SHAMEFUL TRANSGRESSIONS AND INTIMATE BOUNDARY WORKS: ON HOOK-UP APP RESEARCH ETHICS

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As a newly minted PhD student I am eager to explain to my colleagues what hook-up apps are and why we should care to look at them. One day at the University campus talking to a colleague I find myself out of words that satisfactorily describes the feeling of navigating the grid of Grindr, the hook-up app that my sexual biography as a gay man is inseparable of. I decide to "show don't tell'. In powering up the app on my iPad I get a sinking feeling. Perhaps this isn't right? Who will pop up in the grid of pictures, maybe in "challenging" positions? Students, staff, colleagues? As these thoughts make their way through my head the app has loaded and I find myself anxiously explaining the basic affordances in a swift, matter of fact style, and soon closing down the app, doing my best to move on.

Introduction

The issues at play in the above vignette (Humphreys, 2005) represent at least two familiar issues: The media scholar working ethnographically finding that experience moves across media and built environment and that there is "two there's there" (Schegloff, 2002); and the queer, insider researcher coming into academia and moving back into the queer cultural spaces that they are emotional invested in and have privileged access to. The paper focuses on the ethical navigations of the challenges that become apparent in the vignette's intersection of mobilized media use in and across queer spaces and identifications. The paper argues that developments within queer, affective theory, as well as sociological and critical notions of intimacy, can shed new light on how "a process approach to ethical decision making" (Markham & Buchanan, 2012: 5) to this may look like.

Ethnography has a long tradition for using and thinking about the slipping and sliding of identities into cultural spaces. Due to the mediatization (Hepp, Hjarvard, & Lundby, 2015) of intimate encounters (Linke, 2011; Peil & Röser, 2014) media ethnographers face both a quantitative increase and a qualitatively changed situation. In the vignette, the fact that the Grindr app, by way of its locative abilities, displays users nearby ties directly into the felt discomfort: The fact that the community that is "exposed" comprises of students and faculty members that might not have attuned their sexualised self-

presentations to such a gaze. Here the public-private *expectations* come into play, tying into established Internet scholarly debates on the ethical issues regarding these distinctions (Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Marwick & Boyd, 2014).

The paper builds on the work done by queer ethnographic scholars, in that it interrogates not only the actions in fieldwork but also the distinctions and value hierarchies at play, and through that, the norms that put them in place. Further I take on the notion of intimacy to assess its analytical and critical potentials for unraveling the chronicled experience of shame.

Shameful transgression

The issues at play in the vignette attain to the feeling of shame in the face of what is perceived as a lackluster negotiation of the classical ethnographical divide of insider and outsider knowledge, positioning, and identity. The vignette as well as the following general hesitancy to bring forward the field memo shows, that a researcher's affective investment in a given subject swiftly and determinately propels actions seeking to annul the experienced boundary transgression. Adding to the immediate implies for "damage control" shame both reveals taboos and seeks to erase actions that reveals the researcher as a transgressor. This is in line with queer and feminist works on affect (Ahmed, 2004; Bissenbakker, 2013; Munt, 2008) that interrogates shame as moments that both reveal the investments that in turn produce and is produced by the affective response. These questions are critically discussed by way of the concept of 'safe space' and feminist ethics of care.

Intimate boundary works

There are psychological and sociological approaches that use it to describe types of interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Giddens, 1982; Nordqvist, 2013; Stempfhuber, 2011). Related to this approach is the understanding that intimacy is something that is done, that is practiced. It can be understood as arising from boundary works (Jamieson, 2005; Jørgensen, forthcoming) and thus be ontologically entangled with the meeting of the prospect of boundary transgression that marks the end of intimacy. Lauren Berlant on the other hand sees intimacy as:

> …the processes by which intimate lives absorb and repel the rhetorics, laws, ethics, and ideologies of the hegemonic public sphere, but also personalize the effects of the public sphere and reproduce a fantasy that private life is the real in contrast to collective life: the surreal, the elsewhere, the fallen, the irrelevant. (Berlant, 1998: 282-283)

The production of a public/private distinction serves to orient subject attention towards interpersonal matters, making invisible the forces that define which exact distinctions to police.

To support a practice based ethic, this paper argues for an integrative approach, or amalgamation, of sociological and critical intimacy theory. Further, intimacy understood as boundary work between individuals is valuable in its bringing out the mechanics of

being in public or private. It is also the level in which affective investments operate, which promotes critical methodological and ethical reflection. The critical perspective is also important in that it targets the very establishment of public and private realms, something that multilayered media practice complicates. It is argued that a critical approach to intimacy must take into account the ways that seemingly public, online visibilities and actions through discursive and affective work become intimate encounters.

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