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‘Common-sense’ research: Senses, emotions and embodiment in researching stag tourism in Eastern Europe

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Abstract

The article reflects on the experience of conducting participatory research with all-male premarital stag tour groups in Krakow, Poland. The research therefore concerns the performative and embodied aspects of hegemonic male behaviour that are encouraged and enacted by the British men who take part in such tours. Vital to the process of gaining an ethnographic insight into the highly gendered leisure spaces of the stag tourism phenomenon was a willingness to centre sensory, emotional and embodied data in the research process. Methodological reflections, therefore, recall the effects of conducting research in a setting mediated by the consumption of alcohol and collective drunkenness and pervaded with sensory (the thump of nightclub bass speakers, the drunken cheers of stag group participants, the smell of vodka) and emotive (feelings of elation, amusement and disgust) stimuli. Particular importance can be given to the benefit of mutual ‘common-sense’ experiences in building rapport between researchers and their participants. Such insights are of considerable epistemological value. In closing the article it is suggested that learning to recognise and work with such aspects of the research process is vital in developing effective research competencies.

Keywords: Embodiment, Emotion, Ethnography, Participant-observation, Sense.

Introduction

Over the last three decades ethnographic fieldwork, often characterised by but not limited to the use of participant-observation, has been subject to numerous critiques and its practitioners have undergone much soul-searching. Since the latter half of the 1980s, it is said to have experienced or have gone through a ‘crisis of representation’ whereby ‘researchers struggled with how to locate themselves and their subjects in reflexive texts’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:2) and an associated crisis of legitimacy which questions the authority and truth claims traditionally made by such research. In response to this critique, ethnography has sought to reclaim a workable usage of researcher subjectivities primarily through their acknowledgment and through embedding within research the practice of ‘reflexivity’ (Coffey, 1999).

Central to the concerns of these developments is the re-evaluation of the importance of the subjective experience of the researcher. Sensory, embodied and emotive aspects of the fieldwork encounter, which have previously been marginalised in favour of an emphasis on observation alone, are increasingly seen as viable avenues in the process of knowledge generation. In this article, I discuss the importance of senses, emotions and embodiment in my own experience of conducting fieldwork with British stag tourists in the Polish city of Kraków. Each of these three themes was central to my attempts, through participant-observation, to understand the experience of stag tourism. Through reflection on fieldwork it is possible to recognise the importance of sensory, embodied and emotive features of fieldwork and their importance in knowledge generation.

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The article will first give some contextual and methodological detail of the research undertaking before exploring some of the recent insights which have sought to develop an ethnographic practice which takes full account of the senses, embodiment and emotions of social research. Reflection on fieldwork then illustrates these themes in relation to participation with groups of stag tourists. It is suggested that these offer methodological insights both in terms of the practicalities of doing research and, more broadly, the epistemological understanding of the stag tour phenomenon. Finally, I explore the ways in which the themes intersect and interact.

Stag tourism in Eastern Europe

The research from which these reflections are drawn was a qualitative study of premarital stag tourism made by groups of British men to Eastern European cities. Typically, the stag tour weekend will involve a group of male friends travelling to another city and staying for two or three days in which time the group will participate in a range of activities and entertainment. Daytime activities might include go-cart racing, paintball, pistol shooting, white-water rafting or tank driving. Invariably, the evening and night-time is given over to drinking and the pursuit of collective drunkenness in the form of a bar or pub ‘crawl’ where a range of drinking establishments are visited in sequence often ending with entry to a nightclub or strip club. The body is central to this, at times being exhibited quite literally through public nudity and drunken bodily comportment, as are emotions such as joy and excitement. As a social phenomenon, the stag tour is replete with sensory, embodied and emotive practice.

The stag tour weekend involves a group of male friends and, in some instances, male family members, coming together and travelling to a foreign city to spend time celebrating the coming marriage of the groom or ‘stag’. More precisely, the stag weekend ritualistically marks the changing status of the man who is about to enter into marriage and, symbolically at least, is seen to leave the homosocial, fraternal, peer group. Through drinking and collective drunkenness, shared activities and the mutual pursuit of fun, playfulness and ‘good times’, the stag weekend is constructed as a collective masculine experience.

Over the course of a year, participant-observation was conducted with eight British stag groups in the Polish city of Kraków. This participation consisted of a range of activities and engagements. I talked to participants, drank and ate with them, walked the streets of the city from bar to bar and listened to their telling of stories and jokes. Participation within the group was facilitated by the fact that my own personal characteristics closely resembled those of the majority of stag tourists. I am white, heterosexual and in a long-term relationship, from a middle-class background and was, at the time of conducting the research, in my mid-twenties. Given the importance of the stag tour group as a collective entity and as a tightly bonded homosocial group, these similarities played a notable role in gaining access, acceptance, and making my presence within the groups viable. Had a female researcher, for instance, attempted to utilise the same approach it is likely she would have experienced a different response and, possibly, greater challenges.

Fieldwork involved sensory (the thump of nightclub bass speakers, the drunken cheers of stag group participants, the smell of vodka) and emotive (feelings of elation, amusement and disgust) stimuli. Through the use of qualitative, in situ, methods I sought an insight into the nature of the stag tour experience which was particularly attuned to the methodological importance of giving due regard to my own embodied experience as a researcher. These three themes – senses, emotions and embodiments – are worthy of reflection because they are themselves means of knowing and elements of a research process which itself cannot be limited to mere observation.

The significance of the three themes arising from my own personal experience of fieldwork researching stag tourism reflects changes in the theorisation of tourism as a social phenomenon. Prompted by the initially ground-breaking work of John Urry (1990) on the ‘tourist gaze’, numerous critiques have sought to overcome the privileging of gazing or observation as the sole or primary characteristic of touristic behaviour. Moving away from this focus on the visual, therefore, has involved a necessary focus on the body and the senses; on what the tourist *does*, as ‘the tourist ‘doing tourism’’ (Crouch *et al*, 2001:254). David Crouch, among others, has sought to reinstate the importance of a wider range of embodied practices which constitute the tourism

experience (Crouch and Desforges, 2003). Such an emphasis is typified by the collection *Tourism: Between Place and Performance* which, as editors Simon Coleman and Mike Crang (2002:7) rightly point out, 'highlights a more dynamic sense of embodied and performed as well as visualised engagement with places and tourist activities'. In stag tourism we find an overt celebration of the sensuous pleasures of drinking and the embodied feeling of drunkenness. To adequately engage with this, it can be argued, highlights the importance of reflecting upon and developing epistemological knowledge from the methodological challenges of qualitative, participatory, fieldwork.

'Being there': Critiques and developments in ethnographic practice

While critiques have prompted the acknowledgment of the contingencies of ethnographic knowledge and the notable limits of researcher subjectivities, there remains a desire to access a firsthand insight, a sense of 'being there' (Borneman and Hammoudi, 2009). This in itself has often been problematic when the subjectivities of individual researchers are overlooked or, where present, give rise to accusations of self-absorption and solipsism. However, there is much to be gained from acknowledging that researchers are themselves emotional and embodied. Amanda Coffey (1999) argues for the inclusion of this 'ethnographic self' which is embodied and subject to desires and emotions as epistemologically worthy. The subjectivities of the research, it is argued, are valued and unavoidable elements of the research process.

Emotions

There is a tendency for researchers to hide or ignore, unless tactfully promoted, the emotional impact of conducting fieldwork (Pollard, 2009). In relation to her research within the male dominated 'boy racer' subculture, Karen Lumsden (2009) argues that such feelings should be acknowledged. She recounts the emotions involved in biting one's tongue rather than contesting opinions of participants with whose opinions or behaviour she disagreed. Steven Schacht observes of his participatory research on the drinking rituals and sexist behaviour of American college sports teams that 'researchers often stumble upon ethnographic settings that are rich in theoretical potential but are inherently grounded in participants' views that directly oppose their own' (Schacht, 1997:341). In the case of my own research, it was in large part the notoriety of stag tourism and media coverage of the drunken transgressions of British men in foreign cities which piqued my interest in studying the phenomenon sociologically.

Negative emotions experienced during fieldwork are often important sources of knowledge about the topic under research. They can shed light on the researchers own perceptions, assumptions and prejudices as being in themselves important sources of understanding (Holland, 2007). For example, Blee (1998), in her research with racists groups in the USA, reflects that emotions such as fear felt during interactions with participants gave an important insight into the workings of the phenomenon itself. As Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (2007:151) observe, 'feelings of personal conflict, anxiety, surprise, shock, or revulsion are of analytical significance'. The emotions involved in social research are frequently important indicators of the sociological nature of the people, groups or institutions being studied.

Senses

In a similar manner to the sidelining of emotional aspects of fieldwork, sensory engagement with the field has, traditionally, been limited to the visual perceptions which come with an emphasis on observation as the primary ethnographic tool. Taste, smell and touch are all noticeably absent from many ethnographic accounts. The anthropologist Paul Stoller (1989; 1997) argues for the inclusion of sensory aspects of fieldwork as a vital element of understanding. Thus, reflecting on his initial arrival for his fieldwork in Niger, West Africa, he recalls feeling 'assailed' by sensual stimuli only for such to become 'distanciated, intellectualized – taken out of the realm of sensual sentiment' (Stoller, 1989:4). Through engaging with and reflecting on the senses of the field the researcher can generate insights which go beyond those possible through visual observation.

Engaging with the sensory qualities of the field is an important means for the researcher to place themselves in the research setting. Hazel Andrews (2005) notes the smell of vomit as being an integral aspect of her

fieldwork in the tourist towns on the Spanish island of Mallorca. For Andrews, experiencing the field with her senses is an important element of her own engagement with and perception of her subject of study. Coming to know her field, then, involves picking up on such sensory stimuli. While we might take as given the ethnographer's attempts to observe and learn to see the minutia of the field, we place less emphasis on the wider complexities of sensory engagement with place. Here, becoming attuned to the smell of the setting is crucial to knowing place. Such sensory engagements with one's research setting are part of process of place-making and knowledge formation (Pink, 2008a; Pink, 2008b).

Embodiment

As noted above, tourism studies has been criticised for not engaging with the embodiment which is fundamental to the experience of being a tourist. Veijola and Jokenen's (1994) seminal critique of the absence of the body and embodied experiences in early attempts to theorise tourism gave early warning that to give primacy to the practice of tourist gazing, and in turn the researcher's own emphasis on observation, was to deny the importance of the body as a research tool. More recently, Margaret Swain (2004:116) notes that 'if bodies are invisible or silenced in qualitative research, we are missing a very rich source of data and denying a method of investigation that acknowledges the researcher's complicity in knowledge-building'. The researcher's own body develops a tacit and tactile relationship within fieldwork through which important insights can be gained. In this light, the inclusion of embodied knowledge in the study of tourism is built on two principles. First, that tourism practice and experience is inescapably embodied. Second, that the researcher's own body is an important source of epistemological understanding.

It is significant that the bodily sensations of fieldwork are themselves seen as an important source of knowledge and subjected to the same reflexive practice which is now commonly utilised in relation to research identity and positionality. Amanda Coffey develops the notion of the researcher as an embodied self as part of the wider reflexive turn in ethnography, stressing that 'fieldwork is necessarily an embodied activity' (Coffey, 1999:59). Thus, we can argue that 'because these knowledges of the body are embedded with meanings that filter and guide our experiences in the field, they will obviously inform and influence what we write' (Madison, 2005:195). Understanding how our embodiments in the field shape, constrain and enable the development of sociological knowledge is, as such, a pressing task for all social researchers.

An interesting development, and one which perhaps nicely brings together these three themes and how they can be made use of in fieldwork, is the move to understand the role of the embodied practice of walking as part of the research process (Edensor, 2008; Ingold and Vergunst, 2008; Vergunst, 2010). As with the more general discussions of embodiment in fieldwork, the act of walking can be seen as a way for both researcher and researched to make sense of, and sensuously engage with, their environment. Thus, 'the movement of walking is itself a way of knowing' (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008:5). Margarethe Kusenbach (2003:464) recommends as a useful methodological tool a form of participatory walking, 'go-alongs', which 'intentionally aim at capturing the stream of perceptions, emotions and interpretations that informants usually keep to themselves'. As the next section of the article shall discuss, some of the most illuminating moments of my own fieldwork where precisely the times when walking with, talking to, stag tour group participants revealed the complexities of the stag tour experience.

Finding yourself in the field

Senses

With much of the weekend given over to the corporeal pleasures of eating, drinking and dancing, sensory stimuli are an integral aspect of the stag tour experience. Firstly, it is worth noting, this gave rise to particular practical concerns in how research was conducted. The subtlety and tact I tried to cultivate during previous research or when conducting interviews was easily lost to the thump of nightclub bass speakers as I tried to speak to my participants and found myself shouting above the music. Further, the understanding that the weekend was structured by the pursuit of the corporeal pleasures of eating, drinking and dancing was in many ways antithetical to the 'serious' business of conducting research. Beyond this, two sensory facets of the

phenomenon are of particular interest and will be discussed in turn. First, the taste of alcoholic beverages consumed in the field by both participants and researcher and, second, the sound of the group, a boisterous mixture of cheering, laughter and shouted expletives.

Throughout fieldwork, the centrality of drinking alcohol pervaded the activities and behaviour of stag groups. As a participant with groups, I was willing to partake in at least some of this and would regularly share beers with group members although refrained from trying to match them drink for drink. Participating in a round of beers or the downing of vodka shots held particular significance for group membership. At least some level of drinking was expected as a precondition of entry into the stag tour group. Drinking and drunkenness bound together the group and often turned seemingly banal moments into moments of excitement and spectacle. Sharing, at least in part, in this consumption of alcohol meant that the taste and smell of vodka became important in orientating my senses to those of participants during fieldwork.

More complex, perhaps, is the auditory stimulus which, throughout my fieldwork, became associated with the stag tour phenomenon and, as will be discussed below, came to embody the emotional ambivalence often present in my interactions with research participants. This particular noise made by stag tour groups which combined laughter, drunken shouts and name calling, cheering and goading blended to produce a distinctive collective sound or atmosphere which pervaded interactions with the groups. This general hubbub is indicative of the phenomenon in its merging of individual vocal exclamations; this in itself is deeply symbolic of the wider ethos of the stag tour that individuals yield to a collective sense of fun, disinhibition and boisterousness.

It is, of course, possible to render the significance of both these findings on the basis of observation; with common field diary entries remarking to the effect of *The group stand in a circle and count 3-2-1 before downing vodka shots, some cringing as they gulp back the liquid* and *Alex trips as he walks through the door into the bar, the others laugh and jeer*. Indeed, anthropologists and ethnographers can, and always have, aimed to capture such moments through the rich, vivid and evocative details of their written accounts. Yet, a deeper experience of these sensory moments does not readily translate to verbatim quotes as in the case of more subdued and measured interpersonal dialogue. However, such sensory qualities are often hugely valuable in making sense of the field.

One interesting aspect of the role of senses in fieldwork is that they offer a means of recollection, a way of reliving the vivid nature of the fieldwork encounter, in ways that written text such as jotted field notes often fails to capture. Both for the researcher attempting to render the depth of qualitative fieldwork and for their eventual audience, sensory stimuli are often a meaningful way into representations of the field. The French sociologist Loïc Wacquant gave fine credence to this when, speaking at the 2010 Annual Conference of the British Sociological Association, he remarked that the best way for readers to engage with his ethnographic study of a boxing gym on the impoverished South Side of Chicago, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an apprentice boxer* (2004), would be to play an audio track of the sounds of the gym whilst they read the text. Likewise, Vergunst (2010) reveals himself to be listening to an audio recording of an Aberdeen street, the site of his fieldwork, while writing up his findings. The drunken racket of a stag tour group making their way through the cobbled streets of Kraków, the strained breathing of boxers as they train and pound the heavy bag or the footsteps, car horns and snatched snippets of passing conversations on a Scottish high street all appeal to a sensory attachment with the particular field of study which offers important insights not readily captured through observation alone.

Emotions

As with senses, it became apparent during fieldwork that there was a need to address the emotions which are a constituent part of the stag tour experience. As a pre-wedding ritual, the stag tour is a celebration of the coming marriage of one member of the group. As one would expect, this translates into a sense of fun and festivity amongst group members. However, there is also an underlying theme of loss. Commonly, groups played up to the feeling that the stag tour was in fact marking the removal of the soon to be married stag from the homosocial group. Such emotions, both highs and lows, would become manifest in ceremonial activities

staged as part of the stag tour ranging from toasting the stag with a speech attesting to the group's friendship to elaborate practical jokes designed to humiliate and embarrass the stag.

There were many times when the humour and excitement of the groups was overwhelming. The stag tour is a time of heightened excitement, fun and playfulness. Often, it was easy to be drawn into this, to enjoy the company of the group, their relaxed humour and quick wit. Further, the very setting and context of the stag tour lends itself to feelings of camaraderie and often encourages bonding and group cohesion. Meeting groups for the first time I was more often than not warmly welcomed and subject to notable efforts to make me feel part of the group, buying me drinks, asking me questions, telling me stories and jokes.

However, as a researcher, feelings associated with negative reactions to the frequently insensitive or, at least, puerile behaviour of participants were common. It was possible, therefore, to at one point in the evening be struck by the humour and sociability of stag group participants only to later, and with the very same participants, feel emotions of embarrassment and disgust when one member of the group vomits in the corner of the nightclub dance floor or makes vulgar comments to the barmaid. This is quite evident from this extract from a personal email describing one of my journeys to Poland:

'5am in the Wetherspoons pub in Stansted Airport and there are 20 guys in black and pink shirts with nicknames like 'big boy' and 'donkey' written across the back. All eating fry ups and already drinking, already pissed and shouting. So much SHOUTING! How embarrassing!'

This reflection, made towards the end of the fieldwork period, reveals that more than an initial shock at the behaviour of some participants which was soon acclimatised to, emotive reactions to the field and participants are a useful gauge of one's own positionality and preferences.

Managing such ambivalent emotional responses to our participants, those who have been benevolent in allowing us access, for a time, into their lives, can be a challenging and ultimately draining component of fieldwork practice. However, while a social researcher might seek to develop their skills in impression management and in many cases stifle or hide their 'true' emotional response to the comments and actions of participants, there is considerable value in acknowledging the epistemological nature of such emotions. Indeed, my feelings of anger or annoyance when seeing a stag tourist treat a local resident with hostility or condescension goes to the heart of a central dynamic of the phenomenon itself. The strong opinions held within Kraków in relation to stag tourists and their impact upon the city were complex and often highly critical. While a focus on the positive emotions associated with participating with groups is important, it is clear that reflecting on the negative emotional responses is also a significant means of better engaging with the topic of study.

Embodiment

It is again prudent to reflect on some practicalities associated with the embodiment of fieldwork practice. As such, during fieldwork I tried to present myself to an extent to fit in with the group. Wearing shirt and smart shoes in case the group planned to go to a club or bar with a dress code was all part of this process of 'fitting in' and learning to deploy my body within the research setting. Beyond this, I was conspicuously aware of how to place my body as the groups sat, stood or danced in different bars and clubs. In this sense, participation with the group was embodied in the sense that quietly standing at the edge of the group observing embodies a different relationship to that generated when one is positioned within and as part of the group. The researcher's body is the primary site of the presentation of self during fieldwork. This presentation of self is unavoidably gendered; my embodied presence in the group was made possible by my enactment of an embodied masculinity.

The bar crawl in many ways epitomises much of the meaning bestowed upon the stag tour experience by participants. The group walk together, often four or five abreast, emphasising their collectivity. As they walk they joke and laugh, engage in irreverent banter within the group or, at times, with passersby. By accident or intention, they stumble, sometimes quite literally, upon a new café, pub or bar. The sense of fun and

disinhibition which is central to the stag script is embodied in this collective walk. It took participation with the group and to some extent feeling this embodied experience to understand the significance of the bar crawl. Likewise, meeting participants the next day as they slowly stroll through the town, noticeably hung-over and suffering the effects of the previous night, perhaps stopping to drink coffee or eat breakfast at a café to fortify themselves for another night of heavy drinking, was an important means of understanding the shifts and changes in pace the stag tour gives rise to.

Walking with participants is ‘a learning process of being together, in adjusting one’s body and one’s speech to the rhythms of others, and of sharing (or at least coming to see) a point of view’ (Lee and Ingold, 2006:83). As such, walking in the streets and squares of the city becomes an act of place-making. Walking abreast with the stag tour group as they meander towards the next stop on their pub crawl itself is an important act of generating knowledge about the setting. Likewise, a Monday afternoon spent walking the city streets once the stag tourists have left is important element of constructing Krakow as an ‘ethnographic place’. The two different acts of motion, Saturday night walking *en masse* with stag tourists and Monday afternoon leisurely strolling to a café to sit and write up field notes, are indeed part of the same process by which I came to better understand both the spatial and embodied nature of the phenomenon being studied and the process of studying it itself.

Walking in cities is subject to certain constraints. ‘People walking through cities are expected to walk at moderate pace and to progress in linear fashion. They should not express themselves in ways that are too unexpected or overly expansive, nor should they dance, run, or display a *jouissance* of movement’ (Edensor, 2008:125). Stag tourists step outside of this expectation – walking with them as they do so is part of the embodied experience of the research. Through participation, being one more body in the crowd, I was myself adding to this physicality. Certainly, being part of the group rather than watching from the outside gives rise to a different embodied experience; being part of the group collectivity rather than being an outside observer. The next section of the article will reflect on how this embodiment, as well as senses and emotions, relate to the form and nature of my participation with stag tour groups.

‘Common-sense’: sharing the field

The stag tour is built on an ethos of ‘all being *in it* together’. It is a collective experience of homosocial bonding and one which readily revokes those individuals who contradict the ethos of fun, play and release. During the initial introductions with participant groups, a common question was ‘will you be drinking?’ or ‘are you *allowed* to drink?’. The positive answer, yes I would drink, was always warmly welcomed. Indeed, there was some mileage in playing against the stereotype of the research as detached rational observer which many participants held. Being willing to share in drinking and feelings of drunkenness was integral to gaining access to the groups. This sharing of the bodily sensations of stag tourism became an important facilitator of engagement with participants. For example, with members of one stag group I stood, or rather leant, ‘propping up the bar’ and sipping Polish Żywiec beer whilst watching other members of the group drunkenly dancing on the nearby dance floor. This ethnographic ‘moment’ involved sharing in this relaxed posture, sensing the rhythms of the music, the taste of the cold beer and the sight of the increasingly over the top ‘ironic’ 1980s disco inspired dancing.

Sarah Pink (2008b:186) makes an important link between senses and sociality in observing that ‘these points of contact are made through ‘shared’ knowledge of taste, texture and talk’. The suggestion here is that sharing embodied sensations associated with the field helps the researcher develop closer connections with participants. Drawing on the work of American ethnographer Dwight Conquergood, Madison (2005:167) acknowledges the importance of ‘coevalness’ based on ‘the temporality of a shared experience in which bodies are present together in time’. These shared, mutual or common moments are perhaps more readily accessed through the senses, the emotions and through the body than through observation which, by definition, typically remains in some way detached or distant.

There is a need, of course, to acknowledge that to achieve an ‘insider’ account is not possible and my taste, both literal and metaphorical, of the stag tour experience remains just that, both personal and partial. Indeed,

my sensing of the rhythms of the nightclub, the taste and smell of beer and vodka, even the smell of vomit of inebriated stag tourists were all written through with the primary motive of gaining qualitative data with which to construct ethnographic text. Evidently, the points of social contact fostered by sensory and embodied moments within the field are vital in engaging with participants. The benefits of this are twofold. First, on a practical level, invoking such shared experiences or 'common-sense' was central to developing rapport with participants. My evident readiness to actively participate rather than simply observe fostered ground for mutual understanding. Second, on an epistemological level it gives embodied insight which is in itself a valuable avenue of analysis and knowledge generation. For example, jottings made in the field and more developed field notes written up soon after, when viewed retrospectively, still capture a particular character and sense of the event. Although in some ways the development of extensive field notes was detrimentally affected by the specific setting and context, not least in terms of memory and recollection following participation in at least part of the collective drinking of the groups, there is clearly epistemological worth in field diary entries which capture some of the immediacy and emotion of the field of which the embodied feelings of sociability and inebriation were central.

Discussion

Reflection on these issues represents, in many ways, a cathartic practice; part and parcel of removal from the field. In common with some of Amy Pollard's (2009) respondents, the fieldwork experience involved an array of emotions including guilt, shame and embarrassment (as well as, it should be reiterated, positive feelings as discussed above). Beyond post-fieldwork reflection, these emotions are important elements of coming to know the field. In a response to Pollard's article discussing interviews with doctoral researchers, Judith Okely (2009:1) states that 'aspects of fieldwork which interviewees regarded as failures and sources of guilt were potentially key avenues for knowledge'.

It was noted above how the characteristic stag noise, a mixture of laughter, cheering and shouting, became a significant sensory locus in the research. This sound, and my reaction to it as a researcher, is itself symptomatic of an interesting division within the phenomenon. From outside the group looking in, one feels a sense of disgust or distain when faced with the hubbub of the general melee. From the inside, however, the same noises become a marker of inclusion and collectivity; as a participating individual you also contribute through the addition of your own laughter or comments and your embodiment as part of the collective group. This, perhaps, indicates the embodied nature of research ethics where the sensory and emotive response to the actions and behaviour of participants is notably contingent upon the researcher's own embodiment of the research field. The sound of drunken laughter, cheering and shouting is a potent sensory reminder of your position as researcher. Conducting fieldwork with stag tourists brings this marking of group boundaries to the fore.

As noted above, my fitting in with the groups drew on a sense of performing a required gendered embodiment as a young, white, heterosexual man. So too, then, did participation within the research setting give rise to reflections on my own embodied gendered self in terms of my own ability and desire, or lack of, to 'fit in' through enacting a certain embodied masculinity. Participation would, at times, feel like a test where my continued access to the group and the success of my research undertaking hinged on my ability to adequately present myself in the confident and outgoing manner necessitated by the gender embodiment characteristic of the phenomenon.

This is illustrated with a moment from fieldwork where, waiting at a prearranged point to meet a stag group and hearing their approach raised feelings of fear and revulsion which prompted the desire, indeed, need to get away. In this moment, an emotional reaction to a sensory aspect of fieldwork is embodied in the feeling of unease and the urge to avoid participation. Waiting to meet a group of participants whilst feeling tired, introverted and fretful when faced with the coming noise and bustle of the stag tour group, the intersection of the sensory, embodied and emotive nature of fieldwork is clear. Sensory stimuli impact upon and help shape emotions and memory in relation to the fieldwork experience and the generation of situated and embodied knowledge which emerges from it.

Emotions and senses are, as such, closely related. The taste of alcohol and the feeling of ease brought on by the initial stages of drunkenness associated with it are irrevocably linked. The physical sensations of fatigue and tiredness the following morning blend with various concerns and emotions following the previous night's engagement with participants. Even several years after the completion of fieldwork, a connection between these sensation and the emotions of conducting research persists. Another benefit of a qualitative methodology which takes greater account of these complex interconnections is that sensory data becomes a valuable tool for recollection. The smell and taste of Zubrowka, a brand of Polish vodka flavoured with 'bison' herbal grass, brings on an almost Proustian moment of recollection where memories and emotions of fieldwork return through sensory experience.

The notion of 'sensory competencies' (Hockey, 2009:491) which we more readily associate with the embodiment of work and occupational skill, are also of use in explaining our own endeavours as social researchers. I would argue that those involved in qualitative social research must be both aware of the importance of sensory and embodied aspects of the research experience and open to, where possible, the improving of our perceptions and abilities to recognise and work with these personal subjectivities. Senses, emotions and embodied feelings are equally worthy of the attention and practice given to developing ethnographic observation as a research method and a way of engaging with fieldwork and research participants.

Conclusion

The paper has reflected on elements of qualitative research relating my personal experiences of emotive, sensory and embodied practice of fieldwork. Each is related to the others; each is an essential element of knowing the field. Giving due credit to these aspects of fieldwork, therefore, can be summarised in two ways. First, through sensory, embodied and emotive engagement within the field, through sharing in these subjective aspects of the phenomenon being studied, the researcher can facilitate the creation and maintenance of rapport with participants. Through this engagement, I would suggest, the researcher gains a closer relationship and a more meaningful co-presence with participants in the field. Indeed, a willingness to share in these felt subjectivities is often a precondition to entry into the group. Such sensory and emotive responses within the field are excellent indicators of the nature of involvement with participants and, further, say something unique about the precarious relationship between researcher and researched.

Second, and more directly, how the researcher experiences and comes to know the sensory aspects of the field are in and of themselves valued means of knowing. This is particularly evident in research such as that conducted with stag tourists where sensory stimuli and emotional caprices are integral to the phenomenon itself. However, even in an area such as the study of tourist behaviour and experience where the pursuit of physical pleasure and sensation is overt, privileging the body and the senses as meaningful both as components of social practice and in the generation of knowledge about such practice has been hard-fought. Further to this, this approach might also be seen as a relatively untapped means of accessing knowledge about states of intoxication where, as with the collective drunkenness of the stag tour, embodied knowledge is a significant marker of inclusion and one which evidently pervades how the phenomenon is understood by participants.

Because of the contributions of Amanda Coffey on reflexivity and embodiment, Sarah Pink on visual and sensory fieldwork and Tim Ingold on walking as ethnographic method, significant progress has been made in reappraising the importance of a range of researcher subjectivities in qualitative fieldwork. These insights, however, remain difficult to formalise for they interact in unique and unpredictable ways depending on the research context. This is precisely their value for it is the complex mixture of the researcher's own positionality, dispositions and embodied selfhood with those of his or her participants that gives rise to in-depth qualitative insights into social phenomena. The sensory, emotional and embodied challenges of fieldwork are integral to the rigors of qualitative social research. Each researcher, in this sense, must come to terms with themselves in relation to and through their own experiences of research practice.

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Biography

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