

Ethical Dilemmas in Participatory Research

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Structure

- Case studies of participatory methods in action (older children and young adults: 16 to 24)
 - The Story-Telling Project (performance as method)
 - The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (performance as mode of dissemination and pathway to impact)
- Ethical dilemmas and lessons learned

Ethical dilemmas and lessons learned

Kant

- Categorical imperative
- Treat individuals as ends and not means
- Universalise maxims
- Deontological

Bentham

- Principle of utility
- Maximise happiness
- Rational calculation
- Consequentialist reasoning

- Participatory modes of research practice are often messy, unpredictable, an emotional rollercoaster
- Researcher as both subject and object, shifting power dynamics, democratic engagement
- Qualities of humility, emotional resilience, capacity to listen
- Requirement for continual self-reflection and adaptation
- Research is always performative (the situation of the performer - 'our station and it's duties')
- Ethical practice is always in process (never finished)

Case Study 1

The Story-telling project: performance as method

Aims/objectives

- Part of a broader programme of research exploring community cohesion and social inclusion
- Explored the lives and experiences of the young men and women who use the services of a community project based in Edinburgh's Old Town
- The community project supports people who are homeless and those who face deep social exclusion and are marginalised by lack of opportunity, skills and aspirations

Methods

- Unstructured, narrative style interviews with around 20 service users
- A drama and film project: where service users worked with a drama artist to construct a play and film based on the themes from their life-narratives
- A photography project – 'life in a day'

Research Team: Lesley McAra, Susan McVie, Sarah MacQueen



The Journey



Process

- Specialist Drama Artist, Project Leader from Community Centre, Masters Student on Placement and me
- Rituals at start and end, reinforcing confidentiality, 'rules of engagement', building rapport and trust
- Participants sharing and directing scenes from their own lives
- Creation of the performance to be staged at opening of building

Challenges

- Co-operation, shifting power dynamics and tensions in the group (giving space for each other), rebuilding and re-making relationships
- Methodological concerns re researching populations with vulnerabilities, what constitutes data, consents and access
- What to disclose, how/if to sustain 'critical distance'
- Voice and listening vs 'do-gooding' and researcher interference
- Exit from the research (debrief and photography project)

Case Study 2

The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime: performance as mode of dissemination and generator of impact

- Longitudinal research programme
- Cohort of 4,300 young people who started secondary education in Edinburgh in 1998
- Focus on pathways into and out of crime and impacts on longer term well-being and life chances
- Mixed methods (data from: self-report questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, official records, parents survey, geographic information system)
- Currently in the field with cohort at age 33/34 (Phase 8)



Phase 8 research team: Sarah Atkins, Konstantinos Gaitis, Karyn Mabon, Lesley McAra, Susan McVie, Marianne Robertson, Tia Simanovic,; with Rob Barratt and Kirsty Arnott

Doreen's Story

Deep case study

- Born into area of highest deprivation, from low socio-economic status household
- First victim then offender (official narrative)
- Multiple and complex needs not known to agencies
- History of sexual abuse
- In and out of foster care, no consistency in social work intervention
- Excluded from school, early leaver, few qualifications, subsequent unemployment
- Bullied and socially isolated
- Drug user from young age
- Self harm (cutting) and suicide attempts
- History of depression
- Petty persistent offending becomes more serious including assault and weapon carrying (for protection)
- In and out of prison

- Scottish Story Telling Centre
- Narrator and 'Doreen' (Begins as 'fairy tale' – Rapunzel)
- Focus on key episodes, 'Doreen' is 'voiced' through imaginary monologue and dialogue
- Policy and academic engagement



Performance as pathway to impact: risks and rewards

- Justice Leaders' Network

'The most powerful thing we have ever done at the network'

- Scottish Universities Insight Network

'I hate it, I hate it, I absolutely HATE IT!'

Critical concerns:

- Anonymity
- What constitutes data – spurious 'voice'?
- Self-efficacy and 'deficit' focus
- The performance of story-telling has resonance, brings numbers to life, creates an emotional connection but is this in conflict with the 'scientism' of predominantly quantitative research?
- A one-off? Can it ever be repeated as method of policy-maker engagement??

Concluding thoughts

Who and what is (criminological) research for?

The Edinburgh Study only academic research referenced in the policy memorandum accompanying the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019

Service user from Grassmarket: 'I am proud of myself'