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Achieving and evidencing research 'impact'? Tensions and dilemmas from an ethic of care perspective

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While many academics are sceptical about the 'impact agenda', it may offer the potential to re-value feminist and participatory approaches to the co-production of knowledge. Drawing on my experiences of developing a UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) impact case study based on research on young caregiving in the UK, Tanzania and Uganda, I explore the dilemmas and tensions of balancing an ethic of care and participatory praxis with research management demands to evidence 'impact' in the neoliberal academy. The participatory dissemination process enabled young people to identify their support needs, which translated into policy and practice recommendations and in turn, produced 'impact'. It also revealed a paradox of action-oriented research: this approach may bring greater emotional investment of the participants in the project in potentially negative as well as positive ways, resulting in disenchantment that the research did not lead to tangible outcomes at local level. Participatory praxis may also pose ethical dilemmas for researchers who have responsibilities to care for both 'proximate' and 'distant' others. The 'more than research' relationship I developed with practitioners was motivated by my ethic of care rather than by the demands of the audit culture. Furthermore, my research and the impacts cited emerged slowly and incrementally from a series of small grants in an unplanned, serendipitous way at different scales, which may be difficult to fit within institutional audits of 'impact'. Given the growing pressures on academics, it seems ever more important to embody an ethic of care in university settings, as well as in the 'field'. We need to join the call for 'slow scholarship' and advocate a re-valuing of feminist and participatory action research approaches, which may have most impact at local level, in order to achieve meaningful shifts in the impact agenda and more broadly, the academy.

Key words: *ethic of care, research impact, dissemination, participatory action research, feminist methodology, young caregiving*

Introduction

The need for appropriate dissemination strategies and to evidence the 'impact' of research beyond the academy have become increasingly important requirements for geographers and other social scientists in recent years. Although not new internationally (Williams 2012), this agenda is especially prominent in the UK context of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, in which research 'impact'[1] forms 20 per cent of the overall assessment of research quality by which UK universities are judged (REF 2011) and which is likely to increase to 25 per cent in the 2021 REF (UK Government 2013). This shift could be important in ensuring that 'non-academic users' and society benefit from publically funded research. Doing 'impactful' research, though, has now become part of the governance of research funding allocations to UK universities and enhances the esteem of Departments as well as individual careers.

Many academics are sceptical about the 'impact agenda', viewing it as incompatible with established modes of academic practice and convention (Watermeyer 2012), and/or as further evidence of neoliberalism and the corporatisation of the UK academy (mrs

kinpaisby 2008). Williams (2012, 494) expresses concerns about the unacknowledged incentives and performance management regimes that push academics to claim they can 'deliver change in highly charged political situations' from which they are often distanced or insulated. The shift towards research impact may, however, offer the potential to re-value more transformative, participatory approaches to the co-production of knowledge (Pain *et al.* 2011; Gregson *et al.* 2012).

In this paper, I seek to respond to Pain's (2014) call for more feminist analyses of impact and explore the tensions and paradoxes of balancing a feminist ethic of care with the research management demand to evidence the 'impact' of research within the 'audit culture' of the neoliberal academy. I draw on my experience of developing a REF 2014 Impact Case Study (ICS) for my institution, based on research conducted in the UK, Tanzania and Uganda.[2] The research raised awareness of a group that is often overlooked in policy and practice: young carers and families affected by HIV. The impact was predominantly in terms of enhancing wellbeing, health and social care, education, children's and families' rights and welfare provision.

This paper first situates the discussion within recent literature on feminist ethics of care, participatory praxis and 'impact'. I then explore ethical dilemmas raised by the process of participatory dissemination with sibling caregivers in Tanzania and Uganda and highlight key tensions and paradoxes in achieving and evidencing 'impact' from an ethic of care perspective.

Feminist ethics of care, participatory praxis and 'impact'

Feminists and development researchers recognise the importance of researchers' positionality in the 'complex web of relations' they inhabit and the multiple ways that researchers act politically to bring about social change 'in ways large and small that go beyond what they write in journals or in policy briefs' (Benequist and Wheeler 2012, 45). My approach to engaging with research participants and seeking to achieve 'impact' beyond the academy is underpinned by a feminist ethic of care (Tronto 1993) and a critical reflexivity that recognises the complex power relations that shape research (Scheyvens and Leslie 2000). My positionality as a white female academic based in the global North, occasionally caring for my disabled mother (my father is her main carer), my skills and experience, among other factors, had a crucial influence on my interest in care, my approach to the research topic and the level of engagement and collaboration achieved with participants, policymakers and practitioners.

Tronto's (1993) contextual understanding of care formed the starting point for the studies discussed in this paper, which focused on time–space practices of care. From this perspective, care is regarded as an ongoing process that involves 'taking the concerns and needs of the other as the basis for action' (1993, 105). An ethic of care highlights the interdependence and interconnectedness of human relations, responsibilities and practices of care and hence can be understood as an ethical foundation for social theory and research (Blazek *et al.* 2015). By adopting radical relationality, the practice of 'good research' attempts to 'articulate (re-scribe) the object of research in a normatively meaningful way' (Pols 2014, 192). The researcher and carer are thus engaged in parallel practices of trying to understand, articulate and relate to the object of their concern, 'be it by applying band-aids or by being concerned with the workings and improvement of care practices' (Pols 2014, 191).

Furthermore, feminist ways of listening, looking, walking together, knowing and showing (Pain 2014) suggest the need for 'slow geographies' (longer term engagement) at different scales in order to address urgent issues and achieve meaningful social change (mrs kinpaisby 2008; Mountz *et al.* 2015). As Pain (2014, 21) observes, rather than 'a linear notion of impact as striking a blow' at specific points in time, 'feminist knowledge co-production is relational', taking place through a series of smaller transformative actions and reciprocal research relationships sustained over time. Blazek *et al.* (2015, 54) suggest that research should be understood from the outset as 'more-than-research' and ethics of care give rise to multiple academic and non-academic outcomes that 'resist auditability'. Time is thus crucial to develop meaningful connections and collaboration with research participants based on an ethic of care.

Alongside time, action at a range of spatial scales may be needed to achieve social change and transformation (mrs kinpaisby 2008). Participatory geographies draw attention to the embedded political nature of participation in particular places and at different spatial scales (mrs kinpaisby 2008). While participatory action research may lead to tangible social change at the local scale (Haynes and Tanner 2013), it may be more difficult to achieve and evidence societal benefits at a regional, national or global scale.

Academics' concerns about the 'impact agenda' relate to wider scholarly critiques of the 'audit culture' within the neoliberal academy (mrs kinpaisby 2008). The danger is that the top–down surveillance of the REF and other research management mechanisms may lead to a self-disciplining gaze, as 'we internalise a set of expectations, pressuring ourselves and those around us' (Cupples and Pawson 2012, 18). Some authors emphasise the provisional nature of such neoliberal regimes of power and suggest that there is potential for tactical re-appropriation and re-deployment of such

'techniques of government' for other purposes than those originally intended (Ferguson 2009; Gregson *et al.* 2012). We may thereby construct 'alternative ways of being in the academy' and contribute to the development of anti-neoliberal forms of knowledge production (Cupples and Pawson 2012, 18; Mountz *et al.* 2015).

Academic critique led to the clarification in the final REF guidance that 'The criterion of "reach" for impacts does not refer specifically to a geographical scale' (REF 2011, 45; Pain 2014). Nevertheless, hierarchical notions of scale and quantitative indicators seem implicit within the REF terminology surrounding 'impact', which is measured by 'reach and significance', and ICS require 'details of the beneficiaries', 'evidence or indicators of the extent of the impact described' and 'dates of when these impacts occurred'. Although the overall results and ICS and impact statements are publically available on the REF (2015) website, there is a lack of transparency about individual ICS scores. It is difficult, therefore, to evaluate whether impacts resulting from participatory action research at a local scale are accorded an equal significance and as much reward as impacts on 'non-academic users' in powerful positions, such as industry, government and policy organisations working at national and international scales (Pain 2014; Meth and Williams 2010).

My rough analysis of the 18 institutions' geography impact submissions which were ranked highest (whose impact sub-profiles were assessed as 40% or more at 4* 'outstanding') suggests that influence on international policy, national governments and industry was highly regarded by assessors (and was emphasised in the ICS and impact statements). Benefits to communities, capacity-building among individuals and local organisations were only included in a minority of cases, often alongside impacts at other spatial scales. In general, physical geography/environmental studies dominated, comprising 61 per cent of the ICS I reviewed (46/75 ICS) and less than a quarter (17/75 ICS; 23%) of ICS submitted by these institutions had a primary focus on impacts in the global South. Moreover, there was virtually no mention of the participation of children or beneficial impacts for children, except for a few ICS which mention public engagement activities through museums/schools or public health impacts. This is perhaps telling of the limited broader influence that geographies of children, youth and families have had on the wider discipline, despite seeming to gain 'critical mass' in recent years (Vanderbeck 2008).

Ethical dilemmas raised by participatory dissemination

Constraints of time, capacity and resources and the difficulty of achieving social change at multiple spatial scales raise ethical dilemmas for researchers who wish to engage in feminist and participatory praxis, particularly when based at institutions located far away from research partners in the global South. Involving participants in defining their support needs was a key element of the ethic of care underpinning my research, linked to Tronto's (1993) ethical values of being *attentive* to the needs of others, taking responsibility to meet those needs and checking the *response* of the care receiver to the care. Using a participatory dissemination process to co-produce research messages can enable marginalised groups to engage in some level of dialogue with decisionmakers (Van Blerk and Ansell 2007; Cahill and Torre 2007). In so doing, participants and researchers may challenge the power inequalities that determine access to the resources needed to provide care (thereby ensuring the ethical value of competence in Tronto's [1993] framework).

In the research on sibling caregiving in Tanzania and Uganda, my role in bringing different stakeholders together for participatory dissemination workshops reflected that of a 'mediator and conciliator' in Benequista and Wheeler's (2012) typology of the communicative roles of researchers. I considered that visual representations of young people's experiences and priorities could help to reinforce findings for policy and practice audiences. Quantitative data about young people's caring activities gathered through a time-use diagram could be quickly collated, presented and discussed with NGO staff and community leaders in the workshop the following day (see Figures 1 and 2). The quantitative evidence about the mean number of hours of care work that young people engaged in per week, disaggregated according to gender and position within the household, gave greater weight to my findings and helped to emphasise the significance of their care work for

Figure 1   Young person completing participatory time-use exercise, Mbeya workshop

Figure 2   Poster summarising mean number of hours per week young people spent on different categories of caring tasks, presented in workshop with NGO staff, local leaders and community members in Kampala, Uganda

practitioners and community leaders. The poster of ranked priorities provided a striking visual representation of the support needs young people saw as most important (Figure 3).

The workshops also identified orphaned young people's experiences of disinheritance and harassment as key issues about which they wished to raise awareness in their locality. Young people in Kampala and Mbeya developed drama sketches, while those in Nshamba developed a rap song, which I video-recorded following rehearsals. Initial findings and the video-recorded performances (with minimal edits) were then presented
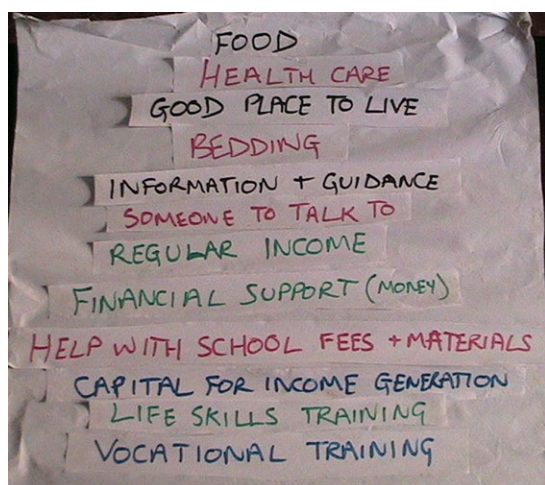

Figure 3   Poster of young people's ranked priorities, Kampala workshop

and discussed further in workshops with NGO workers and community members in each locality the following day. Alongside my interpretation of the findings, the video-performances provided a more immediate way for these messages to be heard by community members, local leaders and NGO staff in each locality, in addition to being presented in policy seminars in the UK. According to evaluation feedback, young people valued the opportunity to raise awareness about their experiences: 'I liked doing the drama because it's short but it can be easily understood and teaches people' (young person participating in workshop).

Power differentials were particularly apparent in seeking to engage young people in dialogue with practitioners and community leaders. Although children were invited to participate in workshops in their locality (and their transport costs would have been refunded), none of the young people attended. In view of adult–child power relations and generational hierarchies, I was aware that young people might find it difficult to express their views in a workshop dominated by adults. I also recognised that young people may not have time to participate in another workshop, given the time scarcity they faced in juggling substantial care work with school, agricultural labour and other livelihood activities (Evans 2012a). Showing the children's video-dramas/song was intended to be a way of enabling their priorities to be heard without needing them to be physically present. This approach nevertheless limited the potential for direct dialogue between young people and decisionmakers (Van and Ansell, 2007).

The process also revealed a mismatch between the research outcomes and participants' expectations that the research would result in tangible benefits at local level. Active participatory dissemination may inevitably raise participants' expectations (Haynes and Tanner 2013) and brings participants in close proximity to the emotional burden of whether or not the research has an impact. Some participants struggled to understand why the research would not lead directly to the development of NGO support services in their locality. In evaluation feedback, young people highlighted a need for more guidance on how to deal with difficulties in their lives and for their needs to be met by NGOs. This appeared to be linked to perceptions of my position as an educated, privileged white person who was regarded as having access to donor funding and potential influence on policymakers, NGOs and local authorities (Meth and Williams 2010).

While researchers may have an ethic of care and be attentive to participants' concerns, they may not be in a position to provide direct care and support or to work with practitioners over a longer timeframe, and may be unable to influence local or national elites, despite an

ethical responsibility (Tronto 1993) to seek to do so. This challenge is related to complex power dynamics and researchers' positionality in the field (Scheyvens and Leslie 2000), as well as to the 'audit game' (Pain *et al.* 2011). Engaging in longer term action research conflicted with my academic role in the neoliberal academy at the time, since I was under pressure to produce peer-reviewed journal articles and submit a large research council grant to meet probationary targets in order to gain tenure. I also needed to fit fieldwork into university vacations due to my personal tutor and teaching commitments. However, spending longer in the 'field' also conflicted with my own ethics of care; I worried about being away from the UK for longer than a few weeks, in case anything happened to my mother or my father and I needed to provide emergency care. Such tensions are particularly difficult for development geographers with caring responsibilities to reconcile and we may end up feeling pulled in opposite directions by ethics of care to both 'proximate' and 'distant others' (Barnett and Land 2007).

This reveals the potential emotional conflicts and paradoxes of action-oriented research; the process enabled the identification of participants' needs for care and support, yet my own and other stakeholders' competence (Tronto 1993) to provide the care needed was compromised by caring responsibilities to 'proximate' others, limited time, insufficient resources and wider structural inequalities which determine the care resources available to child- and youth-headed households at local level (Evans 2012a).

Tensions in achieving and evidencing 'impact'

The participatory dissemination workshops in Tanzania and Uganda worked well in co-producing research messages in visual formats for policy and practice audiences and young people appeared to enjoy the experience, which fostered the development of peer support. These benefits of participatory praxis however do not constitute 'impact' as defined by REF.[1] Ensuring that community members, practitioners and policymakers at a range of spatial scales 'acted upon' participants' messages was much more difficult to achieve and to 'evidence'.

My ICS showed how the National Community of Women living with HIV and AIDS (NACWOLA), an organisation which had participated in the stakeholder workshop in Uganda, found the list of young people's ranked priorities helpful in shaping their future work. The emphasis young people placed on sufficient food (their number one priority, see Figure 3) above other needs, such as vocational training, challenged practitioners' assumptions about the needs of orphaned and

vulnerable children. This finding directly influenced NACWOLA's decision to develop a school-feeding and children's rights programme (in collaboration with Tanzanian and Kenyan NGOs) to support children affected by HIV in East Africa (funded by the UK Department of International Development). The reporting of such linkages between research findings and the development of newly funded NGO projects in my ICS could be seen as endorsing 'development as usual' approaches, rather than critiquing donor agency priorities. The participatory dissemination process, however, at least enabled young people to have a say in prioritising their support needs, which informed the development of the project. While the funded project focused on material needs, my publications drew attention to wider structural inequalities and the de-valuing of care at a range of spatial scales (Evans 2012a; Evans and Thomas 2009).

The feedback from the Director of NACWOLA about the role played by the research findings was available due to our ongoing research student–supervisor relationship, which developed after the Ugandan research and following securing part-funding for a PhD scholarship on a related topic. This collaborative relationship did not 'fit' in my ICS, however, since it was an example of 'academic impact'[1] rather than a change or benefit beyond academia.[1] Similarly, any impacts related to teaching could not be cited within the ICS, although I regularly use the video-performances in my third year module, 'Culture and Development in Africa'. This may arguably have had more 'impact' in challenging stereotypical views of children and youth orphaned by AIDS among successive cohorts of Geography undergraduate students than the impacts 'beyond academia' cited in my ICS. Teaching offers us crucial opportunities to have an 'impact' and develop critical thinking among our students (Slater 2012; Pain *et al.* 2012). The separation of research and teaching that RAE/REF has brought about 'reflects the logic of accountancy rather than the experience of academic practice' and reveals the need for a broader understanding of 'impact' that recognises the interrelated mutual contribution of teaching and research (Pain *et al.* 2012, 122).

While the participatory dissemination process and my responsibility (Tronto 1993) to seek to influence policy and practice were important, serendipity, timing and which research topics are 'in fashion' and top of the policy agenda were also significant in determining the uptake of research findings by policymakers and practitioners. Growing policy interest and a call for studies on asset inheritance and the intergenerational transmission of poverty by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre emerged at the time when I sought to disseminate young people's messages. Academics need the time to respond to timely policy and practice opportunities, such as the

funding call in this example, within a broader flexible and collegiate research environment. Such institutional values are under increasing pressure in the neoliberal corporatised academy (Cupples and Pawson 2012; Mountz *et al.* 2015).

With the exception of the examples given so far, I found it much easier to evidence my contribution to the work of practitioners based in the UK that developed over time, in comparison to demonstrating 'impact' in East Africa following a relatively short participatory dissemination visit. Most of the activities reported in my ICS resulted from informal collaborations with third sector organisations. My role could be regarded as that of a 'critical friend and advocate' (Benequista and Wheeler 2012), which involved taking a normative view of research as contributing to a particular agenda and engaging in dialogue with practitioners. The research also helped The Children's Society and Africa Advocacy Foundation (AAF) to develop capacity-building activities and new support programmes for young carers in the UK (funded by the Elton John Foundation and Comic Relief, respectively[3]).

While I welcomed organisations' use of my findings to establish awareness-raising activities and dedicated support services for a particularly hidden group of children, the focus on 'young carers' compromised in some ways my commitment to an ethic of care and a disability rights perspective that recognised the complexity of caring relations within families. My publications had argued for an ethic of care that addressed the support needs of parents with HIV, as well as those of children, in acknowledgement of critiques of an exclusive focus on 'young carers', which could be seen as undermining disabled parents' parenting roles (Evans and Becker 2009). Although the Children's Society (2015) has advocated 'whole family' approaches for many years and AAF supported parents with HIV long before developing a 'young carers' project, it is ironic that one of the most significant impacts reported in my ICS was the development of newly funded 'young carers' services in the UK. This reveals that impact may depend on how 'research users' interpret the findings. It also highlights a potential danger of the 'impact' agenda; the uncritical institutional reporting and 'owning' of such 'impacts' may diminish researchers' roles as 'critical friends and advocates' who may wish to distance themselves from some interpretations of their findings or critique the ways that these have been taken up in policy and practice.

My nomination as a referee for AAF's Comic Relief funding application for a young carers project was due to sustained collaboration with the organisation, including sharing research findings, raising money in a sponsored Cruse Walk for Life, attending other AAF events and seeking further funding for a collaborative charitable project. Such alternative practices can be seen as subverting academic governance and the demands of the audit culture (Pain *et al.* 2012). I engaged in this 'more-than-research' relationship (Blazek *et al.* 2015) with practitioners due to my ethic of care rather than due to any institutional or funder requirements. These circumstances are rather different from the disciplining effects of impact evaluation practices reported by Williams (2012), and perhaps from a more institutionalised response to ICS evident in the post-REF 2014 era.

The challenge for the ICS was drawing together the rather disparate 'impact activities' I had engaged in that had developed in a serendipitous, unplanned way over time from a range of small research projects, to create a coherent REF 'impact story'. None of the research grants which formed the basis of the ICS (ESRC: £80,000; University of Reading: £3000; RGS-IBG: £3000; CPRC: £5050) had specifically identified 'pathways to impact' at the project design stage, although all included a research objective that sought to identify the policy and practice implications. The research in Tanzania and Uganda developed incrementally and funding for the dissemination element was secured after the initial research. The CPRC research further analysed the datasets from the ESRC and University of Reading/RGS-IBG-funded projects. This demonstrates the incremental value and significance of small grants, particularly for early career academics, in gradually developing a research (and impact) agenda over time, and hence the need for 'slow scholarship' (Pain 2014; Mountz *et al.* 2015). This approach contrasts with the neoliberal drive to design and anticipate the whole 'impact package' from the outset, which often results in funding being streamed to large-scale projects led by senior academics.

A further tension related to the ICS audit process itself. There was little guidance or opportunity for me to discuss in person what a good case study would look like or what kind of evidence would be most helpful to document the impact. The only institutional recognition offered was a discretionary point in the School workload model (another manifestation of the audit culture) for the time taken to write the ICS and £100 to facilitate meetings with key partners to provide evidence. Institutional recognition thus focused only on the task of completing the ICS template, not on the collaborative ways of working and funding that might be required to achieve the 'impact' itself over much longer timeframes.

Given the 'hoops' that academics are expected to jump through, in terms of accountability, for the REF and other audit systems, and in view of the long-established academic culture of peer review, I was astounded to discover that I would not receive any individual feedback about my ICS, except for a composite score and comments about the Unit of Assessment's overall

'impact'.[4] Greater institutional efforts to manage ICS more effectively in the post-REF 2014 era are unsurprising, given the expectation that 'impact' will comprise 25 per cent of the overall score in future. The promise of more support for staff developing ICS over a longer time-frame and more funding for 'impact activities', which are evident in my institution, may help to address some of the tensions. We nevertheless need to continue to be vigilant about the potential gap between our ethical commitments and how we 'do' our academic selves within the academy.

Conclusion

Perhaps now more than at any time previously, the neoliberal 'techniques of government' (Ferguson 2009) that structure the academy may offer opportunities for those committed to feminist and participatory praxis to do the kinds of research we wish (Pain *et al.* 2011). While completing an ICS or changing research direction to focus more on impact activities might be seen as evidence of my own and other academics' capacity to act as 'good neoliberal subjects, by disciplining themselves' (Gregson *et al.* 2012, 344; Williams 2012; Slater 2012), I engaged in these activities before the 'impact agenda' emerged because of my ethic of care to enhance support for young carers and families affected by HIV. We need to remember that what we do is often motivated by our own ethical values and political commitments, rather than by audit and career progressions.

Tensions often emerge between academic researchers' goals and objectives that need to be achieved within a specific project timeframe to comply with disciplinary audit (Pain *et al.* 2011; Williams 2012), our own ethical stance, passions and motivations, and the wider aspirations of participants with whom we work. An ethic of care towards 'distant' others and a sustained commitment to collaboration and participatory praxis may be difficult to achieve within the constraints of our teaching commitments, ever dwindling social science research funding (especially small grants that are so crucial to early career academics) and pressures associated with career stage within the neoliberal academy. Such an ethic of care to 'distant others' may also conflict with our responsibilities to care for 'proximate' others in our personal lives. This can result in emotional conflicts which may be particularly difficult for those engaging in cross-cultural research to reconcile.

My research and the impacts cited in my ICS emerged slowly and incrementally from a series of small research grants in an unplanned, serendipitous way at different scales. This challenges the neoliberal assumption that a linear model of 'pathways to impact' can be designed from the outset of a large research project. Furthermore, research may have unintended 'impacts' on the lives of those we work with which cannot always be anticipated. An action-oriented rather than simply academic research process may bring about greater emotional investment of participants in the project in potentially negative as well as positive ways. Furthermore, it may be the small things you do to support the work of community-based organisations, such as signposting on to sources of funding, or our work in teaching and supervising undergraduate and postgraduate students, that may be regarded as having the most beneficial societal impacts. We need to continue to facilitate these important benefits (such as reciprocity, interdependence and collaboration: Blazek *et al.* 2015) and potentially seek their inclusion within the audit process and definitions of research 'impact'.

The lack of transparency about the assessment of individual ICS raises further questions about academics' roles and our compliance with the current REF audit system. My hope is that there is some reflection on this apparent contradiction, so that in the next iteration of the REF, academics will receive individual feedback on their ICS; our endeavours and the level of accountability demanded of us surely deserve this.

Unfortunately, as it becomes institutionalised, the 'impact' agenda appears to provide further evidence of the disciplinary effects of the corporatisation of the academy on individuals, as well as on research-teaching synergies and the values of collegiality, making it harder to sustain an ethics of care in university life. Such effects are manifested in ever growing expectations of academics' roles, time scarcity and unacceptable levels of stress and burnout, in addition to new hierarchies between those whose work is deemed 'impactful' and those whose work is part of on-going debates, for example, about racism or sexism, for which demonstrating impact is more difficult.

It seems ever more important to embody an ethic of care in university settings and seek to 'rework meaning' (Pain *et al.* 2012) through the ways that we 'do' our multiple selves in and across place. This may include pursuing research and teaching that builds on our passions, curiosities and ethics of care for 'distant' and 'proximate' others, rather being driven by the demands of the audit culture. As feminist geographers, we can join Mountz *et al.*'s call for 'slow scholarship' that enables us to 'work with care, while also *caring for ourselves and others*' (2015, 1253; emphasis in original), and collectively advocate a re-valuing of feminist and participatory action research approaches 'from below', which may have most impact at local level, in order to achieve meaningful shifts in the impact agenda and more broadly, the academy.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 For the purposes of the UK REF 2014, impact was defined by the Higher Education Funding Council for England as 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia' (REF 2011, 48).

2 See Evans and Becker (2009), Evans (2011a 2011b 2012a 2012b) and http://results.ref.ac.uk/Submissions/Impact/1617 (accessed 28 November 2015) for further information.

3 It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the interesting critiques of celebrity development/humanitarianism (see Goodman and Barnes 2011).

4 Institutions and researchers were not provided with feedback on individual ICS, only the overall score and comments on the Unit of Assessment's 'impact'. Given that my unit of assessment impact score was 50 per cent at 3* ('very considerable' impacts) and 50 per cent at 2* ('considerable' impacts), my case study (one of three submitted by the unit) is likely to have been scored as either 3* or 2*. My ICS was internally reviewed by my institution prior to the REF as 3*.

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