Losing faith? Reflecting on the experience of doing memory-work research

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Abstract

We tell the story of our experience of memory-work research. We were enthused to work collectively on a 'discovery' project to explore a method we were unfamiliar with. We hoped to build working relationships based on mutual respect and the desire to focus on methodology and its place in our psychological understanding. The empirical activities highlighted methodological and experiential challenges which tested our adherence to the social constructionist premise of Haug's original description of memory-work. Combined with practical difficulties of living across Europe writing and analysing the memories became contentious. We found ourselves having to address a number of tensions emanating from the work and our approach to it. We discuss some of these tensions alongside examples that illustrate the research process and the ways we negotiated the collective nature of the memory-work approach.

Keywords: memory-work; memory; reflection; faith.

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Introduction

Memory work is a qualitative research method developed by Frigga Haug and colleagues in Germany in the late 1980s as a means of investigating experience and the formation of identity. The method brought a new approach to research by challenging the divide between the objective researcher and subjective researched. Individuals are regarded both as part of powerful social structures in society and as active participants in them. It is through the combination of these processes that identity is formed. Memory-work brings together the researcher and the researched by generating memories from individuals within a group for analysis by the group in order to trace the processes of construction of the individual self in a predetermined social space over time (Willig, 2001).

Haug and colleagues (Haug, Andresen, Bünz-Elfferdin, Hauser, Lang, Laudan, Lüdenabbm Neur, Nemitz, Neihoff, Prinz, Räthzel, Scheu and Thomas) are feminist researchers who aimed to develop a research method that would aid understanding of how women 'live feminine practices' and bring about change and empowerment. (Haug *et al*, 1987). The method evolved within the political and social context of German Marxist philosophy and sought to analyse the conflict between the powerful (male) and the subjugated (female) members of society. Haug's group focussed on female sexualisation, studying the social structures in which women lived and the ways in which they constructed their identities within them and participated actively in the formation of their own experience. Haug *et al* (1987; 1992) were determined

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to use their own experience as the basis of knowledge in order to explore these issues.

Since this initial project, memory work research has been utilized by psychological qualitative researchers to examine phenomena as diverse as the experience of pain and sweating (Gillies, Harden, Johnson, Reavey, Strange and Willig, 2004), anger and happiness (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault and Benton, 1992), and young people's experiences of contraception (Harden and Willig, 1998). The focus of this empirical work has been the application of the method, something which is long overdue (Stephenson, 2003). We explore the method itself, carrying out a close examination of the process of doing memory-work research, the tensions arising from the process and the ways in which real-life constraints and intellectual attachments impinge on the course of research. We hope to explicate, reflect on, and bring this process to 'life' for the reader. Along the way, we will provide illustrations from our group meetings, analyses and discussions.

The development of the memory-work method

The memory-work method represents a way of 'putting experience to work' (Stevenson, 2005: 35). Haug *et al* were concerned about the traditional approach to research that imposed theory onto experience and positioned researchers to use objective processes to produce knowledge, thus flattening subjective experience. Haug's group adopted a less hierarchical approach with greater space for subjectivity by using memories of their own experience as the starting point for empirical investigation.

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The group regarded human history as having evolved from socialization and enculturation processes in which individuals actively participate and insert themselves into existing social structures. Haug and colleagues agreed with the Marxist view that the organisation of society evolves out of the processes of particular individuals (Haug, 1992). Living in Germany in the 1970s they saw their society as being organised into structures within which women were subjugated and repressed.

By choosing to study the sexualisation of female bodies and using their own memories of events triggered by this topic, the group members assumed that they would encounter many examples of the practices of subjugation. They regarded descriptions of experience as representations of male perspectives because of the constraints on language in the patriarchal German society they inhabited. By extension, they assumed that potentially all women (at that time) submitted to their own subjugation in society and none had access to alternative female language and discourses (Haug, 1992). This shared experience was viewed as a strength and the group aimed to utilise it by working as a collective that examined both reason and emotion in individual memories. Each group member provided written memories in response to the collectively determined trigger, female sexualisation.

Writing down the memories is an important component of the memory-work method. Haug saw writing as a way of destroying the encroachments of the culture in which the women lived: "From a state of modest insignificance we enter a space in which we can take ourselves seriously" (Haug, 1992: 36). She argued that

through writing, women are able to transgress the boundaries imposed by cultures of domination, set by men. Conversely Haug saw the development of the art of creative writing as the domain of men and of perpetuating femininity's colonisation of the realm of everyday talk. By proposing that memories be written down Haug advocated the transgression of this boundary by freeing women to explore new territory and make public the events of their lives.

Collective working led to some tensions in the group. The insecurity elicited by the questioning of individual members and their actions had the potential to uncover concealed memories and repressed guilt. Haug *et al* were concerned that this posed a threat of renewed isolation of individuals in the group, both as a response to conflict in the group and as a process comparable to women's practices in the patriarchal society in which they lived. In order to counter these disruptive and destabilising effects, the group decided that the memories should be written in the third person to allow for distancing by the memory's author from the event and to reduce how much the self and self-interest was taken into account in its recall.

The key question for empirical investigation in memory-work is what form individual life processes take. The method is based on the premise that the experiences of any individual constitute their appropriation of existing structures. Each form of appropriation is personal and differs according to socio-demographics such as class, age and gender. Therefore to work collectively with individual memories means to be confronted with the issue of singularity of experience. Acceptance of this issue enabled the group members to discover that they were not alone in having

developed models of behaviour that they had previously thought to be unique and therefore that experience can be generalisable.

Our memory work group

Nearly two decades later we have formed a memory-work group made up of six feminist researchers drawn from academic and clinical institutions across Europe (England, The Netherlands, Austria) to investigate the use of memory-work within a society that has since witnessed two generations of change in feminine practices. We refer to ourselves as Lily, Michelle, Sally, Julie, Harriet and Jo. The group was formed by invitation from Lily (the only member of the group who knew everyone else from the outset) with the purpose of investigating memory work as a contemporary methodological orientation. However, stating this purpose tells only a partial story; just as in most research projects the impetus was far more complex and reflecting on the early days, we were exhilarated and swept along by the challenge of working in a genuinely collaborative manner. Moreover, the project appealed because it felt freed from the pressures of research assessment exercises, rigid timescales, and being pragmatic to the exclusion of all else. It felt organic, novel and energizing as the group shared histories and began to get to know each other via meetings and email. Here are a few illustrative comments to give a flavour of how we were thinking and feeling in response to the invitation:

> I'm delighted to have been invited to participate in this project – for the opportunity to link up with other researchers as well as to acquire knowledge of another approach to research. I have started reading the papers from Lily and am intrigued. I look forward greatly to discussing thoughts with everyone. (Jo)
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> When Lily approached me about the memory study I was very intrigued. It is a method that I do not know much about and that I have never used. I am looking forward to getting to grips with it though and having read what you had to say about yourselves I feel privileged to have been asked to work with you all. (Julie)
>
> This looks really great. I'm excited about it too. (Sally)

Despite this positive engagement and genuine sense of embarking upon a journey, we were also aware of how our different intellectual backgrounds and our individual frames of reference were likely to pose problems. The research interests of the group members span psychoanalysis, motherhood, sexuality, emotion and qualitative research methods. We hold different and overlapping epistemological positions that include psychodynamic, narrative, phenomenological orientations and to varying degrees we move between the critical realist and social constructionist divide. Inevitably, the 'turn to language' (Smith, Harré and van Langenhove, 1995) and the impact of discourse analytic approaches have influenced our thinking. In our personal lives, five of us are mothers with children ranging from 9 months to 18 years, all of us are married and our ages range from 33 to 50 years old.

In the two years that we have been working with this method a number of questions and challenges have arisen for us. We have confronted the practical implications of working collectively, whilst living some considerable distance from each other. We have developed a heightened awareness of the need for inclusiveness and subjective presence when working with individuals' personal memories and we have become

aware of the potential for pain to be caused by the treatment of individual memories by group members. In our debates and questions we have had to manage our different epistemological orientations in a careful and respectful manner, and discuss and reflect on intra-personal conflicts and interpersonal dynamics. In this paper we describe some of these challenges drawing attention to the ways in which we both experienced and negotiated them. First, we describe the procedural stages of memory-work research.

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The stages of memory work

Memory-work was never meant to be a prescriptive set of fixed practices (Stephenson and Kippax, 2008) and different researchers have adapted the procedures. The basic steps developed by Haug are retained and further 'rules' incorporated if necessary. For example, making a decision to write about an early or recent memory. We agreed to adopt the guidelines developed by Crawford *et al* (1992) which are rooted in a hermeneutic social constructionist epistemology and compatible with Haug's theoretical position that sets theory and experience in a reciprocal and mutually critical relationship. Crawford's group suggests that the memory-work method consists of several phases:

1. Choosing a trigger: The trigger is a word or brief phrase which aims to generate memories relevant to the chosen topic. Working with the right trigger is important because the idea is to avoid well-rehearsed memories.
2. Writing a memory: Memories are written of a specific action, event or episode in the third person. They should be concrete and detailed avoiding interpretation, biography and explanation.
3. Memories are analysed and re-written: Each memory is analyzed collectively by the group. New triggers are proposed and new memories written. Original memories can be re-written.
4. Memories and their analyses are re-appraised in the context of a range of academic theories

Below we describe our experience of the first three of these stages.

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Choosing a trigger and the process of writing a memory

The choice of trigger was made with five of the six group members meeting face-to-face; the final member was consulted later via email. At the time of this first meeting Julie was pregnant with twins and travelling was not possible. Thus, from the outset, we had to be pragmatic about how we progressed, navigating between our ideals and what was realistically possible for each of us.

We discussed several topics and eventually selected 'faith', and the trigger of 'losing faith' to elicit our first memories. We felt this topic had the potential to generate specific concrete events for each individual whilst allowing for different understandings of its meaning. We also regarded 'faith' as having a range of social meanings, practices and structures in the western societies that we inhabited. We agreed that each member would write a memory to share by email in a month's time. The memories were to be written in the third person, as suggested by Haug, and to include as much detail as possible but without importing interpretation, explanation or biography (Crawford *et al*, 1992).

In contrast to the relative ease with which we selected a trigger, the memories were not forthcoming. In fact, nobody wrote anything for six months and a protracted email discussion about how to post the memory took place instead. Finally we agreed to set up a dedicated Wikispace and eventually our individual memories were posted on this. However, after the excitement of our initial meeting we were

surprised at the loss of momentum that this process brought to the early stages of the project. In order to try and understand what the process was telling us we agreed to maintain an ongoing reflections page on the Wiki. Referring to this page now gives us some insight to the delays in writing and posting memories. Our reflections centred around three main issues: feelings of vulnerability; difficulties arising from writing the memory; what we understood a 'memory' to be. We deal with each issue in turn.

Vulnerability manifested itself in several ways. For example, Jo expressed concerns about revealing aspects of her life and feeling exposed:

> After the meeting I felt fired up and excited and certainly very comfortable with the group, including the people I had met for the first time. However, when it came to thinking about a memory I began to feel concerned about being exposed and vulnerable. I asked myself questions about how much I wanted to reveal of my life in what was essentially a professional environment

Lily felt vulnerable but in a different way:

> Three powerful memories came to the fore very easily, especially one. I found 're-living' these memories quite painful and the one I posted was the one I found easiest to think about. I did feel vulnerable about posting the other two – not because I minded exposing myself to the rest of the group in the sense of not feeling in a safe environment with people I believe I can trust. It felt very much more about my feeling they were simply too raw for me to share...there was also the more pragmatic concern of anonymity for one of them.

Lily's position of knowing and trusting all the group members provided her with a safety and security not available to the other group members as Jo illustrates. Her vulnerability arose out of revisiting memories of events which were still raw for her. Lily's strategy was to choose the most distant and least painful memory which she

felt she could work with productively. Today we wonder if we spent enough time discussing and preparing for these sorts of emotional responses. At the same time, we are unsure how much difference it would have made. The process of deciding which memory involved sifting through and dwelling in different ones, trying them out for ease and evaluating any costs to ourselves.

Perhaps not surprisingly, once memories had been chosen, it was not necessarily the case that it was an effortless exercise to commit them to paper:

> I found writing the memory to be difficult in two ways. I felt like there was so much relevant background to it. Does that belong there, or is it explanation, which we are supposed to leave out. I am suddenly realizing I didn't include any physical details about the place etc. It's very hard to separate my memory from my analysis of it. Secondly, I found it difficult to know how much detail to go into. I mean there are more details, both factual and experiential, which I could include. How do we know how much detail to include? I kept adding more because the more I wrote about it the more I remembered, but also the more I was trying to make the narration coherent and fit together – I don't mean artificially but rather in terms of my own making sense of my own experience (Harriet)

Harriet felt unsure about what was *appropriate* to include and what should be left out. Her reflection indicates a wish to provide some context for the memory, to give it a narrative form and to situate it for the other group members.

Jo experienced similar difficulty and in order to resolve this cast it in the light of an academic exercise:

> Then I began to wonder about what was a good memory, a correct memory, a true memory, a suitable memory. In the end I decided to simply start writing, a tried and tested technique for approaching academic work.

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Finally, Sally struggled with what a memory might be and "the difficulty of disentangling memory from fiction." Consequently, Sally's memory was

> ...not strictly true, although it wasn't a "lie" more like an amalgamation of various very fragmented memories that I had deliberately patched together in a certain way, in order to try to get at what I thought was the loss of faith associated with that period of my life.

This question of what we (individually as well as group members) understood a memory to be was raised early in the process. Our different epistemological and philosophical leanings led each of us to conceptualize memory in different ways. Sally's preference was to have an extended discussion and engage with the question for its own sake. This is consonant with her psychoanalytic position and a concern with "what drives the production of the memory in the first place". Other members of the group were satisfied to have a loosely agreed understanding of what constitutes a memory, one based variously on recollection, reflection, retention and description.

Whilst Stephenson and Kippax (2008: 140) suggest that memory-work could become a method for "interrogating the socially constituted pathways of remembering, forgetting and repression", most of the group saw this as an interesting side issue rather than the focus of the project. We felt that any conceptual differences were not so great that there was not a shared understanding of what we were doing, and given the very real constraints (geographical and time-wise) we wanted to maintain momentum. By way of illustration, the memories provided by Michelle, Harriet and Sally can be found in Appendix 1. They will be used as reference points for the following discussion of the process of memory analysis.

Analyzing the memories

We carried out the first collective stages of analysis at a meeting held in London, attended by the UK members of the group and recorded for those unable to attend. Prior to this meeting each group member conducted some individual preliminary analysis work which was posted on a Wiki page created for this purpose. Some key issues and tensions arose for us at this early stage of the analytic process.

The decision to start the process of analysis at a distance rather than face-to face, was taken to address the impossibility of having sufficiently frequent face-to-face meetings which we could all attend. In some ways the use of electronic media could be seen to contradict the collective spirit of memory work, as espoused in its development. We felt however that working with email and Wiki and with face-to-face meetings whenever practically possible, was a realistic way to maintain enthusiasm, momentum and involvement with the project. We saw the preliminary work as providing a way for absent members to have some sort of presence and input to the analysis from its outset. We hoped that the electronic presence this approach offered would form the basis of our collective face-to-face discussions when we were able to have them.

The London meeting was described variously as “an enjoyable way of enriching the work I had done on my own”, “energizing, challenging and enjoyable”, and “sharing with the others brought out new ideas for me”. Despite these positive feelings we remained tentative in our analytic claims which reflected our caution in applying the

method in the way intended by Haug (1987) and later described by Crawford *et al* (1992):

> I'm not so sure about its epistemological roots. I haven't thought all of this through yet but it has had a rather stultifying and confusing effect on me. I think we should all read this chapter [Stephenson and Kippax, 2008[1]] and talk about it. (Lily)

Boucher's (1997) suggestion that such 'ebb and flow of discussion' may represent some underlying fear of entering into the analysis proper resonates in this post hoc reflection but at the time we were concerned with remaining loyal to the rationale of a memory-work analysis. It was not until we met three months later in Amsterdam that we were brought up short by the actions of those of us present at the first meeting.

In London when deciding to choose a memory to work with we simply chose the first one on the Wiki page – which happened to be Harriet's who wasn't there. Clearly we did not think through the ramifications of this decision and its potential effect on Harriet. Her sense was that her memory had been "packed into discursive structures" in her absence and she felt "its missing subjectivity" in the analysis. Although Harriet expressed her commitment to a hermeneutics of suspicion and her acceptance of "the processes by which discursive structures co-opt the unconscious and shape experience", her absence from the London meeting meant she wasn't involved in this search for discursive structures, leading her to conclude that:

[1] This chapter was published just prior to the London meeting so although we had read a wealth of literature from Haug and colleagues as well as more recent implementations of memory-work, this contemporary chapter written for qualitative psychologists was particularly useful for us in grounding the method in language and practices familiar to us.

> I cannot accept the results of that search if its process casts my experience totally aside (analyzing without me present or with me as a passive/silent subject) and/or it produces results which are so insufficiently experience-near as to be almost unrecognizable.

Harriet's protestations both flagged up epistemological tensions in the analysis and also reminded us that analyzing in the absence of the writer of the memory goes against the collective spirit of Haug's memory-work. We sought to further understand her reaction and its methodological implications in a face to face meeting where the entire collective would once again be present (ultimately one person cancelled, who had been at the London meeting). In this meeting, we wrestled with the considerable epistemological tensions arising from our analytic discord and from our decision to analyze a memory in the absence of its author. One of the issues debated was whether to include, and what the implications might be of including more biography when analysing memories. Notably a tension emerged between the sense that a more discourse analytic position risks missing the subject—e.g. Harriet not being able to connect with the analytic comments as at all 'experience near'—versus a more narrative/biographical or descriptive position that might miss the influence of social and linguistic structures. In the collective process, it became clear that no one subscribed entirely to either position and that it would be fruitful to embark on a new round of analysis of Harriet's memory in which we tried analysing each element of the previous analysis from multiple positions in order to compare what issues each flagged up as well as what this process might reveal about the method. In the process, Harriet provided some biographical information which helped to contextualize her memory, and in addition we probed—this time together

with her—the question of whether indeed the discursive structures emerging from initial analysis might have been playing a role in shaping her experience. The result of this exercise was a fruitful cross-fertilisation showing both discourse and biography at work. For example, we could see the role of discursive structures in Harriet's narrative but rather than her role being conceptualised (as during the first analysis) as unwitting or passive, she and we were able to see how she had actively drawn from discourse, albeit unconsciously, thus breaking down the false dichotomy between 'passive discourse' and 'active biography'. Through 'bending' the 'memory work rules' by bringing in biography, we were in fact able to further the very goals of memory work, namely understanding how women themselves, as active agents, utilize as well as conform to discursive structures. Harriet and the rest of the group agreed that this enabled a more meaningful analysis which represented both an experience-near and a critical reading of Harriet's appropriation of several of the discursive structures that had emerged in the initial analysis carried out without her.

Here it may be further noted that our varying and multiple theoretical and clinical interests played a role in influencing interpretation. For example, for Sally, Harriet's memory was indicative of the "loss of the fantasy of the exciting other" and "a crisis in relation to an ego-ideal". Harriet's idealized male represented a father figure in Sally's analysis and in a similar way, she saw in Michelle's memory "the failure of a maternal agentic object, both actual and in the figure of Brown Owl". The willingness of members to accept psychoanalytic interpretation as valid (or discursive, or phenomenological etc) followed in some ways a similar path to the process just

described around analysing the role of discursive structures in Harriet's memory. To illustrate, Harriet, who is herself psychodynamically trained and also more at home in phenomenology than discourse analysis, became able take on board the notion that she had appropriated discourses once she could see and make sense of how this might have taken place unconsciously.

Finally, of equal importance was the way in which relationships, emotional responses, and gut feelings entered into the analytic process. This revealed something about the dual hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion at work in our collective. For example, Lily knows Harriet well and also works from a phenomenological perspective, hence she is accustomed to starting from an empathic position before adopting a more critical stance. Here, Lily uses evocative words to emphasize the emotion she imagines (and knows, in biographical terms) that Harriet felt, as part of her memory of losing faith:

> The contrast between *excitement* and *inspiration* on the one hand and *dismay* and *unpleasant surprise* is *tangible* and seems to *slap Harriet in the face*. My understanding is that this might have been followed by an *avalanche* of confusing thoughts and realizations which led to the awareness of how things have shifted for Harriet (emphasis added).

A second powerful display of empathy is displayed in Julie's initial analysis of Michelle's childhood memory:

> What I feel even more intensely as I read this story is the powerlessness of this little girl, her frustration and her difficulty to deal with a person that until recently she admired, trusted and respected. It is a story that makes me feel very angry at the Brown Owl and extremely protective of the little girl

These initial analyses are not characteristic of the relational distance, critique or political agenda that are called for in a memory-work analysis. Yet for us as a group empathy and biography were necessary components of making sense of these memories of losing faith.

Re-writing memories

As Stephenson and Kippax (2008) point out, not many memory-work groups have moved on to the stage of re-writing memories. However, we were particularly keen to try this next stage after having undertaken such an in-depth analytic process with Harriet's memory. After our Amsterdam meeting Harriet re-wrote her memory (see figure 3) and found the re-write very challenging:

> Instead of seeing how I could re-write it along the lines of what we had analyzed, I kept feeling, but that's already THERE in the memory, so what am I really re-writing, these changes will be cosmetic! Wrestling further with it, I decided the only way to re-write would be really radically revising, almost explicitly along the lines of the analysis.

Nevertheless, following the group analysis and her own reflections, Harriet came to realize how she could enmesh this analytic work into the memory and re-experience or at least, re-remember it, in a way that demonstrates her appropriation of discourses " (male/female, fallen/deidealized, phallic v. maternal content and modes of expression) to express or catalyse my shift in consciousness and priorities...". In her re-written memory Harriet portrays this as a "positive developmental shift" rather than a loss or the disappointment of a fallen ideal as "more of an agentic loss, i.e., a losing interest and letting go (the magic has gone) of something outgrown and not needed anymore". On reflection, we can see that this newly adopted stance

represents the re-interpretation of experience that a memory-work analysis can bring about. It reveals the social and discursive processes at work in the production of experience, but equally the central role of the subjective agent in negotiating an appropriating those structures. In other words, by interrogating this memory, our memory-work group enabled Harriet to reconstrue her loss of faith as a moment of realisation that she had outgrown something, which could be felt as empowering and not just as disappointing:

> My shift in consciousness involved an increased sense of meaning and personal engagement, the meaning coming from my own engagements/priorities rather than from a passive act of consumption (the thrill of entertainment or other people's good ideas).

It is interesting to note that the result of the process for Harriet was the very sort of empowerment Haug and her colleagues imagined and hoped for when they developed this method. And yet, our memory work group made mistakes and had blind spots; we wrestled with geographic distance as well as significant theoretical and emotional differences; and we hardly followed the method by the book, rather we bent the rules and changed things along the way. Indeed it seems that precisely some of this messiness—we have highlighted the conflicts in the analytic process related to Harriet's memory in particular—was also that which enabled a more fruitful and close reading, a bridging of differences, and the achievement of seeing something known in a new light.

Concluding comments

We have presented some of the challenges experienced during our memory-work project in the hope that bringing such issues to life for readers will provide a vicarious learning experience for those wanting to embark on memory-work projects of their own but also to suggest recommendations for developing the method for contemporary qualitative psychologists.

The collective spirit of memory-work is part of what makes it unique; it is also what makes it such a challenging endeavour. Initial enthusiasm was difficult to maintain in a group that has so many other commitments and demands on time – further complicated by some group members living outside the UK. More significant though is the cohesiveness of the group. Our delay in writing memories and conjuring those deemed 'appropriate' for group analysis and public consumption illustrates the importance of trust within a memory-work group. At times we needed to fill each other in on finer details of our lives that are salient in terms of situating the memories we wrote. This is a product of the group coming together through one member; although Lily knew everyone, no-one else knew anyone else other than Lily. It is not surprising in this case that we felt the need for further biography to contextualize the life events described in the memories. Perhaps these details would be taken for granted in a pre-established group of colleagues or friends.

Memory-work depends so much on group dynamics, practicalities but also, because of its history, epistemological allegiances. Haug's initial objective for memory-work was to re-think experience and the manner in which we appropriate the societal discourses in order to initiate a change that might break down existing power

relations within society to devise different modes of appropriation. Given this, it was clear to us that a political agenda and a social constructionist epistemology were at the heart of the method. Despite attempts to 'toe the line', in the end our allegiances to psychoanalysis, phenomenology and a commitment to understanding the person in context appeared too powerful to fully embrace the memory-work objective. And yet, the final result, as we have noted in Harriet's case, was not dissimilar to what Haug and her group envisioned.

Having undertaken this project we conclude that memory-work as devised and applied by Haug reflected the experiences, discourses and practices of women living in Germany at that time. In the years since then, psychologists interested in uncovering the discursive construction of experience for women and other subjugated groups have taken up the pursuit of change and the quest for empowerment through critical and discursive psychological approaches (Harden and Willig, 1998). Our work has shown that in the context of memory-work, multiple perspectives may be applied towards a similar end (in our case psychoanalysis, phenomenology, etc), and that it may not be so much the impact of one 'correct' theoretical or epistemological perspective but rather a product of good, albeit (or perhaps characteristically) 'messy' process in a pluralistic collective, which can lead to the empowerment goals of this work. So that those of us within the group who found the sense of inherent reductionism within a discursive approach that purports to make sense of experience could in fact find common ground with Haug's (1987) initial vision to move away from the individualized view of experience toward a re-

remembering in order to discover how we appropriate the social realm and the objective in psychoanalysis to reveal the nature of the processes of "remembering, forgetting and repression" (Stephenson and Kippax, 2008) By looking at our own processes of remembering, forgetting and repression, and by being forced to reconsider our individual methodological epistemologies and ontological frameworks as we negotiated our positions with the group and in relation to analysis of personal data, we too found ourselves moving into new and more complex positions and viewpoints. Although we strayed from the collective ideal at times, we retained a mindfulness of it throughout the process. This facilitated constructive and engaged discussion and encouraged us to work within a context of practical difficulties and personal challenges. Ultimately we furthered our understanding of memory-work and its place in our research. We hope that our experience, including following the method to a stage not commonly reached (re-writing memories), will help raise awareness of the value of this method both as a feminist investigation of the production of knowledge and for it's potential for intellectual cross fertilisation within the context of a collective.

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SALLY'S MEMORY NEEDS TO GO IN

Frost, N.A., Eatough, V., Shaw, R., Weille, K.L., Tzemou, E. & Baraitser, L. (2012). Pleasure, pain, and procrastination: reflections on the experience of doing memory-work research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 9,* 231-248.

Figure 1: Harriet's memory written following the trigger 'losing faith'

She is excited about meeting F., a brilliant interviewer/debate-leader and figure in national media, intellectual and political life, who has always hugely inspired her. Before the event begins, her husband introduces her to F, and, a few moments later mildly embarrasses her by telling F. that 'the only reason she came tonight was to meet you', to which she jokingly retorts 'yeah but I'm shy'. She is surprised by how tiny he is in real life, and warmed by what feels like his genuinely gracious reaction to the interchange-- 'we must have a chat, I'll look for you afterward'. That is, it feels genuine in an emotional sense, but not likely t be meant in a literal one, i.e. that he would actually go looking for her afterwards, but still she is curious to find out for sure. Soon, she is listening from the audience as he delivers a brief but characteristically explosive excoriation of the recent 'rape', i.e. corporate buyout/takeover of a local media concern by a large multinational investment firm. Not having heard about this incident, she has a bit of trouble following him, yet his message and delivery feel familiar from having watched him many times before, as if she could have predicted he would say these kinds of things even without knowing the storyline. In this instant she is surprised, dismayed, and perhaps also strangely relieved (in a bitter sort of way) to realize that for the first time, his normally mercurial remarks seem tired and formulaic. His fresh, artfully delivered anger is fashioned as an old style leftist diatribe. She is suddenly filled with a sweeping sense of losing faith not just in F. but the whole range of figures in this country's intelligentsia, her heroes in media and politics. Their quick wit and sharp remarks, their interviewing and debating styles all seem tired, formulaic and small minded; Local and not connected to Important Global Issues, or the things that she has lately come to feel more concerned with. At the end of the event, she still wonders if F. will really look for her, even though she does not expect so; moreover she feels detached and indifferent, more inclined and frankly more eager to go home to her sleeping baby than to stand around trying to make conversation with all the people here

Figure 2: Michelle's memory following the trigger 'losing faith'

Michelle went to Brownies every Thursday since she was old enough to join. She enjoyed going and looked forward to it each week. When she got home from Brownies Michelle had a bath and then was allowed to stay up to watch Dallas while her hair dried by the fire. This was a special treat on top of going to Brownies, so Thursdays were a special day. Michelle was in the Leprechaun Sixer with Sonia, who would later become one of her close friends at secondary school. One of the six was leaving Brownies to join the Guides and Michelle had been selected to be Sixer when her colleague moved up. Michelle was looking forward to being Sixer. As the oldest in the group, once her colleague left, it was a natural progression for her. Michelle was also looking forward to her first Brownie camp. She had joined the Brownies in

day trips and the organisation of events at Church but hadn't been on camp yet. Michelle went to Sunday School regularly and so she always attended Church parade. On the first Sunday of every month all the Brownies, Cubs and Scouts paraded into Church with their flags. Michelle carried a small Brownie flag and always had an itchy head because of the brown Brownie bobble hat she had to wear as part of her uniform. Michelle's older brother, Michael, was in the Scouts and so he was in the parade too but he was nearer the front with a much bigger flag. When Brownies were promoted to Sixer there was a little ceremony to mark the occasion. Being Sixer meant respect from your peers and also a little extra responsibility. The week before she was due to be promoted to Sixer, Michelle was ill and had to miss a Brownie meeting. Michelle's mother had kept her off school and so she was not able to go to Brownies or any of her other extra-curricular activities (which included swimming, ballet, choir and piano lessons). When Michelle went to the Brownie meeting the following week she found that, in her absence, Sonia had been made Sixer of the Leprechaun group instead of her. Michelle was very upset by this because Brown Owl had promised that she would become Sixer. Michelle was older than Sonia and she felt more committed to Brownies than Sonia because of her family's close involvement in the Church. Michelle's parents were local preachers and the family was well known by the Minister and other Church goers. Brown Owl also attended Church which made it even more upsetting when she broke her promise by giving the Sixer position to someone else. Michelle felt betrayed by this which made her lose faith in Brown Owl and in the Brownies. Michelle was quiet all through the meeting that week. She didn't feel confident enough to confront Brown Owl about what had happened and so waited until her mother came to collect her. When she heard the news, Michelle's mother was annoyed with Brown Owl because she had gone back on her word. Michelle was upset but managed to fight the tears until she got home. The problem wasn't that Sonia wouldn't make an appropriate Sixer, just that Michelle had been promised the role and then had it unjustly taken away from her. Michelle's mother spoke to Brown Owl and made her realise how upset Michelle was by this. Michelle felt that she couldn't trust Brown Owl after this and so she decided to leave the Brownies altogether. Michelle was particularly upset because this meant she would miss the Brownie camp she had been looking forward to, but she didn't want to spend time with the person who had broken her trust or with her replacement, Sonia, in charge of the Leprechauns. Michelle often looked back at this and wondered whether she had made the right decision. Robert, Michelle's older brother, was a Scout and then a Venture Scout. He often went on hiking holidays and climbed the three peaks – Scarfell, Snowden and Ben Nevis. Later on when she was at secondary school, Michelle made friends with Sarah who was in the Guides and then also a Venture Scout. Sarah enjoyed hiking holidays as well as the general camaraderie of being in the Venture Scouts. Michelle was a little jealous of this and sometimes wondered whether she also would have enjoyed these things if she hadn't left Brownies over the Sixer issue.

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Figure 3: Harriet's re-written memory

She is looking forward to meeting F.--a brilliant interviewer/debate-leader and figure in national media and political life--whom she hopes will inspire and excite her with his ideas as he always has before. As it is the first time she will meet him personally, she vaguely wonders what the conversation might be like, if there might be a genuine meeting or sharing of ideas between them, but she knows that this is very unlikely, both because the situation will be busy and crowded, and because this man does not seem like the type to sit down and quietly get to know someone (or at least, not unless that person is Very Important such as the famous people he interviews so shrewdly on television), rather, he is a provocateur and a one-man show. When her husband introduces her to F, saying to him 'the only reason she came tonight was to meet you', she feels the interaction as a friendly charade, her interest and his own gracious response mutually pleasing yet overstated as neither of their intentions nor the situation will support any further contact. Soon, she is listening from the audience as he delivers a brief but characteristically explosive excoriation of the recent 'rape', i.e. corporate buyout/takeover of a local media concern by a large multinational investment firm. His message and delivery seem for the first time tired and formulaic (an old style leftist diatribe), rather than fresh and mercurial as they have before, filling her with a sudden sweeping sense of simultaneous loss and liberation from F. and the whole range of figures like him in this country's local intelligentsia, her former heroes in media and politics. Their quick wit and sharp remarks, their interviewing and debating styles all seem suddenly small minded and disconnected from the pressing global issues she has lately become much more concerned with. By the end of the event, she feels as though F. and the intellectual entertainment he failed to provide, have been subsumed beneath a surge of awareness of her own sea-change of shifting priorities and engagements. She no longer needs to be here, and is happy to go home to her sleeping baby and the life that awaits her.

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