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Ethics, Education and Ethnography; working with young people and children

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'Engaging children and young people: creative methods and research ethics'.

ABSTRACT

Ethnography is one of the most responsive research methodologies and research products within educational research; it is also one of the most contested. There are continual debates about how educational ethnographies should be conducted and presented (Walford, 2008). Not only does ethnography incorporate a wide array of methodologies, but educational ethnographers themselves are situated in the practical domain of the everyday life where the course of predicting ethically sound research practise is to some degree challenging. The ethnographer is forced to respond to the process itself rather than being situationally forged prior to its conduct (Dennis, 2010). This paper attempts to address the dearth in knowledge regarding the exploration of ethics and reflexive practise by exploring the work of two education ethnographers' work with children and young people.

This paper argues that education ethnographers need to be reflexive in their consideration of ethics, especially when taking into account the variable fields of investigation, the close proximity to children and young people over a longitudinal basis and the potential use of a plethora of research methodologies. Ethnography can be varied and unpredictable and as such have key unprecedented consequences for the use of ethics when working with children and young people.

KEYWORDS

ETHNOGRAPHY, EDUCATION, ETHICS, CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

'Research is neither neutral nor innocent practice'

(Sikes, 2006; 105)

All research has the potential to touch people, ethnographers delve into the life of the everyday of their participants, they walk their walk, talk their talk and strive for valid, in-depth contextualised data, gathered over a longitudinal and intimate basis. Ethnography is explorative and inductive in nature and as such it is also messy, unpredictable and complex. Ethnography conducted with young people and children adds to the intricacy and difficulty of managing ethically sound research practice within and beyond the field. Being in the field has implications for ethics (Dennis,

2009). The ethnographer that works with children and young people needs to be ethically aware, ethically reactive and be prepared to be ethically challenged.

This paper acknowledges the importance of ethics but begins by questioning the increased ethical regulation sanctioned upon social scientists as a whole and draws upon Hammersley's (2009) critical stance taken towards this movement. In particular the notion that the formal ethic committees always know best is questioned. Increased ethical regulation may actually compromise the interests of participants, query the expertise of the ethnographer in the field and lead us to think about our own, our institutions and the participants own political and moral agendas. The ethnographer requires particular autonomy and expertise while managing ethics soundly in situ in order to work within the messiness and unpredictability of the participants' everyday lives.

Literature regarding ethics, education and ethnography and working with young people and children is then situated within this debate before a brief summary of the two ethnographer's work is outlined. Most of the literature regarding ethics deals with the management of ethical review boards (Dennis, 2009). This paper takes a reflective view on how ethics works in practice for the ethnographer working with children and young people. The two expert ethnographers then offer reflexive accounts of how they managed particular ethical occurrences within the context of using multiple participatory methods with NEET (not in Employment, Education or Training) young people and ethnically diverse primary school age children over a longitudinal basis.

INCREASED ETHICAL REGULATION

Ethical regulation of social research has increased significantly in the UK over the past decade or so (Hammersley, 2009). This form of regulation has its roots in the field of health and the trend is following that set by the USA. The Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Research Ethics Framework has been imperative to the way in which ethics is viewed and managed by social scientists in universities. Ethical regulation is a requirement and failure to comply rules out certain funding opportunities and possible practises of ethically risky pieces of research that might otherwise have been conducted (Hammersley, 2009). This increased ethical regulation has implications for social scientific research in general. It is now commonplace for all research project plans to go through ethical committee clearance via formal institutional regulation boards. Such committees have an abundance of power to demand clarification and even modification of research in terms of subject choice and methods adopted, and in some instances they may even prevent the research from going ahead. This increased regard held for ethical procedures has been questioned, particularly for those types of research that take place in 'natural' settings over prolonged periods. Such regulations have serious

implications for covert ethnography for example whereby such research may struggle to gain ethical approval despite its merits in yielding more valid and hard to otherwise access data. Furthermore, this procedure assumes that the ethics committee knows best and is superior placed to make a better judgement about the ethics of any given research project than the actual researcher(s) involved. It also assumes that most, if not all ethical dilemmas can be foreseen and managed in advance. Furthermore this procedure assumes the researcher knows from the outset what methods of data collection will be used throughout the course of the study. These requirements to foresee the possible directions a study may go in make it difficult for emergent methodologies such as ethnography to reach their full potential due to the constraints that limited ethical approval may place on them before data collection can begin. The field and indeed the actual purpose and means by which data is gathered is multiple and can vary and evolve within the course of any given ethnography, indeed this is deemed to be one of ethnography's strengths. While the ESRC Research Ethics Framework recognises that ethics needs to be 'continually monitored' in such forms of research, the realities of managing this in the field are somewhat problematic, especially when working with young people and children. This paper proposes that these assumptions make dealing with ethics more problematic for the ethnographer who immerses themselves in the field for lengthy periods of time. The ethnographer spends a long time 'hanging around' and familiarising themselves with the participants, culture and sometimes local context making it increasingly difficult to predict possible ethical quandaries and thus purports the question as to whether those on the ethical committee board are always really best placed to sanction ethical approval. While this emergent methodology may not easily jump through an Ethics Committee's hoops, due to a number of unknowns, it is argued that when a researcher takes time to familiarise themselves with the research context and gives their participants time to become familiar with the researcher that power dynamics can be minimised facilitating a participant's ability to actively consent to take part in a study resulting in a deeper understanding and implementation of ethical practices (Barley and Bath 2014).

Hammerlsey (2009) in his paper, 'Against the ethicists: on the evils of ethical regulation' challenges ethical boards expertise by drawing on the lack of consensus amongst social scientists in the first instance and problematizes the very notion of managing ethics in the field. He purports six ethical guidelines that most active researchers would be aware of, they include:

- 1) Respecting the autonomy or rights of individuals and/or groups
- 2) Not harming people, protecting individual and collective interests
- 3) Taking account of people's needs
- 4) Dealing with people justly, for example not exploiting them
- 5) Treating equitable the various people encountered during the course of data collection and
- 6) Respecting privacy and confidentiality (Hammersley, 2009: 213).

He reminds us that different researchers may prioritise some of these points over others and argues that in some instances some of these concerns may need to be traded off against one another depending upon particular circumstances. While Hammersley recognises the requirement for ethical consideration in *some* circumstances he reminds us of the possible dilemmas and even dangers such regulations may ensue. It is important to remember that most experienced ethnographers do hold a care of duty with regards to their participants and are acutely aware of the formal ethical guidelines that may infringe upon their practise, even if they may not be able to predict the realities of managing ethically sound practise within the field. Indeed there is very little evidence that any recent social scientific research has actually caused harm to participants in a physical or emotional sense, in fact many ethnographers working with young people endeavour to voice the opinion of the marginalised and empower them. Today there is an increased notion of accountability, this increased ethical regulation may be likened to a moral panic, whereby the actual realities of conducting such research by experienced ethnographers are almost always highly regarded with relation to ethics. Of course there is a place for ethical regulation and review but the power placed solely in their hands could be viewed as extreme and even misplaced. Ethnographers are concerned with gaining highly valid data. Research carried out in 'natural' settings, like that of ethnography, needs a flexible procedural approach to ethics that empowers the ethnographer in their 'practical decisions which involve ethical consideration' (Hammersley, 2009: 215) rather than disempowers their autonomy to behave in an ethically sound manner while simultaneously gaining truly valid data. This increased regulation may increase the likelihood of social scientists adopting a more strategic approach to their ethical considerations in order to satisfy ethical review committees and gain funding; indeed consideration of ethics may affect choice of topics researched and the methods adopted to gain valid data. Researchers may shy away from taboo topics and risky means of gathering data. It is also possible that there will be increased discrepancies from the official line taken to ethics and the reality of managing ethical dilemmas in the field – especially for the ethnographer working with young people. The realities of what happens in the field needs to be reflected upon to add to the novice ethnographers knowledge set and improve ethically sound practise for all. Indeed Hammersley goes as far as to suggest that researchers may even abstain from ethical responsibility and assign that accountability to the official ethical committees given the current regulated climate. Increased ethical regulation is thus challenged albeit something that the ethnographer cannot ignore.

ETHICS EDUCATION AND ETHNOGRAPHY; WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILDREN

In 2010 the Ethnography and Education Journal did a special issue entitled 'ethical dilemmas in the field: the complex nature of doing education ethnography'. Ethics

has also been considered when regarding research that works with young people and children, but this is usually considered with relation to qualitative research methods in general rather than specifically looking at ethnographies conducted with young people and children (Sime, 2008; Clark et al, 2013). This paper attempts to address the dearth in knowledge regarding the exploration of ethics and reflexive practise done by two experienced education ethnographers' work with children and young people, including Lisa Russell's work with NEET young people and Ruth Barley's work conducted with ethnically diverse primary school age children. Doing ethnography with young people and children adds to the unpredictability of how ethics can be managed in the field but also adds to the ethical sensitivity required by the ethnographer with regards to doing research with the young and often marginalised.

Education ethnographers need to manage ethics in the academic institutional domain such as that described above within the ESRC ethical framework and within university based or other funding body or professional organisational institutional review boards and within the domain of their interactions with participants (Dennis, 2010). Education ethnographers place themselves in the practical domain of everyday life where the management of ethics is much messier, unpredictable and responsive to the context of particular research processes. Behaving ethically in the field is complex for those ethnographers that work with children and young people. By reflecting on ethical challenges managed by education ethnographers the formalities and the realities of ethics can be disentangled. This paper contributes to the identified gap in the literature relating to this aspect. In her guest editorial in the ethnography and education journal, Dennis (2010) rationalises the need for a special issue that deals with the complexities of ethics education and ethnography.

'We have little in the literature that explores, in concrete ways, how ethical reflection and reflexivity is identified in the situated, interactive context of research practice' (Dennis, 2010: 123).

Ethnographers locate ethical decisions as internal to the research process itself, linked to the everyday interactions and on-going research activities, rather than a set of principles established externally and prior to the conduct of research. Rather ethical decisions vary according to context as well as in accordance to specific researchers political, moral, methodological or theoretical standpoints. Doing education based ethnography may put researchers into contact with unethical behaviour that is part of the everyday lives of the participants, and by studying the everyday the ethnographer is intrigued yet somewhat vulnerable and perhaps cautious about the ethics of researching children and young people.

THE ETHNOGRAPHY'S

Data from which this paper is based is drawn from two ethnographies conducted by the authors. The first draws on a Leverhulme Trust Funded 3 year ethnography that explored the experiences of NEET young people as they moved from various places of employment and education sties and churned through being in a state of NEET and EET (In Employment, Education and Training) in Northern England (Simmons, Thompson and Russell 2014). The fieldwork commenced in 2010 and was completed in 2013. Although 6 follow up semi structured interviews have been conducted in subsequent years where contact with 4 of the female participants has remained open. The project aimed to understand the needs and behavior of these 'hard-to-access' young people and the effectiveness of interventions aimed at moving them into sound education and employment spaces. The experiences of 24 young people identified as NEET or at risk of becoming NEET were explored with a priority being placed on gaining valid data collected in situ. 14 females and 10 males aged between 15 and 20 years including three Asian, one Mixed Race and the rest comprising of White decent participated. This research was led by the young people and so the level of each participant's participation varied from one individual to the next and was dependent upon their personal circumstances at any particular point in time. Indeed where the field work took place was very much dependent upon the young person's circumstances at the time, with a great deal of the field work being conducted in the young people's home. Levels of participation varied over the life of the project (and beyond) which has particular implications for consent (See Russell 2013 for more on this) and adhering to ever changing formal ethical reviews, since university ethical procedures have changed since the start of the project in 2010.

Young people were accessed from a range of sources, including YOT (Youth Offending Team), parent groups, a housing charity, Connexions¹ and word-of-mouth. The NEET group represents a broad range of people, and diverse sources were necessary to gain access. The main corpus of data included over 340 hours of participant observation conducted in young people's homes, schools, colleges, training providers, benefit offices, charity events, work placements, car journeys and fast food restaurants. Fieldnotes detailed the young people's use of space and time; referral procedures and pathways, learner behaviour and relations with tutors, Connexions, benefit office staff, social workers, friends and family. Young people's activities were mapped, alongside their aspirations. Fieldwork commenced in October 2010 and comprised 79 interviews, including employers, practitioners, parents and young people. Each of the 24 young people were interviewed at least once and have been re-interviewed once or twice thereafter dependent upon their transitions or critical life moments that have arisen throughout the research. Photographs taken by the researcher and the young people, combined with official documents detailing local NEET statistics, NEET Strategy Group meeting minutes and local provision data were analysed. As is customary with ethnographic research all data was triangulated where possible. Ethical consent was granted by the affiliated University but procedures did change after completion of the official fieldwork and commencement of extra interviews conducted thereafter.

The second draws on two stages of a longitudinal ethnography with a multi-ethnic school in the North of England and incorporates two periods of fieldwork with the

same group of children when they were in their Reception year (Barley, 2014) and then again in Year 4. Based on the pedagogical principles of 'sustained shared thinking' (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva 2004:6) children collaboratively designed research activities which were used to initiate research conversations. These data were then collaboratively analysed alongside more traditional hand-written field notes. Adopting a participatory approach in relation to the design and development of the study helped to reduce some of the power differentials between an adult researcher and child participants (Cheney 2011). Additionally this participatory framework provided a basis on which to reflect on other ethical issues throughout data collection and analysis. Formal ethical approval was gained before both stages of the fieldwork started from the university ethics committee. Fieldwork aspects of this project took place over the 2010/2011 and then again over the 2014/15 school year.

During the first phase of fieldwork weekly full day observation sessions (full day – including arrival, morning activities, lunchtime, afternoon activities and home time) and research activities with children were carried out for a 10 month period (Oct – Jul). Additionally six visual research 'lenses' were used in this phase of the study to initiate conversations with the children and gain a 'snapshot' of children's views and beliefs.

These six research activities were:

- Children's tours – individual children led the ethnographer round the activity stations in the classroom that they liked to play at and described what they liked to do at each stop
- Children's learning journeys – review with the children their Foundation Stage learning journeys and asking them to select aspects that they would like me to include in my study
- 'My friends are' picture – textual and visual depiction of friends at school (child inspired activity)
- 'Where I am from: Scotland' book – story book about the researcher's home country and culture that was used to prompt an unstructured interview and cultural practices
- 'Where I am from...' digital books – creation of a book about children's own cultural background (child inspired activity)
- Model identities – building activity depicting places that are important to the children

Each of these activities emerged during the fieldwork period and are discussed in more detail in Barley (2014).

The second phase of fieldwork comprised of twice weekly observations of break and lunch times for a period of 5 months (Feb – Jun) while the children were in Year 4. The researcher volunteered as a classroom assistant for the period between break and lunch. This role required continuing negotiation with the children and school class. Combined with this an identity mapping research activity was conducted near

the end of the fieldwork period. This activity, which was adapted from a participatory analytical tool, used in phase one of the fieldwork, asked children to write or draw phrases and symbols relating to different aspects of their identity on a large piece of paper. This led onto an unstructured informal interview with each child.

THE PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND POLITICAL

Education ethnographers have long recognised the significance of the researcher's self upon the research process (Burgess, 1984; Walford, 1991; Troman, 2000; Russell, 2005). The ethnographer enters the field for long periods of time and engages in close constant contact with participants. Due to this intimacy, the personal, professional and political standpoints in addition to the institutional and societal climate are of particular importance in ethnography and have specific implications for the management of ethics. These three related aspects influence choice of topic, where and how research is conducted and with whom and where and how findings are disseminated (Miller and Russell, 2005). These aspects are particularly salient for ethnographers who regard themselves as criticalists – a tradition that broadly refers to researchers who are concerned with issues of social justice and enter the field with an aim to change the community for the better (Carspecken, 1996; Korth, 2005; Dennis, 2009). Within this tradition injustices are confronted head on, the research undertaken is unashamedly political and purposely aims to emancipate the vulnerable and marginalised. When working within this tradition, the ethnographer might be especially willing to risk intervening or not intervening if this action is perceived to benefit the community or participants in some way (Dennis, 2009). Indeed both the ethnographers (Russell and Barley) would place themselves in this camp, thus having particular consequences for modes of participation (or 'intervening' as Dennis would describe it) and reasons behind those decisions which in turn can complicate the manifestation and management of ethics.

The majority of literature on research ethics focuses on the challenges, limitations and ethics of review board requirements and practices, usually addressing issues regarding the need to gain informed consent (from parents and guardians in addition to the young people themselves if under the age of 16 years), protect participants from any physical or emotional harm and ensure their and the related institutions anonymity if deemed necessary (Dennis, 2009). For more on this related to Russell's research on NEET young people please see Russell (2013) and for Barley's work within an ethnically diverse primary school classroom see Barley (2014). Modes of participation and decisions about how and when or even if to intervene in the life of the participants may implicate the management of ethics and indeed throw into question the issue of who owns the data and for what purpose. Dennis (2009) describes facing a decision to intervene in her critical participatory action ethnography. She spent four years in the field and collected data via multiple means. The project aimed to support educator's efforts to create positive and inclusive educational environments for new English language learners. She decided to confront the issue regarding one teachers' negative attitude towards non-white

newcomers in his school and town by informing the Assistant Principal about his abrasive nature towards such students in class evidenced in field notes. She deliberated that 'something needed to be done' (Dennis, 2009; 139). She claims that she did this as she cared about the people she was working with, the goals of the project itself and because she had a particular moral view about how she should behave in the world both within and outside of the life of the research. She has thus dedicated a whole paper to exploring this often 'hidden' and unexplored juncture, where the naturalistic nature of ethnography means the researcher has every chance of confronting complicated dilemmas not dissimilar to those faced in everyday life (Dennis, 2009). Lisa faced a similar decision to intervene in her work with Isla a young mum who was having incredible difficulty accessing services and gaining information needed to help her maintain custody of her baby. Isla was 19 years of age when she had Oscar. She had completed her schooling with 8 GCSEs grades B-D. She had spent some time in foster care but regained contact with her birth parents and started to see them again on a regular basis. Indeed she moved back home with them when she and Oscar's father split up. Isla and Lisa I met on an employability course that was put in place especially for those who were part of the Leaving Care team. Isla had done some level one and two training to help her become a hairdresser but failed to gain the certification after completion of the course. During the fieldwork she returned to her hairdresser training, repeating levels one and two after the birth of her son Oscar. The majority of fieldwork was conducted in Isla's various places of residence (she moved three times during the research) as she remained NEET for the majority of time over the life of the project. Having Oscar and becoming a mum was a significant life event for Isla. Russell only ever observed Isla at home with Oscar however they did discuss photographs she had taken with Oscar's dad Lucas and other members of her family in a semi-structured interview.

Who's truth?

09/02/12

12.00-1.00pm As soon as I enter Isla informs me that she and Lucas split up. Oscar is asleep as I enter on a bouncer near the radiator. Isla seems pleased to see me and is eager to talk about recent events in her life. She walks over and uses the hob on the cooker to light a cigarette. She says a lot has happened since our last meeting. She has an injunction out against Lucas, his mum comes and picks Oscar up to see his dad, and the visits are supervised by Lucas' parents as ordered by social services. Lucas has him about 3 days a week, Isla says this is better as she gets to go out and see her friends, as before he wouldn't let her see friends that he didn't approve of, and they were not allowed to come to the home. She describes going out to her cousin's 21st birthday party, a male friend came by and slept on the chair sofa in the living room with his baby in the room. Oscar was at the parent-in-laws overnight. Lucas suddenly got mad, broke a bowl and threw

it off the table in a random rage, he went up to bed and she didn't go with him as she didn't want to go to bed with someone who was 'like that' – he later came down the stairs shouting saying she needed to leave the house, she refused saying all her stuff was there and he started a chainsaw up and running threatening to saw her legs off if she didn't get out, she ran out of the house to her neighbours with no shoes on and called the police.

She says he has been violent to her for a while, giving her bruises, throwing her around and so forth. He has cut her head open once by throwing her by the washing machine – this was at their previous address and he has got a chainsaw out before but never started it. She has since found out that her dad has kept a detailed log about all the harm he has done her over the years.

Isla says Lucas is known to the police and has been done for theft, racial abuse and other things. He is on a 6 month suspended sentence and this may affect the verdict when she goes to court. She has to go to court early March to give a statement about the chainsaw event. She describes being frightened having to do this in front of him, she says she isn't looking forward to this but sees that she will have to see him again as he is the father to her son. At first she wanted him to go inside for what he did but she now feels that this might not be a good thing as he will come out angry.

Ethics are an important consideration in any research setting, but when the research is conducted in a young person's home specific issues can emerge that require careful consideration. One issue involves consent and the other includes ownership of data. Central to working with children and young people is the issue of gaining consent (Young and Barrett, 2000). Consent requires continual renegotiation especially when the researcher spends long periods of time in the field, in sometimes intimate private spaces such as the home while simultaneously adopting a number of research data collection techniques. Lucas the father and indeed Oscar who was too young to talk did not give their consent to take part in the ethnography, yet parts of their (intimate) lives were made available for Lisa to observe and document through the eyes of Isla, who did give informed consent. Indeed members of Isla's family and some of her friends and professionals who worked with her made an appearance in Lisa's written fieldnotes (as evidenced above); photographs taken by Isla and interviews. Some of these research methods are deemed more participatory than others but all were largely led by the participant. Participatory methodologies assume that data will be owned by the people involved with the research (Young and Barrett, 2000). All young people had first inspection of the photographs taken by them; two copies were made so they could keep one for themselves. In all instances no photographs were censored for analytical purposes of the research. However careful consideration of some photographs was needed for publication purposes, with some depicting sensitive types of data such as young people partying and others portraying people who were not directly part of the ethnography. Content of such

data is deemed sensitive and in some cases can only really be considered in relation to the young person themselves, since it is their viewpoint, their reality in a particular point in time that cannot be triangulated with other sources; indeed they represent data that may otherwise have remained hidden. As can be gleaned from the fieldnotes above some of the data Lisa was exposed to was highly sensitive in nature, examples of issues raised during the course of fieldwork with NEET young people included non-consensual marriage amongst school age Asian females; benefit fraud, theft, drug marketing and domestic violence. Dealing with sensitive material may be commonplace for the ethnographer working with marginalised young people and children but questions about data ownership require further interrogation. The Data Protection Act 1998 and Freedom of Information Act 2000 ensure that the participant may indeed have access to any information the researcher may hold on them and have access to it at any point. Fieldnotes for the ethnographer have sometimes been viewed as a personal record, in their raw form kept only for the eyes of the researcher. Questions of data authenticity and validity come in to play if ethnographers allow their participants to view fieldnotes, edit interview transcripts, photograph selection and indeed any other data source, as they may edit data according to their own agendas. However it is not uncommon for the ethnographer to allow participants to see all data as it is being recorded and after it has been documented, indeed many view this as being ethically sound practice that allows the ethnographer to gain trust and emerge in the field (Russell, 2005). The ethnographer has to be highly reflexive and keep reflective accounts to help uphold validity of findings but also has to be aware of how to deal with sensitive data that involves other people who are not directly part of the research. Furthermore careful deliberation is required when considering what to do when the participant asks to have access to the data (relevant to them). In this instance Isla asks Lisa to provide a statement for her child custody case, Isla trusts Lisa, as do Isla's parents given the amount of support Lisa gave Isla and the family sorting out formalities regarding child benefit, documenting crime references and providing car transport to and from the solicitors. The fieldnotes below give some indication of the level of support Lisa gave. Lisa's response to this unpredictable sequence of events is partly shaped by her own political and philosophical standpoint, like Dennis (2009) she too felt morally obliged to help Isla.

Supporting Isla

05/07/12

10.30-11.30am I text Isla to say I'm outside, I'm not sure whether she wants me in the house as I know her family like to keep themselves to themselves. She asks me to come round the back, we sit in the garden on the back door step in the rain while she has a smoke, she says, 'I've loads to tell you'. She is looking well, her hair is well kept, cut and dyed dark. She is enjoying her

hairdressing and beauty course and wants to pursue both to L2; she says this will help her get a job in a salon.

Lucas and his parents have asked for residency of Oscar, she has him 2 nights on a Tue and Thur, Lucas' parents come and pick Oscar up and Isla's mum comes to the door to transfer Oscar. Oscar is there, dressed and having a bottle as I arrive, he is smiling and tries to grasp my watch. Isla says he is nearly crawling, he can move forwards by shuffling. Her dad is sat in a chair and her mum is sat in another. Her parents tell me that Lucas' parents have applied for child benefit, Isla shows me the letter from HM Revenue asking her to respond within 21 days or her money will be stopped. Her parents urge her to inform her solicitor about this. She says Lucas just wants to make her life a misery and is doing anything he can to achieve this.

She says his parents are reluctant to believe Lucas was capable of coming at her with a chainsaw. She says she has been round on a night to see if his car is outside his parent's house, quite often it is not so she assumes he is leaving Oscar with his parents.

She asks me to read her statement, written up by her solicitor, in there it state's Lucas' episodes of violence; her dad says he kept a diary of the violence she incurred. He used to come round for Sunday dinner, but insist she left before food was served, in order to appease him her mum bought plastic plates for her to take the food home. It states he controlled what she wore; called her 'slag' accused Isla of sleeping around and stopped her friends from visiting.

Isla asks if I would be willing to give a statement, saying the more she has the better, I agree to this but worry about the ethical considerations involved. She was supposed to see her solicitor today but will now see her tomorrow with me. This is arranged later in the day. I can only say what she has told me I cannot comment on her status as a mum, other than what I have seen.

She says it is sad when Oscar leaves, but she is convinced she will gain full custody, as the violence has been well documented if not proven. Charges against him were dropped for the chainsaw incident as the neighbour wouldn't provide a statement for fear of getting involved.

Her solicitor has told her that they can't stop her child benefit until court in August. She rings her solicitor as I am there to arrange me coming in tomorrow.

06/07/12

10.30-2.30pm I arrive at Isla's parents wet and late after a horrendous journey in the floods and rain. I give her mum a lift into town while we park up to see her solicitor.

Caroline her solicitor states that my statement will be short as I can only comment on the state of Isla's residences. She says I may be summoned to court and need to keep the 3rd August free for this reason.

Caroline states that Isla has to prepare herself for the fact that she might lose Oscar, even though she is the last person who wants this to happen. She says it is his word against hers. She says she needs to get police incident reference numbers, any medical records and letters from her Sure Start group to confirm her attendance at the parenting groups.

Lucas' ex has given a statement saying Lucas has displayed threatening behaviour towards her; she is currently in a safe house for witness protection. (OC¹ I worry about my own safety, Isla paints Lucas to be a threatening character). When I ask Caroline about this she says, 'I don't blame you' – this doesn't fill me with confidence. She says Isla has to appear whiter than white as a parent. Caroline says I may have to give evidence if summoned in a family court in front of Lucas.

Graham is her Leaving Care Social Worker; Caroline says he has expressed concerns about who Isla associates with. Isla says he is in close contact with Lucas' dad, Caroline says he shouldn't be doing this and urges her to put in a complaint about him. Graham has told her landlady that Lucas' dad should gain the bond money for the residence – something Isla refutes.

Isla says she is struggling to get people to do statements as people fear Lucas and what may happen. Others haven't got round to doing it. Caroline says Isla needs to be more pro-active, she got the statements done too late.

Isla has a cigarette outside after we're done. We walk back to the car and I drive her home. I go in the house for a cup of tea, her dad asks how it went and I say Isla has a number of things she has to do, like get hold of her social worker, find her crime reference numbers, and ring her health visitor and Sure Start contact. Upon my recommendation Isla uses my phone to try and contact these people.

The Sure Start centre isn't open Fridays. The doctors/health visitors don't respond. She gains two crime reference numbers from the police for the incidents that went to court, the driving incident – where he tried to run her over and the chainsaw incident. She is told someone will ring back with her other numbers – charges that she dropped through fear of what Lucas might do.

Her dad has hold of a medical record stating she harmed her head, paramedics were on the scene. I then drive Isla back to the solicitors so she can hand in her crime reference numbers and medical report.

¹ Observers Comments is a section of the fieldnotes dedicated to the researchers reflexive account as derived from Carspecken's (1996) 5 stage critical ethnography format

We stop off at the supermarket so she can check if Graham has put her bus fare money in for college. He has. She buys lunch on the way home from a local fish and chip take out.

I leave Isla exhausted by the day's events.

Lisa appeared in county family court with another member of the research team on the set date, but luckily was never called. The above depicts the emotional cost to the researcher such dealings can have but also made Lisa re-evaluate her political and moral stance. Concerns about who might ask for the fieldnotes and other data were called into question, what if the courts or Isla demanded to see fieldnotes that detailed her time at home with the baby, how should Lisa as an individual and as a researcher working in a university manage this ethical dilemma? Obviously the fieldnotes depicted Isla's day to day activities and at the time of writing them Lisa had no idea who or why other audiences might want to see the raw material. Furthermore some of the data involved other people who were not directly involved with the research. Indeed any raw data would have to be screened to reveal data pertinent to the case in question. This episode confirms that ethics is important to the ethnographer working with children and young people; one does need to be aware of their political standpoint and how it might affect their position and rationale to intervene or not in the field. Lisa had seen Isla caring for her baby in her home and had no cause for concern, she also wanted to help Isla who she deemed to be a vulnerable young lady, Lisa too felt frustrated by the lack of support Isla was able to glean. This also reveals the need for the ethnographer to be prepared for managing the unpredictable in situ and beyond.

MANAGING THE UNPREDICTABLE IN SITU

The ethnographer has to expect the unpredictable when working with young people, manage the emergence of sensitive issues and really trust his/her own judgement based on his/her ethnographic expertise about his/her own and the participants' safety (Russell, 2013). Certain procedures can of course be implemented before the ethnographer enters the field such as gaining a valid CRB check, ensuring all university, related institutions and participants and funding body ethical regulations are adhered to, but as the above encounter with Isla depicts, ethnography can be messy and unpredictable, the ethnographer may need to question their own moral and political viewpoint and be prepared to intervene. Managing the unpredictable in situ is a complex ethical challenge for the ethnographer.

An example from Ruth's study reveals how this became apparent to Ruth in terms of racial discrimination. The fieldnote extract below describes a participant observation session involving three children in Ruth's study: Annakiya (a girl from Nigeria), Kareem (a boy from Libya) and Fariido (a girl from Somalia).

She's Black

18/11/10

10.30 – 11.35

The class moves to the outdoor play area. I walk to the steps and sit down and watch as the children play. Annakiya picks up a ball and asks me to play with her. We throw the ball back and forth to each other. After a few minutes Kareem comes up to us – also with a ball in his hands – and asks me to throw his ball to him. I throw Annakiya's ball back to her and then Kareem's ball to him and so on alternating between the two children.

Fariido comes, looks at Kareem, and asks if he will throw his ball to her so that she can also join in. He says 'No' and throws the ball directly back to me. As I throw it back to him, Fariido asks him again if he will throw the ball to her, and again Kareem replies, 'No', but this time also shakes his head resolutely to emphasise his meaning. He then turns to me and says 'She black', offering an explanation for why he won't throw his ball to her. I tell him that isn't nice and that everyone can play. Kareem, however, keeps a tight hold on his ball and starts to back away from us.

Annakiya turns to Fariido, who is upset by the encounter, and says to her 'Play with me.' The two girls then start to throw Annakiya's ball to each other.

While Ruth normally did not get directly involved in social encounters and disagreements between children so that she could observe how they resolved them on their own, in this case she felt that there was potential for harm if she did not step in and tell Kareem that his behaviour was unacceptable and to reassure Fariido (and also Annakiya) that this type of behaviour was not allowed at school. Brown's (2007) work supports this approach by saying that quick responses that promote equality and inclusion are needed in situations like this to send clear messages to children. Further Ruth felt that she had a moral obligation to counter racial discrimination. Sending this message was more important to Ruth throughout the course of her fieldwork than collecting data. After this incident, she also immediately discussed what had happened with school staff asking them if they had observed similar incidents and helping them to plan a longer term strategy to deal with this issue.

Around this time The United Nations Human Rights Council (2010:2) issued a statement calling for Libya 'to end its practices of racial discrimination against black Africans.' After this incident informal conversations that Ruth had with Kareem during the first phase of fieldwork revealed that the only ethnic minority individuals he had previously known while living in Libya were servants. He described an ethnically segregated environment where he was taught that he was different from 'the black helpers' who he described to Ruth (see Barley and Merchant 2015 for a more detailed analysis).

Notably during the second phase of fieldwork just over four years after this incident Ruth observed that some of Kareem's closest friends at school were Somali like

Fariido. Ruth observed Kareem regularly playing and conversing with them as equals. It is not possible to ascertain if Ruth's intervention on 18.11.10 helped to change Kareem's views but it is notable from both phases of fieldwork that after this incident Kareem continued to confide in Ruth both in relation to his views on ethnic diversity and in relation to other aspects of the research focus. In this case stepping out of the researcher role and commenting on Kareem's behaviour towards Fariido did not appear to affect Ruth's research relationship with Kareem.

DEALING WITH SENSITIVE DATA

Both stages of Ruth's fieldwork have produced instances of sensitive data relating to children's discourses around armed militias in North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Ruth's fieldnotes from the first phase of her data highlight one example which raised ethical issues for her relating to publishing sensitive data:

A data bomb

3/2/11

14.00 – 14.40

I am sitting in the outdoor play area just under the cover watching Kareem and Lina play in the home corner. Abdul comes over and sits at the Lego tray and starts to build a model car. I watch as he pushes it around making 'brum' noises. He lies on his tummy and pushes it under the bench. When he reaches where I am sitting he asks me to move my legs to that he can continue to push the car past me. When he gets to the end of the bench he turns the car around and comes back with it.

He leaves the car next to where I am sitting and goes to get some wooden blocks. He brings some blocks back and starts to build what I think is a tower. He goes to get more bricks and adds them to the tower. He then gets a longer thinner block and leans this against the tower to make a ramp. He comes back to me and smiling picks up the car. He adds some Lego bricks to it before taking it to the top of the ramp. He pushes the car off and shouts 'bang, bang' as the car hits the floor and smashes into pieces.

He picks up the pieces and puts the car back together quietly saying to me 'It's a bomb.' 'A bomb?' I ask. 'Yes', he replies, 'a car bomb'. He pushes the car off the ramp again and shouts 'bang' as it smashes. As he is rebuilding the car he tells me, 'There are lots of car bombs in [...] to stop the English people.' 'To stop the English people?' I enquire. 'Yeah,' Abdul replies, 'English people are Christians.' 'Are they all Christians?' I ask. He nods as he collects the pieces and starts to build the car again. The teacher rings the bell signaling that it is time to tidy up. I help Abdul pick up the bricks and Lego pieces and sort them into their boxes.

Due to the wider political context of the UK Government's controversial 'Prevent Strategy' Ruth decided not to publish data relating to these discourses from Phase 1 of her fieldwork in her PhD thesis or subsequent book. The Prevent Strategy was first published in 2008, before being reviewed during Ruth's first stage of fieldwork in 2011 resulting in the statutory Prevent Duty being introduced during the second phase of her fieldwork in 2015 that places a number of statutory duties on schools and other organisations. Ruth's reflective notes taken on the same day highlight her initial thoughts on dealing with this sensitive data:

3/2/11

Reflective notes

As I think back to watching Abdul² play in the outdoor area this afternoon I have lots of questions. Where did Abdul get this idea of a game from? Is his game part of a wider fascination with guns and fighting that lots of young boys seem to have or is it something else?

What should I do next? I want to explore this further but is this too sensitive an issue? What happens if I write about this and someone interprets it wrongly? How do I make sure that Abdul is protected and that this observation isn't taken out of context and twisted in line with a right wing political agenda?

Ruth continued to reflect on this after writing these notes and decided to continue recording similar observations and decide at a later date whether or not to include them in her PhD thesis. When analysing her data she felt that it was still too sensitive to mention this and other similar observations and consequently did not discuss this in her final written work.

The Prevent Strategy, which was the wider political agenda that concerned and still does concern Ruth, has been critiqued by community groups (GRC 2013) and teachers (Teaching Times 2016) as unfairly targeting and stigmatising marginalised sections of UK based Muslim communities. Consequently a number of trade unions (including the National Union of Teachers [NUT] and the Union and Colleges Union [UCU]) have called for the strategy to be scrapped or for union members to boycott it. UCU have also expressed concerns about how the Prevent Strategy may become a barrier for social research that seeks to explore and understand why individuals are driven towards violent forms of religious extremism (UCU 2015). A number of well-known academics have openly expressed similar concerns.

Ruth's reflections above show how her awareness of the wider political context impacted on her decision to not publish these findings as she was unsure if she

² When editing the fieldnote above Ruth gave Abdul a second pseudonym so that this data cannot be connected to a wider narrative in previous publications. As Abdul is no longer in the country Ruth feels that it is possible to now share this data four years after the observation took place with these changes.

could protect Abdul from harm in a way that she felt ethically bound to do. Given the wider political context Ruth was concerned that publishing this and other similar narratives may cause children's families to be targeted (under what she sees as a morally dubious Prevent Strategy) and/or give fuel to right wing groups who want to further stigmatise Muslims living in the UK.

CONCLUSIONS

Doing ethnography with young people and children raises particular ethical challenges that the researcher may need to negotiate. Conducting ethically sound ethnography requires constant negotiation and vigilance. The ethnographer must respond to issues as they appear in the field and cannot always foresee how their position, the research they conduct and the data derived from that can impact upon the participants and other audience members. Issues of consent, dealing with sensitive data and managing issues of data ownership alongside the ethnographer's own ethical and political standpoint all need careful consideration and mindful reflexive accounts. Current ethical guidelines and procedures are useful but somewhat problematic, especially when considering the multitude of ethical challenges the ethnographer may need to face in and beyond situ. The ethnographer has to have a degree of experience and confidence to regulate themselves in the field and not fall into the temptation of allowing university and other ethical guidelines and procedures to debunk their sense of ethical conduct.

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