

**Please cite the Published Version**

Duggan, James (2021) The co-productive imagination: a creative, speculative and eventful approach to co-producing research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24 (3). pp. 355-367. ISSN 1364-5579

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1799638>

**Publisher:** Informa UK Limited

**Version:** Accepted Version

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

3 **Abstract**

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

19

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

21 **Introduction**

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

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

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

### 61 **Co-production as creativity under constraint**

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

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

77 As necessary as the co-productive turn is, a recurrent concern is that co-production is  
78 a worldly concept that must travel from theory and rhetoric to contested and complex  
79 application (Innes, Davies & McDermot, 2019). A long-established critique of the  
80 claims of participatory and co-produced modes of working defines participation as a  
81 form of tyranny (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Young people are conceptualised in deficit;  
82 to be trained, socialised and made subject to practices that serve society’s needs  
83 (Foucault, 1997, Vromen & Collin, 2010). The institutional context of academia  
84 entrenches young peoples contrived participation in research (Dentith, Measor &  
85 O’Malley 2009, Fox, 2013). Within the neoliberalising and performative structures of  
86 accelerating academia (Vostal, 2016), temporal pressures constrain researchers’  
87 capacities to sufficiently nurture the relationships required for genuine co-production  
88 (Enright, Facer & Lerner, 2016). Academics therefore must protect against modes of  
89 research that extract the value and capitals of the rich social and cultural  
90 achievements of communities beyond academia (Autonomous Geographies Collective,  
91 2010). Howsoever significant the challenges, co-production is a necessary process for  
92 re-negotiating and re-imagining the relationships between academia, the public, and  
93 knowledge production. The contexts in which research is co-produced are inherently  
94 contested, constrained and messy (Thomas-Hughes, 2018b). If co-production is  
95 implicated in governmentality strategies and the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Ersoy, 2017)

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

98 A useful departure point is the common orientation for co-production to develop  
99 equal relationships *throughout* the research process. Equality in co-production is  
100 problematized, theorised and enacted in diverse ways including commitments to  
101 empower or equalise power relations (Beebeejaun, et al., 2014), enact democracy or  
102 democratise research (Kara, 2017), emancipate participants (Liddiard et al., 2019) or  
103 realise social justice through social change (Banks, Hart, Pahl & Ward, 2018, Perry &  
104 Atherton, 2017). Although not universal (e.g. Perry & Atherton, 2017), co-production  
105 as equality involves including community co-producers in the research, from agenda  
106 setting and planning to data analysis and the dissemination of findings (e.g. Hickey,  
107 Richards, & Sheehy 2018, Liddiard et al. 2019). The justification for continuous  
108 participation is found in the intersecting influences of: rights-based discourses and the  
109 right of the child to be included in decisions that affect them (United Nations, 1989);  
110 the claimed epistemological benefits of developing more relevant and useful  
111 knowledge *with* communities (Durose, Beebeejaun, Rees, Richardson & Richardson,  
112 2011); emancipatory and activist orientations (Liddiard, et al., 2019); and providing  
113 young people with agency within a project, control over and ownership of the data  
114 and outputs (Banks et al., 2013).

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

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

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

#### 145 **Processes for eventful co-production**

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

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

162 This shift requires thinking in terms of the dynamic processes of ‘events’ rather than  
163 understanding the world through a humanistic perspective of *knowing* humans (e.g.,  
164 *I know*) and *known* objects (e.g., the *ball* is round). To understand what events are,  
165 how they emerge and are realized, for the purpose of this article, imagine a sea where  
166 each drop of water is a drop of experience (Whitehead, 1978). These drops of  
167 experience are called actual entities or actual occasions and they are the primary form  
168 of experience. Rather than *we* humans, *they* feel or ‘prehend’ and are felt or  
169 ‘prehended’ through ‘prehensive exchange[s] of affective data’ (Rousell, 2017, p. 16).  
170 Each of these actual entities is the singular outcome from a previous event. The  
171 singularity of each means there is huge diversity amongst them. It is this diversity that  
172 represents the potential and possibility for new things to emerge through eventful  
173 realisation (Whitehead, 1978, Massumi, 2011). Events are pulsing and overlapping  
174 waves of creation, novelty and invention where diversity becomes singularity and the  
175 emergence of a new drop of experience, or actual entity. They are onto-genetic to  
176 experience, meaning they define the world’s becoming and bringing into being  
177 (Massumi, 2011). Events can be profound, relating to the ‘collective thinking of  
178 something that sets something new into motion.’ (Stengers in Manning and Massumi,  
179 2014, p.90) Events can be microscopic, relating to the change through time of non-  
180 human structures such as Cleopatra’s Needle in London from one second to the next  
181 (Whitehead, 1964).

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

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

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

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

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

### 207 ***Loneliness Connects Us***

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



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

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

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

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

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

### 260 **A carousel of moving methods**

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

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

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

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

290 One form of appetite was the movement through different techniques of relation in  
291 the research, and ways of relating to one another and feelings of loneliness. There is  
292 not space to describe the entire process of weekly meetings. In the beginning the  
293 academic team took a greater role in conceiving the techniques of relation and  
294 workshop design. The carousel began with a session on interviewing practice and  
295 practical research ethics. A second session focused on community philosophy (Tiffany,  
296 2009), which encourages talking, listening, and thinking together. We ran subsequent  
297 sessions that drew together ‘patterned contrasts’ in the rough and ready arrangement  
298 of differentials and diversity to create the eventful conditions for creativity (Shaviro,  
299 2009, p.69). There were sessions that explored loneliness together through  
300 discussions about music and film or playful methods that moved the research out of  
301 the workshop space and into the street. In one session, a physical-technology  
302 practitioner joined the group and we made DIY robots out of cardboard, pens and a  
303 small vibrating motor for propulsion. The diversity of ideas, materials, affects,  
304 relations, the arrangement of bodies – side-by-side and eyes following hands occupied  
305 twisting and fixing cardboard, rather than face-to-face conversations – were  
306 imaginative propositions providing lures for prehending new ways of thinking-feeling  
307 loneliness. Some ideas and practices gained greater power and persisted or  
308 disappeared, the motivating orientation being whether they set something in motion,  
309 whether something mattered. Throughout the carousel, the academic researchers  
310 encouraged the youth co-researchers to take a greater role in conceiving the  
311 constitutive techniques of relation and propositions to define their and our  
312 encounters with loneliness.

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

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

### 333 **Relationship**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 380 **Workshop**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 433 **The Email**

434 The rhythm of the co-productive imagination is found in the expansive adventures of  
435 thinking and feeling, cohered through the creative advance towards the verification  
436 that *It Matters!* The concern for verification focuses on a lure’s or a proposition’s  
437 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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 537 **Conclusion**

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

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

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

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583

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