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## **Regulating for care-ful knowledge production: Researching older people, isolation and loneliness**

Helen Manchester, Jenny Barke and the Productive Margins Collective

### **Introduction**

Collaborative, co-produced research is positioned as increasingly essential to the university in delivering public good and in finding answers to the increasingly ‘wicked’ problems we face as social researchers (Facer and Enright, 2016). Important questions need to be asked concerning how far current regulatory norms and practices around research maximize insights and the realization of transformative change. In the UK at least, despite the prominence of ‘co-production’ in Higher Education funding strategies, the balance in research funding remains weighted toward research in which problems and interests are identified from within the academic community. This chapter tells the story of a research project that aimed to develop more equitable and inclusive ‘regulatory systems’ around the production of knowledge concerning the isolation and loneliness of older people. As such this is a chapter about the regulation in and of research programmes and is intended to highlight the way that ‘top down’ regulation, embedded in university ethical processes, funder requirements and forms of accountability around research, create particular relations between universities and publics. This article draws attention to alternative regulatory systems for knowledge production emerging from our coproduced research process that draws particularly on feminist concerns centred on an ethic of care. We call this ‘care-ful’ research.

In order to explore these alternative regulatory systems the chapter examines how we ‘care-fully’ coproduced regulatory structures during our research with older people around an increasingly ‘publically’ discussed issue of the loneliness of older people. Research into isolation and loneliness tends to focus on the psychological and medical causes or consequences of loneliness (Schirmer & Michailakis, 2015). In our work we wanted to understand how the loneliness of older people is framed and understood across society and, particularly, by older people themselves. We consider in this chapter how adopting an ethic of care, founded on accounts in feminist thinking (Bellacasa, 2017; Beasley and Bacchi, 2007; Sorenson and Kalman, 2017; Code, 2015) supported us to practically co-create and sustain a particular set of regulatory systems and processes around our research. The model involved us taking values such as ‘attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion, and meeting others’ needs’ seriously and we worked with an understanding of care as a contested term that goes beyond the self to embrace our interdependencies, involves some kind of action or material doing (caring for, caring about, care giving/receiving) but also is often associated with burden and/or labour (Tronto, 2009, p.102). We draw on a long tradition in feminist scholarship that foregrounds the examination of knowledge hierarchies and the need to recognise and challenge asymmetrical power relations between researcher and researched, acknowledging that unequal power relations and

knowledge hierarchies are often written in to existing regulations around research (hooks, 2004; Caretta & Riaño, 2016; Sörensson & Kalman, 2017). Challenging these knowledge hierarchies requires different notions of value in research processes and an alternative approach to research outputs.

We draw on the experience of community partners and academics, across two settings, in order to explore the processes and practices through which knowledge (of all kinds) was created, contested and transformed in this partnership (McFarlane, 2011) and the different ‘attentions’ required in this process. In the following sections, we discuss how our co-produced, care-ful regulation of knowledge production emerged in these two very different locations. We explore more closely how an ethic of care helped us interrogate ‘just how the ‘co-mingling’ of scientific practices and their various publics takes place’ (Barry & Born, 2013: 247). We consider how new regulatory frameworks, based on our co-produced methodologies and an ethic of care, were built through examining in detail the situated, material, affective and ethicopolitical involvement of ourselves as researchers and the people we worked alongside to co-construct knowledge, and the plurality of public legacies and outputs this led to. Our concerns are related to the regulation of older peoples’ engagement in public knowledge production – we want to raise questions relating to **what** knowledge counts but also **whose** knowledge counts and **how** this knowledge might be produced and exchanged more equitably.

### **Attending to specificities of lived experience and materialities**

Our project took place in two locations, involving community workers, academics, arts practitioners and community members in the Bedminster area of Bristol in England and in Merthyr, in Wales. Our aim was to understand more about older people’s experiences of loneliness within two hyperlocal contexts and consider how the two communities could design social action projects or other initiatives to support older people who experience loneliness. The research was coproduced in each location between a community based research associate and the local community. The project was supervised by a central working group comprised of academics from Bristol (RS) and Cardiff Universities (EW), the Research Associates (JB in Bedminster and CB then RND in Merthyr) leaders of the two community organisations (SDH in Bedminster and LD in Merthyr), and an academic lead (HM).

Situating knowledge production, and acknowledging that this involves both the social and material worlds in which the research occurs, is a key theme in feminist standpoint research that was a starting point in this project (Bellacasa, 2017; Beasley & Bacchi, 2007). Before we began our research we met as a working group in each site and walked the area with a local, knowledgeable guide. We discussed the history of the areas generally and the history of community development and participation specifically. We considered the impact of geographical location on the everyday,

embodied experience of older people. There were interesting differences and similarities between the sites which underlined the importance of understanding loneliness and social isolation within a situated context. We considered the relevance of hilly topography, transport provision, participation in political movements (e.g. the national union of mineworkers in Merthyr) dispersed communities, deprivation and gentrification (e.g. in BS3) which all impact both personally and collectively across different communities. Our guides told us stories of loss (of industry and public space for instance) and of resilience (in community action projects). This built our understanding of the need to explore isolation and loneliness of older people in each location in relation to economics, histories and politics but also to landscapes, materialities and embodied lived experiences. Engagement with these real world experiences and histories was a necessary requirement in our research as we felt this allowed us to move beyond knowing things ‘in general’ and to engage more fully, and in a more responsible and responsive way, to the knowledges held in the community (Code, 2015).

The original project brief had suggested the two sites would work with and train older peer researchers in order to research isolation and loneliness in their communities. However, we found that this model was not applicable in a straightforward way in either site and research design emerged from the messy realities we encountered in the areas. In Bedminster, drawing on strong links already established by the community organisation around working with older people, the RA identified and brought together a group of (mainly) older people to co-produce research with. Collaboration was between the RA and a peer research group and initial activity involved developing research plans and questions collaboratively. In Merthyr, building on our experiences through our walking and talking methodologies and following further discussion with local community development teams in the area it became apparent that there was an element of research fatigue. The RA felt very wary about using the term ‘research’ as she felt that in the local context it “...provokes feelings of mistrust in a community that was used to having research done to it”. The RA therefore worked ethnographically with a carefully selected local poet, storyteller and photographer in order to build relations with key gatekeepers in the community and to begin to explore and make visible the stories of older people (verbally and visually) that had hitherto been largely below the radar.

Through our initial co-produced methodologies with those working in the area we identified that our research needed to be regulated in response to the specificities and lived experiences of older people in the two communities, including attending to the landscapes, topographies, histories of participation and other affective concerns. As researchers this meant we had to adapt and move fluidly between different approaches and that similar methods could not necessarily be adopted in our different contexts. Relationally, the research process became a collective, negotiated process imbued with the various materialities, interests and understandings of the human and non human actors involved. Regulatory regimes that ‘care’ are necessary for this kind of research, including funding regimes and

ethical processes, that allow for the relational labour, time and effort involved in building trust in order for communities to feel confident to express their subjectivities. This can be particularly challenging when working with non dominant, potentially vulnerable communities (Hill-Collins, 2000) where research conducted in the past may have been governed by top-down regulatory systems and relations, designed by researchers interested in rational knowledge production, objectivity and detachedness.

### **Attending to ethics and affect**

In the previous section we have suggested that methods and practices in care-ful co-produced knowledge production are relational and materially situated rather than being governed only by individual or normative, institutional regulatory regimes. This produces the need for regulatory regimes that recognise ethical principles—of care, friendship, intimacy, solidarity, and empathy—which involve practical enactments of responsibility towards ‘others-in-relation’ (Whatmore, 1996). Ellis (2007, p.4) proposes that ‘this type of ethical thinking requires researchers to act from our hearts and minds, to acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others.’ In this section we therefore explore the role of emotion and affect and the possible alternative ethical regulations required in attending to these elements in care-ful research.

As we started to develop projects and collaborate with older people and artists it became apparent that many of our collaborators were motivated to engage with the research due to their own, or close friends’ and relatives’ experiences of loneliness. Whilst our research was not developed in any way as a psychological intervention it became necessary to recognise that there is a socialisation effect in gathering of a group of older people in and of itself that may produce positive change (Masi et al 2011, Minkler et al, 2006). Researcher reflexivity is a key element that contributes to the quality of co-produced research (Caretta & Riaño, 2016). In this project everyone involved, including the working group, the artists we worked with and the older people, were encouraged to reflect on their own lived experiences of isolation and loneliness. We considered how they impacted on the research process as well as how the research process might impact on experiences of loneliness. This necessitated careful consideration of ethical relations and a recognition of the emotions associated with the research process. Responding to the way in which community researchers and artists on the projects gave a great deal of themselves when working on this project. LD, the community lead in Merthyr observed that this meant having to be more open personally than may be usual within a research project and felt it was important to ‘bring the personal’ into the project rather than ‘sitting with our work hats on, hiding behind our titles’. The emotional labours associated with this work in building care-ful knowledge production required different ethical regulatory systems and processes. Care here is understood, not simply as a moral obligation, or as part of the ‘work’ associated with participatory research, but also as a challenge to the foregrounding of rational decision making and

the lack of attention given to unruly bodies and emotions in research relationships (Mol, Moser & Pols, 2010; Beasley & Bacchi, 2007). For instance, we instigated a buddy system for our researchers (both the peer researchers and the university researchers) - someone on the team with whom they could go to (not their line manager) to discuss any emotional concerns they had. The RAs also had to design systems to ensure the safety of peer researchers in the field, including providing emotional support following difficult interviews.

Questions of caring for, caring about and being cared for are also inherent within our research topic. Older people are often perceived as vulnerable and in dependent, precarious relations with others (Mol, Moser and Pols, 2010). This discourse, and its effects, became clear in our initial work. In Merthyr, we began our work by exploring individual narratives around loneliness and isolation and varied outputs including stories, poems, songs and photographs were produced. The RA and artists considered the themes, words and ideas that ran across the diverse stories in order to start to develop a picture of lived experiences of loneliness across the community. Through this work they came to focus beyond the person in isolation and looked wider, for instance, at the impact of natural and urban landscapes on a community's sense of its own isolation and loneliness, the regulatory nature of certain internal and external spaces in the community and the disconnections between different generations in the area. This initial exploratory work highlighted the need to avoid the words 'loneliness and isolation' which carried with them a stigma, and a focus on individual blame and self-help which was found to be unhelpful in relation to the project. Drawing on feminist conceptions of care as an interdependent, collective process, rather than an individualistic one, our findings began to raise concerns for us around how social and welfare systems purporting to 'care' often do the opposite through an increasing focus on individualism and personalisation.

These concerns, added to the initial work that suggested the importance of the sociomaterial situatedness of the research, led to us considering how we might investigate mutuality and interdependence, both with natural and built environments and with others, in relation to tackling isolation and loneliness. In collaboration with youth and community workers in the area we therefore designing a set of intergenerational activities that explored the possibilities and difficulties in building intergenerational connections and solidarity and the impact of natural landscapes and topographies on loneliness. Working with a photographer, participants were asked to take photos of the local area and then use them as a prompt for discussing issues around connections in the local community. The photographs focused on the natural and non-natural spaces in the area where participants of different ages felt 'at home' or 'out of place'. The ensuing discussion illustrated the physical and 'felt' segregation of different ages in the community, where younger and older people inhabited very different spaces. The activities marked a continued shift towards the 'disconnections and connections' felt within the communities they live and work in, rather than a focus on isolation and loneliness. This

helped to build a common and public language around which artists, RA, local community members across generations and formal and informal community organisers, felt able to move beyond the individual blame and stigma attached to loneliness in the community. The focus on connection and disconnection drew attention to the ‘person in relation’ (with the environment, with services, with each other) rather than the ‘person in isolation’. Regulatory regimes specific to researching loneliness and isolation tend to follow disciplinary or field conventions that encourage researchers to classify and bound research participants by generation and or age. Our research suggested that it was important to widen the participants we worked with to encompass others in the communities in order to draw attention to mutuality in relations of care that might better counter social isolation and loneliness. In this way we were also able to avoid paternalistic notions of care that conceive older people as vulnerable and ‘carers’ as generous helpers. This challenges the regulatory model of bounded ‘sampling’ of research populations often required by funders, disciplinary regimes and in academic outputs and suggests the importance of accounting for interdependence between different communities and groups in research design.

Across the sites those involved felt that ethical frameworks gave them clarity, protection and permissions and this helped to ‘hold’ their anxieties around engaging in the research process. For instance, ethical issues around conducting the research were discussed in more detail with the artists working in Merthyr in relation to their own practice and materials (e.g what does it mean to take a camera into a care home for older people?). However, our ethical framework was also negotiated relationally and situated in each of our sites as the research progressed. This is illustrated well in relation to the Bedminster group who were keen to get involved in a more traditional qualitative research experience. This meant we needed to build sufficient common knowledge around the regulations associated with research in order for it to adhere to particular conventions, including ethical practices and robustness in relation to the production of research. We spent some time introducing key methods and processes to the community researchers. However, our focus was not simply on teaching the older people to be social scientists ‘just like us’, rather we needed to provide room within the process for them to bring their own lived experiences, tacit knowledges and other professional understandings to the project as we felt this would both value their knowledge and expertise but also potentially enable new kinds of knowledge to emerge. The process of building common knowledge was understood as involving the construction of ‘inter’-spaces where all in the group felt able to bring different kinds of cognitive and emotional knowledge and expertise, where all involved were committed to learning from each other and to teaching what they know (Edwards, 2005). It was clear from the outset that the peer researchers involved had a huge range of expertise, skills and experience that they brought to the researcher role. This was related to their previous professional roles but also to their age and their diverse experience of the world and the local area, all of which we acknowledged as equally valuable. We discovered adopting this approach required us to

take on different roles and methods as researchers, and challenged traditional knowledge hierarchies where rational, academic knowledge is seen as more valuable than tacit knowledge and expertise.

Our peer researchers' experiences impacted on our methods in various ways. In discussing interview schedules and questions we were able to draw on different ways of eliciting information from counselling, social work and broadcasting backgrounds. The fourteen interviews between the peer researchers and the older people they interviewed became very conversational and the previous professions of the researchers made a difference to how the interviews developed. For instance, Dave's past experience as a volunteer with people with mental health issues and his past histories of mental ill health were brought into the field as resources. His interviews involved him sharing personal narratives with interviewees which often created more intimate moments. Another peer researcher had been a social worker and her ability to listen and create a safe space for the interviewee to speak was clear in her interview style. The RA felt that the researchers asked more probing questions than she would have felt comfortable to ask and noticed the attentiveness of the researchers who were able to connect, notice and pick up on shared experiences perhaps because of their generational and place based shared experiences. Interviews were empathetic, conversational and, in the process, reduced the traditional hierarchies between interviewer and interviewee.

Whilst a similarity in age with interviewees might support empathetic research, the RA was also very aware that it could lead to emotional concerns. A few researchers explicitly stated that the interviews they had undertaken made them wonder 'could that be me?' The open and intimate discussion of these issues was a vital part of the research process that led us to develop an understanding of isolation and loneliness grounded in emotional, affective concerns and relations. Bias is often seen as something to avoid in research interviews however the group discussed the impossibility of removing yourself and your own stories and emotions from the interview situation and the usefulness of not doing so. The traditional model of research often involves a single researcher, who brings their own academic knowledge and understanding to the field, often reproducing dominant discourses in the field (Sorenson and Kalman, 2017). In contrast, the peer researchers brought many and varied experiences and emotions into this discussion. Our co-productive approach, working alongside older people as researchers, and acknowledging and discussing their own affective concerns, allowed us as academic researchers to access an insider view of isolation and loneliness. This enabled us as a team to move across the boundaries between insider and outsider research and to both build new knowledge and challenge traditional knowledge hierarchies and approaches. One example of this would be our increasing focus on the importance of intergenerational encounter in tackling issues of isolation and loneliness.



So, what have we learnt in relation to the care-ful regulation of research? Attending to specificities of experience, emotion and affect requires us to spend time building trust and collaborative processes where knowledge hierarchies can be challenged. Different settings require different approaches and regulatory regimes need to be open enough to allow for this. This might require funders recognising it is not always possible to spell out methods, approaches and timelines in detail in advance, and recognition that building new knowledge with non dominant communities requires their intimate involvement in the research – not as bystanders or ‘subjects’ but as agentic collaborators throughout the research process. Different ethical regimes are also necessary for this kind of work. Ethical relations here go way beyond ‘frameworks’ to encompass the negotiated process of developing shared languages, methods and spaces in which different knowledge, lived experience and expertise might be considered more equally (Brydon-Miller, Aranda & Stevens, 2015). Regulatory regimes such as ethics committees and ethical guidance in research institutions often struggle with collaborative research, and indeed relational ethical frames. An openness to the negotiated, ongoing relationality in ethical encounters in the field within these regulatory structures could enable more ethically strong collaborative research to emerge.

In the previous section we have looked at how a care-ful approach can affect the kinds of relations and knowledge that emerge from the research process. In the following section we explore how these different regulatory regimes may also lead to the production of diverse outcomes, outputs and legacies and the need to account for, and encourage these emergent legacies in the regulatory structures governing knowledge exchange and dissemination.

### **Regulating for knowledge exchange and diverse legacies**

Spaces generally created for knowledge production and exchange favour certain kinds of ‘public’ knowledge. They are often spaces where embodied and experiential knowledge, generated through everyday practices are de-valued (Jupp, 2007). Fraser’s work suggests that a single ‘public sphere’ is neither desirable or possible as marginalised groups will often find it difficult to find the right words or ‘voice’ to express their concerns. She suggested that multiple public spheres or counterpublics, where marginalized groups feel able to express their views in a variety of modes, are necessary (Fraser, 1992). However, current regulatory regimes around the legacies of research tend to foreground a singular measure of value or impact, often defined in quantitative terms or in relation to passive ‘audiences’ (Facer and Enright, 2016) and often occurring at the end of the project lifecycle..

Recognising that these regulatory regimes undermine efforts to hear the voices of marginalized groups involved in participatory research we worked together with our community collaborators to co-create multiple spaces and encounters for knowledge exchange, including those that could be characterized as counterpublics, throughout the project life cycle. For instance, following the

narrative work and the intergenerational photo activities in Merthyr a series of smaller community based exhibitions and a larger exhibition of the material gathered to date were planned. This was conceived as an experiment in opening up space for more mutual and collective community dialogue around isolation and loneliness, away from formalised processes connected with social and welfare systems that foreground personalisation (although importantly those running these kinds of services were invited to come along). The thinking behind the exhibitions was to recover some of what had been rendered 'non-credible' or non-existent in wider conversations around loneliness in the area (de Sousa Santos, 2004). The work that the artists carried out on the project to both capture the stories of the older people and to render credible the informal roles that many community members took on (from the local café owner, to the walking group coordinator to the bingo group organizer) in relation to combatting loneliness and isolation were highlighted. The importance of recognising these roles and building alliances and relationship between formal and informal carers in the community was a key finding of the research. The exhibition helped those running statutory services and the informal carers represented in the exhibition to begin to build common knowledge and a shared language around the issue of social isolation and loneliness. This was vital to the process of engaging older people and other members of the community in the project. However, the flatness of the image, for instance photographs of individual older people in the care home setting, or of the landscape surrounding the area, also failed in some ways to express the embodied and felt realities of older people's experiences of isolation and loneliness, and their connections with others. The artists and curator therefore designed a series of site exchanges in order to move beyond the formality of an exhibition space. The narratives, stories, songs and photographs collected at each of the sites the artists had spent time in were shared with community members at other sites. For example, creative outputs from artistic work at a care home were shared with a bingo group. The juxtapositions, similarities and differences between the sites became visible in these encounters, leading to reflection concerning isolation and loneliness that embraced the materiality of different spaces, and the emotional concerns of the different communities, as well as the range of actors implicated in thinking about isolation and loneliness.

In Bedminster, the peer researchers were keen from the start to ensure that research findings were applied and led to tangible legacies. For some this project had been an opportunity to explore the concept of loneliness and develop spaces in which it could be discussed, both for themselves and for others. Others had more activist motivations, wanting to 'do something' about loneliness and saw the research as a way of understanding what social action projects in the local community might help to prevent or combat loneliness. Allowing for outputs that met both individual and institutional desires was critical in ensuring people felt valued, competent and heard in line with the ethic of care we were adopting. The peer researchers in Bedminster decided together to prioritise three outputs or legacies. First, to find a way to bring in their own individual experiences and address the stigma around

loneliness by creating spaces in which people could talk about the issue. Second, the data highlighted the possible role of technology in preventing loneliness and the researchers wanted to explore that further. Thirdly, the group wanted to explore preventative interventions including a local community led retirement course.

The first objective was met through co-writing a theatre piece/monologues with a local dramaturg (Adam Peck) based on the data but also allowing our collaborators' individual experiences to emerge. Alison, for instance wrote a monologue about walking as comments made by interviewees had chimed with her own initial embodied practice of walking to feel at home/find 'home'. This creative process allowed the peer researchers to hold on to something individual alongside the production of collective themes for a more formal report, reflecting the importance of multiple outputs in a co-produced research project. As a team this process illustrated again the value in bringing in our own lived experiences and acknowledging and embracing our 'affective intensities' with the work and the data, rather than approaching it from the 'cold' perspective of the detached researcher. The community researchers were here moving between insider and outsider positions as they wrote their monologues, building on their own experiences but also attending to the data they'd collected in interviews. There was a desire to create a public space in which to discuss loneliness and this was produced through performing the monologues created in the form of a theatrical piece conceived and directed by a local performer/director (Lucy Tuck). The theatrical piece was able to draw attention to the embodied experience of isolation and loneliness (e.g. sitting alone in your house talking to yourself) and the care often 'handed out' to older people (e.g. the patronising hand on the shoulder). The intention was to highlight these felt and embodied aspects of loneliness and isolation often ignored in the literature and to de-stigmatise the issue through holding intergenerational conversations with a broader community. The first performance at a local theatre concluded with an informal Q & A which has been replicated at performances since. These intimate spaces, held by the peer researchers, provided people with the opportunity to share their own, and others' experiences, to consider potential ways of preventing and alleviating loneliness, and to think about loneliness as a lifecourse concern.

Across both of our sites artists and community partners played a key role, working alongside the research team to share emergent knowledges in accessible and diverse forms that helped to make tangible the lived experiences, and to materialize the affective concerns of those whose voices are often not being heard or listened to. This is complex relational work that must be recognized in regulatory regimes of research – including by funders and university finance and contracts departments. Artists and other external collaborators must be seen as project partners, and properly paid and embedded in the project life cycle in order to build trust, dialogue and understanding, particularly of those in non dominant community groups.

The ethic of care we adopted in our approach to knowledge production was also visible in the events held and managed by the peer researcher group. For instance, a sense of the interdependence between people across generations and the need for caring and careful spaces where the individualized view of social isolation and loneliness and the stigma associated with it could be challenged emerged. Through these connections a policy event at Westminster, ‘Loneliness and Isolation across the Lifecourse’ was designed to highlight the need to build solidarity and conviviality in communities and amongst generational groups. In addition, funders were invited to consider the need for slower, more careful approaches to research and community development around social isolation and loneliness and some of the different regulatory regimes needed for these approaches to flourish.

We characterize our approach to knowledge exchange and the legacies of this project as an activist stance where we made a commitment as a team to opening up new possibilities and encounters beyond the academic community, throughout the project life cycle. We wanted to make a contribution to building more equitable practices and ways of living in the world (Gibson Graham, 2008). We did this through co-creating and pluralising different spaces and opportunities for communities whose knowledge and expertise are often devalued in knowledge hierarchies, to be heard and listened to. We view this as part of our care-ful regulation of knowledge production and exchange, not as a paternalistic moral obligation, but as a political commitment to rendering credible less heard voices and practices around countering social isolation and loneliness and challenge knowledge hierarchies.

We make a case for pluralising outputs from research, for understanding that outputs occur throughout the project lifecycle and, more generally, for rethinking what counts as a ‘valuable’ output or ‘useful knowledge’ in collaborative research (Facer and Enright, 2016). Our outputs from this research are many and diverse. They include a series of exhibitions, reports for community organisations and service providers, academic papers, performances of monologues at national festivals and local community events, we have also written and secured funding to enable the development our Tech and Talk café and to pilot a hyperlocal pre-retirement course. Embodied legacies for community members and service providers include an increased confidence to tackle issues related to loneliness in their local community. Institutionally our university, the community organisations involved and others working in the areas, have been able to negotiate and consider new collaborative and intergenerational approaches to tackling loneliness and isolation. Regulatory regimes around research tend to produce sites of knowledge exchange (or knowledge transfer) that favour decontextualised academic knowledge and therefore often de-value marginalized voices. New regulatory regimes would need to recognise the value in multiple sites for knowledge exchange that represent and nurture diverse forms of knowledge.

Often those forms of accountability that are most valued in academic circles are less easy to produce in these kind of intensive collaborative projects (Facer and Enright, 2016). Our research has suggested a more diverse range of knowledge outputs and legacies need to be recognized within academic accountability structures (going beyond current conceptions of ‘impact’ and ‘public engagement’) and the need to reframe writing and other knowledge exchange techniques as part of the mode of inquiry, embedded through the entire lifecycle of a project. We also call for changes to be made to ensure community partners can actively contribute across all stages of the process of research.

## **Conclusion**

Academic articles that explore participatory research largely ignore the processes of doing the work in favour of accounts of the academic knowledge produced. In this chapter we have deliberately explored the process of the research in two different sites. Focusing in on the process has enabled us to highlight how an ethic of care enhanced the participation of the community members and researchers. In exploring the process we have also been able to shed light on alternative regulatory regimes around knowledge production that might yield richer, more diverse understandings and greater public benefit. This regulatory regime draws on many established practices in qualitative research but brings them together around the lens of an ‘ethic of care’ to draw attention to care-ful research as being a collective endeavor, embued with the various materialities, interests and passions of the human and non human actors involved.

The diverse opportunities for knowledge exchange and the varied legacies that emerged, which drew attention to the relational and interdependent nature of isolation and loneliness in communities, challenged regulatory systems in the social care and welfare systems that tend to portray social isolation and loneliness as an individual problem that the individual must solve themselves. This creates a stigma around loneliness that can inhibit finding solutions. A more care-ful approach to social isolation and loneliness emerged during this project that drew attention to the mutuality inherent in any solutions to isolation and loneliness. The diverse legacies produced met the needs of everyone involved, including the community organisation, the individual older people and the university researchers.

There is a great deal of emotional labour involved in ‘holding’ this kind of collaboration including work in building personal connections, friendship and mutual understanding with people who might not share your view on life, politics or faith. We recognise that while this kind of knowledge production and research with community members can greatly enhance the research process and the value of findings within the local community, it is also a process highly fraught with tensions, raising questions around the synthesis of different ways of knowing the world, around power relations and

social action/activism. However, the effort involved is also pleasurable and has led to many social occasions, new alliances and stronger networks for our research, community and policy work.

We encourage others involved in co-produced research, and indeed those involved in designing policy and regulations for the welfare and social care system, to consider adopting an ethic of care in order to think beyond current personalisation agendas, to be attentive to and acknowledge interdependencies and situated materialities, histories and affect in their work. Care-ful research involves taking seriously the ethicopolitical, affective and material practices of our research encounters and in doing so points out the rather different regulatory regimes and practices that might need to be designed, in the situated realities of the project sites.

### **Care-ful knowledge production**

Our chapter has suggested that the following ten elements come to the fore when taking a care-ful, co-produced approach to knowledge production.

1. Taking values and doings such as ‘attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion and meeting others’ needs seriously in research relations and regulations.
2. Situating knowledge production and acknowledging that this involves both the social, emotional and material worlds in which the research occurs: research should respond to the specificities and lived experiences of those involved in the research.
3. Involvement of non-dominant communities as agentic collaborators not bystanders or subjects.
4. Viewing research as a collective, negotiated process that takes time: e.g. allowing for the relational labour, time and effort involved in building trust.
5. Relational ethical principles that recognise care, friendship, intimacy, solidarity and empathy as components of research design.
6. Researcher (and co-researcher) reflexivity as key to knowledge production.
7. Recognition of the emotional labours associated with this kind of research: recognition of the unruly bodies and emotion in research relations.
8. Challenging traditional knowledge hierarchies to foreground tacit knowledge and expertise as well as academic knowledge.
9. The co-creation of multiple spaces and encounters for knowledge exchange, including counter-public spaces, that represent and nurture diverse forms of knowledge.

10. Taking an activist stance, e.g. adopting a commitment to opening up new possibilities and encounters beyond the academic community and rendering credible less heard voices and less visible practices.

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