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Audio research methods, attitudes, and accessibility theory: Using audio vignettes to elicit attitudes towards sex work

Abstract

Audio recording interviews, focus groups, and naturally occurring interactions have been utilised by social researchers for decades. Yet, the use of audio recordings as a tool to elicit participant responses has received less attention in social science research. This is despite heightened interest in non-traditional techniques such as the use of visual methodologies (Pauwels, 2010), and arts-based methods (O'Hara and Higgins, 2019; O'Neill and Hubbard, 2010). In this article, I describe how I advanced a known method, vignettes, into an audio narrative to explore perceptions of sex work. This article reports on the methodological rationale for the novel use of audio vignettes, and the capacity they have for memory retrieval, eliciting reflections on lived experiences, and for providing richer attitudinal data. By drawing on 'accessibility theory' (Ariel, 2001a), this article argues that audio vignettes are a powerful elicitor of attitudes. Furthermore, I claim that audio methods as I define them, can enhance the social scientists' toolkit and that, what I term 'audio sociology' needs further development.

Key words: audio research methods, vignettes, audio storytelling, attitudes, sound, audio sociology, accessibility theory, sound studies, oral methods, auditory, soundscape, soundwalks.

Introduction

Increasing recognition of the multi-sensory nature of the social world has stimulated the development and utilisation of non-traditional research tools (Sharafizad et al., 2020; Back and Puwar, 2012). Recent years have witnessed the expansion of research methods that have sought to move beyond 'disciplines of words' (Mead, 2012: 3), and embrace the study of sensory experiences, as well as employ methods that draw on visual, sound, sensory, and arts-based approaches. This body of work has identified numerous benefits of adopting non-traditional methodological tools such enhancing data quality, capturing social life in 'real time' and improved participant engagement (Bates, 2013). In addition, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of sound for everyday life (Conway et al., 2009).

The use of sound has traditionally included the audio recording of interviews, focus groups, and naturally occurring interactions using digital technology (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). Its benefits as 'a powerful means of documenting the ethnographic experience' have long been appreciated in social science research (Negrón, 2012: 293). More innovative approaches to recoding participant responses of experiences have included, for example, the use of audio diaries to record young people's experiences and perceptions of their lives (Worth, 2009), and in longitudinal narrative research (Lynn, 2009). However, the use of sound to stimulate rather than to simply record participant responses or experiences has received comparatively less attention in social science research.

'Sound Studies' involve the listening, recording, and transferring of sounds, noises, music, and silence. Research in this field has included soundscape studies which involve field recordings, sound walks, and sound mapping (Gallagher and Prior, 2013; Herrity, 2018). Sounds have also played a prominent role in sensory sociology, where sound environments are heard, felt, and emersed into (Thibaud, 2011). The use of oral methods as a solicitation tool has included computer assisted interviews whereby oral automated interview questions are recorded and used during interviews (Pickard and Roster, 2020), and oral recordings have been used in arts-based installations and performances (O'Hara and Higgins, 2019).

Yet the novel development of vignettes, defined as short descriptions of a scenario or event into an audio narrative performed by actors with or without background sounds, digitally recorded and then played to participants in an interview or focus group, is to my knowledge, yet to be documented in academic literature. This article seeks to address this gap, by examining the contribution of this, what I term, 'audio research methods' to the social scientist toolkit. In this article I describe the novel utilisation of this audio method to investigate attitudes towards sex work. Inspired by my own experience as a former youth and

community worker, and by the use of creative methods in research with young people (Bagnoli, 2009), this article outlines the rationale for using audio vignettes and the potential capacity of this method. By drawing on 'accessibility theory' coined by the linguistics scholar Ariel (2001a), this article demonstrates the powerful utility of this underused method in eliciting attitudinal data, lived experiences, and memory.

The article begins by providing an overview of existing auditory research methods literature, followed by study details. The article then moves on to explore how I utilised audio vignettes in focus groups and interviews to explore perceptions of sex work. In doing so, the article will consider the rationale for adopting an auditory method for attitudinal research on sex work and the benefits of using audio research methods to stimulate data collection. The article will conclude by considering the future potential of audio methods and auditory research, and the development of what I term 'audio sociology'. The article has three main aims, first to examine existing auditory research methods, second to examine the utility of new and novel audio methods, and third to advance debates on auditory research, particularly in the social sciences.

Audio and Sound Methods

'Audio research methods' as I define them involve the use or recording of oral questions, self-reflections, or discussion, sometimes combined with sound, or using sounds alone, with or without audio-digital enabled devices. Audio as a concept, has been used to refer to the hearing of sounds and orality, digital oral and sound recordings, and stimulations caused by sounds (Fatemi et al., 2005; Chu et al., 2009; Burke et al., 2020). Examples of the range of audio methods used by researchers include oral questions, discussion and storytelling, audio diaries, audio-assisted computer interviews, soundscapes, and sound walks.

Audio recorded diaries have been used to capture participants' reflections on a single event, their life stories, memories, feelings, and emotions (Monrouxe, 2009; Hislop et al., 2005; Critten and Kucirkova, 2017). As a method they have taken the form of 'long-form documentaries to short digital narratives, podcasting, social media and online streaming' (McHugh, 2014: :141). Audio-digital storytelling therefore captures a range of 'digitally mediated narrative practices' (Vivienne and Burgess, 2012: 362). For example, Nancy Worth (Worth, 2009) used audio diaries to capture young people's transitions to adulthood, and asked young people to orally record their experiences and reflections about growing up on microcassette recorders. Oral storytelling methods have also been shown to enhance research with indigenous communities, thereby 'decolonizing' the research and preserving and

promoting indigenous oral wisdom (Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013). As Hibbin (2013: 12) explains, cultural transmission of information took place orally well before the advent of literacy and is thus a key methodological tool, as she argues 'we are literally hard wired for story'. The benefits that audio-digital oral methods have of enabling access to marginal voices as highlighted by Cunsolo Willox et al (2013), was one of the key issues that informed my decision to use audio vignettes.

The use of computers rather than humans to interview participants is another innovative audio method. Audio-assisted computer self-interviews (ACASI) involve 'respondents listen[ing] to pre-recorded questions … through earphones connected to a computer while the identical text is displayed simultaneously on the computer screen. The respondent answers questions by pressing the appropriate key on the keyboard.' (Pickard and Roster, 2020: 886). ACASI has been used to research sensitive issues such as sexual health, mental health, alcohol and drug use (Perlis et al., 2004; Tourangeau and Smith, 1996; Broz and Ouellet, 2010), and has been shown to increase reporting rates when compared to standard face-to-face (Jarlais et al., 1999; Newman et al., 2002; Le et al., 2006) and pencil and paper based interviews (Epstein et al., 2001). For example, van der Elst el at. (2009) found that intravenous drug use and the purchase of sex was reported more frequently using ACASI. When compared to face-to-face interviewing, women in their study reported to have paid for sex at significantly higher rates when using ACASI (49.3% compared to 5.8%) (ibid).

Auditory methods have also included 'soundscapes' which involve listening to and sometimes recording the sonic environment. Soundscapes as a method have been defined as 'an acoustic environment as perceived or experienced and/or understood by a person or people in context' (Fiebig and Schulte-Fortkamp, 2020: 255). Anthropologists have long used such sound methods (Stoller, 1989), or what some term 'sonic methodologies' (Bull and Cobbussen, 2020) to listen to the everyday and investigate how sounds are listened to, responded to and made (Boudreault-Fournier, 2020). By investigating what people hear everyday anthropologists such as Feld have learnt about knowing and being in the world, what he terms 'acoustemology'; 'sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth' (Feld, 1996: 97). Feld used sound recordings of the rainforest to stimulate discussion with local people in Papua New Guinea to better understand what sounds means to them. Others have explored 'sonic encounters' and how listeners sense of self is shaped by sound (Mansel, 2020). For example, Kate Herrity's work (2018) examined the sounds of the

prison soundscape in order to understand prison social life, as well as how music helped shape prisoner self-identity.

The most popular method in soundscape studies is the sound walk (Fiebig and Schulte-Fortkamp, 2020). 'Sounds walks' or 'audio walks' involve participants visiting specific locations to listen to and/ record sounds and then reporting on their experiences or feelings through interviews or questionnaires (ibid). Locations have included museums, sex scenes, urban and rural spaces, health care settings, and historic locations (Atkins and Laing, 2012; Keane, 2021; Siebein et al., 2021; Bull, 2014). Butler (2007) explains how recorded sound and voice can be used to help participants interpret the outside world and reflect on the historical, cultural and physical landscape. This approach was utilised by Gallagher (2014) who recorded interviews with local people in Scotland which could then be used by visitors to a ruinous site. Butler (2007) created audio walks based on interviews with people concerning their life on the River Thames in London. He later surveyed 150 people about their experiences of his audio walks and found that they preferred hearing 'real' people rather than a narrator, as this felt more authentic, and that for some people it led to feelings of closeness with their surroundings. The method also informed people's memories and helped them reflect on their own experiences, something that I sought to encourage with my participants as they reflected on what had influenced their attitudes towards sex work. More recent use of audio walks has for example explored the impact of the sounds of costal walks on participant's restorative experiences (Nicolosi et al., 2021), and how residents in Cairo collectively experience the sound dimensions of their urban territory (Battesti and Puig, 2020).

This collective body of work has sought to bring about a 'sensory turn' in order to destabilize the hegemony of the visual. It is argued that both sound and visual are part of a set of sensations that help us to understand experiences of human interaction and the impact senses can have on the human body (Boudreault-Fournier, 2020; Mansel, 2020). Paul Stoller (1989) has called on anthropologists to develop sensuous scholarship to better connect with the social world, arguing that they have lost the smells, sounds and tastes of the places they seek to study. Sociologist Les Back's work has strived towards what he calls a sensuous or 'live' sociology that appreciates the wide range of sensory experiences to better understand 'social life in process' (2009: 3). Indeed, we are socialised through audition and sound, and thus in order to understand society we must understand, appreciate, and engage with orality and sounds, as well as other sensory experiences.

To understand community perceptions of sex work, I employed audio vignettes to stimulate discussion on this sensitive topic. The following section will explain the rationale for developing this innovative attitudinal method for social science research.

Study Details

This article stems from research conducted in 2007-08, that sought to explore 'community' attitudes towards sex work in England (Kingston, 2013). Residents were deemed to form part of the local community and were recruited through community centres in a large northern city. My previous experience as a youth and community worker for a County Council in England led me to explore the use of non-traditional research methods for data collection. Some of the people I had supported were unable to read and write, others felt uncomfortable answering direct questions, and some were nervous around strangers. I therefore decided against the use of a survey and one-to-one interviews because it could act as a hindrance rather than a facilitator of data collection. Instead, I chose to employ the use of vignettes in focus groups, and later developed vignettes into an audio format. [1] Seven focus groups were conducted with forty participants. Participants were accessed through community centres by liaising with caretakers and inviting members to focus groups held at the centres. Three participants were unable to attend the focus groups and were interviewed using the audio method.

The Development of Audio Vignettes

Vignettes refer to stimuli, which may include text and images to which participants are invited to respond (Hazel, 1995; Hill, 1997; Hughes and Huby, 2004; Shamon et al., 2019). Vignettes are generally short descriptions of a person or a social situation which contains precise references to what is believed to be the most important factors in decision making or judgement making process (Cheryl and Henry Jay, 1978; Su and Steiner, 2020). Vignettes can act as a kind of 'third-party' and can relieve some of the awkwardness that a participant may feel by being asked direct questions. While text-based vignettes are the most commonly used format (Boxer and Tisak, 2003; Skilling and Stylianides, 2020; Bennett et al., 2020;

[1] Focus groups are a useful means of identifying attitudes and experiences Haslam R. (2003) Focus groups in health and safety research. In: Langford J and D M (eds) *Focus Groups: Supporting Effective Product Development.* London: Taylor & Francis, 91-107.. They are also deemed to be suitable to people who find it difficult to articulate their thoughts or feelings, and provides a collective power to marginalised groups Liamputtong P. (2011) *Focus Group Methodology: Principle and Practice,* London: Sage..

Barter and Renold, 1999; Sampson and Johannessen, 2019), vignettes have also been presented through music and music videos (Peterson and Pfost, 1989), caricatured images (Chambers and Craig, 1998) on videotape (McKinstry, 2000; Abreu et al., 2003), comic strips (Khanolainen and Semenova, 2020), and computers (Stolte, 1994). However, use of audio vignettes in social science research is novel.

Following on from previous research the vignettes were developed in the written format in the first instance. They were hypothetical (Leahey, 2004; Leahey et al., 2003) rather than factorial scenarios (Spratt, 2001), but were based upon real life experiences of people involved in the sex industry (Edelstein, 1988; Johnston, 1988; Morgan, 1988); news reports (O'Kane, 2002; BBCNews, 2006; CrimeStoppers, 2006); previous research (Pitcher et al., 2006; Koskela and Tani, 2005) and personal experiences, in order to increase their internal validity (Hughes and Huby, 2004a). Five vignettes were developed in a written format that focused on people's experiences of living or working in an area where sex work occurs and a client's experience of purchasing sexual services. These vignettes included a woman's experience of being mistaken for a sex worker and approached by a client; a resident's experience of living in an area where sex work was permitted and not prosecuted; a man's experience of knowing men who paid for sex on stag parties; a news report that identified the murder of a sex worker; and a client's experience of the process of seeking out sex workers. Three vignettes were developed from core themes that permeated academic literature on sex work in local communities and the media at the time: violence against sex workers, residents mistaken for sex workers, and tolerance zones (Kinnell, 2008; Home Office, 2006). I was keen to determine what people who lived in areas where sex work took place thought about some of the key issues being debated academically and politically. To do so I created scenarios to document the experiences and feelings of, for example, someone being approached by a kerb-crawler when walking in the area they lived. I also included two somewhat divergent vignettes depicting male clients to determine whether context and social norms around accepted behaviour would influence people's attitudes, or whether people would express the same opinions about male clients regardless of how, when or where they purchased commercial sex.

The written vignettes were then piloted with a focus group of residents at a community centre where I had previously worked. During this pilot I realised that providing written versions of the vignette stifled discussion and would not be accessible to those with visual impairments. The use of pictures and images of specific scenes that depicted sex work in different contexts was also considered during the pilot phase of the research (Kitzinger,

1994). However, it was felt that providing a visual cue would encourage participants to focus on an external cue rather than their internal attitudes, an issue that will be explored in more detail below. I was concerned that as with the paper-based vignette participants would focus on what was on paper or on a screen in front of them, rather than what they thought about sex work. Reading the vignette orally to the group seemed to be more productive, but I felt that I then became the focus of discussion rather than the personal account being presented. I therefore made the decision to develop the written vignettes into an audio recorded narrative to be played to participants.

The decision to develop the written vignettes into an audio format was made for several key reasons. First, the study focused on exploring attitudes. Vignettes have previously been used as an attitudinal method, albeit in written form (Schoenberg and Ravdal, 2000). Attitudes are defined as 'a person's propensity to evaluate a particular entity with some degree of favourability or unfavorability … the evaluative aspects of beliefs and thoughts, feelings and emotions, and intentions and overt behaviour' (Eagly and Chaiken, 2007: 583). Previous attitudinal research has identified how vignettes can help more richly capture participants voices because they focus on topic rather than 'grand tour questions' (Schoenberg and Ravdal, 2000: 63). Attitudes are 'held in the mind' and are based on past experiences, initial reactions and mediated by the wider social and immediate context in which the participant is situated (Berliner, 2020). Using visual cues to access attitudes held internally I felt could lead to a greater focus on external stimuli and the immediate context rather than their internal beliefs and prior experiences. My intention was to access participants' inner thoughts and dialogue (Hibbin, 2019), and my approach was influenced by Ong's explanation of the interiority of sound:

> Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sounds pours into the hearer … When I hear … I am the centre of my auditory world …You can immerse yourself in hearing … There is no way to immerse yourself in sight (Ong, 2002: :71)

Whilst it could be argued that light is also immersive given it projects into the eye and sound is mediated by, in my case a digital device with a recorded external narrative, the fixed nature of visual stimuli closes space for the discussion of what people think about a subject and focuses more on what people perceive of an object. Stearne (2011:212) provides a summary

of the apparent differences between seeing and hearing, before critiquing them, that is useful to note here:

> 'hearing immerses its subject; vision offers a perspective…hearing places you inside an event; seeing gives you a perspective on the event; hearing tends toward subjectivity; vision tends toward objectivity … hearing is about affect; vision is about intellect … hearing is a sense that immerses us in the world, while vision removes us from it.

Whilst seeing and hearing are less dichotomous than this, they are different sensory experiences with the potential to stimulate participants in alternative and novel ways. A key aim of using this auditory method was to determine participants subjective thoughts on sex work, rather than a discussion about an external object. It was also hoped that participants would '*imagine* that they are in the place where the recording was made' (Gallagher and Prior, 2014: 21, my emphasis) and connect with the people telling the story. As with research on radio, the method seeks to 'stimulate the creation of mental images in the mind of its listeners [and] keep listeners attention' (Rodero, 2010: 458). Kate Herrity's (2019) work has demonstrated how sound is a powerful medium that can stimulate an emotional response, and how those in prison assess their auditory surroundings to determine levels of risk and safety. In my research, the audio vignette became a vehicle for participants to connect with the experiences of others (an external narrative) and stimulate their thoughts (internal narrative) about those people telling their stories orally. Questions following the audio recording, then sought to determine what participants thought about for example, what men who pay for sex look like, their age, ethnicity, employment, class, marital status and so on. These characteristics may be reflective of those who participants have observed if they have experience of meeting or knowing men who pay for sex, or may be influenced by the media, wider society or their internal biases or prejudices. Subsequent questions can then lead on to a discussion of those influences, influences that may not have been recognised or considered without the contextual cue of the audio vignette. It is argued below that audio vignettes make recollecting those influences more accessible.

The production of the vignettes into an audio format involved the assistance of students and staff from the Department of English at the University of Leeds, UK. Following the pilot study, I refined the vignettes to be read by the actors in the first person. The style adopted when developing the vignettes into an audio recording was one of a 'talking head',

whereby the focus is on a single person narrating their life experience. Undergraduate English students were invited by email to be involved as actors of the written vignette into an audio narrative.[2] Participants were provided with an information sheet to read and sign to signify that they understood the nature of their involvement and consented to their involvement in the production of the vignettes. The production took place at the Department of English recording suite with the assistance of a member of the production team. Five undergraduate students with theatre and performance experience enacted the written vignettes into audio monologues without any background sounds. Once production was completed, student actors were given a fee incentive of £25. The audio vignettes were then edited and recorded on to a Compact Disc. The CD allowed me to play each monologue as a track. This enabled me to play and stop the CD where appropriate so that discussion could follow. Prior to playing the vignettes through a digital device, participants were asked general questions about sex work to gauge their responses prior to and following the vignettes. The audio vignettes were then played using a digital device, and questions asked about their initial views, followed by more specific questions about sex work.

The following section will examine the use of audio vignettes in attitudinal research on the sex industry. By drawing on my original data on perceptions of sex work, the next section demonstrates the utility of audio methods for memory retrieval and for soliciting participants opinions and attitudes.

Findings: The value of using audio vignettes in sociological research

The following section will discuss key benefits enabled by using audio vignettes in my study.

Attitudes

One of the benefits of using audio vignettes is that they elicited attitudes without the hesitation of participants. They enjoyed listening to the vignettes, remaining quiet throughout and then expressed their attitudes towards sex work without the need for prompting. Words, phrases, those involved, and the scenarios depicted appeared to trigger initial thoughts, feelings and memories that were not always expressed in response to interview questions that were asked prior to listening to the audio vignette. Audio vignettes also often elicited more detailed responses to questions than those I asked at the start of focus groups. For example,

[2] Special thanks to Professor Bottoms for facilitating my access to undergraduate students and the recording suite. Without this access, the development of the method may not have been possible.

when participants in focus groups were asked pre-vignette 'What do you think about men who buy sex from women?', 11 out of 40 residents abstained from attributing labels or placing men who buy sex into specific categories, preferring to state that men who buy sex could be anyone:

> There's not a typical man coz anyone buys sex. (Craig)
> I just think anyone (Diane)
> Anyone, absolutely anyone (Stacey)

Other participants gave short answers and failed to go into detail about the topic. For example, Gemma replied 'I don't think I have a great opinion about it.' And yet, following vignettes, residents identified clients as specific individuals not identified in the vignette scenarios (e.g., 'big men in high places', 'money men', 'businessmen'). I argue that the use of this audio research method led to a greater ability to access participants' memories, feelings, and attitudes, some of which were influenced by stereotypes and myths, and draw on accessibility theory to explain the contribution this method makes.

Accessibility theory describes how language can be used to stimulate the retrieval of information from a person's memory (Ariel, 2001b). According to the linguistics scholar Ariel, some language can lead to memory retrieval that is 'highly activated' and others 'mildly activated' and leading to lesser memory retrieval. Ariel argues that certain words or phrases more highly activate memory retrieval than others. For example, the word *she* is 'highly accessible', compared to the word *the friend*, which leads to a 'a relatively low degree of accessibility' because it is not a definite description (ibid: 29). The friend could be anyone, whereas she refers to someone specific. In the context of research on perceptions of commercial sex, asking abstract questions about clients may lead to low accessibility, whereas providing an audio scenario that describes the actions or experiences of men who pay for sex leads to high accessibility.

The idea that certain cues or stimuli can trigger memory recollection for the purposes of data collection is nothing new. For example, images have been used in research with young people to explore school bullying (Khanolainen and Semenova, 2020). Utilizing this arts-based method, the authors argue is crucial for research on sensitive topics. Butler (2009: 369) claims that oral histories and audio museum guides 'can mimic the way our memories seem to work in the brain – it is an active, mobile process, connecting often disparate things in an intensely creative way to make sense of our past, present and the future.' He further

claims that attitudes can be evaluated through an 'attitude object', which can be abstract, concrete (e.g., this book or building), individual (e.g., my family), or collective (e.g., migrants, community groups) (ibid). In the case of my own research, the attitude object of the individual talking about their experiences of living and working in an area where sex work took place, provided participants with an audio account that enabled them to connect their thoughts, memories, and experiences with the abstract attitude object.

Audio vignettes prompted participants to reflect on the factors that informed their attitudes and beliefs. This can be seen when participants' attitudes towards violence perpetrated against sex workers were explored. The first audio vignette sought to determine the impact of media reporting of violence against sex workers by describing the violent attack on a sex worker by a client, as presented in a news report. The development of this vignette was informed by media reporting of the sex industry at that time of the research and academic literature on the topic (Lowman, 2000). For example, Kinnell (Kinnell, 2006) has illustrated that media and policy debates in the UK, identify high levels of violence and murder rates amongst street sex workers. The vignette was as follows:

> NEWSFLASH – The government warn against the dangers of Dodgy Punters in their recent campaign to end the violence caused to those working in the sex industry. This campaign has gained pace following the murders of over 70 prostitutes in the last ten years and the most recent attack in Glasgow which left a woman with a severed arm. Marie Parker, 24 a prostitute from Leeds gives her account of her horrendous ordeal in May of this year, in which she was viciously attacked and raped by a client who left her unconscious and barely breathing. This case is one in a long line of cases which highlight the dangers and violence perpetrated against prostitutes in the UK

Although the intention was to determine whether residents perceived men who buy sex as dangerous and violent, discussions focused on the dangers of working as a sex worker and the responsibilities this group of women have to themselves to remain safe. The over-arching theme that emerged was that participants largely thought that sex workers were responsible for acts of violence perpetrated against them, despite this not being depicted in the vignette. Kate makes a comment that epitomises the general perspective of resident participants following vignette one which deems any violence or abuse perpetrated against sex workers as their responsibility. As Kate suggests 'In a way they're to blame for it. They know they're putting themselves out on the street … they're to blame for it

I'd say'. Likewise, Naomi stated 'they're putting their lives at risk'. The assumption was that sex workers were making a choice and with that choice came certain risks that they should be aware of:

> … it's like certain professions carry certain risks…You're a formula one driver; you might just crash your car and lose your life. If you are a prostitute selling sex…then violence, because of the kinds of clients you might attract...some of these clients…are nasty and I'm sorry but if you get into that industry then you've got to appreciate the risks (Angela)

Not one focus group participant stated such strong views about women's responsibility for the violence they were subjected to prior to this audio vignette, and at no point were questions asked about who was responsible for this violence. Instead, I opened by asking the broad question 'what do you think after hearing this vignette?'

The audio vignette, I argue, enabled the high accessibility of attitudes informed by societal myths which surround sex work. Rather than basing their views on lived experiences or an evidence base, participants instead drew on culturally available narratives or information: 'some rapists start with prostitutes don't they or have been with prostitutes I think the Ripper had, hadn't he' (Kylie). The responsibilization of women for the violence perpetrated against them is nothing new, and in particular against sex workers, such prostitution myths are widespread (Monto and Hotaling, 2001; Kinnell, 2008; Sprankle et al., 2018) and can influence hate crime towards sex workers (Campbell, 2011). Previous research has demonstrated how sex workers receive less victim empathy and are more likely to be blamed for their victimisation than non-sex working women (Sprankle et al., 2018). Participants, therefore, it is argued, drew upon culturally available attitudes about sex workers, made highly accessible, or triggered by the audio vignette.

Lived Experience and Memories

Audio vignettes also led to the elicitation of participants' personal lived experiences. For example, the use of vignette three, which identified a situation in which a woman was mistaken for a sex worker by a kerb-crawler, led participants to identify instances where they or someone known to them had been propositioned by a kerb-crawler, and how this made them feel. The audio vignette was performed by a young woman who stated:

> I was on my way home from my mate Gemma's 18th birthday party last week. It was after eleven, but I decided to walk home. I'd walked home alone hundreds

> of times before, so it wasn't a big deal. Plus, I save on taxi fare. Anyway, about, I don't know, halfway home I saw this guy drive past me in his car, almost breaking his neck trying to get a good look at me as he slowed down. He drove off and about two minutes later he drove past again, well if you can call it driving, he was going that slowly. Then the car suddenly stopped. I looked over to see what he wanted. I thought he might be lost or something. He wound down his window and said something. I could just about make out what he said and realised he thought I was a prostitute. I couldn't believe it. I ignored him and set off walking home again.

Many participants identified scenarios in which they or their family and friends were mistaken for sex workers and how this made them feel scared or worried about people they knew:

> The amount of times I've been asked how much (Gemma)

> Yeah, yeah tell me about it … where my mum … lives … I got propositioned … I used to walk home from town and spend my last pound on ten cigs and walk home … [a client asked] 'how much? Ten pounds, fifteen pounds, twenty pounds?' I'm like 'I'm not a prostitute' … it is quite scary. (Karen)

Whilst on one occasion, a participant did share their experience of being mistaken for a sex worker in response to the broad questions, overall personal experiences were shared more openly following this vignette. I argue that the personal account provided in the audio vignette, which depicted another person's lived experience, albeit fictional, led to the high accessibility of memories and disclosure of participants' own lived experiences. As noted above, vignettes are useful when researching sensitive topics because they can act as a third party, deflecting direct questioning of participants. In addition, the audio performance of the vignette personalises the scenario, helping participants to relate to the story and person depicted:

> Sometimes when you read it where you can't get the full picture of it …Whereas with the [audio] recording you can picture it more than just by reading it. … It's as though with the person, [they are] saying it first-hand it's as though it's putting you more in the picture than what it would than reading it. (Ruby)

The audio performance reduces what scholars have called ‘social distance’ between the participant and the person in the audio recording (Ethington, 1997). Developing the abstract written vignette into an auditory personal account minimizes the social disconnect between participants and the scenario depicted. It enables them to relate to the person and their account in a way a written or interviewer spoken vignette could not. Hearing the account enables an immersive experience to focus on the subject, whereas vision separates us from it. As Stoller (1984: 560) explains ‘A person’s spatialized “gaze” creates distance. Sound, by contrast, penetrates the individual and creates a sense of communication and participation’. Social closeness is enabled by the performed audio vignette which can lead to the sharing of experiences. Indeed, research in psychology has shown that sharing life experiences can spark the sharing of experiences in other people (Barasch, 2020). The account given by another person in the audio vignette enhanced the disclosure of personal lived experiences by participants.

The use of audio vignettes also enabled participants’ memory retrieval of previous news stories, social events, and crimes. For example, several participants referred to the Yorkshire Ripper and the Ispwich Ripper when discussing violence against sex workers: ‘I went to school with a girl who got killed by the Yorkshire Ripper’ (Gemma), ‘look at what happened in Ipswich … when this guy went on a killing spree. So, I think ... It’s part of the risk you take [as a sex worker]’ (Brian). Others referred to Channel Four documentaries, magazine articles and news reports that they used to support the claims they made or to explain their beliefs. For example, when Philippa discussed her views about sex workers, she drew upon television to support her claims ‘there’s been several series on television … look at Leanne in coronation street’. Audio vignettes appeared to make these memories more accessible, as participants made connections between what they heard and what they remembered. This links to previous research in education that has shown that digital story telling improved students' visual memory capacity (Sarıca and Usluel, 2016). Likewise, linguistics research has shown how ‘patterns of speech appear to make a critical contribution to memory-related processing’ (Loutrari et al., 2018: 947). Developing vignettes into an audio method I argue can also improve memory retrieval.

Future Research

The development of audio research methods to stimulate data collection in the social sciences is at a stage of infancy compared to the development of visual methods. This article advocates for further consideration of the utility of audio methods for social science research. Whilst much of this article has focused on the current auditory methods, the state-of-the-art of auditory research likewise deserves greater attention. Future research and discussion about the benefits of audio methods for social scientists is needed, as is the development of the field of what I term 'audio sociology'. Audio sociology can be defined as a way of exploring and understanding the social world through auditory sounds and sonic features. Such approaches can include audio data collection tools such as audio recorders (e.g., audio diaries) and audio stimulation techniques (e.g., audio vignettes, audio walks). The advancement and evolution of these techniques provide new insights, help advance theoretical and practical knowledge, and enhance researchers' ability to access hard-to-reach groups. Back and Puwar (2012: 6) have called for a more 'artful and crafty' approach to sociological research, that embraces new technologies such as audio-digital devices. They also suggest working with others such as artists, designers, film makers and musicians to enable 'new modes of sociology to be developed and performed' (ibid: 11). Indeed, without the contribution of actors in the development of audio vignettes, the ability to provide a first-hand account of someone's experiences would not have enabled me to access participants' attitudes towards sex work in such depth.

Advancement of the field of audio sociology may seek to mirror those seen in the context of visual sociology. In recent years we have witnessed the growth of visual methods and the rise in visual sociology (Pauwels, 2010), and more recently sensory sociology (Back, 2009). Academic books, journals, conferences, courses, and training that focus on visual and sensory methods has grown expediently. Visual sociology can be studied as a distinct degree, its recognition as a body of scholarship has led to the establishment of an International Visual Sociology Association, and it exists as a strand under the International Sociological Association. Researchers have rightly gone beyond the use of traditional methodologies to capture phenomenon from new perspectives (Zuev and Nathansohn, 2013). Yet greater attention should be paid to the importance and utility of audio methods for social science research and auditory research as a body of scholarship. Without further advancement in the field of audio sociology, just like speaking and listening in the school curriculum, visual literacy will remain hegemonic (Hibbin, 2016). Indeed, in Criminology it is argued that 'the

'ocularcentrism' of the social sciences is reproduced' (McClanahan and South, 2019). This is not to say that auditory methods should be privileged over visual or other methods, only that they offer a unique contribution to the social scientist toolkit. Audio methods can often compliment other methods as they did in my research. Human experience is concerned with a multitude of sensory experiences, and social researchers should consider the rich range of methods than can help to understand the social world.

Future research could seek to compare the use of different audio research methods. Further work on comparing pre- and post-use of audio vignettes and responses to questions, would be useful, specifically capturing participants' reflections on the impact of their use. Whilst this study began to explore this, further work to undertake a more systematic comparative evaluation of the utility of this methodological tool is needed. In addition, the use of multiple actors in audio vignettes, or the use of audio theatre productions could be fruitful methodological techniques. Arts-based methods have been shown to enable access to areas of everyday life previously inaccessible (Sharafizad et al., 2020), but these have been audio-visually performed, rather than purely audio. What exploits can be gained from this format needs consideration. The theoretical contributions audio research and audio methods make to our understanding of society also requires further debate. For example, the place of auditory sounds both outside and inside a person's sensory world (internal voices, external sounds) could be discussed, as should what aspect or features of sound and words lead to high accessibility of attitudes, memories, and lived experiences. Stoller's (1984: 560) seminal work would be useful to examine in this context, as he argues that 'sound allows for the interpretation of the inner and outer worlds, of the visible and the invisible, of the tangible and the intangible.' The internal processing of sound by the brain compared to that of vision could also be explored, in order to appreciate the neurological processing differences when either method is used.

Ethical considerations in the context of sensitive and stigmatized research also require consideration. Whilst it was not the intention of this research to lead participants, the very nature of any questioning or method developed can subtly or without prejudice influence participants. Indeed, no method is absent from bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012), and thus researchers are encouraged to reflect on the ways in which data is generated in the research environments. Data collection is an interactional process that can be influenced by the methods employed. For example, a comparison of face-to-face and telephone interviews has shown that telephone interviews tended to be shorter than face-to-face interviews (Irvine et al., 2013). Likewise, researchers can experience international problems such as participant

disengagement when discussing sensitive research (Roulston, 2014). The wording of interview questions also has the potential to lead and unduly influence, or bias, an interviewee's responses (Cairns-Lee et al., 2022). As discussed above, the vignette on violence prompted responses that were not expressed in response to open questions about sex work but led to participants drawing on stereotypes and myths. Whilst I suggest elsewhere participants drew on dual discourses to inform their views on sex work (Kingston, 2013), the very framing of the vignettes may recreate a scenario that is underpinned by fallacies, thereby enabling a self-fulfilling response. Reflecting on and acknowledging the interactional nature of data collection can be a fruitful methodological endeavour that informs data analysis.

It is important that research does not contribute to the perpetuation of such myths or stereotypes, nor fuel them. Sex workers are not responsible for any violence they may experience sex working. Involving sex workers or those who support sex workers in the development of methods, taking a participatory approach has been advocated (Gerassi et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2021; O'Neill, 2010). In addition, it may be useful to appreciate that sex worker's stigma and harm management strategies may involve using fake names, alternative phone numbers and not responding to excessive or overly intrusive questioning. Given the increase in the number of sex work researchers with lived experience (Holt et al., 2021; Bee, 2021), which is positive to see, the development of strategies to manage situations where potential harm could be caused by negative comments, and subsequent support following such research may be needed. This is not to suggest that those with lived experience need additional training to manage such situations, many sex workers unfortunately deal with such stigma regularly (Wong et al., 2011; Simpson and Smith, 2020), but that some researchers with lived experience could benefit from tailored support.

For researchers without lived experience, awareness of the potential challenges they may face are important considerations. As with my research sometimes negative, derogative, or hostile comments may be made by participants in response to vignettes that may be challenging for researchers to hear. I have previously written about the stigma I experienced as a researcher exploring sex work (Hammond and Kingston, 2014), and the potential harm to both sex workers and researchers from discussing sensitive topics (Kingston et al., 2020). As a relatively novice researcher at the time, whilst I questioned the views made about sex worker's responsbilization for the violence they were subjected to, I felt unease doing so in such a large focus group where mine was the minority voice. Training for researchers on managing difficult or challenging topics would be useful.

Limitations

There were, however, limitations to this study that future audio sociologists may wish to consider. The first is that as with other methods, impairments such as hearing impairments and language barriers can exclude some participants from engagement with audio methods. Whilst alternative arts-based methods can be empowering for some, they may be disempowering for others.

Further limitations concern the voices and sounds utilised in the audio vignette. Due to financial constraints, only the recording of an actor's voice was included in the audio vignette. To make the scenario more authentic, background noises such as cars going past, the hustle and bustle of bars, or of people talking could have been incorporated into the audio vignettes. Whilst I made the decision to avoid visual cues, a combination of the audio vignettes with visual cues could fruitful. According to Gallagher and Prior (2013: 278) audio walks 'provides another way for participants and audiences to perform research in situ, using geographical location to trigger audio playback.' Playing the audio vignettes alongside a walking tour of a city or town may help to facilitate attitudinal data retrieval. One area I did not explore, and is advocated by Gallagher and Prior (2014) is to take account of the sonic features, such as the speed of speech, pronunciation, or background noises during interviews with participants. Whilst this was appreciated in the production of the audio vignettes, this practice was not considered in-depth in the data analysis of the interviews. As they argue, overlooking this 'leads to the 'privileging of verbalized meaning over sonic features' (ibid: 270). Finally, consideration to accents of actors who perform audio vignettes is something I did not fully consider at the time. Due to finances, I was unable to select from a range of actors. Research has demonstrated that participants can determine the age, ethnicity, and class of someone through their voice (Kim, 2008; Ptacek and Sander, 1966), and this could therefore lead to bias. Indeed, in my study, two participants commented on how the actor sounded and this may have influenced their views ('He sounds like a decent one' Paula, 42, resident; 'Well he sounds proud of it.' Gemma, 46, resident). The impact of vocal tone on the accessibility of attitudes could have led to high or low accessibility of certain views. A 'decent' sounding actor may have led participants to express more positive attitudes towards the vignette. Research on accent discrimination has documented how minority or non-standard speakers can experience stigma (Freynet et al., 2020) and are perceived as threatening, whereas strong accents can be perceived as warmer (Birney et al., 2020). The accent of those recorded in audio methods may thus impact on the perceptions accessed by participants.

Future audio sociologists may also need to reflect upon the time commitment needed to develop audio methods. In my case the development process took several months: first to develop the vignette based on literature and evidence, then to find actors, book recording studios, before editing the material and producing a recorded vignette. Such time commitment has also been noted in other arts-based research, but also how these methods enhanced data collection in a way that would not have been possible using traditional techniques (Sharafizad et al., 2020). Finally, further work may seek to consider the potential bias audio vignettes may have on generating false memories (Reyna et al., 2002).

Conclusion

The vast majority of sociological research has been conducted using traditional quantitative and qualitative methods. Despite the growth of visual and more recently arts-based methods, audio methods have received comparatively less attention in social research. The purpose of this article was to review existing auditory research and describe the novel development of vignettes into an audio format. The article presented data obtained using this method and has argued that its use led to high accessibility of attitudes, memories and lived experiences for individuals or groups for whom traditional methods of data collection were not appropriate. By drawing on academic literature in linguistic studies, specifically 'accessibility theory' developed by Ariel, this paper claims that audio methods spark memories and elicited richer and deeper attitudes, some of which were informed by myths and stereotypes, than would have been possible using conventional methods.

This paper also asserts that the use of audio research methods as a solicitation tool for data collection deserves great attention in social science research. This is not to say that other methods do not make as distinct a contribution to social science research, only that audio methods deserve as much attention from social scientists as other multi-sensory methods (Gallagher and Prior, 2014). It is anticipated that this article will become a useful reference point for future audio sociologists, and that audio methods are further advanced to develop new knowledge and research potential.

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