

Anna Hartman transcript

I: Anna can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your work experience as a research student, topic, context, and so on.

A: So I guess originally it started with the first class... in my class in advanced marketing management we had to do an assignment on a research topic and we happened to find a special issue that if you wanted to respond to it we did it, so I did a content analysis of a bunch of websites that are advertising to women or couples on cross-border reproductive care, and so this started looking at how ethical are they doing their marketing communications. And through that experience I realized that there is this whole market out there for commercial egg donation, and that's what prompted me to start my, guess more of my major research on looking at that as the market and also on a more micro level on consumer experiences. So the last project I did was looking at the lived experience of commercial donors; I interviewed 10 women who had done their transactions, if you want to call it that, in the US —they weren't necessarily American but they were in the US because that's in a commercial market. And so had to find them first which was challenging and doing all my interviews online whether over Skype or Facetime etc. and then find additional data through online self-published stories. And so that was a qualitative project, so interviews on my research and pretty much at this moment. But I am going to extend it and start interviewing women in New Zealand and Australia who have also done egg donation to see if there are any differences in a non-commercial transaction.

I: You've just graduated from your masters.

A: Yes. Thanks for being there. Yes. My second masters

I: So this research talking about formed the basis.

A: So this is part of the minor thesis in the first year of the doctoral program which is the masters of commerce and marketing. So if you hadn't done research prior you needed to do a research component.

I: Okay. All right.

I2: What got you interested in the structure in the subject?

A: Well. I mean if you go back to when I was like five years old I wanted to be a baby doctor apparently, and then later on in my undergraduate studies I did health science and clinical nutrition and wanted to specialize in reproductive health; and that I went into marketing. And worked in wine and food for many years and then when I was thinking about doing a doctoral program, someone gave me some good advice which they choose a topic that's going to sustain your interest for a long, long time and that will still exist you know in four or five six seven years when you're still working on it. And so I thought, oh you know I've done all this work and food and wine and that's all interesting, but what is really, really important. And so I started looking at just the IVF market at that point and that was my part of my proposal to come into the programs just to study the market, or aspects of it, and how women how we have to actually now pay to have children at a certain level we don't have to but you know how... Well there's it's a big question. Infertility is going up; infertility in women over 35 is the major market who use these services. When you look at why women are having children later that brings up a whole range of sociological aspects of what's going on with our lives and career choices and postponing having children later, and then all the consequences that occur with that and then how we have to now engage in a market transaction to fulfil our other desires. And when I had done that original project on...how these clinics were advertising to women, it became very apparent that there is a lot of vulnerability in this group of women and also that the ethical guidelines weren't being met on how they're supposed to be communicating. I mean I was seeing advertisements for 54-year-olds, as in, we've got specials for 54-year-olds come on, you know, we've got eggs, and as I started looking into it I was just imagining potential ethical things, like I was thinking there's all these Romanian teenagers in a

basement somewhere in Spain providing eggs because I had heard that when you buy eggs in Spain they don't even tell you the age of the women. And I guess just on a global level there's a lot of issues with cross-border reproductive care but also just third-party reproduction and the fact that there isn't any regulation in the United States. was also a big beacon of 'let's look into this', ; a lot of egg donors were asking for more research to be done, because there's basically little to none on long-term side effects of their experiences. And they really the producers in the supply chain, and the proper consumer would be the recipient who is buying the service to have children but donors who go in this transaction to then relinquish ownership of their eggs or possession of their eggs to create someone else's child, I think is quite fascinating and has, I guess, I think it's important to look into it because it's growing.

I: and thinking about my thesis...

A: Yes.

I: What was the overarching research question that you were trying to answer?

A: Well because it was qualitative and more of an inductive study, we just did a general 'what are the lived experience of some commercial egg donors', and then had a subset of questions like 'How do these women interpret their experience.', how do they make sense of actually going through this transaction to, I don't want to say sell but 'donate' is in quotes, but they are actually receiving an income from this, to make a child for someone else. How do they make sense of that experience, is something to understand and what are the long-term consequences or unintended consequences. So those are some of the sub-questions but overall what is the lived experience, because we didn't know what we were going to find, and I guess wanted to start with a very broad question do the interviews and then see what the story told us.

I: So really the research question came out of that the topic was kept very broad works inductively.

A: Absolutely.

I2: So in terms of how are you read the literature. How did you link that research question to what had already been done in terms of research particularly in the marketing area.

A: I mean I spent a lot of time reading about the context, and the call for more research to be done, so that was the kind of impetus, but first it was looking at vulnerability, and that was more on the consumer end of things. Then there was a little more research more honest sociological overlooking it Ulrich Beck's unintended consequences, second modernity, and understanding how technology can have unintended consequences in the modern life. And so started with that as the premise of what you could potentially ask questions about, what we might be able to find. But at a certain point I just left the literature alone until after the fact. So it was after I've done my first couple, I guess, analyses, then started to come up with some themes and through those started going back to the marketing literature, and to the broader literature, because it was supposed to be kind of more of a Foucault area of the medical gaze and how looking at that in marketing comes down to how do we...let me rephrase this differently. The themes that came out first was dehumanization, was the big thing.

Women are self-objectifying themselves to go through the transaction. They are also dehumanizing the egg, so they don't see the egg as a human being, and then they also experience dehumanization through the service process, through the medical system. So I started looking at what kind of areas dehumanization has been discussed in marketing and that's when we come across looking at people in prisons or in previous concentration camps. So quite serious areas that have quite an impact on people but those were in a different type of setting, this is not... those were not settings where a person had put themselves there on purpose. So that was a little bit different and just looking at the objectification literature itself objectification which there is quite a bit on in marketing when you think about marketing and magazines and products like make up for the history of women being objectified either physically or sexually. So there's lots of information about that. But we did find positive experiences with these women. So. That was the interesting contribution was how self-objectification can actually empower some women or offer agency, while at the same time experiencing the market objectification, and a decrease in agency.

I2: And in terms of your engagement with the literature, did your work out with your supervisors? Did you talk about which literature you were going to look at or what the fact that you were going to not look at that letter just too soon?

A: Yeah well in the beginning through the proposal it was just more about more sociological literature, but when dehumanization came out, in the first original themes came out, going back to my one of my supervisors she said, Okay now look in all the consumer literature about where dehumanization has been written about. And my second supervisor is in the School of Global. Public health or public...Population so I don't know the name of the school. And that was more on a sociological level. So we talked about whether Foucault would fit or whether this would be an assemblage theory piece, because it could fit in both. So figuring out how to get more specific and how to really define the various terms, was a bit of a challenge but that was my experience.

I2: And what kind of things did you read? Books, articles? How did you search for literature?

A: So searching happened online through the university library and as well as using Google scholar. So Google Scholar would probably pick up the journals the best way and then the university library helped with the book. So I started reading books on feminist methodologies and research through the university library, and actually physically going to the library just with one call number going up to that lovely isle, the smell of old books, and just hanging out in that section and finding some other books that fit which is probably an experience that some people don't get to have very much these days. So that's what started that area, and...yeah online mostly though.

I: And what led you to choose the method you chose.

A: As in the qualitative method? Well...Back in Bill Harley's class. I guess when learning about the various epistemologies and methodologies, this inductive way of discovering knowledge resonated with me the most, and especially when I really want to talk to human beings to understand their experiences, that fits it fits it very well. That doesn't mean I wouldn't want to try maybe another method later on, looking at more of a macro—maybe surveys or something like that for some quick answers. But when I first started doing the research of what had already been done on this particular context, most of that research was in medical. Some in sociology and anthropology, but most medical, and those were all surveys, questionnaires and so they didn't really have that deep information which doing two-hour interviews with these women provided in my opinion.] So it just fit together.

I2: So just to recap how many interviews did you do?

A: So I did 10 initially; I had about 20 women respond to my call for participants, but after going through their answers to my first questions, my expression of interest form, I had to find women who were...The parameters that we created were that they had only donated...that they had donated in a commercial environment, so had received compensation, that they had donated to a complete stranger, and that they had donated at least 12 months ago, not any sooner and up to 20 years ago. So it was pretty broad...but the commercial setting and to a stranger was the most important part.

I2: How did you put out a call to participate?

A: So the first thing I did was create a Facebook page for the study. Then I created an expression of interest form on Google forums. I used that link to put on the Facebook page, created some flyers, then I created a Facebook advertisement which then targeted potential women within Facebook, so I was looking at people who had gone to various universities because we know that the women who go to prestigious universities are targeted through advertising for a donation, historically so targeting women who have done university degrees, targeting particular cities, targeting particular interests. It's a variety of you know... you're testing to see which one's going to have a response and you can do advertising to a particular group and see how they respond and

click through to back to your Facebook page, and then they would click on through to the Google form and put their interests in, answer a couple questions, and then that would get emailed to me. So that's the first part of me just going out into the wide world trying to find these people. The second part was emailing egg donation agencies and clinics who provide these services and requesting for them to forward my call for participants onto their database for anyone who might be interested and so that was that was good. I actually got probably half my participants that way. So some agencies are really supportive because they want more research for this field. So that was the two main things and then I think that the other part was finding Facebook forums that were specific egg donation, some were egg donation surrogacy topics. These were private groups I would request from the administrator to become a member and or request them to share my participants. Most of the time they were happy just to add me as a member, and I can post myself.

I2: Did you explain you were doing...

A: Absolutely, yes. So just with all the forums, all the work that I had created through the ethics application, so all my communication materials were all approved through ethics, and then I could contact, whether it was organisations, agencies, contact people directly. Find a conversation online and just supply them with the approved communication material so that they could respond back to that google forum or to email me directly.

I2: So this is obviously quite a sensitive topic that you were researching. Were there particular ethical issues that you thought about in this?

A: I was advised to not go through the ethics committee of the business school, because people thought that it would not get approved very easily because this was not a minor—what to call it, minor, minor risk...

I: Low risk application...

A: However, it is not unusual to talk to people about their personal experiences and especially if they have had a medical experience. And this wasn't a disease situation, this was a, I've been advertised to do something that I can make some money off of and help somebody. So it should be...it was part of our original positive experience. So we went through the school of health for my second supervisor was and we thought that it wouldn't be an issue because they interviewing cancer patients all the time but that became a concern for them. They were concerned about the sensitive nature of what could be discussed. So I did have to add it and resubmit my ethics application twice to just include more information and they were also uncomfortable or unfamiliar with...whether it's a student or staff member doing research with a group of...with a sensitive topic that that's not in Australia, that's not here, that they're not meeting me here physically and that I can just provide them with the Australian numbers for Mental Health Services, stuff like that. So I did more some more research on where the numbers are in the US, what phone numbers, what exist, what support services exist and it's a little bit more, dispersed, complicated in the US because everything can be state-run as well, not like a national number like they have here. So after redoing the ethics application a couple times, and then they also requested that I get a supervisor who had a psychological background, psych background. So luckily a member in our marketing department has that and he was happy to just be a third supervisor. But you know, my supervisors were never concerned, and had been used to interviewing groups of people with sensitive topics, and I felt very comfortable with that. I have a small background in health and have had patients before. So that was not an issue for me but for the Ethics Committee, they did their due diligence on making sure that we provide all resources in case any issues come up, and to provide a response back to the Ethics Committee what I would actually do and how it would help people or direct them to support services. But I think I submitted that November and didn't get it approved until late March. So it took a long time, when the thesis was due in June.

I: And so Anna, you said you started out shooting for 20 interviews right?

A: Yeah 20 interviews would have been great.

I: And you ended up with 10. How did you decide 10 was enough?

A: It was enough for the minor thesis. There is some research saying that 10 can be enough for interviews, and that's what we used to justify that point, and for a minor thesis that was enough for the one-on-one interviews. We also used 11 personal stories of websites—these were other donors who had written in and self-published their personal stories. So we have about 10, yeah...we have 10 one-on-one interviews and 11 stories.

I: Okay. And you said the interview the one on one interviews were about two hours.

A: Yes.

I: So you still had a pretty big chunk of data particularly if you had the personal stories to it. What was the process went through to analyse the data and draw conclusions.

A: So I used a program called Deduce, which is probably just like Nvivo. I first get all the interviews transcribed. Then the transcriptions were in a word document or another type of RTF file and I would upload them and just go through them line by line by line listening for different kinds of themes or different things that came out. But I was highlighting anything that was possibly interesting or unusual and then I did that a couple different times for the whole of the interviews and started grouping together with the themes to figure out what kind of stories are being told here. There was a lot in there and when discussing with my supervisor about the various aspects that we found, we had to just put some aside. Like whether we just...so we just focused on the consumer experience at this point for my thesis, but I could have also easily made the services marketing paper. But I have parked that aside to do something with later. So after going through the... using this program to highlight different pieces in it—and it's kind of spits out different visual data images, so you can see what kind of things are being talked about more as his word clouds and stuff like that, which were somewhat health helpful, at least for fun or just initial kind of, what's going on here. But then I went and did a major big spreadsheet, and started writing up things in different columns and then putting my quotes in there so, I could kind of see it all in one huge piece, and that also made me go back and forth and back and forth and looking back at the data to see, oh wait I think that there might be something in here. So I was definitely finding things over and over again every time I went back that I didn't see maybe the first time. And it took a long time to actually distill what am I actually seeing here, and to not flatten all the information into, Oh here's one thing that everyone's going through, but to actually see, Well here's some major pieces here some major pieces just for some of the women and then see how that works in a stages way. So from an analysis perspective we did a stages way, like going to market, what happens the first time you have been marketed to, and you decide to actually think, Okay I'm going to go and donate my eggs. Then a second stage of getting chosen to be a donor for a particular recipient, going through the service experience, the legal aspects that you had to deal with and then, at some point some women went through a whole different experience, when they actually met the children that had been conceived, and that was only for some women who had done it a long time. So, that is the journey of analysis that we went through, and then still going back and forth and seeing which quotes fit into which pieces.

I: And so out of that analysis you were able to say, there were there were these sorts of different experiences...lived experiences people had.

A: Yeah there was the general experience of how people come to deciding to be a donor, and that's when we clearly saw it as self-objectification because most of these women are going, I have something of value that somebody else wants or needs, and I can do something with it. And that's more of a general piece and then people would have different interpretations whether they saw... some people used to as travel, some people could go to Mexico, some people could go to India through this experience. Some people really saw it as, I just want to help someone else to have a baby; and so people sighed as, I'm not using them someone else might as well. So is this real kind of, I have something that somebody else needs and wants, so as a resource or something. And

then we went into the experiences...almost everyone there had a very similar service experience, and the issues around that and how the...the service experience or the market the...institution of being a producer in a medical system, you were this, what they call the medical gaze, or an arm's-length transaction. This kind of sanctioned dehumanization where we don't really want to look at eggs as potential people, they really just should be a cell or just like donating blood, and we don't really want people to know each other, or know it's happening, was a major theme that came out, which makes sense with everything else in medical literature and Foucault. . So overall the findings of that project were that egg donors can experience self-objectification and be empowered but also then to be marketed-objectified and experience a loss of agency, and it's that it's very complicated because of the situation and the nature of the market and then subsequently not all, but for a lot of the women, there was this kind of re-humanization or just being able to see their eggs as human beings because they either met the children or they had their own children or over time they realize that this transaction was not finite, that a human being was created and now they have different thoughts about it. And some of the managerial implications of that is service providers really need to understand that egg donors need to be regarded just as important as the consumer or the recipient, as opposed to just producers of something and that the current...the default of being an anonymous donor is not probably the way to go for both parties to be truly happy with their transaction. To be truly satisfied there needs to be more connections; these humans want to know each other they want to know what happened. They don't necessarily want to be involved but they want to know what they did what actually happened after that, and the market is very much set up to keep people as separate as possible. So I think that's really important, and as it also goes into the whole a tradition of the transformative consumer research, or transformative service research which shows that we need to think about the wellbeing of the service provider and the consumer. But in this situation we need to also add in the producer or whoever else is in that supply chain to make the wellbeing is across all parties in equal amounts. So that's the major findings of that.

I2: You mentioned earlier that you'd done the interviews via Skype, and other technologies.

A: So we would set at a time to chat, and of course people who were going to be interviewed need to have the technology to be able to talk from one continent to another, but most people with their smartphones these days that was an issue and I helped them with some directions if they hadn't done it before, but I either used Skype or Facetime if they had an Apple product or, Google Chat and used all of those with different people. And so we were just book time to talk, I'd make sure that our time zones were correct and then I would ring them and they would pick up and some women I spoke to just like a phone call, so it's just voice to voice, and the majority I would offer that we don't have to see each other whatever we feel comfortable with, just to make sure that there wasn't an added extra pressure of having to look a certain way. People do become self-conscious when there's a video camera on them.

I2: Did you record?

A: Yes. So I used my Mac at home, so I used my computer at home and I used Quicktime to record the conversation that would go see the computer. But I also had my phone recording and I also had a voice recorder recording just in case anything got lost, which it did once, or part of one. So yes I had you had my back-ups of technology and if you're recording with your phone, it's good you know you have to turn your phone off in terms of turn the mobile data off, turn it on airplane or whatever, because if you're recording on your phone and somebody calls you it stops the recording. So I recorded all the interviews with the computer, they were all Quicktime files, and then I would listen to them and then sometimes just edit them a little bit too before I submitted them to the transcription, as they charge per minute. So you know, some of that general laughing that went on, I thought, I don't need to include laughing.

I2: Did you use an interview guide, a set of questions. And how did you come up with those?

A: Yes. So originally that was when we first looked at Ulrich Beck, and that theory of unintended consequences, and so they became very broad question you know, Tell me about your experience, and it was very much chronological, so I would go back to, how did this begin? What

made you first think about becoming an egg donor? And this was all in discussion with my supervisor— this went through the Ethics Committee so it had to be approved and they did add a couple of those questions just to make sure that they were truly open-ended and not charged with anything and it was only about six questions with a bunch of sub-questions or questions in case people aren't speaking a lot. But you know the most important part of the interview was that I would just explain, you know, Hi I am my name is Anna, and this is what I'm doing, and this is what I want to do, and this is why I'm interested, and really just kind of using that feminist methodology like woman-to-woman talk, which is just chatting with someone, and they felt really comfortable, they were really happy with being able to just talk about whatever they wanted to and so would go off on tangents and you have to, you know, to lead them back in, cos you start talking about American politics, that can go in so many places. But they really had a good time and they really wanted to share their stories, you know. I think that also says something about people who respond to call for participants, or people who are happy to talk. But they, this was a much deeper way of talking about something that they have done, that they haven't talked about it in-depth with anyone else at that level, and they are really happy with that. So I got a lot of good direct feedback from them, and it was just very casual and just making sure to stay on track in terms of the chronological events that occurred. And I also made sure that I started asking to get lots of details from them for stuff that I didn't know that I would maybe use later on. Which has helped me now and I can go back in and look at it from a different angle, from a different theoretical lens perhaps and see how that might fit with something else. So very open-ended, and fun, enjoyable.

I: And how did you go about writing this up, Anna, and what was the process of writing?

A: Gosh it's all a blur right now. So first I was using that spreadsheet of quotes and really kind of trying to distill what is it that I'm seeing, and just thinking of it as a journey and explaining it in stages, so I suppose in the same way that I interviewed them chronologically about their experiences, I started writing it up in stages. Like how did it start, how they got involved, what was what happened along the way, and then, for those, what their reflections are on the process now. And so, writing about in general what women experience in this part of stage one let's say, what some of the general theories that work for that stage, putting the quotes in, summarizing a bit and just going through that process.

I: and with the structure of the paper sort of a conventional lit review, questions, method, analysis. Or did you find it took a slightly different form because of the logic of the research?

A: In terms of writing it was the findings first. And then going back to...I mean the methodological section was already in my head so I didn't wasn't making that part up but I didn't write it first. So writing the findings was the most important thing because... what am I actually talking about here? What am I explaining? And then going back to the literature and trying to figure out how to explain what I'm talking about in a clear way to a reader, and it is still in the traditional structure, but in the process it was the findings first, then going in to kind of an overview of what these things are as descriptive, so talking about humanization, objectification, looking at it sociologically, anthropologically, and then going smaller into the field of marketing, and seeing where has this occurred in consumer research, and then writing about the context.

I2: Anna, what would you say was the hardest thing about doing this research project?

A: The analysis, I think was the hardest, but in an enjoyable way. But there is so much information in 10 two-hour interviews that...Yeah, that was the heart of the whole project. The hardest part was actually figuring out which piece of the pie are we going to discuss right here. Because there's many things to discuss in one context so, figuring out, What are we talking about here if we're just going to discuss consumer experience, what is the lived experience and how people understand it, and what did they experience and what some possible issues are that makes sense for marketing—that was the hard...what to choose first because there's a lot there. And like I said earlier, how to focus just on their experience vs. discussing the service marketing literature experience—those things that tie in.

I2: And what was the most enjoyable aspect of it.

A: Finishing it. Actually having something to say about it. I mean I really loved talking to the women but over that experience it's just talking—this is what I'm hearing this is what I am learning... Wow wow wow wow, this is so fascinating. But finally looking at everything together going, Ah, this is the story, this is what these women are talking about; this is how I can explain it to make sense to other people without them having to interview women and learn about it. And the parts that are important for marketing discipline, important for medical people to understand, and important for society to understand about what's happening in this context. So being able to talk about those things and communicate its impact, or the importance for people, is probably the most satisfying.

I2: And have you been able in any way to translate your findings into a form that has connected to practice or to participants?

A: Not yet. So this was submitted in June; I just went to my first academic conference ever and discussed it there. I am now looking at taking a portion of those findings and writing something up to submit to a special issue that's due in March; so I have I don't have a supervisor for my PhD yet, so I'm kind of , you know, what the smartest thing is to do. What I would like to do now is actually interview some more women. So I've discussed what I found so far with the current editor of JCR and her suggestion based on what I'm talking about is, what she said was, Well you know what you're talking about really has nothing to do with the commerciality of it. So you might as well talk to some women who didn't do this in the US, and see if they've experienced the same thing. Because to submit to a journal like that you need at least 20 interviews. But then you could also go back and say what is your unit of analysis, right? Is it 20 people, or are we going to look at each egg donation experience as a unit of analysis, and all of a sudden we've got a lot more experiences to talk. So I don't know exactly what's going to happen.

I2: Lots much more research to do.

A: Yes, this is just the tip of the iceberg.

I: Well that covers all the questions we wanted to run through, so thank you very much for that. Is there anything we didn't ask you that you think we should have or would you like to tell us about?

A: I think it's really good to be passionate about something and if it's about a particular context that's okay because there are many stories within a context that can fit into different theories or create new ones that will be applicable and relevant to the discipline of something.