Making internal conversations public: reflexivity of the connected doctoral researcher and its transmission beyond the walls of the academy

Jon Rainford*

School of Education, Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent, UK

The online version of this text can be found at socialtheoryapplied.com/journal/

Advances in digital technologies, especially those associated with Web 2.0 such as blogs and Twitter, have created new spaces for discussion and to encourage the development of ideas. These advances have the ability to reduce the isolation of the doctoral researcher who may have previously been limited to discussions restricted to physical spaces such as departmental offices and at conferences. Whilst moving these conversations into public spaces can offer benefits, it also presents a distinct set of challenges. This paper adopts an autoethnographic approach in order to explore my experiences of using digital technologies to support my development as a doctoral researcher. Drawing on Archer's (2003; 2007) theories of reflexivity and the internal conversation, it explores two critical incidents (Tripp, 1993) during my first year as a doctoral researcher. The first focuses on making sense of the rejection of a conference paper and the second on making sense of what 'can' and 'should' be said in a digital space as the result of tweeting and blogging at a conference. In doing so, this paper highlights the ways in which digital technologies have the capacity to support an individual's varied modes of reflexivity. Through this, it also illuminates how bringing these conversations into a public space can also offer a form of public scholarship, opening up the inner workings of the academy to a wider public, challenging traditional academic

* Email: Jon.rainford@research.staffs.ac.uk

practices. Consequently, the paper concludes with suggestions for future research and training needed to support digital scholarship for doctoral researchers.

Introduction

The process of becoming a doctoral researcher in an increasingly digital world brings with it unique opportunities and challenges. This paper will first explore some of the ways in which digital technologies such as Twitter and blogs have changed academic practices more generally, before examining two specific incidents from my own doctoral development. In doing so, this paper will show the ways in which digital technology has the potential to play a central role to reflexivity and the internal conversations that help shape the emerging self of the doctoral researcher. It will also highlight the potential that this offers for opening up scholarship to a wider public and highlights some of the ways in which it is possible before finally examining the potential challenges associated with engaging in these forms of reflexivity in public spaces.

Increased usage of digital technologies has changed academic working practices and has in many ways resulted in a blurring of the boundaries between the public and the private. This has led to many previously invisible practices, hidden within private spaces, becoming visible to public gaze. For example, writing has long been used as a way to formulate and understand the self but social networking brings this process into the public domain (Sauter, 2013). Areas where this is particularly noticeable are those such as the intricacies of the research process in terms of false starts, failure and choices that are made which do not become part of the narrative within traditional academic outputs such as journal articles. Accordingly, the move towards digital scholarship makes information that is more readily accessible to an audience beyond the academy and has brought about a distinct 'openness' in academic practice (Costa, 2014). Open access publishing and an increasing range of Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs and Twitter have also allowed a new space to open up for public conversations and many of these extend beyond the walls of the academy. As a doctoral researcher, both Twitter and blogging have been central to my reflections on experiences. This paper will first explore Margaret Archer's notion of reflexivity and the internal conversation before demonstrating how this theory maps onto my own experiences.

The internal conversation

The development of identity or a sense of self is shaped through our experiences. This is true of both our general sense of self and the development of an academic self. The work of Margaret Archer places the notion of reflexivity as central to the way in which an individual mediates between structure and agency. She frames this reflexivity as a 'generative ability for internal deliberation upon an external reality' (Archer, 2003, p. 20), but for this deliberation to take place, especially in an unknown field of practice, often some form of external source is needed. This source can allow the individual to develop the resources on which to base those internal deliberations and to make sense of the world. The dialogic nature of Twitter and blogs offers a way of tapping into external sources in a way that helps the individual to make sense of their emerging thoughts and experiences in relation to wider issues. Archer (2003) posits that we do not solve questions of how we feel or what we believe about something by asking other people; however, in order to answer questions we draw on our own experiences. As such, in the case of novel experiences, we need to try to get a sense of how other experienced individuals have navigated similar dilemmas.

Modes of reflexivity

Through her initial in-depth study of twenty individuals (Archer, 2003) and further explored through her later work (Archer, 2007), Archer identified three main modes of reflexivity: Communicative, Autonomous, and Meta-reflexivity.

Communicative reflexivity
Communicative reflexivity can be best thought of as an internal conversation which is discussed with others. Internal deliberations for communicative reflexives require a dialogue to be held with another individual in order to make sense of them.

Autonomous reflexivity
Reflexivity for an autonomous reflexive is a process that takes place within their own heads, relying solely on their own past experiences and knowledge to make sense of their current internal conversations. They draw on specialist knowledge on technical matters but their personal deliberations do not draw in other individuals and there is no externalisation of these conversations.

Meta-reflexivity
Meta-reflexives adopt a more complex form of reflexivity. This internal conversation involves a second loop that involves being reflexive about their own reflexivity. This form of internal conversation is heavily self-oriented although may be about both deep and mundane issues.

Multiple modes of reflexivity

Of her original sample of twenty participants, Archer found that fifteen clustered into one of the first three modes, with the remaining participants falling into a fourth mode that she terms 'fractured reflexives', namely individuals who appeared to be more passive in agency (Archer, 2003, p. 298). Nevertheless, in her conclusions within *Making our way through the World* (Archer, 2007), she acknowledges that there may have been other forms of reflexivity which may not currently manifest themselves due to the lack of relevant social conditions.

Her suggestion that the emergence of reflexivity is reliant on 'interplays between structural, cultural and agential features' (Archer, 2007, p.317) also raises the question of the fluidity of reflexivity. It is through these internal conversations that the self develops by a process that Archer terms morphogenesis. Through this process, an evolving sense of self changes over time and she theorises that identity is an emergent property of this process. More recent work by Popora and Shumar (2010), postulates that individuals may not rely solely on one mode of reflexivity. As a result of this, they theorise that different modes of reflexivity may co-exist in individuals as part of a three-dimensional model of reflexivity. Within this, each of the modes of reflexivity consists of an axis and an individual can exist anywhere on a spectrum from fully reflexive to fully unreflexive. If we accept this notion then each individual may demonstrate different forms of reflexivity in different situations, especially where the situation is removed from their past experience either structurally or culturally.

What is also evident since Archer's original studies is the way in which social lives have become increasingly digital. I will therefore now move to explore the ways in which digital technologies have impacted upon academic networks and access to information and other individuals who can be drawn upon as part of these reflexive conversations.

Academic adoption of Web 2.0 technologies

Twitter has been in existence for less than a decade, but has in many ways transformed communication within the academy. In combination with blogging, these micro-blogging practices are central to the work of many academics (Lupton, 2014b). Where academics are engaged in the use of Web 2.0 technologies, they report that they have influenced their academic practices (Costa, 2014); yet the prevalence of their use varies and a recent study of 127 STEM academics found that social media usage for many of their participants peaked around events such as conferences (Donelan, 2015). Most scholarly conferences now provide details of a specific hashtag to use in composing tweets and many academics will provide their Twitter usernames on their slides. In spite of this, its use is not ubiquitous and how well used it is, often depends on how the conference backchannel is promoted and managed (Li and Greenhow, 2015). It is also becoming more common practice for official academic pages on institutional

websites to feature links to blogs and their Twitter feeds. This public nature of digital scholarship in these forms means that both blogs and Twitter need to be considered in terms of their practical usage and also in terms of self-presentation (Murthy, 2012). This emerging field of digital scholarship has been documented and theorised by an increasing number of researchers (for a detailed overview see Lupton, 2014a), however, the focus of much of this research is limited to practical issues and the networking and pedagogical uses of these digital technologies. As these forms of digital scholarship become more deeply embedded within researchers' everyday practices, so may their role within researchers' thinking processes and identity formation. Despite this rapidly emerging scholarship on the use of these Web 2.0 technologies by academics, one area that is underexplored is the role of these technologies in identity formation of the doctoral researcher. This paper will therefore now focus upon what it is to be a doctoral researcher in an increasingly digital age.

Becoming a researcher in a digital age

There are a range of uses for social media and the relative value that an individual places on these uses shapes their motivation to engage. A recent study found that the motivations for academics' usage of social media could be summarised into four key themes: external requirements of a project, self-development, the need to widen networks and in order to maintain personal networks (Donelan, 2015). This study also found use of social media within their sample (n=127) was high, with 68 per cent of academics surveyed using social media extensively. In comparison, other research has found that social networking has been ranked low in terms of importance by doctoral researchers (Rayner, Lord, Parr, and Sharkey, 2015) and a study of academics at the American Educational Research Association conference found that only 3 of 11 graduate students interviewed used Twitter during the conference (Li and Greenhow, 2015).

For doctoral researchers, understanding how social media can support their development is key to making its usage a priority at a time when there are many competing demands. In fact, the social media has the ability to support all four domains of the Vitae researcher development framework, especially surrounding issues such as networking, public engagement, communication and information seeking (Vitae, 2015). Where social media is being used by postgraduate students, they report that it has a capacity for both emotional and academic support (Lupton, 2014a). This capacity to support emotional development is key to successful progression as a doctoral student, where isolation is often reported as a reason for non-completion (Ali and Kohun, 2006).

The journey from student to academic has been theorized as one of 'becoming' (Barnacle, 2005; Barnacle and Mewburn, 2010). Traditionally this has been one of apprenticeship, with the doctoral student developing into an independent researcher

with the assistance of their supervisor in a mentoring capacity. The quality and consistency of this support places the onus on one or two academics who have been allocated a supervisory role and can often be variable. Digital technologies have changed these practices. Communication technologies such as e-mail and Skype are making supervisory practices less dependent on geographical proximity and Web 2.0 technologies such as virtual learning environments, Facebook and Twitter are allowing for the creation of virtual communities unrestricted by traditional geographical boundaries. The development of these technologies has created new spaces in which doctoral students can develop a sense of self. These spaces can make the development of self easier but also bring added challenges as this paper will highlight. Bauman suggests that formation of self in the digital realm is stripped of many of the discomforting risks of the real world, but he highlights the added need to manage the 'presentation of self in publics' as opposed to a single public (Bauman and Raud, 2015, p. 42). This multiple presentation of self can be thought of through the multiple outcomes of digital dialogues. It is to this multiple nature of 'becoming' within an open public space, such as those provided by blogs and Twitter that I will now turn.

Exploring internal conversations through autoethnographic methods

In order to understand how Archer's notion of the internal conversation and modes of reflexivity may map onto digital practices, such as tweeting and blogging, this paper explores how my own experiences as a doctoral researcher can act as a lens on the internal conversations through an autoethnographic approach.

Autoethnography is an approach that links the personal to the cultural and encompasses a range of different methods (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) but its exact definition varies across the literature. Most definitions centre around a point of balance between exploring the self and the social world within which that self exists (Holman-Jones, 2005). Barbara Tedlock's definition takes this further by placing it as a balance between 'connecting the autobiographical impulse (the gaze inward) with the ethnographic impulse (the gaze outward)' (Tedlock, 2005, p. 467). Simply put, autoethnography has the ability to link personal experiences with wider concerns (Kara, 2015).

Self-study methods have often been critiqued for being both lazy and focused the wrong way, which is inward looking to the self as opposed to outward into society (Delamont, 2007). However, in order to understand how Archer's theories surrounding reflexivity and internal conversations may be applied within a digital world, I would argue that exploring my own experiences offers a useful starting point to bridge the theory-practice gap, through what Sarah Wall terms 'giving voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding'(Wall, 2008, p. 38). By examining my own experiences, I can explore how these relate to

theory such as the notion of the internal conversation. In contrast, if this analysis was based on data gained during interviews, this would only offer a partial insight. In doing so, this paper seeks to apply Archer's theories surrounding reflexivity to the ways in which I have used digital technologies such as Twitter and blogging as an integral part of my internal conversations.

Through the adoption of an autoethnographic method, one of Archer's critiques of her own methods can also be addressed, that of the 'double hermeneutic' invoked by her interpretation of her participants' interpretations of their internal conversations (Archer, 2003, p. 154). Autoethnography actually removes a layer of this through the researcher and the researched being the same person. This method also has the capacity to address one of her other critiques, that we only remember limited essential details of past exchanges. It does this by drawing together a number of different sources of self-document of events, offering a more detailed record of experience than would be possible based on recall during an interview. Whilst this paper adopts an autoethnographic approach, this can take various forms, from personal narratives to more explicitly linked studies relating literature to experience (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). This linking of experience and theory resonates with the concept of critical incidents, commonly used in developing reflective practice for teachers (Tripp, 1993)

Critical incidents

Critical incidents are events on which an individual places a specific significance through their own interpretation of their relative importance. Accordingly, this paper will focus upon incidents that were given prominence within my own research diary. As Tripp highlights, it is the analysis of incidents that make them critical through being seen to have a wider resonance than simply that of individual experience and has implications in a wider context.

I have recorded my experiences during the initial stages of my doctorate in a number of forms, each for different audiences. I have maintained a private research diary, a public blog and have posted tweets on a daily basis. My diary entries focused on a range of issues from purely practical or methodological issues to ones focused on wider researcher development such as submitting papers to conferences, reactions to feedback, peer review and supervisions. In contrast to this, my blog (Rainford, 2016) has focused mainly on specific issues, such as practical issues regarding doctoral study, summarising events, or reviews of books. It was through returning to these three sources during the production of a reflective account to meet the requirements of the research training part of my doctorate, that I noticed a number of specific entries relating to how I was using both Twitter and my blog to help develop a sense of self.

There were a number of incidents that could have been discussed, however the themes of these often converged on similar issues, such as making sense of my

experience through drawing on the input of other individuals and what can and should be said in a public space. Accordingly, this paper will focus upon two specific incidents that illustrate these themes. In order to do this, however, it is first important to make visible the point that these reflections come from, my own biography.

Personal biography

Autoethnography is a method situated within an exploration of a personal narrative and therefore to make sense of my experience it is important to briefly situate these incidents within a wider context. This is also key in exploring reflexivity, as Archer theorises that structural and cultural influences are central to an individual's mode of reflexivity.

My journey to becoming a doctoral researcher is a complex one, having initially studied a foundation degree at an Art college before entering the workplace and having a first career in sales and marketing. Following redundancy and a period of unemployment, I undertook a career change to work in a school whilst completing my Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences by distance learning. Following graduation, I trained as a Secondary School Teacher and completed a Master's degree part-time. I currently continue to work within the field of education but within a Widening Participation department in a university while completing a part-time doctorate.

Certainly the part-time nature of much of my higher education trajectory and specifically during the doctorate has shaped and heavily affected my process of becoming a researcher. Having to juggle full-time employment, part-time study and other demands, means that my experiences may be very different to those of a full-time doctoral researcher. As Archer (2003) suggests, our knowing is contextually situated within a society and as a part-time doctoral student, my participation within a society or community of sense making is heavily embedded within digital technology, most prominently Twitter. As a result, the role of these digital technologies has been central to my own experience and was central to all of the formative incidents within my diary. I acknowledge however, that in being reflexive about my modes of reflexivity, this autoethnographic process in itself is a form of meta-reflexivity. As will be seen, this is not the sole mode of reflexivity I appear to have adopted as the following critical incidents will highlight.

Incident one: Making sense of rejection

This incident comprises of more than one event and spans a two-year period. Focusing upon the submission of abstracts to conferences it provides a prime example of why I see Twitter as essential to my own doctoral development and central to my own reflexive deliberations. Beginning initially prior to the formal start of my doctorate, I was in a state of limbo before being allocated a supervisor. Therefore, Twitter acted as the only real access I had to academics on whose experience and advice I could draw.

An abstract that I submitted for a conference was rejected. Having since talked to many academics, I know that rejection is a common issue but one that is often not shared publically. So for me, when I first experienced the sense of rejection, it became a key focus of my diary and my tweets:

> Maybe I expect too much but when an abstract is rejected for a conference, surely part of the review process should explain what it lacked? (tweet – 9 Apr 2014)

Whilst the tweet adequately summarises my concern, I am not sure that this tweet fully encapsulated the feelings of rejection and despondence that were central to this event. Being my first experience of submitting an abstract for a conference I did not know what I was expecting, but a generic email with no feedback did not help me make sense of the situation. I remember feeling a whole range of emotions from anger and frustration to inadequacy and failure. In a position which was at this point in time, outside of the academy, in the stage before I began my doctorate, I had no one with whom to discuss this within my personal networks. Not having a supervisor, fellow students or colleagues, meant that Twitter was my only way of making sense of this event.

I received a number of responses both in public and private to this tweet, highlighting how the rejection of this abstract may be related not only to quality but also the volume of abstracts received for what is a busy stream at the conference. Other responses focused on the fact that rejection is common regardless of career stage. By being able to draw on the experience of other more senior academics through these conversations I began to make sense of my experience. Moving forward to December, another conference submission soon became another rejection. In this case I responded to rejection and my associated feelings in public, by a tweet that simply said 'not sure if I'm disappointed or relieved' (tweet- 4 Dec 2014). In this instance, my discussions in public went no further. I noted in my research diary that I needed to possibly ask others for their thoughts and feedback on what I had submitted, but this time these conversations took place in e-mails and face-to-face discussions. This was not the end of the reflection on this matter though. Following the conference in question there was another relevant entry in my diary:

> The stream I submitted to was very busy and out of the 11 paper sessions, 4 were pre-planned symposia [...] 95 submissions and there were only about 24 other slots in the programme. Maybe with this level of submissions the scope was too limited. (diary – 15 Apr 2015)

In this instance, the internal rationalisation of the experience did not spill over into Twitter or to my blog. It was kept within my internal conversation and the space of my private research diary.

Mapping theory onto the incident

This incident initially demonstrates a mode of communicative reflexivity. Through the action of putting a direct question out on Twitter in search of some answers, it was clear I needed to share these thoughts in order to make sense of them. As Archer states, the 'need to share these thoughts in order to conclude their deliberations' is a distinctive element of the communicative mode of reflexivity (Archer, 2007, p. 102). Due to having already established a good network of fellow students, both within my institution and within a wider subject based community and experienced academics on Twitter, there were useful responses and therefore this enabled me to carry out external conversations to make sense of my experiences. Whilst Archer's model is very much focused on the use of face to face communication, it can be seen how Twitter has afforded opportunities for me to satisfy the needs for external deliberation with suitable interlocutors within a digital environment.

This need for communicative reflexivity did not go away in the later event but was moved from a public sphere into the private. This was not necessarily a conscious choice to remove it from the public gaze, but more due to evolving circumstances. By this point, I had developed personal networks which went beyond their digital roots within which I could seek advice from a range of other individuals in order to make sense of my experiences. Interestingly, these still featured a high level of reliance on digital technologies through e-mail and private messaging within other social networking tools.

However, what was also evident through my later diary entry was that I had moved into a more autonomous mode of reflexivity. Although I had continued to rely on communicative modes initially through e-mail and personal discussions, this was short lived and the deliberations became less reliant on external dialogues. As Archer conceptualizes, they had become 'self-contained mental activities' (Archer, 2007:113). This move from communicative to autonomous can be viewed in terms of the relationship between myself and the social context. As my relative experience within the academic world increased, my needs for external resources to draw upon to complete my internal deliberations altered and thus I was able to become more autonomous in my reflexivity.

The second incident, to which this paper will now turn, explores the way in which autonomous reflexivity was central to my internal conversations surrounding blogging practices. It also highlights the role my blog had on turning this into a meta-reflexive conversation and also offered a space for this conversation to become visible.

Incident two: Retreating into private

Blogging and making sense of my doctoral experiences have been closely linked since I first considered doctoral study in 2013. My early blogs document a range of issues such as making sense of not gaining funding (Rainford, 2013a), choosing a topic

(Rainford, 2013b), deciding between types of doctoral study (Rainford, 2014) and with wider sociological and educational concerns. Blogging had become a central part of my academic work and was a relatively regular occurrence until the early part of the year where I took a sudden hiatus. This incident will focus on the issues surrounding this event.

As part of a research methods programme, I was asked by my supervisors to write a reflection on a seminar I was attending. In tweeting about my upcoming attendance, I was asked by a follower on Twitter if I would be blogging about the seminar. It therefore seemed a natural choice to place it on my blog to open up those thoughts to a wider audience. However, as a result of this blog (Rainford, 2015), my interpretation of one of the papers was challenged through a subsequent email exchange with the speaker. Whilst this was easily rectified and was a simple error in my notes, what I previously thought was a logical choice forced me to reconsider my practices and became a focus of concern. The entry in my research diary simply read:

> Am I over thinking this or is it a real danger and at these early stages do I need to be more mindful of what I say in open forums (diary – 23 Jan 2015)

This made me question whether a blog was even a sensible thing to maintain any longer. Was it different when I was moving from talking about general issues to ones that were intertwined with my research topic? Would I be judged on the emergent nature of my thoughts? This entry in my diary clearly showed that I was trying to make sense of how to handle this situation. What is notable is that whilst this was a record of my internal conversation, in this case there was no reference to it in my public conversations on Twitter. Following this, there was a notable reduction in my blogging and a later post explored why this might be so:

> …the actual value being in the production and writing down of my ideas in order to work through them and understand them. I was last blogging at a very specific time; namely that of the transition from masters to doctoral study where I needed a focus to work through my reading. (Rainford, 2015b)

Mapping theory onto the incident

This second incident demonstrates two different modes of reflexivity. Firstly, in terms of the actual incident there is a clear autonomously reflexive conversation going on. These 'self-contained mental activities' (Archer, 2007, p. 113) that have been documented within my research diary show that I am trying to make sense of the experience internally and unlike the previous incident there is no sense that other individuals were drawn upon. The documented thoughts can be thought of as a cost-benefit analysis, something that Archer suggests is typical of an autonomous reflexive conversation. This retreat from primarily relying on a public space, as in the previous incident to make sense of my emergent thoughts, into a private space was notable and

one that merits a more detailed examination. Despite Bauman's argument that formation of the self in the digital realm is stripped of many risks (Bauman and Raud, 2015), this incident shows the potential risks to a sense of self that bringing these processes into a public space can create. Consequently, this change could be thought of in terms of a personal morphogenesis, the idea that past internal conversations have changed the 'I' of this incident from one that came before. My emerging sense of self and identity as a doctoral researcher, being at a different stage and having a greater number of internal experiences to draw upon, meant that I did not need to communicate these issues externally in order to understand them.

Whilst the deliberations of how to react to this situation were kept internally, the later blog shows that focusing on the problem alone was not enough, there is a clear focus on the self in my deliberations. This move from more technical concerns to deeper concerns based on values and a sense of self are more typical of a meta-reflexive mode. This can be seen through reflections in the blog on my previous choice and rationalizing my choices. This therefore became a public manifestation of an internal meta-reflexive conversation. In this case, by moving this conversation into the public sphere, the intention was not to engage in a dialogue so much as to make my own thoughts visible to potentially help others. It was also in the process of writing the blog that I was completing my meta-reflexive conversations in order to fully make sense of my own experiences. It may be that adopting meta-reflexive modes could be closely intertwined with digital scholarship practices. Costa (2014) found in her research with academics using these forms of scholarship, that they were highly reflective of the purpose of their profession and that they were concerned with wider issues, something which aligns closely with the concerns highlighted by Archer of being typical of meta-reflexives (Archer, 2003). This meta-reflexivity can also be considered in terms of my own values. The value of blogging and its centrality to my own practices for several years, combined with an issue that triggered an internal conversation caused me to move from considerations of the technicalities of what has gone wrong, to a deeper reconsideration of the value of blogging in relation to the potential problems it may cause. As these incidents demonstrate, digital technologies such as blogs and Twitter can both contribute to and make visible various modes of reflexivity. This paper will now address some of the affordances and challenges this creates.

Enabling doctoral reflexivity

Blogging is by no means a universal for doctoral students and as Weller (2011) highlights, where it is interpreted as an activity that does not add to a researcher's reputation in the same way a scholarly article might then it will often be ignored as a core element of practice. This could also be said of Twitter. Through a lens on my own experiences I have shown how the use of these technologies has been central to my own internal conversations and personal morphogenesis. Both my use of Twitter as a

form of micro blogging and more extensive blogs can be seen to have fulfilled multiple purposes. They have acted both as a central part of my reflexivity through enabling the completion of deliberations through a communicative mode of reflexivity. They have also acted as a way of making visible the more hidden parts of academia such as rejection.

The relative role of the two within my own development seems to have moved and changed over time. As Archer has suggested, reflexivity is shaped by issues of context, both structural and cultural. I would therefore argue that through an increasing range of experiences to draw upon and familiarity with the academic environment, my personal concerns and resources have changed. As my own networks have grown, my communicative conversations seem to have shifted from the digital public spaces of Twitter into private conversations via e-mail and in person. Many of these interpersonal connections would however, not have emerged had it not been for my interactions in the digital sphere. By maintaining virtual networks and enhancing them through real world events, it has allowed me to develop more personal academic networks outside of the public space. In light of this, encouraging use of these technologies in the early stages of development for doctoral researchers could be useful in order for them to be able to draw upon others in order to meet their needs for communicative reflexivity. This is something that would need to be carefully managed however, as there are potential challenges that this paper has highlighted and without a detailed understanding of the affordances and limitations of digital technologies, this may not be something that is possible in all institutions.

Moreover, by making visible these internal conversations and dilemmas, Web 2.0 technologies such as Twitter and blogs can help doctoral students identify commonality in their own experiences and therefore reduce feelings of concern when their own experiences are not consistently positive. The ability to do so relies on substantial work in the early stages of engagement on Twitter to build up a suitable network in order to avoid the phenomenon of the echo chamber, where an individual puts their ideas out there but there is no audience which is able to respond. Where these networks are present, moving these experiences into a public space also creates some new challenges. There also needs to be an appreciation that the reverse is possible, with some doctoral researchers feeling as if they are different due to their experiences being unlike those they are reading about. There is, however, always a danger of putting experiences within public spaces, especially when these may remain long after the concerns of the individuals and it is to this issue that the paper will now turn.

Public reflexivity and its challenges

In talking about connected selves, Bauman highlights that on Twitter 'there are no gatekeepers guarding, and most of the time barring to most people, the entry to the

public stage' (Bauman and Raud, 2015, p. 81). Therefore, information is unmediated and thus free of traditional checks and balances placed on scholarship. This is also something that is true of blogs and can have both positive and negative implications. As Stewart (2015) alludes to, this removal of a system of peer review can allow ideas to be discussed at a much earlier stage in their development and the lack of these gatekeepers can both democratise ideas yet also make them more vulnerable. In Writing for Social Scientists, Becker (2008) talks about the challenges of professional risk and the implications of sharing ideas that are not yet fully formed. This risk of self-commodification (Murthy, 2012) becomes risky when the self is still in a state of flux. Peer-review has traditionally acted as a form of safeguard for an academic through the validation that the ideas hold up to not only self-scrutiny but also that they have been validated by the researcher's peers (Massey, 2007). Whilst this can go some way to protecting the fragile self of the emerging researcher, the speed of the publishing process can often delay useful feedback. Being in many cases a double blind process and in many cases limited in the detailed feedback it can offer, blogging and micro-blogging technologies can offer valuable early feedback on emerging ideas, albeit at an increased risk.

As this autoethnography has highlighted though, the question of what can and should be said in public was a real concern for me as an emerging researcher. Traditional practices still continue to shape what is felt to be right and appropriate and in many spheres, caution shapes advice in these areas. Lupton (2014a) talks of this in terms of a double bind due to the potential vulnerability of early career academics over those more established in the field. That being said, the value of Twitter and blogging for making sense of early academic experiences can be invaluable from understanding processes and conventions to reducing feelings of isolation.

Conclusions

Whilst this paper begins to highlight some of the ways reflexivity can be seen to take place within digital spaces such as on Twitter and in blogs, the conclusions that can be drawn are tentative and based on my own experiences. As I previously highlighted, autoethnographic methods are not without critique (e.g. Delamont, 2007). Whilst Delamont's claim that the lives of researchers themselves have limited interest compared to that of wider societal issues, by examining them in the way this paper has done, it can show new possibilities for applying social theory. With the advances in digital technologies this is essential, as pre-digital theories may take on different lives and directions in a world where traditional social relations are becoming increasingly technologically mediated. Until these digital practices become ubiquitous for doctoral researchers, researching them with large samples, especially through in-depth, qualitative methods are not yet viable and methods such as autoethnography may offer earlier insights into the role digital technologies play in their transformation.

This paper has also shown some of the ways that for me, digital technologies have supplemented traditional modes of communication and allowed me to access those modes of reflexivity needed to maintain my own internal conversations in spite of being geographically distant from suitable others. Nevertheless, self-reflection can often lead to an assumption that everyone reflects in the same way and for that reason the aim of this paper is not to show specific links between modes of reflexivity and digital technologies, but to highlight ways in which they have been central to my own internal conversations. In doing so, it has hopefully shed a light onto how digital technologies may have the ability to supplement face to face social interactions in order to allow individuals in geographically remote circumstances to develop networks of others who can be drawn upon where a communicative mode of reflexivity is required. Much of Archer's empirical work that shaped her work on reflexivity predates the ubiquity of Twitter within academia. As a result, there is scope for future research within this area of study to explore how other emerging doctoral researchers either do or do not find uses for digital technologies in similar ways. It is also important to consider the role that training and support for doctoral researchers plays in this, in order to allow them to make informed judgements surrounding their participation based on an understanding of the affordances and potential challenges created by using public forms of digital technology. This could be something that needs to be offered by individual institutions and by learned societies and may be of distinct relevance to all researchers regardless of their career stage.

Furthermore, this paper has explored how using a digital public space as part of an individual's reflexive resources can offer a lens on a previously hidden private world, opening up a point of reference and a dialogue for other researchers to explore how these issues might be capitalised upon to make the processes of research more visible. This is especially important in considering the issues of what can and should be made public and the potential challenges that are created by placing early ideas in a public sphere without the safeguards that peer-review may create for researchers, especially those whose academic practices are still emerging.

Acknowledgements

References

Ali, A., and Kohun, F. (2006). Dealing with isolation feelings in IS doctoral programs. International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 1(1), 21-33. Retrieved from http://proceedings.informingscience.org/InSITE2006/IJDSv1p021-033Ali13.pdf

Archer, M. S. (2003). Structure, agency and the internal conversation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139087315

Archer, M. S. (2007). Making our way through the world. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511618932

Barnacle, R. (2005). Research education ontologies: exploring doctoral becoming. Higher Education Research & Development, 24(2), 179-188. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07294360500062995

Barnacle, R., and Mewburn, I. (2010). Learning networks and the journey of 'becoming doctor'. Studies in Higher Education, 35(4), 433-444. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070903131214

Bauman, Z., and Raud, R. (2015). Practices of selfhood. Cambridge: Polity.

Becker, H. (2008). Writing for social scientists. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Costa, C. (2014). The habitus of digital scholars. Research in Learning Technology, 21: 21274. http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/rlt.v21.21274

Delamont, S. (2007). Arguments against auto-ethnography. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference 2007, Institute of Education, University of London, United Kingdom. http://leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/168227.htm

Donelan, H. (2015). Social media for professional development and networking opportunities in academia. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 1-24. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2015.1014321

Ellis, C., and Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Holman-Jones, S. (2005). Autoethnography: making the personal political. In N. K.

Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kara, H. (2015). Creative research methods in the social sciences. Bristol: Policy Press.

Li, J., and Greenhow, C. (2015). Scholars and social media: tweeting in the conference backchannel for professional learning. Educational Media International, 52(1), 1-14. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2015.1005426

Lupton, D. (2014a). Digital sociology. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lupton, D. (2014b). 'Feeling better connected': Academics' use of social media. Retrieved from http://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/faculties/arts-design/attachments2/pdf/n-and-mrc/Feeling-Better-Connected-report-final.pdf

Massey, D. S. (2007). The strength of weak politics. In D. Claswon, R. Zussman, J. http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520251373.003.0010

Misra, N. Gerstel, R. Stokes, D. L. Anderton, and M. Burawoy (Eds.), Public Sociology

Berkley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Murthy, D. (2012). Towards a Sociological understanding of social media: theorizing Twitter. Sociology, 46(6), 1059-1073.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0038038511422553

Popora, D. V., and Shumar, W. (2010). Self talk and self reflection. In M. S. Archer (Ed.), Conversations about reflexivity. Abingdon: Routledge.

Rainford, J. (2013a). The time has come..., Jon Rainford's Blog, Retrieved from http://jonrainford.wordpress.com/2013/06/09/time-time-has-come/

Rainford, J. (2013b). Re-writing the map: questioning where I was actually going, Jon Rainford's Blog, Retrieved from http://jonrainford.wordpress.com/2013/10/05/re-writing-the-map-questioning-where-i-was-actually-going/

Rainford, J. (2014). Why I've chosen a PhD over the EdD, Jon Rainford's Blog, Retrieved from http://jonrainford.wordpress.com/2014/05/25/why-ive-chosen-a-phd-over-the-edd/

Rainford, J. (2015). SRHE and UALL widening participation seminar 2, Jon Rainford's Blog, Retrieved from http://jonrainford.wordpress.com/2015/02/10/srhe-and-uall-widening-participation-seminar-2/

Rainford, J. (2015b). What's this blog got to do with it?, Jon Rainford's Blog, Retrieved from http://jonrainford.wordpress.com/2015/08/08/whats-this-blog-got-to-do-with-it/

Rainford, J. (2016). Jon Rainford's Blog, Retrieved from http://jonrainford.wordpress.com

Rayner, S., Lord, J., Parr, E., and Sharkey, R. (2015). 'Why has my world become more confusing than it used to be?' Professional doctoral students reflect on the development of their identity. Management in Education, 29(4), 158-163. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0892020614567247

Sauter, T. (2013). 'What's on your mind?' Writing on Facebook as a tool for self-formation. New Media & Society, 16(5), 823-839, http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444813495160

Stewart, B. (2015). Open to influence: what counts as academic influence in scholarly networked Twitter participation. Learning, Media and Technology, 40(3), 287-309, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2015.1015547

Tedlock, B. (2005). The observation of participation and the emergence of public ethnography. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tripp, D. (1993). Critical incidents in teaching. London: Routledge.

Vitae. (2015). Researcher development framework. Retrieved 20 October, 2015 from https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework

Wall, S. (2008). Easier said than done: writing an autoethnography. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 7(1), 38-53. Retrieved from https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/article/view/1621/1144

Weller, M. (2011). The digital scholar. London: Bloomsbury. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849666275