"Management: Pragmatism, Philosophy, Priorities"

The Story Behind 'Our Stories'

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ABSTRACT

The storyline of this paper follows the methodological journey to explore two interlocking dimensions of diversity, gender and age. The method known as memory-work is outlined and how it was used to explore 'our stories' of ageing. Memory-work, a method theoretically constructed as non-hierarchical, inclusive research and, the individualist, doctoral research project did create tensions and unexpected challenges and these are discussed. It concludes by arguing that despite its limitations memory-work opens up possibilities to those wanting to adopt a multiple lens framework in gender and diversity research.

Keywords: gender, age, diversity, memory-work

INTRODUCTION

 "Management: Pragmatism, Philosophy, Priorities" is an apt title for this paper. The storyline

follows a methodological journey that evolved out of the research experience of a doctoral

thesis that sought to explore two interlocking dimensions of diversity, gender and age. A

number of researchers have discussed ways to encourage the use of a multiple lens framework

that recognises the interconnectedness of gender with other dimensions of diversity (for

example, Arber & Ginn 1995; Glenn 1999; Holvino 2003; McMullin 1995). The first aim of

this paper is to further the discussion on a method that has an explicit feminist methodology,

memory-work. Secondly, the paper contrasts the theoretical foundations of memory- work

with the reality of a doctoral research project. It is argued that despite tensions, memory-

work, does offer a framework for meaningful insights on the simultaneity of gender with

other dimensions of diversity. Extracts from two memory-texts and the analysis generated

from one will be used to illustrate this. Lastly, the paper aims to demonstrate how the overall

purpose of the wider research project was enhanced by my desire to "re-embody and re-personalize academic work" (Knights 2006: 700) as a way to tell a more interesting story.

The paper is organized as follows. Firstly, it begins by reflecting on how the self was at the centre of the research project and the doubts created by adopting this strategy. Epistemological questions and unresolved tensions saw the wider doctoral project

evolve as "their stories" (semi-structured questionnaire), "our stories" (memory-work) and "my stories" (auto-ethnography). Secondly, the method known as memory-work is discussed and the tensions between this method, constructed as non-hierarchical and inclusive and academic process are highlighted. Added to this, my use of memory-work saw some unexpected challenges arise and these are reflected upon. Finally, one memory-work text followed by excerpts from 'our' analysis and interpretation of the memory text is used to illustrate the insights provided by the type of conversations that only occur through social interaction (Katila & Merilainen 2002).

STORIES THAT CREATE QUESTIONS

What does it mean to 'get older'? It is something everyone does, she thought, we all get older and we are reminded of this every year with our birthday. On this day she adds a further year to her chronological age but does that mean she is actually 'getting older'? The numbers increase, the body shows what are defined as recognized symbols of getting older but she had read where those in mid life can cheat this progressive condition. She can try to look young; dye her hair, hide the wrinkles; and dress young. She can act young by playing competitive sport, generally seen as a preserve of the young. But she is constantly reminded that she is getting older; it appears she cannot escape her age no matter how 'young' she looked and acted.

Extract from my 'getting older' memory

I was both the subject and the object of the research project. The constant and often subtle reminders of the inevitability of my own ageing, reflected in my 'getting older' memory text, drew me to the topic – an exploration of the interconnectivity of age and gender within paid employment and sport, specifically field hockey. Research derived overtly from personal experience is often subjected to derogatory criticism. Accusations of romanticized self-indulgence, 'navel-gazing', self-absorption and responding to confessional urges are but some of the reactionary stances highlighted by Sparkes (1999, 2000). Doubt as to whether my experiences were worthy of doctoral research led me to seek a way to see whether there was anything 'out there' that validated my personal experiences.

A semi-structured, anonymous questionnaire was conceptualized as an exploratory study of a wider audience of mid-life women. Initially I was apprehensive about the value a questionnaire might add to the research and as a method; it did not appear a 'good fit'. Feminist researchers, Katila and Merilainen (2002) point out that, research methods such as questionnaires, have not been very effective in revealing discriminatory processes that are an inherent part of organizational life. Furthermore, in a review of the empirical literature generated in the United Kingdom, Duncan and Loretto (2004) propose that a lot of the key controversies that surround the legitimacy of the concept of gendered ageism continue to remain open to debate. This claim is perhaps a reflection of the shifting and tension-ridden quandaries women face as they age and as they accommodate and comply with the pre-existing ageist, gendered structures and meanings (McKay 1997). Pragmatism, won: an exploratory semi-structured questionnaire made it possible to reach a wider group of women to provide a 'snapshot' of the way gender and age intersect within respondents paid and unpaid work and sporting lives. 'Their stories' did affirm 'my story'.

Memory-work as method offered a different perspective. It was a method I knew little about but from a philosophical perspective, it appealed because it is grounded in an explicit feminist methodology and allows the researchers voice to be an integral part of the research process (Markula & Friend 2005). Moreover, it offered a way to capture the type of stories that can

only be generated by a group dynamic where discussion centres on everyday occurrences that are then collectively analysed. The potency of memory-work was that it embraced a "different take" (Richardson 2000: 943) on the societal construction of gendered, ageing, selves.

THE METHOD: MEMORY-WORK

The method that is known as memory work, developed over a two-year period through the work of Frigga Haug (1992) and her research collective (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992; Haug & Others 1992; Johnson 2001; Sironen 1994; Small & Onyx 2001). Building on this framing, subsequent research has created further adaptations (Friend 1996; Johnson 2001; Koutroulis 2001; Sironen 1994; Small 1999; Small & Onyx 2001; Stephenson 2001) to that originally developed and modified (Haug & Others 1992; Crawford et al., 1992). Ovens (2004) and Markula and Friend (2005) outline other practical applications of this method beyond its traditional women centred focus. The study by Crawford et al (1992) provided a useful foundational insight for my research project. The choice to use this method as a means to capture the "little narratives about everyday life" (Sironen 1994: 10) was experimental. I was unfamiliar with the practice of this method done in a collective setting but, I was enthused by the closure of the subject / object distinction (Oakley 1998; Small 1999). It gave me permission to be both researcher and participant and allowed the group to collect 'data' and to collectively, analyse, and interpret "the social nature of their production" (Crawford et al., 1992: 37). In this way, the understandings through memory work are established within the commonsense and experiential knowledge of everyday life (Crawford et al 1992; Haug & Others 1992). As Hall (1996: 64) reminds us, "Understanding these processes is the basis to all further feminist practice".

My memory, triggered by the phrase 'getting older' that began this section was prompted by reflections on ageing. In writing this memory, in contrast to presenting it orally, the self is de-emphasized (Friend 1996). Reinharz and Chase (2003) point out that one possible impact on a woman unfamiliar with expressing herself orally, for example in an interview situation,

is that she may not know what to do when given the opportunity and could find disclosure difficult. Writing a memory in third person after the event allows an element of choice and provides something concrete to contribute and analyze. Haug and Others (1992: 36) state it "involves making public the events of our lives, wriggling free of the constraints of purely private and individual experiences" and to make conscious "patterns of thought drilled into use by others" (Haug and Others 1992: 60). In writing my story, I am reminded of the extent to which my social behaviour is ordered by age and gendered scripts (Maaka 1993) Memory-work produces an array of data. The written text of self as both subject and object leads to a spoken text that is shaped by stories, anecdotes, and experience through collective analysis. To enhance analysis, Haug and Others (1992) developed analytic stages to assist with interpretation. Crawford et al., (1992) summarized these emphasizing that their purpose is to guide rather than dictate, thereby reflecting the discursive process of analysis. The hermeneutic circle as a methodological device depicts this process as discussion moves back and forth, "relating parts of the text to the 'whole' and the 'whole' to the 'parts' to determine meanings of both the parts and the whole of the text" (Friend 1996: 87). In this sense interpretation of meaning is intersubjective (Small & Onyx 2001). As such, an individual is positioned as a 'moving subject' where their view may develop or change through the collective process of analysis and interpretation (Cosslett, Lury & Summerfield 2000; Markula & Friend 2005).

Memory-work recognizes that individuals are intersubjectively constituted through social relations (Knights 2006). Haug and Others (1992) warn against impulsive value judgments or any form of behaviour that may convey either criticism or empathy in the process of analysis. Any reactionary stance can place the author of the memory in a defensive and/or subordinate position, discouraging them to reflect and remember the essential detail that is imperative for successful collective analysis (Haug & Others 1992; Friend 1996). Discussion should continue until members feel all avenues under exploration have been exhausted, with a process of rewriting memories suggested as the final stage (Haug & Others 1992).

Tensions between memory-work as method and academic process

Cadman, Friend, Gannon et al. (2001), in a discussion on the use of memory-work for a variety of research projects, make overt the tensions that can be experienced when using this method. Their review highlights, in particular, the dilemmas of wanting to be true to the feminist underpinning of the method while being constrained by academic conventions; for example, the academic process required for a doctorate. As one illustration, Small (1999) notes from her use of this method for doctoral research, that memory-work in its 'ideal' form, will only work if all the participants have the same investment, hence are true 'co-researchers'. In the doctoral process, however, there is one researcher with other participants defined as research objects because of the overall purpose of the task. In the next section, I reflect on similar tensions and the unexpected 'glitches' between the 'ideal' and the adaptations that others had made.

My research was also for the purpose of a doctorate. Its ownership was solely with one researcher. Memory-work creates an array of data that are the outcomes of two different contexts. In the first instance, these data consist of an individual's written memory prompted by a pre-selected trigger that is written in isolation prior to the meeting. To compose the written text requires thought and time. For the research, nine volunteers were assigned to two memory-work groups, five in one and four in the other with the researcher a further participant in both groups. Each group met three times over a period of six weeks with each meeting lasting from three to five hours. Overall, 33 separate memory texts were written, including five by the researcher. Memory-work therefore, requires a serious time commitment from participants, something I had not given much thought to. A key question for any researcher using this method is to understand why participants volunteer (Markula & Friend 2005). In this case, the initial incentive appeared to be their interest in the research topic but I had under-estimated the time required. By the third meeting, each group had placed a time limit on the length of the meeting but also expressed how they valued the opportunity to share and discuss their experiences and how it had given them a heightened understanding of their

own and others' ageing. My concern was eased with the realisation that memory-work had not only served my purposes as a data collection tool but was reflexive in that it raised the conscious awareness of my co-researchers.

A further unexpected tension arose from the writing process. My co-researchers were given a copy of the rules that were taken from the work of Crawford et al. (1992) and had been used by others who were very familiar with academic research processes. I framed the rules as guidelines having taken note of the warning by Johnson (2001) about researchers being preoccupied with following rules set by others. This knowledge did not negate my unease when, at each memory-work session there were examples of writing where the rules had not been followed. Some stories were often well short of the one to two pages discussed in other studies and, at times, slipped into first person, 'triggered' multiple memories, or were more reflective – rather than descriptive – of experience. The links between some of the stories and the themes being explored in the research were sometimes tenuous. Furthermore, experiences perceived as trite, unworthy, or inconsequential often meant not articulating all the pertinent detail and using somewhat unfamiliar third person text.

Researchers have questioned whether an average, non-university educated person has the ability to write suitable, reflective memories (Markula & Friend 2005). My experience suggests that the barrier is not level of education; it is that we do not see everyday occurrences as worthy of research and we rarely get an opportunity to write about them and ourselves. Stories were what was required and received but they were often not in the form I had envisaged from my reading about this method. My answer was to remind myself that my use of memory-work was experimental and my priority was to ensure my co-researchers felt their experiences did matter. On reflection, the problem was with me and my concerns that if the rules, devised by others who had used this method, were not followed then the memory-work process would not be an effective research method. This fear was unfounded. Through 'our stories' we accessed what is often inaccessible through other methods, our experiences,

feelings and emotions as we vividly reflected on our own ageing within the wider cultural context.

My role was participant in both groups and, when necessary, facilitator. Initially participants were concerned about 'saying the right things', however this concern disappeared as their confidence and familiarity with each other and the method grew. The members of both groups, including the researcher, knew each other through their shared participation in field hockey, however, levels of understanding and knowledge about each other varied. This method does encourage 'narrativization', that is, entering into loosely or completely disconnected conversations 'outside' the memories under discussion (Cadman et al., 2001). At times such as these, I took a facilitation role to channel the conversation back to the memory under discussion. In addition, I found myself prompting conversations to see if others could identify 'absences and silences' that I perceived to be missing from the memory texts and/or the ensuing discussions. In contrast to other studies I had read where students or academics were the co-researchers, only three of my co-researchers were familiar with forms of qualitative research analysis. Reflexivity relies on critical subjectivity and awareness (Lincoln & Guba 2000) so one's social location and the realization of a political consciousness is necessary in order to reinterpret one's individual and collective lived reality (Nielsen 1990). The assumption is that through the memory-work process this type of thinking will occur. Haug and Others (1992: 65) do note that to make such a significant methodological leap does demand "more than a little imagination".

The discussions of the memory-texts did reveal a gap between my perspective, built on foundations of experiential and theoretical understandings within a critical paradigm, and the solely experiential knowledge of the participants. As an older female researcher I am able to view the world from a subjugated position so am "positioned and … being positioned by virtue of history and context" (Olesen 2000: 226), am privileged by location and consciousness (Cook & Fonow 1990; May 2001) and have an investment in the future outcome. It is important to keep in mind that understandings through memory-work are

established within the commonsense and experiential knowledge of everyday life. This is why memory-work is often located within the interpretive paradigm (Crawford et al. 1992; Haug & Others 1992; Markula & Friend 2005).

Memory-work can also be located within a critical paradigm. Analysis of the written text and the subsequent discussion would be based on a different premise. As the primary researcher, I found the tensions between my critical perspective and that of the participants problematic. My bias was at odds with the commonsense, experiential view of the participants – particularly so when required to interpret the words of women who do not see feminism as relevant to them (Reinharz & Chase 2003). Gender issues were present but were not overtly recognised by my co-researchers. The realisation that my voice was not wholly representative of 'ours' was a further reason that led me in the direction of auto-ethnography where I could examine 'my stories' within their gendered cultural context (Aaltio 2002 cited in Thurlow, Mills & Mills 2006). This offered a way to confront the dilemma and ambiguities between the collectivity promoted by an explicit methodology and the impossibility of avoiding the individuality of the academic enterprise of researching for a doctorate. This decision illustrates the multidimensionality, tensions and the continual 'boundary crossing' that feminist scholars can experience (Sprague 2001).

Furthermore, the reality of 'unequal investment' meant that the reappraising of analyses of the written memories and the audio-recorded discussions of the memory-work discussions were the preserve and responsibility of the researcher. Each written memory text generated pages of transcribed spoken narrative that read like the dramatic script of a play. A lot of what was written and said was not going to be an overt part of the project because of the academic process of selection. Ingleton (2001) highlights that this appears to be at odds with a methodology that engenders feelings of empowerment, trust, and the perception of non-hierarchical, inclusive research. Riessman (2003) reflects on similar experiences in the one-on-one interview process compared to naturally occurring conversation in social interactions. It is these spoken narrations, however, that are at risk of being buried or cast aside through the

academic process of selection and the need to identify recurring themes (Ingleton 2001; Riessman 2003). As Ingleton (2001: 70) laments, "memories are stirred, experiences shared, insights gained and perceptions changed, long after the last meeting has been held. But when the project develops into a product for publication, some of these vital signs are lost". So while my co-researchers expected that I would select a portion of the information generated, the process of making that selection has raised ethical questions around ownership of the data, authorship and the boundaries put in place by academia.

Guidance as to how to initially structure the analysis process was provided by the work of Friend (1996). I did make some adjustments, however, as to how as a researcher I approached my appraisal of this data, taking into account the epistemological foundations of the research project. My aim was to keep any academic analysis of the memories and discussion, in the light of the literature, separate and not allow it to take precedence over 'our' collective analyses. The audio recordings of the collective analyses of what were 'our' memories and my subsequent transcription of them, did allow for the common sense meanings identified by each group to be noted. The need to prioritise saw five memory texts subsequently selected to be included in the study because of the discussions they evoked and the contribution they could make to the research project.

The following reconstruction is one example. The entire written memory text is given first. Excerpts follow this from 'our' analysis and interpretation of the memory text. Discussions often followed cyclical pathways so excerpts were selected on the basis of their relevance to the key theme being explored. The cyclical nature of our discussions reinforced the continuous reflexivity of memory-work as it amplifies its hermeneutic foundation. Moreover, cyclical pathways allowed for continuous reflexivity that was useful given the complexity of the two constructs under investigation. The fluidity of the ageing process engages both the objective and subjective realms of individual experiences. As such it can involve a number of intrinsic changes that have both separate and cumulative effects on individuals (Whitbourne 1999). Gender, conceptualized as a socially created component of structural arrangements,

interlocks with age. Both age and gender, in all their complexities, play a role to order our social life (Davies 1999). The memory-work process enabled us to consider how the "selves are the creation of the collectivities in which they live and act" (Crawford et al., 1992: 54).

Anne's 'Past her Best' Experience:

It was early morning and the second little visitor for the morning arrived to take up his regular position in the already crowded king-sized bed. The first visitor had fallen back to sleep so he carefully wriggled between his little brother and his mother and wrapped his arms around her. "It's my birthday Mum," he reminded her. "Yes darling," she whispered. "Happy birthday, you big six year old. We will have to wait till Dad and the other boys waken before you open your presents". She hoped he too would fall back to sleep but realised there was little chance of that.

He chatted away full of excitement and anticipation. They quietly planned out the day discussing what time the party guests would arrive and how many presents he might get. He looked into his Mother's eyes and gently moved forward to kiss her.

He stopped suddenly and drew a line across her face with his finger.

"Why is your face all crumpled up like a Granny, Mum?" he asked inquisitively.

With her busy lifestyle she had avoided looking in the mirror in recent years but suddenly her real image was reflected in a moment. She did not have time to find words to reply as the rest of the family appeared with presents and song and so the birthday began.

Anne's memory text, triggered by the phrase 'past her best', epitomizes the significance of the messages we receive and give through the "little narratives about everyday life" (Sironen 1994: 10). It specifically highlights the appearance of one's own body and the extent to which it is felt that others are negatively evaluating 'our' bodily appearance (Whitbourne 1999).

Anne said her reaction was *"Shock; it was a huge shock, then, I thought about it afterwards and I had always said I did not mind getting old, that you just accept people. But, this was a huge shock that I was now in a different category … a mummy is not meant to look like granny even though she could be"*.

In thinking about the significance of wrinkles, Victoria asked, *"Does this mean you're old?"* Jane, while asserting *"You are as old as you feel, when you are active and fit"*, did later reveal that *"It never used to worry me but the last couple of years as I feel I am getting older and looking a bit saggy around the eyes, I am beginning to think maybe I should do something, having a facelift or something"*.

Anne felt strongly that *"You do not have to accept that this is what you are meant to look like, you should not have to fight it, you should not want people to think you are younger all the time. You are always pleased if people do think you are younger"*.

She then gave her own example; her 10-year-old son had come home from school and asked *"'Are you both, really old?' He said most of the boys in his class said that 'you and daddy are really old', which we are compared to most of his friends …he is beginning to realise that this is a sort of an issue, we are different …*[for him] *it is a bit of an embarrassment"*. In response to light-hearted banter on so-called, 'anti-wrinkle' creams, Anne replied, *"I keep saying that I am going to learn how to put make-up on which I have never done"*. Discussion at this point centred on the need for time *"to put your face on"*, the money to buy the products and how as sportswomen, *"it is something that has never been important to me… I have however started getting highlights in my hair"* (Samantha).

Diane expanded the scope of the conversation by drawing our attention to her experiences in industry-specific recruitment and the importance of first impressions. *"If you are going for a job interview and get some young thing and someone 'old' and they both are equally as good, unless you have got a fairly progressive person who is employing, you would probably go for the younger one. You are looking at the two people and you think, well she is probably a bit*

past it, younger can probably offer more …[it is] *image and how you look"*. However, after further discussion on the role experience played, Diane did concede, *"I suppose for different roles, you perceive people should be at certain ages too"*.

Questioning Anne's description in her memory text of her *"busy lifestyle and not even noticing the ageing, not thinking about it"* (Samantha), Anne clarified that, *"It is something that catches up on you, it is a bad thing [in that] you think that's absolutely terrible and it should not be. On the other hand, I am wiser and I am happier, but why was it such a shock? Because I look like this different person?"* Diane, in response wondered if *"perhaps it is that at a certain age you start feeling sensitive. You can say it is how I feel inside but I think as your face starts to get wrinklier, you start to get more sensitive about it"*.

Interestingly, Anne gave an analogy that spoke of perceptions around boundaries that clearly defined who was old and who was young; *"but when they can go either way, it is hardest at that stage, perhaps that is the stage that we are talking about"*. Samantha then asked when is it that we become aware of boundary changes, *"Is it how we are made to feel?"* Diane replied, *" I think it is probably because when you get to a certain age and you're getting wrinkles and your hair is starting to grey and it is how other people perceive you... that is when you start getting sensitive and you start to think, 'hang on there, I am feeling great inside but people are judging me outside as if I am not great, I am not fit and I am getting past it'"*.

Anne's memory-text and the discussion provoked by the memory-work process allows subjective experiences to emerge in a manner that can be mutually beneficial to co-researchers and the main researcher (Markula & Friend, 2005). Firstly, the memory-work process gives the main researcher permission to be overtly 'in' the research thereby alleviating some of the tensions of the traditional, hierarchical structure of the research process (Markula & Friend, 2005). This was particularly important for me as the research project evolved from my personal story of 'getting older. Secondly, through the writing,

telling and discussion of memories, co-researchers awareness of self and how they are positioned within the prevailing cultural stories is enhanced. The main researcher, on the other hand, can gain an evocative insight into understanding multiple dimensions of diversity.

CONCLUSION

There are a variety of feminist approaches that look at gender and diversity (Thurlow, Mills & Mills 2006). Feminist writers talk about paving the way for a fundamental paradigmatic shift by challenging the either/or dichotomous model where primacy is given to one power relationship, such as gender, race class or age, as one analytical category, while ignoring others. Further, Arber and Ginn (1995) note that the feminist commitment to empower women can also rebound through the research process and lead to objectification. They found in their reading of research on older women that rather than challenge the stereotypes surrounding ageing, research tended to reinforce images of dependence and negativity towards the ageing process. This paper has argued that memory-work is a powerful way to reconstruct experience because understandings are established within the commonsense and experiential knowledge of everyday life (Crawford et al. 1992; Haug & Others, 1992). Memory-work offers possibilities for a multiple lens framework to examine the complex and shifting intersections of categories of difference at a particular time in history and place. The use of memory-work is an example of how a feminist philosophy can shape the way gender and diversity is studied.

The two memory-texts used in this paper illustrate how age and gender act as mutually reinforcing social constructs that are subtle predictors and influencers in our life course. Memory is tied to emotion (Duquin, 2000) and it is feelings that make events important, marked and remembered for later reference. The extract from the transcript of the collective analysis of Anne's 'past her best' experience has shown how through 'our stories' it is possible to reconstruct the processes through which we as mid-life women have experienced age and ageing. A lot was not explored and it is probable, for a variety of reasons, that my co-researchers may not have shared all they could offer on a particular subject (Stephenson,

2001). I have also alluded to the tensions between memory-work, a method theoretically constructed as non-hierarchical, inclusive research and the individualist, doctoral research project. In spite of the caveats, Stephenson (2001) argues – and I concur – that one of the strengths of memory-work is that it allows for the unpacking of "barely perceived, ordered daily training of normality" so participants are able to "move from victim to actor" (Stephenson 2001: 36). Memory-work as a method does lend itself to creative adaptation as long as its feminist grounding is not lost (Markula & Friend 2005). Gender and diversity as an evolving field of research also lends itself to creativity. This paper has shown that by blending the two, the storyline may be one of "Management: Pragmatism, Philosophy, Priorities" but a more interesting, personalised story does emerge.

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