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Making meanings out of me: Reading researchers' and participants' bodies through poetry

Harvey Humphrey[1,2]

Abstract

This article offers autoethnographic reflections on the experience of qualitative research that account for the embodied subjectivity of interviewing as a research practice and the embodied practice of research outside of a traditional 'field'. The article reflects on the ways in which the author was underprepared for the shifting power relations and shared vulnerabilities within research interactions to be experienced in an embodied way. This article then reflects on the process of experiencing research in the body during the writing-up process. The article draws on data collection experiences and fieldwork notes from a research project on trans and intersex activist relationships undertaken by a trans researcher with a history of LGBTI+ and trans activism. Furthermore, this research project was undertaken by a disabled scholar who had to negotiate a complex web of access needs and decisions over in/visibilising disabilities in order to complete the research. This early career scholar experienced a lack of research methods teaching and training on the complexities of in-community/insider research for those who may be members of communities made vulnerable by society *and* a lack of training on the expectations of embodied fieldwork practice. This article does not offer teaching or support suggestions to fill this gap although those are illustrated in detail by Pearce's (2020) 'methodology for the marginalised'. Instead, the article invites early career scholars, and those teaching research methods, to imagine research and imagine fieldwork with embodied researchers in mind. The article uses poetry to take readers on a journey of the embodied research of one trans and disabled scholar in the hopes it may speak to other scholars with a range of diverse identities and experiences who may be made vulnerable by society and those who have the privilege of teaching them. The article uses poetry as a means to express these embodied reflections drawing on Richardson's (1999, 2002) creative analytic practice of ethnographic poetry and Anderson's (2001) embodied writing. The poetic reflections are offered as an interruption to the body of the text with an embodied poetry to touch the reader in a different way. Although these poems deliberately interrupt the

[1] Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK
[2] University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

Corresponding Author:
Harvey Humphrey, Department of Social Sciences, Northumbria University, Newcastle, NE1 8ST, UK
Email: Harvey.humphrey@northumbria.ac.uk

body of the text, they can be read in their locations as reflections on their closest sections or a collection of poetic reflections after reading the article.

Keywords
poetry, autoethnography, qualitative research, embodiment, research practice

Introduction

This is not a how-to or a guide

and no intended learning outcomes

listed out on a PowerPoint slide

I won't tell you what or how to teach

just share words on the researching body

things I wish I had been taught about

before I started the PhD

Researcher vulnerability

There has been substantial sociological and psychological consideration of researcher vulnerability in relation to sensitive topics (Davison, 2004; Dickson-Swift et al., 2008; Woodby et al., 2011). This work on researcher vulnerability and sensitive topics can be found within methods teaching but often as one-off events or optional guest lectures. This is rarely embedded into core methods modules. While this article speaks to that ongoing body of work on researcher vulnerability and sensitive topics, it also acknowledges the broader work of Howard and Hammond (2019) and Råheim et al. (2016) considering the vulnerabilities of researcher identities and positionalities as well as researcher-researched relations of power. However, many of these texts caution against vulnerability and offer strategies to protect the researcher from the associated emotional demands of research. As noted by Humphrey et al. (2020), many institutional ethics application processes required from universities and funding bodies focus on protecting participants (and to some extent researchers) from imagined vulnerabilities and risk with little consideration of the wider societal causes of vulnerabilities or the ways in which strategies to mitigate risk and vulnerability for some may cause harm to others[1]. While van den Hoonaard (2018) calls for the abandonment of vulnerability discourse in relation to participants and research ethics, this article rethinks researcher vulnerability through power relations and bodies. This article embraces the possibilities of connection through shared vulnerability taken from Braidotti (2020); "an ethics that respects vulnerability while actively constructing horizons of hope" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 122). This article does not focus on the vulnerabilities of sensitive topics but draws on considerations of vulnerabilities of (mis)recognising identities, and the vulnerabilities of bodies in research

[1] For example, Humphrey et al. (2020) focus on the example of parental consent on behalf of young participants suggested by an ethics committee creating potential risks for those young participants in a study focused on LGBT+ youth.

during fieldwork and post-fieldwork. In sharing experiences of embodied vulnerabilities during fieldwork, and beyond, it is hoped that this article can provide a useful tool to methods teachers to encourage discussions of these possibilities *before* researchers begin fieldwork. This article also takes inspiration from Butler's definition of "vulnerability, understood as a deliberate exposure to power, [that] is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment" (Butler, 2016, p. 22). This article draws out the importance of power relations during interviews focusing on the importance of these as embodied experiences of power sharing.

Fieldwork Diary

Sitting alone in a coffee shop

thinking over the day's interviews

seeking inspiration in milk clouds

for representing these diverse views

and wondering what to eat for tea

a stranger interrupts my musings

to ask me if I perhaps might be

the trans & intersex researcher

from Glasgow and could they take part too

we discuss their participation

then I am left alone to wonder

reflect on this communication

what had revealed these identities

like someone with a connection to

trans and intersex communities

How did I look like a researcher?

Have I got the Queer PhD 'look'?

this is a very small location

and I sit alone with a notebook

Making meanings out of me: Bodies in the field

For those of you reading this as students on methodology courses this section invites you to imagine yourself entering the research field. As you read this section, especially the poetry, ask yourselves how you might be recognised or misrecognised by your participants. This example includes a trans and disabled researcher with a history of activism interviewing trans and intersex activists. Think about your own experiences and identities. Here are some suggested questions you might want to ask yourself as you read this section. Which of your identities and experiences might matter to your participants? Which of those identities and experiences might you share with your participants and why? How do these considerations relate to why you've chosen this research topic? How might your connection to the research or the community be received? For those of you reading this as teachers of methodology courses I encourage you to facilitate these discussions with your students. However, not all students may be willing to share their connections to research communities or vulnerabilities with their peers. Poetry can be a useful way in to these discussions either by students writing their own or reflecting on the examples here.

For Bain and Nash (2006), the body of a researcher is neither fixed nor stable but made visible through its tensions, contestations and ambiguities that arise from experiencing research which includes research experienced as insiders and outsiders. This section will explore my own experiences as an embodied researcher who at various points during fieldwork felt both accepted as an insider, felt viewed as an outsider, and a variety of experiences that cannot easily be positioned in relation to an insider/outsider binary complicating the shared vulnerability of an interview experience. As a non-binary trans activist who is not intersex researching trans activism and intersex activism I had thought there would be a clear way in which I was an insider and a way in which I was an outsider. Any engagement with insider/outsider research reveals these categories are much more complex as highlighted by feminist scholars (Oakley, 1981; Roseneil, 1993). This section does not interrogate in detail that insider/outsider relationship but its engagement with embodied experiences of fieldwork and community (mis)readings is indebted to that work. These experiences of 'the field' included in-person interviews across Australia, Malta, and the UK as well as online interviews in my home and my participants' own homes over significant geographical and temporal distances. As I interviewed participants, and they shared their stories and their lives with me, I discovered that our relationships and our rapport and my recruitment – even the questions I was able or had to ask – were shaped not so much by my anticipated feelings as an insider or an outsider but by the ways I thought I was perceived by participants. These were the ways in which my outsider or insider status, and my researching body, had been read.

Reading Me

Participants making meanings out of me

inside, outside and complexly weaving

power embracing vulnerability

assumed reading misreading misreading

complicates this vulnerability

is (strategic) essentialism undesirable

embracing, resistance, seeking community

embodied practice made vulnerable

Davis (2015, p. 14), an intersex activist researching intersex activism, reflects that their own intersex experience finds them "personally connected to the intersex community and advocacy movement whether [they] choose to be or not". I found my own connectedness to trans and intersex activism was not so dependent on my own choice but on the ways in which I perceived this connection was read by participants. Davis (2015, p. 6) also "unintentionally altered [their] appearance throughout data collection to match how [they] believed [they] would be perceived". I am a person with a transmasculine appearance that I choose to enhance with clothing such as binders, but when I walked the hot streets of Australia for hours at a time moving from location to location to meet participants, I was not always able to bind. Whether I was binding that day or not changed the way I thought I might be read which I felt changed the ways in which I might be accepted as a member of a community. There was a personal sense of embodied vulnerability shaping these choices that at times did not feel like choices due to a long-term health condition further constraining these options. This embodied vulnerability was also felt in interactions with others. For instance, I risked being misgendered by participants or those working in the often-public locations in which I conducted interviews. My personal relationship with my transmasculine body became a part of my research as I interacted with participants. This is further removed from my personal relationship with my own body as they interpreted my transmasculine self and as I then read their reading of me. At the same time, participants were sharing their stories and their own bodily disclosures with me and using language that called us into being in that space. Language which often named us both offering an example of Butler's "linguistic vulnerability" that through language, and naming, constitutes embodied ways of being (Butler, 1997, pp. 3-5). For instance, one non-binary participant when discussing the increase in non-binary people within their group joked "we're taking over, we're everywhere" with a pointed look at me causing me to feel seen as non-binary. There is a welcome embracing of a shared vulnerability and a shared activism in my interpretation of this linguistic exchange.

Fieldwork Diary: Australia October

AM

Button up checked shirt; freshly shaved undercut

unofficial queer PhD uniform

it would be but it's 35 degrees

fuck the binder it's just too fucking warm

PM

Hot! Not binding was such a good idea

but conducting an interview on a beanbag

after walking for 50 minutes wasn't

the back pain might be worse than the jetlag

In thinking about the body in research I found Ellingson (2006, 2017) useful for reflecting on embodiment in relation to research and the ways research is a physical experience – it is something researchers do with their bodies. Inckle (2010) also considers the way in which their own non-normative queer, disabled and gendered embodiment influences research practice. This offers an example that utilises identities and those related embodied markers of identities influence research choices. My contributions to those texts are to draw on my research and writing with, as well as on bodies, including the body of the researcher as well as the bodies of participants. Finlay's (2005, 2006) discussion of 'embodied self-awareness' highlights the ways in which researchers' bodies can experience responses to participants stories. Similarly, Burns (2003, pp. 234-5) advocates for a "critical embodied reflexivity that engages with interviews as embodied interactions that involve the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of our (researcher and respondent's) bodies". Within this research project I found the embodied interaction of interviews to be of salience both during the interview and post-interview in listening/reading to transcripts and re-reading fieldwork diaries. Harris' (2015) discussion of their embodied experience of research and the ways in which they disclosed verbally and with marks on the body to having a shared identity and community membership reflects many of the considerations here. While Harris (2015) focuses on their body's disclosure and their own feelings on their body, I use these reflections on disclosure of the body to consider the ways in which I believe my body was read by participants.

Body Talk

bodies speak

disclosures written on the body

bodies speak

I read their reading of me

My bodily experience of research was not only an experience of transmasculine reading and misreading but it also involved a confrontation with a disabled body that does not always neatly fit into invisible/visible binary categorisations. While I may choose to invisibilise my disability it becomes potentially readable when I have to pause interviews or deselect interview locations chosen by participants as a result of their accessibility or

distance from the closest public transport. This is further complicated by my disabled body becoming a barrier to my transmasculine presentation at various points during fieldwork that coincided with health condition flare-ups. These reflections on the bodily experience of researching also link to my epistemological position as a queer researcher with a queer body that resists strict binary categorisations within essentialist biological categories whilst also acknowledging the "strategic use of essentialism" (Spivak, 2009, p. 5) and the potential gains to be made from strategic use of categorisation from an activist perspective. These reflections on the ways in which my transmasculine presentation is complicated by the complexities of accessibility, which itself can be fluid and contextual, also related to the symbolic interactionism that weaved through the research interviews that were conducted. The choices that I could make about how to present myself to participants were dependent on my fluctuating disabled body and this relationship fed into my reading of their reading of me.

Body of Work

Words are not typed with this tired hand

articles not read with tired eyes

inside and outside and inside and

processes that involve our bodies

"well you'll know what this is like"; and "you'll get it"

sentences not typed with bodies that won't sit

These considerations of categorisation are a simplification and insider status is not simply about geographical spaces of familiarity or essentialist categories. Trans activist groups and intersex activist groups are not homogenous. The multiplicity of voices and identities within such groups would prevent any singular individual from fully inhabiting such an insider status, reflecting Gorman-Murray et al.'s (2010, p. 105) warning against "romanticis[ing] insider status" and that the "the concept of 'insider' fixes subjectivities within essentialised attributes". Furthermore, Dahl (2010, p. 154) reflects that queer researchers "are neither fully at home nor fully outside of any community we aim to study". I found this important for my own personal political reflections in relation to my experiences of activist settings prior to starting this research, although such reflections had not come up in methods classroom discussions, so I do not know if my peers engaged in similar work to prepare for the imagined field. Hughes (2018) discusses the benefits of not being out, especially to participants he heard expressing transphobic views, but considers that there are benefits to being out as a queer scholar such as a connection to a queer research community. A post-fieldwork reading of Pearce's (2020) powerful reflections on conducting research within a marginalised community of which one is a part caused me to reflect on my own position as a marginalised researcher and reminded me that I had failed to connect to a network or community of scholars undertaking this kind of work. Furthermore, I had at that point failed to form networks with other researchers with non-normative bodies. Since finishing the PhD and attempting to

navigate the complexities of being out as a trans and disabled early career researcher, forming networks of other scholars with shared identities, politics and research interests has become essential to finding space for myself in academia as a researcher (Humphrey, 2021; Slater et al., 2021; Slater et al., 2023 forthcoming). This is important ongoing work, and it should be developed by those with shared identities and experiences seeking each other out to avoid tokensim or inadvertent spaces of hostility. However, it is also difficult work and often additional labour on some of the more marginalised scholars in academia. If those networks could be facilitated and developed earlier for students, as well as academics, this could alleviate some of that work and provide support to students navigating these issues much earlier in their careers. However, there is a risk that if this work is undertaken by institutions, it could reproduce the inequalities those scholars and students are aiming to avoid or become a tokenistic celebration of diversity without room for critique (Ahmed, 2012, 2018). These reflections highlight the complexities of being 'out', as disabled and trans, during the research and as a researcher. This relates to the ways in which I was perceived by participants as a 'researcher', complicating these other identities and positions inside and outside communities, discussed further below.

Where's the Body?

Across articles and chapters

hungrily seeking bodies

amongst disembodied voices

finding feminist scholarship

and disability studies

In Michalko, Harris and Ellingson

but greedily I sought more

looking for embodied research choices

not covered in coding sessions

Researcher bodies like this one

not bodies of objectification

Where were we as researcher not researched?

This kind of reflexive sociology requires an accountability of the influences that the situated researcher has over the research as it is conducted. Acknowledgement of potential bias is not the same as reflecting over the responsibilities of the researcher to account for the influence and multiple power relations at play during researcher and participant interactions. A number of scholars have highlighted the ways in which reflexivity alone is not enough (Koboyashi, 2003; Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Nash, 2010; Taylor, 2010). Taylor (2010, p. 73) warns that "insertion of identity ('lesbian', 'working class')

may risk replacing critique of the resources required to tell (legitimate) stories, tending towards 'self-promotion' rather than signalling responsibility and accountability". Furthermore, for Koboyashi (2003) reflexivity can lead to research that focuses on differences between participants and researchers both throughout their research relationship and in relation to the positions from which they speak which can only be countered as part of larger activist agenda. However, more than these reflections on the self of the researcher inside a community I found myself much more focused on how I *believed* participants were interpreting me.

This is relevant to Finlay's (2002, p. 223) consideration of social constructionist researchers who "notice how both participants and researchers are engaged in an exercise of 'presenting' themselves to each other – and to the wider community which is to receive the research". This idea of presenting identities to each other was relevant during my interviews and how the reading of those identities was at play during conversations. This also speaks back to Butler's use of linguistic vulnerability and the ways language can performatively call us into being (Austin, 1965; Butler, 1997). This is also to some extent reflected in Merriam et al.'s (2001) work on participants believing or not believing ways in which researchers who consider themselves insiders are considered insiders by their participants. They refer to fieldwork amongst black women in which the participants felt a shared understanding of gender and race, but they did not believe the researchers had a shared working class experience.

Who are You

What is it to really be

recognised in this research

my participants see me

Do I see them? Do they see me?

forging connections are we

through authenticity

they say we get too many

research requests coming through

and wonder but who are you

conserving time they say no

more than yes; we said yes to you

community researchers

feel safer; questions feel safer;

their outputs feel safer

In this space we trust each other
I feel safe with them - they see me
more than I was ever seen
back in the methods classroom
we never spoke of our bodies
in that institutional space
maybe more needed that discussion
on how, what, when, why to share
with participants sharing with me
what to reveal about my body
so it was led by participants
focused on my trans body
a welcome recognition
but my disabled body
was silenced in inaccessible
locations; struggling with
public transport and long long days
I wasn't prepared for this
in classroom spaces and discussion
without talk of researchers' bodies

Several participants wished to contact me to find out more information about the project, or myself as a researcher, prior to agreeing to participate or passing information on to others. In some cases, participants found me on social media or spoke to me on the phone to verify that I was who I claimed to be or seeking more information about my connection to and interest in these communities, which is not dissimilar to the requirements to join some online and in-person trans and intersex groups as discussed by my participants. This is not unique to my participants (Amato, 2016; Catalano, 2015). These initial pre-interview conversations were essential for building trust with potential participants, which led to long richly detailed interviews. In these initial conversations, potential participants wanted to know who I was and why I was interested in this

research. Some of these pre-interview conversations with participants included discussions on current or recent activist work in the location of the participant whereas others sent me documents to read that they sought my opinions on. These early pre-interview interactions highlight that it was not only my identities and experiences as an out non-binary trans activist that were important to potential participants, but they also wanted to know my opinions on related-activism or related-research projects. This suggests that some participants wished to know the researcher's connection to these communities whereas for others the researcher's activist positionality was of importance. This highlights that the shared vulnerability of connection may not only be associated with identities but also with shared activist aims. During the course of this research project all three countries faced an increased media focus on trans lives, and trans activism in particular, creating a context of potential participant vulnerability to researchers in this area (Pearce et al., 2020). Concurrently, trans academics and those working in trans studies/ trans-inclusive gender and disability studies faced an increasingly hostile work environment in academic spaces (Phipps 2020; Pitcher, 2017; Slater & Liddiard, 2018). It is important to note that this article does not consider trans nor intersex activist participants to be vulnerable due to their identities as trans and intersex activists, but vulnerability is understood as contextualised and subject to wider structural shifting power imbalances (Bettcher, 2014; Humphrey et al., 2020; Roen, 2009). Following these initial pre-interview conversations and check-ins, subsequent interview interactions included participant language that implied they saw me as an activist that was like them in some way. Repeatedly I heard "well you'll know what this is like", "you'll get this", or "we" used to include me as an activist like them. Within this "we" there is a shared connection to a community that embraces a shared vulnerability within wider state institutions and discourses that shape our lives. This is a "we" of connections through vulnerability and corresponding power relations.

Haiku for the Vulnerable

Who's afraid to be

vulnerable in research

interviews empower

This "we" was sometimes interpreted as an activist "we" due to the context, but another "we" included a trans and non-binary "we". Reading over fieldwork diaries, it is clear that I believed that some participants read me as a trans man, others read me as non-binary, and others were less obviously specific in their reading of me. For example, one participant discussing trans activists in the group and within this broader consideration of this activist involvement said "One, and *you are one of these* three examples in fact, is female to male." Another participant, while discussing the ways language was sometimes used strategically by intersex activists depending on the context, said "this thing about different language is common to every population. I think trans people you know there's wars about how *you* call *yourselves*." The language in these examples is fairly unambiguous in illustrating the ways I felt that I had been read as a trans person. I often felt that I was read as 'like us': sometimes I picked this up at the time and other times as I

was listening to recorded interviews a while later. This did not happen in every interview and if participants asked me about my identity, I told them. I was upfront about being trans and not being intersex if it came up during the interviews and as part of recruitment. Furthermore, my involvement in activism was highlighted in the Invitation to Interview document I sent out. I was influenced by McQueen and Knussen's (2002) reflection that disclosure can be useful for making some participants feel comfortable whereas others can find it irrelevant or inappropriate, so I let participants' own curiosity guide which information I disclosed. However, there is a power imbalance in that I asked participants for demographic information although as with all questions I said they did not have to answer this. Many participants discussed at length their identities, the language they used to describe themselves, and for some participants this involved discussions of their bodies. For both me and my participants it was combinations of linguistic terms used to describe our identities and our disclosures written on the body that created shared senses of commonalities and vulnerabilities throughout these interview exchanges.

Silenced Bodies Ache Quietly

I brought my body with me today

you brought yours too didn't leave it home

sometimes I wish I had left mine there

shrugged it off like a coat in summer

you talk at length about your body

probably best to have it to hand

I'm not so forthcoming about mine

this position I've been sitting in

has been uncomfortable for a while

but today most positions would be

we're not here to talk about my body

but still I couldn't leave it at home

These reflections speak back to the work of Meadow (2013) on experiences of participants and the researcher 'studying each other'. Meadow interprets their experience of their gender presentation being read by the participant parents of trans children to have influenced whether these participants introduced the researcher to their own children. I cannot know if my own experience of being read influenced the snowball sampling work many participants initiated for me. While this experience of being read as 'like us' or not is important it does not mean I am like my participants in all ways. For instance, I may be trans, but I will never know transmisogyny. I will never see the intersection of racism and

transphobia as experienced my trans participants of colour. As I reflect on this experience now, I think about how the rapport I built up as an interviewer was based on those readings by participants and not necessarily on my presentation or how I felt in that space.

I was not always read as a person with a connection to the communities under discussion. For some participants my status as a researcher during the interview was more significant than any shared identity. For example, some parent participants discussed their difficulties working with other activists and trans activists in particular and said, “It’s annoying and irritating and we bitch about it between ourselves, and to you because you’re a researcher”. My role of researcher is also an identity I negotiate and one that participants read onto me. However, unlike being trans and being disabled, the identity of researcher, and its associated power relations with links to academic institutions, is not an identity that can be invisibilised or misinterpreted during a research interview. It is also not an identity that has the same associations of vulnerability, although as a PhD student during the project there are ways in which my status as a junior scholar and my related precarious employment renders me vulnerable within academic institutions (Ablett et al., 2019; Butler-Rees & Robinson, 2020; Rao et al., 2021). Furthermore, moving away from data collection, there are ways in which a complex identity as a trans and disabled researcher can be negotiated and read in other spaces such as academic conferences or LGBT/I events in which I was invited to discuss my research.

The Researcher Researches

with Dictaphone-arms and finger pens

the researcher collects the data

try to see through more than just their lens

they seek more, different perspectives

their mouth becomes research instrument

asking questions and following up

conversation is research event

pressing record on ears to capture

and collect what is ‘having a chat’

to then take away and analyse

to understand and share with others

with that same mouth they now theorise

at events without participants

while their mind wonders how best to share this back

with those who shared their stories first[2]

This interpretation of me as connected to the community meant rapport came easily, and my interviews were often long and personal, but this also meant the kinds of questions I asked were sometimes taken as strange. If I asked for clarity about exactly what a participant meant by a term, because I wanted to know how they were using it in this context, or if I asked for more information about a topic that they believed I should already be familiar with, I was met with "but you know that." I was asked at one point "do you want to know what the term means?" as if we had already agreed a shared understanding that I was now calling into question. This highlights the ways in which my researcher identity can construct me as an outsider during interviews in which I felt that I had been read as an insider. This speaks back to Dahl's (2010) reflections on being neither completely inside nor outside a community during research. My experience as an insider and outsider researcher and as an activist academic depends on my participants accepting, reading, and interpreting me as such. This is subject to ongoing negotiation during an interview interaction and beyond. This comes with the additional problem that this is my interpretation of their interpretation of me. This research project had a particular focus on the importance of language and identities and this complexity of a participant calling into being a pre-existing agreed understanding of a term, which I interpret due to a shared connection of vulnerability, that I disrupted through questioning, highlights a particularly queer unsettling of vulnerabilities, identities, (mis)readings, and relationships.

At 'home' in the body

Much of the consideration in the previous section refers to the bodily experiences while on fieldwork, such as the difficulties of binding in heat I was unused to or the complexities of finding an accessible location without necessarily outing myself as disabled. However, the researching body does not only exist during in-person fieldwork. Four interviews took place using online video-conferencing software allowing the researcher and participants to engage in this interview from their own homes. These home background settings could be viewed by each other creating further spaces of potential disclosures about themselves. Several participants chose to be interviewed in the locations of their activism which for some was their own homes, so this is not unique to the online setting. However, scholars have noted the potential for home settings and home interruptions to form part of online data collection, which may become more prevalent with the ongoing ramifications of Covid-19 (Lobe et al., 2020; Schlegel et al., 2021). The use of the home setting adds a further dimension to researcher vulnerability through an insight into a personal space and through the lack of distinction between a work and home environment.

At Home

The slap of the mail hitting the floor is the knell

[2] This poem on the disembodied researcher is intended as a companion to The Research Interview (Humphrey, 2022), a poem on the research interview as a site of care.

I did not know was coming; the end of a

former way of life in amongst all the junk mail

is a letter containing my instructions

"Must stay at home"; "Stay Safe"; "Patient"; "Don't leave your home"

for 12 weeks I must stay inside in 'shielding'

a word I'd never uttered became a label

with certain constraints and commands I'm reading

I see that excursions to my non-existent

garden are permissible and it suggests

I see a nice view. I watch the bin area

at the back. The letter's extensive requests

are designed for those living in homes unlike mine

the letters keep coming with their updated

advice: "Don't leave your home"; "Try to keep connected"

My experience of this research project was shaped by periods of absence due to flares of a long-term health condition. There were a number of ways in which sometimes my body could not facilitate my continued work on the research. Words are not typed with tired hands; articles are not read with tired eyes; sentences are not constructed with a body that will not sit. Analysis of data and writing up are processes that involve the body. A significant amount of the final version of the written thesis was produced whilst 'shielding' at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. The experience of being named 'vulnerable' by the government and healthcare professionals despite having a personal sense of a complicated relationship with medicalised labels of vulnerability highlighted my own connections to the power of medicolegal language to name and claim as highlighted by my participants in different contexts. My 'vulnerability' was called into being through government communication and speech acts labelling myself as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV). A significant number of letters were received from the government during this time which named me vulnerable and advocated actions to keep my body safe from harm. Receiving these communications and this repeated naming of 'vulnerability' shaped the analysis and the writing up of this project. The importance to participants of self-naming, recognition and the linguistic power of speech acts and identity claims was a significant feature of the analysis of this research project reflecting a wider poststructuralist sociology agenda. Furthermore, my vulnerable body was advised to remain in the home – formerly a space of data collection now reimagined as the only the space I could occupy. A space which constrained the activities of my body causing experiences of signs on the body relating to my health condition that could not be alleviated with outdoor exercise or leaving the home. The ways in which my non-

normative body, as a disabled non-binary trans person, functions shape my relationship with the world and the ways in which I undertook this research project. A reflection on myself as a researcher cannot be separated from my disabled trans non-binary body.

On Covid Time

time feels longer, stretched out and endless.

time is harder now. Shielding extends.

stuck always inside safe from corona's caress

but away too from family and friends

Conclusion

This article has engaged in a reflective process considering my bodily experience in undertaking the research, including data collection, and writing up through to completion. The article invites readers to read themselves into these reflections and ask how they may prepare for the embodied experiences of fieldwork and writing up research. Research is made up of processes that involve bodies which are undertaken by scholars with bodies. I invite methods students and others preparing for beginning fieldwork to (re)read this article with their own bodies in mind. For this early career scholar, the possibilities of recruitment and developing rapport as an insider and an outsider were discussed as well as a more reflective consideration of the experience of being 'read' as inside and outside these trans, intersex and LGBTI communities within this article. These considerations are not unique to trans, intersex or broader LGBTI research and speak to scholarship that considers insiders, outsiders, and the shifting power relations within research interviews. The poetic reflections invite considerations from other scholars whose experiences and identities differ. This article drew on methodological literature relating to insiders and outsiders and considered my interpretation of the ways in which participants were making meanings out of me as they 'read' me as an insider or an outsider during data collection but there is more work to do. While there is emerging literature on the body in data collection in this article, I have sought to contribute to this literature by pushing its bounds to retain the presence of the researcher's body in analysis and writing (Ellingson 2006, 2017; Harris, 2015; Inckle, 2010). Research is enacted by embodied researchers and embodied participants; and disclosures and discourses of the respective bodies of participants and researchers have as much to tell us as their language. I invite readers, researchers, and teachers, to embrace the possibilities of the poetic approach in this article to think through this work early and often through methods teaching. This article seeks to embrace the complexities of vulnerabilities and power through research as a shared experience and calls to others to embrace this as a *collective approach* through which we might co-construct vulnerabilities as possibilities for power, change and resistance.

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