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ROUNDTABLE: METHODS THAT MOVE US: CREATIVITY AND ETHICS IN RESEARCHING DIGITAL YOUTH CULTURES

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For scholars exploring digital youth cultures, creative research methods offer the potential to disrupt existing power imbalances, form empowering creative practices or closely engage with knowledge production that is dynamic, embodied and socially contextual. Yet the experience of *doing* creative research methods poses challenges that are often under- or unacknowledged in our work.

In lieu of a live roundtable, we consider together what methods have we been moved to use in our research exploring digital youth cultures and creative practice work? What questions do our methods ask of us for our future creative and ethical work?

Signe Uldbjerg

In my PhD research, I work with [young women who have had intimate images shared non-consensually online](#). I came into this project from a background in sexual rights activism and I have met and talked to several persons who have been victimized by sexual violence. I have encountered various stories of victimhood; from the ruined victim who depends on the care of others, to the reconciled victim (Colvin, 2019) who is healed and therefore no longer poses a problem to society. However, neither of these versions of victimhood ever seem to fit.

When working with victims of digital sexual violence, I realized that they would voice

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similar frustrations. They are frustrated with not having their victimhood acknowledged and being told by adults to simply 'turn it off', or they feel trapped in the story of ruined lives telling them that the images will haunt them forever and never allow them to become active (digital) citizens again. What lacks in these positions of victimhood is personal and political agency; the right of victims to define their own positions of victimhood and become "authors of their own lives" (Naples, 2003, p. 185).

Creating the circumstances for victims to take on political and individual meaning making calls for methods that are participatory (allow them to take control of their own stories) and experimental. In my research, [creative writing became the practise through which the participants managed to shape, share and co-create their stories](#). Victims of digital sexual violence have little representative language available to describe their experiences as young, gendered and mediated subjects and as victims. Hence, we as researchers must find alternative ways to listen. I therefore ask: how can we listen to voices that do not yet exist? What methods and experiments do we need to encourage their manifestations?

Natalie Hendry

I have a complicated relationship with creative research methods. I love how creative practice research complicates my thinking and being, and draw on my own creative experiences to explore youth mental health and digital life (see Hendry, 2017).

In my PhD project, young people engaged with an Australian youth psychiatric service shared or made images related to #identity with me before we met (Hendry, 2018). These images became the focus in the first meetings; we slowly talked about the challenges of anxiety and pain, not making eye contact until we built rapport together. I learnt about their imaging practices, how they curated their lives online, and how scrolling online through their social media profiles only shared so much.

And yet creative practice-based research with young people is not always ethical. Youth research can be driven by a desire to improve their lives, mental health or young people themselves (is this ethical or even productive?). Creative practice is closely entangled with therapy—including socially and culturally specific histories of creative "care" in communities and academia—that these research methods often are interpreted as a type of therapy where young people discover and "expose" a "real" self. Is this ethical? Is this actually what happens in those encounters? Should it? While digital practices can feel like therapy (Tiidenberg, Hendry & Abidin, forthcoming), how might we think of what else is, or could be, produced, or changed, through creative research engagements?

Ysabel Gerrard

In my latest project, funded by a British Academy Small Grant, I ask how young people aged 11-18 feel about anonymous secret telling social media apps. These apps include Sarahah, YOLO, amongst many others and invite users to confess their 'secrets' or to send anonymous messages to others without revealing any identifying information (see also Tzliil and John, 2018). Since their surge in popularity in 2014, secret-telling apps have been linked to issues like cyberbullying and have also been attributed to several young people's suicides (for example, Lunden, 2019). The research combines interviews and workshops with young people (along with their parents/carers and educators) to shift away from adult- and press-centred discussions of the apps' 'effects' on young people.

The focus of this project – young people's opinions on socially controversial and 'risky' technologies – moved me to use highly ethical methodological approaches (given that ethical issues underpin methodological choices and vice versa (Buchanan, 2010; Gerrard, 2020)). The workshops, for example, consisted of two tasks: (1) a *design-an-app* activity, where young people were asked to collectively design a new secret-telling app, and (2) an art project based on *PostSecret* (an ongoing community art project in which people anonymously mail their secrets on a postcard to the project's founder), where young people were asked to illustrate a postcard and write about their views on anonymous secret-telling apps.

Every stage of this research project – from writing the grant application to submitting journal articles – raised tricky ethical questions. I found myself asking: How do I design a creative, rewarding and safe environment for researching technology with young people? How do I include young people's voices in this particular research agenda without causing them psychological distress (particularly in the second workshop activity, as participants were asked to reflect on their opinions about secret-telling apps)? Essentially, I wanted to know how to conduct potentially risky research about notoriously risky technologies, a question no doubt shared by other AoIR 2020 attendees.

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