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Consuming The Feminist Methodology of Memory-Work: Unresolved Power Issues

A Memory-Work Collective of

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ABSTRACT

Since it was first developed in the 1980s, by a group of German feminists, memory-work has been used and refined by many researchers. Memory-work was designed purposefully as a non-hierarchical participatory research process, to give 'voice' to women and to facilitate emancipation and social change through the production and understanding of knowledge. Memory-work, though, still brings with it many theoretical and methodological issues. A collective of eleven feminist researchers used the memory-work method to explore their experiences of 'unresolved power when using memory-work. This paper reports the difficulties we specifically faced trying to dismantle positivist hierarchical research processes and relationships. Our exploration also suggested that using memory-work within the

dominant positivist discourses and patriarchal structures of academia could, at times, leave feminist researchers feeling powerless. At the same time, we experienced memory-work as a valuable, credible method that was ultimately, exhilarating to be part of.

The use of memory-work as a qualitative method in feminist social research is well established in Australia and New Zealand. While it has been a fruitful method for reaching new depths of understanding human (female) experiences, a number of theoretical and methodological issues remain unaddressed (Small & Onyx 2001). This paper addresses one of those issues, unresolved power, in the non-hierarchical feminist-designed method of memory-work. As feminist researchers, we are committed to ensuring that women and other disenfranchised groups are not exploited

by research; and that their 'voices' are not silenced in either the process or products of our research.

This paper first briefly describes how memory-work theory and method examines and uses collective 'embodied' experiences to create knowledge. Second, it describes how we used memory-work to examine 'unresolved power' inherent in the method itself. Last, it discusses our perceptions of our lived experiences as memory-work researchers, the methodological dilemmas and relations of power that arose as we carried out the process of memory-work. Our experiences indicated concerns about the method and methodological that had not been articulated through our own previous research.

MEMORY-WORK THEORY

Memory-work is a method that was specifically developed by a collective of feminist researchers (Haug & Others 1999) in response to women's and girls' voices being excluded and subjugated in theories of socialization. In their development of memory-work method, Haug and Others (1999) set themselves the task of reconstructing scientific work along feminist lines. (For a full discussion of the feminist concepts embodied in memory-work see Friend and Thompson 2000). Haug and Others (1999) argued that we actively participate in our socialization, rather than existing as inert objects forced into certain roles by various agencies such as family and the school. As such, they argued that the traditional scientific method where individuals figure exclusively as objects is inadequate to uncover the social construction of experiences and their contribution to our self-identities. Instead, they insisted that we become our own subjects using our own

experiences for our own enquires in order to bridge the subject-objective dichotomy. In doing so, we also bridge the gap between 'theory' and 'experience', and thus provide a solid base from which to theorize about experience (Stephenson, Kippax & Crawford 1996). In collectively participating and analyzing our experiences in the memory-work process we gain an understanding of how they are socially constructed. Through this understanding we, as women, are able to empower ourselves and create social change (Haug & Others 1999).

MEMORY-WORK METHOD

In general, memory-work involves a small group of participants who each independently write a story reconstructing a memory evoked by a 'trigger' related to a specific set topic. As outlined (and modified) by Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault and Benton (1992), these stories are written according to a set of guidelines; such as, writing in the third person, including circumstantial detail, and avoiding interpretation, explanation or biography. The research group then meets to engage in a reflexive analysis process. Individual participants in turn read and reflect on their own stories, and then the group discusses each story. As a collective, the group then identifies and analyzes gaps, clichés, contradictions, metaphors, and inconsistencies in the stories to build a 'thick description' of each experience. As more stories are analyzed and the discussion develops, similarities, differences and/or patterns across the stories are identified, and personal and social-cultural meanings are analyzed. The group discussion ends when participants have completed a thorough analysis of each story, and a coherent picture has emerged from the set of memories for that particular

trigger. This can take several hours. In the final stage, the researchers relate this analysis to existing theory, modifying and building theory. New theoretical understandings are then tested against other stories in the group and/or other collectives and adjusted according.

IMPLEMENTING THE MEMORY-WORK METHOD

On the second day of the *Memory-Work Research Conference* held at the University of Technology Sydney in January 2000 (see Small & Onyx 2001), half of the delegates, all experienced memory-work researchers, participated in a memory-work session to explore our power relation experiences with the process and product of the method. We adapted the memory-work process described by Haug and Others (1999) and further detailed by Crawford et al. (1992) and Onyx (2001) as explained above. We collectively chose the trigger 'Unresolved Issues of Power' because it was one problematic aspect of the methodology that we had raised repeatedly during day one of the conference. With our stories on paper, we formed two groups - one group of five and the other of six - to examine and analyze our written experiences. Our collective analysis of the written memories aimed to uncover common social understandings of events, to identify the social meanings and authority embodied and disrupted in the actions described, and to examine how these meanings were constructed. Both groups met for one and half-hours and then reported their discussions to the whole group. All sessions were taped. The taped discussions and written stories were copied and distributed to the members of the collective. As we are geographically scattered throughout

Australia and New Zealand, we used communications technology to continue our collective analysis through writing. In this phase, the material from both the written memories and the collective discussion was further theorized. Insights from 'common sense meanings', identified by the groups through their discussions, were extended and related to theoretical discussions within the wider academic literature. Each of us in turn 'wrote' and 'rewrote' the paper, drawing on the written memories, the taped discussions, and our own knowledge of the literature, before forwarding it on electronically to the next writer. At the end of this process the final editing was carried out. This conference paper presents selected issues from the resultant paper, and uses excerpts from our written memories and discussions to document our experiences. We use italics to distinguish discussion from the written memory stories. Pseudonyms have not been ascribed except where the author has chosen to do so.

COMMON POINTS ON POWER

In our oral and written analyses, we discovered unexpected commonalities in our experience of unresolved power issues in the memory-work process. In this paper, we use the key principles of memory-work as a framework to theorize our experiences of unresolved power using the method. These key principles are 1) to use collectivity as a means of deriving common meaning, 2) to collapse the dualism of subject and object, 3) to understand the reproduction of social formation, and 4) to reflect on memories as a means of agency and change. While these key principles are discussed separately they are not interdependent of each other. These principles revealed themselves as sites of struggle and anxiety for us as researchers who uncompromisingly

embrace a feminist ideology within patriarchal hegemonic research structures. Our analyses moved us towards a new questioning of the core values and processes of memory-work as *method*, and a re-evaluation of these fundamental principles.

‘Collectivity’ as a Means of Deriving Common Meaning

The meanings of actions are not found in the actor’s head but in the common meanings, which she/ he negotiates in interaction with others (Crawford et al. 1992, p. 53).

Through the non-hierarchical collective process of memory-work, we as researchers, seek to derive common meanings from our shared experiences. These common meanings are derived from the broader socio-cultural context and prevailing relations of power. However, we cannot assume this commonality. Due to the discursive construction of agency and disparity within the memory-work group participants may resist others’ interpretation of a particular event (Koutroulis 1993).

However, it became apparent through our discussion that when we, as researchers, deliberately approached the memory-work procedure with the conscious intent to be participatory, to make explicit the usual relations of power and their effects, and to disrupt these, the process itself could quickly engender trust within the research group. The evolving, participatory dynamic of memory-work was clearly represented in our written memories of experiencing the process as researchers:

Amazingly, great questions and discussion followed. There were

also challenges by all to remember to speak in third person and not to talk over others. The group process was evolving. Three and a half-hours later, after reading and analyzing all the memories, they had finished. They agreed it had been a productive and fun session. "What trigger should we use next time?" Annabel pulled out her ideas. There was discussion and other suggestions. They agreed to the trigger, 'an exhilarating clothing shopping experience'.

Nonetheless, for most of us, this collectivity exposed a thinly-disguised contradiction in our positions as researchers throughout the process. This conflict was first felt in our written memories when we described feeling coercive as we selected participants. For many of us this developed in an anxiety as to whether the group would function collectively:

She [the lecturer/ researcher] gathers her things together and swallows from the water bottle on her desk. Her mouth is dry with anxiety and hope. The corridor is warm. The lawn is cool, though no longer frosty in the midday sun.

What will they think? Will they agree? Can she convince them that they might come together as equals? Trust one another, trust the process. Her heart pounds faster with each step across the lawn that brings her closer to where they wait. They are "good girls" - not feminist, not socialist, not intellectuals. She will tell them a story about when she asked her mother to cut her yellow one-piece into a bikini. How she imagined having the bikini would prove that the possibility of romance was everywhere and she would find happiness ever after. She will tell

them that this is an opportunity to participate in generating knowledge about the lives of women and children.

She kept walking, imagining, remembering, anticipating, hoping. Mind racing, mouth dry, heart pumping as she pushed open the door to the rush of warm air and the curious, resistant faces sitting there.

Moreover, in the collective process of memory-work, the disruption of taken-for-granted relations of power inherent in more usual research methods was confusing for participants and researcher alike. Indeed, the emphasis on a collective process can lead to confused priorities for the researcher. Rather than giving voice to the participants, it might actually prevent generation of knowledge:

She sat around the wooden table with her writing friends. She was pleased with herself, at how well things were going, at how carefully she had prepared. There was fresh juice in a jug, good bread, cheese and fruit on the bench behind them, and wine chilling in the fridge for later... . She was very comfortable in her certainty that she would not be a teacher, like Inez had been in their first writing group, sure that she would not be a leader in the group, she knew that this group would be collective and feminist in its processes.

She relaxed into her chair and listened carefully as the first woman read her memory to the group. She noted down phrases and images as she listened. The reader finished and there were low murmurs of ‘Mmmm’, ‘very

good’, and sighs as if of recognition from the audience. Then there was silence. Glances criss-crossed the table, someone cleared their throat, she looked downwards at the table top. She had to stop herself from jumping in, not wanting to go first, to break the silence first. Her jaw grew tense, her body began to tighten. One of the women started to say something, stopped, turned to her and said, “I’m not sure how you want us to do this... . I don’t know what you want.” Others murmured. Fear pulsed through her body, panic, she realized she did not know herself.

Although the researcher might be acutely aware of the collective processes that she hoped to engender, her reluctance to take up ‘authority’ could be read by participants negatively, as a ‘lack’ rather than a difference in approach:

“It seems to me, “ she [*researcher*] said, “that there’s concern that I don’t give enough direction to the group.”

[*participant*] “I don’t think we said that. All I think was said was that it would be helpful to you, not necessarily us, if there was guidance. And didn’t you say you had trouble concentrating on the memories and attending to the group as well?”

[*researcher*] “Hmm, I think that’s what I said. I do. I certainly do.”

[*participant*] “What about if we share it [*facilitation*]?”

Some silence, some No’s.

Paradoxical, we were inclined to claim the authority of the researcher over the researched and, at the same time, to reject it. This situation could leave us in a sort of research limbo:

It's a real sense of isolation – you're isolated because you're not even one of the group, really you don't come across as one of them and you're not one of them.

This tension was particularly strong where participants had not met as equals - where a researcher/ lecturer/ teacher/ expert met with research participants whose co-operation she had solicited for her own research purposes and whose relative age and/or occupational status may be less powerful than hers. Our discussion analyzing this tension highlighted the contradictions inherent in being responsible for the research, for the ultimate outcomes, and for the explicit methodological feature of collectivity:

I felt like I was in charge; I was responsible but I didn't want to take over. I tried not to take over, but at the same time I wanted to make sure that I got out of it what I needed to get out of it...

This refusal of authority was experienced as almost impossible within the academic contexts that framed our research. We were highly sensitive to the ambiguities of our situation, and the tensions engendered were deeply felt:

There's a need to adopt as much of the responsibility as we need, but to keep it as minimal as possible as well – and then we can't police the procedures and get what we want out of it. We would be slipping into positivist and masculinist ways if we did....

But in the end I was the one who was going to write the thesis, be awarded the academic award.

As these excerpts from our stories and discussion indicate, while committed to the principles of collective memory-work, we experienced intense tensions working with a method that requires “going against the grain” of research-as-usual. We felt responsible for the success of the event, but often would not or could not control the discussion. There were contradictions and ambiguities in being, and desiring to be, at once powerful-not powerful, controlling-open, traditional-creative, hierarchical-collaborative, and objective-subjective. These contradictions appeared, at times, to be working against the researcher’s intention to be, and to experience the method as, collaborative and participatory.

Collapse of Subject and Object

Haug states that collective memory-work is “only possible if the subject and object of research are one and the same person” (Haug & Others 1999, p. 35). Davies (1994, p. 83) describes the memory-work process of speaking and writing memories collectively as one which researchers “spin the web of themselves and find themselves in that act of spinning, in the process of making sense out of the cultural threads through which lives are made”. To achieve this, the researcher must position herself *with* the participants. *With* the participants, we can make visible the discourses within which we operate in the world, and be both subject and object of our own research.

Feminist epistemology acknowledges the use of embodied knowledges constructed through ‘lived’ experiences as valid and important data. Feminist

theorizing uses experience and legitimizes the subjective personal voice of the researcher/ researched. Ideally, memory-work creates the space for voices not usually heard to tell their own stories in their own words, in a group where all members are equal in terms of the knowledges constructed.

Such a space stimulates the sharing of personal experiences, not all of which are considered material for the public arena. In our desire as researchers not to “*disadvantage women*”, there was a dilemma as to which memories could be placed into the public arena - how the public might interpret and use these memories against women. As illustrated in one of our written memories and the group discussion, “*every time you make . . . choices, - choosing the memories, how to present them, what order you present them, how much to present, - every time you make those choices it’s a power decision...*”:

They sat side by side on the couch both looking at Alice’s memory detail her first sexual experience with her partner following the removal of both of her breasts. “I want you to seriously consider taking it out”, said Clarissa [her PhD supervisor]. “But” said Alice as she reflected again. She thought about what the experience had meant to her. As she did so tears crept slowly down both of her cheeks. It was such a difficult memory. Difficult to write and equally difficult to share, especially with her partner which she had done so only recently. Alice thought about her motivation for writing the memory and why others needed to know of her experiences. They

need to learn from them she thought. Clarissa continued, “Think about what it will mean for that memory to be in the public arena. Someone may choose to use it against you. Not everyone has a benevolent way”. The tears still with her, Alice returned home to her computer. She opened the document, selected the memory and pressed the delete key.

In addition, we were aware that we experienced the process not just as co-researchers/ facilitators but also as women, as complex and embodied individuals. Being highly personal in nature, memory-work was identified as a highly emotional experience for both participants and researcher:

Reading quickly through the notes transcribed from the previous meeting, Wilma smarted, her energy draining. In black and white, marking her forever like a brand scorching her skin, those words that humiliated her – [words that challenged the authority and *intellectual power* of herself and/or the group]. She noticed them [in the previous meeting] when they were said. Shocked. Don’t confront. Keep them pleased. You need them. So she was mute. Still they kept coming. And again tonight. Cheerful faces, smiling red lips out of which words . . . animatedly spilled. Cramming the room. Diving for the comfortable couch, giggling, displacing, settling.

“You make too much of these things,” thought Wilma. “Go easy”.

She loved the red lips. Laughing heartily to herself she remembered the story Raquel had told her. Red

lips, she said were akin to labia of animals when 'on heat'. They were a message. And so they came to the group wearing red lips. Raquel [the main challenger] knew why. Wilma knew why.

Pam, now firmly planted on the couch, had called her prior to the last meeting. She had, with great intensity, talked about what had gone on in the group, dissecting Diane with painstaking care. Wilma went along with this, knowing she shouldn't. Soon after, at the meeting, Pam had brought up discussion about the group dynamics, asking the group for confirmation that what went on not be discussed outside of the meeting. What a bloody cheek!

On the other hand, our written memories suggest that the emotional commitment and social responsibility of the researcher to the group members and the integrity of the project's outcomes was a critical feature in the bonded collective experience generated by the memory-work method. Indeed, this experience of emotional bonding emerged as a crucial element that could override tensions of subject/object positioning. Our analysis suggested that emotionality is a vital aspect of the embodiment of experience and therefore of the research process. Incorporating our feelings and emotions to understand, direct, analyze and interpret our stories in the memory-work process disrupts the rational/irrational binary that, within dominant positivist research traditions, has served as a powerful means of silencing.

The Reproduction of Social Formation

The stated purpose of memory-work is to unravel social formation or "subjectification", understood as "the process by which individuals work themselves into social structures they themselves do not consciously determine, but to which they subordinate themselves" (Haug & Others 1999, p. 59). Subjectification entails a degree of complicity, an active subordination of the subject within the social. As a group we recognized common ground in our struggles with issues surrounding subjectification. A recurring concern for us was that other academics should acknowledge the methodology and us as researchers, as legitimate and credible. One way this was evident in our study was as a concern about how the method should be implemented:

That methodology was so new and if I didn't do it in some sort of valid way [it would be questioned]. And there was already...debate and questions around it as a valid method. I wanted it all to go well. But I also wanted it to be seen as legitimate... [as it] was still very contentious, and probably still is. So there were all those things around the anxiety of getting started...

These unresolved issues of power were not just to do with too much power but also with *lack* of power. Despite the power conferred by our academic knowledge and positions, our stories of using memory-work highlighted degrees of powerlessness and lack of control felt by all of us at different stages of the method. This lack of power was illustrated in our written memories and group discussion as an "exposed self" where there was a need to feel "adequate" and "credible", to be "a good researcher" in collecting and presenting our research:

Phoebe drags the last chair into the room. Her small circle of chairs looks a bit ridiculous in the middle of this big room, particularly with all the regular room furniture pushed up against the wall. She has begged, borrowed or stolen just enough 'lounge-type' chairs for each member of her groups. Everything is ready. There is nothing else to do but be nervous. She wishes she could have talked the process through with someone before she got started.

Due to our "investment" in the methodology and process of doing memory-work, along with our "responsibility" to the method and group members, the pressure on us to be good researchers was immense. This anxiety was deeply felt both emotionally, as illustrated above in Phoebe's written memory, and physically, as exemplified in Annabel's story below:

It was a hot, still, humid summer day. Annabel was quietly, but anxiously, sitting in her seat by the dictaphones waiting for the others to arrive... The smallish gray seminar room set in the 'power passage' between the Dean's and the school administrator's offices and across from the graduate studies director's office seemed to engulf her. She opened more windows.... Finally the first and shortly after, the third and fourth participants arrived. They had found the room and managed to get a park where they wouldn't be towed away.... Three and a half hours later...they had finished.... Annabel..., in her

anxiety as to whether the session had really worked successfully, lost power in her legs. She had to get a taxi back up the hill.

We wanted to be true to the feminist principles of the method, but we were also aware of the conditions and sanctions produced within prevailing academic discourses that were usually applied to for academic credentials, publications and recognitions. These contradictions became particularly acute where the memory-work was part of a higher degree and subject to academic supervision. This is illustrated earlier in the text where Alice was advised to delete her written memory. Even a benign supervisor may be conscious of the potential responses of examiners and others who will read what may be highly personal and emotive material, and who 'judge' the work in a traditional academic context:

Clarissa [Alice's supervisor] is being quite coercive.... Don't do this [use this material in her thesis or a conference paper] because Alice can't possibly win... - especially if she cries while giving the conference paper. The world is a dangerous place so let someone wise like me tell you what to do... I [Alice] suppose she sort of had my safety at heart...

It...brings up the whole issue of the value of the inappropriateness of public tears, and that kind of femaleness which is considered unacceptable.

Also, my PhD student is not coping which is a reflection on me as a supervisor. The PhD students success is the supervisor's success.

Thus, where memory-work is used specifically for an academic goal, institutional structures can greatly influence subjectification and dominate social formation. We experienced self-doubt about our capabilities and creditability as researchers in the eyes of the academic establishment. It can be downright dangerous to adopt such an intentionally disruptive research methodology as memory-work in academic disciplines unused to such methods. But it can also be liberating, a literal 'breath of fresh air' in the "suffocating halls of power". While we acknowledged memory-work as a deeply-felt emotional experience, it is primarily a research tool (with all that is then implied about its role in formal institutional and academic practices).

Regardless of our levels of experience and "success" as memory-work researchers, we all experienced strong feelings of incompetence. We felt anxious about our sense of responsibility to 'get it right'. We were responsible for the layout of the room, the furniture, the food and drink, and whether the technology worked. But more than that, we felt responsible for the participants and for the outcomes:

She was assailed by all the last-minute doubts. Would the equipment work? Would anyone say anything other than trite banalities? Would they bring their scripts? Would anyone even turn up? Would this be the time when her veneer of competent professionalism would melt away exposing the anxieties and inadequacies beneath?

The "need to nurture" also emerged as a dominant theme within the stories we told. This theme goes beyond our academic training to our primary social construction as women. The

stereotypical hostess role was represented in our stories by clichés such as "waiting for the guests to arrive", "the frilly apron cast aside", and "the white cloth serenely covering the table". Within the usual conditions and habit of binary logic and the prevailing discourses of gender differences, nurturance is usually ascribed to the feminine position. It is embodied as female (Gilligan 1982). Typically, we, as feminist researchers, felt compelled to invest time and energy into providing a nurturing atmosphere. Frequently this meant engaging in obvious, taken-for-granted practices of nurturing such as the preparation and presenting of food. But nurturing the participants also went beyond the provision of food. There was a general feeling of responsibility for "the well-being of the group, trying to make it nice for them", determining "what will make people feel comfortable and not comfortable", and "being responsible for it being alright for them":

[There was the] notion of our awareness that the self-esteem of some of the participants is very fragile or vulnerable. Part of the responsibility of the facilitator is to nurture them.

Also, in an extension of the nurturing role, we took great care with the intellectual preparation of the group. Many of us were concerned to share the method and the theory with the participants, not merely to use it on them. Often we would discuss this material with participants.

All the women had brought along their blue folders from last week. They carefully discussed the extracts from Haug's and Davies's work that she'd [the researcher] photocopied for them. They'd teased out what terms like

“rationalizations” and “explanations” might mean.

Through our stories we came to realize the significance for us of our need to nurture, to balance the human needs and expectations of participants against the imperatives of the research process, even though none of us had articulated this before. Clearly the levels of social formation in which we were involved were multiple and highly complex.

Memory-Work as a Means of Producing Agency and Change

The issues of unresolved power in carrying out memory-work prompted stories that highlighted the vulnerability of the researcher. However, it was the method itself that enabled these stories – usually silenced, and secret – to emerge. Recognition that vulnerability and anxiety were experienced by most of us moved our individual emotional experiences into a different arena, one of collectively recognized and understood experience. Through the memory-work method, each one of us constructed and re-constructed our sense of self as a researcher. In so doing, we became more confident to express the specific conditions of our personal research situations and in this way agency was generated at a fundamental level.

At another level, it gradually emerged that one of the driving forces behind the pressure we put on ourselves as memory-work researchers comes from our sense of “mission”. Memory-work itself is explicitly concerned with empowerment, with bringing about some positive change in the participants and in the world. We wanted our memory-work research to lead to action, to prompt some sort of

personal and social change. As noted in one of our written memories:

The group wanted to talk about changing the masculinist culture of the Business Faculty and started talking about instances where each had done something to challenge the prevailing culture. Jo suggested using memory-work as a way of shaping the paper (for the Wind of Change, EEO conference).

When the impulse toward change was unfulfilled and outcomes were not understood as action, the researcher could feel flat, responsible and thus powerless in the creation of the outcome:

Chrystal said she hoped they [the math staff] had gained from the process. Yes, they'd found it interesting and enjoyable, but one of the women said she didn't think she had learned anything new. Others nodded. Chrystal thanked them for their participation, but felt flat.

[In the discussion, Chrystal recalled feeling flat because she felt she] *wasn't at her best in terms of enabling the group to fizz and buzz*. She was *not tapping into stuff* since there was much less discussed in this group than in her past groups, and because of her *lack of math knowledge*. [As such, Chrystal felt responsible for the group's failure to grow and change.]

Taking responsibility for the group's increased agency, as well as for the academic validity of the results, added to our assessment of what constitutes a successful outcome. On at least one occasion, participants had been inspired

by the memory-work method to take their insights into the public arena themselves (see Luthfi, Bellido-Caceres, Meiliani, Shahin, Siwamogsa, Sudhakaran & Sumpowthong 2000), thus furthering their ownership of the process and adding a dimension to the researchers' appraisal of success.

The capacity of the individual to reflect on memory is a crucial condition for intentionality, and hence agency (Shotter 1984). While we had discussed our various experiences with the method as a group in the main conference sessions, it was only through 'using the method to explore the method' that we came to understand that the anxiety each member had felt in the research process, was actually shared by all in the collective. We broadened our understandings of our selves as (anxious) researchers from an individual to a wider social/ cultural context. It was an empowering experience.

Through this process, we began to reposition our researcher selves outside of the humanist tradition which Haug and her colleagues describe, wherein,

attention is focused on individuals seen in isolation from the conditions in which they live and, what is demanded of the individual is an inner triumph over the surrounding conditions. Individuals are left to come to terms on their own with those conditions, and success is measured in terms of the way the individual can adjust his or her response to them (Haug & Others 1999, pp. 222-223).

From an individualistic perspective, an anxious researcher may consider herself to be inept or unsuited to

academic work. With the collective insight that memory-work brings, we began to see that what we had individually felt as a weakness, could actually be a resource from which we all drew in our commitment to the success of our project. From this realization we can go on to challenge the institutions and disciplines within which we work and study. We can thus question procedures for gaining academic credentials and publications, and the dominant research discourses. Our own agency is thus multi-faceted.

CONCLUSIONS

In our academic work, using memory-work methodology, we have each grappled with questions of power and authority that are often emotionally, physically, and intellectually challenging. Examining and analyzing our embodied experience as researchers in a memory-work collective was one way in which we could 'get a grip' on the academic and social structures and relations within which we are developing personally and professionally as feminist academics. Additionally, by unraveling our own subjectification as memory-work researchers, we have engaged in essential processes of reflexivity and critique.

In summary, what emerged in our workshop collective was the reproduction of numerous acts of powerlessness through self-doubt; anxiety; 'being good'; trying hard to be seen as credible; putting burdens of nurturing and perfection on ourselves; and catching ourselves being silenced in the very act of making our participants' voices (including our own) heard. To a large degree, in generating our own memory-work groups, we have been active in our own 'subjectification' as anxious researchers. Our written stories

provide clues into the active ways in which we have created ourselves in the social structures in which we have chosen to participate. From the many insights of our memory-work analysis, perhaps the most acute is the realization of how hard we try to be seen as credible and competent, instead of taking that power and believing in it.

Although the written stories recorded moments of anxiety, our discussions were animated and excited, and affirmed that each of us had found that memory-work, as a research methodology, generated great joy. At short notice, we had come to the Memory-Work Research Conference from interstate and international locations because of our enthusiasm, our commitment and our continuing interest in the methodology of memory-work. Within our diverse individual experiences as memory-workers and within the collective that came into being for this project, we would concur with Haug and the original collective that:

Despite our own experiences of bottlenecks, dead ends and running on the spot, we would nonetheless plead, in conclusion, that this form of story-writing is a solid method. Writing stories is fun. More than this, it expands our knowledge enormously, sharpens our social perception, improves our use of language, changes our attitude to others and to ourselves. It is a politically necessary form of cultural labor. It makes us live our lives more consciously (Haug & Others 1999, p. 71).

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