# The co-productive imagination: A creative, speculative and eventful approach to co-producing research


## Abstract

This article explores the co-production of research as creative, speculative, and eventful rather than as research processes determined by equality, empowerment and social justice. There are persuasive critiques of participatory and co-produced methods. In response, the case is made for focusing instead on the complex processes through which ideas, affects and relational capacities emerge, are nurtured or obscured, and circulate as part of the complex processes of co-producing research. The argument is developed with reference to a recent research project on youth loneliness. Through process philosophy and speculative approaches, the co-productive imagination illuminates the necessary imaginative work of conceiving propositions, techniques of relation and methodological tactics that move us through creative advance to eventful realisations that something in our research *matters*! Through an ethics of the event the aim of research becomes collaboratively creating new potentials in a world in process.



**Keywords**: Co-production, Whitehead, event, speculative, youth loneliness


## Introduction

The co-productive imagination attempts to rethink the co-production of research as creative, speculative, and eventful rather than as processes determined by equality, empowerment and social justice. Ostrom (1996) coined 'co-production' to illuminate the reciprocal exchanges between public services and communities in the delivery of public goods, such as law and order. Co-production has since come to occupy a prominent position in global policy and practice imaginaries (Bevir, 2019). The co-productive trend in research is indicative of demands on academia to become more relevant, and produce greater value for society (British Academy, 2010). The Arts and Humanities Research Council's *Connected Communities* programme was a significant and illustrative response, funding over 300 projects, with genuine commitments for community-university partnerships and co-production (Facer & Pahl, 2017). Co-production is now a popular and plural repertoire of research practices for the collaborative production of knowledge between professional researchers (e.g.

academics) and those traditionally thought of as participants and/or the objects of study (e.g. young people) (Facer & Enright, 2016).

This article contributes to the field of co-producing research by re-imagining it as creative and eventful. Co-producing research is often defined through terms such as equality, empowerment, emancipation, democracy, and social justice approaches (e.g. Beebeejaun, Durose, Rees, Richardson & Richardson, 2015). In addition to a persuasive critique of the laudable rhetoric of participatory and co-produced practice (e.g., Cooke and Kothari, 2001, Ersoy, 2017), it is not always clear what *equality* or *empowerment* mean in the singularities of practice. The article emerges from the *Loneliness Connects Us* project (2016-2019) (Batsleer & Duggan, 2020), which aimed to work with young people to produce new ways of navigating loneliness, and including youth voices in a national conversation on loneliness. We began the project committing to youth 'co-research' as *co-producing* research felt too restrictive (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015). This decision was challenged after an eventful realisation that one of the youth co-researchers – Patience (anonymised name) – was practising an expansive form of care that was crucial to co-producing the project's aim of young people collectively exploring loneliness. Following the trajectory of this emerging finding questions leading accounts of co-production as equality or empowerment. It warrants developing new approaches to the co-production of research. This article, therefore, speculatively re-imagines *Loneliness Connects Us* as illustrative of eventful co-production. The case is developed through sections on: co-production as creativity under constraint, a speculative and eventful account of co-production, an overview of the project, a description of the carousel of moving methods that represent the methodology, three sections following the trajectory of an emerging finding through three empirical moments (relationship, workshop, email), and a conclusion scoping the potential of eventful practices for co-producing research.

**Co-production as creativity under constraint**

Co-producing research works to decentre, unsettle and disrupt spaces, relations of power and authority across the production of knowledge between academia and the communities beyond. Whether orientated 'within, against or beyond the university' (Bell & Pahl, 2018), co-production provides a necessary space for academics and

communities to challenge elitist and exclusionary knowledge production cultures. It invites us to unlearn the inheritances of academia as a society of letters. It is the space to explore research practices that venture 'beyond text' and academia's logocentrism (Beebeejaun, Durose, Rees, Richardson, & Richardson, 2014), work 'beyond critique' and construct just alternatives in and with communities (Perry & Atherton, 2017), and rethink theory building in relation to *living* knowledges (Facer & Enright, 2016). The reconceptualization of knowledge and knowledge production demands we re-think and re-value the legacies of research (Pahl & Facer, 2016), and the practices and media for knowledge production and dissemination beyond academic books and articles, including 'podcasts, zines, artworks, films, exhibitions, posters, apps, guided walks, pamphlets and soundwalks' (Bell & Pahl, 2018, p.110).

As necessary as the co-productive turn is, a recurrent concern is that co-production is a worldly concept that must travel from theory and rhetoric to contested and complex application (Innes, Davies & McDermot, 2019). A long-established critique of the claims of participatory and co-produced modes of working defines participation as a form of tyranny (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Young people are conceptualised in deficit; to be trained, socialised and made subject to practices that serve society's needs (Foucault, 1997, Vromen & Collin, 2010). The institutional context of academia entrenches young peoples contrived participation in research (Dentith, Measor & O'Malley 2009, Fox, 2013). Within the neoliberalising and performative structures of accelerating academia (Vostal, 2016), temporal pressures constrain researchers' capacities to sufficiently nurture the relationships required for genuine co-production (Enright, Facer & Larner, 2016). Academics therefore must protect against modes of research that extract the value and capitals of the rich social and cultural achievements of communities beyond academia (Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010). Howsoever significant the challenges, co-production is a necessary process for re-negotiating and re-imagining the relationships between academia, the public, and knowledge production. The contexts in which research is co-produced are inherently contested, constrained and messy (Thomas-Hughes, 2018b). If co-production is implicated in governmentality strategies and the 'conduct of conduct' (Ersoy, 2017)

the question is, how we engage, 'the art of not being governed quite so much' (Foucault, 2007, p. 45) as we co-produce and through co-production?

A useful departure point is the common orientation for co-production to develop equal relationships *throughout* the research process. Equality in co-production is problematized, theorised and enacted in diverse ways including commitments to empower or equalise power relations (Beebeejaun, et al., 2014), enact democracy or democratise research (Kara, 2017), emancipate participants (Liddiard et al., 2019) or realise social justice through social change (Banks, Hart, Pahl & Ward, 2018, Perry & Atherton, 2017). Although not universal (e.g. Perry & Atherton, 2017), co-production as equality involves including community co-producers in the research, from agenda setting and planning to data analysis and the dissemination of findings (e.g. Hickey, Richards, & Sheehy 2018, Liddiard et al. 2019). The justification for continuous participation is found in the intersecting influences of: rights-based discourses and the right of the child to be included in decisions that affect them (United Nations, 1989); the claimed epistemological benefits of developing more relevant and useful knowledge *with* communities (Durose, Beebeejaun, Rees, Richardson & Richardson, 2011); emancipatory and activist orientations (Liddiard, et al., 2019); and providing young people with agency within a project, control over and ownership of the data and outputs (Banks et al., 2013).

Do the emphases on co-production as equality and empowerment through continuous participation, however, create forms of unnecessary exclusion? One, co-produced projects are often complex, constituted of multiple types of people and groups (e.g. academics, practitioners, artists, young people, funders, participants) performing various roles (e.g. catalyzer, scholar, broker and project manager) at different stages of a project (Facer & Enright, 2016). The orientation towards equality in navigating this terrain is crucial but what does it mean to empower, enact democratic or socially just research across diverse domains and extended timescales? Are young people without the resources or stability to make sustained commitments excluded from participating? Two, equality as continuous participation is a focus in co-production in public service contexts (e.g. Pemberton & Mason, 2009) which typically relate to transforming the relationships between groups that rely on services and

public or clinical services (e.g. Nesta, 2012). Despite similarities there are significant differences between knowledge co-production through research and co-production as innovation in public service delivery. Three, the assumption that including young people in research tasks is necessarily meaningful and empowering is troubled by the post-qualitative turn which identifies the social construction of, 'conventional humanist qualitative methodology… invented to respond to the [qualitative–quantitative] paradigm wars' (St. Pierre, 2019). Why, for example, is planning and conducting an interview empowering?

Rather than defining and justifying co-production as equality or empowerment a more productive approach is to explore what ways of theorising and practising research are adequate to understanding the complexity of the world, and attending carefully to the processes (Perry & Atherton, 2017) and micro-socialities of co-producing research (Rogaly, 2016). Process and speculative approaches are foundationally committed to thinking amidst a world in process. Thus, we can reconfigure co-production as creativity under conditions of constraint with attention to eventful processes of imagination and creativity. This rationale justifies this speculative adventure thinking the *Loneliness Connects Us* as illustrative of a more expansive form of co-producing research.

**Processes for eventful co-production**

The co-productive imagination builds on A.N. Whitehead's (1967, 1978) process philosophy and its descendants: speculative realism (Shaviro, 2009), activist philosophy (Massumi, 2011) and constructivist philosophy (Stengers, 2011, 2019). Whitehead in some senses prefigured the co-productive turn. He cautioned that our prized academic training, disciplines and theorising prevents us from engaging productively with a world in process. If we maintain abstract academic categories then our mind resides in a 'groove', our intellectual adventures explore the same territories, and 'the remainder of life is treated superficially' (Whitehead, 1967, p. 197). This *remainder* is what oftentimes makes lives meaningful and co-produced research vital. Categories such as production/co-production, service-producer/service-user, academic/young person, co-produced research/ethnography focus our thinking on particular ideas, rationalities and spaces – but what *remainders* do they obscure?

Whitehead illuminates our fraught relationship with ideas and concepts that we cannot think without yet are 'not a human creation… [but] powerful and demanding "other-than-humans"' (Stengers, 2019, p.14). We are moved to wonder: what does *co-production* demand of us, make us feel, enable us to do?

This shift requires thinking in terms of the dynamic processes of 'events' rather than understanding the world through a humanistic perspective of *knowing* humans (e.g., *I* know) and *known* objects (e.g., the *ball* is round). To understand what events are, how they emerge and are realized, for the purpose of this article, imagine a sea where each drop of water is a drop of experience (Whitehead, 1978). These drops of experience are called actual entities or actual occasions and they are the primary form of experience. Rather than *we* humans, *they* feel or 'prehend' and are felt or 'prehended' through 'prehensive exchange[s] of affective data' (Rousell, 2017, p. 16). Each of these actual entities is the singular outcome from a previous event. The singularity of each means there is huge diversity amongst them. It is this diversity that represents the potential and possibility for new things to emerge through eventful realisation (Whitehead, 1978, Massumi, 2011). Events are pulsing and overlapping waves of creation, novelty and invention where diversity becomes singularity and the emergence of a new drop of experience, or actual entity. They are onto-genetic to experience, meaning they define the world's becoming and bringing into being (Massumi, 2011). Events can be profound, relating to the 'collective thinking of something that sets something new into motion.' (Stengers in Manning and Massumi, 2014, p.90) Events can be microscopic, relating to the change through time of non-human structures such as Cleopatra's Needle in London from one second to the next (Whitehead, 1964).

Thinking co-production as eventful realisations orientates us to singularity, creativity and the continual processes of bringing creative potentials together, attuning and attending to the emerging potentials. Co-production becomes centrally focused on imaginative work and the necessary task of developing our vigilance and our,

> [C]apacity to answer the cry "*It Matters*" … a transformation of the way a situation – always *this* situation – may challenge our modes of abstraction. (Stengers, 2019, p.15)

Stengers (2019) writes that answering the cry *It Matters* involves the 'cultivation' and 'awakening of the imagination' (pp. 16-17). This imagination relates to the 'questioning of situations' (Souriau, 2015 cited in Stengers 2019), and the ability to artfully attend to the challenges in a particular sensible situation and nurture 'new ways of making sense in common – experimenting with the very "ontology of ourselves"' (Stengers, 2019, p.4). This experimentation occurs amongst the flux and fluidity of a world in process and so our task is not to make definite statements on what the world *is* as it will have already changed but rather,

> For Whitehead 'philosophy is akin to poetry': its descriptions are carefully constructed utterances (poesis) 'requiring a leap of the imagination'— [creating] lures for feeling, and by extension for thought and action… (Gaskill and Nocek, 2014, p.8).

The rhythm of the co-productive imagination is found in the expansive adventures of thinking and feeling, cohered through the creative advance towards the verification that *It Matters*! The following sections describe the application the co-productive imagination through the *Loneliness Connects Us* inquiry, the ethics of the event, and the techniques of relation and appetition that created the conditions for the eventful realisation that Patience was practising an expansive politics of care.

***Loneliness Connects Us***

*Loneliness Connects Us* aimed to work with a group of young people to research youth loneliness and amplify the findings into an emerging national conversation about loneliness, providing *useful* knowledge to help young people navigate loneliness. Realising these aims required creating spaces in which individual young people felt able to have conversations and encounters that *matter* about the sensitive subject of loneliness. In addition, we wanted to broaden the inquiry: First, geographically by developing the research in different places across the UK. Second, by locating the dialogue in the context of neoliberalising discourses and pedagogies in which issues such as loneliness are individualised and pathologised, with young people made responsible for being resilient to adversity (Fisher, 2009, Kelly, 2001). The project therefore was complex, running from November 2016 to July 2019 and included 22 adults working with and for a group of 14 core youth co-researchers and engaging

over 200 young people. The challenge was how to reconcile co-production understood as enacting equal and empowering relationships if through the project there were so many diverse forms of encounters with young people. Was it enough to empower some young people at some points, while having less empowering or equal interactions with others? What about potentially powerful ideas that emerged in the cracks and liminal spaces of temporary and peripheral interactions with young people?

Thinking co-production as event provides a route for reconciling the challenge between working with specific individual young people in relation to producing interesting thoughts and feelings. Instead of an orientation towards what is equal and common, the ethics of the event is, 'to what is irreducibly singular' (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p.108). There is an emphasis on the differentials and diversity of those forces present, which contribute to the realisation of an event. Rather than a personal ethics, 'a collective practice of care' is a more aligned to a political virtue wherein caring for individuals is folded into an overall concern for the processes of nurturing and realising events (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. 108). For Stengers this includes, 'allowing ourselves to be touched, and artfully giving to what touches us the power to make us imagine, think, and learn' (p.18).

In terms of mobilising Whitehead's process philosophy, research creation represents the most influential practice closest to the ambitions of this project. Research creation engages with art as theory and research, rather than art as means of knowledge dissemination (Truman & Springgay, 2015). *Loneliness Connects Us* was instead grounded in practices from youth work and creative, arts-based and co-produced methods that are foundationally committed to openness and developing authentic and equal relationships with young people (de St Croix, 2016). Although arguably not as theoretically ambitious and pioneering as research creation, the commitment to youth work was essential for our ethical and productive engagement with the young people.

The research ethics progressed beyond standard guidelines to engage with spatialities of care for the youth co-researchers and events. The research followed standard university and professional ethics guidelines, including, for example, securing and

protecting voluntary informed consent from young people and from the parents of children under-16 (BERA, 2011). We invested in a project infrastructure that attended to a politics of space, and the necessary conditions of conviviality and care required to co-produce research (Bell & Pahl, 2018). Locating the research in a youth mental health organisation was significant as engagements with loneliness are potentially traumatic. As an ethical commitment we wanted the young people to be able to access pastoral and counselling support within the project infrastructure and not signpost them to mental health services where there might be a significant wait for referral and service delivery.

**A carousel of moving methods**

We initiated the research through a carousel of moving methods, an iterative and expansive series of encounters and conversations that matter with youth co-researchers. Loneliness is a universal experience but profoundly social, complex, relational and granular in its manifestations. Loneliness might be too painful to confront and articulate in words; but dance, movement and improvisation might help embody and encounter emotions otherwise inexpressible (Levy, 2005). Whereas film or music could act as a familiar and safe set of cultural practices to consider loneliness in one's life or in the apparent safety of imagined characters. We believed plural and expansive research methodologies and approaches would afford diverse vantagepoints of the singularities and diversities of loneliness.

The carousel involved the imaginative work of creating a series of 'lures for feeling' for encountering loneliness, in the form of various propositions or techniques of relation. Propositions can be speculative and conceptual, like Haraway's (1985) cyborg in the Cyborg Manifesto. Or, they can take the form of 'techniques of relation,' which are immanent and processual devices or practices for initiating creative and eventful encounters (Manning and Massumi, 2014). These techniques are iterative, expansive and mobile, creating ways of interacting in research contexts and whose potential can be explored and developed. 'They are springboards… they activate a practice from within. They set in motion.' (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. ix)

An important feature of the carousel was that we did not seek to perfect a singular method, proposition or lure for feeling but rather engage with loneliness expansively

and diversely, inspired by the notion of 'appetition.' Appetition describes the restless appetite towards difference, differentials and the diverse data that create novelty and transformation (Shaviro, 2009, pp. 90-91). Determined by the eventful movement of diversity into singularity and the challenge of knowing in a world in process, we are moved to encounter ever more diverse dimensions of experience and put our propositions and ideas to work there. The carousel developed through a deep concern with how ideas, people and an array of affective and material forces come together in creative research processes.

One form of appetition was the movement through different techniques of relation in the research, and ways of relating to one another and feelings of loneliness. There is not space to describe the entire process of weekly meetings. In the beginning the academic team took a greater role in conceiving the techniques of relation and workshop design. The carousel began with a session on interviewing practice and practical research ethics. A second session focused on community philosophy (Tiffany, 2009), which encourages talking, listening, and thinking together. We ran subsequent sessions that drew together 'patterned contrasts' in the rough and ready arrangement of differentials and diversity to create the eventful conditions for creativity (Shaviro, 2009, p.69). There were sessions that explored loneliness together through discussions about music and film or playful methods that moved the research out of the workshop space and into the street. In one session, a physical-technology practitioner joined the group and we made DIY robots out of cardboard, pens and a small vibrating motor for propulsion. The diversity of ideas, materials, affects, relations, the arrangement of bodies – side-by-side and eyes following hands occupied twisting and fixing cardboard, rather than face-to-face conversations – were imaginative propositions providing lures for prehending new ways of thinking-feeling loneliness. Some ideas and practices gained greater power and persisted or disappeared, the motivating orientation being whether they set something in motion, whether something mattered. Throughout the carousel, the academic researchers encouraged the youth co-researchers to take a greater role in conceiving the constitutive techniques of relation and propositions to define their and our encounters with loneliness.

A second form of movement through the carousel was that of the young people. A core team of 14 young people were central to the project's development. However, apart from a paid youth co-researcher, none participated throughout. Another approximately 186 young people joined for various reasons and lengths of time, for example, as an activity for a university assignment, to 'hang out', or as *participants* in interviews and workshops led by the academic and/or youth co-researchers. Some young people engaged and continued to participate whereas others disengaged or chose not to participate. We aimed to value temporary and peripheral encounters with the project as much as those by young people unable to spend more time participating.

Amongst the appetitive and expansive drive of the research to incorporate more and diverse techniques of relation, encounters with loneliness, and young people's life experience – the research was focused by an overall concern for verification. The co-productive imagination is focused on a lure's or a proposition's capacity to, 'transform our modes of thought, the habits of attention and interest that shape our engagements with the world.' (Gaskill and Noceck, 2014, p.11) The following sections present the empirical content following the trajectory of one emerging finding in the growing importance of the relationship between Patience and Mark, and the tactics and happenings that enabled my eventful realisation of Patience's expansive capacities of care during the project.

**Relationship**

In the carousel's early phase, it was apparent in many ways that 'somethings-doing' (Massumi, 2011, p.5) but not whether or if any of *It Matters!* There were changing configurations of academic researchers and youth co-researchers attending the weekly meetings. All of us were present in the space with undisclosed histories of mental health issues and loneliness, attuning and attending to one another across difference. We were learning how to relate to one another, and how to talk about loneliness and vulnerability. Amongst this Patience and Mark represented an unusual and increasingly interesting relationship.

Patience joined the project before Mark. She was a somewhat enigmatic presence, seemingly aloof and bemused by the project but also clearly committed to helping

young people with mental health issues. She regularly attended meetings and volunteered for the community partner's youth ambassador programme. Patience was quiet and reserved in the sessions, appreciating others' contributions but not volunteering her thoughts. When she spoke, it was obvious she had thought deeply about loneliness. The academic team wanted to provide diverse opportunities for the youth co-producers to develop the research in line with their interests. Patience played the piano. As part of the evolving and imaginative work of the project we conceived an 'enabling constraint' (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p.93). We invited the young people to play music that evoked feelings about loneliness, and we would listen and discuss it. Patience played a song from the movie score to the 1986 film *The Mission*. The music was from a scene after the Guaraní warriors attached a missionary to a cross and sent him over the waterfall to his death. A Jesuit Priest climbs to the top of the waterfall to play his oboe to the Guaraní to plead for his life. The oboe was set apart from the rest of the orchestra, Patience explained. It sounded lonely.

Mark joined several months later. After eight carousel sessions we hosted participatory data analysis workshop to articulate the research agenda and associated methods. Mark arrived late and was anxious that he had somehow annoyed the other young people and was not welcome. Mark's anxieties were a continual concern for me. At times I consulted the community partner's mental health practitioners to ascertain if he was a risk to himself. Yet at other times we would laugh hysterically while, for example, we walked to buy falafel wraps for the group and Mark did impressions of 1990's Jungle MCs played on poor-quality tapes.

Much more could be written about Mark and Patience's relationship but in Whitehead's scheme, we are thinking in a world in process, so, 'it is more important that a proposition be interesting than that it be true' (1967, p. 259). Mark and Patience's relationship *was* interesting. They tended towards opposites of various personal characteristics, such as sociability and conflict resolution. At the time it could not be anticipated that the relationship of support, care and friendship between Patience and Mark would become something that mattered to the research. Indeed, the appetition and drive to make more diverse encounters meant that no one could be sure where the research was going but that more diverse encounters would with

imagination work towards an eventful realisation. Yet through the unfolding of the research, and the complex relations beyond the project, Patience and Mark were busy, doing things – turning up together, laughing at jokes, caring for one another – producing data, and the growing inheritances of potentials that would create tendencies for the research to eventfully realise.

**Workshop**

During one session seven months into the project, a group of six co-researchers were planning a radio show on youth loneliness. Patience and Mark arrived late, as they were working on another arts project held on the same night. The lead youth co-researcher asked the group, what should be in the programme? Mark immediately launched into a series of comments, which were received in an uneasy silence,

> Can we do a show about how trans parents are having kids and not calling the kids a boy or a girl but making them trans kids? I'm all for adults being trans and whatever but they shouldn't impose that on kids. Leave them out of it… Could we look at political correctness? I want to know why if I'm talking to a woman, I'm 'mansplaining'. It's fucking annoying. I'm just talking… What about why there's no men's group here? There's 3 LGBT groups but none (just) for men. Why's that?

These outbursts were a regular feature of the group. However, where before we had engaged or challenged Mark, this time the response of the group was muted and non-committal.

Mark was present with experiences of loneliness, depression and pain. Lonely people tend to exaggerate the level of social threat they are encountering – the psychological effect 'hypervigilance' – and can be anxious and awkward (Qualter et al., 2013). We do not, therefore, encounter loneliness as an abstract category but rather we experience the singularity of a young man sitting amongst others, his loud and potentially transphobic outbursts during sessions when we are trying to conduct research. A swirling sea of words, affects and desires.

I was unsure how to react: Protect Mark, challenge his views, or observe? As I understand them, his outbursts challenged the *inclusive* project space. The prerogative to self-define pronouns and gender identity are embraced in the organisation. It is a microcosm of the societal trends that he feels alienate him. He is,

however, young and attends the project to receive support for mental health issues. Under austerity politics there has been a massive disinvestment in youth mental health services (Youdell and McGimpsey, 2015), creating fewer opportunities for young people to meet in safe spaces that fit their preferences. Research projects are one way of funding youth provision, keeping 'the doors open.' I was careful not to occupy this space of youth sociality and peer-support, not positioning myself to empower or manage the young people. Sometimes the young people's motivation in the space was seemingly dedication to conduct research to better understand loneliness. At other times the project was more diversion, where the young people wanted to socialise and have fun. So, I sat and observed. Looking around the group I noticed Patience seemingly uncomfortable but also looking around to the other co-researchers. Her glances and appeals to the other co-researchers seemed to me to be actively including Mark in the space, intoning: This is not all he is. He needs to be here. We are here for each other.

The significance of this event – its potential to transform our modes of thought – would be born out yet in that moment my capacities to be open and to attune to this sensible moment were closed. I was preparing a conference presentation on masculinity and loneliness. I felt Mark's 'banter', an aggressive and transgressive form of humour, and the way it often alienated him from the support and connection he seemingly desired would be a fascinating focus for the presentation. I noticed Patience, but did not comprehend the potential of this event. Again, *this,* which is to say what would come to *matter* at least here in this article, I did not at that time feel *It Matters!* Yet, events are 'full of oneness and manyness' (James 1996, pp. 93–94 cited in Massumi 2011, p.5) Patience's silent looks and appeals created data that added to the diversity of creative potentials that would be realised through subsequent events as new possibilities, of modes and ways of being in the world.

**The Email**

The rhythm of the co-productive imagination is found in the expansive adventures of thinking and feeling, cohered through the creative advance towards the verification that *It Matters*! The concern for verification focuses on a lure's or a proposition's capacity to, 'transform our modes of thought, the habits of attention and interest that

438 shape our engagements with the world.' (Gaskill & Noceck, 2014, p.11) The movement
439 towards verification occurs through our experience of the world and out prehension
440 or feeling, which has specific implications for co-producing research.

441 According to Whitehead, there is nothing beyond or outside of experience, and our
442 feeling or *prehension* of it (Shaviro, 2009). We experience the world through an
443 endless series of eventful moments: Mark's outburst. Patience's silent interventions
444 to include Mark. My moments of inaction during the session, and *now* as I write this
445 sentence – choosing from a diverse range of words tending towards the next word
446 and the next with each one committed to the page. You, at your desk, reading this
447 text. These are all events. Events become and perish, amidst a sea of pulsing waves
448 moving from diversity to eventful singularity and the creation of something new, an
449 actual entity, which creates the potential for yet more eventful realisations. The
450 emotional basis of experience, in Whitehead's scheme, means the realisation or
451 culmination of events is described as 'satisfaction' (Whitehead, 1978). The task of
452 research therefore is in deepening and intensifying this emotional experience through
453 the creative advance, 'an intensive, qualitative, and aesthetic drive for 'depth of
454 satisfaction' (Shaviro, 2009, p.70).

455 In Loneliness Connects Us project the culmination of the processes of creative advance
456 culminated in an eventful moment while I was sitting in my office, at my laptop
457 answering emails after the sessions with the youth co-researchers had finished. The
458 academic team had written the *Loneliness Connects Us* research report (Batsleer &
459 Duggan, 2018). We were developing strategies for sharing the findings in ways that
460 would help young people navigate experiences of loneliness, including a list of
461 recommendations. One recommendation was to increase capacities for 'friendship,
462 mutuality, association and co-operation' (p.50). This concern to be with one another
463 in difference and vulnerability, discussing feelings of loneliness, was central to the
464 research. It was not clear how these concepts ought to be translated and enacted, and
465 whether I realized them in specific encounters especially when working with Mark.
466 Following Whitehead, I wondered whether these abstractions – 'friendship' as with
467 'empower' and 'co-production' – were mere grooves for my mind. Were these ideas

and practices non-human others, with powerful potentials to illuminate or obscure my openness to imaginatively and expansively engage with a world in process?

I received an email from the research funder. It asked if they could use one of the co-researcher's quotes for the title of an up-coming report. The quote was excerpted from an interview I conducted with Patience. She said,

> Loneliness means something different to everyone because everyone experiences things differently. But I don't think people should be afraid of loneliness. All *your* emotions are important ... if you're lonely it means you're missing out on something. You need that social connection.

The fund representative asked if they could change the quote as the tone, and specifically '*your* emotions', was too didactic for a report written by adults for young people. I agreed to the change, and the report was titled, *All Our Emotions are Important* (Co-op Foundation, 2018). Thinking co-production as equality and by ownership of data (Banks et al., 2013) my consent arguably infringed Patience's ownership of *her* data. I was and continue to be, however, more concerned with the easy acceptance of Patience's quote.

The quote's tone reflects neoliberalising discourses and pedagogies inculcating youth resilience, character and grit in the face of life's adversity. We can read into it an understanding of loneliness as an adaptive drive towards social connection, as hunger is a drive to eat (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2009). Furthermore, indicative of the self-help genre, the statement voices the thinking and wise 'I' demystifying the world for the unaware 'you.' Young people are positioned to include themselves in the social connection they desire. Youth loneliness becomes yet another aspect of human experience and conduct interpolated within neoliberalising governmentality strategies. Janet Batsleer – the principal investigator – was always clear that self-help is okay but not if lonely young people cannot help themselves. Patience's quote abstracted and amplified as the words became text, and as evidence might become a resource for the subsequent imaginative work of denying capacities to act through policy making in austerity contexts.

Sitting in my chair I initiated in an adventure of thought, departing from the proposition: Patience's ways of relating to other members of the group went beyond mere neoliberalising social relations. Patience was evidently versed in dominant discourses – psychology and self-help – relating to loneliness. Yet the research's commitment to appetition and expansively exploring loneliness through plurality had produced diverse encounters of singularity and difference: Mark in the project space and outside. Patience's art exhibition in another project. Eating together in a restaurant. Listening to music together. Arguing and making space for one another. And, finally, translating these events into text for funders and policy makers. It was these shifts and translating and re-proposing the research to the policy domain that worked to intensify the happening of the event towards its satisfaction. In Whitehead's scheme difference is fundamental to creativity, as lightening's "appearance is conditioned by an electro-magnetic differential" between positive and negative charges (Massumi, 2012, p21). Here we can indicate the research developing towards an eventful culmination through forms of creative advance, as,

> Emotions are intensified, and experiences made richer, when incompatibilities, instead of being excluded (negatively prehended), are transformed into contrasts that can be positively integrated within a greater "complexity of order"… (Shaviro, 2009, p.69)

I came to resist the abstraction of co-producing research to particular contexts and spaces where young people were present; instead in my research practice remained open and sought to search for diversity and difference while nurturing the unfolding potentials of the research through an ethics of the event. Rather than equality or empowerment, co-production becomes responding to the insistence of the cry 'It matters!'… intensifying it… [and] giving to it the power to problematize what we ask our reasons to do and what they do to us, how they matter for us and how they make things matter. (Stengers, 2019, p. 16)

The event was realising Patience's profound contributions to the project that the quote failed to capture and that I had previously failed to appreciate. In the multiplicity of the eventful unfolding of the research, as I struggled over whether I was researching or being with another human next to a potentially lonely young man,

Patience was patient and open to the moment. Her relationship with Mark affirmed a genuine embodiment of a more expansive relationship of care, friendship and the capacity to relate to people experiencing loneliness and the accompanying anxiety. Significantly, this suggests a more challenging relational politics of friendship and obligation under the social and emotional conditions of neoliberalism (May, 2012). We may propose to young people, if you are feeling lonely then you need to take action to increase your social connection but *we* need to be there for you even if you are awkward and anxious, or we are trying to do research.

## Conclusion

This article was an adventure of thought: Suspending notions of co-production as enacting equality, instead re-imagining it as creative and eventful through speculative and process approaches. The work's originality is justified as the first application of process and speculative approaches to the field of research co-production. The significance of the shift is that it provides a clearer account of what it is we do when we co-produce research, and why. Although grounded in empowering youth work practices, research is not predicated on or justified by empowering participants or enacting equality, practising social justice or democracy (e.g., Beebeejaun, et al., 2014, Kara, 2017, Liddiard et al., 2019). This step mutes the extensive critique of participatory and co-produced methods failure to realise the laudable aspirations (e.g. Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Furthermore, following the post-qualitative turn, eventful co-production unsettles abstract categories and settled research practices that are definitional of co-producing research (e.g. co-researchers participating in 'planning'), which *might* prevent us from accessing the many *remainders* of a world in process. In some senses more ambitious in others more modest, eventful co-production orientates the research to the practices and processes related to the realisation of events: co-producing new thoughts and feelings that create new possibilities in the world. Following speculative and process approaches, we understand co-producing research as thinking and feeling in a world in process. We turn to the careful and imaginative work of creating propositions and techniques of relation, developing our capacities to attune to the potentials that emerge and determine whether what we research *Matters*! Through Whitehead we can identify principles and practices that

augment and intensify creativity. The appetitive drive determines a restless search for difference and diversity in, for example, the backgrounds and experiences of the young people we work with, and the in thoughts and feelings, experiences and encounters, media and modalities, and regimes of practice we explore. We are not triangulating findings nor applying tested methods but endlessly experimenting, adapting and following emerging findings wherever they go.

It is important in this shift from the qualities of the relationship with specific young people to a broader engagement with the potential in ideas, propositions and enabling constraints that 'theory' or the necessity to be creative and think *new* ideas does not become an additional set of pressures that work to marginalise, disempower and deny the agency of young people in co-produced research. It was, however, these processes of speculation, imagination and remaining open to and following the emergence of new ideas and feelings whether they follow the *grooves* of co-production or not that created my eventful realisation of Patience's contribution to the project. Patience's expansive politics of care in supporting her fellow youth co-researcher co-produced a significant dimension of the project but this was not a trajectory related to empowerment, social justice or equality. Rather the eventful realisation hinged on my actions that might be seen to disempower Patience. Yet something more powerful emerged. The aim therefore is not to *lose* young people but rather to fold commitments for young people with an ethics of the event, finding and tracing multiple and eventful contributions, collaboratively creating new propositions and possibilities to re-imagine a world in process.

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