

Queer Methods and Methodologies

**Intersecting Queer Theories
and Social Science Research**

Edited by Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash

good enough. Later, we would talk about this story in more detail and still, my mother did not waver in her acknowledgment of what she could not know. She did not read or tell this story as extraordinary or rare, mournful or wasted. She did, however, share one concern: She was worried I'd be alone. That I wouldn't have someone to share my life with, to grow old with. All I could say was, 'There's no guarantee of that – of having someone – for anyone. I don't think it's any different for women. Maybe we just don't see women growing old together. Or maybe we do, but we don't recognize it.' – I don't know whether this satisfied her or put her or my worries about what is surely the inevitability of loneliness in life at bay, but that was the end of our conversation, at least for now.

Making coffee at home, I thought about my mother's gift to me: an unblinking, unmoving acceptance of the 'lost arts' and 'hidden experiences' that had become my life. In her recognition of me, in her acknowledgment and claiming of my story, she taught me what I could not teach myself in those long months: the importance of risking ourselves in moments of unknowingness, the necessity of resisting offers of certainty or stability and the flattery of legitimacy. The importance of taking a chance motivated not out of a misplaced or, worse, righteous self-sufficiency, but a willingness to become undone *and* moved to act. Why not write over, on and through the boundaries of what constitutes and contributes to autoethnography – to qualitative and critical research – by creating a few queer stories, a few queer autoethnographies? Why not embrace a critical stance that values opacity, particularity, indeterminateness for what they bring and allow us to know and forget, rather than dismissing these qualities as slick deconstructive tricks, as frustrating, as unmoving and unrecognizable? Why *not* write (Gingrich-Philbrook 2005: 311)? *Why not?*

Chapter 13

Queer Techne: Two Theses on Methodology and Queer Studies¹

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Introduction: Queer Studying

What does it mean to say that a *method* is queer? This question has profound implications, because it destabilizes the often implicit definition of 'queer studies' as either the study of 'queer persons', or as the study of texts and other cultural artefacts produced by and about 'queer persons'. There is nothing remiss in such definitions, which animate most work in queer studies and which I employ in much of my own research. However, they define queer studies in terms of object: 'studies' acts as a noun, and the outcome of queer studies is understood as knowledge about these queer objects and the dominant discourses with which they are imbricated. Questions of *epistemology* have thus loomed large in queer studies – most famously, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, which worked to show how 'many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth century Western culture as a whole are structured – indeed, fractured – by a chronic, and endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition' (1991: 1). Questions of *ontology* have also been salient in queer studies, as can be seen in longstanding essentialist/constructionist debates over the 'causes' of sexual orientation, debates that have incorporated everything from Freudian theory to claims about gay genes (Hamer and Copeland 1994, Stein 1992).

Turning attention to *methodology* complicates these understandings of queer studies. How might a shift to method, 'a word [queer studies] rarely uses' (Plummer 2005: 366), open conceptual space for interpreting queer studies as a modality of inquiry potentially applied to any topic? How might the 'studies' of 'queer studies' thereby act less like a noun and more like a verb, a 'queer studying' even of things not self-evidently queer? How might such a reframing help contribute to, for instance, debates over the constitutive and intersectional relationships between queer studies,

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women's studies, critical race theory, and the critique of neoliberal capitalisms (e.g. Butler 1997, R.A. Ferguson 2004, Joseph 2002, Wiegman 2002)?

In service of exploring this potential reframing, in this chapter I set forth two emphatically heuristic theses regarding what a queer method might look like. My two theses are concerned with the relationship between theory and data as a *methodological* problem. This reflects what I term the 'data-theory-method triangle' – the way in which data, method, and theory cannot be understood or even defined in isolation from each other. What counts as 'data' depends upon the methods used to gather it and the theories used to explicate it; what counts as 'theory' depends on the data used to substantiate it and the methods used to support it; what counts as 'method' depends on the data it is to obtain and the theories it is to inform.

While the intentionally provisional character of these theses means they could be germane to a range of approaches, in this chapter I focus on the ethnographic methods I know best, particularly participant observation. However, the focus on ethnographic methods is part of a broader trend, since 'often, queer methodology means little more than literature theory rather belatedly coming to social science tools such as ethnography and reflexivity ... Queer theory does not seem to me to constitute any fundamental advance over recent ideas in qualitative inquiry – it borrows, refashions, and retells' (Plummer 2005: 369).

With Plummer's well-taken scepticism toward methodological novelty in mind, my goal in this chapter is to set forth two theses that could nonetheless be seen as 'queer' in a methodological sense. I do not make the normative claim that only methods seen to conform to these theses are 'queer', but see them as points of departure; working concepts in service of emergent paradigms. I could have easily illustrated these theses with reference to the work of other scholars, and have elsewhere discussed the breadth of outstanding queer ethnographic scholarship (Boellstorff 2006, 2007a, 2007b: Chapter 6). In this chapter, however, I discuss my own anthropological research in Indonesia and also in the virtual world Second Life, as best represented by my monographs *The Gay Archipelago*, *A Coincidence of Desires*, and *Coming of Age in Second Life* (Boellstorff 2005, 2007b, 2008). This offers me the opportunity to forge a comparative discussion, exploring the queer valence of my methods across two very different fieldsites that are themselves highly variegated and complex. In particular, by the end of this chapter I will ask how voicing the question of queer methodology in terms of technology – more precisely, 'techne', human action that alters the world through crafting – might suggest modalities of queer studying that will be of relevance to a broad range of questions and debates.

Thesis 1: Emic Theory

A queer method might work through emic theory. At the outset of modern ethnographic research, Bronisław Malinowski distinguished between *what people*

do and *what people say they do* as culturally consequential, emphasizing that the former could not simply be extrapolated from the latter (see Kuper 1996: 14). Malinowski thus noted that 'the Ethnographer has in the field ... the duty before him of drawing up all the rules and regularities. ... But these things, though crystallized and set, are nowhere explicitly *formulated*' (Malinowski 1922: 11, emphasis in original). This insight had monumental methodological implications. If the goal is understanding culture as lived experience and sociopolitical dynamic, a researcher cannot rely solely upon methods predicated on elicitation like interviews, surveys and focus groups. Nor can researchers rely solely on methods predicated on analysing cultural products like texts, art or law. Malinowski and others did not construe these methods as useless by any stretch of the imagination, for people's words and opinions have consequences and cultural artefacts can reveal taken-for-granted conceptual frameworks. However, researchers cannot assume that such words and opinions are isomorphic with social action or cultural logic.

Theoretical justification for such a view was not difficult to find in the early twentieth century. Marxist and Freudian thought questioned any assumption of a transparently self-aware subject (albeit in distinct ways), a line of argument developed in a different but linked manner by critics of racism and colonialism (Du Bois 1903, Fanon 1952), by feminist thinkers (de Beauvoir 1949), as well as in other fields of inquiry. Within anthropology itself another key theoretical intervention was structuralism. This intervention spread throughout the social sciences and humanities before its displacement by poststructuralist theory – a displacement, however, that remains partial insofar as structuralist thought remains influential, if often only implicitly (it is now acknowledged as a productive paradigm almost exclusively in linguistics). In anthropology the greatest impact of structuralism came through Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963), who drew upon the canonical linguistic structuralism of de Saussure and Jakobson to craft a theory of culture that powerfully decentered the speaking self as the essence of the human (de Saussure 1959, Jakobson 1980).

I illustrate the crucial methodological implications of the classic structuralist paradigm to my students by showing them some aspect of English phonology – say, how the 'n' of 'inconceivable' appears as 'm' in 'impossible' because of phonological assimilation. 'P' is an unvoiced bilabial plosive (with the lips as place of articulation), and the nasal sound 'n' assimilates to this bilabial place of articulation in a word like 'impossible', becoming the nasal bilabial plosive 'm'. I emphasize to my students that they have 'known' this phonological rule all their lives, or if not native speakers of English, learned this rule without explicit instruction during later language acquisition. Yet despite this 'knowledge', English speakers cannot typically provide the rule to a researcher if asked via an elicitation method like a survey or interview. To discover this rule and others like it, the researcher would have to spend time in everyday interaction with speakers – that is, conduct participant observation. Furthermore, to even describe the rule – much less analyse it, critique it, or discuss its broader implications – the researcher would need to present it in the researcher's own theoretical language, using terms

like 'bilabial' that are in all likelihood not part of the explicit conceptual repertoire of those being studied. All English speakers use bilabial plosives ('b', 'p', and 'm') in nearly every utterance, but save that small subset of speakers with training in linguistics, none of these speakers 'know' what a bilabial plosive is or that there are three of them in English: there is no everyday-language synonym for 'bilabial plosive'. This is significant. Too often contemporary queer studies scholarship (and much scholarship more generally, including ethnographic scholarship) presumes a kind of robustly self-aware, intentional subject – consonant with dominant notions of identity politics as well as neoliberal ideologies of the choosing, consumerist self – wherein the minimalist methodological goal of the researcher is to present the ostensibly authentic, unmediated voices of those studied.

By 'emic theory', I refer to a methodological procedure that steers clear of either the structuralist disinterest in self-understanding, or the intentionalist contention that the revoicing of an ostensibly transparent self-understanding is the endpoint of analysis. The terms 'emic' (insider's point of view) and 'etic' (outsider's point of view) were coined by the philosopher Kenneth Pike, who developed the terms from the linguistic distinction between phonemic and phonetic sounds, recalling my example from language above (Pike 1967). The terms fit so well with anthropological understandings of culture-internal versus observer perspectives that anthropologists from Ward Goodenough to Clifford Geertz drew upon them (Geertz 1983, Goodenough 1970). Many research methods distinguish between data, assumed to be emic, and theory, assumed to be etic. Researchers get their data by studying 'others' – even when researchers are, as is often the case, members in some fashion of the communities they study. They then theorize in a context of 'writing up' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) presumed to be separate from the field site.

One element of queer methodology might thus be to trouble this distinction via a notion of 'emic theory'. This notion of emic theory has longstanding analogues in the social sciences – for instance, in the notion of a 'grounded theory' that is based upon 'the discovery of theory from data' (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 1). Unlike the idea of 'grounded theory', however, which in its classic formulation assumed that 'an effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study' (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 37), I mean the notion of emic theory to frame theory as emerging from both 'within' and 'without', recalling Malinowski's observation that:

Good training in theory ... is not identical with being burdened with 'preconceived ideas'. If a man sets out on an expedition, determined to prove certain hypotheses ... needless to say his work will be worthless. But the more problems he brings with him into the field, the more he is in the habit of moulding his theories according to facts ... the better he is equipped for the work. Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies. (Malinowski 1922: 8–9)

'The Gay Archipelago' as Emic Theory

I can illustrate this notion of emic theory with reference to my research in Indonesia, though the phrase 'emic theory' is one I have never used prior to this chapter. In my Indonesia work, I developed the notion of the 'gay archipelago' to refer to how Indonesians using the Indonesian terms *gay* or *lesbi* to describe or understand themselves in at least some contexts of their lives saw their communities as 'islands' in a national archipelago of *gay* and *lesbi* communities – and, at another spatial scale, saw Indonesia writ large as an 'island' in a global archipelago constituted through relations of similitude and difference, including sameness and difference between forms of *gay* male and *lesbi* female experience.² At the level of subjectivity, I have explored how *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians often evince what I termed 'archipelagic subjectivities' wherein, for instance, a sense of being *gay* or *lesbi* and a life as part of a heterosexual couple are two 'islands' of selfhood (see Boellstorff 2005).

In other words, one form of archipelagic subjectivity can be seen in the large number of *gay* men who are married heterosexually to women at the same time (and *lesbi* women married heterosexually to men at the same time). These persons typically see their *gay* or *lesbi* subjectivity as additive, not supplanting what they often term their 'normal' heterosexual subjectivities. Another form of archipelagic subjectivity can be seen in the ways that *lesbi* women usually see Indonesian *lesbi* subjectivity as one island in a global archipelago of 'lesbian' identities and communities (and *gay* men usually see Indonesian *gay* subjectivity as one island in a global archipelago of 'gay' identities and communities). In my research, it was clear that *lesbi* women and *gay* men always knew that *lesbi* and *gay* were not 'traditional' Indonesian categories of selfhood, but relatively novel terms in the Indonesian context, terms with analogues beyond Indonesia. There was always a sense among my *gay* and *lesbi* interlocutors that there were 'gay' and 'lesbian' people elsewhere in the world, to which they were related in a grid of similitude and difference. The theoretical framework of the *gay* archipelago is one key way by which I have worked to better understand these complex cultural logics of sexuality and selfhood, and relate them to dynamics of globalization and national belonging.

Now, where does this theoretical framework of the *gay* archipelago originate? In Indonesia, the nation-state has, since independence in 1945, promulgated what it terms the archipelago concept (*wawasan nusantara*) as a key metaphor for national unity and diversity. Additionally, one of the first and most influential *gay* organizations in Indonesia calls itself *GAYa Nusantara*, where *gaya* means

2 I use the phrase 'gay archipelago' rather than 'gay and lesbi archipelago' in my work to reflect how I have more data on *gay* men than *lesbi* women, but nevertheless do not wish to erase my fieldwork with *lesbi* Indonesians and thus speak of 'gay and lesbi Indonesians' when discussing either fieldwork data gathered with both *gay* men and *lesbi* women, or when speaking of social formations that transcend a single gender (see Boellstorff 2005: 12).

style in Indonesian but with the first three letters capitalized invokes *gay* as well, and where *nusantara* is Indonesian for 'archipelago'. The most salient possible meaning for the phrase is 'archipelago style'. As I discuss extensively in *The Gay Archipelago*, archipelagic ways of thinking and acting crop up in the lives of *gay* men and *lesbi* women in all kinds of ways, from the notions of a 'gay world', 'lesbi world', and 'normal world' that have island-like distinctiveness, to a sense of discontinuous but powerful linkage between *gay* and *lesbi* communities across Indonesia. Yet my *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesian interlocutors did not walk around saying things like 'I feel like an archipelago today' or 'our communities are like an archipelago'. The notion of a *gay* archipelago was not as foreign to everyday understanding as 'bilabial plosive' is to an English speaker who nonetheless uses four bilabial plosives to say 'my plants should be pruned today'. Yet neither was it as present to consciousness as, say, the concept 'hungry', or 'sister'.

The notion of the 'gay archipelago' is thus neither wholly emic nor wholly etic. It is a theoretical term for which I am clearly responsible, yet it also clearly arises from an engagement with *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians as sources of theoretical insight, not just 'data' narrowly defined. This is what I mean by 'emic theory' as a methodological procedure, one that in my own work is intimately linked to participant observation. In particular, it means that I treat the data I gain from my Indonesian interlocutors as theorizations of social worlds, not just as documentation of those social worlds. It is also a procedure that can be used with methods other than participant observation: for instance, I employ it when exploring how the informal magazines produced by *gay* Indonesian men shape 'zones' of desire for national belonging (Boellstorff 2007b, chapter 1). Researchers who develop emic theories need not be queer or engaging in work they identify as queer studies scholarship, but 'emic theory' can nonetheless be seen as a queer method in that it is predicated on reworking and transforming, rather than transcending, the concepts with which it engages – as queer studies has consistently done, beginning with the term 'queer' itself.

'Techne' as Emic Theory

That emic theory as method is not limited to subjects more obviously 'queer' can be seen from my Second Life research. For instance, one key theoretical claim in *Coming of Age in Second Life* involves the crucial role of *techne*, roughly 'craft', in virtual-world sociality. During my ethnographic research in Second Life, I saw how residents emphasized notions of creativity and making things in a range of contexts, including not just virtual objects but their virtual embodiment as avatars, their online friendships and relationships, and so on. Yet the Greek term 'techne' never appeared explicitly during my participant observation work. I took this term from a range of thinkers, including Martin Heidegger and Bernard Stiegler, but particularly Michael Foucault, who discusses *techne* in volumes 2 and 3 of *The History of Sexuality* (1985, 1986). Foucault is arguably the quintessential figure of queer studies. Yet this is not a case of pasting academic theory onto a fieldsite

context where that theory is utterly alien. As in the case of the 'gay archipelago' concept, the notion of 'techne' is an instance of emic theory.

I do not claim that in speaking of *techne* or the *gay* archipelago, I am presenting the unmediated, authentic voices of my interlocutors. But I also do not claim that the concepts originate solely at the table of the researcher-as-theorist, the same table that is the thing 'nearest to hand for the sedentary philosopher' (Banfield 2000: 66 cited in Ahmed 2006: 3). To insist that researchers can only discuss that which their interlocutors explicitly state would be like a linguist waiting for speakers of the English language to provide the term 'bilabial plosive'. Yet there is also understandable concern with methodologies where a theoretical paradigm is applied to a fieldsite context for no apparent reason other than the fact that the 'travelling theory' in question is au courant in the academy (Clifford 1989, Said 1983). Why use Derrida to discuss labour disputes in Paraguay? The answer I seek to offer with the notion of emic theory is that there is an alternative to responding either 'go ahead, it doesn't matter if Derrida is irrelevant to the lives of the persons in Paraguay of whom you speak' or 'you are limited to theories that the persons in Paraguay, of whom you speak, themselves employ'. A queer method might thus involve a commitment to developing theory as well as data from a vulnerable engagement with one's interlocutors in a fieldsite (Behar 1996), making it possible to speak not just of situated knowledge (Haraway 1988), but situated methodology.

Of course, the idea of situated methodology is in a sense self-evident to ethnographers, for whom a flexible, emergent toolkit is central to effective research. This is a key distinction between the paradigms of 'fieldwork' and 'experiment'. An experimental approach is based upon the idea of controlling an environment and modifying most often a single variable so as to gain knowledge that can predict some future state of affairs: the rock dropped will fall again with the same rate of acceleration. In the classic formulation of Clifford Geertz, ethnographic methods work instead through a form of 'clinical inference':

Rather than beginning with a set of observations and attempting to subsume them under a governing law, such inference begins with a set of (presumptive) signifiers and attempts to place them within an intelligible frame... it is not, at least in the strict meaning of the term, predictive. The diagnostician doesn't predict measles; he decides that someone has them, or at the very most anticipates that someone is rather likely shortly to get them. (Geertz 1973: 26)

That is, it is a situated knowledge produced through a situated methodology. With the notions of emic theory and surfing binarisms (to which I turn below), I gesture toward ways in which queer studies might contribute to the ongoing development of situated methodologies to respond in a synergistic rather than confrontational manner to the continuing salience of science and technology in human affairs. We can argue for the *increasing* relevance of humanistic and social 'scientific' approaches not by trying to make them look like experimental science, but by

demonstrating through our research the long-known yet oft-forgotten fact that not all science works by experiment and not all robust, valuable scholarly inquiry terms itself 'science'. To cite Geertz once again, 'There is no reason why the conceptual structure of a cultural interpretation should be any less formulable, and thus less susceptible to explicit canons of appraisal, than that of, say, a biological observation or a physical experiment' (Geertz 1973: 24).

Thesis 2: Surfing Binarisms

A Queer Method Might Surf Binarisms

My intellectual growth was shaped by a fascination with how binarisms might influence thought, an interest dating to my high school years in Nebraska and largely determining my decision to major in linguistics in college. I later found my fascination with binarisms shared by much queer studies scholarship, which is one reason why my second thesis on queer method concerns them. Sedgwick can serve again as exemplar, since she emphasized how the homosexual/heterosexual binarism has informed a 'metonymic chain of binaries' shaping twentieth-century Western culture (Sedgwick 1991: 73). Pivotal to Sedgwick's argument was the insight that with regard to these binarisms, from nature/culture to behaviour/identity, at issue was 'not the correctness or prevalence of one or the other side... but, rather, the persistence of the deadlock itself' (Sedgwick 1991: 91). It is the construal of the social field in terms of binarisms in the first place that creates the 'self-evident' idea that insight is generated by deconstructing them, for instance by adding a third term or by consolidating a binarism into a single category or spectrum (as in the case of the Kinsey scale).

How, then, to advance an argument when it no longer seems possible to locate the moment of intellectual insight and critical intervention in the mere identification of a binarism, but when the moment of deconstructing binarisms seems equally shopworn? The key move can be methodological and can build upon the emic/etic discussion above. Since I referenced my youth in Nebraska, it seems fitting that I now reference California – where I have lived most of my adult life – to forge a notion of 'surfing' binarisms (with reference to waves as much as webpages). I base this notion on the observation that binarisms are ubiquitous in all languages; no human analytic can avoid them. For instance, when I noted above that merely identifying binarisms no longer constitutes a critical intervention, but deconstructing them seems equally shopworn, I advanced my argument via an implicit binarism of identification/deconstruction. The emic/etic distinction is, of course, a binarism as well.

The ubiquity – indeed, the necessity – of binarisms means that claims of transcending them typically turn out to be exercises in obfuscation. This insight was, for instance, central to Akhil Gupta's conclusion that postcolonial nationalism 'depends on the reversal, not the disavowal, of many binaries that are central to

colonialism' (Gupta 1998: 169). Gupta's use of 'reversal' recalls how Foucault developed the notion of reverse discourse to identify how in the Western tradition, 'homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturalness" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified' (Foucault 1978: 101). This notion of reverse discourse, and also Foucault's conceptual preference for 'resistance' rather than 'liberation' (to invoke yet another binarism), all reflect a specific approach to binarisms that is central to the histories and current practices of queer studies.

Given this context, we might ask: is it necessarily the case that our only two options are to transcend binarisms – to impossibly levitate above the stormy seas, so to speak – or to remain submerged within them, like the water that fish, as the adage goes, never apprehend because it surrounds them as their condition of existence? Might there be a way to 'surf' binarisms? To surf is to move freely upon a wave that constrains choice (you cannot make it move in the opposite direction), but does not wholly determine one's destination. A wave in a sense does not exist, for it is but a temporary disturbance in the ocean, yet waves are consequential: they not only move surfers but can destroy buildings in tsunamis, or erode coastlines of the hardest rock. While any analogy is imperfect, what I mean to underscore with this notion of surfing binarisms is that a queer method could recognize the emic social efficacy and heuristic power of binarisms without thereby ontologizing them into ahistoric, omnipresent Prime Movers of the social.

Surfing the Sameness/Difference Binarism in Indonesia

I can illustrate the methodological implications of this notion of surfing binarisms with reference to my own research. I discovered early on during fieldwork in Indonesia that notions of sameness and difference were central to how *gay* and *lesbi* persons understood their relationship to the global, and to each other across lines of gender, class, religion and place. Never did I encounter *gay* or *lesbi* Indonesians who did not know that in some sense the terms '*gay*' and '*lesbi*' originated 'outside' Indonesia (as is the case for the term 'Indonesia' itself); yet never did I encounter *gay* or *lesbi* Indonesians who confused themselves with gay Australians, lesbian Japanese, and the like. They did not think of themselves in any simple sense as either 'the same' or 'different' from persons outside Indonesia terming themselves lesbian or gay, but this was not because the sameness/difference binarism had been surpassed or dissolved. Sameness and difference were constantly evoked as lived elements of everyday experience, from a *gay* man's desire for another man to a sense of difference a *lesbi* woman might feel from schoolmates looking forward to marrying a future husband. The binarism persisted, but not as something ontologized into an unchanging first principle.

Thus it was that one of the greatest moments of insight during my research occurred when I realized that the key question was not 'how are *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians similar to and different from gay and lesbian Westerners?' That question remained submerged, so to speak, within the binarism of sameness/difference. Yet ignoring

rubrics of sameness and difference altogether was impossible, not least because of my interest in homosexuality, a desire understood in a powerful sense as a 'desire for the same' (*suka sama*), distinguished as such from the desire for difference, known as heterosexuality (*heteroseksualitas*, but in everyday Indonesian parlance often simply the telling loanword *normal*). Since the sameness/difference binarism was a lived element of everyday experience, an ethnographic approach predicated on participant observation was necessary to understanding it. As a result, the key question needed to be 'how is the binarism of sameness/difference itself caught up in globalizing processes?' This freed me to 'surf' the binarism and thus to treat sameness/difference as an ethnographic object. Posing the question in a methodological register also allowed me to place culturally specific understandings of the sameness/difference binarism among *lesbi* and *gay* Indonesians in conversation with culturally specific understandings of the sameness/difference binarism among anthropologists, about whom I had noted that 'difference is seen to be our contribution to social theory. It is expected ... Similitude, however, awakens disturbing contradictions ... there is a sense that contamination has occurred and authenticity compromised' (Boellstorff 2005: 93).

This reframed relation to the sameness/difference binarism transformed my anthropological understanding of participant observation. I was openly gay throughout my research, yet I was also obviously not Indonesian. In anthropology, an earlier near-consensus that anthropologists could only be objective if they were not members of the communities they studied gave way to critiques from many quarters, not least 'native' anthropologists (cf. Abu-Lughod 1991), leading to a broadly shared (if not unanimous) conclusion that the quality of ethnographic work varies independently from the ways in which the researcher is seen (by herself or himself, and by others) to be a member of the communities studied. Researchers 'from' the communities studied can produce excellent or substandard ethnographic research, as is the case for researchers 'not from' the communities studied, and indeed with reference to all the complex shadings within that binarism of belonging/not belonging.

In my own research, a new understanding of the belonging/not belonging binarism (made possible by my reconceptualization of the sameness/difference binarism) was crucial to my methodological approach. When *gay* men in Java, Bali, or elsewhere would sometimes say that I was 'the same' as them, I treated this not as an existential assertion to be refuted (say, by noting that I was white, or American, as if they were not already aware of such things) or accepted (say, by concluding that I could take my own feelings, thoughts, and actions as ethnographic data, since we were 'the same'). Instead, this became a moment to ask my Indonesian interlocutors 'in what way am I the same?' Such a question led to more than one impromptu debate in a park late some Saturday night, producing invaluable insights regarding how *gay* Indonesians understood homosexual desire, national belonging, and transnational connection. *Lesbi* women for the most part did not spend time in parks, but I was able to socialize with them in the places where they found community: shopping malls and clubs, but above all within each other's homes or rented rooms. In such spaces we would talk about differences and

similarities regarding women's same-gender desires in Indonesia versus outside Indonesia, and also about differences and similarities between *lesbi* women and *gay* men. This topic would sometimes come up because of my own presence as a man in an otherwise woman-only space, but it was not uncommon for *lesbi* women to socialize with *gay* men – for instance, in a salon after working hours, or at the home of a friend, and these co-gendered spaces stimulated reflection on the genderings of Indonesian homosexualities.

One unforgettable illustration of how *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians surf the sameness/difference binarism with regard to the belonging/not belonging divide occurred early in my fieldwork, when in the mid-1990s I travelled to a Southeast Asian regional conference on HIV/AIDS with several *gay* men who were members of activist organizations. There were several simultaneous sessions and we were rushing around to take in as much as we could. A meeting was scheduled one afternoon about networking for gay organizations in Southeast Asia. One of the Indonesian activists came up to me about thirty minutes before this meeting was to start and said: 'the rest of us need to be at other meetings. Could you please attend this meeting to represent Indonesia?'

I was taken aback. At both a theoretical and a political level (though it is probably more accurate to say a 'politically correct' level), the idea of having a white American speak for Indonesians was abhorrent, a reinscription of colonial discourse in the context of new regimes of governmentality within domains of health and sexuality. But my Indonesian colleague had no time for such qualms; he was off to his meeting, leaving me holding a pad of paper with the networking meeting about to start down the hall. Then the pieces fell into place. I was not being asked to speak 'for' *gay* Indonesians but to speak 'about' them. The Indonesian *gay* activists were perfectly aware of my non-Indonesian status, but felt my knowledge about the Indonesian situation and ability to speak English meant I could function effectively in this context. I was not being asked to lead a *gay* Indonesian organization, or speak some timeless truth about homosexuality in the archipelago; I was being asked to sit in on a single meeting and report back to the *gay* Indonesians so they could further their work. My Indonesian interlocutors had a better grasp than I on what the methodology of 'participant observation' entailed, theoretically and politically.

Surfing the Virtual/Actual Binarism in Second Life

The concept of 'surfing binarisms' that I developed in the context of my Indonesia fieldwork turned out to be unexpectedly crucial to my fieldwork in Second Life. In that seemingly radically different fieldsite I also encountered a prevalent binarism, typically glossed by terms like 'real life' (often abbreviated 'rl' or 'irl' for 'in real life') versus 'Second Life' (often abbreviated 'sl' or 'inworld'). A few previously unpublished excerpts from my Second Life fieldnotes will illustrate this binarism, often phrased in terms of 'offline' versus 'online'. On 29 April 2006, I was in Second Life at an event with about 30 persons present in avatar form. The location

was a café set in a beautiful village square, and we were all listening to Trudy, a friend of mine in Second Life, make an insightful presentation about differing ways to make money in Second Life.³ After she finished, I turned to her and said:

Tom: Your presentation on the different kinds of jobs in Second Life is simply superb

Trudy: hehe well

Tom: The best I've seen, with all the pros and cons and all that [...]

Tom: Well, I will let you keep greeting [the other persons present in avatar form], sorry to bother you, but I'll catch you soon.

Trudy: Sure, lol [laugh out loud]

Trudy: And I'll have to forbid you to flatter me in public ;) ['winking' emoticon]

Trudy: I'm blushing irl, I'm glad it doesn't show!!

In this exchange, Trudy responds to my compliment by joking she will have to 'forbid me to flatter her in public', but the 'public' in question is a virtual public, a public in Second Life itself. She then states 'I'm blushing irl, I'm glad it doesn't show!!'. The reason Trudy's blushing 'doesn't show' is because it is a physical-world blush that 'shows' only offline. As in the Indonesian case, we see invocations of a binarism, in this case between online and offline. Trudy moves back and forth across the binarisms – surfs it, in fact – but these crossings of the binarism do not dissolve it; the binarism itself is never in doubt. Trudy and I are clearly having a discussion online about a presentation in Second Life about jobs in Second Life, but her blushing is clearly taking place offline. Joking surfings of the online/offline binarism also appear in the following fieldwork excerpt, which took place on 10 January 2006. I was playing the game Tringo at a well-known club in Second Life with several other people, including Marlen, Sue, and Bob, who was the host for that evening. Bob was getting the next game prepared when Marlen said:

Marlen: One more for me and then back to rl for a while.

Bob shouts: Everyone ready [to play a new game of Tringo]?

Marlen: Ready.

Sue: This isn't rl? hmmm

Marlen: Yeah, you're right. sl is part of rl.

Here, Marlen and Sue joke about the relationship between online and offline. Marlen first demarcates Second Life and 'real life' from each other, speaking of going 'back to rl', but following Sue's question revises his assessment, stating that 'sl is part of rl' – even while he is clearly aware that once offline, he will not be

3 As in all my writings, screen names and other details have been altered to preserve the anonymity of Second Life residents.

able to play Tringo with Sue, Bob, and myself. Banter of this kind, pleasurably surfing the online/offline binarism, was quite common during my fieldwork. But those words and actions of Second Life residents that surfed the online/offline binarism did not deconstruct the binarism; online sociality remained distinct and in many cases the source of deep meaning, such that residents would go to great lengths to access their online friends and intimates. For instance, on 2 December 2005, I had the following exchange with Becca, a Second Life acquaintance:

Tom: In rl I'm away from home for a week, at a conference, but sneaking away for a bit to log in from my hotel room lol

Becca: I know how that is. The family is going on a cruise for Christmas.

Becca: I am definitely going to get internet access on the ship. I want to be with my sl family on Christmas.

Becca: We will be at sea Christmas day, everyone pretty much does their own thing.

I just put [the Second Life program] on my laptop. It runs pretty good. But my friend said satellite access is slower than dialup. Guess I will have to see how it works when I get there.

Twenty-three days later, I was playing a quick game of Tringo with some friends when Becca 'instant messaged' ('IM-ed') me from another part of Second Life:

IM: Becca: Hi Tom, Merry Christmas.

IM: Becca: I just came on for a few. I am using satellite access from the cruise ship.

IM: Becca: I was hoping to see [two members of my Second Life family]. But they're not on[line].

IM: Becca: I am having bad withdrawal

IM: Becca: This is worse than quitting smoking.

Here, Becca was 'surfing' the online/offline binarism while literally aboard a ship on the ocean. She felt that she had family on both sides of the binarism, and that her online family in Second Life was real to her, a source of support and meaning significant enough that separation from them could be understood as withdrawal (drawing upon a commonly encountered and contested notion of online 'addiction'). But while notions of family existed on both sides of the online/offline binarism, this did not result in 'blurring' the line between the two categories; Becca did not explore the cruise ship hoping to find members of her Second Life family there (nor did she seek members of her physical-world family within Second Life). Becca and others like her were quite aware of the distinction between their offline and online families. Both might include persons who were biologically related, as well as persons anthropologists sometimes term 'fictive kin'. However, even when (in some cases) some individuals might be part of both one's offline family and online family, the notions of 'online

family' and 'offline family' did not blur or stand in for each other. Becca's social interactions with her family on the cruise ship did not substitute for social interactions with her online family; they did not lessen the sense of longing she felt for the family she had helped create within Second Life.

After only a few months of fieldwork in Second Life, it was clear to me that the binarism of online/offline was as important to Second Life socialities as the sameness/difference binarism was to *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesian socialities. It was also clear that as in the Indonesian case, the punchline had to be one of 'surfing', rather than dissolution or deconstruction, if my goal was to craft a framework that was in any substantial way an 'emic theory' reflecting the lived experience of my interlocutors. I eventually settled on the terms 'virtual' versus 'actual' as an analytical framework, noting the risk that:

I will be seen to be creating or reifying a rigid binarism. I set them forth in an ethnographic sense, not an ontological one. The binarism of virtual/actual is an experientially salient aspect of online culture ... Like all binarisms, it persists in spite of attempts to deconstruct it by adding a third term or conflating the two into one. (Boellstorff 2008: 19)

In other words, I soon learned that while some scholars claimed that the virtual and actual were being blurred, such claims of conflation were incorrect. The binarism was not being dissolved; it was being surfed. People who participated in Second Life clearly knew if they were online or offline at any particular time. Cultural assumptions forged in the actual-world lives of Second Life residents influenced their virtual-world lives (everything from gravity to the idea that you face someone with whom you are talking). In the other direction, experiences in Second Life could influence actual-world life (say, learning that one enjoyed designing clothing, or had a knack for organizing music events, or because one became good friends with someone living 3,000 miles away). But these indexicalities, influences, and references had cultural force precisely because they were emically understood to move back and forth across the virtual/actual binarism. Characterizing this movement in terms of 'blurring' is thus misleading, because it is through the perduring presence of the binarism that the 'movement' can have cultural consequences.

The virtual/actual binarism I encountered during fieldwork in Second Life was just as real as the sameness/difference binarism I encountered during fieldwork in Indonesia. It was not a theoretical nicety I could sweep aside in the face of the complexities of everyday experience, because it played a powerful role in shaping that experience. Yet the binarisms were not generative principles: they were in both cases ontologically subsequent to the cultural context. This is in line with the poststructuralist critiques that have played such an important role in queer theory, but as in the case of my Indonesia research, the realization that one must surf binarisms had pivotal *methodological* implications. With regard to my research in Second Life, the insight that the virtual/actual binarism was

experientially real allowed me to see that one legitimate strategy for research in virtual worlds is to conduct that research wholly 'within' the virtual world in question. A methodologically fatal implication of any attempt to dissolve the virtual/actual binarism is to contend that no method for studying a virtual world is valid unless it involves meeting one's interlocutors in the actual world as well. What this methodological presumption obscures is that residents in a virtual world typically meet only a handful, if any, fellow virtual-world residents in the actual world (where they are, after all, typically scattered around the globe). As a result, for certain kinds of research, including my research on cultural logics as they formed and were lived within Second Life, it was imperative to treat Second Life 'in its own terms' and not assume, for instance, that an interview with a Second Life resident inside Second Life was only valid if coupled with an interview of that selfsame resident in the actual world. Yet on the other hand, it proved productive to remain attuned as a researcher for ways in which the actual world showed up *inside the virtual world itself*, and examine how such 'surfings' of the virtual and actual shaped Second Life culture.

Conclusion: Queer Techne

In this chapter, I have worked to set out two theses regarding queer method. By showing how these theses have shaped my research practice in two highly divergent fieldsites – only one of which is immediately legible as 'queer' – I hope to highlight the possibility of queer studying, of queer methods not bound to ethnographic objects deemed 'queer' at the outset. I do not wish to reduce method to 'technique' in the narrow sense of the term – that is, to research practices that disavow their theoretical investments. But regardless of this wish it is clear that, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, construing knowledge as the endpoint of queer studies limits conceptualizations of both queer method and the scope of that method.

In this regard, it bears noting that 'virtual/actual' was not the only salient binarism I encountered during my Second Life research. I discussed earlier how the notion of *techne* became a central element of the emic theory I developed to better understand Second Life. However, the theorization I eventually set forth framed *techne* as one term within a binarism of *techne/episteme*. This is, very roughly, a distinction between craft and knowledge.⁴ The distinction is germane because queer studies is by definition a knowledge project – the outcome of 'study' is knowledge, *episteme*.

4 Some scholars define *techne* as a form of practical knowledge (e.g. Haney 1999), a definition compatible with my understanding of *techne* as craft, since craft presupposes this kind of knowledge.

What, however, might queer studies look like if it sought to produce not episteme, but *techné*?⁵ How might queer studying, as a queer craft of engagement, shift debates over method in queer studies and beyond? How might it reconfigure the political and activist valences of queer studies, transposing them in new ways into the immanent research practices of queer studies itself? Plummer honed in on this issue when noting how 'what seems to be at stake, then, in any queering of qualitative research is not so much a methodological style as a political and substantive concern with gender, heteronormativity, and sexualities' (Plummer 2005: 369).

Plummer's observation here is correct, but a statement of practice to date – the future might differ. My goal in this chapter has therefore been to suggest how 'methodological style' *could* be not only 'at stake', but pivotal to the queering of research. Such interest in method need not depoliticize queer studies: indeed, I would assert it has the opposite effect and can place queer studies centrally into vital debates over scientific knowledge founded in situated methodologies. I thus intend my theses on emic theory and surfing binarisms to disrupt the exteriorization of the queerly political in conceptualizations of queer studies research, and gesture toward a reframing of intersectionality in terms of method as well as object of queer study.

5 I ask this question of anthropology as well (Boellstorff 2008: 59).

Chapter 14

Queer Quantification or Queer(y)ing Quantification: Creating Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Heterosexual Citizens through Governmental Social Research¹

Kath Browne

Introduction

In the United States context sexual demographics have offered some measure of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) populations and/or heterosexual people (Black et al. 2000, Gates and Ost 2004). Yet there can be no doubt that there has been an emphasis on qualitative data in studies of sexual lives – particularly the deconstruction of sexual subject positions within queer studies (Gamson 2003, Green 2002, Seidman 1995, Valocchi 2005), along with the assumptions of individualised deviancy that have historically pervaded scientific studies of sexualities (Gamson 2003, Reynolds 2001). There is a shortage of critical engagements with quantitative methods and methodologies by queer and sexualities researchers. Quantitative research poses interesting challenges to queer anti-normative and deconstructive tendencies, where the absence/questioning of sexual subject positions are key enquiries. This chapter examines the messy processes of creating a 'sexuality question' for governmental social research in England and Wales.

The chapter begins by addressing governmentality and the 'counting' of ethnic identities arguing that this is an act that is productive of, and legitimates, certain identities and lives. It then moves on to briefly consider the limitations of anti-normative queer theorisations and the possibilities of a more messy conception of 'queer' that refuses to be placed within particular definitional categories. The chapter then examines the complexities of creating a quantitative sexual identity question exploring the processes of creating and trialling of a sexual identity question in England and Wales. It reconsiders how queer can/cannot use quantitative methods, recognising that:

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