
How to do social research with...

Methods Lab

Series editors: Rebecca Coleman and Kat Jungnickel

The *Methods Lab* series is committed to leading-edge critical and creative research practices in and beyond academia. It aims to be a publishing platform that supports a wide range of approaches to studying and intervening in the social world. Through repurposing and borrowing from inside and outside the academy, it stretches the walls of disciplinary scholarship.

How to do social research with...

Edited by
Rebecca Coleman, Kat Jungnickel and Nirmal Puwar



Goldsmiths
Press

Copyright © 2024 Goldsmiths Press
First published in 2024 by Goldsmiths Press
Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross
London SE14 6NW

Printed and bound by Short Run Press Limited, UK
Distribution by the MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA and London, England

Selection and editorial material copyright © 2024 Rebecca Coleman, Kat Jungnickel
and Nirmal Puwar
Chapter copyright © the individual contributors

The right of Rebecca Coleman, Kat Jungnickel and Nirmal Puwar to be identified as the
general editors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with sections 77 and
78 in the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the
use of copyright material. The publisher apologises for any errors or omissions and would
be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or
editions of this book.

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed or
transmitted in any form or by any means whatsoever without prior written permission of
the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles and review and certain
non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-913380-42-7 (pbk)
ISBN 978-1-913380-40-3 (ebk)

www.gold.ac.uk/goldsmiths-press

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

This book is dedicated to the administrative and professional staff who are no longer in the Sociology Department at Goldsmiths but supported the infrastructure of learning and research before the restructure of Goldsmiths, which began in 2019. Their sound professionalism and kindness are missed daily. Here we would like to name especially Violet Fearon, Chloe Nast and Clare Lewis.

Contents

List of figures	xi
Contributors	xiii
Acknowledgements	xxi
Introduction: How to do social research with...	1
Rebecca Coleman, Kat Jungnickel and Nirmal Puwar	
1 How to do social research with... activism	9
Kiran Grewal	
2 How to do social research with... archiving through crowdsourcing	19
Sevasti-Melissa Nolas and Christos Varvantakis	
3 How to do social research with... body mapping	29
Fay Dennis	
4 How to do social research with... a bowling ball	39
Emma Jackson	
5 How to do social research with... a chilli	49
Alex Rhys-Taylor	
6 How to do social research with... collaging	59
Rebecca Coleman	
7 How to do social research with... comics	69
Monica Sassatelli	
8 How to do social research with... documents	79
Aoife Campbell-Franks and Margarita Aragon	
9 How to do social research with... a dog	89
Mariam Motamedi-Fraser	
10 How to do social research with... drawing	99
Catherine Hahn	

11	How to do social research with... an exhibition in a university corridor	111
	Nirmal Puwar	
12	How to do social research with... ghosts	121
	Martin Savransky	
13	How to do social research with... i-docs	131
	Ella Harris	
14	How to do social research with... infrastructure	141
	Sobia Ahmad Kaker	
15	How to do social research with... insider anxiety	151
	Vik Loveday	
16	How to do social research with... knitting	163
	Katherine Robinson	
17	How to do social research with... music	173
	Les Back	
18	How to do social research with... outrageous propositions	183
	Monica Greco	
19	How to do social research with... performance	193
	Katalin Halász	
20	How to do social research with... performative experiments	203
	Michael Guggenheim	
21	How to do social research with... plastic	213
	Caroline Knowles	
22	How to do social research with... podcasts	223
	Michaela Benson	
23	How to do social research with... recalcitrance	233
	Marsha Rosengarten	
24	How to do social research with... sewing	241
	Kat Jungnickel	

25	How to do social research with... wax	253
	Louise Rondel	
26	How to do social research with... WhatsApp soapie	265
	Yasmin Gunaratnam, Phoebe Kisubi Mbasalaki and Sara Matchett	
	Index	275

Figures

2.1	Example of an 'earliest political memory' collected through crowdsourcing and illustrated by Nat Al-Tahhan.	24
3.1	Photograph of workshop showing participants engaging with the collaging materials and making their body maps.	32
4.1	A league member skilfully goes for a 'spare'.	41
5.1	Chilli cultivars and their origins, The Festival of Heat, London.	49
6.1	Collaging materials, 2016.	59
7.1A	Williams's 'Basic Anatomy of a Comic' in qualitative research, redrawn.	72
7.1B	The 'Clothed Self' student project.	75
8.1	End paragraph of ESA65B letter.	84
10.1	The Great Court.	101
10.2	The Enlightenment Gallery.	104
10.3	People in the Reading Room.	107
11.1	'Pierre Bourdieu in Algeria' installation, Kingsway Corridor, Goldsmiths.	111
11.2	'Migrating Dreams and Nightmares' exhibition, Kingsway Corridor, Goldsmiths.	112
12.1	Spectral presence.	121
13.1	'Do you want an injection of bleach...?': Parody of Donald Trump's Covid-19 governance written by participants in i-doc making workshop.	136
13.2	'Sorry this journey is illegal, unless you're Dominic Cummings?': Parody of Dominic Cummings saga written by participants in i-doc making workshop.	137

14.1	An image of a street barrier, placed at an intersection of the main road.	141
14.2	A street entrance into Clifton Block 7.	147
16.1	Working from the perspective of knitting.	166
17.1	Evelyn's mouthpiece and trumpet sock.	177
17.2	Earl Green performing at The Bronte Blues Club, Laycock, Yorkshire.	179
19.1	<i>I LOVE BLACK MEN</i> . Video still (black and white, sound).	195
19.2	<i>I LOVE BLACK MEN</i> . Video still (black and white, sound).	196
20.1	Taste! Exhibition setup. Museum of Natural History Berlin.	204
20.2	Sequential photo from the three steps of sandplay.	205
21.1	A scene from an underground station in Seoul.	213
24.1	Drawings from an 1895 clothing patent for a convertible cycling skirt.	243
24.2	Speculatively sewing historical clothing inventions.	248
24.3	A reconstructed 1895 convertible cycle skirt with material raised up and out of the way of the wheels.	249
25.1	In the warehouse: Raw materials for blending depilatory wax.	254
25.2	In the salon: The beauty therapist's work station.	255
26.1	Homeless, scene 3.	268

3

How to do social research with... body mapping

Fay Dennis

Upstairs in a south London drug service, we are gathered around a collection of trestle tables covered in encrusted paint, splayed out magazines, and various collaging, painting, and drawing materials. I am talking to Jamil,¹ asking him how he plans to use the session, when I spot a piece of 'gauze' (enmeshed metal wire broken off from a scouring pad). What are you going to be using this for? Jamil, surprised by my question, starts scanning the table looking for something, then stretches out, and grasps a plastic 'Bigga' bottle another participant, Sam, had brought in. Holding it up, he explains how he would use the gauze and a piece of foil from a Kit Kat to assemble a crack pipe. With this, Alicia, sitting next to us, who had been listening silently until this moment, says: 'Last week, when he brought the gauze in, I started sweating'. An object that was once so familiar to her had affected her body in an unwelcome and troubling way.

The gauze then started to gain wider attention as other members wanted to know what we were talking about, triggering an exchange of stories, which led Jamil to conclude: 'See, there's a lot of stories around a little bit of metal'.

This fieldnote is based on an encounter that happened during a series of body-mapping workshops that took place in the summer of 2019. The participants were all clients at the hosting drug service and hoping to abstain or currently abstaining from drug and/or alcohol consumption. The workshops sought to explore participants' experiences of 'living with' and 'without' drugs/alcohol and, through this, alternative ways of thinking

¹All names of participants have been changed for anonymity.

about substance use and recovery beyond addiction.² By zeroing in on the body and embodied practice, I hoped to bypass addiction narratives that focus on the ‘diseased brain.’ Defined by a loss of control and agency, an addiction diagnosis and the infrastructure that surrounds it, like its treatment systems, can shut down an imaginary on what else substances can do and be part of – for example, the many stories a little bit of metal can tell! – and the lives and identities people can have outside of addiction. As an individualised pathology, addiction also works to depoliticise dependency and the multiple forms of oppression it intersects with such as the war on drugs, poverty, racism and sexism.

Trying to open up this imaginary on what substances can do and be part of beyond addiction, in the two projects I describe in this chapter, I wanted to pay attention to the skilled embodied ways participants negotiate substances’ effects. Rather than thinking of substances as having inherent properties and linear causal effects, body mapping traces where these effects materialise and continue to reside after the event as a complex interaction of substances, bodies and environments. This approach was initially inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (1987) imagining of the body as an assemblage in *A Thousand Plateaus* and as notably developed in relation to the drug-using body by Peta Malins (e.g., 2004). For Deleuze and Guattari, bodies are not independent of their environment but are made up of it and are defined and gain their capacity to act in relation to it. Body mapping was a way of mapping these assemblages, while also becoming part of the assemblage itself, in terms of body mapping’s own power to prompt memories and stimulate embodied feelings. What becomes important, then, for body mapping, as I use it in my work, is not simply how accurately it can represent the substance-using or recovering body. This is a question of validity that I return to later. Instead, what is important is what it can enable us to think and do in this interaction. For example, what more ethical alternatives to addiction might body mapping generate? With this, I have been more recently helped by Donna Haraway’s (2016) notion of storytelling as a more-than-human practice of

²The workshops formed part of a broader early-career fellowship research project that sought to observe and create its own methodological ways to ‘make people who use drugs matter.’

return and relay. Using string figuring as her metaphor, Haraway describes the giving and receiving of patterns to not only tell stories but construct more liveable futures.

Playing games of string figures is about giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads and failing but sometimes finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful, that wasn't there before, of relaying connections that matter, of telling stories in hand upon hand, digit upon digit, attachment site upon attachment site, to craft conditions for finite flourishing on terra, on earth.

(Haraway, 2016, p. 10)

Body mapping, and its constituting parts, therefore, are very much part of the stories that can be told, and the realities made possible for how we can live with substances. In this chapter, I look at three ways this opening has emerged – through the materials, the act of drawing/image making and the images – before revisiting the aforementioned question of validity.

Two Studies

In this chapter, I focus on two research projects that used body mapping as a drawing method during in-depth interviews and as a collaging method in a series of workshops. Both took place in London drug services. The first study (Study 1: 2012–2016) used body mapping to explore experiences of injecting drug use (predominantly heroin and crack cocaine) with a particular interest in pleasure.³ Using an A1 piece of paper and a selection of drawing equipment including felt-tip pens, crayons and highlighters, I invited participants to draw a picture of their body before, during and after injecting drugs, and mark on and around the body what would be going on at the time (who and what would be present, including people, objects, sounds, smells, etc.) and what they would be feeling (for more details, see Dennis, 2019). The second study (Study 2: 2018–2022) used body mapping to explore experiences of abstaining and living without substances. A group of seven participants were invited over a

³I will always be indebted to Ruth Lewis for suggesting body mapping to me for this project.

series of four three-hour workshops to produce images about ‘living with’ and ‘without’ substances. They drew outlines of their bodies formed by the shadow of an overhead projector and then populated these outlines with various collaging materials, including paint, magazine cuttings and objects brought in by themselves, myself and an artist working on the project (see Figure 3.1).

Rather than focusing too much on the mechanics or the ‘about’ question of the method (which can be found elsewhere; see Dennis, 2019), in this chapter I want to think more about what body mapping *does*. This is a different kind of question. Method, here, is seen as an active part of the research process, rather than a tool for accessing the world ‘out there’ where its purpose is to interfere as little as possible, in the pursuit of objectivity. In this, I want to think about some of the ways body mapping actively changed the research encounter, enabling new thinking and ways of being to emerge.



Figure 3.1 Photograph of workshop showing participants engaging with the collaging materials and making their body maps.

Materials

For my first example, I ask the reader to revisit the fieldnote at the top of the chapter. In this excerpt from Study 2, we witness an exchange of things, bodies and affects. Jamil is prompted by the fizzy-drink bottle belonging to Sam, while Alicia's body acutely responds to the gauze Jamil brought in, and a series of stories are exchanged. Although there is not the space to expand on these stories here (for full details, see Dennis, 2022), they explored the skill, pleasure, harm and friendship involved in smoking crack. As with Haraway's (2016) conceptualisation of storytelling as a mode of more-than-human 'string figuring,' body mapping is operating as a practice of return and relay. While Jamil had brought the gauze to the workshop to tell a story of repetition, sticking it to his body map and writing 'lost my gorze 4 my pipe again,' it takes on a life of its own, and we soon witness the many stories 'a little bit of metal' can tell in this collective setting.

The Act of Drawing/Image Making

Mid-way through an interview with a participant named Jim in Study 1, I nervously re-introduced the idea of body mapping. While people are familiar with the verbal interview, reminiscent of a key-working session or doctor consultation, asking them to draw changes this dynamic. There is a disruption to the order of things as the drawing equipment is brought out but also as the room layout is changed to facilitate the activity. There is also an intimacy as we move in closer so I can see what is being drawn. Body mapping opens out the interview, allowing for a different kind of knowing to be produced. In Jim's case, he audibly uses the mapping as a mode of embodied remembering. He draws an outline of his body and says:

There was me. I was sort of thinking, today, to give you an example, I was thinking about *the clinic* (he writes the word clinic on the piece of paper), and *the time* that it's going to take for me to *flush this beer through me* [metabolise it], and, should I even have the beer ... I'm hoping that I blow below [on the breathalyser]. I know I'll blow something. Normally, I go back to zero because I drink at like half nine, quarter to ten, but I'd have had a Special Brew. Today, I only had a Kronenburg, which is 5% [alcohol], which is nearly half the percentage ... So, I was hoping, *I'm balancing all of this up in my mind* (he draws a set of scales), and then I was thinking ... 'aha, I'll get some *money* if I go down there.' ... And this was another question

as well (he draws a thought bubble), because, I was thinking, ‘aha,’ here’s the (he draws a £20 note), ‘bubububum’ (he makes noises to accompany the drawing). And, I mean, the question is, am I gonna go straight and ‘bum,’ straight back into the *needle* [inject heroin] (he draws a needle)? In fact, I’ll do that in a red one (he chooses a red pen), more of a dark red one, it’s more dominant, it’s sort of playing a big part on my brain at the moment, I don’t know why, but it is...

(Dennis, 2016, p. 136)

In this physical act of drawing, we are introduced to an intricate network of entities and processes informing Jim’s use (or not) of licit (diamorphine, alcohol) and illicit (injecting heroin and crack) substances on the day of the interview. We get a real sense that Jim is not acting alone in the research process or events he describes as he depicts a complicated negotiation of timings, objects (breathalyser, money, syringe), substances (beer, heroin) and bodily processes (‘flush the beer through’). As Jim relaxes into the practice, there is a rhythm to this drawing-remembering as he makes accompanying noises. There is also a representational element in which he thinks about the colours to represent what he is trying to communicate. Unlike a verbal interview, there are prolonged points of silence as participants concentrate on the drawing and can become attuned to what they are describing. One man even broke into song as he remembered some of the joyful ways heroin had affected him. The act of drawing/image making, therefore, affects and opens up the body and what is possible to think and feel in these moments.

Images

The images in themselves should not be imagined as an end point of the body mapping process but part of the relay of bodies, things and affects. In Study 2, we exhibited the body maps to the general public alongside an art installation made by two artists, Isla Millar and Penny Maltby, in response to them (see <https://sites.gold.ac.uk/sociology/i-am-a-work-in-progress/>). By inviting the body maps to be perceived as art and inviting artists’ and publics’ bodies into the storytelling, there is an opening out of what the maps can mean and do.

In what Nirmal Puwar and Sanjay Sharma have called a ‘call and response’ between sociology and art, textiles, like the gauze, became particularly important as a material and metaphor for understanding and

representing the fragility of people's lives without substances. This follows Puwar and Sharma's conceptualisation in which researchers and artists collaborate in a process of exchange that involves stages whereby materials are passed and returned, transformed, only to be carried over to the next practitioner involved in the relay of co-production (2012, p. 54).

In this relay of body maps, textiles, metaphors and bodies, we became attuned to the tensions, burdens and the unending 'work' of recovery, encapsulated in one participant's phrase: 'I am a work in progress,' which became the title of the exhibition. In this, the exhibition challenges a narrowly-defined addiction disease and treatment system that is often time-limited and considered successful as soon as the person is 'drug free,' highlighting the need for longer-term support and diversifying what success and recovery mean for those they concern.

Through this process of working *with* the body maps in curating the exhibition we had to think through the kinds of affects we wanted them to have: how they should be hung, arranged, under what lighting, with what information and in what space. But this is only ever a suggestion. The images and installation will affect people in different ways as visitors to the exhibition are invited to use their bodies in moving around and getting a *feel* for them. By becoming affected, publics too are weaved back into this relay and re-imagining of what substance-using and recovering bodies can be and do after addiction.

Returning to the Question of Validity

The question is not: is it true? But: *does it work?* What new *thoughts* does it make possible to think? What new *emotions* does it make possible to feel? What new *sensations* and *perceptions* does it *open up* in the body?

(Massumi, 2004 [1987], p. xv, emphases added)

As we have seen, body mapping is not an inanimate, window-like portal into the world, but rather works to bring about new constellations of bodies, things and affects. As with Brian Massumi's (2004 [1987]) often-cited reflection on validity inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, the question is not whether method can access truth but what it can *do* in the process: how it affects and moves us. In this, we have witnessed how bodies are opened up by the materials, the act of drawing/image making and

the images themselves. With the materials, we see how the gauze and bottle affect the group and provoke different stories. In the act of drawing, the traditional interview participant who is deemed to be in control of their decision and meaning making quickly gives way to a wider form of participation *with* the drawing and with the entities and processes they describe. Moreover, in working *with* the body map, images as art threads are added to the storytelling relay, meaning that drug-recovering bodies become knowable as ‘works in progress’ and publics are invited into this understanding through a carefully curated exhibition.

Having focused on studying drug practices with body mapping, I now want to briefly extend this focus to social research more broadly by looking at where this opening up of the body – to new thoughts, emotions, sensations, perceptions – could be useful for researching other kinds of *disembodied*, heavily *narrativised*, *hard-to-verbalise* and *sensitive* practices.

Body mapping may be particularly useful for topics where the mind has tended to dominate and yet the body holds memories, like trauma and grief. By extending the research subject through the body, we get to know these ‘problems’ differently. This is similarly the case for phenomena that are heavily researched or narrativised, especially where discourses of pathology prosper. Furthermore, due to our oral Western ‘traditions’ tied up with colonial and patriarchal power relations, word-based methods may find it hard to avoid discriminatory and stigmatising stories and tropes. By introducing drawing or a creative practice that focuses on the body, we can help to circumvent these dominant ways of knowing.

By asking participants to map out various entities and forces, we get to see how bodies are constituted and curtailed, and where to intervene. This may be useful for understanding how even small acts, of violence, for example, or things, can cause what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might call a ‘blockage’, inhibiting what bodies can ‘become’ (see Dennis, 2019, p. 133 for examples). However, by the same token, in treating bodies as assemblages, the method is intrinsically hopeful about how bodies might become otherwise and where openings may appear (Gunaratnam and Hamilton, 2017). Therefore, researching with body mapping, as seen here through its materials, practice and images, is not only useful for studying subjugated bodies and what might be deemed ethically or politically sensitive topics but for imagining and enacting more liberated futures.

References

- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MN, London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dennis, F. (2016) 'Encountering "triggers": Drug-body-world entanglements of injecting drug use,' *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 43(2), pp. 126–141.
- Dennis, F. (2019) *Injecting Bodies in More-than-Human Worlds*. London: Routledge.
- Dennis, F. (2022) 'Chemical species: The art and politics of living with(out) drugs after addiction,' *BioSocieties*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41292-022-00281-9>
- Gunaratnam, Y. and Hamilton, C. (2017) 'Introduction: The wherewithal of feminist methods,' *Feminist Review*, 115(1), pp. 1–12.
- Haraway, D.J. (2016) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Malins, P. (2004) 'Machinic assemblages: Deleuze, Guattari and an ethico-aesthetics of drug use,' *Janus Head*, 7(1), pp. 84–104.
- Massumi, B. (2004 [1987]) 'Translator's foreword: Pleasures of philosophy,' in: Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (eds.) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, pp. ix–xvi.
- Puwar, N. and Sharma, S. (2012) 'Curating sociology,' *The Sociological Review*, 60, pp. 40–63.

