

Poetry In Emotion: a resistant reading of research

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Research Domains

Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract

Two forms of resistance are at the heart of this proposal. The first is the foregrounding of the emotional dimensions of research practice, often silenced or side-lined in conventional dissemination of research findings. The second is the presentation of those research findings as a performed research poem, rather than a prose paper/article. During my investigation of female academics' experiences of working practices, productivity and career progression during the first eighteen months of the COVID-19 pandemic, I became party to multiple, ongoing narratives, many challenging, some traumatic, while maintaining a safe and ethical research space. I also became aware of the significant expenditure of emotional labour this work required. The research poem *Poetry In Emotion: Writing Up Emotional Labour*, explores complex questions of positionality and emotion in research practice. In performance, I literally give voice to my findings. The performance is fourteen minutes long, allowing time for audience questions.

Full paper

Two forms of resistance are at the heart of this proposal. The first is the foregrounding of the emotional dimensions of research practice, often silenced or side-lined in conventional dissemination of research findings. The second is the presentation of those research findings as a performed research poem, a practice of embodied dissemination within an academic context.

This piece evolved from my work on an SRHE-funded research project *Dear Diary: Equality implications for female academics of changes to working practices in lockdown and beyond*.(2021-2022). I investigated female academics' experiences of working practices, productivity and career progression during the first eighteen months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over a five-month period, I collected diary and interview data from twenty-five UK female academics across the career spectrum. They emailed me their diary entries which covered the shift of paid labour into the home; homeschooling and household dynamics; constraints on personal freedoms; rapid changes to working practices, and the impact on physical and emotional wellbeing. We then revisited these experiences in a one-hour online interview. Many participants told me that they found participating in the research cathartic.

'Building and maintaining research relationships with participants is part and parcel of qualitative research ... a process that starts before any data collection takes place and continues well beyond the conclusion of fieldwork' (Roberts 2018). During this project, I became party to multiple, ongoing

narratives, many challenging, some traumatic, while maintaining a safe and ethical research space. Once data collection was complete, I continued to engage with those narratives through analysis and curation of a digital archive (Carruthers Thomas 2022). As a researcher, I valued the way in which the methodology facilitated the development of research relationships with participants. As a female academic working from my spare room, I was researching others' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic while navigating my own way through it. I became increasingly aware of the significant expenditure of emotional labour the project required of me, not least 'the sharing of traumatic accounts without being able to fix or repair their causes' (Mannay 2018). In writing up the findings, conventional academic formats: reports, papers and articles offered little space for this aspect of the research, yet 'emotion is not an intrusion into the research process, but a constitutive element of it' (Loughran and Mannay 2018).

The use of poetry as a form of data representation and dissemination in academia is not unknown but is untypical. 'Social science writing is supposedly emotionless, the reader unmoved' (Richardson 1993: 706), but in her five-page poem *Louisa May* representing the life-history of a single mother, she claims to model a way of telling that creates in its readers and listeners bodily and emotional responses. In a previous experimentation with research poetry (Carruthers Thomas 2019) I created and performed an extended poem, *Glass*, responding to qualitative data I'd collected for a research project investigating the way gender shapes individuals' lived experiences of the university workplace. On the feedback forms, 'individuals wrote of the affective impact: of "goosebumps" and "triggers"; about their surprise and pleasure at the use of creative media to present what some called a "dry" or "boring" subject' (Carruthers Thomas 2020).

The research poem *Poetry In Emotion: Writing Up Emotional Labour*, is a means of showing my workings, accounting for 'how the inner states we experience shape and alter our research' (Loughran and Mannay 2018). In it, I explore complex and compelling questions of positionality and emotion in research practice and articulate them through poetic form. In performance, text is juxtaposed with visual and audio elements as I literally give voice to findings centred on my experiences of the research. This is a way of resisting the sidelining of emotional dimensions of research practice and the restriction of research communication to a narrow set of conventional formats. The performance is fourteen minutes long, allowing time for questions afterwards.

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