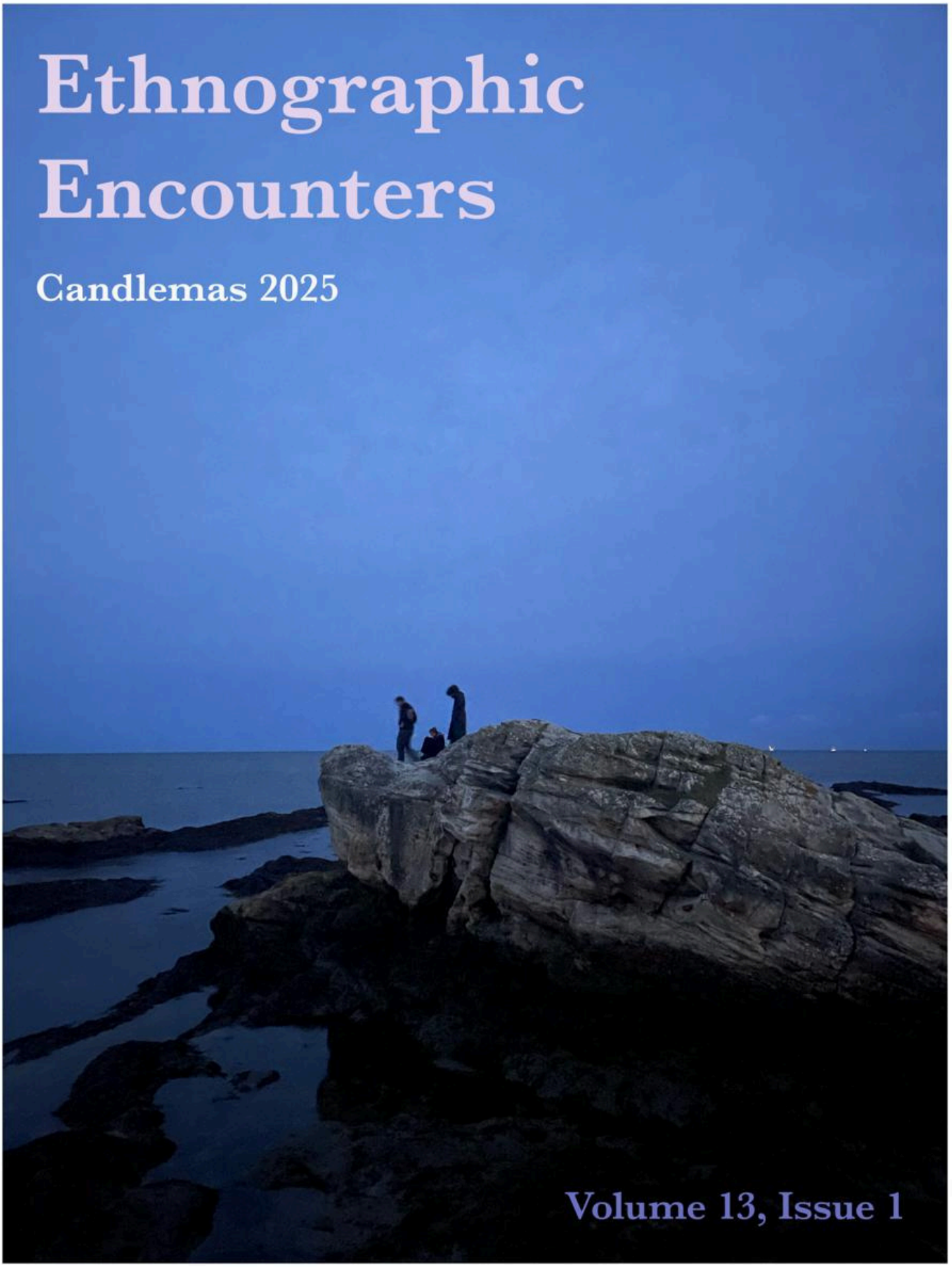
Ethnographic Encounters

Candlemas 2025



Volume 13, Issue 1

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ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS JOURNAL

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EDITOR'S NOTE

We are thrilled to present the long-awaited new edition of Ethnographic Encounters Journal – our first publication after a three-year hiatus. This marks a new chapter for the EEJ, one that blends renewal with a return to our foundational ethos of showcasing the depth and breadth of student scholarship in social anthropology.

In many ways, this issue takes us back to our roots. At its heart, EEJ continues to showcase the remarkable projects emerging from the Ethnographic Encounters module, undertaken by second-year students. These projects represent students' first foray into the field, where they explore topics that capture their curiosity and conduct ethnographic research for the first time.

In this volume, the diversity of student projects highlights the wide-ranging potential of ethnographic inquiry, with themes spanning activism, institutional life, identity, and interpersonal connection. Several projects critically examine the structures shaping daily experiences: Alyssa Morgan explores how commuting impacts student life and belonging; Victoria Lee investigates non-academic staff perspectives within a marketised university; and Celina Chen documents student-led protests for Palestine, revealing the emotional and political dimensions of activism. Other contributions focus on identity, exclusion, and modes of expression: Theus De'ath offers an artistic reflection on the marginalisation of autistic voices in academia; Alabama Michaud explores how immigrant taxi drivers navigate language and belonging in St Andrews; and Cristina Grohmann examines 'latrinalia' in a local bar bathroom as a space of student solidarity. Finally, Emily Kneppers, Ella Roberts, and Olivia Douglas delve into social bonds and community: Emily Kneppers analyses the complexities

of friendship in ethnographic fieldwork; Ella Roberts investigates the role of gossip and "the debrief" in female student friendships; and Olivia Douglas reveals how cold-water swimming fosters ecological awareness and reimagined relationships with nature. Together, these projects showcase the creativity, critical engagement, and depth of insight emerging from the second-year Ethnographic Encounters projects.

While returning to our initial focus, we are equally embracing a broader, more experimental approach. This edition introduces a new strand of work: autoethnographies. Also created by second-year students, these articles use autoethnographic methodology to explore the self as both subject and site of anthropological enquiry. Through embodied reflection and critical self-analysis, these contributions offer fresh perspectives on the experiential and affective dimensions of fieldwork.

This volume's autoethnographies offer varied reflections on embodied experience, sensory engagement, and social critique. Several explore sensory and embodied practices: Jennifer Matthews immerses readers in the multi-sensorial world of wild swimming; Elena Azais Tatistscheff examines the everyday sensory complexities of washing dishes through visual and narrative forms; and Katherine Price reflects on the interplay of senses and memory during a coastal walk. Others engage with embodied physical and creative practices as sites of identity and emotion: Skye Parkes recounts the embodied and gendered experience of aikido practice, while Kazi Gilman uses stop-motion animation to investigate creativity, procrastination, and material humour. Themes of social norms, identity, and cultural critique emerge in Daryl Lamb's article, which critically analyses beauty rituals at a salon through a feminist lens, and in Tara Phillips' contribution, where a barefoot walk acts as a symbolic disruption exposing implicit social hierarchies. Lastly, Camila Gomez and Laura Marquez Navas focus on cultural meaning: Camila Gomez explores spice and globalisation through an embodied dining experience, while Laura Marquez Navas navigates nostalgia and diasporic identity via the making of a carnival costume. Together, these autoethnographies demonstrate how personal narrative and sensory detail deepen anthropological insight and challenge conventional understandings.

As we relaunch EEJ, we do so with a deep sense of excitement and commitment to supporting the outstanding research carried out by anthropology students at the University of St Andrews. We hope this new era of the journal will continue to inspire, challenge, and expand the possibilities of undergraduate anthropology.

Welcome back to Ethnographic Encounters.

Sophie Cooper

Editor-in-Chief

JOURNAL HISTORY

Ethnographic Encounters was founded in 2011 by Zoe Miller, Emily Sheppard and Dr. Craig Lind to provide a platform for undergraduate students in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of St Andrews to share their outstanding ethnographic research.

Inspired by the Ethnographic Encounters project that that second-year students in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of St Andrews do every spring where they conduct their own fieldwork project, the journal highlights the diversity of anthropological inquiry undertaken by students.

After a hiatus, this issue marks our return to publishing and a recommitment to our dedication to showcasing original ethnographic work that reflects the diverse research and perspectives from students within the department.

We remain a student-run journal, and our articles include essays based on fieldwork undertaken during a second-year project to experimental autoethnographic writing.

Our online archives can be found at: https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/SAEE/issue/archive

With special thanks to the University of St Andrews' Department of Social Anthropology.

Editorial Team

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of St Andrews for its continued support of Ethnographic Encounters. Special thanks go to Dr Tony Crook, whose guidance as academic link has been invaluable in bringing the journal back to life. Finally, we are deeply grateful to our authors for sharing their thoughtful and inspiring work – this journal would not exist without you.

Part 1

AUTOETHNOGRAPHIES

Embodied experience in a tidal pool: An autoethnography of sense engagement: 'A dook in the Neuk'

Jennifer Matthews

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic encounter reflects on my own wild swimming experience which I use as the base for an autoethnographic study of this outdoor activity. I have put myself forward as both researcher and subject. I look at the sensory aspects of the experience which include smell, touch, taste, and sound to present a more self-reflective picture of wild swimming. I report that wild swimming is an embodied experience which invigorates the senses creating a feeling of euphoria and community amongst those that participate. The research adds to what is known about wild swimming by presenting a nuanced emotional and in-depth analysis of the practice. This research shows the worth of autoethnography in reporting on the complex issues of embodied experience which in turn allows both inside members of the wild swimming community to be better understood and entice potential interest of outsiders in experiencing a new sense given by wild swimming.

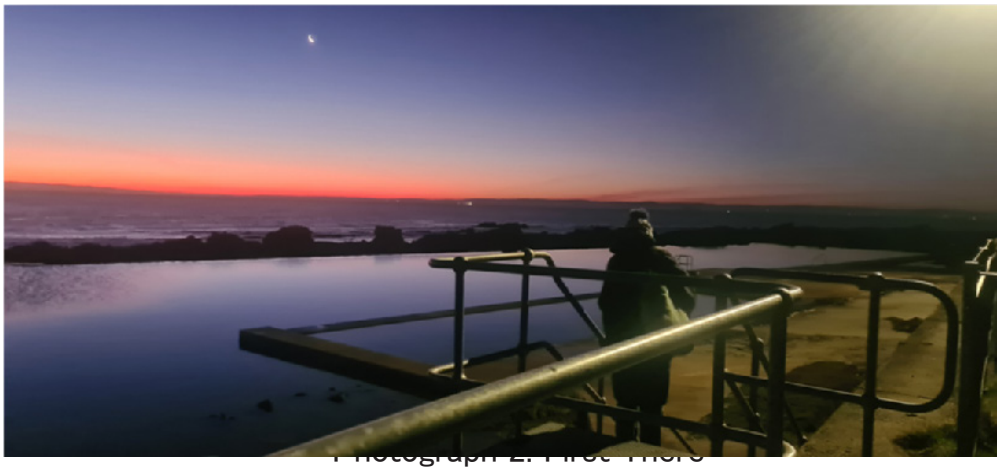
Photograph 1: High Tide

'Bodies can move as they want, fluid and free to experience the water in diverse and inclusive ways' (Bates & Moles 2024: 892).

There in my happy place, surrounded by sea water (Photograph 1). Breaststroke is the preferred stroke of movement for two reasons: Firstly, preventing my bobble hat from getting wet. Secondly, it allows me to part the tidal water through my fingers. Salt, on food I dislike but the taste is a satisfaction of the flavour of being outdoors. Being a participant in outdoor swimming is an addiction, as an individual, a community or knowing someone will always be there (Wise 2019).

In using Ghodsee's "use a subject you love" to conduct the relationship between experience and writing no other activity came to mind (2016: 9). The methodology was autoethnography through the "process and product" (Ellis, et al. 2011: 273) of "evocative research grounded in (my) personal experience" (Ellis, et al. 2011: 274). Although influencing the produced outcome, it makes the whole endeavour open, honest and a "thicker" (Poulos 2021) description to both "insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers)" (Ellis, et al. 2011; 275). I propose to reverse the participant observation, to "observation of participation" through Tedlock's "coparticipation within the ethnographic encounter" (1991: 69). The central aim of bodily engagement through the sensory components is at the nucleus of wild swimming: "Wild swimming is an incredible way to simultaneously numb and heighten different senses" (Wise 2019: 1). The use of the term "sensory ethnography" (Ramšak 2024: 2), through "participant sensing' (Ramšak 2024: 2) shall ground the coparticipation as my body as the subject and myself as the narrator (Ghodsee 2016).

I set an alarm. I do not trust myself to wake up before the sun does. My alarm goes off, I boil the kettle then get dressed, time is important as the sunrise does not wait on anyone. Dressed, meaning swimming costume, woolly joggers, socks, turquoise dryrobe, bobble hat and crocs. The kettle provides two hot water bottles and a flask of hot chocolate. I walk to my happy place, allowing me to emotionally prepare for getting in, being in and the ultimate twin edged sword of getting out. I like to be at the pool first before anyone else (Photograph 2).



Photograph 2: First There

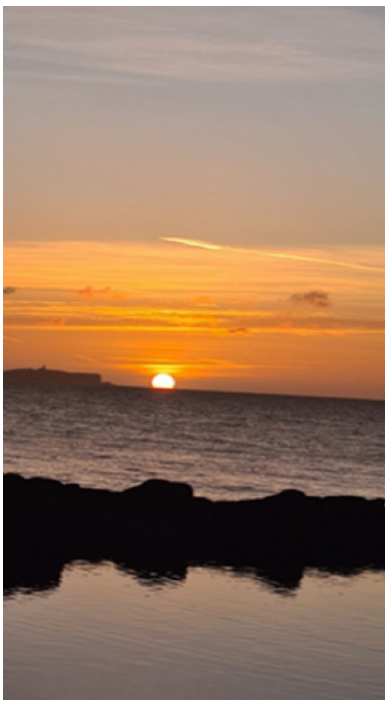
I always place my dryrobe on the same green hook, which is along the sea wall; my bag next to my camping chair and towels wrapped around my hot water bottles. Everything has been packed in order of needed, coming out is a bigger challenge than going in. I see the whole process as a rite of passage. As a special community in the water, liminality between dry land and the embodiment of being in the water. The submergence in the water brings us together as fellow "nutters" (as my father calls the activity), a community gathering to what people say, "sets them up for the day ahead" and recognition as a part of that community "a shared smile when you see someone in a dryrobe" (Bates & Moles 2024: 894).

It is a ritual to take my watch off, wet gloves, wet boots on, old crocs over them and my bobble hat over my ears. I have learned to step down the three ladder steps, take a deep breath and then sub-

merge myself in the water. All my senses come awake. I breaststroke to the far outer wall to adapt to the cold, finding my plastic octopus topped thermometer which I threw in before launching myself in.

I am first there but not for long as 'The Nae Ritchers' are a twenty strong group which are of cult status. They made the refurbishment of Cellardyke Tidal Pool happen, creating a happy place for many. They have their rituals. I observe. They park themselves, cars and dryrobes in the same spot. Each individual has a routine, some swim across the pool for 10 lengths, others along the pool's edges for a certain time. I stay in until my fingers lose the lovely tingle feeling and become numb, with the 'zinginess' of the sea' (Bates & Moles 2024: 896). An 80-year-old woman, who stays in for 10 minutes and gets out, says: "I love it," she says, "It sets up my whole day".

An interesting observation is the group who bob about and do not swim anywhere, staying in a circle, they chat, laugh and in doing so create a humanistic sound which adds to the outdoor acoustics. This sense of a "shared space and belonging, being together in the water is almost more significant than the act of swimming" (Bates & Moles 2024: 896). I prefer to feel the whole experience through my body itself. Once the initial shock of the cold water surpasses, figuring out the movement of the ripples allows me to lie on my back. I close my eyes, I feel safe, salt water is my buoyancy aid. My skin is goose bumps, cold but adapting. The intensity of cold water is part of the therapeutic sense of the whole autoethnographic experience. I feel water hit my outstretched arms and legs, breaking the tidal waves. I breathe calmly, feeling elated and in my mind, I think. I plan my day ahead, I compose an essay in my head, I feel great and then I open my eyes (Bates & Moles 2024). Others cannot focus on anything else apart from the cold and their breathing as Wise states: "It is a good way to completely empty your mind as you can't think about anything" (2019: 1).

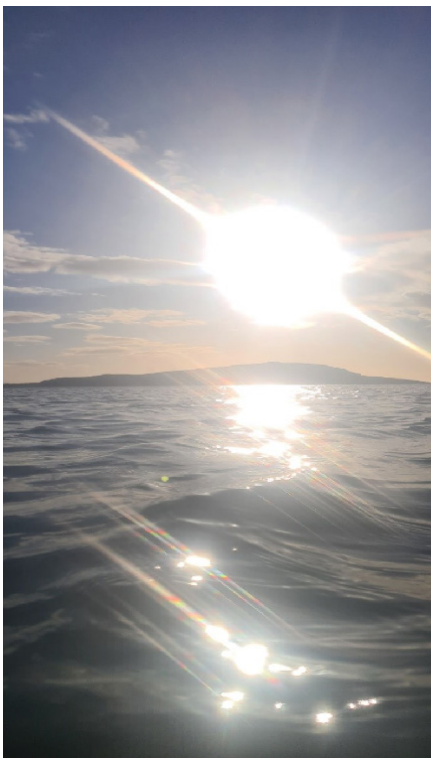


The colours change fast. From my arrival of dawn to sunrise, light hitting the clouds reflects my emotional mood. Mobiles out to capture the sunrise, waterproof cases are the new gadget of discussion (Photograph 3). Observing others, some watch the sun rise fully mesmer-

ized, others continue to swim, and some see it as time to get out. The colour change depends on the clouds, which depends on the wind and reflections off the water. Colour creates an emotional mood, combined with being submerged in the water the greys, blues, reds and reflections off the water and gradual sunlight create a contrast of calm, yet wet in the wild.

The sense of smell is of salt, seaweed and pure sea air. The sea air reminds me where I am and contributes to the whole-body sense of the experience. The scent is interrupted when others join the body of water. I sense washing detergent, deodorant and the wind carrying traces of coffee from outside the pool. The human and naturalistic "olfactory" (Ramšak 2024: 2) give a sense of interruption and return to reality. The sense of smell in this embodied experience would be heightened by new participants who live away from the sea or those who have never experienced the scents of seaweed. Sarah Pink's "sensory ethnography" could be a future idea of a more in depth focus on "Smellscape" within the landscape of the outside pool (Ramšak 2024: 12). This methodology would add to the sensory experience and align the array of senses to complete a fully ethnographic experience.

As with taste, it is avoided by not swallowing salt water! However, this cannot always be avoided if the ripples are high, and you are swimming against them. The saltiness, like smell, adds to the whole experience of being outside, in comparison to being in a chemically scented chlorine pool. The wind adds to all the senses bringing taste through the waves, salt through smell, gusts in the ears and touch through swimming against the water (Photograph 4) (Bates & Moles 2024: 896).

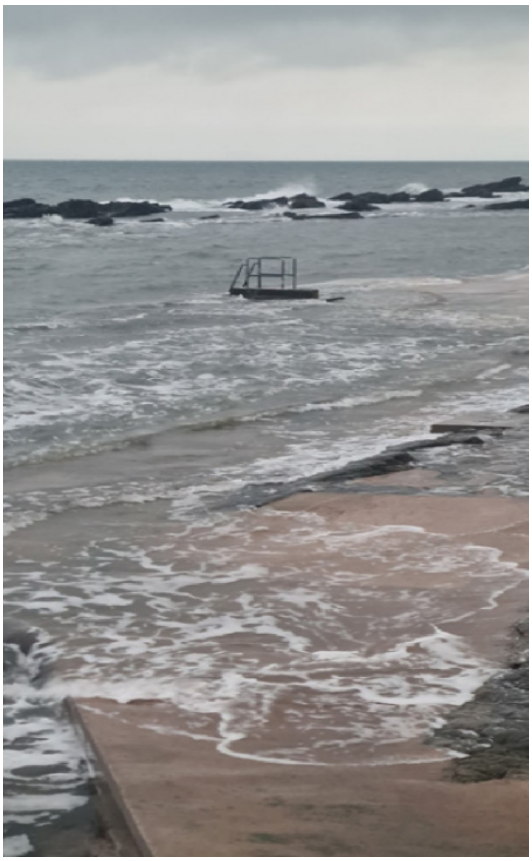


Photograph 4: The Salty Water Waves

Getting out is cold. I feel amazing tingling, across my whole body. I am not cold to begin with as the euphoric feeling in my head suppresses my organs cry for heat. I look back and want to get back in, but again time is moving on without waiting on me.

Being an outside swimmer aids the autoethnographic methodology, it is raw and a truthful

reflection of the emotions. It is a whole-body experience, with all my senses coming alive. It is almost creating a new sense, one that cannot be explained without one participating: "the affect the cold water has on our bodies is powerful, with cold fingers and toes, blue lips and states of euphoria all potential reactions to the cold" (Bates & Moles 2024: 896). To use different medias with sound, provides an atmospheric realistic sensory to the pool itself. Abet high tide and moody skies adding to the sensory experience in this recording, to give a feeling of being in the water.



The photographs do not reflect the array of senses experienced during the activity; they provide a very basic visual element of the whole experience. A more creative and imaginative choice of ethnography would be recording the process while in the water (Culhane 2017). This involves gaining the permission of others and of course would depend on weather conditions. Vara's transcript and accompanying article installs ideals of imagination and creativity throughout with the use of water, encompassing all the senses and the coparticipation (Vara 2024).

To conclude, I love the activity. Therefore, "comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research" (Ellis, et al. 2011: 276) produces an autoethnography which creates a "wider lens on the world" of wild swimming (Ellis, et al. 2011: 275). The insiders and outsiders can obtain a deeper emotional connection of the embodied activity or become interestingly engaged. The observation of the participant through coparticipation removed the stress, as I was the subject and narrator. The concentration on sensory elements provided a descriptive display and resulting analysis. The non-text media enhances the text, providing visual representation of the sensory elements (Photograph 5).

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All photographs, sound and video are my own, taken on my Samsung S20 mobile phone.

2

Salon senses: A feminist's internal conflict

Daryl Lamb

ABSTRACT

Visiting the salon is a sensory experience, one that does not always end in the outcome we desire. Why are salons so visually appealing? Why do we put ourselves through these often painful procedures time and time again? Are these experiences adding value to our lives or stealing our time and self-worth? Why does salon gossip feel so good? These are some of the questions I explore in this essay where I navigate the boundaries of beauty expectations, feminism, and feelings of guilt from the auto-ethnographical perspective of a working-class woman in Scotland. Feminist literature on beauty is extensive and contradictory. I investigate if the beauty industry is inherently suppressive, whilst also exploring the idea of the body as a symbol and beauty a ritual, that creates and sustains social ties.

I can see through the glass panels on the shiny, black patent doors that mark the entrance to the salon. I press down the glossy lever handle and push the door with considerable strength to force it open. It creaks and thuds with the usual grunts that announce the entrance of a client, feeling like a harsh contrast against the serenity of the salon.

I catch Jamie-Lee's eye in the gorgeous floor-length mirror that sits opposite her. We exchange polite, customary greetings as she sits with another client. She creates nail art with outstanding precision and talent, and I'm still sporting the 3D cherry nails she did for my birthday. But I am not here to see her.

Everything in this salon is beautiful, including the artists who work here. The interior design has been executed to an incredibly high standard with a modern, sleek finish. Astonishing detail and consideration have been given to selecting the wooden flooring, neutral tones, and black detailing. The smooth surfaces and furnishings flow seamlessly.

I am given a drink of water in a rounded glass with a glass straw; they chime harmoniously against each other as I reach for a sip. The cold glass in my hand is soothing and feels smooth to the touch. As I sit down on the synthetic Sherpa-fur waiting chairs and take off my waterproof jacket, I become suddenly very conscious of the crunching noises it makes. I worry that I am drawing attention to myself. Being a little dishevelled from the weather, I feel like a disturbance to the flow of visual bliss that seems to be curated so well in the salon. The beauty here usually makes me feel safe and very relaxed, and the returns once I realise the other clients and beauty technicians are immersed in their own conversations. As I wait, I overhear some of the conversations. Mostly

about partners and children, these intricacies of daily life that make me reflect on my own personal relations. There are candles burning, and the scent – though I am not entirely sure – is most likely the combination of essential oils usually labelled as "cotton fresh". The faint, familiar smell of bleach travels from the back of the room, which is the hairdressing section. A step and slightly raised flooring towards the back marks the boundary between the two sections of the room.

Through the sensory experience of smell, we make judgements – often unconsciously – about our relations with others, deciding between acceptance or rejection. The dichotomies present in Western societies – beauty/ugliness, health/disease, morality/sin, purity/dirt and pleasant and unpleasant odours (Mojca Ramšak 2024:17) – account for why it feels so fitting that a salon dedicated to the upkeep of female appearances should also be so pleasantly scented. The women in the salon have managed to remove any sense of impurity from the experience, adding to the sensation of safety and serenity, far from the ails of society.

There is a door across from the waiting area that leads to another smaller room. A client opens the glass door and says her goodbyes before leaving. Gill shouts my name, asking how I am as I walk into the room and close the door. I respond that I am tired but well, and return the question. She doesn't seem herself and explains that she is experiencing painful menstrual cramps; my own stomach almost recoils in empathy. I lie down on the plush black bed; the ergonomics of the bed, having been aimed at women much shorter than me, mean that it always begins to hurt my lower back as I lie there for anything between 45 mins to an hour. Gill sits in a seat above my head, and the conversation never breaks as we go through the familiar pattern of movements.

First, I look upwards as she places masking tape over my bottom lashes to protect them from the eyelash glue she will use for the extensions. This part is always slightly uncomfortable, as the tape sometimes presses against the sensitive skin next to the tear ducts of my eye. Without exchanging any words, I know she has finished, so I close my eyes, and she begins to remove any lashes that have been on too long. Sometimes I feel a sharp sting as a single eyelash is accidentally pulled. Finally, she begins the careful process of gluing delicate fans of plastic lashes to each of my individual eyelashes.

As I lie there and we talk, private details of frustrations in my life come flooding out – even those I had made mental notes beforehand not to bring up, in an effort to convince myself these were problems I was over. The slight embarrassment of oversharing turns to relief, as I am consoled by her return of similar stories from her own life or from other clients, which help me analyse and position my own experiences within the world. The appointment always ends with looking in the mirror to see the finished result of fluffy lashes and my own reflection. Yet I don't feel the sensation that I desired, the one I had tried to purchase. I never do. I book in again for next week.

I feel a conflict within myself in participating in these beauty practices, unsure how much agency I really have, and aware that I have been highly influenced by the cultural gendered norms I grew up with in working-class Britain. *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf (1991) started a contentious discourse in the 90s amongst many feminists. Wolf brings to light the control exerted over women by the beauty industry and patriarchy, as well as the unattainable ideals of feminine beauty. As

Erica Reischer and Kathryn Koo (2004: 301) expressed, "Our market economy requires that we participate in regular cycles of control and release [···] Control is required by capitalism so that production continues, and release is necessary so that the endless stream of products produced in a capitalist society is ultimately consumed." Working Monday to Friday and enjoying the weekend, dieting and indulging: women are the ideal consumers in the multimillion-pound beauty industry.

However, alternative feminist views emphasise a women's agency and creativity in participating in certain beauty practices (Liebelt 2022: 210). Kathy Davis (2003: 80) contests that many "feminists have tended to view such women [those who engage in aesthetic body modification] as the duped and manipulated victims of the feminine beauty culture". Rather than structural oppression, (post-)feminist thought in the early 2000s linked beauty with female self-expression, self-care, and active investment in sexual identity (Liebelt 2022: 210).

Mary Douglas' *Natural Symbols* (1970) highlights the cultural implications of the body as a symbol. John Berger's (2003: 7) *Ways of Seeing* emphasises that sight is the first sense we use to understand the world. The importance of appearance in most cultures is an extremely relevant way of creating and maintaining social relations. It is understandable, then, that body alterations are a method of changing how we are viewed and hence, our status within society.

> "Our bodies transmit a dizzying array of complex information about ourselves, with or without our intention, and we and other members of our culture tend to be expert at reading those culturally specific meanings almost Instantaneously" (Reischer & Koo 2004: 300).

In modern society, it is easier to view body modifications such as tattoos, piercings and alternative hairstyles as a form of artistic self-expression. However, it is slightly more difficult to view an industry such as eyelash extensions or plastic surgery as simply creativity when it is so gendered towards women, with the intention of attaining female beauty ideals that are increasingly becoming a globally homogenous, celebrity 'Instagram face'. A woman is seen to be doing well if she appears to look well. Reischer & Koo (2004: 300) highlight that due to extreme procedures or dieting, women become consumed by the pursuit of this ideal, and less time is spent on other "socially relevant projects [···] Thus, the ideal gendered body does not merely remain in the realm of the symbolic; its power lies in its ability to directly influence behaviour within the social domain." (300)

A constantly evolving vocabulary to label certain human 'imperfections' – such as my own 'hooded eyelids' – further enforces a growing market of 'fixes' for these flaws, such as eyelash extensions or fox-eye surgery. "We are all affected by the forceful images of beauty. They make us dream and they haunt us, even if we consider ourselves unaffected by or opposed to them." (Liebelt 2022: 211) Following Sander Gilman's (1998: xi) argument, aesthetic procedures being more socially accepted and popular convey that these surgeries not only alter bodily imperfections but also heal or fix the psyche – a psyche harmed by societal stigma that surrounds the body. Thus, aesthetic procedures have two dimensions: improving the imperfections of the physical body while also fixing the damaged psyche. As a result, these beauty practices can be viewed as a kind of psychotherapy.

Moreover, there is no doubt that the gossiping or talk therapy that beauty technicians engage in with their clients fosters a sense of community and builds relations and trust. In a world with decreasing human interactions – for instance, shopkeepers being replaced with machines – the act of going to the salon and interacting with other women feels incredibly valuable. As Emma Dabiri (2019) highlighted in D*on't Touch My Hair*, for many Black women, the process of hair braiding can be an important part of cultivating social connections that are increasingly reduced to transactional, rushed experiences under neoliberalism. Although transactional and inherently gendered, beauty practices do also offer relief for the psyche under the intense cultural beauty expectations. Above all, building relationships with our 'salon girlies' and spending an hour with the same lash artist every other week in a safe, female environment feels special, and can also be a powerful act of defiance and community against a system that depersonalises everything.

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3

Barefoot and brave: An autoethnography exploring performatiivity in St Andrews

Tara Phillips

ABSTRACT

In this paper, second year student, Tara Phillips explores embodied vulnerability by taking a bare-foot walk through St Andrews to expose prejudice and explore daily, unnoticed, social hierarchies. Inspired by William Pope L.'s 1979 Times Square crawl and Judith's Butlers theory of performativity, Phillips frames her action as symbolic and disruptive. The project, using the self as both research-er and subject, invited public reaction which revealed implicit biases inherited in everyday life.

Figure 1: Going unnoticed

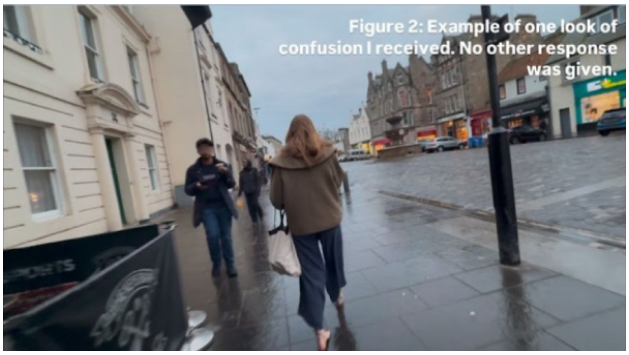

Figure 2: Example of one look of confusion I received. No other response was given.

Figure 3: Walking past a homeless person

Figure 4: men at the pub

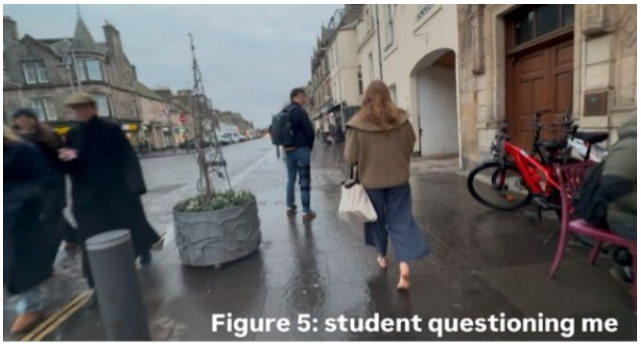

Figure 5: student questioning me

Inspiration

In 1979, a man named William Pope L. crawled through Times Square in a "performance piece in which he took to the streets in the name of, and in support for, those who lived upon them" (Chase 2006: 1). By doing so, he "became a visible boldly metaphor for the struggles that the homeless and disabled endure" (Chase 2006: 1). Inspired by Pope L., I sought to use my body as a source of data collection and example of performativity. In the artist's statement for "Bringing the Décarie to the Mountain," the title given to the performance, Pope L. stated that "when people achieve a certain status, they may feel they are more important than another person… But status is fleeting, we all begin on the same level with the same luck." When thinking about a reinterpretation of Pope L.'s crawl, I remembered a conversation I had with my grandfather many years ago before an interview: "In the morning, no matter who someone is, they put on their shoes on one foot at a time." Even the most formidable individuals are bound by the same basic human experience of putting on shoes. No matter the difference in status, power or wealth, we all share the routine of putting our shoes on every day, conferring a degree of physical and psychological protection and status upon the wearer. I therefore chose to walk through St Andrews barefoot in an attempt to disrupt the unnoticed hierarchies and privilege embedded in everyday actions that protect us from moments of vulnerability; by rejecting shoes I aimed to reject hierarchy. Pope L. gave up his verticality as a symbol of inverting traditional ideas of mobility and dominance. He said in an interview, "I did not see much difference between what I called the vertical folks of economic stability and the horizontal folks of economic lack" (Chase 2006: 2). I gave up my shoes as a symbol of voluntary vulnerability, exposing my body to discomfort as a way to engage with physical and psychological vulnerability.

Performativity

The act of walking around without shoes is performative since it is a physical action that defies social expectations, providing a message through my body rather than through formal arguments. In *Notes toward a performative theory of assembly*, Judith Butler argues that "Embodied actions of various kinds signify in ways that are, strictly speaking, neither discursive nor prediscursive. In other words, form of assembly already signify prior to, and apart from, any particular demands they make" (Butler 2015: 8). Here, Butler shows how movements and physical expressions convey meanings through the body rather than through spoken words. Meaning is produced through more than just language, but through action as well. Actions which are tied to the particularities of different individuals, their lived experience, and the different communities they belong to.

Using St Andrews as my observational setting and site of inquiry, I considered how everyone I passed, myself included, is operating within a shared social framework that governs our behavior and social interaction. Because of this common system, bodies are already read and understood in relation to these pre-decided societal norms that categorize individuals. This affected my research because it highlighted the implicit prejudices I was acting within and ways my body was being interpreted within existing frameworks of assumptions. Reflecting on the experience, I was constantly reminded of the fact that "Autoethnographers [must] recognize the innumerable ways personal

experience influences the research process" (Ellis 2011: 274). I was being judged for not wearing shoes, but I was also conducting the experiment from a position of privilege and security as a young, English speaking, straight, white woman. I entered the field with my own bias and was likely perceived through a biased framework based on my appearance, presentation, and assumed privileges.

In the same text, Butler writes that, "The body politic is posited as a unity it can never be" (Butler 2015: 6), thus pointing to collectivity and homogeneity as a myth that erases the embodied complexities of individual experience. By removing my shoes, I therefore sought to visibly other myself and break with the presumptions of the campus "body politic"—breaking with the communal comfort and understanding of social order, and my own understanding of my stance within it. In reality, society is fragmented and does not fit within the ideal of unified society. My goal was to exploit and call attention to the tension that exists between the individual and the myth of social cohesion which "compels us to reconsider the restrictive ways 'the public sphere' has been uncritically posited by those who assume all access and right of appearance" (Butler 2015: 8). I hoped to use the discomfort felt by me and others as I disrupted our shared social expectations, drawing attention to the tension that exists between an individual and the body politic.

The self as a source of data collection

"Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis 2011: 273).

Writing from the first-person perspective puts me in the position of both researched and researcher. I set out on my task, walking up and down Market Street on a rainy Sunday afternoon, with a degree of fear and trepidation. The town was grey, and its cobblestone streets were coated in water, reflecting the dim afternoon light. My first feeling was that of discomfort and vulnerability. I was insecure about what people would think and who would see me. Conscious of St Andrews as a field site, I anticipated running into people I knew and was doubtful about how they would react. Would anyone say something? Would I just be looked at funny? What if no one recognizes that this is an experiment and I'm mocked? In a town filled with a well-educated and affluent student body, there exist certain unspoken rules of social conformity: I tried to remind myself of the "impossibility of and lack of desire for master, universal narrative" (Ellis 2011: 274), accepting that my experience would be shaped by my own biases as well as those around me and that the goal with this performance was to point to and disrupt these same conventions.

Once this activity began, although my feelings of insecurity lingered, I felt my attitude shift. Unlike Pope L., who experienced doubt as a gateway to loneliness, (Chase 2006: 3), with each step, I began to feel more acceptance, leaning into my position of outsider and a stigmatized body. My feet were cold, and my body was tense. When Pope L. conducted his performance, he said, "I want to be a sieve through which pass the imaginations, fears, and anxieties of all those around me. On the other hand, I want to be a goad that disturbs the peace" (Chase 2006: 3). I too wanted to provoke a reaction but was weary about how I would handle the situation when

it arose. I was afraid of how others would react and thus was all the more surprised when the greatest reaction I received was that of indifference. Many people I passed were too caught up in their own world to even notice, walking with friends or talking on the phone (Figure 1). Many noticed and momentarily looked at me with confusion but were quickly distracted and went back to their lives (Figure 2), like in Figure 2. These responses made me reflect on how people engage with and learn to ignore disruptions within shared social spaces. As Pope L. explains, "There is no choice without its doubts and no doubts without its revelations" (Chase 2006: 4).

While walking barefoot, I finally began to understand that any interrogation is never simple and often reveals more than one intends. The doubt that I started with was not a negative emotion; it gave me the capacity to understand and gain insight into what it feels like to exist between self-consciousness and public perception. I passed three homeless people while walking, one of these interactions is detailed in Figure 3. Each one of them acknowledged my presence with a simple "hello" and didn't comment on my lack of shoes. The woman in Figure 3 was sitting on the floor and level with my feet, and she looked at my bare feet several times before looking back at me, suggesting recognition rather than curiosity. Others chose to question the abnormality. Figure 4 shows two men at the pub. As I walked by, they called out to me: "where are your shoes, young lady?" While in a different mindset I would have credited their reaction to the pints in their hands, I began to understand that they were expressing discomfort as their notions of correctness and social hierarchies were publicly disrupted. In Figure 5, a student and peer of mine walked past and, after choosing to turn around, asked, "What happened to your shoes?" When I explained that today I just chose to do something different, he laughed at the idea.

It was clear that the very notion of someone choosing to go barefoot outside in some way disrupted the social norms we belong to. Throughout the activity and the many hours since, I've had a chance to reflect on how what began as an experiment rooted in disruption and discomfort became an exercise in visibility that pushed me to challenge what I take note of in my everyday social experiences and why. Oftentimes, "autoethnography is criticized for either being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful" (Ellis 2011: 283): I hope this study proves that embodied and highly personalized experiences can serve as the foundations for valid ethnographic research.

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4

Take a bow when you fall: A sensory autoethnography of aikido

Skye Parkes

ABSTRACT

This article is an autoethnography reflecting on my experience as a beginner practicing aikido. It centres around the embodied experience of this martial art: how practices feel to the inexperienced body and the emotional highs and lows accompanying both strength and vulnerability. Following a disjointed narrative that combines experiences over weeks of practice, this autoethnography considers the trust, hierarchy, and gendered expectations that arise and are consequently challenged during training. Violence and the considerations of physical limitations are also taken into account in order to provide a personal description of aikido practice as a woman.

Take a bow, bodies are falling to the floor. Blurred figures in white are both lying prone on the ground and standing victorious above. The ground beneath our bare feet is stained red. The highest ranked figures take down opponents easily, hands on wrists and necks. Twisted wrists, pinned to the floor.

This is a scene of violence.

Aikido is a Japanese martial art that uses the opponent's strength against themselves, aiming to offset their balance more than overpower them (Ganoe 2019). I first discovered this activity in September 2024 while looking to try something new. I then joined the university aikido club, participating in weekly then bi-weekly trainings. I will illustrate these sessions through sensory snapshots and fragmented memories, much like the disjointed feeling of falling.

I can feel the gi[1] against my skin. It's rustling in my ears. The ends are brushing my wrists and flapping around my ankles. This uniform is comfortable. The belt digs into my sides; I've tied it too tight. The knot is unravelling; I don't have the years of experience behind me that handles this still-stiff material like it's second nature. Through this coloured stripe around my waist, I have been placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. This indication of my inexperience digs into my back as I fall.

Through aikido trainings, I have learnt how values can be embodied within a martial art. Aikido includes physical manifestations of ideals regarding community, trust, and respect. One example of this is the tangible structure of the session framed by a bow to the teacher. This is a

1 The Japanese name for the white uniform worn to practice.

physical manifestation of respect and recognition, as well as an acknowledgement of the line drawn between students and teacher within this environment that privileges rank and hierarchy.

I am kneeling on the mats; I can feel my toes digging into the floor. It is silent. We have constructed this protective flooring together, slotting the squares together like a puzzle. We are protecting each other from the violence that will soon occur. I bow.

We are taught how to defend ourselves against opponents who are physically stronger, avoiding a battle of strength that I, as a woman, would inevitably lose. This becomes a reciprocal exercise in trust between practice partners. Indeed, as we practice there must be absolute trust that one will not accidentally hurt the other. There must be a belief that one's partner will execute the technique taught to the best of their ability, only exerting enough force necessary to take down their partner and not injure them during the practice process. A large portion of trust must also be dedicated to one's practice partner to believe that they will stop as soon as they inflict pain. The message to stop is sent in the form of taps on the mats, a non-violent method way to stop the infliction of pain. This message to stop is a universalised embodied gesture that allows understanding no matter the location and illustrates trust that it will always be respected. As such, aikido training sessions prompt the rapid formation of strong relationships based on trust as people are intentionally placed into vulnerable positions.

Suddenly I can no longer feel the mats under my feet. There are hands on me. Fingers around my wrist. Fingers around my arm. I am standing, kneeling, lying with my face to the floor where my feet once were. I am at the mercy of the person above me. My wrist is twisted until I feel pain. This is a particular kind of vulnerability. One hand taps the map while the other feels pain. My body is fragile. A wrist could be snapped with a little extra pressure. This is weakness.

On Saturdays, women usually outnumber men in training. Perhaps we are subconsciously fighting against prescribed images of our weak and passive gendered bodies (Follo 2024: 51). This gender imbalance is exceptional in the face of male-dominated "traditionally hypermasculine sports" (Ganoe 2019: 592) such as martial arts, as I have experienced previously during karate training and witnessed in other university martial arts classes. Despite this, martial arts can be used to transform gendered bodily experiences which focus on women's victimhood into a sense of empowerment (ibid.).

I stand over my partner. I have used my weak limbs to incapacitate them on the floor. I have the upper hand. I feel victorious. There is pride in this achievement, an efficient enactment of a particular skill. This is strength.

Through the active physical agency of aikido, we can improve confidence and control, redefining gender norms in a culture that normalises violence against women (Rentschler 1999). Women must believe that their bodies have the potential to and are capable of fighting on a corporeal level, which fights against the learnt behaviour of non-violence in women (ibid.). Women must be taught to use their full bodily power, thereby leaning into an aggressiveness that deviates from gender norms (Rentschler 1999: 153). I had to be taught to want to inflict violence even for the

sake of practicing a technique, as this was not an instinct I had. Indeed, the presumed inability to fight partly defines normative femininity (McCaughey 1997: 7). A resistance to these ideals and the assumption that women cannot physically challenge men (ibid.) illustrates how aikido can challenge gender ideologies embedded in feminine bodies. Multiple women in aikido, including myself, had to be reminded that the aim is to punch one's opponent and not mime the action.

I don't want to feel my knuckles against a solid body. I will pretend this time, aim towards thin air. I will not hurt. I do not want to cause harm. I must throw my weight into punching the teacher. I must prove my intent to hurt. My fist collides with his chest. I can feel cloth, the resistance of body and bone. The body is a physical entity. It is capable of violence and pain.

A less emancipatory reason why women may gravitate towards aikido is its tendency towards non-violence. McCaughey's definition of violence as "physical force exerted with the intent of damaging, controlling, or stopping someone" (1997: 10) corresponds with aikido techniques' aims, however, aikido as a martial art "emphasises non-violent conflict resolution" (Ganoe 2019: 592) as it mainly uses the attacker's violence against them, using momentum more than brute strength and responding to attacks already in motion. There is both non-violence and violence within this experience.

I am focusing on the demonstration. My hand twitches to imitate the movement. Feet shuffle. I focus on the stance. I track hand movements as they block and twist. I watch as he falls to the floor and thuds against the mats. A hand makes a sharp sound as it hits the floor. There are always two figures in white. One has blue trousers. The semicircle bows to begin.

We are taught to always get out of the line of attack first. Examples are shown, recognizing their utility or lack thereof in real situations of danger. Size differentials are mentioned, and power imbalances are taken into consideration. Certain techniques take advantage of height differences, thereby transforming weakness into empowerment (Fallo 2024). Women's vulnerability is acknowledged through these considerations, as well as the violent world that we live in. Through aikido techniques and their potential applications there is a recognition that "the body can become the reflection and expression of the world in which it lives at a particular time" (Fallo 2024: 52).

I can feel a body twist. I am resisting against muscle that will not yield. I am not strong enough. They escape my hold yet again. I am not skilled enough for this. I am incompetent. I am vulnerable yet again. I cannot compete with men's brute strength. I am no match for the expertise of those above me in the hierarchy. I cannot escape the grip of hands bruising my wrists. Brute force will be my downfall; I can feel it in my bones.

The feeling of empowerment that I experience with a successfully completed technique can easily become disappointment and defeat in the face of my inability to do so. This is a harsh reminder of my lack of physical strength, and my vulnerability to those stronger than me in everyday life. I can sense the violence around me (Spencer 2014), and I am incapable of responding.

Silence. The sound of someone falling behind me. There are low voices explain-

ing instructions again. We help each other. Tapping against the floor. Someone else falls. A giggle or two between movements. A brief moment of silence before the rustling of material and another body falling to the floor. Music starts, a shared space echoing the multiplicity of overlapping conflicting sounds. Chatter. This is the sound of community.

There are multiple rigid sensory delimitations of the aikido experience. Visually, aikido practices are defined by the bright colour of the mats and an array of belts indicating differing levels in contract with all-white gis. This is complimented by the feeling of both the mats underfoot, particularly when they are uneven, and feeling the gi. Sound also structures this experience, with the main sound being moving and falling bodies. Finally, actions frame the experience of aikido, through the communal construction and deconstruction of the mats as puzzle pieces to fit together, and the respectful bow that opens and closes the session.

Throughout these bodily experiences, the violent hierarchical patriarchal society in which we live is an underlying theme that is explicitly and implicitly recognised.

There is laughter and music. We are wearing our colours. Our muscles warm up and stretch. We are ready to begin.

Bodies are falling to the floor. Take a bow.

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5

A Lingering Taste in my Mouth

Camila Gómez

ABSTRACT

This autoethnographic work seeks to explore food anthropologically and interrogate the power relations imbued in ideas of spice. Through the embodied experience of having a meal at Maisha, an "Authentic Indian & Seafood Restaurant", this work centres the ways in which senses, particularly taste, create cultural meanings. Crucially, through a consideration of the author's positionality and St Andrews as a field site, this work analyses the role of globalisation, consumption, and colonialism in creating cultural meanings of food and spice.

Of the flavours that punctuate my day, I crave spice in St Andrews. I search for hints of it in the jalapeño and chorizo library toasties, Tesco meal deal sweet chili chicken wraps, and in the spice sachet of my midnight pot noodles. Dissatisfied, I interrogate its absence on my lips, on the tip of my tongue, at the roof of my mouth–the lingering heat of something spicy. 'Spice' is a heavy word. It carries long histories of imperialism, connoting a racialised Other, a part of an Orientalist imaginary; it leaves the foul taste of the colonial project in my mouth.

I feel this tension lodged in my throat. I'm an outsider here, in 'the heart of the Empire', but I've come to St Andrews from the United States, which represents its own project of cultural imperialism and hegemony. Yet there too, I'm an outsider and an immigrant. And even then, my mother's home (and my birthplace) of Kazakhstan and my father's home of Colombia do not have long traditions of spiciness.

So how do I approach this question of 'spice' as an amalgam of transnational identities made possible through the dynamics of globalisation? How do I approach the power relations imbued in ideas about food and how it constitutes culture as a student of British social anthropology 'in the heart of the Empire'? Drawing from Phillips' (2006) aim of "interrogating ideas about food through the lens of globalisation, and globalisation through the lens of food" (2006: 38), I decided to explore my desire for spice as a flavour and spiciness as a sensorial experience through the embodied experience of eating at Maisha, "An Authentic Indian & Seafood Restaurant".

Likewise proposing "an approach in which taste is central to exploring other aspects of culture" (2010: 213), David Sutton conceptualises an anthropology of food through a particular attention to the senses to understand "cultural issues around taste and other sensory aspects of food" (2010: 215). Emphasising a "robust collaboration of the senses" in the experience of taste (Korsmeyer 2011: 467) and a synesthetic "union of the senses" (Sutton 2010: 217–218), both Sutton (2010, 2011) and Korsmeyer (2011) suggest that food is experienced through the interaction of the senses of taste, sight, sound, and smell, as well as touch, texture, and temperature, challenging Western sensory models which privilege sight and recognizing 'taste' as socially and culturally constructed. With a similar attention to the senses, Rotter (2011) examines imperial encounters as wielding the power to mediate and organise ideas about the senses such that "the entire human sensorium was engaged in tacts of making and accommodating and resisting empire" (2011: 4).

With this focus on the senses and sensory experience in creating the cultural meanings of taste and food, I use auto-ethnography as my methodology in approaching, analysing, and reflecting on spice as an embodied experience of eating a meal at Maisha. In using auto-ethnography, I pay attention to various different aspects of my sensory experiences of taste, sound, smell, and sight "to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner 2011: 273). Crucially, in contextualising my positionality as an international Kazakh-Colombian student at St Andrews experiencing spice in a South Asian restaurant, I can use auto-ethnography to better "understand how the kinds of people we claim, or are perceived, to be influence interpretations of what we study, how we study it, and what we say about our topic" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner 2011: 275).

When 'looking for spice' in St Andrews, I chose a restaurant as my field site for its role in mediating encounters with ideas of globalisation, multiculturalism, commodification, consumption, and colonialism. As such I am drawing from Turgeon and Pastinelli's (2002) writings of ethnic restaurants in Quebec City in a postcolonial context where "cultural difference has been commodified and consumed in more condensed and localized forms than ever before" (2002: 263), describing ethnic

restaurants as "a modernized reflection of colonialism and cannibalism practiced on the home front" (2002: 261) and "a place for the consumption of the world" (2002: 263). My engagement with these ideas is intensified by the setting of a South Asian 'ethnic restaurant' in the U.K., where empire has played a central role in constructing 'Indian' cuisine: both during British colonial rule and in the subsequent tension of 'Indian' restaurants as spaces marked by exclusion and racism, multicultural hybridity and tolerance, and appropriation into British national culture (Buettner 2008).


Maisha

Bengali & Indian Dining

Welcome to our family run authentic Indian and Seafood Restaurant in the heart of the royal and ancient town of St Andrews. Maisha, means working with pride. Our aim is to introduce a truly high quality Indian and Seafood Restaurant which was created with ambition, determination and desire. A desire to succeed, in every sense of the word as we understand it. It is therefore Important that we start by listening to you, our guest. By doing so, we will be able to deliver the best food, the best service and all in all, a friendly atmosphere second to none.

We have a burning desire to please our guests.

We specialize in fish and Seafood in an authentic and traditional way. Throughout the world people are becoming more aware of the health advantages of inducing more fish and seafood in their daily diets. Bengali cuisine has always marinated fish as an integral theme. The Bay of Bengal provides a sweet water delicious fish and seafood such as Bengal Rupchanda - a silvery white pomphet and Tilpia.

We have introduced a Tuna Fish Kebab, Bengal Rupchanda (Pomphet fish) Bhuna, Fresh local Crab Bhuna recipe developed by Mahfuza, Mohi's wife, which Is featured on the menu. We use as much fresh local produce as we can in all our dishes with a highly skilled team of chefs producing a mouth watering range of delicious dishes from Bangladesh, India, Thailand and Scotland which coupled with an extensive wine, Bangladeshi and Indian beer, and spirit list, produces a unique experience.

These dynamics and histories are themselves embodied in the marketing, presentation, and decoration of restaurants and were immediately apparent as I made my way up to Maisha's front door. At the entrance, along the corridors, and on the walls a great variety of different identities were represented through framed paintings and photographs. Hung next to each other, my eyes simultaneously took in and juxtaposed paintings of familiar St Andrews landmarks–Market Street, the Old Course, golfing–with paintings of small wooden river boats along the Ganges. A framed, signed Bangladesh cricket jersey. Holographic images of the Scottish thistle and Tower Bridge. A drum and painting of African warriors. Photographs of the owner–a St Andrews alumni–with various patrons. Framed certificates from the Scottish Curry Awards. From these representations of the restaurant to customers but also back to itself, Maisha expresses its complex identity as embedded in the local St Andrews community, a participant in the tourist economy, nationally linked to Bangladesh yet espousing an idyllic imaginary of India, and perhaps even perpetuating further 'multiculturalist' exoticism through generalising symbols of the African continent. At the same time, aspects of the décor conformed to stereotypical and generalised features of Indian curry restaurants (Buettner 2008): the walls were painted a deep shade of red, the lighting gave a soft orange undertone, and there was an abundance of plants and verdant foliage by the windows. The music also presented this mix of complicated identities: lo-fi Hindi pop songs played faintly in the background, raising questions as to whether a stereotypical aesthetic of 'Indian music' has been 'modernised' and for whom it is playing.

I was seated semi-awkwardly at a table in the corner. It was the perfect vantage point from which to observe the small dining space, but it was also in the direct line of sight of a raised platform from which the service staff observed me. In this way, my identity as a customer was reciprocally constituted by my interactions with the staff:

When I asked for recommendations of their spicy dishes, the waiter directed me to the "mild" section and proposed the chicken tikka masala. I laughed and indicated my higher spice preference after which he pointed me to the "Madras heat" which he described as "a 7/10 spiciness". Immediately after, he and his colleagues asked me where I was from. And then: "What religion are you?" And then: "Are you Muslim?" I gave a half-smile: "I come from the U.S." "Ah," they said, making a dismissive hand gesture.

I ordered a South Indian Garlic Chili curry and Naan[1].

It was very tasty! Though it was nowhere near as spicy as I had been expecting for "7/10 Madras heat"; it was flavourful. The curry left a pleasant tingling, lingering burn at the back of my mouth, on the top of my tongue, and on my lips. The green chilis felt fresh with an aftertaste kick which spread to the top of my mouth and into my sinuses. It had a lovely mix of textures: the baked vegetable made a rich sauce, the chicken was soft and buttery, contrasted by crispy freshly chopped spring onion. The roasted cloves of garlic brought a lovely smoky bite. The naan was warm and fluffy; a vessel with which to clean the plate to get the last residual flavours. I was eating with my hands, paying attention to how each of my senses were being engaged. In the end, I even got some of it in my notebook.

Significantly, the sense of smell was largely absent. The food arrived, already plated, from a little dumbwaiter elevator. The kitchen was distanced from the dining room; there was no wafting aroma nor sizzling sound of food being prepared. Neither was it supplanted by any other scent beyond a faint, ambiguous aroma of 'spices' from my own plate – no candles or incense or aromatic plants. This begs the question whether this absence is merely circumstantial or a conscious distancing in response to the racialized degradation of the "scent of curry" (Buettner 2008 and Rotter 2011).

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1 Maisha advertise their specialty in fish and seafood (as shown in images of menu above) which I was interested in trying, particularly as they said it is central to Bengali cuisine. Unfortunately, the pricing for the Seafood and Fish Specialties was out of my budget.

The racialized dynamics of spice and spiciness were also performed and recreated when the room filled up into a nice chatter. From the customers around me, I picked up conversations centring spice from a group of British and American university boys and a young British couple sat next to me:

One of the university boys opened with: "Guys, why are you looking at the menu like you're not going to get chicken tikka masala and rice?"

"I've got a crazy spice tolerance, actually", another responds. He orders butter chicken instead and asks it to be "mild, please".

A third hesitates before ordering biryani, asking if it's spicy. "Noo, it's not spicy", the waiter reassures, gesturing up and down to his white skin, "not spicy for you!"

The couple and I laughed at the biryani comment. They both got biryani as well. The girl was enjoying hers while her boyfriend struggled through a bite. "Too spicy?" she asked. "Not *too* spicy" he said, before asking for tap water in a "request of shame". They laughed again but when the waiter returned, he pre-emptively brought a glass of water for the girlfriend as well.

The mediation of spice through these conversations, both cocky and bashful, re-iterates dynamics of consumption, appropriation, and hybridity. This intersects with large questions of the authenticity of "Indian restaurants" which claim they are 'authentic' but are often criticised for homogeneously and generically misrepresenting a wide variety of regional cuisines adapted to white tastes (Buettner 2008). Indeed, my friends from Bangalore, Bombay, and Delhi bemoaned my Maisha meal and all offered to cook me "real Indian food" instead. Given my positionality outside knowledge of 'authentic Indian' food and flavour as well as the British national context which claims it as part of its multi-cultural identity, I cannot personally speak to the question of 'authenticity. My search for 'spicy food' was for something that engages all my senses, that leaves a lingering taste in my mouth. In engaging in this embodied experience, however, I can contextualise myself and St Andrews and contend with the power dynamics inherent in culturally constructing food, in this case arising from and often replicating histories of colonialism.

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6

The passing time of pastimes

Kazi Gilman

ABSTRACT

This autoethnography explores stop motion animation, a traditional, time-intensive means of granting motion to inanimate objects and drawings by individually arranging each frame. Though it can, pragmatically, be replaced by modern technology, it remains a distinct medium with a unique capacity for expressing a certain existential, and material humor. In the author's use of the medium the process melds with the practice of procrastination, engaging with the conjunction of the passive and the active, when work is unjustified by a 'productive' result, and rendered valuable only by the process itself..

Absently I lift my mug to my lips, and find that its contents have gone cold, though I could have sworn that mere seconds had gone by since I had last been scalded. Absently I set it down, and tapped gently on the phone screen, so as to avoid jostling the set up, and replay the same three seconds of video which I had now seen countless times, every detail, every shift of the image, every mistake made painfully familiar. I've passed the point where the pettiness of the product pains me, and into the realm of the quasi conscious, where there is no motivation, but merely continuation.

Present again I am aware of the absurdity of my position in the eyes (of the non-existent spectator, having stood here for hours, hardly moving, attempting to imitate a gesture which could be accomplished within seconds. Returning to the work I considered how absurd such an activity is, and how absurd to call it work, for it is a clear refusal to participate in something constructive, erasing hours without concern for more significant activities left undone — looking up at four in the morning, and deciding that rather than sleep, perhaps I could finish just this one detail, and looking up again only two hours later to the sound of my alarm. The overview of autoethnography we read for class claimed that it was most often retroactive, reflecting on experiences of epiphany (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). On a smaller scale I thought to turn to the more minor, intellectual epiphanies — moments of clarity brought about by a clever phrase or well-wrought sentence, when a variety of texts attach themselves to a thought, providing context and depth. Unable, however, to predict their occurrence, and lacking the clarity of recollection to turn to prior experience, I decided on an alternative — a process initiated by an effervescent thought, but whose purpose appeared to overlap with that of the autoethnographic essay, and to provide the opposite of epiphany.

Returning from this consideration, I realized that I had allowed my finger to tremble, as it moved to shift the 'star' which I was currently adjusting, flicking it off a couple inches, significant, considering that it was only millimeter in diameter, and meant to move only half that distance. To replace it, I had to move back three frames, and forwards once more, following the trajectory of each object, calculating the appropriate distance and direction for its next move.

I have long been drawn to those instants of epiphany, when clarity of mind transforms abstract thoughts into accessible images, and apparently disparate facts fall into orbit, and was disappointed to find that attempts to verbalize the experience came off as facile, and drawings lacked the dynamism of the instant, conveying something fixed rather than something vibrant. I was most recently struck by a scene from Joyce, an illustration of the length of infinity,as explained by a priest in a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. The moment brought to mind reflections on the limitations of dignity, ambition, and linear progression, as represented in novels by Miranda July and Chris Kraus, which I had classified as Portraits of the Artists as Ageing Women. Put so bluntly, the idea seemed crude, drawing direct comparisons where there only existed vague associations, and intellectualizing impressions into definitive claims.

Stop motion animation provided an alternative, a practice rather than a result, a bounded reality in which the magnitude of an instant was inevitable, as every second was produced only by dint of protracted effort, infusing it with the depth that a single representation had failed to convey. I was drawn to its torturous practice, less interested in the success of the result than in the painstaking nature of the process itself. Making minute adjustments, countless times, in order to create a single movement — and one which is generally dissatisfactory in retrospect — hardly sounds appealing in the abstract, and yet there is something to losing oneself in something so dependent on continuous concentration. Doubts as to how a task is to be accomplished, or whether it is worthwhile are pushed aside, for in the moment, all that you can effect is the adjustment between two frames, and then again, and again, ad infinitum.

The accusations of navel gazing and self-involvement leveled at autoethnography can surely be applied at least as fairly to animation. Shut up in a room, denying the existence of an external reality, reconfiguring one's gaze to accommodate the standards of the world being created seems opposed to the more social appeal of 'deep hanging out,' or the attempt to join a critical eye with human experience. However, the product of such an immersion is not drawn solely from the moment of isolation, but from a synthesis of social understandings and details, an attempt to condense an experience into a visual form, an alternative approach to thick description, where not only detail, but time expended per detail lend significance.

Documenting her first experience with stop motion, Anna-Kaisa Nässi records a similar effect, for looking up after completing a sequence she found that six hours had passed. Immersed, she continued to work for 60 hours stopping twice and only briefly to force herself to sleep. Rather than citing an exalted artistic motive, she claimed a sense of duty to the emotional wellbeing of a clay bear (Nässi 2014). Seeking a justification for such a task, I turned from writing on animation, to writing concerning procrastination (an adjacent field) and found Richard Beardsworth's definition of the 'practice of procrastination,' to be a fitting theoretical frame. He claims that the apparent contradiction within the phrase — passivity referred to as practice — is, in fact, indicative of the nature of the act. "The inability to move from thinking to action reveals itself, phenomenally, then, as a passive relation to time. For [the]...quality of time is reduced to reenactment and repetition: the future is closed off, never arriving as a future, but falling into the present as the repetition of the past...This loss of the future often appears as the loss of the real." (Beardsworth 1999) This serves as a very effective summation of the animation process. Both the literal process, where photo replaces photo, each only slightly distinguishable from its predecessor, each instantly redefined as the precursor once it has been shot. Likewise, there is a subjective experience of the suspension of temporal perception, as broad swathes of time are lost between thoughts, while instants drag along when one happens to take note. Rather than being marked along the consistent progress of the clock, time vacillates between the meagre seconds accruing on the final product, and the hours which pass by unremarked.

The abstraction from the real is evident as much in the product as it is in the expressions of the creator. The absurdity of the creative act — granting toys or paper a life of their own — is rendered meaningful by the attention required to realize it. The limitations of scope in a world which must be created by hand, in combination with the unlimited time applied force an examination of implicit ambiguities, reveal a potential for humor (Raskin 2008). The practice is dependent on the erasure of the mechanics of the process, concealing the hand that moves the subject, and the time between frames, to create a continuous illusion. Assigned such rules, and set to follow them for hours, their perversion seems inevitable. Jiří Trnka allows the animating hand to creep in as a character in its own right, harnessing the destructive power it has in the delicate maneuvers assigned, for the sake of the narrative. William Kentridge enters his own animation and mixes media, creating illusions even as he claims to unveil them. Even when the illusions of the medium are retained, the results seem to reflect the melancholic inclinations of their creators, exacerbated by the tendencies of the medium. It seems inherently opposed to the parabolic arc of the hero's narrative, progressing too slowly to encompass the easy pleasures of conventional victory. Nässi claimed that the loneliness of her subject was, to some degree, a personal reflection, but that the manner of representing it was affected by the process of animation, where she found that attempts at rapid movement came off as unrealistic, forcing her to work on the creation of stillness.

Completing the final frame, and reaching once more, instinctively, for my cold tea. I attempted to reorder my thoughts, to call them back in and reformulate the disjointed notes I had jotted on scraps of paper, and on my palm, and the back of my hand, and found myself unable to reorient my expression for public perusal. Each sentence was followed not by its natural continuation, but

rather by a reformulation of its claim, or a tangentially related point which happened to come to mind. The resulting text was like the animation it described, inconsistent and repetitive, circling back on itself, or turning to irrelevant details. The result captured neither the individual experience nor any larger social conclusion, hinting, perhaps, at each but never quite achieving the mark.

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7

Un-forgetting the carnival, remembering home

Laura Marquez Navas

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to indagate the role of memory and nostalgia in the field while doing autoethnography. Navigating through the memories of the author, readers follow her and her son as they attempt to create a costume to celebrate the Spanish carnival; an activity which also embodies her childhood nostalgia and her connection with her homeland. The process raises questions about identity and the complexity and guilt surrounding the dynamics of a mother who tries to transfer the feeling of belonging, community, and an appreciation of the traditions of the native country to a child raised in the diaspora.

Neyzan is nervous. He asks me again for the umpteenth time if I will finally start building his costume. He has been waiting for this moment for two months. When I, by chance, went on Etsy and found upon the template of Hiccup's helmet and saw the photos of the final product I knew that it was going to be the perfect birthday present for Neyzan. I contacted the seller to see if he believed the project was possible for a 10-year-old child to undertake, and he sent me a tutorial he had created on YouTube explaining how to make it. Unfortunately, my son saw it days later and he started to ask for my help and the materials he needed to build it. After putting him off several times, hoping he would forget sooner or later, I finally had to confess that it was meant to be a birthday present. He was a little upset that the surprise had been ruined, and he did not ask about it anymore. However, he made sure to remind me frequently over the month that was left until his birthday that I must make sure that I buy all the materials on time for when the date arrives. Children can be very insistent when they want something, and for sure they have a better memory than adults.

Our creation will be the costume he will wear in the 'carnival', a traditional festivity which is celebrated in several countries around the world, including our own country, Spain. During the carnival the streets are filled with music and large floats and people in hundreds of colourful costumes parade along the roads of cities and towns. Neyzan was three the last time we celebrated the carnival, so his recollections of the event lie hidden in the depths of his memory. As a child, it was one of my favourite festivities and traditions. Selecting the perfect costume for the occasion, showing it to your friends, and walking and dancing through the streets surrounded by dozens of playful, extravagant and colourful characters could bring joy that was beyond measure. This joyful experience also connected us as a community and is part of our shared

experiences as people who have grown up in Spanish society. This year I want to come back home to celebrate it before he is too old. I want him to experience the same joy I felt as a child.

It is not the first time that I have helped him create a costume, but this time feels different because this project now embodies the nostalgia of my childhood and of the traditions of a home that I left more than 7 years ago. First, I need to cut out one by one each piece of the template. I have done it at different moments throughout the days we have been waiting for the other materials to arrive. I trace each line very carefully by drawing the outline of the first piece of the emplate on the huge sheet of black EVA foam. I am happy to see that the white ink pen I have chosen is shows up perfectly on the spongy surface, which makes my job much easier when cutting out he piece. Neyzan is sitting right next to me, painting a character from one of his current favourite animes, 'The Rising of the Shield Hero', but also supervising my progress; making sure that I do not distract myself too much from my work and waiting for the time he will get the chance to participate. I have chosen to start by a specific piece that has to be decorated with craft foam, which will be Neyzan's work. Once I have finished drawing each contour over the foam sheet I pass it to him, as he needs it to create the shapes of the scales that will be glued onto the piece to give it a texture that emulates the skin of a dragon. Once finished with the whole project, it will be the helmet that allows my son to put himself in the shoes of Hiccup, the dragon master and protagonist from 'How to Train your Dragon': one of his favourite book sagas. It would have been easier to just go to a shop or do an online search and buy the costume, but Neyzan loves creating; he is a very imaginative and innovative child. He watches the tutorial attentively to make sure than he is following the steps thoroughly, while modelling, with the utmost care, each scale with the craft foam, that afterwards will be glued onto the pieces I am cutting out.

As I advance, I think of my father. I remember the time when I was 8 and he created Halloween costumes for my siblings and I. He did some weapons with cardboard, and he dressed me up as a mummy, for which he just covered me entirely with toilet paper and put some transparent tape to try to hold it all together. A futile attempt in the end, as the whole thing started to fall apart bit by bit as soon as I left the house. But despite that, I loved my mummy costume. Gladly, I smile to myself: I have better resources and materials than he had back then. But this manifests how "the field is evoked in and through memory", and how "[m]emory organises our experience of past and is put to use in multivariate ways of recall" (Haripriya 2020: 3). In this case, memory and the field have a double meaning, and are intertwined as method and product; my memories and the childhood nostalgia that they bring to me are the triggers of this project, for carrying out this project brings those memories back to me. Thus, my memories become the phenomena that trigger the immaterial product of the process, while our creation is, at the same time, the process that triggers memory and the material product: the costume. This project is carved out entirely from memory (Haripriya 2020).

I am aware, however, that the carnival will never mean for him what it means for me. He will possibly remember it as a one-off event of his childhood: he will not feel the sentiment of belonging that the festivities trigger in me. After all, our lived experiences are grounded in place (Kusenbach 2003: 456), and the places we both have grown up will never be the same. Those memories that connect me with my childhood and community are part of my identi-

ty construction. However, for him, as a Spanish child of the diaspora, Spain is a place that he visits once or twice per year: a lousy place where, for a few weeks, he is surrounded by relatives who ask him to "speak with them in Spanish", although, with his dyslexia, he does not differ English from Spanish, and he mixes both while speaking. Spain is the place everyone asks him about, and he only knows to respond that "it is very hot", because that is what he hears everyone say. His Spain is very far from mine. All this is making me wonder if an autoethnography that grounds itself in a present geographical space and memories of events of a past, which occur in a different location, could be considered as a multi-sited ethnography?

Using phenomenology as a research method through the process of autoethnography has helped me, not only to gain insight into how our life experiences shape our perceptual spaces, but also how those experiences and perceptions have geographical roots. Our construction of the life, world, and culture are grounded in places. For that reason, even if we would have decided to travel to another country to celebrate the carnival, we would for sure enjoy the experience, but it will not be my carnival: the carnival from my childhood. This is a bitter sentiment which migrants must navigate constantly: the guilt and sadness of never being able to fully share our culture with our children because of our decision to migrate, whatever the reasons might have been. The knowledge that we have taken from them could have formed the sentiment of belonging to their native homeland. But I try to convince myself, with little success, that this trip will bring to some extent, a hint of what carnival means for me, to him. And creating this custom with Neyzan has not only brough back the nostalgia and the memories, but it has also helped me understand what reflexivity means to anthropology and ethnography, and to comprehend that "as a method autoethnography is both process and product" (Ellis et al. 2011: 273) and that writing can be a way to un-forgetting (Mackinlay 2019).

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8

Gloves, headphones and soap

Elena Azais Tatistscheff

Abstract

This article is a creative reflection on the simple act of washing dishes, encouraging readers to grasp the sensory complexity of acts that are part of our daily life. I have identified five sections of analysis: location, touch, hearing, movement and time perception. To explain these I use different methods including diagrams, vignettes and photographs. Through the use of visual representations I hope to transmit my sensory experience of washing dishes as closely as possible.

In this essay I will analyse my experience of washing dishes at my Univeristy flat. Just as eating, drinking and walking are all integral parts of my daily life so is washing dishes. There are several aspects to this act that I will study: the location of the sink in my flat, my wearing of rubber gloves, listening to music and dancing. As this list suggests multiple senses are stimulated during the act of washing up: the sink's location determines what I look at as I do the dishes, wearing gloves alters its sensation and listening to music effects what I hear as I do so.

Location

My kitchen sink is placed in the kitchen, which also serves as a living room, and faces a window. This window looks onto a courtyard and the inside of the other houses surrounding this courtyard. As such, many of my neighbours' kitchens are visible from my own, it even happens that as I wash the dishes my neighbours are doing so simultaneously. While this occurs less frequently, I am almost always washing dishes while being visible to my neighbours. This impacts how I carry myself as I stand in front of the sink: I behave in such a way that I am happy to be seen. This example illustrates the tension between individuality and society which the space of the house represents (Gauvain and Altman 1982: 28). While my flat is a place where I feel free to act as I want and express my individuality, there are moments where I come in contact with my community of neighbours in ways that restrict this, as is the case with noise pollution. When washing dishes, I perceive the presence of my neighbours and move my body mindfully of this, even as I break into dance.

Touch

When washing dishes I have gotten into the habit of always wearing rubber gloves. While I really enjoy cooking with my bare hands and the sensation of handling ingredients, I really don't enjoy washing dishes without my gloves. This is heavily linked to notions of purity and dirt, which transform the food that recently held the status of nourishment into food waste. My perception of food as waste means that I am reluctant to use my hands to pick it up and throw it away: instead, a fork or knife are often used to scrape a plate clean. Using gloves makes me feel a lot freer to use my hands which I find to be more practical, while not being worried about getting them dirty. All the same, I am aware that the food I am handling has not changed from when it was on my table and that the categorisation of dirt and cleanliness is culturally dependent (Douglas 2003). Choosing to wear gloves renders me aware that, like any other sensation, the sensation of dirt is palpable.

The transformation of food into food waste made me reflect on the way washing dishes acts as a ritual inferring the status of clean and useful to objects that prior were cast-off as dirty. Washing dishes has water as its central element and requires the use of soap and sponge to be successfully performed. Additionally, my personal practice developed over time is accompanied by the use of gloves and music. As such, I find that washing dishes is a very ritualistic act.

Hearing

As I wash dishes, I often listen to music. This is not to cover up any existing noise but rather to motivate myself to undertake a chore while feeling tired: this is especially true in the evening after a long day. Tia DeNora's insights have helped me reconceptualise the relationship between the body and music. If before I would have found Diagram 1 to be an acceptable representation of the relationship between the body and music, now I find it insufficient. That is because Diagram 1 categorises the body and music as two separate entities that upon coming into contact do so in a unilateral manner. In contrast, Diagram 2, inspired by DeNora, accounts for the ways in which music alters the composition of the body itself into a different state.

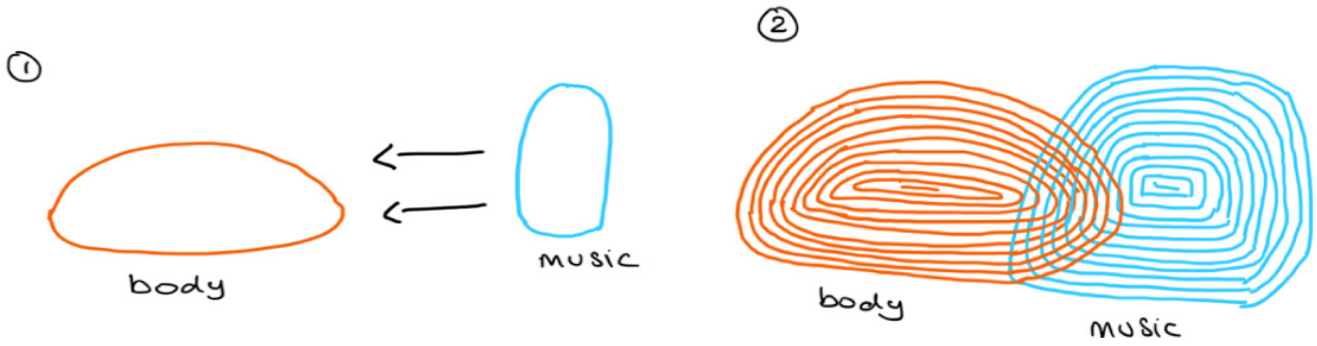

Figure 1: Music and the Body

Diagram 2 requires a rethinking of the definition of the body itself. Instead of perceiving it as being separate from "nature, culture and technology" it suggests that the body is a "socialised entity" resulting from their intersections (DeNora 2008: 75). As such, when music and the

body come in contact, this affects "the constitution of the body and its physical processes", including oxygen levels in the blood and heart rate (DeNora 2008: 76–79). This bodily response to music can be replicated and manipulated, as in my case of washing dishes. When doing so, I play upbeat music to produce the bodily state of excitement, motivation, amusement and to delay to bodily state of fatigue. This is a process that I replicate every time I wash dishes, and even though its effectiveness depends on the given day, it is a process I now rely on. This brings me to my second point: over time, a bodily state becomes associated with certain music — such as sad songs — and the memory of music's effect helps to reinforce both the association and its ability to recreate that bodily state. When washing up, music always cheers me up and makes me feel more energised so I anticipate that result as I put on my headphones.

Movement

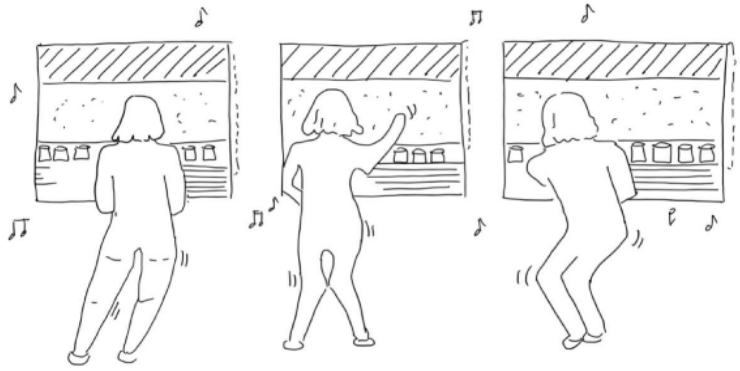

Figure 2: Dancing Vignettes

Additionally, as I do the dishes, I do not limit myself to listening to music but often break into dance: how much I boogie depends on the given day. In the drawing above, I have illustrated some of my statement moves.

DeNora distinguishes between two aspects that dancing consists of: being "entrained rhythmically" and engaging in "stylistic manoeuvres" (DeNora 2008: 78). More simply, dancing comprises of the body moving to the music's rhythm and how it chooses to do so. In the case of washing dishes, I mostly dance on the spot using my legs and hips so that I can keep cleaning as I dance. Nevertheless, I often take breaks to use my arms to dance more expressively. As I move my body, I feel carefree, happy and more connected to the music as I move along with it. In fact, it appears to me that dancing is merely an extension of attentively engaging with the music and letting it alter my bodily state. The amusement I feel as I dance originates in the difference between the dance movements I make and how I normally move my body. Breaking away from the conventional manner in which I carry myself causes me to feel release. The latter explains why fear is associated with dance, as it can challenge the messages and issues surrounding the body (Sansom 2011: 37).

Time Perception

Another implication of washing the dishes is the marking of the passing of time. Every morning, I unload the dishes from the drying rack into their respective designated places, endowing them with the status of clean useful objects once more. In this way, a new day begins for the mugs, cutlery and plates as it

does for me. Below is an image of the empty drying racks in my kitchen on a sunless St Andrews morning.

Figure 3: Spotless Sink

Similarly, before sleep, I clean what I used during dinner and any other accumulated mugs, making order from the mess of the day and saluting the day in doing so. In this way, washing up is an empowering action wherein I restore order and cleanliness and positively mark the passing of time.

Conclusion

Washing up is an easily overlooked activity which occupies a small but distinct part of the daily routine of most students. This analysis of my experience takes a closer look at some of the different layers of this activity through the senses it stimulates. Nonetheless, I recognise that the division of the senses that I used is not entirely accurate as these are much more interlinked than their categorisation accounts for. As Ingold states: "looking, listening and touching···are not separate activities they are just different facets of the same activity" (Ingold 2000: 261). Separating the singular activity of washing dishes into separate categories such as touch, movement and hearing undermines just how connected they are to each other. In the case of hearing and movement, it's clear how connected they are. For the sake of the essay, categorising the senses was useful to offer a structure to my argument although I remain critical of it.

Lastly, I hope the images and drawings included stimulate the reader's imagination and help them to better visualise my surroundings.

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All diagrams are drawn by the author.

9

Embodied experience: A walk down memory lane

Katherine Price

ABSTRACT

In this essay, the author explores the anthropological method of autoethnography during a walk along East Sands. Focusing on the sensorial experience, the article draws connections between the senses and memory. With these findings, the author analyzes the idea of the 'field' and how these interactions influenced their experience with the 'field.'

I first step out of my flat and walk around the two orange fences guarding the trail. I feel the dirt beneath my sneakers. In some way, it makes me remember home. The dirt path I would walk my dogs along felt similar beneath my shoe, with a similar scattering of small rocks along the dirt that would make a similar soft crunching sound. Each step feels freeing, a step away from bustling pavement and towards my community of trees. The trees and I "co-create multiple narratives about [our] embodiment" (Liberone and Myers 2019) as I pass through them: with reaching branches, protect me in my haven. One particular tree sits along the curve of the path, with some of its roots exposed to the world. As I pass this tree, I am reminded of another that I encountered during a cross-country race in high school, of "the breath and the movement that we...had together" (Tang et al. 2024). Both paths contained the challenge of a protruding root where I had to mindfully lift my foot an inch higher than my normal tread to not trip. With this motion my body remembers the breathlessness I felt when I ran through the wooded portion of the race. I become more aware of my breathing at this moment.

I feel safe among the trees. The path is wide enough for both my feet but no one else. The trees on both sides hug but don't smother me. I am alone but I don't feel lonely. To the side of the path, Kinness Burn swims beside me, leading me to the sea. I reach the end of the trail, which dumps me along Abbey Walk. Now out of the protection of the trees, I feel the wrath of the wind howling and asserting its strength. The sounds of seagulls squawking grow louder as I cross the street to get to the harbor. Uneven cobblestones lay the path.

My heel meets a taller cobblestone while the ball of my foot falls to a lower, slanted cob-

blestone. My other foot braces to keep me upright. My feet continue to contort along the ancient path. This familiar movement reminds my body of the first time I visited St Andrews and walked along the cobblestones near St Salvator's Chapel. There was something about the connection of my feet with the earth that gave me solace. Each step was completely different, with a different set of stones to meet. I became aware of each step. At home in the United States, I would mindlessly walk on flat pavement, but here in this new environment each step was purposeful and attentive. I felt grounded and present, meaningfully connecting with the ancient stones each step. My body experienced new interactions with this environment.

While most other sites along this walk bring me memories of other places, the sensation of the cobblestones makes me explicitly aware of where I am now. The sensation of the texture beneath my shoes is a sensation unique to this space. The image above brings the reader into the same space that I was in. The viewer can see the different heights of the cobblestones, allowing them to better understand my relationship with the space and for them to form their own relationship.

The cobblestones lead me to the harbor. It is low tide, which bears a very specific smell. It has a putrid and sulphury smell that takes me back to my childhood of playing in the creeks at low tide with my family. In the harbor, the keels of the boats are stuck in the mud. A sense of concern rushes through me as I think of all the efforts my family makes to keep our boat from scratching the bottom of the sea at low tides in New York. My grandfather would be horrified. But the earth is different here: the sea floor of the harbor is a sandbox of spongy mud, whereas in New York, rocks prevail against the raging waves.

I walk along the harbor and across the bridge that takes me to East Sands. With no protection from the sea wind, I am blasted with the wind's grand puffs. I taste salt in the wind. With each step, I get a mouthful of sea salt and battle against the wind. The white noise of the waves contradicts the less-than-calming experience of shielding myself from the wind with my arms, as if I am trudging into war.

An older man and a brown fluffy dog walk towards me on the path. We both are walking in the middle of the path. My body experiences a quick shock of anxiety as I try to understand which side of the path to walk on to avoid collision. My body naturally steers to the right as is cus-

tom in the United States. I fight this instinct and stay towards the left of the path to give them room to pass, as I assume is more custom in the UK since they drive on the left. As they pass, I smile at the man and the dog stretches its neck to smell me. I pet the top of its head with two strokes and then we both continue in our respective directions. The dog's fur is soft like a blanket. I feel a rush of serotonin but also a small heaviness in my chest as I yearn for my own dogs.

Despite the dramatic wind waging war, my body feels calm being in proximity to the sea. I look out at the stone pier and then to the rocky cliffs along the coastal path. The endless sea makes my body feel free. I feel my shoulders ease and my jaw unclench. The smell and taste of the salt air along with the view of the ocean cause a comfortable feeling throughout my body. Sensations of the sea bring me back to the little beach in New York where my family goes every summer. Even though my family is an ocean apart, my body feels like they are with me because we share the ocean. Even in this new place with new textures and customs, I feel at home because it is not a new space, just a new place.

Writing about the 'Field'

Through this ethnography, I have gained appreciation for the interweaving of writing the ethnography and the physical experience. Geertz (1988) writes about how anthropologists need to get "themselves into their text" (Geertz 1988: 17). My sensory experience informed my ideas, as through the physical experience, I learned how my body interacted with the space, allowing me to then write about the relationship between the body and space. Without my embodied experience with the harbor, I may not have understood my body's relationship with smells, tastes, and sounds of the seaside and how they evoke memories of family. Investigating the relationship between embodied experience and space in this way allows anthropologists to question the concept of 'field' in anthropology.

Thinking of the field as the social interactions between other people and the environment widens the lens of anthropologists to understand their bodies as sites of knowledge. Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus directly relates to this through his idea of sociospatial framework, which manifests through embodied experiences (Bourdieu 1977). The social relations of the harbor were shown and understood through my bodily interaction with it. Using sensorial methodology, rather than 'traditional' ethnographic methodologies, I was able to better understand my interactions with my environment. My body "engage[d] with its surroundings to gather knowledge about itself and the world" (Vara 2024). Using my senses allowed me to recognize a sense of familiarity with the environment. Without my senses, I might not have been able to register the nostalgia invoked by the environment. My senses were able to bridge my bodily interaction with my environment and my memory to understand my engagement with this environment. The sense of sight "is shaped by our experiences, and our 'gaze' has a direct bearing on what we think" (Stoller 1989: 39). Through my sense of sight, I was able to reflect upon what I see and how it leads my body to remember my previous experiences in similar settings. My sense of smell allowed me to transport myself back to my childhood (Seremetakis 1994). My sense of taste made my body feel calm because the taste of the salt air connected me to memories of being with my family at the beach. Furthermore, through my sense of touch and my body's movements, I was able to recognize textures and performances

of my body that connected me to memories of St Andrews. My experience with the space evoked memories of similar spaces where my body had interacted and experienced similar sensations.

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Part 2

Ethnographic Encounters

10

Outside the ethical parameters: Exclusion and connection for an autistic anthropologist

Theus De' Ath

Abstract

Is it possible to do an ethnography on ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) without consulting a spectrum of autistic people? The limitations structural exclusion of autistic voices place on anthropological knowledges are highlighted in this proudly autistic autoethnography. In analysing the systematic mundane exclusion of autistic people in academia and beyond, alongside the joy felt in neurodivergent connection, 'ethical' exclusion of potential autistic participants is challenged. Embodied more-than-words, following SEN-based recommendations, are expressed through paintings.

Introduction

I was diagnosed with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder, henceforth referred to as autism) at 18. I'd reached a point in my life where masking ("the suppression of aspects of self and identity... to avoid stigma associated with negative stereotypes of autistic people" (Miller et al. 2021: 331)) to fit in with neurotypical (for the purposes of this ethnography, neurotypical means non-neurodivergent, where 'neurodivergence' includes neurodevelopmental (Miller 2021: 332) disabilities such as autism or ADHD) peers had had a traumatic effect upon me. This diagnosis brought relief in validating the vast number of ways I did not 'fit in' (Moore et al. 2022: 422), but as with many other autistic people, I quickly fell into grief for the life I 'should' have had (Miller et al. 2021: 333). There was nothing 'wrong' with me, yet I was the one who had to suffer for all the ways in which the neurotypical-dominant society around me could not accept my autistic way of being (Sutton 2021: 677). Hopelessness and burning anger became my mantra, but at some point, I had to accept there was nothing I could do. This would be my life.

'neurotypical-dominant society around me could not accept my autistic way of being'

Two years later, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I aimed to uncover the effects of my masking-induced internal shame. Instead, I found an intricate web of exclusion, in both academic and public spheres, which shamed and silenced autistic ways of being and the people who embodied them. Opening my sensory and emotional self to this amplified ever repressed feeling I had been ignoring since that gradual acceptance years ago. I found the wounds just as raw as before, only now with the knowledge that I would need to bleed them dry to write an ethnography worth the pain. It was in the process of peeling back the scabs that I found the true value of my ethnography: neurodivergent connection as a path to individual and communal healing.

The main section of this ethnography will be split in two halves: analysis of my autistic experience of exclusion in both the wider public world and the academic sphere, and of inclusion in a neurodivergent space. My own artwork is included as depiction of my emotional and sensory states where words fall short, and as an accessibility tool for neurodivergent readers following Sutton's suggestions of a SEN-based (Special Educational Needs) approach to ethnography (Sutton 2021: 685-686).

Exclusion

An autoethnography is not what I wanted to do. I had wanted to do a standard, interview-based ethnography with other autistic students. Unfortunately, I was told that as autism is a protected characteristic as a disability (Equality Act 2010: 5), that project would be outside the ethical parameters. I could not safely and responsibly ask autistic people to participate in my ethnography. I could, however, be involved myself, and so this autoethnography was born. On the surface, this is reasonable and logical – how could I argue against protection for my own neurotype?

Over the course of my fieldwork, I was able to realise that the upset I was feeling as a result was not to do with my inability to carry out that project. It was to do with the reasoning behind the rejection. I was visiting my parents over a short break in my studies, and one conversation with my mum gave me my answer. We had been discussing my therapy, the surface-level aspects, when I mentioned that I took the bus to and from my therapist. She let out a short gasp, a laugh, and made some jest about how she never would have believed it. Right then, I felt all my confidence leave me. I had hated taking the bus before, as it triggered all of my autistic sensitivities in one fell swoop: lights, noise, people, the specific 'rules' of when to say thank you or take your ticket or sit down or press the stop button, an endless string of stressors that I gladly did without. I am proud I no longer find it so intimidating, even though the same environment exists, because now I am confident and loud in my autistic self. I am able to accept and enjoy the reactions I have and the accommodations I need (such as headphones and stimming) in that environment, instead of worrying over how others will see me, or shame of my inability to passively accept such stimuli. My mum did not see that. To her, my autism was not the chaotic, charmingly weird, and deeply considerate part of me that I see it as. It was instead the quietness, the awkwardness, the incapability of a child who does not understand how to be. As my mum, she will always view me as her child, yet her view of my autistic self as incapable and dependent was not purely from our personal relationship. I asked a few people I knew what their perception of autism was, as a way to challenge my own perception, and one answer I received

gave me both joy and desperate sadness.

"The incapability to socialise."

It was the perfect response, a precise summary of what I knew I would find. Incapability. Because neurodivergence is identified in terms of difference in behaviour and thought, "deficit-based conceptions of ND conditions" (Sutton 2021: 679) are the norm. For autism, that deficit is heavily associated with the pity-enhancing image of a child (Stevenson et al. 2011: 4). Until May 2019, the NHS's website page on autism was specifically dedicated to children with autism – the 'symptoms' page was split between pre-school and school-age children. Adults had their own page, without mentions of symptoms, and warning that a diagnosis may not even be available to autistic adults within certain areas. The assumption was clear: autism means child. It is a depressing reality that this was not simply a one-time blunder; Stevenson et al. found that "90% of the autistic characters portrayed in the 105 fictional books [they studied] were children" (ibid: 6). A particularly notorious example, Autism Speaks (a charity claiming autism advocacy) created an ad entitled "I Am Autism" (2009).

"I am autism. I have no interest in right or wrong. I derive great pleasure out of your loneliness. I will fight to take away your hope. I will plot to rob you of your children and your dreams. I will make sure that every day you wake up you will cry, wondering who will take care of my child after I die?"

The ad's 'uplifting' response from the parents of autistic children lays out the bare points of what they believe autism is.

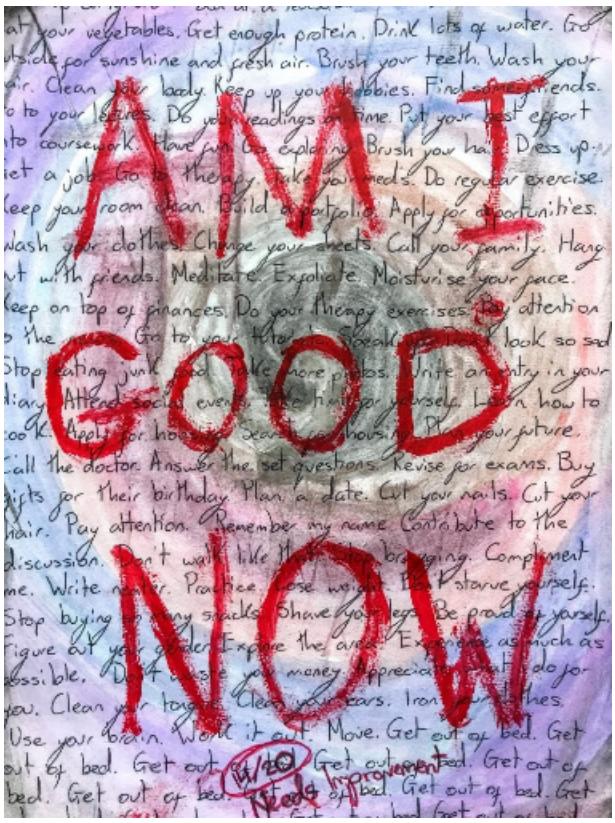
"You think because some of our children cannot speak, we cannot hear them? That is autism's weakness. You think that because my child lives behind a wall, I am afraid to knock it down with my bare hands?"

The autistic children do not get a say in this imaginary argument. Autism Speaks epitomises the belief that children are made incapable of personhood by the 'terrifying' autism, and caregivers must fight the autism to recover their child (creating another horrifying implication that the child's autistic self is not really the child). This is the baseline of what most people are aware of around autism. It is deeply rooted infantilisation – where autistic people are "treated as childlike entities, deserving fewer rights and incurring greater condescension" (Stevenson et al. 2011: 2) – and it is horrifically pervasive.

With this in mind, why is protection via exclusion from ethnographic participation needed? Why is it unethical to have autistic participants discussing their autism? Sutton explores why their argued "neurodiversification of existing research methods" (2021: 678) is needed – ableism. Academic practices are inevitably informed by the society in which they take place, and with the image of autism as childlike, "researchers tend to assume the vulnerability of all [neurodivergent] people", despite the vast "diversity of the respective experiences" (ibid: 680–681). Therefore, when acknowledging the potential of harm or lack of support in participation for some autistic people, a blanket exclusion is given. Ethnography cannot be neurodivergent because neurodivergent people are not capable of participation. In doing so, "an untold wealth of assets is lost" (Stevenson et al. 2011: 9). What seems to be missed is that neurodivergence is not neuroabsence – the autistic way of being is not lesser than the neurotypical way of being, but simply different, and therefore has valuable divergent experiences and knowledges that neurotypical participants and researchers cannot provide (Mellifont 2023: 876). Instead of

"facilitating an inclusive learning and research environment" (Sutton 2021: 682), the entire autistic community and the value they hold is thrown aside – the easiest approach to avoid having to question tradition, and one that passes on all of the effort to the already struggling autistic academics. As Miller, Rees and Pearson put it, "the cost to [the autistic person] is doubly high as they are putting effort into sustaining social cohesion with those who do not put the same effort into understanding them in return" (2021: 335). Due to being denied autistic participants, I had to conduct my ethnography on myself; I had to let my mental health be steadily crushed as every minute of every day became potential ethnographic material, meaning I had to open up my sensitive emotional and sensory self all the time, instead of allowing multiple people to take that burden collectively in a definitively bounded time and space.

It could be said that this is a simple mistake, over-precautions unintentionally causing harm. To claim the cautious approach, however, the autistic people already in academia must be protected and accommodated too. This is not the case. As an autistic student, I spend most of my time burnt out and exhausted – physically and mentally – due to the additional challenges of an academic environment built solely for my neurotypical peers. When I attend a lecture, I must sit and concentrate in a room of bright lights, prepared for a potential social situation (sitting between two friends, the lecturer enforcing discussion, etc), unable to stim as this would break the attention and annoy students around me, and using twice as much of my normal concentration in order to understand the lecturer's speech, given my autistic auditory processing difficulties. I cannot miss a lecture if I do not have the energy to manage this overwhelming experience, as they may not be available online meaning I may miss vital information. Lectures happen up to three times per day, and after I must still have enough energy to mask (a deeply exhausting endeavour (ibid: 331)) through social events, look after my health and environment, and carry out set coursework and additional readings. Tutorials are worse – I briefly unmasked during my fieldwork in a tutorial, opening myself up to taking in more sensory input than usual, and immediately found the awareness physically painful.



'spend most of my time burnt out and exhausted'

All of these issues are immediately obvious to anyone with an awareness of common autistic sensory sensitivities. The fact that they exist, and that the only way I may have a hope of arranging accommodation is to make public something so private and personal, displays how little protection is in place for the real active autistic people in academics. To place the effort of making the academic environment comfortable on the autistic people themselves by forcing them to arrange their own accommodation, and then claiming protection of autistic people by

placing blanket exclusion of participation in academic research is a clear display of laziness. It is easier to keep to tradition, passively accepting the "stigma that silences" (Mellifont 2023: 880).

Inclusion

The toll of my fieldwork became too much. I went to the one person who I could trust to help me figure out what to do with the Pandora's box I had opened – my therapist. I had become too aware of how my masking had prevented "a real connection" with most people I knew and loved (Miller et al. 2021: 334), yet I had enough experience of harm from others due to unmasking that taking the mask away became a frightening concept. Not only that, at some point, masking becomes instinctual – it is hard to separate what is 'me' and what is my 'mask' (ibid). As ever, my therapist had the perfect simple solution – unmask around those I already trust to not cause the harm I was afraid of. Unlike my experience in my tutorial, I could allow myself my full emotional and sensory range without pain, and, should all go well, gain an experience of trust and connection with those I had been hiding from for so long.

'masking had prevented "a real connection"

I decided to hold a casual gathering where I lived – a space I had curated for my own sensory comfort – giving a shorter explanation when inviting and then a full explanation on my friends' arrival of what I intended to do. Their quick acceptance of the concept was reassuring. Even so, I found my heart beating faster than usual, my cheeks flushing with heat as I prepared to reveal the most vulnerable parts of my autistic expression. It was not only fear of humiliation that affected me, but fear of abandonment also. Should any of my friends find my autistic self too 'weird', they could consciously or unconsciously draw away from me. Even worse, should any react negatively, I would instantly lose any building trust I held for them. Either way, I could lose a relationship I held close to my heart. The effects of my lifelong experiences of exclusion ran deep, despite my constant self-reassurance that, if such a thing did happen, that relationship would not be a healthy one for my autistic self.

My worries proved to be unfounded. Not only was my stimming, random noises, unsuppressed reactions to positive and negative stimuli, and long-winded dives into areas of special interests taken in stride, but actively supported and encouraged. One friend, unprompted, collected a plastic tub of fidget toys to encourage easier and more satisfying stimming. Later in the evening, when asked if any difference had been noticed in my behaviour, the only response was that I had seemed more 'open' and 'comfortable'. These were incredibly validating experiences: the autistic expressions I had always hidden were not shameful, but a valued part of myself that others actively encouraged. The 'problem' of my former exclusion had created a false sense of personal fault (Moore et al. 2022: 435), but my struggles to find friendship and connection had nothing to do with myself. It

had only to do with the external world, and the different social communication styles to mine those I interacted with used (Miller et al. 2021: 334). With people who were able and willing to communicate in my autistic communication style, I could find comfort, joy, and connection.

This connection was further enhanced by a distinct sense of unspoken solidarity and kinship through common experience. I was not the only one to use the fidget toys. As time went on, more and more of the gathered group picked up and made use of them, until eventually the whole room was fidgeting as they talked. I was in no way singled out – this autistic expression became communal, a shared moment of sensory joy. In a brief lapse in conversation, the noises of clicking, snapping, popping, and whirring became a new language, communicating a simultaneous individual and shared contentment. An activity which is often, in wider society, considered abnormal and disruptive was subverted into normality and became an expression of respectful connection. I was able to settle into the relief the fidgeting gave me, without the ingrained shame, and steadily I was forgetting I had previously found embarrassment in the activity at all. I later discovered the same hope-inducing concept described by Miller.

> *"Research has suggested that a feeling of community belongingness not only provides a sense of kinship but can also mitigate the effects of internalized stigma."* (Miller 2021: 335)

The community belonging of this particular experience went beyond sympathetic communication. When discussing the evening with one participant later, they said they enjoyed having people around who "understand the things [they] do on a fundamental level". The communal experiences we shared were not fleeting or bounded in one evening, but a continuation of a communal experience of autistic-like being – diverting yet joining together at the most vulnerable points. Those shared memories, though sometimes drastically spatially and temporally separate, create an unspoken sense of belonging. The fascination and joy with which those in the room made use of the fidget toys speaks to a deeply buried part of the autistic self that was denied those pleasures. A conversation late into the night on how 'accepted' we would be in past centuries is the blissful imagination of people who believe they have no hope achieving such acceptance in the present day, as a consequence of the popularised rejection they have experienced before.

'diverging yet joining together'

In a space where deeply impactful experiences are communal, there is support and safety in bringing out those experiences and attempting to understand and heal from them. By finding a community in which autism is not just accepted but embodied, I was able to find comfort

and joy in my autistic expressions that were otherwise deemed shameful and so find pride in my true autistic self. Not only this, but my moment of healing created a space for others to share in, autistic or non-autistic, exploring the possibility of a life without exclusion.

Conclusion

Exclusion of the autistic way of being is a complex reality. What is often "ignorance born of marginal exposure" (Stevenson et al. 2011: 10) can spiral into horrifically harmful action – the effects of being forced to mask alone can lead to suicidal feelings (Miller et al. 2021: 331). Academia is not exempt from this. Misplaced 'protection' and a difficulty creating safe accommodation for autistic academics leads to an "absence of [neurodivergent] ethnographers, anthropologists, and anthropologies" (Sutton 2021: 679). However, should the scales of advocacy and accommodations be tipped in the right direction, we may find a growing sense of autistic community belonging which can work to heal the scars of past exclusion and build towards a future where neurodivergence is valued and normalised.

'heal the scars of past exclusion'

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11

Interlocutorial friendship

Emily Kneppers

Abstract

While kinship is a key and thoroughly analyzed tenet of anthropology, friendship has not been afforded the same status, as it is notoriously difficult to categorize. This paper seeks to contribute to the widening of this field through analyzing the experiences and definitions of friendship of four interlocutors, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of friendship between interlocutor and anthropologist in ethnographic fieldwork.

Setting the Stage

In early September of 2014, I had an epiphany. Alex and I had been friends since the ripe age of five, when our mothers decided that we should play together. Since we were both in the same first grade class of about 15 people in a small private school, over the next five years we became as close to siblings as you could get without sharing a parent or a home. However, in 2014, Alex started sixth grade in public school.

When we met in the park at the end of her first week of classes, she was in tears. "This is awful, I hate it. I don't know anyone. I'm going to try transfer back". In that moment, I suddenly came to the glaringly obvious realisation that I had never had to make a friend, and neither had Alex. Our class (roughly four girls, six boys) had grown up together and had, as Alex put it, "never had to make friends before". To this day, this group, which includes two of my interlocutors, is my primary support network, and the closest thing I have to siblings. We never properly 'became friends', because we grew up together, but that is also what keeps us together – I know these people so well that I have grown into them, and our shared pasts provide a solid base for a shared future. Then I arrived in St Andrews, and while chatting to my flatmate, May, I was surprised to discover that she had grown up in a similar environment to mine, yet she doesn't speak to a single one of her childhood friends. This discrepancy greatly intrigued me, and paved the way for what would later become my first ethnography.

In my initial research on the subject, I found that while kinship is a key tenet of anthropology, friendship has not been afforded the same status. This can be attributed in part to anthropology's early attempts to "establish ethnology as a science as exact as physics or chemistry" (Bouquet 1993: 114), and, by extension, the dif-

ficulty in pinning down a universal and standardised definition of "friendship" in comparison to the almost obsessive categorisation of kinship (Desai and Killick 2010: 1,4). I myself encountered this difficulty with a mere four interlocutors, as Alex viewed friendship transactionally, "[friendship] never stopped being entangled with 'what can this person bring to me?' ", while Xander saw friends as people who he could "do things with". However, despite differences in definition, all four of them shared the same fundamental experience of the action of friendship. As such, my research seeks to shed further light on the experience of making and maintaining friendships, as someone who is a made and maintained friend to all my interlocutors.

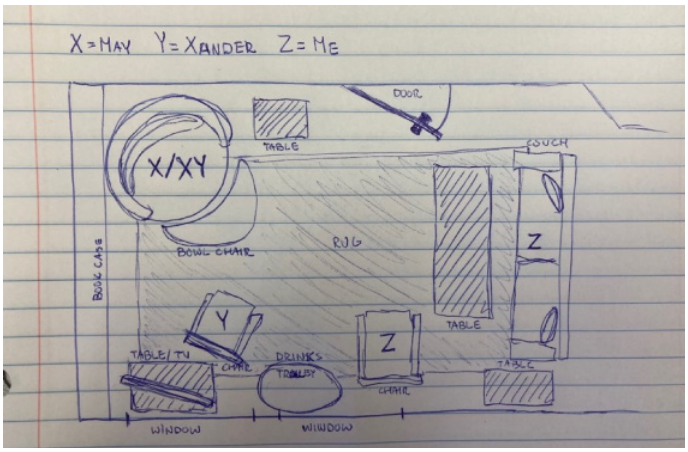
Methods

The idea of befriending your interlocutors is not entirely radical in the world of anthropology, but studying those with whom you already have an established friendship certainly is. The typical paradigm of fieldwork requires "a separation between the researcher(s) and the participant(s), on the basis that any kind of personal involvement would bias the research, disturb the natural setting, and/or contaminate the results" (Owton and Allen-Collinson 2014: 284). However, I chose to work with Alex and Miranda, whom I have known for the better part of 16 years, and my flatmate May, as well as my friend (and May's boyfriend) Xander, both of whom I see on a daily basis. I did this intentionally: while being friends with your interlocutors isn't an automatic shortcut to a more profound dialogue, if executed well, it can generate richer data with a much broader and deeper context, especially if friendship itself is the object of the research (Owton and Allen-Collinson 2014: 302).

Of course, having a shared history has its own difficulties, which are not limited to the supposed bias, contamination, and disruption of raw data (Owton and Allen-Collinson 2014: 284). I conducted several phone and video interviews with both Alex and Miranda, in which we would chat while I simultaneously typed out a rough summary of what they were saying. However, having spent over three-quarters of our lives conversing, we are intimately familiar with each other's speech patterns. This worked to my advantage with Miranda, who speaks slowly, so I could predict the pauses and general direction of her words well enough to type and maintain a normal conversation, but Alex and I have a much more rapid dialogue, so trying to catch all the relevant data while maintaining our established rapport proved very difficult.

Being friends with my interlocutors also led to some interesting negotiations of power dynamics. As George Allen said, "friendship is a bond in which issues of hierarchy and authority have no bearing" (1989: 20), so introducing my hierarchical role as anthropologist to my previously egalitarian friendships produced noticeable reactions. Alex took it as an opportunity to give me an overview of how friends are made in middle school, high school, and university. She took an authoritative position, acting as the middleman between me, the foreign anthropologist, and friendship dynamics in American public schools in general. Miranda, on the other hand, was more concerned with participating in the interviews "correctly" despite my attempts to make them democratic 'chats', asking if she could "go off topic, if that's okay", whenever she changed the conversation's direction. My conversations with May and Xander took place face-to-face, so I elected not to take notes while talking, in the hopes that it would facilitate a more natural conversation. This approach worked very well for May, although it was difficult to recall the nuances of our conversations after the fact,

and was reinforced by Xander, whose second interview I recorded. We were talking in the living room after dinner, and I unthinkingly jotted down the age ranges for his primary school, which he found funny, but which also stilted the conversation by highlighting the awareness that I was overtly collecting data, rather than simply engaging in a normal, friendly chat.



Sketch in my notes of our living room, where the majority of May and Xander's interviews took place. The letters denote seating arrangements during the interviews, which do not differ from the normal seating arrangement in our flat.

Making and maintaining friends

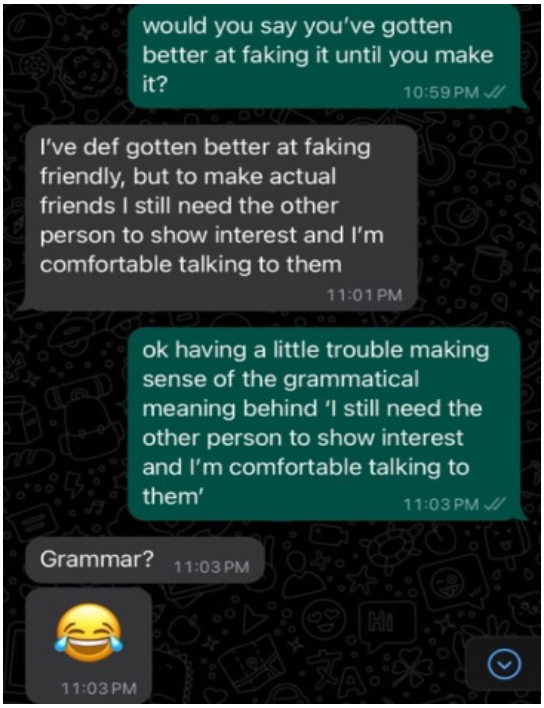
Despite their differences in nationality, gender, and relation to both me and each other, all four of my interlocutors related to the experience of making and maintaining friendships. Alex was the first member of our class to leave without moving several states away, and was consequently my first proper window into the world of befriending. When recalling her first weeks at Timberlane Middle School, she paints a slightly different picture from the sobbing 11-year-old I recalled sitting in the park with. "It was sort of mostly convenience – I'm in your class, and we both have lunch next period, so let's walk-to-lunch-together kinda thing." Most of Alex's recollections weren't deeply personalised, and she leaned more into giving me the general dynamics of how befriending worked, rather than personal anecdotal experiences. When I asked about her friend Sasha, who I'd met briefly and who was one of Alex's closest public-school friends throughout middle and high school, she said she "vaguely remember[ed] meeting her" in theatre class. They bonded over "not knowing anyone else" and "slipped into becoming friends". They maintained their friendship through consistent proximity, something which Alex notes carried into university. She doesn't see Bridget, her roommate from last year, "except for big events, but since we're not living together anymore she doesn't come over for the small things, which creates a gap". She identified consistent, small interactions as the main factor in keeping friendships from fading.

Alex was keen to emphasise the stages of friendship: in middle and high school you made friends out of convenience, such as being paired to sit together, and in university, you made friends out of choice, such as "making conversation while in the bar line". She also took a generalised standpoint when talking about our shared school experience, saying "[our school] really fucked us over in terms of making friends", because there was a "subtle art of talking to strangers" that we weren't exposed to until we left or graduated.

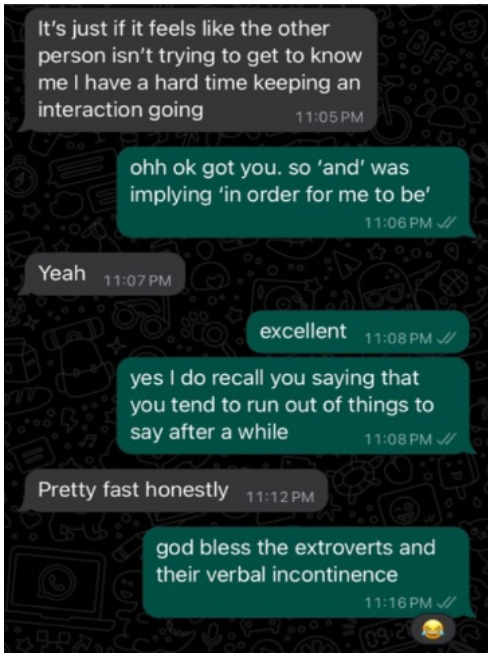
While one could argue that some of Alex's generalised statements are not necessarily universal experiences, her point about our inability to make friends certainly has some grounding. Miranda, who was with me from first grade until we graduated, had a rough time in high school. Like Alex, I remember having several tearful conversations during her freshman year. "It was so hard to make connections, because I keep thinking 'what do I say next?'" After the first

few weeks of high school, Miranda realised that lots of friendship groups had carried over from the local middle schools, and "it didn't seem like most people wanted to make [new] friends".

Additionally, while Miranda was born in the United States, her family is from Taiwan, which put her in the fraught middle ground wherein she couldn't fully relate to the Asian student population, but likewise couldn't quite connect with the Caucasian students. This calls back to the idea of "growing into each other", from another person's perspective. I am a white South African/American/British hybrid, and culturally Miranda and I would have little in common, except that, since we grew up together, I will regularly go over to her house for hot pot, and she covets my mother's biltong. Our friendship wasn't founded on having things in common, but rather being together for long enough that we mutually created commonalities that then keep us bound together.



Some post interview clarifications with Miranda, discussing how she currently makes friends as a 21-year-old in university.



Xander's experience, on the other hand, required commonalities in order to establish a friendship. He had a similar experience to Alex, Miranda and me in that he went to a small local primary school (although his was in Scotland, while ours was in the US), and only started properly making friends in secondary

school, which consolidated all the local primary schools into one big system. Notably, he didn't put the people from primary school into the category of "friend", but since they were "a group of people that were your own age, so you would sort of know everyone".

Xander first met Cameron because they were in the same registration class in year one of secondary school. "I saw him every day, and then we were talking about like, Forza, and then we started playing Xbox together." Cameron and Xander bonded over this shared activity, which expanded to include several other friends who also enjoyed gaming. Gaming acted as a jumping off point for establishing a friendship, but also became an agent in maintaining it, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown. However, while "that whole thing with guys making, like, keeping friends through doing things together" remained the key aspect of Xander's friendships, the mode of shared actions changed as its participants grew up. Now, when Xander goes back to his hometown, he'll "go for a pint with Cameron or we'll like, go for a walk or we'll go out on the bikes". Indeed, whenever Xander or Cameron send me a snapchat of the two of them together, they're always doing something: mountain biking, gymming, or pubbing.

May also came from a small school in a lower income area outside Edinburgh. Unlike Xander, she had solid friends in primary school, but in her case, moving to a nicer area and going to a private secondary school instead of the high school she was "supposed to go to" caused a rift between her and her friends as their parents encouraged the rhetoric of "she's too good for us now".

May's secondary school was all girls and "very cliquish". However, she joined a hockey camp the summer before her first year, which "gave [her] and in" and allowed her to establish a friend group before school started. May has a twin sister, so she always had a "built-in friend" which meant that she was never desperate to make connections. Since she has her twin as a base, May has no fear of putting herself out there, and her go-to method of making friends is by inviting them to a party, pregame, or coffee. This is actually how I ended up in the university friend group that I did – May texted me out of the blue in first year asking if I'd like to come with them to the Safeword Bop at the Union. Since then, I've seen her invite at least 10 people to gatherings at our flat, drinks, and so forth. However, May is a self-proclaimed awful communicator, so unlike Alex, who's friendships rely on constant small connections, May will be out of contact with her friends for months, but as soon as they meet up, they "pick up right where [they] left off".

Many thoughts and few conclusions:

Between my four interlocutors, there were many differences and scant commonalities. The process of making friends varied drastically from person to person, as did the method of maintaining those friendships. However, as Killick and Desai put it, "friendship is interesting precisely because it evades definition: the way in which friendship acts to express fixity and fluidity in diverse social worlds is exciting and problematic for the people that practise friendship, and for the social scientists that study it" (2010: 1). Amongst my interlocutors, no single definition of friendship emerged, but I did find some common ground within their experiences. All four people wanted to make, and put effort into making, friends, and once they had established connections, they all sought to maintain them.

This broad experience certainly creates problems for people within friendships, as well as the anthropologists studying them, but ar-

guably the most exciting and problematic aspect arrives when you are simultaneously inhabiting both roles. As someone who shared a past with my interlocutors, I was able to access a deeper context much more rapidly than if I had been interviewing strangers. I was part of Alex's experience of attending a new school, and watched her friendship with Sasha unfold in real time. I took walks into town with Miranda to buy bubble tea and listened to her struggles with making connections, and later met her new friends when those connections finally clicked. Cameron has told me many stories of him and Xander covered in mud, manhandling their bikes over sodden ramps in the woods. I was on the receiving end of one of May's inviting texts, and have since become one of the friends that comes back from a summer holiday of no contact whatsoever and immediately picks up where we left off in April.

Our shared experiences allowed for a certain level of comfort and confidence in even the earliest conversations, as well as a stronger rapport, since we were both working off a shared history, which de-snagged the dialogue. However, this also proved to be a hindrance, as since it was assumed that I knew certain things, there was no need to break the flow of conversation to clarify a point or provide context. This was not the fault of the interlocutor – the problem was that I knew the context, so oftentimes it didn't occur to me to get their perspective, because I already had mine, from my side of the experience. This also caused me to ask some biased or leading questions, because I knew both the interlocutor and the context of the conversation well enough that I could predict their response. Perhaps one of the best examples of this was during an interview with Miranda.

Me: (sarcastically) *"So tell me about your many friends in Taiwan"*.

Miranda: (no words, just torrents of laughter)

I already knew that Miranda didn't make friends easily, and that since she only visited Taiwan for a few weeks of the summer each year, she didn't have a solid friend group there, so instead of asking her to explain this context to me, I based my statement on our previous shared knowledge. While perhaps not an egregious imposition, moments like this remove "the degree of difference required for dialogue" (Owton and Allen-Collinson 2014: 298) and make a self-centred monologue of what should have been an interlocutor-based conversation.

I do not agree with the idea that a clinical distance between ethnographer and interlocutor produces more 'accurate' data, but there is always something to be said for getting a wider range of perspectives and experiences. Bringing in the voices of people with whom I shared no prior history or relationship would certainly contribute to both the depth and breadth of this ethnography in that regard. Further, Killick and Desai argue that "the most important aspect of friendship to its practitioners [is] that it is a relationship that stands in contrast to other ways of relating" (2010: 2). This study contrasted various forms of friendship as an action, but it would be interesting to contrast it to other ways of relating such as kinship, which occupies a similar space in terms of relatedness, yet receives vastly different treatment in traditional anthropology.

Despite its relative lack of exploration, friendship is a valuable aspect of anthropology. It contrasts to other ways of relatedness in its refusal to be neatly categorised. Xander relies on commonalities to make friends, whereas Miranda creates commonalities with people to maintain connections. Alex fosters friend-

ships through constant, small interactions, while May establishes friendships through a few large events and then expects them to maintain themselves. Friendship presents an inherent difficulty in definition, but that is precisely what makes it so engaging to study. However, "friendship is not only a valid subject of anthropological inquiry but also an important part of the process of ethnographic knowledge production itself" (Killick and Desai 2010: 3–4). Being friends with your interlocutors certainly poses some significant challenges, but also allows for greater contextual understanding, as long as the anthropologist's positionality is reflexively and consistently acknowledged. In this way, friendship not only contributes to a diversification of ethnographic study, but to the methodology of the anthropologist as well.

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12

Outside the Bubble: The experiences of student commuters at the University of St. Andrews

Alyssa Morgan

Abstract

The act of commuting and the subsequent effect it has on the quality of experience any one student will have at The University of St. Andrews is determined by many factors. It necessitates disconnect from the academic and social environment, contextualised based on the all-encompassing social integration that the small town allows. From my own experience as a commuting student living in Dundee, I became aware of and interested in the impact of commuting. Through grounded experience and conversation with fellow commuters, I explore the impact and consequences of conditions surrounding transport, space, time, personal wellbeing, and academic success to highlighting the good and the bad of what commuting means for the some of the students at St. Andrews.

Introduction

To be a commuting student at St. Andrews is to be outside the academic sphere. It necessitates disconnect from the academic and social environment, and the all-encompassing social integration that the small town allows. In the process of considering my options on what to focus on within this project, commuting was always an interest – largely due to its incredible impact on my own life and studies when I moved to Dundee. The distance that was made between my life and the academic environment led to disconnect and deterioration of aspects of life that I had learned to rely on when living in halls. Through this change I was made aware of how integral the non-academic aspects of student life are to academic success and personal well-being and so I began my ethnographic project.

Background

I would like to place this ethnography upon a backdrop that acknowledges the great impact of class (Ishitani and Reid 2015:25) and familial support (Ishitani and Reid 2015:17) upon any student's experience, along with lack of housing which is apparent in St. Andrews. These are main components on a student's choice to commute and to its effects on their life. Though, in this ethnography, I will not be focusing as much on these aspects as I would if I were writing on a wider scale as this is true for university students across Scotland, not just St. Andrews and my project is concerned more intimately with St. Andrews as a unique setting for conversations around commuting. At the beginning of the ideas stage of this project, I had my own predictions for where it would lead me and that this would be quite advocative in nature, in that I would be shedding light on the struggles of commuting students for the sake

of showing the context of St. Andrews implies upon the student experience. Largely due to my own perspective on commuting myself and how drastic I felt the change was for me. However, when I branched out and got different perspectives, it seemed that it would not be so straightforward. The lens I started with was widened and became less about the personal experiences of commuting as a student, but how the spatial and social components of St. Andrews made for a particular idea of student-hood in the "bubble" which was flipped upside down when one stepped outside of the town.

Methods

Due to the multiplicity of spaces that commuters occupy, my research did not rely on participant observation within a specific setting as much as may be expected. Place and the spatial conditions to the commuter experience are, however, still key to this project and will be acknowledged as such. My main form of fieldwork was one-on-one interviews with a few people who I knew had experience with commuting to St. Andrews and were open to sharing how it affected them. This process had a couple bumps along the way as I was learning and gaining the insight that built this ethnography. Something that I became aware of was how I played the role of ethnographer among friends and in the interview setting where the typical observer stance was not taken. I found myself, as with familiar faces and talking about a topic I had personal experience with, reacting to my interviewees with my feelings or thoughts and this worried me at first.

As I continued, this helped me understand and notice varying views held by my research participants. For instance, when Rachel was contacted about the project, she expressed wanting to speak to someone about commuting. This suggested that it is not a common topic of conversation within friendships here despite it being a daily activity and a huge part of her university experience. This was assisted by the fact that I felt similarly and had a desire to talk about it. The issue that I had faced with feeling like I was talking too much during my interviews became a point of reference within my fieldnotes in addition to everything else. It re-iterated a feeling of isolation or loneliness within the commuter experience and a desire to feel understood.

I interviewed 3 people that I have and will continue to refer to using the pseudonyms: Lola, Aisling, and Rachel. Through my own experiences as well as those expressed by the people I was able to interview, there were a few topics of conversation that jumped out to me as important to the issue of productivity and wellness regarding commuting as a student at University of St. Andrews. The stress of the commute, the temporal impacts of daily travel, the town of St. Andrews as an academic space, academic success, and friendships.

Before delving into experiences of students in St. Andrews, I would like to acknowledge the differing definitions and treatments of commuting in literature. In this ethnography I am identifying commuting as any distance not walkable or easily cyclable. This is firmly based on the makeup of St. Andrews. The furthest, but still very common, place to live in St. Andrews is around Morrisons as it can be around a 30-minute walk to the centre, but even that is do-able, and the bus is about 10 minutes. With this, a basis on which wider university life is built on is made by the geography of St. Andrews. In Anna Jabloner's ethnography titled, 'Commuting as Americanist Time', the writer states that "Many Northern Californians spend large portions of their lives commuting and even more time in conversation about their commutes. It seems

to be a structuring element of life" (2020: 86). In her writing, she studies commuting in America which can be said to be "the most car-dependent nation in the world" (Lutz 2014: 232) so commuting as I will identify it is much more common there. This supports the suggestion that the category of "commuter" may differ between institutions (Maguire and Morris 2018: 16). For example, some works on commuter students may distinguish between students living in their own private accommodation and ones who still live at home with family (Ishitani and Reid: 17–18). The similarity is seen when referring to the commute as 'a structuring element of life' (Jabloner 2020: 86) – one which I attempt to uncover throughout my encounter and with assistance from various pieces of literature.

Ethnography

The first interview I had was with Lola, a third-year STEM student driving from Edinburgh most days to partake in the long contact hours that come with studying the sciences. She expressed the most enthusiastic attitude towards wanting to bring light to the commuter experience in St. Andrews. As the officer of the university's group speaking on commuter issues as well as other groups such as mature students, she was the face of efforts to make changes within the University support system. She also authored the 'Commuter Report' and the 'Commuters' Motion', both of which she sent me and were enlightening shows of collective opinion on commuter matters within the University population. We met via a video Teams call as neither of us had class on the day of the interview so were not going into St. Andrews. This decision itself made me reflect and brought to light the first factor towards the disconnect felt by commuters. The travel time and surrounding preparation to go into St. Andrews does not always feel worth it unless there is a class to attend, adding to the isolation. This additionally emphasises an important point about commuter experiences as a university student – academic success and how different needs are prioritised for commuters versus residential students. Due to Lola's particularly long commute to St. Andrews from Edinburgh, she feels that her "potential isn't being reached" as the 4 hours each day spent driving cuts into time she can work. Not only that, her personal life and wellbeing is being affected. She stated in the commuter report that "commuting is a consistent, unavoidable activity that consumes a significant amount of personal time and resources", re-iterating the persistent and inflexible nature of the commute.

One thing I can say about the commute itself and the related stressors it is that people have different experiences and attitudes towards travel, and this makes for variety when speaking on commuting generally. For example, I get travel sickness most of the time, but most intensely in the morning which makes the morning commutes much worse for me. Whereas Aisling, one of the research participants found the morning travel time to be pleasant, peaceful, and a chance to enjoy a coffee and wake up properly before heading to class. This difference between personal attitudes to the activity of the commute can be reflected in Maguire and Morris's Homeward Bound (2018: 10). Additionally, as supported by Tuvikene et al, I find that the bus can be constructed as another public space that I occupy as well as classes, the library, and the commuters' lounge (2023: 2966). It does not feel like a restful place – rather a strange liminal space in which I just wait the 30-minutes until my day can start/continue. This links to the theory around stress and the commute for people using public transport as it has been said that control is 'the most powerful predictor of commuting stress' (Spo-

sato, Röderer and Cervinka 2012: 581) and that "high impedance can cause commuters to feel less control and thus more stress" (Chatterjee 2020: 9). In either case, town buses and cars are settings in which it is difficult if not impossible to be academically productive, cutting down on time for both academic and personal tasks.

The decrease of productivity that commuting leads to cannot be questioned as the time it takes alone has an impact on a student's life, but in terms of the impact on academic achievement I have found that, from my experience and the feedback from Aisling and Rachel, academic success isn't the first thing to fall upon having to adapt (Mellon and Stalmirska 2022: 3). The interest I have with academic productivity is St. Andrews for commuter students is informed by the fact that the University and its students are very driven due to high expectations and busy days. Something that is unique to St. Andrews is that classes are often scheduled close together due to the ease at which students can get between classes and other study spaces in town. This also makes it easier for commuting students to make a whole day of their travels rather than feeling unmotivated by not being able to make the most of their journey home and back.

On the other hand, the high demand of contact hours and classes in pre-honours, often starting before 10am and sometimes finishing after 5pm, makes commuting students more likely to fall behind. As written in related literature, suggesting that, to accommodate for commuters, "formal teaching activities should start after 10am" (Mellon and Stalmirska 2022: 7) as it makes the "working" day for commuting students more realistic and achievable and in turn motivates them. Along with long days at university, commuter students' have additional mental load including making lunch to save money, organising their home chores as they cannot pop home between classes. Aisling, for example, stated that she ate less when commuting and was more tired due to having to wake up early and not having time to make a lunch to go or getting back too late to make dinner. On top of everything else, this made her less likely to go into St. Andrews. From this it is apparent that "the commute experience 'spills over' into how people feel and perform at work and home" (Chatterjee 2020: 22). All of this leads to long-term exhaustion from energy being is drained throughout a full teaching day as well as the commute (Maguire and Morris 2018: 33). Other potential commitments such as caring or employment, which are increasingly likely to be present for commuters (Mellon and Stalmirska 2022: 1), may also result in lowered motivation to go to class or do other work as well as a decrease in general personal wellbeing. Within the Commuter Report, it reads "From my own experience, pressure due to university workload and commuting time have often led to my well-being becoming negatively impacted after only two weeks of term" and the overall conclusion made by research on commuting across the board is that life satisfaction is generally damaged as a result (Maguire and Morris 2018: 33).

The key difficulty I have noticed commuter students face has been the lack of social integration, added to with reference to personal overall wellbeing and life satisfaction. As stated by Mellon and Stalmirska, "prioritisation of the academic engagement among commuter students comes at an expense of their social integration." (2022: 7). When all time is spent in classes and studying, then at home away from St. Andrews, students can have perfect grades but be completely isolated from many other facets of student life. As casually stated by a PHD student and one of my former tutors, in St. Andrews "the only thing you can do is hang out with friends, if you find your people

living here is great". This gave insight into the views out people living here and validated my experiences as moving the Dundee left me very isolated from friendships I had made before, especially during busy periods of study. This was also a point that was brought up by two of my research participants as Lola stated that young students' social lives are impacted by commuting – making the holistic student experience far from expected or deserved (Maguire and Morris 2018: 5), and Rachel stated that she has more of a "fear of missing out" now as she has to plan her life around bus times and she can't go out with friends with much comfort as she either has to stay at a friend's or leave early due to very limited night bus options. This all touches on an overarching theme throughout the limited literature on student commuting: the lost or missing sense of belonging that can stem from isolation from student life aside from the academics (Mellon and Stalmirska 2022: 3).

Another topic that is key to speaking about the student commuter experience in St. Andrews is highlighted in one article as commuters were referred to as "learn and go students" (Mellon and Stalmirska 2022: 2). This definition of the commuter student alone brings to light an issue felt by commuter students of St. Andrews – that the town is a place of study and the environment itself is an important contributor to motivation in students. So, the distance made between students and their place of student as well as their peers makes for a lost "sense of belonging" (Giacalone and Perrelli 2020: 180) and a disconnect with the wider student identity. One way the university has attempted to amend this is by introducing commuters' lounges as a place commuting students can keep their things, heat up meals, and rest.

The main topics that Lola advocates for are to better the state of the commuters' lounge and to better the student support for commuters. The commuters' lounge has been a frequented place for me this year as a commuter from Dundee, and, although it's a handy place to eat lunch and having a locker is good for keeping an extra bag or jacket I must bring sometimes, it isn't always comfortable, clean, and it's not a practical place to do quiet work in. This lounge is the only place that acts as a "home away from home" for commuters – playing the role accommodation would throughout the day for people living in St. Andrews. As I have acknowledged, St. Andrews in its entirety is a scholarly environment unique to other city universities as the student population overtakes that of the locals. For students in St. Andrews, their private accommodation acts as an extension of the academic environment similarly to how university accommodation would (Mellon and Stalmirska 2022: 3). This is partly because they are always close to their university grounds, but also because of the limited housing – people often live very close to one another, making it easy to spend time together and build or keep close friendships.

One of my research participants whom I interviewed in St. Andrews Library [Rachel] had a lot to say on her experience within the student environment and the commuters' lounge. She highlighted that the separation and distinction of St. Andrews as "studious" lead to a subconscious distinction as home/Dundee as "not studious" and therefore it made it harder for her to work there versus working in her flat in St. Andrews. Despite the purpose of the commuters' lounge being to act as a pseudo-accommodation throughout the day, Aisling expressed that there is a lack of privacy that one feels as a commuter: while the library can be overwhelming and very busy, leaving one feeling the need for space, the commuters' lounge doesn't feel comfortable, and the Wi-Fi con-

nection isn't always sufficient. The space has not changed in over a decade even with an increase in students commuting (Figure 1), and it is not kept in great condition. For example, the dishes piled up (Figure 2) and it began being especially unpleasant to spend any amount of time in there due to it, and other frequenters of the lounge shared similar opinions. Although personal use of the dishes should be each person's responsibility, I had to spend my own money for communal soap and sponges for this which I believe should not be the case within a University Managed communal space.

This is why the Commuter Report states:

> "Commuter student spaces act as hubs for rest, study, and refuelling, therefore focusing on improving commuter rooms/spaces is important to student experience. Commuter rooms must be dual purpose spaces, that act as a home from home capable of hosting several students, with a diverse range of needs".

As underscored by Lola as I asked her more about her work on advocating for commuter students in St. Andrews, she stated that the University had been helpful in hearing the issues of commuting students and that they were open to acting upon this, though it comes with a long process. Additionally, the University has acknowledged the increase in people commuting within the study body: "We know that this has grown to over 1,500 commuter students in recent years with students commuting" (University of St Andrews Student Association). Therefore, there may be potential for longer-term changes for the infrastructure and support put in place for commuting students, however the social aspects that make up the study-body environment of St. Andrews isn't likely to change which is likely to be a challenge for anyone who commutes and it looking to build meaningful friendships alongside their studies and other commitments.

Conclusion

To conclude on my findings throughout my short-term ethnographic fieldwork, the overlapping fallout of commuting to and from St. Andrews has adverse effects. Part of why I believe these experiences are not accounted for is due to the "relatively little" known about commuter students in the UK (Maguire and Morris 2018: 6), but this is increased ten-fold by the academic environment that St. Andrews has established and that has its own unique impact on student commuters. Going forward, I think that this study could be a contributor to filling this gap in information – with more interest in the experiences of individual students (varied in distance) that can then reflect wider trends as well as considering the town and surrounding student life. Even with the variation in opinion and experience, commuter students at St. Andrews are a valuable group within the student body and their lived realities as students at the University are important and worth keeping in mind.

FIGURES:

Figure 1 The University of St Andrews ca. 2010–2012A

Figure 2

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13

Complicity, conspicuousness, and change: Protests for Palestine in St Andrews

Celina Chen

ABSTRACT

The genocide in Gaza continues, and the University of St Andrews administration has stayed silent. However, members of the student body have used their rights to protest week after week, calling for action from the University, the United Kingdom, and the rest of the world. This article examines student-led protests for Palestine in St Andrews and argues that the challenges and tensions that come with exposing oneself to the town and university can be simultaneously disheartening and motivating. Through mainly auto-ethnography, supplemented with participant observation and interviews, I unpack the ways people understand their roles and experiences in protests. Protests are a way to spread a message, and this piece hopes to spread a message as well.

The misty drizzle, the kind that does not feel as though it warrants the use of an umbrella but still ends up dripping through hair and sliding down faces, is unrelenting. The rain is not uncommon for a Scottish beach town, but the stillness and solitude that tend to accompany these days are disrupted by loud cries.

"Come rain, come shine, free Palestine!"

Someone leads the chants while the rest join in on the refrain and attempt to unite their voices into one. Hands clutch banners, flags, and signs. In the chilly air, I am aware of how exposed my hands are as they grip a wooden post, the message 'From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free' written on the cardboard above it. I hear my own voice ringing in my ears.

"Say it louder. Say it more… Not a conflict. Not a war."

"In our thousands, in our millions…We are all Palestinians."

Passersby tend to stare. Some seem uncomfortable while others smile. I find myself looking intently at their reactions, and it seems as though I am making eye contact with everyone. Students walk to and from class. Some linger, and others try to walk past as quickly as possible. Drivers look out their window, and some honk their horns in solidarity with the movement.

After going to these protests for months, I have seen the group vary significantly. Sometimes, I am lost amongst a crowd, and on other days, the megaphone is set down, and the small group huddles together, but every Wednesday, since before winter break and after the start of the term, members from the University of St Andrews have gathered outside United College to protest the genocide in Gaza. When the numbers allow, the participants march

throughout the town, continuing their chants.

I use 'genocide' purposefully and intentionally. With the post-structuralist turn in Social Anthropology, anthropologists have noted that the writing process cannot be separated from the observer, and the reflexivity of authors has a significant influence on how they communicate information (Clifford 1986: 2). I do not intend to take a neutral stance because I see the atrocities Israel is committing against Palestinian people, and I believe in the need for peace. Expanding on the growing acknowledgment of reflexivity in Social Anthropology, Gay y Blasco and Hernández (2012: 1) write that ethnographic knowledge is made by both ethnographers and informants, and thus, they should be owned by both (Gay y Blasco & Hernández 2012: 1). My interlocutors are protesters for Palestine, and we all show up each week with specific political goals. It would be disingenuous to both them and myself to frame this essay as apolitical and not communicate their wishes with all their political intents. Although anthropology is traditionally 'unbiased' to the extent that is possible, Scheper-Hughes (1995) disputes this notion. She states, "Witnessing…is in the active voice, and it positions the anthropologist inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally committed being, one who will "take sides" and make judgments, though this flies in the face of the anthropological nonengagements with either ethics or politics" 419). I am a witness to the destruction of Gaza through news images and videos, and I am a witness to the protests in St Andrews that call for the end to this destruction, so I will make ethical and political judgments.

In this essay, I examine the feelings and motivations protesting and chanting brings participants. I consider complicity, on an individual and institutional level. How do people think about their positions in large-scale international movements? How does it feel to take on an extremely visible and loud position? How are feelings of complicity and visibility intertwined?

I argue that personal feelings of complicity are tied to institutional belonging and institutional complicity. These feelings then motivate exposing oneself to high levels of visibility despite vulnerability and nervousness. Protesters in St Andrews see that despite the smallness of the town, the institution is big and so is the issue. Protesting is full of tensions and contradictions that tend to fuel action for frequent protesters instead of canceling it out.

Every protest is a moment for self-reflection, and as I stand there every week, as I leave, and as I write this essay, I continue to reflect. I have been involved in social justice movements for numerous years before my time at university and now. I am no stranger to protests and marches, many on large scales, such as the wave of protests in the United States in 2020 for the Black Lives Matter movement and in 2022 for abortion rights. Although the weekly protests for Gaza in St Andrews are smaller, I find them just as important as any other social movement, and I find the potential impact of successful negotiations with the University to be great.

The feeling I got to attend these protests, long before I decided on them as a research topic, is strongly affected by my own positionality. On one hand, I am enshrouded in privilege. I write this while secure in my physical and economic well-being. I am able to attend university while all the universities in Gaza are now destroyed. On the other, I understand racism, censorship, and generational trauma. I empathize and feel an affinity with the Palestinian people as they experience imperialism and vilification, and although I cannot fully understand the atrocities

people in Gaza experience every day, I know I must stand with them. Both of these sides impact my motivations for participation. I do not intend to take on a position of self-righteousness or propose that protests are the only way to bring about change, but I also cannot separate my own beliefs nor strip the passions and motivations of my interlocutors away.

Since protests are linked to solidarity and participation, I found a mix of auto-ethnography – which is the dominant method in this piece – participant observation, and interviews with student protesters to be the best way to articulate my findings. As previously stated, my positionality and my life experiences are tied to my choice of research focus and my motivations to protest for the rights of the Palestinian people. Because of this, I feel as though my own thoughts and feelings are important to note. That being said, despite my previous engagements in political protests, I do not claim to be a complete 'insider' because the boundaries of 'inside' and 'outside' are always fluid as an anthropologist (Ryang 2005: 154). I examine the expressions of my interlocutors in their own right, and I draw common parallels between their feelings and mine.

Complicity & The University

"This Uni is complicit. This Uni is complicit."

This chant seems to hold more significance as the protesters march throughout the University since it is a direct challenge to the institution where most of us reside. For Sarah, one of my interlocutors, the feeling of complicity is a fundamental reason for protesting. She argues that the University and the British government exacerbate these feelings from their silence and non-action. St Andrews' credibility provides it with the power of prestige and a large platform, and higher education institutions have political power based on the soft power and renown they bring to states. Great Britain exists within the imperial core of the world, but it has largely been against or neutral in calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.

She also states her own complicity as a person who lives in St Andrews and attends university here. I find my own feelings about my privileges remarkably similar. Despite only being a second-year in the University, St Andrews has become one of my communities. I am entangled in this town, this university, and all its people. I am aware I challenge an institution I am a part of, but I also find I am able to because of my position in the community. I echo Hale's (2008) framing of activist research as contradictory because we advocate for justice, yet we are implicated in the political processes we oppose (98). I found that this acknowledgment complicates research but also adds meaningful nuance and reflections from my interlocutors and myself. On one hand, we are restricted by our membership in the University as our demands must be phrased and positioned in ways that are more likely to be achieved. On the other, we are only able to protest because of this membership since we have political power as people who give the school money and credibility with our achievements.

Protesting becomes a way of challenging individual complicity by challenging institutional complicity. We see the potential of a snowball process in which individuals can come together to spark action from the University, which could in turn spark action, including sanctions, condemning Israel for human rights violations, etc., from the government. "Performance is a form of agency expressing a political voice" (McGarry et al. 2020: 18), so through the performance

of protests, participants use their positions to express agency and retaliate complicity. There are tensions in complicity as protesters are aware of the way they contribute to the issues they oppose, but this discomfort is part of the reason to join and become visible in the movement. The following section will explore the tensions in visibility and the ways protesters also use these feelings to spur action.

Visibility

Another one of my interlocutors is Hind, a pseudonym she deliberately chose to pay respects to Hind Rajab, the six-year-old girl who was killed by Israeli troops surrounded by deceased family members after hours of pleading for help. With the choice of this pseudonym and the choice to attend protests, Hind's goal is awareness. The visibility of protests for Palestine in St Andrews is tied to the visibility of Palestinian resistance globally. From the poems and stories shared to the shorter slogans that are easily understandable to passersby, human rights for Palestinian people and the refusal to look away from their struggles are highlighted.

Protests are meant to be a spectacle. Protests are about aesthetics or performances in order to communicate a political message and to mobilize action (McGarry et al. 2020: 17). The aesthetics of protests encompass objects and slogans that symbolize or impart the political objective (18). In the case of the protests for Gaza in St Andrews, the various banners and signposts state the names of organizations that support the cause along with messages, such as 'Boycott Apartheid'. The Palestinian flag is waved, and many protesters wear the keffiyeh, a Palestinian garment that now symbolizes the liberation movement. All of these objects along with physically standing there and taking up space play into the visual aspect of the protest and the wider goal of being seen and heard.

Buthpitiya (2022: 118) writes about forms of visibility in protests conducted by Tamil families of the disappeared in Northern Sri Lanka. Buthpitiya argues, "[Visibility] affords both political possibility and risk where the struggle for self-determination is concerned. Visibility is also central to the design of truth and reconciliation processes, where violations and violences are required to be made visible" (123). Using this framework of visibility, we can understand how the protesters in St Andrews use the medium of public protests as a form of "political possibility" as Buthpitiya theorizes. Although the risk for most of the protesters, at least those who are not Palestinian, is not necessarily direct self-determination, protesting still holds risks, such as potential ostracization, public scrutiny, and other forms of social tensions that come with having clear stances in issues mainstream Western media has made controversial. However, visibility is necessary for the goal of protests, which is, once again, to be seen and heard. In order for "violations and violences" to be addressed by institutions, they must also be brought to light by the grassroots resistance. When protesters perform, they expose themselves to others.

Expanding on this idea, the tensions of visibility are clear from the experiences of my interlocutors, who have given speeches and led chants. Hind states that the first time she spoke into the megaphone, she was filled with nervousness as the crowd was silent and she was the center of attention. Although she states that these feelings eased the second time she gave a speech, there is still hesitancy around being the main focus. However, she also told me that once she thinks about this hesitancy, she changes her mind and realizes that she wants people to look. She is speaking

for the Palestinian people and raising awareness so as many eyes on her as possible would have the best chances for reaching the political objectives of university and state calls for ceasefire and divestments from Israel. Visibility fuels the goal of peace. She also finds it easier to speak with support from the audience. Engagement by nodding, clapping, or cheering aids the ability to articulate her words and continue speaking. Looking across at a group of supporters for the same cause can be relieving.

Similarly, Sarah notes that when she leads chants, in the moment, while she yells into the megaphone, she is consumed with remembering the calls and responses and not making a mistake. She expresses similar anxieties about attention. However, when she steps back into the crowd, she recalls the necessity of this attention and how more protesters and more people watching will show the university that the Freedom for Palestine movement has a considerable following, and the student body has stated enough interest in the cause.

As I watch the crowd, I notice people chanting at various volumes. On numerous occasions, a protester has stumbled on the refrain or continued chanting while everyone else stopped, which tends to lead to a slight giggle and looking around to see if anyone else caught the dissonance. I understand this feeling since everyone is trying to blend their voices together, there is the anxiety of being an outlier in the group and being the sole chanter. However, as I have seen in the crowd and what I noticed about myself, once other people look back empathetically or choose to ignore the minor fumble, voices gradually increase in volume again as the main goal of visibility is remembered. Tension seizes throughout my body numerous times, especially when large crowds walk past or people on the street stop to take videos. Protesting in a small town can be difficult for many as anonymity is not granted. I noticed myself looking around for people that I knew, simultaneously hoping to catch my eyes on a familiar person and draw them in and also being nervous at being seen, but after contemplating these feelings, I am reminded they are valid but not as important as my motivations for continuing. Upon further reflection on this tension and from the statements of my interlocutors, I have come across a recurring theme that being loud and seen is better than being ignored or not doing anything. For Sarah and me, we found commonality in the feeling that these chants become somewhat cathartic as it is a way to try to be heard. The anger that comes with the feelings of invisibility and hopelessness when institutional change is slow-coming and violence continues to be perpetrated flows through the outlet of yelling.

In the organization and sustenance of political movements, emotions are essential (Bayard de Volo 2006: 461). They may play into why people initially join protests, such as the feelings around complicity, but the emotions that protests impart onto people are also important. They can take the form of encouragement and high spirits or anger and mourning as stated above. Emotions and the bonds people create from joining in on the same actions form a collective identity and the motivation to continue protesting (461). Various feelings impact tensions and motivations. Emotions, such as anger and empathy, can make people louder, and thus, more visible.

Numbers also matter. Numbers matter when it comes to supporting speakers and other protesters as Hind noted. Larger numbers mean fewer people to ignore, which continues to feed into the goal of visibility. A larger crowd also means more supporters and typically, more energy that other people draw on. Once again, individual motivations are spurred

by group belonging. As I have observed across the weeks, numbers fluctuate, and for my interlocutors, who go more regularly, small crowds can be disheartening. However, small numbers do not necessarily mean failure, and many protesters felt the need to be louder to make up for the people who they had hoped would be there. Once again, discouraging and tense feelings end up serving as further motivation and emotional stimulus to accomplish the broader goal of awareness and action.

Although small crowds can be impactful, the goal of protests is to gain more people and draw more attention to the cause. There is more to protesting than the individual. If there is one message Sarah could impart to the student body, it would be: "Don't stay silent." Hind wants people to know there are people behind them, so "do not be afraid."

Conclusion

From the experiences of protesting for Palestine in St Andrews, I have noticed that protesting is full of tensions and contradictions. However, these tensions and contradictions seem to be more of a motivating factor for participants. Complicity is uncomfortable. Acknowledging one's own past complacency and the ways one might feed into structural violence is not an easy reconciliation, but it is also this acknowledgment that spurs people to act. Visibility is simultaneously nerve-wracking, desirable, and liberating. Protesting and chanting can lead to personal catharsis, solidarity, and a collective identity.

I do not find this knowledge to be absolute. My interlocutors are either organizers or frequent attendants, so these conclusions are more applicable to us. We believe in the power of protests while others may not, and I want to note the dynamism in people's feelings and emotions. The negative aspects of the feelings of complicity and visibility may detract people from participating. Protesting is full of highs and lows, victories and losses, but for those who continue to show up, they must reconcile these strains. For people to continue showing up, they must use these tensions. There are many scales to consider when protesting: the individual, the institutional, and the global. We build relations between protesters (in St Andrews and beyond), between ourselves and the Palestinian people, and between our pasts and futures. What do we hope for ourselves, our institutions, and the world? Protesting is a way of confronting these questions.

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14

Wild Waters: Community and Nature in the Depths of Cold-water Swimming

Olivia Douglas

Abstract

This ethnographic study examines the practice of cold-water wild swimming among university students in St. Andrews, Scotland, to explore the activity's social, affective, and ecological dimensions. Drawing on participant observation and semi-structured interviews, my research looks at how swimmers construct meaning around their experiences beyond commonly cited health benefits. Through employing theoretical frameworks including embodied mutuality, indigenous epistemologies, and critiques of the nature-culture binary, the study highlights how cold-water immersion fosters community, environmental consciousness, and reorients participants' perceptions of self and nature. My findings suggest that the shared physical and emotional intensity of wild swimming generates social bonds and a sense of spiritual renewal, while also challenging dominant Western paradigms that separate humans from the natural world. The research also highlights how wild swimming acts as a site of ecological attunement and grassroots environmental activism. Overall, this study contributes to anthropological understandings of embodiment, relationality, and human-environment interdependence in contemporary leisure practices.

Stripping Down and Dipping In

First swim - *"hopping down the old concrete steps"*:

10 times stronger than a hit of cocaine. That, minus the crash afterwards, is what the rush of cold-water swimming is described to feel like. Down at St. Andrews' Castle Sands on a calm morning, 9AM, my first participant observation fieldwork swim commenced. Hopping down the concrete steps I took in the scenery, asking Olive various questions as we made our descent. It was just the two of us, and the minimal wind and tranquil surface of the water allowed for conversation to flow undisturbed. Pausing at a large rock, Olive placed her bag down and began to remove her warm layers, laying them out in a specific way with her towel folded just to the side. I imitated her movements, following the same process as she explained that having everything ready to put back on after ensures you will warm up more quickly. The uneven surface of stones pressed awkwardly against my

feet as we creeped to the shoreline. Olive waded straight in, totally calm. Okay it can't be that cold then, right? I stepped in up to my knee and gasped as the water reached my thigh, the cold burn instantly humbling me. Olive laughed as I struggled to find my bearings. Water rippled and flowed around me as beams of sunlight broke through the cloudy sky, bouncing off the green hues of the seawater. Once I finally reached Olive, she counted us down to glide in and paddle. I gasped for air as we went under, the deep cold shocking my system. Icy jabs permeated my skin with each stroke and kick through the water. After 30 seconds we swam back to shore and trudged out. I felt significantly warmer as we emerged from the water, a subtle buzz beginning to hum through my body. I felt amazing. Energy continued to build in me as we redressed, chatting away and scheduling a coffee date so I could ask her some more questions. Then I headed home, feeling a new excitement to find out more about this adrenaline inducing activity.

St. Andrews is a town with a rich history of swimming in the North Sea – students were first noted to be keen swimmers in the 20th century (Betz, 2022) – making it the perfect location to access people who enjoy swimming regularly. I met interviewees through asking around my social circles about people who cold-water swim frequently and met even more through them. I ended up interviewing eight female university students over about a two-week period. I chose to work with these women as they wild-swim regularly, with many participating in other water-based activities, such as surfing. Although not as diverse a pool of participants as I perhaps would have initially wanted due to time constraints, going to the same university, knowing a lot of the same people, and being of a similar age and gender, all facilitated connection and mutual understanding between myself and the participants. This reality provided a foundation of relatability and therefore trust, arguably inciting more truthful answers from participants. Additionally, this all-female demographic is actually reflective of recent national (UK) statistics which highlight that a higher percentage of women participate in 'wild' swimming regularly (Outdoor Swimmer, 2022).

Most interviews were conducted on land in various coffee shops, study rooms and park benches, facilitating relaxed conversation and easing my notetaking process, which would have been slightly more challenging while submerged in the North Sea. Participants were made aware of their rights within the study and their ability to withdraw at any point in the process, however none chose to do so. I made use of a notebook and pen for all interviews, and a recording device for about half, after realising I was struggling to note things down at times. Questions were of a preprepared nature, however, as the swimmers' stories unfolded, follow up questions sparked by curiosity were integrated into the interviews accordingly. Additionally, it was during my interviews with participants that I realised how important my partaking in the activity had been, to build trust between myself and participants, and in facilitating my understanding of their stories and insightful points of view.

When I started my fieldwork, I candidly was not sure what direction to take the study in. I suppose I initially wanted to understand why people take part in wild swimming and go so consistently and frequently for reasons other than the health benefits, and that is ultimately what I found out, while also drastically shifting my personal perceptions of the activity, community, nature, and self. Thus, this ethnography explores why people engage in wild swimming beyond its well-known health benefits, such as energy and mental clarity. It seeks to understand how the broader aspects of the activity

– such as the environment, preparation, and the act of swimming itself – cultivate community, friendships, and a connection to nature. This study will examine how cold-water swimming in Scotland, especially in St. Andrews, fosters these relationships and environmental consciousness through an anthropological lens, ultimately suggesting ways to leverage these connections for ocean conservation and challenging the nature-culture binary. Throughout, I will make use of anthropological concepts such as nature-culture, embodied mutuality, anthropological understandings of cosmopolitanism and anthropological understandings of Indigenous epistemologies to assist in my argument and subsequent analysis of results. The term 'wild swimming' here will always assume the characteristic of taking place in cold-water for the purpose of this ethnography due to the location in which fieldwork has taken place.

Coldness, Community and Connection

Swimming in cold-natural spaces offers a unique means of forging connections among individuals. Unlike other social activities, the shared embodied experience coupled with positive language of encouragement fosters friendships and human connection more rapidly. Swimmers emphasised how experiencing the "same adrenaline rush" and feelings of "intensity and excitement" in addition to the shared challenge of the swim and sense of accomplishment can create a sense of community and belonging amongst participants. Neal et al. have described this as "embodied mutuality" in which doing the same activity with people can generate "exchange and connection" (2019: 80). The shared physical rush of adrenaline in anticipation of entering the cold-water which creates these intense feelings can thus be understood in this sense. Flora described the activity, especially full head submersion, during morning swims as being close to a spiritual experience – as if she and her friends are being "reborn" for the day. The described "spiritual experience" can perhaps be understood along these lines of embodied experience in which an "experience is a coincidental mix of sensory influences from the surroundings and phenomena, sensory influences from our inner visceral sensory experiences, and personal memories and experiences" (Hellmann, 2022; Schilhab, 2018 in Barrable., Wünsche, and Touloumakos 2023: 4). Thus, this neatly illustrates how the physical sensation of cold-water swimming interacts with participants' emotional states, creating those profound feelings of community connection.

"You can do it!": those who swim in groups all described the overwhelmingly positive and supportive nature of swimming in a group. Everyone pushes each other to go in, "hyping each other up" with words of encouragement. Here, the cold-water is a vital dimension in fostering these community connections as it adds an extremely challenging aspect to the swim. Thus, positive reinforcements and support through language from other swimmers is important in ensuring successful participation. Emphasis placed on this encouragement by participants reminded me of Malinowski's concept of "the language tool" in which magical language induces action in things (Malinowski, 1948). In the context of the swimming group, language doesn't merely convey information; it actively works to build and maintain social bonds and facilitate collective action. It's akin to "magical language," where words do not just describe reality but are used to influence and transform it, creating a shared experience that enables individuals to overcome the physical challenge of cold-water swimming. Moreover, Bates and Moles discuss how "becoming a swimmer is a practice that re-orientates social and spatial ties, through

the search for water to swim in and the support and friendship offered by other swimmers in and around the water" (2022: 888), thus further highlighting how swimming in a group has fostered growth in existing and new dual and community relationships for these women.

However, the activity also fosters connection long after people have left the water as well. Isla was one of two swimmers who actually prefers to swim alone; however, she describes how she feels a connection to the swimming community but also the St. Andrews community from swimming even if she's not taking part with a group. She talks about seeing the ladies' swim groups with their matching swimsuits and hats and how she has even connected with people at social events if they've both recently been for swims, discussing things such as the temperature of the water. Wild swimming's ability to connect people thus transcends temporal boundaries as people can have the same physical, emotional and mental experiences even if it is done separately. Isla describes this experience to me as the sea itself being the connecter between people, even if they're not together or in the water at the same time.

'Wild' Spaces, 'Wild' Swimming, 'Wild' People

Almost all of the women highlighted developing more of a connection to nature and consciousness of environmental concerns throughout their swimming journeys. Here I will argue that such sentiments suggest a break in Western notions of human relationality to nature. Indigenous knowledges offer different – from a Western-centric orientation – perspectives and understandings of our connection to and positionality within nature and the environment. Darya says she feels so much appreciation, gratitude, and love towards the community found at the beaches and the spaces and places that they are, and that for her drives a want to protect them and conserve them: "it inspires you to want to protect it more, makes you more cautious of how we're impacting it and the role humans play in nature and what our relationship looks like with it" and how she has "come to understand how we are in nature and our place in nature; we are not separate from it in these wild spaces that exist just outside of our doorstep, we are a part of them". This conception of nature through cold-water swimming practices flips Western-centric perspectives of the nature-culture binary on its head, by articulating a more integrated view of human-environment interactions. This integrated perspective aligns with Indigenous knowledge systems, which often do not recognize a strict separation between nature and culture. Indigenous epistemologies tend to view humans as participants in a broader ecological system, where every element is connected. The critique provided by anthropologists like Carpena-Méndez, Virtanen, and Williamson (2022) regarding the Western dichotomy of nature and culture further elaborates on this point. They argue that "imaginaries of linear progress and the nature-culture binary produce forms of rationality that privilege monocultural, Eurocentric scientific knowledge premised on notions of objective truth, mechanistic efficiency and productivity (see Apffel-Marglin and Marglin 1996; Santos and Aguiló 2019) [...] which has resulted in the environmental devastation we experience at a global level" (Carpena-Méndez, Virtanen & Williamson, 2022: 310).

Exploring the concept of 'wild' in the context of 'wild swimming' reveals the deep cultural layers and biases embedded in our understanding of nature. The term 'wild' itself, as suggested by thinkers like Bert Spinks and Eric Shelton, is a gradient and a social construct

that often excludes humans from the landscape, assuming 'wilderness' to be populated only by non-human fauna and flora (In the Name of Wild, 2022). Yet, the binary between the human world and the natural world dissolves in many intriguing ways when closely examined. Swimmers describe wild swimming as not just a physical activity but a dynamic interaction with a powerful, living world, challenging the traditional notion of wilderness as absence and embracing 'wildness' as a presence – an evolving kinship with the changing land. This experience reflects Johnson Washington's and Kristen Tanche's views that 'wild' is a complex term, culturally laden and difficult to translate across languages, indicating that nature and culture are not separate but overlapping layers (In the Name of Wild, 2022). 'Wildness' then becomes not about separation but about a relation, a feeling, and an atmosphere that does not rely on a dichotomy between nature and culture. Thus, when swimmers feel a deep connection to nature, they are engaging with this powerful, interconnected environment, suggesting that we are not outside the idea of wilderness but a fundamental part of its nuanced expression. This perspective resonates with Indigenous views of interconnectedness and challenges the Western notion of 'wild', prompting us to reconsider our place within, not apart from, the natural world.

Talise emphasises the respect she has gained for nature through wild swimming. She discusses her heightened sensitivity to the planet and environmental issues and how she has become more attuned to the strength of nature and dangers of the sea in the sense of being aware of its power and the danger it holds, while also being grateful that we can "experience it". Capaldi et al discuss how "many people are not as connected to nature as they could be and this has implications, not only for the wellbeing of the environment, but also for the wellbeing of individuals (2015: 3). Thus, wild swimming reinforces the awareness in people of the strength of nature and the power it holds. Having respect and knowledge of the power nature holds is important to ensure we understand that it will retaliate in unprecedented ways if we don't recognise our positionality in protecting it.

This is reflected in Davis' (2011) argument where, to address ecopsychologists' fears that people are destroying nature and ourselves in the process, he proposes re-establishing connection with nature: to establish a transpersonal understanding of the relationship between humans and nature, it may be required to first conceptualise nature as an expanded, more inclusive self (Davis, 2011: 39 in Sam, 2020: 38). Isla echoes this sentiment, discussing how "we think of nature as separate" but that our bodies are connected to each other, and as women they are connected to the moon and tide so how can we not be intertwined with nature? Indigenous knowledges reflect these swimmers' understandings of human-nature interconnectedness as such perspectives view knowledge as arising from a belief in the interconnectedness of all life. This approach emphasises acting responsibly and respectfully towards every aspect of life by "being a good relative, in order to enhance possibilities for human-ecological continuance and regeneration" (Carpena-Méndez, Virtanen & Williamson, 2022: 312). Building upon insights from Davis, Isla, and Indigenous knowledge, this discussion points towards a paradigm shift in environmental action. By viewing nature as an extension of ourselves, we foster a sense of kinship that motivates sustainable practices prioritising ecological resilience. This holistic approach integrates human activities with natural systems, arguably promoting environmental health and offering a viable solution to global environmental crises.

Speculative Seawater

Stefan Helmreich's idea of water as a "theory machine" further supports such arguments and is reflective of sentiments voiced by these swimmers. His concept can be related to the nature–culture binary by examining how water blurs the lines between what is considered natural and what is considered cultural (2011). This perspective challenges traditional divisions where nature is seen as purely biological or physical and culture as solely human–made or socially constructed. By analysing water's role in various scientific and cultural frameworks, Helmreich suggests that water itself acts as an agent that transforms and is transformed by both natural and cultural forces, thereby questioning the validity of strictly separating nature from culture (2011). This concept encourages a more integrated view of the environment where the interactions between nature and culture are seen as fluid and dynamic. This perspective resonates with the experiences of wild swimmers who feel a profound connection to nature, challenging the notion of 'wild' as separate from human. These experiences prompt us to reconsider our part in the natural world, potentially shifting beliefs and fostering community action.

Can this understanding of a connection to nature facilitate discussion and action surrounding wild swimming? The community culture of swimming is the perfect location to spread the word. As discussed previously, this culture exemplifies how communal activities can foster environmental awareness and action. Swimmers Darya, Maya, Talise and Mira discussed their participation in events such as "dip a day for surfers against sewage" where they went wild swimming every day in the month of October of last year (2023). Such events exemplify the community efforts to address environmental concerns through the practice of wild swimming. Helmreich's framework here would see water not just as a physical substance but as a medium through which cultural values (like sustainable development) are expressed and enacted. The swimmers' participation in events like "dip a day for surfers against sewage" showcases how water–based activities can be platforms for environmental activism, reflecting Helmreich's view of water as a dynamic participant in cultural and scientific frameworks.

Additionally, as Indigenous pedagogies emphasise ethical and collective relationships, the shared experience of swimming not only promotes a sense of community but also a broader environmental consciousness. For example, wild swimmers like Flora describe feelings of tranquillity and a deep connection to others through shared immersion in the sea, suggesting that local practices can influence global perceptions and responsibilities. This underlines the potential of integrating community–driven activities into broader environmental and social strategies, highlighting the transformative power of such engagements in fostering a cosmopolitan ethos of collective responsibility and environmental care. Neal's analysis of Singh echoes this, where he argues that "the proximities and interdependencies of bodies in a shared space engaged in shared activities give rise to a wider 'being together' as well as the ways in which, 'contrary to the assumption that beliefs drive actions [···] actions often lead to new beliefs'" (Singh, 2013: 190 in Neal, 2019: 80). Thus, the action of wild swimming in groups can drive changes in collective belief surrounding human–nature connectedness and environmental awareness.

Drying off and Warming Up

Final Dip – *"reflective water, reflective thoughts"*:

Here is a photo from the other day when I went swimming with my friend Henry. This final dip offered me space for reflection upon this experience and my learning over the past few months. Two older ladies, probably in their late 50s, were also getting ready to take a dip. They spoke about how the cold-water helps with their aches and pains and told me about the times of year that are the coldest – apparently, I had picked the coldest period in which to conduct my fieldwork. This interaction made me wish I had had more time to expand my participant demographic and create a more wholistic picture of cold-water swimming in St. Andrews. Nonetheless, much was still learned about how the activity can alter people's perspectives of nature, community, and self.

Cold-water swimming is an activity unique to Scotland and St. Andrews, presenting a novel experience to many participants, especially those from warmer regions, including southern England. Initially, the idea of swimming in cold-water may seem unappealing, as it contradicts the common perception of swimming as a relaxing activity conducted in warm, supervised environments. However, the culture of wild swimming and its benefits have shifted this perspective. Having moved to Scotland from a warm country in my early teens, I never considered swimming in cold-water during summer, assuming it would be an unpleasant experience. Yet, my fieldwork has transformed my understanding of nature, the essence of swimming, and our connection to the wild, turning what once seemed strange into something familiar.

Through participant observation and engaging conversations, I witnessed first-hand the vibrant community that thrives around this challenging yet rewarding pursuit. The intense, shared experience of cold-water immersion not only forges strong bonds among swimmers but also fosters a profound connection with the natural environment. Moreover, the act of wild swimming has reshaped my understanding of the human-nature relationship. It challenges the traditional dichotomy of nature versus culture, revealing a symbiotic interaction where both elements are intertwined. The courage and camaraderie displayed by the swimmers, coupled with their increased drive to engage in protecting these natural spaces, underscore the potential of community-based practices in fostering sustainable ecological attitudes. In conclusion, this ethnography has not only broadened my academic horizons but also enriched my personal perspective. It underscores the transformative power of immersive fieldwork and the profound insights that arise from truly engaging with one's subject matter. This study leaves me with a reinforced belief in the value of ethnographic research as a conduit for understanding complex human and environmental relationships in a rapidly changing world.

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15

Encountering the market: Marketization in higher education and hierarchy among non-academic staff at the University of St Andrews

Victoria Lee

Abstract

Non-academic, or Professional Services, staff comprise 46% of the University of St Andrews' employees. Despite this, as a second-year student, I felt that my engagement with this significant portion of the University's staff was limited. Thus, I sought to discover what insights would emerge from ethnographic encounters with them. With interlocutors' repeated references to students as 'customers' and the University as a 'business,' the project's focus soon became the marketization of UK higher education. This paper contributes to "critical anthropology of the neoliberal university" (Gusterson 2017) from the perspective of understudied non-academic university staff. It situates interviews and participant observation with non-academic staff at the University of St Andrews in the context of the increasingly marketized UK university. It proposes that due to marketization, a hierarchy of valuation arises across types of University staff based on their proximity to the student-customer, then concludes with reflections on how students might leverage their 'consumer' status to effect change in higher education.

Introduction

One afternoon at the University of St Andrews Main Library, I opened Twitter to an announcement from the University and College Union (UCU): "EVERY SINGLE UK UNIVERSITY WILL BE SHUT DOWN WITH 18 DAYS OF STRIKE ACTION ACROSS FEBRUARY AND MARCH." Resigning myself to an amended deadline schedule, I considered my surroundings, where business was as usual: electricians surveyed a flickering light, cleaners propped up 'Wet Floor' signs, and front desk staff helped load a van full of books. I remember thinking – if all those people went on strike, they could take the 'shutdown' of the university to another level.

Staff at the University of St Andrews fall into two categories. Academic Schools host professors and researchers, while the other 46% of staff (in departments such as Finance, IT, Estates, and the Library) are classified as Professional Services (University of St Andrews 2022). Despite sharing an institution, my engagement with this entire other dimension of the university was incredibly limited. This project thus became an attempt to discover what different perspectives would arise from encounters between me, a student entrenched in the academic side of the university, and non-academic staff.

It did not take long for these differences in perspectives to become clear. David, a newly hired project manager in capital development, was one of my earliest interview-

ees. He seemed passionate and energized by the mission of his work, expressing a sense of purpose and contribution to a wider goal:

> *"I feel it's really important that we live up to the mission to make this a world class place, and to put the student at the front of that."*

Curious about his thoughts on educating future generations, I asked:

> *"Why do you think the student should be at the front?"*

He replied with some amusement:

> *"Well, fundamentally, 'cause you're paying the money, aren't you?"*

Perhaps I should not have been as taken aback as I was. After all, I had entered the field to highlight perspectives other than my own, and affirm that not everything was about me. But as fieldwork continued, it appeared that in the context of the modern university, everything is about me – as a customer. Emerging time and time again in my fieldwork among non-academic staff at the University of St Andrews was the concept of the university as a *business*, with the experience of its students – or *customers* – being of paramount importance to its continued funding. This framing is the result of a wider process of neoliberal marketization in higher education (HE), defined by Brown (2015: 4) as "the provision of higher education on a market basis, where the demand and supply of student education... are balanced through the price mechanism".

Hugh Gusterson noted this movement in his 2017 presidential address to the American Ethnological Society, and highlighted a lack of studies that explore "the reshaping of knowledge production and consumption in response to larger political-economic forces; the transfer of contemporary corporate workplace practices to the university; the changing structure of the university workforce in the context of··· increased economic stratification··· and the silent complicity of liberal faculty with many of these processes" (439). While these aspects have since been further and internationally explored (see Gupta 2018; Ahmed 2016; Macheridis, et al. 2020; Xiong, et al. 2022), only Magolda & Delman (2016) have addressed them in relation to non-academic staff, in their ethnography of custodians at American universities. This ethnography thus attempts to further fill the gap in "critical anthropology of the neoliberal university" (Gusterson 2017: 439), specifically examining the effects of the UK marketized university on experiences with hierarchy of non-academic staff at the University of St Andrews.

Method

I conducted my fieldwork through a combination of ethnographic interviews and participant observation at the University of St Andrews Main Library help desk. I met most of my interviewees through an email call for interest, to which four responded: Luke, an electrician; David, a project manager; and Xavier and Mary, both cleaners. From contacts at the Library, I was able to conduct another interview with Bernadette, an academic liaison librarian, and meet and speak informally with four library assistants – Katie, Paul, Eleanor, and Julia – during observation.

The lived experiences of these individuals are at the forefront of this ethnography, against the backdrop of neoliberal marketization of higher education in the UK. Here I will note that neoliberalism is a highly "polysemic" concept in anthropology (Ganti 2014:91), with a vast range of

analyses on its foundations (Harvey 2005; Ong 2006; Lemke 2001; Plehwe 2009) and definitions (Foucault 2008; Hilgers 2011; Mirowski 2009; Wacquant 2012, Eriksen, et al. 2015). In my analysis of the 'neoliberal' marketized university, I draw on Wacquant (2012), Mirowski (2009), and Treanor (2005) to define neoliberalism as a political-economic movement characterized by the reframing of the state to serve rapid economic growth. Specifically following from Treanor's (2005) claim that neoliberalism regards market systems as a primary instrument for efficiency, I use the term to underscore the wider historical context of the marketization of the HE sector, which will later be further explored.

Reframing the university

After the reality check from David, I entered subsequent interviews and participation observation with a new inquiry – what do you think is the purpose of the university? Another topic from David's interview served as a helpful entry point into this question: his recent staff induction, in which it was "made very clear" that student experience was "key."

When I asked other informants if they had similar inductions or were told similar rhetoric, they all affirmed they were aware of the priority of student experience. Bernadette, whose position as an academic liaison librarian is the most closely integrated into the academic side of the university, identified "the student experience" and "the continuing success of the university" as the "absolute core things that the university is here to do." David certainly agreed – in an attempt at conversation, I offhandedly commented to him, "we students think everything's about us." Fortunately for the integrity of my research, he countered, "well, it is about you!" When I made a similar comment to Katie at the help desk, she responded in turn: "It is about students. You are our bread and butter. The university wouldn't exist without students." Sharing this awareness was Mary, a cleaner, with wry resignation:

> *"All of us pretty much realized it when we realized that students don't get pulled up for anything… [the university] always seem[s] reticent to enforce anything that might impact the student saying, 'it's a wonderful place to be.' Because we depend on students, on the tuition fees. If that's the way the university sees it, that's just the way we have to work with it."*

Mary identifies exactly what wider discussions in anthropology and sociology about marketization in higher education have highlighted about the 'student experience' discourse. While a seemingly innocuous goal, the concept of 'student experience' has in practice come to represent the importance of student fees and the student as a consumer in the wider context of a higher education market. Her last statement speaks to Furedi's (2011) argument that "as customer, the student is expected to serve as the personification of market pressure...since according to the logic of marketization, the customer is always right, the university had better listen to the student" (3). I will now further explain the context and "logic" of neoliberal marketization of higher education.

Marketization in UK higher education: a brief overview

In the mid-to-late 1970s, economic recession and frustration with perceived ineffectiveness of social services created conditions for a vast expansion of neoliberal policies, such as the mass privatization of services and deregulation of markets, signaling changes to the administration of public services – including higher educa-

tion (Foskett 2011:28; Holmwood 2014:63; Holmwood 2016:65). Based on neoliberal conceptions of the state serving economic growth – with market mechanisms as the most effective facilitator of that growth – policymakers concurred that resources would be most efficiently used if universities responded to student-consumer demands directly, rather than through the intermediary of the government (Foskett 2011: 29). As such, for-profit teaching institutions were given degree-granting status to expand the HE market, public research councils were instructed to limit spending to encourage competition, and it was consequently argued that private contributions, in the form of unsubsidized overseas and domestic tuition fees, would become necessary to maintain the growth of this market (Holmwood 2016:65; Brown 2015:5; Department of Business, Innovation and Skills 2010).

Since then, rather than a publicly accessible education system, higher education in the UK has taken the form of an immense range of autonomous institutions competing for research funding and tuition fees, which have since become a significant contributor to income – in 2022, tuition fees constituted 43.8% of the University of St Andrews' revenue (University of St Andrews 2022). Despite some remainders of the "public" status of universities, including caps on domestic tuition fees and government regulation of market entry, it is evident that higher education in the UK has become effectively marketized sector (Brown 2011:17).

One appendage upholding this sector is league tables, a "ritual of commodification" (Furedi 2011:2) that have become of particular interest to the University of St Andrews with its recent success in the *Times* and *Guardian* university rankings. League tables have been criticized for their lack of credible assessment criteria, reinforcement of the hierarchy of elite institutions, ineffectiveness in improving teaching quality, and neglect of more intrinsic benefits of education (Furedi 2011:2; Jones-Devitt & Samiei 2011:96). However, left to the market, universities rely on performance in ranking scales to attract student-customers for funding, particularly in the international market (non-UK fees comprised 72% of the University of St Andrews' tuition revenue in 2022) (Foskett 2011:34; University of St Andrews 2022). As such, to improve rankings, universities are incentivized to divert resources toward attracting and enhancing 'student experience' through branding, outreach, and "glitzy" new buildings (such as those that David oversees) – arguably, an ironically inefficient use of resources (Brown 2015: 6).

The impacts of competition on teaching and research have led many to argue that marketization is antithetical to the educational goals of the university (Holmwood 2014, Brown with Carasso 2013, Gusterson 2017). For instance, some universities have concentrated focus on subject programmes that receive accolades and produce "useful" research, while neglecting and even cutting others on the basis of "low interest" and "lack of sustainability" (Brown 2015:9). Along with these challenges to the educational principles of the university, I will now explore the effects of marketization on economic and social hierarchies of non-academic staff at the University of St Andrews.

Ingrained Hierarchies

Over the course of conversations with informants about the personal and social aspects of their work, I noticed a categorization of staff arise – (1) academics, (2) 'higher-grade' professional staff (including academic support and capital development, like Bernadette and David) and (3) 'lower-grade' staff, or everyone else.

These categories became clear explicitly, with informants directly referencing these distinct positions in conversation; and implicitly, as patterns emerged across my 'higher-' and 'lower-grade' informants in responses to questions about work motivation and relationships.

I received a variety of answers from 'lower-grade' staff about their motivations for working. Mary, a graduate of the evening degree programme, told me she likes having a low-stress job that gives her access to academic resources to feed her love of learning – a benefit that Julia, library assistant and fellow evening degree graduate, also appreciates. Xavier, a cleaner, took up his job as a form of "self-anthropology" and a "confrontation" of his social class after becoming disillusioned with his work in the NGO sector following his law and International Cooperation for Development degrees. Because cleaning positions at the university are part-time, he also works as a lab technician, and has enjoyed learning new things through that role. Luke, an electrician, provided a more succinct response: "I don't have an endgame...I get paid to be here." His statement highlighted a commonality of these various motivations: rather than speaking to a wider mission, jobs were framed through their roles in contributing to informants' personal fulfillment.

Bernadette and David, however, did seem to have "endgames" – both were sincere about their feelings of contribution to a broader purpose. For Bernadette, being able to support the "amazing" work of students and staff and help them "reach their potential" reminded her on difficult days why she comes into work. David similarly shared that he enjoyed working toward a "mission" he was "passionate about," in that his day-to-day work directly "make[s] things better for the students."

This divergence between these two categories of informants also emerged in conversations around staff members' view of professional relationships with academics. Bernadette and David, working closely with academics as collaborators in their day-to-day tasks, told me that they "absolutely" regard academics as colleagues (David), and the branches of Professional Services and Academic Schools as a "partnership" (Bernadette). While other informants agreed with this view of the two branches, they had very different reactions to the question of whether or not they considered academics colleagues. The library assistants did not, with Katie attributing this to the nature of their position: "I'm seeing people over a desk – I don't see them in work, but to facilitate." Luke, Mary, and Xavier also rejected this premise, with Xavier adding, "I'm pretty sure not too many [academics] would think of *us* as *their* colleagues."

Conversations about relationships with academics usually then turned to interactions with people at the university more broadly. While everyone shared that their experiences were generally positive, all (except for Bernadette and David) did have some less positive interactions to mention: from "finger snappy" academics at the help desk, to "entitled" students ignoring 'no food' signs. I was assured these incidents were a rarity, but descriptors of their jobs like "lowly pay band," "*our* grade," "support," and "service" indicated a persisting awareness of systemic rank and hierarchy. As Xavier explained: "We are valued by individuals. But... being a cleaner puts you in a place which is what it is, and nobody tries to change that."

My observation in the library corroborated this dynamic. Every person who approached the help desk was polite, but comments from the library assistants ("That's a nice academic. They usually are.") indicated an 'us/them' relation-

ship seemingly facilitated, as Katie mentioned, by the desk separating us from the students and staff that would approach for questions.

Spheres of valuation

Evidently, hierarchies are felt between the Academic Schools and Professional Services, as well as within Professional Services itself, between roles in higher and lower pay bands. This social dynamic that informants spoke to is supplemented by organizational distinctions as well. First, while higher positions are full-time, the vast majority of library assistant and cleaner roles are capped at 25 hours per week. Disparities also exist in provisions for staff – I was told an anecdote about Occupational Health providing support for a struggling academic until they chose to leave the university, in contrast to the more regimented 'sick note' schedule of lower-level positions. This manifests itself in day-to-day forms as well, such as mandatory customer service trainings inconveniently scheduled during peak cleaning hours. Xavier, coming from a white-collar background and currently working as both cleaner and lab technician, was well-placed to make a connection between the valuation of different jobs and corresponding social dynamics. I asked if he has been treated differently between his various jobs. He responded:

> *"Since I am here I felt a lot different. You feel that [many people] treat you with some kind of contempt… What I felt is that of course, working as a low qualified manual worker gives you a completely different position in the public space. Even between the two jobs I have, I'm not treated the same."*

He explained that when someone has an issue with the cleaners, they direct it to the cleaners' management rather than the cleaners themselves. In contrast, if problems arise in the lab, they address him, the lab technician, directly. Xavier then offered an explanation for these disparities: "It all has to do with how society is organized…people's behavior reflects what society is."

In the context of the marketized university, this claim might explain why distinctions across informants in higher and lower grades emerged. With the university being organized according to a neoliberal market model, customer satisfaction (student experience) is key. As such, more value is placed on the work of staff more proximate to student experience (academics, academic support, capital development), as illustrated in the following diagram:

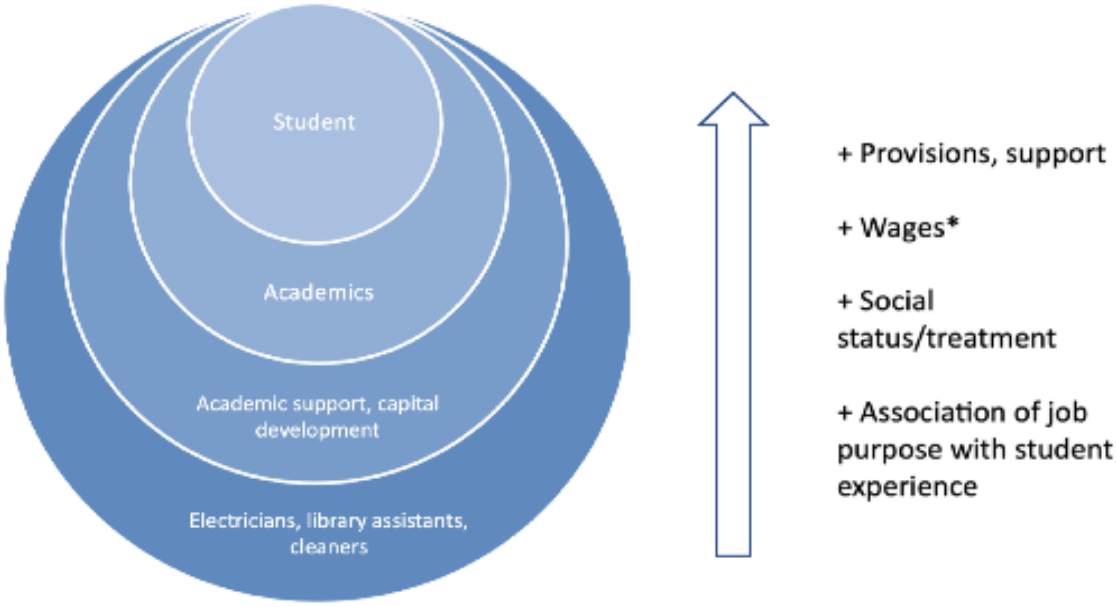

Fig 1. Different categories of staff at the University of St Andrews experience economic and social variations based on their proximity to student experience, placing them in 'spheres of valuation.' *(Indeed 2023; University of St Andrews 2022)

These 'spheres of valuation' may account for the disparities in structure and provisions across various jobs, as well as the social status that is assigned to certain roles. Consideration of academics as colleagues, association of the job's purpose with student experience, and respectful treatment increase with jobs in spheres closer to the student. This social hierarchy, constructed based on the priorities and goals of the neoliberal marketized university, has become ingrained in how non-academic staff experience and perceive their work, illustrating that marketization affects every aspect of the university, including beyond the academic dimension.

Conclusion: A New "Customer Empowerment"

Marilyn Strathern has stated that "anyone interested in the future of anthropology as a discipline should be interested in the kind of institution which reproduces it" (2000: 3). I certainly agree that the complex social changes taking place at the university, the host of academic study, warrant more of this very academic study – particularly in reference to their effects on wider society. Pressing aspects of marketization not addressed in this ethnography are the role of marketized universities in the reinforcement of socioeconomic inequality, the tensions between and implications of knowledge as a public benefit versus commodity, and dynamics of prestige in the HE sector: all questions to which the university is uniquely proximate through its societal role in disseminating knowledge and educating future generations.

Moreover, while the effects of marketization on the academic side of the university can and should be examined – especially in the context of UCU demands for equitable treatment of academic staff – it is also critical to engage in what Magolda & Delman (2016) call "border-crossing," or confronting and communicating across

hierarchies and categories of staff, if we aim to widen access within and to the university (258).

On that note, students, as the basis of the 'spheres of valuation,' may possess unique agency to change the principles of higher education – attributing new meaning to the market notion of "customer empowerment" – through facilitating more ethnographic encounters such as this one, or, like Mary, simply expressing our appreciation for education in itself:

> *"No one [goes to university] now simply because they like what they're doing! I'm sad for that because there's so much joy to be had in learning things. Do I sound mad?"*

Quite the opposite – with academics, students, and staff corroborating frustration with the turn that higher education has taken, perhaps it is time for a united effort to not only 'shut down' the university of the present, but 'build up' the university of the future.

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16

Fresh Words Multiply: Latrinalia in a St Andrews Public Restroom

Cristina Grohmann

ABSTRACT

The pristine exterior of St Andrews includes a distinct lack of any form of visual chaos, be that posters, street art or graffiti. The phenomenon of latrinalia in the female bathrooms of Aikman's Bar and Bistro therefore offers a unique insight into the subjectivities of students at the University of St Andrews. Rather than focusing on the content of each individual inscription, as has been typical within previous studies of latrinalia, this ethnography examines the experiences of five female students at the University of St Andrews and their individual responses to the practice of latrinalia in Aikman's female toilets. The study found that these students characterised the space as vulnerable, connected and impermanent, creating a sense of solidarity amongst bathroom users. These findings provide a complex and diverse insight into the internal experiences of a selection of the student population and encourage further study of possibilities for self-expression within the town.

It feels right to start poetry with poetry

To begin a dismantling of words

With an entanglement of meaning.

Words like these feel safe,

And it is in safety where I begin,

A safety that I expand upon

And watch others describe.

They say to write you must read

And so, people have feasted and scrawled,

Confessed and absolved,

Embossed their anonymity

Into a coat of white paint –

Fresh words multiply.

Like imprints in sand,

Their presence lingers in the sound of the dryer,

Preserved amongst the plugholes.

Absence takes form

In determined lines,

Irreverent shapes –

Decorated poetry.

Introduction

The interior of Aikman's Bar and Bistro is purposefully reminiscent of an informal European bar. Wooden tabletops are precariously balanced on wonky legs, frayed cardboard boxes house a selection of obscure boardgames, and a variety of Belgian, German, and Czech beer accompany weekly performances of live folk music. Despite its location in the heart of the town, Aikman's has arguably become a space that transcends the boundaries of St Andrews, visually, socially, and temporally. Its relaxed appearance does not align with the well-maintained exteriors of the town's mediaeval heritage, and its warm environment offers a respite from a student population pervaded by exclusive societies and social hierarchies. Furthermore, the nature of the space, as an alcohol-serving venue, augments these elements through an intoxicated rejection of linear time. The network of graffiti in Aikman's toilets, in particular, offers an antidote to the pristine exterior of a university town otherwise lacking in any form of visual chaos. There are words etched onto the back of the cubicle doors in biro, marker, red chalk, white lines where the wood finish has been scratched away, empty lines where the imprint of a broken pen has failed to leave its mark. There is an infectious energy in the repetition of an exclamation mark, a gestural movement in the curve of an underline, a

promised affection in the outline of a love heart. Phrases such as *don't take it too seriously* and *this is your sign to text him* accompany political statements like *trans rights are human rights* and *vaginas out for Corbyn*. Writing in 1966, Alan Dundes (2007) labelled this type of graffiti latrinalia – inscriptions specific to the walls of public restrooms. Much of the literature that followed this definition studied latrinalia by documenting and categorising each individual inscription (Stocker, et al. 1972; Gonos, et al. 1976; Cole 1991; Wolff 2010; Haslam 2012; Amevuvor & Hafer 2019). I have instead decided to focus more generally on the experiences of five female students at the University of St Andrews and their personal responses to the practice of latrinalia in Aikman's female toilets, to gain an insight into means of personal expression within the student population of St Andrews.

Vulnerability

One of the most unique aspects of public toilets is the fleeting anonymity that the cubicles provide. It is this juxtaposition between public and private that creates such poignant vulnerability. It seemed important to respect this anonymity by extending the privacy of the bathroom space beyond my field-site, so the majority of my interviews took place within the privacy of my flat. Curled up on the living room sofa, my flatmate Victoria, a second-year student of Art History and English, points out that "if people are capable of expressing themselves, it means that it's a vulnerable space." What does this say about the student culture in St Andrews, however, if anonymity is a pre-requisite for honest self-expression? Wallis, also in second year, describes the town as lacking in opportunity for dialogue. Because of the size of the town, words spread like wildfire: "it feels like everything you do and everything you say will be noted and will be attached to your name…nothing feels untouched, nothing feels safe". Consequently, an anonymous space like Aikman's bathrooms can offer an antidote to this incessant social pressure. "I think that's what's kind of beautiful about it, that no matter what you're writing, it's because you just want to write it and for it to be heard and seen for what it is instead of who you are", Wallis concludes. Victoria remarks that the isolation experienced as a result of this social pressure is also somewhat relieved by the intimacy paradoxically created through anonymity. "I think we take intimacy as being in physical proximity to one another, but that's not exactly what intimacy is. [St Andrews] is one of the easiest places to feel quite detached and quite isolated." She describes bathrooms as being intimate spaces that contrast this isolation; the act of undressing oneself in the cubicle is one of the most vulnerable acts that one can do. Anonymity enables vulnerability which in turn encourages freedom of expression.

Both Victoria and Wallis have published poetry in student run magazines. However, neither of them has yet contributed to the latrinalia in Aikman's. Having asked them to compare their perceived experience of writing in an identified versus anonymous setting, Wallis replied that she would find writing in an anonymous space less anxiety-inducing, whilst Victoria felt that it would be putting herself in a more vulnerable position. Both agreed, however, that this was not to do with the space itself, which they perceive to be very positive. Victoria also describes writing in an informal setting as freeing in comparison to the more rigid requirements of the creative industry: "all you have to do is physically be there and have a pen." There was a general consensus amongst all participants of the accepting nature of the space as a result of the positive tone of the latrinalia. Delilah, a second-year student of French, described

it as "a space to communicate your feelings. Every feeling is going to be accepted regardless of whether it's happy, sad, meaningful, light-hearted". There seems to be a universally friendly and supportive atmosphere in women's bathrooms, particularly in bars and clubs where women often compliment each other and give out advice. Existing social structures are suspended whilst a shared sense of vulnerability reigns. As Jocelyn Amevuvor and Greg Hafer argue, bathroom stalls offer a respite from the pressure of female beauty standards that permeate society; they are a gender-separated space in which women come together to reject the male gaze (2019: 98). In Aikman's, it is as if this female bathroom culture has taken visual form and attached itself to the walls, mentions Emma, a second-year student of Art History.

A consensus in much of the literature on latrinalia is that the anonymity of bathroom spaces permits individuals to express ideas that fall outside the accepted societal norms (Wolff 2010: 6; Amevuvor & Hafer: 102; Gonos, et al. 1976: 42). Victoria points this out, asking what it says about the university that people must write trans lives matter within the safety of an anonymous bathroom cubicle. Are LGBTQ+ rights not generally accepted within the student community? Or is the individual able to express themselves more openly and has simply chosen to repeat this message within this space? Caroline Cole extends this argument beyond the dichotomy of the individual and the institution to argue for the role of anonymity in challenging the patriarchy (1991: 403). Latrinalia "enables womyn to speak out freely since men cannot control what womyn write in the washroom" (ibid.). Restroom walls become a place of female expression, communication, and solidarity (Cole 1991: 401). In Aikman's, inscriptions warning other bathroom users of sexual assaulters express a desire to protect fellow women (see fig. 1). However, the use of initials rather than a full name perhaps indicates a lingering fear that the author's identity would be exposed if they were to name the perpetrator.

Most studies of latrinalia have focused on a comparison of male and female restrooms, attempting to find explanations for their differences to understand more general social trends. Terrance Stocker et al. contend that "graffiti, as an aspect of culture, can be used as an unobtrusive measure to reveal patterns of customs and attitudes of a society" (1972: 356). Observed differences in the content of male and female latrinalia show distinct contrasts. Women tend to use latrinalia as a positive means of self-expression or response to personal problems, whilst men's latrinalia tends to be more image based and aggressive in nature (Haslam 2012: 124). Without any awareness of the content of the male latrinalia in Aikman's, there was an assumption amongst all of my participants that it would be far less amiable than the female latrinalia they had witnessed: "I guarantee you there will not be love hearts everywhere" says Delilah, whilst Oriane, a fourth-year student of Philosophy, describes the supportiveness of female bathroom culture, saying "guys are a bit rough and just don't have that thing, so it would make sense that no one's going to write, like, 'love you mate' on the wall." A friend of mine offered to take some photos of the graffiti in the men's bathrooms and from the pieces that I saw the majority of inscriptions tended to relate to sex, politics or humour, with no instances of encouragement (see fig. 2). Perhaps this is due to spatial differences as, with only one cubicle, anonymity is not foregrounded within the space. Men also take less time in restrooms, and, as Trahan writes, there seems to be an apprehension of homosexual discomfort and a set of unspoken rules common to male bathroom culture in order to limit such discomfort: "no talking...no

eye contact...no lingering...no showing emotion" (Trahan 2011: 4). Signage, the act of undressing, and the act of excretion, posit gender as a focal point when it comes to restrooms, and so gender differences in the content of bathroom graffiti become exacerbated (Haslam 2012: 125). Although unavoidable to at least mention, I purposefully did not further explore the relationship between gender and latrinalia, as to give a comprehensive insight into it would have been beyond the scope of this ethnography. I am also more concerned with individual narratives of self-expression and connectivity within latrinalia. which is why I have contained my research to a select number of female-identifying participants.

Connectivity

As a result of the shared vulnerability created by the nature of the public restroom, as a place of both anonymity and intimacy, connections are formed between past, present, and future bathroom users. In Aikman's this connectivity manifests itself visually in the appearance of latrinalia. "It makes you feel so connected to someone you don't even know...they're on the same sort of level as you thinking about existential things" explains Emma. Victoria describes how essential moments of connection like these are in order to thrive in a place like St Andrews: "I think here, more than anywhere else in my life, I've yearned for connection with people···human relationships here are the most important thing because there's nothing else." Connection takes on both the form of in-person conversations undertaken within the bathroom space and more implicitly through the graffiti etched onto the back of the cubicle doors. De Zeeuw describes this graffiti as "an illicit and anonymous communication system" (de Zeuuw 2021: 364). It is irrelevant whether one is a writer or a reader in this situation. Everyone is actively consuming the words. As Victoria illustrates "I think even though I have never written something, it doesn't feel like there's this massive gap between me and the wall and all these people who've written".

Shared experience is also manifested through the act of looking. Inspiration for partaking in the writing of latrinalia takes place within the environment. As Delilah explains, it is unlikely for someone to enter the pub with the intention of going straight into the toilet to graffiti on the wall. People are influenced by the pre-existing latrinalia, upon which they may base their contribution. In some cases, people have even collaborated with, or responded to, previous graffiti. For example, one inscription reads i*f his name is Hugo don't bother* (see fig. 3). Surrounding it are a jumble of arrows in different coloured pens responding to this statement: *he put a baby in me! / #knockedupthefresher / never met a good Hugo.../ he's too good for y'all.* Cole describes this as "story-chaining", where subsequent authors reply to a central message (1991: 406). This type of collaborative graffiti is most common in female bathrooms and generally tends to feature respectful comments that never criticise the original author (1991: 460). Other examples of 'chaining' include graffiti that invite an answer, almost like a sort of in-flight entertainment for the viewer. Bold red ink exclaims: *[X] is the hottest tutor I've ever had!!! Tick if you agree* (see fig. 1). It is accompanied by five ticks. Further down the door *England* is crossed out in red ink and *Scotland* is scrawled above it (see fig. 1). A third party has added the colloquialism *4 eva!!!* underneath, creating a collaborative piece that reflects the existence of political tensions within and beyond the student community. Methods of 'chaining' demonstrate that connectivity exists beyond the presence of the bathroom user.

Absence

There is absence in the fresh coat of white paint that prepared Aikman's for The Open Championship last summer, concealing thirty-seven years of graffiti. There is absence in the words occasionally deemed inappropriate enough to be removed. There is absence in passing time and every occupant whose eyes have feasted on those words. There is absence in the meanings lost of poetry divulged.

I presented participants with a section of latrinalia which I believe encapsulates the tension between the connectivity and human absence of the space: *This graffiti is fleeting human contact. Both of us are lost. But for a moment we are lost together. I wonder who you are* (see fig. 4). Wallis' response was: "It's funny that it says lost together because I think in a lot of ways the Aikman's bathroom kind of represents being found together because I think of it as a positive space of graffiti." Victoria agreed with the message but was also unsure of the use of the word 'lost' and suggested 'connected' as a more fitting replacement. Similarly, Delilah took issue with 'lost' but acknowledged the beauty in recognising the connection between writer and reader: "I love the concept of fleeting human contact, because you can imagine this person writing it, and now you're there reading it with your eyes…in this specific moment, you're stood in the same place as them." Emma responded similarly: "it kind of feels like time travel, like they somehow planted themselves there and they can't really be removed."

Retaining a presence in a space that has become renowned within St Andrews was a central theme when I asked participants about their reasons for contributing to the latrinalia. Oriane plans to write something before she graduates in summer, "something positive and empowering and funny", something that speaks to other people rather than simply marking her presence with her name. Delilah, on the other hand, has already inscribed a message onto a ledge inside one of the cubicles. *Dil Pez loves you,* it reads. "I don't want to be known as Delilah in the town. I want to be known as Dil Pez, because I feel like that's the identity of myself that I most want to project into the world." She found herself in the bathroom with a pen and so the act of writing was a somewhat subconscious impulse to attach a piece of herself to that space, inspired by the presence and actions of others before. "I'm a very nostalgic person" she continues "and so I'd like to think that someone's going to see that in years to come." Last summer, a friend of Victoria who was leaving the town for a year inscribed a poem about blackberries into the white paint: "it was her way of keeping a tangible presence in St Andrews while she was away." The poem has since been covered up. Although Dundes' primary focus is on explanations of latrinalia as breaking the taboo of excretion by subliminally reverting to primal urges of marking one's territory, he also notes the importance of latrinalia in order "to leave a record of one's presence" (Dundes 2007: 370). There is something universal about the human urge to emboss one's existence into places of solidity, something nostalgic about acknowledging our impermanence.

Conclusion

There is a complexity and a multiplicity in the meanings and purposes of the latrinalia that have appeared in Aikman's bathrooms. Although there is no real way of knowing when, why or by whom each inscription was made, a selection of experiences by those who have read, written, would write, is enough to begin to interpret a network of expression specific to

its location within St Andrews. The expression of solidarity created through the shared space of a toilet cubicle offers a necessary antidote to the isolation apparent as a result of the town's somewhat suffocating size. Furthermore, observed gender differences in latrinalia production and bathroom culture invite alternative methods of enquiry to understand previous anthropological research within the context of St Andrews. Consumption of latrinalia makes all bathroom users active users, creating connections simply by having a body exist in that space and inviting new additions to the walls. Examples of graffiti show that there is a resistance in protection, an honesty in advice, a comedy in communication. There is a poignant universality in the human desire to be connected to those who have come before and in the need to leave one's mark upon the world.

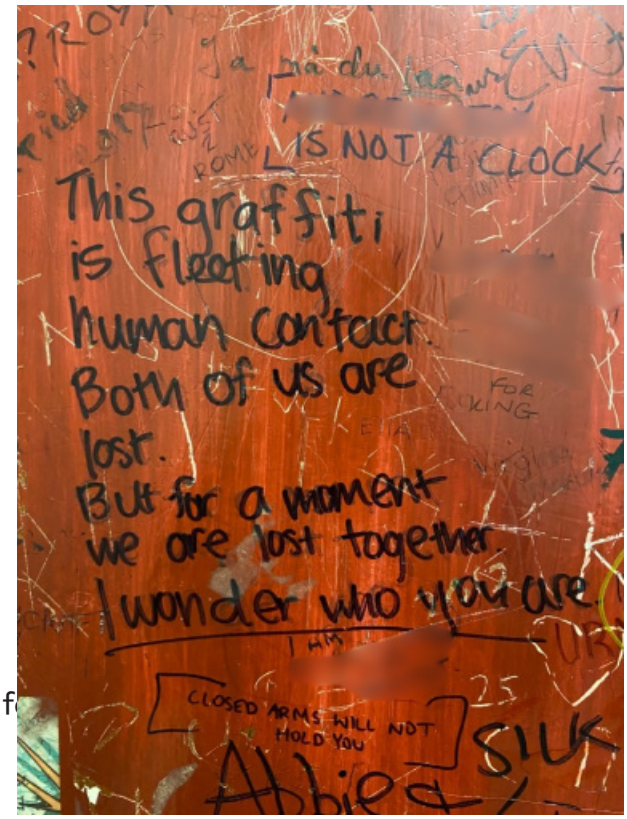
Photos[1]

Fig. 1 taken by me, Aikman's female bathrooms, 23rd March 2023.

Fig. 2, taken by Quentin, Aikman's male bathrooms, 4th April 2023.

1 Images have been altered to blur identifying information for privacy reasons.


Olivia fucks
with my baby
Never met a gosd
HUGO
Idunn was here
name is Hugo. DONT bother!
He put a baby in me!
Tits | Ass
Queer?
Join Women's
Rugby


IS NOT A CLOCK
This graffiti
is fleeting
human contact.
Both of us are
lost.
But for a moment
we are lost together
I wonder who you are.
CLOSED ARMS WILL NOT
HOLD YOU

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Language, identity, and belonging: Immigrant experiences in the St. Andrews taxi industry

Alabama Michaud

Abstract

Through the experiences of two immigrant taxi drivers, Malik and Pranab, this ethnography seeks to better understand the intersection between language, immigration, and identity. Using methods of participant observation and interviews, the study reveals how language operates as both a tool for connection and a source of exclusion. Both drivers face racism and xenophobia, but their responses differ based on their relationship to the language. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, the paper argues that despite legal citizenship, immigrants face a second-class status shaped by language, cultural assimilation, and public perception.

Introduction and Methods

Drunk in the back of a taxi with my bladder nearly bursting, the man driving me home kept taking wrong turns whilst spilling to me intimate details of his life. I suspected the wrong turns were tactical, so to increase the fare of the ride if only by a few pence. I'd correct him politely by saying, "I actually think you turned the wrong way," in hopes of not offending the professional, while he'd continue ranting to me about his impending divorce. This interaction was what inspired my original project: studying the relationships between taxi drivers in St Andrews, Scotland and the population that lives here. I was interested in conversation and chaos. How do taxis create an intimate setting between strangers that facilitates these vulnerable moments?

I had no hypothesis about what would come out of my fieldwork; I had no idea what to expect as I wanted to enter the field with no preconceived notions. I was open to any direction my work might take me. My methodology mainly consisted of participant observation and lengthy interviews. I'd wait at taxi depots, knock on windows and ask if I could ride along, and every time I was denied (no one let me sit in on a ride), I lowered the stakes by asking for an interview, to which only two drivers agreed – Malik and Pranab[1]. Over the course of two weeks, between Malik and Pranab, I conducted 4 interviews and spent time with them in their cars as they'd wait for a call or a customer. From these conversations, I gather that surface level similarities like skin color, immigrant status, and occupation by no means indicates similar life experience and world view. I set out to argue that the use of language, how immigration informs identity, and how both are perceived publicly are at the forefront of Pranab and Malik's individual

1 Malik and Pranab are pseudonyms used to protect the privacy of my informants.

experiences as cab drivers within St. Andrews.

The physical process I went through to conduct my fieldwork was tedious, yet crucial. My informants shared similar demeanors; they both were very curt in conversation. Each question I asked they examined like a puzzle, 'how could I answer this question in as few words as possible.' Anthropology prides itself on its approach to research. This is my first ethnography, so I took 'participant observation' to mean in practice, making friends. And in theory, anthropologists claim the method produces data that reflects the perspective of your subjects (Tedlock 1991:69). Amidst conducting interviews, I grappled with balancing my responses. It was essential to maintain an agreeable personality so my informants could speak freely, especially when sensitive political topics came up: at some points when I would disagree on some perspectives, I had to keep my mouth shut.

During the interviews, especially the first one, my nerves were on display. I was constantly tapping my foot, tucking my hair, and clicking my pen. Speaking to Malik and Pranab about very personal moments was daunting. Luckily, Pranab and Malik did not seem to share the same anxiety. Despite my position as the anthropologist leading the interviews, I found myself not needing to rely on pre-prepared questions and instead gave them each a space with which to discuss any elements or aspects they felt relevant. However, due to my positionality as a younger white woman, I imagine that these conversations were likely tailored to what they expected I wanted to hear, in addition to what they felt was socially appropriate. While I was studying them and their occupations, it is evident to me that "the observer and the observed are not entirely sperate categories" (Tedlock 1991:81). As I take in every detail I can about these men, it would be almost hypocritical not to expect them to analyze me in return. During my conversations with Pranab, I felt almost like his student, as he lectured me about his experiences more than he told me about them. His assumptions of me were made and displayed by the way he interacted with me. During my field work often, I was reminded of the question 'Who was I for them?' especially considering the fact that I was in a way a representative of one of their client bases as a student (Dumont 1978: 200). Positionality in anthropology, while contextualizing the author within the genre of ethnography, can diminish the author's identity and assume that both the reader and subject react only to the author's spelled-out facts (Robertson 2002: 789). In other words, the relationship between me and the interviewees cannot simply be broken down into simple facts of identity, such as male vs female, though these aspects of identity undoubtedly play a role in perceptions. As Malik and Pranab have revealed to me, who you are and what defines you is much more complicated than what meets the eye.

Language as a Tool and a Barrier

"In taxi driving, knowing the language of what people speak, and being a people person is the most important thing."

Both Pranab and Malik are immigrants whose first language is not English. The language barrier is one of many aspects of identities they had to overcome as they assimilated to Scottish culture. As Pranab has identified, language is a monumental aspect of his profession. As seen in my own experiences in a cab, the physical proximity in a cab "blurs the lines between private and public space" (Luedke 2010: 6). In other words, the liminal aspect of this space allows people to be more receptive to vulnerable conversations with strangers. Both Pranab and Malik

referenced having to take on various personas: a therapist, a friend, a confidant, even a parent. To take on these personas established within the liminal space of a cab, they rely on language.

Language is arguably the most valuable tool a taxi driver has to create and maintain a customer base. Ironically, language is also a damning force, as it often is used violently against foreign taxi drivers as Malik accounted to me.

During our interview, no more than ten minutes could pass without Malik getting a call. At one point, Malik got a call from an anonymous number.

Looking up at me, he tells me to "Record this, it'll be good for your project."

He explained to me that he gets these anonymous calls a few times a day. Prank calls, where strangers would scream at the top of their lung's racist profanities, telling Malik to go back to his country among other xenophobic and racist insults. Despite immigrating to Scotland from Pakistan in 2013, and since then owning multiple successful businesses, Malik is met with hostile language daily.

Language has been theorized as a "tool that allows individuals imagine themselves as a group"; therefore, difference in language may result in ostracization (Bucholtz M. and Hall, K 2004: 369). In anthropological circles, notions of authenticity are often juxtaposed with language. Shared language is a powerful force which helps create national identities that nation-states use to unify their citizens for the sake of juxtaposing them against other nation-states; language is a means of state control and exclusion (Anderson 2020: 287; Bucholtz M. and Hall, K 2004: 385). Within Scottish geographical borders, speaking English with a Scottish accent implies authenticity. The 'inauthenticity' of language implied by Malik's Pakistani accent makes him susceptible to xenophobic attacks. In Malik's experience with immigrating, the society in St. Andrews values a certain form of expression of English above his own, thereby harming his social identity despite his efforts to assimilate and contribute to Scottish culture (Philips 2004:489).

The adversity Malik has faced in his profession has not pushed him away. As an owner of a taxi company, he says he is more than fulfilled by his profession. He claims that as a people person, 8/10 people will be pleased by and interested in his recommendations and receptive to his conversation. He describes himself as witty, and as able to "deal with" all sorts of people.

Interestingly, Pranab has a completely different experience with language in St Andrews. Pranab immigrated from India to Dundee thirty years ago and started his own taxi company in St Andrews in 2016. Being here for so long, he's developed a local Fife accent and experiences less xenophobic comments than Malik. His personal response to xenophobic comments is to brush them off.

"It's the way it is here, foreigners have to expect it and move on, being called chocolate isn't the end of the world, it's all in your mentality."

Pranab upholds his ability to wield and react to language as his money maker. By moving through spaces where he might experience adversity and choosing to "brush off" these comments allow him to keep his business successful. He argues that the comradeship that results by ignoring these comments in the business is helpful because he gets tips from taxi drivers from other companies on where the crowds are on a certain night, that he wouldn't get otherwise. For Pranab, the pros of comradeship within the industry are worth

withstanding the cons of ignorant language.

For both these taxi drivers, language is a primary tool for assimilating into Scottish culture. Despite having similar social identities, as immigrants in Scotland working as business owners in the taxi industry, their experiences and opinions manifested differently. I argue that immigration and assimilation is transformative of the individual, but the way it manifests cannot be attributed to a profession as seen in Malik and Pranab's experiences. Despite their different interpretations of the racism, they experience and their process of language, both Pranab and Malik are viewed as having the same experiences as seen through an exploration of imagined communities and second-class citizenship.

Navigating Second-Class Citizenship

Second-class citizenship denotes the status of individuals or groups in a society who are not granted the same privileges, rights, and opportunities compared to 'first-class' citizens. In Pranab and Malik's case, despite being full citizens in Scotland, they are attributed second-class citizenship by the way they are treated socially and by institutions. Their status as immigrants and their ethnicities are targets of this second-class citizenship. So, while they are both citizens of the state, the state and its other citizens still treat them as non-citizens.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is helpful in understanding this concept. He argues that nations are arbitrary, imagined communities contained within certain physical geographies (Anderson 2020: 283). Nation-states use devices like language (as I spoke about earlier), art, media, any form of expression, to market itself, to create an identity which its citizens can relate to. Physical geography is important because it limits a nation-state. In Scotland, 96% of the population is white (Scottish Census 2020). While Scotland is becoming more and more cosmopolitan, a lot of the way Scotland represents itself and recreates itself comes from white people. On billboards, in commercials, on live Scottish TV, white people are the standard. Malik, Pranab, and all non-white citizens in Scotland are thus excluded from the national identity Scotland creates, explaining in a small way the xenophobia and racism that they then experience.

A specific institutional example of exclusion and second-class citizenship comes from Malik. He told me of petty competition between Scottish-born taxi companies and his own, where in instances of over-reporting and flat out lying by the Scottish to Fife Council occurs. One particularly violent experience Malik had involved the police. A customer asked Malik for a ride from St Andrews to Kirkaldy, telling Malik upfront that he had only 20 pounds on him (the fare is usually 30). Malik didn't mind taking the customer if he paid upfront. After telling him this, the customer got very violent very quickly, yelling at him obscenities and pulling on Malik's seat belt, choking him. In the chaos Malik managed to contact the police while trying to get the violent man out of his car. In the end, once the man was aware that police were on the way, he spat on Malik and ran out of the car into the night. When the police got to the scene, despite seeing Malik in distress, they made almost no effort to look for the suspect and told Malik to brush off the experience. Between the little concern for Malik by the Scottish police and the willingness of Fife Council to inconvenience his business in a way obvious enough to Malik and Pranab that they're favoring Scottish-born business, we see the institutions perpetuating this second-class citizenship.

Pranab did not specifically reference any times

he felt like a victim of second-class citizenship; however, he did reference a change in the taxi industry in recent years. Since he started his business, he noticed that as the years have gone on more and more foreigners are joining the industry in St Andrews, and that as this is happening the community and comradery has diminished. The division in the industry is indicative of the imagined communities Anderson coined.

"The Scotts stick to themselves, as do the 'foreigners."

It is not all grim though. While there are a lot of identifiable injustices both Malik and Pranab face, they both mentioned the constant communication between companies regardless. Facebook links are sent between drivers of events happening, so they know where the crowds will be that night. Pranab is a devout Hindu and spoke a lot about Karma. He said the energy must always be exchanged positively, you must always treat your competition with respect, or no positive energy will come your way, nor will respect. Pranab said he contributes to the culture in St Andrews by welcoming first year students every year, giving tips to parents and kids on where to get the cheapest pint and where to buy bedding, and that this is what makes his company competitive.

Based on my observations and their views on immigration and citizenship, I argue that neither Malik nor Pranab views themselves as second-class citizens. Despite others viewing their status differently, Malik and Pranab view their citizenship as equal within society and larger culture. They argue that what makes a citizen is his legal status, his contribution to society, and his interaction with local culture.

Conclusion

This paper has set out to explore the dynamics between language, immigration, and identity among taxi drivers in St Andrews. Through the lens of taxi drivers Malik and Pranab, language is shown to be a tool used to bridge together communities while simultaneously used to abuse and discriminate. Malik and Pranab, despite facing xenophobia and racism with regularity, have love enough for their profession and the people they meet daily to continue with it.

The concept of second-class citizenship explored using Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, helped shed light on the inequalities immigrant taxi drivers face in Scotland. Anderson's concepts around what exactly nationhood is and how its perpetuated explain why Malik and Pranab experience second-class citizenship despite being full citizens in the eyes of the law. By examining Malik and Pranab's experiences, it becomes clear that citizenship is more than a legal status. Citizenship to Malik and Pranab is about the role one embodies in their community. Despite the adversity, even within the taxi industry, they find solidarity and actively engage in shaping the culture in the industry and in the larger St Andrews community.

Moving forward, it is important to identify and correct systems of oppression that sustain second-class citizenship. By giving voice to marginalized communities we can strive towards a society where all individuals are valued and respected, regardless of background or immigration status.

Due to scheduling conflicts, I could not spend as much time with the drivers as I wanted. With more time, I would dive into the reasons they came to St Andrews, why they stayed, and I would have asked how the process of immigration affected their views on Scotland, identity and nationality. The pro-

cess of conducting this ethnography was extremely informational, and if given the opportunity I'd like to continue documenting and collaborating with taxi drivers in St Andrews.

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The debrief: The function of gossip in configuring pro-social relationships

Ella J M Roberts

Abstract

This project presents the familiar story of a new relationship via the lens of the gossip that fuelled it and investigates the function of gossip within female student friendships. It proposes 'the debrief' as a term under which to categorise different gossip-based events contrasting 'urgent', 'formal', and 'moving', debriefs. It argues that gossip functions to transmit both the content of an event and information about the gossip-teller. This information sharing facilitates social bonding and maintains established bonds. For participants, the debrief carried multiple functions: an opportunity for collective problem solving, an outlet for emotional expression, a diversion away from unproductive conflict, and a pleasurable experience within with to romanticise storytelling amongst friends. The project ultimately argues that the debrief is a highly functional occurrence more frequently structured with a positive outlook as opposed to circulating negative content.

Daisy screamed downstairs. Happy screams, but still loud enough to outcompete my music. I jumped up from my desk and threw open my fire door. It slammed behind me. I started screaming too; I didn't know why yet but I knew that I was excited. I hung over the landing banister to see Daisy stood at the bottom of the stairs. Amongst a healthy number of giggles, I gathered that Charlie had replied – Daisy had a date.

We were interrupted by our phones chiming in unison. Violet was finishing a meeting in her room and frantically texting us to get an explanation for the noise. This was clearly time sensitive information. Our fourth flatmate (Sage) was injured and in bed but was shouting out to be heard and join the debrief conversation.

Violet was texting from downstairs. Daisy was downstairs shouting up the stairs. Sage was in bed upstairs, gathering context from her phone, and shouting her inputs loud enough for me (on the landing) to pass along the chain and back down the stairs. It wasn't particularly organised, but it was functional. Everyone gave Daisy advice on how to reply and in return she told us about Charlie. This formation repeated itself throughout the evening as Daisy needed more advice or just wanted to share exciting news.

Introduction

My fieldwork centred around the 'debrief' and its offshoots to investigate the influence of gossip on female student friendships. 'Debrief' here indicates a semi-structured, often deliberate, gathering of people to present information in gossip form. The opening vignette presents the informational origin of a theme that frequently occurred through-

out my participant observation: the emergent relationship of Daisy and Charlie. To analyse the debriefs stemming from this event, I will present this familiar story of a new relationship via the lens of the gossip that fuelled it.

Anthropologists have analysed gossip and friendship in various forms. Gossip may transmit knowledge for pleasure or protection (Barrett 2020; Drążkiewicz 2020; Monson 2020) and may mediate perceptions of Self and Other (Goodwin 1980; Valentinsson 2020). Gossip has been observed to negatively impact reputations (Cole 2014); however, my present focus is on the positive repercussions of gossip and its role in companionship. I found that gossip was a generally enjoyable occurrence that brought friends closer though the transmission of information, even if this content was itself negative. Aspects of this positive slant are also present in literature (Bell 2003). Friendships have been presented as functional, often calculated relationships (Ahn 2011; Clement & Harding 1978; Dyson 2010) with strong emotional bonds (Mains 2013). I believe my fieldwork mirrors these sentiments whereby gossip is not just a pastime within friendships, but also a tool for building strong, pro-social relationships.

Methodology

I utilised participant observation to study the debrief by virtue of already being an 'ingroup' member. My participants were all female university students with which I had previously established friendships. All participants were members of overlapping, but non-identical, friendship groups such that everyone was known to each other but with varying levels of familiarity. I conducted semi-structured interviews with six key informants. These were recorded with participant consent. I have changed the names of all participants to preserve anonymity throughout.

The Urgent Debrief

Many participants stated that they felt some gossip must be communicated as immediately as possible. Cam explained that this content was typically superficial information surrounding spontaneous interactions or witnessing something they thought would be meaningful to a friend. Another type of urgent communication, conducted in more of a debrief fashion, occurs when one friend needs help with time sensitive problem solving – such as in the opening vignette. These occurrences require trusted friends to be contacted quickly so participants tend to consist of whoever is both trusted and presently available. Those in physical proximity are targeted first and, barring this opportunity, texts are sent until somebody replies.

In the opening vignette, I was the initial point of contact as I was physically close and available to talk. Observing the actions of Sage and Violet, however, reveal the importance attributed to participation in such an urgent debrief. Though Sage and Violet could not move to the stairs to talk at that moment in time, their texting and shouting reflects their serious endeavour to provide support to their friend in this exciting situation and learn about someone important to her. The main role of gossip in this situation was to give quick, situational context so that we could most effectively help Daisy. We were informed of how they met, instances of contact so far, and Daisy's feelings towards and opinions about Charlie. We were quickly and efficiently 'clued in' to the situation and all engaged in collective problem solving to help her feel confident in her message.

This debrief was highly animated which both reflected and maintained the exciting atmosphere. The animated nature positively reinforced

Daisy's reflections on Charlie and reassured her that this new contact was a desirable path of action. In her interview, Daisy explained that it was unlikely she would have pursued a relationship with Charlie had the initial, and subsequent, reactions to her talking about Charlie not been so positive. She expressed that debriefs are, "unifying, supportive and encouraging" experiences. Throughout my fieldwork, I found that debriefs all centred around the theme of helping friends and the idea that this help, whether informational or actionable, will be reciprocated. This mirrors the theme of reciprocity in friendship presented by Mains (2013). In both instances, unrequited action (whether gifting material goods or gossip content) leads to distress and weakening relations between friends.

The Formal Debrief

I have named this next presentation the 'formal' debrief as it feels more structured than other gossip exchanges and involves a full group gathering. My household utilises the kitchen for these gatherings, but Cam, Maggie, and Zahra's respective households use a designated bedroom. The common theme uniting all participants however was that this 'main stage' was a constant: the location did not change unless the debrief content or group makeup significantly changed. This gathering represents, in my opinion, the purest form of the debrief. When I asked participants about 'debriefs', this was the occurrence they first associated with the language.

During my fieldwork, debriefs with this configuration occurred frequently. They typically occurred over morning coffee or following somebody returning alone from an exciting event they wanted to share – such as Daisy and Charlie's date. Daisy called on her way home to initiate a debrief gathering. This pre-planned aspect was common to most formal debriefs and typically took the form of a call or text at relatively short notice. There were also more spontaneous forms of full group gathering often initiated by somebody being particularly loud in the kitchen in hopes that others would hear and join in. Spontaneous meetings typically functioned less to present information and more to catch up after a period apart.

Daisy returned from her date to find me and Sage waiting in the kitchen. Violet was still walking home so was swiftly called and told to hurry up; she ran home to start the conversation. This positive content gossip always entailed a sense of genuine fun that was best appreciated when everyone was present. In interviews, Violet expressed, "what's the point in my life being interesting if I can't tell my friends?". Although said in a humorous manner, this highlighted a sentiment which was common to many interviews: participants seemed to enjoy high points more vividly when they could share experiences with their friends. The debrief provided a stage upon which to romanticise storytelling. The more information that was shared, the closer participants felt to one another. Consequently, happiness increased. Wutich et al. (2014) found an association between low social bonding levels and low mental health. It would be interesting to model the effect of gossip on bonding and investigate a potential regression model between mental health and positive gossip occurrences.

Upon Violet's return, everyone assumed their "debrief positions" (Violet, interview). The presenter stands, often pacing the floor space, whilst the audience sits; the two stool are filled first and the third member sits on any clear counter space. In this instance, Daisy presented the events of her afternoon whilst her audience asked frequent questions and offered validating statements when her confidence lulled. Throughout the conversation, Daisy asked for

group opinions on appropriate next actions. In debriefs, everyone presents their perspective and a group decision on which route best achieves the desired outcome within an actor's boundaries is agreed upon. When asked what they had learned about their friends through gossip, many participants expressed that listening to stories or observing other's reaction to their own gossip helped them better understand how their friends were likely to respond to situations. This gave participants a deeper, functional understanding of their friends. The debrief allowed them to learn how to tailor their treatment of friends to maintain the most emotionally advantageous relationships.

Confidentiality and Proxy Conflict

Inclusion in a debrief depends on the level of trust shared across actors. Although individual relationships may vary, trust that the group will provide you with non-judgemental confidentiality is essential to participation. I believe it is this sense of confidentiality that facilitates the free sharing of information. The debrief represents a safe space: it would not be initiated if all members did not have pre-requisite trust and immediately stops if a third party enters. In all my interviews, trust was in some way correlated with a feeling of closeness. Zahra highlighted that time spent with others was integral to her felt level of closeness and Maggie cited that less organised gossip could accelerate this relationship.

Violet expressed that the knowledge I have of her life by virtue of gossip could potentially ruin many of her valued relationships. The nature of our friendship would prevent me from spreading such information; however, I believe that the way in which I learned this information also signalled in the moment of hearing that the content had potential negative repercussion if repeated. Once trust is established, there seems very little need to specify what is, and what is not, confidential.

Maggie expressed that she enjoyed discovering through gossip that her experiences were not unique; it made her feel less alone in a new place. She further explained that gossiping with friends facilitated an avoidance of direct conflict. She could vocalise her thoughts to friends and work through her emotions in a safe space. This notion was also highlighted by Violet. She presented that having open conversations without escalating to a dramatic conflict required close friendship and engaging in such conversation for the first time was a significant move in any relationship. She expresses her anger at third party actors to her friends through gossip to avoid having to signal this trust to a new person before she is ready and sure that it will be reciprocated.

The Moving Debrief

The moving debrief is the most informal debrief category and entails gossip exchanged on a directional walk. These conversations are quick due to the hard time limit defined by arrival to your destination. Participants hit key points like giving headlines. This may be revision of old information or teasing new gossip to be fully discussed later in an alternate debrief form. One moving debrief with content centred around Daisy's relationship occurred on a walk home from town. Cued by the simple question, "how has Charlie been lately", Daisy started filling me in on all the recent 'good headlines' and well as the worrisome. I responded with reassurance and brief snippets of advice that should be (and were) expanded on later, in a larger group. I functioned as a sounding board for Daisy to figure out her own feelings. The pace of the conversation dramatically accelerated as we neared our road, and we finished as we reached our driveway.

Theoretically, this conversation could continue inside the house but the change in environment often entails a change in group composition or signals the necessity of another activity like a lecture. Including more actors or elaborating ideas would shift the conversation into an alternate debrief category. In this way, the moving debrief often merges into other debrief categories. I have separated the categories as they feel distinctly different whilst participating. This was a shared sentiment among participants.

Alternatively, the moving debrief may be used to fill in friends from overlapping groups about non-confidential events. Surface level gossip occurs between members who are building the trust required to talk in deeper terms. This content focuses on individual feelings rather than specific explanations of others' activities as it skirts the boundary of what is acceptable to reveal. During fieldwork, Maggie and I often engaged in this type of debrief as we walked to lectures. Maggie expressed that these conversations accelerated the formation of our relationship. She felt they gave each of us an insight into the other's respective world, in which we were not active participants, and ultimately solidified our friendship.

The Importance of Relative Location

Participants consistently used one room per household to conduct formal debriefs. Participants from my household expressed that the kitchen provided a neutral backdrop for conversation and was physically convenient. The back door (our most frequented entry point) leads directly into the kitchen and this, added with the functional use of the room, positioned it as the most common meeting place. Violet elaborated that moving the conversation to a bedroom feels more personal and the gossip content tends to reflect this. Gossip occurring in bedrooms, with a subsection of an entire household group, consistently contained more emotional content than group discussions. During interviews, it could be observed that participants meaningfully selected the bedroom to talk in as they were seeking out a specific individual to converse with. Debriefs in bedrooms have consistent participant formations much like the layout of the formal, kitchen debriefs. Across all households, debrief participants tend to sit on the bed or floor. There is a distinct lack of chair use even though every bedroom in question does contain at least one chair. This is a point that none of my participants could raise an explanation for.

The use of technology to check the location of other members was an unexpected theme that occurred during fieldwork. I frequently observed my household checking, or checked myself, the location of other group members by tracking phones. This is an ability all group members have equal access to. Checking which members might overhear a conversation often determined the volume at which that conversation took place or the room itself. These checking occurrences became more frequent as my fieldwork progressed as a conflict emerged among participants. This resulted in a decreased frequency of four-person formal debriefs as the level of trust required to talk openly as a group decreased. Formal debriefs subsequently started to occur with three people although the format was slightly altered by virtue of the more secretive nature. The kitchen was still the first choice for meeting however, if this made transmission of information unattainable, bedrooms as a place of debrief became more common.

The term 'debrief' with this gossip centred meaning seems to be group specific. When searching literature, 'debrief' appeared predominantly within the context of debriefing

medical interviews (Rancila 2021). If you were not a group member, you would not witness a debrief due to issues of trust. However, if you could invisibly observe, I believe you would still be unable to access the full content due to the extensive use of colloquialisms. Many passages of my transcriptions were unintelligible without adding contextual notes. The language included code-named, third-party references and silent gestures. It was common to gesture to the identifying location of a person discussed to indirectly signify identity: the general direction of their house (if outside the household) or their bedroom or kitchen cupboard (if inside the household). Understanding the colloquialisms and gestures required context gained through lived experienced.

Unanswered Questions and Methodological Reflections

My fieldwork only included participants with which I had established friendships due to the time constraint on and nature of the project. All participants responded when asked that they believed everyone was engaging in at least similar interactions. Despite this, I am unclear on how universal debrief analogues are. The conflict that occurred during my fieldwork changed the group makeup of many debrief sessions and moreover dictated content. As an invested member in this conflict, I chose not to target it as an area of investigation as I this would have exacerbated the situation. I believe it would, however, be fruitful to investigate instances where the debrief goes wrong and the line between the positive function and the negative applications of gossip.

Throughout the process, I encountered many 'false start' interviews. It was often in these moments of spontaneous tangents that I discovered most about my participants as they were uninhibited by the desire to give the 'right' answer. During my first attempt at interviewing Violet, we were overheard talking in her bedroom. Sage and her (trusted) houseguest entered the room, and we all proceeded to engage in a debrief nearing two hours. Though not one of my questions was directly answered, this experience demonstrated the captivating power of a debrief. All four of us were fully engrossed in discussion of, on reflection, mundane daily activities scattered with opinions of people we had encountered with no regard for the time even though Sage's guest had a 4am flight the next day.

I did not expect to encounter the amount of laughter that I did throughout this process. Lots of laughter came from genuinely enjoyable moments that naturally occurred during debriefs. The other type of laughter occurred in response to participants discovering and evaluating my research focus. Many participants did not think their gossiping practices were worth researching and I was frequently told during interviews that individuals didn't think they could give me any helpful information. This may also reflect the strict confidentially surrounding the debrief. Participants might have held reservations as it is uncommon to talk about the debrief outside of debriefing previous gossip.

Conclusions

At its most basic level, the debrief transmits information between friends via a gossip medium. Participants learn about present events whilst simultaneously learning about friends' boundaries and interests. This information sharing facilitates social bonding and the maintenance of established bonds. Debriefs require an attendance to confidentiality and can accelerate the formation of trusting relationships. Once members have strong, trustworthy bonds, the debrief provides an

opportunity for collective problem solving. In this way, the debrief provides an outlet for performative expression of information allowing participants to maintain close social relations.

The debrief is a highly functional occurrence with a generally positive outlook. I believe the core aspect of the debrief is emotional regulation. Gossip provides an outlet for emotional expression in a safe space that facilitates sharing the highs of friends and supporting them in their lows. The debrief is a stage for catharsis and can siphon off anger to be processed amongst friends instead of creating unproductive conflict.

Overall, I believe the debrief exists not only due to its function in social bonding and problem solving but simply because it is pleasurable. All participants expressed a sense of enjoyment surrounding debriefs and my fieldwork was densely populated with laughter. Violet's closing interview remarks reflect the experience of being a newly independent adult and the uniting nature of the debrief in such an exciting but unsure time. Her words can be made out amongst her intense laughter on the recording, reflecting the joy she associates with the experience.

"It's like I'm in a sinking boat in the ocean. I'm trying to stay afloat, and I look across and see that you're sinking too and we're like [beat] 'we're both fucked!'. And we just keep paddling. [Laughter]" – Violet

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