Qualitative Methods Conference 2018

Where are the boundaries around research?

Embodied and creative research methods provoke honesty, emotion, and vulnerability in participants, which add to the richness of the stories they tell and are willing to share. The positionality of the researcher is less of ‘interviewer’ and more ‘co-producer’ or participant in a dialogue. Visual and creative approaches invite participants to share in ways in which they are not able or willing through words alone. The data and outputs they produce, with film, art, or objects can in turn affect those who see it more than written text, and need to be analysed and disseminated along with more traditional transcripts, articles and presentations.

In the context of investigating sensitive issues such as those around embodied identity, these methods, which use embodied methods to explore embodied research questions may feel the most appropriate. These approaches lie along the boundary of therapy and research, asking much of researchers who are unlikely to have received therapeutic training or on-going support. Due to this deficit, the researched may find that their experience is not held or contained in a way that the content would demand. Similarly, the data themselves lie on the boundary of art and research, in that they can be seen as more than a tool to facilitate reflection, but as artifacts in their own right.

What are the implications in this scenario? Where should we position ourselves and our work along these boundaries? Who holds the space for the researcher and the researched if both are made vulnerable?

Micro keynote

Embodied and creative methods are becoming more popular across many fields in order to investigate affect and sensitive topics, or with those unable or unwilling to use their voice. However, the consequences of using these approaches are underexplored. There are implications for researchers and the researched, in terms of the therapeutic support and training a researcher might require initially and on an on-going basis, and the reality of dealing with the resulting art or data in an output and metrics driven academy.