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## 12. ENDANGERED PRACTICES

### *Writing Feminist Research*

#### GENESIS OF THE CHAPTER

Alison: When an invitation to write a chapter on feminist writing for this book arrived on my desk, my first response was to think: "I don't have time to do feminist work any more, I have nothing to say". A moment's reflection revealed, however, that I actually spend a good deal of my time working in supervision with doctoral students who are undertaking feminist research. The pedagogical relationships of supervision are one important site for the production of feminist knowledge and identity - and for the practice of feminist writing.

The situation in which I find myself, 15 years out from my own doctorate, and preoccupied with the demands of management and intensified working conditions, is to look for the spaces and cracks in which feminist scholarship can still be done. For me, doctoral pedagogy is one such space. I am therefore still able to be involved in doing feminist intellectual work - once removed.

This brief sketch serves as a framing for the focus of this chapter, which is concerned with the conditions under which feminist research can be done in current times. This chapter is a co-production between a senior academic and two doctoral students, engaged in supervision and joint writing about feminist scholarship. We aim to contribute to a discussion about the terms and conditions in which feminist research can be done in the university today, with a particular focus on the "practice disciplines". Our title, "Endangered practices: Writing feminist research" refers to the risks and uncertainties of undertaking feminist work in fields where there is not always a strong tradition of feminist scholarship, to the possibilities and challenges of doing so, and to the kinds of writing that it is productive and instructive to engage in. Our title also alludes to the different senses signified by practice in the discussion: the practice of writing research and writing research on practice.

We draw on our quite different experiences to illustrate some of the main issues and opportunities for feminist research writing, with a view to offering some ways forward for researchers wanting to explore questions of practice from a feminist perspective. We take brief "thumbnails" of our different positions on these issues, as points of departure for developing some shared thoughts and insights.

In what follows, we are less concerned with questions of distinctive feminist methodologies or "women's ways of knowing" than with exploring what is possible in circumstances that are often described by critics as *post-feminist*. We

are mindful of the passing of the heyday of feminism: the decline of the women's movement, the rise and dispersal of feminist theory, the passing of the moment of equal opportunity, the changing of the generational guard.

We don't advance identity politics, but we share a project of re-minding our communities of the problem of gender. As Terry Threadgold said in relation to feminist work in the academy, "It will always need doing again".<sup>1</sup>

#### ENDANGERED SPECIES?

*Kate: My doctoral research stems from three main concerns about the endangered position of feminist scholarship: firstly, the effects of the decline in the institutional space dedicated to feminist scholarship; secondly, the effects of a declining women's movement and lack of generational succession; and finally, the long-term effects of "crisis" talk within the field generated by postmodern critiques of some of feminism's key terms, such as women. These concerns led me to a research question that asks, "What are the possibilities of feminist scholarship in the contemporary university?"*

In 2007 I conducted on-the record interviews with seven senior Australian feminist academics who are powerful in the field, and rewrote these interviews as (auto)biographical stories of becoming feminist and academic. This research is both about, and an example of, the possibilities of feminist scholarship. From these stories several reflections are relevant to this discussion: feminism has become less visible in the academy; feminists are more uncertain about what counts as feminism, what the progressive positions might be and what is appropriate to pass on to younger generations; feminists have internalised their version of feminism as part of their embodied subjectivity to the extent that they no longer articulate or name it; feminist scholarship no longer functions merely as critique, but critique is still a vital and important contribution of feminist scholarship to the academy; and finally, an acknowledgement that the stakes have changed.

From this we can conclude that to do feminism in the contemporary university means something quite different than in the heyday of the women's movement.

In this section we address the question of what it means to write feminist research in a practice discipline in two ways: first, by examining the disciplinary location of most feminist research (humanities and social sciences) and its relationship to professional practice disciplines; and second, by exploring what feminism itself might mean in today's social and intellectual context.

Historically, feminist scholarship entered the university in Women's Studies programs and in woman-centred courses throughout the humanities and social sciences (Curthoys, 2000). Women's Studies programs and research centres expanded rapidly throughout the 1980s but began to decline in the 1990s (Magarey & Sheridan, 2002). Some programs were transformed into Gender Studies, and feminist knowledge was extensively integrated into existing disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, particularly history and philosophy (Threadgold, 2000). Feminist knowledge and scholarship have now had a strong presence in

these disciplines for more than 30 years, but their reach into other disciplines, such as science disciplines, and into professional practice fields, such as nursing and architecture, has been rather more limited. To understand how one might write feminist research today it is necessary to understand feminism as being well established in some fields but less so in others, particularly in the different fields of professional practice, as widely diverse as design or dentistry.<sup>2</sup>

Recent feminist intra-communal debate has been focused either on critiquing the legitimacy of key concepts and terms employed by earlier feminist researchers, often under the influence of postmodern thought; or on re-imagining feminist research through a postmodern lens. These debates can become a dangerous minefield that is difficult to navigate for novice researchers or non-philosophers; yet outside this community, politically motivated researchers are grappling with what a feminist method might be and how to undertake and write feminist research.

In its early incarnations, feminist methodology was primarily concerned with producing research that either critiqued prevailing patriarchal knowledge or improved the material lives of women. As such, the first attempts to define a feminist method were woman-centred and often delimited feminist methods to include practices such as consciousness-raising, collaborative research practices, challenges to objectivity, and concern for the unethical exploitation of women as research subjects (Bowles & Klein, 1983; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1979, 1983). Feminist methods aimed to represent human diversity, transform patriarchal social institutions and create social change by empowering women through research (Cook & Fonow, 1990; Reinharz, 1992). In addition, some feminist researchers attempted to discover and define women's ways of knowing, thinking and being (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982), whereas others foregrounded research from a feminist standpoint (Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987). Also during this period, specifically feminist methodologies that attempted to bridge the gap between theory and experience were devised, such as collective memory work in which data is generated and analysed collectively by women in a group setting (Haug et al., 1987).

However, as feminists engaged with postmodern theory in increasing numbers, many of these earlier feminist methods were criticised for being essentialist<sup>3</sup> or for being problematically framed within positivist and realist epistemologies. Some feminist researchers have applied insights garnered from postmodern theory to feminist research methodologies, thereby expanding definitions of feminist research (Lather, 1991, 1993; Ryan, 2001; St Pierre & Pillow, 2000). Due to the varying methods employed under the name of feminism, there is no single identifiable or definable feminist method or methodology. However, there are some constants: feminist research is still concerned with gender and power and is still interested in social change.

Yet the contemporary context for feminist research is radically different from the one in which it was established in the 1970s and 1980s. The rapid expansion of the higher education sector, the rise of neo-liberalism and an audit culture in universities (Davies, 2005; Strathern, 2000) and the linguistic turn<sup>4</sup> have all impinged on the possibilities for writing feminist research. In addition, changes

within the feminist academic community, such as the integration of feminists and feminist knowledge into disciplines, the transformation of Women's Studies into Gender Studies and the debates generated by increased interest in postmodern and queer theory have also affected the possibilities for writing feminist research.

The cumulative effect of these changes, coupled with a declining social movement, has been reduction in the institutional space dedicated to feminist scholarship, increasing invisibility of feminist intellectual work, mass diffusion and dispersal of feminist ideas, and a lack of generational succession. Feminist research and scholarship is becoming increasingly invisible as it either becomes submerged in disciplinary knowledge or dissociated from the feminist label. Anti-feminist backlash and neo-liberal economic policies discourage feminists from identifying themselves or their work as feminist and perhaps even discourage them from undertaking feminist research at all. Critically, these developments result in a lack of generational succession. As many academic feminist women who entered the academy during the heyday of the women's movement reach retirement age, these issues are becoming vitally important to the survival of feminist research into the future. Feminism in universities is, we suggest, an endangered species.

Because of this history, feminism will always need to be remade for the changing contexts in which it is placed. In a text generated by Kate's doctoral research, Terry Threadgold pointed out that feminism "will always need doing again".<sup>5</sup> For disciplines without a strong history of feminist interventions in research, such as professional practice fields, critique is still a very necessary methodology.

Interviews from Kate's doctoral research raise several contemporary concerns for those engaging in feminist scholarship in today's university. While acknowledging the necessity for critique, some feminist scholars who have been generating feminist research and theory for the past 30 years have revised their political positioning to match the climate of uncertainty. In the interviews with seven prominent Australian feminist academics uncertainty was a key issue. Kate Lilley remarked:

I feel like it's all provisional ... I had a lot more certainty when I started out as an academic about what I should be doing and what must be taught. I don't feel that level of certainty now. I hope that what I do is no less progressive, but it's in a different way. The way things have shifted around it's not so clear what the progressive positions are.<sup>6</sup>

One of the reasons for this uncertainty is the influence of postmodernism on feminism, as evidenced by a comment made by Dorothy Broom: "In the beginning we were very naive about the future and what we could achieve. Postmodernism made me question the 'progressivist' angle of feminist scholarship".<sup>7</sup> In other words, postmodern theory challenged not only the foundational knowledge on which modernism was based, but also the ethical implications of modernist thought. The effect for feminist scholarship and research was to create a climate of uncertainty around the political goals of feminist intellectual work.

Problematically, the climate of uncertainty makes generational succession more difficult, because young feminists must find new ways to engage in feminist research and older feminists are prone to revising their past political positionings. Uncertainty also affects the disciplinary and methodological coherence of feminist research, because there is no agreement on the central tenets or on research approaches. We could conclude that uncertainty contributes to the invisibility of feminist scholarship in the university and amounts to bad news for women, but this was not the consensus from the powerful feminist scholars in Kate's research.

On the contrary, those scholars suggested that uncertainty, as a key aspect of contemporary feminist practice, is a necessary and effective political response to the current conditions under which feminist researchers operate, including, as mentioned previously, the rise of neo-liberalism and the linguistic turn. Uncertainty permits feminists to learn from past mistakes and also to remake feminism in new contexts.

So what might the central tenets of an uncertain feminist research practice be? As stated, feminism is still fundamentally concerned with gender and power, but how might we conceptualise these in the practice of writing feminist research? Ann Curthoys suggested that "it's the questions you ask that matter".<sup>8</sup> So contemporary feminist research must continue to ask questions of gender and power in the changing contexts in which feminist research is generated. Changing contexts, particularly those of the professional practice disciplines, may require feminist researchers to pose their questions differently, but it is through asking that feminism continues.

#### TRAVELLING INCOGNITO

*Teena: I am a graphic designer with 20 years' professional experience. Since 1996 I have lectured in design at various universities. Design education in Australia moved into the university sector only as recently as the 1990s. When I began teaching I noticed that many colleagues and most of the students were women, yet the professional practices we taught had their basis in the male-dominated printing industry, and the histories we drew on were notable for the absence of women. On commencing doctoral research, my first question was - had the increase in women into the profession and into the academy made a difference to design, and if so, in what ways?*

Beginning with the assumption that gender mattered in an emergent scholarly discipline situated in the professional practice landscape of design, I wanted to address the absence of women in design histories and their marginalisation in design discourses. Conceived as a way to determine what women were contributing to a new academic subject, I devised a rationale and research plan that incorporated what I understood to be feminist research methods - collaborative ways to generate knowledge and theory arising from women's lived experiences. By providing spaces for design women to speak about their everyday lives in the university, I sought particular kinds of stories that would render visible the

material conditions of their lives while also creating a different kind of record of women's contribution to design. And so I set out.

Teena's research is located in the field of design, a newly "academicised" professional practice field, which does not have a strong tradition of feminist research. The difficulty for her, in her fieldwork consisting of conversations with 15 academic design women in Australia and the UK, is how to name the work. Naming or not naming her research as *feminist* or as being about *women* has seen Teena "travel incognito" in two locations: first as a novice researcher in a faculty of education with an established feminist history, and later as a feminist researcher in the discipline of design.

When Teena began her inquiry she sensed some discomfort, resistance even, from the women in the study to naming gender as problematic in their disciplinary lives. That is not to say that the women were unaware of feminism. On the contrary, like Teena, most of them incorporated feminist principles in their day-to-day teaching and professional practices. They were aware of gender imbalances, as in the difficulty in attracting men as sessional tutors and guest lecturers, and the high concentration of women who are prominent in the academy, a statistic not reflected in the profession. There was a perception in the field that there were more important problems than gender, for example, "I have more problems being short than being female" (Jennifer Morla, cited in Vienne, 2001, p. 169). For Teena, it seemed that the words *gender* and *feminist* prompted uncomfortable responses from design academic women.

A further difficulty in naming her research as feminist was the related difficulty in naming Teena's practice field as design. Passionate debates, mostly between men, about defining and naming what is and what is not design continue to rage on international PhD design research discussion lists, as elsewhere in the field. This is not unexpected for a profession that is an emergent scholarly field.

Teena's experiences have given us pause to consider the conditions under which feminist research might be undertaken in a practice-oriented academic field such as design, the issues that have arisen in the process, and to think about how these might be named.

In the context of design, there have been many changes since the 1980s. Firstly, there has been a significant increase of women in the field, both in professional practice and the academy. Secondly, digital-electronic media and poststructuralist theory dramatically altered modes of design production and contributed to shifts in thinking about the role and function of design. Thirdly, Australia, the institutional setting for this newly academicised field, underwent further restructuring as a result of policy-led changes to universities that substantially altered the scope, conditions and terms of work in the academy. This subsequently impacted on what it means to be academic in a contemporary professional discipline. Academics are now engaged in reconfiguring the relationship between practice, pedagogy and research.

Within scholarly design writing there is a small band of women who have written about women and design. Of this group, only a few would name their concerns as feminist. These feminist writers generally focus on the lack of visibility

or the "exclusion" of women and often problematically call for the restoration of women to design histories. Teal Triggs (citing Nanette Salomon, 2000) cautioned that using women's biographies to redress the imbalance "underscores the idea that she is an exception; they only apply to her and make her an interesting individual case study" (p. 150). This means that one of the risks of "discovering" and restoring one woman and her achievements to design histories is that she becomes a notable exception while the majority of women continue to be marginalised, silenced and excluded.

As members of a new discipline without a strong history of feminist scholarship, design scholars have drawn from the work of feminists in other fields, for example, Rozsika Parker, Griselda Pollock and Linda Nochlin in art history and Judith Zinsler in history. Contemporary feminist design writers have taken up feminism in the context of design in two ways. Some have called for a re-examination of design from the viewpoint of women (Attfield & Kirkham, 1989; Hagmann, 2005; Lupton & Haycock Makela, 1994; Vienne, 2001), whereas others have called for a re-examination of feminism in the context of design (Buckley, 1986; Gorman, 2001; Triggs, 2000). Regardless of approach, these writers become a feminist satellite in a parallel universe to the dominant design discourses. Consequently, in design anthologies, they are an addition rather than the mainstream. It seems that in naming themselves as feminist these design writers risk being marginalised and are required to operate separately and under different terms from mainstream design discourses.

We ask here, as a provocation: What "remaking" needs to occur for feminists to write research in design? What new questions need to be asked? Furthermore, what is at risk when individual feminist design writers retire? What happens to the satellite of collective ideas?

Although feminist work is being done in design fields, it is not widely taken up in practice contexts, academic and otherwise. It seems that the same old arguments about gender roles get played out over again. This means, not engaging in a critique of the gendered power relations in the field, and problematically relying on naturalistic and populist understandings of women and men as reasons for women's perceived absence in the field.

For example, Teena observed that when the issue of gender was raised in various international design web forums, conversation often devolved to gendered artefacts and consumption/buying habits. Teena's discussions with other women about this phenomenon suggested that these conversations resulted in women feeling dismissed and subsequently silenced. These women interpreted this kind of engagement with gender as disinterest, ignorance and/or uncomfortable avoidance.

Furthermore, the absence of women from prominent discussion panels and at international conferences prompts heated debate, which still relies on naturalistic assumptions about women. For example, recently an intense discussion on the US Web forum *Designobserver* arose from an eminent male designer's response to a question posed to the all-male panel at a US book design seminar. The question was, in "a profession that's more than half female" (Bierut, 2006), why were there no women on the panel, especially as book design is considered an area where

women dominate? His response was “women get pregnant, have children, go home and take care of their children” (Milton Glaser, cited in Bierut, 2006). This prompted dozens of responses from designers, some of which are summarised below, and accompanied by our commentary (italicised in brackets):

The majority of design students are women, but where do they all go? (*professional invisibility*); perhaps things are changing, we just need to persevere (*generational succession*); it's not equal, but it's good enough (*it's better than it was*); women can do anything (*having it all, the double shift*); women are caring and nurturing (*that's why they teach*); gender should be irrelevant, women don't want special concessions (*the work will speak for itself, judged on merit*); affirmative action is unnecessary (*it discriminates against men*); “woman designer” only targets women (*gendered ghettos*); women don't want fame/lack confidence/are too timid/too sensitive (*“feminine” ideals*); notable exceptions, she's a woman, she's successful (*tokenism, it's not gender, but talent and will*); you just have to want it enough (*there is no glass ceiling*); it's not gender, it's... (*lack of childcare, etc*); don't get me wrong (*I don't hate men, I have a husband, son and many male friends*); what about race, immigrants, gays (*the “other minorities”*); nobody will do it for us (*it's up to women alone to change things*); men externalise (*boast*); women internalise (*don't boast*); it's not design, it's society (*we can't do anything about it*); it wasn't us, it was a woman (*see, women discriminate against other women*); women are still being portrayed as “kittens” on design journal covers (*it goes on*); men need more attention than women (*it's just naturally so*); I hate to complain, but... (*I don't want to be considered a “whiney baby”*); women make better employees (*they're reliable and do what they're told*); this whole thing is so ridiculous (*not taken seriously*).

These responses identify a set of gender dynamics that are not new. This is significant because feminist research has to be done within such dynamics. If the topics of gender, women or feminism are raised in conversation, women run the risk of attracting responses like those above. This means that researchers need to be careful about how they name their research. However, feminist research in design is still necessary because women still struggle with these dynamics. This is evidenced by Teena's data. One woman said:

I've adjusted my expectations. I'm just tired of being angry that there's so much bias and prejudice that I'm fighting against. If I make another inch in this lifetime, then good, and then the next generation, it's going to take many generations to change it. So I've shifted from a model where we thought that this was our right and that was natural, to a more realistic expectation that it wasn't going to be like that. And there were choices to be made about how much time was proportioned to work, and how much to life and family and responsibilities and what not. Not that I have children, but I have elderly relatives, and you just get older and well, re-think your expectations and all that stuff.<sup>9</sup>

In summary, women academics often feel disillusioned and frustrated at the lack of change in gendered power relations in design. In order to establish an empirical basis for these observations, Teena conducted an audit of “the numbers” as a way to map how the professional field and the academy are gendered. The aim of the audit was to identify the indicators of invisibility and absence of women in the field and the gendered division of labour in terms of power and prestige. The results show that in the design field in Australia, women represented a large proportion of practitioners and academics. In the international design literatures, 10–30% of articles focused on or were authored by women, whereas less than 10% of those acknowledged in design histories and industry awards were women. Furthermore, women comprised 30% of the editorial boards of the most influential international scholarly design journals. Yet the journals themselves attracted lower academic rankings than comparable art and architectural journals.

Although these scans were preliminary and approximate, the figures roughly correlated to women's positions more broadly in the university. Emerging from this map is a key paradox. Although women's involvement as academics was around 40%, their representation in the “canon” was less than 10%. This says something about the value and visibility of their contribution in a field where the academics were traditionally established and eminent practitioners.

Interestingly, Teena's initial response to noticing that women's representation at Associate Professor level and higher was 34% was “it's not as bad as I thought!” Despite their representation as 34% at these levels, women appeared to have to work harder to get there. On a closer look at the actual work women engaged in – the number of workload hours, the subjects taught (often first year subjects with large numbers of students and increased pastoral responsibilities), the increased administrative and promotional work, and the involvement in committees – a different picture emerged. This suggested that women often overcommitted workload hours with unacknowledged work such as protracted student consultations. This clearly indicated significant gendered power imbalances in design disciplines. Therefore, feminist research which is named as such is necessary.

Although Teena must travel incognito in the field, where are the spaces in which it is safe for her to name her work as feminist? And what are the risks of *not* naming it so? As suggested in Alison's opening piece, doctoral supervision is one of the spaces in which the work can safely be named and discussed as feminist. In Teena's doctoral study, supervision is a space of mutual learning among three women, a senior feminist academic, a senior design academic, and a novice feminist researcher who is also an experienced design practitioner and teacher. This is a collaborative and generative space in which mistakes can safely be made, feminism and writing research can be learned, and risks taken to do what might not otherwise be done. That is, Teena dares to call herself feminist, declare her ignorance, and practise writing in ways that identify her as feminist beyond the safe circle of doctoral supervision. By extension, collaborations such as the one from which this chapter has emerged are also possible.

Beyond the safety of the doctoral space, Teena faces multiple risks of her work being lost, dismissed or misread in design literatures. The predicament is then, if

not to “remake” feminism in design, what are her motivations for naming her research as feminist, and what new kinds of questions can be asked? How can Teena bring a feminist reading into a professional practice discipline? In so doing, she engages in a different kind of inquiry. New questions might be: How might this proceed? What are the new risks involved? In asking these questions, and in reflecting on what she is learning, Teena is developing “feminist literacies”. This means that Teena is beginning to be able to read and write texts in more open and less judgemental ways in relation to women’s positioning, actions, attitudes and values; to recognise universalised, binaristic, naturalistic, and generalised claims about the nature of the relationships between women and men; to read and evaluate feminist texts in other disciplines in such a way that she can identify the kind of feminism they signify and how they might contribute to her understanding of and application to her disciplinary context; and finally, to write with growing confidence about the mediated relations of power between women, men, practices, texts and research, without, for example, fear of theory, resorting to comparisons between femininities and masculinities, or slavishly following particular feminist research agendas, methodologies or practices.

#### CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: FEMINISTS WRITING RESEARCH

In this chapter we have discussed the conditions under which feminist research can be done in current times concluding that feminist research is both endangered (at risk) and dangerous (risky, but for whom?). Through a collaborative process of writing, we have provided a snapshot of current feminist research and discussed the conditions under which this work is done.

As Kate’s research demonstrates, feminist research writing is possible; however, uncertain times require feminist questions to be asked anew. Teena’s research illustrates the risks that feminist researchers take in order to ask these questions in new contexts, such as the recently academicised professional practice fields. Teena’s elucidation of the practices she engages in to “become feminist” points to the fact that feminist research is not definable by a particular method or methodology but is better understood as literacies (reading and writing practices) and sensibilities (how you think), and reminds us yet again that “it’s the questions you ask that matter”.<sup>10</sup>

We conclude that feminist writing is not a particular genre of writing; rather, it is writing that is informed by particular sets of questions (of gender and power) that must be remade for changing contexts and uncertain times, and it is our hope that in this way feminist research is enabled to live on in the university.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> On-the-record interview with Terry Threadgold, 2007, from Kate’s doctoral research.
- <sup>2</sup> This is not to say that feminist research has had no presence in professional practice disciplines. There are notable exceptions, see Buckley (1986), as an example. However, feminist theory and methods have not been taken up as widely in practice fields as in the humanities and social sciences.

- <sup>3</sup> As Diana Fuss explained, “essentialism is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity” (1989, p. xi).
- <sup>4</sup> The “linguistic turn” is a phrase used to describe a shift in focus towards language in philosophical thought and the humanities and social sciences generally in the 20th century (see Rorty, 1967). The linguistic turn radically altered the relation between language and reality, which in turn changed how feminists perceived the relation between academic knowledge production and helping “real” women.
- <sup>5</sup> See note i
- <sup>6</sup> On-the-record interview with Kate Lilley, 2007, from Kate’s doctoral research.
- <sup>7</sup> On-the-record interview with Dorothy Broom, 2006, from Kate’s doctoral research.
- <sup>8</sup> On-the-record interview with Ann Curthoys, 2007, from Kate’s doctoral research.
- <sup>9</sup> De-identified interview with a senior woman design academic, 2007, from Teena’s doctoral research.
- <sup>10</sup> On-the-record interview with Ann Curthoys, 2007, from Kate’s doctoral research.

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### 13. WRITING POLITICALLY

#### *Reflections on the Writing of Politics and the Politics of Writing*

#### RESEARCH AND/AS POLITICS

The political dimensions of qualitative inquiry can come as quite a surprise to novice researchers (and to more experienced researchers), and may lurk in the background as an often unspoken source of potential discomfiture. For those whose research training has taken place under prevailing empiricist orthodoxies, the very idea of writing politically may sit uncomfortably alongside that of research understood as an objective or "neutral" science. However, scholars across a range of disciplinary fields have been arguing for several decades that there is nothing theoretically or politically neutral about the various methods of inquiry and modes of representation that are encompassed under the rubric of qualitative research (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2007; Ellis et al., 2008). Qualitative inquiry comes into particular focus when considering the ways in which both researchers and research are positioned by, and in relation to, political activity and specific policy agendas. As Yvonna Lincoln and Gaile Cannella (2004, p.197) aptly pointed out, "research is not only political, it has never been more politicized than in the present". The field of qualitative inquiry has also been influential in opening up interdisciplinary dialogues about the politics of writing, calling upon the research community more broadly to consider the ways that power relations articulate with the meaning-making practices of qualitative research (Lingard, Schryer, Spafford, & Campbell, 2007).

These are important points for researchers in professional practice domains, situated as they so often are at the nexus of political and professional change, and speaking as they so often do to the contested knowledges, practices and power relations within a given field (Allen & Lyne, 2006; Cochran-Smith, 2006). In this chapter, therefore, I offer some reflections on both the politicised nature of research in recent times and on the politics of writing about, against and into the politically-charged discursive spaces of professional practice domains. The chapter is organised around three central premises. The first is that qualitative research in professional practice fields occupies contested and increasingly politicised discursive terrain, regardless of a particular researcher's substantive concerns, theoretical orientations, ideological positions or intended aims. Secondly, research and writing about contested and politicised professional practice contexts is a political act—a writing of politics—even if this is not the express aim of the research. Thirdly, the power relations—past, present, and future—that structure the positionality of researchers and research participants alike require ongoing

## Writing Qualitative Research on Practice

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Writing Qualitative Research on Practice brings together key authors in the field of qualitative research to critique current trends and expand discourse about the challenges and practices of writing qualitative research. This book is located in the context of professional practice and the practice world. It scopes and maps the broad horizons of qualitative research on practice and explores writing in major qualitative research traditions. A key issue addressed in writing qualitative research, particularly the narrative forms, is finding a way to write that encapsulates the goals and genre of the research project. Writing is presented as a process and journey and also a way of thinking and creating knowledge. Within research, writing is an essential expression of the research frame of reference and a key element of the research genre. This book explores writing for a range of publications including books, chapters, theses and papers for journals. The practical and accessible style of this book makes it an invaluable resource for postgraduate research students, teachers and supervisors and scholars of qualitative research.

ISBN 978-90-8790-906-2



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# PRACTICE, EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIETY

Volume 1

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SENSE PUBLISHERS  
ROTTERDAM/BOSTON/TAIPEI

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 978-90-8790-906-2 (Paperback)  
ISBN: 978-90-8790-907-9 (Hardback)  
ISBN: 978-90-8790-908-6 (ebook)

Published by: Sense Publishers,  
P.O. Box 21858, 3001 AW  
Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Printed on acid-free paper

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