



## **Disorienting Methods: Some Challenges for Transnational Communication Research in Sexuality**

KATHERINE SENDER  
University of Auckland

On a visit to London in 2008, my girlfriend and I had tickets to Amora, an exhibit in London's Leicester Square that was advertised as a "sex academy" where "even the most experienced Lotharios can learn something new." We had hoped to find the experience illuminating, entertaining, and arousing. Instead, we felt distanced from it: The exhibits were puerile ("Press the button to see the lady's erogenous zones light up!"), the address was almost entirely heterosexual, the other visitors moved in other-sex pairs or large same-sex groups. We left disappointed and bemused: How was it that an exhibition with such promise left us feeling so alienated and disappointed? Who was the intended market for this sex academy, and what did they need to learn? Soon after, I read an article in the UK's *Guardian* newspaper about a "Love Park" to open in Chongqing, China. The manager said that he hoped the park "will improve sex education and help adults enjoy a harmonious sex life" (Branigan, 2009). The percentage of Western women who had experienced orgasm was given as a standard to which Chinese visitors should aspire. I was pressed again to consider who the market was for this Love Park, and what they were supposed to learn. To what extent did this institution import a specifically Western construction of sexual pleasure and health to disseminate among its largely Asian visitors?

These two events sparked this transnational study of sex museums and other institutions displaying expressly erotic materials.<sup>1</sup> The aims of both exhibits were apparently similar, yet the Chinese version drew upon Western standards of sexual health and pleasure, suggesting a "West-to-East" transnational flow of discourses about sexuality. As I began exploring European and U.S. sex museums, however, I realized that these places are full of artifacts from China, Japan, and India. In other words, the very norms of American and European sexual health and pleasure being exported were constructed in relation to an Orientalized other.

---

<sup>1</sup> The question of what a sex museum is—or indeed, of what constitutes erotic displays—is a complex one that I explore elsewhere. My deepest thanks go to my collaborators: Valentina Cardo, Andrew Lee, Ji Hoon Park, and Satoshi Tomioka. My gratitude also goes to the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and the Faculty of Arts, University of Auckland, New Zealand, for research funds for this project. Thanks also to Myria Georgiou for helpful feedback on an earlier draft.

This study is based on numerous trips to, and interviews with directors and curators of, more than a dozen sex museums in East Asia, Europe, and the United States. I discuss the transnational flows of sexual artifacts, media, and discourses elsewhere, as well as how sex museums disrupt the norms of engagement in museums.<sup>2</sup> This article addresses the methodological challenges of doing research in transnational sexuality studies from a communication perspective.

In her study of sex museums in the United States and Mexico, Jennifer Tyburczy asks, "How is globalization sexed?" (2009, p. 213). Sex museums are particularly rich sites for research on transnational flows of sexuality.<sup>3</sup> They are evidence of how artifacts travel through networks of collecting. The European museums intimate that sexual commerce has long thrived along trade routes from China and Japan. Sex museums also reflect how people travel as traders, tourists, and military personnel. For example, Japanese interviewees for this project commented that they could only display copies of *shunga* (erotic woodblock prints) because most of the original examples had been bought and exported by GIs when the U.S. military occupation of Japan ended in 1952. Sex museums also demonstrate how sexual discourses travel: The Korean Sex and Health Museum opens with the World Association for Sexual Health's Declaration of Sexual Rights. This project is thus transnational in scope, focusing on the movement of media, discourses, and people between nations and regions; and it is also cross-cultural, comparing sex museums located in these nations and regions.

Much has been written on the challenges of doing cross-cultural sexuality research in the intersections among postcolonial studies, gender and queer studies, performance studies, and anthropology. Major areas of research include kinship and sexual practices in "traditional" societies; sex work and sex tourism; sexuality and migrant labor; transgender identity; HIV and AIDS; and the politics of adopting such Anglo/European identities as gay, lesbian, and queer in non-Western contexts. The reflexive turn in anthropology, social construction models of sexuality, and postcolonial critiques of cross-cultural research have all demanded that researchers be self-aware of the construction of the sexual "other" by Western scholars (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Vance, 1991). Scholars studying Asian communication cultures have prioritized sexuality in understanding tensions between tradition and globalization. For example, Audrey Yue describes the "contradictory backdrop of sexual repression and cultural liberalisation" (2012, p. 1) as fundamental to broader strategies of "illiberal pragmatism" (ibid., p. 2) in Singapore. Others have looked at young people's uses of media and communication technologies in sexual experimentation and intimacy within friendship networks in China (Erni & Fung, 2010). Thus far, however, scholars working in Europe and the United States have all but ignored the role of sexuality in global, transnational, and cross-cultural media studies. Situating sexuality as central to transnational

---

<sup>2</sup> Planned articles include "Lust in Translation: Sex Museums and the Transnational Flows of Erotic Discourse" and "What is a Sex Museum? Bodies of Knowledge in Marginal Institutions."

<sup>3</sup> The rise of institutions publicly displaying sexual artifacts varies around the globe. They have been a fixture since the 1960s and 1970s in countries or cities that have a thriving tourist industry and a tolerant attitude to sexuality, if in circumscribed ways, such as Japan and the Netherlands. More recently, sex museums have been established in other Asian and European tourist sites, as well as the United States, Russia, and Iceland, reflecting a confluence of global mobilities of tourists, savvy local entrepreneurs, and more tolerant zoning laws.

cultural flows deepens existing communication perspectives on global processes. At the same time, communication's nuanced approaches to technologies of globalization, risks of cultural imperialism, transnational consumption of media, and hybridity in reception practices can enhance existing sexuality studies.

The comparative study of sexuality, however, comes with a troubled history not necessarily shared by other areas of communication research. Frantz Fanon (1967 [1952]) and Edward Said (1978) have offered pivotal critiques of the central place of sexuality in African colonialism and Orientalist configurations of "the East," respectively. They alert us to the central fantasy that sexuality is the "heart of darkness"—in Conrad's memorable phrase—of non-Western cultures: variously primitive, inscrutable, and exotic. Gender is pivotal in these fantasies about sexuality: "Women frequently figure centrally in such national imaginaries—whether in terms of traditions to be preserved and protected, modern rights and freedoms to be promoted, or anxieties about cultural or ethnic boundaries" (Jackson, Jieyu, & Juhyun, 2008, p. 5). Scholarly research has often justified these colonial fantasies and the corresponding calls for "progress." In the design and implementation of this sex museum research, I have been reflexive about how fraught comparative research in sexuality can be. In the sections that follow, I briefly outline my project and then extrapolate from Sonia Livingstone's (2003) useful summary of the challenges of doing cross-cultural work in communication to consider cross-cultural sexuality research. I discuss working with local collaborators as one approach to displacing such orientalisms, albeit an imperfect one. I then consider a reflexive approach to the presentation and responses of my own body as a useful complement to other forms of methodological reflexivity. How could my feelings of arousal, alienation, or shame, for example, inform this study of sex museums across cultures?

### **The Sex Museums Project**

This study combines site visits to 14 sex museums and eight interviews with museum personnel in East Asia, Europe, and the United States.<sup>4</sup> I have yet to visit and interview at one museum in China and two more in the United States. I have worked with a number of collaborators throughout the project: my partner, Valentina Cardo, who took photographs in most of the sites, as well as associates who knew the local cultures well in Japan (Satoshi Tomioka) and Korea (Ji Hoon Park and Andrew Lee). These East Asia collaborators helped me to set up interviews and accompanied me on visits to the museums, and they continue to offer insight into the contexts of the museums. The decision to work with local collaborators and some of the implications of this are discussed in the following section.

---

<sup>4</sup> I have visited the Seishin-no Yakata (Nikko), Kinugawa Hihoden, Atami Hihokan, and Kanayama Shrine in Japan; Love Land and Sex and Health Museum in Jeju Island, Korea; Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli's Gabinetto Segreto (Secret Cabinet) in Naples, Italy; the Amsterdam Sex Museum and Amsterdam Erotic Museum in the Netherlands; the Museo de l'Erotica in Barcelona, Spain; the Amora exhibit in London, UK; the New York Museum of Sex, the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University, and the Erotic Heritage Museum, Las Vegas, in the United States. I have conducted interviews at all of the East Asian museums, and at the Kinsey Institute and the Erotic Heritage museum in the United States.

### **The Impossibility and Necessity of Studying Sexuality Across Cultures**

*"In the social sciences, cross-national comparisons are both attacked as impossible and defended as necessary"* (Livingstone, 2003, p. 478).

To critique histories of Orientalism in the context of the rapid expansion and transmission of global media, some of which is sex related, it is necessary to study sexuality across cultures from a communication perspective. What are such an undertaking's "impossibilities"? Or, at least, what are the primary challenges that media scholars working in Anglophone and European institutions need to take into account when designing and conducting cross-cultural sexuality work? In what ways must comparative sexuality scholars be attentive to the "imagined geographies" (Said, 1978), that structure "West-East" relations?

In her overview of conducting cross-national media research, Sonia Livingstone summarizes the tensions facing researchers:

A common complaint from critical scholars is that crossnational research produces "measurement out of context," it asserts methodological and/or theoretical universalism at the cost of recognizing cultural specificity; they argue further that in practice comparative research often results in viewing "other" nations through a western lens. On the other hand, if research methods and findings are so thoroughly contextualized that the meaning of any term or measure is understood only within its unique context, there can be no criteria by which to make comparisons in the first place. (2003, p. 482)

Livingstone identifies the temptation in cross-cultural research toward methodological and theoretical universalisms: In the present study, for example, one such universalism might be the assumption that sexuality is experienced and can be studied in the same ways across disparate regions. In their introduction to an anthology on East Asian sexuality, Jackson and her colleagues discuss the challenges of finding a shared language of sexuality across regional and discursive contexts: "The concepts of gender and sexuality are modern, Western constructs—and, in the case of gender, specifically Anglophone in origin" (2008 p. 2). They caution against assuming a uniform adoption of values such as modernism, individualism, and neoliberalism throughout Asia. Lisa Rofel (2007) also notes tensions between traditional and official emphases on "harmony" and desire (in terms both of sexuality and consumption) among young people in China.

The local negotiations of transnational flows of sexual discourses were apparent during our visit to the Sex and Health Museum in Korea. Near the entrance was a large poster in Korean and English detailing the World Association for Sexual Health's Declaration of Sexual Rights, developed at an international sexology conference in Hong Kong in 1999 and drawing upon a UN-style language of human rights. This poster advocated sexual autonomy and choice, and other posters were sympathetic to people who are "not heterosexual." I was surprised to find any explicit acknowledgment of, let alone support for, gay-identified people in a Korean museum, because my reading and research collaborators had all discussed pressures against open acknowledgment of same-sex desire or relationships in Korea. When I

mentioned this to the museum's founder, he became visibly uncomfortable, saying, "I'm not the professional on sexology. I'm a businessman. I have another company [whose] staff make [the decisions about this content], some specialists." The founder's passion was collecting the exquisite artifacts displayed in the last section of the museum. He may have merely tolerated the content on sexual orientation while not being entirely comfortable with it; he may have approved of it, but was anxious about being seen to do so. However "universal" the language of human sexual rights may become, this instance suggests that there is an uneven adoption of it, even among proponents of a Western-style sexual liberalism.

Livingstone's third caution to researchers who are doing cross-cultural research concerns imposing a Western lens on media and its reception in non-Western countries. I became aware of a number of dimensions of this as I designed the sex museums project. One is assuming that "the West" is diverse in its sexual manifestations, whereas "the East" is a relatively homogeneous region. Both Korea and Japan share a history of Confucian ethics that emphasize the family over individual identity and sexual expression (Jackson et al., 2008). However, how Confucianism came to shape the sexual lives of everyday people in each country is quite distinct. Japan's Confucian ethic was tempered by Shintoism, a life-philosophy that celebrates fertility and sexuality. In Korea, by contrast, Confucianism became the dominant ethical system, and its principles remain central to Korean cultural and family life. Since the 19<sup>TH</sup> century, the rise of Christianity further marginalized sexual matters in Korea. The Korean interviewees repeated their commitment to "unveil" an otherwise suppressed Korean sexuality. No one in Japan mentioned this objective; some interviewees instead described their museum's mission as preserving the history of sexual openness of the Shinto tradition.

Another refraction of the Western lens is the tendency to overemphasize the perceived differences between West and East. I had assumed that interviewing museum personnel in East Asia would be awkward and embarrassing, and that people in Europe and the United States would be relaxed about frank sexual talk. On most points, however, Korean and Japanese interviewees seemed delighted to talk about the museums' content and sexuality more generally. Yet I received the following response to my inquiry posed to an interpreting agency for their services at an interview at the Paris Musée de l'Érotisme: "Thanks for your email but I am afraid that we won't be able to proceed further with this request due to company policy and nature of the discussions." When I asked what the company policy was, I received no response, suggesting that "company policy" was a convenient brush-off for a job they did not want to touch. Such encounters disrupt a simplistic opposition between a uniform and sexually repressive Confucian East and a liberated, progressive West.

A further refraction of the Western lens that transnational research on sex museums challenges is the binary logic of Orientalism that locks the West and the East in an exclusive relationship. In my visits to museums in Japan and Korea, I expected to find artifacts and media imported from Europe and North America as a standard of sexual liberation.<sup>5</sup> In general, however, materials from the West were not very common, partly because censorship laws in both countries prohibit the display of explicit sexual imagery.

---

<sup>5</sup> Tyburczy, for example, found that the United States was the primary referent for Mexico City's El Museo del Sexo, albeit rendered through local characters and customs.

"Western sexiness" was often singlehandedly embodied by a lifesize model of Marilyn Monroe, a fixture in many of the Asian museums we visited. Instead of looking Westward, Korean and Japanese museums drew upon their own imagined geographies to construct a sexual other, featuring artifacts from elsewhere in Asia and the global South. These displays contradicted the assumption embedded in the East-West binarism that Europe and the United States would be the referents for modern Asian sexuality.

Because of the central place of sexuality in Western constructions of "the East," researchers must be attentive to context, specificity, and the Western lens in cross-cultural studies of sexuality. At the same time, we must avoid becoming so attentive to the specifics of context that we become unable to address broader, macro-level processes. The following section considers how communication scholars' approaches to these challenges assist in forming a locally nuanced approach to transnational flows of sexual artifacts.

### **Displacing Orientalism, Disorienting Oneself**

What would it mean to disorient oneself in the course of conducting transnational research, and to displace "the East" in comparative research in sexuality? Communication and media scholars have identified various strategies to counter ethnocentrism in their cross-cultural work: collaboration, methodological cosmopolitanism, and working between macro and micro levels of analysis. Anthropologists have also considered the role of the body and sexuality in field work.

I realized early in the sex museum project that I needed to work collaboratively with people in Japan, Korea, and China who knew the local cultures well. Collaboration, however, can describe a variety of modes of interaction, and it comes with its own challenges. My collaborative relationships for this project originate in very different types of existing relationships: Cardo is my partner and a political communication scholar; Park is a former PhD student and communication scholar; Lee is Park's graduate student (whom I did not know before our research trip); and Tomioka is an old friend and linguistics professor. When I approached these collaborators, I outlined my preliminary ideas for the research project, and we discussed possible levels of investment. These ranged from helping me to set up field visits and interviews, travelling with me to these visits, and subsequent assistance with translation and matters of interpretation, on one hand, to taking a more significant role in shaping and writing up the project, on the other. For reasons that included other work commitments and being outside the field of communication, these collaborators declined to participate in developing or writing up the project, but they were willing to assist in its organization and some of the interpretive stages.

The different collaborative relationships that support this project suggest a range of possible modes of research engagement across sites, with varying degrees of commitment and indebtedness. Livingstone notes features of collaborative relationships that researchers must be attentive to:

[Collaborators may have] difficulties with writing (including the crucial question of working in a foreign language and the inequalities introduced by the common resort to English as the lingua franca); they face inequities in funding, institutional support or ease of data collection; and they experience anxieties over the issues of data ownership and intellectual property that arise in collaboration. (2003, p. 482)

Each of my collaborators has spent considerable time living in the United States or the UK, and thus, each is fluent in English and familiar with American and European cultural attitudes about sexuality. But this shared language and cultural experience does not resolve a fundamental lack of fit between the understandings of sexuality in Korea, Japan, and the United States, and attempting to translate across locales inevitably changes the frame of these understandings.

Although these collaborators have declined a role in writing up the project, the question of voice nonetheless remains important. There are ethical implications of working with collaborators who facilitate the collection of data and some of its interpretation, but have little input into the final analysis. Each collaborator has read and given feedback on this article, but the final product remains my responsibility. Collaboration may offset the danger of "speaking for the other," or it may, from a more cynical viewpoint, merely exploit local participants' labor to produce an outcome that is still profoundly Western in orientation. By including collaborators' feedback on this article and others from this study, I hope not only to reduce the risk of exploitation, but also to enrich the project overall.

A related concern has to do with vectors of indebtedness inherent in collaborative relationships, which may include my sense of indebtedness toward collaborators for giving their time, labor, and expertise; financial indebtedness in either direction; the giving of gifts; and so on. I was able to secure travel funds for Park and Tomioka to join me at the museums in Korea and Japan, respectively, as part of my research grant. I did not pay them for the time spent organizing and accompanying me on field visits. Cardo and I shared the costs of her travel on research trips. I was not able to pay for Lee's visit to the Korean sex museums, but his department funded this. Scholarly activity involves both labor and rewards, many of which are not directly or obviously financial. Our institutions survive, however, on unpaid labor for which we get other kinds of credit: publications, reputation, annual reviews, and so on. It was not clear to me what my collaborators would gain from this research, so as I was drafting this paper, I emailed each of them to ask about how different forms of indebtedness shape these relationships. As a former student, Park wrote that he felt he should help out "because it is my teacher's project." Both Park and Tomioka also thought the project itself was interesting. Lee responded that he felt honored to be working with a senior academic whose work he already admired, and that he learned from seeing me conduct in-depth interviews. At the time I approached Park, I was still working at the University of Pennsylvania, where Lee was applying to the PhD program, and Park thought it might be helpful for him to be able to ask about the application process. Tomioka and I shared the view that his assistance was part of a long history of exchange fundamental to our friendship. He also wrote that the experience did, in fact, complement one of his courses in linguistics: "In my Language Use class we discuss how we approach linguistically taboo topics, including sexual issues." Cardo accompanied me because she was invested in the research, not only for personal reasons (wanting the research to be successful), but also for "a scholarly sense of community," believing that "cooperation makes for better scholarship." Cross-cultural collaboration does not relieve a project of its troubling distributions of power—authorial, financial, institutional, and so on; rather, these distributions can form the basis of a discussion that contextualizes each member's position, both in the field and in our respective institutions.

A second strategy to reframe Orientalizing tendencies is to adopt what Myria Georgiou (2012), drawing from Beck and Sznajder (2006), calls "methodological cosmopolitanism." Based on her

experiences with diasporic audiences across the European Union, Georgiou observes that cross-cultural research tends to reify nation states, while underplaying the importance of transnational movements and their local effects. Instead, she advocates a more cosmopolitan approach to media and their engagements:

[one that] recognises spatial relations, and similarities and differences across and within place. It also acknowledges migration and transnationalism not as marginal but as core elements of current social realities. Any research across nations (especially when focusing on human subjects and behaviours) needs to take into account human mobility and its consequences both in its design and its analysis. Finally, it recognises the point of tension between researcher's analytical approach to cosmopolitanism and subjects' experience in place and within social and political systems. (2012, p. 378)

On one hand, I am interested in how the museums produce local, idiosyncratic versions of a national ideal of sexual desire, performance, health, and so on; on the other, I am interested in how this national ideal is produced within a cosmopolitan context in which participants draw upon increasingly mobile flows of bodies and materials. This means addressing sex museums as nation-building institutions without reifying nations or regions in the process, being attentive to local specifics while also recognizing how these specifics are worked through transnational mobilities. I have become increasingly interested in the migratory biographies of the museums, including those of directors who travel widely to procure artifacts to display in their museums; of the language of international human rights; and of visitors who represent changing patterns of tourism. Methodological cosmopolitanism has also meant finding the commonalities across, rather than overemphasizing the differences between, countries: The UK, Japan, and Korea have very different approaches to sexuality, for example, but exhibits in some of their museums draw on similar values of education, entertainment, and commerce.

A cosmopolitan approach to decentering the nation-state poses the problem, however, of how to remain engaged with macro processes (movements of people, materials, and discourses) while also being attentive to their local manifestations. Murphy and Kraidy, for example, discuss the problem of thinking about global phenomenon at a local level, including the relationship between "meta-theoretical narratives of development and imperialism" (2003, p. 304) on one hand, and empirical work on the other. They argue that paying ethnographic attention to local processes does not obviate the need to consider global processes, but is the route through which one might understand how these processes are experienced at a local level. Many of the museums situated themselves within a global context by organizing exhibits of imported objects or regional sexual stereotypes. In Korea's Love Land, for example, there was a garden devoted to sculptures of trysting heterosexual couples dressed in traditional garb from various countries: "American Love" was connoted by a man in a colonial-era wig and coat; "Japanese Love" by a man with traditionally long hair pulled into a bun. This exhibit demonstrates how some of these museums manifest macro processes of geographical mobility, drawing on the virtues of cosmopolitanism—however anachronistically—to construct a local fantasy of sexuality.

A further tool available to scholars of cross-cultural research in sexuality is a reflexive consideration of the researcher's body in the processes of gathering and analyzing data. Since the crisis in



anthropology posed by the publication of Malinowski's diaries (1967), in which he records his sexual relations in the field, anthropology has become increasingly reflexive about the "problem" of sex (Newton, 1993). In his introduction to an anthology that considers the erotic dimensions of fieldwork (Kulick & Wilson, 1995), Don Kulick argues that sexual interactions do not mitigate the fact that anthropological field relations are "almost inevitably highly unequal and colonial" (ibid., p. 22). However, "sexuality seems to have the potential of bringing into theoretical and political focus exactly those asymmetrically ordered conditions" (ibid.). I have found very little in communication and media studies that considers the role of the researcher's body or sexuality in the research process. One exception is Antonio La Pastina's (2006) moving account of passing as a married heterosexual man while doing research on the reception of telenovelas in rural Brazil, where coming out as gay may have jeopardized his access to particular groups in his research community.

In contrast to La Pastina and Kulick, my field visits were fleeting and involved relatively little interaction with local people. The opportunities for interpersonal erotics were low, yet the materials I have been looking at are expressly sexual, shifting desire in this field from the more anthropological concern with field relations to a consideration of my own responses—bodily, emotionally—in the sex museums. As Kulick warns, to consider my erotic experiences of sex museums does not guarantee a reflexive engagement with these experiences; sexuality may fuel the most unreconstructed Orientalist and colonialist fantasies. I have been troubled by and curious about my body and my responses in the sex museums project in a number of ways. The first concerns how my body, gender, and sexuality might be read by the people I have interviewed. Of the two interviews conducted thus far in the United States, both have been with women who articulated a feminist politics and queer sensibility that I share. The six interviews I have done so far in Korea were all with men, singly or in pairs, whose sexual identifications were not obvious to me. I wondered how they made sense of me, a white, Anglo woman in a high-status professional position, as I asked frank questions about the sexual materials in the museums. When I asked these collaborators whether they felt my race, gender, and sexuality might have made a difference to the interview dynamic, Lee commented that he was less aware of gender than of what he considered to be interviewees' investment in Korean positive self-representation. Park responded that it might have been seen as more unusual if a Korean female researcher had asked questions about sex, whereas "average Koreans believe that all white people are quite liberal about sexuality." Collaborators thought my sexual identification and relationship with Cardo were not necessarily legible to our interviewees in Korea and Japan. These comments suggest that the researcher's body can be read as a complex signifier in which gender is not necessarily the most significant factor, but is imbricated with race, nationality, and professional status in interviewees' performance of national pride and openness on sexual matters.

The second way in which my body provided useful data was in terms of my responses to the museums: their locales, participants, and exhibits. After a few visits, both Cardo and I began to experience a vague sense of dread when approaching the museums in Europe. We considered the locales of the museums as often on the border between tourist and sex industry districts, locales not considered especially safe or welcoming for outsider women. It also made a difference to me whether I visited these sites accompanied. When I arrived early to the Museum of Sex in New York, I stood outside surrounded by groups and couples, feeling somewhat abashed about being there alone. I felt the shame of sex and the single person—the voyeur, the masturbator—outside Rubin's (1992) charmed circle of coupled sex.

I was surprised that my erotic feelings at the museums were never especially demanding and diminished rapidly as the project progressed. This was not necessarily the case for my collaborators; one commented a couple of times during one site visit that he found some exhibits very arousing. I was taken aback that he told me, in part because of the transgression of a "respectable" research demeanor that this entailed. Yet far from being troubled by the erotic demands of my particular field, I am perhaps more troubled by my lack of sexual feeling about it. As Tyburczy (2009) also found in her study of sex museums, the enjoyable permission for non-museum-type interaction offered in these spaces was offset for me by the tedium of routinized heterosexuality and sexism in many of their exhibits. Cardo and I sometimes felt uncomfortable around other visitors in the museum: groups of young men enjoying the permission to touch the exhibits and each other, to laugh and shout; apparently heterosexual couples fondling and snuggling. Their freedom to transgress the norms of museums felt oppressive to me. I also experienced a tension between an objective detachment habitual in data gathering (observation, note-taking), and the pleasures of the museums (peeking, touching, surprise). Many of the museums encourage participation, but of a different kind from the participant observation we are used to thinking about in field work.

It cannot be said that I felt "at home" in museums in Europe and the United States, and "a stranger" in their Asian counterparts; my lack of desire reflected my sense of strangeness across all the sites. Not especially welcome as a woman visiting unfamiliar neighborhoods, alienated by the lack of interpellation of my own identifications and desires within the museums, other to the majority of visitors there, and distanced by the research enterprise, my overall response to the visits was as someone marginal, an outsider. This is not to say that I was an outsider in the same way across all of the sites, but that the predominant feeling prompted by the visits was not desire and pleasure, but alienation, discomfort, and sometimes shame. These emotions offer useful data to consider the operations of sexuality in these museums, and they also suggest an important counterpoint to contemporary anthropological reflections on field erotics, in which attraction, not antipathy, poses the more significant dilemma.

What can this methodological investigation of the study of sex museums bring to the growing field of sexuality studies in communication? For one thing, it offers an opportunity to draw from communication and media studies' sophisticated approaches to cross-cultural and transnational research, while, at the same time, foregrounding the terrain of sexual culture and meaning-making. In doing so, it extends a body of work that considers how to study the increasingly global transmission of media and materials into an important, yet relatively under-studied, area. It addresses, for example, the benefits and challenges of collaboration, the need to displace the nation as the preeminent unit of analysis, and the value of negotiating between the currents of globalization and their local iterations. My study brings these together with contributions from neighboring fields—anthropology, gender and sexuality studies, and postcolonial studies—that have developed robust frameworks for understanding the importance of sexuality in global processes and nation formation. These perspectives also demand a reflexive approach to methods and their ethical implications in sexuality research. Together, these approaches offer a robust set of tools to attend to the importance of sexuality (in media, among audiences, in economies, and so on) in a world where mobility and transnationalism are not marginal, but are "core elements of current social realities" (Georgiou, 2012, p. 378).

### References

- Beck, U., & Sznaider, N. (2006). Unpacking cosmopolitanism for the social sciences: A research agenda. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 57(1), 1–23.
- Branigan, T. (2009, May 16). China tackles taboo with first sex theme park. *The Guardian*.
- Erni, J. N., & Fung, A. (2010). Clever love: Dislocated intimacies among youth. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 3, 21–27.
- Fanon, F. (1967 [1952]). *Black skin, white mask* (C. L. Markmann, Trans.). New York, NY: Grove.
- Georgiou, M. (2012). Media, diaspora and the transnational context: Cosmopolitanizing cross-national comparative research? In I. Volkmer (Ed.), *The handbook of global media research* (pp. 365–380). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Grewal, I., & Kaplan, C. (2001). Global identities: Theorizing transnational studies of sexuality. *GLQ*, 7(4), 663–679.
- Jackson, S., Jieyu, L., & Juhyun, W. (2008). Reflections on gender, modernity and East Asian sexualities. In S. Jackson, L. Jieyu, & W. Juhyun (Eds.), *East Asian sexualities: Modernity, gender and new sexual cultures* (pp. 1–32). London, UK: Zed Books.
- Kulick, D., & Wilson, M. (Eds.). (1995). *Taboo: Sex, identity, and erotic subjectivity in anthropological fieldwork*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- La Pastina, A. C. (2006). The implications of an ethnographer's sexuality. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(4), 724–735.
- Livingstone, S. (2003). On the challenges of cross-national comparative media research. *European Journal of Communication*, 18(4), 477–500.
- Malinowski, B. (1967). *A diary in the strict sense of the term*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Murphy, P. D., & Kraidy, M. (2003). International communication, ethnography, and the challenge of globalization. *Communication Theory*, 13(3), 304–323.
- Newton, E. (1993). My best informant's dress: The erotic equation in fieldwork. *Cultural Anthropology*, 8(1), 3–23.
- Rofel, L. (2007). *Desiring China: Experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Rubin, G. (1992). Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In C. S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality* (pp. 267–293). London, UK: Pandora.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Vintage.

- Tyburczy, J. (2009). *Exhibiting sexualities: Pleasure, power, and performance in museums*. [Doctoral dissertation]. Chicago, IL: Northwestern University.
- Vance, C. (1991). Anthropology rediscovers sexuality: A theoretical comment. *Social Science and Medicine*, 33(8), 875–884.
- Yue, A. (2012). Queer Singapore: A critical introduction. In A. Yue & J. Zubillaga-Pow (Eds.), *Queer Singapore: Illiberal citizenship and mediated cultures* (pp. 1–25). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.