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**Acknowledging Activists
Identities in 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 field 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

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