

# **Exposing the Private in the Public through Poems: Reflections of a PhD Student**

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## **Abstract**

As narrative researchers PhD students can find themselves balanced on an edge — making choices about what to include in a story (exposure) and what to exclude (keep hidden) — making choices about re-presenting the private in the public. But what if the private we are making public is our own life? And this exposure is occurring through stories and poems? In this presentation my reflections on these questions, written as I lived the experience of being both researcher and participant, are re-presented through reflective poems drawn from my thesis. My reflections, written from the security of successful graduation, are woven into the text surrounding these poems. The simultaneous mirror/window quality of these re-presentations opens for the listener a reflective space within which to imagine and re-imagine their research experience.

**Key words:** Issues in Learning at a Doctoral Level; Alternative forms of Doctoral Study

# Exposing the Private in the Public through Poems: Reflections of a PhD Student

## Prologue: Once upon a time ...

Once upon a time there was a woman  
Who wasn't sure if she could do a PhD

A male PhD student said  
Don't be ridiculous, you'll never finish  
His supervisor said  
Yes that **was** so  
No woman had ever completed in **his** faculty.

The academic journals agreed.  
Women experienced barriers  
To becoming postgraduate students  
To completing their postgraduate study  
Women took longer  
Few completed.

Her work colleagues said  
Nonsense, don't take any notice of the men.  
Her friend said  
Oh yes, let me introduce you to three bloody good women  
Who supported me through my PhD.

Her husband said  
Go for it.  
Her children said  
Well she didn't ask them actually.  
She just went ahead and did it anyway.

As I begin to reflect and relive my PhD journey I can see in my mind's eye, and feel in my heart, the pain and the joy that is writing; the pain of vulnerability and exposure; the joy of knowing more about my self and of wanting to share that 'more' with others. This journey was a time when as a writer I felt like I was balancing on an edge as I negotiated the boundary space between private and public.

The writing story that follows — *Balanced on an Edge* — is a narrative about the writing process itself (Richardson, 1997). The story begins by introducing the complications that arose as I negotiated the unknown space where the boundary between researcher and researched has collapsed. These were complications about exposing my private in the public as a research text to be analysed and interpreted by

others, and complications that arose as this exposure occurred through poetic representation of my life stories<sup>1</sup>. In the second half of the paper the focus turns to the two critical moments that gave me permission to write my personal poems in the public. The first ‘moment’ was my recognition, through the use of the Johari Window, of multiple presentations of my self: public-self, personal-public-self, personal-private-self and private-self. The second was the use of the zebra metaphor to expose my personal-private-self in the public.

This writing story, like all ‘good’ stories, is composed of a beginning, a middle and an end. Drawing on the approaches to narrative described by a number of researchers (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Cortazzi, 1993; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Riessman, 1993) the writing story — *Balanced on an Edge* — contains the following elements.

<b>Beginning:</b>	
Prologue: Once upon a time ...	An orientation to the story to follow.
Choices, Questions, Dilemmas	An orientation to the people, places, and events that led to the complication that is the heart of the story.
<b>Middle:</b>	
Poems are most instructive when the writers are most vulnerable	The complications that arose in response to the question: And then, what happened?
In the end my personal poems emerge in print for all to see	The resolution of the complications.
<b>End:</b>	
Yes, it was worthwhile!	The evaluation (why the story was told).
Once upon a time ...	The coda (brings the story to a close).

My reflections written as I lived the experience of being both researcher and participant are re-presented through reflective poems drawn from my thesis. Through these reflections I invite the reader to relive with me the events portrayed. My reflections, written from the security of graduation, are woven into the text surrounding these poems. In this text my personal voice as participant and my

academic voice as researcher are intertwined. By sharing both sorts of reflection this story contributes to a growing literature that reflexively explores the personal lived experiences of PhD researchers<sup>2</sup>.

As interactive reader of this story don't be a spectator lurking in the margins of the text. Be open to "feel, care and desire" (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 24). As you read ask yourself: To what extent is this my story? To what extent is it different? Then, take up the challenge to become a storyteller. Begin to tell your story by writing of your experience and sharing that story with other readers.

## **Balanced on an Edge: A writing story**

### **Choices, Questions, Dilemmas**

I began my PhD journey knowing there would be choices, questions and dilemmas. As a researcher I knew I would be questioning my understandings of the nature of knowledge, how knowledge is constructed, my conceptions of research and my practice of research that had formed around these values. I knew that being a postgraduate research student was not necessarily a smooth journey. For example, the postgraduate literature suggests writing can be a problematic area of the postgraduate research experience (Phillips & Pugh, 1994; Torrance & Thomas, 1994). Postgraduate students can experience difficulty getting started and once underway may encounter barriers and writing blocks. I knew too, that there was a balancing act to negotiate around multiple roles as academic, PhD student, and my roles in other life spheres. My colleague, Barbara, had alerted me to the need to make choices between competing values to resolve difficult dilemmas. Barbara had said:

... there's always competing values and that part of your job in life is to be thinking and rethinking. I'd learned some skills of hard nosed thinking and then heart felt thinking about my priorities and that's what is the heart of the balancing act. At first I thought I was really only balancing the academic and the research side of things but they don't separate out that easily. It's all about balancing living.

(McCormack & Pamphilon, 1997, p. 19)<sup>3</sup>

I recognised many of these choices and dilemmas when as a beginning postgraduate student I wrote:

I am beginning my dissertation  
I am making choices  
Contextual choices  
    Personal  
    Political  
    Professional  
Positioning Choices  
    Epistemological  
    Methodological  
    Method  
Writing Choices  
    Textual form  
    Voices  
Textual interactions

Choices  
    Questions  
    Dilemmas

I am a woman writing  
Is this a contradiction?  
No, women have always written  
    In their personal spaces  
    In homes, kitchens, bedrooms.  
    In their personal places  
In journals, recipe books, prayer books.

I am a woman writing publicly  
Is this a contradiction?  
No, as an academic I'm expected to write  
Dissertations, journal articles, conference papers  
Lecture notes, textbooks, web sites.

So, what **is** the problem **then**?  
Well, the problem is:  
I am an academic writer  
And a writer in private places and spaces.  
My knowledge is theoretical  
It is also personal, practical and political.  
The knowledge of professional and personal lived experience.  
My research is lived and living practice.  
I am a woman writing the private in the public.

Choices  
    Questions  
    Dilemmas

How can I nurture my own voice  
Be true to myself  
And at the same time  
Lay claim to knowing something?

How can I write myself  
And the women I research with  
Into My Dissertation  
With intellectual and spiritual integrity?

I am a woman writing my dissertation.  
Who do I allow into my dissertation?  
I?  
Allow?  
My texts?  
Do I really mean allow and my?  
Really?  
Is it a matter of allowing or the right to be there?

I want to give voice to my participants  
I want?  
Give voice?  
My participants?  
What right do I have to give voice?  
Rights?  
Whose voice can I give but my own?

I want to write myself into my text  
I want?  
Write myself?  
My text?  
But I have multiple voices?  
Within and Without  
Which voices are included?

Choices  
Questions  
Dilemmas

Already I feel overwhelmed.  
But it is more than the questions  
That is weighing me down  
It is the responsibility  
Caring for research participants  
Caring for myself during the research process  
Caring for myself as a participant in the research  
Sharing the research with others  
Choices, Changes, Making a Difference.

(McCormack, 2001, pp. 27–29)

Common to the dilemmas identified in this poem — researched/researcher, within/without, personal/professional, student/academic, living practice/theory — was the necessity for me to expose my private in the public. Acknowledging and celebrating the ‘I’ in the research process and in the texts that grew from the research was integral to my researcher self. What was new to this self as a PhD researcher was that not only was I

writing myself ‘into’ my research, but also, I was a participant ‘in’ my research. My PhD research<sup>4</sup> asked thirteen women to tell what it was like ‘up close and personal’ to be a postgraduate research student. To tell the very ‘stuff’ that was missing from the stories of the postgraduate research experience available to PhD students at that time, and to do that telling with intellectual and spiritual integrity. How could I not be one of the women who told her story? How could I ask other women postgraduate researchers to tell their story — to tell all — if I too did not tell my story of being a postgraduate researcher? I could not. Coralie became one of the six women whose personal narratives were recorded in my thesis. This decision was then further complicated by my choice to represent my self-inquiry through poems.

As I began my PhD research I was drawn to ways of writing that were different. My eye seemed to unconsciously seek out and fix upon titles in bibliographies that indicated by their choice of words that something different was going on between their covers. Why was I so drawn? I’m not sure. Some possibilities come to mind.

- ❖ My growing understanding of research as lived and living practice.
- ❖ My commitment to a feminist research approach sensitive to issues of power and control in the research process.
- ❖ My concerns around voice and re-presentation of the ‘other’ in research texts.
- ❖ My feeling that writing was a personal act of becoming/being, an act of self creation/development and a social and collective activity, not a solitary and hidden task and definitely not a mechanical/objective task.
- ❖ Also, in the writing I had done since my Masters thesis I had become much more self-conscious about my own assumptions and values and how these became visible through what I wrote.
- ❖ I saw my PhD research as an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of other postgraduate researchers, in the lives of those who joined me on my research journey and in my own life.

- ❖ There was also a hope that I could encourage interactive rather than passive readers.

Then, as I started to write my story I found that I couldn't write stories that looked like the stories of my early childhood. The tale was not a linear sequence, moving progressively over time in a neat and tidy fashion. The words just would not come out in neat lines and paragraph-sized chunks. Sometimes the words would rush out onto my page and I would sit amazed (and frightened) by what was in front of me. And mostly these words didn't look like the text of the theses I saw on library shelves, but more like the poems I had enjoyed as a teenager.

“Film, video, storytelling, novels, performance, poetry, visual art, music and photography are a few of the emerging genres in arts-based research” (International Institute for Qualitative Methodology, 2003). However, as I began my self-inquiry in 1996 few researchers had published alternative re-presentations of their interview texts. Personal narratives (Kiesinger, 1998; Tierney, 1998), poems (Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 1992, 1997), dramatic monologues (Hatton, 1998) or reader's theatre (Adams et al., 1998; Ellis & Bochner, 1992) were among the few published arts-based re-presentations of research that I came across in my early forays into the literature. Two of these works were particularly influential. As I read and reread the poetic representation of interview transcripts composed by Corrine Glesne (1997) and Laurel Richardson (1992, 1997) I gained the courage to keep writing my poems.

Courage was needed because in these poems I saw my most intimate self looking back at me from the text on the page. These were poems whose tentacles extended beyond research, to tug on my heart. They were exposing feelings that came from deep within me. Feelings I had never spoken to myself, let alone to others — the readers of my story — who I did not know, and indeed would probably never meet. And they were about choices that stretched me to consider issues and feel feelings I had not anticipated when I began my PhD journey. So, why do poems heighten for

the researcher/participant the intensity of choosing to expose their private in the public?

### **Poems are most instructive when the writers are most vulnerable**

Poetic re-presentation complicated the choices about what to expose and what to keep hidden in my thesis re-presentations of my life because poems are performance texts (Denzin, 1997) that touch us “where we live, in our bodies” (Richardson, 1997, p. 143). Poems call into play multiple selves: the physical or sensual self, the cognitive self and the feeling self<sup>5</sup>. Poems can do this because they are relational, sensual, messy texts.

The poems I wrote were relational. They were about relations with others and with my selves and they invited particular relationships with readers. As Kenneth Gergen (2000) notes, writing gains its meaning and significance through its relationship with the reader and the form we choose for our writing simultaneously “invites certain forms of relationship while discouraging or suppressing others” (p. 1 of 17).

As self-inquirers the relationships with others we most often need to make sense of through our writing are the intimate relations with those who are closest to us. Through poems the writer offers the audience a dressmaker’s view of these relationships. In my poems I found myself revealing memories I thought I had safely ‘locked away’. I experienced the garment of my self being turned inside out to expose — the fraying edges, loose threads and pieces of material that didn’t fit neatly together — my memories of my relationships with my mother.

They’re always there  
In our secret inner spaces  
Burdening our hearts  
Or exposed on our shirt sleeves  
Visible to all  
They lie in wait  
Those memories.

They’re always there  
Our most secret feelings  
Pain and Fear

Love and Hate  
Anger and Calm  
They lie in wait  
Those memories.

They're always there  
Moments that changed our lives forever  
Success and Failure  
The miracle of life  
The finality of death  
They lie in wait  
Those memories.

Then Suddenly  
When we least expect, or want it,  
They Leap to the fore  
Filling all our personal Space  
Exposing the depth of our Feelings  
Returning the intimate details of the Moment  
Until Overwhelmed we can stand no more  
Those memories.  
They lie in wait.

(McCormack, 2001, pp. 364–365)

It is in the poetic telling of intimate moments with those we love that storytellers are at their most vulnerable and this vulnerability is heightened because poems are a performance that calls on all the senses of both writer and audience. Poems employ particular ‘devices’ such as meter, rhyme, cadence, speed, alliteration and repetition to elicit sensual bodily responses from the reader/listener. “Through accessing the senses, poetry makes one pause, reflect, feel” (Glense, 1997, p. 213).

Sound — hearing as writer and reader — noisy words, quiet words;  
soothing words, abrupt words.

Sight — seeing as writer and reader — the emptiness of blank spaces,  
the anger of bold tall words.

Taste — tasting as writer and reader — the dry mouth of fear, the salty  
taste of tears.

Feel — feeling as writer and reader — the chill that runs down your  
spine and the sweat on your palms as tension mounts.

Writing poetic memories of my mother drew forth responses from my sensual self (hands shaking, eyes blurring), my cognitive self (my questioning self) and my

feeling self (emotions squeeze through the cracks) and in so doing call forth similar emotions from the audience (e.g. empathy, compassion, mindfulness).

How can I write of the personal  
While my hand shakes  
While my eyes blur  
While tears drip  
Drips turn to a shower  
Showers to a waterfall  
How can I draw the blind on the window  
That opens my feelings

But the blind cannot be drawn  
Emotions squeeze through the cracks  
Where the blind is not flush with the window  
Then, like the morning sun  
They flood into my research  
As the tension on the blind is lost  
And it springs up  
To wind around itself at the top of the window  
The blind cannot be drawn.

(McCormack, 2001, p. 57)

Poems as performance texts are also messy texts — messy in structure and messy in presentation — and as such are ideal to re-present the complex, often contradictory, experience of being a postgraduate researcher. Poems do not necessarily structure an ordered sequence of thoughts. Words do not necessarily follow each other neatly across a line, and lines do not always proceed in an orderly fashion down the page. Poems look messy because they consciously employ visual aspects of text such as: word shape (colour and size), line length, shape and direction of movement (up and down, across and around the page), and use of space (arrangement of black and white spaces on the page). For example, in the poem on the following page I use white space to evoke the sense of emptiness I experienced after my mother’s death and to invite the reader/listener into the text to imagine and experience this emptiness with me.

The heart of the dilemma then, is that as embodied performance texts, poems are “most instructive and revealing when they are most personal ... when the owners of the stories are most vulnerable” (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997, p. 82). That is their value and their danger. Poems are sensual and relational and as such are an invitation to

intimacy; an invitation that must be carefully considered when offered, and never taken for granted when accepted.

**The pain of loss.**

Of mother, of self.

The hardest part is knowing I'll Survive

Emptiness

The hardest part is knowing I'll Survive.

(McCormack, 2001, p. 370)

### **In the end my personal poems emerge in print for all to see**

Resolution of the complications that arose from my position, balanced on the edge as participant/researcher, became possible when I realised that for me there is a difference between the public, the personal and the private. Drawing on the self-reflective tool of the Johari Window (McGill & Beaty, 1995) was what finally alerted me to this difference<sup>6</sup>. The Johari Window asks us to think about aspects of our selves in four ways: aspects known to self, aspects unknown to self, aspects

known to others and aspects unknown to others. When these aspects of self are plotted on an axis four combinations of knowing are possible:

Known to self	Unknown to self
Known to others	Known to others
Known to self	Unknown to self
Unknown to others	Unknown to others

Relating these quadrants to my private-public dilemma I was able to distinguish four presentations of my self and to recognise that these presentations are always situated, contextual and relational. What we reveal is always a balancing act.

<b>Public Self</b>	Known to others and known to my self. I can present this self openly to others.
<b>Personal Public Self</b>	Known to self, unknown but can become knowable to others (the personal that I can expose in the public). <u>Or</u> Aspects unknown to my self, but known to others, and can become known to my self through self-discovery. No balancing is needed here either.
<b>Personal Private Self</b>	Unknown to my self and unknown to others, but can become knowable to my self through self-reflection and knowable to others through my stories and poems. Careful compromise gives permission to expose the personal-private in the public.
<b>Private Self</b>	Unknown to self and unknown to others revealed through the process of self-inquiry but which must remain unknown to others. This private self cannot be written in the public because it is just too painful. Too painful for my self and too painful for those closest to me who are positioned by their closeness as subjects in my stories and poems.

Knowing there are multiple presentations of self doesn't always make locating particular events within one of these presentations any easier for there will always be edge dwellers. Life, of course, is always more complicated than the neat boxes of the Johari Window. Some of these edge dwellers will, with the passing of time, move

from the private to the personal and eventually become public. As Marion Halligan (2001) writes there are “things” that writers find “too hard to deal with now” that have to be “put away till later” (p. 26). There are, however, feelings that come from deep within me, things that will forever remain private.

Initially I thought I was somehow failing as a writer as I agonised over these private aspects of self I needed to keep hidden. I had read inspirational evocative texts such as those of Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner<sup>7</sup> (1992) and Carol Rambo Ronai<sup>8</sup> (1992). Why couldn't I ‘tell all’? In the end, what helped me sort through this dilemma was remembering that each of the accounts I read was indeed ‘only a story’. In any story things are left out and sometimes what is not said is more than what is exposed in the text. I did not know what each of these authors had left unsaid; how each had located their public—personal—private boundary. Also, making a distinction between ‘being silenced’ and ‘choosing silence’ helped me come to terms with my decision to keep some aspects of my self in the private. While being silenced in a text is disempowering, I found choosing silence and valuing that choice to be empowering.

Naming parts of my life as public, personal-public, personal-private, or private, and valuing my choice to sometimes remain silent, moved the dilemma of writing my personal in the public toward resolution. Writing the public self and exposing the personal-public self in poems was then possible. It was metaphor that helped me expose the personal-private self.

Metaphors present the “qualitative aspects of life” (Eisner, 1991, p. 227), that is, our feelings, values and perceptions. Metaphors capture the reader’s attention through their powerful use of association, the “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). Janice Jipson (1995) in a discussion of research as autobiography talks about it being “inconceivable” for her to understand what has happened in her life “without metaphor” (p. 187). For me, writing the personal-private self in the public is inconceivable without metaphor.

Metaphors ‘allowed’ me — gave me permission — to transform the painful personal-private into the less painful personal-public and provided a vehicle for this transformation to occur. Metaphors do this because they allow the writer to distance the feeling or event about which they are writing, decontextualise it, and attribute that feeling or event through association to an ‘other’. In my poems, the other is a zebra whose stripes are unwinding, and accumulating in a pile behind her. This zebra became a metaphor to capture and expose my feelings, and through poetic re-presentation of these feelings, to call for help from my readers who at that stage in my research were my partner and my supervisors. The zebra became a way for me to talk about, and write about, the personal-private in the public.

Though I came by the picture of this zebra quite accidentally, a colleague asked me to review her subject outline and the zebra was part of that document, the zebra metaphor is a ‘natural’ choice for me and as such, made immediate sense to my partner and supervisors. My passion as a geographer for particular sorts of landscapes has drawn me to both imagine and experience the African savanna — the home of the zebra. The pattern of the zebra’s stripes, which is unique to each zebra but also has a sense of commonality across zebras, reflects the simultaneous individual and collective nature of personal experience. Poems that story this personal experience encourage readers/listeners to “raise questions about their practices ... question their own stories ... to foster reflection, storying and restorying” (Clandinin, 1992, pp. 135-36, in Laidlaw, 1997, p. 11).

In the poem below, the zebra’s experience of stress is my experience of stress during my last year of balancing full-time academic work, family and postgraduate study. A time when my balancing act was not working particularly well, and my need to re-balance urgent.

The pile of unwound stripes on the ground is  
Huge  
Enormous  
Gigantic!

My trusty weather vane,  
The zebra poster by my desk,  
Showing a zebra looking around  
In horror  
To see her stripes unwinding  
Is looking distinctly tattered  
And not just around the edges!

The zebra knows more than it is telling.  
But in what it shows  
An enormous pile of unwound stripes,  
It is doing the telling.

My unique pattern unwinds  
Lies in the dust behind me.  
I desperately push close to a tree  
Trying to make the stripes stick.  
It's a temporary fix  
As soon as I move they begin again  
Unwinding, unwinding, unwinding ...

I am exhausted.  
I keep getting dizzy,  
Feeling nauseous.  
My normally low blood pressure  
Is lower than it has ever been before.  
I just want to get things finished,  
Tie off the loose ends.

Soon I'll have no stripes left  
Will I still be me?  
Only when my thesis is finished.

(McCormack, 2001, pp. 358–359)

This metaphor not only helped me talk publicly about my experience of stress at a particular point in my research journey, but also acted as a resource on which I could draw to later talk about my experience of re-balancing during my period of study leave.

#### Study Leave

I think I am actually  
Winding some stripes back on  
And they are staying in place!

#### Recovering stripes means

Recovering health  
Standing without pain  
Returning to aerobics  
Moving to the music  
Confidently, and with energy.  
Taking time to enjoy tennis and squash with friends.

Not being so tired in the evening  
That collapse is all I can think of  
As I open the door.

Recovering stripes means  
Recovering the joy of writing.  
The freedom to write in different formats  
To write when I want to  
Morning, noon or night  
To write where I want to  
Under a tree or at my desk.

Recovering stripes means  
Recovering my children.  
Not that they had actually gone anywhere  
But I had in a way  
I just wasn't there  
Now I notice what they wear  
I listen to what they say  
And speak more than monosyllables to them.

Recovering stripes means  
Recovering balance  
Study is still leisure  
But other parts of the balancing equation  
Health, research and family  
Have now returned.

(McCormack, 2001, pp. 379–380)

### **Yes, it was worthwhile!**

And, in the end, when recovery was assured and graduation achieved, was balancing on the private — public edge worthwhile? Well, the answer to this question is both yes and no. On one hand I have learnt, as Becky Ropers-Huilman (1999) discovered, that writing as inquiry comes “from and returns to places deep inside me, from places where meaning is churned up and tossed around, only to promote more questions and uncertainty” (p. 21). On the other hand, there is the sense of achievement I feel through coming to know my self as a writer and the confidence I now feel to reveal in public that I am a writer of stories and poems.

I write for my life  
And of my life  
And for and of the lives  
Of the women I research with.

Writing is cathartic  
Writing is discovery

Coming to know myself as a writer.

Experimenting with textual form  
Poems, Conversations, Stories  
Individual Stories, Collective Stories.  
Stories within Stories, Nested Stories.

Writing is interpretive  
Writing is about inquiry

Inquiry into others' lives  
Inquiry into my life  
Inquiry into our lives  
Inquiry into the unknown

For who can know the outcomes  
Balancing on the edge  
Who will gain  
Who will lose  
Who remains on the edge  
And whose footing will give way  
As the edge crumbles beneath.

(McCormack, 2001, p. xx; and my journal)

Experimenting with voice  
Personal experience 'I'  
Participants' voices  
Co-authored 'We'  
A researcher's voice.

Experimenting with interaction  
Researcher/Reader conversations  
Inviting readers into my text  
Offering them choices  
Seeking their opinions  
Hoping for their responses  
Inviting their stories.

Coming to value myself as a writer.

(McCormack, 2001, pp. 371–372)

The choices we make as participant/researcher are inevitably complicated. They are complicated because they can appear when you least expect them, and so are least prepared for them, and even when you anticipate them, life in its complexity throws your neat preparations into confusion. They can stir something deep within us that may not have been stirred before and so leave us feeling that, though we know more than when we began, we also know more than we wanted to know when we began. They are choice simultaneously about our own lives/selves and choices enmeshed in our everyday lives.

What we learn as an outcome of these choices is not as straightforward as the dictionary definition of 'more' as a quantity would suggest. More is not a quantity we can place on the scales at the completion of our research and balance against what is still to be known. Sometimes the 'more' we know is empowering, we learn more about our selves, our topic and those we have been researching with. At other times, however, the 'more' becomes a burden, an albatross on a chain around our neck, bending us over as we are provoked into more self-questioning that we had expected as we began our research.

But, when all was said, done and felt

**YES it was WORTHWHILE!**

## Coda: Once upon a time ...

Once upon a time

There was a PhD researcher  
Who strove  
Diligently  
Relentlessly  
To be ethical  
Accountable  
To her participants  
To her readers  
To her self.

But,

She was an insider/outsider  
A researcher and researched  
Teller of her story  
Receiver of others' stories.

And,

Knower of more than she dared hope to know

But,

Knower of more than seemed bearable to know.

And, in the end,

Knowing there were more questions than answers  
For an ethical and accountable researcher.

So,

As interactive reader your invitation is ongoing.  
No RSVP date is included.  
Continue to reflect on our stories, your stories.  
Continue the process of storying stories.

(McCormack, 2001, pp. 478–479)

## Notes

1. Writing the private about other research participants is also an important issue for researchers to explore (see for example, Ribbens & Edwards, 1998) but this issue is not the focus of this paper.
2. See for example: Bartlett & Mercer, 2001; Byrne-Armstrong *et al.*, 2001; Comber, 1999.
3. Barbara's was one of many stories generated from a research project that sought to explore the balancing strategies employed by women academics during their time as postgraduate research students (McCormack & Pamphilon, 1997).
4. My doctoral research (McCormack, 2001) begun in 1996 explored the question: How does the experience of being a postgraduate research student change the way women construct and experience leisure? This longitudinal exploration occurred through in-depth conversations with 13 women over their entire time as postgraduate researchers.
5. Rudolf Steiner (1947) observed that the human being consists of a physical body, emotions and thoughts.

6. “The diagrammatic representation known as the Johari Awareness Model or Johari Window (a name derived from the authors’ names (Luft, 1984)” describes “the forms of awareness of behaviour and feelings in a relationship” (McGill & Beaty, 1995, p. 144).
7. In their experimental performance piece “Telling and Performing Personal Stories. The Constraints of Choice in Abortion” Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner (1992) present their personal account of their lived experience of abortion.
8. Carol Rambo Ronai (1992) examines her emotional experience while rejoining the strip bar setting as a dancer/researcher and the lived experience of writing about it.

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