

# **Sensitive topics and vulnerable participants**

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# Overview

“Who is this man?”

Considering vulnerable participants and sensitive topics

Arts-based approaches, artefacts and metaphors

LEGO®

Challenges and opportunities



# Who is this man?

Age

Marital status

Family

Home circumstances

Past history

# Meet Eddie

- Eddie is a taxi driver in Hackney. His car is an old Nissan.
- He is 60 years old.
- He's lived in Hackney on and off for twenty years and says it's better than it used to be.
- He is married with three children aged 38, 32 and 27.
- His children all went to university. One is a doctor, one a nurse and the other a financial advisor.
- He came to England in 1972 to do a degree in engineering.
- He goes back to Ghana most years and helps on his father's farm.
- He would like to return to Ghana to spend his old age there.

# Vulnerable participants and sensitive topics

Who are the “vulnerable” participants?

What are the “sensitive” topics?

How do we “deal” with vulnerable participants and sensitive topics?

# Vulnerable participants and sensitive topics

- Definition of sensitive topics and vulnerable groups is ambivalent
- Vulnerability may affect researchers as well as participants
- Research sensitive topics and vulnerable groups may not make research high risk
- The role of insider research

Brown, N. & Quickfall, A. (2022). *Sensitive topics and vulnerable groups* [Position Paper].

<https://www.nicole-brown.co.uk/Downloads/PositionPaperSensitiveTopicsVulnerableGroups.pdf>

# Vulnerabilities and sensitivities...

## Art-based methods

powers of expression, illumination and evocation  
radical, politically grounded social justice  
experienced as particularly cathartic (flipside!)

## 4 guiding questions

What is the data?

How do you record that data?

What are the ethical/practical implications?

What are the advantages/drawbacks?

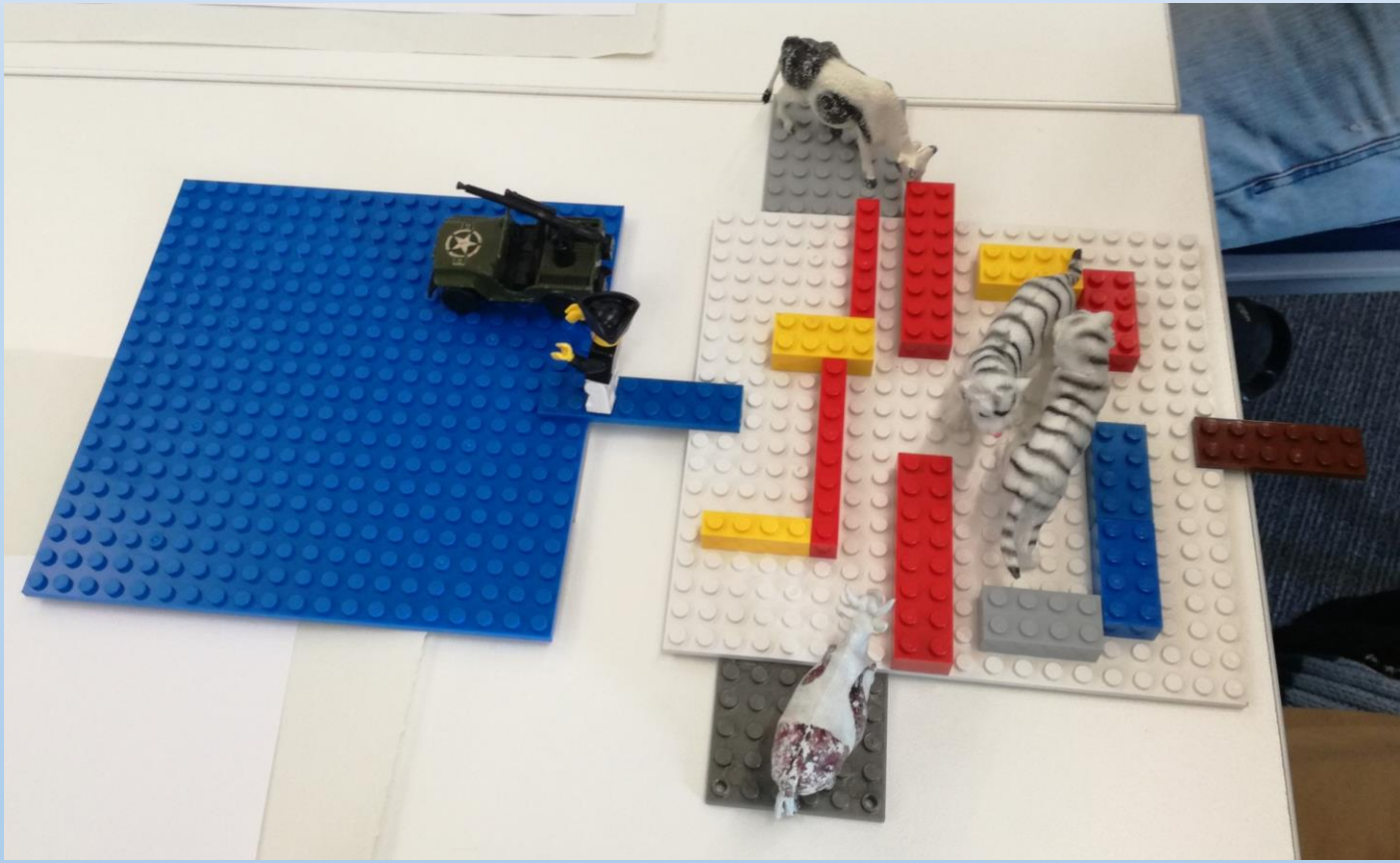
# Artefacts and metaphors

Photographs

Objects

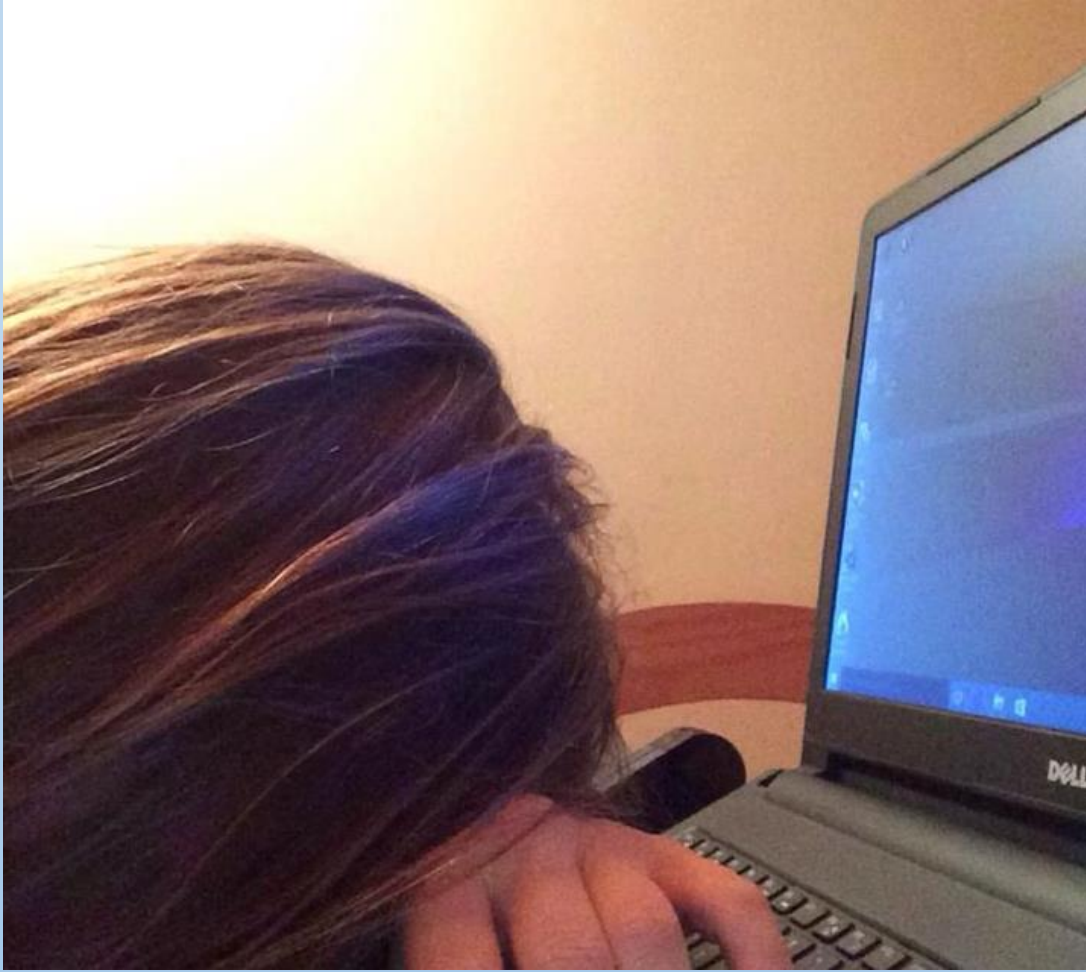
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# Underpinning of artefact and metaphor work

- 3 pillars of human understanding and communication
  - role of embodiment
  - Inexactness of language
  - role of metaphors
- study of experience – phenomenology
  - Husserl: getting close to the experience, to its core/essence
  - Heidegger: being-in-the-world and self are in interaction with other(s); experience is therefore relational and interpretational

# Phenomenology “in practice”

Condense the experience to an essence

“going to the thing itself”

Represent that essence

Elaborate on the essence

building on the interpretational and relational

# Challenges and opportunities

Involving counsellors or therapists

Preparation of data collection

Who are you? vs. Who are you as a...?

choice of images

setting (group vs. one-to-one; home, neutral place, office, online)

setting the scene (building trust and rapport)

# Challenges and opportunities

## 4 guiding questions

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Deficiency model of vulnerability and sensitivity

Ethics review committees

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