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OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

Talking About Memory-Work Adrienne Hyle, Diane Montgomery, Judith Kaufman in conversation with Robert Hamm

Introduction

In this conversation Adrienne Hyle, Diane Montgomery and Judith Kaufman explain their views on using memory-work as a method of research and a method of learning. From their own experience of being in a group for a long time doing memory-work, they describe their initial contact with the method, how they used it over seven years together, and what learning effects it had for them.

Robert

What is your understanding of the terminology, how you would use the term Memory-Work? Referring to a method, or to an approach or to a part of a method, or what you would think the term depicts for yourself?

Judith

I consider Memory-Work to be using earliest memories triggered by whatever cues are decided on by a collective. Then, after generating those memories and analysing them to understand how we have been socially constructed, to think about the particular topic that is the focus of Memory-Work in the context of how we have participated in that social construction.

Diane

I agree with Judy. On the question of whether it is a method or an approach, I think it has to be both. It is larger than just a method as it has to include its underlying philosophy and the ability for the process to really look at the socialisation.

Robert

If Memory-Work is a method and an approach and the two are connected and you can't separate them, is the aim something that is necessarily connected to it? Or can you start a project using the method but have a different aim?

Judith

I'm not quite sure I understand, do you mean, must you have an aim when you begin Memory-Work?

Adrienne

I think he's saying; must your aim be to understand socialisation?

Robert

Yes, exactly. Or can you use the method with a different aim? Is it possible to start an investigation of any sort that does not have this particular aim and yet use Collective Memory-Work? For example, there is a project by Katie Anderson who

did a study in the UK on the effects of the use of ecstasy. Her focus was not particularly on socialisation. It was something like, what are the effects of ecstasy on people, and what does it do to them.

Judith

I suppose you can use Memory-Work to do that. But why would you? Memory-Work is tied to understanding socialisation.

Adrienne

Agreed.

Diane

In our work we spent some time talking about the idea that Memory-Work is not psychotherapeutic. It is not something where we just understand self. But understanding self helped us understand the socialisation aspect. So, I think rather than being seduced into other aims we always kept socialisation and social construction as our aim throughout our discussions and analyses. We always kept that as our purpose. I would say purpose instead of goal or aim.

Judith

Yes, I agree with that.

Robert

When you came to use Memory-Work in the project that led to the publication, *The Girls in Their Elements* (Kaufman, Ewing, Montgomery, Hyle & Self, 2003) did you have a model prior to that? How did you actually know the method?

Judith

In 1989 I graduated with my PhD, and my dissertation was on emotion and cognition.

I read the Crawford and Kippax book on emotion and meaning. I had just got a job at Oklahoma State University and knew Diane as she taught in the same program. Adrienne, I'm not sure I knew yet. But I got very excited about forming a collective. I thought, oh, my God, I need to find a group of colleagues who would be interested in studying this. And, I think, Diane caught the excitement and said, "Yea, let's do this and find a group of women, who would be interested in doing this."

So, it was Crawford and Kippax that led us to Haug. Once we started the group and we had stable members, we dug into Haug and attempted to understand her book on *Female Sexualization*. I think I had initially talked with Diane about doing a project, and at that point we had no idea what we were going to do. But you were willing to roll your sleeves up and we got Margaret and Patty and Adrienne all excited about it, too. And so it began.

Robert

What was the fascination about it?

Judith

My dissertation was on emotion and cognition and how ridiculous it was to separate them. The Crawford and Kippax piece spoke directly to that, with the idea that emotions are smart, they are intelligent, they provide meaning. And they got to that understanding through this process called Memory-Work. This is prior to neuro-research, and I have to say, we have been vindicated with all the current research on the brain. So that seemed to me an empirical way to get to the idea that emotions are smart and that emotions are cognitive in a sense. That's what appealed

to me. Here is a method that we can use to probe that idea.

Diane

What appealed to me was first Judy's enthusiasm. I came to the university about the same time. I did my dissertation with Q-methodology and it just allowed me to recognise subjectivity for people who keep their blinders on from seeing other people's subjectivity points. So, that was the draw. And then, I think what kept me for seven years meeting every week was the openness, the trust, the strong feminine piece that kept us together intellectually, emotionally. I mean, we couldn't separate it. We were a mighty group.

Robert

But you could not foresee that at the beginning.

Diane

No. We were in a very male dominant department, and a very male dominant college.

Adrienne

I think mine was even worse because I was in leadership and administration. The possibility of working with women on something academically rigorous, using a method that was new and intriguing was just perfect.

Judith

And its roots were in feminism.

Adrienne

Yes. I think every woman in the group brought something new to the table. It was a great learning opportunity, a great learning experience.

Robert

When I read your book, *The Girls in Their Elements* ((Kaufman, Ewing, Montgomery, Hyle & Self, 2003), my impression was that you went through different phases in the work, not only in relation to your own relationship as a group which I would assume is normal for any group that develops over a certain time, but also in relation to how you coped, or struggled, or appropriated, or adapted the actual method. My feeling while reading it was that working with Collective Memory-Work was actually kind of a trial and error on the basis of the literature that you read.

Judith

That's correct. We evolved in our use of it. In the beginning we struggled with Haug's Female Sexualisation. Once we felt like we had a good understanding, we worked between the Crawford text and Haug's text to find something that worked for the five of us. We played with different memories. Did these work, did this cue work, do we need other cues? We struggled with the tension between capturing the essence of an early memory and filtering it through who you are in the present. In this context, it's important to say that the collective not only shaped the analysis, but we also shaped the memories that we generated for analysis.

Diane

Just understanding a little bit about memory was also one of the side-tracks that we took. We brought in photos of the time of the memories that we had generated. And one of the things that we recognised is that the memories were not fact-based. For instance, in one photo there was a different colour carpet than what we remembered, there were different colour

boots, and so on. That started thoughts about processes on how we constructed the memories.

Then we tried rewriting memories, and we recognised that after we rewrote them and after analysis, they became very much part of the group memory rather than our own personal memory. We tried a lot of different things. We didn't feel pressure to publish or to come to a product. And that's very different for assistant professors who come together in a group. Because we had no pressure to publish in the collective. It was a process of understanding, of growing, of recognising our intellectual advancement. It was an evolution of what was needed next.

Adrienne

You made me think about something. What role does time play in this method? Diane, you've mentioned more than once the time that we spent doing this. And, Robert, you talked about somebody doing just this little piece as part of a small session. I think time is a component in this. It's like fermentation, you have to think, reflect and question. And can that happen really quickly? I don't know that it can.

Robert

Can I direct that to Judith, because in the collection of essays that you published in *Dissecting the Mundane* (Hyle, Ewing, Montgomery, & Kaufman, 2008) one of the essays is about using Memory-Work in teacher training courses. And that is Judith's piece. In a teacher training course, and the method being used during that course you have a time limit, a semester, two semester, a couple of weeks, whatever. You have a set time. Not only Judith has written about that, Naomi Norquay's piece

in *Dissecting the Mundane* relates to that also, and in Austria there are a couple of people who use the method in teaching also. Every single application in that regard is restricted in time. It might be interesting to hear what Judith says about that.

Judith

Actually, after I wrote that piece for the book, I have not used Memory-Work since with my teacher-ed students, because of the time issue. You know, that was a particular course where I had three hours a week with undergraduates. And I could take a good chunk of time out of the course to devote to Memory-Work. I haven't done it since because it took so much time and I wasn't sure it was worth the trade-off. I may try it this semester coming up in the fall with my graduate students. But I mean to do it in an abbreviated version. It's an early childhood course, and I'm going to have them generate their earliest memories of school. Then we'll do some analysis, and we'll return to the memories mid-semester, and do a little bit more analysis with what we've read. We'll return to the same memories again at the end of the semester and do more analysis with all the readings from the course. It may be another short article coming up on an abbreviated use of Memory-Work as a pedagogical tool.

But as I talked about in that chapter, there is a real difference between using it in a class with students and using it to research a particular question. I think when I did it with my undergraduates, I was attempting to use the same method, the same approach that we used in our own work with my undergraduates. And it was just too much for them. I mean, it helped, they got some interesting insights about their own attitudes towards school and their

socialisation in school. But clearly I stopped using it after that, I think it was too inefficient. I tried to use it as a research tool with my students. And I needed to think about it very differently as a pedagogical tool.

Diane

My experience, in addition to the time aspect is the power difference. If you have a different role, whether you're an administrator, or faculty, or student, or graduate student, that power differential takes away from the pieces that I saw as so important to the method—openness, timelessness, intimacy and trust.

I tried to introduce two different faculties to the method, one in Ohio and one in Indiana. They wanted to know more about the method as process, and you have an hour-and-a-half or two hours to introduce a methodology. It's not going to happen without some practice. So, we generated memories and tried to get the PhD-level people, some were scientists, to look at socialisation. And not a single person in either faculty ever picked it up or read a book or asked more questions. I'm sure they viewed it as two hours of wasted time for all that was interesting they've forgotten. It didn't work for me to introduce colleagues.

I also used just recalling memories in a class that I taught, called creativity for teachers. It was really to understand at what point the rememberer had a creative spirit or how it was culturally extinguished. It was more individual than it was group. Although we came up with some group generalisations it didn't work in the same way.

Robert

And did you try to use the method in a different setting, Adrienne?

Adrienne

I haven't done any group work, but I use, to this day, some important components about the process and the method, for myself, with myself. I still work with a lot of doctoral students, so there potentially were opportunities. I don't know if it did not occur to me or, if it did, I dismissed it?

Robert

In Dissecting the Mundane there is a quote where you refer to learning experiences as I understand it, something that you got out of the method of Collective Memory-Work, and there is a sentence that I found very strong. You said the experience of doing Collective Memory-Work on that particular topic of female socialisation into science has led to a situation where you can never do science as you did before. I don't know if you remember the sentence. I find it a very strong sentence. How did that happen?

Judith

I remember that idea in the introduction. We were socialised to think about the work that we did in a very particular way. Memory-Work changed our relationship to our work as scientists, and as Diane has said, in the midst of doing Memory-Work we started referring to ourselves as scientists. Something that we had never done before. I was an educational psychologist, Diane has specialized in creativity and special education, Adrienne in leadership and administration, but we never called ourselves scientists. The whole notion of science is socially embedded and through the process of Memory-Work we

came to recognise how socially embedded our work is. It was a coming to consciousness, and that was one of the unexpected results of engaging in the process.

Diane

Collective Memory-Work changed how we viewed ourselves as teachers and how we interacted with learners

Adrienne

I had experiences that this collective project helped me navigate. One of them was when I was told by my department chair that I should not do research on women in leadership, that was the death knell for my academic success. I also wrote a paper presented at AERA. based upon the horror stories that women had told me, about how they were treated within the academy. I got a standing ovation for the presentation, but no-one would publish the paper because I had not systematically collected and analyzed data within a theoretical frame.

I think it was important for the lot of us, but for me, it was really important to have a group of people saying, wait a second, our memories, our understandings, the stories that we've been told, the stories that we can tell, are important. They do contain important information about how we are socialised and the impact of that socialization.

Robert

Would you go as far as saying that Memory-Work is actually a means of education?

Adrienne

Certainly.

Diane

It is definitely a learning experience for those who participate in the process. From talking to one member of another collective, it was clear that our experience was dramatically different from their experience as graduate students in a class. It would have been an interesting way to look at the comparison, because I would like to know what they would say they learned, how is it a learning experience for them?

To say our experience was educational is meek. It was a profound, life-changing learning experience those seven years. And that's why we can't do science like we did science, we can't interact with children like we did before. Because, seven years, five years two hours every week, it was profound. Our experience was profound.

Adrienne

It was really empowering for me. Robert, you used emancipatory in a couple of your e-mails, it was empowering for me more than it was emancipatory. I mean, now I look back at what I felt I could say and do, and it changed dramatically because of this experience.

Judith

I would say that, too. One of the things that has stuck with me since our work is interruption as opposed to emancipation. The whole idea of interrupting the narratives that we take for granted. That is something that has stayed with me and something that we talk about, in both of our books, is how it is an ongoing process.

For me, I've learned the habit of scrutinising and interrupting what I take for granted. I have always questioned

assumptions, but I think Memory-Work just gave me the empirical experience of what happens when you do that. It's more than a process of reflecting and being critical. It is getting into the habit of interruption. And I think I've learned that from Memory-Work.

Robert

And do you think that's a technical issue, is the reason for you learning that located in some technical issue of the method? Is it depending on the texts, on the way you analyse the texts? Or is it something that has to do with the group and the intensity of the group seven years working together?

Judith

I think it was the analysis, that's the empirical part of this that we all experienced. And we experienced it as a result of collective analysis. I think having that experience is what changed me. That the five of us could engage in this endeavour and within our own memories we can capture socialisation and think about what we were taught to forget. Having the experience of discovering what was forgotten, that experience only comes out of the analysis. Oh, my God, I was taught to forget; the analysis changed me.

Diane

Wasn't there a time when we read the transcripts of our analysis to do another analysis? I think that might have been one of our trials, a time when we agreed to look at how we analyse the memories? I don't remember perfectly now, but we took our analysis transcripts and did another level of analysis of the transcripts. When you're meeting two hours a week for five years, you get to try a lot of things. At that second

level of analysis it was reinforcing. We found exactly the thing that Judy's talking about.

Adrienne

I thought of two things while you were talking. One of them is the respect and status that each of us experienced among our colleagues. Secondly, I have always thought that to change the system you have to be part of the system. And this collective was. And yet, we have been able to change.

Judith

Well, you know, we changed, but the institution didn't change.

Adrienne

Yes, but the thing is, what we did within the institution could change. We wrote articles and books about Memory-Work, and that counted towards promotion and tenure. We didn't have to do standard experimental work to be researchers and contributing academics.

Judith

Right. And that was also at a time when at least here in the United States the controversy between quantitative and qualitative research was raging in the early and mid-90s. What we were doing was off the charts. I think we carved out a space for ourselves within the institution. That was always my experience of Oklahoma, you could be as radical as you want to be, within a bubble. And so we carved out space within a bubble. But I think the institution itself remained unchanged. We carved a space for ourselves.

Diane

Perhaps our interactions with subsequent

students and classes may have changed those people in a way that they could go out and make subtle changes. You can only plant seeds, you don't know what grows.

Adrienne

Nobody ever told me I could not do stuff after this group. Either that or I just didn't hear them, wouldn't hear them.

Diane

After the book came out we had a couple of people in the College of Education that wanted to start another group. One of them said, oh, you should start a new group and make sure I'm part of it. And I said, "Why can't you start your own group?" They never did.

Robert

In the shape and form that you applied it, definitely yes, because of the time and the involvement. But you know that your group in that regard is exceptional. There are only a few groups that worked for such a long period of time. Most of the projects using Memory-Work are of a smaller scale, or they have a fixed time frame. Often it is this seminar work over a couple of weeks, and then somebody writes up and presents the results. But it differs quite a lot from the experience, and the spaces of experience that you opened up for yourselves.

Diane

I am grateful for the time that we had because I think that contributed to my learning experience, and to what we were able to accomplish. During the writing process, we tried pairing up and writing as the whole group. When Judy moved to New York, we wrote online. We flew to

New York to write and Judy flew back to Oklahoma.

Robert

When the group in Hamburg and Berlin started their initial attempts in the late 1970s from which then Memory-Work derived, they were very closely connected to the feminist movement, Marxist politics, socialist politics. Their developing of the method was kind of a struggle with positions which they found in the respective groups of which they were part. When you worked with your group, that was already a couple of years later. Nowadays, it is another nearly 20 years gone.

A question that arises for me in that regard is, how timely is a method that has its roots in a different era, in a different sphere? How timely is the method as a means of education nowadays? How does it fit into the times that we live in, in the U.S., in Europe?

Judith

In my discipline, which is human development, Memory-Work is even more timely, because human development has come to a point in the discipline where it is now accepted that children develop through socialisation. We can't talk universals when it comes to thinking about child development. The only way to think about child development is to understand in any particular community what adults value, and then how adults transmit those values to their children. And once you understand how that transmission happens then you have a sense of how development occurs in that particular community.

So, development is all about socialisation. I think when Haug and her

collective were undertaking this, it was much more radical, because certainly in the field of psychology at large, everybody was looking for universals. There weren't a lot of folks thinking about socialisation as a way to conceptualise various psychological processes. But now I think at least for me in my discipline, I think Memory-Work is a piece of ways to explore socialisation in humans

Diane

It is definitely timely now. And in the future, 20 years from now it would be very interesting to continue to study science and learning about scientific things, how children are remembering what their parents are saying about science now.

We have a real distrust of science in the U.S. right now, along with a systematic rejection of any scientist holding offices at the government level. There is a governmental rejection of climate change and the science behind it. So, I think that the science and truth need to be explored in a way that is focused on raising consciousness. I was reading a Buddhist newsletter about how we need to look at social norms and have more contemplative practices so that we can raise our consciousness so that we can become aware of our socialisation.

Adrienne

I agree with both Diane and Judy. It was useful then. So, why wouldn't it be useful now? I think socialisation doesn't stop, it continues.

Robert

The question about timeliness comes from going back to the notion of emancipatory learning. Emancipation is an aim in the method at the very beginning. Emancipation requires that as a starting point you have something to emancipate from.

I can say in relation to projects that I have started over the last year the method appears attractive to a lot of people that I talk to. When they hear, you go into a reflective loop, you take a step away from your everyday experiences, but you look at exactly those everyday experiences from a distant position, and it's kind of a bird's eye view where you look at yourself, this alone is attractive.

But when I try to explain, how is that done, we use a text, and we analyse a text, and we look at contradictions in the texts, and we look at empty spaces and all of it, I realise that there is a reluctance often in people. Why should I do that? It is hard to pinpoint and say what exactly it is where people become reluctant. It may be the time factor, I don't know. So, all of that comes together in that question of timeliness.

Judith

It raises another question. Is it only academics who are interested in Memory-Work, who in 2019 have the time and space to develop a project like this? I think of parallels to the consciousness raising groups of women who came together in the 1960s and discovered that their experiences had something in common, and I think about Paolo Freire and his work with peasants in Brazil, and liberatory education.

Certainly, for the five of us, we just came into this with my excitement because it was related to what I had been doing my research on as a doctoral student. We didn't go into this with the idea that we were doing something like consciousness raising or something like liberatory education. It was appealing to a group of academics who were looking to carve out a new space in our particular academy. As a newly minted PhD, I didn't see a lot of places for me to plug in. So, I had to create my own space. And then we had this fortuitous outcome.

Robert

For me that leads to another question. You created your own space. Now you have your own space. Does that now mean that the method Collective Memory-Work has done its job, we don't need it anymore?

Adrienne

No.

Judith

It opens up new possibilities, you begin to think about all the applications. I wanted to use it in my work with teacher education students. In my experience, they come into education very naïve and almost apolitical, and have not begun to grapple with this very political field that they have chosen for themselves. I'm always searching for ways to help them raise their consciousness and help them become empowered.

Diane

I taught a course called "The psychology of memory," for sixteen year-old high-schoolers that came for a summer camp. They were there for ten days and I got to meet with them for an entire day to have a learning community. I did that for ten or eleven years. We also did some Jungian things with clay and colouring and art things that really helped focus on the memories. It was the same sort of process but different triggers perhaps. I didn't call it Memory-Work, but the students were

really shocked about what they were learning about their own families and their own communities and their own culture by looking at things across a number of people.

So, I would agree that you just start seeing opportunities for this interruption, what Robert. vou're calling emancipation. And maybe it is just stepping back, maybe it is consciousness raising. There is another term coming from Buddhist literature called cultural humility. It's an interesting concept, to be able to recognise that what happens to me is shared in some cultures and not shared in other cultures. And what is it about the way I was socialised that I am not aware of. how do I raise my contemplative awareness?

Judith

Well, Diane, what it raises for me is that, maybe some of the work ahead is to figure out how to condense Memory-Work, how to talk about condensing it to make it more user-friendly.

Diane

Or accessible?

Judith

Accessible, so that more people can use it and would be willing to use it because you can do it over a shorter period of time. Perhaps some sort of hybrid between Memory-Work and consciousness raising, where Memory-Work gives more structure for consciousness raising? Maybe that's the next step here?

Adrienne

I think about movie trailers, and what they do is they catch your excitement about a movie in a very short period of time. Perhaps there is a way to use the classroom pedagogy as a teaser, trailer for engaging in a larger, longer project.

Robert

Memory-Work was developed on the basis of the experiences of women in consciousness raising groups, and their frustration with the groups. That is something that Frigga says in a couple of publications, consciousness raising groups were great up to one point where you start thinking, o.k., but what does it tell us now? And what do we do with the memories, and with our stories? We share them, we get a feeling of empathy, we get solidarity of sorts.

That's all fine, but when it comes to making that crucial step of understanding what these experiences are about and where they come from, and bridging from the individual to the social and bridging from the social back to the individual, and thinking about capacities of acting, consciousness raising groups didn't do that. The analysis was missing. And that is where Memory-Work is actually based on the idea of consciousness raising groups, bringing in the individual experiences, taking yourself as a subject of interest, and then using your own material as a means to get to an analytic understanding.

That's what I think Judith said at the beginning, this idea of socialisation and growing into society not only as a passive act but also as something that you actively do. And therefore, you have ways of influencing that, and ideally not on your own, but in solidarity with others. But that requires that step out of the flow of things. Memory-Work is already that crucial step beyond the consciousness raising. So trying

to bring consciousness raising into Memory-Work, it's already in it. It is part of it.

When I hear the term accessibility it immediately rings in my ears because that is exactly what I hope to do with the study that I am working on, to provide a way for people who want to pick up the method in different frameworks. not only universities, but also in adult education, If you have a group where people just come up with an idea, want to learn something together, they organise in a framework of vocational education, and meet for a certain period of time. But they are never engaged over such a long period of years and years. It's maybe twelve weeks, it's ten weeks. For this particular time frame to find ways to make it possible for people without an academic background to use the method, or elements of the method, so that it becomes useful for them, I think that's a very attractive idea.

Judith

That's Ivan Illich, his notion of knowledge networks. Probably the text he's best known for is *Deschooling Society*. He talked about informal groups of people coming together particularly for teaching themselves something that they didn't know, coming together with people who do know, who are experts, and creating networks. But, yes, that's what I ought to experiment with in the fall. How can I make it more accessible for my students, and can we come up with something with just kind of one set of memories and analysing them over the course of a semester based on what we're reading?

Robert

As a lecturer, a teacher in third level

education, or any institutional context using Memory-Work, how would your role change when you offer Memory-Work as a method to students, in comparison to other methods?

Judith

That's the power issue. It's something I tried to stay conscious of when I used it with my undergraduates. But, yes, the power issue is very concerning because I am the teacher, and I am saying to my students, I'm requiring you to write a memory. And then I'm requiring you to do an analysis of those memories. And then we're going to do it three times over the course of the semester. That's very different than a group of people coming together willingly to study some aspect of self. That's the contradiction.

Robert

Did you experience something like resistance in the course, when you did that some ten years ago?

Judith

No. The students were actually fascinated by it. They loved it. It was all about them. "I get to write about me." I read over that chapter in preparation for our discussion today, and I was amazed by some of the students who said, "I never knew my memories could be so valuable and it's so important, it's interesting that you can do this with your memories." They were just so surprised and shocked by it. So, they were pretty open to it. When we got into the analysis that became difficult.

In the chapter, I discuss our wholeclass analysis and I am hearing issues that relate to gender, race and class. They're not hearing those things at all. And so, am I facilitating? Am I shaping? That was the conundrum for me. And I justify it because I think it is essential that students in teacher education understand the impact of gender, race and class on the work they are going to do as teachers. That was a conundrum, absolutely. But they loved it. The analysis not so much, but writing the memories, they loved.

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