Research journaling to deal with vulnerabilities in research

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Abstract

Whilst vulnerability is discussed and highlighted in research methods literature, there is a noticeable absence of guidelines on how researchers may consider approaching their vulnerability, and/or exploring their emotional responses. This chapter seeks to redress this gap by offering an insight into how research journaling may be a practical tool to support researchers. Drawing on my experiences as a researcher and research supervisor, I offer some practical strategies and examples for the role a research journal can effectively play, whilst also outlining future opportunities for researchers to engage with research journaling in the context of their own vulnerability. The conclusion reiterates key messages from the chapter.

Keywords

research journal, research journaling, vulnerability, practical strategy

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Setting the scene

Since the dawn of qualitative research, researchers have explored key themes such as positionality and reflexivity, as they have been painfully aware of the roles they play in a research process. Research methods textbooks and articles have long highlighted significant tensions of being an insider researcher (e.g. Zinn, 1979; Elliott, 1988), researching sensitive topics (e.g. Sieber and Stanely, 1988; Lee and Renzetti, 1990) and/or getting involved with vulnerable groups (e.g. Goodin, 1986; Weil, 1989). At the time, vulnerability was discussed under the umbrella of ethnographic fieldwork, in anthropology for example, where individuals spend substantial amounts of times researching communities by navigating, working, and living with them. As researchers get involved in, engage with, observe, and analyse ways of working and living that differ from their own, they encounter so-called "culture bumps". Culture bump theory posits that individuals experience disconnects, tensions, and discrepancies caused by the difference between expectations and actual, real-life developments (Archer, 1991). Whilst people learn to cope and deal with culture bumps by engaging in critical self-reflection to uncover personal thoughts, beliefs, prejudices, the initial responses tend to be complex and emotional in nature. It is this complex, emotional involvement that is referred to when vulnerability is described as a condition that manifests in the witnessing of and writing about social and cultural phenomena (Behar, 1996).

As qualitative research moved on, however, discussions around vulnerability became more significantly focussed on research participants, even though being involved with communities throughout the research process may impact individuals to such an extent that they

experience vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and burn out (e.g. Hendron et al., 2012; Newell and MacNeil, 2010). Particularly in the contexts of stressful, private, sensitive topics research becomes threatening or damaging (e.g. Gibson, 1996; Johnson and Clarke, 2003). Vulnerability then is no longer an emotional response, but distress and risk (e.g. Ballamingie and Johnson, 2011; Davison, 2004).

Whilst vulnerability is discussed and highlighted, there is a noticeable absence of guidelines on how researchers should be approaching their vulnerability, and/or exploring their emotional responses. This chapter seeks to redress this gap by offering an insight into how research journaling may be a practical tool to support researchers. I do not wish to suggest that research journaling is the only means to deal with vulnerability, nor do I suggest that research journaling is an appropriate measure for all contexts and situations. However, drawing on my experiences as a researcher and research supervisor, I offer some practical strategies and examples for the role a research journal can effectively play. I begin this chapter with an overview of how literature describes vulnerabilities in research, along with a critique of vulnerability in those contexts. I then explore research journaling as a form of writing before I share two examples from my own research journaling practice. Subsequently, I show what may be possible when we move on from research journaling into a creative, arts-based approach to research, whilst also outlining future opportunities for researchers to engage with research journaling in the context of their own vulnerability. The conclusion reiterates key messages from the chapter.

Vulnerable researchers?

Within the context of social sciences research, vulnerability is widely discussed as a topic with some scholars emphasising the role of the participants, whereas others focus on the researcher experience, which is not limited to the relationship with participants, but also includes collaborations within colleagues (Laar, 2014). Commentators outline that the feeling of vulnerability stems from relations of power within the research process (e.g. Huckaby, 2011), as well as from life experiences relating to the topics under exploration and regarding the individual's personal characteristics such as, gender, race, sexual orientation, or political and ideological viewpoints (e.g. Howard and Hammond, 2019), whereby, of course, such personal characteristics may coincide with power dynamics at play. Without formally acknowledging the theory, these commentators reiterate Archer's (1991) concept of culture bumps, the discrepancy between one's own stance and somebody else's opinions and thoughts.

Unfortunately, however, this discourse of vulnerability does not take into account that the terms "vulnerable" and "vulnerability" themselves are the result of power dynamics, as it is within the eye of the beholder as to who is to be seen vulnerable (Brown and Quickfall, 2022). Let us consider a researcher exploring the sensitive topics of bullying and harassment in an educational research study with participants who are aged 8 to 13 years. Most ethical review boards, grant funders and publishing companies will see the participants as vulnerable, as they are underage, and that may well be the case. However, what if the researcher is an early career researcher, or is an experienced researcher but new to the methodological instruments to be used in this study, or is someone who has themselves been subjected to bullying and harassment throughout their own educational career or who is a teacher-researcher working in the school context that is to be studied? In such situations, it is the researcher – along with the participants – whose vulnerability should be recognised

formally. In practice, therefore, vulnerability is not a simple black-and-white situation, as the context, circumstances, and even the project details matter in whether or not a person is vulnerable. Irene Zempi's (2016) account of researching Muslim women's experiences of wearing the niqab (face veil) in public in the United Kingdom exemplifies this previous point. Zempi herself identifies as a non-Muslim woman, who was encouraged by her research participants to step into their shoes by wearing the niqab herself. Zempi, very aware of her own privilege of being able to step out of the niqab at any point, had not realised what she had let herself in for when she agreed to this aspect of her research. Her harrowing account of name-calling, swearing, threats of physical violence and derogatory forms of humour (Zempi, 2019) demonstrates a vulnerability acquired for that specific period of time that she had not anticipated. A particularly controversial example of a researcher entering a risky space and making themselves vulnerable is Alice Goffman's (2014) *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*, an ethnographic study of a Philadelphia neighbourhood. In this particular case, critics emphasise that a young white woman fresh out of university would sincerely not have been able to judge the potential risks and vulnerabilities at play, when she entered the socially deprived, Black neighbourhood in Philadelphia, and that therefore she should not have been allowed to engage in that research. Irrespective of the wider criticism of accuracy, transparency, and morality, the fact remains: vulnerability is ambiguous and ambivalent.

Another important aspect lies within the wider context of contemporary higher education, and the ways of working this wider context brings. Without delving into the details of the neoliberal academy (see Tight, 2019), I do wish to highlight the vulnerability individuals experience. Amongst the general public, higher education continues to be seen as a working environment, where flexibility, privilege, and autonomy prevail. In fact, even academics themselves continue to romanticise their working environment (Lovin, 2018). Unfortunately,

this idealised image of working within the academy could not be further from the truth of contemporary higher education. Precarious contracts, job insecurity, pressures from teaching and research excellence frameworks, and highly competitive grant applications are making researchers' lives and careers difficult (e.g. Evans, 2016; Naidoo-Chetty and du Plessis, 2021). University-wide cost-cutting measures in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly increased individuals' fear over their roles and positions (Gilbert, 2021). Vulnerability in this context is inextricably linked to being able to afford the basics: housing, food, and a good work-life balance. The reality of contemporary higher education is one of stress, depression, and burnout (Opstrup and Phil-Thingvad, 2016; Mudrak et al., 2017; Darabi et al., 2017). Of course, not all early career researchers find themselves in such dire circumstances, yet, even if a researcher is able to secure a post-doctoral position after another, there is hardly every sufficient continuity to settle down properly at one location, which again coincides with poor overall health and wellbeing, and also impact relationships (Lashuel, 2020).

Role of writing in research

Depending on the disciplinary conventions, philosophical standpoints and research approaches, research journals or fieldnotes are more or less integral to the research process. The tradition of keeping field notes dates back to studies within ethnographic anthropology and other disciplines influenced by positivism, where observations needed to be recorded systematically and in as great detail as possible (e.g. Remsen Jr., 1977; Emerson et al., 2011). Field notes then were an opportunity to record information objectively, accurately and immediately (Ottenberg, 1990). The aim and purpose of those field notes was to enable the analysis and interpretation in the moment, but also later in the research process. However,

impressions and personal experiences were not usually included in such note-taking, a way of working that Ottenberg (1990), for example, genuinely regrets. Ottenberg (1990) talks about how recording memories and experiences would have added an interesting layer of data and meaning, had he recorded what he calls his "headnotes", the "notes" he holds in his mind. Grounded theory, by contrast, advocates detailed memo-writing as an intermediary step of sense-making between coding and writing (Charmaz, 2012, 2014). As a method grounded theory has developed over the course of time and is often misunderstood (Charmaz, 2012), but the strong emphasis on writing notes and memos has remained a constant throughout. "Memo-ing" is not related to maintaining immediate field notes but is already a layer of analysis that enables the researcher to formulate initial interpretations based on the codes generated from interview transcripts. Through reflexivity work, the researcher knows about their role in the conceptualisations as they occur. However, other than that, the researcher largely remains an unseen entity in this process. Whilst this extra layer of information and potential for analysis may well be an important factor regarding diary-keeping and research journaling, Ottenberg (1990) and Charmaz (2012, 2104) are not fully transparent about the power of writing.

In her work, Laurel Richardson, for example, highlights that writing is the main element of research and indeed is the inquiry (e.g. Richardson, 2000, 2001, 2002; Richardson and St Pierre, 2000). As we are recording our thoughts, experiences and observations in field notes, diary and research journal entries, we engage in writing throughout the research process, not merely afterwards at the end of the journey (Gibbs, 2007). Writing is also not only a solitary endeavour but works as a collaborative inquiry (Gale and Wyatt, 2017). It is through writing that we uncover, discover, and rediscover experiences and indeed, our selves. We make sense, interpret and reinterpret our position vis-à-vis others and the world. Of course, our

writing is contextualised in the specificities and particularities of the moment when the writing occurs. We shape and are shaped in writing, and through writing we can link ourselves to the other and the world, which, in turn, enables us to process our positionality, our sense of belonging and our identities.

It is this power of writing that is tapped into in therapeutic contexts. In our contemporary society, writing therapy has long been recognised as a meaningful approach to support individuals with mental health illnesses, post-traumatic stress disorders, pain conditions, and stress-related diagnoses. Early studies suggest that through writing individuals become more reflective and deliberate (McKinney, 1976), which spills into their everyday life-experiences and thereby fosters better symptom management. It has also been observed that the process of writing, thus externalising one's emotions, is often sufficient for individuals to learn cope with their experiences so that no further therapeutic support would actually be needed (Murphy and Mitchell, 1998). This does not mean that counselling or therapies should be replaced by writing as therapy, but it does show that writing offers significant support in dealing with difficult circumstances and experiences.

If as researchers we accept that journaling personal experiences may offer an additional layer of information and analysis, but also that engaging in writing itself may be experienced as therapeutic and cathartic, then it should not come as a surprise that journaling may help us deal with our vulnerability. At a first level, writing about our vulnerability leads to us externalising our experience of vulnerability and any associated emotional responses. At a second level, revisiting our own writing about vulnerability, enables us to engage with the experience and emotions in a more rational, scholarly manner as if we were dealing with research data. Together, the initial externalisation and subsequent rationalisation allow us to

distance ourselves somewhat from the immediate experience and feelings. It is at this stage that the cathartic effect of having journaled truly sets in. In the following, I would like to share examples of research journaling from my own journaling practice: the poem "This is just to say" and two images entitled "Two parts of a whole".

I should say here that I have many exercise books, ring binders, loose papers, computer documents, arts projects, and files that make up my compendium of research journaling. What I have chosen to share in this chapter are examples of where I used research journaling for specific purposes, and in particular ways, in order to deal with what I found difficult to process at the time.

The poem "This is just to say" came out of several very painful experiences, where other academics used my work and presented that as theirs. Unfortunately, this unethical behaviour is not uncommon in the context of contemporary higher education, and may even be a sign of the times in that we see competitiveness play out, with the more junior members of the academy suffering the results the most.

This is just to say
I have taken
the thoughts
you voiced in
our meeting

and which
you were probably
saving
for writing

Forgive me
they were ingenious
so noble
and so bold

(Brown, 2021a).

Although rarely talked about, plagiarism, academic and research misconduct are rampant in higher education (Dubois et al., 2013; Hausmann et al., 2016; Tolsgaard et al., 2019), which, given the competitive situation described earlier, should not come as a surprise. At a rational, scholarly level, I even understood, when the situations occurred that other people used my work for their purposes and presented it as theirs. However, at a personal level, I felt angry and hurt that someone would do this to me, and I became worried and anxious about the impact and consequences. After all, I also needed to establish myself as an academic, and if other people presented my ideas as theirs, how would I then be able to gain sufficient evidence for my own career developments? I felt vulnerable. I realised that I would need to offload these emotions as otherwise I would not be able to let go, which would result in even poorer wellbeing. I set to writing an apology, that would be half-hearted and not completely meant. Using the "This is just to say" poem by William Carlos Williams as a template, I crafted my own version of the three-versed 28-word non-apology. I took true pleasure in playing with words and syllables, as well as the irony of having "stolen" the poem format to express someone "stealing" ideas from another person.

It would be wrong to say that as soon as the poem was completed, my anger, hurt, and fear dissolved. Yet, focussing my mind on producing something to come out of the experience that would be an impactful statement, did help me process my emotions. Very soon, I wanted to share my poetry to see whether the experience would resonate with others, and perhaps trigger a response of laughing-crying amongst those who work in higher education. However, not all of my journaling is always meant to be shared, as the next example "Two parts of a whole" will show:

Two parts of a whole

<IMAGE x.1>

<IMAGE x.2>

These images are two of a series of paintings, collages and installations. For several years now, I have worked on ableism in academia and have researched academics' lived experience of disability, chronic illness and/or neurodivergence as they navigate the higher education context. My data collection approaches included delivering arts-based workshops, holding interviews, and recording focus group conversations. The constant narrative throughout the different projects with all the participants was that of "two faces" (e.g. Brown, 2019, 2020, 2021d, 2021e, 2022). Participants always explain that they have a public academic self that is well-curated to foster the image of an accomplished, successful researcher and teacher, along with a private self that deals with the fall-outs of needing to be that accomplished, successful researcher and teacher. I was particularly affected by my participants' stories of having to hide parts of themselves, as that would not be tolerated, least welcome in their workplaces. A level of connection and empathy ensued, but I realised I needed to explore these "two faces", if I was to be able to move on from these conversations. Through doodling, painting, and collage-making, I became better acquainted with my participants' plight, and connected more closely with my participants' experiences of higher education, but I was also able to

externalise my own feelings of distress. The interviews and conversations collapsed the protective walls I had built around me to ensure I would not become overly invested and emotionally involved. Using the arts-based forms of expression was a form of "emotion dump" that enabled me to rebuild those protective walls. Obviously, by sharing my humble attempts at creating something meaningful, and powerful, I am making myself vulnerable again, now. But I think it is important, especially for early career researchers, to see that research journaling does not necessarily need to be aesthetically pleasing and also that not all entries in that research journal must be shared.

Ideas for research journaling

Many researchers feel that they do not have the time to write detailed notes and use that as an excuse for not journaling at all (Remsen Jr., 1977). In my experience, I have also seen that researchers worry about getting the journaling wrong, or they do not really know where they should start and how (Brown, 2021b). Consequently, journaling becomes this all-encompassing exercise that we must work towards and that should be attained. Thus, journaling becomes connected with "should" and "must" statements and becomes seen as a chore. I argue that for research journaling to be meaningful, helpful, and effective, we need to approach it by far more pragmatically, for example, by using templates for specific activities.

So far, throughout this chapter I have focussed on the vulnerabilities in the sense of distress and risk, the affective aspects of research. However, as was mentioned earlier, vulnerability amongst researchers is not merely about emotional responses, worries, and anxieties, it is also about developing careers, preparing for promotions, and planning for grant applications, as

all of these are necessary to position oneself within a labour market that is characterised by instability, insecurity and precarity.

As I mentioned earlier, I do not have one research journal, but a collection of exercise books, papers, ring binders, and the like. This is because I use many different trackers, that is templates which help me keep track of particular aspects of my work. In my book *Making the Most of Your Research Journal* I offer many practical strategies, tools and ideas for using research journaling effectively. However, at this stage I would like to share two ideas for research journaling from Chapter 3 (Brown, 2021b) to proactively support researchers within the context of contemporary higher education: the research tracker and the full CV. These are two particularly important tools that enable academics, and more specifically those at earlier career stages, to build stronger career trajectories and narratives. The researcher tracker and the full CV therefore are dissimilar to the tools presented earlier in this chapter, but they are practical strategies that enable individuals to combat vulnerability when it comes to standing out against the competition in job interviews, grant applications, and the like.

Research tracker

Essentially, this is a document or handwritten record to keep track of research projects and publications. Some colleagues also call it the research pipeline. The layout of a research tracker often depends on whether the researcher is planning for a big project, such as a doctoral thesis or books, or if the researcher is working on their publication strategy, as is commonly required. The research tracker for bigger projects lists different stages of a research and the chapters that need to be written, whereas the research tracker for the overall

publication strategy lists the status of each publication, as it moves from conceptualisation, through writing, submitting, revising and resubmitting to publication. Some researchers may even have both trackers alongside one another. For a research tracker template and more guidance on maintaining such a research pipeline see Brown (2021c).

The main advantage of these trackers is that the researcher can keep an oversight of all works in progress, which, in turn, helps prioritise what needs to be done in the short-, mid- and long-term. If it becomes evident that there are no articles or chapters under review, for example, writing a new article or chapter should be taking priority over finishing a chapter of a bigger project, as the review process in academia is rather lengthy. Ultimately, we should all have an article or chapter, or more, under review at any one time for our publication strategy to continuously move forward instead of stagnating. Naturally, the information from the research tracker will also become helpful when applying for new positions, roles, or grants. Many grant or job applications do not necessarily allow for listing "publications in progress". Yet, within the narratives of expressions of interest or during interviews, a researcher's progression, research vision and productivity will be tested and extracting the information from the researcher tracker will enable the applicant to provide irrefutable evidence.

The full CV

A full CV is what it exactly what it says: a document that lists every aspect of a researcher's working life. Just like the researcher tracker, a full CV also serves several purposes. On a very basic level, the full CV is an opportunity to simply keep a record of what a researcher

has done, as in the throes of our work we tend to forget which conferences we presented at, which websites we contributed to with a blog post, or which research engagement activities we were involved in when we agreed to a podcast interview. Secondly, this record of what a researcher has done, enables us to keep track of our achievements. Again, when life is busy with researching, writing, teaching, marking, grant applications, administrative duties, and whatever else we do, we are often unable to formulate for ourselves what we have achieved in a particular period of time. By regularly updating a document that is a full CV, we have a tracker of all the tasks and duties we have completed. The full CV is not about presenting ourselves in the best possible light, it is about having an as detailed record of our work as possible, with all of the failed grant bids included, which leads me to the third purpose of the full CV: a full CV is an incredibly useful starting point for any job or grant applications, as we can easily extract the information that is relevant for the role or bid we apply for. Instead, of having to recreate a CV from memory, which tends to fail us under the pressure of needing to reconstruct milestones and events, researchers can simply adapt their full CV to speak to any specific criteria, which, in some cases, may relate to demonstrating willingness. For example, interviewers will recognise a researcher's willingness to apply for grants, even if they were unsuccessful; hence, my advice to include all information within the full CV document. Should you wish to begin a full CV, please, download a template from the companion website to my book: https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/asset/9868/3.x-nb-full-cv.docx.

At this point, I would like to return to what I mentioned in the introductory sections about the contemporary higher education regarding job insecurity, precarious contracts, competitiveness in the academy, as well as the emphasis on productivity and effectiveness. Naturally, maintaining a full CV and a research tracker does not automatically result in

improved roles or more secure contracts. However, even the mundane tasks of tracking one's progress does offer a sense of achievement and success, which would otherwise become lost. The benefit of the full CV and research tracker derives from the fact that as researchers we can see our professional growth in front of us, in black on white, or colour. For many academia is a lonely environment, where criticism, negative feedback and disappointing module evaluations are all-too-common, whereas positive reinforcement and praise are hard to come by. Tracking activities and milestones with strategies like the full CV and the research pipeline offer an opportunity for the individual to positively reinforce their work, to praise themselves. Vulnerability cannot automatically be countered; but just like using writing as an "emotion dump", the "brain dump" that is the recording and tracking may be experienced as cathartic.

Research journaling: to infinity and beyond

Thus far, I have discussed writing as an act of sense-making of one's experiences or as an opportunity to prepare systematically for further career development to show how research journaling may help us deal with our vulnerability. I have also reiterated that this kind of research journaling does not need to be a public endeavour and can remain purely private. In fact, many journalers do not even revisit their own entries. Instead, they externalise their experiences through writing, and once they feel they have finished that process of externalisation, they shred and dispose of the pieces of paper. I am known to have burned the odd piece of paper as a symbolic act of cleansing and completing a particular research journey. Most notable is the episode after I had finished my undergraduate thesis and Viva. Theoretically, I would have wanted to burn all my books, but obviously, me being me, I did

not feel I could get rid of, let alone burn a single book. So, in the presence of friends and family, at the foot of an Inuksuk (an Inuit man-made landmark of stone that was traditionally used for navigation) that adorned the university campus, I set fire to reading list of American and Canadian literature.

Although the "getting rid" felt cathartic in its own right, my instinct to hold on to all research entries and journals has enabled many avenues I had not envisaged or planned for. The more I experimented with form and media, the more experienced I became in research journaling, and the more opportunities I saw arising. Not every journal entry is offers new opportunities for analysis and extra layers of interpretation, but the aggregate of journaling allows for experimentation with the entries through revisiting. One such example is "An academic lament", a poem written in villanelle-form for a collaborative poetic inquiry project (Brown et al., 2023):

An academic lament

Academia's a lonely place
for us hamsters in the wheel
spin, spin, spinning in this rat-race.

Chasing promotions to face
precarity with a heart of steel.
Academia's a lonely place.

You depend on others' grace
to overcome rejection, to heal.
Spin, spin, spinning in this rat-race.

Successes are hard to trace
on your own. It feels
academia's a lonely place.

We're trapped to compete, to brave-face
the loneliness we feel
spin, spin, spinning in this rat-race.

And so, we hamsters continue to pace
the bars of the academic cage and wheel.
Academia's a lonely place
spin, spin, spinning this rat-race.

Once I had used my journals as an "emotion dump" regarding my own experiences of the neoliberal academy, I began to analyse interview transcripts from various projects in relation to my own experiences. Rather than be guided by the interview data, I specifically looked for thematic links. As I observed conversations and email communications reflecting the same thematic links, I began journaling by taking notes. All of this information resulted in an image of a hamster perpetually trapped in a wheel. I deliberately select the villanelle structure to replicate the continuous recurrence with its repetitive verses. This carefully crafted poem has moved on drastically from the initial ramblings and random notes, it has developed into an output as part of a Poetic Inquiry. As is often the case with research methods, the definition of what constitutes of Poetic Inquiry varies greatly, but commonly relates to the researcher's "use of poetry as/in/for inquiry" (Faulkner, 2017, p.210). In the case of "An academic lament", I started out with the particulars and specificities of my own experiences as a researcher and academic, which I then set against more universal ideas and realities. In the collaboration with other poetic inquirers it emerged how relatable the experienced reflected in my villanelle were. Through its emotional and emotive connection Poetic Inquiry offers an opportunity to raise awareness of social justice matters, to call for change and to demand transformation, in the individual and society as a whole. Naturally, we may be critical regarding the power of poetry, but to do so would mean we would have to be critical of the powers of all qualitative research, more generally. It is not my aim to critique nor to defend the role and purpose of Poetic Inquiry. I am merely demonstrating that research journaling offers opportunities far beyond what Ottenberg (1990) imagined, when he bemoaned the fact that he had not recorded certain experiences, as they felt to be outside the

scope of anthropological field notes. Whilst there is no particular need that forces us to share the research journaling we did as part of dealing with our vulnerabilities, we may find that there are important messages and experiences that are more universal and therefore should be shared. For some researchers, like myself, the Poetic Inquiry may offer this space, others may turn to drawing, painting, collaging, photography, videography or indeed any other form of expression. To infinity and beyond.

Conclusion

For this conclusion, let me return to the beginning of this chapter: my emphasis on understanding and exploring vulnerability. All researchers are more or less vulnerable at some points in their careers. Being vulnerable does not mean being weak, with the inverse also true: not being vulnerable does not mean being strong. Being vulnerable, therefore, is not necessarily something that we should avoid. Indeed, in many cases we become vulnerable because we were unable to predict potential risk and distress accurately, and so stumble into this feeling of vulnerability. What is important is that we have mechanisms and strategies to deal with any vulnerability that may arise throughout the research process.

Research journaling is one such tool. When we need to make sense of our experiences the research journal can become a loyal friend, attentive listener, and caring coach. Ultimately, the research journal is not actually a therapist, though, and in more serious circumstances it is imperative to seek professional help, which may well exacerbate our feeling of vulnerability.

I have discussed the benefits of writing in the context of therapy, but I would like to add to that here that "writing" does not necessarily mean "physically, literally writing". Research

journaling can take many forms and should suit the individual. For some research journaling will take the written form, as it does for me for the most part. For others, though, research journaling is doing arts and crafts, or recording themselves on video or audio. The therapeutic effect of externalisation and rationalisation is not diminished by form or media, it is, however, impacted by a form or medium that does not suit the researcher. As we begin research journaling, therefore, we may need to experiment with different modes and media to identify what suits us best, and how we can best harness the cathartic effect of research journaling. I felt incredibly self-conscious the first time I recorded myself on a video talking about my experiences, although I kept an open mind. In the end, the recordings did not work for me, and instead, writing, fictionalisation and Poetic Inquiry have become my preferred modes for research journaling, although I am often anxious when I share some of my works in progress. Even the process of research journaling is characterised by our vulnerability: we begin our journey to dealing with vulnerability through research journaling by making ourselves vulnerable and trying out new approaches; and when we share our journal entries, we make ourselves vulnerable again as we open our offerings to the world. In sum, vulnerability remains with us, but the research journal is a patient companion.

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