

## *Methodological article*

### **How poems go beyond: Advocating the use of poetic representation for therapeutic practitioner researchers in qualitative research**

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*This article focuses on how poetic representation of research offers therapeutic practitioners distinct ways to engage audiences, leading to a deeper, more dynamic and relationally based understanding of the lived experience of another than other research outputs allow.*

*Methodologically, it advocates that using poetic representation presents practitioners with an accessible, flexible, and therefore more viable way of presenting research findings that can encourage research confidence and engagement. It briefly describes the use of Gee's (1991) psycholinguistic framework in creating poetic form from unstructured narrative interviews with therapists who work with psychological trauma. This framework allows the researcher to readily draw out content that represents the most meaningful aspects of interview material. Using extracts from resultant poems, it explores the ways in which this form of data presentation offers the ability to connect with readers deeply and evocatively, ultimately leading to potential change in the reader's world as a result.*

#### **Introduction**

Qualitative research generally strives to understand meanings created with, and from, our experiences. Similarly, understanding the inner world of individuals as psychologists and therapists can be seen as integral to being able to support their psychological needs and work effectively in the therapeutic relationship. On this basis, qualitative research provides an immediate alignment with the work of practitioners in the field of counselling and psychotherapy. Despite this commonality, there is evidence from research, and practice, that practitioners find engagement with research as a scholarly activity to be a challenge. In a personal account, Young (2004) cites practical barriers: a lack of time to support the learning of new skills; a lack of organisational support for the research ideas; and a lack of mentoring and advice, as well as other financial and workload implications. This is echoed in findings

from Bager-Charleson et al. (2019), where lack of support from organisations and colleagues together with a lack of knowledge of research from their clinical training leaves practitioners feeling ‘homeless’, ill equipped and unsupported. These findings allow us to understand that practitioners see engaging in research around their practice as unsupported, time-consuming, illusive, and isolating. Becoming a researcher-practitioner is viewed as difficult, fraught with problematic implications for career and self, as well as a learned intellectual activity in which practitioners potentially do not believe themselves capable of (Harvey et al., 2013).

Offering practitioners a way of engaging with research that can assist in overcoming these difficulties is central to building confidence, community, and feasibility. Providing an enabling way of engaging with qualitative research may assist in bridging the divide between those that do research and those that are in practice. It is advocated here that the use of poetic representation offers such a proposition to practitioners. In doing so, this presents ways in which a level of reader engagement can be attained that can allow research to bring deeper insights and be more impactful and more personally meaningful to their intended audience than other methods are capable of.

Poetic representation of data is presented here as a way of ‘going beyond’ other forms of data representation, offering something unique to the reader, and the to the world they occupy. For qualitative research this opens up the dislocation between subject and method, what Denzin and Lincoln (2011) refer to as the ‘crisis of representation’. In seeking ways to be even more grounded in a quasi-scientific tradition, aspects of qualitative research have turned to increasing systematisation of method, what Galvin and Prendergast call the “scientific concern” (2016, p.xi). Galvin and Prendergast (2016) maintain that this focus on process runs the risk of suppressing the ‘participant’ voice through over fragmentation and collective summary, resulting in output that is missing depth and fails to adequately portray the rich, messy, thickness of life as lived. In such qualitative research, the arrangement of interview data can offer the reader categorical understandings that are largely decontextualised and fragmented in their preparation (Galvin & Prendergast, 2012). Whilst these categorisations may have been derived using an emic process, they are nonetheless primarily researcher-led in their placement in any output, often grouped together by thematic commonality or by researcher interpreted meaning. As a result, comparatively, the research product in these traditions can be seen to only allow a limited appreciation of the impact or experience of that being recounted, for both narrator and reader.

It is central then, to poetic representation, that the position of the narrator in relation to the text is retained in any research production. This allows the resultant stories to be represented in the way the narrator created meaning, how they positioned or situated themselves in relation to the experiences in their lives (Riessman, 1993). Meaning here is seen as dependent on the surrounding context for its interpretation, i.e. what precedes and follows the spoken text, in order of its spoken presentation. Poetry allows the flow and context of the narrator's words to be retained in a condensed form so context dependent meaning is accessible as intended by the narrator (Furman, 2006). In this way, the use of poetic form that retains the textual placement of the narrator provides a more phenomenologically holistic and authentic representation of their accounts than other forms that separate context from the text, where meaning is more researcher, rather than narrator, driven.

Sparkes and Douglas (2003) argue that through poetic representation the reader is given an opportunity to see the same landscape through an alternative lens, to engage in this world in new and different ways. This alternative lens gives the freedom to the reader to use their own frame of reference to sense make and to transfer that meaning into their own lives more directly and poignantly (Swan, 1999). Furman (2006) further adds that the use of poetic form provides a powerful tool through which reciprocal understandings and insights can be created and shared between reader and narrator. It is through this reciprocation that poetic form is proposed to convey affective and relational elements of narrator meaning more succinctly and effectively than other methods (Furman, 2006; Prendergast, 2009). The focussed, compressed and contextually retained text has the function of becoming the "compact repository for emotionally charged experiences" with its capability of concentrating on the emphasised affect in text (Furman, 2007, p.1).

Drawing on these assertions, the following discussion focuses on demonstrating *how* poetry not only provides a more authentic account of the lived experience of another through this medium, but goes beyond this to connect deeply with the reader's emotional world leading to inner shifts and potentially transformational change as a result. Illustrations from a small-scale research narrative project, carried out to explore what personal meanings therapists draw from their work with psychological trauma, are used to examine the ways in which poetic form connects with us. The project was conceived in response to identifying that much of the literature on the effects of working therapeutically with trauma was either

quantitatively or thematically driven (Baird & Kracen, 2006; Elwood et al., 2011; Kadambi & Ennis, 2003). The use of poetic representation in this project therefore offered a way to explore these effects in a new and unique way to therefore produce new understandings of the impact of this work on the therapists who perform it. The purpose of this article however, is not to discuss the outcomes of that study per se, but rather to use the resultant poetic form to demonstrate and explore the connections that this offers to us, as a reader, as an individual and as a human being; to show therefore how it ‘goes beyond’ other methods of qualitative data representation.

## **Method**

The poetic extracts used in this paper are drawn from poems created by the researcher from unstructured interviews carried out as part of a project to explore the effects of working with psychological trauma on therapists. Epistemologically, the research viewed meaning derived from experience as fundamental to the way in which we construct our representations of the world, what Husserl (1970) saw as a source of our knowledge. A phenomenological approach was adopted that sees these experiences as fundamental to the meaning created in individuals’ lives. Therefore, only an account of that experience, as received by the therapists themselves, can give insight and understanding of the meaning they draw from them (Silverman, 2013).

Fully qualified therapists with at least two years’ experience of working with psychological trauma were invited to be involved via email and using a snowballing method of recruitment (Denscombe, 2003). A participant information sheet and consent form were then disseminated to interested parties and interviews arranged. Given the sensitive and potentially revealing nature of the discussion, informed consent was viewed as a process that was explicitly revisited at several points in the recruitment and data collection phases. In addition, to protect confidentiality and ensure anonymity pseudonyms were used for those taking part with any revealing information (dates, places, names etc) redacted.

Interviews took place face-to-face, pre-pandemic, at a location to suit. The interviewee was invited to think about things that had impacted them during their work with psychological trauma. Consistent with a narrative approach, interviews were not time limited; they were unstructured and free flowing, allowing space for the interviewee to come to a

natural conclusion when they had shared what they wanted to. In keeping with a desire to access the narrator's experience as they chose to situate it, but recognising that any input from the interviewer could alter and direct the course of the narrative, interviewer contributions were kept to a minimum. To achieve this, the narrative interview process proposed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2013) in their free association narrative approach was used. This involved following the order and temporal presentation of the interview flow, never going back to ask for clarification, never asking 'why' questions and only using reflective comments in the words and frames of reference as dictated by the language of the interviewee. In as much as was possible, this ensured minimal direction from the interviewer in the interview process. Each therapist was interviewed twice, once to gain an initial narrative account of their work, and subsequently to explore any recurring connections that were noted in the first. The starting point for the second interviews was to present the connections noted from the first and again, in an unstructured and free narrative approach (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2013) to ask for their thoughts. The second interview therefore offered the opportunity to take a deeper dive into the personally meaningful aspects of the first account and is a common method in narrative approaches (Bauer, 1996; Riessman, 1993). Although there were other participants in this project, a decision was made to use poetic extracts from two of the therapists' accounts as illustrative examples here, to both provide brevity and continuity of narrative context.

There are numerous ways of creating poetic verse from interview material (Furman, 2006). As a relatively uncreative beginner in the poetic world, utilising methods of self-directed selection of core elements of the story was daunting and potentially fraught with methodological tension. Equally, although this was not a co-created piece of research nonetheless the intention was to privilege the words and context of the narrator. Gee's (1991) structured framework offered a safer pair of methodological hands for a foray into the then relatively unknown territory of poetics, but also a way to be consistent with the desire to retain context with content. Gee's (1991) focus on these psycho-linguistic features of the interview, noting both what is said (the words) and how it is said (the speech), allows a determination of the most personally meaningful aspects of the interview narrative for the narrator.

This framework essentially involves a series of questions that the researcher asks of the interview material in different ways: *what is the paralinguistic context of the interview*

*material? What is the syntactic structure of the interview? What is in the plot of the story being told? What is the psychological subject of the story? What is the focus of the story?* The researcher applies these to the interview material to access the key features of the text.

Although a full account of this process is beyond the scope of this article, in practice, and in brief summary for each as they appear above, this involves: listening to the way the words are spoken, noting the emphasis given to what is said based on pitch and tone (up-down, loud-soft); determining the focus based on the linguistic structures used to link or separate words (syntax and semantics showing importance and meaning); identifying the important aspects of the story by recognising what is in the mainline plot or story of the narrative given (what fits in the plot and what is an aside); identifying the psychological subject of the story in how it is presented in context and related to that or those around it (who or what is the story really about and what are others' roles in relation to that); and to decide what is focused in the story and what is not (collectively where the emphasis is, what congregates around it to illustrate this).

Applying these questions to the interview material is an iterative process where the researcher gathers the selected aspects of the narrative. Reading the text, and listening to the way in which the words are spoken, readily allows the central and meaningful elements of the text to be drawn out. In progressing through the interview material it becomes evident that there is a rhythmic quality to speech that naturally, when attended to, begins to evidence the focus and emphasis itself. Natural pauses indicate breaks and changes of subject with new focus. Increased volume, or change in tone signal emphasised speech. The picture from this as to who, or what, is the main feature in the narrative becomes clear; collectively the chunks and sections that are core to narrative meaning jump out as a result.

Using Gee's (1991) markers of linguistic features, focussed text is produced. Capitalisation denotes emphasis in speech, underlined text signifies a change of tone, a back slash represents a change or break in meaning or topic (what Gee calls idea units), stanzas and strophes embody the subject and the focus of the story. Breaks in the rhythm of the speech are connected to the moving between stanzas and strophes, evidencing changes in subject and focus. These poetic devices provided the verse structure that can be seen in the following extracts. The process is illustrated in the example from Linda's story below, lines numbered in order of recounting, retaining the temporal flow of the narrative.

Strophe 5 I learnt from that

Stanza 9 I am okay

30. yeah ABSOLUTELY it's a way and it's a way of/
31. I guess another kind of sense of it is
32. is that I am actually/ I am AN OKAY INDIVIDUAL
33. and that is COMPLETELY COUNTER to the message/that I got in CHILDHOOD erm/

Stanza 10 I am not who they said I was

34. I think the message I got in childhood was/ you're a hard-faced BITCH basically/ so actually IN THERAPY
35. when I can relate with somebody in a way which is kind of AUTHENTIC/ actually I'M NOT THAT PERSON
36. I am somebody who is kind of SOFTER AND KINDER/
37. than the message I got in CHILDHOOD I think

From my novice poetic position with little confidence in the process outlined briefly above, the manifestation of the core aspects of the narrative surprisingly arrived as a product of this process with relative ease and little researcher owned directive. Whilst there was a need to make decisions about what text to include and not to include, based on the perceived plot of the story, and what was emphasised or changed in syntax based on how the speech is heard, the included text was produced as purely as was possible as a result of the application of Gee's (1991) process. Coined as 'found poetry' by Prendergast (2009), the resultant poem is 'found' from, and in the words of the narrator rather than being created through researcher-derived picking of the text based on their interpretation of meaning alone. Whilst there are always many possible interpretations of text, the focus of these questions on the way in the story is told and why "guide the researcher towards understandings that privilege the respondents meaning making" (Emerson & Frosh 2009, p. 61). Gee (1991) recognises this is an interpretive process, however he also points out that the application of these questions allow a 'senseful' reading of the text.

Gee's (1991) framework allows linguistic structures (morphemes, syntax and semantics determining importance, meaning and focus) and paralinguistic context (i.e. pitch, tone, emphasis in the way the words sound when spoken) to be retained as they were originally narrated. This concentration on linguistic context allows a teasing out of the central essence,

the core focus and emphasis, but without the separation from the surrounding context in the narrative. Unlike other methods, utilising these linguistic devices allows a compression of the text but avoids the separation or decontextualisation of text that, as Riessman (1993) contends, effaces the original narrator. The attention to the way the story is told by the storyteller honours the meaning they create (Emmerson & Frosh, 2009). It is these focused parts of the story that form the verse produced. The compressed text containing condensed meaning and emphasis when portrayed through the verse facilitates what Poindexter (2002, p. 709) describes as the “diamond cutting away all but the most evocative in emotion and clarity”. The resultant poems provide what Stenhouse (2009, p. 197) defines as “a window through which we are invited to look. They allow the reader to engage with the subject in their own way”. In this way poems are not instructive or directive, rather we are inviting the reader to immerse themselves in the world of another in a distinctive and evocative way.

The claim of this work is that poetry ‘goes beyond’ other methods of data representation. It is useful therefore to examine the ways in which poems achieve this in more detail. Claims are made in the literature about the deeper connections poetry can make but not as of yet, an exposé of how this is achieved in a tangible form. Such an endeavour also permits a deeper understanding of the value that this form of data representation can have for researchers and for readers. What follows is an account of the unique ways in which poems can connect with us as readers. Drawing on the ways in which the earlier literature describes how poems engage us, the poems produced in the research project are employed to portray *how* these effects manifest. Taking these themes from the literature into an examination of the poems has resulted in the classification of six distinct, and yet not mutually exclusive, ways in which these connections are made. The following exploration develops in these six areas, each one building deeper connections than the one before. Each uses illustrative examples from the poems included to show *how* poetic form encourages and compels the reader to initially occupy themselves in the world of the other, but to also to move beyond this to increasingly take the meaning in the teller’s story into their own world. First, it considers how poems have the ability to achieve emotional connections with the reader through ‘affect in context’; second, the way in which the reader is connected with what is unsaid through implicit meanings is explored; third, how poems allow the reader to glimpse the journey of the narrator through past, present and future, as if time were in motion is illustrated; fourth, how poetic form can connect the narrator on a relational level with the reader’s own experiences in an embodied participation is evidenced; fifth, how poetic form can connect reflectively and



subjectively with the narrator's own experiences in their world is explored; and finally to illustrate how poetry moves into the world of the reader more fully to bring new insights to their world as a result, to transform, motivate, and make a difference in a tangible way, leaving a lasting imprint.

### *Affect in Context*

Poems created from interview data, what Prendergast (2009) categorises as '*vox participare*', or 'found' poems, are a particularly suitable research medium for topics with a clear affective element (Prendergast, 2009). This aspect potentially relates to practitioners in the therapeutic area whose research in their own area of practice is highly likely to mirror this context. An avenue to represent this element of practitioner work more expressly offers more appeal potentially than those methods that do not permit this focus to the same extent. 'Found' poems, being directly created in the words of the narrator, centralise the narrator voice and maintain the semantic context, yet enhance the affective dimensions of the narrative retaining an evocative yet authentic phenomenological account. In this form, poetry is seen as allowing the heart to speak directly to the mind, connecting to the reader more directly at an emotional level (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009). In evoking such responses in the reader, poetry is manifestly interpreted differently to other texts, and in a way that they do not allow, invite, or compel.

Whilst the poems produced in this research offer different stories about the impact of the work on the therapists they relate to, they also convey the different relational and emotional sense the narrator makes of this. In the extract below from Linda's story, Linda's words in the first two verses directly express her emotional motivations for this work:

I was abused when I was little by my uncle  
With the complicity of my mother  
It makes me very ambivalent towards women  
Counselling is a way for me to be different.

Relating to women is agonising for me  
In this they are authentic but vulnerable  
It allows me to be in a way I'm not outside  
It's giving me something missing in my life

In poetic form, the emotional content of the words is heightened by the way the text is honed and focussed on the core of narrative elements in the story. The enhanced affective dimensions of the text come through the situated context and the compressed nature of the poem (Furman, 2006). Linda's disclosure of early sexual abuse with the complicity of her mother demonstrates in a few lines the reason relating to women is so difficult for her, without any need for further explanation. The compressed text not only makes these links explicit but starkly evident. Presented without distracting discursive meanderings, or conversely, separated thematically by semantically related subject matter, the associations are unambiguous. From Linda's disclosure of her mother's betrayal to Linda's long-term relational issues with women, a desire to be able to be different than this in her work, the reader can grasp a tangible sense of what doing therapy offers to Linda and why it provides the 'something missing' in her life. If treated thematically, these contextual elements may have been pulled out from the original transcript and placed elsewhere in any representation of the research findings, situated against overarching themes, and not retained together. Here, through the attention to psycholinguistic markers during the creation of the poems, described in the method, focus on the way the words are spoken allows the narrator to be the guide to what is situated where, ultimately retaining their chosen location in the story. This situated focused compression of the text has the net effect of magnifying affect through tapping into the core personal meanings of the teller, as Brady asserts: "The trick is to remember that context is practically everything for determining meaning" (2009, p. xiii). In Linda's story, this context gives a deeper appreciation of the situation of her early abuse and the ongoing consequences of Linda's mother's betrayal in just a few lines, allowing the reader to have insights and understanding in a different way than other forms of representation of interview material would allow.

### ***Implicit Meanings***

Whilst compressed text and situated context illuminates the affective elements and an understanding of the core meanings attached to this, it also allows the reader to make implicit links from the content in context. In this way the poem can say what the words in isolation do not, going beyond the words themselves, creating meanings that represent more than the sum of the parts (Spiers & Smith, 2012). In the extract below from Rose's story, Rose describes the impact that working with victims of child abuse has had on her view of the world:

I just think it's always been there,  
It will always be there  
It's almost part of society  
I would have thought that is rare  
Trusted adults  
Baby sitters, next door neighbours

I know sometimes I am being unreasonable  
I see a father with a little girl  
I think for goodness sake  
It sounds terrible doesn't it?  
I see it everywhere I suppose  
  
I don't know how warped I am  
I actually honestly don't  
I suppose suspicious is the word  
You think 'I wonder what's going on there?'  
You realise the world is a bad place  
You see the extent of it

Although Rose does not use the word 'abuse' here, it is implicit that she is referring to her potential to see society comprised of perpetrators, those who should be able to be trusted. A father, neighbours, babysitters, all seen as untrustworthy. Her views are generalised beyond these specifics; the whole world is a bad place; it is everywhere; part of society; always has been, always will be. This gives the reader a sense of the enormity of the impact the work has on Rose, her inability to see society as free from abuse, the perceived endemic nature of the unspeakable embedded in the fabric of our social structures.

Implicit also are the effects this has on Rose's view of herself; the reference to being 'suspicious' indicates an acknowledgement that others would not hold the same view, that her view of the world is different. Rose's question "*it sounds terrible doesn't it?*" implies that she sees the view she now holds of society as terrible, she recognises the damage this causes her, describing herself as "*warped*" and berating her initial response to seeing a father and a little girl together. This 'reading between the lines' is immediately available to the reader given the compressed and situated context of the text. Whilst this can be recognised as both

an individual and interpretive activity, nonetheless the poetic presentation of the text allows the reader access to a wider understanding of the impact the work has and the pervasive nature of this, providing the reader with far more than words or phrases, singularly or thematically, would allow.

### *Time in Motion*

Through the poem, the reader is situated in the life of the narrator in a temporal way that allows them to access a deeper understanding of the life lived and the multiplicity of the events that have shaped it. Breheny (2012) notes poetic form is particularly useful in exploring stories where time is present. Stories expressed in poetic form have an ability to convey a sense of time through the location of the events in the lifespan of it. The events recounted in the poems span a sense of before and after, not in a linear fashion but in a way that enables the reader to understand the importance of these in creating a sense of what is now for the narrator.

For Linda, her starting point was her historical abuse and the context of that in her childhood. Throughout the following poem, the impact of this history is woven with the present tense:

It's my identity, it doesn't hold any fear  
To walk back to where I was with a different lens  
I'm not remotely grateful, I'm not remotely lucky  
But it's given me a way to engage that's really useful for them and me

I'm okay with that, it was a valuable experience  
There's still a hotness, still the heat  
It's connected to my earlier life stories  
If you're not acceptable to your parents then who are you acceptable to?  
A really difficult one to get my head around

After training, after a lot of therapy  
Okay, I'm mostly acceptable  
That's what I want for my clients  
Their acceptance for who they are

It's hope, what kept me going  
Maybe I can feel it for them

Linda recounts her acceptance of her history as part of her identity which involved her going back with a 'different lens'. Having done this, it gives her a way to engage with her clients in the present that is useful to her and them. Her responses to past experiences still resonate with her – “*still the heat*” - and the challenge of feeling unacceptable to her parents, these remain present. Linda refers to past events from her training, and that therapy has been influential in her belief that she is acceptable now. She expresses a desire to see this in her clients, to feel their “*hope*” for them in the future. The jumps from long past to more recent past, and to present and back again have no sense of logic beyond that which the teller attaches to it in the context of the narrative. Taken together, this gives a sense of overall coherence and allows the reader to understand the paths taken and the reasons for this that would be lost without this context. Although, as Breheny (2012) states, the goal of poetic representation is not necessarily to create a coherent story per se; the unity of meaning in these poems is drawn from the events in the way they are situated and woven together. How the subtext shows the way the elements of the story interact with each other to create a picture of the world of another, we can appreciate as a whole.

### ***Embodied Participation***

Through enhancement of emotional and relational aspects of the text, the reader is offered the opportunity to connect to the poem through their reactions to it. The reader's emotional responses, together with deeper understandings and holistic appreciation of the context, invite an embodied engagement with the experiences depicted. In both poems drawn upon here, the reader is offered the opportunity to connect with a felt sense of the reality expressed, and none more so than where the sensory aspects of the poem are expressed. In the example below from Rose's story, she explains how her anonymous online therapeutic work is different to other types of therapy, leaving her being exposed to more explicit details and leading to her creating visual imagery from these accounts:

Online  
People will be saying things  
They would never say face to face  
You are exposed to details

Sexually explicit stuff, stuff about abuse  
They would not tell anybody

I am sure it affects you  
Like reading a novel  
You are picturing it  
That's what I am doing  
I am reading

But they're not novels  
These true things about child abuse  
You always picture the scene  
You just do  
Now and then it flits in and out of your mind

In the following extract from Linda's story, her own felt sense is described and linked to her physical memory of her own abuse, something she sees as providing a valuable way to connect with her clients:

I have a sense of people, a felt sense  
It's really strong  
Sometimes someone can really sicken me  
Sometimes someone can really frighten me  
I feel it on my skin  
When I'm with a client

I use that a lot, hugely, I trust that  
I can feel it, when I was abused, choking  
There are links, pelvic, pain, doubling up  
I see it in my clients, traumatised  
Physical you know

Some clients talk about it  
I'm aware, I feel it, I'll offer it  
This is kinda my sense, instinctively

It's like, yes absolutely!  
The bane of my life is actually valuable

Through poetic presentation of Rose's visualisations and Linda's somatic experiencing of her abuse, the reader instinctively can connect with their own visual and sensory experience of this. Prendergast states that poetry demands we listen deeply to "feel, taste, hear what someone is saying" (2009, p. xxvi). Through hearing in this way, the reader gains a physical awareness of the experience in themselves. From sensing the sickness at exposure to explicit details and the horror of picturing of graphic images, to feeling the physical echoes of the pain of abuse and imagining a child's suffocating struggle for breath, the reader is engaged in an intuitive embodied sense of others' experiences, offering what Galvin and Prendergast (2016, p. xiii) label as a "return home to our embodied mortal human existence". Owton (2017) identifies impact on the reader as one of the quality criteria in poetic representation, asking: does this affect me emotionally? In post-research circulation of the poems, one reader recounted feeling the hairs stand up on the back of their neck and having a visceral reaction when reading this part of Linda's story. These verses build images in the mind. The words "*I am reading*" resonate from Rose's words; I picture a book filled with graphic abusive images and being forced to read it over and over again. From Linda's, I hear a little girl's voice in distress and feel a sickness in my stomach. In this way the poem builds a scene that gains a life of its own, the reader's own sensory counterparts of it drawn beyond the words into the parts of themselves that creates a tangible sense of the teller's world. A somatic sensory embodied sense, not only of the other's experience, but one of placing of yourself in it, what Brady (2009, p. xiv) describes as "a sensuous-intellectual activity" that "shows us something of what we are, literally as embodied participants and observers".

### ***Subjective Experiencing***

Having demonstrated that poetry can turn the experience of others into an emotional and physiological experience of ourselves, this personal journey with the life of the narrator can additionally turn inwards to focus on the life experiences of the reader. Through a felt sense of conceiving another's world, this intuitively and subjectively connects the reader to their own life. As Breheny (2012) affirms, the reader's embodied response to the poem cannot be separated from the discursive and social aspects of their own worlds. The hearing, the feeling, the picturing, the being with the teller in their journey brings the reader reflexively to their

own world. Furman (2006, p. 561) describes it as a process where the “imagistic language allows the reader to enter a world and to develop his or her own personal relationship with it; the images are transformed into a knowledge pertaining to both the poem and the reader”. This subjective account can usefully be illustrated through examining my own personal reactions here. In Rose’s poem, I have shared below the parts that resonate most deeply within me, and how these echo through those experiences most closely associated with my own:

Nothing online, nothing is safe  
I know more about what goes on online, I get to know  
The online world is a very dark place  
Ironic parents are shutting their children up  
  
Not letting them go out  
They think they’re safe on their computer  
Well they’re not  
They are more at risk there  
They don’t have a clue  
  
Girls  
Meet people online  
Go and meet them  
Get raped  
It’s common  
I’ve had a few like that

As a parent to a teenage girl - one whose socialising appears to be conducted from her room and consists of social media use, group chats and sending selfies across the ether - I am immediately connected to all my deepest fears about her safety online and the security of her online activities. I flick back in my mind through the conversations, mentally ticking off each risk that I know we have spoken about, trying to reassure myself that her awareness of these risks will protect her. I hear Rose’s words in my head: “*parents*”, “*they think they’re safe, well they’re not*” and “*they don’t have a clue*”. My thoughts jump to the ‘what if’ scenario - surely my daughter can’t possibly know all 394 ‘friends’ she has on Facebook? I see the



shadowy figure of an older male perpetrator hidden in them, masquerading as a young girl, grooming - it happens, I have a lurching sense of panic.

Here the poem takes me, the reader, beyond the felt sense of placing ourselves in the world of the other into a space where we also place their world in ours. In this instinctive process the response the poem invokes in us is “weighed through our existing repertoires of information, verbal and non-verbal, as stored in our cognitive and emotional memory banks” Brady (2009, p. xiv). The reader is led to relate their sense of the teller’s experiences, what it evokes in and for them, not only to their imagined sense of the other’s experience, but to their own lived experiences. They are drawn into an exploration of the value of the messages to their own world, seeking parallels and comparisons, examining differences and counter values. In doing so, this produces the meaning that the poem holds personally for them. As Sparkes and Douglas state (2007, p. 173), poetic representation compels the reader to create their own sense of the narrative “so that they are better able to transfer this understanding to their own lives”.

### *Imprints on the Soul*

Transferring the meaning we take from another’s experience to our own lives engenders a reflexivity in which the reader’s sense of the other gives them something for themselves. In taking this meaning into our own lives and selves, it leaves us with a message as to what, or how, that impacts us. Beyond how we subjectively relate those experiences to our own, and the personal meaning it holds, to relating more to our own ontological and epistemological level. It shifts our wider knowledge and understanding of the world into a much broader message about ourselves and the others in it. Whatever the message is - a truth confirmed, a lesson learnt, an experience validated - it results in a change in our wider awareness and understanding. It contributes to our understanding of what it means to be human; as Galvin and Prendergast (2016) affirm, poetry is concerned with the nature of human existence, who we are and how we come to understand our world.

The meanings created in us give new ways of seeing the world and the societies we live in; our understanding of our world is altered. The above account shows how I took Rose’s poem into my own world, informing my view of my daughter’s activities, and the meaning I drew in terms of my ‘what if’ concerns. In the confirmation of my fears that the online world is not a safe place no matter what, it also gives me a broader awareness. I can

see that the seemingly isolated incidents reported in the headlines of girls being attacked after meeting up with 'friends' are more frequent than I might have presumed. I can appreciate the number of teens who live through this online world, just as my daughter does, and who are all conceivably at risk. The potential is vast, the realisation huge. I am grateful for this, a chance to change, to pre-empt, a renewed promise to cherish.

Poetry in this way has the potential to have an enduring effect on the reader, touching the deepest parts of us, leaving an imprint on our souls. From this we can be galvanised to take action, to remedy, to restore, to make a change to our lives or the lives of others as a result. For me, this was a renewed conversation with my daughter to both alert her and reassure me, acting directly due to the way in which the poem was internalised in my own world. Whatever the effect - children hugged more tightly, family valued more directly, life lived more fully, precautions more embedded - poetry gives us the scope to explore in our own world what it means to be, moving from human being to human becoming (Wiebe, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

This article has shown *how* poetic form goes beyond that of other forms of participant data representation and enhances reader engagement with findings from qualitative research. It explicates the ways in which poetic representation of interview material effectively reaches out to readers in a way that other qualitative methodological approaches do not. The use of Gee's (1991) framework to guide the poetic researcher allows poetic form to clearly emerge from interview material, offering an accessible way in which those less confident or experienced in qualitative research can engage in research more readily.

In addition to providing an obtainable way of encouraging those less familiar or experienced in research methodology to utilise this method in their own practitioner research, poetic outcomes open up unique ways in which practitioners can connect with their intended audience more meaningfully than other data representations may allow. The explorations of affective and relational responses evoked within the reader through the poetic form builds an embodied connection, enabling us, the reader, to feel, sense, and experience the world of another that gives unique meanings to the reader and to the world they occupy. The potential for new understandings, change and even transformation in our own lives brings impact, arguably exclusively, available through this medium.

With a focus on emotional links, implicit meanings, and the way in which narrative strands connect with self and other, poetic representation further speaks to the work therapeutic practitioners themselves carry out. Conventionally, an understanding of the work of therapeutic practitioners is only readily available to those in the profession. Allowing a felt sense of this work to be accessible to readers can acutely convey a sense of the work we do. It is argued here that for practitioner-researchers, conveying your own work with clients, patients, or from other participant-derived material in a poetic form can develop new and useful understandings, appreciations and insights into the therapeutic world we occupy, which may be otherwise unattainable.

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