encounter are created, maintained and experienced, and on the type, form and content of knowledge co-produced in such spaces and moments. Here again we are drawn to the work of geographers, for their critical understandings of difference, power and inequality across and within space (see Hardill and Mills, 2013).

For instance, Evans (2016, p 214) notes how her 'positionality as a white female academic based in the global North, occasionally caring for my disabled mother ... my skills and experience, among other factors, had a crucial influence on my interest in care', and her resulting impact work. This volume explores in greater detail the role and identities of researchers in spaces of engagement and encounter between academia, industry, policy (makers) and society in terms of intersectionality, social identity and difference. Our aim is to open up for critical examination spaces of interactions between academia, policy makers, industry and society by unpacking the processes of engagement and encountering. We do this by providing a range of real-life examples of such encounter

spaces and the intersectionalities therein, as described in the next section.

Intersectionality, identity and positionality

The application of ideas about intersectionality is at the heart of the critical discussions contained in this collection. Key writings by black, critical race and feminist scholars that developed theories of intersectionality, including Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, bell hooks and Leslie McCall, focused predominantly on the interconnections of gender, race and class. As Brah and Phoenix (2004, p 76) elucidate, the concept of intersectionality signifies ‘the complex, irreducible, varied and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation ... intersect in historically specific contexts’. Scholars widely recognise ‘the extraordinary contribution to feminist scholarship that intersectionality has made’ (Lewis, 2013, p 871), although its adoption and application draw much further than this. As theory, analytic and method (see Lewis, 2013; McCall, 2005; Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina, 2018; Windsong, 2018), intersectionality is increasingly being enrolled within policy, community and activist projects as a means of offering a more critical approach to how issues are named and framed (Crenshaw, 2018). Examples of policy application to date include the uneven impacts of austerity (Hall et al, 2017), and the role of intersectionality in equitable population health outcomes (Bauer, 2014). Here, intersectionality remains committed to the understanding ‘that experience could be at the ground of theory making’ (Lewis, 2013, p 873), through intersecting identities of ‘intercategorical complexity’ (McCall, 2005 p 1773; also see Windsong, 2018).

In addition, Crenshaw (1991) makes the case for multiple forms of intersectionality: structural, political and representational:

‘Structural intersectionality is about the ways in which black women have to deal with “multi-layered and routinized forms of domination”’ (Crenshaw, 1991: 1245) such as those associated with housing inequalities or employment practices. Political intersectionality focuses on the ways in which black women belong to at least two marginalized groups and so often have to engage with different political agendas. Representational intersectionality focuses on how images of women of colour – and debates about these – tend to overlook the intersectional interests of such women. (Hopkins, 2017, p 938)

Together, the chapters in this collection speak to all three of these forms, by exploring the institutional and social settings of research engagements (structural intersectionality), the meeting of intersecting webs of power within these settings (political intersectionality) and the voices and experiences that become silenced or amplified as a result (representational intersectionality).

However, we also aim to expand upon these ideas both regarding representation and application. By this we refer to recent efforts to expand upon the original intersectional triad of gender, race and class by drawing also upon discourses and experiences of disability (Grech and Soldatic, 2015) or age and generation (Hopkins and Pain, 2007) – what O’Neill Gutierrez and Hopkins (2015, p 386) term ‘different constellations of intersections’. This is by no means to suggest that gender, race and class are not central – far from it – but that to understand the contexts and effects of research encounters, a more comprehensive approach may be needed. We take heed of anxieties about the fetishisation and fashioning of intersectional theory (see Lewis, 2013), initially developed largely by black female American activists and now woven into white European feminism and feminist agendas, also known as ‘white washing’ (Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina, 2018, p 550). We

acknowledge that an intersectional approach is not simply a case of adding ingredients and stirring (Bonds, 2013), nor can its core meaning be appropriately addressed if the discussion of race is removed, but rather it requires thoughtful and engaged analytical processes. All the authors within this collection thus apply the theory with the greatest regard and recognition of these important and inextricable origins and motivations.

We also seek to develop ideas of intersectionality as it is applied, as more than a theory or empirical project but also as a form of praxis. This volume therefore speaks to developing ideas and dialogue across the social sciences that take a critical perspective of the relationship between policy and research, but with an original focus on the individuals and the personal experiences of those who lead such dialogue. In particular, it maps out how the liminal space between policy and research, as spaces of difference and engagement, are not by any means apolitical. In doing so, we address Valentine's (2008, p 332) call to

think more carefully, therefore, about which types of encounters are sought, and by whom, and which are avoided, and by whom. ... we need to pay more attention to the *intersectionality* of multiple identities (not just to ethnicity), and particularly to consider which particular identifications these purposeful encounters with difference are approached through, and how these encounters are systematically embedded within intersecting grids of power.

Indeed, there have been more recent and ongoing calls for research 'to advance how intersectionality is theorised, applied in research and used in practice' (Hopkins, 2017, p 942), and 'to work collaboratively with practitioners to do so' (Hopkins, 2017, p 943; see also Bauer, 2014; Hopkins and Pain, 2007).

As a burgeoning area of academic attention, bringing together these ideas around intersectionalities and research engagement can raise poignant if not complex debates. For instance, in their observations regarding collaborative funded PhD scholarships (where an academic institution partners with a business, charity or governmental partner), Macmillan and Scott (2003) identify the role of these intersecting grids of power within doctoral research, particularly as they pertain to issues of ownership, access and confidentiality, and can put extreme pressures on research relations. For instance, a ‘key concern’ for Hogg et al (2014, p 401) in their experience of these collaborative awards ‘was the likelihood of the partnership surviving the duration of the studentship, and indeed beyond’. As we can both report from our own experiences, while such collaborative forms of research are personally and professionally rewarding, operating at the interface of academia and public life, they are also imbued with complexity. As Macmillan and Scott (2003, p 102–104) explain:

In the light of differing positionalities such as age, gender and ethnicity, for example, our collaborating organizations may perceive us in contrasting ways. ... Local interest in the results of the research may be heightened and may, therefore, raise the stakes in safeguarding the interests of participants, especially where power relations are involved.

The risks to academic autonomy are very real in collaborative work, and others writing on the impact agenda have similarly remarked how such autonomous working ‘potentially declines with the increased pressure to engage with different research users and publics outside the academy’ (Rogers et al, 2014, p 4). This is only the tip of the iceberg of a set of complex issues (see Brah and Phoenix, 2004; McCall, 2005) which are not, by any means, easily or readily resolved.

In the spirit of contributing to and developing these interdisciplinary debates, we raise more questions in this volume than we can possibly address, by asking: How do the social identities of researchers in research encounter spaces shape the types of engagements and impacts that take place? What – and who – are the presences and absences in these research engagement and encounter spaces? How do assumptions or perceptions about researchers' positionality in encounter spaces facilitate the transmission of different forms of knowledge, the receptiveness to ideas and the forming of coalitions? Or do they reify and reproduce long-standing (elitist) assumptions about academia and academics?

Collection contents and key themes

Together, the chapters in this volume map out and unpack some of the key concepts, processes and entry points in analysing spaces of engagement and encounter in research, policy and practice. These are arranged into three themed parts: (1) Encounters with Difference; (2) Experts and Expertise, and (3) Research, Power and Institutions. We also offer practical advice for other researchers embarking on engagement and impact work, in a bid to engender greater social awareness of the role of intersectionality, identity and power in their work. Examples of encounter spaces from eight authors – across a range of contextual, conceptual and methodological perspectives – are presented and employed to unpack how research engagement takes place within research/academic institutions, as well as between research/academic institutions, policy and society. In particular, the collection draws out the significance of identity, social differences, intersectionality and subject positionings; most of our contributors write from within and reach out beyond geographical debates on these topics. The chapters speak to the ways in which engagement spaces between policy, public and research also intersect with personal and social identities, such as gender, race, ethnicity,

class, (dis)ability, age/generation, sexuality, cultural heritage and so forth. Each deal with inter-categorical complexities (McCall, 2005) in different ways and in different settings. In doing so, the collection instigates new thinking in the field of research engagement and in impact as social and political space; it is much worthy of further investigation.

The book starts with a Foreword by the activist Ruth Ibegbuna, whose long-term engagement with young people, and particularly young black men, exposes and reminds us of why a greater understanding of intersectionality in encountering others is needed within society, and of the conflict and loss it could lead to if, once again, it continues to be ignored by academia, policy, industry and society.

In [Part I](#), 'Encounters with difference', we explore close up the ways in which research encounters and engagements shape and are shaped by understandings of social difference. Opening with Erin Pritchard's reflections on being a female with dwarfism and conducting fieldwork, [Chapter Two](#) works through the multiple negotiations of gender, disability and (hetero)sexuality as emplaced and lived. Drawing on examples covering text messages and face-to-face interactions at UK conventions, Pritchard examines how power relations within fieldwork are played out in real time, with sometimes unsettling consequences. Moving to consider the interconnections of class, accent and dialect, in [Chapter Three](#) Sarah Marie Hall examines identity making and social positioning in the context of research engagement with families, academic communities and policy makers in the UK. Drawing also on gender and whiteness, she makes the case for class and accent as an important, though less-acknowledged, form of social positioning in spaces of research encounter.

[Part II](#), 'Experts and expertise', then takes a critical look at where and whose knowledge is valued and sustained within research engagements in the name of 'impact'. In [Chapter Four](#) Michael Richardson explores the notion of research participants as experts in their own lives. Reflecting upon

research in the UK and Hong Kong, he works to problematise the notion of expertise within spaces of engagement when interacting with other actors, groups and stakeholders. [Chapter Five](#) by Ralitsa Hiteva then works to unpack intersectionalities of gender, disciplinary background and nationality in working with policy and industry and between academic institutions in the context of infrastructure, exposing the burden of emotional labour for early career researchers in performing as experts in encounter spaces. Transdisciplinary expertise in the Illawarra region of New South Wales, Australia, forms the focus of [Chapter Six](#) by Gordon Waitt. Bringing ideas around situated knowledges together with intersectionality, he describes how experiences of working with interdisciplinary teams and the federal government may both reproduce and contest conventional approaches to knowledge.

[Part III](#), on ‘Research, power and institutions’, then zooms out to explore the structural context in which issues around engaging with policy, practice and publics arise. In [Chapter Seven](#) Pamela Moss and Michael J. Prince focus on concerns about disability from a Canadian policy perspective, developing the notion of ‘nomadic positionings’. Considering how intersectional identities are open to change and fluidity, they propose recommendations for how needs across the life course may be better addressed with clearer articulation of shifting social positions over time. John Paul Catungal continues some of these themes in [Chapter Eight](#), exploring the multiple positionings of academics in public policy in the Canadian context. Using examples of critic, advocate and enforcer, particularly in research and activism relating to race and sexuality, he presents intersectionality theory as a means to more fully understand the relationship between academia and policy. Finally, the collection closes with a Conclusion by the editors, in which we reflect on the key lessons and remaining questions raised by the discussions.

This volume brings together different insights into how those researching and engaging with others in academia,

policy making, industry and civil society are perceived and encountered in these engagement spaces; how different aspects of their social identity, embodied characteristics, beliefs and knowledge affect how they work with others; the type of research they do; and how their work is received, depending on the context. In sum, this book aims to unpack the how and why of encountering and engaging with others, including the decisive role of encounters in engagement outcomes. By giving voice to personal and social identities, the book aims to create a multifaceted understanding of researchers that moves away from situating them as neutral, objective and lacking agency outside of their areas of identified expertise, as well as to highlight the difficulties that are encountered in being perceived as experts. The collection thus offers a diverse range of real-life examples and practical advice for researchers, and the people who work with them, on how to address the issues arising from our multiple intersecting identities when we encounter each other. More importantly, it explores how to bring to light that which often remains hidden but shapes how we are understood and how we respond to those around us in our research engagements and encounters. This collection illustrates the need for further investment in understanding and codifying the relationships between academia, industry, policy and civil society in the encounter spaces within which they take place. Furthermore, it is a call for their joint stewardship in making encounter space and impact a force for positive change and well-being for all.

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PART I

Encounters with difference

TWO

Dwarfism expectations: intersections of gender, disability and (hetero)sexuality in engagements with potential participants

Erin Pritchard

In this chapter I explore the challenges of conducting empirical research as a female with dwarfism. Within the social sciences, disabled participants are often classed as a vulnerable research group (Good, 2001); however, the vulnerability of disabled researchers has been overlooked. In my fieldwork, concerns around personal safety meant I have had to adapt recruitment strategies, which have therefore shaped my research encounters. I shall reflect upon my positionality in terms of intersectionality as a young female researcher with dwarfism and how this has impacted on my research engagements. Aimed at academic researchers, particularly disabled female researchers, the discussion in this chapter demonstrates the importance of taking into account a researcher's intersectional identity which can impact upon relationships with research participants and communities. Speaking to a broader audience, the chapter also calls for research ethics to be more considerate about the safety

needs of the researcher, taking into account the risk of sexual harassment and assault. This chapter therefore adds to critical discussions concerning researcher safety and to the subject of disability and (hetero)sexuality.

Researching disability

Research concerning disability is often characterised by an interest in the personal (Worth, 2008). Being a disabled researcher is often viewed positively within disability studies. For instance, Berger (2013) suggests that being an insider gives the researcher an advantage in knowing about the topic. During recruitment and the conducting of interviews, participants would openly acknowledge that I was someone with dwarfism interviewing other people with dwarfism about their experiences. In this way my identity as a woman with dwarfism was a method of recruitment, a way to demonstrate to participants that the research was personal and significant to me and that I shared some of their experiences. The positionality of the researcher is known to affect access to participants, as many people are more willing to share their experiences with a researcher who has a better understanding of their point of view and experiences. Berger (2013) argues that having commonalities in personal identity with participants can aid in building rapport. Several of the participants in my study pointed out that my having dwarfism influenced their decision to take part in the project, including a woman with dwarfism who lived in the south of England:

‘Sometimes non-disabled people do these things [research] and they don’t understand. People say they know how it feels but they don’t. By having someone the same as yourself means they can understand more of what you are on about.’ (Female with dwarfism, telephone interview, 2011)

Being researched by a non-disabled researcher can be a source of worry for disabled people, presenting a concern (as in this quotation) that the researcher will not fully understand their views and experiences and opening up the possibility of misrepresentation (Kitchin, 2000). During the research and since then, I have often reflected upon how having dwarfism gave me access to people with the same impairment and a deeper understanding of them than those who did not. Nonetheless, while having dwarfism can be considered an advantage, it was also a disadvantage when coupled with my gender. Much research has begun to focus on the relationship between female researchers and male participants, particularly issues around female safety (see Chiswell and Wheeler, 2016; Mugge, 2013; Sharp and Kremer, 2006; and Yassour-Borochowitz, 2012).

Drawing on my own experiences, I discuss female researcher safety in what follows, employing notions of disability and (hetero)sexuality in order to demonstrate how sharing the same impairment with participants can also be problematic. While within disability studies disabled researchers are actively encouraged to carry out qualitative research with other disabled people (see Barnes and Mercer, 1997; Kitchin, 2000), there are also drawbacks that have not been fully explored previously, including the safety of the researcher. Through exploring how the intersections of disability and gender influence interactions between researcher and participants, this chapter focuses on the implications of my positionality when interviewing and recruiting male participants with dwarfism. Sharp and Kremer (2006) suggest that sexual harassment is a common problem faced by female researchers, especially when interviewing male participants. I argue that this is compounded by the intersectional processes of disability, gender and (hetero)sexuality (see also [Chapter Seven](#) in this volume). More specifically, I discuss two incidents that occurred when I was conducting fieldwork in 2010, to work through these complex but important issues.

One of these incidents occurred when attending an event held by an association¹ for people with dwarfism. It is argued that, while such conventions are useful in recruiting hard-to-reach participants, they can also be problematic because of the reasons why some choose to attend them. In my experience, interactions at these events can be unpredictable and may be hampered by relationship difficulties associated with having a physical disability, especially one that is visible, such as dwarfism. Because of the barriers a person with a physical impairment experiences in looking for a partner and forming a relationship, recruiting and interviewing male participants with dwarfism can, at times, be problematic. Some of the men with dwarfism I encountered when recruiting participants behaved in an inappropriate way towards me and towards some other women with dwarfism, who shared their experiences with me. However, some women with dwarfism also use these conventions as a place to look for a date and possibly a potential partner. I want to show how my experiences were not isolated incidents by including the experiences of other women with dwarfism. In conclusion, I argue that the positionality of the researcher is more complex than previously thought, particularly when considering intersectional factors, and that the safety of researchers needs more attention.

Disability and sexuality

How disabled people are perceived in society in relation to sexuality is important for them in forming romantic relationships. Disabled people are commonly viewed as asexual (Esmail et al, 2010; Shakespeare, 2000; Taleporos and McCabe, 2003). There are several reasons for this, including the perception that disabled people cannot have sex because of their impairments, are not sexually attractive or are perceived to be childlike in some cases which undermines their sexuality (Shakespeare, 2000). This can make forming a relationship, especially with non-disabled people, difficult.

Esmail et al (2010) argue that those who are physically disabled have an increased likelihood of being single. People with dwarfism have a visible physical disability that can affect how attractive others people perceive them to be. Shakespeare et al (2010) point out that people with dwarfism are more likely to be single than the general population. Height is something people often find attractive. Of course, this is not to imply that people with dwarfism are undateable, for many people with dwarfism are married to average-sized partners or to others with dwarfism. But it does hamper a person's ability to find a life partner. How they are culturally perceived can also affect someone with dwarfism forming a relationship; people with dwarfism carry cultural baggage, including links to mythology and humour. Kruse (2002) suggests that the social aspects of being a person with dwarfism are more disabling than the physical barriers they encounter.

In 2012 the American entertainer Chelsea Handler, who is of average stature, remarked on a talk show that she would never sleep with someone with dwarfism, as it would be child abuse. While Handler's comparison is absurd, it demonstrates how dwarfism can be perceived in society, which affects the chance of a relationship for someone with dwarfism. Handler constructed people with dwarfism as childlike because of their similarity in height with children. Grosz (1991) argues that people with dwarfism occupy a binary middle ground between children and adults, and Bolt (2014) suggests that disablist infantilisation – that is, the perception and subsequent treatment of disabled people as children – is common within society. Shakespeare (2000) argues that sexuality is socially constructed and that, if disabled people are perceived as asexual by society, then the social construction of their sexuality will differ in spaces such as conventions for people with dwarfism.

The dynamics associated with forming a relationship are also important to consider here. Shakespeare (2000) points out that most people tend to meet potential partners in social spaces, and this is difficult for disabled people because of both

physical and social barriers. Kruse (2002) found that one of his participants, who had dwarfism, avoided places such as nightclubs as a result of the anxiety he felt in a crowd. For people with dwarfism, meeting a potential partner within typical social spaces for dating such as a nightclub or a bar can prove even more difficult because of the unwanted, negative social encounters they often experience. In some of my own work I have explored how people with dwarfism often receive unwanted attention, such as staring and name calling, especially in places such as bars (Pritchard, 2014). Shakespeare (2000) also suggests that meeting a potential partner is affected by a person's self-esteem, and the self-esteem of those with dwarfism is going to be affected by the unwanted attention they receive from others.

Conventions held by formal associations for people with dwarfism are thought to provide a safe space to meet a potential partner without the problem of receiving any unwanted attention from others. Kruse (2002) suggests that many people with dwarfism depend on these conventions for social interaction with others, and that they are important opportunities for friendships and romance. Because of this, research engagements in these spaces became problematic for me as a female researcher with dwarfism. I now want to move on and demonstrate the difficulties associated with my positionality when trying to recruit participants within these encounter spaces, in the light of this.

Positionality of someone with dwarfism

As mentioned, the field of disability studies looks favourably on research that is carried out by disabled people and that includes disabled participants as equal subjects. Kitchin (2000) suggests that, in research relating to disability, disabled people themselves tend to prefer the use of qualitative methods as these give voice to their experiences. The positionality of the researcher can affect access to disabled participants,² as many

more people may be more willing to share their experiences with a researcher who has a better understanding of experiences associated with a person's impairment. Berger (2013) argues that having a similar identity to participants can aid in building a rapport between researcher and participants and therefore provide access to richer information.

While disability research has focused on the importance of positionality and giving disabled people a voice, it has often failed to consider the implications of and intersections with gender and with researcher safety. As Valentine (2007) suggests, while categories such as race and gender are thought of as different social structures, individuals can experience them simultaneously. This is important to consider in relation to ethics and research policies, as the importance of intersectionality is given scant attention; however, it can result in power inequalities, depending on the researcher's identity. Giving more attention to the researcher's various and intersecting identities, I argue, can aid in ensuring that more protocols are put in place to minimise any risks to their safety.

My PhD research on 'The social and spatial experiences of dwarfs in public spaces' was an empirical study based in the UK (Pritchard, 2014). The aim was for people with dwarfism to share their experiences of how they navigate the built environment, given the social and spatial barriers associated with their dwarfism, in the course of an interview. In order to recruit participants, I joined and attended numerous conventions held by associations for people with dwarfism. It is estimated that there are fewer than 6,000 people living with dwarfism in the UK, which indicates that dwarfism is a rare impairment. Attending conventions held by various associations for people with dwarfism seemed a logical way to recruit participants, giving me a better chance of meeting lots of people in one place.

The research project used feminist methodologies that reflected key aims within disability research. This included taking into account my positionality and the importance of

building a rapport with the participants in order to reduce power relations (Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabata, 2002). Feminist methodologies acknowledge how power relations between the researcher and the participant can affect *what* and *how* data are produced (Sharpe, 2005). My identity as someone with dwarfism was therefore, from an academic perspective, considered a positive part of the research as I had an insider account. At the same time, Sharp and Kremer (2006) suggest that the identity of a researcher, relative to that of a participant, can have detrimental effects on a participant's behaviour.

While it was clearly indicated within my research documents that my identity as someone with dwarfism could positively contribute to the recruitment of participants and to the information they shared with me, my identity as a *female* with dwarfism proved to be problematic with some men with dwarfism. As England (1994:82) notes, 'reflexivity is the self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as the researcher'. So, while it was important to recognise that having dwarfism gave me greater access and helped build rapport, at the time I failed to consider how also being a woman in research encounter spaces could be problematic in different ways (see also [Chapter Five](#) in this volume). Yassour-Borochowitz (2012) also questions the importance of her identity and how her participants identified her. The dominant part of my identity was that I was young, female *and* a researcher with dwarfism. I presented myself as a researcher aiming to complete a doctoral thesis and therefore had to adopt a professional manner. While I wanted to build a rapport with potential participants, I was not interested in forming an intimate relationship with any of them. At times I had to make this very clear, sometimes with troubling consequences.

Lone female researcher with dwarfism

Research suggests that there are minimal guidelines regarding the personal safety of the researcher when they are out in the

field (Paterson et al, 1999). I did not fully consider the ethical implications of being female and attending conventions held by associations for people with dwarfism, or when interviewing male participants. Sharp and Kremer (2006) suggest that early career researchers are more concerned with the safety of their participants and with ensuring that they recruit a high volume of participants. These were major concerns, as I was well aware of how difficult recruitment could be and did not want to jeopardise the safety of my participants, as I was conscious of how the research could affect them because of the emotionally triggering subject.

My own safety did not at first seem to be at risk, as the conventions were considered safe. These conventions are attended by couples, families and singles, all of whom have dwarfism or who are related to someone with the disability. As stated earlier, these conventions were also a place used by some men (although some women may also have the same intentions) to find a sexual partner, but I was not aware of this until I began to attend the conventions. This particular encounter space changed the way I perceived potential male participants as I became aware of how some of them perceive women with dwarfism. I was not interested in finding a partner, and the thought did not even occur to me. I did not think that I would even be approached by members of the opposite sex who were romantically or sexually attracted to me, especially since I made it clear that I was there simply to recruit people for my research project.

As pointed out previously, it is important to consider the social spaces where people meet in order to understand how they may impact upon the researcher's safety. Shakespeare et al (1996) argue that many disabled people meet their partners in residential institutions and special schools. While looking for a partner at these conventions should not be frowned upon, it was problematic for me as a female with dwarfism as I was only looking for potential participants for my doctoral research. Most of the respondents shared that they had met new friends,

dates and mates from attending these conventions. Weinberg (1968) notes that many marriages have resulted from people meeting at such conventions: 43 per cent of participants in Weinberg's study had met their partner at a convention. Some of the participants I later interviewed had met their partner through attending an event. However, this did blur the boundaries between my identity as a researcher and as a possible date. Weinberg (1968) says that males often try to rush into relationships at these conventions. On several occasions, one man in particular persisted in his sexual advances towards me, despite my numerous refusals.

I attended my first convention in 2010. I was by myself and was finding it difficult to meet other people for recruitment purposes. Most of the people already knew others there and it was hard to join in. I did eventually meet some people who were friendly and who became interested in the project. Attending an event like a convention requires you to converse and to take part in activities. It was important to build a rapport while remaining professional, but it was difficult to separate the professional space of research, engagement and recruitment from the social space because of my positionality and the need to identify potential participants. I would engage with activities and in conversations with other members, but that was as far as it went. On one occasion I began conversing with one man who then introduced me to his friend, to whom I spoke mostly about the research project. After a while, he asked me if I would be his date for the party the association was holding that night. Being asked out (to be someone's date) can be considered part of the social experience at these conventions (Weinberg, 1968). I declined but said I would be there. Despite my reply, he made some inappropriate remarks, such as wanting to come up to my hotel room and watch me try on a dress. The need to stay at a hotel, where most of the other attendees are also staying, can lead to difficult and unwanted encounters. Another participant told me of a similar situation at a previous event:

‘I was at an event and I was in so much pain due to my arthritis that I took some painkillers and went to bed early. I was woken up by a constant banging on my door. When I answered it there was a man [with dwarfism] standing there with a bottle of champagne and two glasses, wanting to come in.’ (Female with dwarfism, telephone interview, 2011)

Staying at the same hotel where the convention is held may therefore lead to an increase in such unwanted behaviour. My decision to stay overnight at the hotel was driven by the desire to recruit participants over the two full days of the convention. However, the man’s behaviour made the chance of recruiting more men difficult, as I began to feel uncomfortable about their possible intentions. While not all men will act inappropriately, this experience made it difficult for me to be sure that no other male participant would behave in a similar way.

Yassour-Borochowitz (2012) recognises that the behaviour of male participants can be problematic and include flattery and flirting. My difficult experience was compounded by an encounter later that day at a charity auction during the convention. During the auction I noticed that the man was bidding on a crystal necklace. When I outbid him he asked me why, as he was trying to win it for me. I replied that I could buy things myself. This was intended to indicate to him that I was not interested in him in this way, regardless of his persistence. However, as Weinberg (1968, p 68) notes, the short time frame of the conventions can lead to ‘intense involvements or intense disappointments’.

Being at a convention where other people share the same disability gives some people more confidence and they may assume that there is a better chance that someone will date them or become a potential partner. Shakespeare et al (1996) also point out that it is often assumed that disabled people will form relationships with other disabled people. It became apparent to me at this convention that some men with dwarfism

also had the same idea. Perhaps some men with dwarfism think that a woman with dwarfism is going to be less critical of their appearance, and that it is easier to form a relationship with someone with the same impairment because they are likely to encounter the same problems in forming relationships with other people. For example, I had previously dated an average-sized man who told me it was difficult to date me as his friends found it ‘funny’ that he was dating a ‘dwarf’. I am not sure if this was because of our difference in size or because people with dwarfism are often constructed as figures of fun in the media (see Adelson, 2005), but it made the relationship difficult and led to it ending. Dating someone with dwarfism would avoid this sort of problem.

Back to my experience at the convention; that night, after the evening meal, I went to get coffee. The man who had been seeking my attention came with me, grabbed my hand and kissed me on the face. I walked away and stayed away from him for the rest of the evening. In the morning, I left the convention. After the incident, I felt shocked, upset and didn’t know what to do next. There is limited guidance on what to do when interviewees’ behaviour is problematic (Yassour-Borochowitz, 2012). How I handled the situation might have been very different had I not presented myself as a researcher trying to recruit participants. The most obvious solution would have been to report the incident straightaway, but I did not do this. I just remember trying to distance myself from him and to carry on building a rapport with other potential participants. I did not want to jeopardise my research and so became more tolerant of the unwanted attention I received at the convention.

After my own encounters and after speaking to other women with dwarfism it became obvious to me that unwanted attention from men with dwarfism was a common experience at conventions:

‘When I was a teenager, a man [with dwarfism] old enough to be my Dad was perverting on me. He kept smiling at me

in a very flirtatious way, and then when he'd walk past me, he'd deliberately brush past me and ensure he'd touch me. I didn't report it as you know when you're young you wonder if you're giving off a vibe that is encouraging it ... that's literally how I felt. I felt like it might be my fault he was doing it. I was too young to realize it was not.' (Female with dwarfism, email interview, 2018)

Sharp and Kremer (2006) suggest that female researchers often blame themselves for these types of unwanted encounters. After the incident, I often questioned myself as to what had happened and if I had influenced it in anyway. This is another reason why I didn't report it straightaway. After discussions with my supervisors, I eventually reported the incident to the association. Although I received a reply to the initial report, I was not informed that any further action would be taken.

This leads on to the second incident I wish to discuss. During the recruitment process, it is recommended that a researcher use a separate mobile phone from their personal one. Having a phone for research purposes helps separate their personal and professional lives. This phone is used to contact participants, such as when travelling to meet them. This means that if there are any problems with the participants the phone can be easily disposed of. The following is a text message conversation with a male participant, whom I recruited through the method of snowballing:³

Male participant: Why haven't you answered my texts?

Erin: I've been travelling all day to do an interview.

Male: Who was it with?

Erin: I can't say.

Male: Was it with another man?

(Text conversation, 2011)

I had previously made it clear to the participant that I was not interested in having a relationship with him. With these

messages, I was expected to divulge confidential information about other participants, even though he was aware, from reading the information sheet and signing his own consent form, that I could not do so. Despite my making it clear that I was a researcher, he seemed far more concerned with the fact that I was a woman with dwarfism and someone he could potentially date. He expressed concern about my interviewing any other male participant, but this was not out of concern for my safety but in case I formed a relationship with any of them. I did not reply to any of the texts he sent me thereafter, asking what I was up to and how I was doing, as they were not related to the research. In response to his messages, I explained that it did not matter if my interview was with another man as his involvement with my research related only to his own interview; after this, I blocked him on my phone. This interaction further indicated the problem of interviewing male participants. Yassour-Borochowitz (2012) argues that male participants have more power than female researchers, but this power imbalance has been given little attention. Had I been a man with dwarfism, the power relations would have been different and I probably would not have had to deal with these issues.

After this incident my supervisors and I decided that I would no longer interview any male participants, which therefore altered the demographics of this (and possibly other people's) research. These incidents changed how I perceived men with dwarfism. Valentine (2008) argues that a negative encounter with someone from a minority group can create a negative generalisation of them. It would be unfair of me to assume that all men with dwarfism would behave in the same manner as the two men I had encountered, but I did not wish to encounter this sort of behaviour again. I could not be sure which men would or would not behave in a similar way. Although I am disappointed that my research could not fully include the experiences of men with dwarfism, whose experiences may be different because of their gender, my safety as a researcher has to take priority over the research findings.

Another female PhD student with dwarfism, who is also carrying out an empirical study on dwarfism, shared with me a similar experience that had led to her blocking a potential participant from social media and ultimately removing him from the research:

‘I had a participant try to change the dynamic of what I was requesting by proposing he “take me out” to do the interview I had requested. It made me very uncomfortable that he took my initiative to meet as a social researcher and potential participant and frame it as a “date” and it felt very much that he wanted to have the upper hand on what was occurring between us. In the end I had to block him from social media as it was clear his interest in me would prevent him participating in my research project.’ (Female with dwarfism, email interview, 2017)

These incidents indicate that, although researchers can try to minimise the power imbalance between themselves and their participants, this is not always possible or advisable. Sharp and Kremer (2006) argue that women are often viewed as subordinate to men and this can suggest that female researchers have less power than male participants. Other aspects of their positionality, including sharing the same disability, can also influence how men behave towards female researchers, hampering opportunities for rapport between themselves and the creation of a safe and comfortable research environment.

Conventions for people with dwarfism can be a safe space for people with dwarfism to partake in social activities without receiving unwanted attention, unlike social spaces outside of these conventions. But, as a result of these spaces being defined by a particular identity of the members (that is their dwarfism), they can be problematic encounter spaces for female researchers. The associations that run these conventions need to be aware of the multiple identities of their members and how these can impact upon the social relationships at these meetings.

Conclusion

The intersectional positionality of a researcher is complex and can result in both pros and cons in carrying out research. Having dwarfism and being a young female researcher resulted in unwanted interactions for me, which were influenced by the fact that some men with dwarfism regard women with dwarfism first and foremost as potential partners. This perception of me changed how I viewed men with dwarfism and subsequently changed the dynamics and scope of my research. The men discussed in this chapter did not identify me as a researcher but as a woman with dwarfism whom they thought was dateable. Gender, (hetero)sexuality and disability can form complex relationships between researcher and participants. It is important to consider these relationships between a female researcher and male participants, especially when researching hard-to-reach groups. There were clear unequal power relations between myself and the male participants and it was only by dismissing them from the research or blocking contact with them that I was able to revert this balance.

Female researcher safety needs more consideration within disability research, and within research ethics as a whole. This is especially important in relation to doctoral students and early career researchers, who often have less experience in handling problems in the field. It is important for disabled female researchers to consider their safety when recruiting male participants because of the issues surrounding disability and sexuality, including the widespread assumption that disabled people only date other disabled people. Given that feminist methodologies are encouraging more engagement with research participants in a bid to reduce power imbalances, it is fundamental that the safety of the researcher is considered.

While associations for people with dwarfism can create safe spaces for them to freely interact with others socially, if unchecked they can also be unsafe encounter spaces for research, as they can create unequal power relations between

male and female members. More research needs to consider the complex relations that exist within these associations, as I have done here. This chapter has demonstrated the importance of recognising the researcher's various identities and how they can intersect in certain encounter spaces to influence the relationship between researchers and participants. As a result, this can impact on how the research is engaged with and on its end results (see also [Chapter Five](#) in this volume). As disability research encourages the use of disabled researchers, it must take into account how this can have ethical implications, depending on the researchers' other identities. Disability and sexuality is an important topic within disability studies, but researchers have yet to examine how sexual encounters between researcher and participants can be problematic.

Associations for people with dwarfism should not discourage people from meeting potential partners at their conventions, but they should be aware of the unwanted attention that lone women receive at them and act accordingly to reduce this sort of unwanted behaviour. This can be achieved through ensuring that they have and compile adequate safeguarding and whistleblowing policies. They could also provide a safeguarding and women's officer to deal with such incidents, and ensure that there is a proper complaints procedure, which can be appealed if necessary.

Notes

- 1 In the UK, there are numerous associations for people with dwarfism, including the Restricted Growth Association (RGA) and Little People UK (LPUK). There are also many other associations for people with dwarfism across the world, including Little People of America. These associations aim to provide support and advice to people with dwarfism and their families. Most hold conventions throughout the year that bring together people with dwarfism and their families. These conventions include various workshops, but mostly provide an opportunity for people to socialise, for example with a disco in the evening.
- 2 I have adopted the term 'disabled people' as opposed to 'people with disabilities' as the former resonates with a social model understanding of disability, which places the cause of disability within society.

- 3 The process of snowballing involves asking participants if they are aware of anyone else who may be interested in taking part in the research.

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THREE

'You're not from 'round 'ere, are you?' **Class, accent and dialect as opportunity** **and obstacle in research encounters**

Sarah Marie Hall

Assumptions made about social class, accent and identity, and the links between them, have long been understood as a form of geographical referencing, a way of placing ourselves and of being placed by others, both socially and spatially (Donnelly et al, 2019; Savage, 2015; Skeggs, 2004). In this chapter I reflect on this form of identity making and social positioning in the context of research engagement with families, academic communities and policy makers alike, in an attempt to speak back to these various stakeholders. As I discuss, by locating people socially and spatially according to accent and dialect, leaps in understanding can be made about whether and how as a researcher your lived experiences are similar to those whom you research, and the extent to which you may be able to speak for others – if this is ever even preferable (also see [Chapter Four](#) in this volume).

To do this I draw upon relevant literatures alongside insights from two ethnographic research projects in the north-west of England. Both studies explored everyday family relationships

and practices (the first in 2007–9, the second in 2013–15), involving families and communities from varied socio-economic backgrounds. They also applied similar research designs, built predominantly on participant observation and supported by taped discussions, participatory tasks and photographs (for further details on methodology, see Hall, 2017). And, significantly, both projects were led by and carried out, with findings disseminated by the author, Sarah: a young(ish) white woman from a working-class family, born and raised in Barnsley, a small Yorkshire town in the north of England.

As I discuss here, while an accent associated with a northern, working-class, peripheral region became a research opportunity, a space for discussion and similarity, it also presented obstacles. I begin with a discussion of literature on the links between place, class and accent, couched in geographical, anthropological and sociological debates, before moving on to discuss the place of class, accent and dialect in research encounters. In the closing section, I argue that further discussion of class and accent is much needed, as a less often acknowledged but nonetheless significant form of social positioning in spaces of research – fieldwork, academia and engagement – and indeed in UK society today. Throughout I adopt a broadly intersectional perspective to class that draws on accent and dialect, as well as at times gender and whiteness, in social identity and social structures.

Place, class and accent

Within geography as a discipline, place occupies a particular, special role. It is argued that place is subjective, sensed and experienced, part of the essence of what it means to be human (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001). At the same time, place is also shaped by power relations and social identities, which in turn shape our sense of being in or out of place (Donnelly et al, 2019; Savage, 2015). Places are also represented – to what

extent is debatable – and one of the key ways in which place is understood is through cultural associations, such as art, literature, music and television: 'from pop music to poetry, film to fiction, it is obvious that representations can include a vast array of artefacts and forms which people use to interpret the world around them and present themselves to others' (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001, p 144).

Taking northern England as an example, the locale of my research and geographical focus in this chapter, representations of place have a strong cultural resonance. Whether through L.S. Lowry's distinctive paintings of industrial landscapes, also known as 'lowryscapes' (Waters, 1999, p 122), or the cobbled streets of TV's longest running soap opera, *Coronation Street*, certain representational features stand firm: gritty northern life, tight-knit white working-class communities and distinctive regional identities.

The last example, the soap opera, is a poignant and useful case in point. A sense of place is constructed by and within soap operas – for characters and audiences – of familiar and particular spaces, practices and relationships. As Rose (1993, p 57) explains, 'soaps offer one of the most influential images of community in the contemporary UK. They depend on a range of female characters holding the community together ... and they also often have a detailed sense of place.' This is particularly the case for *Coronation Street*, which has been hailed as an excellent example of how geographers and social scientists more broadly conceptualise place, and the socio-cultural associations with which place is bound: 'the drama of personal relationships within a homogenous community which was the hallmark of *Coronation Street*, establishing a sense of geographical place so strongly that it over-rode the boundaries of the family' (Geraghty, 1992, p 133). These ideas are also mirrored by 'classic' community ethnographies in the UK, such as by Young and Wilmott (1962) in east London, by Edwards (2000) in Lancashire and by Pahl (1984) on the Isle of Sheppey. However, it is not only social relations that are

represented here, significant as familial and kinship relations across the cobbles might be. Also key are place-based identities as they relate to and reflect socio-economic structures and class identities.

In representing 'typical' northern life, such forms of cultural expression can become enrolled in and reify place myths and stereotypes. One of the most commonly cited examples of place myths is the 'north-south divide' in the UK. Situating the north as marginal, bleak, industrial and working class, compared to its central, middle-class, high-culture southern counterpart, Holloway and Hubbard (2001, p 161) argue that such place myths are indicative of 'important social, economic and cultural rifts, perpetuating distinctive stereotypes of people from both regions'. These place myths and socio-economic imaginaries also need to be understood in relation to representations that exist on various spatial scales, whether of streets and neighbourhoods, of towns and cities, or of regions and nations.

The 'Crap Towns' book series is an excellent illustration of the stereotypes of place and how such representations are also implicit within place making. First published in 2003, the series has seen three editions of the so-called 50 worst places to live in the UK. Towns in the north of England feature prominently in these publications. Despite media and public backlash and despite being positioned as comical, the series in many ways epitomises the pitfalls of representations of place, and the damaging associations this can have for people and communities. This begs the question 'What makes "crap towns", and who do we associate with them?' What imaginings of place do we draw upon, and what are the geographical impacts of this?

This strikes at the very heart of geographical concerns about place, inequality and social difference, for, as Skeggs (2004, p 15) explains, 'geographical referencing is one of the contemporary shorthand ways of speaking class'. Geographical associations are tied up with complex notions of social class;

asking somebody what they 'do' for a living and where they are 'from' are commonplace methods of both spatial and social placing (Hall, 2014). Wills (2008, p 28) makes a similar point, that 'geography is often used as a surrogate for the question of class'. For instance, in research with families, residents and community workers in Newhaven, a town on the southern English coast facing economic decline, Harrison (2013, p 103) found that 'such perceptions, propagated by outsiders, are then repeated by some residents. Sometimes this is in terms of simple stereotypes ("my family is rubbish – they're all wasters"), sometimes there are more subtle education and class-based analyses.'

Indeed, one key form of geographical and social placing is through accent, though it is rarely discussed in these terms. It is recognised that 'locatedness, a geography of placement, becomes a way of speaking class indirectly but spatially, through geography and physicality' (Skeggs, 2004, p 50). However, the literal or rather embodied elements of this 'speaking' have elided many discussions of place and class to date. Pinpointing where somebody is 'from', in terms of where they were born and raised (with its implicit links to their socio-economic background) is a ubiquitous form of placing in the UK, a country known for having a rich set of geographically dispersed accents and dialects.

However, it is important to distinguish between the two. Where accent refers to the pronunciation of language depending on geographical origin (and ultimately tied up with educational and class background), dialect refers to the variety of vocabulary and grammar within a particular language. Accent and dialect therefore have inherently spatial and social qualities, since they change across terrain and time, and vary between people and groups. For Kanngieser (2012, p 336), 'how we speak and listen is political', including accent and dialect. She explains that 'what is heard as accent or dialect is imbued with sociopolitical connotations' as to the 'geographical background, class, race, nationality and education' of the

speaker (Kanngieser, 2012, p 341). As such, accent and dialect are also used as a way of placing ourselves and in relation to others, the differences and similarities of which lead to the stereotyping of people and places.

An ongoing outreach programme and research study undertaken by Erin Carrie and Rob Drummond, both sociolinguists at Manchester Metropolitan University, have been exploring these very links between location, place, accent and social class. Using blank maps of the Manchester local authority (one of the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester), people living across the area were asked to draw boundaries on the map to illustrate different accents and dialects, and to use words to describe them. The researchers then mapped the most commonly used words in each area (that is dialects), with the size of the typeface for annotations indicating the frequency with which descriptors were used. The results are highly illustrative of the placing of class and accent. Accents associated with geographical locations are labelled on a map, with descriptions such as ‘broad’, ‘poor’, ‘rough’ and ‘posh’ being most prevalent.¹ A literal example of geographical referencing and representations, this nevertheless illustrates how accents are used to place people, both physically and culturally (also see Donnelly et al, 2019). The study also indicates what social scientists have long been arguing – that class is not simply an economic condition, but rather it has distinct social and cultural elements too.

There is real depth to the geographical variation of class. Understandings of class in the UK are often thought to be more particular than in other parts of the Western world, and that in the majority world issues of caste, religion and ethnicity are more pertinent to everyday and structural inequalities, although there is emerging literature suggesting the contrary (see Dowling, 2009). Class is considered to be ‘hardwired’ (Savage, 2015, p 375), a more than material concept that can be very personal given its connections to identity and community. Although it is an important element in geographies of

identity, Dowling (2009, p 833) notes that class 'is less likely than dimensions such as gender or race to come up in geographical discussions of identity as lived experience'. In general, it is not an issue prioritised in the discipline (Stenning, 2008; Wills, 2008). While geographers have pondered 'whether it is class or place of residence that matters more in social life' (Dowling, 2009, p 835), the focus of such scholarship is typically on classed encounters, and 'the ways in which class and processes are played out, in, through and across space' (p 836). Commenting on 'new scholarship and activism' surrounding working-class studies, Wills (2008, p 26) nevertheless notes that such work 'has an acute sense of the importance of place'.

While class has been defined as 'a lens through which people interpret their worlds' (Dowling, 1999, p 511), Wills implores scholars 'to avoid the banality of arguing that class processes are simply differentiated by class' (2008, p 26). That is to say, class identities, encounters, processes and relations have spatial dimensions, and this should be the starting point for discussion rather than the concluding note. In a similar vein, Stenning (2008, p 10) makes the point that, while class can be considered a 'dynamic and relational category', a space for expression and interpretation, it is 'simultaneously economic and cultural', rested in symbolic as much as in material values and practices. Stenning (2008, p 10) also notes 'the mutual constitution of class and place through the everyday', that it is 'performed and constructed within communities and, in turn, shapes the spaces of community, economy, politics and much more'. Likewise, for Savage (2015, pp 376–7) class is 'in the minutiae of discussions about everyday life', where boundaries are drawn between people and places that in turn work as 'markers when thinking about their own place in the world'.

Within this boundary making and place marking, class, accent and dialect are closely connected. For, if 'implicit, class-based references are used by people in order to position themselves within the social structure', so too are 'language and accent ... frequent implicit markers of class identity' (Savage,

2015, p 382). And so it follows that class, accent and dialect intersect to give shape and form to representations and imaginations of people and place. However, when writing about ‘a new *language* of class ... a *language* of complexity and multiplicity, *enunciating* classed processes, experiences and emotions’ (Dowling, 2009, p 838, emphasis added), the link to accent and dialect is typically overlooked, despite the linguistic metaphors.

Class, accent and dialect in research encounters

The social identity of researchers has long been understood as integral to the research process and outcomes. It is often discussed in terms of positionality, but in my own research I have noted ways and means of ‘placing’ that can occur during fieldwork encounters, between researchers and participants:

the families asked questions about my personal life (e.g., where I was from and where my family lived, where I lived, what my parents did for a living, whether I was in a relationship), and also about aspects of daily life such as what I did the day before, or how my research was going. This helped the families to ‘place’ me in their lives. (Hall, 2014, p 2180)

This work of being ‘placed’ – socially, politically, economically – is also relational, whereby we are placed in relation to *something*, *someone* else. Placing is therefore used as a way to articulate similarities and differences, in and out groups, togetherness and otherness, and can also occur along multiple social fault lines: gender, race, class, sexuality and so forth. In fieldwork, this can be a blessing and a curse. Being perceived as an ‘insider’ can open doors to spaces and conversations of communities that might otherwise appear clandestine. And yet on the other hand an ‘outsider’ can be more likely to be given access into communities and everyday lives, with participants

willingly playing the part of 'welcoming locals, eager to help a stranger' (Hall, 2014, p 2181).

One of the ways in which this placing, or geographical and social locating (Skeggs, 2004; Stenning, 2008; Wills, 2008), occurs is in how accent and dialect are heard by the listener (also see Kanngieser, 2012). I identify as being from a working-class background, and this was more often than not assumed by participants once they heard me speak, commonly followed by some questions for confirmation purposes. Of course, my current class position is somewhat murkier given my education and employment as an academic, though this seemed to be secondary in participants' interpretations of my identity and positionality. Many of the assumptions about my working-class identity were based on how I talked (and partly what I talked about), the delivery and content of my spoken words and how they were interpreted or 'heard' by recipients. More specifically, assumptions were made as to my class and upbringing because of my accent and dialect.

A Yorkshire accent conjures up all sorts of imaginaries, associated very firmly with the northern, parochial, uneducated stereotypes noted earlier (see Holloway and Hubbard, 2001), even though Yorkshire is a large region in the UK with much linguistic diversity. In South Yorkshire, where I grew up, the most distinctive element of the regional accent (and frequent within my own speech) takes the form of a glottal stop, 'a voiceless stop sound made in the throat often replacing a "t" in spoken English' (Loughran, 2018, p 258). Participants would mimic this, since it tends not to be used in north-west England (where the aforementioned projects took place), and so confirming my outsidership. This was accompanied by jokes about regional dialect, and where this intersected with accent. As noted in earlier writing, 'participants would laugh at my pronunciation of words and my "flat vowels". They also remarked upon the terms I used for everyday items (for example, that what I called a "breadcake" was instead a "barm")' (Hall, 2014, p 2181). This was further confirmed in

how they referred to me ‘as a “Woollyback” – a colloquial and comical (if not slightly derogatory) term for someone from outside the region’ (Hall, 2014, p 2181), placing me according to both geographic location and socio-economic status.

Here, class, accent and dialect cannot be set apart from other elements of social identity, and where they intersect (also see Binnie, 2011; Dowling, 1999; Stenning, 2008). Gendered and generational norms around working-class practices, for example, can infuse interactions with research participants, such as discussions about favourite childhood foods or household chores performed for pocket money, or the working-class tradition of never turning up at someone’s house empty handed (also see Hall, 2017). On one occasion, I was asked by a gatekeeper from the local Church of England school whether I used my middle name, which was displayed on the front of my project information leaflets. The question was prefaced with a comment about there being “lots of Catholic schools in Yorkshire”. Here, my background as a young woman from a working-class Catholic family was presented to me, drawn from what seemed to be scraps of evidence – a middle name and an accent – but that apparently provided enough information to create a fuller picture for this gatekeeper. These descriptors also marked me as being from outside the community, in terms of both physical locale and faith network, which shaped my access to local families in ways I may never fully know.

The place of class, accent and dialect within academia has also infused a small but noteworthy set of discussions, and likewise emerged in my own research encounters. It has been argued that ‘one possible reason for the absence of the classed body is because of the personal backgrounds and characteristics of those in the academy’ – that ‘relative privilege’ has the potential to ‘distance us from the markings of class’ (Dowling, 1999, p 511). Academia is predominantly white, male, middle class, heteronormative and able-bodied, which is also reflected in the topics deemed suitable and worthy of academic interest (see Binnie, 2011; Hall, 2018).

It shapes how academics identify themselves, as well as what parts of themselves they 'give' to the research process. As Taylor (2010, p 1) writes: 'identifying as working-class in academia is a fraught, challenging and uneasy process. Slippery negotiations occur in the claims to knowledge, amidst dismissal, in attempts at representation, amidst mis-representation, and in the effort to lay claim to academic agendas.' These unwritten rules are also embedded in the performative elements of academic research and engagement, including conferences and events. Here, accent and dialect are important, since they are part and parcel of this communication of our research, more than simply 'a conduit for the transfer of information' (Kanngieser, 2012, p 337). For Loughran (2018, p 256) this can have very affective implications: 'even now, I meet people in professional settings who hear my voice [accent] and seem to mentally write me off'. In fact, Stenning (2008, p 11) writes of how 'the processes of neoliberalism and globalisation are lived, negotiated and transgressed by working class people', and academia is no exception.

An example that speaks to this issue comes from one of my earliest research encounters, my first presentation at an academic conference targeted at doctoral students. It was only on the morning of the event that the organisers announced how the audience would have an opportunity to provide anonymous feedback to speakers. I was unconvinced that this would be all that useful an exercise, but with no opportunity to express this opinion a pile of feedback sheets was handed over to me at the end of the day. Right beforehand, in the last session of the conference, someone was giving a talk on their research with working-class families. Showing a photograph and accompanying quotation, the speaker paused what they were saying to make a joke: "Why do they all have big TVs and big dogs?" This comment took me by surprise, and even more so when the room erupted into laughter. I looked around and there was one other person who looked as shocked and appalled as I felt. We shared a taxi back to the station not long

afterwards, spoke of our disgust at the comments and the roar of laughter that had accompanied them.

Meanwhile, the feedback sheets were sat in my backpack. Once settled on the train, I took them out of my bag, expecting to give them a cursory glance before staring mindlessly out of the window for the rest of the journey. My heart sank when I started reading, and going through the stack of 30-odd pages I experienced a whole array of emotions: rage, shame, irritation, amusement and pride. Among the pile were a handful of vitriolic comments that were specifically about my accent and the way I spoke. Supposedly ‘helpful’ suggestions included that I enunciate ‘properly’, that I speak slower and breathe more because my accent was ‘quite thick’, scribbled alongside comments on my ‘lack of confidence’ and inability to ‘project’ my voice. I threw the comments away soon afterwards, on the advice of a friend, but over ten years later I still remember those comments and the way they made me feel. The feedback, combined with the conference laughter, made me reflect on my place in academia, or rather my *placelessness* – caught somewhere between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Only a few years ago did I reconnect with the person with whom I had shared both disgust at the comments and a taxi ride. It was at a conference where by complete coincidence she was due to give a presentation on academic sisterhood which included reflections on that very same conference and that very same comment: “Why do *they* all have big TVs and big dogs?” (see Mannay and Morgan, 2014).

Public and policy engagement is another research engagement space in which accent and dialect can be a means of placing and social differentiation, and one of growing importance given the emphasis now placed on research impact by academic institutions. There are a number of relevant research encounters I want to highlight here. The first is from a recent research project I developed and toured, the *Everyday Austerity* exhibition, a collection of objects, field notes, interviews and drawings presenting key findings from around Greater

Manchester. I visited market halls, libraries, women's centres and community businesses, engaging with the general public about the research. During the tour I would regularly be asked, or rather told, "You're not from 'round 'ere, are you?" (hence the title of this chapter). My accent marked me as an outsider, and regional 'insider' visitors would take pleasure in telling me about local histories and politics, again adopting the role of a welcoming native towards what they perceived to be an unaware and curious outsider (Hall, 2014).

When I took these findings into more formalised engagement settings, such as meetings with local city councils or national policy makers, additional and sometimes different forms of geographical placing occurred. Those with an untrained ear would commonly assume that, because my research was in Greater Manchester and I have a 'northern' accent, that I must be from Greater Manchester too. I was assumed to be familiar with all the acronyms for reports, council departments and details about certain communities and their background, local knowledge that would have taken me a lifetime to learn. Conversely, when I was presenting or discussing findings with people from outside Greater Manchester, who did not pick up on these dialectical nuances, huge assumptions would be made – I was from within the community I studied, right? I was the first in my family to go to university, surely? Leaps in understanding can be made about how our experiences as researchers are similar to those of the people we study, and the extent to which we may be able to 'speak for' others, particularly when intersected with gender and race too. And, on the flip side, parameters are placed around what subject we are deemed eligible to talk about and research, based on embodied identity, which is also an obstacle to our research.

Another pertinent example of accent as geographical and social placing comes from a meeting with a national media broadcaster, where as part of a team of academics I was asked to pitch ideas for new educational programmes. Although I was seated in the centre of the group (made up of white

academics and only one other female apart from me), I was made to sit and wait for every other academic to take their turn. At one point an academic was lamenting the lack of appreciation for classical music among ordinary people in the UK, and dismissively claiming that “every house used to have a piano”. Everyone in the room was nodding, knowingly and sincerely. I was confused by the sheer lack of awareness about what was being claimed here. I edged my hand up and cut in with “No, they didn’t”, which had the effect of immediately pitching me against both a fellow academic and our invitees. Despite pointing out the very obvious – of course, every house did not have a piano, when inside toilets became the norm in working-class communities in the UK only within the last 50 years or so – my intervention was met with disagreement and disdain. There followed a scramble for people in the room to prove me wrong – *they* were working class and *they* had grown up with a piano in their house. The evidence was clear cut and I was wrong, *misplaced*, for speaking out.

While they represent different research engagement spaces – with the public, policy makers and media – and deal with class, accent and dialect in different ways, each of these examples also speaks to concerns about the ability of researchers to speak ‘for’ others and to represent their experiences (Hall, 2018). At times, my seeming ability to represent a particular social group and identity (working-class households), based upon my accent, made others in the meeting feel uncomfortable and seek evidence of legitimacy. As such, I am mindful of Taylor’s (2010, p 1) warnings that

To situate oneself ... within changing climates of class(less)ness can be rather fraught: difficultly read as a claim to knowledge through experience (or dismissed via an excess of experience, in being the ‘wrong’ person in the ‘right’ space), or uneasily ‘performed’ and perhaps (re)produced through personalised ‘outness’, where

confession and admission may nonetheless be unsustainable and unsuccessful as a 'reflexive' currency.

Speaking out in these encounter spaces can be a fraught experience, with my questions and the ways in which they were delivered (through accent and speech) outing and producing classed-based assumptions about knowledge (see Dowling, 1999; Kanngieser, 2012). Furthermore, Binnie (2011, p 21) asks 'what scripts are available for queer academics from working class backgrounds', and I have to also acknowledge here my relative privilege and position. Nonetheless, in the last example, with the media company, I came away with a sense that I was perceived to have a working-class 'chip' on my shoulder, and so attempts were made to unravel my working-class identity by refuting my claims of generalisability. Place, power, position and privilege loomed large.

Conclusion

As with all elements of everyday life, in research encounters our bodies and identities are placed according to gender, class, race, age, dialect and likely other social markers too, including where they intersect. This chapter has explored the intersections of class, accent and dialect, along with gender and whiteness at times, and the ways in which they can work as opportunities and obstacles within different elements of research. In doing so, it makes two key contributions. First, it sheds light on the lesser discussed role of class, accent and dialect in identity making, and, second, it acknowledges social positioning within research encounters (an overall concern of this volume), particularly as it relates to class.

Unpacking the relationship between class, accent and dialect in research encounters reveals 'the way in which space and place [impact] on class formation and distinction' (Binnie, 2011, p 24), as a move against current engagements with class as typically 'abstract, even ungrounded, and often

hidden' (Stenning, 2008, p 9). How our research is received and regarded depends upon our social positioning, and how it is articulated and vocalised is no exception. I encourage researchers to be considered and reflexive about their place in research encounters – from seminars and talks to fieldwork and recruitment – and in dissemination and engagement, and I hope that the opportunities and obstacles presented by class, accent and dialect, as discussed here, continue to be explored.

Nonetheless, and borrowing from Ahmed and Swan (2006), I am mindful that the work involved in diversity work can be a form of emotional labour (see also [Chapter Five](#) in this volume) that falls unevenly, when in fact it should be a collective endeavour within institutions and across society. On a practical level, this could involve open acknowledgement by chairs of meetings, organisers of conference panels and researchers in the field that accent and dialect *matter*, and that class status and background should not be assumed about any group members. This is not to say that participants of these spaces should have to 'out' themselves in these spaces. Rather, equality and diversity remits, training and procedures would benefit from the explicit inclusion of class, accent and dialect as important elements of personal identity. By stating and reinforcing the (often overlooked) obvious point that people come from different backgrounds and social positions, and that lived experiences should be valued without being assumed, spaces of academic, public and policy engagement can move more towards being spaces of intersectional inclusion.

Notes

- ¹ See www.manchestervoices.org for more.

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PART II

Experts and expertise

FOUR

Participants as experts in their own lives: researching in post-industrial, intergenerational and post-colonial space

Michael Richardson

Within my academic practice I have always worked with the notion of ‘participants as experts in their own lives’. As a qualitative social researcher, I state plainly that the people involved in my research know more about their lives than I do, and I embrace the partial, yet rich and detailed, insight gleaned from such work. This seems logical. Indeed this seems ethical, and it supports approaches that participatory researchers across the social sciences would champion. There are various tactics academics can employ to account for this, and these often revolve around visual, narrative and creative research methods (see Mannay, 2016, for example). They are often deemed innovative by research institutions – and can attract funding as such¹ – yet they operate as everyday practice in more applied and arts-based settings.

This chapter opens with important questions that should be considered when engaging with policy, research and

crucially the idea of participant empowerment. First, does a ‘post-expert’ era change the role of academic knowledge? Second, is it always ethical to absolve expertise of responsibility? I hope that, in answering these questions, this chapter proves of interest to students, fellow academics, policy makers and practitioners alike.

I draw from my experience of working on geographies of gender and generation in post-industrial, intergenerational and post-colonial settings. I problematise the notion of ‘expertise’ within these spaces of engagement to acknowledge the important role it has played in shaping how I, as a researcher, have encountered other actors, groups and stakeholders. I have written about my social positioning in all of my published work, but it is the encounters with expertise in the post-industrial space (Richardson, 2014, 2015a, 2015b), the intergenerational space (Pattinson, 2018) and the post-colonial space (Richardson, 2018) of my work that form the focus of this chapter.

A post-expert era?

‘People in this country have had enough of experts ...’
 (Michael Gove, then UK Justice Secretary, interviewed
 on *Sky News*, 3 June 2016)

These words, delivered during the referendum campaign on Britain’s membership of the European Union, became an epithet for a populist movement. To those who sought to condemn this populism, the words echoed a fear that charismatic individuals were problematic proponents of simple solutions to more complex social problems. What it led to was a resurgence in an older problem of ‘town versus gown’² relations – the idea that, among other things, universities as sites of liberal and progressive thinking maintain a superiority over local people and communities through an intellectual snobbery. In understanding this relationship I point to the work

of the eminent human geographer Danny Dorling (2016, p 1, quoted in Anderson and Wilson, 2017, p 2). Dorling helps to point out that analyses of electoral geographies wrongly identified that working-class individuals were crucial to the populist vote and that through the reporting of this, these communities were ‘unfairly blamed’. Nevertheless, the words of Michael Gove marked the start of a ‘post-truth era’, one where academic research and policy relevant expertise are questioned and often rejected. This has arguably been further engrained through President Trump’s US administration and his preponderance for highlighting ‘fake’ news. These events have led to a challenge to the academic sector, forcing it to restate its purpose in and for contemporary society.

What this means for the liminal spaces between policy and research, as spaces of differences and encounter, is a newly politicised nature of such engagements. While the benefits of contextualising this chapter through timely discussions of Brexit Britain and Trump’s America are hopefully clear, it is worth noting that two of the three critical reflections this chapter draws on took place before either of these events had occurred. What follows in this chapter is split into three main empirical sections. The first explores the role of expertise in research with men and masculinities in a post-industrial³ setting, specifically research with men of Irish descent in the north-east of England (Richardson, 2015a, 2015b). The second discusses the role of the expert within intergenerational space, through documenting the experiences of university students and primary schoolchildren in the National Centre for Children’s Books (Pattinson, 2018). The third draws on research within the post-colonial setting of Hong Kong and on the racialised politics inherent in these encounters (Richardson, 2018). As a conclusion, the final section documents some recommendations to account for the fact that many research participants do not always recognise their expertise or share the viewpoint that what they have to offer is valuable. Instead, this chapter points to the use of ‘safe space’ as a method of

feminist intervention to account for expertise in more responsible ways. The following empirical reflections begin to address the second key question of this chapter: How ethical is the absolution of expertise?

Experts in post-industrial space

One of the aims of this edited volume is to better articulate the social positioning of researchers, and this section considers the research encounter in terms of gender, class and age. The chapter argues for a greater acknowledgement of intersectionality, which Hopkins (2017, p 1) describes as:

an approach to research that focuses upon mutually constitutive forms of social oppression rather than on single axes of difference. Intersectionality is not only about multiple identities but is about relationality, social context, power relations, complexity, social justice and inequalities.

In my early research into masculinity, nationality and intergenerational relations, what quickly became a feature of the work were questions of ‘embodied intergenerationality’ (Richardson, 2015a). I coined this term to refer to the ways in which family position and family background as embodied physical presence impacted on expertise within the research encounter. In particular this led to my participants making assumptions about me. For instance, in my work with Victor (not his real name), a fourth-generation Irishman, born in the north-east of England in the 1940s, it was comments from his wife that spoke directly to some of these issues. She stated simply: “You know it’s funny, Michael, you look just like my nephew ... the spitting image in fact, only he’s a little taller.” My assumed status as ‘just like them’ helped open doors (sometimes literally) within the research encounter but raised broader questions about epistemic privilege (also see [Chapter](#)

Three in this volume). While this chapter is not claiming that my privileged position made the research any better than if I had been considered an outsider, the nature of the research encounter, and levels of access and rapport, certainly changed as a result. I was deemed an expert by my participants. They considered me an expert in their lives as they often assumed I had lived – or would live – a very similar life to their own. In quoting from some of my earlier work I note:

It became apparent during the interactions with Peter that he saw me as a similar man to himself, with the major difference between us being our ages. Peter's remarks – 'you'll find this out one day' and 'you've got this all to come' – clearly position me in relation to himself as a fellow heterosexual man, who, though not yet having children, is expected to become a father at a later (older) stage. (Richardson, 2014, p 259)

Was this interaction constructed around some form of heterosexual performance? I propose that it is more likely that this was instead shaped by my participant's frame of reference. This point, including later analysis (Richardson, 2015a, 2015b), was picked up on by Dawn Mannay in her book *Visual, Narrative and Creative Research Methods* (2016) through discussions of safer and more accountable space. Of particular relevance is what Mannay calls (2016, p 27) 'making the familiar strange', which revolves around concerns over knowledge production. The value placed on experiential knowledge by participants, while simultaneously negotiating researcher nearness (the problematic nature of preconceptions within research) becomes a central concern. Ultimately, these issues of epistemic privilege are concerned with 'expertise' within the research encounter.

Questions of expertise can be heightened within the context of post-industrial masculinities, accelerated by the self-deprecating, humble and modest masculinities of working-class

men. My work on embodied intergenerationality (Richardson, 2015a) speaks directly to this. Through conversations with research participants, I was able to build a rapport simply through the aforementioned ability to ‘look like’ them. However, all of this was preceded by a level of disappointment for some of my participants who were expecting that meeting a human geographer (who was researching men of Irish descent) meant that they would receive help in completing their family trees. I did not, and do not, possess the expected genealogical expertise. Furthermore, despite reaffirming my skill set, these encounters were at times rife with my own misinterpretations. I recall the following incident from some of my early research:

In one instance, the occupation of ‘shipwright’ was incorrectly transcribed as ‘shipwriter’ – a job which does not exist. While a seemingly minor detail, the accuracy of this statement for the participants served as testimony to their knowledge of maritime industries; in one telephone conversation I had with Peter (Victor’s son), he pointed out that he did not want an audience member to question the integrity of the research based on this oversight. (Richardson, 2015b, pp 626–7)

It was through the pursuit of what I call ‘returning performance’ that the realisation of difference was most clearly articulated. The performances were ‘returned’ in the sense that the stories were taken back to where they derived from. Some were ‘returned’ on stage through a verbatim theatre performance (Richardson, 2015b), while participants were offered the chance to hear the digital recordings. All 38 of the men involved declined to listen to the audio recordings, many of whom repeatedly referred to the embarrassment of hearing their own voice.

As I explained to my participants at the time, I too feel embarrassment upon hearing my own voice both through the process of transcription and through having to endure this in

my teaching practice via audio recordings of my lectures (also known as ‘lecture capture’). The illusion of the all-knowing academic persona, along with some of the likenesses to the participants, however, began to break down in these moments. The relationships became risky, and made participant withdrawal from the research more likely. For example, some of the men challenged the typed verbatim transcripts of their interviews, and it was through such a process that the discussion of maritime job roles (mentioned earlier) was facilitated. Participants were encouraged to comment on the accuracy of my transcription. Typos were picked up, as well as my (deliberate) inclusion of the at times colloquial grammar and regional dialect. I responded to those who asked for these to be corrected that my sanitising of these data would have adversely affected the ethnographic moment of the spoken words themselves. The more serious consequence of this process was the risk of participant withdrawal, but thankfully this did not happen in my study. There were discussions with some participants about the potential omission of sections of their narratives, of certain stories, but, through careful and considered conversations about the value I placed on participants’ narratives, where their expertise was established, positive participant relations were maintained.

Experts in intergenerational space

In moving from class-based analysis to age-based analysis, this discussion explores the role of expertise in intergenerational work. More specifically, this section draws on an intergenerational practice (IGP) project with the National Centre for Children’s Books⁴ (see also Pattinson, 2018). Childhood is defined by what it is not – adulthood – and is shaped through relationships with institutions, such as the school, the state and the family. Power relations are inherent in such relationships and, if childhood is defined only by what it is not or by what it lacks, then conceptualisations

of it remain pejorative. It is important therefore to recognise children as experts in their own lives. Vanderbeck and Worth (2015, p 6), in their introduction to the edited collection *Intergenerational Space*, remind us that ‘younger generations have much to teach older generations’.

Expertise is harder to articulate when working with children. In these intergenerational spaces it is, however, the questions of *who* is doing the reading and listening and *where* the reading and listening is taking place that matter most. The books we read and share are important to the way we understand who we are. Undoubtedly then, reading can be considered an intimate source of childhood socialisation yet this process can be bi-directional. Nevertheless we are reminded through the words of Philo (2003, p 9) that ‘All adults have at an earlier time of their lives *been children*. We have all been “been there” in one way or another, creating the potential for some small measure of empathy’ (emphasis in original). Bavidge (2006, p 320) sounds a cautionary note (through the citation of Philo’s [2003, p 17] earlier warning) by pointing out that the writers of children’s stories can themselves be seen to be ‘too easily encapsulating children’s worlds’. Books then, as intergenerational, are often *for* children but rarely *with* them. It is important to remember this when considering Lee’s (1982) documentation of the evolution of childhood, which explains how children were first considered as the property of adults, were then seen as dependents in need of protection by and from adults, before finally being acknowledged as active actors in their own right. All of this was factored into the IGP project with university students and primary schoolchildren. This work reflects more recent calls within geography where Holloway et al (2018), for example, present a more nuanced articulation of children’s agency. They talk of the capacity, subjectivity, spatiality and temporality that have too often been overlooked by those involved with the geographies of children, youth and families.

As social science researchers we are not neutral, impartial observers of society and we should not pretend to be; rather we are products of our own environments. For Holloway et al (2018, p 14) these more embodied approaches, or as they would have it processes of ‘being and becoming’, have gained momentum, and they go on to argue:

that there is potential to extend this more broadly throughout the subdiscipline, and in relation to the children, youth and adults who influence, and are affected by, young people’s lives. More fundamentally, combined scrutiny of the embodied subject of agency and stretched notions of time moves us to emphasize that children are ‘biosocial beings and becomings’.

The ‘biosocial’ nature of the intergenerational spaces of this project were marked by the students considering themselves as young people. They were using the reading of particular children’s stories to children in the National Centre for Children’s Books with IGP as a method of research to explore issues of gender and gender-based identities. Proponents of IGP often say that the purpose of the activities is of secondary importance to the relationships established across age-based boundaries. What was particularly significant through this project was the children’s overlooking of the students’ expertise. Instead, the children considered the students as fellow learners and peers or, at best, as role models. The dynamic was different from that between the children, myself and their teacher. To use a familial framing, educators such as myself were seen as being like parents, whereas the students (as pupils themselves) were seen as being like older siblings. This has important policy implications for those interested in university impact and engagement. Indeed the findings on this project have been fed back to, through and with the Vital North Partnership.⁵

Significantly, the children involved articulated the IGP event in more intra-generational terms, while at the project's outset the students had set out with clearer distinctions. These are typified by the thoughts of one of the third-year undergraduate students:

‘[The book] is something which takes people away from what they know and what they consider to be their “comfort zone” to allow room for broader identity exploration, as it is telling children they can be who they want to be, not what society tells them they have to be, thus tackling the gender issues and stereotypes within the generations of the future. It is also a very relevant issue in society at the moment and something I am deeply interested in.’

This statement, made prior to the IGP event, speaks directly to the idea of the feminist intervention in challenging gender stereotypes and questioning unconscious bias. In contradictory ways, the fictional stories are employed as ‘safe spaces’ to broach sensitive subjects with strangers, although, for this student at least, part of the motivation of the activity is to embrace the uncomfortable so as to challenge children's preconceptions. A fuller analysis of this intergenerational project, however, stems from the later evaluation of the event; during which different views emerged from some of the students. The following statement helps us better understand who can be an ‘expert’ in these encounters. These remarks, made by the same student as quoted earlier, express doubt: ‘I’m not sure our intergenerational practice project worked. The children seemed to already know what we were trying to tell them and, if anything, we learned more from them’ (third-year undergraduate student).

Through working with IGP as a research method, expertise has been allowed to flow back and forth between children,

student and teacher. This student's evaluation actually resonates with the core of IGP work, that the very coming together across age boundaries brings greater understanding and cohesion. Yet, because of the institutional framing of the activity, the student was expecting to be educating the children through a hierarchy of knowledge. Earlier in this chapter, I introduced the importance of intersectionality, which specifically helps us understand how these power relations are shaped by multiple identities rather than by single axes of difference. It is not always clear who is the 'expert' in more participatory approaches to such research, or whether one is needed, often because each of the individuals involved is at different times denouncing their own input as valuable or important. In the post-industrial space, self-deprecation was commonplace as an innate narrative, whereas in this intergenerational space the students learned of their limits through interaction and encounter. The children looked up to the students as role models but this left many of them feeling not 'expert enough'. Self-doubt as an outlook is built into the social constructions of classed identities and it is the infantilisation of the students through the institutional setting (as fellow young people) that leads them to doubt their own aged-based identities.

Experts in post-colonial space

This, the third of the chapter's empirical reflections, does not draw from classed or aged-based identities but from those that are racialised and set within a post-colonial context. In particular they stem from my more recent research in Hong Kong, where I looked at issues of citizenship and intergenerational justice. Key to understanding expertise in this research is better understanding of the role of white privilege in the city. My reflections are a useful starting point and centre on the Cantonese term *gweilo*, which has various definitions depending on who you speak to; running through all variations however, is the depiction of a white foreign person:

I look like a *gweilo*, but I cannot contribute to the city in the way I am expected to. This led, I argue, to open and frank discussions of citizenship and social justice that would otherwise have not emerged in a less critical analysis of racial homogeneity. (Richardson, 2018, p 492)

Its relevance in this chapter stems from the privilege this whiteness enables and the associated expertise (or learned knowledge) that comes with such an identity. The quotation points to the crux of the issue and revolves around participant assumptions. Similar to those of the post-industrial setting, these assumptions are based on a set of working knowledges, in this case about life in the city, working for ‘big’ business and living as a privileged migrant. The *gweilo* label can therefore be attributed both internally within whiteness as well as across racial difference. My white British academic status is assumed to bring a level of knowledge and carries a prestige that includes me culturally in the elite post-colonial spaces of Hong Kong.

Despite this, I often felt out of place in the city and lacking in the required cultural knowledge to converse in ways that were convincing or meaningful. This doubt, my own doubt, is typified by my reflections:

At times, discussions I observed – and was expected to participate in, especially when revolving around working in Hong Kong – were conducted as if in a foreign language. The numbers, percentages, and figures woven into the everyday speak of working life were alien to me. I could converse freely with the two teachers of the study, but with the thirteen others who worked for, and as, the city’s business elite, this was lessened dramatically. (Richardson, 2018, p 491)

These reflections were based on conversations in English with white city workers. The tensions that this presents are not only

an ethical dilemma for me in my research – as I tried to distance myself from and to mitigate this privileged (racialised) position – they also affected some of the people I was researching. Indeed the words from one of my (white) participants spoke directly to this:

‘It’s tough, as unfortunately a lot of white people think they are better than locals as they have moved to Hong Kong to live the good life, and some people believe that locals are a lower grade/class. It raises the argument why do people who have moved to Hong Kong from the Western World call themselves “expats” and anyone who moves from a poorer country are considered “immigrants”?’ (Richardson, 2018, p 492)

In researching citizenship and intergenerational justice in the post-colonial setting, forms of situated knowledge help establish the expertise of my participants. It is the ‘axiomatic’ (see the work of Cranston 2017, and also [Chapter Six](#) in this volume) – the self-declaring – nature of these identities that proves influential in understanding their significance most clearly. My work in Hong Kong set out to investigate the role of white city workers in the recent Occupy movement. While across the participants there was a lack of engagement with the protest, the reasons for this varied greatly. A central theme emerged which was in effect established as a hierarchy of experience. This was based temporally on length of residence in the city. This is not to say that the longer they had lived in the city, the more likely they were to evoke their sense of active citizenship, but rather that they were simply more likely to be sympathetic to the ideals of the movement and to be more tolerant of its impact on city life. As a result of the aforementioned ‘sameness’ (see the section on ‘Experts in post-industrial space’), the participants assumed that I knew that their disengagement was deemed apolitical.

Yet this became clear only once it was explicated within the localised contexts.

The recognition of participants as experts in their own lives exists alongside the recognition of the limits of researcher knowledge. Shared experience and participant assumptions run through all three of these empirical examples, albeit in different ways.

Conclusion

As has been shown throughout this chapter, power relations are shaped by archaic legacies of ‘the ivory tower’, whereby the all-knowing academic was held in high regard (see also [Chapter Eight](#) in this volume). The lived realities of social and cultural capital (or, more appositely, a lack thereof) often trouble participants’ and researchers’ ability to accept their role as experts. Discussion in this chapter has been shaped by two key questions. First, and for context, academic knowledge was set against the ‘post-truth era’. Academic knowledge has a continual value, and I would encourage others to see this as a challenge to reinvigorate research rather than to dissuade them from engaging in it. Second, the chapter set out to explore the relationship between ethics and expertise within the research encounter. The notion of expertise is key to moving beyond the limiting nature of preconceptions. While rapport can often be an asset to a qualitative social researcher, it can also belie the significance or meaning of a research encounter.

Throughout any intersectional analysis, identity markers became significant as the categorisations were addressed in academic writing. However, listing such positions in our writing does not necessarily account for their relevance in our fieldwork (Moser, 2008). While our academic training may teach us about how to negotiate our multiple positionalities – itself a facet of newer, more ethically minded social research – there is a tendency to think that this is sufficient preparation for fieldwork. We can arm ourselves as participatory researchers who

are keen to minimise any adverse impacts on the research and to situate our knowledge within multiple and variable subject positions. Yet Moser's (2008, p 383) observations from a decade ago remain particularly pertinent to answering the chapter's key question on ethics and expertise:

The ways in which we were treated and talked about by the locals in our field site varied significantly and were based less upon our biographies and more upon our unique individual social and emotional qualities – our *personalities* rather than our *positionalities*. (emphasis in original)

While Moser's use of 'personalities' is only loosely framed within psychological literatures, its relevance remains if we conceptualise these in line with the biosocial, embodied perspectives of Holloway et al's more recent call (2018). Indeed it was the rapport established in my research in post-industrial space that led to the initial confusion of expertise. I was deemed an 'expert' in the lives of my participants because of assumed knowledge, assumed shared values and assumed life experiences. That I often looked like them further engrained these preconceptions. As discussed in this chapter, however, I did not always live up to participant expectations and, in spite of the self-deprecating denouncement of expertise on the part of the working-class men, it was established that they were experts in their own lives, helped through the pursuits of 'safe spaces' through participatory approaches and creative methodologies.

In intergenerational space, and when working with children in particular, similar pursuits of 'safe space' were sought. Children's books were seen to be a safer site for exploring big ideas. Like the aforementioned post-industrial pursuits, this critical reflection utilises the power of the creative and the fictional. What the intergenerational practice work helped explore was the hierarchy of knowledge which is often based on our age-bound identities and assumed capabilities. This can

be unnerving and may lead to self-doubt in older participants while remaining empowering for children.

Finally, post-colonial space was objectively more risky. Research in this context led to more doubt on my part, as researcher, than ever before. This was further established only through the temporal hierarchy of experience and residency. Being 'expert' required more situated knowledge. Despite this, however, and in sharing the observations of Moser quoted earlier, a greater acknowledgement of the emotional intelligence of the researcher is key to navigating the terrain of expertise in social research. Participants will always make assumptions and carry preconceptions, but so do researchers and thus it is of vital importance to remember that they are the *experts in their own lives*.

This chapter has drawn research reflections across different research settings. In moving between the spaces of the post-industrial, intergenerational and post-colonial it has focused on common ground and shared experience rather than on articulating difference. Taking an intersectional approach to this work has helped explain how commonality within and across multiple research encounters exists and how, ultimately, this is present whether a researcher anticipates it or not. Successful social research is therefore less about who and what we are and more about who and what our participants perceive us and themselves to be. Ultimately, the chapter champions the notion that participants are experts in their own lives. This is not in response to a top-down impact agenda (or any other directive for that matter), but it does not mean that the work is without impact. While this work is not – and should not be – target driven, the person-centred, embodied and intimate nature of these encounters make important and impactful contributions. Acknowledgement of this is under-reported within the 'world leading' agendas of global academia. It is a notion that participatory scholars need to continue to challenge.

Notes

- 1 Work from which this chapter is drawn has received funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) through its Festival of Social Sciences, as well as from the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Fund at Newcastle University. There are implications therefore for teaching, research and scholarship.
- 2 The historical metaphor of ‘town’ and ‘gown’ continues to have credence in contemporary discourse, where ‘town’ refers to the non-academic population of a university area and ‘gown’ symbolises those within the academic community. These divisions have fuelled, at least in part, the work of Goddard et al (2016).
- 3 The setting is post-industrial in the sense that the research participants all had connections to the region’s former industries, most often in the maritime industries of the River Tyne and affiliated work in the surrounding Tyneside. Through processes of deindustrialisation the region saw change in employment primarily through a shift from the manufacturing sector to the services sector. The high wages and job opportunities that the area once provided in heavy industry were often replaced by lower skilled (and lesser paid) service based jobs. It is worth noting though that, in more recent times, there has been a re-industrialisation of the region, particularly in relation to newer maritime technologies.
- 4 See www.sevenstories.org.uk
- 5 The Vital North Partnership is the formal collaboration between Newcastle University and Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children’s Books, which is in part funded by Arts Council England (<https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/vitalnorth/about>).

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FIVE

Encounter(ing) spaces and experts: negotiating stakeholder relations within infrastructure research

Ralitsa Hiteva

Increasingly, career progression and grant funding within academia necessitate working with policy makers, industry and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). For example, the interest in universities' engagement with industry partners has grown considerably in recent years, from both a policy and an academic perspective (Cohen et al, 2002). This means that infrastructure research – exploring issues around the governance and delivery of infrastructure assets (such as power plants and railways) and services (such as flexibility and mobility) – involves multiple encounters with different types of stakeholders in a variety of encounter spaces, some of which may have distinct institutional settings and norms.

While interdisciplinary research in collaboration with policy, industry and civil society rapidly becomes the norm, this type of encounter space is very much still a black box in research on infrastructure, or is considered to be neutral. I argue that such spaces can in fact be hotspots of emotional labour, in particular for early career researchers (ECRs), and that they

shape the type of engagement and potential for impact from collaborations. Using personal anecdotes and experiences, I unpack the intersectionalities involved in doing social science research and engagement on infrastructure in encounter spaces between academia, policy, industry and civil society. Positionality and intersectionality play a decisive role in how we are perceived in encounter spaces and in the terms of our engaging with others within them. Positionality articulates gender, race, class and other aspects of our identities as markers of relational positions (Alcoff, 1988), which can ‘position’ researchers as insiders or outsiders relative to the community with which they are engaging on the basis of whether or not they share characteristics, such as cultural background and gender (Nagar and Geiger, 2007).

Infrastructure encounter spaces can create the conditions for simultaneously facing bias along multiple identity dimensions – in my case, as a young/junior female social scientist from Eastern Europe – and how the combination of these social identities (for example this intersectionality) shapes bias against my research in a surprising way, rendering me on occasions invisible as an expert in encounter spaces.

Encounters and encounter spaces in work on infrastructure

Encounter literature provides a critical examination of the varied forms through which contact takes place and the importance of the different spaces where contact takes place. Encounters in different spaces have different potentials to become ‘meaningful’, that is, to translate beyond the specifics of the individual moment and to change values in a positive way (Valentine, 2008, p 325). In the context of my work on infrastructure, encounter spaces have ranged from the expected meeting rooms, offices, cafes and corridors of the powerful to golf courses and shooting ranges. The context of spaces and the diversity of contexts within which others are encountered does matter, especially if they are outsiders to these spaces (Piekut

and Valentine, 2017). Piekut and Valentine have examined the role of contact in different types of spaces in encounters and whether encounters in selected spaces are significant predictors of attitudes towards people with distinctly different characteristics such as ethnic and religious backgrounds. Encounters are essentially confrontational since people tend not to welcome difference, transformation and change, as well as opportunistic as they create the possibility for change and transformation by destabilising and shifting existing boundaries in stereotypes, perceptions, habits and criteria.

Piekut and Valentine (2017) argue that intergroup contact in institutional spaces has a stronger positive impact on attitudes than encounters in other spaces, such as public and consumption spaces. Introducing diversity in infrastructure research and interactions with policy makers, industry and society, however, does not automatically translate into positive encounters or into greater diversity in terms of impact. Meeting a young/junior Eastern European female researcher from a social science background does not necessarily translate into challenging negative representations and perceptions of all female researchers, or into introducing positive change. Instead, as Brown and Turner (1981) point out, this could lead to the exclusion of individuals from group stereotypes, that is, being subtyped. Valentine (2008) points out that, while in negative encounters individuals are perceived to represent members of a wider social group, in positive encounters minority individuals tend to be treated as individuals. This therefore makes it difficult to change perceptions of young/junior female social scientists working in the field of infrastructure so that they will be seen as experts. In fact, contact with difference can leave attitudes and values unmoved, and even hardened (Valentine, 2008). Only certain types of encounters produce 'meaningful contact' (see Chapter One). However, I argue that this depends to a large extent on the *type of space* where encounters take place (also see Chapter Two in this volume).

Piekut and Valentine (2017) distinguish spaces that differ in the quality of social interactions that they facilitate, including, among others, institutional spaces like universities and schools. Universities can thus be thought of as institutional spaces where encounters with difference are developed and sustained. Although relations within universities are guaranteed by equality laws, asymmetries of power and access to resources can stretch beyond the immediate work environment (that is, a department or a campus), including a diversity of other spaces where researchers engage with academics and non-academics in relation to their research/work.

In the context of infrastructure, encounter spaces are at the intersection between social science and engineering, and involve working on complex technical policy areas, often as part of large interdisciplinary consortiums. As such, they are often encounter spaces outside of my immediate institution and involve external partners, including industry, policy makers and civil society. Encounter spaces can be powerful means of opening up research and policy areas dominated by a homogeneous group of researchers and ideas, such as infrastructure. Including a more diverse range of voices, experiences and values is an important element of making infrastructure work better for society. There is recognition that infrastructure offers limited opportunities for meaningful engagement with decision making, which can manifest as ‘the institutional gap’ (Coelho et al, 2014). As a practice, research and policy field, it is also dominated by Western white men with technical expertise, most commonly from an engineering background and with a set of methodological approaches and skills such as modelling (see Chapter Six in this volume). These largely represent what Stanley and Wise (1993, p 66) describe as ‘western industrial scientific approach [which] values the orderly, rational, quantifiable, predictable, abstract and theoretical’. England (1994) argues that a greater diversity of research methods and experts can have a positive impact

on embracing (rather than dismissing) existing contradictions and complexities.

The concept of encountering is useful for the emphasis it places on encountering difference, that is, ‘others’. The ways in which encounters with ‘others’ play out are not just determined by the momentary materiality of the encounter itself, but also by pre-existing socio-spatial imaginaries about what place is or should be (Hoekstra and Pinkster, 2019). For example, in the context of infrastructure research this means performing as an expert in a context that identifies older/more senior, male engineers as the ‘rightful’ and traditional experts in infrastructure, as the ones who ‘belong’ to such spaces of encounters. I remember turning up to speak at a technical session on renewables at a large industry conference, where I felt acute unease when I realised that in a room of 60 people I was the only woman. At that point I observed the session chair locking the room “so that latecomers do not interrupt the proceedings”. The audience and the rest of the panel members proceeded to look at me with a pointed interest for the next 90 minutes. As a young/junior female social scientist, I did not feel as if I belonged in the sea of blue suits. Shortly before the start of the session, when I sat down on the table at the podium and pulled my notebook out, I was asked by a fellow panel member if I was lost. This comment illustrates the extent to which he thought that I did not belong in that setting as an expert on technical aspects of integrating renewables into the national grid.

Far from being a single instance or a particularly bad example, some of the encounters I have experienced have had a long-lasting impact on different aspects of my research, such as defining my research topics and identifying a potential audience for my research. Shortly after I started my current position as a research fellow, I was part of a team invited to engage with a government agency. I was standing between two male colleagues at the reception of the building when the senior policy maker behind the invitation came to greet

us, shaking hands with my colleague on the right and then with my colleague on the left, while my outstretched hand was left hanging. In what was far from a gendered difference in welcoming or awkwardness, he continued to ignore me during the discussion and in the email exchanges that followed. In encounter spaces some of the hidden power asymmetries, perceptions of experts and intersectionalities that shape encounters can come to the fore (that is, become visible). The act of purposefully not shaking my hand and of dismissing my input were ways of expressing that I did not belong to these encounters and that I was not welcome in them. As with many other such occasions, although the gesture (or lack of it) was immediately noticeable to me, my colleagues remained oblivious to what was happening. While Domosh (2015) argues that it can be increasingly difficult to recognise the ways in which gender differentiation is taking place within a professional setting, such as an institutional space, encounter spaces do not offer the same level of protection that is usually afforded on campus. In the context of both encounters, I was identified as an 'other' not only on the basis of my gender but also as a result of the compounded effects of my being a young/junior female social scientist.

Encountering experts and being encountered as an expert

In the context of infrastructure research, working with non-academic stakeholders often involves engaging with experts. In fact, a preferred method of collaboration in the production of impact is working closely together, on an equal footing (that is, implying a mutual recognition of respective expertise) for co-production, rather than disseminating knowledge that has been independently produced away from the target audience. However, while co-production involves more frequent encounters outside of academic institutions using different encounter formats, such as email exchanges, calls, meetings, workshops, joint grant applications and report

writing, the role of the expert is not automatically assumed or granted. If anything, co-production puts greater importance on the researcher being recognised as an expert by external stakeholders. Failure to be recognised as an expert by external stakeholders can severely limit the scope and nature of any potential impact and have a long-lasting effect on the researcher. The role of an expert in co-production is useful only in that it creates opportunities for the open exchange of views and the acceptance of different ideas and experiences in shaping discussions and outcomes.

A focus on encounter spaces offers a closer look at how the politics of belonging are enacted within this specific space, that is, how the boundaries of who belongs to a particular community of experts and place and who does not are set (following Leitner, 2012). Encounter spaces can be claimed by specific cultures and contexts, and by groups of participants (experts), while others (experts) can be excluded (Valentine, 2008). Furthermore, these spaces can be influenced by unequal power dynamics between groups and subject to contestations over their meaning and functional use as spaces for encountering experts (and difference) (Wessendorf, 2013). While encounter spaces can be envisioned as a space of encounter that fosters positive experiences of 'others', as encounters are usually organised to learn and to hear a variety of opinions and experiences, they can also be less welcoming to some, who may struggle to be accepted as and to perform as experts. If an identifier of difference in an encounter space is gender, it can undermine female researchers' sense of belonging, rendering them invisible in this space in the role of an expert.

For example, on several occasions when I was attending meetings organised by government agencies in an academic capacity, with senior male colleagues, I was asked if I was a PhD or a Master's student accompanying them, despite my clearly introducing myself as a research fellow with expertise pertinent to the meeting. The failure to be recognised as an expert made me self-manage my input into the discussion, as

I no longer felt as if I could contribute in the meeting or be heard by others in the meeting. Encounters can invoke strong emotions, such as fear, annoyance, anger, humiliation and discomfort, the management of which, within and beyond the encounter space, is the ‘emotional labour of encounters’. In my case, on many occasions I felt as if I needed to justify my presence to others at meetings and my credentials as an expert. Furthermore, my input is more likely to be left unnoticed (that is, the discussion moves on as if I haven’t said anything), dismissed or challenged. The anticipation that any or all of that would take place during encounters is always present, colouring even encounters where such instances do not take place.

Positionality can have a significant impact on the research process, outcome and impact as it informs how various people interact with researchers and helps provide access to certain people and places. For example, although the female gender of researchers can grant them access to spaces or more emotional access to research subjects (Kusek and Smiley, 2014), it can also result in an outsider status within an encounter space, and limit the researcher and the potential impact of their work (by labelling them as non-expert or as someone of diminished capability to engage with a particular issue or audience). Expert making, or how we pass (or not) as experts in different encounter spaces, depends on how certain characteristics of our identity are called forth (or positioned) in these spaces. Participants in encounter spaces have multiple and intersecting identities and thus differential capacity to participate (Valentine, 2008). Therefore, we need to pay more attention to which particular identifications are approached through such encounters.

For Merriam et al (2001), positionality denotes where one stands in relation to the ‘other’ and in regard to the politics of knowledge construction (England, 1994). This is particularly important in the context of the co-production of knowledge in encounter spaces. Maher and Tetreault (1993) argue that the validity of knowledge depends on acknowledging the knower’s

specific position in any context, because changing contextual and relational factors are crucial for defining identities and our knowledge in any given situation. The shaping of one's voice in encounter spaces is largely constituted by one's position there (that is, a researcher providing expert opinion to a government agency). Sharing certain identity markers of pertinence to the encounter that is taking place, or to the encounter space, plays an important role in the positioning of oneself as an expert. Being the only female in the room and the only social scientist in a technical discussion has often positioned me as an outsider in a group of experts, that is, as a non-expert. This exclusion is manifested as comments about 'accompanying' the actual experts in the more junior role of a PhD or Master's student, roles that clearly exclude me as an expert and at best position me as an expert-in-training.

Through sharing personal experiences I aim to illustrate some of the commonplace practices of framing and positioning researcher's identity as an expert (or not) in different encounter spaces, which can lead to the dismissal of expertise. Once I started working on issues related to infrastructure policy and governance, my positionality became more complex and problematic, as my research and expertise entered the realm of 'infrastructures of national importance' and the 'UK industrial strategy'. Nationality became a prominent marker of my positionality as an expert in national (that is UK) level policy on investment and innovation in economic and social infrastructure. When recommending an alternative way of doing things I was repeatedly asked 'if this is how it was done where you come from', and I started to be asked how certain approaches compare to practices in other countries.

Rather than my being an expert in UK national infrastructure policy, which I had researched and worked on for the past ten years, it was assumed that I was an expert on 'other' national infrastructure policies linked to my place of birth. Having worked almost exclusively on UK infrastructure for the past

seven years, I know little about infrastructure in my country of birth or in most other countries in the European Union (EU). This was when I started noticing whether I was the only non-British national in the room. For the first time people also started noticing my (non-British-sounding) name and asking me, in the break, where I came from and whether I was planning on 'going back'. The shift in the focus of my research on national-level infrastructure and the importance of my nationality coincided with the referendum for the UK leaving the EU and the process of Brexit which followed. Instances of being othered persisted, while my identity as an expert became more complex with the changing political context. I found that my critical analysis of existing approaches to national-level policy were less welcomed and even more easily dismissed.

In a recent workshop with academics from different institutions and national-level policy makers I argued that we need to move away from existing rationalisations for investing in economic infrastructure for the purposes of accumulation in the most affluent areas in the UK (such as London, Oxford and Cambridge) and then to distribute the benefits to areas in need; that we should invest in the social and economic infrastructure as a way to localise benefits from investment in areas that are struggling. I spoke about the geographies of inequalities in the UK and the vast differences in infrastructure investment between the south and the north. The idea goes against the policy of several national-level infrastructure institutions but builds on substantial scientific evidence. My passionate intervention was followed by a senior British academic from a different institution addressing me in front of everyone present: "Don't worry, the British people will make the best decision about how to spend their budget". Once again I was positioned as someone who did not belong to that discussion and who shouldn't be talking about it in a critical manner, the marker of difference clearly being my perceived nationality. In none of the conversations about my place of belonging did anyone ever ask me if I had British citizenship.

The senior British academic did not ask me if I paid taxes and thus contribute to the UK's national budget. Too shocked, indifferent or scared to say anything, no one commented on his statement. The context within which I was not an expert, or lacked the legitimacy to discuss issues around national-level policy, had shifted once again, adding to the emotional labour of engagement in an already complex encounter space for me.

I have wondered whether, if I worked on a different topic, such as community energy for example, I would come across similar, sometimes seemingly insurmountable, barriers to being perceived as an expert. The rationale was that NGOs and community organisations would be less hierarchical and more open and used to coping with difference. In addition, industry is believed to operate in a more stringent environment, where professional etiquette is always followed. However, encounters and encounter spaces in working with industry and civil society can also be complex spaces of tension. Despite academic institutions' focus on equality, diversity, mentoring and eradicating bias on campuses and within administrative work, teaching and research, encounter spaces with external, non-academic stakeholders are tricky to navigate, even if the encounters take place on university grounds.

When I meet external industry stakeholders on campus, my role as someone involved in teaching (lecturing) can compete with my role as an expert outside of teaching. I recently chaired a meeting with industry partners, following a request from the company for help with evaluation of a pilot project. My role in the evaluation involved designing a data collection and evaluation strategy, which was repeatedly ignored by the pilot coordinator, an older man, despite my explaining it to him several times. During the meeting he dismissed my inputs and my role as an expert in data collection and project evaluation with comments such as "This is how we do it in practice. You wouldn't know because you mainly work at the university" or "Maybe this is how you make your students do it but I have done it this way for over 25 years". Throughout the meeting

he referred to my role as a “student tutor”, making statements about what it entailed. These statements, off topic and uninvited, illustrated how he saw me as someone who works with students, as a teacher rather than as a practitioner of evaluation and projects. It was quite clear that he saw these two identities as mutually exclusive.

At the end of the meeting, when I raised the issue with his line manager who was also present, my concerns were dismissed and, along with them, my suggestions for data collection and evaluation. I was reminded that the coordinator was not a student, that I could not expect him to do everything that I want and that I need to speak to him in a different way because he is a professional. It became clear that the line manager of the coordinator did not consider it to be his responsibility to act in the encounter space to resolve issues of conduct. He thought that, since the meeting had taken place on campus, it was my responsibility to act and manage the encounters in that space by raising the issue at that point. My reasoning was that it was his responsibility as the coordinator, his supervisee, was engaging in an (un)professional manner on a project that he had been hired to coordinate, and that the location of the encounter didn't matter in this regard. He suggested that I email him directly, stating my discomfort with the situation, and he would then act on it because the ball was then in his court and there was a procedure he could follow for email complaints, but he felt unable to act in person at the time of the encounter.

Such encounters are problematic not only because of the lack of clarity on the mandate to manage encounter spaces but also because of the ‘hidden’ effect that they have on researchers and on the potential impact of the cooperation. It seems that encounter spaces are in-between spaces, where it is everyone's and no one's responsibility to act. Problematic situations in encounter spaces are even harder to manage if the researcher in question is in the early stages of their career (that is, an ECR). An ECR may feel that they have even less agency to manage encounters in impact spaces, especially when there

are clear hierarchies acting in that space, such as more senior academic colleagues or senior policy, industry or third-sector actors. Further complexities and barriers to agency for ECRs may emerge if the senior academic colleagues who are party to the encounter are from another academic institution, or if the encounter space is outside of the university.

The most difficult aspect yet of such encounters and the spaces within which they take place is the emotional labour, which can extend beyond the immediate encounter itself and compound and stir up previous encounters with or beyond specific participants. Encounters can stay with the researcher and linger over different aspects of their related or future work. Most of all, there is significant emotional labour involved in trying to raise an issue in encounter spaces, explain what has gone wrong and to convince others that it was indeed wrong and that action should be taken (Domosh, 2015). Emotional labour is also involved in how researchers are perceived, whether as an expert or not, which in turn shapes how they can engage in that space and the impact that they can have. After my encounter with the senior government official who would not shake my hand I wondered whether he would talk to other colleagues about me and whether that would mean that I could not meaningfully engage with one of the most powerful national-level institutions in my area of expertise in the UK. After two years, these doubts have subsided significantly but are still not entirely gone. A common response to managing the emotional impact of encounters is to evoke protective strategies of self-management, which can manifest as spatial and social self-marginalisation (that is, avoiding encounter spaces and encounters with specific individuals and types of stakeholders) (Maddrell et al, 2019). For example, I consciously avoid workshops and seminars where the senior government official who didn't shake my hand, or the senior British academic who thought that that British people know best what is good for them, are due to speak or likely to attend. I will never attend events organised by either of them. I have

met many fellow ECRs who have similar lists of people, and often the same people will appear on multiple lists. However, I am not aware of any instances where such behaviour has been confronted at an institutional or project level. A more sinister effect of such encounters is the self-management in terms of how critical I can be and who I can be critical in front of.

Raising such issues internally often comes up against concerns about institutional and individual reputation, and negatively impact the potential for future collaborations. While ECRs may fear that they do not have the agency to express their concerns directly and immediately during problematic encounters, senior academics who are better able to address problematic encounters often do not see them as problematic, or share similar experiences of difference in encounter spaces. Moreover, some are actively discouraged from raising issues. I have been cautioned not to question team dynamics, as “being cast as ‘the difficult female social scientist’ is the easiest way to kill your career in its nascence”. As illustrated, the failure to be recognised as an expert in such encounter spaces because of signifiers of difference, can lead to the homogenising of impact from interdisciplinary work, as well as strengthening the homogenisation of approaches, research methods and teams in infrastructure.

Although there are multiple barriers to impact, being perceived as an expert in a space of encounter with others has so far not been discussed in the literature. There seems to be limited flexibility of the extent to which researchers, and ECRs in particular, can award greater or lesser significance to different aspects of their identity and circumstances in encounter spaces. In my case, and for many others, vectors of difference like gender, age and nationality can come together to raise more barriers to meaningful encounters in interdisciplinary collaborations within and beyond academia. And as my experience shows, the significance of specific vectors of difference can change with large shifts in the political and cultural environment, such as Brexit, and with the change of research topic and stakeholders encountered.

Yep writes about ‘thick intersectionalities’ as the embodied identities lived by people within specific geopolitical and historical contexts, which lead to affective investments that people make in their identity performance (Yep, 2010, p 173). Academic identities (that is, research fellow, senior research fellow, principal investigator) often transcend job title and contract type, which can create and magnify advantage and disadvantage (Maddrell et al, 2019). So an ECR can end up in charge of impact engagement with others, and as the expert of specific case studies and projects, or in managing projects as a principal investigator – a title the significance of which does not translate well, if at all, outside of academia. Despite academic titles and levels of responsibility, encounter spaces are populated by invisible standards against which ‘other’ (that is, my) identities are measured and from which they are declared to deviate. As illustrated in the shared experiences here, my role as an expert in encounters with others has often been perceived against a male, British senior engineer. The emotional labour of working in these encounter spaces and being encountered as ‘other than an expert’ emerges from the affective investment in being recognised as an expert in my area of research (infrastructure).

The biggest surprise for me personally was the role of nationality as a vector of difference. Having lived outside of my country of birth and having studied and worked in the UK for the past 16 years, I felt that nationality was mostly an invisible aspect of my personal identity as a researcher and as an expert, rather than a powerful sense of belonging to an ‘an imagined political community’ (Anderson, 1991, p 6). In my case, expected experiences of sexism were compounded by other, unanticipated aspects of intersectional difference such as nationality, including expectations of what their role in encounters could be.

Considerations of encountering

Although encounter spaces between academics, policy makers, industry and civil society play an important role in

shaping relationships between these stakeholders and the opportunities for such encounters to produce an impact, they can be spaces of intense emotional labour, which reproduce practices of discrimination such as sexism rather than spaces for positive change through encountering difference. ECRs can be particularly disadvantaged in encounter spaces, with some negative impacts stretching beyond specific encounters and stakeholders, and resulting in self-imposed isolation and censorship. If we do not critically engage with encounter spaces, they can remain lost in between different institutional cultures, producing experiences which will likely not be tolerated elsewhere. The rules of one's institution are not simply and seamlessly imprinted on encounter spaces; they have to be enacted by a diverse set of participants. It is better for awareness of encounter space dynamics to take place pre-emptively, with the introduction of guidelines, rules and best practice for managing encounters, both within individual institutions and in shared institutional spaces. Collective intolerance of so-called micro-aggressions and intersectional discriminations can be a powerful force for change, but would require direct action and a shared sense of responsibility to act.

Although there is training available for how researchers can work better with other stakeholders in encounter spaces and get their expertise across more effectively, there is no training on how to navigate and support others, especially ECRs with difference, in encounter spaces between academic and non-academic stakeholders. Furthermore, there is no training available on how to manage the emotional labour of such encounters researchers have to deal with. The emotional labour of encounters can be reduced by the pre-emptive action of bringing clarity and awareness of intersectionality to encounter spaces, and by embedding support measures for emotional labour in mentoring schemes, impact training activities and ECR training in academic institutions.

Assumptions and relationships linked to intersectional characteristics such as differences in gender, race, class, age and nationality, in encounters and exchanges between researchers, industry and policy makers facilitate the transmission of different forms of knowledge, the receptiveness to ideas and the forming of coalitions. Spaces of encounter generate relations, connections and strategic capabilities that serve as a basis for the articulation of difference in infrastructure research and can play a decisive role in defining the impact of research on academia, industry and policy, and on social relations. For encounters to be meaningful they should broaden the reflexive processes of engagement with infrastructure, and the associated generation of knowledge and prescriptions for action; facilitate deep interaction between different stakeholders (including differences in terms of gender, race, class, age and nationality); and enable learning about how to alter thinking and organising towards new practice sets and paradigms that are reflexive of the positionality of researchers in terms of these characteristics (Pereira et al, 2015).

Positionalities and encounters are co-constitutive. Encounters reflect and reproduce the positionalities of those involved, but they can also cause positionalities to be questioned through the encounter (Leitner, 2012). However, realising such opportunities for positive change in encounter spaces is not easy or a given, as illustrated by my anecdotes. Examining the encounter spaces between policy, industry and academia is important, because they hold open the possibility of destabilising boundaries and creating new spaces for negotiating across difference. As such, these spaces need to be governed by a set of clear rules to all participants to enable opportunities for positive changes in practice. Encounter spaces should be open to all types of experts and levels of expertise – not necessarily where differences are erased but where they can coexist.

Engaging with encounter spaces at an institutional level can also provide opportunities to take into consideration the impact *of* diversity and *on* diversity within interactions between different actors. Unless we recognise that diversity is an integral part of the solutions needed for societal challenges such as climate change and our well-being, there is a danger that infrastructure research agendas miss opportunities for new research directions, different voices and ways of engagement. Ultimately, pursuing such questions could lead to understanding how we can turn encounter spaces between academia, industry, policy makers and society into sites of destabilisation and transformation of stereotypes of gender, age, nationality and discipline (among many) in infrastructure research and practice.

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Theorising transdisciplinary research encounters: energy and Illawarra, Australia

Gordon Waitt

Transdisciplinary research is one of the calls of our day, when the entire world faces the challenges of a changing climate and precarious access to resources. Transdisciplinary research offers possibilities for grappling with a series of crises related to how we live by asking new questions. That said, the promise of transdisciplinary research to deliver a concerted effort of social change is not separate from unequal knowledge regimes, including consideration of Western masculinist knowledge. Scientists and social scientists often stand in relation to each other in transdisciplinary projects, especially as inflected through differences and similarities in epistemologies and methodologies. Conducting truly transdisciplinary research requires that we develop a deeper understanding of how knowledge production, circulation and credibility relates to not only the political bases of research but also how scholars arrive at a project, and the social norms that constitute the expert.

This chapter aims to address the challenges of conducting transdisciplinary research by drawing upon concepts within feminist science and post-structuralist feminism. A feminist domestic energy upgrade framework is offered as a new way to think about conducting transdisciplinary research. This framework refers to how knowledge may be conceived as always partial, situated, gendered and hierarchical. Furthermore, current approaches to energy efficiency tend to overlook how embodied differences in gender, class and age influence accessibility and interact with energy provision and infrastructure. I seek to illustrate the applications of a feminist domestic energy upgrade framework through an applied example as a feminist geographer researching domestic energy use with engineers and social marketers.

The chapter is structured as follows. To start, a brief background to the energy crises in Australia and the Energy+Illawarra project is provided. Next, I offer the feminist domestic energy upgrade framework, which played a decisive role in thinking about how knowledge related to domestic energy efficiency is produced, circulated and gains credibility. Then I reflect on my position as a feminist geographer in this transdisciplinary household energy-efficiency project to open up discussions around intersectionality and impact for policy, practice and publics. I focus on two research encounters. First, I will critically reflect on my assumptions and encounters with engineers and what happens when geography is positioned as an alternative form of knowledge. Second, I introduce the research encounter with a closed 'data portal' – a website where data is catalogued, analysed and stored – generated by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) as an avenue of investigation into how knowledge is produced and shared with policy makers. To conclude, I work through possible conundrums that may exist between building future research coalitions, feminist research agendas and energy publics.

Background to Energy+Illawarra project

Fuel poverty is a key challenge in the global North, and Australia's older low-income households are among the most at risk because of surging domestic energy costs. Household electricity prices as of June 2017 have more than doubled in a decade. Domestic energy price hikes are attributed to uncertainty in the market, generated by a decade-long federal government failure to integrate climate and energy policy. One wake-up call was the estimate by Simshauser et al (2011) that, by 2030, 30 per cent of low-income households in New South Wales, Australia, will spend more than 10 per cent of their budget on energy. Pressures on domestic energy are likely to be exacerbated by the changing climate and social norms of thermal comfort. It is not at all clear, if domestic energy demand were left unchecked, where energy resources would come from to supply peak demand or the implications for prices, electricity grids and climate change.

In the climate and energy policy mix, energy efficiency is positioned by neoliberal governments as a highly cost-effective strategy for reducing fuel poverty, carbon footprint and energy insecurity. Neoliberal energy efficiency economics plays out internationally and nationally in terms of engineering design, technologies and household practices. Since 2014 the energy efficiency economics of doing the same (or more) with less was endorsed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2014). Likewise, in Australia, the household is an important space where neoliberal policies of responsible consumer citizenship are articulated and played out through energy star ratings of domestic appliances and houses. Only in 2003 were energy efficiency regulations introduced for Australian houses, hence most Australian housing, regardless of climatic location, is likely to need large amounts of energy for domestic heating or cooling.

In 2012 the Gillard Australian Commonwealth government announced a series of energy efficiency funding initiatives, including targeting community partnerships towards low-income households (Low Income Energy Efficiency Program [LIEEP]). Energy+Illawarra was funded as part of this federally funded low-income energy efficiency programme. The project involved working with Regional Development Australia, Illawarra, Workers' educational associations, community forums, aged care providers and older low-income people in the Illawarra region of New South Wales to support domestic energy-efficient practices and comfort and well-being in the home through energy upgrades of existing housing and community engagement programme (see Cooper et al, 2016). Yet, the challenge remained of how to reduce the amount of energy required for each household to provide and perform everyday lives without compromising their health and well-being, within specific climatic, housing and social preconditions.

Titled 'Energy Efficiency in the 3rd Age' (EE3A) and branded Energy+Illawarra for the social marketing campaign, this project was a community-led energy efficiency trial funded through the Australian government's Low Income Energy Efficiency Program from 2015 to 2016. The project was one of 20 trials across Australia 'to support groups of service providers to demonstrate smarter energy use in low income households across Australia'. The domestic energy challenges of the Illawarra are representative of many Australian coastal regions with a temperate climate (mean afternoon summer temperature around 23°C and mean night-time winter temperature around 9°C) and an ageing population that had grown rapidly in the 1960s as a result of migration primarily from the UK and Europe. In the Illawarra, as in the rest of Australia, the absence of energy building rating standards at the time allowed builders, or migrants themselves, to construct low-density and low-cost

fibro-clad housing without attention to insulation, passive heating or cooling. Coal-fuelled power stations, supplied by abundant reserves of low-cost domestic coal, ensured that domestic energy supplies were among the lowest in Western nations. In the Illawarra, ineffective and inefficient domestic winter warming practices are often exacerbated because of a shared cultural understanding of this as a summer place, despite night-time temperatures during the winter months falling below 8 °C for 10 per cent of winter days over the past 15 years (Hitchings et al, 2015). While households are often well versed in strategies to stay cool over the summer, winter warming practices tend to be more ad hoc (Hitchings et al, 2015).

Energy+Illawarra was conceived as a community-led project that involved social marketers, human geographers, engineers, the regional development agency, community service providers, aged care providers and local councils. Each of these stakeholders had important project roles. Three trials and associated activities were carried out: (1) a tailored social marketing programme to 830 households; (2) customised energy efficiency retrofits to a subset of 185 of 830 households; and (3) energy efficiency workshops and leadership capacity building courses. The project was not one in which people working in different paradigms could work in isolation – the project team had to acknowledge that disciplinary knowledge produces different rather than similar understandings of the challenge. The project's mixed-methods design employed energy audits, a baseline and two follow-up surveys of household energy attitudes, knowledge and behaviours, and focus groups alongside energy sensory ethnographies that combined semi-structured interviews, videos and follow-up conversations. The social marketing programme consisted of a multilevel and multi-component strategic social marketing programme including newsletters, narrative videos, Liquid Crystal Display video brochures, small energy-efficient products, a

project website, social media activity on Twitter and Facebook, community events, media relations and media advocacy, stakeholder advocacy (for example with energy retailers) and policy advocacy with local and national government.¹ The Energy Upgrade Program involved generating tailored household retrofits by drawing upon the energy audits of the building physicists and engineers, hand in hand with the energy sensory ethnographies conducted by the human geographers. Energy upgrades involved the installation of a range of energy-saving technologies selected from a list that included roof/floor insulation, pipe lagging, blinds, fridges and heat pumps.

A feminist domestic energy upgrade framework

I offer the notion of a feminist domestic energy upgrade framework to open up discussions for those researching with others in academia and impact on policy, practice and publics. The notion of a feminist domestic energy upgrade framework builds upon feminist science and post-structuralist feminist geography, analysing situated knowledges, gender dynamics and alternative knowledges marginalised through unequal power relationships. I draw on some concepts from the feminist literature and develop a domestic energy upgrade framework to think about how certain knowledge may be privileged for energy efficiency. To help think through the unevenness of energy upgrades I use the following concepts: ‘situated knowledge’, ‘materialities’, ‘performativity’ and ‘intersectionality’. Situated knowledge refers to the social context of knowledge production (Harding, 1992). This concept alerts us to the potential for certain knowledges to be privileged over others, for example, in this project understanding energy and energy efficiency. Materialities bring to the fore how bodies are folded in and through the relationships that constitute spaces.

Hence, in this project energy upgrades depend not only on the design of the building but also on the everyday

practices and experiences of those who must dwell in them. Performativity brings to the fore how categories of social identity are stabilised through the repetition of cultural norms, and highlights how energy upgrades can not be separated from subjectivities. Intersectionality is helpful for thinking about how power, perspectives and subjectivities are shaped along the intersecting lines of gender, ethnicity, class and age (see Moss and Falconer Al-Hindi, 2008). Thus, energy use produces intersections between gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and disabilities via differential consumption practices. I find these concepts helpful for thinking about whose knowledge is prioritised in energy policy making, in order to better understand the reciprocal relationships between energy, housing, households and policy.

The domestic energy upgrade framework refers, first, to how knowledge related to households' energy consumption is produced, circulated and gains credibility and authority. Questions are asked as to how household energy efficiency came to be important and through what epistemological and ontological processes domestic energy is known. Second, it refers to the gendering of household subjectivities and reciprocal relationships that make and remake the house as home. That domestic energy consumption becomes gendered at all is noteworthy given the ways in which dominant cultural norms around a family (heteropatriarchy) co-constitutes home-related work, identities and knowledge (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Third, it reveals alternative perspectives or marginalised knowledges (McDowell, 1992) that may help us to imagine different futures. At a time when the challenges of fuel poverty demand engagement and require urgent attention, these three dimensions have important implications for transdisciplinary energy research practice, energy policy and energy publics. In proposing this framework, I follow Coddington's (2015, p 215) lead, and build on a feminist 'history of boundary breaking ideas [that] makes possible the present-day spaces where feminist geographers explore power,

justice and knowledge production, ideas that encompass but also surpass a focus on gender’.

Encountering engineers: knowledge of domestic energy efficiency

A feminist energy upgrade framework builds on feminist science studies to understand how gendered inequalities and power structures are embedded in science. The history of the field of domestic energy illustrates how scientific practices and results are gendered. Energy discourse is a stereotypically ‘masculine’ one that is historically defined by a view of ‘scientifically objective’ knowledge to classify, measure and ideally model household energy consumption as if it were predictable and knowable rather than chaotic, unpredictable and dynamic.

The energy expert is normally positioned as a physical scientist or an economist (see [Chapter Four](#) in this volume). The physical scientist speaks to charged electrons, protons and the laws of physics and physical units to quantify energy use. Much engineering laboratory work involves a lack of interest in the subject to generate supposed objectivity and therefore ignores the situated knowledge and geography of science (Livingstone, 2003). Accordingly, an understanding of energy efficiency may be achieved by studying the building itself and its constituent technologies. Engineers measure the physical attributes of the building and electrical appliances, and introduce more efficient structures or appliances as a solution to the ‘problem’ of domestic energy overuse. Knowledge of energy efficiency is then derived from complex computer modelling which simulates various scenarios for testing hypotheses, based on mathematical abstractions and composed of variables and equations, and digital representations of the spaces and technologies.

Economists are often positioned as experts and given a key role in energy policy and publics by quantitative modelling

of domestic energy, using measurable units (for example kWh) to quantify heating costs for different groups of users (Spreng, 2014). In market-driven governance decisions, such a conceptualisation of energy efficiency is part of an energy science-to-policy paradigm that paralyses public agency by positioning science as the authoritative voice (Cooper, 2017). Yet, this supposed scientific objectivity of energy modelling can render people as essentialised, passive and static, merely cogs in a machine who respond logically to stimuli and exhibit behaviours that can be abstracted and tested. Techno-scientific control is a dominant trope in energy efficiency knowledge and is highly gendered. Energy policies are often informed by the dominant discourse of ecological modernisation which advocates for the use of technological advances to bring about lower energy bills, energy efficiency and lower carbon footprints in a win-win-win situation. For example, the installation of smart energy meters is often advocated in policy to motivate ‘good’ – that is, more efficient – household behaviours (see Darby, 2012). In this masculinist atmosphere, alternative knowledges, practitioners and methods are marginalised. Yet, as noted by Strengers (2013), smart meters do not challenge the social practices that householders consider immutable. Dominant responses to energy efficiency often display a masculine focus towards supply-side-driven technological solutions.

What can feminist scholarship offer to inspire a richer interplay between the physical and social sciences in energy research? Feminist scholars argue that all knowledge claims are socially situated, and hence can only be partial (Haraway 1998; Harding, 1986). To strengthen methodological rigour and the genuine co-production of knowledge, researchers must therefore reflect on their position in the social matrix (see [Chapter Eight](#) in this volume). This method remains a key component of feminist research frameworks, despite critiques of the limits of reflexivity (Rose, 1997). Indeed, critiques help extend what the process of self-reflective thinking entails,

including what it means to embody research through gestures, language and clothes.

Given my foreknowledge about analytical-quantitative science, it was with a sense of unease that I first met with the engineers. As a feminist geographer who questions positivist forms of knowledge production, I think energy efficiency is too narrowly focused on kilowatts alone. Instead, I approach domestic energy with a research agenda to open up who can and cannot participate in energy efficiency policy making. This leads to key questions such as:

- Who produces knowledge on ‘energy’ and ‘energy efficiency’?
- How is energy enrolled by the one who does the work of home making?
- How is energy use always a more than human achievement?
- Who is able to access energy and why?
- How can access to energy be improved?

The gendered context of home, which often disproportionately implicates women, in a heteronormative family, as carers and provisioners is not separable from domestic use. Practices of care that constitute a place to call home are conceived as extending beyond humans to include pets, plants and objects. Furthermore, the house as home that I conceived of is embodied through the routine movements of the body that engaged all the senses.

A feminist domestic energy upgrade framework underscores that there is no one world ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered by employing the ‘correct’ methods to reveal accurate knowledge about the why, where and how of fuel poverty. Instead, interactions between the different elements of situated knowledge, materiality, performativity and intersectionality help produce the problematic under scrutiny – that of fuel poverty. In practical terms, this meant that my starting point was opening a dialogue between various epistemic foundations

of knowledge on energy, and specifically fuel poverty. Consequently, the methods I employed included narrative storytelling and sensory ethnographies. I have sought to create narratives of domestic energy relationships that speak back to science and that are produced by approaching energy through a sense of place, the personal, affective connections and emotional responses. In sum, household energy use may be meaningful and significant through, for example, care practices beyond statistical models of doing the same with less.

Interpreted through the language of feminist science (Harding, 1992), a feminist domestic energy upgrade framework seeks that researchers accept a plurality of situated knowledge. No longer are older low-income households preconfigured as vulnerable, but instead they are repositioned as specialists in their everyday domestic energy use. The lead engineer on Energy+Illawarra, Paul Cooper, never questioned the knowledge of lower-income households and storytelling. He was comfortable with accepting the plurality of knowledge that is valid in its own context, and that morals related to energy use may be expected to vary between and across cultures by age, class and ethnicity. I learned later that Paul has a long-standing academic interest in unequal social relationships and systems of power discrepancies.

An important lesson arises for those who are less fortunate in their research encounters with scientists. Such knowledge diversification may be met with resistance from some stakeholders, given that energy narratives challenge the existing power relationships held by engineers and economists as experts within energy efficiency research (see [Chapter Five](#) in this volume). Even so, with the lead of Barry and Born (2013), a feminist domestic energy upgrade framework is driven by a 'logic of innovation' in which new energy lives are fashioned through the conflict of agendas. For instance, in the Energy+Illawarra project this plurality of knowledges sometimes required adopting a feminist praxis that insists on intense negotiation over contested issues and positions, which

triggers self-reflexivity, mutual learning and the co-generation of new knowledge. In such moments, the goal is not to force engineers to believe that appliances such as refrigerators may be full of emotional meaning and sustain reciprocal human-home relationships. Nor, in our case, must residents put faith solely in engineers' computer-generated-models in their decision to change appliances or the material fabric of their homes.

Instead, our goal should be to understand that knowledge is always underpinned by unequal social power relationships and value judgements. Addressing power discrepancies means making these value judgements transparent and accessible, and submitting them to debate to generate a mutual learning process. In doing so we subscribed to Harding's (1992) concept of 'strong objectivity' by encouraging researchers to reflect on their social situatedness and on the implications their intersectionality had on their paradigm, power, position and policy perspective. In practice, there were several implications. First, the possible energy retrofits were modified through conducting the sensory ethnography. Second, the types of energy upgrades were tailored by the engineering team to ensure that the house was still felt and understood to be a home. Finally, the social marketing programme to reduce domestic energy use included the voices of participants.

Encounters with a data portal and beyond: collective video storytelling

A data portal was the key site of encounter with the Australian federal government. The houses of older low-income people are framed through the data portal as an 'experimental space', as the basis for an energy policy based on scientific work rather than as home. Household data from the energy audit conducted by engineers and a building physicist were uploaded to a data portal managed by CSIRO, including measures of half-hourly indoor air temperature and the air permeability of buildings. Alternative knowledges derived from energy household ethnographies were marginalised as perhaps too messy for the data

portal, limiting who could and who could not participate in energy policy. The quantitative data of indoor air temperature lack the gendered division of household labour and the emotional and sensory interactions with houses as homes. Knowledge production is restricted to a specific group of scientists. The data portal reconfigured the lines between authority and science. To be credible, energy policy relied only upon measures of physical attributes. Within the context of the data portal, energy efficiency is reconfigured as a largely scientific problem. Alternative knowledges are marginalised in this context, restricting the well-documented research and policy benefits derived from troubling the authority of science, including the types of questions asked and the diversity of methods employed.

How do we bridge the perceived gulf between social science and science? How do we unsettle dominant narratives and representations of energy efficiency which tend to privilege prediction, cost–benefit analyses and quantification? As part of our community engagement strategy, our ‘experimental work’ turned to narrative and what we termed ‘collective video storytelling’ as a form of engagement with domestic energy use in its everyday context.

Narratives are well established in the feminist literature for documenting and giving voice to marginalised groups, including older low-income households (see Waitt and Gorman–Murray, 2011). Furthermore, narratives are celebrated in the feminist literature for capturing the messiness and contradictions of everyday life. As Groves et al (2016) illustrate, narratives retain the unfolding details of a context, giving insights into how energy is enrolled to sustain places as homely. For example, energy narratives provide insights into the subjective, the provisional, the excluded and the unforeseen dimensions of the ways in which energy is used to make, and remake, places called home (see Galvin 2013; Reeve et al, 2013).

Alongside these applications, our interest was in taking narratives a step further in energy research. How could scientific knowledge from engineers about how ‘best’ to

use energy be socialised by harnessing energy narratives to encourage self-reflection and mobilise change? To answer this question, we embraced van Laer et al's (2014) case for the potential of storytelling for self-reflexivity and changing everyday practices. As van Laer et al (2014, p 799) posit, the potential of new realities are purposefully created through an ontological logic:

the story-receiver's consumption of the story through which he or she does not just read the story but also makes it readable in the first place ... in short a narrative is a story the consumer interprets in accordance with his or her prior knowledge, attention, personality, demographics, and significant others.

Rather than the story receiver revealing an objective world, we take van Laer et al's (2014) definition of narrative as referring to an interpretation process that encourages reflection on how the listener dwells in their world. The production of the videos involved socialising the scientific knowledge of engineers by addressing ten key concerns identified during 11 focus groups with 55 older low-income people that elicited narratives regarding energy use, energy efficiency and everyday practices. The script for each video wove together extracts of the stories told to us about their energy concerns in the focus groups, which arose from different domestic energy practices (such as cooking, lighting, heating, cooling and refrigeration).

After van Laer et al (2014), our collective video storytelling contained three key elements that relate to the storyteller: identifiable characters (the story receiver can know and feel the world in a similar way), relatable (the story plot connects with the audience's life experience) and verisimilitude (believability).² For each energy home-making practice, collective video storytelling was used to meld together the claims of

engineering sciences, predominantly cognitive concerns (evidence, reason, practical efficacy), with the embodied, aesthetic, moral, economic, political and personal concerns of older low-income residents. Animations in the video were designed to blend the scientific knowledge and recommendations of the engineers in our team with the narratives of participants. In effect, we were encouraging viewers to consider how domestic appliance narratives are produced, circulated and given credibility. More broadly, the video contests the perceived gap between scientific and lay knowledge of domestic energy use, which are seen as mutually exclusive; teaches viewers about energy consumption; and opens up conversations about expertise. Viewers were not told what to do but instead were invited to reflect on the personal experience of a domestic practice. When participants, aged care housing providers and health and community workers encountered our video books, they played a decisive role in opening up conversations around domestic energy use.

Collective video storytelling thus responded to calls for a new *modus operandi* to bring together divergent epistemic foundations of energy knowledge from the social and physical sciences to create new energy realities formed from dialogue, reflexivity and learning from clashes in ontology or our understandings of ‘reality’ (Castree and Waitt, 2017). In the context of collective video storytelling the scientific knowledge to help reduce energy use and bills makes social sense. Engineers can thereby play a central role in opening up rather than closing down discussion within households as to what is feasible and socially desirable by bringing together lay and scientific narratives.

Intersectional dynamics: impact for energy research practice, policy and publics

In the context of a project on fuel poverty, I have put forward a case for thinking through transdisciplinary research through a

feminist domestic energy upgrade framework. Informed by the work of feminist scientists and post-structuralist feminist human geographers, such a framework draws on the importance of the notion of intersectionality, alongside those of performativity, materiality, relationality and situated knowledge. In a project on fuel poverty that engaged with engineers, different disciplinary knowledges shaped the research encounter. I argue for a feminist domestic energy upgrade framework to better understand this research engagement through presenting two research encounters: the first with the discipline of engineering, and the second with the data portal of the federal government. These encounters illustrate the ways in which intersectionality, together with situated knowledges, may reproduce or contest conventional approaches to knowledge about domestic energy research practice, policy and publics.

First, my research encounters with engineers underscored that there is much that human geographers, sociologists and anthropologists can learn from building physicists, including how different materials store and release energy, the operations of reverse-cycle air conditioning and thermal dynamics. Equally, engineers have much to learn about how domestic appliances are not purchased solely for energy efficiency, or turned on and off purely for thermal comfort; they are entangled in how people think of themselves as healthy, thrifty and independent; as hosts; and in terms of how they make homely homes. A feminist domestic energy upgrade framework identifies the ongoing need for energy knowledge formed from dialogue across the social and physical sciences to better understand energy publics.

Second, my research encounter with the data portal highlighted the ways in which neoliberal politics and a gendered discourse of science and knowledge dominate the production of household energy knowledge within the Australian domestic energy policy realm as 'energy efficiency'. The dominant understanding of household energy is that of science, which is not a neutral representation. Our experimentation

with collective video narratives responded to calls that advocate for a shift in research and policy from technological and quantitative measures that conceive of energy in terms of kilowatt hours. No longer is energy simply energy; instead, energy is conceived as a means by which people sustain the everyday routines and habits that enable them to call a place home. Attention in the collective video storytelling turned to bringing everyday lay knowledge of energy into conversation with the knowledge of engineers. In doing so, the aim was to encourage individual householders to reflect on expectations of how energy is used, or not used, around the home to sustain their sense of home, self and well-being. The collective video storytelling worked against portraying householders as passive victims by encouraging audiences to reflect upon about how the disparate capabilities of home making (cooking, washing, doing the laundry, keeping warm/cool) are mediated and co-constituted through unequal social power relationships.

To conclude, I finish on the conundrum between building future research coalitions and feminist research agendas. Despite the enthusiasm for our collective video narratives as part of our social marketing campaign, I am mindful of how structures of power and masculinists' knowledge discourses continue to dominate research engagements with the federal government. Policy makers responded favourably in meetings to non-traditional experts within the collective video storytelling. Yet the advice for writing up our final report was to focus on the epistemic power of cost-benefit analysis through reporting the most cost-effective energy upgrades. The report responds to the question 'What is the most cost-effective energy upgrade policy for low-income households?' The narratives of older low-income participants were to be drawn upon as illustrative examples that single out experiences that might appeal to the minister. And, in doing so, the final report overlooked capitalist agendas and structures that are integral to energy injustices (Sovacool, 2015). There is still much work

to do on how feminist-informed research can impact energy research and policy.

Notes

¹ See www.energyplusillawarra.com.au

² See www.energyplusillawarra.com.au

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PART III

Research, power and institutions

SEVEN

Nomadic positionings: a call for critical approaches to disability policy in Canada

Pamela Moss and Michael J. Prince

Away from intersectionality ... towards nomadic thinking

Intersectionality has gained popularity since the end of the 20th century as a way to both describe and explain inequities in society, including disability. We understand intersectionality to be ‘an analytical and political orientation that brings together a number of insights and practices developed largely in the context of black feminist and women of color political traditions’ (May, 2015, p 3). Central principles include understanding the experience of lived realities as a set of connections across multiple categories of differences; linking individual experience to wider social, political, cultural and economic processes; and refusing a preconfigured experience along any axis of power (after Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983; Cho et al, 2013; Hankivsky, 2014).

Disability justice and radical accessibility are two streams of the disability movement that use principles of intersectionality. Disability justice involves picking at, undoing and dismantling

ableism as a system of oppression in concert with other forms of oppression such as racism and sexism. Radical accessibility, an intersectionalist political strategy, challenges all forms of oppression. It seeks to go beyond the inclusion of disabled people and to create communities where difference is not an organising principle of social order. Thus, access is as much about wheelchair ramps as it is about shedding light on the privilege arising from one's social positioning in society (see Withers, 2012). Yet the mobilisation of intersectionality as a way to inform disability theory, practice or policy does not always succeed in holding the complexity that intersectionality is so good at identifying.

Although intersectionality, through radical accessibility, may be a promising political organising strategy for disabled people, we see difficulties arising out of using intersectionality theoretically in policy formation. Complexities are often reduced to a one-size-fits-all approach that favours stable and permanently impaired bodies over ones with temporary and fluctuating bodily symptoms that episodically hinder abilities. As part of the constitution of what counts as normal, impairment – whether physical, emotional, psychological or developmental – is cast as something to eradicate, heal and indeed overcome (DeVolder, 2013). No other category of difference is subjected to the same sort of removal of the central characteristic forming an identity (except perhaps for poverty, if one were to count wealth as a *social* category of difference rather than an *economic* one).

Unlike embodiments giving rise to race, ethnicity, gender and sex, anyone can become disabled at a given time, disrupting what constitutes the normality of the body. Also, unlike other social categories of difference, someone in circumstances of recovery and healing can actually become either un-disabled or pass for normal even while disabled (see the essays in Brune and Wilson, 2012). Within intersectionality, a desire to 'fix' a social location to a specific identity eclipses the intricacy of shifting to identities that are not rooted in a set of social,

political or economic power relations. As well, positioning individuals within systems of oppression emphasises the way power works across categories and axes of difference. Such an approach does not provide enough attention to the capacity to switch categories and jump axes, even in analyses stressing that identities are temporally and spatially specific.

Forming and then claiming a disabled identity brings to the surface acts and processes that are not pivotal in other identities (see [Chapter Two](#) in this volume). For example, Garland-Thomson (2014, para 4) argues that persons with disability are bifurcated in social interaction in ways that other oppressed people are not, and must engage in what she calls ‘body management’ and ‘social management’. Body management involves a set of practices associated with experiences of one’s own embodied existence and an embodied navigation of the world. Social management involves social location and identity or one’s enmeshment in the world (see [Chapter Three](#) in this volume). Thus, in place of the questions ‘Who are you?’ and ‘Where are you from?’, which draw identity into place, persons with disabilities have to answer ‘What’s wrong with you?’ (Garland-Thomson, 2014). The need for fixity (and fixability), or social location in intersectionality, conjured in response to Garland-Thomson’s questions, prompted us to think, why these questions? Why not ask ‘How are you?’? Our ‘how’ is not the conventional way to greet someone; rather, our ‘how’ relates to the process through which one comes to be known as disabled.

For us, the process of making subjects – or subjectification – can provide insights into the way in which disability policy could be more flexible by holding the complexity of disabled bodies in tension with its formulation. Braidotti (2011a, 2011b) takes up the formation of subjects through a feminist theory of embodiment wherein ‘Subjectivity is the effect of ... constant flows of in-between power relations’ (2011b, p 4). These power relations are both within and outside the subject, both sustaining systems and being beyond them, in the crevices

between people, non-human beings, places and inanimate things (Braidotti, 2013, p 188). Depending on the context within which people live their lives, subjectivities emerge *in situ*. They are not fixed, or cemented into a set of relations, an institution or characteristics used to describe an individual. They do not lead to identities to latch onto. Yet they are identifiable, even though fleeting, fluid and positioned contextually. They emerge as a placeholder of sorts that captures a set of conditions that have given rise to what one understands as a subject with embodied experiences, and not any one specific body. These placeholders move, dart out of sight and are replaced by a different configuration of placeholders. Thus, subjects may appear the same but are slightly different. Braidotti (2011a, p 164; 2011b, p 7) calls these subjects ‘nomads’, who hold multiple and overlapping positionings at once and encapsulate what feminists understand to be difference. For instance, a soldier with a psychiatric disability in the military forms in particular sites and dissolves in others, only to reform in yet another situation (Moss and Prince, 2014). A soldier may endure emotional distress in the battlefield and get tagged as ‘wounded’. The soldier is then sedated, evacuated and admitted to a hospital. Upon awakening, the wounded soldier is gone and a psychiatric case appears. Yet, when they do not recover as expected, the soldier as a psychiatric case is recast as a malingerer and discharged from the military. These subject positionings have material consequences for fleshed bodies; yet it is the subject positioning that moves this soldier around the institution, transforming them from a combat asset to a less than honourable, discharged veteran.

Braidotti’s understanding of subjectivity, subject positionings and nomads can assist in rearranging the field of disability policy. Rather than focusing on identity, something that emerges as a moniker for a fixed social location, Braidotti (2011b, pp 4–5, 216) focuses on nodes of specific figurations of subject positionings. She suggests that these figurations can be accessed through a cartographic method that begins

with ‘micro–instances of [an] embodied and embedded self and the complex web of social relations that compose subject positions’ (2011b, p 4). In the rest of this chapter, we sketch out a partial cartography in an effort to show ‘how one is’ in relation to disability policy. We use Canada as a site of enquiry because of its unique context of the organisation of federal and provincial responsibilities for developing social welfare policy, including disability.

A partial cartography of the nomadic subject in disability policy in Canada

Rather than lay out a fully developed cartography that would include both nomadic positionings and the context within which nomadic positionings are generated, we wish to draw attention to the elements in the terrain that need to be taken into account when developing disability policy in Canada. A cartography of the terrain in disability policy that nomadic subjects navigate would look at (1) the multiplicity of differences, (2) the specificity of contexts and (3) the variety of positionings people inhabit. First, difference *across* disability needs attention. Individuals with episodic conditions, those with hidden impairments or those with illnesses still contested by established medicine vie for recognition of their embodied needs with the dominant discursive understanding of disability as people with a visible or obvious impairment. In policy, difference gets worked up into eligibility criteria, qualifying time periods and measurements of disablement by using impairment and incapacitation as ways to mark social difference. Entry into income or support programmes becomes problematic when categories are fixed while bodies are in flux because policy excludes the nomad as a possible subject positioning of a person with a disability.

Second, specifying the various dimensions of the context within which nomads are generated would provide texture and depth to disability policy. As a public policy issue, disability has

been historically tethered to the growth of health professions and rehabilitation sciences. Disability programmes as collectivist social policies of public and private interventions, especially during the age of the Keynesian welfare state, were put in place from a social solidarity perspective that promoted the institutionalisation of rights, rights that had been medicalised to a strong degree (Prince, 2016). This collectivism still operates in conjunction with individualist notions of bodily limitations, potential workforce capacities and authoritative interpretation in what constitutes persons with disabilities. Charting an understanding of disability in Canada in nomadic terms would highlight the fluid and mutable character of what constitutes not only disability, but also entitlements, benefits and supports. If it works from the assumption that there is meta-domain of disability, general policy to integrate various categories of disabled subjects across aspects of Canadian life is bound to be exclusionary. For example, most policy relies on the definition of disability as a permanent impairment or as a disruption in psychological functioning. This meta-domain excludes those disabling disease processes or situational illnesses that are temporary or episodic, including bodily fatigue or emotional distress.

Third, the curtailment of subject positionings tendered for people with disability in Canada has articulated with the state in sundry and often cumbersome ways. The tight relationship between medicalised understandings of rights and bodies and the state has closed off subject positionings of disability for people embroiled in disabling processes that are chronic, episodic and contested. For example, throughout the 20th century, the discourse around social citizenship populated the expanding field of public income protection for people with a disability, who became central figures in the creation and adoption of programmes for displaced or lost income, including the injured factory worker, the shell-shocked veteran and the permanently disabled adult. These disabled subjects were programmatically constructed with separate benefit

structures, distinct bodies of knowledge and idiosyncratic systems of rules. Opening up the variety of subject positionings that are being generated among people with disabilities, that is, recognising persons with disabilities as nomads, would break open policy so that it could address the needs of bodies and not overarching state discourses.

These cartographic elements of the context within which nomads are generated are complicated by three sets of relations informing disability policy in Canada: (1) the organisation of the Canadian state, (2) the prominence of medicine in defining disability and (3) the cultures of institutions. First, an important feature of Canada's constitutional dimension relates to the federated nature of the political system yielding two regimes of citizenship, provincial and federal. Provinces are responsible for paying for and delivering public health care, social housing and social programmes associated with the welfare of their citizenry. The federal government administers some social welfare programmes, including child benefits, veteran benefits and the national income and tax disability benefits. The dualism of federal and provincial citizenship persists and shapes policy. For example, the current effort to develop a Canadians with Disabilities Act of some kind, introduced as the Accessible Canada Act (ACA) as a way to implement human rights guaranteed to persons with disabilities federally through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Constitution Act, 1982). Because of the limitations of what the federal government can address, the ACA will concentrate on employment and the capacity of persons with disabilities to work – not housing, not insurance, not health, not guaranteed income, not inclusive rights (McQuigge, 2017; see also Prince and Moss, 2016) – which is largely outside the everyday practices by which disability citizenship is claimed, negotiated and produced. The nomadic quality of disabled subject positionings is ignored and pushed aside while the static, fixed identity of the ideal citizen as an employable worker remains dominant.

Second, the cartography is also complicated by medicine as a knowledge system that defines disability in Canadian policy. Claiming disability is not simply revealing impairment or bodily difference. Canada's approach to social policy and discourse on social citizenship privileges labour market participation, earned benefits, private insurance and categorical diagnoses of bodily impairments. Definitions of disability in public programmes tend to incorporate medicalised dichotomies that set up a person as either able-bodied or completely disabled. These definitions emphasise the inability to work rather than focus on capacity to work at particular times, in particular ways. Rather than setting up guidelines and policy for workplace accommodation, these programmes tend to leave workplace issues to employers and insurance companies, both of which have vested interests in turning a profit rather than in ensuring the social welfare of a citizen. These definitions also ignore fluctuating or episodic conditions, and consequently exclude some people from qualifying for benefits. The general effect, because of a shared medical orientation, is to individualise and pathologise a person's condition and thus transform a seemingly social institutionalisation of rights for disabled people into a medicalised world of discrete bodies requesting support. For instance, in 2006 the Canadian government replaced the lifetime disability benefits in the form of a pension for Canadian Forces personnel who have a disabling illness or have acquired a service-related injury with one-time payouts. Two tools determine the amount of the award, one directed at the severity of disablement ('Table of Disabilities') and the other at the degree of impact on military service ('Entitlement Eligibility Guidelines'). Both tools are based on medical diagnoses arising from biomedical research. This medicalised 'meat chart' approach forces veterans into a pension situation that is based on employment history. Yet, as has been well demonstrated, veterans face challenges with regard to employment, such as maintaining a secure job, as a result of chronic illness and mental health issues.

Third, the cultures of institutions are significant in restricting subject positionings for people with disabilities. Institutional contexts include interacting with medical practitioners and other health-care workers, participation in peer support groups, consultations with labour, human rights and estate lawyers, interactions with life insurance companies, and transactions with employers or trade union officials. Each institution holds a normative understanding of bodily difference which, even when there may be some sensitivity to disability as a category of difference, exalts an ideal that reinforces, competes with and contradicts readings of real, fleshed bodies. These bodies are integral to the generation of subject positionings for they occupy numerous roles, adopt various identities and acquire labels assigned by others in an assortment of authority relationships. Yet the implementation of policy does not yet recognise these fleeting and porous attachments between ideal and fleshed bodies, an act that results in people with disabilities encountering bureaucratic resistance to official membership in the category of disability. Adjudication of applications to the national disability insurance plan, the Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefit (CPP/D) exemplifies the embeddedness of this culture. To qualify for CPP/D, a person must be determined, through a process of medical assessment, to have a severe and prolonged disability that does not allow them to pursue gainful employment. In a recent report, researchers found that one third of all applications denied were found to be eligible for benefits and two thirds of the appeals were successful upon review of the application (see Press, 2017).

In our partial cartography here, we have begun pulling pieces together to lay out a figuration that can point to where nomadic subject positionings are being thwarted in Canadian disability policy. In contrast to the notion of encounter as an individualised negotiation of social diversity (see Wilson, 2017), nomadic encounters actually seek out the edges of embodied experiences and manoeuvre through the existing holes in the very definitions of an identity. Multilevel governance,

medicalised bodies of knowledge and institutional practices shape the milieu within which disability issues get taken up and these nomadic positionings get generated. Recognising the porosity of the boundaries that seek to ‘fix’ an identity through, for example, eligibility criteria and medical diagnoses, nomadic positionings refuse normative social codes and disclose the problematic nature of ‘fixity’ in existing disability policy. Sensitivity to the need to challenge this fixity alongside the elaboration of disability nomads – across difference, context and subject positionings – can better inform the development of disability policy in Canada. This type of discussion would bring specificity to the context that policy must both govern as well as arise from and value the variety of subject positionings that could be available to people with disabilities. But we have to ask, is nomadic disability possible? If so, what would it look like?

Possibilities

In general, public programmes as spaces of encounter delivering services to persons with disabilities are formally regulated and highly prescribed. They are governed by statutory frameworks with conceptions of disability, incapacity and employability fixed in laws and regulations. To date, disability policy has unavoidably required a definition of disability to distinguish between types of bodily difference. The definition is inevitably rooted in a physical, measurable deviation from a norm and inextricably linked to what work a body can do. Our goal in thinking about nomads is to reject this arrangement and seek out how subjects occupy these spaces. It is the notion of becoming, a generative process describing the emergence of a subjectivity that can account for historical difference (Braidotti, 2011a, pp 258–9) that more effectively captures the materialities associated with specific bodily difference as well as the ebbs and flows of disablement. Thus, for us, the issue is whether disability policy can itself be nomadic.

By understanding these arrangements as enmeshed within bodily difference and discursive policy fields, we think that a relational, embodied policy could be formed. For it is when buildings, public spaces and transit systems are unreachable, when common forms of information and communication are inaccessible, when general attitudes are uninformed and popular assumptions towards people with impairments cast them as abnormal and tragic figures, when practices in everyday spheres of living are restrictive, when work is a domain where people with disabilities are sidelined and materially disadvantaged, and when public policies create or replicate obstacles that society is routinely experienced as disabling. Nomadic policy must account for disability as the exclusionary effects of the fixity that policy so firmly clings to, particularly the reliance on a medicalised classification as the basis for a disabled identity and on the capacity to work. If policy were to focus on unfixity as fluidity, changeability and flux, disablement as a process would be front and centre.

Recommendations

Concretely, nomadic policy would change the everyday life of persons with disabilities and disabling illness and conditions. We recommend the following (organised along the life course):

- A nomadic policy would eliminate the determinant of an IQ measurement of 70 for determining eligibility for various assisted living services and community supports for people with neurological, cognitive and developmental disabilities and, instead, focus on capacities over time and in embodied and embedded social contexts.
- Youth with disabilities would no longer age out of child and family services when they turn 18. There would be flexibility in continuing support through transitioning

to adulthood by accounting for material conditions and personal circumstances.

- In post-secondary education, persons with episodic, cyclical and invisible disabilities would be protected against negative discursive constructions and material disadvantage through accommodation programmes.
- Income security insurance programmes would provide medium-term disability benefits to fill the temporal gap between short- and long-term contingency funds.
- As well, there would be support in the form of workplace reconfiguration and accommodation for people with disabilities that would facilitate living wages rather than pin money available through sheltered workshops.

Nomadic policy must actively work against the exclusionary effects of norms, categories and practices that constitute policy formulation and so compromise full participation in society. Policy makers must adhere to the principle that there can be a critical consciousness that refuses to settle into socially coded processes, behaviours and living (Braidotti, 2011a, p 26). Researchers, too, must reject the pursuit of ‘fixing’ identities through social locations. Prevailing socially coded identities and reflective processes need not simply be replaced by another set of socially coded identities and reflective processes. This refusal to settle, this moving away from political fictions, asking the question ‘How are you (disabled)?’ instead of ‘Who are you?’ (that is, disabled), is necessary if nomadic positionings are to inform disability policy. Policy generated from a set of nomadic principles can form the basis for an inclusive, fluid and embodied support for a society brimming with the sometimes disabling contingencies of life.

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EIGHT

Critic, advocate, enforcer: the multiple roles of academics in public policy

John Paul Catungal

This chapter considers the diverse ways in which academics are involved in policy processes, paying particular attention to forms of policy engagement that are concerned with issues of social inequality within academic institutions and in society more broadly. It takes seriously how these engagements constitute a response to the critique that the academy as an institution is woefully insular and too removed from its broader community. Indeed, the notion of ‘the ivory tower’ as a referent for academic institutions powerfully condenses such critique into a spatial metaphor, one that names the privileged position occupied by those in the academy and their capacity to turn away from or even look down upon the broader societal context. Scholars have subjected their own communities of practice to such critiques, articulating from an ethical vantage point the responsibility of academics to multiple publics within and beyond the institution. One arena that scholars have identified as a space where academics can and should engage with more fully in order to fulfil such an ethical mandate is the realm of public policy (see Martin, 2001). Yet there is no consensus on the absolute good of scholarship oriented towards policy,

with Jamie Peck (1999, p 131) noting that the relationship between ‘research and the policy process remains in many ways a fraught one’.

Some 45 years ago, the geographer David Harvey (1974) cautioned that a wholesale commitment to a policy geography risks foreclosing ethical questions about just what kind of policy geographers should orient towards and, concomitantly, just what kind of geographical thought is best suited to informing engagements with policy. He memorably uses the case of General Augusto Pinochet as an example of a trained geographer successfully putting geographical thinking to use in ways that are nefarious and socially unjust. Indeed, one of the limits of the metaphor of the ivory tower is that universities and academics actually have a long history of grounded engagement and influence in society, and not always in ways that are ethical and socially just in intention or effect. Scientific racism and environmental determinism, for example, provided – and continue to provide – an intellectual gloss to long-standing white supremacist societal attitudes, and gave rise to segregationist and eugenicist policies, for example. Fairchild’s (1991, p 109) research on the race thinking of J.P. Rushton, for instance, notes that his and others’ social scientific work on racial difference ‘led to policies that “blame the victim”’, since socio-biological accounts of black people’s ‘natural’ inferiority serve to naturalise inequality as ‘biological destiny’. Such an example – and there are many others – suggests that the isolationist implication of the ivory tower metaphor does not adequately account for the powerful role of academics in producing particular social conditions, in part through the intellectual justification they provide for specific public policy approaches.

And yet, as Peck (1999) reminds us, it is possible to approach academic scholarship in ways that are responsive to community needs, including ones that engage in diverse forms of policy engagement for social change. In this chapter, I think with lessons offered by intersectionality scholars, particularly black

feminist scholars, whose works exemplify robust forms of engagement with legal and policy processes, including paying attention to their implications for inequality and struggles for justice. The concept of intersectionality is most commonly attributed to the field of the black critical legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), even while the spirit and method of intersectional thinking has a much longer genealogy (as, for example, in Sojourner Truth's question in the mid-1800s, "Ain't I a woman?"). Scholars of intersectionality, including those who are engaged in research concerning law and policy, recognise that intellectual work can shed light on the limits of existing policy frameworks and can provide alternative ways of conceptualising and approaching social issues.

Intersectionality has enjoyed some level of success as a policy approach since its inception, with Yuval-Davis (2006, p 206) noting that 'Intersectional analysis of social divisions has come to occupy central spaces in both sociological and other analyses of stratification as well as in feminist and other legal, political and policy discourses of international human rights'. Issues of inequality and marginalisation constitute key intellectual and political concerns of intersectionality thinking, with some scholars paying special attention to how law and policy differentiate people's lived experiences on the basis of gender, race, sexuality and other forms of social difference. Intersectionality treats these multiple forms of social difference as coexistent and mutually shaped, thus eschewing common understandings in law and policy that treat 'subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis' (Crenshaw, 1989, p 140). The continuing resonance of intersectional theorising in recent scholarship opens up further possibilities for academic engagement with policy.

What does intersectionality theorising offer us in terms of thinking about the relationship between academia and policy? Along with important conceptual tools, intersectionality theorising in the vein of Crenshaw, Collins and others reminds us that academics have the capacity, and thus perhaps

responsibility, to examine the underlying thinking encoded in law and policy, including what understandings of power, identity and difference are packed into their conceptual apparatuses. Academics also have the capacity to offer deconstructive and different ways of thinking, or more robust and even new concepts to enrich policy conversations and processes. Through various spaces of pedagogy – in the classroom and the public realm, say of media – academics can participate actively as interlocutors and invigorate conversations about how to understand, from an intersectional perspective, policy processes and epistemologies and their effects (see also [Chapter Four](#) in this volume). In addition, as academics we can be advocates, using our conceptual analysis to speak to the merits and limits of various forms of policy, and heeding lessons from intersectionality theorists. This may be done by ensuring that our analysis takes account of the complex multiplicity and simultaneity of marginalisations and how they materially shape and are shaped by experiences of policy.

Furthermore, we must recognise that academics are key actors in the making and implementation of policy, especially in our workplaces. As administrators and members of committees and in our interactions with other members of our institutional communities, we exist in a complex institutional ecology regulated by various policies, among them ones that govern privacy, ethics, admission standards, labour conditions, curriculum, diversity, accommodations. In some cases, we also actively participate in the (re)crafting of policies within our institutions, for example by advocating for better policies concerning the attraction and retention of faculty of colour (‘diversification’) or for appropriate accommodations for our students. Often relegated to the unsexy realm of ‘service’ – and subjugated to the more valued work of research and, to a certain extent, teaching – these forms of academic labour nevertheless exemplify engagement with policy that intimately impacts the geography of the university, the space of our work.

In what follows, I discuss three roles that academics do play vis-à-vis policy: as critic, as advocate and as implementer. In each of these roles, intersectionality plays a vital role in shaping the possibility of a relationship between academia and policy that is ethically and politically responsive to the challenges faced by marginalised communities. In going over each of these roles, it is my hope that this chapter can illustrate the many proximities to policy that academics experience, and thus further enliven our conversations about policy through the realisation that policy is much closer to us than we sometimes imagine.

The academic as policy critic

As an urban geographer with interests in community organising by marginalised groups, particularly queer folks of colour and immigrants in the realm of health, social services and education, policy is a topic close to my work. My training in interdisciplinary intersectional feminism and queer of colour critique enable my approach to urban geography to be politically attuned to systems, structures, practices, discourses and epistemologies of policy making and implementation. Among other things, intersectional urban scholars are interested in assessing how municipal governance processes affect different urban citizens and communities in different ways, depending on the nexus of positionalities that shape people's life conditions. For example, Munoz (2016) stridently critiques how the regulation of street economic activities, for example vending, disproportionately impacts poor, racialised and feminised urban residents. More generally, urban scholars have criticised revanchist approaches to the city for privileging property owners, tourists and business interests through policy frameworks that centre on/around their needs and punish other uses and users of urban space (Smith, 1996). These scholars have variously named forms of policy making and implementation – along with institutions

such as police, by-law enforcement, caring sectors and business improvement associations – as key enactments of urban social injustice that insidiously target poor urban communities in ways that are simultaneously classed, racialised, gendered and sexualised.

Urban scholars informed by queer, critical race and feminist theories provide further nuance to such critiques of unjust policy logics and effects. They are especially attuned to how sedimented dynamics of racialisation, settler colonialism and the normalisation of heterosexuality, along with capitalism, produce narrowly normative ideas of the proper urban citizen. David Theo Goldberg's (1993) important work on the production of periphractic urban spaces, for example, names how segregationist racial logics are made material in urban spaces through policy and regulatory practices that 'emplace' people of colour, especially black communities, in marginal spaces that are marked as degenerate. Meanwhile, Cathy Cohen (1998) mobilises queer theorising to note how queerness is produced, in part, through policy and public debates about the proper citizen, which has historically been indexed against white middle-class constructions of heteronormative domesticity. Ted Rutland (2018) has also recently noted how urban reform policy approaches that were enacted historically in Halifax (Canada) were premised on normative constructions of the urban good life as defined by white settlers and are thus indelibly steeped in white supremacist constructions of domestic and public life. Many other examples abound.

In my own work, I have approached my role as an academic critic of policy most fully through analysing the epistemological underpinnings of revitalisation policy making and their ground-level implementation in the city of Toronto, Canada. One policy idea that I have focused on in previous work is the 'creative city', which preached the idea that creative industries and members of the creative class drive urban economies and thus must be key foci of urban policy and planning (see Florida, 2002). My collaborator Deborah Leslie (who was my

PhD supervisor) and I found ourselves in an auspicious position as we were doing this work, as Toronto was ramping up its municipal creative city policy strategy at the time.

Deborah and I approached our work using lenses offered by critical race, feminist and queer urban scholars. We trained our analysis particularly on the role of liberal multicultural, capitalist and masculinised underpinnings of creative city policy making (see Catungal and Leslie, 2009; Leslie and Catungal, 2012). In our work, we critique neighbourhood level enactments of creative city policy by local business improvement associations and the municipal policy frameworks (for example the right to impose a levy locally that enable such enactments. We highlighted how the creative city took form in specific securitisation and beautification projects undertaken in the name of creative firms and workers, which were justified through the social construction of adjacent neighbourhoods as threats because of the presence of degenerate subjects (sex workers, drug users, low-income residents) in these spaces (Catungal and Leslie, 2009; Catungal et al, 2009). We have also argued that creative city policy is premised, in part, on romanticised constructions of racialised diversity as enjoyable amenities and ingredients for urban vibrancy and innovation (Catungal and Leslie, 2009; Leslie and Catungal, 2012). Along with fellow feminist, queer and cultural economy scholars (for example Gill, 2002; Oswin, 2012), we contend that creative city policy is premised upon a particular idealised subject – the creative worker – as a central urban economic actor, who is imagined in ways that naturalise heteronormative and masculinist cultures of creative work and narrow understandings of desirable urban life.

Intersectional feminist approaches enabled us to unpack the ways in which mobile policies such as the creative city smuggle in normative ideas that define the urban citizen in narrow ways, and that result in the marginalisation of many others along simultaneous racial, class, gendered and sexual lines. As policy critics, we relied on the wisdom of intersectional feminisms to

trace how the neoliberalism of this policy idea manifests in ways that also reproduced racial and socio-economic inequalities and gender and sexual normativities. Without intersectional feminisms, we risked reproducing critiques of the creative city that too narrowly construe the scope of its epistemological and material violence. For instance, critiques that focus narrowly on economic inequality in the creative city, while necessary, are inadequate if the racial and gender dynamics of such inequality are ignored by academics.

Intersectionality is thus a powerful resource for invigorating the work of academics as policy critics. The utility of intersectionality lies in its ability to push the robustness and completeness of academic critiques of policy. It enables a more fulsome academic engagement with policy because, as a framework for critique, it takes stock of multiple and simultaneous iterations of power and inequality.

The academic as advocate

A second role that academics play in relation to policy is that of advocate. Intersectional frameworks offer ethical orientations to policy that, among other things, call on academics to mobilise intellectual resources to produce better material conditions for marginalised communities. Sultana (2007, p 375) has noted, in the context of international research especially in the Global South, that researchers must rightly be ethically cautious, but also must not shy away from the possibility of ‘politically engaged, materially grounded and institutionally sensitive’ research. In the work of policy advocacy, this often means that scholars must negotiate their ethical commitments with the communities that they research and/or partner with.

In my own work, I have engaged in policy advocacy in two ways: first, by being invited to do so by an organisation with which I was doing work, and, second, by being personally moved by policies that connect intimately to my experiences. In the first instance, I was called upon by a research participant

to advocate on behalf of the Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS) Youth Program, which at the time was facing funding cuts in a particularly hostile climate of municipal austerity (see Catungal, 2015). I approached this task armed with empirical research findings drawn from interviews with HIV/AIDS sector workers and a conceptual understanding of the nexus of ethno-specific community organising approaches and urban neoliberalism. I felt compelled to advocate out of a sense of ethical responsibility to the very communities that I was researching for my own dissertation. Given my research interests in the marginalisation of people of colour in the HIV/AIDS sector, this presented an opportunity for me to put my knowledge to use to speak directly to those who were implementing austerity policy approaches, particularly to warn them about the possibly deadly effects of harming racialised communities' efforts at responding to HIV/AIDS in the city. As I was a graduate student at the time, I had misgivings about whether I had the professional standing and social capital to be able to make a difference. In the end, the ACAS Youth Program's funding application received a second look, buoyed in part by mobilisation from the broader community and ACAS's own clients. I have no sense of what specific role my letter played in this, but in a way tracing the effects of my own individual advocacy work is not important or necessary. To me, what matters is knowing that my own response was part of a broader community effort to advocate on behalf of a community to which I was intellectually and politically committed. Academics, after all, rarely do policy advocacy work alone.

Besides being called specifically by research participants, I have also felt compelled to respond to policy issues that relate to but are not specifically within my current research projects. These issues include heritage preservation relating to historically racialised (black and Chinese) neighbourhoods as well as school board policy debates about gender and sexuality, both in Coast Salish territories in Greater Vancouver. In both cases,

I felt compelled to speak as a scholar and teacher of gender, race and sexuality, and in the case of the latter as a queer person of colour with experiences of homophobic bullying in the school system. Professional and personal positionality thus mattered tremendously in igniting my sense of responsibility regarding these issues (see [Chapter Two](#) in this volume). In addition, my embeddedness in particular communities of practice were critical to my own work as a policy advocate. In the case of the former, I felt compelled to engage as an instructor of university courses that deal with local manifestations of global issues of migration and racialisation, where specific content on the very neighbourhoods in question (Chinatown and Hogan's Alley, a historically black neighbourhood) were key to my course curriculum. Indeed, in my February 2018 letter to the City of Vancouver concerning the Northeast False Creek Plan (which dealt in part with the future of these neighbourhoods), I referenced both my positionality and my commitments as a teacher, noting:

Both the history of Chinatown and Hogan's Alley, I tell my students in GRSJ 102, powerfully illustrate the racial inflections and effects of urban planning, which forces us to reckon with the active role of the City and its decision makers – your historic counterparts – in shaping Vancouver's urban landscape in racist ways.

I ended my letter in part by drawing again on my own role as a teacher:

In future offerings of my GRSJ 102 course, I want to be able to tell my students that the City did the proper thing in recognizing the importance of Chinatown and Hogan's Alley as spaces of significance for urban history and for various marginalized communities. I want to be able to tell my students that marginalized communities'

histories, grounded expertise and visions are taken seriously by those in positions of power.

Along with the rhetorical flourish of such a framing, I also firmly believe in the importance of classroom communities as key publics for conversations about policies and their effects.

In the case of school board policy debates, I was moved to respond out of my own personal experiences of being bullied for being queer while in high school. In 2011, while I was a graduate student at the University of Toronto, I had caught wind of debates in the Burnaby School District (SD 41) in Greater Vancouver, where I had completed my high school education, about the adoption of a policy for affirming LGBTQ students, staff and teachers in schools. A local but broadly networked group of conservative activists, organised under the rubric of parental concern, constituted very public and vocal opposition to this policy effort. These organised forces mobilised discourses of heterosexuality as a societal good, along with religious and parental rights discourses, to oppose the policy proposal.

A similar debate took place in the Vancouver School Board in 2015, this time concerning a policy proposal that was more specifically about affirming trans and gender-diverse students, staff and teachers. In both cases, I felt compelled to offer my own personal and academic expertise via letter writing. With this debate, given that I had moved back to Vancouver at the time, I also attended school board meetings to bear witness and lend my physical presence in support of the policy. While the opposition forces were ultimately unsuccessful, they nevertheless required countering, and my personal experiences and involvement with a group called Que(e)rying Religion compelled me to advocate, via letter writing, for the policy. Wielding access to institutional letterhead and opting to lend a personal touch to my advocacy by sharing my own horrid experiences of having been bullied, I was able to mobilise my

positionality and experiences as a queer person alongside my professional and political commitments as a scholar of sexuality to advocate for affirming school policies. As with the previous example, my individual effort was never strictly individual. In the Vancouver case, I became part of a political community that I came to experience in palpably emotional ways during the school board meetings. I was also able to draw on scholarly communities of practice by citing the important interventions of fellow scholars, including Elizabeth Saewyc et al (2014), to combine the personal and the intellectual in my letter.

Approaching policy advocacy from an intersectional perspective requires that academics take stock of how their various positionalities and relationships to power and institutions might inform both the content and the reception of their advocacy. Advocacy may be energised by academics' personal histories and professional expertise, which are inseparable for academics whose research is intimately informed by their own identities and commitments. Advocacy may also be compelled by research participants themselves as one component of reciprocal and engaged research relationships. In either case, when viewed through an intersectional lens, advocacy could be understood as an ethical commitment, in part because it requires academics to be attuned to the multiple relations of power – for example with research participants, with policy actors, with institutions – within which they find themselves.

The academic as maker and enforcer of policy

It is important to note that, for academics, policy worlds exist not only 'out there' (outside the university), but also 'in here' (within the academy). Academics who are formally affiliated with educational institutions also contend with and participate in the making and implementation of policies in their multiple roles as teachers, administrators, researchers and more generally members of university communities. Admissions

and graduation requirements, policy frameworks that govern student and staff conduct, and ongoing struggles concerning affirmative action, diversity and institutional responses to campus rape culture constitute some current examples of the ways in which academics engage with policy conversations and processes in the very environments in which they work. At times, academics take on policy advocacy work within their own institutions, such as when we seek to improve existing policies that are not working or when we push for new policy frameworks that imagine better, perhaps more just, universities.

Intersectional perspectives demand that we recognise that academics are differentially situated in relation to struggles over the production and implementation of university policies. Differentiated positionalities as academics – along lines of seniority, race, gender and tenure, among other crucial axes of difference – also mean that we encounter, feel and live the materiality of institutional policies in starkly different ways. We thus have differentiated stakes in relationship to institutional policy work. Sara Ahmed (2012) has powerfully documented, for example, the ways in which policy-making processes towards improving institutional racial diversity tend to multiply the work of people of colour, especially women of colour, whose labour and presence are wielded as evidence of the accomplishment of diversity itself. In addition, Henry et al (2016, p 8) found, among other things, that hidden criteria – what they call “‘soft’ metrics such as personality, civility and collegiality’ – affect the progress of racialised and indigenous scholars across the ranks of the academy, which contradicts the centralisation of merit in formal academic policies concerning tenure and promotion. They note that institutional policy responses to racial diversity (or lack thereof) in the Canadian academy have been diverse and highly uneven, taking the form, variously, of human rights, equity and diversity frameworks (Henry et al, 2016, p 9). In general, however, ‘Four decades of equity policies have failed to transform the

academy significantly to make it more diverse and reflective of the broader society and student body' (Henry et al, 2016, p 12).

In my own institutional home, the University of British Columbia's (UBC) Social Justice Institute (GRSJ Institute), I have had the opportunity to participate in institutional policy making through membership in policy committees at the university level. One memorable example concerns being part of the Trans, Two-Spirit and Gender Diversity Working Group, which was an advisory group of the vice president's Strategic Implementation Committee for Equity and Diversity. Through the leadership of Mary Bryson in the Faculty of Education, the working group sought to emplace 'gender identity and expression' (GIE) as named protected grounds within the university's existing discrimination policy (Policy 3). We were successful in doing so, aided in part by GIE's addition within British Columbia's Human Rights Code in July 2016. The recognition of GIE within UBC's Policy 3 had cascading effects on different aspects of university life – from conversations and shifts around gendered spatial segregation policies and practices in on-campus housing and recreation facilities to the visibility of legal gender markers on institutional documents (for example enrolment lists). In this case, agitation and committee work from concerned members of the campus community combined with broader legal and policy shifts elsewhere to secure institutional changes at UBC. Policy shifts of this sort are unable to fix long histories of gender and sexual marginalisation, particularly given that the university as an institution constitutes only one location for such marginalisation. However, these policy shifts nevertheless provide a formalised, if aspirational, framework for a more affirming university for gender-diverse members of the university community. Indeed, one admittedly hopeful perspective is that such a policy shift can provide the groundwork for further changes in the institution and its constituent communities.

Such hope is sometimes stymied by the very institutional and policy environments in which we try to do our work. One policy area where I've experienced this difficulty

concerns student accommodations, especially for mental health. Though faculty have some flexibility to grant informal accommodations, in many cases institutional policies and procedures require faculty members to direct students to a labyrinthine network of institutional bodies to access supports, among them departmental and faculty-level advising officers, student counselling and health care, and the university's Centre for Accessibility. Students' stories of navigating these institutional systems suggest that they add even more work and stress for students who are trying to manage already challenging workloads and mental health circumstances. As a teacher, I have made it a commitment to be open to requests for flexibility with timelines and deliverables but, as a junior faculty member, I also find myself having to navigate institutional expectations, including meeting deadlines (for example for submitting marks) in the temporally circumscribed contexts of academic semesters. As a junior faculty member, a queer person of colour in a historically white and cis heteronormative institution, I therefore sometimes find myself in a tough position, caught between wanting to support marginalised students and ensuring that I navigate institutional expectations adequately.

These examples illustrate that courses of possible action within the university are governed by multiple and diverse policies. Analysing the differentiated force of these policies from an intersectional perspective reveals that they often reproduce and even exacerbate existing inequalities within the university. Academics employed in universities are thus caught in a bind with regard to policy compliance, enforcement, advocacy and change. Policy advocacy within the university is possible, and indeed necessary, but it does entail risk, especially for those in relatively more precarious institutional positions (for example contract faculty, racialised faculty). Intersectional analysis offers strategic opportunities to engage university policy critically, in part because its attention to differentiated and multiple forms of power can help identify openings for and barriers to policy change within the university.

The politics of relevance: a tentative conclusion

Universities continually wrestle with the question of the relevance of the academy for public life. This is especially true in the twin contexts of public anti-intellectualism and austerity agendas targeting public institutions. Some suggest policy relevance as a ready answer to those who question the ‘value added’ especially in the social sciences and humanities fields (see Schultz, 2016). The geographer Jamie Peck (1999) refuses a crude version of policy relevance that makes academics uncritical handmaidens of the capitalist state and reproducers of marginalising status quos. Yet he also refuses to concede the idea that policy work can be ethically responsible work for academics who are trying to shift conditions of life, especially for marginalised communities, noting that policy remains powerful in shaping social life.

In this chapter, I have drawn intellectual inspiration from intersectionality theorists, including Kimberlé Crenshaw, whose critiques of law and policy illustrate how attention to the multiplicity, complexity and co-constitution of social differences enriches our understandings of these governmental instruments and their uneven impacts. I hope to have shown that academics interface with many policy publics, both ‘out there’ beyond the university and ‘in here’ within our institutions. They include planners and policy makers and mass media, as well as those more broadly interested in policies and their impacts, such as students in our classrooms. Crucially, I also emphasise how academics exist in complex policy environments in our very workplaces. Academics participate variously in the lifespan of policy – dreaming it up, providing critiques, evaluating it, proposing something else and so on – within and beyond universities. Intersectionality theories offer important ethical resources for such a task, through compelling scholars to attend to the politics of difference and how they manifest not only in policies’ effects but also in their very conceptual cladding. In other words, an intersectionality-informed

approach to policy relevance is responsive to difference in its multilayered complexity at all stages of the policy process. Above all, intersectionality demands an academia–policy nexus that does not romanticise policy relevance, but approaches academic engagements with policy that is carefully attentive to systems of power and how they impact upon, shape and are shaped by the representations, lives, needs and desires of marginalised peoples and communities.

In other words, attention to the materiality of power and its differentiated manifestations is crucial to the project of a more ethical approach to academic engagements with policy. It is necessary to begin with this premise, as it is to pay attention to those who already enact such an approach in their engagements with policy, both within and beyond universities. Within the academy, interdisciplinary intersectionality scholars offer models for such an approach. Thus, in our quest to reimagine a more socially just academia–policy nexus, we would do well to heed their example.

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NINE

Conclusions: encountering and building on difference

Ralitsa Hiteva and Sarah Marie Hall

Through personal anecdotes, this collection has zoomed in on certain aspects of how research is conducted and perceived, many of which often remain hidden in academia and beyond. The main message of the book is that these encounters and engagements *matter*, not only to researchers but also to the way the research is perceived in and percolates through into the ‘real world’. Rich in illustration of cases across different countries and contexts, the chapters in this volume offer a persuasive account of why it pays those involved in research or users of research to develop a more critical eye towards the research process and its impact. The aim of the book has been to expose the plethora of social interactions and characteristics that are manifested in encounters and the role of researchers, policy makers, industry representatives and civil society in negotiating difference in engagement and impact. A key message of the book is that difference is encountered in many ways, some less subtle than others, during every aspect of research and engagement. However, institutions are ill equipped to recognise and offer support and training in critically engaging

with intersectionality and its implications in encounters and encounter spaces. This needs to change.

This book serves as a testimony that the things that can shape research are often unexpected to the researchers themselves and that, while they may be invisible to others, they can be unsurmountable to some, shaping and moulding future research and reaching out beyond neatly labelled parts of research work, such as fieldwork and engagement. As researchers who are bound by strictly defined notions of impact and its relationship with research, we can be blind about the ways in which our personal characteristics, convictions and experiences can be empowering in everyday contexts (see [Chapter Eight](#)). In this chapter we offer closing thoughts and, using the contributions in this volume, offer provocative questions for readers from academia, industry and civil society and for policy makers to take away and ponder.

The impact of encounters and being encountered

The premise of the chapters in this volume is that we need to unpack encounters and to speak openly and critically about the role of encountering in the creation of impact. As we have seen from Pritchard, Hiteva, Hall and Richardson's chapters ([Two](#), [Five](#), [Three](#) and [Four](#), respectively) in this collection, encounters (whether during fieldwork or engaging with others) can be internal and intimate. That is, we as researchers encountered others (in capacities with which we may not always be comfortable), sometimes with far reaching consequences for us as people, for our research and in the real world. That academics are increasingly expected to perform through encounters with others and that encounter spaces between research, policy, industry and civil society are multiplying and expanding means that it is important to get serious about encounters and impact. Finding shared understanding, rules and language about encountering others and being encountered is an important part of the process of working

CONCLUSIONS

towards more inclusive and ethical impact. It has the potential to change not only researchers' experiences in engaging with impact but also the way in which impact is co-created and serves a greater group of people (as advocated by Moss and Prince and by Catungal in Chapters [Seven](#) and [Eight](#), respectively). What the collection of contributions has compellingly shown is that researchers, policy and industry representatives and civil society alike have a lot to gain from thinking through how encounter spaces can be made 'safe spaces' for engaging with difference and spaces for change. A key message of this volume is that we need to apply the same level of criticality and reflexivity to our impact and engagement activities as we would to our data analysis.

Like all types of social interactions, encounters are not neutral or limited to the here and now. If unchallenged they can inform and shape multiple future encounters. On the flip side, encounters can also be transformational in a personal and professional context, and as such can and should be thought of as points of possible metamorphosis and openings to change and as opportunities to challenge hidden biases and preconceived notions, as well as dominant models of operation and being. Having a non-critical perspective on what underpins encounters and being encountered leads to missed opportunities for change. It can also lead to limited impact. As Ibegbuna points out in the Foreword, we collectively need to become more aware of the gaps and tensions between different stakeholders and learn to build upon such differences for genuine and meaningful engagement and impact. Encounters and intersectionality, as has been shown in this volume, are one of the building blocks of engagement and impact, and without one we are unable to fully understand the other.

Institutional investment in safe and meaningful encounter spaces can allow for differences to be acknowledged and embedded in the process and outcomes of research engagement. They can lay the foundations of the type of partnerships that share deep, genuine connection of ideas, bridging and

connecting across class, gender, race, (dis)ability or discipline that limit our ability to see and act differently. Such partnerships can change practices of engagement: from seeking out strategic partners to disseminating findings and extending research to hard-to-reach groups and areas; to building partnerships by recognising the intersectionality of different stakeholders; and to the multiple, often subtle, ways in which ‘sameness’ (see Richardson, [Chapter Four](#)) and/or difference (see Hiteva, [Chapter Five](#)) can be a building or stumbling blocks for (dis) engagement. To borrow once again from Ibegbuna’s astute observations, building genuine connections between different stakeholders would require looking beyond ‘over-simplistic labelling’ and engaging with the multifaceted reality of people’s lives. We could not agree more that an intersectional approach would be instrumental in fostering richer and more impactful connections between stakeholders.

The first step is to start a conversation engaging policy makers, industry and society on the need to reflect on encounters between them, to open up understanding of encounters and encountering. As researchers, we are often judged on aspects outside of our work and identity (gender, disability, class, race, how junior/senior we are) both within and outside academia. Furthermore, unchecked biases in both spaces and encounter spaces ‘in between’ can have a disproportionate effect on researchers who are in the early stages of their career (ECRs) and shape *who* and *what* we are not able to engage with or *whom* or *what* we actively choose to disengage with (see Pritchard and Hiteva, [Chapters Two and Five](#), respectively). Therefore, we hope that this collection is the beginning of a larger discussion between academia, policy makers, industry and civil society.

Lessons from across the contributions

In the Foreword the practitioner Ruth Ibegbuna warns about how a lack of meaningful engagement exercises between

CONCLUSIONS

researchers, policy and communities could deepen existing divides along lines of race, class, gender and so on and are doomed to perpetuate a system that creates limited value for everyone involved. She points out that the cost of non-action is fleeting and often transactional connections ‘rather than a deeper shared understanding of the issues and solutions’. An intersectional approach as a starting point for encounters, engagement and impact aims to debunk the myth of homogeneous communities ‘that share the same perspective and outlook, to be studied and to be steered’ and help develop ‘the appropriate mechanisms for understanding and engaging the multilayered views of the individuals that make up the community’. She urges us to proactively seek and see the intersectionality of encounters and to do the ‘the extra work’ needed to ensure that we do not ‘ask the same unanswerable one-dimensional questions’ and that we create authentic relationships, build trust and confidence with communities for genuine and meaningful engagement.

In Part I, ‘Encounters with difference’, Erin Pritchard’s [chapter \(Two\)](#) talks about the intersections of gender, disability and (hetero)sexuality in engagements with potential participants. Using her personal experience during her PhD fieldwork she illustrates why female researchers’ safety needs to be part and parcel of research ethics. This is in contrast with current ethics approval procedures which are designed to safeguard vulnerable participants rather than researchers. Pritchard’s experiences show how intersecting identities of disability, gender and age in encounter spaces that at first sight might appear to be ‘safe’ can turn the tables on who is vulnerable in encounters between researchers and participants. Pritchard’s story begins to illustrate the multifaceted ways in which intersectionality can have a disproportionate effect on ECRs in encounter spaces, a theme developed further by several other contributions in the collection. The intersection of the researcher’s various identities and the specific encounter space of the annual gathering of people with dwarfism skewed the power balance between researcher and participant, changing the scope of Pritchard’s

study and its impact on the disability community. Pritchard's experience should serve to raise awareness for associations for people with dwarfism of the intersectional drivers of unwanted encounters during their meetings. She calls for the development of a safeguarding and whistleblowing policy during meetings, including measures such as a women's officer and responsive complaints and appeals procedures.

In the second contribution Sarah Marie Hall ([Chapter Three](#)) unpacks class, accent and dialect as opportunities and obstacles in research encounters. Hall's contribution speaks of the importance of being placed, often according to class, accent and dialect. When these social markers intersect, at times also with gender and whiteness, they can manifest as opportunities and obstacles within research and serve as means of social positioning within research encounters. Although they are often invisible and sidelined by more prominent markers of difference (such as gender and race), Hall reminds us how class, accent and dialect can also be powerful in shaping research perceptions. Personal and almost inseparable characteristics of researchers' identity can also emerge as a form of emotional labour in encounters, which falls unevenly on some. Hall calls for the explicit inclusion of class, accent and dialect as important elements of equality and diversity remits, training and procedures, within institutions and across society, therefore making this a collective endeavour rather than a personal burden for a few.

These contributions raise a number of questions for several institutions, once again reminding us that change would need to take place across the board as well as within research and professional institutions like universities, not-for-profit organisations and businesses. We ask academic institutions and funders: How can we adjust existing research ethics policies to offer adequate protection for researchers in engaging with research participants? What training can research institutions provide for researchers (and their supervisory teams) to help them deal with the vulnerability that emerges from intersecting

identities and specific encounter spaces? How can we (as researchers) partner with civil society associations to inform their policies and understanding of vulnerability as a result of intersection between identities characteristics (such as disability and gender) and encounter spaces that are meant to be safe? How can class, accent and dialect be productively included in equality and diversity remits, training and procedures, within institutions and across society?

In Part II, 'Experts and expertise', Michael Richardson ([Chapter Four](#)) explores the relationship between ethics and expertise in three encounter contexts: post-industrial, intergenerational and post-colonial spaces. He argues that the notion of expertise can unlock the limiting nature of preconceptions. Moving between the three encounter contexts, his accounts of expertise built on perceptions of 'sameness', assuming shared values and life experiences and revealing yet another facet of the intimate nature of encounters between researchers and participants. Adopting an intersectional approach, Richardson explains how commonality sits within and across multiple research encounters, and is sometimes unexpected to researchers. However, he warns, rapport can also belie the significance or meaning of a research encounter. Richardson experienced 'sameness' as key in expert making, alongside the emotional intelligence of the researcher and the importance of situated knowledge.

This is in stark contrast to the experiences described by Hiteva in [Chapter 5](#) on encounter(ing) spaces and experts. Using personal experiences of engagement on infrastructure outside and within academia, she argues that encounter spaces between policy, industry and academia hold open the possibility of destabilising boundaries and creating new spaces for negotiating across difference. She reveals such encounter spaces as spaces of intense emotional labour, which if unquestioned can reproduce practices of discrimination. The negative impacts of this can stretch beyond specific encounters and stakeholders, resulting in self-imposed isolation and censorship in research and

engagement. She calls for pre-emptive action to bring clarity and awareness of intersectionality to encounter spaces, and to embed support measures for emotional labour in mentoring schemes, impact training activities and ECR training in academic institutions. In a similar vein to Hall, Hiteva argues for building a shared understanding of the importance of encounters and institutional capacity, both within and outside of academia to raise awareness of encounter space dynamics *pre-emptively*, with the introduction of guidelines and best practices for managing encounter spaces. Failing to recognise diversity as an integral part of the solutions that are needed for societal challenges such as climate change and well-being could mean that infrastructure research agendas miss opportunities for new research directions, ways of engagement and inclusive impact on the lives of people.

Gordon Waitt's chapter on transdisciplinary research encounters in a fuel poverty project in Australia examines the intersectionality of a feminist domestic energy upgrade framework (Chapter Six). Through two research encounters, Waitt illustrates how intersectionality, together with situated knowledge, may reproduce or contest conventional approaches to knowledge about domestic energy research practice, policy and publics. He calls for energy knowledge to be formed from dialogue across the social and physical sciences, and for future research coalitions to be built using an intersectional approach and feminist research agendas. Using the example of collective video narratives, he unpacks how structures of power and masculinist discourses continue to dominate research engagements with policy makers and to overlook questions about larger capitalist agendas and structures that are integral to energy injustices.

Building from these contributions, we ask researchers and the researched: Who are the experts in fieldwork? What do assumptions of expertise rest upon?

To research funders and institutions we put the question: What support can be introduced in research institutions to support

researchers in managing the emotional labour of research in engagement?

We ask institutions and organisations routinely working with researchers or planning to do so in the future to consider all aspects of such engagement, including the emotional labour that comes hand in hand with expert work.

In Part III, on 'Research, power and institutions', Moss and Prince ([Chapter Seven](#)) introduce the concept of nomadic positionings and becoming to emphasise the need for flexibility in our understanding of disability and to explore the possibility of nomadic disability policy. They show how intersecting realities of physical capabilities of the human body, the built environment (buildings, public spaces and transit systems), common forms of information and communication, general attitudes, and popular assumptions and practices can be encountered as disabling for those with episodic, cyclical and invisible disabilities. They offer multiple, useful ways of taking these two academic notions and transplanting them at the heart of disability policy in Canada, so as to provide more extensive protection for and assistance to people with disabilities. They invite the reader to reject the pursuit of 'fixing' identities through social locations and to create a more open and flexible agenda for understanding how disability is encountered and could be engaged with. They invite researchers to unpack and engage with the multiplicity and fluidity of disability and its impact on the lives of the disabled.

In the final contribution of the collection John Paul Catungal explores the intersecting roles of academics in public policy, as critics, advocates and enforcers, and raises the question of ethics in engaging with policy ([Chapter Eight](#)). Catungal uses an intersectional approach to offer a timely and engaging critique of the public and policy relevance of research. He illustrates how attention to the multiplicity, complexity and co-constitution of social differences enriches our understandings of governmental instruments and their uneven impacts, and emphasises the complex policy environments within which

researchers work, dreaming up policy, providing critiques and evaluating it. Intersectionality demands that we approach academic engagements with policy with careful attentiveness to power and how such encounters impact upon, shape and are shaped by the representations, experiences and needs and desires of marginalised peoples and communities.

This leads us to ask institutions (in academia and beyond): What guidelines, rules and best practice for managing encounters can be introduced within individual institutions and shared institutional spaces to enable better understanding and management of intersectionality and engagement? How do we create a flexible understanding of encounters and encounter spaces that allows us to account for the multiple and complex ways in which experiences become disabling at the intersections of perceptions, human bodies and the built environment?

Where to from here?

The individual contributions in this edited volume unpack different facets of understanding how intersectionality shapes the fundamentals of impact: from researchers and the research process to the making and accepting of expertise. It highlights the complex spaces of engagement between research, policy (makers), industry and civil society. First and foremost, we have shown that all of us – researchers, policy, industry and civil society – need to pay critical attention to a lot of things that are currently overlooked. While academia has a long, albeit inconsistent, tradition in self-reflection and learning, this kind of inward gazing can be difficult to implement in practice in policy, industry and civil society, especially if the potential gains for all of us are not clear: a better environment for encountering each other, and meaningful and inclusive impact. So we ask: How can we work together in dreaming up a future where intersectionality and encounter spaces are used to create better outcomes for research and society? And how do we make it happen?

Index

A

- ACA *see* Accessible Canada Act
- academic and research
engagement 4, 11, 12, 14–15,
62–3, 76
- advocacy and 138, 142–6,
147, 149
- contemporary landscapes of 2–5
- disability 22–4, 26, 27, 36, 159
- infrastructure
research 79–96, 161–2
- making/enforcing policy 146–9
- policy criticism and 139–42, 149
- policy engagement 135–9
- politics of relevance 150–1
- power relations 71–4, 82, 138
- social class and accent/
dialect 50–2, 55
see also encounter spaces
- ACAS *see* Asian Community
AIDS Services (ACAS) Youth
Program
- accent 13, 41–2, 56
- social class and place 42–8
- social class/dialect in research
encounters 48–55, 160–1
- accessibility *see* radical accessibility
- Accessible Canada Act (ACA) 127
- advocacy 138, 142–6, 147, 149
- age 9, 92, 95, 96
- domestic energy efficiency 100,
105, 109
- aged care providers 102, 103, 113
- Ahmed, Sara 56, 147

- alternative knowledges 100, 104,
105, 107, 110–11
- Asian Community AIDS Services
(ACAS) Youth Program 143
- austerity politics 4, 8, 143, 150
- Australia 3, 14, 101–4, 109, 162

B

- BAME *see* black, Asian and
minority ethnic
- Barry, A. 109
- Bavidge, J. 68
- belonging 85, 88, 93
- Berger, R. 22, 27
- Binnie, J. 55
- black, Asian and minority ethnic
(BAME) *vii–ix, x, 136, 140,*
143, 144, 147
- body management 123
- Bolt, D. 25
- Born, G. 109
- Brah, A. 8
- Braidotti, R. 123–5
- Brexit Britain 63, 88, 92
- Brown, R.J. 81
- Bryson, Mary 148

C

- Canada 14, 121–5
- nomadic
positioning 125–32, 163
- policy makers 140–1, 143–6

- Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefit (CPP/D) 129
- Carrie, Erin 46
- charities 2, 4, 11
- Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Constitution Act) (1982) (Canada) 127
- childhood: expertise 64, 67–71, 75–6
- Chinese communities 143
- citizenship 71–4, 88–9, 101, 126, 127, 128, 139–40
- civil disobedience *vii–viii*
- civil society *x*, 1, 4, 15, 161, 164
 - infrastructure research 80, 82, 89, 93–4
- class *see* social class
- classroom communities 144–5
- climate change 96, 101, 162
- co-production 2, 84–5, 86, 107
- Coddington, K. 105–6
- Cohen, Cathy 140
- collaborative work 4, 10, 11, 79, 80, 84, 92, 140
- collective video storytelling 110–13, 115, 162
- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) 100, 110
- community engagement *ix–x*, 89, 102, 103, 111, 143
- community ethnographies 43–4
- Constitution Act (Charter of Rights and Freedoms) (1982) (Canada) 127
- Coronation Street 43
- CPP/D *see* Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefit
- ‘Crap Towns’ (book series) 44
- ‘creative city’ policy 140–2
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé 8–9, 137, 150
- critical reflexivity 1, 3, 28, 155, 157
 - domestic energy efficiency 107–8, 110, 112, 113
- criticism: of policy makers 139–42, 149
- CSIRO *see* Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
- cultural exchange/associations *xi–xii*, 4, 13, 80, 92, 121, 141
 - domestic energy efficiency 103, 105
 - expertise 72, 74
 - place 43, 44, 46, 47
- cultural perceptions:
 - dwarfism 24–6
- D**
- data portals 100, 110–13, 114
- dialect 13, 67, 160–1
 - social class and 41–2, 45, 46, 47, 48–55, 56
- difference 7, 8, 12, 13, 44, 52–3, 136, 155, 161
- disability 121, 122, 124, 125, 129, 130–1
- gender and 81, 83, 84–5, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96
- intersectionality 155–6, 157, 158, 159, 162
- policy makers 137, 138, 147, 150–1
 - training and 155–6, 160–1, 162
- disability justice 121–2
- disability *x*, 9, 13, 14, 121–5, 158
 - academic and research engagement 22–4, 26, 27, 36, 159
 - difference 121, 122, 124, 125, 129, 130–1
 - nomadic positioning 124, 125–32, 163
 - policy makers 122, 125–6, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131–2
 - power relations 123–4, 129
 - sexuality and 24–6, 36, 37
 - social identity 122, 123–4, 129–30
 - social spaces 13, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29–30, 35, 36–7
- disablist infantilisation 25
- disadvantage *x*, *xi*, 23, 93, 94, 131, 132, 137
- diversity 49, 56, 81, 96, 129, 147

- doctoral research 11
 domestic energy efficiency 104–10, 115–16, 162
 Energy+Illawarra project (Australia) 101–4, 109
 gender 100, 104, 105, 106, 108, 111, 114
 geographers 100, 103, 104, 108, 114
 household data portal 100, 110–13, 114
 inequality 106, 109, 110, 115
 intersectionality 104, 108, 114
 marginalisation 104, 105, 107, 110, 111
 policy makers 100, 101, 102–3, 104, 105, 106–7, 108, 110, 115
 power relations 104, 105, 106, 109, 110, 115, 162
 Domosh, M. 84
 Dorling, Danny 63
 Dowling, R. 47
 Drummond, Rob 46
 dwarfism 13, 21–2, 37–8
 disability and
 sexuality 24–6, 36, 37
 lone female researchers with 26, 28–35, 159–60
 masculinity 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 31–5, 36, 159–60
 power relations 27, 28, 34, 35, 36, 159–60
 researching disability 22–4
 social identity 22–3, 28
 social positionality of 22–3, 24, 26–8, 30, 35, 36
- E**
 early career researchers (ECRs) 14, 29, 36, 158, 159, 162
 infrastructure research 79–80, 90–1, 92, 93, 94
 economists 106–7, 109
 education policy 143, 146–9
 Edwards, J. 43
 EE3A *see* ‘Energy Efficiency in the 3rd Age’ (EE3A) (Australia)
 electoral geographies 62–3
 embodied intergenerationality 64–5, 66, 75
 emotional labour 14, 56, 160, 161–2, 163
 infrastructure research 79, 85–6, 89, 91–2, 93, 94
 encounter spaces 5–8, 12, 14–15, 79–80, 130, 155, 157
 considerations of 93–6
 disability and social spaces 13, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29–30, 35, 36–7
 expertise and 81–2, 84–93
 impact of 5–8, 80, 90, 91, 93, 95, 156–8
 policy makers 79, 80, 82, 87–8, 93–4, 95
 social positionality 80, 86–7, 88, 95
 work on infrastructure 80–4, 89–91, 161–6
 working-class 51–2
 see also academic and research engagement; ‘safe spaces’; social spaces; urban spaces
 Energy+Illawarra project (Australia) 101–4, 109
 energy *see* domestic energy efficiency
 ‘Energy Efficiency in the 3rd Age’ (EE3A) (Australia) 102
 Energy Upgrade Program (Australia) 104
 engagement *see* academic and research engagement
 engineers 99, 100, 103, 106–10, 113, 114
 England, K.V.L. 28, 82–3
 Environment Programme, United Nations (UNEP) 101
 environmental determinism 136
 epistemic privilege 64, 65
 Esmail, S. et al 24
 ethnographic research projects 41–2, 43, 67, 103, 104, 109, 110
 Evans, R. 7
Everyday Austerity exhibition 52–3
 exclusion *viii*, *ix*, 81, 87, 126, 128, 131, 132

- expertise 14, 15, 61–4, 75–7, 146, 161, 164
 engineers 99, 106–10
 female researchers 81, 83–4, 85–6, 87, 92
 industry 79, 80, 82, 87–91, 93–4
 infrastructure research and 84–93
 intergenerational space 64, 67–71
 post-colonial space 71–4, 76
 post-industrial space 64–7, 75
 researchers 64–5, 66–7, 74, 85, 87
- F**
- Fairchild, H. 136
 faith networks 50
 family relationships/practices 41–2, 45, 64–5, 105, 108
 female researchers
 expertise 81, 83–4, 85–6, 87, 92
 safeguarding 11, 21–2, 23, 24, 26, 28–9, 33–5, 36, 37, 159–60
 feminist domestic energy upgrade framework 100, 104–6, 108, 109, 114, 162
 feminist scholarship 8, 9, 27–8, 36, 70, 115, 136–7
 fixability 123, 125, 130, 131, 132, 163
 fuel poverty 101, 105, 108–9, 113, 114, 162
 funding *x–xi*, 2, 11, 61, 79, 143
- G**
- Garland-Thomson, R. 123
 gender 69, 70, 80, 86, 142, 144, 158
 difference and 81, 83, 84–5, 92, 93, 95, 96
 domestic energy efficiency 100, 104, 105, 106, 108, 111, 114
 safeguarding 9, 13, 14, 23, 27, 36, 159
 social class and accent/dialect 42, 50, 53–4, 55, 160
 gender identity and expression (GIE) 148
 generational norms 9, 50, 67–71
 geographers 43, 47, 63, 66, 136, 139
 domestic energy efficiency 100, 103, 104, 108, 114
 Goldberg, David Theo 140
 Gove, Michael 62, 63
 Grosz, E. 25
 Groves, C. et al 111
gweilo (white foreign person) 71–4
- H**
- Handler, Chelsea 25
 Harding, S. 110
 Harrison, E. 45
 Harvey, David 136
 Henry, F. et al 147, 148
 heritage preservation 143, 144–5
 heterosexuality 13, 14, 65, 140, 145, 159
 dwarfism 22, 23, 24–6, 36
 HIV/AIDS sector 143
 Hogg, E. et al 11
 Holloway, L. 44
 Holloway, S.L. et al 68, 69, 75
 Hong Kong 14, 63, 71–4
 Hopkins, P. 9, 64
 Hubbard, P. 44
 Human Rights Code (British Columbia) 148
- I**
- identity *see* social identity
 impact 1, 12, 69, 76, 82
 contemporary landscapes of 2–5
 difference and 157, 158, 160, 164
 encounter spaces and 5–8, 80, 90, 91, 93, 95, 156–8
 social positionality 81, 84–5, 86
 transdisciplinary research 113–16
 in-between spaces 90, 94, 123, 158
 India 3

INDEX

- industry 1, 2, 4, 7, 14, 15, 164
 expertise and 79, 80, 82,
 87–91, 93–4
- inequality 1, 7, 44, 46, 88, 121
 domestic energy efficiency 106,
 109, 110, 115
 policy makers 135, 136–7,
 142, 149
- infantilisation 25, 69, 71
- infrastructure research
 considerations of
 encountering 93–6
 early career researchers
 (ECRs) 79–80, 90–1,
 92, 93, 94
 emotional labour 79, 85–6, 89,
 91–2, 93, 94
 encounter spaces 80–4,
 91, 161–2
 expertise and 84–93
- institutional spaces 9, 71, 79, 128–
 9, 130, 155–6, 157–8, 164
- infrastructure research 81, 82,
 93–4, 96
- policy makers 138, 146, 147,
 148, 149
- interdisciplinary teams 14,
 79, 84–5
- intergenerational space 64–5,
 66, 67–71
- Intergenerational Space* 68
- intergroup contact 81
- intersectionality *ix*, *x*, *xi*, 1, 8–12,
 13, 14, 80
 academic engagement and
 research/policy makers 137–8,
 139, 141–2, 146, 147, 149,
 150–1, 163–4
 difference 155–6, 157, 158,
 159, 162
 disability 121–3
 domestic energy efficiency 104,
 108, 114
 dwarfism 27, 159–60
 expertise 64, 71, 76
 ‘thick
 intersectionalities’ 93, 94–5
 transdisciplinary research 113–16
- Irish descent 63, 64, 66
- ‘ivory tower’ notion 3, 74,
 135, 136
- ## K
- Kanngieser, A. 45–6
- Kasturirangen, R. 4
- Kitchin, R. 26
- knowledge production 65, 95, 99,
 108, 111
 feminist domestic energy upgrade
 framework 100, 104–6, 108,
 109–10, 114
- Kremer, E. 23, 28, 29, 33, 35
- Kruse, R. 25, 26
- ## L
- labelling *vii*, *viii*, *x*, 86, 158
- Latimer, J. 6
- Lee, J.A. 68
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender
 or queer (LGBTQ) *x*, 55, 139,
 140, 141, 144, 145–6, 149
- Leslie, Deborah 140–1
- LGBTQ *see* lesbian, gay, bisexual,
 transgender or queer
- LIEEP *see* Low Income Energy
 Efficiency Program (Australia)
- life course 14, 131
- López Gómez, D. 6
- Loughran, T. 51
- Low Income Energy Efficiency
 Program (LIEEP)
 (Australia) 102
- low-incomes 101, 102, 109, 110,
 111, 112, 115
- Lowry, L.S. 43
- ## M
- Macmillan, R. 11
- Maher, F.A. 86
- Manchester 46, 52–3
- Mannay, Dawn 65
- Maori communities 5
- marginalisation 91–2, 94,
 161–2, 164
 domestic energy efficiency 104,
 105, 107, 110, 111

- policy makers 137, 138, 141, 142,
 143, 144–5, 148, 149, 150, 151
- masculinity 99, 141, 162
- domestic energy efficiency 106,
 107, 115
- dwarfism and 22, 23, 24, 27, 28,
 29, 31–5, 36, 159–60
- materialities 104, 108, 114, 130, 147
- meaningful contact 6, 80–1, 91,
 95, 157, 158–9, 164
- media *vii–viii*, 5, 32, 104, 138, 150
- class and accent/dialect 44,
 53–4, 55
- mental health 148–9
- Merriam, S.B. 86
- methodologies 61, 70–1, 82,
 103–4, 109
- mobile phones 33–4
- modelling 82, 106–7
- Moser, S. 75, 76
- Munoz, L. 139
- N**
- narratives 61, 65, 67, 103,
 109, 111–12
- National Centre for Children's
 Books 63, 67–71
- nationality 14, 64, 87–8, 92,
 93, 95, 96
- neoliberalism 51, 101, 114,
 142, 143
- New Zealand 3, 5
- NGOs *see non-governmental
 organisations*
- nomadic positionality 14, 124, 125–
 32, 163
- see also social positionality;
 subject positionality*
- non-governmental organisations
 (NGOs) 79, 89
- Northeast False Creek Plan
 (Canada) 144
- Northern England 43, 44, 49–50,
 53, 63, 64
- O**
- Occupy movement 73
- O'Neill Gutierrez, C. 9
- oppression 64, 122, 123
- 'others' *xii*, 83, 84, 85, 86,
 87–8, 93
- outsiders and 'outness' 45, 48–9,
 50, 53–4, 65, 72, 80, 86
- P**
- Pahl, R.F. 43
- Peck, Jamie 136, 150
- people of colour *see black, Asian
 and minority ethnic (BAME)*
- performativity 104, 105, 108,
 114, 156
- personalities 75–6
- Philo, C. 68
- Phoenix, A. 8
- physical disabilities 24, 25
- Piekut, A. 81, 82
- Pinochet, General Augusto 136
- place
- researchers and accent/
 dialect 48–55
- social class and accent 42–8
- policy makers *ix*, 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10,
 14, 15, 63, 135–6, 139, 163–4
- academic advocacy and 138,
 142–6, 147, 149
- academics making/enforcing
 policy 146–9
- academics and politics of
 relevance 150–1
- difference 137, 138, 147, 150–1
- disability 122, 125–6, 127, 128,
 129, 130, 131–2
- domestic energy efficiency 100,
 101, 102–3, 104, 105, 106–7,
 108, 110, 115
- encounter spaces 79, 80, 82, 87–
 8, 93–4, 95
- inequality 135, 136–7, 142, 149
- institutional spaces 138, 146,
 147, 148, 149
- marginalisation 137, 138, 141,
 142, 143, 144–5, 148, 149,
 150, 151
- policy criticism by
 academics 139–42, 149
- race and racism 136, 140, 142,
 143, 144

social class and accent/
dialect 52–4

political intersectionality 8, 9

populism 62–3

positionality *see* **nomadic
positionality; social
positionality; subject
positionality**

post-colonial space 71–4, 76

post-industrial space 64–7, 75

‘post-truth era’ 62–4, 74

power relations 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 12,
13, 146, 149, 150

academic and research
engagement 71–4, 82, 138

childhood 67–8, 71

disability 123–4, 129

domestic energy efficiency 104,
105, 106, 109, 110, 115, 162

dwarfism 27, 28, 34, 35,
36, 159–60

gender 84–5

place 42, 55

privilege *xii*, 6, 50, 55, 64–5, 71–4

professional space 30, 33

public engagement 52–3

Q

Que(e)rying Religion 145

R

race and racism *ix*, 9, 14, 27, 53,
80, 95, 122, 158

policy makers 136, 140, 142,
143, 144

radical accessibility 121–2

reading books 68–71, 75–6

REF *see* **Research Excellence
Framework**

reflexivity *see* **critical reflexivity**

Regional Development
Australia 102, 103

regional identity *see* **accent
relationality** 64, 114

representational
intersectionality 8, 9

research engagement *see* **academic
and research engagement**

Research Excellence Framework
(REF) 2–3, 4

research participants 13–14, 146

accent/dialect 41–2, 48–55, 56

intergenerational space and
expertise 64, 67–71

males with dwarfism 22, 23, 24,
27, 28, 29, 31–5, 36, 159–60

place and accent 42–8

post-colonial space and
expertise 71–4

post-industrial space and
expertise 64–7, 75

researchers 81

expertise and 64–5, 66–7,
74, 85, 87

females with dwarfism/
disability 26, 27, 28–35,
36, 159–60

social class and accent/
dialect 48–55

‘returning performance’ 66

Roa, T. et al 5

Rogers, A. et al 3, 6

Roots Programme *xi–xii*

Rose, G. 43

Rushton, J.P. 136

Rutland, Ted 140

S

Saewyc, Elizabeth et al 146

‘safe spaces’ 63–4, 70, 75, 157
see also **encounter spaces; social
spaces; urban spaces**

safeguarding 37, 159, 160

female researchers 11, 21–2,
23, 24, 26, 28–9, 33–5, 36,
37, 159–60

gender 9, 13, 14, 23, 27, 36, 159

‘sameness’ 64, 66, 67, 69, 73, 75,
158, 161

Savage, M. 47

science-to-policy paradigm 106–7

scientific racism 136

‘scientifically objective’
knowledge 106

Scott, A. 11

self-doubt 70, 71, 72, 76, 91

- sexual harassment 23, 24, 30–1,
 32–4, 37
- sexuality 13, 14, 22, 144, 146
 disability and 24–6, 36, 37
- Shakespeare, T. et al 25, 26, 29, 31
- Sharp, G. 23, 28, 29, 33, 35
- Simshauser, P. 101
- situated knowledge 14, 73, 76,
 104, 106, 107, 108, 114, 161
- Skeggs, B. 44
- soap operas 43
- social class 9, 13, 41–2, 56,
 95, 158
 accent/dialect in research
 encounters 48–55, 160–1
 domestic energy
 efficiency 100, 105
 place and accent 42–8
 whiteness and 50, 53–4, 55
- social identity 1, 3, 7, 10, 12, 13,
 14, 15, 80, 137
 disability 122, 123–4, 129–30
 dwarfism 22–3, 28
 infrastructure research 84–93
 post-colonial spaces 73, 74
 reading books 70, 71
 social class and accent/dialect 41,
 46–7, 49, 50, 56, 160
- Social Justice Institute (GRSJ
 Institute) (University of British
 Columbia (UBC)) 148–9
- social management 123
- social marketing programmes 100,
 102, 103–4, 110, 115
- social positionality 1, 7, 11, 12,
 13, 14, 64, 74–5, 107, 110
 dwarfism 22–3, 24, 26–8,
 30, 35, 36
 encounter spaces 80,
 86–7, 88, 95
 as a feminist geographer 100
 impact 81, 84–5, 86
 policy makers 144, 146, 147
 social class and accent/dialect 41,
 42, 46, 55–6, 160
see also nomadic positionality;
 subject positionality
- social sciences 2, 4, 10, 21
 expertise 61, 69
 infrastructure research 80, 81,
 82, 107, 111, 150
- social self-marginalisation 91–2, 94
- social spaces 13, 24, 25, 26, 27,
 29–30, 35, 36–7
see also ‘safe spaces’; encounter
 spaces; urban spaces
- socio-economic
 structures 44, 45, 50
- “soft” metrics 147
- space *see* encounter spaces;
 ‘safe spaces’; social spaces;
 urban spaces
- Srinivasan, K. 4
- Stanley, L. 82
- Stenning, A. 47, 51
- Strengers, Y. 107
- strong objectivity 110
- structural intersectionality 8, 9
- subject positioning 123–5, 126–7,
 129, 130
see also nomadic positionality;
 social positionality
- Sultana, F. 142
- Swan, E. 56
- T**
- Taylor, Y. 51, 54–5
- techno-scientific control 107
- Tetreault, M.K. 86
- ‘town versus gown’ relations 62–3
- training 56, 74, 87, 94, 139, 155–
 6, 160–1, 162
 difference and 155–6,
 160–1, 162
- transcription 66–7
- transdisciplinary research 14,
 99–104, 162
 data portals and collective video
 storytelling 110–13
 feminist domestic energy upgrade
 framework 104–6
 intersectionality and
 impact 113–16
 knowledge of domestic energy
 efficiency 106–10
- Trump, Donald 63
- Truth, Sojourner 137
- Turner, J.C. 81

INDEX

U

- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 101
- University of British Columbia (UBC) 148–9
- university impact and engagement 69, 82
- urban spaces *vii–viii*, 139–41, 143, 144–5
see also encounter spaces; ‘safe spaces’; social spaces

V

- Valentine, G. 6, 10, 27, 34, 81, 82
- van Laer, T. 112
- Vanderbeck, R. 68
- veterans (Canadian Forces) 128
- Visual, Narrative and Creative Research Methods* (Mannay) 65
- Vital North Partnership 69

W

- Weinberg, M.S. 29, 31
- whistleblowing 37, 160
- ‘white washing’ 9
- whiteness 13, 42, 71–4, 82, 140, 160
social class 50, 53–4, 55
- Wills, J. 45, 47
- Wilmott, P. 43
- Wise, S. 82
- working-class communities
accent/dialect *x*, 42, 43, 47, 49, 50–2, 53–4
expertise 63, 65–6, 75
- Worth, N. 68

Y

- Yassour-Borochowitz, D. 28, 31, 34
- Young, M. 43
- Yuval-Davis, N. 137

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