



# How do we “get at” people’s everyday practices of digital technology?

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# What is the difference between traditional fieldwork and “digital fieldwork”?

Depends on the context but not really much.

“To observe social life in its natural habitat; going where the action is and watching.”

Earl Babbie (1995)

- John Lofland's "thinking units":

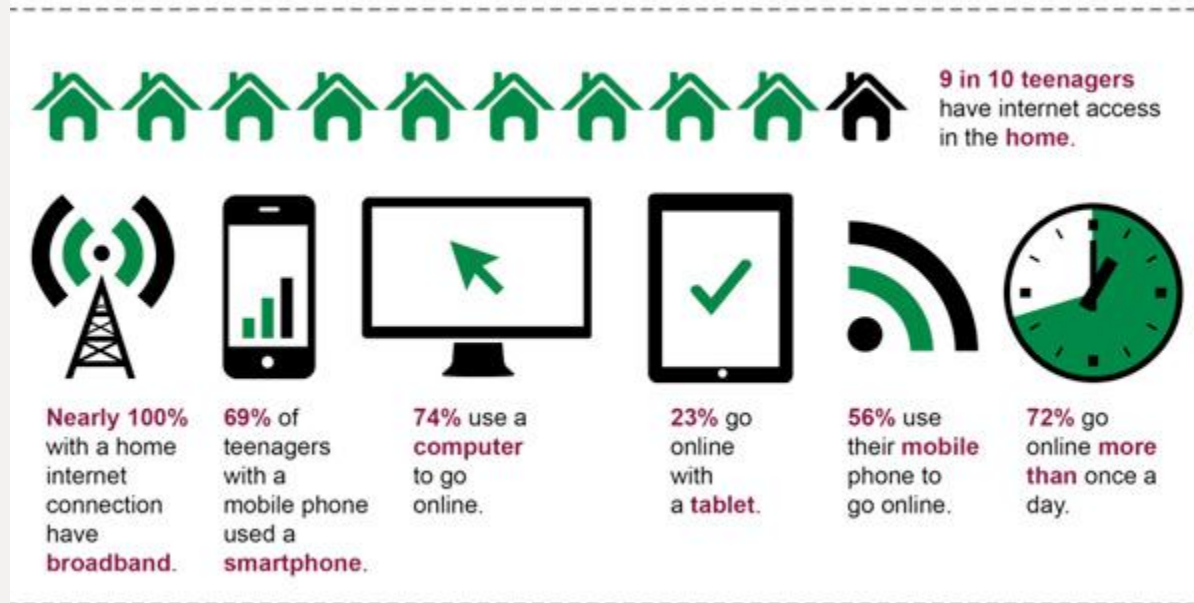
Meanings, Practices, Episodes, Encounters,  
Roles, Relationships, Groups, Organisations,  
Settlements (societies, neighbourhoods etc.)

- Digital fieldwork studies these in an online setting.

# Why do it?



- 2013 82% of Australians spent 23.3 hours online/week (Nielson Australian Connected Consumers Report 2013)
- Australian teenagers (14-17 years):
  - 56%** (vs US 49%) use a mobile to access internet
  - 69%** (vs US 37%) have a smartphone
  - 74%** (vs US 88%) use a computer to access internet



Key indicators of Aussie teenagers online, December 2013  
(ACMA)

- There is a limited time period to observe this great change from a life “off-line” to a life integrated with “on-line.”
- Times of change present great opportunities to study meanings and practices, roles and relationships as these are renegotiated.
- Huge focus on big data and quantifying people’s behaviours and literacies can exclude thick description.

## Getting ethical approval for doing digital fieldwork

- The problem:

Ethnographies and social history are stories of the particular and the individual situated in their social, economic and political contexts.

- Human subjects committees are focused on protecting individual privacy (as am I) but emphasise de-identification and decontextualisation.

- A possible solution:

Think carefully

Create detailed plans

Assess risk

Explain, explain, explain to:

- Participants

- Ethics committee

- Reviewers

Build relationships with participants, your institution, funding agencies.



# Data Collection & Analysis



- Cohorts:

Design modular studies where you can add cohorts as you gain access.

- Be flexible: not everything will go to plan.
- You don't always know what data you will collect so you can't always plan your data analysis in advance.
- Write everything down (journal, notebook, in Nvivo...)

# For Human Subjects Committee



*This is a documentary research project with the express intention of retaining all material in a public archive. All participants will understand the purpose of the interview before proceeding. Only first names will be used to identify records and participants may choose to use a pseudonym if they prefer. Due to the ethnographic and documentary nature of the research, true anonymity is not possible. To mitigate risk, participants will be given extensive briefing as to how and where their information will be displayed. If participants choose to review the transcripts and sound recordings, they will be able to do so before the information is published. They will be able to withdraw their data from the research project at any point.*

# For Participants



*I understand that information gained during the study will be published in a public archive and that audio files will be linked to a photograph and a first name. The researcher has explained to me options for increasing my privacy by using a pseudonym and an alternative to a photograph.*

*I understand that the digital audio files will be placed in a public access archive under Creative Commons Licensing, which means that other people will be able to listen to the stories and use sound clips from it.*

# Some tools



The screenshot shows a mobile browser interface for the Quadrant application. At the top, the status bar displays 'Telstra 3G', '3:00 pm', and '100%' battery. The address bar shows 'app.quadrant.edu.au'. The page title is 'Quadrant - Welcome'. The main header is blue with the 'QUADRANT BETA' logo on the left, 'SHOW HINTS' and 'JENNY OSTINI' on the right. Below the header, a green button says 'Create A New Project'. A link 'View archived projects' is on the right. A project card for 'Everyday Digital Lives' is shown, created by Jenny Ostini on 11/02/2014. The description states: 'This project will study what digital literacy means in practice by asking people to share their stories about using technology. Of interest is the way that people themselves conceptualise and articulate their understandings of the technology that many use'. A green button 'Enter This Project' is at the bottom of the card. The footer contains copyright information and links for NeCTAR, project partners, website, terms, help, and support.

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# Everyday Dig...

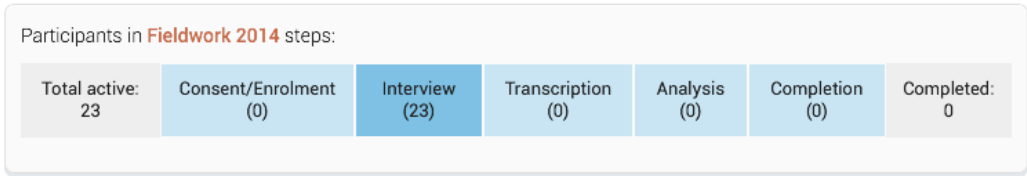
Project Role: Project Owner

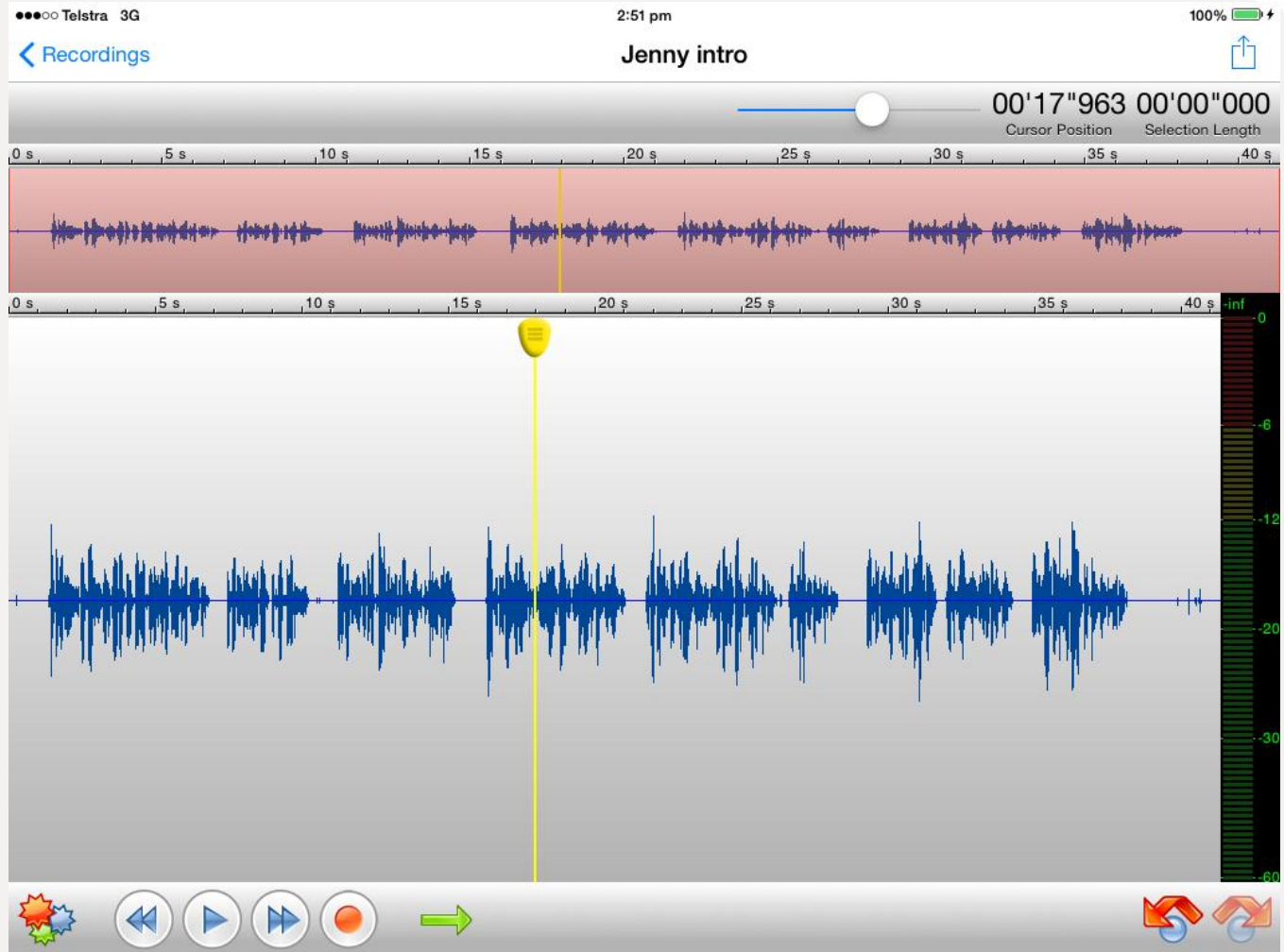
- HIDE MENU
- Project Home
- All Project Participants
- My Participants
- Team Members
- Files
- Reports
- Project Admin
  - Assign Team Member to Workflow
  - Create A Workflow
  - Add Participant
  - Add Team Member
  - Manage Workflows
  - Manage Microsite
  - Edit Project
  - Archive Project
  - Delete Project
  - Export Participants as CSV

## Welcome to the **Everyday Digital Lives** project!

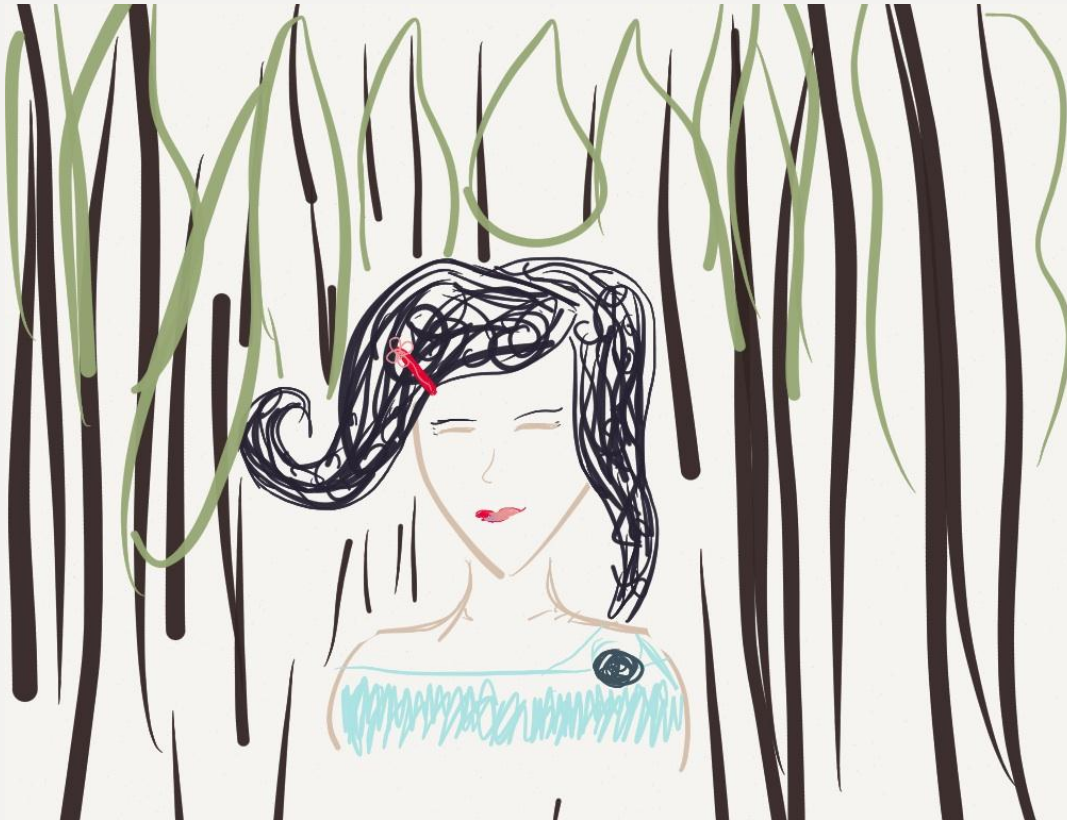


Participants that are currently in your workflow steps:





# Teenage girls in Brisbane



17 Year 9 and 10 (15 and 16 year old) girls at a girls' school.

Original artwork by Isabella Ostini, Studio FiftyThree Paper App





# Reading and contacts



- <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/fieldresearch/2014/09/19/fieldwork-in-a-digital-age-questions-of-privacy-and-copyright/>
- [http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jenny\\_Ostini](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jenny_Ostini)
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