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INTERVIEW

“My work is about trying to create a democratic learning space”

An Interview with Angie Hart, Community University Partnership Programme, University of Brighton

GRAHAM CROW, *University of Southampton*

Angie Hart is the academic director of the award-winning Community University Partnership Programme at the University of Brighton. She is also professor of child, family and community health in the School of Nursing and Midwifery in the Faculty of Health and Social Science. She teaches professional courses for health and social care practitioners and undertakes participatory research into inequalities in health and social care in relation to children and families. She currently has a number of resilience-focused research projects under way.

Professor Hart is a child and family therapist, and until August 2008 she worked part-time as a research-practitioner in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Sussex Partnership NHS Trust, Brighton. She worked both in a specialist team supporting fostered and adopted children and in a CAMHS clinic located in a socially and economically deprived area of Brighton. As the adoptive parent of three children from the care system, she has much experience herself as a user of both statutory and voluntary health and social care services.

Hart has published widely on health and social care services to disadvantaged children, their families, and their supporters, especially in relation to fostering and adoption, midwifery and health visiting, and the concept of resilience. She has also published her work on the development of community-university partnership programs. Her current work includes developing a series of communities of practice, in

collaboration with a local charity. This project involves working with groups of parents and practitioners to implement and develop Resilient Therapy.

Hart's degrees are in philosophy and social anthropology from the Universities of Sussex, Cambridge, and Oxford, and she has a postgraduate diploma in psychotherapeutic counseling from the University of Sussex. She has worked as a research collaborator and project manager on many multi-disciplinary research projects, some commissioned by major United Kingdom government agencies, such as the Department of Health and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

More information about Angie Hart and her work can be found at <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp/contact-cupp/cupp-team/72-angie-hart.html> and at <http://www.boingboing.org.uk/>. See <http://www.theasa.org/networks/apply.shtml> for more about applied anthropology in Britain.

She is interviewed here by Graham Crow, deputy director of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods and professor of sociology at the University of Southampton.

CROW: To what extent did the applied aspect of anthropology influence your decision to become an anthropologist?

HART: When I started off doing my anthropology postgraduate training, my first degree was in philosophy and European Studies at Sussex University, and one of the things I was interested in was cultural difference. I didn't really get much opportunity to explore it in that degree, but I loved learning different languages—I'd lived in different countries, so that aspect of anthropology appealed to me to study at masters level. So I applied to do an MPhil at Cambridge in the social anthropology department. The applied anthropology in Britain at that time, the late 1980s—there wasn't any applied aspect in anthropology postgraduate training that I knew of; it was very much conventional academic research. But during the course of that year and the subsequent three years doing a PhD in social anthropology at Oxford I was part of a group of people who were involved in the early days of what we called Anthropology in Action, what is now Apply, the applied anthropology organization. So it came the other way round. There were very few people I knew who were applying anthropology. They were working in NGOs. Tom Selwyn was doing research on tourism that had an applied

aspect to it, but really it was a very minor discourse, a counterdiscourse to what was going on in mainstream anthropology in some contexts, for sure. Funny, because now I see that Apply has become part of the mainstream Association of Social Anthropologists. You couldn't have imagined that back then. There was quite a drama in setting up Anthropology in Action, and I remember the committee meeting where we decided on the name. Some of the key figures at the time were Tom Selwyn, Sue Wright, Cris Shore, Andrea Cornwall, Phil Gatter, Simon Abram. I was actually quite involved at that time, [and these were] people who had a sense of how anthropology could be used in a way to be useful to people, organizations, in practice. But most people I knew weren't doing that.

CROW: Could you say a bit about your thesis topic?

HART: When I was doing my MPhil I became very interested in feminist anthropology, different ways of looking at gendered relationships around the world—although I wasn't thinking about applying it to a particular project, how to set up some gendered activity or institution differently, for example. My MPhil dissertation was around constructions of public and private in an Italian village, female-male relationships in households. It was a very small empirical project but it obviously had consequences. It might have had some minor policy consequences down the road if I have taken it any further but that wasn't how I was thinking.

When I did my MPhil at Cambridge I was not taught anything about applied anthropology at all. We basically were taught things like Evans-Pritchard, incest taboos in ancient Egypt, kinship diagrams, you know—the “exotic practices of people in far away places.” I was trained in old school anthropology.

CROW: I suppose Cambridge would be one of the most traditional anthropology departments.

HART: It was ever so traditional. I really enjoyed it, reading all the traditional anthropologists, but then when I came to do my PhD, I'd been thinking very much about gendered dynamics, which hadn't been taught on our course at all; this was all by side reading. I'll tell you how I got into it. I'd rented a room in a house from Henrietta Moore, who'd written *Feminism and Anthropology*, and she wasn't then part of the mainstream Cambridge setup. She was very much before her time, but it

looked as if they wouldn't give her a permanent academic job. Our lecturers at Cambridge didn't know what to do with her book.

But students devoured it and other related texts in secret. Her book was the anthropological equivalent of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in those Cambridge halls. Henrietta went off to work somewhere else and I continued to rent a room in her house. So I got into feminist anthropology *per se* through her, and also through someone else who was marginalized at Cambridge but who did the odd lecture with us on economic anthropology—Judith Ennew. It was also because of the sort of person that I am, interested in those things. But I'd had a very classical anthropological training in those years.

For my PhD the idea I had I wanted to do was something around gendered dynamics, and I was a bit of a Marxist, so I was very interested in prostitution, as a case study if you like of gendered economic power relations. I had loved learning about traditional economic anthropology with Keith Hart (no relation) at Cambridge, and I was interested in postmodernism, Foucault, discourse, and also in structuration theory—Tony Giddens was in the sociology department at Cambridge at the time and I enjoyed reading his work and talking with him.

In relation to my proposed PhD, I noticed there was a gap in the literature. There was nothing on relationships between male clients and female sex workers. Everything written in sociology, for example, on prostitution ignored this dimension and focused on the women. Masculinity and what it meant in terms of the gendered relations of heterosexual sex work was what I was especially interested in.

So I wrote a proposal for an ESRC studentship. There were hardly any available at that time, 1989. It was really dismal. But I had this idea of doing this thing. It was actually very original. There was only one journal article I knew of that was on clients and prostitutes, and it was in an STD [sexually transmitted diseases] journal, about men who have sex with women and whether or not they get STDs; it wasn't about the relationships. So I wanted to do an ethnographic study of street prostitution focusing specifically on these gendered power dynamics within this particular economic context.

I went to Oxford University to do that because my partner got a job in Oxford, and I wanted to do the research in Italy, and the committee said that I couldn't go to Italy—they were worried about the Mafia—so I decided Spain would provide a similar context. Then I had to learn

Spanish really quickly. I didn't know Spanish at all so I joined an A level course half way through and hoped for the best. That's when I really got involved in applied aspects of anthropology.

Jump forward a few months and I was volunteering as an HIV counselor in an STD clinic in Spain. I got involved in that through gatekeepers—there was the gatekeeping issue of how do I get into the field? Also I got introduced to a group of nuns who did reading classes with sex workers. I supported them with that, partly as a social welfare contribution, to get into the field. I did also have a real sense even then that I wanted to be useful to people “in the field” once I got there. I did have a political awareness of that, but most anthropologists I knew weren't really talking about it.

There was one paper from a Spanish anthropologist challenging the imperialist English gaze in Spain, and I was mindful of that, but at the same time I'd got this money. I did also think I might do it in England, but that was really frowned upon. If you wanted a career in anthropology, in my circles you had to go abroad unless you were a single parent or something, and you really couldn't. But there weren't any single parents in the Cambridge and Oxford anthropology circles I moved in.

CROW: Anthropology at home hadn't taken off at that point?

HART: No, not really. A few people were doing it. But the whole thing about anthropology was that it was predicated on this sense of us going over to study nonindustrialized societies. Spain was already seen as pretty bizarre.

My then supervisor Peter Riviere, a posh classically trained anthropologist, who I imagine had spent quite some time lying in a hammock in the Amazon, was skeptical but really supportive in the end, and he had quite a few students who went off to Europe. Judith Ennew, my other external supervisor, who influenced me more—she had left Cambridge a bit fed up with mainstream anthropology and anyway she was only being paid on a part-time hourly basis—ended up working for the YMCA; now she works in Thailand for a charity. So she's taken her anthropology and asked: What is the point of it?

I wanted to be useful from an ethical research point of view. I was aware of these debates about imperialism and colonization, but then also once I'd got into the field, and HIV and AIDS were rife at the time, it was very distressing seeing what was happening with that and trying to see what could be done that would be useful for future policies and practices around HIV prevention.

CROW: So did that take you to a particular type of publication?

HART: Not really. I couldn't really have cared less about that at the time. However, I was involved in setting up *Anthropology in Action*, so I co-edited a special issue of *Anthropology in Action*. I think it was on sexuality, HIV and AIDS, and I wrote an article in that on men's understandings of safe condom use, so that was at the beginning of people asking questions about what kinds of rationalities and worldviews are at play here. I was thinking about how my work could be used.

But to be honest most of my work in Spain wasn't particularly useful in a direct way. I was writing in English, so I wasn't connected to the whole Spanish system, and I came back to the UK to write it up. I did go back and forth a few times, maintaining local relations and trying not to be an exploitative anthropologist. For example, I was involved long term helping a woman who was having her child taken off her because she was a sex worker and drug user. Remember, I was really young as well. I was in my early to mid-twenties doing a piece of work on street prostitution, really hard core, lots of heroin use, HIV/AIDS, violence.

When I finished that I got more into the applied work because I just felt that I wanted to do work that was helpful to the people outside anthropology. So I got into the idea of applying with Phil Gatter, another person in *Anthropology in Action*, to write a grant proposal to one of our research councils to look at condom use, discourses of condom use and how you might better help people use condoms, understand people's rationalities. We put in a bid on that, but it wasn't successful.

In the meantime I was asked to do a needs assessment. That was my first piece of applied anthropology; this was in the UK. That came about because Phil and I were developing this project which was very theoretical, looking back. I had no idea about how to approach sexual health services and set up a relationship with them and show them how it might be of use to them.

I wrote a letter to the local HIV prevention people attaching my ESRC proposal for this anthropological project which was very theoretical, with postmodern discourse analysis and this, that, and the other, and asking the director if she wanted to be a partner in this, and offering to do it in Brighton if she liked. Anyway she left me a message on the answerphone swearing, saying, "You must be bloody joking, that's of no use to me at all. What do you think you academics are like? Stick your proposal up your arse!" She really did say that on my answerphone.

CROW: Perhaps that's a good point for me to go on to the next question. As an anthropologist who has worked extensively in the field of community-university partnerships, you will be aware of the criticism of academics from activists. How has this critique influenced the development of your work?

HART: That was a real turning point for me, a defining moment. The trouble is, a lot of people don't tell you what they think, so this was a gift to me. It was horrible, this woman saying, "Stick your proposal up your arse!" So I took a deep breath and rang her up, because I realized I'd got it very wrong and I had a genuine wish to do something worthwhile. I am really driven by that, more than by a desire to work at a particular institution or to have my papers published in a particular journal. I wanted to do something that the wider community would find useful. So I rang her up and said, "I'm sorry, I've completely messed this up, but I do want to do something sensible so can I come and have a conversation?"

She said yes, so I went along and we really hit it off. She said, "I so respect you coming along," so I said, "Let's start a conversation about what you need and see whether I've got any skills that could support that, because I'm really interested in this HIV prevention work." I'd also at the same time become a volunteer, training people in HIV awareness, because I did know a lot about it, having done the Spanish stuff. She had this needs assessment that needed to be done, and she asked if I would do it. I said yes because it was a really interesting piece of work, a local needs assessment, about the needs of prostitute women in Brighton. I knew I had the skills to make connections with sex workers; people accepted me and allowed me into their world. It was hard, interviewing women in very difficult situations, underground.

CROW: Were you associated with a particular institution then?

HART: I was still finishing my PhD at Oxford, but living in Brighton, and I took this on as an extra job.

CROW: So you didn't need institutional credentials? Might that have been a handicap?

HART: I don't think it mattered at that time. The HIV prevention director was very relational. She is now one of my best pals, after a bad start, which has really taught me that nothing is over until the fat lady sings (or both; she is quite large and so am I). She wanted someone who she felt could work well with street prostitutes and not muck it

up. They had some very tentative relationships with the HIV prevention team, who were trying to reach out to this client group and didn't know how to do it. They didn't want a researcher going in and being aggressive.

And I had a lot of ideas, lots of theory—I just didn't have much of the practice, although hanging out in Spain with street sex workers for fifteen months alongside volunteering in an HIV clinic over there had given me a bit of experience. I had ideas even then about the democratization of research, how we could get sex workers in to help us, a multi-stakeholder approach. It was very much intuitive practice at that time.

CROW: Did you publish from that?

HART: There was a report. I'm not sure what happened to it, but I didn't publish on that project. It was a local piece of research, but it was very important in getting into the applied research world. I decided that it would be useful to have a multi-stakeholder meeting to discuss the findings and the way forward. They'd never done anything like that. I didn't know how to do it—I just thought it was a good idea. And it was a critical event, bringing together the police, sex workers, and service providers, a very diverse group. Now it's much more common and is part and parcel of my work. Our communities of practice do this kind of thing routinely. But it wasn't happening then as far as I was aware in my networks, twenty years ago.

The research involved interviewing sex workers, service providers, and policy makers, and also ethnographic work, hanging around in brothels and in STD clinics, seeing how people were being treated. So in terms of anthropology it's more the research method that I've taken from anthropology rather than the wider historical legacy. I suppose it's also a more generalized thing that you learn about being immersed in different worlds and having to make yourself fit in, not getting too stressed out when dealing with very complex and harrowing situations. All of this has been very useful to me since.

CROW: And have you gone on to work with other community groups as co-researchers, as a way of meeting the criticism that researchers are outsiders who don't really get what is going on?

HART: Yes, I stopped doing research in the field of prostitution and HIV education. For the past seven years or so I have focused on resilience research, around supporting and parenting children and young people with complex needs. I am an adoptive parent myself and I had

real political problems around sex work. People used to make jokes—asking, “Are you a sex worker as well?” and expecting me to laugh—and not being a sex worker in that world was really tricky for me politically. There were quite a few people around at the time who felt that sex workers should really be the ones to talk about these agendas, not academics making a living from their distress. I’m a fan of Illich, and he talks a lot about that kind of thing—how parasitic some of us can be on other people’s misfortunes. Once I’d finished the sex worker project I moved into less politically emotive arenas.

I did applied work around maternity services. A job came up in Brighton when I was working elsewhere, but I was fed up with commuting, and although it was a risk to go to work in a health trust, it was work evaluating a new way of providing maternity services, women having one-to-one support, and lots of things I was interested in anyway, working with disadvantaged women. I made more of the link between the project and Brighton University, to keep an academic base and academic links, to be able to discuss my work. The National Childbirth Trust was the service user group, and I worked well with them.

But it was really hard being an insider researcher in a health trust, harder in some ways than the prostitution study because you’re accountable to the head of the trust, they don’t like it if you say different things; lots of politics. I had many discussions with other anthropologists doing insider research in organizations, about how you retain integrity. Again I used anthropological methods, ethnography, hanging around, sitting in on home births, clinics. In terms of the application of collaborative principles I was still only in the middle of the ladder of participation, consulting people but not co-researching. That came later. I used the language of giving voice and multi-stakeholders. I did a subsequent project where we were awarded funding to look at disadvantaged women in care, again a very interesting piece of work.

CROW: Did it help to have a background in anthropology rather than a training in nursing and midwifery?

HART: Hard to tell really. It might have been better to have a more rounded research methods background, but then I suppose I did know quite a lot about social science methodology, not just anthropology. I’d taught at Keele and at Southampton. It was very contentious that they awarded the project to us, ahead of other teams headed up by professors, and I wasn’t even a lecturer heading up my team. But we had a lot

of enthusiasm, and we didn't underestimate the difficulties of working with disadvantaged women. I already had a solid grounding, through my work on street prostitution, with life on the ground. Some people probably weren't very happy when we got the bid, but we did a good job on it. And that was one of the things I have published most about, conventional publications in journals.

The applied part of it came more in terms of getting very cross about women getting an inadequate service, so I did a lot of thinking about that, and writing. We produced work that has had quite a bit of impact. We developed a model called the inequalities imagination model, to support practitioners and students, especially those who came from privileged backgrounds, to get a better handle on their clients' realities. We used the model in our own teaching, and people in Canada have taken it up. It's funny how these things happen. Someone's done an evaluation of it in relation to their students.

CROW: The next question is about your work with community partners in Brighton and East Sussex, and how that profile came about, with your projects being very grounded locally, so can you say something about that, and how local context matters?

HART: We've answered some of that already, but it's not just a pragmatic thing—it's also a political thing. I had that in Spain, where I needed to understand the local context. I didn't even speak Spanish, but I'm lucky—I pick up languages quickly. And though I'm a bit embarrassed about it now, I'm not too embarrassed because I was trying to bring about some good, and the same applies now.

I do do other work elsewhere. For example, I have work going on in Sweden, but I can't just take our stuff and slap it onto Sweden. Local context matters. Sweden is very different to the UK, where a group of us have developed a research-based approach for supporting children with fewer chances and greater needs, an approach called Resilient Therapy (RT), and applied it as practitioners. I've done a lot of work as a practitioner in recent years, working in mental health, developing and using this approach that we developed through bringing together different bits of knowledge—academic, parent, practitioner, and young people—and synthesizing a way forward. It was never just an academic exercise. It was collaborative right from the start.

And other people have contacted us about our approach. For example, colleagues and parents are using it in Italy and in Crete, and people

working with adults want to apply it there, even though it's been put together through working with children and young people. But the approach needs to be adapted contextually. I'm not at all precious about people changing things or doing their own thing with the approach, although I suppose it does make me cringe a bit when it's applied in a way that really oversimplifies the concept of resilience and does not acknowledge issues of inequality. Still, what matters is that partners we're working with want to own it. For example, an Italian group has translated our basic stuff into Italian and then they put their own spin on it. Another example is a group of teachers I'm supporting who are using it in a local secondary school, and it's very important that they own it—I'm not coming in and imposing it. Well, they'd just kick me out anyway.

CROW: So what is your role? If they own it, what is your relationship to the process? Do you own it as well?

HART: That's fascinating. I suppose the best example of that is a piece of work I did with young people. This was a group of young people with very complex mental health needs. They approached me and asked if I'd train them in the resilient therapy approach, and although I had many other things on, I do have a real principle from the community-university partnership approach of trying to be responsive—I have been part of a community helpdesk response team at Brighton.

The young people had been through some very difficult experiences, and they hated RT at first, and then they grew to appreciate it and asked if I'd help write a book about it. From them saying that they hated the therapy language because they'd been abused by the medical system, they then took the resource to use and thought very differently about it. It was a very interesting process writing a book with ten or more people. They own it more than I do, we "joint own" it, but they own it more. My principle is that anything explicitly using RT and claiming that I endorse what they do needs to be true to the academic practice origins of it and not have glaring mistakes.

We had quite a few debates about the process. I did have editorial involvement. And we did write about the process. It's on our Boingboing website [listed earlier], the RT toolkit. And we have a section at the beginning of the book about how we've negotiated this relationship. We have this issue with all of our communities of practice: you want people to own it if they want to get involved and take it up, but you don't want

them to change everything. You want them at least to understand the legacy.

It involves a massive amount of work, in this case writing with a large group of young people, some of whom were in and out of psychiatric institutions or couldn't get out of bed because they were depressed. So some people quite often didn't turn up to meetings. But the outcomes are very shared and the group had a fantastic facilitator who made sure all voices were heard. There are some bits I had to compromise on. For example, I didn't want to call it RT; I've had so much criticism from people who hate that term, *therapy*—who say it does more damage than good, it's too professionalized, even though you are trying to change things—but by that time the group owned the process and wanted to stick with the term.

I suppose if I'd insisted, they would have changed it. But it wasn't really mine to change. They did brilliantly. We didn't always agree. But that's the process, and the result is good enough. And really at the end of the day you just have to live with the fact that people will do what they want to with your stuff, and be thankful that it might in some way be of use to them.

CROW: So community partners are in there from the start.

HART: Yes, most of my work these days is people coming to us—the group I very loosely lead based at the University of Brighton and in the wider community. I'm not very proactive these days! I'm responsive, and I do have to say no to loads of things, or pass them on to colleagues. Our model is that we are co-developers of the model. We ask: "Is it of use to you, how might you adapt it, or if you want to build child resilience, what tools do you need to help you with that?"

CROW: And presumably one of the constraints is that people come to you and they haven't necessarily got money to fund the work.

HART: Some of the things I do for nothing. I do have quite a bit of flexibility. And we have our social enterprise now, that pays for some things. The money that comes in supports other people's salaries and parents' or young people's participation.

CROW: So it's a very different model to the conventional academic one of coming up with an idea and putting in to a research council to see if it gets funded.

HART: I go for a mixed economy approach. I have got conventional grants as well. You have to at least try to keep the university sweet!

CROW: And has Brighton being recognized nationally as the best university in terms of its community-university work through the Times Higher Award been a mixed blessing then, in terms of bringing lots of demands on you?

HART: Nobody in our local community cares much about that. They don't exactly read the Times Higher! What brings people to us is word of mouth, people hearing about us through their networks. And I also get a lot of e-mails from people nationally who've heard about our work and want us to help them.

CROW: While we're on the subject of money, one of the things you have strong views about is research councils supporting community partners through their funding. Could you say a bit about that?

HART: While many people may do this now, nothing like that was around when I started, and people's time was just yours for the taking. I never thought for a moment when I went to Spain that I'd have to pay anyone in exchange for their experiential knowledge. In relation to those sex workers who really did support me in the field, I took them shopping, but that was totally from me, although one of my supervisors really supported my approach. But over the years I've developed very much a sense that my work is about trying to create a democratic learning space; that's how I think about it. A democratic learning space where people can participate equally and where the power and authority embedded in particular bodies of knowledge and their carriers are acknowledged. And you have to do something to equalize the financial rewards for sitting in the room. So parents in our community of practice, we pay them. They have parental expertise in that context, and the practitioners are being paid. You have to have a real inequalities imagination about this and insist on it, because most people don't get it.

When people invite community partners to do something, my first thought is always "Are we going to pay them? How much are we going to pay them? How are we going to release them from their organization? How do we work out payment in relation to the welfare benefits system?"—all that kind of thing. The principle is that people should be paid. My colleagues and I have had a lot of discussion about how much to pay, and if we insist on paying people a decent amount of money, are we denying other people opportunities if we end up not inviting them because we've spent all the money? We have a lot of debates about that. What is the hourly rate for a parent to sit in a meeting? We've had some big and productive rows about this, over the years.

CROW: And is it the same rate for everybody, is that part of the discussion?

HART: A local charity I work with, Amaze, has got a good line on this, and I've been put in my place by them for not paying people enough. They have different rates for different activities. If you're saying you value the service user experience and then you don't pay them, or pay them £5 an hour and a cup of tea, then that's very patronizing. I'm thinking back to the time when we had a bursary scheme to enable people to go to a conference in Canada, and I was very clear that I wanted one of the bursaries to go to a parent, not just practitioners, and we had to pay child care for that parent. It was very important to me that we did that, but one of my community partners said we should have paid even more. We do have some more working out to do on what we pay people.

It's about rights and responsibilities. If we pay people and they do something that's a bit shoddy, then we should be able to say that perhaps, rather than just ignoring it because they are a service user or whatever. We have a lot of debates about that kind of thing. You could write a book about the debates we've had. I expect someone's already gone over the same arguments. But the principle is that the people we work with get paid.

That was another thing with the young people: they train people. They have got a training package, RT training, and they do a really good job on that, but how much should people be paid for that if they're on the dole? And the other thing that's important in terms of universities is that if you want to be a collaborative anthropologist and pay people, UK universities are not set up to handle this. Their bureaucratic nature makes it tough when they have to pay someone who doesn't have a bank account, for example. You get in a right muddle. So what we've done is set up a social enterprise. In theory, it takes some of that pain out of universities.

CROW: So there is the point about research councils only recently allowing money to be spent on community partners, but then there is also a separate thing about accounting procedures in universities.

HART: They are a nightmare. It's contradictory. The university finance people don't want to have to deal with tiny payments to loads of different people, half of whom don't have a bank account. They're overwhelmed by it, and so they say can you get Boingboing, your social enterprise, to do this. Then I get an e-mail from another person in finance saying, "What is all this money going to Boingboing?" This was

when Boingboing was a co-applicant on a research proposal, and I had to say, “But another bit of your department told us to do this to save university accountants having to deal with it!” And they were worried about a conflict of interest, but there isn’t one, because although I’m a co-director of Boingboing, I don’t get a salary from it. It’s not like other areas where people might make their salary again. But it is very complicated, when you’re doing it on the scale we’re now doing it on. And it’s very tiring and anxiety-inducing. I feel sorry for the finance people too because they are just trying to do their job, and the auditing culture has become ever more risk averse.

CROW: Collaboration has become something of a buzzword in recent years. What is your take on this?

HART: It is a buzzword, but you quite quickly get through that, and there are various frameworks for doing collaboration, and different models of community-university partnership. Kim Aumann and I have written something on that.

CROW: And are we now in a position where you can point people toward a way of working and say, “That works”?

HART: It’s still a work in progress, and a lot of it hasn’t been written up empirically and theoretically. There is a whole drama about that. Your collaborators aren’t remotely interested in that, and do you have a principle that whatever you write, it should be something that everyone can read and understand? We work with young people with learning disabilities; we have a lot of debates about this. I have read quite a lot of critiques of how people have worked collaboratively, and I think, well, community partners don’t read this. So I try to involve people in discussions. I try to get people to get their heads around the idea of communities of practice, to use it, but these are practitioners and parents—they’re not academics.

CROW: And the curriculum, getting collaborative working onto the curriculum, is that another work in progress?

HART: In the United States they’re further on with that. They’ve got service learning institutionalized. In the UK we’re behind. But at Brighton we have a course that every student can do, supposedly, on community-university partnerships. And we have talked about having a half degree in it. And we encourage student projects—it’s not just about academics doing stuff. But the social science world doesn’t necessarily speak to the community-university partnership world. There’s a very different set of journals in which people publish.

CROW: And do you see any element as more important in the collaborative process?

HART: That's an interesting question. Relational stuff, I would say that's the first thing, establishing good relationships. And there has to be enough of a shared interest. And the third thing is not being a pain-in-the-arse academic! Trying not to think that your knowledge base is the one that's best and has to be rammed down everyone else's throats.

CROW: And what about unconditional positive regard, that's quite difficult too isn't it, not being judgmental, and being positive about everyone else, whoever they are? You must work with some people with whom you have more affinity than others.

HART: I don't have unconditional positive regard; do you?

CROW: I get the concept, but it's hard in practice!

HART: I have been trained as a psychotherapist, but not in that style. It's hard not to make judgments about people. I try to be aware of what my judgments are and have a word with myself about keeping my gob shut when I need to.

CROW: And on the question of comparative work, a lot of what you do is moving in the direction of being comparative, is it?

HART: I am interested in those debates about whether anthropology is more than a method, the ethnographic approach, and more than a comparative approach. I do think it's important that we are responsive, and to try to set up democratic learning spaces. There are other people who use the anthropological gaze approach; I don't do that. With students I'll talk about making the familiar strange and standing outside one's cultural context. All my students are working on comparative issues in some way. So, for example, comparing service users' experiences with those of practitioners, the whole concept of communities of practice, on which I base much of my community university partnership work, is deeply anthropological. Etienne Wenger is an anthropologist, and the approach came about by thinking about knowledge bases and collaborating over them. And it's deeply comparative, because it involves so many different perspectives in one place, and trying to develop a shared narrative or a shared approach, and learn from each others' experiences.

CROW: And the final question is, what advice would you give to early career anthropologists?

HART: One thing would be to have an awareness of the usefulness of

the methods, like making the familiar strange. But you get that from psychotherapy as well, standing outside your context. Whatever you want to do later, get those skills and ground yourself in those. Stepping outside of things and thinking comparatively is deeply useful and other people find it deeply useful. Being able to communicate what the differences are is very complicated. And as well as making the familiar strange there is also looking at things and thinking that they are strange and trying to make sense of them. I love that.

There's something very exciting about the comparative method, and doing it democratically. You don't have to go in and impose your perspectives in a colonist kind of way. Fortunately, more and more people are doing that. We shouldn't be precious about methods. We should look to develop methods, and use what is appropriate. These may be visual methods or statistical methods. A lot of my work now is with people with learning difficulties; that makes you think differently: how do we do something in this cultural context? You don't have to go abroad, there are plenty of different cultures in this country!

CROW: And that takes you to classification, does it?

HART: Not explicitly, no. I probably do without quite realizing. It comes up in trying to give anthropology a political edge, working on inequalities. Disadvantaged people and how they are positioned, how they're excluded. I also draw on other disciplines—sociology, social policy, psychology. If I were to pick out a couple of things, Ivan Illich's work on disabling professions and Donald Winnicott's ideas on delinquency as a sign of hope are real guiding lights for me. So it's not just that I'm collaborating and trying to equalize power relations. It's actually that I wouldn't even be here being paid an above average university salary to do this interview with you now if it wasn't for the people with whom I collaborate. That's an issue of political economy as much as anything else, and we shouldn't forget it.

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