GAIL CRIMMINS

8. THE INTRINSIC PLEASURE OF BEING PRESENT WITH/IN HUMANISTIC RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research is said to add flesh to the bones of quantitative data, and narrative inquiry more specifically, is described as emotionally comforting, reassuring, and validating for the participants who share their stories. But little is written on the impact of engaging in qualitative research on the researcher. This chapter therefore explores a humanistic approach to investigating the lived experience of women casual academics in Australian universities, and exposes the emotional and embodied labour and rewards involved in researching others' stories. Through reflecting in and on my practice as a narrative inquirer I discuss how I was affectively and ideologically motivated to investigate the lives of women casual academics, and demonstrate how my heart worked in conjunction with my head with/in the research process. I also explore how humanistic inquiry cannot be fully pre-planned or determined as we use our affective and logical response to each research stage to inform the next re-search action. Humanistic inquiry therefore requires emotional and cognitive presence and embodied reflection where we look outward to connect with research participants, and reflect inward to learn how we feel and think about our research journey, relationships and emerging outcomes. We then use our feelings, values and thoughts to motivate and shape subsequent steps in the investigation. Regular self-reflection allows us to connect with Others/research participants, (re)connect with ourselves, and achieve a sense of research 'flow' and unbounded and pleasure.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT – THE HUMAN CONDITION

Qualitative research invites researchers to inquire about the human condition and explore the meaning of human experiences (Taylor, 2013), and is often ascribed human or humanizing characteristics. For instance, Patton (2002, p. 132) suggests that 'qualitative data can put flesh on the bones of quantitative results, bringing results to life'. Similarly, particular approaches to qualitative research such as arts-informed, person-centred and narrative inquiry are afforded humanizing qualities. For example, Dewing (2002) suggests that contributing to person-centred research can affirm the humanity of participants, whilst White and Epston (1990) claim that listening attentively to research participants' accounts of lived experience can validate participants' humanity and enhance their self-efficacy. Finally, the artistic representation or performance of narrative research is considered to have a

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humanizing effect on an audience. In particular, Sikes and Gale (2006) claim that performed data enhances the emotional connection of humans by opening our senses to others, and Gray, Fitch, LaBrecque, and Greenberg (2003) posit that engaging with patients' lives on the stage has a "humanizing effect" by offering increased insight into, and empathy with, the experiences of patients and their families.

Yet, despite the human and humanizing qualities ascribed to qualitative research on its participants and audiences, there is currently very little discussion on how the research process impacts on us/researchers, or that the emotional and cognitive experience of research can actually shape research decisions making. That is, it is not fully understood how we as researchers *feel* and *think* during the research process, and how our experience helps to determine our practice. In order to uncover and acknowledge the human dimension of academic research (and perhaps in doing so celebrate our humanity) I share with you here a reflection in and on my process (Schön, 1983) as a humanistic narrative inquirer.

Humanism is a secular, philosophical and ethical stance that places importance on the dignity and values of human beings. It also recognizes humans' affective, emotional and rational domains of being. Humanism accepts that we engage with our environment on affective/emotional and intellectual levels and that our thoughts and feelings motivate our action in the world (Huitt, 2009). More specifically, a humanistic approach to research is described as compassionate, caring, concerned with meeting human needs; and aims to address human problems for both the individual and society (Rogers, Lyon, & Tausch, 2013). Therefore, humanistic research is undertaken by fully embodied persons (that is, persons with affect and cognition) for the good of individuals (selves and others), and for society.

RESEARCH APPROACH AND PROCESS

For the project I discuss here I adopted a self-reflexive stance of "not knowing" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992) how my humanistic stance might impact on my research decision-making within an investigation into the lived experience of women casual academics in Australia. Self-reflexivity is understood to be an integral process in qualitative research where we/researchers reflect on how our perceptions and actions impact upon our actions (Gerrish & Lacey, 2006). It is also considered to be an important part of transparency and self-disclosure within the qualitative research process (Smith, 2008). Yet, despite the fact that self-reflexivity is usually a central characteristic of qualitative inquiry, it remains under-discussed and almost invisible in the scholarship we create about our research practices. In contrast, in this chapter I focus explicitly on my thoughts, feelings and emotions experienced during a research project, and how they inform/ed the research journey.

Selecting a Research Focus and Approach

Prior to researching the lived experience of women casual academics in Australia I had held a Senior Lectureship in the UK and enjoyed what I understand now as the dignity of ongoing academic employment. The role afforded me an office, regular salary, and a visible presence, a significant degree of academic autonomy, and a voice in the school and university in which I worked. After six years in the role I immigrated to Australia, seven months pregnant with my first child, a husband, and two suitcases. I returned to academia, this time part-time and in Australia, when my second child was eight months old and my first born was two. I was employed as an academic development coordinator three days a week. Again, in this role I was provided the dignity of an office, regular income, social/cultural integration, academic autonomy and recognition. But I missed teaching students, and so after a year I resigned from that post to work as a casual academic. Casual academics are also known as an adjuncts, sessional staff or casual teachers. Yet within my role as a casual academic I felt anonymous. I was without a regular income and paid entitlements and had very little control over what, I taught, or even how I designed the learning and teaching I offered. The feelings of invisibility and disenfranchisement were highly emotional for me. On the one hand I re-enjoyed teaching and engaging with students, but I felt lonely, undervalued and without voice. It was this emotional response to experiencing the lived experience of being a casual academic that compelled me to explore academic casualisation within a research process.

Subsequently, by examining the scholarship around casualisation, I identified that there was indeed a “gap in the literature” and that very little was known about the lived experience of casual academics (Coates et al., 2009). Yet “turning to the literature” was a *response* to my embodied self-reflexivity, not my primary impulse. Embodied cognition is considered a primal, pre-rational, non-introspective process (Wojciehowski & Gallese, 2011), where self-knowledge is contained and communicated through bodily and emotional sensations (Pagis, 2009). Embodied self-reflexivity is described as the capacity to identify and understand bodily sensations as indexes to psychological states (Pagis, 2009). For me, my emotional response to working as an adjunt motivated me to explore the lived experience of women casual academics, a motivation that was supported by engaging with the scholarship around casualisation of academia.

Second, through the feminist lens with which I view and understand the world, I observed that most casual academics in Australia are women (May et al., 2011), and as a feminist researcher I recognize “the essential importance of examining women’s experience” (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004, p. 3). I decided therefore to develop a research project that focussed on the experience of women casual academics in order to “touch base with the variety of real life stories women provide about themselves” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 21).

Reflecting on my initial research process, therefore, identified that I was both emotionally drawn to the research focus, and that my political/ideological/cognitive stance helped to shape the research methodology I would employ. Thus, research decision-making is not necessarily predominantly or solely a cognitive process, as most academic literature seems to suggest. I wonder, then, how many other qualitative researchers feel initially compelled by their/our emotional and ideological 'situation' to engage in a particular research project, and subsequently seek to verify our decisions in academic discourse as a secondary impulse, or even hide an emotional or ideological rationale behind/under/within a logical 'academic' argument?

Physical Cognition and Emotion can act as a Litmus Test to Determine the 'Fit' of a Research Process for the Researcher

Once I'd selected the research focus and methodology, I spent the following few months considering suitable research methods, engaging in a literature review and writing an ethics application. Interestingly, even though I'd initially been emotionally and ideologically compelled to engage in the research, I spent most of my time in this second phase of research cognitively engaging with others' theories and processes. In other words I spent most of this time 'in my head'. Reflecting both in and on this process I recognize that I maintained my interest in the focus of the study but was not excited or passionate about it. I found much of what I read interesting and occasionally re-read a paper as it was so 'useful' to my planned practice. But I was rarely animated or exuberant within or about the process. At times I admit it felt like 'hard work'.

In contrast, during phase three of the research, which involved meeting with women casual academics and eliciting their stories of lived experience, I noticed a strong emotional impulse and connection to the project resurface, I became very animated, enthusiastic and energized by the research again. I felt *compelled* to spend as much time as possible engaging with the women participants, ensuring that they felt comfortable, listening care-fully to their her-stories, and was physically, emotionally and empathetically absorbed by them.

In particular, cognisant that talking about personal experience is usually an emotional experience (Richards, 2011), and being open to participants' potential vulnerabilities, I spent time chatting to the women participants (usually several times) before inviting them to share their stories with me. I also let them decide to tell their stories in whichever media or medium they wished as Keats' (2009) suggests that participants may have a preference for one form of narrative expression over another. I also felt that the more comfortable the women were, the more likely they would be to share of the stories that they wished to tell. This was part of an interviewing process which resisted establishing the parameters of formal and structured interviews that can confine the responses participants can select or share (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002), I simply told the women that it was up to them what and how what talked about their experience of working as a casual academic. In this way I ceded control of the storying process to the participants and assumed the role of active listener (Jones, 2004). I simply listened to and was fully to receptive the stories the women shared. I didn't 'veer' them into any particular direction or narrative theme I instead gave my time, presence and authority to the storyteller, who I acknowledged “as the one who knows and tells” (Kramp, 2004, p. 111).

And as I sat and listened to “the ones who knew and were telling”, I experienced a strong empathetic engagement with the women and their stories. I felt honoured that the women would share their time and intimate details of their lives with me. I was also humbled that they would tell me their dreams, hopes, disappointments, joys and fears. The sense of humility, and care with the women could not be easily located in a particular part of my body or head. I can only describe the experience as a “feeling of body” (Wojciehowski & Gallese, 2011), where my whole being was engaged and absorbed in and by the women and their stories, and I experienced a very strong sense of connection. Wojciehowski & Gallese (2011) similarly explain that empathy and connection are “the outcome of our natural tendency to experience interpersonal relations at the implicit level of intercorporeity” or inter-physicality (Wojciehowski & Gallese, 2011, p. 17). Thus, by listening intently to the participants and then reflecting inwardly to how I felt in/with the women and their stories I recognized a fully embodied sense of empathy. In fact the experience was all consuming and provided me with tremendous energy. I felt vibrant, ‘alive’, dynamic and had the sense that to sit in this stage of story gathering without rushing on was the right thing to do; the right thing for me, for the women, and for the research project.

In particular, as I sat with the research participants listening to stories of lived experience I found myself mirroring their breathing patterns, facial expressions and gestures; and later when I listened to recorded transcriptions of the interviews I noticed that I was physically still, holding my breath, afraid that a sound – even my breath – might obscure or mute the nuance of a participant’s tone, pitch, pace or pause. I was physically and emotionally engrossed in the women’s narratives and wanted to hear and sense them as fully as possible.

I also noticed that it was during this time, when I was most emotionally engaged in the research process, that I enjoyed the research most too. It was indeed physically, emotionally and cognitively compelling, and demanding. I cried with the women, I cried for them afterwards, many times. I also laughed with them, out loud. I shared much of their sadness and joy. I was completely immersed in collecting their stories, the detail, the texture, the unique experience and telling and was tireless in my pursuit of capturing their authentic voice and experience. It was all consuming and as I didn’t resist it or try to hurry the process the experience was deeply satisfying and humanizing.

And then, once I’d collected their stories over 12 months and countless conversations, emails and phone conversations, I began to consider how I would select the narratives to re-tell. And this consideration made me pause. My relentless energy and drive halted, abruptly. This ‘hiatus’ seemed to coincide with (and therefore probably reflected) my emotional, cognitive and physical resistance to narrative analysis, which was the process of “handling the data” I’d originally planned to undertake. I fear/ed that the process dissecting the women’s stories into themes for analysis might distort the narrative flow of their stories, limit the possibility of establishing the context of each described event or character description, and diminish the idiosyncratic nature of their individualized experience. I also shared Richards' dilemma that she would "trespass with muddy feet into the hearts of her participants" were she to deconstruct the lived experience/stories of participants into un/usable categories of data (Richards, 2011, p. 11). I responded to this emotional, physical and cognitive resistance by sitting with the data for a while, *seemingly* doing nothing. Yet all the while I was thinking (and feeling) about how I might validate and share the women's stories without dissecting and scrutinizing them as if they were discreet cells. This rest, pause, interval (call if what you will) wasn't written into my research plan. It hadn't been built into my "projected timeline" as I could not have predicted my resistance beforehand.

So, in addition to times of high energy, focus, exhilaration, and passion, the humanistic, self-reflexive researcher may find her/himself in limbo, with unplanned pit stops, or a need for reorientation. The pleasure of high intensity can be accompanied with lows of emotional and cognitive responsibility to the other/research participant. But moreover, this experience taught me that our embodied response, *our thoughts and feelings about a particular research process can actually act as a litmus test to determine if the course of action we are undertaking or planning to enact, 'fits' with us as researchers, 'fits' with who we are as people and researchers, with how we view the research participants with whom we work, and how we want to engage in research more generally.* Although the experience didn't initially 'progress' the project, it did identify that we as researchers are humans with a capacity to feel and learn and act according to our feelings and values.

Academic Scholarship Can Stimulate an Embodied Response and Research Momentum

Interestingly, whilst I was seemingly pausing I was actively considering how I might engage in a process of organizing the 'data' (the women's stories) for discussion, I encountered Maggie MacLure's 2013 paper, "The wonder of data". What was remarkable about the encounter was that rather than 'the literature' substantiating my embodied or ideological impulse, as it had done previously, MacLure's scholarship instead *stimulated* an embodied response and re-energized me, motivating me to carry out the next stage in the research process with gusto. In fact, when reading the paper my heart raced and my face flushed, I felt overcome with physical and emotional energy. MacLure suggested that it was legitimate to engage with research data emotionally as narrative data is indeed emotional. She also acknowledged the "productive capacity for wonder that resides and radiates in data", and in our interaction with it (MacLure, 2013, p. 228). That is, MacLure accepts that researchers/we can have an emotional interaction with research data that confounds the methodical, mechanical search for meanings, codes, or themes. I was relieved, and my feelings (and pause) seemed validated.

In fact, MacLure's (2103) ideas created a sense of "home-coming" for me, my shoulders dropped and once again I began to feel exhilarated in and by the research process. She offered a sound theoretical and political base for my reluctance to undertake a narrative analysis, and perhaps unwittingly, offered a practical restorying solution to me. Moreover, the ideas MacLure presented created a strong feeling of 'rightness', of 'fit', 'legitimacy' and indeed, 'pleasure'. It felt so good to have my previous uncertainties and research pause legitimized. It's OK to engage in research as a fully embodied person and to feel protective over participants' stories she suggested. It's OK to engage with research data emotionally as well as cognitively, MacLure's words seemed to sing.

Using MacLure's ideas as inspiration, I worked relentlessly, tirelessly, and with creative energy, restorying the women participant's stories into a short drama, a drama that comprised participants' stories that excited me, moved me, or stimulated thought. I included in the data re-presentation only the words, sighs and silences that resonated with me, most of which were moments of personal story and biography that were peculiar to an individual participant. They told of the loss of a child, a colleague's unexpected death and no-one in the university telling the woman's casual colleagues, the casual academic that was told she was 'off-limits' and would not be receiving any future casual teaching, and the story of domestic violence and the need for casual work to sustain a family. These were not stories repeated by more than one participant, they were instead personally experienced and defied classification. Yet these stories 'glowed' me (MacLure, 2013), they resonated and deeply affected me. The restorying process, harnessed by MacLure's scholarship, was for me the most humane, satisfying, and enjoyable research process of the project. Yes, it was emotionally and creatively challenging too, but it was *equally* rewarding and joyous to pay homage to the strong, resilient and powerful women whose voices had hitherto been unheard in academia. I'm not suggesting though that the research process *has* to be emotionally challenging in order to being pleasurable and rewarding, but in my experience academic challenge can *also* be pleasurable and gratifying.

The result of my change of heart/process in deviating from my plan to narratively analyse the gathered research data, resulted in the creation of a performed drama that was presented live (at a research conference) and recordings of the drama were presented at an international and two national conferences. Moreover, the recordings of the drama (uploaded onto YouTube) received over 1000 views. It's doubtful that an academic paper would have generated such 'reach'. Yet if I had not been so emotionally engaged and self (and bodily) reflexive in and on the research process I perhaps would not have taken the risk to reject narrative analysis. I would have probably (instead) examined the data looking common themes, oft-repeated aspects and incidence of experience, and in doing so would have presented and discussed the research outcomes in traditional academic papers and conference presentations. This process would have undoubtedly prevented me from selecting the idiosyncratic stories that 'glowed' to me (MacLure, 2013), and some of the more private of stories of women casual academics would not have been re-presented for others to experience or know. I think then that had I not been emotionally, physically and cognitively engaged in the process, many of the stories of women's experience as casual academics would remain “yet to be voiced” (Arnot & Reay, 2007). Therefore, humanistic, fully embodied research can create an opportunity for multiplicity of stories and storytellers to be presented and celebrated in academic organisations (Boje, 1995) and supports the essential human right of being able to see oneself and one’s community conjured to the stage and thereby reflect on both the strengths and injustices of your world (Valentine, n.d.). The lesson I learned from this is that the researchers who are offering new insights and presenting new stories are not necessarily the ones following paths well-travelled. They may in fact be following their own path and judgment.

REFLECTIONS ON THE OVERALL RESEARCH PROCESS

On reflecting on the entire research process I see that there were times that my research was emotionally driven, and times when my rational and intellectual process dominated the process. But there were also phases of research within which my head and heart were symbiotically engaged. Moreover, when my emotional, moral and cognitive energies were simultaneously activated and I experienced an intense feeling of research flow. I was completely absorbed in the process, was excited by it, and engaged in it tirelessly for weeks – which-seemed-like-hours. Indeed, my experience of engaging with narrative research was as Patton *warned* (my emphasis) “time consuming, intimate, and intense” (Patton, 2002, p. 35), but it was also exhilarating, emerging and flow-full. I was fully immersed in the research process with a strong sense of contentment, alertness and energy (Csikszentmihályi, 1990). I was aware of a heightened experience of emotional and cognitive congruence (Hektner & Csikszentmihályi, 1996). Without full bodied engagement I doubt I would have reached such a pleasurable and satisfying experience.

A second reflection I have is that qualitative research when undertaken with full embodiment and humanity inevitably *unfolds* or *evolves*, it cannot be predetermined or systematically planned. For instance, I could not have predicted that I would feel the need to employ a data restorying process that privileged the unique narrative moments of participants until I had experienced an intense reaction against analytically ordering the stories into theoretically organized themes. As Merriam (1998) suggests “where to focus or stop action cannot be determined ahead of time” (p. 97). Thus, it seems that the humanistic researcher cannot know the path or destination of the research at the outset of a project. Instead, s/he initiates an action then responds with a fully embodied openness to context, to research participants, and to self. Furthermore, this process requires time and academic freedom. In particular, humanistic fully embodied research is dependent upon the researcher discerning how s/he feels about each stage in the research process before s/he/we can respond to what becomes physically, emotionally or cognitively apparent. In this regard fully embodied research is closely aligned to slow scholarship, an academic process where ideas are allocated time to ‘marinate’ and ‘ripen’ (Mountz et al., 2015, p. 3). Similarly, it is harmonious with feminist research which refuses to adhere to ‘masculine’ linearity or the placing of logic over emotion. Feminist research instead 'promiscuously' invites researchers to create 'in-the-making', unfolding, and responsive scholarship (Childers et al., 2013) that deviates from the restricted and tired timelines and formulas of traditional discourse. Fully embodied research, like feminist and slow scholarship, therefore requires researchers' presence, self-reflexivity, time, and internal and external flexibility to engage in care-full research practices. Unfolding and evolving processes are also conducive to a flow full and joyful experience for the researcher.

CONCLUDING STATEMENTS AND CLOSING THOUGHTS

Qualitative research is often described as having a humanizing effect on research participants and research audiences. Yet little has been written about the researcher's human and humanistic process of engaging in qualitative research. In this chapter, I have therefore discussed a fully embodied, reflexive account of a narrative inquiry. It is offered up as a "personal tale of what went on in the backstage of doing research" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 741). Reflecting in and on my research process helped me to identify and communicate that I was emotionally and ideologically drawn to a particular research focus and approach, and that some scholarship, as well as research data, can resonate or 'glow' (MacLure, 2013). Indeed both published literature and research data can compel the researcher to an emotional call to action, and when stimulated, engaging in research can be an intense, highly productive and creative 'flow-full' experience. Finally, when we work tirelessly, creatively, and compulsively we can find intense joy and satisfaction in the research process.

Yet, fully embodied, self-reflexive research is perhaps paradoxical to the p/restrictive traditional structures of academia where budgets, timelines and detailed research plans and outcomes are expected to be communicated before the research process begins. It occurs to me, through reflecting on this research process, that fully humanistic, fully embodied research, like slow and feminist research, inhabits a human resistance that challenges "neoliberalism's metrics and efficiencies" (Mountz et al, 2015, p. 19). It is not a resistance that requires fight, or angry determination, it is instead simply requires presence, self-knowledge and care-full engagement with each stage of the research journey. It is a resistance worth preserving as the alignment of heart and head, or affect and cognition, during the research process can bring a sense of humanism, integrity, and flow to the research process so that our work as academics can, and indeed *should*, be pleasurable and gratifying.

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