
Downloaded from: http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/5374/

Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria’s institutional repository ‘Insight’ must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria’s institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available here) for educational and not-for-profit activities provided that

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
- a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

You may not

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator’s reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found here. Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing insight@cumbria.ac.uk.
Acknowledging Activists Identities in Research: Taking the Lead from Namibian Activists Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls
Research Purpose

- Women’s activism is a key influencer of policy and practice (Htun and Weldon 2012)

- Conceptualise women’s activism in post conflict / divided societies

- Understand the impact of legacy of conflict and division on VAW activism and vice versa
Methodology

- Qualitative, feminist research
- Life history method
- 10 activists in each filed site
- Namibia - 2015 and Northern Ireland - 2016
Aim for Today

To make the case for rethinking the social science convention of distorting the identity all life history participants.
Pseudonymity

- Pre interview, participants were asked to select a pseudonym

- Rosa refused – subjected to extensive public ridicule (and support) as an activist

- “Why should I hide behind another name?”
Pseudonymity

- Sarry supported women to go public about their experiences of violence and abuse.

- Hiding her identity wouldn’t feel right.

- “How can you write about a person who does not exist?”
What to do?
Being Convinced by Rosa and Sarry

- Already aware of the need to carefully manage Rosa’s data - easily identifiable
- Sarry and Rosa both gave compelling reasons that were integral to their activism
- Remembered the unease, but acceptance, expressed by some other participants
Feminist Methodological Angst

- Women’s human rights defenders across the globe endured many harms (Barcia, 2014)

- Therefore distorting identity in research may be all important OR feel totally irrelevant

- Feminist reflexivity; importance of feminism in activism (Yoder, Tobias and Snell, 2011)
Feminist Methodological Angst

- Postcolonial reflexivity: personal motivation, the choice of field sites and dignity

- Thinking about research through imperial eyes (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999)

- Expecting push back from Departmental Ethics Committee
Respecting Participants’ Wishes

- I researched confidentiality and anonymity issues to request amended ethical approach.

- Grinyer (2009) – allowed choice because of distress experienced by participants.

- Guenther (2009) – didn’t allow choice based on concern it would harm participants.
Problems with “Pseudonymity”

- Guenther (2009) concluded women could be recognised even with distorted names.
- Every datum can point to an identification.
- When groups, places are involved, how do you effectively distort?
Rethinking Methodology

- Smythe and Miller (2000) recommend process consent; consent for every datum
- Not possible in this instance, but valuable lesson learned for the future
- Seeking to coming together with research participants in praxis
The Outcome

- The Departmental Ethics Committee approved variation in approach

- 5 out of 16 have chosen to use their own name

- Still attempting to make contact with 4 Namibian participants


Mukungu, Kate (2017) “How can you write about a person who does not exist?”: rethinking pseudonymity and informed consent in life history research. Social Sciences, 6 (3). p. 86.

