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

Dr Coralie McCormack
Lecturer, Centre for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Scholarship, University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT 2601. Australia.
Tel: 61 02 62015385
Fax: 61 02 62015290
Email: Coralie.Mccormack@canberra.edu.au

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\(^1\). 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.

**Beginning:**
- Prologue: Once upon a time …
- Choices, Questions, Dilemmas

  An orientation to the story to follow.
  An orientation to the people, places, and events that led to the complication that is the heart of the story.

**Middle:**
- Poems are most instructive when the writers are most vulnerable
- In the end my personal poems emerge in print for all to see

  The complications that arose in response to the question: And then, what happened?
  The resolution of the complications.

**End:**
- Yes, it was worthwhile!
- Once upon a time …

  The evaluation (why the story was told).
  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 researchers².

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)³
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 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 re-present 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. 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 emptyness 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

Emptyness

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. 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Known to self</th>
<th>Unknown to self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Known to others</td>
<td>Known to others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Known to self</th>
<th>Unknown to self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unknown to others</td>
<td>Unknown to others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Known to others and known to my self. I can present this self openly to others.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Known to self, unknown but can become knowable to others (the personal that I can expose in the public). Or 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^7\) (1992) and Carol Rambo Ronai\(^8\) (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.

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.

(McCormack, 2001, pp. 379–380)
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.


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).


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.

References


dissertation, University of Bath, Bath, UK. Online at:
http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/moira.shtml.


