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Moments of Collusion? Close readings of affective, hidden moments within feminist research

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Introduction

Focusing on the temporal transition from doctoral research to post-doctorate research positions immediately post-PhD, this paper questions the concept of collusion within (immersive) fieldwork, and examines the delicate and complex question of who is colluding with whom, and for what purpose at different times within the early career academic journey. This paper addresses affective 'moments of collusion' present in feminist research relationships, and contextualises these seemingly personal encounters within a wider systematic framework of the early career researcher and the increasingly neo-liberal climate of academia.

Multiple combinations of embodied affects, emotions and past histories can culminate in a particular moment in space and time; during fieldwork is no exception. Building on feminist methodologies and theories of affect, this paper draws on two specific case studies to provide a close reading of emotional, embodied and affective moments during qualitative fieldwork. Both case studies will be personal, reflective anecdotes from the author/ researcher at different times in my early career; the first being immersed in doctoral fieldwork; the second being a temporary, fixed-term RA (Research Associate) in my first post-doctoral post. The two case studies are an important comparison of how these emotional, embodied and affective 'moments' are significantly shaped by wider structures and processes of the temporal academic journey. The first explores some concerns about friendship, guilt and coercion during my PhD research into women travellers (2009-2010) and how a brief, emotional 'moment' between researcher and participant has the potential to significantly influence the direction of the research.

Developing this further, the second case study expands this discussion by focusing on the private moments of research which are often omitted from our methodologies. Here I reflect on my own experiences of receiving emotional and practical care from research participants on a post-doctoral project, and how these moments of care

impacted on the data and findings of the research. This paper explores the power of those moments that challenge the drive to appear 'professional', and how this impacts on the relations with the participant an the data produced. In addition to these 'real' emotions problematising existing literature into the 'fake' performance of the researcher establishing friendships and rapports, this paper discusses the extent to which allowing moments of care, kindness and support to go un-critiqued can lead to complex systems of collusion and coercion within the research process. Specifically, this second section of the paper focuses on how the increasing pressures of the neo-liberal university play out on our emotions and bodies during fieldwork, an area which still requires attention within the growing critiques of the affects of neo-liberalism in Higher Education. Using these personal case studies as springboard for a far wider and important discussion, this paper situates such methodological dilemmas within a broader temporal framework of the increasingly precarious nature of early career academics, where 'moments of collusion' may be the only way to keep your head above water.

Part One: Immersive participant observation: ethical boundaries during doctoral fieldwork

The first section of this paper focuses on my PhD thesis which explored the embodied and emotional experiences of independent women tourists from a feminist approach. This opening section, which follows a very particular time in my academic journey- namely a period of intense, individual and immersive fieldwork for my own PhD project - is a useful starting point in order to set the foundations for the later discussion of post-doctoral research contracts, where becoming fully immersed in the design, delivery and analysis of a complete research project is no longer possible. In both cases, I colluded with the expectations of gathering 'the best' data possible, within the allocated timeframe, to prepare myself for the competitive arena of the early career academic (details of which shall be more fully discussed throughout). Moments of discomfort and ethical boundaries between researcher and participants were still very present, but played out in both comparable and contrasting ways.

Friendship in the field: Positionally, Feelings and unease and collusion (with whom?)

For my PhD research into the embodied and emotional experiences of independent women travelers. I carried out qualitative interviews, in-depth participant observation in the field, focus groups and 'sensual diary' written exercises between 2009-2012 with women travellers. Throughout this research I referred to 'women travellers' instead of 'tourists', to acknowledge the distinctive characteristics with which these participants chose to identify. Distancing themselves from mainstream tourism, these women can loosely be identified through certain characteristics, codes and practices which distinguish them from other types of tourists (no fixed itinerary, low budget, desire for close experiences with local culture). The term 'women travellers' is in itself relatively broad, including women from a variety of nationalities who travel alone through transient spaces, independently (not as part of an organised package or tour), and for periods of time ranging between two months and two years. Women who engage in this kind of travel are not a homogeneous group, differing with regard to cultural background, and to a lesser extent educational background, occupation, ethnicity, social class, sexuality and age.

Moving through travelling spaces during fieldwork, I became a woman traveller myself as I experienced the embodied and emotional experiences of this form of mobility. I encountered participants at almost every stage of my fieldwork, met with women for arranged, formal interviews but also embarked on countless informal conversations about the same topic, shared breakfast, lunch or evening meals together, exchanged help and travel advice, held brief chats as we waited together at a bus station, and experienced much longer, shared journeys on trains, buses, boats and car rides. It was during some of these shared 'moments', that the process of reflection on my position as a researcher moved beyond the long established importance of reflective positionally in the research process (Ryan and Golden 2006) and took on an increased shape of emotional unease. It is only in retrospect, as will be discussed later, that these previously unidentified feelings of unease were attributed to a sense of uncomfortable complicity with the increasingly neo-liberal, highly critiqued institutional time pressures to gather rich data at the risk of emotional wellbeing during such interactions. Structural critiques of academic performance affecting wellbeing permeate throughout all areas of this increasingly uncertain and pressurised sector.

This arguably impacts on multiple forms of academic labour, but there have recently been scholarly arguments that claim this is especially pertinent for early career feminist researchers who arguably bear the brunt of this weight within the institution (Gill 2012, do Mar Pereira 2016). Situating 'moments of collusion' with the academic research process within the principles of feminist research is crucial, as it exposes the tensions between carrying out feminist research and adhering to institutional expectations (Gill 2012).

The politics of place and placing in qualitative research (Hoggart et al 2002) has stressed the importance of positioning the researcher at all stages of the research process, from data collection to analysis and interpretation. My position as both a researcher and a fellow traveller enabled a blurring of boundaries, raising questions about whether these moments of shared interaction between women travellers and myself were in themselves covert, perhaps even semiconscious, instances of data collection. On one hand, using 'insider status' and reciprocal interaction has long been established as highly beneficial to qualitative feminist research (Acker 2000), and is a key element of feminist methodology. Adopting a feminist methodological framework in qualitative interviewing involves examining the power relations between researcher and participant. In the attempt to avoid perpetuating the exploitation of women as research subjects, feminist researchers such as Oakley assert the need to break down the traditional hierarchal relationship between researcher and participant so as not to 'objectify your sister' (1981: 41). Oakley calls for a more intimate, reciprocal research setting where the participant can identify with the researcher. Such identification, she argues, enhances both the validity of the data and the researcher's interpretive abilities.

Establishing a relationship with participants is perceived as a vital structuring factor for qualitative research (Hoggart et al 2002). As Bloom explains, participants can often feel uncomfortable and self-conscious when their narratives move from a mutual dialogue to an 'unnatural monologue', where the researcher's responses seem like 'silences' in contrast to their longer, in depth story telling (1998: 19). Sharing the experience of an extensive backpacking journey myself, I therefore disclosed myself as a former backpacker to the participants in my research. For the most part, the interviews followed the more traditional semi-structured approach of researcher prompting and facilitating relevant information from the participants. However, there

were many instances where the interview slipped into a conversational dialogue where we identified with each other's views and experiences, and even compared stories.

Sharing experiences with the participants produced narratives rich with candidness and critical engagement. Reading through the transcripts, I become aware of the amount of laughter and recognition present in the interview, and how this strengthened our connection and, subsequently, allowed the participants to become more forthcoming in their narratives. Humour present in interviews (and even more so in focus groups) was integral to narrative performance of the travel story, which became a crucial empirical finding. Whilst it is important to remember these encounters were set under the classification of an interview, where our conversations can arguably never be 'natural', the reciprocal nature of the exchange, in addition to my conscious partiality, not only validated the way we both felt towards particular situations, but further opened up the participants to engage deeper in the discussion.

This interactive style of interviewing does, however, require careful ethical consideration as it can negate a process referred to by Holloway (2000: 6) as the 'defended subject', where research subjects 'are invested in particular positions in discourses to protect vulnerable aspects of self, … and are motivated, largely unconsciously, to disguise the meaning of at least some of their feelings and actions'. In mediating this response, it is possible that the interactive style of interviewing may encourage participants to reveal aspects of their experience that they would not otherwise reveal. Undertaking feminist research while immersed in the field, particularly involving participant observation, raises more complex ethical issues that require reflection. Here I outline two areas where my interactions felt both genuine, and also moments of collusion with a system which required me to gather rich, emotional data to enhance the findings of the project. The first addresses eliciting data on sensitive, emotional topics, and the second reflects on the boundaries of friendships in the field.

One ethical dilemma which remains particularly complex in feminist social research is how to deal with 'sensitive topics', which may evoke an emotional response in some participants. This was particularly difficult to negotiate since a major objective of my research was to investigate emotional responses to travelling space and encounters. It is therefore difficult not to 'stir up' particular emotions when this is the focus for the

narratives elicited in interviews and focus groups. Of course, I discussed the necessary steps and formal ethical procedures I took to prepare my participants for subjects that they may find uncomfortable, sensitive, upsetting or intrusive. In the methodological section of my thesis, I defended this by stating when my participants gave consent, they were fully aware of the topics that I wanted to discuss with them. Moreover, I stated that I never pushed a topic that was met with reluctance, and always closed down the interview on a positive topic, taking great care not to leave participants feeling exposed and vulnerable after our interaction had been completed. Whilst this is not untrue, in reality these moments were far more complex. Each individual encounter is, however, unique and it is difficult for any standardised ethical procedure to anticipate and control for issues that may be faced during the course of the research. For example, during my fieldtrip to India in 2009, one woman traveller I interviewed, Kelly, discussed at length how spaces of travel had greatly impacted on her grieving process after the recent death of her mother. Kelly described how independent travel created a surplus of free time in which to reflect on her emotions, and indicated that the process of the interview itself had evoked a strong connection with her grief. I had experienced the death of my own mother the year before, and understood how mobility and transition and can affect the grieving process. Whilst this was an emotionally difficult process for both of us, the depth of our emotional conversation provided excellent research data into the emotional experiences and motivations of women travellers. In this regard, it appeared that sharing my own story prompted deeper trust and reflections from Kelly, in a way that seemed uneasy and manipulated on one hand, and utterly appropriate on another. Uneasy because I was acutely aware I was, ultimately, using this interaction to produce rich data to use in my research, yet to be dishonest or withdrawn about my own experience felt like an even greater betrayal. Kelly thanked me for the opportunity to be able to work through her reflections, claiming she had found the process of the interview 'healthy'.

Given that this research aimed to explore emotional experiences, it was fortuitous that Kelly, along with the majority of my research sample, was highly reflexive and in control of the information she was willing to disclose. Reflecting on emotions is a key motivation for travel, and therefore the nature of the formalised interviews- whether that be embodied or emotional 'stories'- were often an extension of what is discussed

within travel space *anyway*. The women who agreed to participate in the study all responded positively to questions that had the potential to evoke heightened emotions, and were willing to reflect upon deeply intimate and complex issues regarding their bodies and sexuality. Women travelers have been identified as a particularly responsive group in which to share stories and experiences (Malam 2006), and the process of reflection has been characterised as a key component of the travelling experience. Like Kelly, many participants thanked me for the opportunity to talk about their experiences and for providing a space in which to do so. Be that as it may, it remains important that these dilemmas are discussed and reflected on in more depth than that merely required as part of formalised ethics procedures. These moments evoke subtle and complex issues of collusion; emotional collusion, collusion with institutional ethics, collusion with wider expectations of the data-gathering PhD student, who can (must?) use her own emotional labour and very personal experiences to elicit rich, qualitative data from others. It would be crudely inaccurate to suggest that I *used* my own grief and pain to 'capitalise on rapport' (Gajparia 2015[1]) with Kelly in order for her to reflect on hers, as this would undermine the very 'real' moment of connection we shared during a particular time and space. However to acknowledge that such a rapport remains integral to the quality of data collected, depth of analysis, subsequent outputs, and commodification of research provokes slippery ambiguities as to where the collusion lies within such emotional encounters.

These ambiguous boundaries between myself as a researcher and fellow travellers that were inherent to the participant observation resulted in further ethical dilemmas regarding whether this process constituted covert observation during otherwise 'natural' interactions with women travellers with whom I had formed friendships. Feminist epistemology has stressed the non-neutrality of the research process (Rose 1993 in Madge et al 1997) and has contested the boundaries between fieldwork and everyday life, arguing that 'we are always in the 'field' (Katz 1994:67). During my immersed period of time as a woman traveller I entered into friendships with other travellers, making it increasingly unclear where my data collection began and ended, as the following extract exemplifies:

Priscilla, Marta and I are sitting on the streets of Bangkok discussing past stories and feelings and experiences of travel. These are the situations in which insightful data emerges, but I don't know anymore if this is a genuine discussion where I too reveal truths, emotions, concerns and humorous anecdotes, or whether I am (sub)consciously engineering the conversation in order to encourage the women to delve deeper into their emotions and reflections. I continually seem to be steering the subject matter back to my own topics of concern. This everyday engagement feels completely natural, sincere and comfortable and simultaneously forced and manipulative. This PhD is taking over my mind! **Research diary 2010, Bangkok, scribbled in a toilet in a bar**

Whilst this scenario is crucial to what I instantaneously recognised as 'insightful data', this dilemma evokes a critical enquiry as to whether such covert qualitative research is consistent with feminist goals. The genuine relationships and friendships I often inevitably formed with participants over time in travelling spaces (and upon return home) produced these ethical dilemmas. I was at times troubled by the attachment I made with my participants, as this extract reveals. Mason (2002: 95) points out that during participant observation, researchers have to 'live through and manage relationships which are simultaneously personal, emotional, physical and intellectual'. Even where my role was overt, Oakley's 'transition to friendship' is not without critique. Cotterill (1992) explores the difficult dilemmas facing feminist researchers who adopt more intimate practices, where participants can be at risk of manipulation or feel obliged to reveal uncomfortable information, and to presume that 'sisterhood' overcomes class, race, sexuality and age inequalities (1992: 600). In contrast to the emotional labour involved in the more simulated performances of reassuring tense participants in challenging interviews, many of the women and I 'got on famously from the start'. Even though these women were aware that I was carrying out research, the lines between research and friendship were inevitably blurred. The need to identify a point where private lives and the research process remains separate has already been discussed by researchers who question the appropriate level of (de)attachment necessary when maintaining friendships with participants (Hall 2009). Here, Hall argues that current frameworks for ethical guidelines remain too formalised in their approach to ethnographic research, which may fail to take into account the reciprocal

nature of interactions between the participant and the researcher. Having given their time, energy and personal information to the project throughout the research process, Hall argues that it would then be 'unethical to ignore communication from them (the participants)' after the research process had been completed. The crux of this ethical dilemma points to the exploitative nature of a friendship that is formed for the primary purpose of data collection, but which dissolves thereafter as the researcher loses interest:

> The notion of staying in contact only when you needed something made very apparent the potential to really offend participants if I were to suddenly 'disappear', after having seen them on a regular basis. The concern of 'using people' is a common dilemma of ethnography that can encourage feelings of guilt (Hall 2009: 268).

The emotional guilt for 'using' the women with whom I formed friendships whilst travelling became unsettling, and the only way to alleviate this dilemma is to honour the friendship where appropriate. Mason (2002) advises researchers to carefully consider how they will 'depart' from qualitative research once relationships have been formed. Therefore like Hall, I am still in contact with some of the women I interviewed and 'studied' during periods of travel, and have shared personal information about my own embodied and emotional experiences of travel with them along the way in return for their invaluable trust and honesty in the project. In this respect, collusion with the academic doctoral process feels less troubling, and active resistance to the 'professional' relational boundaries of institutional guidelines feels less complicit with the academic process of data collection. Therefore whilst this relationship continues to complicate the research process, I follow Hall's argument that such complications *should* reshape the formality of research ethics, and adhere to the principles of feminist methodology.

Emotional 'work': Prolonged immersion in the field

In comparing my experience of doctoral research with subsequent positions as a fixed term RA (Research Associate/ Assistant), a key difference was the temporal process of project design/ direction and time and space given to fieldwork. In contrast to the

external time pressures driven by funding bodies, principle Investigators and fixed term employment contracts, the recruitment process during prolonged, immersive participant observation during my PhD proved significantly more fluid. Conducting three months in 'the field', namely travelling to backpacking hotspots in India, South East Asia and Australia, this fluid immersion also came at an emotional cost. With regard to recruitment, I often felt uneasy or uncomfortable about approaching participants for the purpose of collecting data. Everyday in the field became an opportunity to collect data for my research, and therefore I never felt 'off duty'. As Bolton (1995: 148 in Walsh 2007:512) notes, ' for ethnographers, life is not so simple. All perceptions and experiences are potentially data'. This, at times, became an emotional burden, as all 'natural' interaction with women travellers began to feel like an opening line for recruitment. Consider this extract from my research diary:

> There are plenty of potential participants about my hostel, but how to approach them still remains problematic. Sometimes I start the preamble, but then realise from their reaction that they are cautious, suspicious or not interested, and I slink away rejected. I have returned to the niggling worry of constantly looking for potential participants. I circle their tables, shiftily catching their eyes, ordering drinks so I can sit next to them, making up excuses to start up conversations; where did you get that? What is that bread like? Could you please put some sun cream on my back? (surely intimate enough to start a conversation!). I often spot women dining alone, but can't help feeling that may just want to be left alone to eat their dinner in peace. I'm still unable to shift the discomfort I feel about intruding on them and, in some ways, the betrayal of their oblivious trust as I feel I am using them for my data and therefore breaking some kind of unspoken travelling code. I often wonder whether I should just come straight out with it and disclose my intentions, introducing myself as a researcher, or beat around the bush for a while first and ease the tension with the normal pleasantries. Viewing virtually *everyone* as a potential participant I feel frustrated that I am missing out on data opportunities. **Research diary 2009**

This reflective example highlights the problematic nature of recruitment in the field. Some women refused to be interviewed, while others became suspicious, wary, or cautious of my intentions as a researcher and as a result appeared to withhold information. One traveller commented that she felt constantly 'under observation', problematising the research process, and indicating that women's awareness of my research role may impact on our otherwise genuine rapport. The emotional labour involved with attempting to form rapport with my participants at times compromised my own identity, as the boundaries between my role as a researcher became blurred with my everyday interactions with women travellers I encountered. This forced me to manage my own emotions during the fieldwork (Walsh 2012). Cotterill (1992) has highlighted that whilst the research subject is often open to exploitation, the researcher can also become vulnerable within the research process. With regard to emotional labour, Cotterill (1992: 601) notes that the researcher must always appear to be in control to reassure and

> 'inspire confidence in her respondents. She cannot betray her nervousness for the other woman may sense it, becoming nervous herself, or worse, judging the researcher incompetent. Consequently, whatever her inner feelings, outwardly at least, the researcher must appear relaxed, unworried, and capable'.

This resonates with Hoschild's (1983) theory of the emotional labour of air hostesses, who are expected to perform a particular emotional role in order to ensure passengers feel important and secure. Keeping written reflections on my own emotional responses to recruitment or particularity tense interactions with participants enabled me to realise that my performance as researcher was at times compromised and exhausting. Be that as it may, however, this emotional labour and professional demeanour was relatively void of feelings of collusion with the fast-paced neo-liberal academy, where research relationships are performed within particular timeframes, as prolonged immersion in the field allowed for this reflection, adaptation and control over the direction of my own research project. In retrospect, and in light of the contrasting experiences of the post-doctoral RA, the immersed period of fieldwork and (relative) control over the temporality of my research proved to be the most valuable time during my early academic journey, where a space free of colluding with competing and

strategic pressures of job (in) security seemed like precious respite in light of what was yet to come.

Part 2: Surviving Academia: Early Career researchers, temporality and the neoliberal university

The second case study I reflect upon occurred during my first Post-Doctoral post as a temporary, fixed term, contracted Research Associate for a project that aimed to explore affective feelings of (dis)belonging and ideas of what makes a 'community' in a postindustrial commuter settlement in the NorthWest of England (June 2012- Feb 2013). The sample of research participants was far broader than the 'insider status' of my PhD research; anybody who lived, worked or commuted to and from the town in which the case study was based were eligible to participate in the research. Guided by the pre-existing project proposal, requirements of the senior research team and conditions of the prestigious funding source, my role was to recruit members of the community and carry out extensive data collection in accordance with the proposal remit. Like many of my peers, fresh out of PhD submission and competing for a scarce number of post-doctoral positions, I was desperate to keep my foot in (let alone climb the ladder) the world of academic employment, gather relevant experience, and attempt to publish. This specific post was particularly time limited, with a remaining funding period of nine months, and gathering effective data for what was a highly complex research project was a pressing priority.

Allowing vulnerability: How moments of care affect knowledge production

During the fieldwork, I became increasingly reliant on the good will and cooperation of community participants in order to collect my data within the given timeframes. Consistently aware of time pressures of the post (and imminent unemployment), I would press for interviews, apologise profusely for inconvenience, and remain polite but very persistent as I persisted with potential research participants into becoming involved in the research. In one particular incident, this reliance turned into allowing myself to accept significant emotional, practical and intimate care from one participant. I arrived at an interviewees home- a retired single woman of my mother's generation-unwell, cold and exhausted on a freezing December morning, desperately trying to get

myself through the day and conduct the interview. I had damp feet, a throat infection and one of the family photographs on her mantel piece evoked a powerful sense of my own loss and bereavement. I burst into tears in her living room. The interview was suspended as she made me a pot of hot tea, dried my winter boots on her kitchen radiator, talked about her family and the children in the photographs, and offered me a comforting space to explain my own thoughts before I recovered, and the dynamics of the traditional interview resumed its 'correct' order.

Bursting into tears in the participant's living room was not a conscious decision, and at the time I wished I could have left my embodied emotions outside in the car. Be that as it may, the direction of the interview and data produced with that participant dramatically shifted after our care. Reading back through the interview transcript, this particular dialogue was by far the most insightful and deeply personal, directly reflecting the intense nature of our interaction and emotional vulnerability that day. As the nature of the research objectives were to gather emotional and affective responses and feelings, this made for particularly useful and rich qualitative data. The knowledge produced from our interactions is consistently shaped by these experiences. This is not an isolated tale, many researchers I know whisper such stories on coffee breaks, share experiences and offer support. Yet these 'hidden' moments of care rarely enter into our authorised methodologies. Moreover, to what extent did this unexpected moment of vulnerability and care become a canny tool for achieving research goals? What does this mean for the concept of 'collusion', and with whom and what? The notion of collusion carries with it negative connotations, yet there is nothing inherently problematic about reflexively drawing upon personal resources and skills to collect the best data possible within a given timeframe. Indeed, in contrast , it could well be argued that this process is a key requirement for developing research skills, not least to adhere to the expectations contracted in the job description. Rapport and gaining the trust of participants occurs in all social research interactions, to varying degrees of depth and connection, albeit more often than not in more subtle ways then the extreme example presented here. Why then, is this emotional labour anymore problematic than other forms of labour which rely on personal interconnections to get the job done? To answer these questions, it was necessary for me to situate this seemingly very personal incident within wider theoretical critiques of the affective, emotional and

embodied impact of the power relations inherent in research relations within the neo-liberal academy.

Pushed into Collusion? The Precarious nature of Early Career Researchers (ERCs)

In recent years, critiques within the social sciences, particularly those from sociologists and feminist academics, have exposed the damaging effects of neoliberal processes: largely defined by encouraging business like competition, intensified accountability, market-first ideologies, increasingly precarious conditions and corporate managerialist practices in universities (Beck and Young 2005; Canaan and Shumar 2008; Davies and Petersen 2005; Shore 2008, Lynch 2010, Gill 2012). While the growth of a neo-liberal academic culture where entrepreneurialism is valued has particularly grave impacts on women, working class and non-white academics (Alemán 2014; Clegg 2013; David 2014; Davies et al. 2005; Joseph 2014; Swan 2010), it has been widely acknowledged that those entering their academic careers in such precarious conditions are also deeply affected:

 'The neoliberalisaion of academia demand a particular kind of academic subject and particular temporality: self-motivated, enterprising, highly-productive, competitive, always-available, and able to withstand precarity. But *who* is this ideal academic? *Who* can – and indeed wants to – play *this* game? For those at the start of their career such questions have particular pertinence'. (The Res-Sisters, 2016: Forthcoming)

The early career academic, therefore, is expected to achieve a multitude of measurable outputs and skills, publications, evidence of income generation, international collaboration, teaching excellence and impact strategies within a very tight timeframe in order to retain any employability within the fiercely competitive academy. Temporality here is a key theme, as the Res-Sisters (Forthcoming) imply as they ask: 'Why do we feel like bodies out of place? Perhaps we are also bodies out of time'. Unless an early career academic is fortunate enough to secure a secure lectureship, they are faced with a string of deeply precarious short term contracts, often in disparate geographical locations, whilst simultaneously driving any additional resources into enhancing their future employability. In such conditions, despite discontent and ill health, early career researchers face no other option then to collude

in their own exploitation and compete with a system which disadvantages them and sets them up against their peers:

> 'Increasingly, early career academics are living precariously on a patchwork quilt of short-term contracts, negotiating gruelling schedules cobbled together from crumbs of hourly paid teaching and research. In this environment, competition and measurable outputs (publication and grant applications) are a means of survival, and compliance with the neoliberal discourse, whether we like it or not, seems like the only option'. (The Res-Sisters, 2016)

In addition, there is an increasing scholarly focus on the embodied and emotional affects of the neo-liberal academy, which result in stress, shame, poor health, guilt and exhaustion (Gill 2012). Gannon et al (2016) explore the emotional and 'bad affects' of affective politics of academic work for women in neoliberal universities, claiming that examining relational work in a competitive neo-liberal climate is essential for assessing emotional health wellbeing. Indeed to situate my own embodied vulnerability from the above example- exhaustion, sore throat, wet feet- into a wider context, indicates that such accumulative embodied affects of deep strain and work pressure can erupt during fieldwork, which in turns requires us to be cared for by others in ways that confound conventional research relationship boundaries.

Concluding discussion: fleeting moments or the whole process?

The crux of this paper is to suggest that seemingly personal 'moments of collusion' can be seen as a wider desire to gather as much rich data as you can in a tight timescale, reflecting the growing pressures on insecure early career researchers. It concludes with the argument that these 'moments' of emotional labour and rapport are, in fact, moments of great connection, which in turn lead to complex *processes* of collusion. Whilst this process begins during the doctoral research experiences, I argue that this process intensifies immediately post PhD. Unless an early career researcher is fortunate enough to succeed in winning project funding for their own research, or secure a permanent lectureship in a highly competitive field, they are faced with an unknown future of potentially years of research assistance to research projects belonging to and steered by more senior academics. This is, perhaps, part of the

career development for a relatively inexperienced researcher, yet the degree to which emotional labour becomes apparent during this time can be perceived as disproportionate to the level of investment and returns for compromised wellbeing and uncertain future employment. The early career researcher may feel alienated from the project objectives, goals and outputs, yet needs to invest heavily (and quickly) in order to produce the data required to join the political economy of research and employment. Desperately trying to carve out a research career in an increasingly precarious climate of academia and job security, early career researchers could well be forgiven for grasping 'moments of collusion' as grateful opportunities to produce adequate data for more senior Principle Investigators. This inevitably impacts on those involved in research as participants, and in turn shapes knowledge production. Joining the pool of fierce competition for limited posts, early career academics are faced with dilemmas between true, ethical consideration of power dynamics and pressured time limits to produce rich and insightful data within the confines of their fixed term contract. These reflective examples of my own unease within the research process are interesting to a certain point, but what use is such indulgent self- reflection to really create change and address power relations in the research process? It is necessary to situate all of our embodied and emotional affects within wider social, systematic and structural frameworks. PhD, early career and relatively inexperienced researchers- many of whom are 'thrown in the deep end' through temporary fixed term contracts as research assistants with limited training and inductions should perhaps be forewarned of their potential power and its (mis)use in the research process.

This is not to suggest that moments of collusion are consciously or strategically thought out as such. Indeed with the examples of my own research discussed in this paper, these were arguably 'authentic' emotional interactions which inevitably arise when researcher becomes close to their research subject(s). Even the most skilled researcher and interviewer will get a better response if there is a good rapport. Thus collusion becomes far more complex: the researcher allows herself to play a role where she is cared for, or divulges certain information about herself, yet this is not a strategic methodological tool from the outset. However, I argue that what may start out as a genuine emotional rapport can *become* strategic if not unpacked reflectively. This is especially the case where we allow these moments to occur in order to produce data as quickly and effectively as possible, so we can progress our competitive

research careers during precarious times. As researchers, we need to think about how moments of collusion work, come about, and are addressed within this increasingly difficult wider climate of job insecurity.

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