

Memory work

Traditions, recipes and
resemblances



Researching personal and social change: qualitative approaches

Remembering

memory work;
oral/life history

Being with

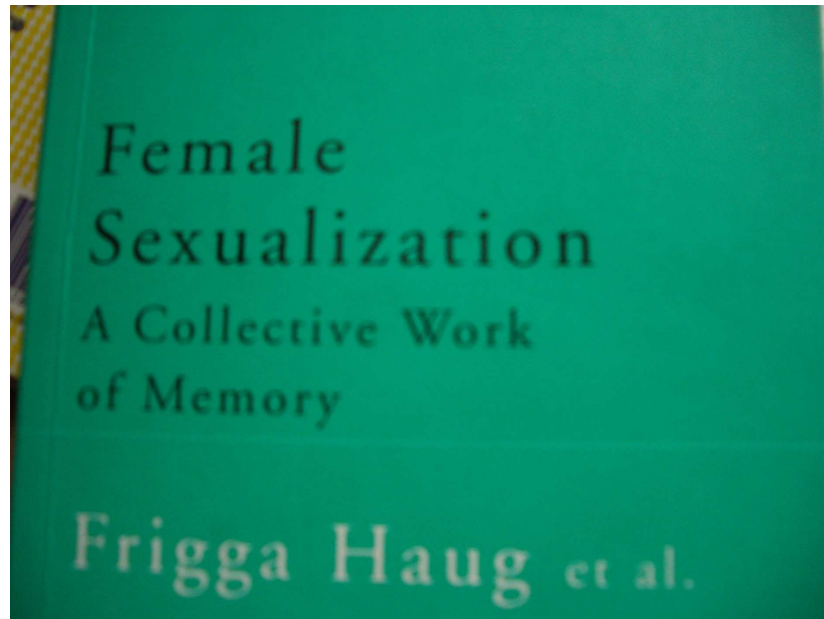
ethnography
qualitative longitudinal

Inheritance

follow- up studies & secondary analysis
intergenerational studies

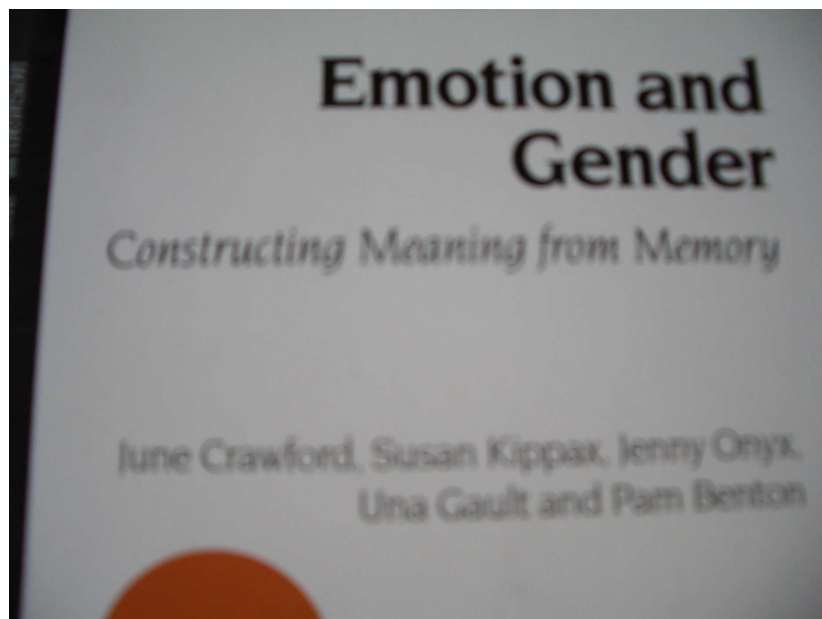
Memory work exemplars

- Haug et al. (1983/7) *Female Sexualization: A Collective work of memory*
- Crawford et al. (1992) *Emotion and Gender: Constructing Meaning from Memory*
- Annette Kuhn (1995) *Family secrets: Acts of memory and imagination*
- The Birmingham School, 1982 -



Haug et al.

- The subject and object of the research are one
- Research should be a collective process
- *Importance of good research questions*
- *Techniques for reducing prejudice.*
- *A focus on form*
- *'Memory work', 'transcription', 'creative writing'*



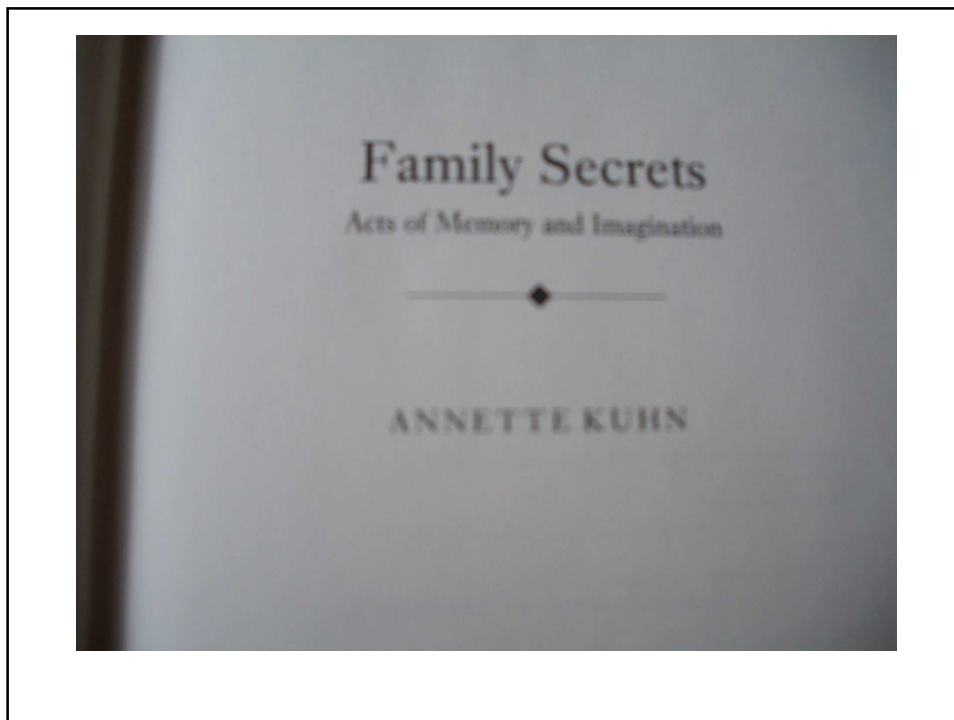
Phase one:

Write a memory

1. of a particular episode, action or event
2. in the third person
3. in as much detail as is possible, including even
4. 'inconsequential' or trivial detail (it may help to think of a key image, sound, taste, smell, touch)
5. but without importing interpretation, explanation or biography.
6. Write one of your earliest memories (45)

Phase 2

1. Each memory-work group member expresses opinions and ideas about each memory in turn, and looks for similarities and differences between the memories and looks for continuous elements among the memories whose relation to each other is not immediately apparent.
2. Each member should question particularly those aspects of the events which do not appear amenable to comparison. She or he should not, however, resort to auto-biography or biography.
3. Each memory-work member identifies clichés, generalizations, contradictions, cultural imperatives, metaphor
4. And discusses theories, popular conceptions, sayings and images about the topic.
5. Finally, each member examines what is not written in the memories (but what might be expected to be), and
6. rewrites the memories. (49)



Kuhn – Family secrets

Memory provides 'material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined for meaning and possibilities. It involves active staging of memory; it takes an enquiring attitude towards the past and its (re)construction through memory; (157)

1. Consider the human subjects of the photograph. Start with a simple description, and then move into an account in which you take up the position of the subject. In this part of the exercise, it is helpful to use the third person ('she', rather than 'I' for instance). To bring out the feelings associated with the photograph, you must visualise yourself as the subject as she was at that moment, in the picture: this can be done in turn with all of the photograph's human subjects; if there is more than one, and even with animals and inanimate objects in the picture.
2. Consider the picture's context of production. Where, when, how, by whom and why was the photograph taken?
3. Consider the context in which an image of this sort would have been made. What photographic technologies were used? What are the aesthetics of the image? Does it conform with certain photographic conventions?
4. Consider the photograph's currency in its context or contexts of reception. Who or what was the photograph made for? Who has it now and where is it kept? Who saw it then, and who sees it now? (8)



Family resemblances

- Hermeneutic epistemology
- Time as subjectively experienced (Bergson)
- Distinction between selection of memories and representation of memories
- Both undertaken in the present and shaped by context/ communities of remembering (Halbwachs)
- Situating experience

Using memory to research change

Memories are not simply records of the past, but in their evocation represent the past within the present.

Memories are *constructions* into which the personal, social and the historical are intertwined.

Memories are likely to be fragmentary, contradictory and include latent as well as manifest meanings.

Memories can be distinguished/ distanced from narratives that give memories coherence. It is also possible to explore memories through the narratives that occasion their telling/ representation.

Memory texts can be productively analysed as cultural texts: asking questions about audience, genre, composition etc.

The context in and through which memories are produced is always relevant. We remember for and with others and this will shape what is remembered and how it is remembered.

The process of engaging in memory work can heighten perception as contribute to creativity and theoretical generation

Memory work applications

- **As a parallel practice**, revealing investments, forming teams
- **As a sensitising practice**: feeding into design of instruments, prearing for fieldwork, feeding into analysis
- **Inspiring methods**: trigger words (youth values); memory books (inventing adulthoods), memory objects (Making of Modern Motherhood)